



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Living Lab research concept in rural Areas – "LIVERUR"

1



DELIVERABLE D6.1: *Report on the round tables*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION..... 3

II. OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY..... 3

 II.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY..... 3

 II.1.1 INTRODUCTION..... 3

 II.1.2 GENERAL OBJECTIVES 3

 II.1.3 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES 4

 II.2 METHODOLOGY APPLIED 4

 II.2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 4

III. RESULTS & FINDINGS 6

IV. CONCLUSION..... 11

Tables

Table 1: Details from the implementation of the round tables 5

Table 2: Key-results of the report on the implementation of the round tables 10



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



I. INTRODUCTION

LIVERUR is a pioneering H2020 project addressing Living Lab concepts, circular economy and the creation of new business models for rural enterprises in Europe and beyond.

LIVERUR project aims to introduce the Rural Living Lab research methodology in SMAEs framework, in order to identify and analyze various business model approaches and, to that, create benefit, social cohesion, jobs, stakeholders' integration, actors' inclusiveness and business resilience through the development of an innovative business model for rural enterprises based on the concept of Rural Living Labs (RAIN).

This model will be integrated into an online platform (RAIN platform) to ensure accessibility and sustainability.

3

II. OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

II.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

II.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Deliverable 6.1 – Report on the round tables was developed within the framework of WP6 – Development of the regional circular living lab tool for entrepreneurs in rural areas.

WP6 aims at creating a unique and integrated tool / environment for incubating the concept of RAIN – Regional Circular Living Lab business model. The tool shall include a website (RAIN platform) and an integrated App for smartphones (both for Android and iOS operating systems), which will have the same features, components, sections and contents.

II.1.2 GENERAL OBJECTIVES

A first step towards the development of the RAIN business model and RAIN platform and, therefore, the main objective of the implementation of the round tables, is to record and analyze



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



the current situation and needs of the rural / agriculture enterprises in order to reflect these needs within the new business model and adapt the design and the contents of the RAIN platform in a way that meets these needs.

II.1.3 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the implementation of the round tables and of the overall report are:

- ✓ Identify and collect the needs and challenges of the rural entrepreneurs present in the project's piloting areas.
- ✓ “Transform” these needs and challenges into concrete requirements and features that the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should include.

II.2 METHODOLOGY APPLIED

II.2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The steps that project partners followed in order to reach the objectives of Task6.1.1 were:

- I. Work package leading partner (IED) developed a structured questionnaire to be used during the implementation of the round tables in the piloting territories.
- II. After collecting relevant feedback from all partners, the questionnaire was finalized and transferred in an online form in order to facilitate the recording of the results in each piloting territory.
- III. Partners in the project's piloting territories organized and implemented the round tables with rural entrepreneurs in order to collect the relevant filled questionnaires. The number of entrepreneurs that participated in the round tables organized in each piloting territory as well as the total number of collected questionnaires are available in the following table.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Piloting area (country / region)	Partner(s) responsible	Number of participants / entrepreneurs
Austria	RMB	19
Spain / Murcia	ADRI	20
Czech Republic / Bohemia	UHLA	20
Malta / Gozo	TRA	4
Azores / Archipelago	FRCT	5
Slovenia	UL	19
France / Britany	CRAB	8
France / West of France	CAPL	16
Latvia	ZSA	19
Turkey	ZEKA	23
Italy / Lake Trasimeno	UCT	20
Italy / Reggio Emilia	E35	22
Tunisia / Gabes Governorate	DAR	20
Italy / Sicily	CESIE	9
Total		224

Table 1: Details from the implementation of the round tables

- IV. Following the implementation of the round tables in each piloting area, partners collected the filled questionnaires and recorded the results in the relevant online form that was developed for that exact purpose.
- V. As the final step, the Work Package leading partner (IED) developed the overall report on the implementation of the round tables.

The questionnaire's main sections are:

- General information about the rural / agriculture enterprises that participated in the round tables:
 - Year of the business foundation
 - Initial involvement in the business
 - Main reason(s) for starting the business
 - Main activity / activities of the business
 - Financial information



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- Legal form
- Customers & customer's location
- Channels used to reach customers
- External companies / stakeholders / suppliers
- Number of employees
- Family members working in the business
- Average working hours per week
- ➔ Information about the location of the rural / agriculture enterprises
- ➔ Information about the business goals, business capability and the general business strategy
- ➔ Information about the specific business needs
 - Business needs for growth
 - Needs for business advice / support
- ➔ Information regarding the level of participation of rural / agriculture enterprises in continuing education and training activities.

III. RESULTS & FINDINGS

In the table below, an overview of the key results along with a relevant analysis of the input that each key result provides to LIVERUR for the development of the next deliverables and, specifically, the RAIN platform is being presented.

This analysis can be considered as the “heart” of the report on the implementation of the round tables and, of course along with the overall conclusions and results, is the main guide in order to achieve the ideal design and functionality of the RAIN platform in a way that the platform covers all relevant needs of rural entrepreneurs and enterprises.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Key results from the round tables	Key outputs / conclusions for LIVERUR next steps & activities
<p>Regarding the relevant channels that rural / agriculture enterprises use in order to reach their customers, the majority of them (59%) uses a combination of channels in order to reach their customers (in person, through wholesalers, online, etc.). But, it is also worth mentioning that 18% develops only in person relationships with the customers, 15% exploits wholesalers' and third parties' networks for the promotion of their products / services and 3% uses only online channels for reaching out to customers.</p>	<p>The innovative RAIN business model is recommended to combine the RAIN principles of social sustainability and stakeholders' involvement / openness with the core business activity of marketing and distribution in order to provide a context of new and/or innovative channels that can be used to reach customers.</p>
<p>The majority of the rural entrepreneurs that participated in the round tables states (63%) that the weekly working hours are more than 46, a result that confirms that running a business requires a great amount of personal effort and time, significantly affecting the work-life balance.</p>	<p>RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should provide support and guidance on the topic of work-life balance through the presence of relevant experts and through the possibility that rural entrepreneurs can directly communicate with them through the online community.</p>
<p>Examining the operational and technological business capability, besides the fact that the vast majority of the rural / agriculture enterprises have the capacity for more productions and sales, the following results can also be highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A significant percentage (13%) declare that they <i>do not know</i> if they are able to achieve more sales or not. 	<p>RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should provide support and guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conducting a business state-of-the-art analysis so that rural entrepreneurs are able to recognize their capability and their potential for business growth. ➤ Improving the rural / agriculture enterprises' technological readiness level, exploiting the cooperation with relevant stakeholders.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Key results from the round tables	Key outputs / conclusions for LIVERUR next steps & activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15% of the rural / agriculture activities does not acquire IT equipment and internet connection within their premises. ▪ 36.2% of the rural / agriculture activities does not acquire video-conferencing facilities and equipment within their premises. 	
<p>Analyzing the general long-term business strategy of the rural / agriculture enterprises that have participated in the round tables, the following strategic objectives appear to be very important:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Maintain current position or achieve slight expansion ✓ Get onto a secure footing ✓ Substantial expansion / develop and adopt a new business model 	<p>These results lead to an important business need: ensuring the long-term business viability and sustainability which can be covered through the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool and the innovative RAIN business model by enriching the core business activities with the RAIN principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ecological sustainability ✓ Economic sustainability ✓ Open innovation ✓ ICT ✓ Stakeholders involvement / openness ✓ Circular economy ✓ Social sustainability
<p>Several factors (both operational and financial) affect the capability of a business to grow in a viable and sustainable way. Focusing on the operational part:</p>	<p>RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should be designed in a way that enables the cooperation between rural / agriculture enterprises and other stakeholders from the quadruple helix embodying open innovation procedures. This can be achieved through an interactive map, which will provide</p>



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Key results from the round tables	Key outputs / conclusions for LIVERUR next steps & activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 35% of rural entrepreneurs states that the lack of space / premises prevents them from growing. ▪ 44% of rural entrepreneurs states that the lack of staff / experts prevents them from growing. <p>Focusing on the financial part of business growth, 60% stated that there is indeed a shortage of capital and another 20% stated that there is no such shortage but can only just afford a slight expansion.</p>	<p>information on relevant organizations (public authorities, research organizations, universities, other rural / agriculture enterprises, etc.) that can support rural / agriculture enterprises and cover their needs in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➡ space / premises ➡ specialized staff / experts ➡ product development ➡ marketing activities ➡ Updated business equipment / buildings / IT equipment
<p>Analyzing the specific needs of rural entrepreneurs for advice / support, the following topics / “areas” emerge as the most important ones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developing the business model ➤ Developing the business strategy ➤ Development of management and organizational skills ➤ Staff training/development ➤ Quality standards and their application ➤ Environmental sustainability ➤ Financial management / taxation ➤ Developing the marketing strategy / Market search / Digital marketing 	<p>These results directly highlight and enrich the topics and areas in which rural / agriculture enterprises need support and advice. Therefore, RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should adopt a personalized approach in order to meet these needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identification of each entrepreneur’s specific needs through the data each one will provide while registering in the platform. ➤ Analysis of these data and direct matchmaking of each entrepreneur with the relevant expert / section of the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool that can help him/her address the relevant needs.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Key results from the round tables	Key outputs / conclusions for LIVERUR next steps & activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developing new products/services ➤ Innovation ➤ Public relations / Networking ➤ ICT skills ➤ Risk management methods ➤ HR management ➤ Management of discrepancies 	
<p>Rural entrepreneurs present a high level of engagement and participation in training courses and activities while, on the other hand, the level of the employees can be improved. One of the main reasons why both business owners and employees are not engaged in training activities is the lack of information on available training courses.</p>	<p>These results provide lead us to two main conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cooperation schemes between the rural / agriculture enterprises and relevant and useful stakeholders should be promoted within the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool focusing, in this case, on the cooperation for the engagement in continuing training and education. This can be achieved again through the feature of an interactive map. ➤ The RAIN business model and, consequently, the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool should include a feature for recognizing the rural / agriculture enterprises' specific needs for training and education.

Table 2: Key-results of the report on the implementation of the round tables



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



IV. CONCLUSION

The present reports consists an analysis of the 224 questionnaires collected from rural entrepreneurs from the project's piloting areas within the implementation of the round tables (task 6.1.1).

The main objective of this report is to identify and record the needs of rural entrepreneurs in order to design and develop the RAIN Entrepreneurial Tool (platform) in a way that meets and cover these needs.

The key results along with a relevant analysis of the input that each key result provides to LIVERUR for the development of the next deliverables and, specifically, the RAIN platform is being presented in [Table 2](#).