



**PROJECT H2020**

**LIVERUR**

**Living Lab Research Concept in Rural Areas**

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**DELIVERABLE 6.3:**

**Report on the training activities**



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LIVERUR - 773757

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**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** combines key rural subjects (agricultural, tourism, innovation, energy & environment, food, water, entrepreneurship, social innovation, and so on) to address future issues in rural/ remote/ mountain regions. The goal of WP6 is to provide a one-of-a-kind, comprehensive tool/environment for incubating the RAIN – Regional Circular Living Lab business model. The tool will consist of a website (RAIN platform) and an integrated smartphone app (for both Android and iOS operating systems) with the same features, components, sections, and contents. The **LIVERUR** tool for entrepreneurs is like an “incubator” concept: it will have an anchor where entrepreneurs will have access to marketing guidance, finance options, counseling services from relevant specialists, and legal input.

This report details the findings of Task 6.3 Training Activities, which entailed gathering and recording feedback from participants in the project’s piloting territories through the implementation of workshops in which rural stakeholders were introduced to the RAIN platform and asked to complete a structured questionnaire.



The key findings of the survey are presented here to summarize the platform's influence on the initial stakeholders that encountered it and to assist in the design of the following stages in terms of the refinements that must be made to make the deliverable fully functional, appealing, and competitive.

- The overall perception has been positive and encouraging.
- To prevent becoming confused, some pages should be simplified to serve as clear indicators of the information provided in each section.
- Explanatory sections should be included to ensure that all terms are understood by all parties involved.
- Case studies and examples should be provided in all languages spoken in the pilot regions, as language can be a significant barrier.

Finally, the consortium should properly investigate the negative comments and the challenges that stakeholders experienced and should establish new additional guidelines for the platform's developers.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

We live in an era when smart cities outnumber rural areas, and we are faced with the challenge of halting the financial contraction of these places in order to enhance Europe's economy. Europe must play a dual role in guaranteeing the agri-food sector's future while also assisting rural communities in developing new sources of sustainable growth. The new issues in the rural economy are confronted by **LIVERUR**, who deals with them as a necessary component of universal business. This specific project will find and form ways to strengthen the few and ineffective initiatives that have previously existed in order to stimulate social innovation in rural areas; areas that, due to their location, have so many unique characteristics that it is sometimes impossible to apply a single solution to all. In this regard, the **LIVERUR** project intends to assist Europe in identifying the unique qualities of each region and to develop instruments to deliver personalized social innovation projects. More specifically, **LIVERUR's** main purpose is to integrate the Rural Living Lab Research technique into the SAMEs Framework. This will be accomplished by following a set of objectives that will eventually lead to the creation of a new business model concept called the Regional Circular Living Lab – RAIN. The development of a regional circular living lab tool for entrepreneurs in rural areas, the RAIN platform, with the concept of a mobile friendly website that will provide marketing advice, funding solutions, expert counseling, legal feedback; and it will also act as a training tool for policymakers, will be done for knowledge-sharing, communitarian, and dissemination reasons. This first step is being materialized through the implementation of the roundtables in the project's piloting territories with the participation of rural entrepreneurs, while this report demonstrates the results from the relevant survey.

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

- 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.

### 1.2 Objectives

Following the development of the platform, the **LIVERUR** collaboration arranged training sessions to improve end-user awareness of the platform. The consortium planned specific training activities, and the training was delivered in a two-day workshop in each pilot zone, during which entrepreneurs were asked to utilize the platform directly under the supervision of the developers. The training was held in the piloting territories of Tunisia, Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Portugal and France with more than 50 participants in total. It should be noted that the pilot territory of Malta didn't participate as Malta's partner left the consortium and the platform could not be tested in the pilot region of Malta.

In order to evaluate the RAIN platform, the participants were asked to complete feedback questionnaires on the platform's functionality and effectiveness.

The objectives of WP6 that embed this procedure were:

- Develop a one-of-a-kind and comprehensive environment for the RAIN concept's incubation.
- Develop an entrepreneurial tool that will ensure the project's long-term viability even after the funding process is completed.
- The **LIVERUR** platform for entrepreneurs as a hub for marketing guidance, financial solutions, professional consultation, and legal feedback.

## 1.3 Procedure

There have been defined three main target groups: the general public (target group I), the specific target groups (target group II) and the policymakers (target group III) for **LIVERUR** project.

There have been two rounds of training exercises in total. A single round of workshops was originally intended, but the minimum number of participants was not met, and the kind of participants was not the desired one (partners rather than stakeholders), so a second round of workshops was organized to fulfill the deficiencies in the process. Prior to the Organization of the second round of workshops, a training of trainers was organized by iED and Wellness Telecom SL. During the training of trainers, each local partner-representative of a pilot region was trained on how to present the RAIN platform to stakeholders, how to organize local workshops and how to collect feedback. So, finally, the trainings consisted of a one-day workshop in each piloting territory in which entrepreneurs were asked to utilize the platform directly under the supervision of two developers who assisted in a platform training for the regional trainers of the activities. A "how to use me" feature has been established within the platform to make usage simple and user-friendly as well as practical. Furthermore, because rural enterprises are often hesitant to engage in open innovation activities, a system of incentives based on platform accesses was initially devised. The interactive map in the community layer will mark the entry of a new entrepreneur with a national flag, and after a certain number of flags have been reached, that nation will be awarded in terms of visibility and advertisement on the **LIVERUR** website and social network.

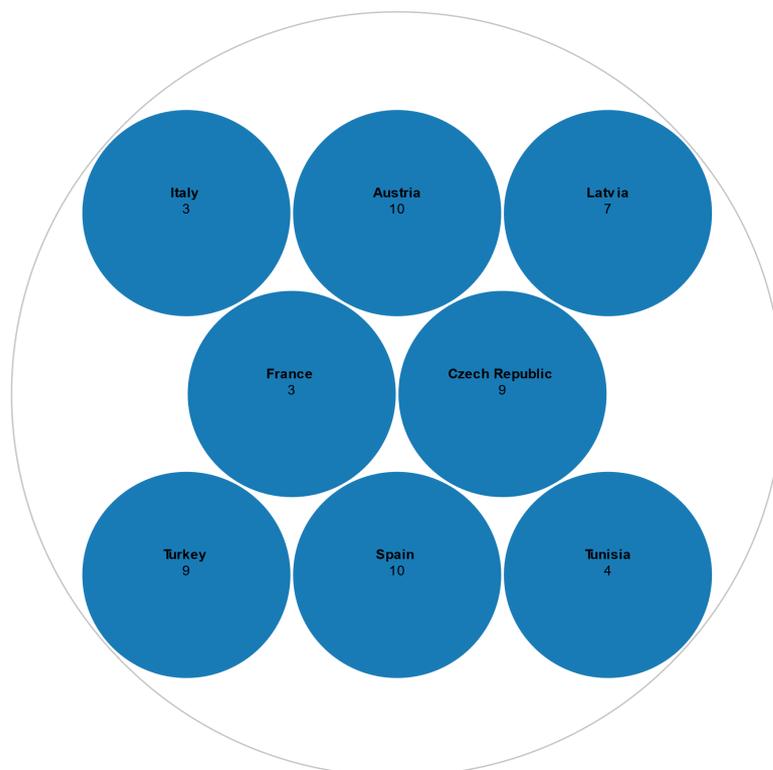
## 1.4 Method & process

Before the workshop feedback questionnaires were prepared in their draft versions and commented on by all partners. Corrections, feedback, additions, and elaborations from partners were shared while the final versions of these documents were prepared for all participants by Wellness Telecom SL. A **LIVERUR** partner assisted with the organizing of the workshop and acted as a translator in each piloting region. In addition, all surveys were translated into the languages of the participants. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, an open and spontaneous discussion was held with the goal of collecting inputs on the user experience. Participants in training events were given electronic feedback questionnaires after the discussion. They had a 7 to 14-day deadline to submit the feedback form after the workshop. Local partners were requested to gather all comments and complete the survey in English. The overall comments of each region's participants were compiled into a single questionnaire. Project partner iED, Greece, gathered the results and findings.

## 1.5 Research sample

In each pilot zone, the round table discussion should have no more than 15 participants. This translates to a total of 120 participants. The round table discussion should last around 1.5 hours, and the target

audience should include **LIVERUR** Pilot Area partners, technical partners, and stakeholders. The participation in the first round of workshops is shown in the figure below.



*Figure 1: Sample of the First Round Participants*

The consortium decided to hold a second round of workshops in order to obtain the desired percentage of participation and participant background.

All these contributions resulted in 21 regional feedback questionnaires during the first round of Workshops and 4 regional feedback reports during the second round, containing data collected by **LIVERUR** partners who contributed to the implementation of the workshops, and they are the same data that we will analyze in the following sections of this report.

# 2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

## 2.1 Participant's background

Figure 2 depicts the regions from where the feedback of first round of workshop originated.

The first round's participation did not represent the full range of target groups.

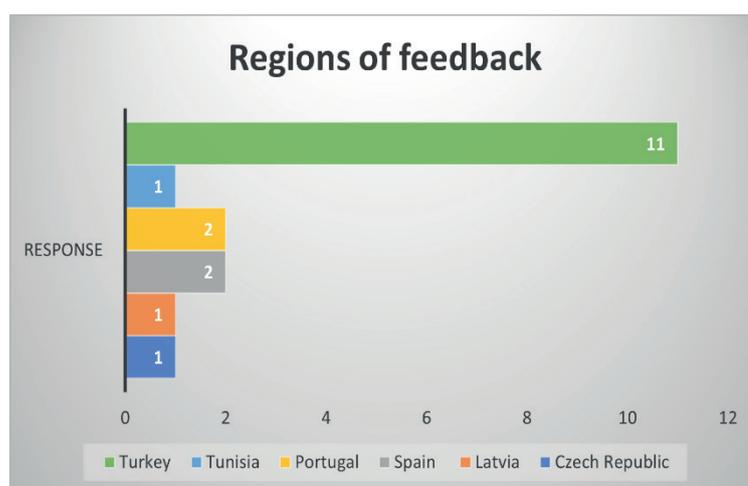


Figure 2: Regions Feedback

## 2.2 Questionnaires

The first round's data was taken directly from the questionnaires, no reports were developed.

The questionnaire referred to the platform's two areas, public and private, and its sections were an actual breakdown of the Rain Platform and its tools. In the sections below, the data and feedback will be arranged by sector and questionnaire question.

### PUBLIC AREA WEBPAGE

#### Additions or removals of the sections

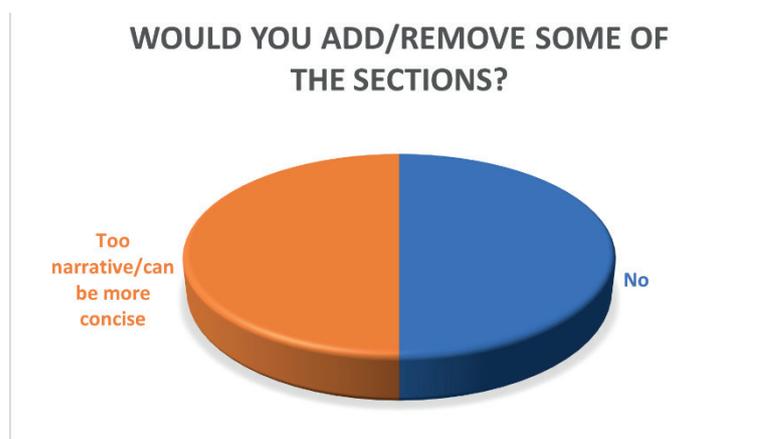


Figure 3: Would you add/remove some of the sections?

The two most important viewpoints on the webpage are depicted in the figure above. Additional comments were that it is simple to register and utilize the translation, however translation errors do occasionally surface during registration. It was also recommended that there should be alternatives for company types, and that the date of birth should not be required.

### Addition of new section / description

The majority of participants agree that no new section is required, with the exception of one suggestion that claims that because not all entrepreneurs are familiar with the term “living lab,” an explanation section should be included alongside a list of all living labs developed throughout the project.

### Benefits of using the RAIN business model

The strongest benefits of using the RAIN business model, according to the data analysis, are a comprehensive analysis of the business environment and the ability to adjust the business model accordingly, as well as an innovative approach to business modeling that considers new variables such as circularity and open innovation. Encouraging and developing the circular economy in these places is also a strategy to recruit talent and revive these rural communities. Rain business may also provide useful information for establishing and managing the Living Lab, as well as a greater insight of the procedures and features to be followed.

### Improving users’ experience

Adding videos and examples, as well as converting the majority of the text into key messages, might improve the user experience. Navigation is a technical aspect that should be improved, since some users had difficulty returning to the homepage after exploring other sections of the platforms.

### Overall perception

The overall perception about the webpage section is that is informative, appealing, and efficient. Although the context is too narrative, it provides a lot of information, and it is easy to use.

### RAIN TOOL

Figure 4 illustrates users’ comments on the RAIN Tool overall, and the percentage of users that decided to register for the platform after reading the Rain Tool section to learn more was overwhelmingly positive.

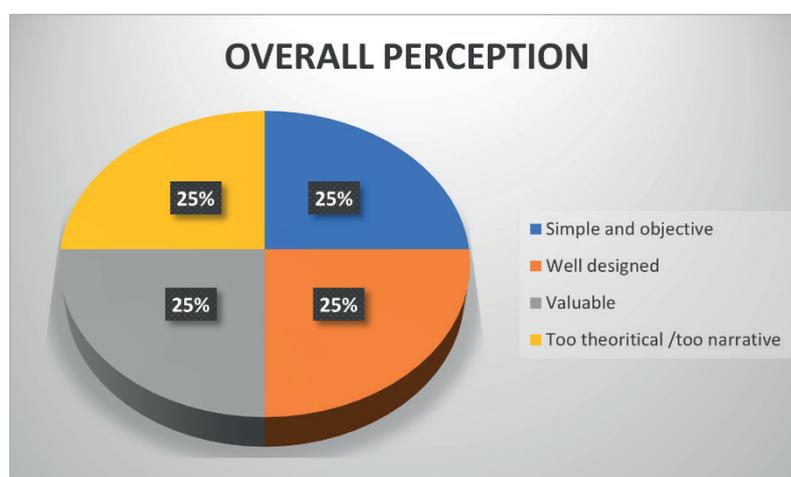


Figure 4: Overall Perception

In terms of the RAIN Tool’s context, less than half of the participants propose **no additions or deletions**, and some other suggestions included a comparative section with other regions/businesses, while others would prefer the details to be moved to different sections or the private area, leaving only a brief introduction and key points in the RAIN Tool section. An idea has also been suggested that a link should be included here, which will provide immediate access to the registered area.

## KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Almost all the participants prefer the Knowledge Sharing section as it is, apart from a suggestion to include a sub-section titled “Support for Businesses & Internationalization.” More knowledge categories have also been suggested, such as “cultural aspects,” “rural development,” and “supply chains,” which some participants consider essential to be involved. The response to whether this area makes people want to register was unanimously positive, and the overall impression offered was that this area is easy, informative, and engaging, and that providing live training sessions would be beneficial.

## CONTACT US

As seen in Figure 5, the feedback for this part as well as the overall perception for this section were both positive.



Figure 5: Contact Us Section

## REGISTRATION

The overall perception and the content of the registration section were satisfactory apart from the sensitive information about the date of birth which most participants consider unnecessary.

## GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE PUBLIC AREA

The overall impression of this section seems to be quite favorable, as it was described as simple and easy to use, as well as sufficient and encourages registration. The only comments were directed towards the length of the text, which some believe could be shortened. There were no suggestions for additions or removals.

## PRIVATE AREA

## NEWS

The overall impression of the News section was positive once again, and there were some interesting and targeted suggestions, such as providing information about funding opportunities (e.g., new calls), synchronizing the Project’s Twitter account with the News landing page, and using real-life business cases and examples alongside policies.

### ENHANCE YOUR BUSINESS!

Stakeholders considered this topic not only informative but also innovative, as seen in Figure 6. There were still some entrepreneurs who could not relate the usage of this specific area to their business, others who thought the context was too theoretical, and some who thought presenting successful examples of enterprises and Living Labs would be motivating and inspiring. Also, apart from a proposal to include a link to the section that would immediately redirect users to the “Business model analysis,” “Toolbox,” and “RAIN Concept,” nothing was recommended **to be added or removed**. Ultimately, except for a few users who found it informative but a little generic and others that expected a larger database, the **overall impression** was positive.

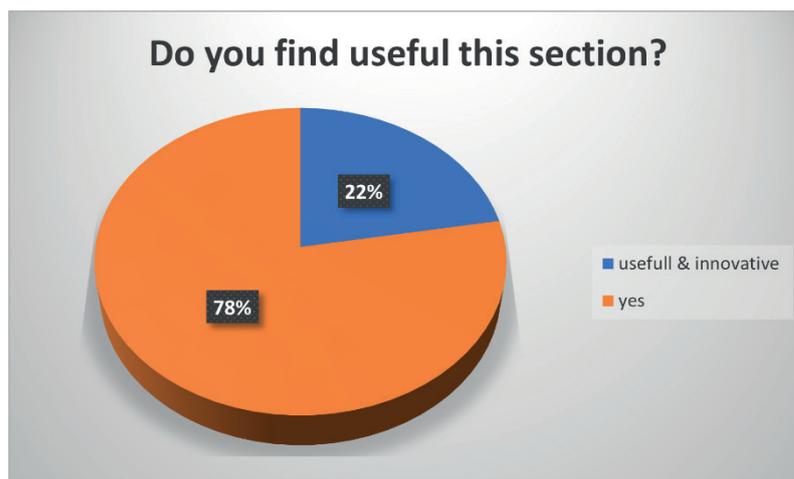


Figure 6: Do you find useful this section?

### RAIN TOOL

As far as **additions and removals** are concerned regarding this section there has just been a proposal for addition that could improve users’ experience and give them an immediate sense of purpose. That would be to add descriptions right below the titles “Business Model Analysis” (e.g., Discover your soft spots and strengths); “Toolbox” (e.g., A tool for every challenge); and “RAIN Concept” (e.g., Innovating your business model). There was also a **suggested field to be completed**, a benchmarking tool that would allow users to compare different regions/living labs/companies. Apart from some comments about the colours of the layout, which might be varied to make the area more visually interesting, the **overall impression** was positive.

### RAIN TOOL-BUSINESS MODEL ANALYSIS

The participants’ thoughts after reviewing the business Model Analysis are depicted in Figure 7.

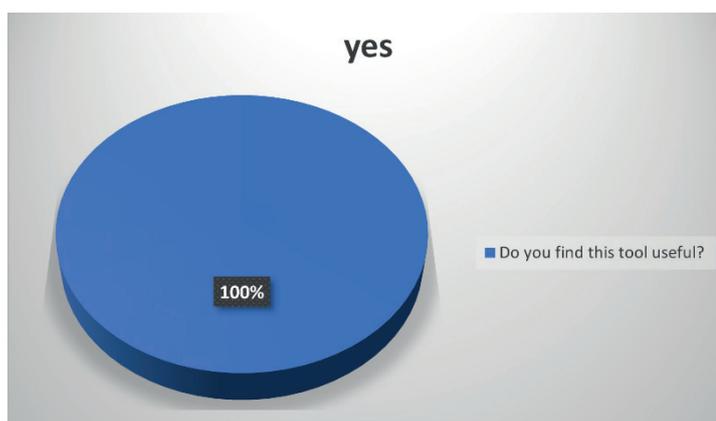


Figure 7: Business Model Analysis

In addition, the **overall perception** was that it ensures the success of the business model and the only recommendation for improvement was to add a financial analysis tool and a database with specific cases to serve as a comparison tool between the findings and the region's general evaluation.

### RAIN TOOL – Toolbox

All users regarded the Toolbox to be useful and informative, no **suggestions** for improvement were given, and while the **overall impression** was positive, some users felt the concept to be too academic and complicated and struggled to understand it.

### RAIN TOOL –Rain Concept

The Rain Concept received the same feedback as the Toolbox in terms of data analysis. Although the response to whether the section is **useful** was overwhelmingly positive, some users were confused by the function, claiming that comparable information was provided in multiple links and that some of the content was difficult to understand. The only **suggestion for improvement** was the addition of two separate sections regarding 'RAIN principles' and 'RAIN Core Elements'. Concluding, the RAIN Concept was described as challenging yet with enormous promise, and it was described as visually beautiful, educational, and enticing.

### OPEN LEARNING

This part was characterized as beneficial, with some ideas for improvement offered, such as the addition of a section on EU Finance and some more technical information that would serve as suggestions to producers, in terms of advances in key sectors and production regions. The overall impression was positive, the section was seen to be engaging and educational, and the only issue highlighted was the necessity for extra registrations and log ins on external platforms. The idea for enhancing the user experience on this problem was to integrate chosen videos and webinars in the platform.

### RAIN COMMUNITY

All participants thought the main section and the regional sections were good, with the sole suggestion being that more actors be included in the discussion. Videos, solutions from companies that have already dealt with and addressed an issue, and a circular economy attitude so users may recycle products and services were all proposed as specific items per region. Although there was a remark that the landing page appeared to be cluttered and that it might be presented differently, the overall impression was positive.

### PRIVATE MESSAGES

The beta version of private messages was hailed as highly beneficial, and it was widely viewed as a great way to improve communication.

### GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THE PRIVATE AREA

Apart from one comment regarding adding the findings of the latest selected business model analysis or a tracking mechanism of the learning resources that have been used or finished to the users' profile, there have been no recommendations for additions or removals in this section. Moreover, apart from a suggestion that the sustainability could be strengthened by sections referring to partners for specific business operations, international trade, participation in EU funded projects, and certain EU calls, it was also widely regarded as a complete section that required no additional functionalities to improve its sustainability.

The data for the **second round** was collected from reports created by partners in the regions where the workshops were held.

As far as the **PUBLIC AREA-WELCOME PAGE** is concerned, to generate interest in registration, the participants proposed adding a visible area where the benefits of registering are clearly mentioned, as well as an overview of the extra content that will be available once enrolled. They also proposed placing the language switch/options area directly on the page and making it larger to make it more apparent. Participants suggested that the photos on the page should be more inclusive, not just focusing on agriculture and the rural areas, but also including urban agriculture. The use of language should be given the same care in order to be more inclusive of the many users' backgrounds, which might include not only agricultural but also other rural backgrounds. The page's graphics were applauded for being attractive, clear, and user-friendly. Regarding the **PUBLIC AREA – RAIN Tools and Knowledge Sharing** it was suggested that the benefits of registering should be more obvious on the homepage. The overall impression of the **Private Area** was that it appeared a little cluttered while people looked up specific information, and it was suggested that direct pathways or links should be offered. Furthermore, users of **RAIN TOOLS** noted that it should be supplemented with best practices and case studies. In the **Open Learning** section, there should be a section dedicated to calls and financial possibilities, and the webinars should cover a wider range of topics. **RAIN COMMUNITY** may be improved with a chat feature to encourage direct contact, as well as a more detailed user profile to encourage networking through the platform.

In a broader sense, nearly all workshop participants agreed that the RAIN platform might become a crucial source of information for those who are not insiders to rural areas' business, lives, and communities across Europe and beyond. This includes students of all levels of agricultural education, as well as students of all sorts of business schools, workers of all types of institutions dealing with rural issues, and consultants looking for inspiration or best practices. Local action groups and NGOs in rural areas provided the sense that this would be a good source of information and motivation. The material on business models actually is a good place to start when designing and developing a firm, however it lacks a wider national perspective (specific regulations and local conditions). Some users of the RAIN platform community have remained skeptical, believing that the platform's content is too general at the moment to encourage them to join. The open learning section appears to be overly broad for the participants; most webinars (excluding those on best practices) were recommended to be customized to local conditions. Finally, the agricultural audience seems to lack sufficient incentive to utilize the platform; some are uncomfortable with the language (or translation); and, while searching for information on the internet, they want the national format and setting. Another view that was highlighted by the stakeholders was the importance of disseminating the platform in circular economy events and forums and vice versa.

Other major takeaways from the questionnaire responses, which were included in the reports, are that the platform is easy to navigate and use, the content is sufficient, and there are suggestions for Circular Business Models to be added and for the information provided to be of a broader spectrum, as it appears that there is more about legislation and less about entrepreneurship.



## CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of the 6.3 Training Activities in the framework of the 6th Work Package is to find out if the functionality of the RAIN Platform meets the participants' expectations, if the design and content meet the project's requirements and whether this initiative can be attractive to users and sustainable. Conclusions are based on qualitative and quantitative data coming from feedback responses. The data for analysis was collected from 55 feedback responses from all 8 pilot regions. Summarizing the key reflections of the respondents, the RAIN platform has achieved its aims to a large extent. Following the consortium's guidelines and principles, the developers created a great structure that provides a meaningful context, is appealing to users, and appears to be able to spread the Project's main goal. Participants' comments and ideas were direct and to the point, highlighting the platform's flaws when used in real life, as well as some good discoveries that, if implemented, may take the platform to the next level of perfection.



## IMPLICATIONS TO RAIN PLATFORM

Having analyzed the collected data, the following implications can be drawn:

Regardless of whether the stakeholders' overall impression has been positive and occasionally enthusiastic, the negative comments and difficulties that have been mentioned should be carefully considered in order to smooth out all the edges and ensure that the platform contains no elements that will deter anyone from approaching this initiative. All people in rural areas should have their backgrounds considered, so all terms should be explained in all sections, developers should find a way to overcome the language barrier, and all relevant sections that have been suggested should be thoroughly examined, as their addition may be very appealing to some stakeholders and help the platform's sustainability.