Institutional structures and policy panoramas in the Pilot Regions

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Deliverable Number	WP / T
D4.1	WP4 / T4.2

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Planned Delivery Date	Actual Delivery Date
31.01.2024	31.03.2024

Type of deliverable	R	Document, report (excluding periodic and final reports)	x
	DATA	Websites, patents filling, press & media actions, videos	
	DMP	Data management plan	

Dissemination level	PU	Public, fully open, e.g. web (Deliverables flagged as public will be automatically published in CORDIS project's page))	x
	SEN	Sensitive, limited under the conditions of the Grant Agreement	

**Funded by
the European Union**

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1. Introduction

This report assesses (and compares) the institutional structures and policy panoramas that respond to the selected transition challenges in the 14 Pilot Regions. The objective is to understand the capacity of the present policy environment in the Pilot Regions to adapt or respond to the identified transition challenges, and to identify what are the gaps and opportunities for designing and implementing effective policies that address the selected transition challenges. The analysis is performed at the Pilot Region level, which covers both the regional and local levels. This report is produced at the end of the first Living Lab cycle (see Cycle 1 in Figure 1), which sets the basis for preparing the data experiments that will be conducted in the second cycle.
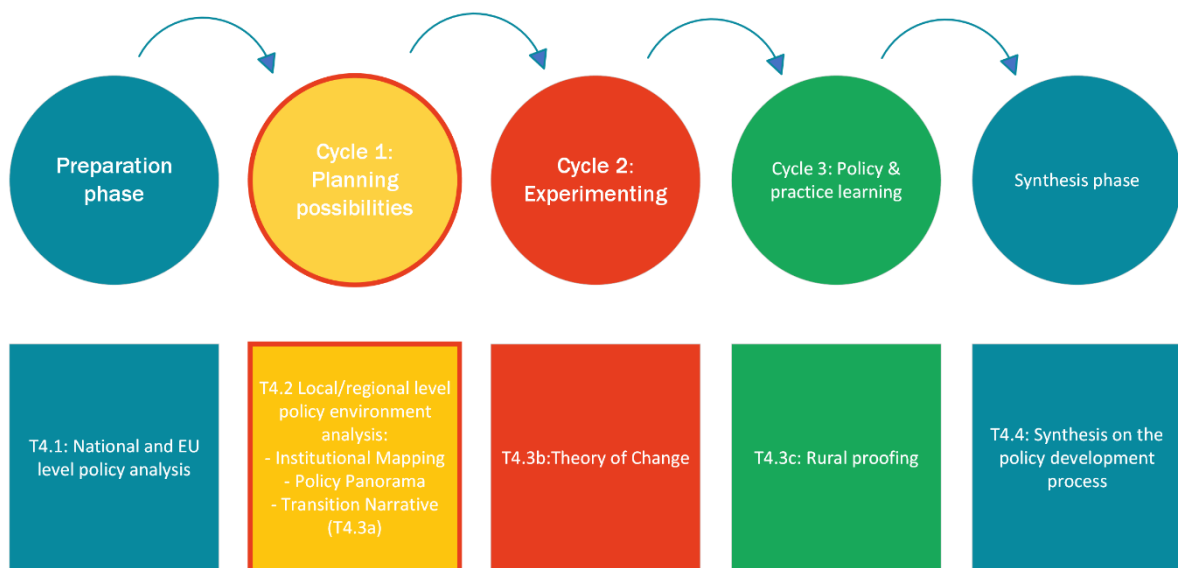
Figure 1 Intersection between RUSTIK Living Lab cycles and WP4 Tasks

The data included in this report supports the activities in the Living Labs of RUSTIK:

- The report provides a systematic approach for comparing the institutional maps in the 14 Pilot Regions (and distinguishes different forms of multi-level governance).
- The report provides a systematic approach for comparing the policy panoramas in the 14 Pilot Regions which respond to the identified transition challenges.
- The report supports the development of innovative experiments that respond to the selected transition challenges within Pilot Regions in the second Living Lab cycle.

2. Overall approach and methodology

The methodology of this report consists of three inter-related stages: (1) Institutional Mapping, (2) Policy Panorama, and (3) Transition Narrative. The first two contribute to the third stage, which

forms the basis of the analytical part of this report (Section 4). The following Section describes the methodology of the three stages.

First, the Institutional Mapping exercise was carried out between 07th July 2023 and 31st August 2023. The exercise consisted of the Pilot Region partners undertaking a systematic desk-based inventory of institutions and actors in the Pilot Regions and assessing their relevance to the three main transitions. In particular, the aim was to define the profiles and competences of the actors and to identify which actors should be included in a more detailed analysis in the next stage. Partners were asked to characterise the institutions and actors and to categorise them according to type, territorial scale, statutory mandate, specific tasks, and actions related to the transitions, impact/outcome, mode of operation, interest, and power in the transition in question. The exercise was documented in Excel files. As part of the documentation of the results, two figures were produced for each of the Pilot Regions. The first (Figure 2)) is a graphical representation of the distribution of regional/local institutions and actors between the public and private sectors, public-private partnerships, and civil society. The second is a scatter plot illustrating the distribution of power and interest (in terms of addressing transition) between institutions and actors (Figure 23). These diagrams were produced to help partners select policies in the stage 2 (Policy Panorama).

Public sector	Private	Public-Private Partnership	Civil Society
Local Municipal Office in Jastrzębie Wierzbica Commune Complex of General Education Schools named after Henryk Sienkiewicz Orońsko Municipality Municipality of Mirów Joseph Brandt Public Elementary School in Orońsko Mayor of the city of Szydlowiec Head of the Municipality of Orońsko Orońsko Community Library District Employment Office in Szydlowiec	Biskoptti - Pastry shop FHU Pomidzi Dance Club Bis		Local Action Group "Together on Sandstone" Association "Renovation and Development of Orońsko Commune" Orońska Academy for Personal and Social Development
Regional Psychological and Pedagogical Clinic Chamber of Crafts and Small Business in Radom	stonemasonry/ kamieniarka TOOLMEX TRUCK company in Szydlowiec		

Figure 2: Example of Institutional Map of Mazowieckie, Poland
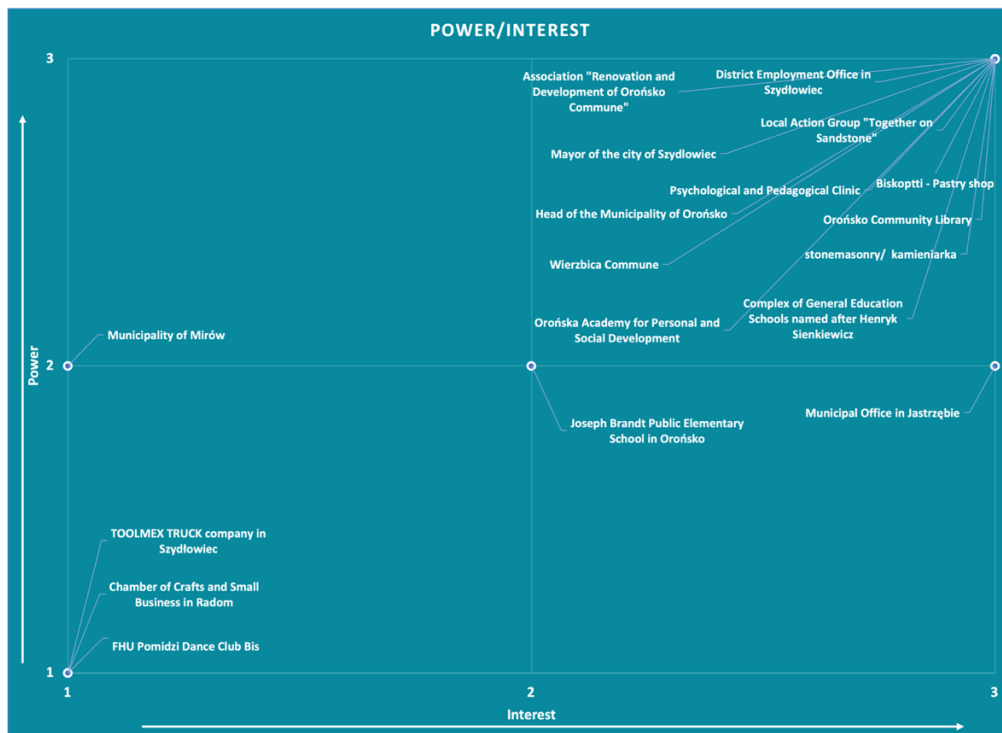

Figure 3: Example of power/interest scatter plot of Mazowieckie, Poland

1=low, 2=medium, 3=high

Second, a Policy Panorama exercise was carried out between 20th September 2023 and 20th October 2023. This exercise deepened the findings of the Institutional Mapping by focusing on those institutions identified Institutional Mapping as having a high level of interest and/or power regarding the transitions. The exercise consisted of the Pilot Region partners conducting a desk-based inventory of strategies, policies and programmes that respond to the selected transition challenge in the Pilot Regions. The aim was to provide a structured overview of how the policies address the identified transition challenge or transition(s) at a more general level in the Pilot Regions. Specifically, the partners were asked to describe *the purpose, nature, influence, mode and timeframe of the strategies, policies, and programmes.* The results of the exercise were documented in Excel files. The Policy Panorama provided the basis for the final stage (stage 3), the Transition Narrative.

Finally, the third stage, the Transition Narrative exercise, was carried out between 10th November 2023 and 31st December 2023. The Transition Narrative exercise consisted of the partners utilising the results of the previous two exercises and producing a narrative illustrating the capacity of the policy environment in the Pilot Regions to respond to the selected transition challenges. The aim was to create a narrative that highlights the crucial role of the institutional structure and policy environment in shaping the trajectory of a specific transition within the Pilot Regions, and how stakeholders/organisations can work together to achieve a desired transition outcome. Specifically, the Transition Narratives included an assessment of the facilitators and inhibitors for addressing the transition challenge identified in the Institutional Maps and Policy Panoramas, an overall impact assessment of stakeholder efforts, and an envisioning of a pathway for addressing the transition challenge.

The analysis, based on desk research of the Transition Narratives of the 14 Pilot Regions, aims to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the gaps and opportunities for designing and implementing effective policies to address the selected transition challenges? (chapter 4)
2. How conductive is the policy environment in the Pilot Regions for adapting or responding to the transition challenges? (chapter 5)
3. What are the key pathways for addressing the transition challenges? (chapter 6)

3. Policy environment

The policy environment plays a role in the capacity of a region to adapt or respond to the transition challenges it is facing. The policy environment in this report refers to the strategies, policies, and programmes, as well as the constellation of institutions and actors that can influence policy makers. The policy environment is constructed through a multi-level process in which high-level EU and national policies, laws, and regulations (see RUSTIK Deliverable 4.1) are filtered down to the regional and local levels.
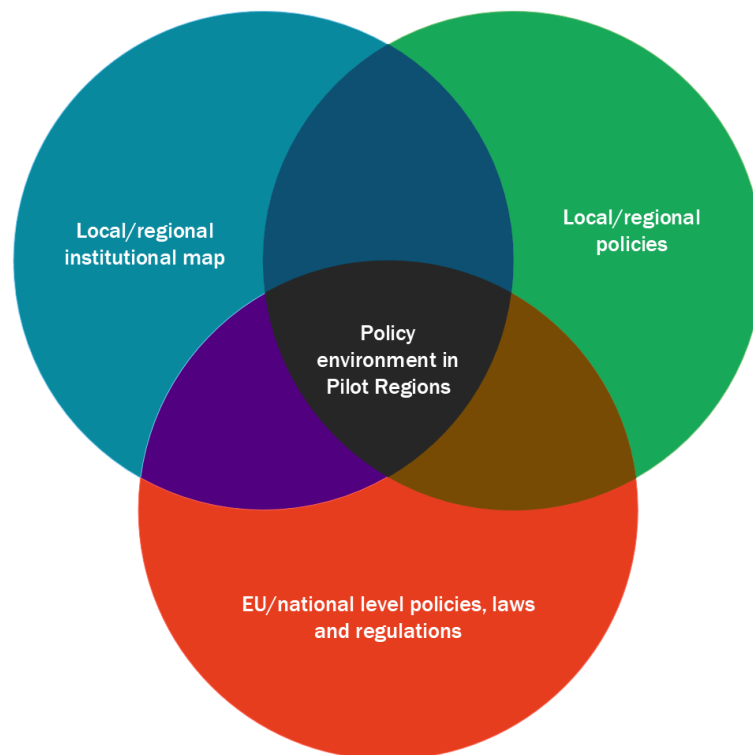
Figure 4: Conceptualisation of the policy environment

Effective transition responses depend on the coordinated actions across diverse sectors and stakeholders within a conducive policy environment. This coordination enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of transition efforts while revealing the strengths and weaknesses of existing policy structures within specific contexts. Central to successful collaboration is the quality of cooperative efforts transcending broad coordination, which necessitates a supportive policy environment. Through shared understanding of challenges and alignment of interests, stakeholders have a possibility to drive regions towards sustainable futures within the contours of the policy environment (Geels et al. 2019). The interplay of perceptions and incentives in shaping collaborative landscapes is emphasised, underscoring the nuanced dynamics among various actors coping with transition challenges amid evolving policy environments.

In this setting, the policy environment serves as the backdrop for navigating the intricate socio-economic transitions encountered by local and regional communities. Within this context, policy interventions can play a crucial role in facilitating smooth transitions by addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities. At the heart of effective policy interventions lies the principle of translating broad strategic objectives into actions aligned with differing potentials and needs of local communities. Place-based approaches emphasise the importance of region-specific instruments and community-driven initiatives in addressing transition challenges, recognising the diversity of local contexts and the significance of local autonomy.

A coherent and consistent approach to transition responses necessitates alignment and coordination across governance levels. Policies and initiatives should be embedded within comprehensive frameworks to promote sustainable and inclusive growth. Effective collaborative coordination is essential for achieving coherence and alignment across policy levels and actors. This can be promoted via new or enhanced horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms, which facilitate the construction of partnerships between diverse stakeholders. In the same vein, reporting mechanisms at different levels allow to monitor policy outcomes comprehensively (Ferry 2021). This is vital in transition settings where policy implications are hard to predict from the start and may spread costs and benefits in an unbalanced way. Ongoing negotiation and refinement of roles and responsibilities are crucial to maximizing the impact of bottom-up initiatives and fostering integrated approaches to transition challenges.

Figure 4 illustrates the multidimensional policy environment in Pilot Regions, delineating the intersection of (1) Local/regional institutional maps, (2) Local/regional policies, and (3) EU and national level policies, laws, and regulations. The intersection of these three dimensions underscores the importance of cohesive coordination and alignment across different governance levels in the Pilot Regions. It also emphasises the necessary interplay between diverse stakeholders and the ongoing negotiation of roles and responsibilities, as well as highlighting the importance of integrated approaches within comprehensive frameworks.

Identifying and overcoming barriers, such as conflicting interests or policy priorities, lack of shared understanding, and administrative hurdles, is crucial for effective collaboration within the policy environment. Strategies for overcoming these barriers include reconfiguring power dynamics or top-down centralised structures, nurturing shared understanding with sensitivity to existing or emerging inequalities, and streamlining administrative processes to foster a policy environment conducive to effective collaboration and collective action towards shared objectives. The imperative lies in engaging key stakeholders and ensuring inclusivity in decision-making processes. Fostering broader participation and collaboration among stakeholders is essential to bridge divides and ensure a fair approach to addressing transition challenges.

The dynamic nature of transition challenges necessitates adaptive and collaborative approaches in policy design and implementation. Enabling process models in the policy environment are characterised by mechanisms that foster stakeholder engagement, iterative refinement, and adaptation, ensuring that policies remain responsive to evolving circumstances and effectively address transition challenges (Howlett 2014). A transition-oriented policy environment is expected to recognise and directly tackle the multifaceted challenges posed by transitions. Such environment prioritises principles such as sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, guiding the development of policies that address transition challenges comprehensively and effectively.

In such complex policy environment, barriers like regulations, capacity limitations, and evidence gaps hinder effectiveness. Strategic solutions such as simplifying regulations, enhancing capacities, and prioritizing data-driven decisions are essential (Geels 2019). A repository of transition-oriented policy principles can guide policymakers by compiling good practices. By distilling successful intervention principles, this resource informs future policy design and implementation to tackle transition challenges comprehensively.

In summary, our comparative report provides a holistic view of Transition Narratives, contextualising them within the broader policy environment characterised by Institutional Mapping, Policy Panorama, and collaborative efforts. By understanding the conceptual base and background dynamics of these narratives, we aim to provide insights that inform policy decisions and strategic actions, ultimately guiding the development of innovative experiments responsive to evolving needs within RUSTIK Pilot Regions.

4. Analysis

The analysis of the Transition Narratives aims to identify commonalities and differences between the policy environments in the 14 Pilot Regions regarding their capacity to adapt and respond to the transition challenges.

The analytical framework employed in our comparative report is designed around five key questions aimed at elucidating the dynamics, effectiveness, and alignment of various actors, strategies, and policies within the context of transition challenges faced by the Pilot Regions.

Firstly, we delve into the relationships and alignment of actors within the policy environment to discern coordination gaps. This involves categorising actors based on their mutual interests and engagement with the identified transition challenge, highlighting the importance of cohesive action and effective collaboration.

Secondly, we analyse the coordination and collaboration efforts to understand their efficiency and effectiveness in addressing transition challenges. This includes assessing whether actions are embedded within existing collaboration structures or facilitated by specially established networks, thereby uncovering strengths and weaknesses within existing frameworks.

Thirdly, we evaluate the activity levels of various actors in the Pilot Regions to gauge the effectiveness of transition strategies. Understanding the level of engagement among key actors helps identify opportunities for improvement and refinement of policies and actions to enhance the transition process.

Fourthly, we examine policy coordination and coherence to identify potential gaps or conflicts in policy implementation. This involves examining the alignment of multi-level policies in addressing transition challenges and ensuring that policies evolve over time to adapt to changing dynamics.

Lastly, we assess policy efficacy in targeting the transition challenge specifically, providing insights into the effectiveness of policies in addressing identified needs. This analysis allows for targeted improvements and adjustments to enhance the success of transition initiatives in the Pilot Regions. Through these five key questions, our analytical framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Transition Narratives and facilitate informed policy decisions and strategic actions.

Before moving forward with the analysis, an overview of transition challenges selected by RUSTIK's Pilot Regions, as referred to in the subsequent chapters, is presented in the table below.

Table 1 Transition Challenges in RUSTIK's Pilot Regions

Pilot Region	Transition Challenge
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten	Identifying the needs and challenges of Small Rural Businesses in Nockregion-Oberkärnten and establishing a network to address them.
BG: Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin	Tapping into the potential of rural food systems to address socio-economic and demographic transitions, incl. unequal access to food of marginalised groups.
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück	Making the region an attractive place to live and work for young people, and the long-standing challenge of unfilled jobs and apprenticeships in the region.
ES: Galicia	How to reconcile land use and land ownership?
ES: Osona	Enhancing the quality of life in Sant Miquel de Balenyà, prioritising social cohesion, equity, climate resilience, and balanced socio-economic competitiveness through improved territorial and urban planning.
FI: North Karelia	To improve its retention together with the settlement and integration of immigrants so that more people who move to the region would stay and work for the benefit of the region in long term.
IT: Garfagnana	To develop multifunctional forest use models and ensure a close link with the other goal of socio-economic transition through local community regeneration projects.
IT: Parma and Piacenza	Water availability and management for irrigation and production
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie	To develop entrepreneurship, specifically through using the area's natural resources, supported by awareness of and knowledge about the local cultural heritage and traditions, and strengthening local ties and networks between and within rural areas.
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	Developing infrastructure to rural tourism, silver, diagnosis of the status quo and preparation of assumptions on rural tourism for the planning document.
SR: Zaječar District	The need for economic restructuring towards higher value-added activities and labour-intensive services.

Pilot Region	Transition Challenge
SI: Osrednjeslovenska	Food loss and waste (FLW), and social inclusion
UK: Gloucestershire	The opportunity for developing a dataset of fine-grained community-level data generated and used by (mostly rural) community support organisations such as social housing providers, food banks, health and social care advocates, and local parish or town councils.
UK: Monmouthshire	Understanding the drivers of demographic change, and ways to achieve better demographic balance through retaining/attracting younger working-age people to live and work in the county.

4.1 Institutional capacity to respond to the transition challenge

The institutional capacity to respond to the identified transition challenge was analysed through three dimensions: 1) Coordination; 2) Cooperation and 3) Participation.

4.1.1 Coordination

The first dimension of the analysis focused on the capacity to coordinate action across sectors to address the transition challenge. This capacity is essential in addressing the transition challenge because of the involvement of many actors with conflicting objectives and agendas. It also provides insights into the potential efficiency and effectiveness of efforts to address the transition challenge and helps to identify strengths and weaknesses in existing structures in the Pilot Regions. Understanding these dynamics is essential to ensure a more coherent and effective approach to navigating the complex policy environment in the Pilot Regions. Three following categories provide a robust framework for understanding the nature of coordination and collaboration in the context of the transition challenge (results are summarised in Table 2):

a. Action is embedded within existing and well-functioning forms of collaboration,

b. action is coordinated for this purpose by specifically established network of actors, and

c. action is taken by different actors and is not coordinated.

Table 2 Capacity to coordinate action in Pilot Regions

Pilot Region	Action is embedded within existing and well-functioning forms of collaboration	Action is coordinated for this purpose by specifically established network of actors	Action is taken by different actors and is not coordinated
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten	X		
BG: Troyan-Apriltzi-Ugarchin			X
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück			X
ES: Galicia		X	
ES: Osona		X	
FI: North Karelia	X		
IT: Garfagnana	X		
IT: Parma and Piacenza		X	
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie		X	
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	X		
SR: Zaječar District			X
SI: Osrednjeslovenska		X	
UK: Gloucestershire	X		
UK: Monmouthshire	X		

The analysis of the Transition Narratives revealed varying degrees of coordination within the Pilot Regions. The key points in this regard related in particular to the pre-existing collaborative networks and the central coordinating body, which play an integral role in enabling effective communication, collaboration and alignment between stakeholders, ultimately contributing to a successful transition process.

Relevance of cooperative networks

Cooperative networks refer to partnerships and alliances formed by stakeholders with common interests and goals. These networks allow for open dialogue and information sharing, fostering trust and mutual understanding among participants. By leveraging their collective resources, expertise and influence, cooperative networks can help drive progress towards desired transition outcomes. Many important collaborative networks have been identified in the Transition Narratives. Local Action Groups (LAGs) are a prime example of such networks. As illustrated in the Transition Narrative of Garfagnana, these organisations have a proven track record in dealing with

the complexities of the transition challenge. With their extensive experience, LAGs are in a unique position to facilitate communication and cooperation between different stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the successful implementation of transition initiatives.

In many Pilot Regions, LAGs were already identified as important cooperation partners. For example, in the Nockregion-Oberkärnten it was noted that the partnership between the Pilot Region Partner (RVN) and the LAG showed strong cooperation. The LAG was recognised as an essential collaborative network due to its broad representation of different sectors and its significant power and interest in addressing the transition challenge. With its diverse membership, the LAG ensured that different perspectives were taken into account when formulating strategies and actions to address the complex issue of transition. This broad sectoral representation not only promoted a more holistic understanding of the challenge, but also facilitated the alignment of efforts between different stakeholder groups.

LAGs were identified as important actors in the context of transition challenges precisely because of their bottom-up approach. This approach is particularly important in addressing transition challenges, which often require the active involvement of local stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainability and success. The bottom-up philosophy of LAGs allows them to develop tailor-made solutions that meet the specific needs and realities of each community, making them indispensable partners in the transition process. This aspect of LAGs was highlighted in the Transition Narrative of Osrednjeslovenska, where it was emphasised that LAGs are appropriate vehicles for transition due to their bottom-up approach.

Presence of institutional facilitators

Institutional facilitators are organisations or structures that provide a framework for cooperation between different sectors. They can include government agencies, regulatory bodies and industry associations. Institutions serve to establish rules, guidelines and incentives that encourage cooperation and enable coordinated action towards common goals. In the Transition Narratives, nine out of fourteen Pilot Regions reported the existence of some form of institutional facilitator that coordinated the collaborative networks addressing the transition challenge. Often this facilitator was also the Pilot Region Partner, as in the case of Nockregion-Oberkärnten, where the Pilot Region Partner had already developed a strong network that served as a solid foundation on which to build initiatives to address the transition challenge. Similarly, in the case of Galicia, it was highlighted that the Pilot Regional partner (AGADER) had established a strong network between several other actors and maintained regular contact with other actors identified in the institutional map.

The presence of institutional facilitators was seen as essential not only for coordinating networks between different sectors within the region, but also for bridging gaps between different levels of government (local, regional, national and EU). For example, in the case of Parma-Piacenza-Ferrera, it was pointed out that the Inter-Branch Organisation (IBO) not only plays a prominent support and coordination role in several activities crucial to the operational dynamics of the supply chain, but also acts as a central actor in a multi-level matrix composed of production/processing, intermediary/sectoral bodies and authorities, regional/national/European interlocutions and legislation. A strong central organisation with dedicated resources was seen as crucial to

sustaining these multi-level networks. This was underlined in numerous Transition Narratives, including that of Rhein-Hunsrück, where the lack of such an entity with clearly defined financial support emerged as an obstacle in addressing the transition challenge. A key reason given for this lack was that the challenge of transition is multifaceted and cannot be fully addressed by a single actor.

Fragmented or missing cooperation

Cooperation networks and institutional facilitators played a key role in addressing the transition challenge, and their absence posed significant challenges in several Transition Narratives. For example, in the case of Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, it was found that there were no pre-existing cooperative networks among the actors involved that addressed the transition challenge. Instead, cooperation occurred infrequently and did not consistently serve as a basis for interaction between local stakeholders. A similar fragmentation of cooperation efforts was described in the Transition Narrative of Zaječar District. While cooperation in agriculture and tourism often emerged through regional or local projects and ad hoc initiatives, cooperation within the agricultural and food supply chain remained underdeveloped, underinvested, fragmented and limited to specific sectors or local products. In the case of Osona, it was found that while there were cases of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and collaborative initiatives between industry and the community (e.g. discussions on energy transfer), these efforts remain isolated. They were also found to be at the local level, which may overlook wider regional dynamics and integration.

In response to fragmented cooperation, many Transition Narratives highlighted the potential of the RUSTIK Living Labs to act as an integrating tool, bringing together actors who could optimise their work through targeted cooperation. This was highlighted for example in the case of Nockregion-Oberkärnten, where it was stated that the transition challenge of the Living Lab is focused on identifying the needs and challenges of SRB (small rural businesses) and establishing a network to address them. The aim is to strengthen the position of SRBs in regional decision-making processes and to identify priority issues for SRB development. Similarly, in the case of Gloucestershire, it was emphasised that there is a need to form a wider network to address the challenge of the transition to digital services, and that the RUSTIK Living Lab could be a particularly useful tool to facilitate the integration of stakeholders with a common (but possibly divergent) interest in digitalisation. The Rhein-Hunsrück Transition Narrative summarised these sentiments well:

"We however see this as a great opportunity for the RUSTIK Living Lab to bring together the relevant partners, who work in different departments and in some cases have not yet been in contact with each other, gain new insights and create new networks."

4.1.2 Quality of cooperative efforts

The second analytical dimension went beyond the capacity for coordination and focused on the quality of cooperation between different sectors and levels of government. This related in particular to the common perception of the transition challenge and the existence of mutual interests, both of which serve as a crucial basis for fostering effective cooperation efforts. The

common perception of the transition challenge plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of cooperation. If there is a shared understanding and recognition of the transition challenge, it becomes easier for different sectors and levels to work together effectively. Conversely, if there are conflicting perceptions or misunderstandings about the transition challenge, cooperation may be hampered. Moreover, the existence of mutual interests is another critical factor that contributes to effective cooperation efforts. When different sectors or levels have overlapping or complementary objectives, this creates incentives for them to work together towards common goals. Three following categories provide a robust framework for understanding the dynamics among various actors in the context of the transition challenge (results are summarised in Table 3):

a. Various actors share mutual interests and common features and address the identified transition challenge,

b. various actors share mutual interests, but do not address the identified transition challenge, and

c. various actors do not share mutual interests as well as do not address the identified transition challenge.

Table 3 Quality of cooperation in Pilot Regions

Pilot Region	Various actors share mutual interests and common features and address the identified transition challenge	Various actors share mutual interests, but do not address the identified transition challenge	Various actors do not share mutual interests as well as do not address the identified transition challenge
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten		X	
BG: Troyan-Apriltzi-Ugarchin		X	
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück		X	
ES: Galicia		X	
ES: Osona		X	
FI: North Karelia	X		
IT: Garfagnana		X	
IT: Parma and Piacenza	X		
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie			X
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie		X	
SR: Zajecar District		X	

Pilot Region	Various actors share mutual interests and common features and address the identified transition challenge	Various actors share mutual interests, but do not address the identified transition challenge	Various actors do not share mutual interests as well as do not address the identified transition challenge
SI: Osrednjeslovenska		X	
UK: Gloucestershire		X	
UK: Monmouthshire	X		

All 14 Transition Narratives reflected that key actors in the Pilot Regions shared a common understanding of the transition challenge. This is understandable as the Institutional Mapping exercise focused on the actors involved in addressing the transition challenge. Three Pilot Regions stood out for their extensive collaboration across sectors and levels of government to collectively address the transition challenge. In the case of Monmouthshire, it was highlighted that all key strategic stakeholders at county and regional level share a common understanding of the challenges faced and their medium to long term implications, as well as clear synergies in their current and future strategies to address these challenges. In North Karelia, there was widespread recognition of the transition challenge of integrating and retaining newcomers across different levels of government, from state organisations to educational institutions, municipalities and private companies. This collaborative approach brought significant benefits, such as improved integration capacity for North Karelian service providers and more effective settlement of immigrants in the region. In Garfagnana it was also highlighted that there is a clear consensus among stakeholders to address the transition challenge related to demographic change and forest resource management. The capacity to coordinate actions between different actors in the region was found to be strong due to existing relationships and plans among local stakeholders in project design and knowledge of policy instruments. It was also highlighted that there is a policy environment that enables community projects through different institutions such as the regional administration, local health authorities and municipalities.

Barriers of cooperation

While there was a relatively high level of shared understanding of the transition challenges in the Pilot Regions, many barriers to collaborative action emerged in the Transition Narratives. These barriers can be grouped into four categories: power dynamics, competing interests, lack of common understanding and administrative barriers.

Power dynamics

A significant obstacle to effective collaboration was identified as power dynamics, which refers here to the imbalance of influence, decision-making authority and resources between different stakeholders in a collaborative endeavour. In particular, many Transition Narratives highlighted the issue of unbalanced power dynamics between bottom-up actors and top-down authorities. Bottom-up actors, such as community groups or grassroots organisations, tend to have less formal power and fewer resources than top-down authorities, such as government agencies or businesses. The Gloucestershire case exemplifies this predicament, as although bottom-up actors have the chance to engage in ongoing multistakeholder consultations and policy development processes, their unequal distribution of power often results in their suggestions and contributions being disregarded or underestimated. Another aspect of power dynamics identified in the Transition Narratives related to disparities in decision-making authority. For example, in the case of Osona, it was pointed out that the localisation of decisions to address local needs is hampered by the lack of decision-making authority on urban planning on the part of the Pilot Region Partner (EMD).

The power dynamic between bottom-up actors and top-down authorities goes beyond influence and decision-making power to include the crucial aspect of resource allocation. Resource allocation plays an important role in shaping the balance of power between different actors. Bottom-up actors often lack the financial, human or technological resources to pursue their objectives effectively. Conversely, top-down authorities usually have access to substantial resources due to their formal power and larger budgets. This imbalance can result in top-down authorities exerting greater control over collaborative initiatives. This was demonstrated in the case of Nockregion-Oberkärnten, where the distribution of roles and competences between the federal state and the regional level was identified as a source of conflict. This was mainly due to the federal state's ability to provide vital funding essential for regional growth, an aspect that made seamless cooperation difficult.

Conflicting interests and lack of shared understanding

Another barrier identified in the Transition Narratives related to instances where collaboration was hampered by conflicting or competing interests between different stakeholder groups. Conflicting interests refer to situations where different parties have different objectives, needs or values that are not easily reconciled. These conflicts can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including disagreements over resource allocation, conflicting visions of the future, and disputes over decision-making authority. This aspect was highlighted, for example, in the case of Woj. Mazowieckie, where conflicting interests and competition between district and municipal actors hindered a cooperative response to the transition challenge. These power dynamics were further complicated by the presence of a significant generational divide between different stakeholder groups, which led to misunderstandings and misaligned perspectives on how best to respond to the challenges of the transition process. This notion further emphasised the need to find mutual understanding and common ground between different stakeholder groups in order to respond effectively to the challenges of transition. The aspect of competition between stakeholders was also highlighted in the case of Woj. Świętokrzyskie, where it was found that the lack of cooperation

between stakeholders in the tourism sector is due to the competitive relationship between these entities.

In the case of Garfagnana, it was found that bringing together key stakeholders was rather hampered by mistrust of new initiatives and low enthusiasm for a more entrepreneurial approach, due to the perceived low added value of local forest activities. Similarly, in the case of Nockregion-Oberkärnten, it was found that there is a lack of enthusiasm for cooperation among certain stakeholders; potential partnerships between regional actors and the Chamber of Agriculture faced challenges due to the Chamber's lack of interest in cooperation. This was perceived as an obstacle to the successful implementation of strategies concerning agricultural enterprises in the region. In this respect, an important task for the Living Lab was to build a cooperative network between these actors.

Administrative obstacles

Many of the identified barriers to cooperative action in the Transition Narratives were related to administrative barriers resulting from laws and restrictions and limited resources. The issue of laws and restrictions was exemplified in the case of Zaječar District, where it was noted that the existing legal framework does not provide a solid basis for establishing quality, sustainable and effective partnerships. Similarly, the case of Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin highlighted the existence of significant administrative barriers to effective cooperation between actors in the region. There are barriers related to limited resources, top-down requirements and restrictive regulations, all of which contribute to a limited capacity for cooperation.

4.1.3 Activity and participation

The third dimension of the analysis focused on the level of activity of the various actors in the Pilot Regions in addressing the transition challenge. This included both the level of activity of key actors and the identification of potential actors whose contributions could have a significant impact on the transition process, but who were absent. Three following categories provide a robust framework to understand the level of engagement of various actors (results are summarised in Table 4):

a. All main actors for the transition challenge are active,

b. main actors for the transition challenge are present but other important ones need to be involved, and

c. only a small circle of key actors are active.

Table 4: Activity of the actors in Pilot Regions

Pilot Region	All main actors for the transition challenge are active	Main actors for the transition challenge are present but other important ones need to be involved	Only a small circle of key actors is active
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten		X	
BG: Troyan-Apriltzi-Ugarchin		X	
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück		X	
ES: Galicia		X	
ES: Osona		X	
FI: North Karelia		X	
IT: Garfagnana	X		
IT: Parma and Piacenza	X		
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie		X	
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	X		
RS: Zaječar District	X		
SI: Osrednjeslovenska		X	
UK: Gloucestershire		X	
UK: Monmouthshire		X	

The findings revealed that while key actors in most of the Pilot Regions displayed considerable efforts towards addressing the transition challenge, numerous Transition Narratives identified a lack of involvement from certain essential actors necessary for effectively tackling the challenge. One reason for this was partly due to the problems in the cooperation described above, such as low power dynamics and conflicts of interests. For example, in the case of Woj. Mazowieckie, the Transition Narrative underscored that the involvement of local entrepreneurs in confronting the transition challenge was insufficient. This situation was attributed to a lack of commitment from the public sector in fostering entrepreneurship, which was rooted in the intergenerational divide among various stakeholder groups, as described above. In a similar manner, in the case of Nockregion, it was found that one of the important actors, the Agricultural Chamber was not cooperating with the regional actors, which was attributed to low interest on behalf of the Chamber.

In many cases, absences concerned actors who were most affected by the transition challenge, but who were not involved in policy planning. A clear example of this was found in the Transition

Narrative of Monmouthshire, where the transition challenge revolved around retaining young people in the region. Significantly, the perspectives and insights of young people were found to be conspicuously absent from the development of key strategies to address this issue. The reason for this attributed to difficulties in involving young people in the consultation processes. Another example, also concerning a lack of youth participation was found in the Rhein-Hunsrück Transition Narrative, where it became apparent that young people were excluded from the process of developing regional strategies and policies to address the transition challenges facing the area. It was found that this lack of involvement had a negative impact on these initiatives, as they did not consider the specific experiences, needs and aspirations of the younger generation. In the case of Osona, it was stressed while many of the key actors (such as industries, retail and neighbourhood association) did have a role in the policy planning, it was mostly informal, and thus had reduced influence regarding the addressed challenge. The absence of stakeholders affected by the challenge of transition didn't just affect policy planning, but also implementation. This was found to be the case in the Nockregion-Oberkärnten, where it was pointed out that while the strengthening of small businesses is emphasised at the strategic level, this does not translate into the representation of their interests in practice.

Finally, many Transition Narratives highlighted the potentially important stakeholders that could be further engaged. For example, the Transition Narrative of Galicia, identified multiple potentially important stakeholders that could have relevance for tackling the transition challenge, such as Protected Designations of Origin (POD) in the wine sector of the Pilot Region (PDO Monterrei, PDO Ribeiro, PDO Ribeira Sacra), important players in the forest sector or large agri-business firms like COREN. However, also here it was accentuated, that potentially conflicts of interests might hinder the cooperation between these actors. In this regard, it was stressed that spatial planning has a critical role in reconciling between different interests.

In light of these findings, the Transition Narratives highlighted the ability of the RUSTIK Living Labs to convene different stakeholders in the region, including those who haven't previously engaged in related activities. This sentiment was well summed up in the Gloucestershire Transition Narrative:

"The LL offers potential to be a useful integrating tool to gather together actors who could optimise their own work through targeted collaboration. In other words, the LL has the potential not only to prototype data collection and analysis methods, but also to facilitate the integration of stakeholders with a shared (but possibly divergent) interest in digitisation."

4.2 Policy capacity to respond to the transition challenge

The policy capacity to respond to the identified transition challenge was analysed through two dimensions: 1) coordination and coherence of policy measures identified as relevant to the transition challenge across levels of government and 2) the extent to which identified public policy measures actually target the transition challenge and are effective.

4.2.1 Policy coordination and coherence

Analysing the Transition Narratives from the different Pilot Regions reveals varying degrees of policy coordination and coherence in addressing the transition challenge. This dimension considers the existence of policies relevant to the transition across policy levels, if they are coordinated, and if there is coherence across them to ensure effectiveness. It thus provides a discussion on multi-level governance. The following categories provide a framework for understanding the alignment and effectiveness of policies across different levels and sectors:

1. The transition challenge is embedded and aligned in existing multi-level policies. This category considers Pilot Regions' Transition Narratives that demonstrate embeddedness or integration across existing policies at different governance levels, and coordination and alignment across policies and actions for effective implementation.
2. The transition challenge is embedded in existing policies but lacking alignment or coordination at different policy levels/sectors. While Pilot Regions under this category demonstrate policy coherence across multiple levels, coordination tensions that could hinder effective alignment and implementation are noted.
3. The transition challenge is embedded only in local/regional efforts. This category encompasses Transition Narratives that outline initiatives are coordinated and aligned only at the community level where the experiment is implemented, lacking integration with higher governance levels. Gaps could be due to fragmented policymaking structures on either local or national levels.

This categorisation is utilised in Table 5, which provides a summary analysis of the Transition Narratives according to several sub-dimensions of policy coordination and coherence. Policy coordination and coherence is evident in the alignment between local, regional and national policy frameworks (e.g. Garfagana, North Karelia), efforts in inter-agency coordination (e.g. Monmouthshire, Rhein-Hunsrück), different mechanisms employed for policy harmonisation and implementation (e.g. Nockregion, Woj. Świętokrzyskie), and coordination in leveraging of funds across governance levels (e.g. Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, Woj. Mazowieckie).

Alignment and consistency sought across local, regional and national levels

Transition Narratives indicate variations in terms of the governmental levels across which alignment of policies and actions are sought or exist in addressing the selected transitions. In some cases, goals, and frameworks relevant to the transition are embedded in multi-level policies (e.g. Monmouthshire, Garfagnana, North Karelia), while in other cases coordination of efforts among specific levels of government is more prevalent. For example, there are cases with strong local-national alignment, at least when formal policies are concerned (Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, Zaječar District, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin). Yet, to address the transition challenges in practice, some Pilot Regions identify that efforts take place predominantly at local and/or regional levels (Woj. Mazowieckie, Gloucestershire, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Osona, Galicia). To a certain degree, these differences can be explained by the institutional landscapes across the ten RUSTIK countries, which include a mix of unitary and federal countries characterised by different number of self-government levels. Moreover, the overall extent of decentralisation of government

responsibilities and fiscal autonomy across counties where Pilot Regions are located varies significantly. Thus, throughout the following sub-sections, a distinction is made between cases where more top-down dynamics are evident with key frameworks set at national level having limited flexibility to accommodate local level input (e.g. Zaječar District, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin) and more bottom-up or place-based approaches where the local or regional level is able to set key policies, with consideration of local circumstances and needs (e.g. Galicia). There are cases where multi-level governance works effectively aligning top-down goals and bottom-up needs (e.g. Monmouthsire).

Countries where there is a federal administrative structure (Nockregion, Rhein-Hunsrück) present different power and alignment dynamics across the different governance levels and are comparatively quite different from the rest. While this is emphasised in this chapter, there are still relevant patterns and complexities related to policy alignment and consistency that can be identified across all cases.

Multi-Level Embeddedness

Rural transitions are place-specific and as such they require coordinated inputs from a range of actors and at multiple administrative levels rather than centrally designed and implemented measures. The multi-level architecture required to address such place-based transitions prescribes to the upper levels of government a role of setting general goals, targets, performance standards, rules and incentives in ways that steer development towards long-term goals, while the lower levels of government are provided "the freedom to advance the ends as they see fit".[1] Such multi-level embeddedness is evident in several of the RUSTIK's Pilot Regions. In Monmouthshire, the Transition Narrative outlines a clear multi-level consensus on the challenges to be addressed. Policies and initiatives demonstrate a deep embeddedness across the county and regional levels, and alignment with national frameworks, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to addressing socio-economic challenges and fostering sustainable development. At the local level, the Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) is the key actor in formulating strategies, policies, and programmes. Through initiatives such as the Community Strategy (CCS) and the Regional Land Development Plan (RLDP), the MCC aims to guide the socio-economic transition towards a 'zero carbon county' that supports the wellbeing, health, and dignity of its residents. These strategies address critical issues such as housing affordability, access to education and employment opportunities, and demographic imbalance. These concerns are shared not only in the broader Welsh policy context – through the Welsh Government's economic growth strategies and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act – but also at the UK level, with the UK Parliament's Welsh Affairs Committee launching an inquiry into the demographic changes in Wales. As the Transition Narrative states, "*this is a shared area of concern across the levels of local, devolved and central government.*". The Garfagnana case also highlights the potential for pursuing strategies aligned with transition challenges at multiple levels of governance. The Transition Narrative shows alignment in the LEADER programming, the Local Development Strategy (LDS), the regional Rural Development Programme, and the National Strategy for Inner Areas, prioritising

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[1] Barca, F. (2008). *An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy: a place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations* (No. EERI_RP_2008_06). Economics and Econometrics Research Institute (EERI), Brussels.

the agri-forest sector and its key functions. These initiatives provide an opportunity to translate local needs and priorities identified through focus groups into concrete actions supported by national strategies and funding, demonstrating place-based development. This is especially relevant for the LEADER programme, which hinges on its ability to translate national strategies into concrete, locally-driven actions.

Conversely, in North Karelia, national, regional, and local strategies and initiatives are leveraged for addressing the transition challenge of demographic change and immigration. This is evident in the Integration Act, which has mandated the integration of immigrants, and has strengthened local agency and intermunicipal cooperation through the municipal integration programmes. Alignment extends to national and regional strategies (e.g. A New Direction for Eastern Finland Vision and Action of 2023, North Karelia 2040 Strategy and the Regional Strategic Programme for North Karelia 2022-25), which recognise the challenges of population decline and shortage of skilled labour and prioritise work- and education-based immigration to address them.

In Search of Effective Local-National Alignment

Cases where local-national alignment, in particular, appears predominant include Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, Zaječar District, and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin. The extent to which this alignment is conductive to addressing the selected transitions, however, varies. The Italian region showcases a complex web of policies geared towards water resource management and climate change mitigation in the agricultural sector. Strong alignment between national policies (CAP strategy, National Plan for Ecological Transition (PET), National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)) and regional strategies (Emilia-Romagna's Rural Development Program, Water Protection Plan (WPP)) is highlighted in the Transition Narrative, with both levels prioritising environmental sustainability and water management: *"Water resources issues are dealt with by several national, regional and* [sub]-*regional policies that in different ways directly or indirectly regulate and enhance their use and management."* As another example, the allocation of funds from the NRRP to finance digitalisation and innovation projects aimed at optimising energy and water savings demonstrates alignment with ecological transition objectives outlined in the PET. Aside from alignment with national strategies (e.g. NRRP, District Management Plans), alignment with broader international environmental agendas and timelines (e.g. Paris Agreement, EU Climate Framework) is also clearly outlined in this case, with the revision of the regional WPP demonstrating policy learning and responsiveness to evolving needs. In the Zaječar District, public policy measures that more generally target rural areas are defined at national level. Policy coherence between the local and national agendas is evident in the alignment of municipal development plans (e.g. tourism, agriculture, rural development, socio-demographic issues) with national strategic priorities. Moreover, the Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin case study illustrates the interplay between national-level policies and local implementation dynamics. National policies, such as the CAP Strategic Plan and the Rural Development Programme, set the overarching framework for agricultural and rural development, with ministries like Agriculture, Food and Forestry leading the coordination efforts. This continues at the local level, with an existing cross-territory structure with NUTS 3 on agricultural services. Similarly, tourism policies guided by the national Ministry of Tourism influence regional (NUTS3) and municipal initiatives. Other ministries define policies and guidelines, and coordinate implementation at sub-regional (mostly local) level.

Nonetheless, cases like Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin highlight challenges in achieving seamless alignment between local and national levels. In both Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, while there is formal alignment between local level solutions and national priorities, criticisms arise regarding the rationality of top-down approaches and the potential prioritisation of national objectives over local needs. As a result, there is a perception that the local level cannot fully utilise national frameworks and, in fact, TAU identifies that the dependence on top-down directives "*explains the lack of standalone local policies*".

Local and Regional Agency Bridging Transition Gaps

Responses to the transition challenges are in some cases more clearly embedded at the local and/or regional level, with this category including Pilot Regions like Woj. Mazowieckie, Gloucestershire, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Osona and Galicia. In Woj. Mazowieckie (district-level), alignment between local development strategies and regional objectives (namely through the regional Development Strategy of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship) of improving economic development and living conditions reflects a shared understanding of regional needs and priorities, facilitated by flexible governance structures. However, the Institutional Mapping analysis reveals a dominance of local public actors, whose interests might not always fully align with other governance levels: "*The majority of stakeholders involved in the Mazowieckie Living Lab are local government representatives, of which the core originates from the Orońsko municipality.*" (excerpt from Transition Narrative). In Gloucestershire, efforts to address digital equity demonstrate a blend of local, regional, and national alignment, albeit with certain limitations. At the local level, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) has taken proactive steps to develop digital strategies and initiatives aimed at improving digital access and literacy within the county, such as the Digital Strategy 2018-2023 and the ICT Strategy 2019-2024. The partnership with Herefordshire on the Fastershire project exemplifies regional coordination for digital connectivity. In the Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin case, efforts have been made to create local-level food policies through the cooperation of local actors across municipalities, with the Local Action Group covering three municipalities. These bottom-up or grassroots initiatives tend to be the most recognisable to the community and are attempts to bridge the gap between local needs and the national policies, which can be seen as imposing.

While there is some evidence of multi-level alignment in the Spanish cases of Osona and Galicia, they have predominant local and regional approaches to tackling the transition challenge, however with some inefficiencies in coordination. For example, in Osona, there is a division of powers and delineation of responsibilities between the Decentralised Municipal Entity (EMD) of Sant Miquel de Balenyà – a local authority under the jurisdiction of the municipality – and the Seva City Council. While EMDs are responsible for providing various services and organising events at the local level, urban planning is under the jurisdiction of the municipality (e.g. Master Urban Plan 2006), and overarching territorial planning is governed by regional plans such as the Partial Territorial Plan for the Central Catalan Counties (2008). As referenced in the narrative: "*The EMD has been collaborating through the last years with the Provincial Council of Barcelona in the improvement of the area's territorial planning*". However, this delineation of responsibilities between the EMD, the Seva City Council, and the regional level exemplifies complexities in multilevel governance and decision-making, creating challenges in comprehensive planning efforts. Additionally, it could

result in disjointed strategies and hindering an integrated approach to transition challenges. Conversely, in Galicia, there are some general deficiencies in coordination among different government levels, with unclear division of competences and low thematic coordination which may limit the impact of existing policies in effectively addressing socioeconomic transitions. Still, local governments and action groups demonstrate innovative approaches to address challenges and complement when there is a gap. Examples of successful initiatives implemented by local governments and LAGs include those in A Veiga and Limia-Arnoia.

Approaches in Countries with Federal Administrative Structures

There are two cases within this category of local/regional embeddedness that are worth highlighting given the country's particular administrative structure, and those are Nockregion and Rhein-Hunsrück. These countries have a federal state level between the national and the regional level. It is this federal or state level that has the relevant policy jurisdiction to address the transition challenges. Because of this, their Transition Narrative could not be categorised as being solely embedded in the regional level or being locally-nationally aligned. Nockregion operates within a comprehensive framework of strategic policies and instruments at both local and regional levels. Policies and strategies in Carinthia, including the Demography Check, LEADER Strategies, Master Plan for Rural Areas in Carinthia (2021), and the Carinthian Regional Development Act, are aligned and coordinated to address demographic challenges and promote local and regional development. Each of these policies serves as a complementary component within the broader State (Carinthia region) framework. The most prominent example of this alignment is the Master Plan for rural areas in Carinthia (2021). Crafted between the State and the regions, the plan incorporates seven individually tailored regional strategies (one of them applied to Nockregion) in line with Local Development Strategies. This creates *"a common thread throughout the region"* and blends top-down and bottom-up contributions. The Carinthian Regional Development Act (K-REG 2023) also enhances multi-level policy alignment by regulating cooperation between the State of Carinthia and its regions. Notably, K-REG 2023 views regions as functional areas, promoting the development of a cohesive regional identity and vision while discarding sectoral lines. While the national government possesses regional planning competences, the local, regional, and state level links are strengthened. This indicates heightened competency and autonomy at the state and local levels but also reveals some potential fragmentation in policy coordination.

Likewise, the Rhein-Hunsrück district operates within a federal administrative framework, where most of the alignment is made between the local, regional and federal levels. Initiatives such as the "GELOBTES LAND" and "WILDWUCHS" skilling workers, training, and career orientation campaigns led by the regional council in collaboration with public and private entities demonstrate multi-level alignment in addressing labour market challenges and socio-demographic change. This is also exemplified in federal level strategies like the Third Rhineland-Palatinate strategy for skilled workers (2022-26), the Demography Strategy for Rhineland-Palatinate (2023), the 'jes!' youth strategy of the Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry for Family Affairs, Women, Culture and Integration, and the State Youth Plan. District and local agencies demonstrate significant development in addressing the transition challenge. The district is located within two LEADER areas, extending beyond its boundaries. Their respective LEADER strategies, namely the LEADER Local Integrated

Rural Development Strategy (LILE) of the LAG Hunsrück and the LILE of the LAG World Heritage Upper Middle Rhine Valley, aim to achieve sustainable development, secure skilled workers, and increase local opportunities for young people.

Inter-agency coordination: horizontal and vertical dynamics

In examining the dynamics of inter-agency coordination across the various regions, it becomes evident that different horizontal and vertical approaches and collaboration mechanisms are employed to facilitate policy coordination and alignment. These collaborative endeavours foster a shared understanding of transition challenges and objectives among diverse stakeholders, promoting coherence in policy interventions across multiple governance levels.

Some of the Pilot Regions' Transition Narratives have highlighted strong vertical and horizontal inter-agency dynamics, such as Monmouthshire and Garfagnana. The Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) actively participates in regional partnerships and boards, such as the Marches Forward Partnership (including the Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys, and Shropshire local authorities) and the Gwent Public Services Board (PSB), exemplifying horizontal collaborative governance to set a development vision for the region. Additionally, the MCC also leads a Local Delivery Group (LDG) for Monmouthshire, participating along other public bodies. This and other LDGs from local authorities sit within the PSB, facilitating the implementation of its objectives at the local level, and highlighting the importance of inter-agency collaboration in policy alignment. Other partnerships and examples of inter-agency collaboration addressing transition challenges in the Monmouthshire Pilot Region include the Monmouthshire Integrated Services Partnership Board, and the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations. The involvement of diverse stakeholders, including local authorities, public bodies, community organisations, and regional partnerships, in policy formulation underscores a participatory approach to governance. MCC's involvement in these partnerships also indicates inter-agency vertical coordination between local authorities and higher levels of governance to achieve collective goals, and ensure local initiatives are consistent with broader national frameworks. The MCC is a statutory partner in the PSB, alongside other public bodies (e.g. Health Board, environmental regulatory body), regional voluntary sector and educational organisations. The PSB has drawn a Well-Being Plan for Gwent, ensuring coherence the Welsh Government's 2015 Well-being of Future Generations Act. By participating in the Gwent PSB, the efforts of the MCC are thus further aligned with national objectives. This is also evident in how impact assessments are conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and initiatives in addressing socio-economic challenges. These assessments often involve reporting to higher levels of governance, such as regional authorities or national government bodies, demonstrating vertical coordination in monitoring and reporting on policy outcomes.

In Garfagnana, horizontal and vertical coordination is evident in the interaction between local development associations, producer associations, and regional authorities to support the agri-forest sector. Local communities are often empowered to participate in decision-making processes related to forest management and sustainable development, identifying multi-faceted local interests, enhancing local governance structures, and enabling place-based development. The allocation of funds from different sources (EU, national), also demonstrates vertical

coordination across different government levels to ensure efficient use of resources and project management.

Vertical Dynamics

Vertical coordination, particularly between local and higher levels of governance, is prominent in several cases, such as Nockregion, Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin. Here, collaborative efforts between national, regional, and local actors facilitate effective policy implementation and resource allocation, ensuring alignment with broader strategic objectives. In the Nockregion, forums for inter-agency collaboration are embedded within existing multi-level policies, facilitating bottom-up and top-down coordination mechanisms. Vertical dynamics highlighted and exemplified in the collaboration between the State government of Carinthia, the Regional Association of Nockregion (RVN) and the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG). The latter two entities share resources and jointly implement projects, leveraging LEADER funds to address local and regional priorities. Synergistic partnerships between the EU, the national level, state, regional, and municipal entities are also argued to facilitate coordinated efforts to address regional challenges. The Carinthian Regional Development Act has also sought to strengthen regional development and cooperation, as mentioned in the previous section. The Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara case exemplifies multi-level governance with clear roles for national, regional, and local actors. Collaboration between the Ministry of Environment, basic authorities, region and environmental agencies for water standard definition and monitoring programme development indicates vertical coordination. Furthermore, the involvement of the Regional Agency for Prevention, Environment, and Energy (ARPAE) and other territorial operating offices underscores the importance of inter-agency coordination in monitoring and managing water resources. This is crucial for implementing technical aspects of water protection plans and ensuring compliance with national and EU directives. Horizontal coordination among local stakeholders is only evidenced in the use of Land Reclamation Consortia for infrastructure projects related to water storage facilities. The Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin case also suggests a vertical coordination bias. While policy implementation involves coordination among multiple stakeholders across different territorial and governance levels, with ministries collaborating with municipal administrations and businesses to execute policies related to food distribution, waste management, and social services, national policies are predominantly shaping local actions. Efforts to create local food policies are primarily driven by actors operating at the municipal level, with limited coordination across municipalities or regional entities. Horizontal coordination is therefore inhibited, hindering the sharing of best practices and collective problem-solving among local and regional stakeholders.

Other Pilot Regions highlight some of their vertical coordination endeavours, though these are not a predominant feature in their cases. In North Karelia, the Integration Act and the 2023 Vision and Action document from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment suggests vertical coordination between the national level and the regional and local levels, though the extent of collaboration efforts is unknown. Nonetheless, given the extent of alignment and the number of actions envisaged, stakeholder engagement and inter-agency collaboration seem crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of initiatives. In Gloucestershire, inter-agency coordination extends beyond local partnerships. The engagement of national organisations like the Good Things

Foundation, which coordinates the National Digital Inclusion Network, highlights vertical linkages that leverage national resources and expertise to support local efforts.

Horizontal Dynamics

In contrast, regions like Woj. Świętokrzyskie, Woj. Mazowieckie, Rhein-Hunsrück, Gloucestershire and North Karelia primarily focus on horizontal cooperation among local stakeholders. By enhancing dialogue and knowledge sharing among diverse stakeholders, regions can capitalise on synergies and avoid duplication of efforts, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of policy interventions. In Woj. Świętokrzyskie, NGO-driven initiatives dominate regional cooperation, particularly in rural tourism development, spearheaded by the Regional Tourist Organisation. Planning documents at both regional and local levels like the Tourism Development Strategy highlight common transition challenges, reflecting shared understanding and dialogue. Stakeholder engagement, especially in rural tourism, involves local communities, businesses, NGOs, and government agencies, promoting participatory decision-making and knowledge sharing. In North Karelia, collaboration between municipalities, non-governmental organisations, and private stakeholders in promoting immigration and integration is an example of horizontal coordination, facilitating information exchange and the sharing of best practices. Actions such as internationalisation of businesses and education, training for employers and the population, and the support for immigrants' integration, require the involvement of diverse actors. Similarly, in the Rhein-Hunsrück case, cooperative inter-agency dynamics are evident in the district administration, schools, and businesses, addressing common challenges collaboratively. Horizontal (and some vertical) coordination is observed through collaborations between LEADER areas and initiatives like LAG Hunsrück and LAG World Heritage Upper Middle Rhine Valley, aiming to boost regional economic development and secure skilled workers. Various stakeholders collaborate on policy implementation, exemplified by initiatives such as the "Concerted Action / Youth Conference" and programmes like JOBfux and JobAction, integrating efforts across district administrations, schools, employment agencies, and private enterprises. Moreover, in Gloucestershire there is evidence of extensive collaboration among various organisations and stakeholders within the county. For instance, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) plays a central role as an independent charity working closely with communities to address digital exclusion. Through initiatives like the Digital Accessibility, Inclusion Support & Innovation (DAISI) project, GRCC collaborates with local authorities, community groups, and partnerships to provide digital skills training and improve digital access in rural areas. Additionally, the involvement of other entities such as Age UK Gloucestershire, universities, and health and care organisations underscores a concerted horizontal approach to tackling digital inequity from multiple angles.

Horizontal coordination dynamics are also observed to some extent in some cases, yet they do not emerge as the dominant characteristic. The Zaječar District provides one notable positive example related to the Strategy for the Development of the Urban Area of the city of Zaječar and the Municipalities of Knjaževac, Boljevac, and Sokobanja for the period of up to year 2034. This included the collaboration of different municipalities, as well as the engagement of the Regional Agency for the Development of Eastern Serbia. The collaboration has allowed for a systemic, participatory, and comprehensive approach to regional socio-economic and environmental challenges. In Woj. Mazowieckie, involving diverse stakeholders, including local government

representatives and community members in the Mazowieckie Living Lab demonstrates horizontal cooperation, and a commitment to inclusive decision-making and collaborative problem-solving. Local level municipal stakeholders exhibit willingness to collaborate not only among each other, but also with the regional level (voivodeship).

Challenges in Inter-Agency Coordination

Several challenges impacting the coherence and efficacy of collaborative efforts have nonetheless emerged in the analysis of the narratives from the various Pilot Regions. In regions like Osrednjeslovenska and Galicia, a fragmented policy environment hinders coordination efforts. In Osrednjeslovenska, inefficiencies and duplicated efforts result from a lack of integrated approaches, while deficiencies in Galicia's coordination across the multiple institutional levels involved in rural policy design and application highlight the need for improved vertical mechanisms. Additionally, while some LAGs and local governments collaborate (e.g., LAG Limia-Arnoia, A Veiga), wider horizontal coordination seems limited. Similarly, Woj. Świętokrzyskie and Osona face disjointed policy efforts due to gaps in both horizontal and vertical coordination. In Osona, while collaboration between the EMD, the municipality, and the Provincial Council of Barcelona is evident, greater engagement with adjacent municipalities and regional entities such as the Mancomunity of La Plana and the County Council of Osona could strengthen the development and implementation of regional strategies tackling shared transition challenges. Some of this is already being done, with collaboration between the County Council of Osona and different municipalities on studies and initiatives focused on social equity, climate resilience, and economic competitiveness.

Rhein-Hunsrück and Nockregion encounter challenges in aligning policies across sectors and governance levels, whether for coordination or autonomy reasons. In Rhein-Hunsrück, despite visible vertical coordination efforts in the GELOBTES LAND and the WILDWUCHS campaigns between the regional council, the district, municipalities and several enterprises, challenges persist in achieving coherence between sectors and policies at different levels. Efforts such as local campaigns, career guidance programmes, and state-level strategies indicate concerted but fragmented actions, with potential gaps in coordination and coherence between local, regional, and state-level policies. Tensions between bottom-up and top-down actors are also evident in the Nockregion, where the proposed role of a regional coordinator financed by the federal state sparks scepticism among regional actors. This highlights the delicate balance between the RVN and the Federal State, or between regional autonomy and policy coherence, necessitating a refinement of responsibilities and scope of action for each stakeholder while maintaining regional autonomy.

Meanwhile, challenges in horizontal dynamics are prominent in Zaječar District, where despite collaboration between municipalities and national authorities, gaps persist in fostering inter-agency cooperation among local stakeholders. The absence of well-structured inter-municipal forms of cooperation exacerbates challenges and long-term commitment, reflecting asymmetries in administrative divisions and varying local government capacities. The existing legal framework allows voluntary collaborations but lacks provisions to foster this on regionally relevant projects in the long term. Municipalities are mandated to cooperate in specific areas, such as regional and spatial planning, municipal activities, tourism, civil protection, and environmental protection, but critical aspects remain inadequately regulated. Similarly, conflicts of interest and competition

between and with municipalities in Woj. Mazowieckie underscore the need for enhanced horizontal coordination mechanisms, whether through targeted interventions, capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement, fostering alignment with broader development objectives. Similarly, vertical coordination between municipalities, district-level, regional level, and national level could also be strengthened.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to streamline coordination mechanisms, enhance stakeholder engagement, and foster alignment across governance levels.

Overcoming Boundaries for Shared Solutions

Cross-border cooperation emerges as a significant aspect of inter-agency coordination in regions like the Zaječar District **and** Nockregion**,** where strategic documents and initiatives are developed collaboratively with neighbouring jurisdictions. This underscores the importance of transboundary dialogue in addressing shared transition challenges and leveraging synergies across administrative boundaries. In the Zaječar District, several strategic documents related to the tourism sector were developed between the Serbian municipality of Sokobanja and Bulgarian municipalities. In the Nockregion, the regional association can operate beyond rigid territorial boundaries and beyond LEADER funds, demonstrating the capability for cross-border cooperation on transition challenges. This signals that enhancing sectoral policy coherence could also improve dialogue across boundaries, help optimise funding utilisation, promote (horizontal and vertical) cooperation, and address transition challenges in various areas like low-carbon, circular economy, rural development, tourism, and agriculture. However, challenges such as asymmetric administrative divisions and differing economic development priorities may pose obstacles to seamless cross-border collaboration, necessitating tailored approaches to foster effective coordination.

Harmonisation and implementation mechanisms

Different mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate dialogue across multiple governance levels and harmonise goals, objectives, strategies, and actions for more effective implementation.

Some more top-down or centralised mechanisms for policy coordination and alignment have been formalised in the Pilot Regions of Monmouthshire, Nockregion, North Karelia, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Woj. Mazowieckie, and Zaječar District. In Monmouthshire an iterative mechanism of policy revision is in place, exemplified in the Welsh Government providing recommendations and requiring amendments to the Preferred Strategy to address local issues and environmental limitations. The strategy is furthermore subject to engagement and consultation, and this mechanism promotes overall synergy in policy interventions. In North Karelia, the Integration Act is a core national level framework that provides some coherence. It serves as a harmonisation and implementation mechanism by enhancing municipal agency and stakeholders' efforts in achieving integration outcomes. Similarly, Nockregion's legal and policy framework fosters consistency across policy silos and administrative levels, bolstered by cooperation between regional entities and bottom-up decision-making processes. The Master Plan for Rural areas and K-REG 2023 exemplify this, providing a formalised structure for policy coordination and alignment. Moreover, cooperation between the Regional Development Agency and the LEADER group,

alongside the Local Development Strategy, enables more efficient implementation and actor-driven decision-making, enhancing policy coherence.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also an important aspect of harmonisation and coherence and have been emphasised in the partner regions of Monmouthshire, Woj. Świętokrzyskie and Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara. In Monmouthshire, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, such as impact assessments, facilitate multi-level alignment and allow for continued dialogue on policy and transition progress. In Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, consistency and synergies in policy implementation and monitoring are ensured through a designated body called ARPAE. In Woj. Świętokrzyskie, all planning documents for the region and municipalities indicate the need to develop the tourism function, supported by a shared evidence-based approach and various forms of monitoring.

However, these top-down harmonisation mechanisms can generate challenges for local authorities. In Woj. Mazowieckie, Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, insufficient cooperation mechanisms and centralised governance hinder policy coherence and local autonomy. In Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin and Zaječar District, a centralised approach to governance and a hierarchical structure in policy implementation results in policies being highly aligned and harmonised, but limits municipal autonomy, flexibility, and place-based approaches. Local authorities therefore serve more as implementers rather than innovators. In Zaječar District, aside from the established voluntary inter-agency collaboration in the legal framework, and the possibility for the development of sectoral strategies across administrative boundaries, the case study demonstrates a straightforward top-down approach. Limited inter-municipal cooperation and short-term municipal strategies further challenge long-term planning. In Woj. Mazowieckie, while public actors at the local level demonstrate a high level of power and interest to cooperate related to regional needs, mechanisms like statutory cooperation are deemed insufficient, with some heightened coopetition dynamics present. The Development Strategy of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship is a guiding document for interventions, and a harmonisation mechanism that promotes some degree of policy coherence. However, the document lacks details on concrete implementation mechanisms to translate strategic objectives into actionable plans. These challenges highlight the need for stronger cooperation mechanisms and policy instruments that promote coherence in policy implementation across all governance levels.

In contrast, Pilot Regions like Rhein-Hunsrück, Garfagnana, Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, Galicia, Osona, Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire, Woj. Świętokrzyskie and North Karelia demonstrate local and regional autonomy in concerted efforts to develop shared strategies. North Karelia's requirement for each municipality to prepare an integration programme reflects a harmonised approach to policy design, implementation, and monitoring. Moreover, the existence of multi-level strategies that aim to tackle the challenges of immigrant integration and labour shortage suggests concerted efforts for coherence. The development of shared strategies and vision at both regional and local levels, related to key sectors and smart specialisation priorities (e.g. health tourism, construction, agriculture, foundry industries) in Woj. Świętokrzyskie, underscores efforts to develop collaborative networks and to align policies with regional development goals. Collaborative networks and partnerships also play a crucial role in harmonizing digital inclusion efforts in Gloucestershire. Organisations like the Good Things Foundation and Gloucestershire

Rural Community Council (GRCC) work collaboratively with local authorities, community groups, and other stakeholders to address digital exclusion through initiatives like the DAISI project and the Gloucestershire Digital Hubs Project. These partnerships facilitate coordination, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange to maximise the impact of digital inclusion initiatives. Various initiatives in Rhein-Hunsrück provide comprehensive support for career guidance and employment opportunities at multiple governance levels, showcasing a harmonised and coherent approach to addressing the transition challenge and local needs. The new district development concept, which involves the Pilot Region and the Living Lab, has potential for increasing harmonisation and ensure the integration of findings into broader strategic frameworks. According to the Transition Narrative: *"This process is another important transmission belt where interests from various stakeholders can be integrated, forwarded to public authorities, and joined into a coherent concept."*

In Garfagnana, Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire, Osona and Galicia, local initiatives, groups and programmes like the LEADER programme, GRCC, LAGs, and the DIES (Diagnosis and Strategies of urban planning) provide a platform for harmonising national and local strategies, and bridge gaps between different policy levels, integrating various funding measures into local development plans and pilot experiences, streamlining policy making, enhancing coordination, and avoiding overlaps. For example, the LDGs in Monmouthshire serve as platforms for stakeholder engagement and policy implementation, ensuring coherence in addressing shared challenges. In Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, coherence with international directives and agreements (e.g. Paris Agreement) is also sought, specifically related to the WPP revision, as mentioned above. By integrating the WPP with district management plans and other regional and national policy documents, policymakers aim to ensure coherence with broader sustainability objectives. Still, the promotion of local efforts for integration and coherence is a complex matter. The division of responsibilities and lack of dialogue between policy silos is emphasised in the Transition Narratives of Osona and Galicia, the latter in reference to the separate policies dealing with land use and housing, which can affect legal matters and hinder new entrants and business expansion within the farming sector. In Osona, while a coordinated approach between the local and the provincial government is facilitated by the DIES, the division of responsibilities between the Decentralised Municipal Entity (EMD) and the Seva City Council can lead to overlapping and fragmented efforts.

Leveraging funding opportunities for development enhances coordination

Funding mechanisms were referenced across several Transition Narratives as relevant devices for enhancing multi-level and cross-sectoral policy and stakeholder coordination, or at the very least, emphasising existing gaps. Notably, alignment with EU frameworks, timelines and leveraging of EU funds have been argued to foster these synergies across several Pilot Regions, such as Nockregion, Rhein-Hunsrück, Woj. Mazowieckie and Woj. Świętokrzyskie, Osrednjeslovenska and Garfagnana. In Osrednjeslovenska, policy timelines coincide with the Multiannual Financial Framework at the EU level, suggesting a degree of synchronisation in policymaking processes and funding cycles that can facilitate coordination and implementation. Furthermore, in the Polish Pilot Regions of Woj. Mazowieckie and Woj. Świętokrzyskie, the availability of national and EU funds presents opportunities to support local initiatives aligned with regional development goals. In the Garfagnana region, several EU funds (€20 million in ERDF, ESF, EAFRD) are leveraged under LEADER for the transition theme of forest management, particularly under the new Development

Plan of the LAG MontagnAppennino and in the new Inner Areas Strategy. A multi-fund Rural Development Plan call in 2015 also financed a forestry Integrated Supply Chain Project (Dall'Appennino al Mare: Energia Toscana al 100%). These examples illustrate how EU funds have been crucial to organising new and existing bodies and capabilities to address transition challenges.

Leveraging EU funds has also enabled the mobilisation of national, regional, and even local funds to facilitate broader stakeholder participation, promotion of regional development topics, and policy coordination. The Nockregion region encourages projects to utilise multiple funding instruments, which requires a more structured multi-level governance approach that ensures close collaboration across various administrative and funding levels. This approach fosters synergistic partnerships between EU, national, federal state, regional, and municipal entities, thereby enhancing coordination and maximising the impact of investments. In Rhein-Hunsrück, career guidance programmes like JOBfux are co-funded by the ESF+, the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and the district administration. Likewise, in Woj. Świętokrzyskie, capacity-building initiatives supported by both EU and national funds enable the mobilisation of resources and expertise for entrepreneurship development and tourism promotion in the district. Furthermore, in Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, the strategic alignment between EU funds, national policies (e.g. PET and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)) and regional development goals fosters synergies and complementarities, enabling effective utilisation of funding for environmental and climate objectives. For example, €30 million from the NRRP have been allocated to Emilia Romagna to finance digitalisation and innovation projects to optimise energy and water savings.

Several regions also demonstrate local proactive approaches to leveraging funding opportunities for policy coordination and addressing transition challenges. By mobilising stakeholders (e.g. association networks and producer associations), and combining financial resources, internal human resources, and good practice examples, Garfagnana has enabled the production of positive outcomes for the region. In Osona, the Provincial Council of Barcelona provides grants and support for specific areas or infrastructure developments that contribute to regional development. The Woj. Świętokrzyskie is also actively engaged in developing business support institutions (e.g. Kielce Technology Park) and attracting foreign and direct investments in key sectors, such as foundry industries, agriculture, construction, and health tourism, aligning these with broader regional strategies. Moreover, Rhein-Hunsrück refers to the (state-level) public funding of programmes like JobAction, the Rhineland-Palatinate 'jes!' youth strategy, and the State Youth Plan, which are key strategies for the transition. In Gloucestershire, regional funding from entities like the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Growth Hub contributes to economic development and skills training, including digital skills. The LEP channels government funding and initiatives for economic growth and inward investment, while the Growth Hub provides business support services, which may include digital literacy training and support for digital innovation. Additionally, collaborations with social change charities like the Good Things Foundation, which coordinates the National Digital Inclusion Network, provide access to funding and resources for addressing digital exclusion at the community level.

However, there are still some notable challenges related to leveraging funding and resources in Pilot Regions such as Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Rhein-Hunsrück, Zaječar District and

Osrednjeslovenska. In Zaječar, municipal plans are limited by short-term funding, hindering the enactment of a development vision for the region. In contrast, a more long-term policy window could be a leeway for boosting dialogue, experimentation, and funding utilisation. In both Osrednjeslovenska and Rhein-Hunsrück, the narratives suggest challenges may arise in ensuring continuity and consistency across different policy cycles and funding streams, especially when priorities or funding availability shift over time. Moreover, in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, municipalities' dependence on national and EU funds – which are managed by the ministries – limits local agency and explains a "lack of standalone local policies". Nonetheless, some municipal and LAG financial resources are still mobilised for food-related initiatives like food gardens, culinary festivals, and local traditional food promotion. However, the lack of specific funding for such initiatives under CAP or Cohesion Policy limits their scalability and sustainability, necessitating reforms to empower bottom-up approaches and remove regulatory barriers.

Table 5 Policy coordination and coherence summary analysis

Categorisation	Pilot Regions	Local-national alignment	Inter-agency coordination	Mechanisms for harmonisation and implementation	Leveraging funding instruments
(3)	AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten	Medium	High	Medium	High
(3)	BG: Troyan-Apriltzi-Ugarchin	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
(2)	DE: Rhein-Hunsrück	Medium	High	Medium	High
(2)	ES: Galicia	Medium	Low	Low	..
(3)	ES: Osona	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
(1)	FI: North Karelia	Medium	Medium	Medium	..
(1)	IT: Garfagnana	High	Medium	Medium	High
(1)	IT: Parma and Piacenza	High	Medium	High	High
(3)	PL: Woj. Mazowieckie	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
(2)	PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	Medium	Medium	Low	High
(2)	RS: Zaječar District	High	Medium	Low	Low
(2)	SI: Osrednjeslovenska	Medium	Low	Low	Low

Categorisation	Pilot Regions	Local-national alignment	Inter-agency coordination	Mechanisms for harmonisation and implementation	Leveraging funding instruments
(3)	UK: Gloucestershire	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
(1)	UK: Monmouthshire	High	High	High	..

Categories: (1) embedded and aligned with existing multi-level policies, (2) embedded in multi-level policies but lacking alignment/coordination at different levels/sectors, (3) embedded only in local/regional efforts
High: high level of policy coordination and coherence; Medium: moderate level: Low: low level.

4.2.2 Policy alignment with transition challenge and policy efficacy

While the dimension above has assessed the coordination and coherence of existing policies relevant to the broad transitions, this dimension takes a closer look at these different policy measures to understand the extent to which they actually target or provide effective response to the transition challenge that the Pilot Region has decided to focus on within RUSTIK project. Barriers inhibiting policy efficacy or the comprehensive alignment of the policies to the transition challenges are identified as well. This dimension seeks better understanding of the policy efficacy as this can allow for targeted improvements and adjustments during the Theory of Change (ToC) stage (Cycle 2), enhancing the overall success in tackling the transition challenge in the Pilot Regions.

The analysis in this dimension classifies the policy measures in three categories which are overlapping to a certain extent:

1. existence of public policy measures aligned with the transition challenge, i.e. measures that target the transition challenge directly or on-the-ground actions are tailored to it;
2. public policy measures aligned with or relevant to the transition challenge that function with limited effectiveness due to certain barriers;
3. public policy measures that are relevant to the transition challenge but do not target it or tackle it comprehensively.

Summary of key findings across the three categories is presented below in (Table 6). This is followed by a more detailed analysis per category.

Table 6 Summary of key findings

Pilot Region	Existence of governmental measures targeted at the transition challenge (TC)	Effectiveness barriers present in governmental measures		Challenges with effective targeting or comprehensive tackling of the TC
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten	Broad governmental frameworks and instruments exist and can be tailored to target the TC	-	-	Governmental measures do not result in actions/projects effectively tailored to the TC
BG: Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin	TC mostly addressed via ad-hoc initiatives of local governments or non-profit actors. Only fragmented gov. measures exist		Relevant national level measure (on social exclusion) and local gov. initiatives (food festivals) face different effectiveness barriers	Relevant national level strategy (in tourism) does not include objectives aligned with the TC
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück	Broad strategic goals and instruments exist and need to align to target the TC		Lack of data prevents strategic goals to be translated into actions well aligned with the TC	Instruments targeted at the TC not fully tailored to include marginalised groups
ES: Galicia	Governmental instruments at regional and local level targeted at the TC exist		Lack of data and scalability barriers prevent instruments (e.g. model settlements) to respond effectively to the TC	Relevant gov. instruments (housing census) obligatory only in areas with certain population size larger than in the LL territory
ES: Osona	Territorial plans relevant to the TC exist		Effectiveness of territorial plans problematic as they are outdated	-
FI: North Karelia	Local level instruments targeted at the TC exist		Effectiveness of local instruments problematic due to lack of data	-

Pilot Region	Existence of governmental measures targeted at the transition challenge (TC)		Effectiveness barriers present in governmental measures	Challenges with effective targeting or comprehensive tackling of the TC
IT: Garfagnana	Local level instruments targeted at the TC and national financial frameworks exist. A wider policy mix needed to address social issues		Policy barriers to local level instruments associated mostly with regulatory rigidity	-
IT: Parma and Piacenza	Multi-level gov. frameworks and funding programmes tailored to the TC exist		Technical barriers to effectiveness related to large data processing and coordination	-
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie	Predominantly public-private projects target the TC; No specific gov. measure(s) tailored to the TC	-	-	-
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	Predominantly non-governmental-private projects target the TC; No specific gov. measure(s) tailored to the TC		Policy barriers at local level associated with lack of institutional capacity and translation of strategic goals from upper level to action	-
SR: Zaječar District	TC mostly addressed via isolated regional or local projects and *ad hoc* initiatives funded by local budgets. Fragmented gov. measures lack specific focus on the TC.		Lack of clear legal framework reduces incentives for local entrepreneurship; sporadic nature of provided project funding; lack of evaluation of the effectiveness of previously implemented local strategies.	Relevant national-level strategy (in tourism) does not include targeted measures aligned with the TC

Pilot Region	Existence of governmental measures targeted at the transition challenge (TC)		Effectiveness barriers present in governmental measures	Challenges with effective targeting or comprehensive tackling of the TC
SI: Osrednjeslovenska	Multiple governmental measures in place, however, the extent to which they target the transition is uncertain		Policy barriers associated with lack of institutional capacity; translation of strategic goals to action; data and adequate indicators	-
UK: Gloucestershire	Broad strategic frameworks in place as well as informal initiatives. A strategy that is more tailored to the TC is in progress	-	-	-
UK: Monmouthshire	Multi-level governmental frameworks exist and target the TC		Potential policy efficacy barrier could be the lack of youth participation in the design of county-level well-being measures	-

Before moving forward, it is worth noting that lack of comprehensive data has posed certain challenges in assessing the extent to which relevant policies align fully with the transition challenge or if they address it effectively. Some Pilot Regions reported limitations in accessing data regarding the functioning of funding schemes or evaluations of policy outcomes (Rhein-Hunsrück; TAU; Gloucestershire; Zaječar District). Where Pilot Regions reported that policies have been put in place recently (on tackling food waste in Osrednjeslovenska región), an assessment of their efficacy and if they address comprehensively the transition challenge has been limited. Assessing relevant policies that are currently being designed has also not been possible (Gloucesterhire's Digital Inclusion Strategy). Finally, gaps in understanding the interactions of multiple policy interventions and how they together contribute to tackle the transition challenge are also highlighted in Transition Narratives (Garfagnana; Osrednjeslovenska región).

Governmental measures targeted at the transition challenge

In multiple Pilot Regions, Transition Narratives identify public policy measures – strategies, plans, programmes or other implementation instruments – that essentially address the transition challenge at hand, and thus can be classified under this category. In more limited cases, these encompass coordinated strategic or policy frameworks that define broad goals set at upper level

of government, which are then translated to concrete targeted actions at the lower level. This is crucial in multi-faceted transitions which require an integration or coordination of multiple thematic areas (economic, social, environmental, spatial, etc.). The most prominent example is Monmouthshire. Overall, strategies and policies align well with the demographic transition in Monmouthshire. While they address the transition from different thematic angles, it is the synergy between them that allows to effectively respond to the transition challenge. The Wellbeing of Future Generation Act (Wales) of 2015 is perceived as particularly valuable given the Pilot Region's focus on the demographic change characterised by aging population and youth population loss. In addition to fostering collaborative efforts across various levels of government, the Act is seen as facilitating appropriate solutions to the transition challenge by mandating governmental bodies to regularly monitor developments in relevant domains, such as 'good quality livelihood opportunities' and to develop plans as necessary. The Pilot Regions of Rhein-Hunsrück and Nockregion also identify several strategic frameworks and instruments that are inter-sectoral or set flexible horizontal objectives, amenable to the transition challenges. This indicates a good basis for a conductive policy context.

In other cases, it is specific implementation instruments that seem particularly aligned with the transition challenge. In Garfagnana, the Local Development Plan under LEADER is well suited to the transition challenge as it supports community-driven solutions in the domain of service provision and small-scale business activities. The Pilot Region attributes the success of the instrument to past experiences that permitted adjustments or amendments through reflection and learning from lessons, namely, a previously dominating sectoral approach that proved ineffective. Local actors perceive the current instrument as an 'experiment', which signifies certain autonomy – strategically and financially – at the local level to test new solutions, within frameworks provided by upper levels of government. Similarly, in Galicia, the Galician Regional Agency for Rural Development (AGADER), RUSTIK's Pilot Region Partner, is managing land mobility instruments, including the model settlements/villages. The latter is well aligned with the challenge to access land for agricultural use as it targets the recovery of agricultural activity in abandoned or underutilised land of high production capacity around villages.

Other positively evaluated measures that help tackle the transition challenges are assessed rather as ad-hoc or informal initiatives, which are not part of formal (or multi-level) policy frameworks as it was discussed in the preceding dimension (Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin's local food festivals; vocational local census of vacant housing in Galicia's rural areas; public-private initiatives in Szydłowiecki powiat). This signifies a sizable policy gap that Pilot Regions shall consider addressing in their future work when devising transition pathways.

In conclusion, key reasons why Pilot Regions appear to assess public policy measures as aligned with the transition challenge bear similarities and include the perceived autonomy to design policies and projects tailored to territorial circumstances, including via experimentation (Garfagnana; Galicia; North Karelia); availability of (multi-) funding channels (Garfagnana; Nockregion; Parma and Piacenza); the integrated nature of solutions combing efforts of different (public policy) actors (Monmouthshire; Nockregion), and last but not least the evidence-base of the policy approach (Monmouthshire).

Albeit aligned with the transition challenges, the potential of some of the measures may not be fully utilised, and the reasons for this are discussed in the following sections.

Governmental measures relevant to the transition challenge facing efficacy barriers

Some of the above mentioned as well as other governmental measures – identified as broadly relevant to the selected transition challenges – face obstacles in addressing and tackling successfully these challenges. Delving deeper into the key issues, there are several barriers that one can identify in the Transition Narratives.

Framework Frustrations: In the grip of restricting regulations

One prominent issue is linked to the quality of regulatory or strategic frameworks set at higher levels of government. This type of barrier has been discussed partially in the preceding analytical dimension and focused on the restricted autonomy of the subnational or subregional level to devise strategies and policy measures according to local circumstances.

Apart from the restricted autonomy to strategic planning, Transition Narratives also refer to the constraining nature of relevant regulatory frameworks. Encompassing a set of laws, rules or standards established by governments or designated regulatory bodies within a certain (sectoral) domain, regulatory frameworks are prone to be prescriptive. Due to that, they can (further) interfere with local autonomy and clash with place-based priorities. In Garfagnana, for instance, regulatory frameworks concerning forest management are perceived as '*rigid*' and found to limit the opportunity of local decision-makers to tailor policies that align with their unique circumstances. Moreover, complying with complex regulations, while trying to adapt them to local needs, may also result in high compliance costs. In Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, for instance, a municipal policy measure to start a garden for food production on municipally owned land has generated multiple regulatory hurdles. To overcome them, the municipality concerned had to 'invent' a creative solution involving the support of private stakeholders, which, however, is not always available.

The two examples indicate that regulatory frameworks may produce different types of barriers including conflict with local priorities, constraints to a place-based approach, hight compliance costs, which all can lead to tensions and frustrations at sub-regional level.

As opposite to too much regulation, the lack of legal framework is also registered as a barrier. This is highlighted particularly strongly in Zaječar District. In light of the importance of home-based food production for the PR's transition challenge, the incomplete legal framework for safety in home-based food businesses is a concern. Together with insufficient financial incentives, the lack of clear rules and standards applicable to home food production for business purposes is perceived to inhibit local entrepreneurial and innovative potential.

Size Matters: The puzzle of efficient public services

The efficacy of certain governmental measures is compromised by difficulties associated with economies of scale, a challenge frequently encountered in those rural areas that are sparsely populated or remote and that face demographic problems. This is explicitly discussed in the Transition Narrative of the Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin Pilot Region. It identifies that the support to socially disadvantaged communities via a social service called 'Hot Lunch' is constrained in the Pilot Region's remote mountainous areas. This measure is not available in such territories due to

the limited number of recipients, effectively leading to the exclusion of certain areas and communities from otherwise relevant national policy measures. Reducing social exclusion is also an important theme in the transition challenge selected by the Slovenian Osrednjeslovenska región, where access to services is an area needing improvement, in combination with increasing literacy, digital skills, and generally more access to information and financing of affected groups.

More generally, service provision concerns are raised in Galicia. While the Pilot Region currently does not highlight gaps, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining service provision levels in coordination with efforts to attract newcomers interested in agricultural activities.

Lost in implementation: Gap between strategic priorities and action

While themes related to selected transition challenges may be prioritised in policies or strategies at higher levels of government, these may not be translated into concrete actions at the level where the transition challenge needs to be tackled. This indicates high politico-strategic effectiveness in addressing the transition, but a low impact effectiveness in terms of actions that translate the strategic commitments on the ground.[2] This can have significant consequences including missed development opportunities and continued vulnerability to the negative trends triggered by the transition challenge. Woj. Świętokrzyskie recognises the existence of such a gap and acknowledges the risk it poses to successfully address the transition challenge in the region. In identifying the roots of this challenge, the Pilot Region recognises two possible explanations. In the first place, the lack of specific actions on priorities set by higher levels of government is linked to the multitude of short-term or immediate needs that local policymakers and administrations must address. These can be overwhelming and stretch local administration to capacity, inhibiting long-term strategic planning. Second, the Transition Narrative of Woj. Świętokrzyskie identifies a lack of recognition among local authorities of the potential of certain local resources to stimulate the promotion of tourism and consequently economic prosperity. This may explain the lack of prioritisation in allocating resources and implementing targeted initiatives to harness these assets effectively.

A gap between strategic priorities and action is also evident in Rhein-Hunsrück, however, due to differing reasons. The Pilot Region appreciates the existence of measures such as LEADER strategies whose objectives invite solutions in the field of the transition challenge (for instance, the objective of creating a liveable region for young people). However, the analysis reveals that this objective is not further distilled in concrete goals and actions due to lack of *'deeper understanding of e.g. motivations of young people for staying in/leaving the region or requirements for a job or training place'*.

Paving the way to change amidst capacity roadblocks

Transition Narratives also identify a barrier of soft nature, namely administrative or institutional capacity. Capacity is frequently an implicit factor in the successful design and implementation of

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[2] Happaerts, S. (2012). Sustainable development and subnational governments: Going beyond symbolic politics?. *Environmental Development*, 4, 2-17.

governmental measures[3], and in RUSTIK capacity is relevant not only in terms of efficacy of existing measures but also of the future solutions that Pilot Regions would experiment with. Two of the Transition Narratives have explicitly mentioned that effectively formulating and implementing policies addressing the selected transition challenge is closely tied to specific administrative capabilities, which may pose challenges. In Woj. Świętokrzyskie, lack of local administration's expertise - particularly in the doming of tourism promotion – is perceived as a potential constraint, hindering active engagement with tourism policy measures already mentioned earlier. In this case, capacity has a more traditional meaning of human resources (i.e. qualified staff) but potentially also relates to leadership capacity, i.e. capacity to set long-term goals in the field and drive a collective commitment at the local level. The Osrednjeslovenska región assesses the level of institutional capacity as insufficient particularly in view of the complexity emerging when combining ambitions to combat food waste and social exclusion in one solution. Lack of capacity in this case is associated with the novelty of the integrated solution that, apart from qualified human resources, may predominantly require new organisational capacity to cooperate and coordinate across policy domains.

Obstacles to evidence-based policy

Finally, a number of Transition Narratives highlight that existing governmental measures and initiatives relevant to their transition challenges lack relevant or holistic data that can support their design or their monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, this causes concerns regarding their effective targeting and their impact. While reasons partially link to financial resources, especially when it comes to local administrations obtaining granular data, there are other barriers to evidence-based policy making that relate to the capacity to integrate external knowledge in different stages of the policy, and more generally, to the culture/openness in public administrations towards external knowledge/data.

Evidence base in the design of public policy measures

In North Karelia, municipalities currently play an important role in addressing the transition challenge linked to the integration of migrants, and their role will increase in the future due to planned delegation of additional responsibilities. In this context, the Pilot Regions finds the quality of local programmes for migrant integration occasionally problematic. The reason for this appears to primarily relate to the knowledge base upon which the local government can draw. This has implications for the targeting of the policies across municipalities which may require better tailoring to specific territorial trends or integration issues. After gaining experience with public policy measures targeted at the transition challenge in Galicia (measures promoting the use of abandoned land), the Pilot Region observes that they have not achieved an impact significant enough to reverse the negative trends contributing to the transition challenge. While the evidence base of these measures is not the sole reason that can explain this, the Pilot Region recognises that one of the risks is that the design of such measures, like the model settlements, has failed

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to obtain and utilise key data about land/house owners and individuals interested in accessing land/housing in the region. Here, the Pilot Region also highlights some of the specific barriers to civic participation in rural areas including factors such as age, distance and less dense social networks. The value of tailoring the organisation of local initiatives – food festivals – based on data/evidence is reportedly unrecognised by local administration in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin due to their ad-hoc and sporadic nature.

Evidence base in monitoring and evaluation of public policy measures

Both quantitative and qualitative data are perceived to play an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of existing public policy measures addressing the transition challenges in Osrednjeslovenska region and Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, as well as in North Karelia. Governmental measures in Osrednjeslovenska region that currently link to the environmental side of the transition challenge on food waste do not indicate attempts to use territorial data to monitor and evaluate their effects. Quantitative indicators, set in the measures, are generic and not place-based (e.g. not indicating different quantities of food waste). The situation differs when it comes to measures on the social side of the challenge (access to food of marginalised communities). Relevant public policy measures include different qualitative indicators such as a variety of wellbeing indicators. While this is generally positive, the sophisticated nature of wellbeing indicators poses a question on whether local administrations would be able to easily use the data to feed into the policy. Lack of relevant indicators and more broadly mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the territorial impact of integration measures is also perceived as a risk to their effectiveness in the case of North Karelia.

In Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara the obstacle is of different nature. While data are collected by local public bodies to facilitate water management, a response to water scarcity is possible only via timely processing of the large amount of data and coordination within the monitoring systems. This task is complex and requires a more effective approach than what is currently in place. This complexity is well captured by the following excerpt from the Transition Narrative:

> *"...information about the evolution over time, on daily and hour basis, and about weather condition (e.g. temperature, amount of rain), but also other technical information about the water need of different crops, and tomatoes among these (e.g. evapotranspiration). This data are needed also to develop appropriate models to estimate water need and to plan water distribution in different areas of the region, according to productivity potential."*

Table 7 Summary of key barriers

Barrier	Identified in
Regulatory rigidity/burden	Garfagnana (*forest management*) Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin (*municipal food production on municipal land*)
Access to services of marginalised groups	Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin (*in mountainous areas*)

Barrier	Identified in
	Osrednjeslovenska región
Gap between strategic priorities and action	**Woj. Świętokrzyskie (*tourism sector*)** **Rhein-Hunsrück**
Admin/Institutional Capacity - human resources/leadership - inter-sectoral collaboration	Woj. Świętokrzyskie (*tourism sector*) Osrednjeslovenska region (*connecting food waste and social exclusion issues*)
Evidence base - in the design of public policy measures - in the monitoring and evaluation of public policy measures	Galicia (*measures promoting the use of abandoned land*), North Karelia (*migrant integration*), Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin (*food festivals*) North Karelia (*migrant integration*), Osrednjeslovenska region (*environmental footprint of food waste*), Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara (*water management*)

Governmental measures relevant to the transition challenge do not target it or tackle it (comprehensively)

Below we outline the perceptions of some Pilot Regions that certain governmental measures have been found relevant to the broad transition within which the selected challenge is situated. However, the objectives and implementation of these measures do not, presently, address directly or holistically the transition challenge the Pilot Region is focusing on. Thus, such policies may not yield positive change in the direction of the transition challenge. The value of this review is to set a basis for reflection, including in the next stages of the research, if such policies can be adapted to bridge the gap between their current formulation and the transition challenge, creating a more conductive environment for the desired change.

'Cooking Up' Success: Revisiting Food Production in Tourism Policy

One group of such cases include the Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin and Zaječar District. Both Pilot Regions view tourism policies as relevant to the broader socio-economic transition underway in their rural areas. Tourism policy is also perceived as pertinent to the selected transition challenge, which focuses on (traditional) food, home food production and short supply chains. However, food and food production, particularly home-based one, and its business promotion within local supply

chains is not fully recognised as one of the avenues through which tourism is currently being promoted. Naturally, such a gap can be considered as a substantial barrier to socio-economic transitions in these rural areas, where among their primary function is food production. The tourism policy is viewed as a crucial aspect in addressing the transition challenge, thereby emphasising the significance of the existing gap.

Falling between the cracks

Finally, the target economic/social group or target territory of some governmental measures appear non-conductive to foster actions that otherwise address the transition challenge at hand. Some measures – either advertently or inadvertently – exclude or do not consider the needs of certain demographic groups or territories relevant to the Pilot Regions' transition challenges. In Galicia, measures to improve access to housing, which are directly linked to the explored transition challenge, are available. This includes a Register of housing demand and Vacant dwelling census. However, the implementation of the latter is voluntary and primarily oriented towards urban areas. The measure is obligatory in places where a certain number of inhabitants is reached, and this criterion excludes the Pilot Region's territories. In Rhein-Hunsrück, the Carrier Guidance Concept offers a policy framework for training and further education, which addresses the transition challenge related to labour market mismatch among young people. However, considering the special attention the Pilot Region gives to marginalised communities, the risk is that this instrument may not meet their career guidance needs, which differ from those of mainstream populations. In the Nockregion, the focus is on the region's socio-economic transition and particularly on the role of the small rural businesses who have a significant contribution to the local economy. While relevant instruments exist to financially incentivise the participation of these businesses, this is done within the broad policy objective to stimulate economic development. This opens a question about how to ensure that regional strategic objectives cater for the distinct and diverse needs and potentials of small rural businesses.

Table 8: Summary

Barrier	Identified in
Exclusion/non-consideration of the transition challenge in governmental measures - in tourism measures	Zaječar District, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin
Exclusion/non-consideration in governmental measures of - certain social groups (marginalised communities) - certain territories (rural/areas below 10 thousand inhabitants) - certain economic actors	Rhein-Hunsrück Galicia Nockregion

5. Assessment of the policy environment

Building on the discussion of key promoters and inhibitors of Section 4, Section 5 aims to provide an indicative assessment of how conducive the overall policy environment (see also Figure 4) is in the Pilot Regions to address the transition challenge on a scale of low, medium or high.

Table 9 below provides an initial overview of the key inhibitors and promoters concerning the institutional and policy environment that are seen to affect the transition in the Pilot Regions. In addition, the Table contains an indicative assessment of how conducive the overall policy environment is to address the transition in the individual Pilot Regions on a scale of low, medium, or high. A low ranking means that there are (at present) several limitations across the institutional and policy environment, and these factors are assessed to outweigh the factors that are conducive to the transition. In the medium and high ranking, there are several important facilitators and fewer and/or (perceived to be) less severe limitations. The assessment is done based on the data of the Transition Narratives and is therefore only indicative.

The subsequent discussion looks in more detail at the factors affecting the policy environment. To structure the discussion, the individual Pilot Regions are allocated into one of the three groups based on the scale of low, medium or high. Given the interpretative nature of the analysis, in some cases it has been difficult to assess the exact scale and therefore some Pilot Regions have been categorised in-between two scales (i.e. low-medium or medium-high.)

Table 9: Key inhibitors & promoters, and the conduciveness of the policy environment to address the transition challenges in the Pilot Regions

Pilot Region	Key inhibitors for transition? [governance / policy]	Key promoters for transition [governance / policy]	Conduciveness of policy environment to TC? [low, medium, high]
AT: Nockregion-Oberkärnten	**Governance:** Power dynamics (incl. funding power) btw. bottom-up & top-down actors; certain stakeholders lack interest in collaboration; absence of a network to advocate for the needs of key stakeholders (small businesses). **Policy:** Governmental measures do not result in actions/projects effectively tailored to the TC.	**Governance:** Collaborative, cross-sectoral & integrated approach; LAG is an important collaboration network. **Policy:** Broad governmental frameworks & instruments, which can be tailored to the TC.	Medium / High
BG: Troyan-Apriltzi-Ugarchin	**Governance:** Lack local-level cooperation; administrative barriers that	**Policy:** TC (mostly) addressed via ad-hoc initiatives of local	Low

Pilot Region	Key inhibitors for transition? [governance / policy]	Key promoters for transition [governance / policy]	Conduciveness of policy environment to TC? [low, medium, high]
	impede effective collaboration. **Policy:** Only fragmented gov. measure(s) exist; lack of synergies between policies.	governments or non-profit actors.	
DE: Rhein-Hunsrück	**Governance:** No key actor / institution (with sufficient funding) concerned with TC; absence of key stakeholders (youth) in the design of strategies for TC. **Policy:** Limited policies/strategies which directly address TC; limited funding for strategies/policies; impact of existing measures difficult to assess. Lack of data prevents the translation of strategic goals to actions aligned with the TC. Instruments targeted at the TC not tailored to include marginalised groups.	**Governance:** Many actors have worked on TC related solutions for years. PRP Regionalrat Wirtschaft a key player in tackling the TC. **Policy:** Several sub-national policies/strategies that address indirectly the TC.	Medium / High
ES: Galicia	**Governance:** Coordination challenges between different levels of governance. **Policy:** Implemented measures have not had the desired impact; top-down approach of policies.	**Governance:** Effective cooperation between local stakeholders; Several key actors have interest in & commitment to the TC (incl. key role played by AGADER with relations to other actors). **Policy:** Several policy instruments for TC (regional) which are aligned; local level active in experimenting with initiatives to address TC.	Low / Medium

Pilot Region	Key inhibitors for transition? [governance / policy]	Key promoters for transition [governance / policy]	Conduciveness of policy environment to TC? [low, medium, high]
ES: Osona	**Governance:** Limitations & gaps in coordination, engagement, and alignment to addressing the TC. **Policy:** Largely constraining policy environment.	**Governance:** High commitment by stakeholders (esp. local-level) to address TC. **Policy:** Territorial plans relevant to TC exist.	Low / Medium
FI: North Karelia	**Governance:** Absence of support to municipalities in fulfilling the requirements of key policies (Integration Act). **Policy:** Limited municipal resources; limited knowledge-based & target-oriented strategy work in municipalities.	**Governance:** Widespread recognition of TC & collaboration. **Policy:** Several national & regional policies & initiatives support TC.	Medium / High
IT: Garfagnana	**Governance:** Mistrust in new initiatives affecting cooperation. **Policy:** Issues related to rigid administration / regulation concerning the TC.	**Governance:** Key role of LAG; know-how amongst stakeholders. **Policy:** Local level instruments targeted at the TC & national financial frameworks; financial resources to implement dedicated policies by LAG; planned policy instruments; supportive political environment to community projects.	High
IT: Parma and Piacenza	**Governance:** Mostly related to lack of coordination (vertical and horizontal). **Policy:** Lack of data; governance of data needs to be developed.	**Governance:** Involvement/commitment of several stakeholders. **Policy:** Multi-level gov. frameworks & funding programmes tailored to the TC; funding to meet	High

Pilot Region	Key inhibitors for transition? [governance / policy]	Key promoters for transition [governance / policy]	Conduciveness of policy environment to TC? [low, medium, high]
		the needs of key stakeholders.	
PL: Woj. Mazowieckie	**Governance:** Conflicting interests & competition between district & municipal stakeholders hindering cooperation in response to the TC; generational divide which creates misunderstanding. **Policy:** No specific gov. measure(s) tailored to TC.	**Governance:** Awareness of / commitment to the TC amongst many key stakeholders (esp. those in the LL). **Policy:** Predominantly district/municipal level policies involving public-NGO/private-NGO projects target the TC.	Low
PL: Woj. Świętokrzyskie	**Governance:** (Indirect challenges) lack of local-level cooperation; capacity of stakeholders working for rural tourism. **Policy:** No specific gov. measure(s) tailored to the TC; Tourism not considered a priority at local level; Local policy barriers related to lack of institutional capacity.	**Governance:** High involvement by NGOs (which incl. entrepreneurs & social actors), which create networks, have connections & understand the challenges; leading role by Regional Tourist Organisation. **Policy:** Predominantly NGO-led projects with private & social partners target the TC.	Low
SR: Zaječar District	**Governance:** Fragmented cooperation; absence of critical mass of actors & resources; administrative obstacles & mistrust for establishing partnerships; limited capacity of certain actors. **Policy:** Fragmented gov. measure(s) lack specific focus on TC. Relevant national strategy (in tourism) does not include	**Governance:** Various partnerships (although mostly through ad-hoc activities). **Policy:** TC mostly addressed via isolated regional or local projects and *ad hoc* initiatives.	Low

Pilot Region	Key inhibitors for transition? [governance / policy]	Key promoters for transition [governance / policy]	Conduciveness of policy environment to TC? [low, medium, high]
	objectives aligned with TC. Also lack of financial incentives & limited legal framework.		
SI: Osrednjeslovenska	**Policy:** While there are multiple governmental measures, the extent to which they target the TC is uncertain. Also policy barriers associated with lack of institutional capacity, translation of strategic goals to action, data & adequate indicators.	**Governance:** LAGs foster largely bottom-up collaboration between private & public stakeholders. **Policy:** Multiple governmental measures in place.	Low / Medium
UK: Gloucestershire	**Governance:** Power discrepancies btw. bottom-up & top-down actors affect collaboration. **Policy:** No clear & coherent vision on the TC; limited data on effectiveness of existing measures.	**Governance:** Many actors work on TC-related issues. **Policy:** Broad strategic frameworks & informal initiatives. A strategy more tailored to TC is in progress.	Medium / High
UK: Monmouthshire	**Governance:** Lack of youth participation in the design of county-level well-being measures. **Policy:** Balancing intervention priorities across the different geographies & demographics.	**Governance:** Widespread understanding & collaboration to address TC. **Policy:** Multi-level governmental frameworks target the TC. Synergies in strategies for addressing TC.	High

5.1 Policy environment not conducive to transition – limited level of institutional and policy capacity

Based on the factors facilitating and inhibiting transition in the individual Pilot Regions of Section 4, the conduciveness of the overall policy environment to address the transition challenge is assessed to be low or low to medium in seven Pilot Regions. As noted earlier, due to mixed data of the Transition Narratives, in some cases it is difficult to allocate the Pilot Regions into one of the three categories. While four Pilot Regions are assessed to fall under the low category, three Pilot Regions are assessed to fall in-between the two categories of low and medium (see Table 10 below). However, they all share similarities regarding the state of their overall policy environment, which is discussed in further detail below.

Table 10 Conduciveness of the policy environment to the transition challenge – low to medium

Conduciveness of policy environment to TC	Low	Low / Medium
Pilot Regions	Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin (TAU) Woj. Mazowieckie Woj. Świętokrzyskie Zajecar District	Galicia Osona Osrednjeslovenska

5.1.1 Key findings concerning factors affecting institutional capacity

In terms of the institutional capacity to respond to the transition challenge, the Transition Narratives reported on various factors related to 1) coordination, 2) cooperation and 3) participation amongst the actors. In this group of Pilot Regions, there are important factors which both facilitate and inhibit the transition. However, the inhibiting factors are assessed to be more severe and numerous in relation to the facilitating factors, and in relation to the findings of the other group of Pilot Regions (i.e. Pilot Regions with medium-high level of conduciveness in their overall policy environment). The key findings are as follows:

Limited capacity to coordinate action

In this group, there is currently relatively limited capacity to coordinate actions of the different stakeholders to address the transition challenge. Depending on the transition challenge in question, coordinating actions can be a particularly difficult task when there are several actors involved with different interests and agendas. In this group of Pilot Regions, the limited coordination capacity is linked to the absence of structured coordination mechanisms for the involved actors. Such a mechanism can help with Transition Narrative communication, collaboration and alignment between stakeholders, and can consequently affect the success of the transition process. Where there are no such mechanisms, cooperation tends to rely more on infrequent and isolated interactions. This was found to be the case in some of the Pilot Regions in this group. For example, in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, there is no cooperative network for the actors involved in addressing the transition challenge. Instead, cooperation tends to take place

via local-level initiatives, such as food fairs and festivals. In a similar vein, in Zaječar, cooperation is centred on regional or local projects and *ad hoc* initiatives. The well-structured forms of cooperation and partnerships between municipalities are more of an exception than a rule, given the mixed level of capacities and development of local governments in Serbia. Another example concerns Osona where actors collaborate to address the transition challenge, but there are nonetheless limitations and gaps in their coordination, engagement, and alignment, which in turn can impede the transition efforts.

It is important to note that some of the Pilot Regions in this group have reported also on examples of successful coordination and coordination mechanisms, and as such do not necessarily face as severe challenges. For example, in Woj. Świętokrzyskie cooperation networks exist and their coordination is reported as satisfactory. Similarly, in Osrednjeslovenska, the role played by the LAGs through their bottom-up approach is considered suitable to addressing the transition challenge. Also, in the case of Galicia, the Transition Narrative mentions a strong network of actors established by the Pilot Region Partner (AGADER).

Significant barriers affecting the quality of cooperation

The quality of cooperation is affected by different factors. A common understanding of the transition challenge and mutual interests provide a crucial basis for fostering effective cooperation. In this group of Pilot Regions, Transition Narratives note challenges such as achieving consensus on the transition challenge. Depending on the understanding, interest, and commitment of the stakeholders to the transition challenge, the Transition Narratives note diverging interests and priorities (e.g. Woj. Świętokrzyskie, Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin) which affect the cooperation. Furthermore, demographic factors such as the generational divide in Woj. Mazowieckie between district and municipal actors was reported to be a factor hindering the cooperative response to the transition challenge. Other key barriers included administrative issues such as legislation/regulatory framework (Zaječar, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin), the availability of resources and local capacity (Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Zaječar).

Key actors participate, but with limitations

While many of the key actors in the Pilot Regions are actively involved in addressing the transition challenge (see also Table 4), there are limitations concerning either their involvement or the involvement of other important groups. For example, in Woj. Mazowieckie, the local entrepreneurs were reported to have limited involvement, which was claimed to result from the lack of commitment from the public sector in fostering entrepreneurship. Moreover, the two key institutions, which have a recognised role in the development of the Pilot Region in Woj. Mazowieckie (i.e. the Center for Contemporary Sculpture in Oronsko and the Local 'Action Group Together for Sandstone'), have refused to cooperate actively. In other cases, such as in Osona, the informal nature of key stakeholders such as industries, retail and neighbourhood association in the policy planning was noted to limit their influence in addressing the challenge.

5.1.2 Key findings concerning factors affecting policy capacity

In terms of the capacity of the policy environment, Pilot Regions in this group show mixed but largely limited multi-level policy coordination and coherence of measures relevant to the transition challenge. Existing policy measures face efficacy barriers due to limitations in scale, outreach, data integration and administrative capacity. Most notably, Pilot Regions assessed to have low level of conduciveness in their policy environment do not identify a targeted place-based policy or strategic framework that can address the transition. Instead, they rely on local initiatives. The Transition Narratives describe transition relevant policies with different governance arrangements reflecting the diverse administrative contexts of the countries. However, some of the shared issues are as follows.

Seeking multi-level alignment of policies in a fragmented context with inefficient coordination

While Pilot Regions in this group demonstrate examples of multi-level policy alignment (e.g. via a national-level strategic framework in Woj. Świętokrzyskie), many report on specific challenges most notably in relation to the fragmented nature of the policy environment (e.g. in Galicia and in Osrednjeslovenska), or dominance of one level over the other. In Osona and Galicia, this is characterised by the division of responsibilities, lack of dialogue between policy silos, and inefficient coordination. For example, in Galicia, the Transition Narrative notes limitations in coordination among the different levels of government, unclear division of competencies, and low thematic coordination as key barriers which may impact the way existing policies address the transitions. In the case of Osona, the fragmented responsibilities and limited collaborative frameworks for stakeholders could in turn lead to disjointed strategies and hinder an integrated approach to transition challenges. A further example can be noted in the context of Woj. Mazowieckie where there is alignment between local development strategies and regional objectives through the Regional Development Strategy of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, but in a context where the interests of the different levels may not always fully align.

The delineation of responsibilities between local, regional, and national levels underscores complexities in multi-level governance, highlighting the need for streamlined coordination mechanisms to address transition challenges comprehensively. Initiatives and mechanisms aimed at strengthening collaboration and communication channels between different levels of government could enhance capabilities and boost policy coherence.

Strong top-down steering limits the consideration of local needs

A clear top-down approach to policies is notable in some of the Pilot Regions in this group (Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin). Public policy measures that target rural areas are defined at the national level and the actions of local actors are very much dependent on the top-down processes. While there is strong evidence of policy coherence between local and national agendas in the case of some of the Pilot Regions in this group (e.g. Zaječar, Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin), this alignment is not seamless. In both Zaječar District and Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin alignment between local level solutions and national priorities exist. However, the rationality of top-down approaches and the potential prioritisation of national objectives over local needs is questioned. Moreover, in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, despite efforts by local actors to promote local food policies, there is a lack of alignment that limits addressing local needs, and a level of dependence on top-down

directives. Broader coordination across agencies or the creation of collaborative platforms could facilitate communication, information sharing, and joint initiatives.

As concluded in Section 4, these cases highlight the importance of having / enhancing mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and participatory governance to ensure effective policy implementation at all levels.

Limited resources affect effective responses to the transition challenge

While there are examples of successful approaches to leveraging funding in the Pilot Regions, many also face specific challenges (Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Zaječar, Osrednjeslovenska). These are related to the short-term nature of the funding (e.g. municipal plans in Zaječar), concerns regarding the continuity and consistency across different policy cycles and funding streams, especially when priorities or funding availability shift over time (e.g. Osrednjeslovenska), and the lack of specific funding streams for the transition challenge (e.g. Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin) which in turn limits their scalability and sustainability. A more long-term policy window could be a leeway for boosting dialogue, experimentation, and funding utilisation, allowing for more integrated and sustainable development strategies.

The absence of a targeted place-based policy or strategic framework is a barrier in addressing the transition challenge

As discussed earlier, several Pilot Regions (Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin; Woj. Mazowieckie; Woj. Świętokrzyskie, Zaječar District), rely predominantly on local and informal initiatives to address their transition challenges. These are often not strategically planned, promoted or coordinated via existing policies and count on voluntary cooperation between local stakeholders. For example, in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, where the transition challenge is concerned with the unknown potential of the rural food system to address socio-economic and demographic transitions, there are local initiatives which involve the organisation of fairs and festivals that promote local/traditional foods. Despite their relevance to the transition challenge, there is no strategic plan on how these activities feed into local or regional development, and there is no stable financial framework which means that in some instances, initiatives are dependent on isolated project funding. However, there is opportunity of bridging the gap between the existing initiatives and the transition challenge, which in turn would create a more conducive environment for the transition. This is noted to be the case in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, Zaječar district, Woj. Mazowieckie and Woj. Świętokrzyskie. In all these Pilot Regions, there is seen to be (entrepreneurial) potential that is not sufficiently taken advantage of at present.

To utilise the local potential, reliance on existing policies may not yield an effective solution. This is due to the lack of alignment of earlier mentioned top-down policies with the transition challenge or due to efficacy barriers. The key obstacles are related to issues such as the constraining nature of relevant regulatory frameworks in the delivery of transition relevant measures (e.g. Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin) or challenges related to the absence of a legal framework (e.g. Zaječar District). Other reported issues relate to the economies of scale and social inclusion, prevalent in rural areas of the Pilot Regions in this group. This is a particular issue in Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin, where the access to the 'Hot Lunch' service initiative for the socially disadvantaged communities is

constrained in the remote mountainous areas of the Pilot Region. There are also barriers concerning the gap between strategy prioritisation and action. Such a gap can be recognised in Woj. Świętokrzyskie originating either from the pressure to address short-term needs, which affect longer-term planning at the local level; or lack of recognised potential of certain local resources to promote (in this particular case) tourism to spur economic growth. Pilot Region

Most Pilot Regions in this group highlight the crucial role of data in a successful transitioning. At present, however, the Transition Narratives describe several barriers to an evidence-based and inclusive policy making Transition Narrative. These barriers are rooted in the lack of administrative culture and capacity to use data, especially qualitative data, in designing, monitoring or evaluating policies. As highlighted by Osrednjeslovenska Pilot Region, this has negative implications where policies need to define suitable indicators to measure the extent of the challenge or the impact of the policy. The Galician Pilot Region also reminds us that there are specific barriers to participation in the co-creation processes due to the rural context. This includes the mobility of the residents and their distance to the places where policy decisions are discussed and made. General policy awareness of the local potential is also inhibited by the lack of some basic data, one example being Pilot Region Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin where there is a lack of data regarding organic food production.

The work of the LLs on data collection is therefore crucial in addressing the data gaps. Efforts such as the LLs' comprehensive data collection through fieldwork and engagement strategies address the scarcity of information. These types of initiatives not only enrich the understanding of local needs but also involve the wider public in planning and decision-making processes (e.g. Osona) and can help tailor policies more effectively and advocate more resources.

Moreover, there are crucial administrative capacity implications. As discussed in Section 4, this is not just for ensuring the efficient delivery of existing measures, but also for future solutions. In this group of Pilot Regions, the link between administrative capacity and efficient formulation and delivery of policies is explicitly noted in Woj. Świętokrzyskie and Osrednjeslovenska (e.g. limited capacity of local administration in Woj. Świętokrzyskie and insufficient institutional capacity in Osrednjeslovenska).

5.2 Policy environment largely conducive to transition – moderate to high level of institutional and policy capacity

Based on the discussions of previous Section, the conduciveness of the policy environment to address the transition challenge is assessed to be between moderate to high in seven Pilot Regions. As noted earlier, due to mixed data of the Transition Narratives, it is difficult to allocate all the Pilot Regions into one of the three categories. In this assessment, three Pilot Regions are assessed to fall under the high category, and four in-between the two categories of medium and high (see Table 11 below). However, they all share similarities regarding the state of their overall policy environment, which are discussed in further detail below.

Table 11 Conduciveness of the policy environment to the transition challenge – medium to high

Conduciveness of policy environment to TC	Medium / High	High
Pilot Regions	Nockregion-Oberkärnten North Karelia Gloucestershire Rhein-Hunsrück	Garfagnana Parma and Piacenza Monmouthshire

5.2.1 Key findings concerning factors affecting institutional capacity

The Pilot Regions in this group report on various factors concerning their institutional capacity to respond to the transition challenge. These are related to 1) coordination, 2) cooperation and 3) participation amongst the actors. Similarly, to the previous group of Pilot Regions, in this group, there are important factors which both facilitate and inhibit the transition. In this group, the facilitating factors are assessed to be more important and numerous in relation to the inhibiting factors, and in relation to the finding of the other group of Pilot Regions (i.e. Pilot Regions with low-medium level of conduciveness in their overall policy environment). The key findings are as follows:

Enhanced stakeholder coordination and participation through a holistic approach involving networks

In this group of Pilot Regions, key stakeholders are keen to cooperate and coordinate actions and adopt necessary measures to adapt and/or respond to the transition challenges. The analysis reveals three examples which are important in ensuring the participation and coordination of different actors and sectors and bridging gaps between different levels of government to develop tailor-made solutions to the transition challenges. These include a holistic approach bringing together sectors; the use of cooperation networks drawing on their experience, broad representation, and their bottom-up philosophy (e.g. LAGs and other informal networks are commonly noted examples); and institutional facilitators that coordinate the collaborative networks (in some cases these include Pilot Region Partners e.g. in Nockregion-Oberkärnten, Monmouthshire). The role of institutional facilitators was noted as important not only for the purpose of coordinating networks between different sectors within the region, but also for bridging gaps between different levels of government (local, regional, national and EU) (Parma-Piacenza-Ferrera). The high level of capacity to coordinate actions amongst the different stakeholders was also noted to be a facilitating factor (e.g. in Garfagnana). Many of the Transition Narratives also bring forward the importance of a strong central organisation with dedicated resources to sustaining these multi-level networks. The need for this was underlined in numerous Transition Narratives, including that of Rhein-Hunsrück, where the absence of such an entity with clearly defined financial support is an obstacle in addressing the transition challenge. However, given the multi-faceted nature of the transition challenges, it is recognised that this can be a difficult task for a single actor.

Common understanding and shared interests pave the way for quality cooperation

Findings of the Transition Narratives indicate that the key actors have an awareness, and, in most cases, a common understanding of, and interest in, the transition challenges and their untapped potential, as well as readiness to respond to these. Three Pilot Regions were assessed to have extensive collaboration across sectors and levels of government to collectively address the transition challenge (e.g. Monmouthshire, North Karelia, Garfagnana). The importance of a shared understanding and consensus-building among stakeholders at various levels of governance is exemplified well in the case of Monmouthshire. Here the Transition Narrative emphasises the significance of multi-level and inter-agency consensus on challenges and priorities. This shared understanding enables the formulation of comprehensive strategies and initiatives that resonate across local, regional, and national levels.

While there was a relatively high level of shared understanding of the transition challenges, there were also significant barriers to collaborative action, which in this group of Pilot Regions related to power dynamics between bottom-up and top-down actors touching upon influence and decision-making power (e.g. Gloucestershire), as well as resource allocation (e.g. Nockregion-Oberkärnten). In addition, there were also issues related to mistrust (e.g. mistrust of new initiatives and low enthusiasm for a more entrepreneurial approach in Garfagnana), and lack of interest (e.g. Nockregion-Oberkärnten) among certain stakeholders.

Active participation with potential to reach out to key missing groups

While the Transition Narratives describe a generally active level of participation amongst the key actors (see also Table 4), also in this group there are some challenges in the engagement with certain stakeholder groups. Crucially, this concerns actors that are most affected by the transition challenge but have not been included in the policy planning (e.g. young people in Monmouthshire, Rhein-Hunsrück).

In Nockregion-Oberkärnten, the issue is more unique as compared to other Pilot Regions. Here, it is rather the absence of a network that can bring together key actors – small businesses – and steer the policy delivery in line with their needs that is problematic and is at the heart of the transition challenge.

5.2.2 Key findings concerning factors affecting policy capacity

In terms of policy capacity, Pilot Regions in this group show largely moderate to high levels of coordination and coherence of policy measures identified as relevant to the transition challenge across levels of government. Similarly, there are either broad policy or strategy frameworks amendable to the transition challenge or specific policy instruments. Some efficacy barriers exist and relate predominantly to integration of data in policy design and implementation as well as to the translation of broad strategic goals in concrete actions that recognise diverse social and economic groups.

As in the other group of Pilot Regions, the picture is very mixed regarding policy coordination and coherence. The Transition Narratives describe transition relevant policies with different

governance arrangements reflecting the diverse administrative contexts of the countries. However, some of the shared issues are as follows.

A comprehensive policy approach promotes conducive policy environment

A comprehensive policy approach, which foresees that policies and initiatives are coherent and aligned across the different levels of government (e.g. Monmouthshire) or there is a high potential for this (e.g. Garfagnana), is an example of a factor 'facilitating' a conducive policy environment to transition. In some cases, this type of an approach is facilitated by different mechanisms employed for policy harmonisation and implementation (e.g. Nockregion-Oberkärnten), and coordination in leveraging of funds across governance levels (e.g. Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara). These mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate dialogue across multiple governance levels and harmonise goals, objectives, strategies, and actions for more effective implementation. These include national-level frameworks which are intended to foster coherence of actions (e.g, the Integration Act in North Karelia; the Master Plan for rural areas in Carinthia which provides a common thread in the case of Nockregion-Oberkärnten and the binding role of the Carinthian Regional Development Act), and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (e.g. Monmouthshire, Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara).

Transition Narratives note (also) the example of inter-agency cooperation fostering multi-level policy alignment (e.g. Monmouthshire, Rhein-Hunsrück). These types of cooperative arrangements come in different formats, scales (e.g. cross-border inter-agency cooperation in Nockregion-Oberkärnten), levels (e.g. horizontal and vertical cooperation in Monmouthshire and Garfagnana; vertical coordination in Nockregion-Oberkärnten and Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara; horizontal cooperation in Rhein-Hunsrück, Gloucestershire and North Karelia) and are delivered under different regulatory contexts (e.g. voluntary, mandatory). Whilst generally perceived as beneficial for the effective implementation of initiatives, Transition Narratives note also specific challenges associated with the inter-agency coordination mechanisms. In some cases, the situation is described to be challenging due to unbalanced power dynamics. For example, in Austria/Nockregion-Oberkärnten, the regional coordinator, financed by the federal state, has sparked scepticism among the regional actors, who question the added value and are concerned about the increased top-down influence and loss of autonomy. This underlines the importance of defining clear responsibilities and scope of action for each stakeholder, while striving towards common goals and policy coherence.

Funding provides opportunities for enhanced policy coordination

Funding mechanisms were noted in several Transition Narratives as relevant devices for enhancing multi-level and cross-sectoral policy and stakeholder coordination or filling gaps. Utilising multiple funding sources, including EU funds were noted crucial in the work of addressing transition challenges. For example, in Garfagnana, the role of EU funds has been particularly important in organising new and existing bodies and capacities related to the transition work. Leveraging EU funds has also enabled the mobilisation of other (domestic) funding sources to facilitate broader stakeholder participation, promotion of regional development topics, and policy coordination. In Nockregion-Oberkärnten, the multi-fund approach, which has been introduced in the new Regional Development Act is noted as an example which aims to provide a structured

mechanism for channelling financial resources into initiatives aimed at mitigating the challenges associated with the transition. In Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, it is specifically the strategic alignment between EU funds, national policies and regional development goals which is seen to foster synergies and complementarities, enabling effective utilisation of funding for environmental and climate objectives.

Targeted strategies offer opportunities to respond to the transition challenge

As discussed in Section 4, most Pilot Regions report on at least some form of governmental measures (strategies; plans; programmes; or other implementation instruments) which target their transition challenge. However, their nature (binding, non-binding), scale (national, regional, local), focus (explicit or implicit focus on the transition challenge), ambition and assessed impact varies. In this group of Pilot Regions, this includes examples of coordinated strategic/policy frameworks that define the broader, higher/national-level objectives, which are translated into more targeted sub-national actions. These are particularly well-suited for the multi-faceted nature of the transitions requiring integration / coordination of different thematic areas. A prominent example of such an approach is in place in Monmouthshire, but other similar inter-sectoral frameworks and instruments assessed to be conducive for addressing the transition challenges are in place also in other Pilot Regions such as Rhein-Hunsrück and Nockregion. In other cases, it is rather specific implementation instruments that are currently used to respond to the transition One example is the local development strategy under LEADER in Garfagnana which is assessed to be well tailored to the transition challenge, not least due to the gained experience.

While these measures are aligned with the transition challenges, it is evident that their potential is not in all cases fully utilised. Albeit strategic priorities conductive to the transition challenge exist, Rhein-Hunsrück recognises that this does not always result in actions that can effectively tackle the transition challenge. Among the reasons for this is the lack of granular data, which can help tailor actions. Similarly, availability of data and how it is used in responding to or managing the transition challenge is among the key policy barriers in North Karelia and Parma and Piacenza. Regulatory barriers exist, although they are recognised in a limited number of cases, namely in Garfagnana where regulatory frameworks concerning forest management are perceived to be too rigid.

6. Transition pathways

In drafting their transition narratives, the Pilot Regions have also undertaken the task of delineating the transition pathways within their respective contexts. Transition pathways were not a part of Pilot Region activities during Cycle 1, which set the basis for preparing the Living Lab (LL) experiments. The Transition pathway was the last section in the transition narratives produced by Pilot Regions. The intention of the Transition pathways is to capture the initial plans devised by each Pilot Region to implement their LL experiments, revealing progressive events, policies, and actions aimed at navigating transition challenges. Through these Transition pathways, Pilot Regions not only outline their immediate actions but also pave the way for future endeavours in Cycle 2. Transition pathways set the stage for the practical implementation of solutions and

interventions. This forward-looking approach ensures continuity and momentum in the planning process of their LL experiments.

However, we need to bear in mind that each Pilot Region finds itself at distinct stages of planning efforts for their LL experiments, reflecting the unique contextual situations and challenges they face. While some may have carefully outlined their initial plans, others might still be in the process of fine-tuning their strategies, recognizing the iterative nature of transition planning.

In analysing the Transition pathways described by Pilot Regions in their Transition narrative reports, our focus is on understanding the steps leading to positive outcomes in their initial plans of LL experiments. The Transition pathways in the Transition narratives have emphasised envisioning sequences of events, policies, and actions to tackle transition challenges. We have processed our analysis by categorising the fourteen Pilot Regions into three groups based on their readiness to implement the LL Experiments: advanced, moderate, and initial implementation readiness. This categorisation process aligns with the focus on establishing feasible and attainable goals and objectives for the experiment. We emphasise understanding the narrative flow of events and actions in the Transition pathways. This method allows for a clearer understanding of the overarching trends and challenges faced by different regions.

Table 12 provides an illustration of the three groups based on their readiness to implement the LL Experiments. Additionally, the table also includes a general short depiction of the three groups. However, this group-based description does not do justice to the Pilot Region-based analysis. Therefore, after the table, a more exact characterisation of the Pilot Regions is provided. Once again, when reading the Pilot Region-based analysis below, it's important to bear in mind that their Transition pathways reflect different stages and situations. Therefore, they are not directly comparable.

Table 12 Pilot Regions readiness to implement the Living Lab Experiments

	Pilot regions
Group 1: Advanced implementation readiness These Pilot Regions display a clear articulation of goals and actions, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning despite challenges in stakeholder coordination.	Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin Galicia North Karelia Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara Osona
Group 2: Moderate implementation readiness Pilot Regions in this group exhibit structured approaches to challenges but require improvement in clarifying assumptions and addressing potentials to enhance appropriate approach and readiness for implementation.	Gloucestershire Monmouthshire Nockregion-Oberkärnten Rhein-Hunsrück Zaječar District Garfagnana

Pilot regions	
Group 3: Initial implementation readiness These Pilot Regions face challenges in articulating the logic linking actions to outcomes, indicating a need for enhanced stakeholder coordination, institutional support, and clearer intervention logic for successful implementation.	Woj. Świętokrzyskie Garfagnana Osrednjeslovenska Woj. Mazowieckie

Pilot Regions in Group 1 display a clear articulation of goals and actions, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning despite challenges in stakeholder coordination. Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin heavily relies on local initiatives to address transition challenges, particularly in the rural food system. However, limited coordination among stakeholders and the absence of a strategic plan are hindering scalability and sustainability. Despite these challenges, the region's transition pathway outlines specific research questions and articulates intervention logic. However, gaps in identifying and addressing risks suggest a need for more robust planning processes. By addressing these gaps, the region can enhance its capacity to navigate transition challenges effectively. In Galicia and Osona, policy coordination among different levels of government hinders an integrated approach to transition challenges. Despite these obstacles, the regions' transition pathways demonstrate a clear statement of goals and a logical sequence of actions. This highlights the significance of goal-setting and action planning, even in the face of governance challenges.

On the other hand, North Karelia demonstrates a comprehensive policy approach fosters coherence of actions, despite challenges related to data integration. Region's transition pathway displays advanced implementation readiness with clear articulation of goals, robust intervention logic, and specific measurable outcomes. However, there's room for improvement in explicitly discussing assumptions and risks. This region highlights the significance of policy coherence and data-driven decision-making in facilitating successful transition pathways. There is a clear commitment to leveraging synergies for addressing transition challenges in Parma-Piacenza-Ferrara, and region's transition pathway demonstrates advanced implementation readiness with clear goals, specific research questions, and a well-defined intervention logic. However, there's room for improvement in explicitly discussing assumptions, through which the region can enhance its capacity to leverage resources effectively and drive sustainable development.

Pilot Regions in Group 2 exhibit structured approaches to challenges but require improvement in clarifying assumptions and addressing potentials to enhance appropriate approach and readiness for implementation. Zajecar District exhibits a strong top-down approach to policies influenced by national directives. While local solutions align with national priorities, concerns exist regarding the prioritisation of national objectives over local needs. In regions like Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire, while there are structured approaches to addressing challenges, there's room for improvement in explicitly identifying assumptions and addressing potential risks. Enhancing

the more effective intervention logic may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay of actors, contextual constraints, and long-term objectives, and thereby informing more effective transition planning and implementation strategies.

For instance, in regions like Rhein-Hunsrück and Garfagnana, challenges related to data availability and regulatory frameworks pose barriers to effective action. Strengthening policy capacity in areas such as data collection, utilisation, and regulatory alignment emerges as a critical need to enhance transition pathway robustness and readiness to implement the experiment. Nockregion-Oberkärnten, the pathway shows moderate implementation readiness with less profoundly defined goals and actions. However, there's room for improvement in clarifying accountability ceilings and explicitly addressing assumptions and risks. Despite enhanced stakeholder coordination through a holistic approach challenge remain in the region, such as the absence of a network to bring together key actors.

Group 3 Pilot Regions face challenges in articulating the logic linking actions to outcomes, indicating a need for enhanced stakeholder coordination, institutional support, and clearer intervention logic for successful implementation. In Woj. Mazowieckie, there is an evident challenge in articulating the logic that links actions to the outcomes despite having clear objectives. Region's situation underscores the difficulties in coordinating stakeholders and aligning policy efforts, potentially calling for enhanced institutional support and better coordination mechanisms. A comparable issue arises in Osrednjeslovenska, where the importance of stakeholder engagement is acknowledged, but at the same time there is confusion about who is accountable and what specific outcomes to aim for. This indicates a need for a more developed intervention logic for implementation. Similarly, in Woj. Świętokrzyskie, although there are examples of successful coordination between local development strategies and regional objectives, challenges persist in addressing short-term needs. The pathway lacks specificity in identifying measurable intermediate outcomes suggesting a need for a deeper understanding of the local context to inform policy decisions effectively.

Two critical insights emerge in synthesising the outcomes of Transition pathways' analysis. First, effectively navigating the challenges of transition in the pilot regions depends on a delicate balance between methodological rigour and contextual flexibility. This makes necessary to develop a nuanced intervention logic that can accommodate the dynamic and varied nature of transition challenges in various Pilot Regions. Different regions articulate and address their unique challenges differently. Therefore, a flexible and context-aware approach to transition planning is necessary.

Secondly, the analysis highlights the importance of robust planning processes, stakeholder coordination, and policy capacity in enhancing the effectiveness of LL experiments. To ensure success, it is important to prioritise these elements. Pilot regions that demonstrate advanced implementation readiness share common features, such as clear goals, coherent policy approaches, and a potential for structured intervention logic. Despite facing challenges such as data integration and stakeholder alignment, a logical flow of information with causal connections between statements is maintained. A focus on strengthening these aspects could significantly improve the capacity of Pilot regions to navigate transition challenges effectively.

In conclusion, the Theory of Change approach of Pilot Regions' transition pathways in Cycle 2 (see figure 1) will provide critical insights into the complexities of planning and implementing transition strategies in varied contexts. It can highlight the importance of adaptability, rigorous planning, and stakeholder engagement as central to navigating the intricate process of sustainable regional development.

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