Land of Opportunities

SOCIAL HACKATHONS
Final Report

D4. Manual of best practices and recommendations to replicate these initiatives

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Contents

|EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, prepared by the Bulgarian partner (UBBSLA), represents one of the main deliverables under *WP2. Need Analysis: Investigation, Recommendation and Social Hackathons* of the LOPPO project and summarizes the social hackathons results, best practices and recommendations for replicating a similar initiative in another context (2.6). Thanks to this work package, the project consortium was able to access quality information to, on the one hand, better understand the different contexts and training needs of each local community, and on the other hand, we established a network of contacts with individuals, institutions, and organizations that can become key players in each activity and beneficiaries of the results achieved.

This document synthesizes and summaries the work conducted by the project partners, Ingalicia Cultural Association in collaboration with ADR Comarca de Lugo in Spain, Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities (UBBSLA) in Bulgaria, Educational Association in Czech Republic, HIESE – IPN incubadora in Portugal and Bia Innovator Campus in Ireland.

Following a common Methodology, each project partner was responsible for conducting a social hackathon in their country and to evaluation the results. In total, 9 events as Social Hackathons were implemented in 5 partners countries Spain, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Portugal and Ireland during the period June – December 2024 with the participation of 253 users.

The profile of these participants was related to the defined target groups:

◇ Unemployed adults who want to do business in rural areas and want to acquire digital, management and entrepreneurial skills to develop a viable business idea.

◇ Women who wish to enter the world of green entrepreneurship and need support to overcome gender barriers and access resources.

◇ Young people looking for job opportunities in rural areas and want to improve their digital practical skills to succeed in the labor market.

◇ Migrants who wish to settle in rural areas and need training and support to integrate into the rural community.

The evaluation of social hackathons results was based on the common questionnaire and each partners adapted it to their needs. The level of participation and feed-back of hackathons were described by each partner in a simple report template. The current Final Report was prepared, by UBBSLA, but based on the project partners reports and the feedback received from participants.

Summarizing the best ideas, offering guidance and assistance for these ideas to become real projects, we provide this information as a manual of results and recommendations in order this approach and methodology to be replicate in other local communities.

|PROJECT OVERVIEW

The LOPPO project aims to be a valid, innovative, accessible, and sustainable tool. On the one hand, it aims to train and advise current and future green entrepreneurs to develop essential digital, leadership, and communication skills. On the other hand, it seeks to advise green entrepreneurs and landowners to facilitate agricultural transmission allowing more people to stay or move to rural areas to establish sustainable businesses aligned with current priorities.

The partnership works to promote constructive exchange and communication between current green entrepreneurs and aspiring ones. This will enable current entrepreneurs to make land available for cultivation, addressing the primary barrier to entrepreneurship in rural areas-limited access to capital for land purchase or rent, given the difficulty of seeing a short-to-medium-term return on investment.

These favorable conditions will allow farmers to continue using their land, welcoming new, passionate, and highly educated farmers. Simultaneously, this approach preserves the environment by keeping the land clean and well-maintained, reducing the risk of fires.

Aims and Objectives:

- Promote Sustainable Rural Development
- Enhance Business Competitiveness
- Improve quality of life in rural population
- Promote Equal Opportunities
- Promote Integration of ICT in Rural Areas
- Provide guidance and technical training

Project target groups:

- Unemployed adults interested in getting involved and wanting to acquire digital, managerial, and rural entrepreneurial skills to develop a viable business idea.
- Women who wish to engage in the world of green entrepreneurship and need support to overcome gender barriers and access resources.
- Young adults seeking job opportunities in rural areas and wanting to enhance their digital and practical skills to succeed in the labor market.
- Migrants who wish to settle in rural areas and need training and support to integrate into the rural community.

Project results:

- Involve at least 300 users in the initial research survey
- Carry out at least 5 Social Hackathons with the participation of at least 250 users
- Carry out a 60-hour training course, divided into modules, and attended by at least 150 people during the life of the project.
- Create an eBook and Manual of recommendations to promote the replicability of the project
- Carry out 5 LOPPO Fairs to promote the results, involving at least 250 people

|COMMON METHODOLOGY FOR SOCIAL HACKATHONS

The main purposes of the LOPPO Social Hackathons were to allow the project partners to:

- Solve local problems: Bring together community members to identify and address local issues such as lack of access to education, inadequate healthcare, or unemployment.

- Promote innovation: By bringing together people from different backgrounds and skills, new ideas and innovations are generated to address rural area problems.

- Foster collaboration: These collaborative events encourage participation from different groups, including local residents, businesses, organizations, and government entities.

- Develop skills: Provide opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

- Boost entrepreneurship: Help foster entrepreneurial spirit in the community by giving participants the opportunity to develop and present new business ideas and products.

Targeted value: Implementation of 5 social hackathons in total, each lasting 48 hours, bringing together at least 50 participants from each partner's countries representing public institutions, businesses, associations, and civil society, among others, to participate in a co-creation event that produces innovative solutions and encourages active citizen participation.

Important issues:

- Focus on the process: All partners implementing the social hackathon should focus on the process and not just the outcome, trying to activate and involve local actors to strengthen active participation in civil society.
- Environmental awareness: All partners should ensure that during the events, all participants are aware of our commitment to work towards combating climate change.

Each event started with an initial presentation of working methodologies (design thinking and challenge-based learning) applied to practical cases, so that working groups can learn the initial steps, get inspired, and then co-create in a fun and empowering way. The final result will be the development of common and creative solutions to real-life problems that currently hinder their daily lives.

LOPPO Social Hackathon HINTS:

- Rather than talking, let participants talk.
- Observe the group, encourage participants to talk;
- Start from reflections in pairs, then in groups, then on forum;
- Count the time of exercises before;
- Prepare fun exercises;
- Let people get to know each other;
- Take your time, and let participants take their time to talk and share

<u>Example of scenario for implementing a Social Hackathon:</u>

Icebreaker Dynamics: "Life Map" where each participant draws major milestones in their life on paper and shares them with the group. This activity helps participants get to know each other and share life experiences related to learning and work.

Then each participant can write something related to their story on a sheet of paper, the sheets are shuffled and each person takes one out, trying to guess who the anecdote on the sheet refers to.

Work Session 1: Needs Identification

◎ Guided Brainstorming: Participants discuss and list the training needs they perceive in the rural community for young people and people active in the labor market. We focus on Business Mentality, Effective Communication and problem solving.

Use guiding questions to facilitate discussion, such as:

◎ What situations in our community could improve if more youth and adults developed an entrepreneurial mindset?

◎ What are some common problems in our area that could be solved with better problem solving?

◎ How could effective communication improve labor and community relations here?

Each group creates a list of training needs based on the discussions, directly related to the three key skills.

ROLE PLAYING

1. Business Mentality

Scenery: Create a small business of local products.

◎ **Role-Playing**: Two participants act as partners who are planning to open a small market for local agricultural products. They must decide what products to offer, how they will acquire them and why, and how to attract customers. A third participant acts as a business consultant offering advice on how to make the business sustainable and successful.

2. Problem Solving

Scenery: Improve access to basic services in the community.

◎ **Role-Playing**: One participant acts as the mayor of the town and another as a resident concerned about irregular access to drinking water in their area. They should discuss the problem and propose feasible solutions that could be implemented to improve the situation. Other participants may join as experts or other residents with additional opinions or ideas.

3. Effective Communication

Scenery: Host a community event to promote health and wellness.

◎ **Role-Playing**: One participant acts as the event organizer, while another is an older resident who has been reluctant to participate in previous events. The organizer must use effective communication skills to persuade the resident of the benefits of participating in the event, adapting their message to overcome objections and motivate participation.

Work Session 2: Proposal of Solutions

◎ **Formulation of Proposals**: Based on the identified needs, participants work in small groups to formulate specific proposals for courses or workshops. These may include topics such as modern agriculture, digital technologies, rural business management, etc.

Examples of proposals:

◎ **Entrepreneurship and Business Management Course for Young People**: Teach how to start and manage your own business, including notions of finance, marketing and product development.

◎ **Problem Solving Workshops**: Practical sessions where participants learn to apply critical thinking techniques to solve common problems in agriculture, local businesses, etc.

◎ **Communication and Leadership Programs**: Train youth and adults in communication, negotiation and effective leadership skills.

Presentation and Feedback

◎ **Share ideas**: Each group presents its proposals to the rest of the participants.

◎ **Quick Feedback**: Other participants and organizers give quick feedback on the ideas presented, fostering an environment of support and continuous improvement.

◎ **Share options of achievement concrete:** participants can think about as perform in a manner concrete shared ideas and proposals.

Following the example for organizing and conducting the social hackathons, each partner was able to adapt it according to national/regional needs and situation.

Evaluation Methods

Each partner was responsible for conducting an evaluation of the social hackathon in their country. To comprehensively assess the impact and effectiveness of the social hackathon, a detailed evaluation process was implemented, including:

Post-Hackathon Google Form survey:

Participants completed a digital survey that captured quantitative and qualitative feedback, addressing:

- ✔ Likelihood of recommending the event to others.
- ✔ Overall satisfaction with the hackathon.
- ✔ Perception of the event's uniqueness.
- ✔ Appropriateness of the duration and organization.
- ✔ Adequacy of information provided on the project's goals and outcomes.
- ✔ Quality of the venue.
- ✔ Skills or knowledge gained during the sessions.
- ✔ Likes, dislikes, and any additional feedback.

Observation and notes by facilitators: Facilitators monitored group dynamics, participation levels, and the creativity of solutions generated during the event, recording key observations.

Informal participant discussions: Short, informal conversations at the end of each session provided additional insights into participants' experiences and immediate takeaways.

| GENERAL EVENTS INFORMATION

Context of the Social Hackathons: aimed to promote sustainable rural development by equipping community members with entrepreneurial and digital skills. The events addressed local challenges and involved participants in co-creating solutions for their communities.

In total, project partners managed to implement 9 events as Social Hackathons in partners countries during the period June – December 2024 with the participation of **253 users,** as follows:

Organization, hosting the Hackathon	Date and place	Duration of the Hackathon	Number of participants	Target group
Ingalicia in collaboration with GDR Lugo - Spain	✔ Friol on 25.06.2024 ✔ Lugo on 26.06.2024	Two sessions, each lasting one full day	**30 participants** - local rural entrepreneurs (Friol) **20 participants** - residents aged 50+ from rural areas (Lugo)	Rural community members, including active entrepreneurs and older adults interested in improving their entrepreneurial, problem-solving, and communication skills
Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities (UBBSLA) - Bulgaria	✔ Dobrich on 15.10.2024 ✔ Varna on 11.12.2024	Two sessions, each lasting half day	**21 participants** – Farmers, hobby gardeners and local rural entrepreneurs (Dobrich) **39 participants** - young unemployed people, students, women entrepreneurs (Varna)	Interested farmers (professionals in the field of agriculture), hobby gardeners, plant growers, women entrepreneurs and young people from the region, representatives from NGO sector and local authorities
Educational Association - Czech Republic	✔ Milevsko on 17.09.2024 ✔ Tábor on 14.10.2024	Two sessions, each lasting half day	**34 participants** in Milevsko **31 participants** in Tábor	Young adults - rural community members. Adults interested in improving their entrepreneurial, problem-solving, and communication skills.
HIESE – IPN incubadora - Portugal	✔ Penela on 25.06.2024 ✔ Penela on 11.11.2024	Two sessions, each lasting half day	**30 participants** - entrepreneurs, landowners and local entities **28 participants** - students from the Technological and Professional School Sicó	Landowners interested in making their land profitable, young entrepreneurs, as well as older and younger adults seeking to enhance their entrepreneurial, problem-solving, and communication skills.
Bia Innovator Campus CLG - Ireland	✔ Galway on 24.10.2024	One full day	**20 participants**	Representatives from local community groups in Athenry, a rural development partnership (GRD) and a Social Finance provider

| COUNTRY SPECIFICATIONS

01 Description of the activity in Spain

◎ <u>Overall objective and how it relates to the objectives of LOPPO project?</u>

Both Social Hackathons in Spain were targeted to foster innovative, practical solutions to enhance rural economic and social development, empowering participants to address local challenges collaboratively.

◎ <u>How Design Thinking and Challenge-Based Learning were applied, adapted to the local context?</u>

Design Thinking: used to identify needs and generate creative, actionable solutions.

Challenge-Based Learning: applied to adapt challenges to the specific context and realities of the participants.

Activities included interactive icebreakers, role-playing exercises, and proposal development sessions.

◎ <u>Structure of the Social Hackathons</u>

✔ Initial presentation: introduction to the event, objectives, and methodologies to align participants with the hackathon's goals. Icebreaker: this activity was designed to foster trust and a sense of connection among participants. Each participant was given a blank sheet of paper and asked to illustrate key milestones in their life, such as important events, personal achievements, or significant challenges. After completing their "maps," participants shared their stories with the group, creating an open and collaborative atmosphere. This activity also helped facilitators understand the participants' backgrounds and experiences, setting the stage for effective teamwork.

✔ Session 1: the first session targeted local rural entrepreneurs and focused on identifying specific challenges they faced in their businesses. Challenge identification: participants engaged in discussions to pinpoint obstacles such as limited market access, logistical inefficiencies, and a lack of digital skills. Role-Playing scenarios: facilitators introduced role-playing exercises tailored to real-world challenges. For example:
Scenario 1: a group of participants acted as business partners planning to launch a delivery service for local agricultural products. They discussed which products to prioritize, logistics planning, and strategies for customer engagement.
Scenario 2: a participant assumed the role of a logistics manager, while others acted as suppliers and customers. This scenario explored the difficulties of streamlining supply chains in rural areas.
Proposed solutions: as a result, the participants collaboratively designed potential workshops on topics such as sustainable business practices, digital marketing, and e-commerce tools.

✔ Session 2: the second session involved older adults (residents aged 50+) from the rural community, focusing on addressing broader community needs. Community needs assessment: participants discussed key issues, including poor access to healthcare, insufficient social activities, and limited mobility options. Role-Playing scenarios: these exercises allowed participants to simulate real-life problem-solving situations:
Scenario 1: a participant played the role of the town mayor, and another represented a concerned resident advocating for better healthcare services. Together, they debated potential solutions such as telemedicine initiatives and mobile health clinics.

Scenario 2: a mock town meeting was conducted to discuss how to improve communication among community members and address social isolation among older residents.

Skills development: participants practiced effective communication strategies to articulate their concerns and brainstorm actionable steps.

Co-creation: active co-creation was encouraged through structured discussions, group work, and collaborative brainstorming.

◎ Involvement of Local Actors

Local entrepreneurs and senior community members contributed firsthand knowledge, ensuring the relevance and practicality of the proposed solutions.

◎ Brief analysis of Local Impact on the community or participants

The hackathons not only identified challenges and solutions but also instilled a sense of purpose among participants:

- A vision for a shared future: the sessions sparked a dialogue about how to preserve the best of the past while embracing innovation for the future.

- Practical prototypes: groups developed ideas with real-world potential, such as a community-run logistics service leveraging electric vehicles or an online platform promoting "Made in Friol" products.

- Reinforced community bonds: the intergenerational collaboration bridged gaps, fostering mutual respect and teamwork.

◎ Summary of ideas/proposals generated

Key challenges identified by participants	Suggested solutions
1. Invisible assets: Both groups noted that many unique local resources (e.g., untapped natural landscapes, traditional crafts, or forgotten cultural practices) are underutilized because they are not recognized as potential business opportunities.	"Hidden Gems mapping project": A community-driven initiative to map hidden local resources (e.g., unused spaces, natural landmarks, or cultural practices) and brainstorm business ideas to monetize or preserve them. Example: transforming abandoned mills into eco-tourism attractions or venues for local events.
2.Generational disconnect: Entrepreneurs and older residents identified a gap in communication and collaboration between age groups, with younger individuals focusing on modern solutions and older individuals relying on traditional methods.	Intergenerational "Mentor-Mentee" incubator: A program where older residents with traditional knowledge mentor young entrepreneurs to merge old practices with modern business models. Example: using local herbal knowledge to develop sustainable wellness products with digital marketing campaigns.
3.Longevity of initiatives: Older participants expressed concerns about the sustainability of new projects, particularly those reliant on younger community members who might migrate to urban areas.	"Future-Proof Rural projects" workshops: Training sessions on creating projects that adapt over time, such as modular farming systems or multi-use spaces. Example: a cooperative farm that starts with crop production and later integrates a visitor center or educational workshops.
4.Circular economy ignorance: A lack of understanding of circular economy practices, such as waste reduction and resource sharing,	Gamified circular economy: An app or platform designed to gamify recycling and sharing within the community, rewarding participants with discounts at

limits innovative approaches to creating self-sustaining communities.	local businesses. Example: collecting points for contributing to a community compost initiative or sharing equipment, which can be exchanged for local products.
5.Knowledge preservation: Older residents emphasized the risk of losing traditional knowledge and skills that could otherwise become the foundation for niche businesses (e.g., heritage cuisine, artisan crafts).	Preservation labs: Pop-up workshops where older residents demonstrate traditional crafts or practices, and entrepreneurs explore modern ways to scale or commercialize these skills. Example: teaching traditional weaving to create eco-friendly fashion lines marketed online.

Advantages of rural living, identified by participants:

✔ Micro-ecosystems for innovation: The contained and collaborative nature of rural communities allows for testing innovative ideas at a small scale before scaling up. Example: experimenting with community-supported agriculture subscriptions or shared economy platforms for tools and resources.

✔ Creative freedom in natural settings: The calm and inspiration provided by rural landscapes encourages creativity, making them ideal for incubating creative industries (e.g., film production, digital design retreats).

✔ Resilience Through Diversity: Rural areas often have diverse skills and resources that can be connected to create hybrid businesses, such as combining agriculture with tech-based monitoring solutions for efficiency.

✔ Heritage-Based Branding: Businesses in rural areas can use their cultural and natural heritage as unique selling points to tap into global niche markets. Example: Exporting heritage teas or honey with storytelling about the community's history.

✔ Community Resilience Hubs: Rural communities naturally excel at mutual support, making them ideal for resilience hubs that combine co-working spaces, skill-sharing platforms, and micro-manufacturing units.

◎ Evaluation and Monitoring

Post-Hackathon Google Form survey was prepared by the Spanish team in national language. In total, 37 questionnaires were completed. The results show a high level of satisfaction: the majority of participants rated the event positively, highlighting its unique approach and the engaging format. Most expressed a high likelihood of recommending the hackathon to others. 54% of respondents would recommend the social hackathon to others. More than 56 rated the overall social hackathon as excellent event Feedback on structure and organization: 91% of respondents are completely satisfied with the hackathon duration and organization. As 59% shared that the events were excellent planned and executed. Skills and discoveries: 73% of participants noted significant gains in collaboration, problem-solving, and communication skills. Many appreciated the focus on intergenerational collaboration and innovative methodologies like role-playing and brainstorming. Positive aspects identified: The venue, interactive sessions, and real-world

applicability of solutions were frequently mentioned as highlights. The opportunity to work closely with diverse groups (entrepreneurs and older residents) was valued for its ability to bridge generational gaps.

Areas for improvement: Some participants suggested more detailed guidance on the project's goals at the start of the event. A few felt that certain sessions could have been longer to allow for deeper exploration of ideas.

Unique value of the Hackathon: Many participants described the event as a fresh and creative way to address rural challenges, appreciating its emphasis on both traditional and modern approaches.

02 Description of the activity in Bulgaria

◎ <u>Overall objective and how it relates to the objectives of LOPPO project?</u>

The main goal of the social hackathons in Varna and Dobrich was to familiarize the participants with the possibilities of organic farming in terms of funding opportunities, certification methods, connecting with end customers, best practices, etc. Organic farming is currently being developed by small family farms. The primary workforce typically consists of family members. However, beyond purely agricultural tasks, the farm also needs to handle marketing, logistics, administration, certification, funding, and more. Our studies show that small farms face difficulties in these areas. The objective of the hackathon was to enhance knowledge specifically in these sectors. Opportunities for funding, certification, market identification, and other relevant topics were presented in detail, which completely relates to the objectives of the KA2 project

◎ <u>How Design Thinking and Challenge-Based Learning were applied, adapted to the local context?</u>

The hackathons were held in the form of an open discussion about the development opportunities of small-scale farmers. Their main advantage is the production of organic products. The topic that was presented by UBBSLA expert was the new possibilities for financing small agricultural organic producers. Given that Bulgaria is at the beginning of the new financial period, the presentation was up-to-date and presented important information to the participants.

◎ <u>Structure of the Social Hackathons</u>

✔ The initial presentation of LOPPO project provided a comprehensive overview of the hackathon's goals, highlighting the methodologies that would be employed to foster collaboration among participants. Participants were introduced to a variety of innovative approaches aimed at addressing challenges faced by small farmers in transitioning to organic practices, with a focus on sustainability and financial viability. The presentation outlined the specific objectives of the event, including the development of actionable solutions for enhancing funding opportunities, certification processes, and market connections for organic farmers.

✔ Both hackathons began with participants being divided into diverse groups, encouraging collaboration and the sharing of unique perspectives on organic farming challenges and opportunities. Following the group formation, an ideation phase was initiated, where teams brainstormed innovative solutions to enhance the funding, certification, and market connections for organic farmers. Each group then presents their solutions for feedback and further improvement.

✔ Co-creation was actively promoted through interactive methods that encouraged participants to engage in hands-on activities, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone's ideas were valued and explored. Both hackathons used collaboration tools and platforms to facilitate real-time feedback and communication between teams, ensuring that all voices were heard and included in the solution development process. Participants were motivated to take ownership of their projects by working closely with mentors and industry experts, allowing for a dynamic exchange of knowledge and experience that enriched the co-creation experience.

◎ <u>Involvement of Local Actors</u>

The hackathons actively engaged local farmers, agricultural organizations, and community leaders, ensuring their insights and experiences were integral to the development of practical solutions for organic farming.

Local actors participated in panel discussions and feedback sessions, providing valuable perspectives on regional challenges and opportunities, which enriched the collaborative efforts of the participants. By fostering partnerships with local businesses and institutions, the event created a supportive network that not only enhanced the hackathon experience but also aimed to sustain ongoing collaboration beyond the event itself. The hackathon's structured format encouraged active participation and open dialogue, allowing participants to freely share ideas and innovate collectively, which significantly enhanced the quality of solutions generated. By promoting a collaborative environment where diverse perspectives were welcomed, the process inspired creativity, leading to the development of unique and effective strategies tailored to the needs of organic farmers.

◎   Brief analysis of Local Impact on the community or participants

The hackathons were expected to have a significant local impact by empowering small farmers with knowledge and tools that enhance their ability to transition to organic practices, ultimately improving their livelihoods and community sustainability. Immediate effects include strengthened connections among local farmers, agricultural organizations, and consumers, fostering a supportive ecosystem that promotes collaboration and resource sharing. By highlighting successful solutions generated during the event, the hackathon can inspire further initiatives and attract additional investments in the organic farming sector, creating lasting benefits for the community as a whole.

◎   Summary of ideas/proposals generated during the Social Hackathons

N	Key challenges identified by participants	Suggested solutions
1	Relatively difficult access to the end customer - currently access to the end customer is once a week at the so-called "Farmers' Markets". But the product is organic, which is why it has a very short shelf life. This is how about 30% of the produce spoils	It is necessary to find solutions for faster and consistent access to the end customer
2	Excessive administrative burden - in small farms, the owner is responsible for almost all necessary activities in the farm, such as - processing, protection from pests, protection from the weather, watering, sales, maintenance, marketing, etc. I.e., those working on the farm are extremely busy in its maintenance. It turns out that they are subject to constant inspections by various state authorities. As in some cases the inspections require too much time for the preparation of various documents by the farmers, with which the work on the farm is abandoned.	It is necessary to reduce the administrative burden.
3	Small farms meet the requirement for organic production, but are not certified by an external body. The reason is that this service is prohibitively expensive.	They need to be outside help.
4	With the onset of climate changes, farmers are also faced with new challenges in cultivating the land - drought, new pests, hailstorms, etc.	There is a need to increase knowledge and capacity to address these challenges.
5	Small farms are limited from contacts with other similar farms in Europe. It is of extreme interest for them to visit such farms.	It would be good to organize training seminars and visits to their colleagues from Europe.

6	Their access to new seeds and varieties is relatively limited.	There is a need to organize a training workshop on this topic.
7	There is a weak culture of unification between individual farms, which makes them weak in the free market. The problem is very old, over the years there have been attempts at unification, but with relatively little success.	It is necessary to study the European experience in such associations, and make an attempt to create them. At this stage, this task seems very difficult

◎ <u>Evaluation and Monitoring</u>

Post-Hackathon Google Form survey was prepared in advance by the UBBSLA team in national language. After the completion the Hackathons in Dobrich and Varna, all participants were asking to complete the survey on the spot or later on. In total, 42 questionnaires were completed. The results from the survey can be summarized as follow: More than 71% of respondents would recommend the Social Hackathon to others in the sector. 78,6% of respondents give an excellent rating to the social hackathon as a whole. 42,9% believe that the event was unique, the rest though - very or somewhat unique was the event. 92,9% think that the social hackathon was long enough. 78,6% shared that the event was very well organized. Half of respondents believe that the location was excellent, the rest think that the location of the venue was good. Most of respondents shared that they liked the social Hackathon due to the topic, good organization and ideas focused, the lecturer and the way the information was presented, it was an opportunity to find solutions to given challenges in the agriculture sector; exchange of good ideas for starting an own business, curiosity, new opportunities and exchange of experience; business partnerships; opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and representatives of the agricultural sector; to learn more about training opportunities in agriculture; an opportunity to present a project idea for the creation of a bank for the storage of seeds of old varieties of vegetables.

03 Description of the activity in the Czech Republic

◎ <u>Overall objective and how it relates to the objectives of the LOPPO project?</u>

The initiative aimed to foster entrepreneurship within rural agriculture through two successful social hackathons organized in the Czech Republic, specifically in Milevsko and Tábor. The Milevsko hackathon attracted a diverse group of participants, segmented into two distinct groups: older adults and young adults over 18 years of age. This event focused on creating a collaborative environment where both younger and older participants could share insights, experiences, and innovative solutions for rural entrepreneurship. The Tábor hackathon exclusively featured young adults over 18 years of age. This concentrated group allowed for an intensive and focused series of activities, discussions, and role-playing exercises designed to enhance their entrepreneurial skills and mindset.

◎ <u>How Design Thinking and Challenge-Based Learning were applied, adapted to the local context?</u>

Design Thinking: used to identify needs and generate creative, actionable solutions.

Challenge-Based Learning: applied to adapt challenges to the specific context and realities of the participants. Activities included interactive icebreakers, role-playing exercises, and proposal development sessions.

Each hackathon was meticulously planned to ensure a balanced mix of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. This included preparing engaging content, and organizing logistic details.

◎ <u>Structure of the Social Hackathons</u>

Both hackathons followed a structured program, featuring: Icebreaker Dynamics to foster initial connections; Work Sessions focusing on Needs Identification; Role Playing sessions to enhance Business Mentality, Problem Solving, and Effective Communication.

A. Icebreaker Dynamics

We kicked off the events with a series of icebreaker activities designed to get everyone warmed up, relaxed, and ready to collaborate. These initial interactions were crucial for setting a friendly and open atmosphere, ensuring that all participants felt comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts from the get-go.

B. Work Session: Needs Identification

The first work session focused on "Needs Identification". Participants were divided into small groups where they engaged in lively discussions and brainstorming sessions to pinpoint critical needs within the rural agricultural sector. This exercise not only highlighted the pressing issues that need addressing but also set the stage for innovative thinking and problem-solving.

C. Role Playing Sessions

Business Mentality: In this session, participants were encouraged to adopt a business mentality. Through various role-playing exercises, they stepped into the shoes of entrepreneurs, decision-makers, and strategists. This experience was designed to develop their understanding of business principles, market dynamics, and strategic planning, essential skills for anyone looking to start a venture in agriculture.

Problem Solving: Effective problem-solving is at the heart of successful entrepreneurship. This session challenged participants with real-world scenarios and problems that agricultural entrepreneurs face.

Through collaborative efforts, they learned how to approach issues systematically, identify root causes, and develop innovative solutions.

Effective Communication: The ability to communicate effectively is vital in any business setting. This session focused on enhancing participants' communication skills through various interactive exercises. They practiced presenting their ideas clearly, negotiating, and persuading others, all while receiving constructive feedback to improve their techniques.

Motivational talks: Throughout the social hackathon, participants had the opportunity to hear from successful examples of good practice of entrepreneurs in agriculture (for example sea buckthorn fields in Moravia, growing blueberries, collection and processing of pitch, etc.). Participants shared their journeys, challenges, and triumphs. This motivational part served as a source of inspiration, providing valuable insights into the realities of starting and sustaining a business in agriculture.

Networking opportunities: One of the key aspects of the hackathon was the emphasis on networking. Participants were encouraged to connect with like-minded individuals and/or potential mentors. These connections are invaluable, offering support, guidance, and potential collaborations that can help turn ideas into reality.

◎ Involvement of Local Actors

The diverse demographics in Milevsko added a valuable intergenerational element, while the Tábor event focused on intensive youth engagement. Throughout the social hackathon, participants had the opportunity to hear from successful examples of good practice of entrepreneurship in agriculture (for example sea buckthorn fields in Moravia, growing blueberries, collection and processing of pitch, etc.). Participants shared their journeys, challenges, and triumphs. This motivational part served as a source of inspiration, providing valuable insights into the realities of starting and sustaining a business in agriculture.

◎ Brief analysis of Local Impact on the community or participants

The hackathon went beyond identifying challenges and solutions—it inspired a shared sense of purpose among participants:

1. A Unified Vision for the Future: The sessions encouraged meaningful discussions on preserving valued traditions while embracing innovation to shape the future.

2. Real-World Prototypes: Teams developed practical ideas, including a community-managed logistics service powered by electric vehicles and an online platform promoting "Made in South Bohemia" products.

3. Strengthened Community Connections: Intergenerational collaboration bridged divides, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and teamwork.

One of the key aspects of the hackathon was the emphasis on networking. Participants were encouraged to connect with like-minded individuals and/or potential mentors. These connections are invaluable, offering support, guidance, and potential collaborations that can help turn ideas into reality. These social hackathons were tailored specifically for young adults over 18, with the overarching goal of motivating them to embark on entrepreneurial ventures within the rural agriculture sector. Recognizing the immense potential of youth in driving innovation and change, the event aimed to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence.

Summary of ideas/proposals generated

These hackathons provided invaluable opportunities for participants to develop crucial entrepreneurial skills, build networks, and gain the motivation needed to venture into rural agriculture. The success of these events underscores the importance of continued support and innovative initiatives to nurture the next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic. By the end of the hackathon, participants had not only developed a deeper understanding of the needs and opportunities within rural agriculture but also gained practical skills and confidence. The hands-on sessions, coupled with the theoretical knowledge imparted by experts, ensured a well-rounded learning experience. The social hackathons were a resounding success, leaving participants inspired, informed, and eager to make a difference in the rural agricultural sector. With the tools and connections, they gained, they are now better equipped to take on the challenges of entrepreneurship and contribute to the growth and sustainability of rural communities.

Key challenges identified by participants	Suggested solutions
1.Lack of Finances: This is a significant barrier, making it difficult for potential entrepreneurs to secure the necessary capital to start their ventures.	Financial Support and Grants ✔ Microfinance Programs: Establish microfinance institutions offering low-interest loans specifically for rural entrepreneurs. ✔ Subsidies and Grants: Government or NGO-provided grants and subsidies can alleviate initial financial burdens. ✔ Crowdfunding Platforms: Utilize crowdfunding to raise capital and engage the community in supporting local businesses.
2.Insufficient Public Transportation: The lack of reliable public transport makes commuting and logistics challenging, further discouraging entrepreneurship in rural areas.	Improving Transportation ✔ Investment in Public Transport: Advocate for better public transport services connecting rural areas with urban centers. ✔ Community Transportation Services: Establish community-run transport services, such as shuttle buses or ride-sharing programs.
3.Low Purchasing Power: Rural areas often have lower consumer spending capacity, which can affect the profitability of new businesses.	Enhancing Connectivity Infrastructure Investment: Lobby for government investment in mobile and internet infrastructure to ensure rural areas have adequate connectivity.
4.Poor Mobile Signal and Internet Connectivity: Connectivity issues hinder communication and access to vital online resources, making it hard to run modern businesses effectively.	Partnerships with Telecom Providers: Collaborate with telecom companies to extend coverage and improve service quality.
5.Lack of Knowledge on Starting and Managing a Business: Many participants highlighted their lack of understanding regarding business setup, accounting, obtaining permits, and securing grants.	Educational Programs and Workshops ✔ Business Training Programs: Offer workshops and courses on business management, accounting, and obtaining necessary permits. ✔ Mentorship Programs: Pair young entrepreneurs with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and support.

	✔ Online Resources: Create a centralized online portal with resources and tutorials on starting and running a business.
6.Neighbor Relations: Potential conflicts with neighbors or community members were also cited as a concern.	Community Engagement ✔ Building Relationships: Encourage open communication and relationship-building activities to foster a supportive community environment. ✔ Community Involvement in Decision-Making: Involve community members in planning and decision-making processes to ensure their support and minimize conflicts.

Advantages of rural living, identified by participants

✔ Tranquility

Benefit: The peaceful environment of rural areas can provide a stress-free setting for entrepreneurs, allowing them to focus on their business without the distractions of urban life.

Utilization: This tranquility can be marketed as a unique selling point for businesses that require a calm setting, such as retreats, workshops, or creative studios.

✔ Beautiful Nature

Benefit: The picturesque landscapes and natural beauty can attract tourists and nature enthusiasts, creating opportunities for tourism and hospitality businesses.

Utilization: Entrepreneurs can develop eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and recreational activities that leverage the natural scenery.

✔ Ample Space and Larger Plots

Benefit: More space provides opportunities for larger-scale agricultural operations and diverse types of farming that are not feasible in urban settings.

Utilization: Utilize the larger plots for activities like organic farming, animal husbandry, or building larger production facilities, which could be marketed as eco-friendly and sustainable.

✔ Lower Living Costs

Benefit: Reduced living expenses allow entrepreneurs to invest more capital into their business operations.

Utilization: Promote the cost benefits to attract young entrepreneurs who are looking for more affordable living and business setup options.

✔ Strong Community Bonds

Benefit: Close-knit communities offer support, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, which can be essential for business growth and sustainability.

Utilization: Leverage these relationships to create cooperative business models and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives, where local residents invest in and support local businesses.

✔ Better Air Quality

Benefit: Clean air enhances the quality of life and can be a significant draw for health-conscious individuals.

Utilization: Market this advantage to businesses in the health and wellness industry, such as organic food production, wellness retreats, or outdoor sports.

✔ Improved Opportunities for Animal Husbandry

Benefit: More space and better conditions for raising animals can lead to high-quality produce and diversified agricultural activities.

Utilization: Develop premium livestock products, such as free-range meats, organic dairy products, and sustainable farming practices that can be marketed as superior due to the rural setting.

✔ Less Competition

Benefit: Fewer businesses operating in rural areas can mean less competition and a greater share of the market.

Utilization: Identify gaps in the market and establish niche businesses that cater to the specific needs of the rural population, using the advantage of being among the first movers.

By capitalizing on these advantages, young entrepreneurs in rural areas can build thriving businesses that not only benefit from the unique aspects of rural living but also contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of their communities.

◎ Evaluation and Monitoring

1. The Post-Hackathon Google Form survey was prepared by the Educational Association,z.s. in national language. In total, 65 questionnaires were completed.

2. Observation and notes by facilitators: Facilitators monitored group dynamics, participation levels, and the creativity of solutions generated during the event, recording key observations.

3. Informal participant discussions: Short, informal conversations at the end of each session provided additional insights into participants' experiences and immediate takeaways.

The results show a high level of satisfaction: the majority of participants rated the event positively, highlighting its unique approach and the engaging format. Most expressed a high likelihood of recommending the hackathon to others. More than half of respondents would recommend the social hackathon to others. More than half of respondents (52 %) in Milevsko rated the overall social hackathon as an excellent event, in Tábor it was rated as excellent by 19 % of participants, as very good by 55 % of participants. Feedback on structure and organization: 68 % of respondents in Milevsko and 84 % in Tábor are completely satisfied with the hackathon duration and organization. On the question "What did you like about the social hackathon?", participants like the sharing of the experiences, information and motivation. The venue, interactive sessions, and real-world applicability of solutions were frequently mentioned as highlights. Participants noted significant gains in collaboration, problem-solving, and communication skills. Many appreciated the focus on innovative methodologies like role-playing and brainstorming. Some participants suggested more detailed guidance on the project's goals at the start of the event. A few felt that certain sessions could have been longer to allow for deeper exploration of ideas.

Many participants described the event as a fresh and creative way to address rural challenges, appreciating its emphasis on both traditional and modern approaches.
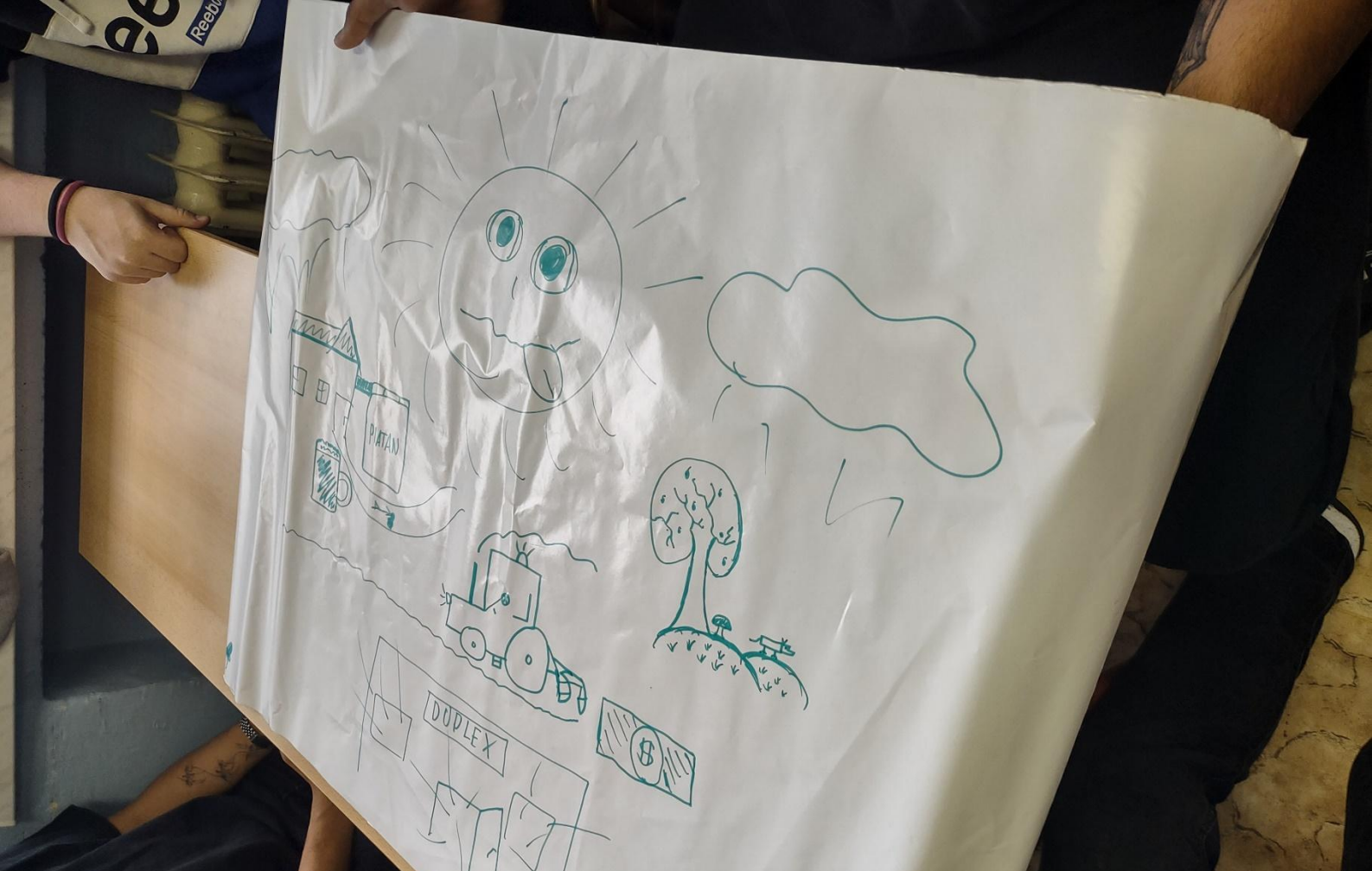
04 Description of the activity in Portugal

◎ Overall objective and how it relates to the objectives of LOPPO project?

Both Social Hackathons in Portugal were targeted to foster innovative, practical solutions to enhance rural economic and social development, empowering participants to address local challenges collaboratively. The event addressed local challenges and involved participants in co-creating solutions for their communities.

◎ How Design Thinking and Challenge-Based Learning were applied, adapted to the local context?

- Design Thinking: Utilized to define challenges such as "How might we value the land or territory?" This step included identifying pain points, challenges, and opportunities to guide the problem-solving process.

- Challenge-Based Learning: Adapted to explore entrepreneurial and territorial enhancement opportunities, considering the specific realities of the participants.

The activities included structured brainstorming for idea generation, prioritization of ideas based on feasibility and impact, and collaborative sessions to refine proposals.

◎ Structure of the Social Hackathons

Initial presentation: introduction to the event, objectives, and methodologies to align participants with the hackathon's goals.

Activities performed:

Introduction Activity: this activity was designed to facilitate a quick introduction among participants and establish a sense of purpose for the session. Each participant was invited to share their name, the organization or company they represent, and the reason for their participation. This simple yet effective activity helped create an initial connection among the group, allowing everyone to understand each other's motivations and expectations, fostering a collaborative environment from the start.

Session 1: The first session brought together entrepreneurs, landowners, and local entities to collaboratively address challenges and opportunities for valuing land and enhancing the local territory.

o Challenge Definition: Using a Design Thinking approach, participants explored the question, "How might we value the land and territory?" Through guided discussions, they identified pain points, challenges, and opportunities, such as underutilized resources, limited economic potential, and a lack of collaboration between stakeholders.

o Idea Generation and Prioritization: Facilitators introduced brainstorming activities where participants proposed innovative ideas to address the identified challenges. These ideas were then prioritized based on feasibility and potential impact on the community.

o Proposed Solutions: Among other outcomes, participants collaboratively designed potential workshops on topics such as sustainable business practices, digital marketing, and e-commerce tools to address the identified challenges.

Session 2: the second session engaged students from the Technological and Professional School of Sicó (Penela campus), focusing on the question, "How might we reactivate abandoned lands to create sustainable business opportunities?"

o Challenge Definition: Participants worked in small groups to explore the challenges related to reactivating abandoned lands. Discussions centered on understanding the barriers to land reuse, such as lack of resources, limited community engagement, and the need for innovative business models.

o Idea Generation and Prioritization: Using brainstorming techniques, each group generated a wide range of ideas aimed at addressing the challenges. These ideas were then prioritized based on feasibility, potential impact, and sustainability.

o Proposed Solutions: The session concluded with participants proposing potential initiatives, such as:
Developing partnerships between landowners and entrepreneurs to create eco-friendly agricultural projects.
Designing workshops to teach sustainable land management practices.
Exploring the use of digital tools to promote land availability and attract investment.

This session empowered young adults to think critically and creatively, encouraging them to view rural challenges as opportunities for sustainable entrepreneurship.

◎ Involvement of Local Actors

Session 1: entrepreneurs, landowners and local entities - approximately 30 participants.

Session 2: students from the Technological and Professional School Sicó (Penela campus) - approximately 28 participants.

◎ Brief analysis of Local Impact on the community or participants

Both hackathons not only identified challenges and solutions but also instilled a sense of purpose among participants:

✔ A vision for a shared future: the sessions sparked a dialogue about how to preserve the best of the past while embracing innovation for the future.

✔ Practical prototypes: groups developed ideas with real-world potential, such as a community-run logistics service leveraging electric vehicles or an online platform promoting "Terras de Sicó" products.

✔ Reinforced community bonds: the intergenerational collaboration bridged gaps, fostering mutual respect and teamwork.

Advantages of rural living, identified by participants

Micro-ecosystems for innovation: The contained and collaborative nature of rural communities allows for testing innovative ideas at a small scale before scaling up.

Example: experimenting with community-supported agriculture subscriptions or shared economy platforms for tools and resources.

Creative freedom in natural settings: The calm and inspiration provided by rural landscapes encourages creativity, making them ideal for incubating creative industries (e.g., film production, digital design retreats).

Resilience Through Diversity: Rural areas often have diverse skills and resources that can be connected to create hybrid businesses, such as combining agriculture with tech-based monitoring solutions for efficiency.

Heritage-Based Branding: Businesses in rural areas can use their cultural and natural heritage as unique selling points to tap into global niche markets.

Example: Exporting heritage teas or honey with storytelling about the community's history.

Community Resilience Hubs: Rural communities naturally excel at mutual support, making them ideal for resilience hubs that combine co-working spaces, skill-sharing platforms, and micro-manufacturing units.

◎ Summary of ideas/proposals generated

Key challenges identified by participants	Suggested solutions
1. **Lack of Skills and Knowledge for Rural Development:** Many participants emphasized the absence of adequate skills and knowledge among landowners and entrepreneurs to manage rural businesses effectively.	Training programs for rural skills development: Workshops and training sessions aimed at equipping individuals with essential skills tailored to rural areas, such as sustainable farming, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing. Example: organizing courses on regenerative agriculture practices combined with online marketing strategies to promote rural products.
2.**Underutilized and Abandoned Lands**: The difficulty in identifying and revitalizing abandoned lands was highlighted as a significant barrier to creating sustainable economic opportunities.	Creation of digital platforms to connect producers, consumers, and local stakeholders: Developing digital solutions to facilitate interaction and transactions between local producers, consumers, and businesses. Example: an app connecting local farmers to consumers and nearby restaurants, promoting the sale of fresh and organic products.
3.**Disconnection Between Stakeholders**: Limited collaboration between local entities, landowners, and entrepreneurs has led to missed opportunities for innovation and economic growth.	Sustainability and regenerative agriculture (Agroforestry and regenerative farming): Encouraging the adoption of agricultural methods that restore ecosystems, enhance soil fertility, and promote biodiversity. Example: implementing agroforestry practices where trees and crops coexist to maximize productivity and ecological benefits
4. **Low Appeal of Rural Professions:** Negative societal perceptions of rural professions contribute to difficulties in attracting younger generations to these careers	Campaigns to enhance the value of cultural and natural heritage ("Heritage Branding"): Initiatives to preserve and market cultural and natural heritage as unique selling points for rural areas. Example: creating branding strategies around local traditions, crafts, and landmarks to attract tourism and investment.
5. **Need for Sustainable Practices**: The lack of understanding and application of sustainable agricultural and business practices limits the potential for long-term growth in rural areas.	Collaboration networks for rural development: Pop-up Establishing networks and alliances that promote resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and collective rural growth. Example: setting up co-working spaces in rural areas that bring together entrepreneurs, artisans, and local businesses to foster innovation and collaboration.

◎ <u>Evaluation and Monitoring</u>

To comprehensively assess the impact and effectiveness of the social hackathon, a detailed evaluation process was implemented, including:

1. Post-Hackathon Google Form survey: Participants completed a digital survey that captured quantitative and qualitative feedback. In total, 43 questionnaires were completed. The results show a high level of satisfaction: more than 53% of respondents rated their overall experience at the hackathon as excellent, the rest are very positive. About 53% of participants shared that the event completely met their expectations. On the question "What did you like most about the event?", most of respondents shared: networking between the various agents of territorial development; the diversity of people who participated; the possibility of generating new ideas; methodology in discussing problems; exchange of opinions and sharing views; the involvement and interest of the various stakeholders, owners, entrepreneurs and entities; the problem-solving model "brainstorming"; all participants were encouraged to participate, giving their contributions without judgement; knowledge of people from different entities and professional areas

2. Observation and notes by facilitators: Facilitators monitored group dynamics, participation levels, and the creativity of solutions generated during the event, recording key observations.

3. Informal participant discussions: Short, informal conversations at the end of each session provided additional insights into participants' experiences and immediate takeaways.
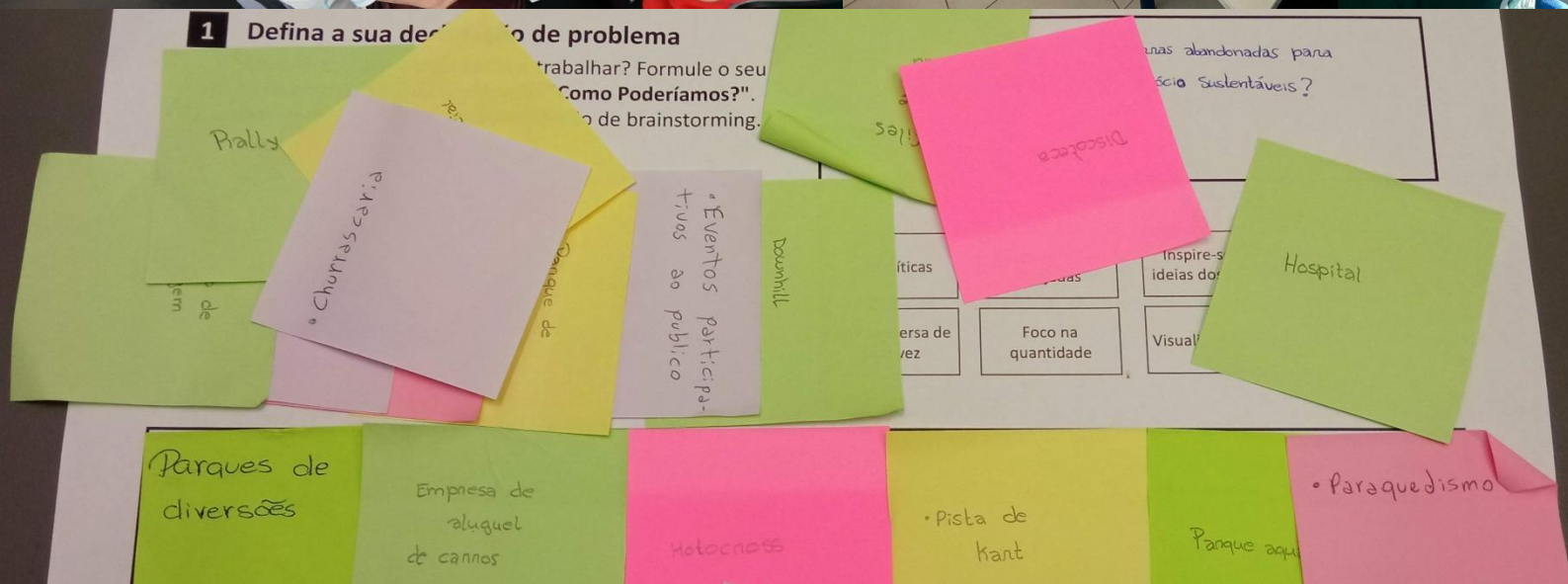
05 Description of the activity in Ireland

◎ <u>Overall objective and how it relates to the objectives of LOPPO project?</u>

The social hackathon which took place at the BIA Innovator Campus and addressed several issues impacting rural areas. Participants on the day included representatives from local community groups in Athenry, a rural development partnership (GRD) and a Social Finance provider. Participants identified several pressing issues affecting rural areas, focusing on sustainability, digital accessibility, and social cohesion.

◎ <u>How Design Thinking and Challenge-Based Learning were applied, adapted to the local context?</u>

Design Thinking: used to identify needs and generate creative, actionable solutions.

Challenge-Based Learning: applied to adapt challenges to the specific context and realities of the participants. Activities included interactive icebreakers, role-playing exercises, and proposal development sessions.

◎ <u>Structure of the Social Hackathons</u>

We began the session with a focused Problem Identification Activity, designed to uncover the core challenges and issues faced by rural areas. The room was energized with open discussion, where participants shared their experiences, insights, and observations about the pressing problems in rural communities.

To structure this activity, we embraced a challenge-based learning approach, encouraging participants to think critically and collaboratively about the root causes of the issues. This approach fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas and provided a foundation for developing innovative, practical solutions.

Through guided facilitation, we delved into several key areas:

● Challenges and Issues in Rural Areas: Participants highlighted limited transportation options, lack of access to essential services, youth migration, and the challenges of digital connectivity. These conversations painted a vivid picture of the barriers faced by individuals and families in rural settings.

● Design Thinking to Explore Needs: Using design-thinking principles, we created small brainstorming groups where participants could empathize with the daily struggles of rural residents. Each group worked to identify the most pressing problems, focusing on the needs of vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, youth, and local entrepreneurs.

● Proposing Solutions to Identified Problems: After identifying the issues, participants were encouraged to propose actionable solutions. Ideas ranged from developing rural transportation apps and coworking spaces to introducing green entrepreneurship training programs and creating digital marketplaces for local artisans. This solution-focused exercise not only inspired creativity but also emphasized feasibility and impact.

Throughout the activity, we revisited the challenges through the lens of challenge-based learning, which helped us break complex problems into manageable components. By combining this method with active participation, we successfully aligned the insights from the room with practical, community-oriented solutions.

This activity was a powerful start to addressing rural challenges, ensuring that the voices of the community are at the heart of our strategies.

◎ Involvement of Local Actors

Participants on the day included representatives from local community groups in Athenry, a rural development partnership (GRD) and a Social Finance provider. Participants identified several pressing issues affecting rural areas, focusing on sustainability, digital accessibility, and social cohesion.

◎ Brief analysis of Local Impact on the community or participants

The participants actively engaged in a Problem Identification Activity, where they shared insights about the challenges faced in rural areas. Through open discussions and group brainstorming, they highlighted key issues such as limited transportation, inadequate access to essential services, youth migration, digital connectivity gaps, and the struggles of local businesses. The use of challenge-based learning and design thinking allowed them to empathize with the needs of rural residents and identify the root causes of these problems, fostering a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by various community groups.

The session also emphasized solution-focused thinking, where participants proposed innovative ideas like rural transportation apps, coworking spaces, green entrepreneurship programs, and digital marketplaces for artisans. By breaking down complex problems into actionable components, they demonstrated a commitment to creating practical, impactful solutions tailored to the community's needs. This collaborative effort left us with a rich pool of ideas that will guide future initiatives aimed at addressing rural challenges effectively.

◎ Summary of ideas/proposals generated

Key challenges identified by participants	Suggested solutions
1.Transportation and Accessibility Limited public transportation and inefficient services were highlighted, with 64% indicating mobility difficulties in rural and town areas (identified in Community Needs assessment questionnaire).	✔ Enhancing public transportation infrastructure to improve accessibility, especially in remote locations, was suggested. Improved schedules and extended routes could help residents reach essential services more effectively and increases feeling of safety. ✔ Digital Mobility Solutions: Develop a rural ride-sharing app or partnership with existing platforms tailored for rural communities. It could coordinate carpools for local farmers, entrepreneurs, and community members to reach town centers, markets, or service hubs more efficiently.
2. Logistical Infrastructure Limited access to essential services like healthcare, banking, and postal services, often due to inconvenient operating hours or scarce availability.	✔ Establishing more accessible community services with extended hours and digital service options could provide rural residents better access to these essentials. ✔ Childcare facilities, breakfast clubs to be made available.
3. Economic Development Opportunities There is a need for more job creation and economic reform to support local development. A lack of entrepreneurial support, such as mentorship and tax incentives, was also noted.	✔ Initiatives like coworking spaces, startup tax incentives, and mentorship programs can foster local business growth and innovation, particularly for green entrepreneurs. This approach encourages job creation and boosts the local economy. ✔ Green Microloan Programs: Establish low-interest microloan programs specifically for green entrepreneurs to help them kickstart sustainable businesses. These loans

	could cover costs for eco-friendly infrastructure, renewable energy installation, and sustainable farming tools.
	✔ Local Green Marketplaces: Develop local markets or online platforms specifically for sustainably produced goods from rural entrepreneurs, providing direct access to customers who prioritize green products. This could help build a stronger market for eco-friendly products in the community.
	✔ Eco-Tourism Ventures: Promote eco-tourism businesses, such as farm stays, nature trails, and educational workshops, which can create jobs, attract visitors, and foster an appreciation for sustainable practices.
	✔ Online upskilling courses
	✔ Grants; LEO/LEADER funding for startups
	✔ Micro Finance Ireland
	✔ Amicitia as an example of a social hub in Athenry
4. Green Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Although there is a strong interest in sustainable practices, barriers exist in accessing the necessary training and resources, especially in green farming, renewable energy, and eco-friendly tourism.	✔ Providing targeted training programs and resource support in sustainable practices can bridge this gap, making green entrepreneurship more accessible and promoting sustainable development. ✔ Green Business Incubators and Accelerators: Establish dedicated green business incubators that provide specialized mentoring, resources, and funding for startups focused on sustainability. These incubators can also facilitate partnerships with eco-friendly suppliers and investors. ✔ Resource-Sharing Cooperatives: Develop cooperatives where entrepreneurs can share resources such as compost, renewable energy equipment, or eco-friendly packaging, reducing costs and encouraging collective sustainability efforts. ✔ Enterprise training in secondary school, awards for business ideas
5. Youth Engagement and Skill Development Youth in rural areas often lack access to entrepreneurship training, digital innovation skills, and leadership programs.	✔ Developing youth-focused programs that include entrepreneurship training and digital skills workshops can empower the next generation to participate actively in local development. ✔ Green Entrepreneurship Bootcamps: Host immersive bootcamps for youth, focused on green business skills, sustainable farming, and renewable energy. ✔ These could combine practical training with digital and leadership skills, making green entrepreneurship more appealing and accessible. ✔ Mentorship Programs with Local Green Entrepreneurs: Pair young entrepreneurs with established

	local green business owners who can provide guidance, real-world insights, and networking opportunities. ✔ School Partnerships and Eco-Clubs: Collaborate with local schools to introduce eco-clubs or green entrepreneurship courses, allowing students to explore sustainable business ideas and projects that they can later scale up with the right support.
6. Limited Digital Connectivity Many rural areas around Athenry lack stable and fast internet connectivity, limiting access to digital resources and creating a digital divide that affects education, remote work, and access to information.	✔ Using Wi-Fi sharing between households and businesses in the region. This initiative would involve local stakeholders and government support to enhance coverage, reduce costs, and ensure stable connections in remote areas.
7. Youth Migration and Lack of Local Employment Opportunities Rural youth often leave for urban areas due to limited career prospects, impacting the long-term vitality of local communities.	✔ Offering co-working spaces and remote job opportunities with training in digital skills, such as coding, digital marketing, and e-commerce. Partnerships with tech companies could also facilitate job placements and mentorship programs.
8. Limited Access to Mental Health Resources Stigma around mental health and a lack of local services prevent many from seeking help, especially among isolated populations in rural areas.	✔ Establish a Telehealth Mental Wellness Program that connects residents with certified mental health professionals online, paired with community workshops to raise mental health awareness. This could be funded through local partnerships and grants aimed at improving rural health services.
9. Agricultural Challenges and Environmental Sustainability Local farmers face difficulties in sustainable practices due to outdated resources, and many aren't fully aware of new eco-friendly farming techniques.	✔ Create an Agricultural Support and Education Program, with on-site demonstrations and digital tools for soil analysis, crop rotation planning, and water conservation. ✔ A mobile app for farmers could provide real-time advice and connect them with suppliers offering eco-friendly products.
10. Isolation and Lack of Social Engagement Rural residents often feel isolated, especially among elderly populations, due to limited social opportunities and transportation barriers.	✔ Develop a Community Engagement App that coordinates social events, volunteer services, and carpooling options. The app would also feature a buddy system connecting younger volunteers with elderly residents for weekly visits or shared community activities.
11. Limited Access to Education and Upskilling Opportunities Residents have limited access to upskilling resources and educational workshops to improve employability and entrepreneurial skills.	✔ Establish a Digital Skills Academy in collaboration with local universities and tech firms to offer online and in-person training on topics such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and practical business management.
12. Decline in Local Businesses and Artisan Skills Traditional businesses struggling to adapt to modern markets, risking the loss of local crafts and commerce.	✔ Digital Marketplace for Local Artisans and Farmers where small businesses can sell products locally and internationally. This platform would include training on digital marketing and e-commerce to help artisans and farmers adapt and thrive.

13. Difficulty in recruiting Employees Finding enough employees to operate a business	✔ Provide accommodation for employees, housing opportunities

◎ <u>Evaluation and Monitoring</u>

A Post-Hackathon Google Form survey was prepared by the BIA Innovator Campus. In total, 20 verbal questionnaires were completed. These questionnaires were collected verbally as the participants preferred to provide feedback in this format. The results show a high level of satisfaction: the majority of participants rated the event positively, highlighting its unique approach and the engaging format. The following details verbal feedback from participants: Liked learning about green earth organics as an example of a green entrepreneur; I liked engaging with other members in the community and discussing shared challenges in Athenry; I enjoyed learning about the LOPPO project and look forward to keeping up to date with its journey; I enjoyed learning about the obstacles to starting your own green business; I liked learning about the important work of Amicitia which I didn't know was in Athenry; I liked informing participants about supports available within GRD; I enjoyed hearing about Clann Credo as a community finance group; As a student it was great to hear about representatives of the community and learn what supports are available to start my own business; I liked identifying challenges in the community and how to combat them; I really liked learning about the work of Galway Rural Development; I enjoyed learning about LOPPO and offering my opinion on solutions to challenges in Athenry; I enjoyed the discussions on the day; I enjoyed sharing about the work of my organization and the supports we offer; I enjoyed the PowerPoint and discussions which followed; I liked understanding the different perspectives on what it takes to start your own business; I enjoyed learning from the older generations present on the way, as they had its knowledge and experience; I liked being part of the talk today and having the chance to mix with others in the community as I have recently moved here; I enjoyed the problem-solving element, etc.

| RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Social Hackathons, conducted in the frame of LOPPO project, proved to be a dynamic and collaborative event that highlighted both the challenges and the untapped potential of rural communities. Participants brought diverse perspectives, engaging deeply with the issues and proposing innovative solutions that reflect a shared commitment to community development. This momentum sets a strong foundation for future initiatives.

Key insights included:

- Empowerment Through Collaboration: The hackathon created a platform for collective problem-solving, encouraging participants to approach challenges with creativity and practicality. The use of methodologies like challenge-based learning and design thinking allowed for structured, impactful discussions.
- Focus on Actionable Solutions: A variety of practical solutions were proposed, ranging from improving transportation and digital connectivity to fostering green entrepreneurship and addressing social isolation. These ideas were grounded in the real-world experiences and needs of rural residents, ensuring relevance and feasibility.
- Building Momentum for Rural Development: The event highlighted the community's readiness to embrace innovation and collaboration, with participants demonstrating a clear willingness to take ownership of solutions and drive change.

At the end of the social hackathons, we have identified the key competencies we think the participants should gain from each module to be well-prepared for rural entrepreneurship in agriculture:

Business Mentality

1. Entrepreneurial Mindset: Understanding risk-taking, resilience, and adaptability in business.

2. Strategic Planning: Learning how to develop, implement, and review business strategies effectively.

3. Financial Literacy: Basics of financial management, budgeting, and securing funding or grants.

4. Market Analysis: Identifying target markets, understanding competition, and recognizing market opportunities.

5. Sustainable Practices: Incorporating sustainable and eco-friendly practices into business models.

Problem Solving

1. Critical Thinking: Developing the ability to analyze issues, think critically, and make informed decisions.

2. Creativity and Innovation: Encouraging creative solutions and innovative approaches to traditional farming challenges.

3. Decision-Making Skills: Effective decision-making techniques, including weighing pros and cons and considering long-term impacts.

4. Risk Management: Identifying potential risks and developing mitigation strategies.

5. Conflict Resolution: Addressing and resolving conflicts with neighbors, clients, or within the team constructively.

Effective Communication

a. Interpersonal Skills: Building rapport, active listening, and empathizing with others to enhance relationships.

b. Presentation Skills: Effectively presenting ideas and business plans to stakeholders and potential investors.

c. Negotiation Skills: Mastering negotiation techniques to secure deals, collaborations, and partnerships.

d. Networking: Developing skills to build and maintain professional networks.

e. Marketing and Promotion: Understanding the fundamentals of marketing, including digital marketing and social media strategies to promote agricultural products and services.

By focusing on these competencies, the LOPPO educational course will equip young people with the necessary skills to not only start but also sustain successful and innovative agricultural businesses in rural areas.

Results obtained

1. High levels of satisfaction:

    - **The majority of participants rated the event positively, highlighting its unique approach and the engaging format. Most expressed a high likelihood of recommending the hackathon to others.**

2. Feedback on structure and organization:

    - **The duration and organization were well-received, with many participants feeling the event was efficiently planned and executed.**

3. Skills and discoveries:

    - **Participants noted significant gains in collaboration, problem-solving, and communication skills. Many appreciated the focus on intergenerational collaboration and innovative methodologies like role-playing and brainstorming.**

4. Positive aspects identified:

    - **The venue, interactive sessions, and real-world applicability of solutions were frequently mentioned as highlights.**

    - **The opportunity to work closely with diverse groups (entrepreneurs and older residents) was valued for its ability to bridge generational gaps.**

5. Areas for improvement:

    - **Some participants suggested more detailed guidance on the project's goals at the start of the event.**
    - **A few felt that certain sessions could have been longer to allow for deeper exploration of ideas.**

6. Unique value of the Hackathon:

   ◼ **Many participants described the event as a fresh and creative way to address rural challenges, appreciating its emphasis on both traditional and modern approaches.**

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Lessons Learned

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1. Enhance pre-event communication:

○ **Provide clearer, more detailed information about the project's objectives and expected outcomes before the hackathon to align participants from the outset.**

2. Iterative feedback during sessions:

○ **Incorporate mid-session feedback loops to allow participants to refine their ideas in real time, leading to more polished proposals.**

3. Balanced duration of activities:

○ **Adjust session lengths to provide adequate time for deeper discussion and collaboration without overwhelming participants.**

4. Follow-Up mechanisms:

○ **Establish a system to track participants' progress on implementing their proposals, offering mentorship or resources post-event to maintain momentum.**

| CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The hackathons achieved their primary objective of fostering creativity, collaboration, and actionable solutions for rural challenges. By engaging both rural entrepreneurs and older residents, the events successfully bridged generational gaps and leveraged diverse perspectives to address local needs.

The sessions demonstrated the potential of blending traditional knowledge with modern approaches, offering participants practical tools and strategies to drive economic and social change in their communities. Additionally, the hackathon highlighted the importance of structured, engaging, and forward-looking learning experiences, especially for young participants.

Recommendations for future followers

1. Interactive and Engaging Learning Methods:

   ✔ **Gamification:** introduce game-like elements (e.g., points, leaderboards, and rewards) to maintain high levels of engagement during hackathons and training sessions.

   ✔ **Hands-On activities**: incorporate practical workshops where participants can apply their learning immediately, such as prototyping business plans or tackling real-world challenges.

   ✔ **Experiential learning:** include field trips to successful rural enterprises and guest lectures from entrepreneurs who can provide inspiration and mentorship.

2. Modern and relevant content:

   ✔ **Ensure training content reflects the latest trends in agriculture and entrepreneurship, such as sustainable farming practices, digital marketing, and tech-driven business solutions.**

   ✔ **Showcase innovation by integrating case studies on urban farming, renewable energy, or circular economy practices tailored for rural areas.**

3. Community-building opportunities:

   ✔ **Facilitate team-based projects during hackathons to encourage collaboration and peer learning.**

   ✔ **Create an online community platform to keep participants connected, sharing progress and best practices beyond the event.**

   ✔ **Organize networking events to link participants with potential partners, mentors, and investors.**

4. Flexible and inclusive format:

   ✔ **Adopt a hybrid learning model that combines in-person and online sessions, accommodating diverse schedules and learning preferences.**

   ✔ **Design shorter, focused modules that emphasize real-world applications, using engaging content to maintain attention spans.**

5. Incentives and post-event support:

   ✔ **Provide participants with seed funding opportunities, scholarships, or grants to help implement their ideas.**

✔ **Offer certifications that enhance participants' resumes and demonstrate their commitment to rural entrepreneurship.**

✔ **Establish a long-term mentorship program to guide participants through the challenges of launching and sustaining their ventures.**

6. Tailoring for different audiences:

✔ **For younger participants, emphasize innovation, technology, and creative problem-solving approaches to make the experience dynamic and future-oriented.**

✔ **For older participants, focus on preserving traditional knowledge while introducing simple, tech-enabled tools to enhance their projects.**

7. Embed Longevity and Sustainability:

✔ **Encourage the creation of self-sustaining ecosystems, such as cooperative models or community-driven businesses that can adapt over time.**

✔ **Promote continuity by organizing follow-up events, sharing success stories, and maintaining active support networks.**

By combining these elements, future hackathons and training programs can attract and retain diverse participants while providing a robust foundation for rural entrepreneurship. The focus on interactive methodologies, modern content, and strong community engagement ensures long-lasting impact and relevance to real-world challenges.

Success!

SOCIAL HACKATHON

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