

DIGINEXT

Professional Profile- Report



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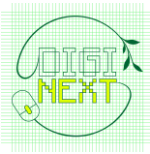
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INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from the DIGINEXT project, which examined digital skills needs and cultural management challenges in rural areas across five European countries: Austria, Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain. In particular, the research conducted by the partners in these countries focuses on more limited regional areas: Niederösterreich (Austria), Attiki (Greece), Sicily (Italy), Andalusia (Spain) and Muntenia (Romania), in which the LAGs - Local Action Group - were traced as territorial reference unit. The project focused on understanding the digital literacy requirements and cultural preservation efforts of various groups, including older adults, low-skilled individuals, and LAG) managers in rural communities.

The research employed a mix of focus groups, interviews, and surveys to gather insights from diverse stakeholders. Key areas of investigation included:

1. Cultural needs and management practices in rural areas;
2. Training system requirements, particularly for digital skills development;
3. Strategies for digitalization in rural regions;
4. Specific needs of different target groups (e.g., adult education providers, LAG managers, older adults).

The report highlights common themes across the participating countries, such as the pressing need for enhanced digital literacy among rural populations, the importance of preserving local cultural heritage through digital means, and the challenges faced by LAGs in implementing cultural and educational initiatives. It also underscores the potential of digital technologies to foster community engagement, improve access to services, and support sustainable rural development.

By providing a comprehensive overview of the digital and cultural landscape in these rural European areas, this report aims to inform policy-makers, educators, and community leaders about the critical areas requiring intervention and support. The findings serve as a foundation for developing targeted strategies to bridge the digital divide and enhance cultural vitality in rural communities across Europe.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR LAGS IN EUROPE

Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Europe were born out of the need for rural development during the late 20th century. Many rural areas in Europe faced significant economic challenges, such as declining agricultural employment, outmigration, and the need for economic diversification. To address these issues, the European Union (EU) introduced the LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) initiative in 1991. The LEADER initiative aimed to foster rural development through innovative, community-led strategies. Its objectives included empowering local communities by involving them directly in the development and implementation of strategies tailored to their specific needs, encouraging innovative approaches to rural development, and focusing on sustainable development that balanced economic growth with environmental protection and social inclusion. LAGs are primarily funded through the EU's Rural Development Programs (RDPs), which are part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This funding is complemented by national and regional contributions, ensuring multi-level support for rural development projects. Each LAG develops and implements a Local Development Strategy (LDS), which details the priorities and actions to be undertaken in their territory. They evaluate and select projects for funding based on their LDS, ensuring alignment with local needs and strategic goals. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to assess the effectiveness of LAGs and their projects, ensuring transparency and accountability.

LAGs are built as partnerships comprising public, private, and civil society representatives, typically including local authorities, businesses, NGOs, and community organisations. Each LAG operates within a specific rural area all over Europe, allowing for a targeted approach to local development. They embody the bottom-up approach central to LEADER, where local actors design and implement development strategies based on local needs and potential. The LEADER methodology involves area-based strategies tailored to the specific characteristics and opportunities of the LAG's territory. An emphasis is placed on partnership and a focus on the active participation of local actors, encouraging innovative solutions to local problems. The actions promoted try to be integrated and multi-sectoral and address the economic, social and environmental aspects of development. Networking and cooperation within and between regions are also key components of this



methodology.



LAGs continuously adapt to changing economic, social and environmental conditions, including the impacts of globalisation, technological advances and climate change. In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on sustainable development, including renewable energy, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. In addition, more emphasis has been placed on networking through digitisation of skills and actions and on cooperation at national and European level, facilitating knowledge exchange and joint initiatives. LAGs support the economic diversification of rural areas, trying to cushion the massive phenomenon of depopulation and promoting certain sectors such as tourism, handicrafts and local food production. To sum up, Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Europe emerged from the need to address rural development challenges through community-led, innovative, and sustainable approaches. Rooted in the LEADER initiative, they continue to play a crucial role in empowering local communities, fostering economic diversification, and promoting sustainable development across rural Europe.

Austria

Austria's national report highlights a few examples of initiatives that can help us outline the state of art of the country. One of the big players in the field of professional training and education is the Bildungs - und Heimatwerk in Niederösterreich. This training focuses on digital competences and offers courses free in charge for participants. Learners can obtain a PC start licence after completion. The courses are subsidised by the European Social Fund, the Federal Ministry of Education Science and Research, and the Province of Lower Austria. A strong partner in the tertiary education sector within the LAG Mostviertel

- Mitte is "net for future/Zukunftsakademie Mostviertel". It offers training and further education programs focused on digitalisation. Currently, there is also an ongoing digital education initiative, the "Digital Competence Offensive for Austria" that aims to organise workshops for free in all municipalities throughout the country. The municipality of Kirchberg an der Pielach (where the LAG-office is located) is currently a pilot municipality. Small initiatives have already been implemented, such as the expansion of broadband, enhancing digital literacy in schools through coaching, and the provision of collaborative robots and 3D printers for educational networks. In terms of digital citizenship, a citizen communication app was introduced to improve communication and engagement among residents.

Kulturvernetzung NÖ (Cultural Networking Lower Austria) serves as the primary platform for cultural events in Lower Austria, including those involving the LEADER regions. It offers comprehensive information on all (inter-)regional festivals and events.



People who want to stay up to date on ongoing cultural events can sign up for a



newsletter. Summer events such as the cultural summer Kirchberg or “culture on the Eisenstrasse” are quite popular. The latter is providing cultural events in several communities and also uses unusual cultural spaces that have been revitalised in recent decades. For local cultural events, municipalities predominantly act as the main information providers. They organise their own events such as hikes, open-air movies, public lectures, “chat hour” for generation 50+, men’s day, brass bands etc. These examples highlight various ongoing initiatives focused on professional training and education, digital literacy, cultural events, and community engagement within the LAG regions.

CULTURAL NEEDS

As written before, cultural events and activities are primarily coordinated through “Kulturvernetzung NÖ” (Cultural Networking Lower Austria). This platform provides comprehensive information on a wide array of regional and interregional festivals and events, facilitating local participation and preventing the concentration of cultural activities in urban centres. Municipalities also play a significant role in organising local events, including excursions, open-air films, public lectures and activities aimed at specific groups such as the elderly. In particular, classical music events are especially popular among the elderly, who remain a key demographic group for cultural engagement. The region hosts several cultural events, such as the Kirchberg Summer Cultural Festival and the Open Workshop Day, which enjoy strong community participation. Efforts have been made to encourage community involvement in cultural activities to promote a vibrant cultural scene. Ensuring the distribution of cultural events across regions also helps to promote local participation and prevent cultural centralisation. The cultural needs of Austrian Local Action Groups (LAGs) include several important areas. There is a need for up-to-date and appropriate technological equipment to facilitate digital learning, a change of mindset towards digital transformation and innovation, and the development of digital skills among educators and administrative staff. Furthermore, adult education centres need to incorporate current digital education initiatives to ensure they are up-to-date, addressing the issues revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic regarding slow adaptation to digital formats.

TRAINING NEEDS SYSTEM

The adult education and training landscape in Lower Austria is primarily served by the “Verband NÖ VHS” (association of adult education centres Lower Austria) and BHW, offering a wide range of courses from language and IT training to vocational education. However, there is a noticeable lag in innovation and digitalization within these centres, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed the need for better digital

infrastructure, updated mindsets, and enhanced competencies among educators and administrative staff.

Digital skills development is a key focus, driven by initiatives like the "Digital Competence Offensive for Austria," which organises workshops across municipalities. While many participants are proficient in basic digital tools, there is a growing demand for advanced digital skills training, including project management, digital collaboration, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity.

Digitalisation in Rural Area:

The digitization of the rural region of LAG Eisenstraße and Mostviertel-Mitte, involves several focused efforts. For Smart Villages, these efforts should encompass promoting digital citizenship and inclusion to ensure everyone can participate in and benefit from the digital economy. Enhancing digital education and lifelong learning opportunities is vital to equip residents with the necessary skills for the digital age. Raising awareness about the benefits and risks of digital technologies, fostering civic participation, and boosting local businesses with tailored digital solutions are also essential components. Additionally, implementing climate protection measures and developing shared mobility and intelligent mobility systems are critical to ensure sustainable development.

Regarding digital education initiatives, it is important to design and implement region-specific, needs-oriented education and learning opportunities that cater to the unique requirements of these rural areas. Promoting digital expertise through various programs, organising innovation fairs to showcase new technologies and ideas, and educating the public about the dangers of cybercrime and the potential for digital addiction are all crucial elements. These initiatives aim to build a robust digital infrastructure and culture that supports the growth and resilience of rural communities.

NEEDS OF EACH TARGET GROUP

General Adult Education and Training Providers

Adult education and training centres require significant upgrades in technology and equipment to support effective digital learning. There is also a need for a cultural shift towards embracing digital transformation and innovation. Educators and administrative staff must enhance their digital skills to effectively manage and implement digital learning environments.

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

LAG managers and multipliers need training on using digital tools efficiently for both



professional and personal purposes. For work, they use digital tools for project management, website administration, and content management. In their personal lives,



they use digital tools for communication, information sharing, and news consumption, indicating a need for improved digital literacy.

Rural Population (Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals)

These groups have specific needs related to digital proficiency and safety, including the ability to efficiently navigate smartphones, manage data, transfer photos, and use cloud services. They require training in online banking, using digital signatures, and financial management apps. Cybersecurity awareness is crucial, so they must learn to identify fake news, deal with cybercrime, verify information, and understand internet dangers.

Additionally, they need to configure settings on devices, bookmark websites, and implement password protection. Other essential skills include basic computer literacy, email management, basic coding, accessing telemedicine, using social media, and online shopping.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

Conducted in Vienna, the focus groups included LAG-Managers and multipliers who are involved in digital education and regional development strategies. Discussions centred on integrating digital education into existing programs and past regional projects. Participants worked on an initial action plan that included training multipliers, creating educational materials, organising workshops, and establishing Digi-Cafés to foster community learning.

Participants generally rated themselves as competent in basic digital skills but identified a need for training in more advanced tools, particularly in areas like project management, digital collaboration, AI, and cybersecurity.

The interview participants, aged 50 to 70+, came from diverse professional backgrounds, including housewives, former teachers, shopkeepers, and officers. Their interests ranged from political activism and hiking to choir singing and spending time with grandchildren.

Many were unaware of online resources like fit4internet.at and Digital Austria, but there was a strong interest in sustainability and practical digital skills training. This includes managing smartphone functionalities, online banking, cybercrime awareness, and utilising digital tools like 3D printers, indicating a clear need for practical and accessible digital education.

Greece

The Local Action Group (LAG) of the "Cooperation Network of Municipalities of the



Regional Unit of the Attica Islands" is already implementing several initiatives. Examples include cooperation with educational and training institutions such as the KEAN-Cell of

Alternative Youth Searches, which has an educational platform and organises workshops on subjects like sustainable fisheries. Another initiative is participating in activities to inform the population and raise awareness of threats to the marine environment of the Argo Saronic islands, and educational and informative activities for fishermen, including first-aid seminars and safety training. The LAG also supports investment projects across various economic sectors, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by providing funding for tourism, food services, small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises, and support for farmers and fishermen. Cultural initiatives include financing festivals and events like the Poros Art Festival 2022 and Galatas – Troizinia Saroneia 2022, funding for traditional costumes and equipment for cultural associations, and supporting VR programs for historical reenactments, such as the Salamina naval battle. Additionally, digitization efforts involve digital mapping and QR code applications for tourism and cultural heritage preservation, such as the underwater port facilities in Aegina and walking trails in Kythira.

CULTURAL NEEDS

In the Attica Islands, there is a strong emphasis on preserving cultural heritage. This includes organising cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions that celebrate local traditions and history. These initiatives help maintain and promote the region's unique cultural identity, which in turn attracts tourists and boosts the local economy. Active involvement of local communities in cultural activities fosters a sense of belonging and community cohesion, which is essential for sustaining local cultural practices. Additionally, collaboration with local artists, cultural organisations, and other stakeholders is crucial for supporting heritage preservation projects. This collaborative approach ensures that cultural initiatives are well-supported and have a broader impact. In this context, the needs of the cultural system and management of the Local Action Group (LAG) in Greece include providing funding for cultural initiatives such as festivals, traditional costumes, VR programs, and digital mapping projects. These initiatives aim to preserve local traditions, promote cultural tourism, and support community development. Additionally, there is a significant need for enhancing digital skills among adults and seniors, particularly in rural areas. This includes basic digital literacy, advanced digital skills for professional use, and the implementation of digital tools to streamline operations and promote local culture. Vocational training programs are also essential, focusing on areas like agriculture, tourism, and small business management. The overall cultural system in Greece requires a strong emphasis on preserving cultural heritage, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering economic growth through cultural tourism and community engagement.

TRAINING NEEDS SYSTEM

Enhancing digital skills among various target groups, especially older adults and low-skilled individuals, is critical in the Attica Islands. Training programs are needed to help these groups navigate digital tools for both personal and professional use, including smartphones, online banking, cybersecurity, and basic computer skills. There is also a gap in the availability and effectiveness of vocational training programs tailored to the needs of rural communities. Targeted training that addresses local economic activities, such as agriculture, tourism, and small business development, is essential. Promoting lifelong learning opportunities is another crucial need. This ensures that residents can continuously upgrade their skills and adapt to changing economic conditions, encompassing both formal education and informal training programs. Upgrading technological infrastructure and providing necessary resources for effective digital learning is also essential. This includes reliable internet access, digital devices, and supportive learning environments.

Digitalisation in rural areas:

The local development strategies in Greek rural areas, implemented through the Local Action Groups (LAGs) under the LEADER/CLLD (Community-Led Local Development) framework, focus on several key initiatives and interventions to address the digital divide and promote sustainable development. These strategies involve local partners, including civil society and local economic and social actors, to tackle economic, social, environmental, and demographic challenges.

Under the actions of the Attica LAG "Cooperation Network of Municipalities of the Regional Unit of the Attica Islands", there is a growing awareness and use of digital technologies among the population in Attica islands. The use of digital technologies is promoted in the cultural and tourism industries and digital training programmes are organised for professionals in the agricultural and tourism sector.

There is a need in enhancing digital literacy across all age groups, particularly targeting low-skilled adults and seniors. This includes establishing community-based training centres equipped with computers and internet access, as well as deploying mobile digital units to reach remote areas. The vocational training programs also need to be tailored to meet local job market needs in sectors such as agriculture, business, and tourism, integrating digital skills to boost employability.

Improving digital infrastructure is another critical aspect, focusing on enhancing internet connectivity and access to digital devices. This can be supported by securing funding from government programs and public-private sector partnerships. The strategies also involve the continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs to ensure they meet the residents' needs and can adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities.

NEEDS OF EACH TARGET GROUP

General Adult Education and Training Providers

General Adult Education and Training Providers, the primary needs include the development and implementation of comprehensive digital literacy programs that span basic to advanced digital skills, ensuring these programs are accessible and relevant to the local job market, particularly in agriculture, business, and tourism. Providers also need to establish community-based training centres equipped with digital devices and internet access to facilitate learning.

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers require support in enhancing their digital skills, particularly in areas such as digital content creation, security, and problem-solving. They also need to foster partnerships with educational institutions to ensure that training programs are effective and tailored to the community's needs. Furthermore, LAG managers must focus on improving digital infrastructure and securing funding from government programs and private sector partnerships to support their initiatives.

Rural Population (Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals)

The rural population, including older adults and low-skilled individuals, needs targeted digital literacy programs to bridge the digital divide. There is a significant need for training in the use of digital devices and administrative services, as well as programs that cater to the specific needs of older adults and low-skilled workers to improve their employability and social inclusion. Improving access to digital infrastructure, such as internet connectivity and digital devices, is also crucial for this group.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS

Focus groups included six participants from the Local Action Groups (LAGs) of Attica. Participants were highly engaged in discussing the challenges faced by rural communities, showing notable enthusiasm for addressing the digital divide and improving vocational training opportunities. Key themes that emerged included the need for digital skills training to support personal and professional development, the importance of involving local communities in planning and implementing development strategies, and a strong desire to preserve and promote local cultural heritage through various initiatives.

Surveys were conducted with different age groups, including participants aged 60 and above, aged 18 to 59, and members from the LAGs of Attica. Older adults identified a



need for basic digital skills training, such as using smartphones, online banking, and cybersecurity. Low-skilled adults focused on vocational training to improve employment prospects and learning digital tools applicable to work and personal lives.
LAG participants

highlighted the importance of structured approaches to cultural and economic development, with a focus on sustainable practices and community engagement.

ITALY

THE CULTURAL NEEDS

The cultural system in Sicily is deeply rooted in its rich historical and agricultural heritage. The region boasts a unique blend of traditions that reflect the diverse influences it has absorbed over centuries. Cultural initiatives in Sicily are often community-driven, highlighting local customs, arts, and gastronomic specialties. Events sponsored by Local Action Groups (LAGs), like tourism fairs and cultural festivals, are instrumental in preserving and showcasing the local culture. These activities not only celebrate the historical and artistic richness of the region but also contribute to the social cohesion and economic development of rural areas.

The report emphasises the importance of cultural management and engagement in promoting community cohesion and enhancing the quality of life for digital low-skilled adults and seniors. The respondents demonstrated awareness of cultural organisations and activities, but a significant portion had not actively participated in organising events. However, there is a strong willingness to engage in cultural activities, with 80% expressing interest in contributing to the organisation of such events. The types of cultural activities that resonate most include music, theatre, cinema, fairs, and talks, which promote not only cultural enrichment but also emotional skills, gender dynamics, and sustainability.

This highlights a crucial need for structured cultural programs that facilitate and encourage active participation. There is also an evident demand for diverse cultural events that cater to various interests and contribute to both individual and community development. Addressing these cultural needs requires collaboration between local authorities, cultural organisations, and the community to create accessible and engaging cultural experiences. This will not only preserve cultural heritage but also foster a sense of belonging and community spirit among digital low-skilled adults and seniors.

TRAINING SYSTEM NEEDS

The training system in Sicily requires a multifaceted approach to address the diverse needs of its population. There is a strong emphasis on vocational training and digital literacy, particularly for marginalised groups and the elderly. Key training



institutions, such as the ARCA Consortium and the ARCES Association, collaborate with LAGs to deliver education and skill development programs. These initiatives focus on equipping individuals

with practical skills necessary for employment and personal growth. For instance, the activation of digital education centres aims to enhance e-government capabilities and basic internet skills among older adults. This training is crucial for fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all segments of the population can participate in the digital economy.

The training needs identified in the document highlight a significant gap in awareness and participation in professional training courses among digital low-skilled adults and seniors. Although 70% of respondents had not engaged in professional training due to a lack of perceived need or interest, there is a clear indication that those who had participated found value in specialised courses and degrees. This disparity underscores the necessity for targeted training programs that address the specific needs and interests of this demographic.

Moreover, the document reveals a deficiency in digital skills among the respondents, with many lacking basic competencies in using digital devices and online tools. Despite a high usage of smartphones and PCs, there is a notable interest in enhancing digital skills, particularly in areas like social media management, digital marketing, and the use of specific software such as Adobe and Google Analytics. This indicates a need for comprehensive digital literacy programs that not only cover basic skills but also provide advanced training tailored to professional and personal development.

To effectively address these training needs, educational institutions and training providers must develop and offer accessible, relevant, and engaging programs. These programs should be designed to build confidence and competence in digital skills, thereby enabling digital low-skilled adults and seniors to navigate the digital world more effectively and improve their employability and quality of life.

Digitalisation in Rural Area:

LAGs like Madonie and Elimos in Sicily are addressing digitization challenges through various initiatives. They are organising digital skills training programs to improve literacy among rural residents, covering basic computer skills, internet usage, digital communication tools, and online safety. Supporting entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies and integrating them into their business models is another critical action to be done, which includes training on e-commerce, digital marketing, and the use of digital tools for business management.

Moreover, establishing Innovation Hubs or co-working spaces equipped with high-speed internet and modern technology infrastructure can provide a collaborative environment for startups, freelancers, and innovators in rural areas. This approach fosters digital innovation and entrepreneurship, creating a vibrant local economy.

Digital Infrastructure Development is also a priority, involving advocacy for improved digital infrastructure, expanded broadband internet coverage, and



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advanced

telecommunications networks. This effort aims to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to digital services for all residents.

In agriculture, the adoption of Smart Agriculture and Agri-tech solutions can enhance efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. Initiatives related to precision agriculture, remote sensing, and farm management software help modernise agricultural practices, making them more competitive and sustainable.

Lastly, leveraging digital technologies for Digital Tourism Promotion can attract visitors and stimulate economic growth in rural areas. Developing digital tourism platforms, mobile apps, and virtual tours showcases the cultural heritage, natural attractions, and local experiences, making rural areas attractive destinations.

Overall, these digitization efforts are the milestones of a plan for the next few years, and it will empower local communities, foster economic development, and ensure that rural areas remain vibrant and competitive in the digital age.

Needs of each target group

General Adult Education and Training Providers

Training providers need to develop comprehensive programs that address both vocational skills and digital literacy. Collaborations with local institutions and LAGs are essential to tailor these programs to the specific needs of rural communities. Providers should also focus on continuous professional development for trainers to keep them updated with the latest educational methodologies and technological advancements.

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

LAG managers require training in project management, community engagement, and sustainable development practices. Their role involves coordinating various stakeholders and ensuring that projects align with the broader goals of rural development and social inclusion. Training in digital tools and data management is also critical to improve the efficiency and impact of their initiatives.

Rural Population (Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals)

This group needs targeted educational programs that are accessible and relevant to their daily lives. Digital literacy programs are crucial to help them navigate e-government services and social media, enhancing their overall quality of life. Additionally, vocational training in sectors like agriculture, tourism, and craftsmanship can provide new economic opportunities and reduce social isolation.

SUMMARY OF THE FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS

The focus groups and interviews revealed a consensus on the critical areas of need for the different target groups. For general adult education and training providers, the emphasis is on creating relevant and up-to-date training programs that meet the specific needs of the rural population. LAG managers highlighted the importance of sustainable development and effective community engagement strategies. They also expressed a need for better digital tools to manage projects more efficiently. The rural population, particularly older adults and low-skilled individuals identified a significant gap in digital literacy and access to vocational training. The establishment of digital education centres and vocational programs tailored to local economic activities were seen as vital steps toward addressing these needs. Overall, the feedback from these sessions underscores the importance of a collaborative and targeted approach to education and training in Sicily.

ROMANIA

Cultural Needs

Based on the information provided in the report, the cultural management characteristics and needs in the context of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Romania can be described as follows.

LAGs are well-positioned to initiate and coordinate cultural projects that meet community needs and potential. Their involvement in cultural management is seen as essential for valuing and protecting local cultural heritage. LAGs have the capacity to organise various cultural activities and events.

However, there is a significant need for LAGs to diversify their activities to include cultural promotion and preservation of traditions. Currently, LAGs focus more on infrastructure development, and there is a pressing need for them to increase their involvement in organising cultural interest activities. A crucial need is for LAGs to collaborate and form partnerships with educational institutions to attract financial resources and projects in cultural areas. Additionally, training and seminars for LAG representatives are necessary to sensitise them to the importance of cultural activities in local development.

Potential cultural management activities that LAGs could engage in include organising cultural festivals, initiating heritage restoration projects, and developing cultural education projects.

Unfortunately, the current status shows that LAGs in the analysed area do not get heavily involved in organising activities of cultural interest, despite having members from cultural fields. There is a noticeable gap between the theoretical objectives of



LAGs regarding cultural management and their actual implementation of cultural projects.

Overall, there appears to be significant potential for LAGs to contribute to cultural management in rural areas, but this potential is currently underutilised. There is a clear need for greater awareness, training, and resource allocation to enable LAGs to fulfil their cultural management role more effectively. This shift would not only enrich the cultural life of rural communities but also contribute to preserving local traditions and heritage. LAGs should initiate and coordinate cultural projects, such as festivals, heritage restoration, and cultural education, to enhance the value and protection of local cultural heritage.

Training needs system

In terms of IT and digital literacy, seniors have shown a high interest in frequent IT courses to learn basic skills, using phones, and various IT applications. Adults with low skills urgently need foundational IT knowledge, regardless of their formal education levels.

Educational and cultural projects for LAG representatives are essential. Training should focus on the importance of educational, cultural, and community development projects.

Additionally, LAG representatives need to sensitise on their statutory role in supporting such initiatives and workshops on the development and implementation of community education and cultural projects. Digital skills and sustainability training are necessary for all groups. Seniors and adults require basic digital literacy for beginners, while LAG representatives have varied levels of digital competence, necessitating a tailored approach from beginner to advanced training.

Strategies for Digitalisation in Rural Areas:

Improving digital infrastructure, including broadband services, is crucial. Establishing multimedia centres and internet access points will provide residents with essential access. Organising digital literacy programs and supporting digital businesses and local e- government projects will further digital inclusion. Additionally, promoting digital inclusion of marginalised groups, such as seniors, will ensure broader access to digital opportunities.

Simplifying questionnaires for seniors to avoid confusion is necessary. Developing tailored educational and training programs to meet the specific needs of each target group is essential. LAG representatives should be encouraged to engage more actively in educational and cultural activities. Continuous assessment and adaptation of training materials and methods will ensure they are accessible and relevant to all participants.

Finally, regular focus groups and interviews should be conducted to gather feedback and assess the evolving needs of target groups. Collaborative efforts



between LAGs, educational institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders will maximise resource utilisation and impact. Capacity-building workshops and seminars for LAG representatives will enhance their understanding and involvement in community-centric projects. Addressing these training needs will enhance digital literacy, cultural management, and community development, ultimately improving the quality of life in rural areas.

NEEDS OF EACH TARGET GROUP

General Adult Education and Training Providers

For the General Adult Education and Training Providers in Romania, there is a need to design and implement education and learning opportunities that are region-specific and oriented to the needs of the local population. These initiatives should focus on promoting digital expertise among adults, organising innovation fairs to showcase new technologies and their applications, and educating the population about the risks of cybercrime and the potential for addiction to digital platforms.

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

LAGs in Romania require tailored strategies to address the digitalization of rural areas. This includes improving digital infrastructure such as extending internet networks and providing broadband services. Establishing multimedia centres and internet access points in rural communities is essential to offer residents free or low-cost access to the internet and necessary digital equipment. Moreover, organising digital literacy programs is crucial to teach rural residents how to use computers, the internet, smartphones, and other digital technologies effectively. Supporting the development and promotion of digital businesses, implementing local e-government projects to streamline administrative processes, and developing specific projects for the digital inclusion of marginalised groups like older adults, persons with disabilities, and Roma communities are also imperative.

Rural Population (Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals)

For the rural population, particularly older adults and low-skilled individuals in Romania, there is a pressing need for more frequent and accessible information and training sessions on IT. Many older adults are eager to engage in digital learning and require basic to advanced digital literacy programs to enable them to use digital administrative services and devices confidently. Low-skilled individuals, despite some having a high level of formal education, also urgently need IT knowledge to enhance their employability and daily functioning in an increasingly digital world.

Summary of focus groups and interviews

The National Report covers the findings from focus groups and interviews conducted with various target groups and stakeholders, including LAG representatives, adults with low skills, and seniors. Additionally, the report includes insights from representatives of cultural centres, libraries, schools, NGOs, churches, local public administration, and small entrepreneurs.

A focus group with five LAG representatives from two different groups took place at Izvoarele City Hall in Prahova County on May 10, 2024. A separate interview was



conducted with a LAG director in Bucharest, totaling six LAG representatives. Two focus groups for

seniors were held on May 9, 2024, at Homoraciu Cultural Center în Izvoarele, with 14 participants, including 10 seniors and 4 adults with low skills. Another focus group for adults took place on May 14, 2024, in Drajna commune, Prahova County, with 6 adults. In total, there were 10 seniors and 10 adults with low skills participating.

The participants' level of involvement was assessed through feedback forms and discussions. Seniors showed a high level of interest in participating in IT courses to learn more about using technology for everyday tasks. However, LAG representatives demonstrated less interest in educational and cultural activities, focusing primarily on infrastructure projects.

The documentary research section provides an overview of LAGs in Romania, noting their role as public-private partnerships aimed at rural development. The report mentions that the National Federation of Local Action Groups (FNGAL) acts as an umbrella organisation for 239 LAGs, with 183 currently active. LAGs are governed by various national and European regulations, including laws on local public administration and finance, and EU regulations on structural and investment funds.

The selected LAGs for the project include ASOCIATIA PLAIURILE RAMIDAVEI and the Valea Teleajen Local Action Group, which consist of multiple public and private sector entities. These LAGs focus on areas such as rural and agricultural development, rural tourism, community development, environmental protection, entrepreneurship promotion, social inclusion, and cultural heritage preservation. However, it was noted that LAGs in the analysed area are not currently involved in organising education or training activities.

Educational needs and activities were discussed with participants and educational institution representatives. Seniors expressed a strong desire for more frequent meetings and IT training, while adults with low skills also highlighted a need for digital literacy.

Despite these needs, LAGs in the region do not engage in educational or cultural projects, indicating a need for increased collaboration and awareness among LAG representatives. In conclusion, the report recommends simplifying questionnaires for seniors and increasing LAG involvement in educational and cultural activities to better meet community needs. It also highlights the necessity of developing digital skills at the beginner level for both seniors and adults with low skills, and enhancing awareness and sensitivity among LAG representatives regarding their roles in community development.

SPAIN

Cultural needs

The Spanish report highlights the cultural needs of various target groups.



particularly seniors and low-skilled adults in rural areas. Cultural activities are a key focus, with around 43.8% of Local Action Groups (LAGs) having associations dedicated to cultural promotion. However, only 12.5% of these groups organise yearly cultural activities. Seniors and low-

skilled adults' express interest in activities such as theatre, heritage preservation, classical music, guided tours, hiking, reading workshops, language classes, and cinema. While a significant percentage of seniors (88%) are aware of cultural organisations, only 62% participate actively.

Cultural management in rural areas involves organising activities related to heritage and other cultural interests, but there is a need for more frequent and diverse cultural events to better meet the community's needs.

TRAINING SYSTEM NEEDS

The report outlines the training system needs, focusing on the digital and professional training requirements of seniors and low-skilled adults. Digital skills training is a significant area of need, with 62.5% of organisations providing such training. There is a strong demand for improving digital literacy among these groups, who have expressed interest in learning to use computers, tablets, AI, Drive, Asana, PowerBi, graphic design tools, social media, and public administration platforms. Currently, the most commonly used devices are smartphones and laptops, primarily for reading news, communicating with relatives, and work-related tasks. However, there is a need for better proficiency in using these devices for broader purposes.

Professional training also plays a crucial role in the vocational training system, which aims to motivate seniors in rural areas and introduce them to new professional opportunities. Strategies include offering digital literacy courses, workshops, mentoring programs, and access to necessary equipment and connectivity. The focus is on both soft and technical skills training, retraining, and supporting entrepreneurship.

Digital inclusion is another critical aspect, with support points available in different areas where locals can seek help with administrative and financial issues. However, there is a notable gap in awareness and knowledge about these opportunities among the residents. Enhancing skills in digital administrative procedures is a key area of focus to ensure the rural population can effectively engage with digital tools and platforms.

In summary, there is a clear need for more robust and diverse cultural activities and targeted training programs to enhance digital literacy and professional skills among seniors and low-skilled adults in rural areas. Addressing these needs through structured programs and support systems is essential for their social and economic inclusion.

NEEDS OF EACH TARGET GROUP



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General adult education and training providers need to offer digital literacy courses and workshops to enhance digital skills among adults. They require programs that include training in both soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving, and technical skills, like IT proficiency and data analysis. Ensuring access to necessary digital devices and reliable internet connectivity is crucial. Additionally, these providers should include opportunities for retraining in new skills and support for entrepreneurial initiatives in their programs. Engaging in advocacy for policies that support adult education and digital inclusion initiatives is also essential.

Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

Local Action Group (LAG) managers and multipliers focus on providing digital literacy courses and mentoring programs, particularly targeting seniors and women. They aim to establish digital points that assist the rural population with administrative tasks and connectivity issues. Organising community courses and activities to improve digital skills is a key need. LAGs encourage sustainability practices through digital administrative procedures and promote the green transition. Additionally, they should facilitate cultural activities and professional training for seniors and low-skilled adults to enhance their involvement and skills.

Rural Population (Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals)

The rural population, particularly older adults and low-skilled individuals, desires access to cultural activities such as concerts, cultural heritage activities, art exhibitions, sports, theatre, and festivals. Many express a desire to organise community cultural activities, particularly focusing on animation and heritage. There is a need for training programs to improve their digital skills, especially for completing administrative tasks online. Education on sustainability practices, including recycling, energy saving, and water management, is important. These individuals also require assistance with digital procedures and connectivity, often through community centres or local organisations. Training on the use of devices like smartphones, laptops, computers, and tablets for various daily tasks and communication is essential to meet their needs.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

The summary of the "Summary of Focus Groups and Interviews" section from the DIGINEXT National Report for Spain highlights the engagement and responses of various participants involved in the study. The project involved 16 Local Action Group (LAG) officers, 37 seniors, and 29 low-skilled adults from rural areas in Spain, particularly in Andalucía. These participants were contacted through various local organisations and groups. A total of 82 individuals responded to the questionnaires, including LAG officers, seniors, and low-skilled adults.

Participants were highly involved and interested in the topics discussed during the focus groups. They willingly shared their experiences and opinions, contributing valuable insights for the project. There was a strong interest in continuing collaboration on the project. The report includes detailed analysis based on desk research, though specifics are not provided in the summary. A focus group was conducted in Seville with a mix of face-to-face and online participants. The participants, primarily women leaders or officers of LAGs, discussed various issues related to digitalization, vocational training, and cultural management.

Key findings from the discussions emphasised the importance of digital skills and vocational training, especially for seniors in rural areas. There were discussions on the need for better access to digital tools and support, as well as the challenges faced in administrative and financial tasks. The focus groups also touched on sustainability practices, with a significant percentage of seniors recognizing changes in their communities related to sustainability measures.

Overall, participants were satisfied with the discussions and the project's potential to address the identified issues. They expressed a willingness to continue working on the project and offered suggestions for improvements. This summary encapsulates the main points from the focus groups and interviews, reflecting the engagement and insights of the participants involved in the DIGINEXT project in Spain.

CONCLUSIONS

The DIGINEXT International Report examines the digital skills needs and cultural management challenges across rural areas in Austria, Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain. A common thread across all countries is the need to enhance digital literacy and competencies, particularly among older adults and low-skilled individuals in rural areas.

Key digital skills needs and competencies identified include:

1. **Basic digital literacy:** Many rural residents, especially seniors, require training in fundamental skills like using smartphones, computers, and navigating the internet.
2. **Online administrative services:** There is a widespread need for competence in using e-government platforms and online banking services.
3. **Digital communication tools:** Skills in using social media, email, and video conferencing platforms are increasingly important for social inclusion and remote work.
4. **Cybersecurity awareness:** Training on identifying online threats, protecting personal data, and safe internet usage is critical.



5. **Advanced digital skills:** For Local Action Group (LAG) managers and multipliers, there's a need for competencies in project management software, digital marketing, and data analysis tools.

6. **Cultural management in the digital age:** LAGs and cultural organisations need skills to digitally promote and manage cultural events, heritage sites, and local traditions.

7. **Digital content creation:** Abilities to create and manage digital content for cultural promotion and preservation are becoming essential.

Regarding cultural system management, the report underlines:

- The importance of integrating digital tools in preserving and promoting local cultural heritage;
- The need for LAGs to diversify their activities to include more cultural promotion and digital engagement;
- The potential of digital platforms to enhance community participation in cultural activities and events;
- The necessity of training cultural managers in using digital tools for event organisation, audience engagement, and heritage documentation.

In conclusion, bridging the digital divide in rural areas is crucial not only for economic development but also for preserving and promoting local culture. Enhancing digital skills across all age groups and proficiency levels will enable more effective cultural system management, fostering both digital inclusion and cultural preservation in rural communities.

Website

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