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Fueling Startup Villages with Circular Bioeconomy Strategies

Pilot projects design report and policy brief

Deliverable 5.2 (v3)

WP5 Community building and mobilisation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The FoodCoP project supports the development of Startup Villages as drivers of innovation, sustainability and community resilience in rural Europe. This deliverable, D5.2 – Pilot Projects Design Report, presents the operational framework and the first designs of pilot projects that demonstrate how Startup Villages can collaborate across regions, share resources and co-create solutions for the green and digital transition.

The work builds on an iterative process. The mapping of Startup Villages and the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1) provided the first collective reflection on common challenges such as access to funding, weak communication and the need for stronger community engagement. The cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3) addressed these gaps through targeted workshops on storytelling and funding strategies. In parallel, a series of webinars and hybrid events in Fundão (Portugal), Kočevje (Slovenia) and Killorglin (Ireland) brought together local stakeholders, startups, policymakers and European partners to showcase practices and explore opportunities for cooperation.

The pilot projects designed in this report are not large-scale implementations, but small, strategic experiments that test how rural regions can generate value together. Three pilots are proposed:

- **Interregional Agro-Living Lab Network**: connecting infrastructures across villages to test sustainable agri-food and circular innovations in different contexts.
- **Rural Innovation Storytelling Hub**: pooling communication resources to strengthen the visibility of rural entrepreneurs and Startup Villages.
- **Circular Marketplaces for Rural Products**: linking cooperatives, startups and circular enterprises to create cross-border markets for sustainable products.

Together, these pilots form a structured framework for interregional collaboration that is resource-based and sustainability-driven. They demonstrate how Startup Villages can act as distributed living labs, communication platforms and market gateways, providing lessons that can be replicated in other regions.

The report also captures early findings and lessons: communication and visibility are critical enablers; funding remains a systemic challenge; community engagement is essential for sustainability; and diversity of assets becomes a strength when connected across borders. Building on these findings, and with additional insights from WP3 (best practices identification), this deliverable also proposes a draft version of the policy brief that structures the key themes that will be tracked and elaborated upon in Task 6.3 and the final FoodCoP Policy Brief.

By aligning with the European Green Deal, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA), the pilots show how rural innovation can contribute to Europe's broader objectives.

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The pilots designed in this deliverable are conceptual and strategic in nature. The FoodCoP project does not include their physical implementation or testing, but rather their validation through stakeholder dialogue, collective learning and integration into the FoodCoP Platform (WP4). Their outcomes will feed into future cooperation actions and policy recommendations in WP6 and WP7, as well as the final FoodCoP Policy Brief (D6.3).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BIC- Bio-based Industries Consortium

CA – Consortium Agreement

CBE-JU Circular Based Europe Joint Undertaking

D – Deliverable

DoA – Description of Action

EC – European Commission

GA – General Assembly

H2020 – Horizon 2020 The 8th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

HEU – Horizon Europe – the 9th framework Programme of the EC for research, technological development and innovation activities.

IPR – Intellectual Property Right

JU- Joint Undertaking

PC – Project Coordinator

FOODCOP- Fuelling Startup Villages with circular bioeconomy strategies SC – Steering Committee

SME – Small and Medium Enterprise

WP – Work package

CoP – Community of Practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

The FoodCoP project was created to strengthen rural innovation ecosystems in Europe by positioning Startup Villages as key actors in the green and digital transition. By embedding circular bioeconomy strategies in rural areas, the project supports the objectives of the European Green Deal, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). These frameworks call for rural territories that are more resilient, better connected and able to contribute to climate neutrality, sustainable food systems and inclusive economic growth.

Within this framework, Work Package 5 focuses enabling rural actors to share experiences, identify the conditions that make innovation possible, and design collaborative actions together. Deliverable 5.2, the Pilot Projects Design Report, is a central output of this process.

The deliverable has three main objectives: to define a practical framework for interregional collaboration between Startup Villages; to propose schemes for sharing resources and building synergies that strengthen rural innovation ecosystems; and to present the design of pilot projects as small-scale but strategic experiments of cooperation across regions. The pilot projects are not large implementations, but testbeds to explore how Startup Villages can cooperate, share strengths and jointly address challenges such as access to funding, effective communication, community engagement and climate resilience.

This report builds directly on earlier milestones. The Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1) was the first structured moment for Startup Villages to share their innovation journeys and reflect on common challenges and enabling conditions. The Cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3) responded to gaps highlighted in that workshop, focusing on communication and funding strategies, and equipping Startup Villages with practical tools for cooperation. Together, these outputs form the knowledge base for the design of the pilots presented here.

The report also draws on the webinar series and hybrid events held in each Startup Village, which provided spaces for mapping challenges, showcasing practices and engaging local and European stakeholders. These activities were not pilots themselves but important preparatory steps that helped shape the pilots.

Finally, this deliverable also contains the FoodCoP Policy Brief, which will be expanded into D6.3 Final Policy Brief.

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2. METHODOLOGY

The design of the pilot projects presented in this report follows an iterative and participatory process. Rather than starting from scratch, the pilots build on the knowledge, exchanges and collaborative tools developed earlier in the project. The approach combined mapping, collective reflection, peer learning and targeted stakeholder engagement, gradually moving from shared understanding to concrete proposals for interregional cooperation.

Figure 1 Methodology flow

The first step was the mapping of Startup Villages, which collected information on their local innovation ecosystems, ongoing initiatives, challenges and opportunities. This mapping provided the basis for identifying the unique strengths of each village and the areas where collaboration could generate added value.

The second step was the Sensemaking Workshop (reported in D5.1). This was the first structured opportunity for Startup Villages to share their innovation experiences and reflect together on common needs and enabling conditions. Using a facilitated methodology of deep listening and reflective dialogue, participants identified recurring themes such as funding barriers, the need for stronger community engagement, and the importance of better communication and storytelling. These insights highlighted the potential for interregional collaboration and set the stage for the design of pilots.

The third step was a series of webinars and hybrid events in each Startup Village. These events brought together local stakeholders, entrepreneurs, policymakers and European partners to discuss success stories, showcase circular bioeconomy initiatives and explore opportunities for cooperation. Each event followed a structured template covering objectives, participants, methodologies and outcomes, ensuring comparability and

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consistency across the three villages. While not pilots themselves, these events served as spaces for ideation, helping to map synergies and generate practical evidence that now informs the pilots. A detailed overview of the six webinars and three hybrid events carried out in Task 5.3 is provided in Annex 1, including dates, themes and key outcomes.

The fourth step was the set of cross-regional collaboration initiatives (reported in D5.3). These included targeted workshops on communication and funding strategies, directly addressing the gaps identified in the Sensemaking Workshop. By providing practical tools and shared capacity, they equipped Startup Villages to engage more effectively in the pilot design process.

Throughout this process, FoodCoP made extensive use of participatory and digital tools to ensure inclusion and transparency. Structured templates, co-creation formats, sensemaking windows and the FoodCoP online platform were used to document contributions and make them accessible across the consortium. This ensured that local voices—from farmers and entrepreneurs to local authorities and civil society organisations—were reflected in the pilot design.

Finally, the different strands of work were brought together into a structured pilot design phase. The pilots are presented in this deliverable as small-scale but strategic cooperation schemes, rooted in the local realities of the Startup Villages while designed to be transferable to other rural regions in Europe.

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3. STARTUP VILLAGE PROFILES

3.1. Fundão (Portugal)

Fundão is an emblematic example of rural transformation. Located in central Portugal, between the Serra da Estrela and the Serra da Gardunha, the municipality has moved from a traditionally agricultural economy to a dynamic hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and digitalisation. Its development strategy combines a strong rural identity with a forward-looking vision that embraces technology, sustainability and international collaboration.

The local innovation ecosystem is supported by a range of infrastructures and initiatives. The Praça Incubator and a network of coworking spaces provide tailored support for startups, while the FabLab Aldeias do Xisto offers digital prototyping facilities. The Agrotech Centre and experimental fields drive innovation in precision farming, climate-resilient food production and bio-based solutions. Cultural and creative industries are also nurtured, for instance through the Music Incubator and the Craft Lab that apply digital tools to traditional arts.

Fundão has become a reference point for attracting talent and investment into Portugal's interior. Over 1,000 new jobs have been created in ICT and tech-driven industries, and the town now hosts residents from more than 70 nationalities. At the same time, precision farming, regenerative practices and digital tools are modernising agriculture and adding value to local produce.

Despite this progress, Fundão still faces challenges. Retaining young talent remains difficult, as opportunities in larger urban centres continue to attract skilled professionals. The economy also needs to diversify further beyond agriculture and ICT to ensure long-term resilience. In addition, the region is highly vulnerable to climate impacts such as droughts and soil degradation, and local startups often struggle to secure venture capital for scaling.

At the same time, opportunities are significant. Fundão is uniquely positioned to leverage digital transformation in agriculture through IoT, AI and blockchain applications, while its natural and cultural assets support sustainable tourism and creative industries. Its open and collaborative approach makes it an ideal living lab for testing innovative solutions in rural areas.

The hybrid event organised in Fundão in July 2025 took place within the Agricultural Innovation Fair, under the theme "The Role of Robotics, AI and Big Data in Agriculture." The event gathered stakeholders from Portugal and Spain to discuss rural innovation, circularity and regenerative agriculture. It confirmed Fundão's position as a living lab for Agri-tech and sustainability, where digital transformation goes hand in hand with social and community-driven innovation. Examples showcased during the event included AI-based irrigation systems, soil monitoring tools, and bio-waste valorisation into

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renewable energy and fertilisers, all illustrating Fundão's commitment to the circular bioeconomy.

This profile is complemented by insights from Fundão's hybrid event and webinars, which showcased the municipality's innovation journey, the AgroTech Centre, and the experience of local startups such as StarMountain and UPinC. These events also highlighted how Fundão integrates training and education with entrepreneurship to create pathways for rural youth.

3.2. Kočevje (Slovenia)

Kočevje, located in southern Slovenia near the Croatian border, is the country's largest municipality by land area, stretching over 550 km², with around 16,000 inhabitants distributed across 86 settlements. Its landscape is dominated by vast forests, covering about 86% of the territory, making it one of the most ecologically preserved regions in Central Europe. Among them lies the Krokar primeval forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site, which reflects both the richness of biodiversity and the community's long-standing relationship with nature.

Despite its natural wealth, Kočevje has long faced structural challenges common to remote rural areas. Dispersed settlements make infrastructure maintenance costly, while distance from the capital has encouraged youth outmigration and made it harder to attract new investment. Nevertheless, the community has built a reputation for resilience and innovation, and in 2018 Kočevje was recognised with the Golden Stone Award as Slovenia's most progressive municipality.

The Kočevje Business Incubator (Podjetniški Inkubator Kočevje) lies at the heart of the local innovation ecosystem. It provides training, mentoring and coworking facilities, while acting as a connector between entrepreneurs, farmers, educators and the municipality. The incubator has been instrumental in supporting startups and organising initiatives such as the Zlata Šapa (Golden Paw) competition, which gives aspiring entrepreneurs a platform to test their ideas, receive expert feedback and connect with investors.

Another key actor is the cooperative Zakladi Kočevske (Treasures of Kočevje), founded in 2015 by local producers with municipal support. Today it unites over 30 suppliers offering more than 170 locally produced items, from dairy products and honey to herbal teas, natural cosmetics and baked goods. Alongside the renovated Kočevje Market, it provides a platform for promoting healthy food, fair trade and local identity.

The village also invests in sustainability and digital transformation. Initiatives include the development of solar power plants and a broader "smart city" strategy to integrate renewable energy and digital solutions into local development. Education and awareness campaigns complement these efforts, ensuring that sustainability is embedded in both community values and economic practice.

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Kočevje faces persistent challenges such as limited financial resources, shortages of skilled facilitators, and rising costs of raw materials. Yet, opportunities abound in leveraging its ecological assets, developing bio-based value chains from its forests, and scaling up its cooperative and market structures to connect with European networks.

The hybrid event held in Kočevje in September 2025 focused on the use of the MAG Tool, an AI-based platform for designing sustainable business models. Farmers, SMEs, researchers and students explored how digital tools can support the integration of environmental, social and economic criteria into rural entrepreneurship. The discussions highlighted both the opportunities of AI for sustainability and the challenges of accessibility, usability and adaptation to local contexts. The event confirmed Kočevje capacity to combine cooperative structures with advanced digital solutions, reinforcing its role as a Startup Village where tradition meets innovation.

Together, these activities highlight the strength of Kočevje's cooperative model, the role of its incubator in nurturing startups, and the municipality's growing capacity to combine sustainability and digital innovation as key drivers of regional development

3.3. Killorglin (Ireland)

Killorglin, a small town in County Kerry on Ireland's Atlantic coast, is home to the RDI Hub, a digital innovation centre that anchors the region's transformation into a rural startup hotspot. Founded as a public–private partnership, the Hub provides an advanced ecosystem for entrepreneurs, corporates and researchers to collaborate, test solutions and scale digital and bio-based innovations.

The RDI Hub combines state-of-the-art facilities with a strong focus on community engagement. Its mission is to support startups and high-growth companies in fields such as fintech, digital transformation and the circular bioeconomy. By linking the local community with national and international networks, it creates new opportunities for rural regions to participate in the digital and green transitions.

Events organised under the FoodCoP project showcased Killorglin's strengths in combining entrepreneurship with sustainability. Webinars highlighted community-driven projects such as Local Roots, a native tree nursery, and Scotia Village, a social enterprise empowering people with intellectual disabilities to contribute to climate action through food production and eco-crafting. Other examples included MyGug, a technology converting household food waste into renewable energy, and startups valorising seafood by-products and cultivating microalgae. These stories demonstrated how rural innovation in Killorglin is rooted in both environmental stewardship and social inclusion.

The Hub also acts as a bridge between land and sea economies. Partnerships with aquaculture enterprises and coastal communities show how circular approaches can strengthen resilience in Ireland's seafood sector, while local entrepreneurs are advancing sustainable farming and waste-to-resource solutions. The diversity of

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actors—from individual innovators to national agencies—creates a fertile ground for experimentation and collaboration.

Killorglin faces challenges typical of rural Ireland, including limited transport links, lower population density and a dependence on external markets for scaling innovations. However, its position at the intersection of digital entrepreneurship and the bioeconomy offers significant opportunities. By connecting rural startups with global networks, and by fostering inclusive, community-based innovation, Killorglin demonstrates how small towns can become drivers of systemic change.

The hybrid event hosted in Killorglin in September 2025 brought together 29 participants including startups, NGOs, researchers and policymakers. Discussions focused on bioeconomy practices, local drivers and challenges, and the identification of best practices for replication. Examples included circular solutions such as food waste conversion into renewable energy, community-based nurseries for native trees, and social enterprises that combine food production with skills training for disadvantaged groups. The event confirmed the importance of linking such community-driven initiatives with broader European networks, reinforcing Killorglin's role as a connector between local innovation and interregional collaboration.

3.4. Interregional synergies

Table 1 Comparative overview of Startup Villages

Startup Village	Strengths	Challenges
Fundão (Portugal)	▪ Strong municipal leadership and long-term innovation plan ▪ AgroTech Centre and experimental fields driving Agri-tech and bioeconomy ▪ Network of incubators, FabLabs and coworking spaces ▪ Attracts global talent and digital nomads	▪ Retaining young talent against urban migration ▪ Need for economic diversification beyond agriculture and ICT ▪ High vulnerability to droughts and soil degradation ▪ Limited access to venture capital for rural startups
Kočevje (Slovenia)	▪ Rich natural capital (86% forest cover, UNESCO primeval forest) ▪ Progressive municipality recognised nationally ▪ Business incubator supporting startups and competitions (Zlata Šapa) ▪ Cooperative Zakladi Kočevske and renovated market as strong community platforms	▪ Dispersed settlements and costly infrastructure ▪ Youth outmigration and demographic decline ▪ Limited skilled facilitators ▪ Rising raw material costs ▪ Financing constraints for scaling
Killorglin (Ireland)	▪ RDI Hub as a high-level innovation centre in rural context ▪ Mix of digital, circular and social innovation	▪ Peripheral location and weak transport connectivity ▪ Small local market and dependence on external scaling

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	▪ Strong link between land and sea economies (aquaculture, agri-food, bioeconomy) ▪ Inclusive projects (Scotia Village, Local Roots, MyGug) bridging community and innovation	▪ Low population density limits talent pool

The three Startup Villages bring together complementary strengths that, when connected, create a stronger and more resilient innovation ecosystem. Fundão's expertise in Agri-tech and digital farming provides technical know-how and infrastructures that can be adapted and tested in other rural contexts. Kočevje contributes its strong cooperative model and community platforms, showing how small producers and local markets can join forces to achieve greater scale and visibility. Killorglin, through the RDI Hub, offers a space where digital entrepreneurship, social innovation and circular bioeconomy solutions can be trialled and connected to global networks.

These complementarities open the door to concrete synergies. For instance, precision agriculture tools tested in Fundão could be linked with Kočevje's cooperative structures to support small farmers, while Killorglin's experience in circular solutions for waste and by-products could inspire new applications in both Fundão's AgroTech Centre and Kočevje's forest-based economy. At the same time, Kočevje's focus on renewable energy and smart city strategies aligns with Fundão's and Killorglin's ambitions to position themselves as sustainable living labs.

Working together, the villages also create a more balanced portfolio of strengths: Fundão demonstrates how rural municipalities can drive innovation through proactive governance; Kočevje illustrates the potential of strong community-led initiatives; and Killorglin shows how digital and social entrepreneurship can anchor innovation in peripheral regions. Together, they form a diverse testbed that can generate lessons transferable to many other rural areas in Europe.

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4. PILOT PROJECT DESIGN

4.1. Operational framework for interregional collaboration

The pilot projects proposed in this deliverable are guided by an operational framework that defines how Startup Villages can cooperate across borders in practical and transferable ways. This framework builds directly on the insights from the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1), which emphasised the need for stronger communication tools, access to funding, and deeper community engagement, as well as on the targeted capacity-building activities developed in D5.3 and the webinars and hybrid events organised in each village on T5.3.

The pilots presented in this deliverable have been co-designed by the three Startup Villages directly involved in FoodCoP — Fundão (Portugal), Kočevje (Slovenia) and Killorglin (Ireland). They serve as conceptual frameworks to illustrate how interregional collaboration can be structured in practice, with the aim of inspiring and guiding other Startup Villages across Europe to replicate or adapt them through structures such as the FoodCoP Community of Practice and the EU Startup Village Forum.

Three main principles underpin the framework:

1. **Collaboration as a structured process rather than ad hoc exchange.**

The experience of the Sensemaking Workshop showed that Startup Villages benefit from regular and well-facilitated spaces for reflection and co-design. Participants stressed that staying connected and jointly applying for funding would help them overcome isolation and scale up their local initiatives. Building on this, the framework proposes a cycle of structured interactions (online and hybrid) where villages commit to regular knowledge exchange and co-creation sessions.

2. **Resource pooling to overcome rural constraints.**

Webinars in Fundão and Kočevje highlighted how startups and cooperatives struggle to access specialised facilities, investment and skilled facilitators. At the same time, each village has assets that others lack: Fundão's AgroTech Centre, Kočevje's cooperative structures and Killorglin's RDI Hub and digital expertise. The framework therefore encourages resource sharing—both physical (labs, incubators, test fields) and intangible (mentoring, networks, visibility)—to create an interregional pool of assets available to all.

3. **Embedding circular bioeconomy and sustainability as cross-cutting drivers.**

Across all events, stakeholders underlined the importance of connecting innovation with climate resilience, sustainable food systems and local identity. Examples include circular models of food waste valorisation in Killorglin, precision farming in Fundão, and forest-based products in Kočevje. The framework ensures that all pilots are explicitly linked to

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the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the Green Deal and the LTVRA, making sustainability not just a theme but a shared organising principle.

This operational framework therefore defines interregional collaboration as structured, resource-based and sustainability-driven. It provides the foundation for the following sub-sections on resource sharing schemes and the design of pilot projects.

4.2. Types of shared resources and interregional synergies

One of the strongest messages emerging from the FoodCoP process is that rural innovation ecosystems often lack the critical mass of resources available in urban centres. This was a recurring theme in the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1), where participants identified access to funding, skilled facilitators and modern infrastructure as major barriers to scaling. Webinars and hybrid events in all three Startup Villages confirmed that while each territory has built valuable assets, they remain fragmented and underused when seen only in a local perspective.

1. To address this, the proposed scheme focuses on **the types of resources that Startup Villages can share for the greatest impact** — both tangible and intangible — as a way to build collective strength across territories. Three main categories stand out: **Shared infrastructure and testbeds.**

Fundão's AgroTech Centre and experimental fields are ideal for testing digital farming tools and bio-based practices. Kočevje offers cooperative platforms and local markets where innovative products can reach consumers and receive immediate feedback. Killorglin contributes advanced facilities at the RDI Hub and experience in running digital platforms for collaboration. By connecting these infrastructures, the scheme creates a distributed "interregional incubator" where startups can trial solutions in diverse rural contexts.

2. **Knowledge and mentoring exchange.**

D5.3 highlighted the need for improved communication and funding strategies. Building on this, the scheme proposes cross-village mentoring: entrepreneurs from Fundão can benefit from Killorglin's experience in storytelling and digital marketing, while Kočevje's cooperative leaders can mentor others on community engagement and producer collaboration. This mutual exchange addresses the gaps identified in earlier activities and strengthens collective capacity.

3. **Joint visibility and market access.**

The hybrid events showed that visibility remains a bottleneck for rural entrepreneurs. By pooling communication resources and aligning branding efforts, Startup Villages can

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present themselves jointly at European fairs, policy dialogues and digital platforms. This shared storytelling not only boosts local startups but also positions Startup Villages as credible actors in the EU's green and digital transition.

These schemes are not static but dynamic arrangements that can evolve as trust deepens, and new opportunities arise. They represent a first attempt to operationalise interregional collaboration, turning the diversity of Fundão, Kočevje and Killorglin into a shared strength. They also provide the backbone for the pilot projects described in the next section.

4.3. Proposed pilot projects

4.3.1. Pilot 1 – Interregional Agro-Living Lab Network

Objectives

This pilot connects and aligns existing infrastructures in the three Startup Villages to form a distributed Agro-living lab network. The aim is to enable joint testing of sustainable agri-food innovations in diverse rural contexts, accelerate knowledge transfer and demonstrate how rural territories can cooperate to validate solutions that support climate resilience and the circular bioeconomy.

Actors involved

- Fundão (Portugal): AgroTech Centre, experimental fields, municipal innovation team.
- Kočevje (Slovenia): Cooperative Zakladi Kočevske, Business Incubator Kočevje, local farmers.
- Killorglin (Ireland): RDI Hub, local entrepreneurs in aquaculture and waste-to-resource startups (e.g. MyGug, Anam Algae).
- Local universities and research centres (IPCB in Portugal, Jožef Stefan Institute in Slovenia, Irish partners in Kerry).
- European networks connected through the FoodCoP platform.

Activities

- Identify and document a portfolio of agri-food and circular bioeconomy innovations currently available within the three Startup Villages (e.g. precision irrigation, soil monitoring, waste-to-fertiliser, forest-based materials, algae valorisation).
- Map complementarities to explore **cross-testing potential** — for example, adapting Fundão's digital farming tools within Kočevje's cooperative structures, or showcasing Killorglin's circular solutions in Mediterranean contexts.
- Define a shared methodology and templates for future testing and data exchange (protocols, impact dimensions, responsible actors)
- Facilitate peer-learning visits and hybrid workshops to discuss findings, lessons and transferability.

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Document and disseminate outcomes through the FoodCoP platform as **conceptual test cases**, demonstrating how distributed living labs could cooperate in practice. **Expected outcomes**

- Three innovations tested across different rural contexts.
- Interregional knowledge base on circular agri-food practices.
- Improved skills among farmers and entrepreneurs through peer-to-peer exposure.
- Increased recognition of Startup Villages as European testbeds for rural innovation.

EU policy alignment

The pilot directly contributes to the European Green Deal by promoting climate-neutral farming and sustainable resource use. It advances the EU Bioeconomy Strategy by supporting the development of circular agri-food value chains, while aligning with the CAP through its focus on smart farming, climate resilience and farmer cooperation. Finally, it responds to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas by positioning Startup Villages as attractive, innovative and connected places to live and work.

Evidence base

The pilot builds on several strands of evidence gathered throughout Work Package 5. The Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1) revealed that all Startup Villages face common needs for dedicated testing spaces and mechanisms to exchange knowledge systematically. The cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3) provided complementary tools, particularly in funding and communication, that enable joint projects of this kind to be pursued more effectively. Fundão's webinars and hybrid event collectively showcased the AgroTech Centre as a living lab where digital and regenerative farming solutions are already being trialled. Demonstrations during the Agricultural Innovation Fair included AI-driven irrigation systems, soil monitoring tools and bio-waste valorisation models, providing tangible examples of how Agri-tech infrastructures can support circular bioeconomy practices. Kočevje's events demonstrated the potential of cooperative models and local markets to serve as testing grounds and scaling channels for new products, while Killorglin's webinars highlighted circular solutions such as MyGug, Anam Algae and Local Roots, which offer ready examples of innovations that could benefit from cross-regional testing. Together, these elements provide a strong foundation for piloting an interregional Agro-living lab network that connects infrastructures, digital tools and community-led experimentation across Startup Villages.

Preliminary indicators of success

- Number of innovations tested across two or more villages.
- Participation levels of farmers and startups.
- Documented knowledge transfer outputs.
- Evidence of replication potential in other rural areas.

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These indicators are indicative and intended as design guidelines. Specific KPIs and targets would be defined by the Startup Villages or partners that decide to implement this pilot in the future.

4.3.2. Pilot 2 – Rural Innovation Storytelling Hub

Objectives

This pilot strengthens the visibility and influence of Startup Villages by pooling their communication capacities into a joint storytelling hub. It responds to the common barrier of weak communication and branding, equipping **local ecosystem actors, startups, cooperatives, innovation hubs and municipalities,** with skills to present their circular and sustainable innovation stories more effectively at both local and European levels. The co-branding approach illustrates how the three participating Startup Villages could jointly communicate their circular and sustainable innovation stories under a shared narrative. The intention is not to establish a universal brand for all EU Startup Villages, but to outline a transferable model that could later inspire other villages through the FoodCoP Community of Practice and the EU Startup Village Forum.

The hub aims to build a collective identity among the three participating Startup Villages, raising their visibility in EU policy and market arenas, while providing a transferable model that can inspire other rural communities across Europe through the FoodCoP Community of Practice and the EU Startup Village Forum.

Actors involved

- **Fundão (Portugal):** Municipal communication office, startups such as StarMountain and UPinC.
- **Kočevje (Slovenia):** Business Incubator Kočevje, cooperative Zakladi Kočevske.
- **Killorglin (Ireland):** RDI Hub with expertise in digital entrepreneurship and marketing.
- FoodCoP communication channels and European cluster networks.

Activities

-
- Develop a shared storytelling platform hosted within the FoodCoP Platform, serving as a collaborative repository for Startup Village narratives, toolkits and communication assets.
- Explore synergies with the JRC Startup Village Platform to ensure complementarity and EU-level visibility. Deliver training workshops on digital communication and **co-branding**, focusing on how the three participating Startup Villages can jointly position their circular and sustainable innovations under a shared visual and narrative identity that can later be adapted by other rural communities.
- Produce promotional materials (videos, case studies, brochures).

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- Launch joint campaigns at European fairs and policy events.

Expected outcomes

- Conceptually, the pilot foresees training activities for around 15 local ecosystem actors, including entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and municipal or hub representatives, to strengthen their storytelling and digital communication capacities.
- Creation of a joint communication toolkit for Startup Villages.
- Increased visibility of rural innovations in EU debates and markets.
- Stronger collective identity within the FoodCoP Community of Practice.

EU policy alignment

The pilot supports the European Green Deal by increasing awareness of sustainable rural practices and contributes to the EU Bioeconomy Strategy by promoting bio-based innovation stories. It aligns with the CAP through its focus on knowledge transfer and innovation in farming communities, and it reinforces the LTVRA by addressing the need for stronger visibility and connectivity of rural territories.

Evidence base

The rationale for this pilot comes directly from the communication challenges identified in FoodCoP activities. During the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1), weak communication and limited visibility emerged as shared barriers across Startup Villages, hindering their ability to attract partners, funding and policy support. This gap was partially addressed in D5.3 through targeted workshops on storytelling and strategic communication, which were well received and revealed a strong appetite for capacity building in this area. Kočevje's webinars further underlined the importance of cooperative branding and producer narratives in strengthening local markets. Killorglin's events showcased inclusive innovation stories such as Scotia Village and Local Roots, highlighting how compelling narratives can mobilise community support and policy attention. Finally, Fundão's events emphasised the municipality's open and international positioning, which depends heavily on effective communication to attract talent and investment. Taken together, these insights confirm the strategic relevance of creating joint storytelling guidelines that enhances visibility at local, national and European levels.

Preliminary indicators of success

- Number of local ecosystem actors trained.
- Production and use of joint materials.
- Engagement metrics from campaigns (views, shares, mentions).
- Presence of Startup Village narratives in EU events and publications.

These indicators are indicative and intended as design guidelines. Specific KPIs and targets would be defined by the Startup Villages or partners that decide to implement this pilot in the future.

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4.3.3. Pilot 3 – Circular Marketplaces for Rural Products

Objectives

This pilot conceptually explores how cooperative platforms, startups and circular initiatives across the three Startup Villages could collaborate to promote both sustainable rural products (e.g. agri-food, forestry and craft goods) and innovative circular solutions (e.g. bio-based materials, valorisation practices) through shared visibility models or "circular marketplaces." The aim is to strengthen market access, promote sustainable production, and demonstrate how rural territories can collaborate to scale their innovations.

Actors involved

- **Kočevje (Slovenia):** Cooperative Zakladi Kočevske and the renovated local market.
- **Fundão (Portugal):** AgroTech Centre, startups such as UPinC and StarMountain.
- **Killorglin (Ireland):** RDI Hub, circular startups valorising waste and by-products (e.g. MyGug, Réalt na Mara Shellfish, Anam Algae).
- Local producers, SMEs and community organisations in all three villages.
- European networks and fairs where Startup Villages can jointly showcase products.

Activities

- Joint promotion of rural products under a shared Startup Villages identity.
- Conceptually design cross-village showcases that highlight both sustainable rural products (e.g. agri-food, forestry and craft goods) and innovative circular solutions (e.g. bio-based materials, valorisation practices) developed within the Startup Villages.
- Integration of circular solutions (e.g. food waste valorisation, by-product use) into cooperative supply chains.
- Participation in European fairs and events with joint branding.

Expected outcomes

- Increased visibility and sales opportunities for rural producers.
- Strengthened cooperative structures through cross-border partnerships.
- Development of a "Startup Village brand" associated with circular and sustainable products. While this pilot can be implemented independently by individual Startup Villages using their existing branding strategies, it can also build on the shared storytelling and co-branding framework outlined in Pilot 2 when pursued jointly across regions. This flexibility allows each Startup Village to adapt the model to its own context and level of collaboration.

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- Practical demonstration of how local markets can become drivers of the circular bioeconomy.

EU policy alignment

This pilot supports the European Green Deal by promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, while directly contributing to the EU Bioeconomy Strategy through the creation of circular value chains in food and agriculture. It aligns with the CAP by encouraging producer cooperation, market development and innovation in farming systems. At the same time, it reflects the ambitions of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas by strengthening local markets, fostering vibrant communities and connecting rural territories to European value chains.

Evidence base

This pilot builds on lessons learned about market access and circular practices in all three Startup Villages. In D5.1, participants noted that while innovative products existed, their reach was constrained by limited market channels and fragmented branding. The cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3) reinforced the importance of storytelling and visibility, which are essential to connect rural products with broader audiences.

The pilot is based on the complementary value chains of the three Startup Villages, which include both traditional rural products and emerging circular innovations that demonstrate new forms of cooperation and market visibility.

Kočevje's webinars highlighted the success of the Zakladi Kočevske cooperative and the renovated local market as effective platforms for bringing small producers together under a shared identity. The Kočevje hybrid event further demonstrated how cooperative structures can benefit from digital methodologies such as the MAG Tool to align business planning with sustainability criteria, providing a concrete example of how marketplaces can integrate both circular practices and advanced planning tools.

Fundão's webinars and hybrid event showcased local startups such as UPinC and StarMountain, which are developing innovative solutions for agricultural by-product valorisation into renewable energy and organic fertilisers. These cases illustrate both the potential and the challenges of scaling circular products beyond regional markets, underlining the need for interregional marketplaces that connect circular producers across Startup Villages.

Killorglin contributed additional examples of circular approaches, from seafood by-product valorisation to waste-to-energy solutions such as MyGug, showing how sustainability can add market value. Collectively, these experiences point towards the potential of linking cooperative platforms, startups and circular solutions into cross-border "circular marketplaces" that showcase rural innovation under a common Startup Village label.

Preliminary indicators of success

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- Number of producers involved in cross-border circular marketplaces.
- Joint presence at European events and fairs.
- Uptake of circular practices (e.g. waste-to-resource solutions) within cooperative structures.
  Recognition of the Startup Village brand in policy and market arenas.

These indicators are indicative and intended as design guidelines. Specific KPIs and targets would be defined by the Startup Villages or partners that decide to implement this pilot in the future.

4.4. Interconnections and complementarities among pilots

Together, these pilots form a coherent framework for interregional collaboration that goes beyond isolated initiatives. They directly respond to the challenges identified in the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1)—such as limited access to funding, weak communication and fragmented infrastructures—by transforming them into opportunities for joint experimentation, shared visibility and market access. At the same time, they build on the practical tools developed through D5.3, ensuring that the pilots are not only ambitious but also feasible in terms of communication and funding strategies.

The pilots also embody the principle of **complementarity**: Fundão contributes its Agro-digital infrastructures, Kočevje brings cooperative and community-based models, and Killorglin adds expertise in digital entrepreneurship and circular solutions. By combining these assets, the pilots show how rural territories with different strengths can generate value together.

Finally, the design of these pilots' positions Startup Villages as **European testbeds for rural innovation**, aligned with the European Green Deal, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the CAP and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. They demonstrate how small-scale, locally grounded experiments can provide lessons of wider relevance, offering models that can be replicated and scaled in other rural regions across Europe.

Table 2 Summary of proposed pilot projects

Pilot	Objectives	Key actors	Expected outcomes	EU value added
Agro-Living Lab Network	Create a distributed testbed to trial agri-food and circular innovations across different rural contexts.	Fundão AgroTech Centre, Kočevje Cooperative Zakladi, Killorglin RDI Hub, local	At least three innovations tested in two or more villages; shared knowledge base; improved skills among	Demonstrates how rural regions can jointly act as living labs, increasing transferability and replication

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		farmers and startups.	entrepreneurs and farmers.	potential across Europe.
Rural Innovation Storytelling Hub	Pool communication resources to strengthen visibility and branding of rural entrepreneurs and Startup Villages.	Killorglin RDI Hub, Fundão startups, Kočevje Business Incubator and cooperative.	At least 15 entrepreneurs trained; joint communication toolkit; shared campaigns at EU level.	Builds a collective identity for Startup Villages, positioning them as credible actors in EU policy and markets.
Circular Marketplaces for Rural Products	Link cooperatives, startups and circular enterprises to create cross-border markets for sustainable products.	Kočevje Zakladi Cooperative, Fundão startups, Killorglin circular innovators (e.g. MyGug, Anam Algae).	Shared Startup Village label; cross-border showcases; uptake of circular practices in cooperatives.	Scales local circular practices into EU-level value chains, aligning rural innovation with the Green Deal and Bioeconomy Strategy.

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5. EARLY FINDINGS AND LESSONS

The activities carried out so far under Work Package 5 — including the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1), the cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3), and the series of webinars and hybrid events held in each Startup Village — have generated a solid evidence base for pilot design and for the policy reflections that follow.

Across all Startup Villages, several recurring lessons emerged. Communication and visibility proved to be key enablers for building credibility and partnerships. Access to funding remains a systemic challenge that requires collective approaches and joint positioning. Community engagement and inclusion are preconditions for long-term sustainability, ensuring that innovation is locally owned and socially grounded. Finally, the diversity of assets across Startup Villages — digital, cooperative, and bio-based — becomes a strength when connected through interregional collaboration, as demonstrated during the hybrid events.

These findings confirm the strategic value of the pilot approach: small-scale, conceptual experiments that test new cooperation frameworks, resource-sharing schemes, and collective learning processes among Startup Villages. They also form the analytical foundation for the next section, which translates these insights into a policy-oriented perspective through the *Draft FoodCoP Policy Brief*.

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6. DRAFT POLICY BRIEF

Building on the first set of early findings and lessons presented in this deliverable, and with additional insights from the Startup Village best practices identified by the project[1], this section proposes a draft version of the FoodCoP policy brief. It structures the key themes that will be tracked and elaborated upon in Task 6.3 and lays the foundation for the final FoodCoP Policy Brief (Deliverable 6.3).

1. Introduction and policy context

Rural areas play a vital role in Europe's green and digital transitions. However, they face intertwined challenges: depopulation, ageing workforces, economic stagnation, and limited access to innovation and technology. Despite these obstacles, they have demonstrated their credentials to act as key testing grounds for innovative, sustainable and community-driven development models.

The Startup Village concept emerged from the European Commission (EC)'s long-term commitment to revitalising rural territories through innovation. Introduced in 2021 under the Startup Village Forum piloted by the EC's Joint Research Centre (JRC), it was designed to foster dialogue, exchange of best practices, and concrete collaboration between rural innovators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs. The aim was to demonstrate that innovation and entrepreneurship can flourish beyond urban centres, driving digital and green transitions from the ground up.

Since then, the Startup Village approach has evolved into a European movement, enabling communities to connect through shared experimentation and capacity building. FoodCoP builds on this momentum by transforming the Startup Village idea into an operational and active Community of Practice (CoP) powered by circular bioeconomy strategies. Together, participating Startup Villages are co-creating and testing inclusive and sustainable solutions for food systems across Europe.

Evidence gathered so far confirms both the promise and the ongoing challenges of this approach. FoodCoP's comparative examination of 45 Startup Villages across Europe revealed that nearly half remain in an experimental phase, still developing their ecosystems and exploring viable innovation models. FoodCoP's policy brief looks to learn from those showcases to support those Startup Villages that are still envisioning and experimenting.

Both the FoodCoP project and the broader Startup Village initiative have potential to contribute to discussions around the **European Green Deal**, the **EU Bioeconomy Strategy**, the **Common Agricultural Policy**, and the **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas**. In the context of the **New European Innovation Agenda**, FoodCoP promotes innovation cohesion between more and less developed regions through interregional cooperation

[1] FoodCoP project. Deliverable 3.3. Best Practice Case Studies. October 2025.

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among rural ecosystems. Furthermore, by linking its learning to the **Regional Innovation Valleys** initiative, FoodCoP can ensure that rural areas are recognised as active partners in Europe's innovation landscape rather than peripheral beneficiaries.

2. Early findings and lessons

Startup Villages are distributed innovation ecosystems - across Fundão (PT), Kočevje (SI), and Killorglin (IE), rural innovation emerges through networks of small places combining entrepreneurship, circularity, and community action. These as distributed innovation ecosystems, where physical infrastructure ("hardware"), civic organisations ("orgware"), and local identity ("software") interact to support transition processes. These ecosystems show that innovation in rural areas depends as much on community participation and local leadership as on technology and investment.

2.1. Community and place-based attractiveness

Strong sense of local community ownership of innovation. Across all FoodCoP activities, participants stressed that rural innovation is only sustainable when rooted in community ownership. In Kočevje, the Zakladi Kočevske cooperative unites producers under a shared platform. Killorglin's Scotia Village mobilises vulnerable groups for climate action. Fundão focuses on education and training programmes that prepare rural young people for meaningful local careers. Together, these examples confirm that community participation is essential for long-term rural innovation.

FoodCoP events further illustrated this principle: when NGOs, students, startups and policymakers came together to discuss local challenges and solutions, the importance of environmentally and socially grounded innovation stood out in discussions and concrete examples of social enterprises and circular startups.

Interregional learning and cooperation. While Startup Villages share many elements of their visions, they often struggle to find spaces for structured exchange around experiences and solutions to challenges. FoodCoP's proposal of webinars and hybrid event formats proved effective in engaging both local stakeholders and European partners. Webinars enabled knowledge to be shared widely and at low cost, while hybrid events ensured strong local anchoring and visibility within regional innovation ecosystems. This dual format increased participation and diversified perspectives. Participants showed strong commitment to regular knowledge exchanges and co-creation sessions: to stay connected, overcome isolation and scale up their local initiatives, including through jointly applying for funding.

Moving beyond dialogue to strategic interregional pilots. FoodCoP's Startup Villages recognised the added value of moving beyond dialogue and networking to validate tools and methods through interregional pilots and allow them to deploy common metrics to gather an evidence base for rural innovation. Three pilots have been conceptualised and will be validated in the project's next phase:

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- **Interregional Agro-Living Lab Network** – connecting infrastructures for agri-food and circular innovation.
- **Rural Innovation Storytelling Hub** – pooling communication resources and promoting shared narratives.
- **Circular Marketplaces for Rural Products** – linking cooperatives, startups, and SMEs into transnational circular value chains.

Communication and visibility as enablers. As the pilots above show, a key project finding and challenge to address is that rural entrepreneurs and communities often lack tools to communicate their value effectively, limiting investment and place attractiveness. Shared storytelling and branding through high-impact platforms and channels have the potential to strengthen both collective identity and attract partners and investors, raising the credibility of rural startups.

Enhanced communication and visibility – through a collective identity under an EU label linked to the JRC's Startup Village Forum, a powerful "**Rural Innovation Storytelling Hub**" about societal and economic impact, and capacity building for rural stakeholders – emerges as a low-cost, high-impact enabler. Such efforts can improve both policy visibility and market reach, enhancing visibility to European investors, public procurers, and consumers at fairs and events.

2.2 Economic vitality and access to funding

Innovating from tradition. FoodCoP confirms the JRC's findings that traditional rural sectors – notably crop and animal production, accommodation and tourism, and forestry and logging – remain the backbone of Startup Villages. These sectors face structural constraints, including limited diversification and depopulation pressures. However, good practices analysed by the project show that trritional extensive agriculture can envolve into community-based territorial value chains, cooperative processing, and circular rural services. Distinct local assets, such as the unique natural environment surrounding some villages, can be leveraged into "competitive niches". Successful Startup Village integrate green and blue economy ideas, encompassing circular bioeconomy and renewable energy.

Funding and access to investment. Access to capital remains a major barrier to scaling rural innovations. Startups in Fundão and Killorglin highlighted difficulties in securing venture capital, while Kočevje's cooperative model revealed limits to self-financing in resource-constrained contexts. Stakeholders underlined the need for stronger interregional cooperation to pool demand for funding and attract external investors.

Participation in EU projects (e.g., Horizon Europe, Interreg, Leader) and international networking offers supplementary financial and intellectual resources that facilitate the acceleration of innovation testing and adoption. However, meaningful success comes from the ability to transform diversified funding channels into tangible assets that

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anchor long-term sustainability and revitalisation, for example, incubation and acceleration centres, pilot sites, rural testbeds, and smart and vibrant public spaces. Where Startup Villages secure competitive one-off funding and the EU recognition of their strength, there is a case to be made for the regional and national level to provide further longer-term support that insures impact on the ecosystem.

Marketplaces and e-commerce. Noting fragmented and limited markets for rural products and services built on circularity, Startup Villages such as Kočevje have turned to strong cooperative models and community platforms, showing how small producers and local markets can join forces to achieve greater scale and visibility under the renovated local market Zakladi Kočevske. FoodCoP Startup Villages also envisage a **pilot around "Circular Marketplace for Rural Products"** that would link cooperatives, startups, SMEs and consumers into interregional circular value chains.

2.3 Governance and leadership

Local authorities as important facilitators. Municipalities frequently serve as important facilitators of startup village efforts due to their oversight of local development strategies, access to EU rural development subsidies, and coordination of participatory processes. They can also activate well-coordinated public-private partnerships, with private partners active in the villages' key economic sectors (e.g., agritech industrial players), increasing the probability of economic attractiveness and viability of innovation initiatives.

Leadership across political lines. At the same time, rural municipalities are sensitive to changes in political leadership and possess restricted decision-making autonomy. Neutral and inclusive leadership development can ensure the continuity of initiatives. Anchoring support for policies that promote entrepreneurship and sustainability in local development agendas at the national level can mobilise multi-level governance and national and regional resources.

Mentorship for local authorities. FoodCoP's analysis of 45 Startup Villages across Europe (D3.3) identified that roughly one-third of Startup Villages are in an "envisioning phase" while only about 18% are advanced role models with strong ecosystems. Policy frameworks should therefore encourage mentorship mechanisms where advanced villages support emerging ones, scaling capacities and leadership skills across Europe. Moreover, specific policy instruments depending on the level of maturity should be considered, with priority for access to mentoring, seed funding, and enabling infrastructure.

2.4 Knowledge and infrastructure

Skills and training. Rural vitality depends on communities' ability to retain and upskill people while attracting new talent. Ageing populations, youth outmigration and skill mismatches remain key obstacles for Startup Villages. Successful practices address the

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issue by integrating training and education with entrepreneurship to create pathways for rural youth, as demonstrated by Fundão in Portugal.

Local innovation hubs. The existence of business incubators, co-working spaces, or cluster organisations that attract and support startups was shown to be a common characteristic of successful StartUp Villages, with strong digital infrastructure and international networks attracting external talent. Initiatives include repurposing historical buildings into vibrant coworking hubs such as Fundão's Local Market. They can also be connected proactively with the community; Mancomunidad de servicios Andia's AndiaLan features an "idea germination room," which welcomes local project proposals and helps turn them into viable initiatives.

Interregional pool of assets. While FoodCoP's Startup Village faces similar challenges, they differ in the assets they can use to address them: digital and agri-tech infrastructures in Fundão, cooperative and forest-based resources in Kočevje, and digital entrepreneurship and circular solutions in Killorglin. Individually, these assets are modest; connected in an interregional network, they amount to a diversified portfolio that allows for experimentation and scale up. This insight underpins the **Interregional Agro-Living Lab Network pilot** based on physical and intangible resource sharing between Startup Villages. Labs, incubators and test fields but also mentoring, networks and visibility can create a shared pool of assets that rivals the critical mass of resources available to innovators in urban centres.

3. Next Steps and Outlook

In the next phase, FoodCoP will validate the three pilots through participatory workshops, stakeholder dialogue and policy consultations. Insights will generate targeted policy recommendations for EU, national, and regional policymakers. FoodCoP's findings will be connected to the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA), Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs), and the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI).

A final Policy Brief (Deliverable 6.3) will integrate stakeholder feedback propose actionable guidance for policymakers, while a final Policy Event will conclude the process, ensuring that lessons learned position Startup Villages as integral nodes in Europe's circular and sustainable innovation landscape.

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7. CONCLUSIONS

The work carried out in WP5 shows that Startup Villages can act as strategic laboratories for rural innovation when they collaborate across borders. The design of three pilot projects demonstrates this potential in practical terms. The interregional Agro-living lab network illustrates how infrastructures can be connected to test innovations in different contexts; the rural innovation storytelling hub addresses the common challenge of visibility and communication; and the circular marketplaces for rural products showcase how local economies can be linked to European value chains.

These pilots respond directly to the enabling conditions and common challenges identified during the Sensemaking Workshop (D5.1), while building on the tools and skills developed in the cross-regional collaboration initiatives (D5.3). The webinars and hybrid events in each Startup Village enriched this process with real-world examples, stakeholder perspectives and practical evidence.

Taken together, the pilots represent an operational framework for interregional collaboration that is structured, resource-based and sustainability-driven. They demonstrate that small, locally grounded experiments can generate lessons with broader relevance, positioning Startup Villages as credible contributors to the European Green Deal, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, the CAP and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

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8. ANNEX 1

Type	Host (Startup Village)	Date	Time (CEST)	Topic
Webinar	Kočevje (Slovenia)	19/08/2025	11:00–12:00	Success Story: How can a Startup Village support local success?
Webinar	RDI Hub (Ireland)	27/08/2025	14:00–15:30	Join Us to Explore Circular Solutions and Innovation
Webinar	Kočevje (Slovenia)	04/09/2025	11:00–12:00	Success Story: How can a Startup Village support local markets?
Webinar	Fundão (Portugal)	05/09/2025	11:00–12:00	Building Innovation Ecosystems in Rural Areas: The Case of Fundão
Webinar	Fundão (Portugal)	12/09/2025	11:00–12:00	Next-Gen Agriculture in Fundão: Rural Innovation from the Ground Up
Webinar	RDI Hub (Ireland)	01/10/2025	12:00–13:30	Cultivating Change: Stories from Land & Sea
Hybrid	Fundão (Portugal)	05/07/2025	16:00 – 19:00	FoodCoP at the Fundão Agricultural Innovation Fair
Hybrid	Kočevje (Slovenia)	17/09/2025	11:00–12:00	AI for Sustainability: Transforming Food Systems with the MAG Tool
Hybrid	RDI Hub (Ireland)	24/09/2025	14:30 – 16:00	Growing Change: Community Action for a Sustainable Future: Best Practice Examples

Table 4 List of webinars & hybrid events carried out in T5.3

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