



SUST_ENT

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SUST_ENT Final Project Report

Green skills to support the sustainability of rural enterprises

SUST_ENT Team
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Executive Summary

SUST_ENT - Green skills to support the sustainability of rural enterprises - was a two-year Erasmus+ KA210-VET partnership designed to help rural small and medium-sized enterprises turn the European green transition into practical business opportunities. The project connected vocational education and training, rural development and transnational cooperation in Italy, Slovenia and Latvia.

3 project countries	4 partner organisations	24 months	€60k Erasmus+ grant
5 interconnected activities	9 selected good practices	10 LAG staff in capacity building	54 local training evaluation responses

The intervention followed a clear progression from evidence to action. It began with an international needs analysis, moved into the development of a practical green-skills curriculum and capacity building for Local Action Group (LAG) staff, continued with local training programmes for entrepreneurs, and concluded with a study visit and international event in Italy. Across these stages, the partnership combined research, peer learning, work-based methods, digital resources and territorial networking.

The project achieved its original objectives. It strengthened entrepreneurs' knowledge of sustainability and their ability to identify applicable green solutions; improved the training, organisational and transnational cooperation capacities of the LAGs; created reusable multilingual learning resources; and established stronger links among enterprises, public authorities, civil society and rural-development actors. The final phase, held in Cascia from 15 to 19 July 2026 within Social Hackathon Umbria 2026, extended the project's international visibility and culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding committing the partners to continued cooperation.

SUST_ENT demonstrated that rural entrepreneurs are not lacking interest in sustainability; they mainly need clear information, practical tools, access to finance and regulation guidance, locally relevant examples and opportunities to learn from peers. The project responded to this need with a training pathway designed around real business decisions and territorial contexts.

1. Background and Needs Addressed

SUST_ENT was developed in response to the difficulties rural SMEs face in accessing understandable information, relevant training and practical tools related to the European Green Deal. Preliminary work had shown broad interest in environmental issues, but also uncertainty about how green policies apply to individual businesses, whether required investments are economically sustainable, which opportunities are available and where reliable support can be found.

The project also addressed an organisational need among the participating LAGs. Their staff needed stronger competences in engaging SMEs, designing adult and vocational learning activities, using

participatory methods and working within transnational partnerships. By bringing together three rural-development organisations and EGINA as a VET provider, SUST_ENT created a bridge between territorial animation and structured capacity building.

The international needs analysis confirmed five recurring challenges:

- Uneven knowledge of the European Green Deal and future sustainability requirements.
- Concern about investment costs, feasibility and the administrative complexity of the transition.
- Limited awareness of grants, incentives and other forms of financial support.
- Strong demand for practical monitoring tools, business-oriented workshops and expert guidance.
- A need for locally adapted examples rather than standardised, one-size-fits-all solutions.

3. Objectives and Intervention Logic

Objective	Implementation focus	Status
SO1 - Understand needs	Carry out quantitative and qualitative research on awareness, interests, barriers and opportunities related to the green transition among rural entrepreneurs.	Achieved
SO2 - Build green skills	Develop and deliver a practical VET pathway based on good practices and competences needed to adapt businesses to Green Deal objectives.	Achieved
SO3 - Exchange competences among LAGs	Strengthen peer learning among rural-development organisations and improve their ability to raise awareness and support SMEs.	Achieved
SO4 - Create dialogue among entrepreneurs	Create local and international opportunities for entrepreneurs to exchange experiences, ideas, challenges and solutions.	Achieved
SO5 - Strengthen LAG organisational capacity	Improve project-management, training, stakeholder-engagement and transnational cooperation competences.	Achieved

Table 1. Project objectives and final achievement status.

4. Partnership and Cooperation

Organisation	Country	Role	Main contribution
GAL Valle Umbra e Sibillini	Italy	Coordinator / rural-development actor	Overall management, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, budget supervision, study visit and final event.
Razvojni Center Srca Slovenije DOO	Slovenia	Rural-development partner	Sustainable rural development, entrepreneurship and tourism expertise; coordination and adaptation of local training.
Aizkraukle District Partnership	Latvia	Rural-development partner	Community participation, circular economy and bioeconomy expertise; coordination of the survey and common target-engagement strategy.

Organisation	Country	Role	Main contribution
European Grants International Academy SRL (EGInA)	Italy	VET provider / SME	Training methodology, curriculum development, good-practice systematisation, capacity building, website, Moodle, infographics and dissemination support.

Table 2. Partnership composition and complementary roles.

Cooperation was supported by a clear distribution of responsibilities, monthly online meetings, continuous e-mail exchange and Basecamp as the shared working environment. Project Management Guidelines established the operational Gantt chart, responsibilities, technical and administrative procedures, reporting templates, budget distribution, risk management and logistical arrangements. This structure allowed the partners to address differences in national calendars, internal procedures and languages without significant delays.

5. Implementation by Activity

ID	Activity	Start	End	Grant allocation
A1	Project Management and coordination	01 Aug 2024	31 Jul 2026	€7,100
A2	Survey and needs analysis	01 Sep 2024	31 Jan 2025	€6,200
A3	Training curriculum and capacity building	01 Feb 2025	30 Nov 2025	€12,800
A4	Local Training programme	01 Aug 2025	31 May 2026	€15,800
A5	Study visit and international event	01 Apr 2026	31 Jul 2026	€18,100

Table 3. Overview of project activities and lump-sum allocation.

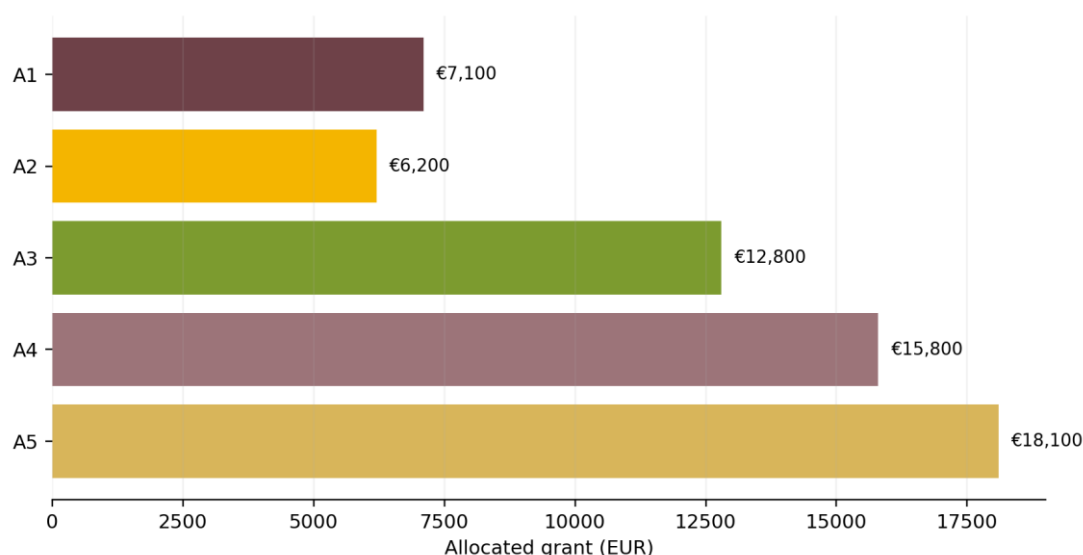


Figure 1. Grant allocation by activity.

5.1 A1 - Project Management and Coordination

A1 ran throughout the project and provided the operational framework for all other activities. The coordinator supervised implementation, deadlines, budget use, communication with the National Agency, risk management and quality assurance. Monthly meetings, periodic activity reports, e-mail and Basecamp ensured continuous monitoring and a shared documentary record.

Main results:

- Project Management Guidelines, operational Gantt, risk analysis, reporting models and shared procedures.
- Partnership agreements and a transparent distribution of responsibilities and resources.
- Regular monitoring of progress, outputs, participation, quality and emerging risks.
- Stronger partner competences in European project management, reporting, transnational communication and event organisation.

5.2 A2 - Survey and Needs Analysis

A2 provided the evidence base for the training pathway. In each country, the partnership combined an online questionnaire with a focus group involving entrepreneurs, a mixed focus group bringing together entrepreneurs, civil society and local public authorities, and three qualitative interviews with key informants.

Main results:

- More than 30 survey responses per country; the updated consolidated dataset contains 116 responses.
- Three entrepreneur focus groups, three mixed focus groups and nine qualitative interviews.
- National analyses and an international synthesis identifying shared needs and country-specific priorities.
- An infographic communicating the main findings in the partnership languages and English.

The research showed high interest in sustainability but uneven Green Deal knowledge. Across the countries, entrepreneurs repeatedly asked for understandable regulatory information, financing guidance, monitoring tools, practical workshops and expert support. Italy showed especially strong interest in energy communities, renewable energy, circular economy and sustainable food systems; Latvia prioritised renewable energy, circular economy, energy efficiency and energy communities; Slovenia placed strongest emphasis on sustainable food systems and renewable energy.

5.3 A3 - Training Curriculum and Capacity Building

EGInA coordinated the transformation of the needs-analysis results into a practical and participatory training curriculum. Partners contributed national examples and good practices, while the capacity-building programme equipped LAG staff to use participatory, project-based and work-based methods with rural entrepreneurs.

Main results:

- Nine good practices selected and systematised across the partnership.
- A vocational training curriculum designed around Green Deal priorities and rural-SME needs.
- Four online capacity-building sessions of three hours each.
- Ten LAG staff members involved in the capacity-building pathway.
- A multilingual Moodle environment containing learning materials, resources and capacity-building outputs.

The capacity-building phase strengthened both content knowledge and facilitation skills. It also enabled the LAGs to deliver the local programmes with methods that prioritised active participation, real business challenges and the development of concrete ideas.

5.4 A4 - Local Training Programme

The local training programmes represented the main direct capacity-building phase for rural entrepreneurs. The delivery model combined interactive workshops, case analysis, company visits, peer discussion and the development of ideas that participants could adapt or test in their own professional settings. The project website, repository and Green Deal Room supported access to materials and exchange across countries.

The international evaluation of local training collected 54 unique feedback responses: 16 in Italy, 15 in Latvia and 23 in Slovenia. The results show very high perceived quality and strong implementation potential.

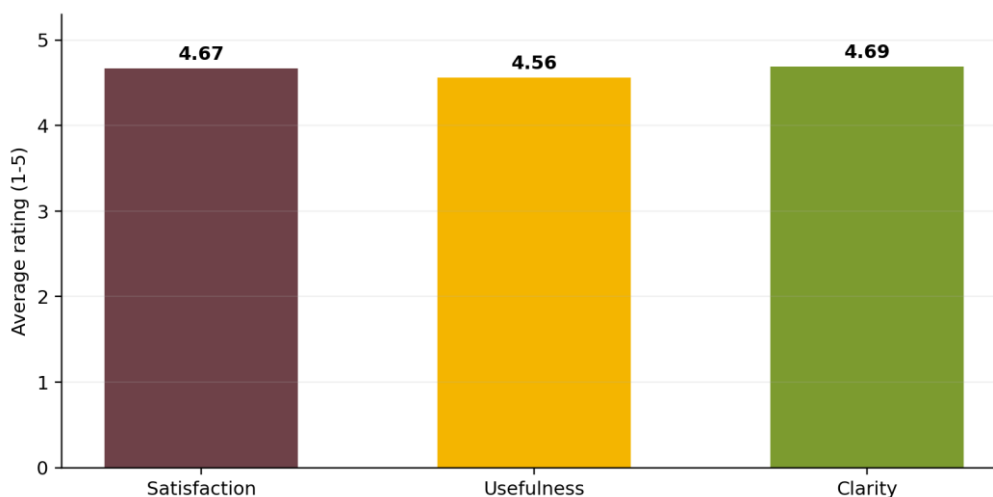


Figure 2. Overall evaluation of the local training activities.

Training feedback at a glance

Average satisfaction: 4.67/5. Usefulness for business or professional activity: 4.56/5. Clarity: 4.69/5. Overall, 64.8% stated that they intended to apply the learning and a further 29.6% answered “maybe”, meaning 94.4% expressed at least a potential intention to transfer the learning into practice.

Open responses translated this intention into concrete ideas, including energy and resource efficiency, waste reduction, circular economy, sustainable procurement, biodiversity, local value chains, sustainable tourism, community services, traditional crafts, business development and cooperation between local actors.

5.5 A5 - Study Visit and International Event

The final activity brought the learning and networking strands together in Italy. The study visit and international event took place from 15 to 19 July 2026 in Cascia within Social Hackathon Umbria 2026. Entrepreneurs, project partners and other stakeholders took part in visits, presentations, peer exchange and networking with organisations, institutions and participants from other European initiatives.

Main results:

- International exchange among entrepreneurs and rural-development actors from the three project countries.
- Study-visit activities and direct exposure to local sustainable practices and territorial initiatives.
- A final international event with broader visibility through its integration into Social Hackathon Umbria 2026.
- A project Memorandum of Understanding formalising the partners' intention to continue cooperation and develop future initiatives.
- Final dissemination materials and an infographic summarising the project pathway, products and impact.

6. Key Results and Achievements

Result area	Evidence of achievement
Evidence-based design	The project built the training pathway from research with entrepreneurs and stakeholders rather than from assumptions.
Practical green-skills curriculum	The curriculum connected Green Deal objectives to business decisions, good practices, competitiveness and territorial realities.
Capacity of rural-development actors	LAG staff improved competences in participatory VET, project-based/work-based learning, stakeholder engagement and transnational delivery.
Entrepreneurial application	Training participants identified concrete ideas and actions, with 94.4% of evaluation respondents indicating that they intended or might apply the learning.
Reusable digital infrastructure	The website and multilingual Moodle platform extended access to materials, resources, good practices and capacity-building outputs beyond the project period.
European cooperation	The final study visit, international event and MoU transformed project cooperation into a basis for continued networking and future joint initiatives.

Table 4. Main project achievements.

Several results exceeded the original expectations. The multilingual Moodle environment increased accessibility and reuse; integrating the final event into Social Hackathon Umbria 2026 widened the project's international reach; and the Memorandum of Understanding converted a temporary partnership into a formal commitment to continue cooperation.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Quality Assurance

Quality assurance was embedded in implementation rather than treated as a final exercise. Progress and quality were monitored by the coordinator with active contributions from all partners and methodological support from EGINA.

- Monthly online coordination meetings to compare actual progress with the work plan and agree corrective actions.
- Periodic activity reports documenting actions, participants, outputs, results and any deviations.
- Shared documentation through Basecamp, including calendars, deliverable versions and operational updates.
- Quantitative and qualitative indicators covering participation, output completion, material quality, relevance to identified needs and beneficiary satisfaction.
- Attendance records, evaluation questionnaires, participant feedback, trainer observations, photographs and dissemination evidence as supporting documentation.

The final evaluation confirmed full completion of the project objectives and principal outputs. The local training evaluation also provided direct evidence of quality, with more than 90% of respondents rating satisfaction, usefulness and clarity at 4 or 5.

8. Impact

8.1 Impact on entrepreneurs

Rural entrepreneurs improved their awareness of the Green Deal and gained practical reference points for introducing sustainable practices. Training, case studies, good practices and peer exchange helped participants connect sustainability with innovation, cost management, resilience and competitiveness. The local evaluations show that participants were able to formulate concrete applications rather than only express general approval.

8.2 Impact on partner organisations

The LAGs strengthened competences in training design, facilitation, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and the organisation of international activities. EGINA and the coordinator further consolidated their experience in transnational partnership management and multilingual VET resource development. The project also strengthened local and European networks around rural enterprise support.

8.3 Territorial and European impact

At local and regional level, SUST_ENT increased dialogue among businesses, public authorities, associations and civil society around the needs of rural SMEs. At European level, comparison between Italy, Slovenia and Latvia enabled partners and entrepreneurs to identify shared barriers while recognising the importance of locally adapted solutions. The Cascia final event extended visibility beyond the consortium and created new networking opportunities with a broader international audience.

9. Erasmus+ Horizontal Priorities

Horizontal priority	How SUST_ENT addressed it
Inclusion and diversity	The project targeted entrepreneurs in rural areas, where access to training and international networks can be more limited. Flexible formats, attention to women and young entrepreneurs and multilingual resources reduced participation barriers.
Digital transformation	Online meetings, Basecamp, online capacity building, the project website and Moodle supported management, learning, sharing and long-term access to resources.
Green transition and sustainability	Environmental sustainability was the core project theme. Training addressed energy efficiency, circular economy, waste reduction, sustainable technologies, green financing and responsible business models.
Participation and common values	Mixed focus groups and local/international events created dialogue among entrepreneurs, public authorities, civil society and communities. The MoU formalised shared responsibility for continued cooperation.

Table 5. Integration of Erasmus+ horizontal priorities.

10. Dissemination, Open Access and Sustainability

Dissemination was continuous and addressed entrepreneurs, LAG staff, local authorities, business associations, civil-society organisations, trainers, citizens and other stakeholders interested in sustainability and rural development. The main channels were partner websites and social media, newsletters, mailing lists, direct territorial contacts, local events, workshops, focus groups, the project website, infographics, the study visit and the final event.

The project respected the Erasmus+ open-access principle by making its principal outputs freely accessible. The website acts as a public entry point, while Moodle hosts the training curriculum, learning materials and capacity-building resources in the partnership languages. Partners intend to keep these resources available and reuse them in future training and SME-support activities.

For follow-up, the partnership plans to continue dissemination through its networks and to valorise key outputs through the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. The Memorandum of Understanding provides an organisational basis for continued cooperation, future European proposals and further exchanges among rural businesses and support organisations.

11. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Implementation was successful, but the partnership faced challenges typical of small transnational projects involving rural businesses. The main difficulties were coordinating different languages, calendars, procedures and territorial contexts; adapting and translating materials; maintaining entrepreneur participation alongside professional and seasonal commitments; and managing the logistics of mobilities and the final international event.

The main lessons learned were:

- Needs assessment should precede training design. The strongest training decisions came directly from survey, focus-group and interview evidence.
- Rural SMEs respond best to practical, business-oriented learning linked to real costs, incentives, regulations and implementation choices.
- Flexible delivery is essential because entrepreneurs must balance training with operational and seasonal business demands.
- Peer learning and locally rooted good practices increase relevance and make sustainability feel achievable rather than abstract.
- Digital repositories improve continuity, but implementation often still requires human follow-up, mentoring and trusted local intermediaries.
- Clear roles, regular communication and shared digital tools are particularly important in small partnerships where each organisation carries substantial responsibility.

12. Conclusions and Follow-up Priorities

SUST_ENT fully achieved its core purpose of strengthening green competences and support capacity in rural territories. The project moved logically from needs analysis to curriculum development, trainer capacity building, local experimentation and international exchange. This progression ensured that the training was grounded in the realities of rural SMEs and that learning could be translated into business and territorial ideas.

The project's most important legacy is not a single output, but a reusable support ecosystem: evidence on SME needs, a practical curriculum, good practices, trained LAG staff, digital learning resources, stronger local networks and a transnational partnership committed to continuing its work. The evaluation evidence indicates strong potential for further implementation, with 94.4% of local-training respondents saying that they intend or may intend to apply what they learned.

The priority after project closure is therefore to support the transition from intention to measurable implementation. Future actions should combine the existing training resources with mentoring, peer exchange, updated financing and regulatory information, and follow-up checks on the measures introduced by participating enterprises. In this way, the outputs of SUST_ENT can continue to support more resilient, competitive and sustainable rural economies beyond the formal funding period.