Guidelines for field research and case study analysis

Deliverable number D 3.1

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SERIGO in a nutshell

European rural areas face societal, demographic, economic and environmental challenges due to global transformations and crises. Uneven development affects people's livelihoods and overall well-being, hitting individuals in vulnerable situations the hardest.

SERIGO aims to enhance resilience, social inclusion, and well-being of vulnerable groups in European rural areas through socially innovative solutions initiated by or involving actors from the social economy. The project is:

- Conducting community-based participatory research through case studies from across Europe and pilots testing in five EU Member States.
- Fostering debates and collaboration on the topic among diverse stakeholders in Europe.
- Providing policymakers with recommendations for policy development around social inclusion in rural areas.

With a focused approach to addressing the challenges faced by rural communities, SERIGO is committed to harnessing the capabilities of social economy actors to drive inclusive development initiatives and support vulnerable groups in rural areas.

For more information, visit **www.serigo_project.eu** or follow the project on **Twitter** or **LinkedIn**.

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Summary

This deliverable outlines the guidelines for conducting field research within SERIGO WP3 and for reporting case study findings. Coordinated by the University of Vigo (UVIGO) in close collaboration with Eurac Research (EURAC) and Comenius University of Bratislava (UNIBA), and supported by other project partners (PPs), the document ensures consistent research methodologies and standards across SERIGO's case studies. These case studies are conducted by partners from BAB, CUAS, EURAC, GALWAY, ESOGU, TLU, UVIGO, UEF, UNIBA, ZSI and WUR.

Building on the conceptual framework and research questions developed in WP1 and WP2, this deliverable provides detailed guidelines on research conduct, tools for research design, and recommendations for data collection and analysis. These resources are designed to support partners involved in the implementation of case studies (i.e. case study teams) during different phases of data collection and analysis as well as in reporting their findings.

Resources provided in this deliverable D3.1 include **Tools** that provide step-by-step guidance to partners (such as self-assessment of positionality, defining the boundaries of a case study and the related mapping of stakeholders). Additionally, **Annexes** include interview samples and consent forms to facilitate practical application. Ethical considerations are also addressed, with particular attention to fieldwork involving vulnerable groups, aligning with the principles outlined in Deliverable 7.1.

The guidelines incorporate critical systems thinking and intersectional research approaches. By integrating these, the deliverable establishes an intersectional critical systems thinking framework that underpins the entire document to support an in-depth examination of out how vulnerabilities intersect and then interact with SSE effectiveness.

The guidelines are flexible, allowing adaptation to the specific local contexts of each case study. Their primary objectives are to ensure the quality and timeliness of data collection and analysis, promote collaboration and exchange among research teams, and produce structured, comparable case study reports suitable for cross-case analysis.

This work contributes to the overarching aims of WP3: understanding local community challenges, assessing the impacts of social and solidarity economy initiatives and social innovation on vulnerabilities, and providing empirically grounded inputs for EU policy recommendations.

Throughout the deliverable, partners will encounter in-depth information boxes. These are designed to provide either theoretical insights (highlighted in **orange**) or practical guidance (highlighted in **green**), ensuring clarity and usability.

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Keywords list

- Critical Systems Thinking
- Cross-case comparison
- Grounded theory
- Intersectional approach
- Ethics
- Qualitative analysis

List of acronyms

Acronym	
CS	Case Study
ICST	Intersectional Critical System Thinking
PP	Project Partners
RQ	Research Questions
SSE	Social Solidarity Economy

1. INTRODUCTION: BRIDGING CASE STUDIES WITH SERIGO CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Ensuring structure and flexibility throughout SERIGO case studies

SERIGO WP3 uses the case study approach to investigate and understand how **social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives**[1] respond to local vulnerabilities. SERIGO WP3 adopts an inductive and interpretivist/constructivist epistemology. Accordingly, the case study approach emphasizes the **situatedness of SSE initiatives**, to better grasp how context-specific solutions develop and function. Moving beyond variable-based approaches, **SERIGO case studies (CSs)** focus on uncovering the mechanisms, conditions, and capacities of SSE initiatives across cases (Schwandt and Gates, 2018). The case study approach also highlights a **configurational view on SSE initiative**: 'cases are viewed as configurations—i.e. as combinations of characteristics' (Ragin, 1987). SERIGO CSs are conceived as **bounded systems,** i.e. epistemological devices whose boundaries are defined by the researcher(s). This way, SERIGO CS aim to contribute to developing grounded theory about the role of SSE in tackling rural vulnerabilities while acknowledging the boundaries of these generalizations (Schwandt and Gates, 2018).

In WP3, the **SERIGO analytical framework (i.e. D2.1)** plays the role of a pragmatic tool orienting the research process, without negating the inductive characteristics of grounded theory. In this sense, the analytical framework is not deployed to impose pre-existing themes onto the data, but rather as a scaffolding to ensure coherence and alignment of each CS with the SERIGO's overall objectives and, most importantly, to bridge CS findings. The diversity in types, forms, and scope of the 24 SERIGO CSs demonstrates that a top-down approach could be too restrictive. The dilemma of restricting creativity through one-size-fits-all frameworks versus the need to develop a broader understanding for the research aims, demands that reflexivity, humility, and a commitment to care is built-in the research design, data collection, and data analysis protocols and processes.

As a result, the aim of these guidelines that structure and guide fieldwork in the SERIGO CS (i.e. Task 3.3). The guidelines are designed to be adapted to the specific local conditions of each CS. Consistently, CS Teams are encouraged to adapt their strategy to engage with the research aims and questions in the best manner possible. The expectation is that the flexibility in the approach to data collection and analysis will enable novel understandings of the role of SSE in tackling rural vulnerabilities, that hitherto remained unnoticed. The adoption of the grounded theory method ensures that theory development is anchored in empirical data. By linking theoretical perspectives with practical, real-world case studies, SERIGO fosters a dynamic and responsive research framework. This approach allows for continuous adaptation and refinement as new data emerges, making the research process both flexible and robust.

[1] Here and in the rest of the document, the reference to SSE initiatives implicitly includes processes of social innovation that trigger or that may be generated by social economy. The complex relation between these two notions is addressed in SERIGO Initial Integrated Conceptual framework, pp. 35-38

The reflexivity and creativity of the SERIGO CS Teams could be further enhanced by several activities that enable respectful exchange and mutual learning. These activities include:

1. Bimonthly meetings among WP3 coordinators (Eurac, UVIGO and UNIBA) and CS teams for mutual learning, by discussing ongoing fieldwork, findings and challenges.
2. Self-arranged bilateral or multilateral meetings among CS teams seeking in-depth discussions, specific comparisons, or collaboration opportunities with CSs that share similarities.
3. Feedback on case study reports: Draft case study reports are shared among CS Teams - each case study team will read and give feedback to 1-2 other CS Teams.
4. Participating in Community of Practice activities to engage with key concepts and relevant experiences.

Orientation notes: Towards Task 3.3 Fieldwork considering data analysis

To get a sense of the overall approach to research design, data collection and analysis, WP3 coordinators (EURAC with UNIBA and UNIVIGO) organize a one-day workshop on **February 3rd, 2025**. The first half of the workshop focuses on the ways to conceptually, methodologically, and ethically align the aims and goals of SERIGO with the data collection and analysis process of case studies. In the second half of the workshop, the focus is on Gioia methodology for data coding and analysis, to align the different experiences of CS Teams in coding and data analysis especially in the face of collecting data for cross-case analysis.

Timeline for fieldwork and reporting

Upcoming activities of WP3 consist in case study fieldwork and reporting, (Task 3.3) cross-case analysis (Task 3.4) and final, cross-case reporting (Task 3.5). Overall, these activities are divided into five phases and related timing, described below and represented in Figure 1:

1. **Research design**: this part is the most articulated of the guidelines as it provides a shared structure for CS Teams to navigate the complexity of their CS and to ensure robustness and validity of the research, as well as to ensure cross-case comparability in terms of the process of research design. No deadline is set for this phase, but it is up to the CS Teams to update WP3 coordinators if they face difficulties. CS Teams shall inform WP3 Coordinators once they have completed this phase.
2. **Data collection**: this part gives flexibility to each CS Team to adjust data collection to the specific local conditions of each CS. At the end of this phase, CS Teams are required to submit "Tool 1: Research design" i.e., the finalized documentation related to the research design (illustrated in the section 2. Research Design).
3. **CS-level data analysis and CS report preparation:** this part, **to be completed by June 2026,** foresees the submission of the first draft of CS report by each CS team to WP3 coordinators. At the end of this phase, CS Teams are required to submit their **Case Study Report**, accompanied by the **Case Study Codebook** (as described in the section 5. Data Analysis).
4. **Internal CS report peer-review:** this part consists of cross-CS peer-review of the Case Study Reports to enhance mutual learning. Based on this, CS Teams will revise their CS reports to integrate feedback received and submit to WP3 coordinators the final version of their CS report by December 2026. This phase takes place in September-November 2026.
5. **Cross-CS analysis and report preparation**: WP3 coordinators prepare, with the support of PPs, the cross-case analytical report for the submission expected in June 2027. Cross-case analysis at the end of the fieldwork will bring together findings about different types of SSE initiatives, forms of vulnerabilities, patterns of social exclusion, and other related phenomena. The results of the cross-case analysis of CSs (Task 3.4) will contribute to refine and enhance SERIGO Initial Integrated Conceptual Framework in Task 1.3 and SERIGO Analytical Framework in Task 2.5.

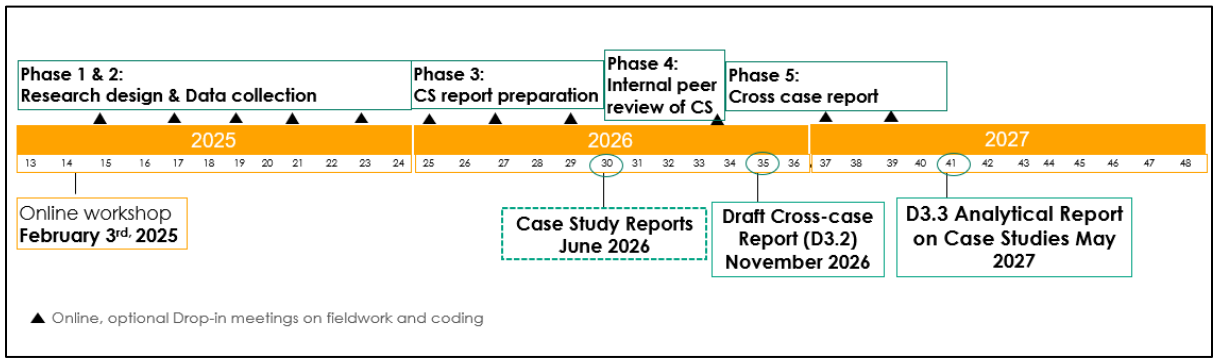

Figure 1. Timeline of the fieldwork and reporting in WP3

The following Figure 2 represent the **internal workflow of each case study (Task 3.3)**, synthetizing the steps and tools provided in this deliverable to support CS teams in carrying out and reporting their CS.

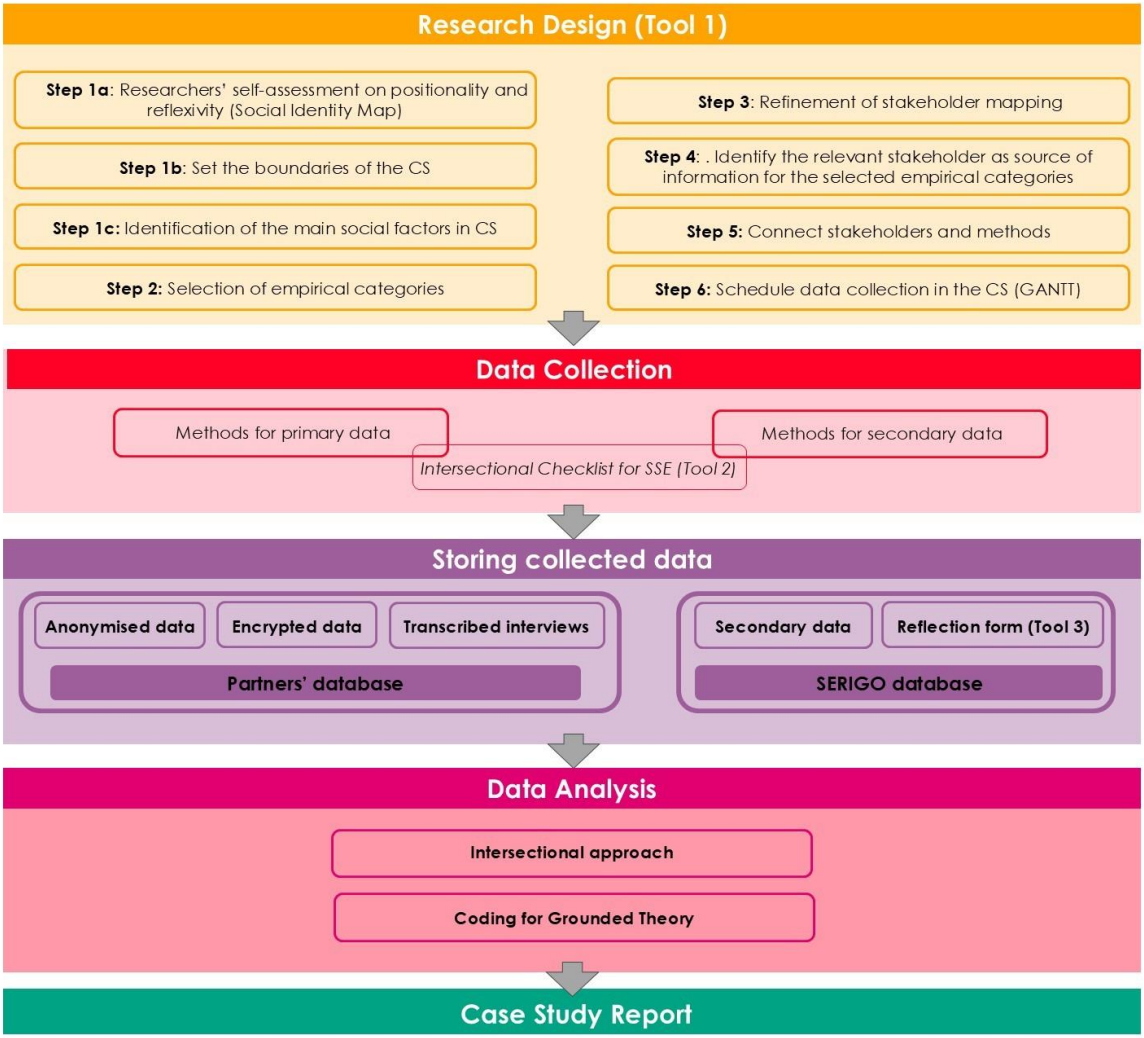

Figure 2. Workflow of SERIGO single case study fieldwork and reporting

Bridging SERIGO's objectives with case studies diversity

SERIGO project partners (i.e. CS Teams) initially selected CSs based on their potential to illuminate the role of social and solidarity economy in addressing rural vulnerabilities. In Task 3.1, CS Teams provided initial descriptions of each CS, which EURAC processed to:

- Align CS with SERIGO's conceptual (D1.2) and analytical frameworks (D2.3) through an inductive analysis of descriptive information.
- Highlight the diversity of SERIGO CS in terms of territorial characteristics, governance structures, practices, and visions.
- Ensure transparency, address potential limitations, and clarify the purpose of theory-building grounded in CS (Krehl & Weck, 2020).

The consolidation process identified shared objectives, including research questions, relevance, and CS design (WD3.1). An inductive analysis of research questions from CS factsheets shows a mix of descriptive and explanatory research questions and objectives. To navigate their diversity, they have been categorized as follows (See also Table 1 below):

1. **Internal factors of the SSE**: Examining SSE's structure, functioning, practices, and the mechanisms, roles, and processes through which SSE occur in rural areas.
2. **Contextual Factors**: Investigating external enablers and barriers to SSE development, such as policies, governance, and funding.
3. **Meanings & Narratives**: Exploring local interpretations of resources and practices.
4. **Impacts**: Analyzing SSE's effects on rural well-being and vulnerable groups, including service provision, inclusion, and rural development.
5. **Upscaling**: Examining conditions required for the expansion of SSE.

CS's Research Foci	CS Acronym																							
	TOI	VIT	BAG	SEB	SBG	CAR	BBC	ECO	COM	RED	DIV	SRE	HAR	IMC	TAI	SPN	LIB	UTA	SMK	SIK	SAR	SOS	RAS	SEK
Internal factors of the SSE				•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
Contextual factors	•		•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Meanings & narratives	•								•		•	•	•	•			•			•				
Impacts	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•			•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Upscaling						•					•		•											•

Table 1. Distribution of SERIGO CSs according to the focus of analysis

Figure 3 illustrates the proposed correspondence between the three main dimensions identified in SERIGO Initial Integrated Conceptual Framework (D1.1) (challenges, pathway, impact), SERIGO overall research questions (RQs adapted from SERIGO Analytical Framework D2.1) and the foci of analysis of CSs that were identified in WD3.1. This correspondence highlights the alignment between theoretical inquiry and the practical insights drawn from fieldwork, ensuring that the research remains grounded in real-world experiences while maintaining a clear conceptual focus. This correspondence also helps CS Teams navigate and match SERIGO overall research questions, with specific research interest in the CSs, and design data collection in a robust and traceable manner.

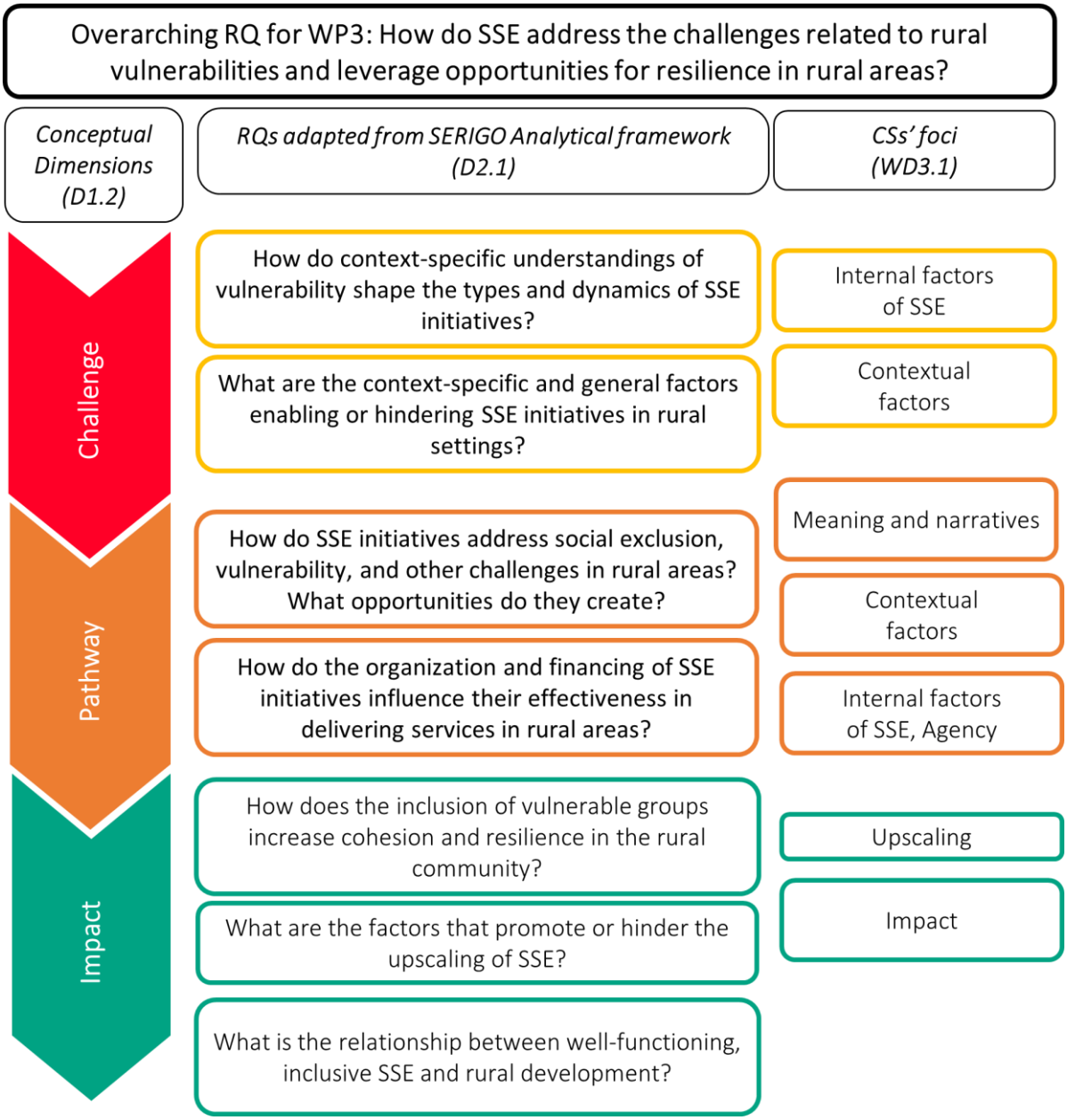

Figure 3. Identified correspondences among SERIGO conceptual and analytical frameworks and CS´s research foci

The final list of SERIGO CSs is presented in the following table.

CS n.	Acronym	PP	Title	Location & country
1	TOI	UEF	Toimi säätiö - Empowering vulnerable individuals through social and labour market rehabilitation in Iisalmi and Kiuruvesi	City of Iisalmi and Kiuruvesi municipality, FI
2	VIT		Vihreä Telakka – the institutionalization of green care in public service provision	Savonlinna municipality, FI
3	BAG		SANCHO - Labour-market integration and increasing social participation of women living in a segregated Roma settlement in Hungary	Village of Dány (Pest County), HU
4	SEB		Basta! Social Enterprising. Rehabilitation through work	Nyvan, Södermanland county, SE
5	SBG	BAB	Silbersberg: Green Care, community-based networking, and social integration in rural areas	Schwarzau im Gebirge, AT
6	CAR	WUR	Community initiative that empowers villages to self-organize and meet the needs for a good quality of life within the framework of a social enterprise	America, NL
7	BBC		Building bridges in Cranendonck	Budel, municipality of Cranendonck, NL
8	ECO	UVIGO	Ecological food and local bonds	Tenerife and Gran Canarias, ES
9	COM		The technological gaze and Rural Communities	Galicia, ES
10	RED		Migration and the quest for dignified lives and livelihoods	Tenerife, ES
11	DIV	EURAC	Social-ecological vulnerabilities linked to intensive farming and monoculture systems in rural mountainous areas: Vinterra and Da cooperatives	Upper Venosta valley, South Tyrol, IT
12	SRE		Women's Shelter and Rural Empowerment	Community district Val Pusteria, South Tyrol, IT
13	HAR		Housing Accessibility & Autonomy in Rural areas through SEE & Social innovation	Community district Eisack valley, South Tyrol, IT
14	IMC	CU AS	Integration and participation of migrant and refugee women in Carinthia	Carinthia, AT
15	TAI	GALWAY	Third Age Ireland	Summerhill, Co. Meath, IE
16	SPN		A critical assessment of Spéire Nua's work to reintegrate people with criminal histories into rural society	Athenry, Co. Galway, IE
17	LIB	TLU	The Changing Role of Libraries in rural communities	Toila municipality, EE
18	UTA		University of Third Age in Võru	Võru County, EE
19	SMK	ZSI	Social impact of Mozaik's Korenika and MenSana through interconnected social entrepreneurship	Murska Sobota and Šalovci, SI
20	SIK		The social impact of Kiútprogram	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, HU
21	SAR	ESOGU	Social farming for vulnerable groups in the rural areas in Eskişehir	Eskisehir, TR
22	SOS		Management of environmental and socio-economic effects of natural disasters on rural people	Antalya, TR
23	RAS	UNIBA	Raslavice Municipal Enterprise and other local governmets initiatives	Prešov region, Bardejov district, SK
24	SEK		SEK – Social Enterprise Košice	Košice region, SK

Table 2. Overview of SERIGO case studies: acronym, responsible PP (i.e. CS Team), title and location

Integrating Intersectionality and Critical Systems Thinking in case studies

SERIGO WP3 is committed to integrating in CSs an intersectional approach to find out how vulnerabilities intersect and then interact with SSE effectiveness. The integrated application of intersectionality and critical systems thinking (CST) in the design, data collection and data analysis of CSs provides a structured yet flexible lens to examine how various social, political, and cultural elements interact to produce and replicate social inequalities and vulnerabilities.

The integration of CS Teams and intersectionality into SERIGO CSs, which it is referred to as **intersectional critical systems thinking (ICST)** has been done by leveraging on the commonalities and synergies between these two analytical approaches, as follows.

Different levels of operationalization of ICST in SERIGO CSs are proposed, according to the availability and capacities of CS Teams: as a minimum requirement in the **research design**, but as an option in **data collection** and in **data analysis.** While only taking all three steps ensures following a fully-fledged ICST approach, the minimum requirement allows for a basic ICST assessment. The levels of application and related tools are illustrated in Figure 4.

In the **research design**, ICST is carried out by researchers through a self-assessment of positionality and reflexivity, a refinement of the stakeholder mapping based on the critical assessment of their case study boundaries, and the identification of those main social factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity) that may be lived by stakeholders and characterize exclusion/vulnerability in the CS. Hence, CS Teams are encouraged to identify how selected social factors may intersect.

This requires **data collection** of also the intersections of social factors, that is, besides collecting information, e.g., about gender and ethnicity of research participants, CS Teams will also collect data about the intersection of gender and ethnicity. During data collection, CS Teams can add a consideration of power structures and systems in the CS and can select which methods to use with which stakeholders to avoid reproducing power structures and exclusion.

These steps may be followed by an intersectional **data analysis** (see below: **"Intersectional approach to data coding and analysis"**). However, as mentioned, CS Teams can also decide to apply ICST partially, that is, only at the level of research design and a first step in data collection without being then compelled to proceed to a full intersectional data collection and data analysis.

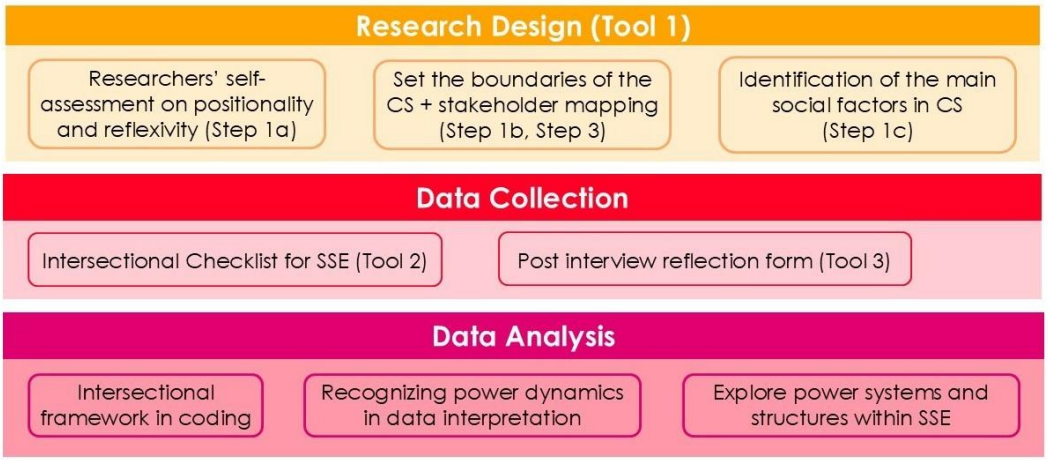

Figure 4. Synthesis on how ICST informs research design, data collection and data analysis

A glimpse into Intersectionality and Critical Systems Thinking

What is Critical Systems Thinking and what does it imply

CST highlights the interconnections and feedback loops within CSs, that is the configuration, or the bounded system, illustrating how these elements influence SSE initiatives and shape the dynamics of rural settings. This focus helps to frame case studies as tools for understanding systemic interactions, facilitating a critical exploration of context and power structures.

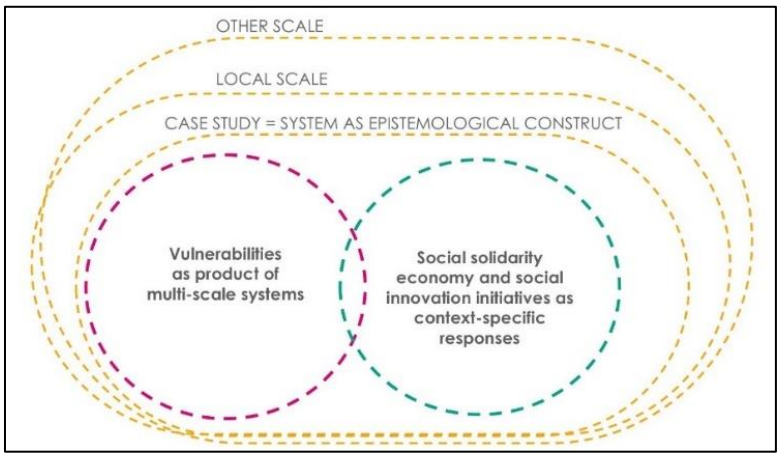

Figure 5. Feedback loops and interconnected system elements leading to the creation of vulnerabilities and SSE initiatives (adapted from WD3.1)

What is Intersectionality and what does it imply

The intersectional approach adds depth to the case study methodology by considering how different social factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, disability) create complex matrices of discrimination, marginalization and oppression. This perspective prevents oversimplification and avoids homogenizing the experiences of different groups. It enables, for instance, to gain a more critical insight on how SSE beneficiaries may be trapped in social inequalities as well as to carefully assess the inclusiveness, openness and horizontal character of SSE governance.

Intersectionality was championed by Crenshaw (1989, 1991) to envision the crucial discrimination suffered by Black women for finding themselves at the intersection of gender and race, a claim present in other previous works too (e.g., by Patricia Collins and bell hooks).

Today, intersectionality remains valuable as an approach for examining complex social realities by considering the interplay of multiple **social factors** with systems that maintain people and groups in situation of discrimination and oppression, inequality and exclusion, like e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia[2]. The intersectionality approach can shed light on how these dynamics change over time and within different historical, geographical, and social contexts (Collins, 2006; Misra et al., 2020).

Likewise, intersectionality flags and stresses the key role played by power (structures and systems) and its relationship with sameness/difference (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). A core principle of intersectionality is the critique of how power structures intensify or uphold various

[2] As a practical example, considering the lived experience of a queer black woman, sexuality, race and gender are the social factors upon which the axes of homophobia, racism and sexism intersect and create a complex (and systemic) condition of exclusion/discrimination/oppression.

forms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, to understand lived experiences and social justice, social structures and systems of power must be considered as well (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Grabe, 2020). As such, intersectionality can serve as a model for empirical research (Hancock, 2007) and can critically inform our way of thinking and our epistemology (MacKinnon, 2013).

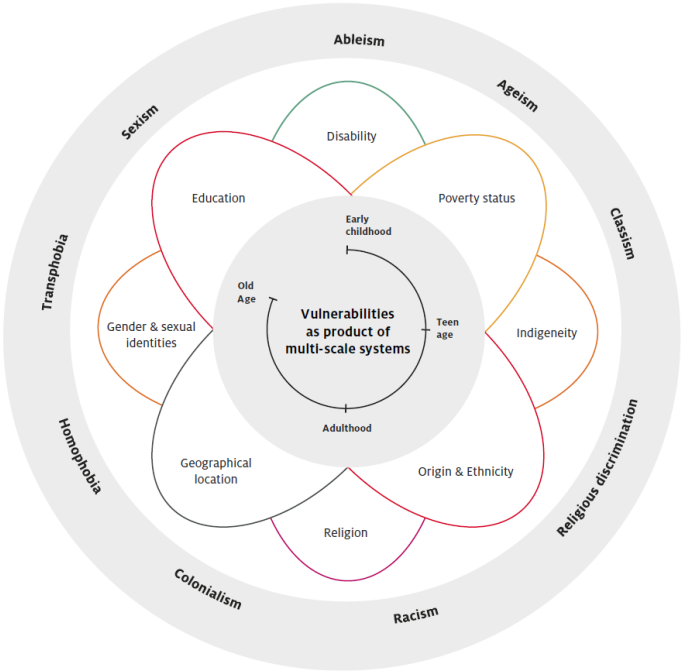

Figure 6. Intersectionality wheel showing social factors and intersectional axes that may determine discrimination and exclusion

What synergies and commonalities CST and Intersectionality share

Both approaches highlight the complexity inherent in social systems and recognize the influence of power dynamics, particularly concerning inclusion and exclusion. Both CST and intersectionality focus on interrelationships and feedback loops that shape marginalization, vulnerability, inequality, or—alternatively—inclusion and resilience. This aligns with the goal of understanding SSE initiatives as complex systems that influence, and are influenced by, intersecting social identities and structures and/or systems of power. Both CST and intersectionality acknowledge that categories of differentiation are the dynamic result of both individual and institutional factors and must therefore be challenged or implemented at both levels. They also share that the investigation shall consider the social groups at different levels, with an analysis of the interactions between the individual and institutional levels of the problem examined (Hancock 2007; Stephens et al., 2018). Ultimately, these approaches share a commitment to situational improvement, advocating for transformative research that does not merely observe but also seeks to address and reshape systemic inequities (also) within rural contexts.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN: PRELIMINARY STEPS

To ensure a **common basis** across CSs while allowing **flexibility** during the data collection phase, CS Teams are invited to familiarize themselves with and complete the six preliminary steps of the research design outlined in this section. These steps are proposed with the aim of guaranteeing a common procedure given the diverse expertise and backgrounds of CS Teams.

The starting points of this process are the case studies factsheet and preliminary stakeholder mapping conducted by CS teams and now saved on the Shared SERIGO database.

Through these six steps, CS Teams are guided to identify the most relevant dimensions for their case study and defining the data collection methods and stakeholders through which they will investigate these dimensions. **Each Step corresponds to a Tab in the Tool 1, named the same way as the Step**. This step-by-step approach includes:

Step 1a. Researchers' self-assessment on positionality and reflexivity (Social Identity Map)

Step 1b. Set the boundaries of the CS

Step 1c. Identification of the main social factors in CS (see below "Step 1c – Identification of the main social factors in CS")

Step 2. Selection of empirical categories

Step 3. Refinement of stakeholder mapping

Step 4. Identify the relevant stakeholder as source of information for the selected empirical categories

Step 5. Select the suitable data collection methods for the identified stakeholders

Step 6. Schedule data collection in the CS (GANTT)

Information collected in this structured, six-steps process, can then be used by CS Teams to describe the research design in the **CS report - Annex 1**.

According to the general fieldwork schedule, WP3 coordinators recommend that this preliminary phase be concluded by February 28th, 2025. However, the WP3 coordinators recognize that the timeline may vary based on the approach chosen for conducting the case study. CS Teams may either finalize their research design before starting data collection or refine it throughout the data collection process. In this context, **Tool 1** serves as a *living document*. CS Teams are requested to save **Tool 1** in the corresponding CS folder on UEF Teams. Upon completing all six steps, teams should notify the EURAC, UVIGO, and UNIBA teams via email, no later than the completion of data collection.

Clarification notes

In the following, **Tools** are the documents constituting the backbone of SERIGO CS guidelines. As such, they are provided at the bottom of this document and in the Shared database hosted on UEF Teams, where they should be filled in by each CS Team.

Annexes are useful documents including the informed consent and data treatment information. They are provided as templates that need to be checked for compliance with the case study at hand and adapted by each PP before being used.

Placeholders that need to be updated/adapted with details related to the institution of the CS Team are marked with **square brackets []**.

Step 1a - Researchers' self-assessment on positionality and reflexivity

Applying an intersectional critical system thinking (ICST) lens, any emergent information is always located within a precise bounded system that has been selected and then interpreted by the researchers (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). This means that knowledge production is shaped by the researchers' **positionality** (Misra et al., 2020).

Engaging thoughtfully with positionality can help researchers to understand how the research process might remarginalize and silence participants, reproducing patterns of structural discrimination, (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism[3]) and other injustices. This process also helps researchers maintain some distance from their case study, fostering an analytical perspective that allows them to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the selected SSE under study in the CS.

A thoughtful approach to reflect on positionality begins with critically assessing one's identity in relation to others. To do that, individual researchers of the CS Team can use the **Social Identity Map** (SIM) (**Tool 1a**) based on the work of Jacobson and Mustafa (2019). The SIM serves as a tool to facilitate reflection on which aspects of our identities as researchers hold greater influence at particular times and in specific contexts. In Tool 1a, alongside the SIM, CS Teams will find practical guidelines and the recommended procedure not only for its compilation but also for how and when to use it.

The SIM is a tool through which researchers self-consciously reflect on how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes. By doing this they engage in **reflexivity**.

Just as a researcher's social identity can afford them various privileges, the intersecting identities of research participants can compound their experiences of oppression, discrimination and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, a white, European, relatively wealthy, cisgender researcher may struggle to fully grasp the challenges faced by a black, non-European, gender-non-conforming refugee participating in the study due to differences in privilege and power.

The SIM remains useful as a **reflective tool** throughout fieldwork, allowing researchers to continuously assess how their social position may influence interactions and data collection. In fact, while the SIM is conducted in this preliminary phase, it supports the process of reflexivity that CS Team members carry out throughout their data collection and data analysis. In particular, the SIM should be considered a reference at the time of filling in the **post-interview reflection form** after each primary data collection moment, as articulated below (See Tool 1a and **Tool 3**).

[3] Ableism is considered both in its physical and educational components (i.e., through the use of technical jargon and data collection tools that are too demanding of the participants).

A glimpse into Positionality and Reflexivity

Positionality encompasses the "*researcher's social location, personal experience, and theoretical viewpoint, the relational and institutional contexts of the research, and the bearing of these elements on the research process itself*" (Suffla et al., 2015, p. 16). As Parson (2019) points out, "*[b]y interrogating one's role, placement, and motivation, identifying one's positionality prompts researchers to explore the power and privilege inherent in one's identity*" (p. 15).

Understanding positionality is essential for both a) critically exploring and considering one's role, along with the associated powers and privileges, and b) mitigating potential harms and risks that arise in the conduction of research with vulnerable groups. A critical re-evaluation of positionality begins with acknowledging that, irrespective of other identities, a researcher's position relative to participants is inherently one of privilege. This stems from the researcher's influence over every stage of the research process, including the selection of research questions, methods, participant inclusion, and the interpretation and communication of findings (Parson, 2019).

Researchers wield power not only over what and how topics are studied but also over what is accepted as knowledge. As Arber (2000) points out, researchers often interpret participant narratives in a way that aligns with the standards of Western academia and prevailing ideologies. Consequently, the voices of marginalized communities may remain unheard, as researchers speak *for* rather than *with* them, reshaping these narratives to align with their interpretations of social reality. This process can lead to the (unintentional) exploitation of participants. Parson (2019) illustrates this by stating, "*[f]or example, if I publish a participant's words (accurate or misrepresented), then I profit via job security, accolades, or merit raises. Meanwhile, participants gain very little, if anything. I have, in essence, turned participants' 'struggles in society' to my own personal gain*" (p. 16).

Compiling the SIM helps in navigating the plurality intrinsic to social factors. For instance, as Bonu Rosenkranz (2022) notes, being a woman represents both an element of subalternity in a patriarchal system and, as a cis-woman, one of relative privilege. It becomes evident, then, that another added component of the SIM is that it is a tool through which CS teams can reflect on their position within the systems in **relative terms**, that is, how is their position vis-à-vis that of the research participants.

Addressing positionality further requires engaging in **reflexivity**, which should be understood as "*a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes*" (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023, p. 242). Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) identify three main dimensions of this process: personal, interpersonal, and theoretical-methodological reflexivity.

Personal reflexivity involves asking, "*[h]ow are [my] unique perspectives influencing the research?*" (ibid., p. 244). Interpersonal reflexivity prompts questions like, "*What relationships exist and how are they influencing the research and the people involved? What power dynamics are at play?*" (ibid.). This requires considering one's position as an insider (e.g., challenges in maintaining distance from the studied community) or a privileged outsider (e.g., the risk of social desirability bias) when conducting research within marginalized communities.

Theoretical-methodological reflexivity involves examining how methodological and theoretical choices are made and understanding their implications. This means asking, "*[h]ow are we making methodological [and theoretical] decisions and what are their implications?*" (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023, p. 245).

Positionality and reflexivity should be viewed as essential components to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, ultimately strengthening the validity and impact of the research. By integrating continuous reflexivity and a deep understanding of positionality, researchers can better navigate complex social identities and contribute to more just and equitable knowledge production.

Step 1b - Set the boundaries of CS

ICST reminds us that the knowledge produced in any study is shaped by the boundaries researchers establish. CS Teams are invited to reflect on the boundaries of their CS, asking: *What is the system under analysis? Does the case study focus solely on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiative itself, or does it also encompass the broader context in which the SSE operates?* Making these boundaries explicit helps clarify the CS's focus.

Using **Tool 1b** as guidance (and **step 1b and 3 Excel Tab**), CS Teams are encouraged to thoughtfully identifying stakeholders and critically assess what kind of role stakeholders have and which stakeholders should be included in the mapping.

The aim is to at least identify—and then, if possible, to engage in research—not only obvious stakeholders but also to amplify the voices of vulnerable groups whose voice might otherwise be overlooked. This enables CS Teams to enrich the overall understanding of social dynamics.

Nevertheless, there is awareness that this process may entail structural inequality, as identified stakeholders from vulnerable groups may not have time or resources for effective participation and may put excessive expectations of what benefit they will gain from their participation to research.

Below is a set of questions to be reflected upon and answered by CS Teams before implementing the refinement of their stakeholder mapping.

Self-Identification and Perspective: When identifying stakeholders, are there perspectives or groups you feel a stronger affinity with? How might this influence the selection or prioritization of stakeholders, and how can you strive for a balanced approach?

Perceived Role and Expertise: How might stakeholders in the rural community perceive your knowledge, expertise, or affiliation with the case study? What steps can you take to ensure this perception does not limit engagement with all relevant groups?

Impact Awareness: Your presence and role may shape stakeholders' responses or willingness to engage. How can you be mindful of this influence to minimize bias and avoid unintended impacts on stakeholder relationships?

Responsibility and Role Definition: In these complex, rural settings, what specific roles and responsibilities do you hold as a researcher? Which expectation may arise in relation to your role and intervention?

Alternative Ways of Knowing: Beyond formal knowledge sources, how can experiential, practical, or symbolic ways of knowing inform a richer understanding of stakeholders and their roles in addressing rural vulnerabilities?" (see part on "Enabling methods" in section Methods of Data collection)

Step 1c – Identification of the main social factors in CS

In this Step, corresponding to **Tool 1c**, CS Teams are encouraged to reflect on the relevant social factors that are present and intersect in the context of their SSE.

Lutz and Wenning (2001) suggest the existence of at least 13 social factors that may intersect: gender, 'race'/skin colour[4], ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class (socioeconomic status), culture (incl., language and level of education), disability, age, mobility, origins, religion, urban-rural.

Taking these as a starting point, CS Teams are invited to identify a reasonable number of social factors that may be relevant for their CS, with two being the minimum for the research to be considered intersectional[5].

Pragmatically, then, CS Teams can use either the list provided by Lutz and Wenning above or the intersectionality wheel to both reflect and take note of the social factors of relevance. CS Teams can refer to the Excel Tool 1 – Step 1c, for conducting this exercise.

In the following, three examples are provided on how this reflection can be done at CS level.

- **Example**: *Case study HAR focuses on the role of SSE in mitigating migrants' housing exclusion. Reflecting on their CS, the team would identify migration status, gender, family status, and socioeconomic status as social factors of salience and take note of this on the intersectionality wheel.*
- **Example**: *Case study DIV focuses on the role of SSE in addressing social-ecological vulnerabilities linked to intensive farming and monoculture systems in rural mountainous areas. Reflecting on their CS, the team would identify gender, migration status, (dis)ability, and culture (i.e. non-mainstreaming worldviews on what is development/good life in rural areas) as social factors of salience and take note of this in the intersectionality wheel.*
- **Example**: *Case study SRE focuses on the role of SSE in addressing gender-based violence in rural areas. Reflecting on their CS, the team would identify gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race/skin colour, socioeconomic status, origins, religion, and nationality as social factors of salience and take note of this by using the Lutz and Wenning (2001) list or the intersectionality wheel*.

By completing this step, CS Teams lay the groundwork for the collection of intersectional data.

[4] Race is meant as a social construction, and, as noted by Meer (2014, 118), it "has often been a means to deny equal dignity to those deemed as less developed, [and] racial categories exist as social phenomena and are important because the assumption of race exists and has social implications".
[5] Traditionally these are gender and race/ethnicity due to intersectionality being first formulated by and about black women's experiences in the US (Crenshaw, 1989; The Combahee River Collective, 2014).

Step 2 – Select empirical categories

CS Teams are asked to complete **Step 2 of Tool 1**, grading each empirical category based on its relevance and feasibility within their own CS.

Based on the grading, CS Teams select the most relevant empirical categories that will be key in their data collection for the refinement of interview questions. It is suggested to consider those that are graded from 3 and above.

At the end of the data collection and analysis phases, this table should be reviewed and updated as necessary to account for any additional dimension that was addressed unexpectedly or, conversely, to reflect dimensions that could not be fully explored as initially planned.

Step 3 - Refine the stakeholder mapping

This step is **closely linked to Step 1b.** After having reflected on the boundaries of the CS, CS Teams are encouraged to refine the initial stakeholder mapping they have already completed in Task 3.1, by filling in the table in **Excel Tool 1 – Step 3**, where instructions are provided. CS Teams will find guiding questions in **Tool 1b**. Very importantly, CS Teams may keep a non-anonymized version of the stakeholder mapping on their own institutional servers, while the version shared on the UEF Teams must be fully anonymized.

Step 4 - Identify the relevant stakeholder as source of information for the selected empirical categories

In this step, CS Teams should consider which stakeholders can provide information relevant to each empirical category that CS Teams have selected in Step 2, based on stakeholder's assessed role (as done in Step 1b) and assumed expertise. It is important to collect diverse relevant perspectives on the same empirical category. Diversifying information sources is key to ensuring the validity of the data. CS Teams do so by filling in the matrix reported in the Excel **Tool 1 – Step 4**, where instructions are provided.

Step 5 - Select the suitable data collection methods for the identified stakeholder

CS Teams decide what is the best method to collect information about the selected empirical categories when it comes to the different stakeholders that have been identified. A comprehensive list and explanation of data collection methods is provided in Section 3.

CS Teams might consider using enabling methods according to the characteristics of the research participants, power relations among research participants, or preferred ways of expression. CS Teams should also consider previous data collected—such as those collected and analysed for Task 2.1—that may be relevant for empirical categories such as rural context, EU, national or local policies.

CS Teams conduct this Step, by filling in the **Excel Tool 1 – Step 5**, where instructions are provided.

Step 6 - Schedule data collection in the CS

As a result of all previous steps of the research design, CS Teams should be able to define a tentative schedule of the data collection in the CS. Using and adapting the GANTT chart provided as wished, CS Teams plan the different data collection moments according to their needs and those of the mapped stakeholders they want to engage in the CS, considering what are best moment in the year to conduct activities. The tentative schedule can be updated during the fieldwork to represent the real time that was required to carry out the fieldwork.

A glimpse into Validity and Rigor according to the intersectional critical systems thinking approach:

A traditional research approach judges the rigor of a project by the consistency in which its methodology is applied. Inspired by the ISE4GEMS approach, the ICST approach draws on rethinking of validity and rigor and asks the following: is the research engaging with the right people and using the right methods?

Accordingly, **validity** implies using multiple participants in providing information and in the interpretation of the findings to validate (by substantiating or by challenging) the collected perspectives. This attention ensures that multiple views and interests are considered and that these are made transparent. Furthermore, a credible and trustworthy CS investigation uses appropriate methods to address the questions under investigation, with trained, experienced, qualified and competent personnel.

Similarly, **rigor** can go beyond the concept of methodological rigor to include the level of participation and inclusion. This becomes particularly important when thinking about the involvement of stakeholder in the research, for example. Accordingly:

• Methods selected must be appropriate to the users of the methods in context. Using a variety of methods allows for a more responsive methodology for all stakeholders and emergent issue There should be flexibility and adaptability of methods for improvisation, innovation and iteration to create new combinations.

• The ICST approach prompts evaluators to keep asking "what are we missing?", adopting an attitude to being open, alert and inquisitive. Look for the unexpected, accept uncertainty and plan for emergence.

3. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Following the completion of the research design, CS Teams move on to conduct their fieldwork. Reflection forms are used after any data collection activity to record essential observation and findings: this enables CS Teams to share relevant information among them, without having to share sensitive content such as the full transcript of the interviews.

The below provides a summary list of steps that connect research design with data collection and data processing:

1. Step 1 – drawing from the research design outlined in section 2, the partners should adapt and translate the interview questionnaires, consent forms, and participant information sheets
2. Step 2 – partners should apply for ethical clearance in line with their local rules and regulations
3. Step 3 – partners conduct field research, collect data, and complete reflection forms (Tool 3)
4. Step 4 – the data will be stored in line with database plan outlined in section 4
5. Step 5 – partners will conduct initial coding in line with instructions in section 5

In general, this section offers outline of the methods of collecting primary and secondary data that can be used. It is important to note that these are general guidelines that the CS Teams may adapt to their needs. In this sense, the selection of data collection methods is not strictly pre-defined and the CS Teams may exercise freedom in choosing what fits the exploration of CS the most, based on the preliminary exercise facilitated by **Tool 1**. Moreover, the CS Teams are encouraged to explore other enabling data collection of methods if they would allow for a more appropriate capturing of the realities of the CS or if they would allow the participants to express their ideas more comfortably.

The freedom and flexibility of data collection methods are underpinned by three overarching principles: data complementarity, heterogeneity of respondents and data saturation.

1. The methods are designed to make the **primary data complementary based on the principle of triangulation**. As Ritala and Karhu (2023) note "data has potential for complementary value when different types of datasets are combined and recombined in different ways". In other words, combined sets of data could bring complementary value beyond the that of the two data separately.

2. **Heterogeneity of respondents** – the research should cover different target groups as they are defined in the research design (especially

3. Step 1b - Set the boundaries of CS and Step 4 - Identify the relevant stakeholder). The principle of representativeness of basic targets should be complied following the criteria of respondents' selection. More details are described for each of the suggested method separately.

4. **Data saturation** has a specific role in qualitative research, namely it is the condition to make sure that the small N sample is sufficient to cover the variety of emerging patterns. Quality of recruiting process is crucial for achieving data saturation – heterogeneity of respondents as mentioned above. According to the academic literature: "Data saturation refers to the point in the research process when no new

information is discovered in data analysis, and this redundancy signals to researchers that data collection may cease" (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017, p. 1).

Intersectional approach for data collection

WP3 is committed to integrate in CSs an intersectional approach to examine how intersectional vulnerabilities interact with SSE effectiveness. In adopting data collection methods, CS Teams will thus adapt them to collect data about the relevant social factors (e.g., gender and ethnicity) that become intersectional axes identified in their CS (see **Step 1c**).

In practical terms, based on the selected social factors identified for each CS in Step 1c, CS Teams elaborate relevant questions and observations related to how such factors may intersect in their interviews/focus groups/observations/enabling methods, etc. Whenever possible, such intersections shall be considered as well in the collection of secondary data (see Methods of collecting secondary data).

Such questions/observations may start by investigating single social factors (e.g., gender and ethnicity) to then move on to explore their intersection, i.e. how these factors become axes that intersect in the frame of the SSE activities. Considering such intersection enables to shed light on:

- emerging or neglected vulnerabilities that are not properly addressed by the current configuration of SSE;
- existing obstacles that prevent SSE from properly addressing specific, intersectional vulnerabilities;
- the reasons why SSE include or not such vulnerabilities;
- if and how SSE include intersectional axes in the governance and mission of the SSE.

By integrating these aspects, CS Teams will facilitate the emergence of a nuanced understanding of the intersectional dimensions of their CS. This also enables considering such intersections in the following data analysis phase (see below section 5, "**Intersectional approach to data coding and analysis**").

Through this approach, additional and in-depth knowledge is generated that moves beyond single social factors and may provide a refined answer to our research questions[6].

Kindly see **Tool 2** (Intersectional Checklist for SEE) on how to take into consideration heterogeneity in the end-users and governance of SSE initiatives.

Key data/observations emerging from interviews/focus groups/observations/enabling methods etc. during fieldwork may be (re)collected in the post-interview reflection form (**Tool 3**) and then verified in the transcripts and in the data analysis.

EXAMPLE 1 *– Case study HAR focuses on the role of SSE in mitigating migrants' housing exclusion. In doing so, interviews will explore how the SSE addresses gendered experiences of housing exclusion as well as challenges deriving from the intersection of migration status, gender and family status.*

[6] See further information in Rice, Harrison, and Friedman (2019), Bailey et al. (2019) and Misra et al. (2020).

EXAMPLE 2 *- Case study DIV focuses on the role of SSE in addressing social-ecological vulnerabilities linked to intensive farming and monoculture systems in rural mountainous areas. To do so, data collection will explore how SSE addresses experiences of labour, production and social exclusion linked to (dis)ability, gender, migration status and different worldviews on what is good life in rural areas, as well as challenges from the intersection with socio-economic status.*

EXAMPLE 3 *– Case study SRE focuses on the role of SSE in addressing gender-based violence in rural areas. Reflecting on their CS, the team would identify gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race/skin colour, socioeconomic status, origins, religion, and nationality as crucial social factors. Hence, the team will collect data on these single factors as well as selected intersections of such factors, e.g., gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and evaluate if and how this intersection affect both gender-based violence victims and how the SEE operates.*

Methods of collecting primary data

In general, the given methods of collecting primary data were chosen because of the particular flexibility they offer to the researchers. Moreover, listed methods are also well-suited as they allow for a more direct involvement of the research participants, granting them agency in the co-creation of the shape or direction of the data collection which is in line with interpretivist/constructivist epistemology that underpins the grounded theory.

1. **Semi-structured interviews** with individual respondents, including SEE stakeholders and beneficiaries in vulnerable situation.

2. **Focus groups** discussion with target groups' representatives.

3. **Non-participatory and/or participatory observation in the field**, in the communities and municipalities where the initiatives are active (e.g. attending meeting of the municipality representatives, visiting facilities of social enterprise, places of providing social services, schools and pre-schools, community centres).

4. **Enabling data collection methods**, such as photovoice and walking interviews, to transcend traditional hierarchic and verbal-only approaches by creating more egalitarian researcher-participant dynamics and incorporating non-verbal expressions.

The following methods for data collection are further described in the following sections.

Semi-structured interviews

In a semi-structured interview, a set of predetermined topics must be covered, but it is up to the interviewer to decide how to ask the questions, which are tailored to each interviewee or group of interviewees, what is developed below. Interviewing in qualitative research is usually unstructured or semi-structured. It has to be flexible in order to explore the complex views of the participants. That is why an interview guide should allow some flexibility in the way questions are asked. Qualitative interviews should be recorded, transcribed, and then analysed.

Following identifying of the stakeholders/actors to be interviewed based on the mapping tool outlined in **Tool 1: Research** design, the following list of indicative themes related to the empirical categories selected in **Tool 1: Research** design should be explored via semi-structured interviews. Given the complex, situated, and configurational nature of our research on SSE initiatives, two distinct, ideal interview guide types are proposed: Type A for **actors/stakeholders directly related to the organization/initiative/locality** where the SSE initiative sits, and Type B for **SSE initiative's partners**, e.g., stakeholders within the broader local territorial constellation, such as policymakers, community leaders, and other influential figures. This approach allows us to tailor our inquiries to capture the specific roles, perspectives, and interactions of each group, enriching our understanding of the SSE ecosystem within its unique local context.

Type A: example of guidelines and themes for the in-depth semi structured interview with TYPE A stakeholders[7]

CS Teams conduct 5 to 10 interviews lasting approx. 45-90 mins with actors/stakeholders directly related to the organization/initiative/locality, covering the following topics:

Challenges to be explored regarding internal characteristics and contextual factors:

1. Details on position vis-à-vis the selected SSE initiative (examples: founder, co-founder, member of different kinds of bodies – councils etc.)
2. Inception and objectives of the initiative.
3. Primary target groups.
4. Barriers when founding the initiative? Elaboration and the means to overcome them.
5. Partners and supporters (not funders) at the beginning
6. Expectations regarding the impact

Pathways/Activities:

1. Areas of your activities
2. Description of activities conducted
3. Linkages between activities and objectives
4. Financial sources of your activities (private/public; local/regional/national/ EU; corporate; church; other?)
5. Evolution of funding with critical points
6. Future prospects and sustainability

Impact and outcomes:

1. Evaluation of the impact over time – practices and procedures used or needed
2. Benefits to the target group (s) and its limits
3. Indirect benefits such as awareness raising, knowledge gathering, transfer to other projects
4. Conditions and factors effecting the sustainability and expanding of the initiative
5. Overall assessment and areas for improvement

Type B: example of guidelines for the in-depth semi structured interview with TYPE B stakeholders

CS Teams conduct 5-10 interviews lasting approx. 45-90 mins with partners of the initiative - if there are any – like mayor, local MPs, NGOs, church representative, state administration – local Labor Office, local school etc.), as well other related stakeholders – funding organization/s, regional representatives

1. Description of position vis-à-vis the selected SSE initiative

[7] Stakeholders will be identified by each CS Teams based on Step 2 and 4 of the research design

2. Involvement in the activities of the selected SSE initiative

3. Evaluation of the impact and effects of this initiative on the vulnerability and marginalization of the a) community; b) target group; c) effects beyond – (e.g. good practice example worth to follow).

4. Horizontal and vertical cooperation, cross-sectoral partnerships

Focus groups

The central feature of focus group methods is that they rely on interaction among the participants to generate insights into the subject under study. Focus groups enable their members to interact in a "safe" environment with very little direction from the researcher. As a result, participants have a chance to express their true feelings on the topic under study and can bring up any aspect of that topic that they feel is important. The group process may allow them to come to understandings about the topic that none of them could have achieved alone. According to Rich et al. (2018: 304-319) focus groups have three substantive advantages: (1) they may provide more accurate insights into what people actually think than do other techniques that involve more influence from the researcher; (2) they can produce results that reflect social realities more accurately than methods that ask people to act in isolation; and (3) they give us the ability to study group dynamics in ways that other techniques do not (Rich et al., 2018: 306). All these characteristics qualify focus group method to be applied in the field research of the SERIGO project. It is recommended that possible target groups are addressed, together with using a flexible guide for conducting the data collection.

Conducting focus groups (2-3 focus group discussions, 6-9 respondents each, duration – 60-90 minutes, audio-recorded) - determined by research design conducted by the CS Teams.

Identifying, for instance, primary beneficiaries target groups:
1. Socially excluded, marginalized, unemployed inhabitants of the community who represent the target group/s of the initiative.

2. Employed recently in the social enterprise, even those who were employed in the past.

3. Ordinary/random inhabitants of the community (optional)

Important rules when conducting focus group discussion:

1. Setting the criteria of recruitment of the respondents – if the target group is heterogenous use criteria for covering the variability.
2. At least two researchers should be present during the focus groups, one as a moderator, the other one taking focus notes on not verbal interactions.

Qualified moderator: a) must not intervene just for intervention's sake. They must know when to stay out of the discussion and let it flow when it is progressing appropriately on its own. b) To ensure the validity of the research, the moderator should have a neutral position towards the discussed topic. c) It is unacceptable for the moderator to openly adjudge the statements of respondents or ask suggestive and manipulating questions.

Guidelines for the focus group discussion:

At the beginning – "warm up" phase (first 5-10 minutes), the goal is to relax and activate respondents. During the main part of the discussion, a moderator goes through the individual topics mentioned in the moderator's guide step by step.

It is appropriate at the end to briefly summarize the entire discussion with respondents. It is ideal if the respondents themselves can summarize in several sentences the main point upon which they all agree.

Intro: Welcoming the participants, presenting the project, explaining the nature of the meeting, specifying its duration (approx. 60-90 min.) and objectives, clarifying expectations towards the respondents, informing about recording and confidentiality, asking to turn off/ mute cell phones, asking FGI participants to introduce themselves and describe their education profile/professional experience, and affiliations, etc. Explaining that there are neither right nor wrong answers, their authentic opinions are considered interesting.

Main topics and potential questions are outlined in **Annex 2: Sample interview(s) questions**.

Non-participatory and/or participatory observation in the field

Observation, as a method of collecting qualitative data, is applied mostly in anthropological and ethnological research and it is equally suitable for grounded theory. In principle, the distinction between direct (or non-participatory) and the participatory observation is made. In non-participatory or direct observation, the data are those that can be observed and do not inherently require any interaction between the observer/researcher and those being studied. Participatory observation refers to such observation that requires more involvement from the observer/researcher and the purpose of it can be often hidden to those who are being observed. This is more probable to happen during the fieldwork than non-participatory observation.

Bernard (2011) identifies four reasons for conducting participant observation research:

1. Opening up the areas of inquiry to collect a wider range of data.

2. Reducing the problem of reactivity: as people tend to adjust their behaviour/action in the presence of outsiders, prolonged presence of the researcher through participant observation minimizes her influence on "normal" behaviour.

3. Enabling researchers to know what questions to ask.

4. Gaining intuitive understanding of the meaning of the data since the interpretation of qualitative data is a somewhat subjective activity.

Taking into consideration that the researchers will visit the place where the CS will be conducted at least once, and more often several times, observation is recommended as the accompanying method during the fieldwork. Aspects that could be observed, but ultimately dependent on the CS teams and the focus of their CS:

- Place Assessment (in addition to secondary data collected - infrastructure & services, transportation, water sources, electricity, availability of services – schools, clinics, shops etc.), set-up of internal and external spaces, function and meaning of places (are they meeting points of the local people? For just a group?), visible social differences.

- Communication and the overall atmosphere – spontaneous informal communication at the place (greetings, small-talks etc.), un/friendly atmosphere, spontaneous demonstration of solidarity.

During the observation, the researchers are encouraged to write a **research diary** captured during the stay at the research site. The post-interview reflection form can work as a suitable tool for this type of information recording as well. Notes contained in the research diary should provide a detailed record of the facts. Once there are more data (of different kinds) collected, the primary notes should be extended into a more complete story.

Enabling methods

ICST has implications also in terms of how data are generated and how careful and ethic the process is to put "not obvious" research participants in the condition of participating to research. The so-called enabling methods empower research participants to use visual and spatial means to communicate their stories, which can reveal nuanced insights that may not surface in conventional, researcher-led interviews. By engaging participants as co-creators of knowledge, these methods put their agency at centre stage and foster a collaborative research environment. These methods not only challenge power imbalances inherent in standard data collection but also enrich the research with a more holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences. This section has been compiled taking inspiration from the work of Moriggi (2021) on Green Care practices and of Prof. Donna Mannay on creative research methods.

These methods mobilize an object as mediating element: it can be through pictures, maps or by walking together into the landscape, with the aim to expand the potential for knowledge sharing beyond the strictly verbal realm.

Photo-voice

Photo-voice uses the production of photographic images as the main carrier of information and experiences, rather than words or written texts. Research participants are asked to narrate aspects of their realities through photographs. A camera is entrusted to the participants (personal phones can be used as well if already in possession of all participants), who become active agents, voicing their representation of the world and related expectations. Photo-voice bears great potential to include vulnerable people or marginalized groups who may be left out of more conventional forms of data collection processes (Masterson, Mahajan, & Tengö, 2018; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Participatory mapping

Participatory mapping methods are collaborative techniques that engage community members in creating maps that reflect their local knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Through these methods, participants identify, describe, and locate significant places, resources, and social dynamics within their environment. This approach not only empowers participants by valuing their lived experiences and insights but also generates maps that are grounded in community-specific realities, revealing spatial relationships, local challenges, and assets that may be overlooked by external perspectives. Participatory mapping is widely used in research and development to foster inclusivity, strengthen local ownership, and provide actionable insights for place-based decision-making and planning. Specific techniques can be (first two taken from Moriggi (2021), the third from systems thinking):

- **Chronological timeline** can be used to elicit reflections from practitioners upon the development of the initiatives they are part of, to identify major tipping points signalling change or transformation (Cinderby et al., 2015; Pearson et al., 2018). The timeline can be used to integrate information related to processes/SEE development that had emerged during the interviews to trace 'narratives of change' (Wittmayer et al., 2015).
- **Eco-social network maps** can be used to identify collaborators, clients, and institutions directly and indirectly involved in the SSE initiatives. Participants are asked to brainstorm about stakeholders and resources, placing them on the map according to their relative relevance to the practices. After that, connections between stakeholders can be traced and discussed, to further fed into the stakeholder mapping process. Such maps are commonly used in systems thinking–inspired research (e.g., Moser, 2016).
- **Causal loop diagrams** can be used to identify the drivers and causal links influencing the addressing of vulnerabilities through SSE initiatives. Through interactive workshops, stakeholders brainstorm key variables and processes, categorizing drivers into clusters such as social, economic, biophysical, etc. These drivers are ranked and discussed, highlighting enablers and challenges for community resilience in rural areas. Causal loop diagrams (CLDs) are then developed to map system feedback structures, forming dynamic hypotheses or systems archetypes. These maps help diagnose problems and inform interventions, facilitating comprehensive stakeholder-driven modelling (Sterman, 2000; Nyam et al. 2020).

Walking interviews

Walking interviews involve conducting interviews while walking with participants through their familiar environments. This approach allows participants to share their experiences and insights in real-time, often prompted by the places they encounter along the way. Walking interviews offer a dynamic, context-rich setting that can deepen the conversation, uncovering spatial and social dimensions that may not emerge in a traditional interview setting. By situating the interview in participants' daily landscapes, this method promotes a more egalitarian exchange and helps to capture the connection between people and place, revealing how environments shape lived experiences. The informality and place-based meanings that can emerge through walking interviews facilitate the understanding of "the processes, structures and lived experiences of people, of citizenship and lack of citizenship, partial citizenship, the multi locality, and personal and emotional forms of representation" (O'Neill and Einashe, 2019, p. 34; see also Wiederhold, 2015).

Narrative interviews

A narrative comprises of events, actors, experiences, and contexts that are organized in a specific order by a narrator. The active process of building a narrative from a collection of events, actors, and experiences enables the narrator to bring to the fore issues and concerns that might remain implicit or sidelined in the traditional interview tools used for qualitative interviews. As a result, narrative interviews (either a life story or a story associated to a specific event) can be a useful way to engage with people who might be intimidated by a Q&A format or are less interested in engaging with outsiders in a time constrained manner. The narrative interviews may also bridge the gap between the worldviews (ontology) and ways of knowing what is important (epistemology) that may develop between the interviewer and the interviewee in the traditional format. As compared to traditional interview format, narrative interview creates a role reversal where the interviewee plays an active and leading role in the interview process while the interviewer acts passive with minimum intervention. The role reversal

may also add to the empowerment of vulnerable group and enabling them to tell their story in the way they see most appropriate. It is important that a narrative interview is conducted in a setting most comfortable to the narrator to ensure distractions created by the settings.

Orientation note: Towards data collection

This list is not exhaustive. CS Teams are encouraged to find and use other enabling methods, and report/share about their use and the outcomes of the research process on the CS report. Moreover, based on CS Team's interest in adopting such methods, a training will be organised by WP3 coordinators on these, during the first months of 2025.

Methods of collecting secondary data

In addition to those identified in WP 2.1, following sources could be used as secondary data, if the CS teams find them relevant for their CS:

1. ***National census usually conducted each 10 years by national Statistical Office –*** useful data – demographics (gender, age, education, type of housing), ethnicity (self-identification, mother tongue), religiosity (self-declared denomination). Statistical office usually provides the breakdown of data for regions and districts. Concrete district where the CS is conducted should be described.

2. ***Program of economic and social development of the studied municipality/region/locality (if available)*** – most municipalities have such document at the level of local government, usually prepared for at least 5 years and approved by the local MP (local council). The main objectives of economic and social developments should be identified. In addition to that some municipalities have also a Community Plan of Social Services – to identify local public policies aiming at vulnerable groups in the community.

3. ***Project documentation (if available)*** - depending on the nature of the initiative and if provided by the initiative, project documentation (such as mid-term progress and final reports for funding bodies or other internal documents) should be considered as additional materials for analysis.

4. ***EU-SILC data*** – Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is the EU wide survey within the program of the European Union, usually conducted annually. The basic purpose of the survey is to map current quality of life of households across the EU countries, their socio-demographic structure, the way, quality, and financial demand factor of housing, and also labour, material, and health conditions of persons living in households.

As the secondary documents information for the SERIGO research some indicators from the EU -SILC for the respective countries can be OPTIONALLY taken from the most recent national survey (usually conducted by the national statistical office). The most relevant would be the indicator of

A. the risk of poverty (social exclusion) and

B. severe materially and socially deprivation for the respective country and the most vulnerable groups (like one parent's households, pensioners, marginalized groups etc.)

These data could be used for identifying the social background of the respective municipalities and/or regions.

5. Political map of the municipality/region/locality (if available) – using electoral statistics the political profile of a municipality could be constructed.

6. Relevant media coverage – the goal of including media coverage about the CS under investigation is to map whether the case gets attention in nation-wide or local media. If that is the case, the CS Teams are encouraged to note the main messages of how the selected SSE initiative is presented – e.g., whether the CS is presented as an example of a good practice or a problematic case of fraud or abuse, who is given space to speak about the CS. The CS teams do not have to conduct a media content analysis per se but rather, they can selectively focus on media outlets and coverage that map concrete instances related to the CS under

investigation that are worthy of the CS teams' interest. Time span – definitely 2025, but earlier coverage could be included as well depending on the focus and the overall research design of the concrete CS.

7. Optional: Additional country specific documents – e.g., in Slovakia Atlas of Roma communities is prepared each 5-6 years. It provides information about Roma living conditions in marginalized communities.

4. STORING COLLECTED DATA: OUTLINE OF THE CASE STUDY DATABASE

This section summarises what, why, and how building of a case study database for the purpose of this study.

What is a case study database: A repository where different forms of data (audio, visual – text, tables, photos, videos) are collected for ease of access and ease of analysis by respective teams.

Why a case study database is needed: A case study database enables systematic recording, archiving, and analysis of data that is crucial for achieving the aims and objectives of the SERIGO project.

How the case study database is created and what are the roles and responsibilities of different participants: The case study database in the case of SERIGO is divided into two parts: 1) case study database for project partners, 2) shared case study database (Figure 7). Each case study partner shall maintain an individual SERIGO case study database (saved as a folder) on their secure servers. This database may contain four subfolders that contain audio files, video files, interview transcripts and the reflection form. The shared SERIGO database consists of a set of separate folders (one for each case study) on the SERIGO Teams workspace hosted by UEF that is divided into subfolders based on the classification of data and material. During data collection each case study team will systematically add data and materials to the respective folders in a format accessible to all members.

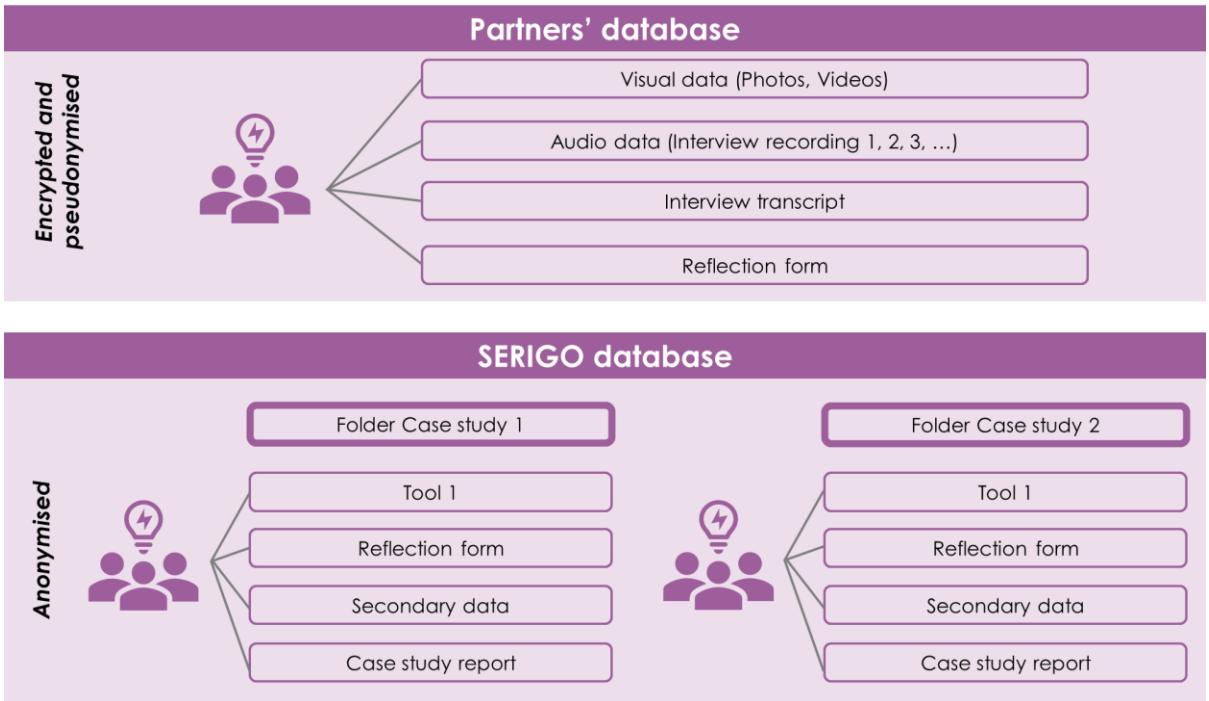

Figure 7. Partners' and SERIGO database

Type of data

Audio data

The audio data consists of audio recordings of the focus group meetings and interviews. To ensure the privacy of the participants, all audio recordings must be temporarily stored only in the PP's secure folders until the transcription is concluded.

Visual Data

The visual data consists of video and photographic material gathered during data collection/field work. This could be videos/photos describing different aspects of the case study shared by the stakeholders or videos/photos collected by the fieldwork team that supplement the audio and written material. To be saved on Partners' database.

Interview transcripts

All interviews and focus group data will be transcribed by the project partners. The transcribed data must be stored only on Partners' database.

Reflection form

Fieldwork reflection form should be filled in English language, ideally within 24 hours after the data collection activity (interview, focus group) to capture fresh insights. As the reflection form does not contain any personal detail that enable the identification of research participants, it is stored on SERIGO database as it will serve for cross- case analysis. The Reflection form (**Tool 3**) may serve to record important data on social factors such as age, gender, education, nationality, etc. (see section Intersectional approach for data collection) to understand the responses from an intersectional position. Such social factors may refer both to the position of the research participant in a vulnerable situation, as well as the SSE initiative's actors. This form should enable interviewers to register their immediate reflections and insights (in the form of response to some relevant questions related to the project).

Data encryption

During interviews, focus groups, observations or other enabling methods, research participants may be asked to provide information about their name, surname, (ethnic) origin, native language, gender, residence, and employment or volunteer affiliations. Although such data may not be asked to all stakeholders and may not be relevant in all CSs, in case they are collected the following data protection requirements apply.

Data that include personal and special categories of data (such as ethnic origin) as defined by Article 9 of EU Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) will be encrypted using a free software such as VeraCrypt or the encryption feature available in Teams, before being stored on Partners' database. The encryption key will be kept in a secure folder on Partners' database, accessible only to designated project partners.

Data pseudo-anonymization

Before uploading into respective audio/ visual folders, all data must be pseudo-anonymised with a unique ID to protect the identity and privacy of the participants. The unique ID must include information about

1. The acronym of the case study (see Table 2. For example, RED for the case study of Somos Red in Canary Islands, Spain)
2. The stakeholder ID (see Excel Tool 1 – Step 3).

3. The type of participant interaction (see Excel Tool 1 – tab RESEARCH METHODS for a list and acronym. For example, Semi-Structured interview-SSIN, Walking Interview – WIN, Life Story Interview – LSIN).
4. Number of interviews (Each interview can be numbered based on the number of participants interviewed in each category. For example, an interview with a first general expert can be labelled GE-01, and interview with a second general expert can be labelled GE-02.)
5. The date of the recording. The date should follow the day-month-year format without the dashes.
6. The kind of file (Audio -A, Video-V, Reflection Form -RF, Transcript - T)

For example: A semi-structured interview audio recording with a second general expert for the case study RED on 28-02-2025 can be coded as "RED-001-SSIN-02-280225-A".

5. METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection and analysis are intricately intertwined. For instance, initial data analysis may inform the direction of data collection and vice versa. As a result, building theoretical insights from data may involve multiple rounds of interaction, iteration, and comparison between different data sources as well as between data collection and analysis. In comparison to the fully deductive (data as evidence for testing a theory) or fully inductive (data being independent to existing theory), in this project an abductive or hybrid approach are used. The hybrid/abductive approach ensures that a fine, yet dynamic balance is sought between structure (to ensure some degree of comparative possibility among a diversity of cases) and agency (creative pursuit and flexibility of identifying yet unexplored and emergent themes). When operationalized into practices of data collection and analysis in SERIGO, this means that 1) the pre-existing theories and the gaps therein are employed to develop the conceptual and analytical framework that informs the research questions for each case studies. 2) Consequently, systematic process of data collection and data analysis to build new theoretic insights may engage back the research questions to articulate the relationship between pre-existing and newly generated theoretical insights. The delicate dance between theory and data and the approach of SERIGO for data analysis is represented in figure 9.

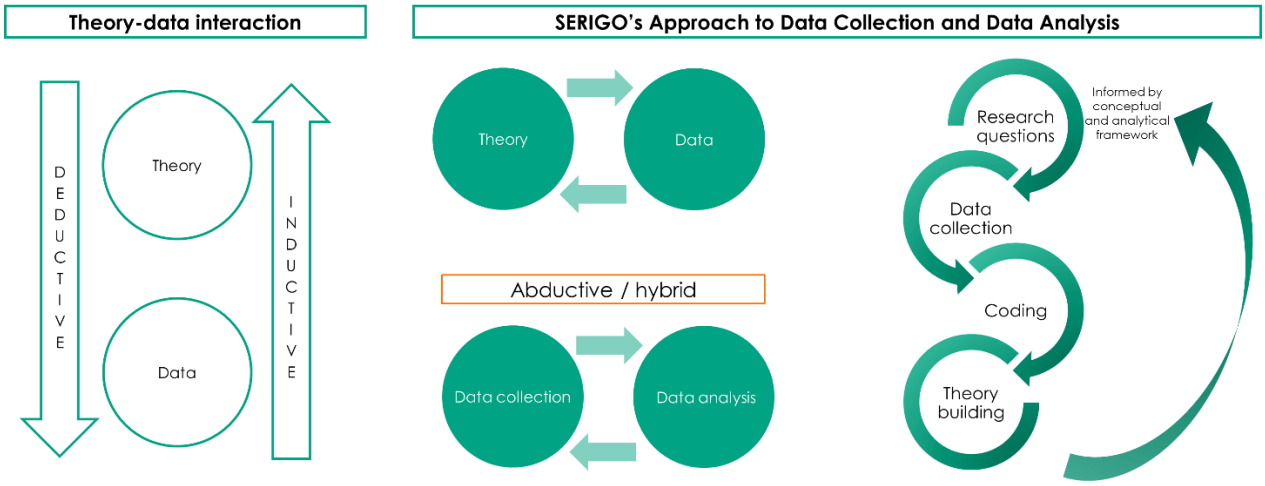

Figure 8. The delicate balance between data and theory in SERIGO's data analysis approach

Data coding and analysis

The data analysis follows a hybrid (**combination of inductive and deductive) approach**. The deductive aspects of data analysis involve building research questions based on the conceptual framework and analytical dimensions that guide the empirical enquiry and data collection. The inductive aspect of the analysis of transcribed data requires coding. Codes may be described as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Depending on the amount and quality of data, the coding can be conducted manually or using appropriate software (e.g., NViVo, Atlas.ti, MaxQDA). If done manually, coding is an iterative process that requires reading and rereading the interview data, breaking down it into smaller segments and identifying different themes and sub themes of relevance.

There are different ways of coding data and data analysis based on different approaches of grounded theory. SERIGO applies the coding process inspired by an adapted version of the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012). Gioia Methodology is a well-recognised method for **uncovering theoretical and conceptual knowledge from qualitative data through a series of coding and aggregating processes** (Gioia et al., 2012). Recently, this approach has been used in the EU-funded project JUST2CE (Friant et al., 2023). The methodology follows the bottom-up development of theoretical dimensions by breaking down the coding process into first order codes, second order codes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions. The figure below schematically depicts the coding process.

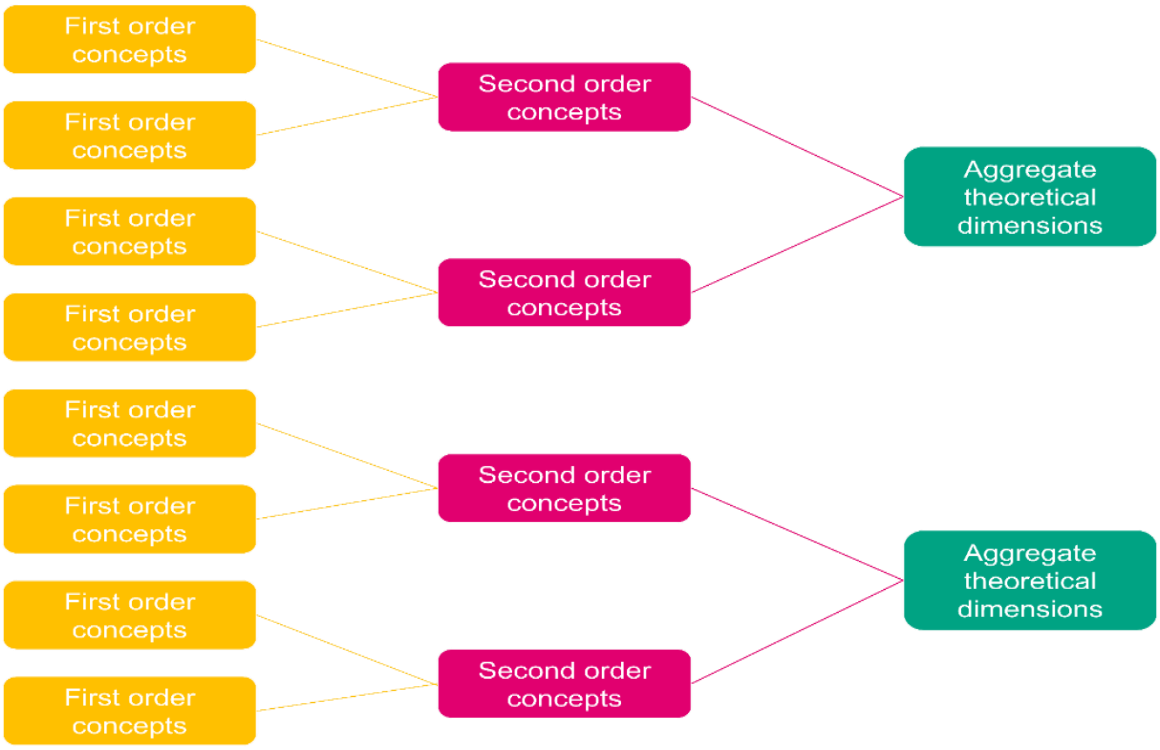

Figure 9. Schematic presentation of data analysis using the Gioia et. al (2013) method

An iterative engagement between the inductive and deductive aspects of data analysis would facilitate a conversation between the conceptual and analytical frameworks and empirical data ensuring theory to be build bottom-up while addressing the research questions developed for each case study. Collectively, this combination of induction and deduction will develop evidence that would generate meaningful insights for the overall objectives of SERIGO.

Intersectional approach to data coding and analysis

In analysing data or developing codes from an ICST perspective, a nuanced consideration of social factors, such as race, gender, disability, and others that may intersect, and the power dynamics surrounding them, is essential. This approach goes beyond viewing social factors in isolation, instead recognizing that **individuals are situated at the crossroads (intersections) of diverse social factors** that shape their experiences and access to resources, opportunities, and rights.

This can be done through the following steps:

1. *Intersectional framework in coding*

As mentioned under data collection, an intersectional framework encourages the inclusion of variables that capture the complexity of social identities and realities. This applies also to data coding. For instance, CS Teams may want to consider:

- **Intersectional demographics**: instead of categorizing participants by a single demographic characteristic, such as gender or age alone, data collection should include multiple dimensions to capture how these identities intersect. This might involve coding, for instance, age, gender, and disability simultaneously.

- **Nuanced data points**: standardizing data points that acknowledge variations within demographic groups (e.g., recognizing disparities within ethnic groups or distinctions in gender identities beyond binary categories) can reveal patterns of advantage or disadvantage that single-axis analysis might miss.

- **Detailed subcategories**: including detailed subcodes within demographic data helps capture variations within groups. For example, using categories beyond "male" and "female" allows for a fuller representation of gender diversity.

- **Context-specific variables**: depending on the focus of the CS, additional variables that capture specific aspects of power and privilege (e.g., immigration status, employment type, or access to healthcare) can further deepen the analysis and clarify how different groups experience systems of power differently.

2. *Recognizing power dynamics in data interpretation*

Power dynamics play a critical role in shaping the lived experiences of individuals and communities as well as in influencing the trajectories of SSE initiatives. In data analysis, recognizing these dynamics involves examining how certain groups may be privileged or marginalized within the system being studied. An assessment of power structures and their interaction with social factors involves examining how **formal and informal systems of power** influence—and are influenced by—societal conditions, cultural norms, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and other social factors. Power structures—whether political, economic, or ideological—affect how resources and opportunities are distributed among different groups, thus creating privileges and discrimination/exclusion.

Understanding this dynamic interplay is crucial for analysing social inequality, institutional bias, and the ways in which vulnerabilities are maintained or challenged within societies. Key considerations may include:

- **Privilege, oppression, disadvantage, exploitation and marginalization**: understanding how these different social processes operate in society can illuminate why certain outcomes disproportionately impact some groups over others. For example, an analysis of healthcare disparities must consider both ethnicity and socioeconomic status to fully understand how access to care varies.

- **Institutional bias and systemic inequities**: coding and analysis that account for institutional bias reveal how entrenched social hierarchies influence access to resources and power. This might include assessing whether data reveals bias in service provision by SSE, policing practices, hiring processes, or educational opportunities, which often disadvantage intersecting marginalized groups.

Therefore, while analysing data about the effectiveness of SSE initiatives in tackling rural vulnerabilities, CS Teams may want to explore also on **what are the main power systems and structures** in the selected SEE to uncover how the intersections of selected social factors

intertwine with SSE potential to tackle rural vulnerabilities. In the frame of SERIGO, this means that the analysis may uncover following questions:

- What is the power system and structures that the SEE aims to address?
- Does the SSE address it in a way to reduce such power system or structures, or are there mechanisms that reproduce the identified power system?

Assessing power structures and their interaction(s) with social factors involves understanding how existing inequalities and forms of exclusion are challenged or perpetuated by the SSE initiatives studied in WP3[8], also by examining the social dynamics that allow or hinder individual and collective agency[9].

The interaction between power structures and social factors often leads to consider how complex social hierarchies, as institutions, including SSE and relevant donors, favour certain groups over others, sometimes unconsciously. Hence, the intersectional lens applied to data analysis enables to develop new knowledge on the factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of the studied SSE initiatives.

The mechanisms through which power structures interact with social factors usually include (although may not be limited to) the following, that should be observed in the CS:

- **Legal and institutional policies**: they can either protect marginalized groups or perpetuate their disadvantage.

- **Cultural norms**: they often reflect and support the existing power structures. For instance, the notion that certain jobs or roles are better suited for one gender over another reinforces traditional gender roles and maintains power imbalances.

- **Socialization and education**: the curriculum, access to resources, and opportunities for different social groups can reinforce existing power structures by limiting or expanding social mobility.

EXAMPLES:

For instance, through the investigation, CS Teams may notice that even allegedly race-neutral or gender-neutral language or procedures are instead pervaded by tenants of patriarchy and racism. Other aspects to consider may be existing power asymmetries among stakeholders as well as the role of their agency. Therefore, to conduct this assessment, once the social factors that are relevant for the CS are identified, during the data collection CS Teams may plan to **explore how selected power structures or systems influence the intersection of the three abovementioned factors (race, gender, agency).**[10]

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[8] About the transformative aim of SSE, see SERIGO Initial Integrated Conceptual Framework (D1.1): As SSE initiatives develop their transformative aspirations, "systems entrepreneurs" are emerging who find "opportunities to connect an alternative approach to the resources of the dominant system" (Westley, 2018, p. 24). [p.43]
Central to this effort is the transformation of existing social practices and the creation of new ones, essential for sustainable economies and lifestyles (Ravazzoli & Valero López, 2020).
Pandey, P., Gazol, S. I., & Pansera, M. (2024). Bridge-building practices for holistic vision of agrarian-rural societies in India and Spain. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *106*, 103196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103196

[9] See SERIGO Initial Integrated Conceptual Framework (D1.1), p.39: "Agency refers to the ability to define goals and take action upon them, including decision-making and various forms of negotiation and resistance (ibid). Resources and agency together constitute as capabilities that means people's potential for living in the way they want (Sen, 1999)."

[10] See further in Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) and Bailey et al. (2019).

A Glimpse into Intersectional Categories

Intersectional analysis may give important insights with a comparison across groups, time periods, or experiences (Misra et al., 2020). Therefore, in the CS there may be the need to further split categories of stakeholders, e.g., separate the data between women with state citizenship and those women without. If CS Team considers it appropriate, the team may need to start identifying categories of analysis at the stage of data collection to save time during data analysis, that is, the team will have already collected data that are already separated by social category. In this vein, CS Teams may find useful the threefold division suggested by McCall (2005) on how to explore the complexity of intersectionality:

anticategorical, that refuses to reduce social life to categories, that is, in our example, gender would not be a decisive factor for citizenship in the CS;

intercategorical, that allows the use of analytical categories but critically in order to document inequalities between social groups and track evolving patterns of inequality across multiple, often conflicting dimensions – thus, in our example, allows comparing women with or without state citizenship; or

intracategorical, that emphasizes particular social groups situated at often-overlooked intersections. By doing so, it aims to uncover the complexity of lived experiences within a specific group, that is, in our example, within only women with a state citizenship and considering within it other factors (e.g., age, disability).

The approach that is most often used, by McCall herself (2005), is the second, the *intercategorical*.

Single and cross-case analysis

While single case analysis may provide an in-depth understanding of a particular case, a cross-case analysis enables a multi-dimensional, layered holistic understanding about a research question. In a way, single case analysis complements cross-case analysis and vice versa. Case studies have increasingly become one of the most sought-after methods of qualitative research. Yet, their contribution in informing broader perspectives such as policy decisions remains limited. **Cross-case analysis as a methodological tool for analysing case studies provides an opportunity to draw broader lessons from case studies research.** It enables comparison between different aspects (commonalities, differences, meanings) as well as activities and practices among different case studies. A comparison between different cases with specific aspects might mobilise an understanding of **relationality between different issues, themes, and contexts.** As a result, cross-case analysis enables the refinement and development of new concepts and methods, test theories and develop critical evidence that could empower policymaking (Khan & VanWynesberghe, 2008). SERIGO takes a case-oriented approach for cross-comparison. This approach relies on narratives that are built through a reflexive coding of data while ensuring symmetrical treatment of diverse positions and viewpoints.

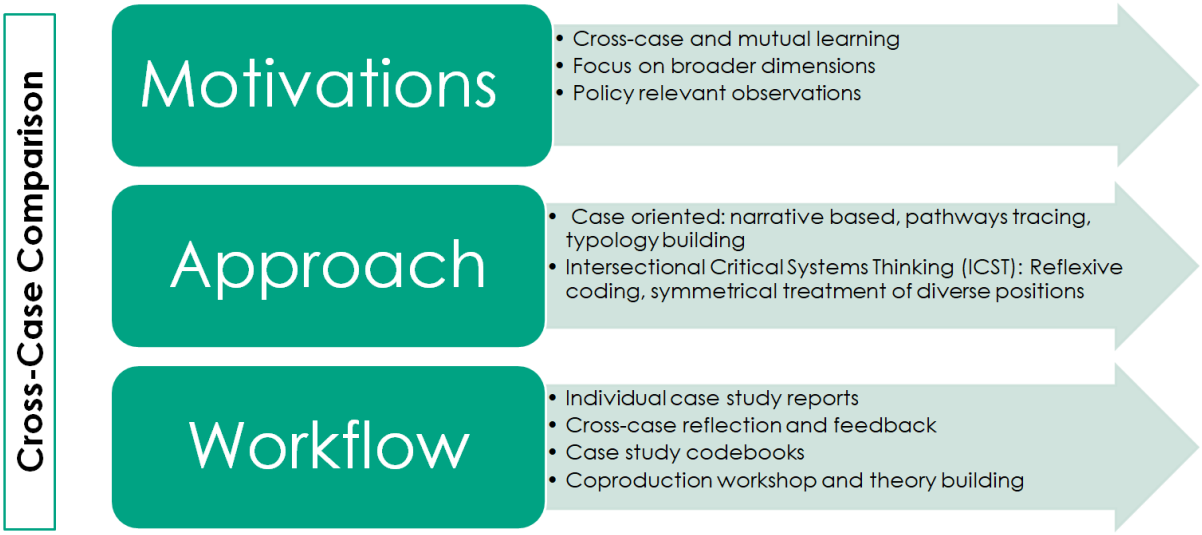

Figure 10. Cross-Case Comparison approach

Types of cross-case analysis

There are two kinds of cross-case analysis that are prominently used in case based qualitative research (Khan & VanWynesberghe, 2008; Ragin, 2008): 1) Variable oriented 2) Case oriented.

1) **Variable oriented:** The variable oriented case analysis is used in situations where the number as well as the variability of cases are high. The process involves conducting statistical analysis on many variables that are pertinent to all cases (Yin 2003). This type of analysis may not be relevant for SERIGO.
2) **Case oriented:** This method of cross case analysis associates more deeply with the complex contextual factors rather than individual variables. Different strategies could be employed to conduct case-oriented analysis. The strategies more suitable for SERIGO could be *process tracing* and *building typologies*. Process tracing allows the researchers to sequentially engage with the progression of certain events (creation and development of SSE in response to vulnerabilities) within individual case studies. The process tracing also illuminates what pathways were chosen and what were not, to address the local contextual concerns. For cross-case comparison researchers can build *typologies* of pathways (for SSE initiative) based on certain shared aspects of the process, phenomenon, or the trigger and target (vulnerabilities). Both process tracing and typology building requires engaging with the case in detailed narratives. Theory building relies on building a story based on the identification of the sub-categories of a major phenomenon (role of SSE in addressing vulnerabilities in rural areas).

Organizing cross-case data analysis for SERIGO

Based on a case-oriented approach the cross-comparison analysis of SERIGO will take the following direction to ensure feedback and learning among CS Teams:

First, individual case study reports will be produced in detailed narrative forms by each CS Teams at the end of the fieldwork, in the **Annex 1: Case study protocol and CS report structure.** These reports are later shared among CS Teams for a cross-CS feedback round. After the feedback from partners, each CS Team will revise and update their case study reports. The final case study reports will then be tagged by each case study partner with codes relevant to the research aims and research questions of SERIGO. A penultimate co-production workshop, comprising all case study partners, will be carried out to reflect on and discuss the

individually coded case study reports to build typologies for cross case analysis. Together, the codebooks and typologies will be used to develop aggregate theoretical dimensions as well as broader policy suggestions.

Aspects to be considered for cross-case comparison

1. **Preserving the unique features and context of single cases:** A focus on finding features for comparison may result in oversimplification of the particularities and sensitivities of individual cases. Cross-case comparison may conceal the unique and revealing specificities of single cases in pursuit of more obvious trends. Similarly, the focus on cross-comparison may sideline the context specificity of certain observations and features in individual case studies. Though the neglect of context specificity might be useful in abstracting single case data to the level of comparison, the broader results generated in this process might be illusionary. Thus, the separation of context from the case study data for broader understanding might be counter-productive for cross-case analysis.

2. **The limitations of generalizations:** Generalizations have to be seen as indeterminate, context specific, relative, and time and context bound (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Rather than a focus on generalizability, **comparability (aspects of cases that can be compared) and translatability** (specific features of one case that can be translated and related to some features of other cases) are more appropriate for cross-case analysis. To ensure that comparability and translatability do not over-reproduce specific characteristics of one case, it is important that all individual case studies that form the part of cross-case comparison for specific aspects have provided detailed and well-defined description of these aspects. Similarly, researchers conducting cross-case analysis should remain constantly reflexive about their theoretical positioning and purposes of this exercise to ensure that specific aspects of individual cases are not concealed in pursuit of making broader claims.

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the CS approach will make use of the research with various stakeholders including those the from marginalized communities, this section will outline ethical standards, procedures and other aspects that will be considered. In general, the SERIGO Data Management Plan (refer to p. 16 for CS specifically), the European Commission Ethics Self-Assessment Guidelines, EU Regulation 2016/679 on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other EU guidelines and recommendations concerning research ethics are rigorously followed.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that while these Guidelines outline general ethical considerations, when applying for the ethical clearance from their respective institutional ethical committee bodies, the CS Teams should adapt the final wording of the ethical considerations based on the national and/or institutional regulations as well as the contextual conditions of the CS.

Having these in mind, the CS approach is guided by the following ethical principles adapted from the European Commission (2021a, p. 6):

1. **Respecting human dignity, human rights and safeguarding personal integrity, safety and well-being and respecting and protecting the environment and future generations**

While pursuing academic freedom and new knowledge is a fundamental right, it shall be superseded by the preservation of human dignity, human rights, safeguarding of personal integrity, safety and well-being of the research participants. To minimize the harm, researchers shall be guided by the principle of *non-maleficence* ("do no harm" and minimization of potential harms). The researchers are asked to continuously "carefully consider the potential implications (including inadvertent consequences) of research on human groups […] and contextualise their findings to minimize as much as possible potential misuse or risks of harm to the studied groups in the public sphere" (Science must respect the dignity and rights of all humans, 2022, p. 1030).

Practically, as outlined above, researchers should use **Tool 1a** to help them explore and understand how their own social identities may impact various stages of the research process and how to become aware of them in order to minimize harm and remarginalization; **Tool 2** to draw attention to intersectional experiences of the research participants to avoid silencing and harming them in the process; **Tool 3** to reflect on the process of interviewing, with special attention being paid to the ways researcher's positionality may have impacted the process of interviewing; **Annex 1** (especially question 3.4) to help once again reflect on the ethical considerations and whether intersectionality was taken into account.

2. **Promoting justice, inclusiveness, autonomy and agency of the participants**

To incorporate justice and inclusiveness lens on a procedural level means that the research participants are seen as equal in the research process. Such an approach is based on the respect for and support of the personal autonomy of the research participants. In this sense, research participants are not seen as "objects" of the study, but they exercise autonomy and agency over the research process. If approached in this way, the research participants may contribute to unexpected or novel forms of situated knowledge that go beyond the knowledge traditionally produced by the researchers (McGarry, 2016).

On a practical level, this means that researchers should involve various groups of people in the research, taking into account their intersectional identities. For instance, the selection of

research participants must be carefully examined to ensure that certain groups (e.g., specific racial minorities, one gender, or individuals in institutions) are not being chosen solely due to their easy accessibility, availability, vulnerable status, or susceptibility to being influenced. It must also be considered that there could be a self-selection bias, meaning that people who lack the necessary time and resources to participate are unlikely to get involved in the research.

Similarly, choosing the methods of data collection such as semi-structured interview, focus groups, participant observations and enabling methods allows for a more direct involvement of the participants as they are allowed to shape the direction of the data collection and exercise their autonomy and agency. Practically, **Tool 1**, especially the matching of the empirical dimensions with stakeholders and consequently combining various stakeholders with data collection methods are important as they allow the researcher to be attentive to the various results a method may produce while considering the positionality, intersectionality of the participant.

Similarly, once the data is collected, the researchers are encouraged to plan adequate timing so as to be able to consult participants, if needed. As Suffla et al. (2015) argue, when the publications are being produced, it is equally important to "incorporate the voices of others without colonizing them in a manner that reinforces patterns of domination" (p. 15). In this way, the autonomy of the research participants is also exercised in the form of "counter-storytelling" (Muhammad et al., 2015) that involves incorporating personal perspectives and narratives of those that are marginalized or tend to be silenced. Finally, to avoid exploitative research, researchers should maximize the benefits the participants can gain thanks to their participation in the research, especially the members of the marginalized groups.

3. **Ensuring honesty and transparency towards research subjects and obtaining free and informed consent**

Research participants shall participate in the research voluntarily and no means of coercion, improper pressure or undue influence are applied and their rights, dignity, well-being are appropriately protected. Making autonomous decisions about the participation, direction of, and "exiting" the research rely on ensuring honesty and transparency towards the research participants. The responsibility to inform honestly and transparently lies with the researcher. The information relayed to the participants shall be using understandable language adapted to the needs of the participants, and it should be contained in the participation information, consent forms and data privacy statement (**Annex 3**) that CS Teams may use or adapt for their needs. At the same time, the researcher has the responsibility to answer any questions of the participants honestly and transparently and inform the research participants about their rights.

In some cases, it may be difficult to obtain informed consent since certain people may possess impaired capacity to consent. This may apply to people with mental illness, development disabilities or people with substance abuse problems. In such cases, researchers need to carefully consider whether they possess the ability to consent and safeguard their rights and needs. The research with such individuals may be carried out when a) it is essential since the research cannot be conducted with people capable of fully consenting, b) the research holds a meaningful value for the individuals, c) any risks to research participants are minimal. All three of these conditions need to be met. In such cases, the consent must be secured from the guardians or relatives. Additionally, research with children will not be carried out.

Practically, while informed consent usually takes form of a written, sometimes digital, form, there might be situations where standard procedures for obtaining informed consent are not appropriate due to contextual or cultural differences or barriers. If written consent form cannot be given, consent can be obtained in alternative ways listed below. Similarly, if possessing information or consent form poses a safety risk for the research participants or the researchers, the information should be provided in other ways.

Types of informed consent that the CS Teams can use:

Written/signed informed consent – Written consent is usually given before the research but should be constantly observed and re-checked (explicitly and/or implicitly) during the whole duration of the research. When dealing with the written consent, the researcher carries around two copies – one is given to the research participant that gets to keep it, and the other, after being signed, returns to the researcher. The signed copy of the informed consent shall be stored in a secure place where only the selected people have access to. At the same time, a good practice is to scan it and store it an online folder, too. In a case when carrying around or storing physical copies of the informed consent could endanger the safety of the researcher or research participant, alternative ways of informed consent shall be applied.

Online/digital consent – The researcher sends the research participant an electronic copy of the informed consent. In this case, the researcher sends the document containing the participation information and informed consent form to the research participant via email or other secure channels of online communication. In the next step, the research participant either adds their electronic signature and this whole document is then safely stored in an online folder, or the research participant responds to the email with, stating that they understand what the research is about and that they agree with the participation. In the latter case, the researcher makes a screenshot or saves the email in a secure online folder. This type of informed consent can be given only to those who have access to the Internet connection.

Oral (recorded) consent – In many cases, the participants will not agree with signing a document due to various reasons (e.g., cultural and contextual barriers, illiteracy etc.). In this case, the informed consent can be given orally. After the researcher reads out loud or freely retells all the necessary information about the research and the participation, the research participant may agree to participate orally. In this case, the consent should be recorded on a recorder, smartphone or a similar device. Before recording, the researcher should let the participant know that they have started recording. This recorded consent is then safely stored in a secure folder as an audio file or it can be likewise transcribed and then stored.

Passive (tacit) consent - This type of consent means that after the individual has learned about the research, they do not explicitly object to participation. In general, this type of consent is undesirable. This is because a) the researcher cannot check whether the relevant information has been properly received by the participant, b) or because the research participants have been unable to indicate non-consent or disagreement due to various reasons (e.g., other people in their community consented so they feel they cannot reject as they would be looked down upon). Only in specific situations can passive consent be accepted. Those are: a) if the activities of the research do not pose any or very limited risk or burden to the participants, b) the researcher makes sure that the participants can opt-out of the research at any moment and is continuously explicit about it, c) the opt-out procedure is very straightforward, d) it would be very difficult or burdensome to obtain informed consent from every single research participant (e.g.,

this may be the case for a general field observation). In general, all these reasons as to why the researcher opted for a passive consent need to properly justified.

No consent – There are only a handful of occasions when the informed consent does not have to be provided: a) when the informed consent is not in the interested of the participant as it may endanger or violate their privacy (e.g., if a participant is a part of an anonymous online forum, informing their legal guardians is against the participant's interest or wish for anonymity), b) when the research contains observation of behaviour in public spaces (e.g., streets, shopping centres) and no personal data about specific individuals will be collected, c) when the research involves studying behaviour at a group level (e.g., observing cultural activities in a cultural centre, teaching methods in schools, impact of new management style on teamwork) and no personal data or specific information about the individual participants will be collected. Note that in the third case, the informed consent should be required from the representative of the institution, responsible person or authority.

*Note that written/signed, online/digital and oral informed consent still work with the same sample documents in the **Annex 3** (participation information sheet, consent form and data privacy statement) and it is up to the researcher to decide what form is appropriate based on the contextual clues (e.g., if the researcher decides the oral consent is appropriate, the researcher reads aloud or freely summarizes the information contained in the forms before they ask the participants to consent to their participation in the research). Passive/tacit and no consent are specific cases when the Annex 3 is not used and the researcher should carefully consider when such approach can be used based on the guidelines above.*

Finally, the CS approach departs from traditional understanding of informed consent as a "one-time thing" because it "glosses over differential levels of power between researchers and participants (both elites and non-elites), and obscures how the context in which research takes place affects the ability to provide consent" (Plankey-Videla, 2012, p. 4). Here, informed consent is seen as a *continuous process* between the researcher and the participants that includes a continuous reflexive exercise that may happen explicitly or implicitly pre-fieldwork, during the fieldwork and post-fieldwork (Plankey-Videla, 2012; Klykken, 2022). Practically, pre-fieldwork consent includes the process of going over the information and consent form with the participant while, during the fieldwork, checking for consent may include heightened attention to verbal and non-verbal clues and keeping the research diary, post-fieldwork consent may include authorization of the transcript of the interview or going over the preliminary interpretations and checking with the participants if necessary.

4. **Ensuring privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality**

In line with ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants, the project will follow the EU Regulation 2016/679 on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – special attention will be paid to the data protection of the special categories including marginalized and vulnerable population as stipulated in the Article 9 GDPR. This will be supplemented by Ethics and Data Protection document (European Commission, 2018) that outlines ethical consideration pertaining to the data protection. Since some CS will work with migrants or refugees, the research will be also informed by the Guidance Note – Research on refugees, asylum seekers & migrants (European Commission, 2021b).

Anonymity refers to the practice of gathering data from the research participants without collecting any details that would identify them (e.g., removing their name, age, gender,

profession, residency, email address, photography). Confidentiality will involve using codes instead of identifying information while the identifying information should be kept in a separate secure place where only the primary investigators have access to, limiting access to data, having security passwords on computerized or digitalized data. Similarly, once the information is no longer needed, it will be destroyed. For concrete steps on how to anonymise, encrypt and categorise the data, refer to the section **4. Storing Collected Data: Outline for the Case Study Database**.

As outlined in the SERIGO Data Management Plan, no personal data is foreseen to be used for the purpose of the research. The instances of personal data will be encoded, redacted or omitted. The researcher notes containing the personal data will be stored using partners' own individual data management procedures. Participation information, informed consent forms and data privacy statements will contain personal data such as names and/or contact details. If these will be provided in a physical form, they will be stored locally by the researchers and destroyed at the of the project. Since the informed consent form will also exist in online form, they will be stored in the MS Teams data management infrastructure for the duration of the project. List of names, and contacts will be stored on password protected servers of the researchers. For a full procedure on how the data will be handled, please refer to Data Privacy Statement in **Annex 3**.

7. ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS WITH RELEVANT MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Conducting 24 case studies on social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives offers rich insights into how these initiatives tackle rural vulnerabilities. However, this large-scale, multi-context approach introduces a range of challenges that require careful management. Below, anticipated challenges and limitations are outlined, together with the strategies designed to mitigate them.

1. Variability in Case Study Contexts and Data Collection Methods
The diversity of rural contexts means that each SSE initiative operates within distinct socio-economic, cultural, and institutional landscapes. This variation can complicate the consistency of data collection across case studies, especially as research methods are adapted to fit each context.

Mitigation Strategy: To address these inconsistencies, structured yet flexible guidelines are provided that specify core questions and data points to be collected across all cases. This approach allows each case study to retain local relevance while ensuring that key data is systematically gathered, facilitating cross-case comparability.

2. Language Barriers and Communication Challenges
Rural areas often encompass a variety of minority languages or dialects, and language barriers may limit communication with local stakeholders, affecting data richness and accuracy. These barriers also risk excluding certain stakeholders from fully participating in the research.

Mitigation Strategy: Where needed, local interpreters or bilingual facilitators will be engaged to bridge communication gaps. Written and verbal communication materials will be adapted to the local language, in a language as clear as possible and using direct formulations to improve accessibility. This approach will help maintain the inclusivity and accuracy of data.

3. Shifts in Stakeholder Dynamics Over Time
Stakeholder relationships in rural areas can be complex and dynamic, and changes in these dynamics (e.g., due to political or economic shifts) may affect engagement levels and data availability. These shifts can impact the roles and influence of stakeholders, adding variability to case study findings.

Mitigation Strategy: Regular updates and stakeholder check-ins will be implemented to monitor changes in local dynamics. CS Teams will be encouraged to document shifts in relationships and power structures throughout the study, helping to contextualize data within the evolving landscape.

4. Discrepancy Between Planned and Actual Participation
A gap may arise between the expected number of respondents and the actual number of participants engaged, as rural populations can be challenging to reach consistently. This can reduce the breadth of perspectives present in findings.

Mitigation Strategy: The role of gatekeepers in key to address this challenge. Strategies such as expanding outreach to alternative local groups or holding additional engagement sessions, as well as varying the times and places for meetings may help meet data collection goals.

5. Resistance to Participation and Refusal of Recorded Interviews

Some stakeholders may be reluctant to participate, especially if they perceive a lack of direct benefit or fear repercussions. Additionally, some participants may resist recorded interviews, which could reduce data quality and depth.

Mitigation Strategy: To build trust and encourage participation, CS Teams will engage with local leaders and organizations as gatekeepers to convey the project's value. For those uncomfortable with recording, allow non-recorded interviews are allowed with detailed notetaking to capture insights accurately. Ensuring participant anonymity and transparency about data usage will also help address concerns and reduce resistance.

6. Ethical and Privacy Considerations with Vulnerable Participants

In rural contexts, engaging marginalized or vulnerable groups may raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding privacy, consent, and participant safety. Respecting these considerations while gathering robust data presents a delicate balance.

Mitigation Strategy: Ethical guidelines address these aspects in detail.

7. Unbalanced power relation between researchers and research participants, bias in data collection, data interpretation due to positionality

This relates, for instance, to risks of the researcher being the most profiting one in the relation, the researcher deciding what is most important (to be researched or reported upon), the researcher inhibiting conversation and thus collecting data and challenges in maintaining distance from the studied community, and the risk of social desirability bias when conducting research within marginalized communities.

Mitigation Strategy: Self-assessment of positionality and reflexivity

WP3 coordinators and responsible CS Teams will set up bimonthly drop-in meetings to ensure any further challenge not covered in this section is detected and addressed timely.

Tools and Annexes

Tool 1: Research design

Note on usage of this Tool: *Tool 1 guides CS Teams in the step-by-step research design. Each CS Team will find Tool 1 in Excel format in the respective CS Teams folders. Tool 1 comprises 6 tabs corresponding to 6 steps. CS Teams are asked to fill in one table for each CS they are carrying out.*

Step 1a. Researchers' self-assessment on positionality and reflexivity (Social Identity Map)

Step 1b. Set the boundaries of the CS

Step 1c. Identification of the main social categories in CS (Intersectionality wheel)

Step 2. Selection of empirical categories

Step 3. Refinement of stakeholder mapping

Step 4. Identify the relevant stakeholder as source of information for the selected empirical categories

Step 5. Connecting stakeholders and methods

Step 6. Schedule data collection in the CS (GANTT)

Tool 1a: Researchers' self-assessment on positionality and reflexivity

Note on usage of this Tool: *Tool 1a - The Social Identity Map (SIM) is a reflective tool designed to help researchers explore and understand how their own social identities may impact various stages of the research process. It is recommended that each member of the research team print and complete their own SIM as a preparatory step before entering the field and continue to reflect on it throughout the study.*

Pre-Fieldwork

Completing the SIM before fieldwork provides an important foundation. By doing this exercise, researchers gain a clearer sense of their own social identities and can anticipate how these identities might influence interactions with participants and the contextual setting of the research. A thorough understanding of personal identity within the study's context settings helps researchers engage in fieldwork with greater awareness and sensitivity.

Steps for Compiling the SIM

The SIM consists of three main reflective tiers. These steps are designed to progressively deepen researchers' self-awareness and understanding of how their social identity intersects with the research. Moving from the centre and going outwards, the first tier encourages researchers to focus on broad dimensions of their social identity; the second one shifts the attention to the impact that these dimensions have on our life; and the third tier deepens this reflection by bringing the focus to feelings and sensations associated by these facets of social identity.

5. **First Tier: Broader Dimensions of Social Identity**
   Start at the centre by identifying and reflecting on the broad dimensions of your social identity. This foundational step encourages researchers to explore various facets of their identity that may shape perspectives, assumptions, and interactions.
6. **Second Tier: Impact on Life**
   Next, consider how these broader identity dimensions influence your life experiences, opportunities, and interactions within different contexts. Reflect on how these identity facets have impacted your worldviews, privileges, challenges, and interactions, particularly in relation to the communities or groups involved in the study.
7. **Third Tier: Feelings and Sensations**
   In this final tier, deepen your self-reflection by exploring the emotions, feelings, and sensations associated with the aspects of your social identity identified in the previous steps. This involves articulating any emotional responses connected to your identity, which may be activated during interactions in the field.

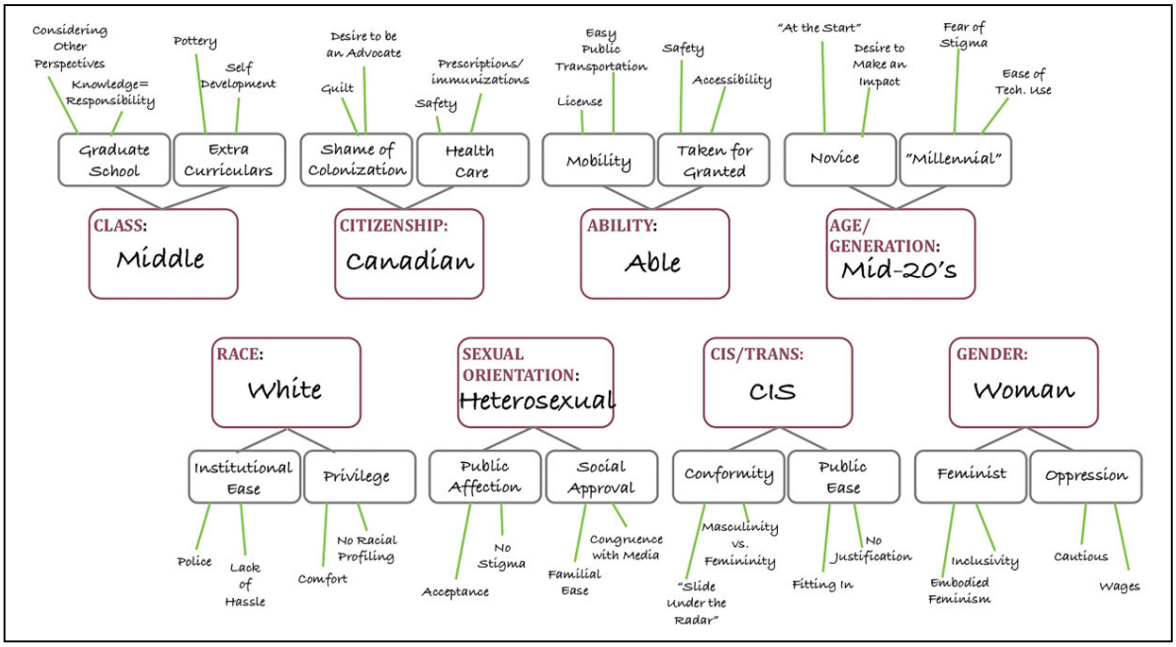

Figure 11. Completed SIM. figure taken from Jacobson & Mustafa (2019).

During and After Fieldwork

The SIM remains useful as a reflective tool throughout fieldwork, allowing researchers to continuously assess how their identity may influence interactions and data collection. Keeping a *research diary* to document reflections on positionality and specific identity facets can be valuable for capturing insights on how researchers' identities affect engagement with participants and the research setting.

Finally, the SIM can be particularly valuable during data analysis. It serves as a reminder that, even within a grounded theory or objective analytical approach, researchers interpret findings through the lens of their personal perspectives and experiences, which are shaped by various factors such as their socio-demographics, professional backgrounds, and worldviews.

By regularly revisiting the SIM, researchers can stay mindful of these influences, potentially leading to a more nuanced and reflective interpretation of emerging codes, themes, and theories, ultimately enriching the analysis.

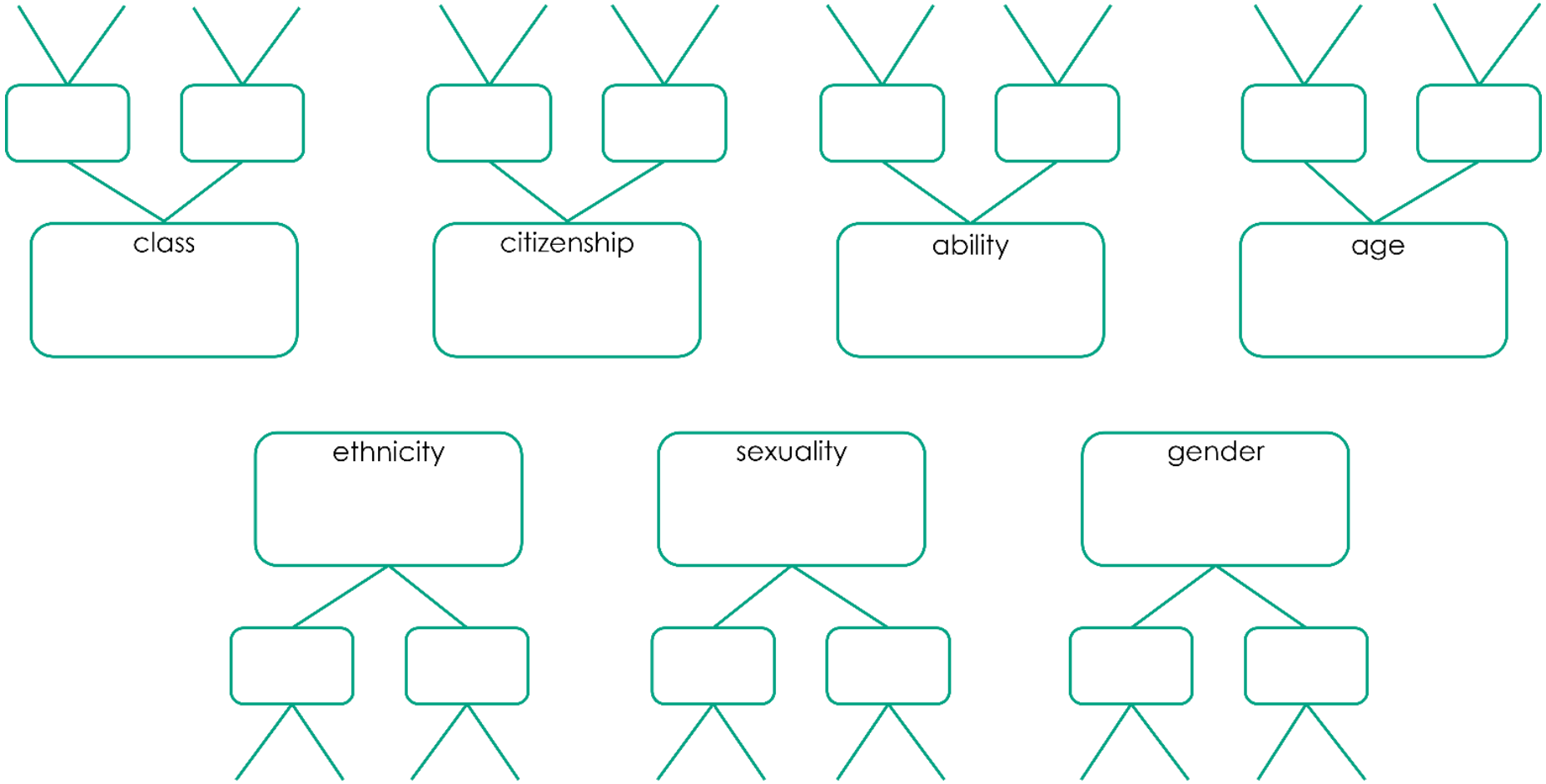

Figure 12. Social Identity Map (SIM)

Tool 1b: Setting the boundaries of CS and updating the Stakeholder mapping

Note on usage of this Tool: *Tool 1b is used to update the initial stakeholder mapping (T3.1) including a deeper reflection on CS boundaries and integrating the ICST approach. This is related to STEPs 1b and 3 of the research design and of Tool 1. The goal is to eventually have a focused list of* ***up to 25 stakeholders****, who will actively participate in data collection activities, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or other methods suited to gathering insights.*

1. CS Teams reflect upon the following question: Does the case study focus solely on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiative itself, or does it also encompass the broader context in which the SSE operates?
2. CS Teams re-open the initial stakeholder mapping document (T3.1, done on the base of SSE typology of stakeholders)
3. CS Teams try to locate initially identified stakeholders in Figure 13, following the boundary judgements as questions (adapted from Reynolds 2014):
    a. **Decision-Making Power (Internal or External)**: Which stakeholders identified hold significant decision-making power over the design or outcomes of SSE initiatives (both internally and externally)? How might this influence their roles in addressing rural vulnerabilities?
    b. **Local and Specialized Expertise (Internal or External)**: Who are the key individuals or organizations with local or scientific expertise relevant to the rural socioecological context (both internally and externally), and how might their input support an inclusive understanding of vulnerabilities?
    c. **Beneficiary**: Which stakeholders benefit from the SSE initiative activities?
    d. **Marginalized and Vulnerable Stakeholders (i.e. Witness)**: Which stakeholders could be considered marginalized or vulnerable in the SSE context, because they are not involved in the SSE initiative, or excluded from the possibility to use the services for different reasons, or only passively involved, as service-users? Which stakeholders are negatively affected by the SSE initiative?
4. CS Teams include other stakeholders were not initially considered but now seem relevant
5. CS Teams update the file (tab STEP 3 on Tool 1), reported in Table 5 adding the ICST-related role to the stakeholders (Table 4) besides the role according to the SSE typology by OECD (Table 3).

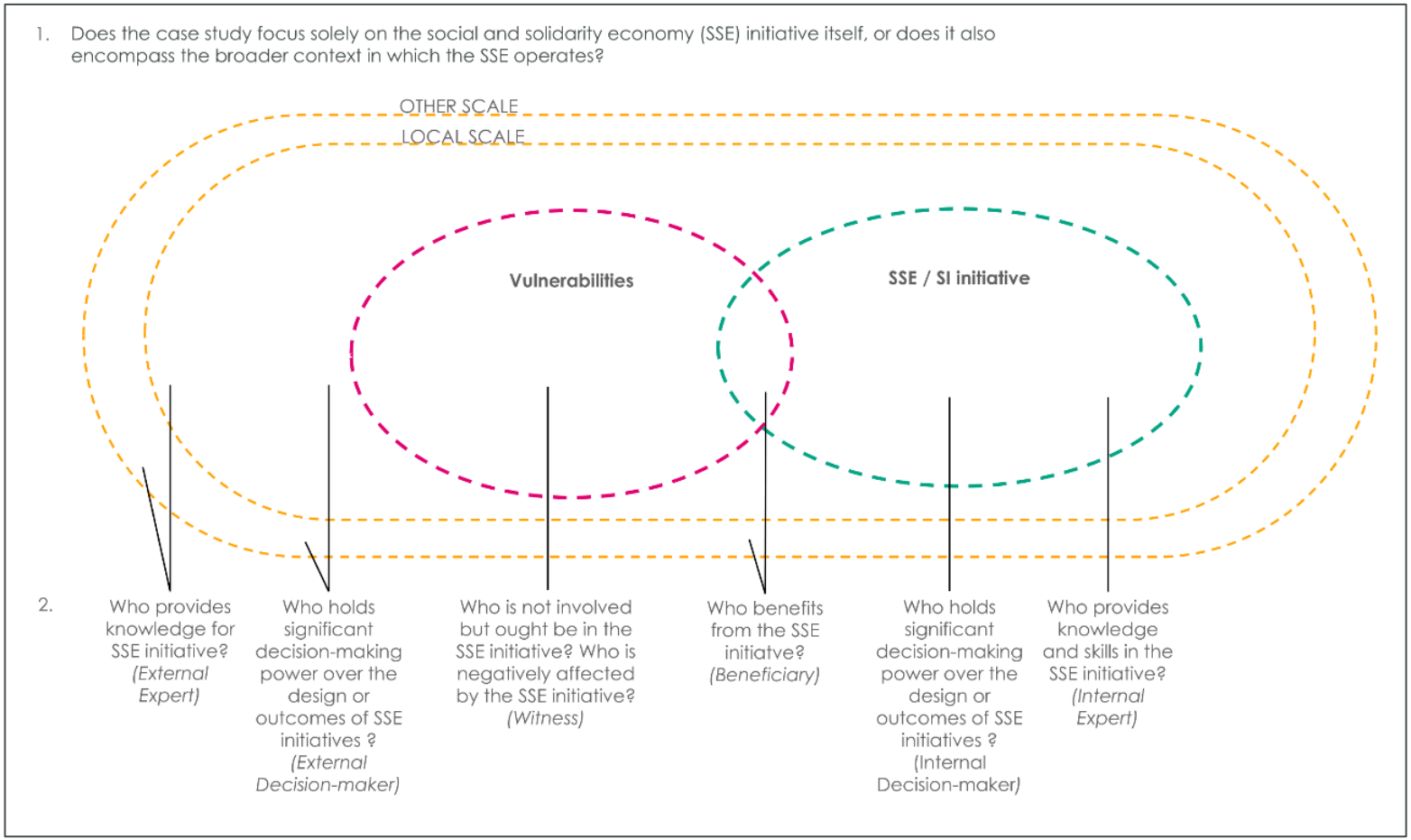

Figure 13. Guided mapping scheme of CS stakeholders through boundary judgements as questions (adapted from Reynolds 2014)

SSE typology	
Internal Stakeholders	Owner / Board member
	Volunteer
	Member
	Employee
	Manager
	Expert
	Other
External Stakeholders	Expert
	Local/National public administration (policy maker)
	Citizens & community organisation
	Local cooperation
	Donors / Investor
	Indirect stakeholder/ Witness
	Other

Table 3. SSE typology of stakeholders

ICST typology	Description
Internal Decision Maker	*Individual inside the SSE initiative that hold significant decision-making power over the design or outcomes of SSE initiative*
Internal Expert	*Key individual or organization inside the SSE initiative with knowledge and expertise that support an inclusive understanding of vulnerabilities*
Beneficiaries	*Individual or organization that directly benefit from the SSE initiative's activities*
External Decision Maker	*Individual or organization outside the SSE initiative that hold significant decision-making power over the design or outcomes of SSE initiative*
External Expert	*Key individual or organization outside the SSE initiative with knowledge and expertise that support an inclusive understanding of vulnerabilities*
Witness	*Individual or organizations that could be considered marginalized or vulnerable in the SSE context, because not involved in the SSE initiative,* excluded from the possibility to use the services for different reasons, or only passively involved, as service-users, or negatively affected by the SSE initiative

Table 4. ICST typology of stakeholder

Stakeholder ID (Case study acronym + Stakeholder Nr. (i.e., 01, 02,….)	SSE role	ICST role	Position	Name – Last name	Contact
E.g. DIV001	*E.g. SSE's board member*	*E.g. Internal Decision maker*	President of BGO	*To be kept confidential - Not to be shared)*	*(To be kept confidential - Not to be shared)*
…	…	…	…	…	…
…	…	…	….	…	…

Table 5. Template for updating stakeholders mapping (Tab STEP 3 in Tool 1)

Tool 1c: Identification of the main social factors in CS

Note on usage of this Tool: *Tool 1c allows CS Teams to move a first step towards intersectional research. The goal of this tool is to conduct an identification of the main social factors that could be relevant* that are present and intersect in the context of their SSE. *To do so, it is recommended to print out the intersectionality wheel and/or using the 13 social factors identified by Lutz and Wenning (2001) to record which could be the most salient categories.*

Lutz and Wenning (2001) suggest the existence of at least 13 social factors that may intersect: gender, 'race'/skin colour[11], ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class (socioeconomic status), culture (incl., language and level of education), disability, age, mobility, origins, religion, urban-rural.

Taking these as a starting point, CS Teams are invited to identify a reasonable number of social factors that may be relevant for their CS, with two being the minimum for the research to be considered intersectional[12].

Pragmatically, then, CS Teams can use either the list provided by Lutz and Wenning above or the intersectionality wheel to both reflect and take note of the social factors of relevance. CS Teams can refer to the Excel Tool 1 – Step 1c, for conducting this exercise.

[11] Race is meant as a social construction, and, as noted by Meer (2014, 118), it "has often been a means to deny equal dignity to those deemed as less developed, [and] racial categories exist as social phenomena and are important because the assumption of race exists and has social implications".
[12] Traditionally these are gender and race/ethnicity due to intersectionality being first formulated by and about black women's experiences in the US (Crenshaw, 1989; The Combahee River Collective, 2014).

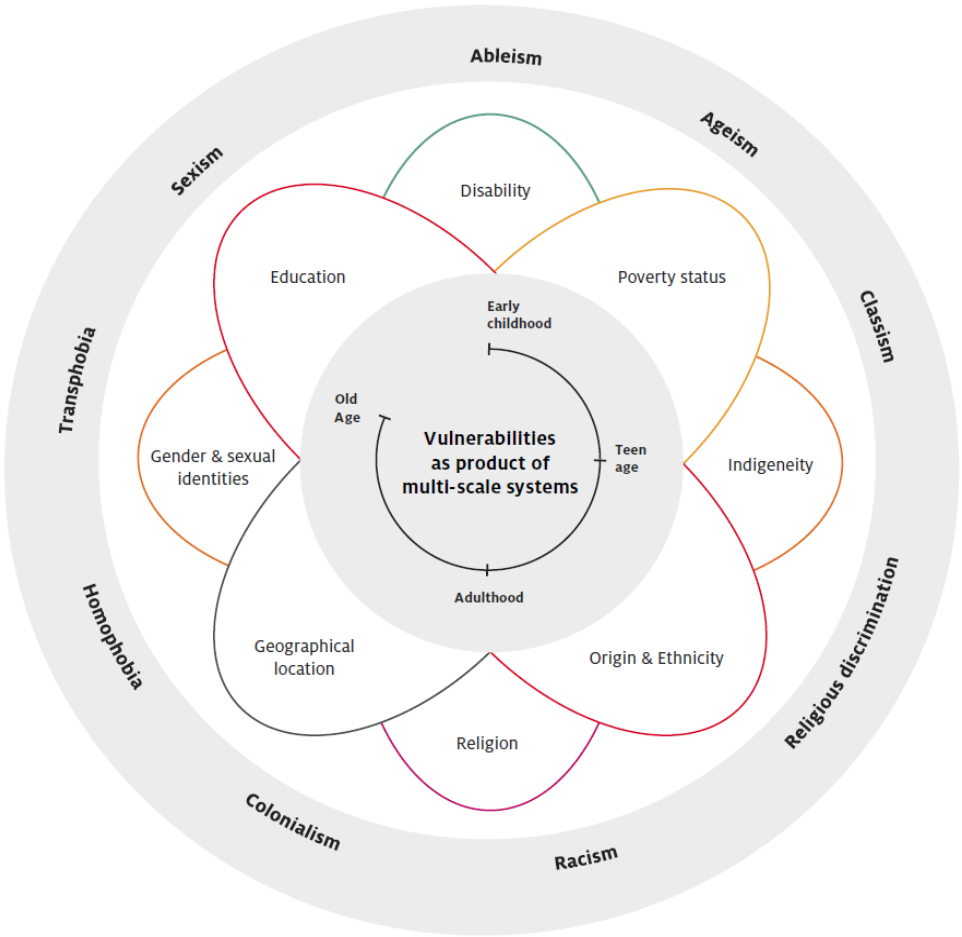

Figure 14. Intersectionality wheel to be used in combination with Lutz and Wenning's 13 social factors.

Tool 2: Intersectional Checklist for SSE

Note on usage of this Tool: *Tool 2 (adapted from the IGLYO 2014 Intersectional toolkit) is a form of memo for CS teams during data collection, complementary to the information directly collected during the interviews with SSE initiatives' stakeholders. It aims to clarify heterogeneity in the end-users and governance of SSE initiatives. After completing Step1c in the research design, CS teams may use this tool 2 to assess whether the identified social factors during the research design phase find some correspondence in the data collection. For example, a team has identified that gender, ethnicity and disability are crucial factors in their CS: they may therefore use the sections below regarding these three factors. Important: if you do not find any correspondence in the 5 listed answers, you may add an additional one in accordance with your observations/data, etc.*

- **Gender.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

[Gender is different from sex assigned at birth. The latter is the binary F/M, the former may include other identities and expressions. For this question, please consider both F/M but also other genders, if you are able to identify them.]

◯ There is a range of genders who attend it

◯ No single gender makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There is a range of genders represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Genders are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with gender organisations

- **Ethnic identities.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There is a range of ethnic identities who attend it

◯ No single ethnic identity makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There is a range of ethnic identities represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Ethnic identities are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with ethnic organisations

- **Origin.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There are a range of people from different origins who attend it

◯ No single origin makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There are a range of people from different origins represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Origins are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with origins organisations

- **Socioeconomic status.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There are a range of people from different socioeconomic statuses who attend it

◯ No single socioeconomic status makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There are a range of people from different socioeconomic statuses represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Socioeconomic statuses are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with socioeconomic statuses organisations

- **(Dis)ability.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ The is a range of people with (dis)abilities who attend it

◯ No single (dis)ability makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There is a range of (dis)abilities represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ (Dis)ability is regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with (dis)ability organisations

- **Religion.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There are a range of people from different religions who attend it

◯ No single religion makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There are a range of people from different religions represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Religions are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with religious organisations

- **Age.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There are a range of people from different ages who attend it

◯ No single age range makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There are a range of people from different ages represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Age is regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with age-related (e.g., youth, elderly) organisations

- **Sexual orientation** *(if the CS team and participants are willing and/or able to collect this data)***.** Which of the following describes at best the SSE initiative(s) your CS focuses on

◯ There are a range of people from different sexual orientations who attend it

◯ No single sexual orientation makes up the majority of attendees/members

◯ There are a range of people from different sexual orientations represented on SEE the board/committee

◯ Sexual orientations are regularly discussed/considered

◯ There are links with sexual orientations organisations

Tool 3: Post-interview reflection form

Note on usage of this Tool: *to be filled by the* CS Teams *for each interview/focus group within 24 hours of interview. It may help going back to* Tools 1a, 1b, 1c, 2 *to include reflexivity, positionality and intersectional critical systems thinking aspects in the compilation of the reflection form.*

1. Email of the researcher
2. Unique ID (to ensure anonymity of the interviewee)[13]
3. Date of the interview
4. Length of Interview (total number of minutes)
5. Format (Zoom/In-person)
6. If in-person describe the setting in detail
7. Stakeholder type
8. Location
9. Intersectional demographic details post-data collection[14]. Here we ask you to note any information emerged during the data collection that may be relevant to identify, make sense, interpret research participants' experiences of vulnerability through an interactional lens (see also Step 1c and Tool 2). As a researcher, you may decide to ask direct questions on these dimensions or rather let this information emerge spontaneously during your interaction with the research participant. To ensure this information is grounded and verified, we ask you to double check this note based on the transcription, once completed it.
10. Did you face any challenges in approaching/reaching/meeting/talking the participant? What were they?
11. Do these challenges say something about the vulnerability of a group or individual in the given setting?
12. Did the Social Identity Map (Tool 1a) aid you in your interactions with the participants? If so, how?
13. Key overall observations
14. Any significant observation on the respondent's description of challenges and vulnerabilities in marginal and rural areas (please add relevant quote from the respondent)?
15. Any significant observation on the respondent's description of role of the selected SSE initiative in addressing the vulnerabilities in marginal/rural areas (please add relevant quote from the respondent)?

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[13] When using the unique ID its important to have a separate table (on CS Teams secure servers) in which to insert the real data and the unique ID - this table has to be encrypted to ensure data protection.

[14] Gender may be F, M, non-binary, fluid or others – participants shall feel free to self-identify regarding this. Ethnicity may include self-identification along public articulations of a linguistic community or territory, real or imagined descendance, religion or other factors that have a subjective power; the disproportional attribution of given socioeconomic characteristics; the ways of living; the strategic mobilizations some (created) groups adopt; and/or cultural distinctiveness, e.g., in norms and practices or others. Socioeconomic status/class may include many possible answers well beyond the classic working class, middle class, upper class.

16. Any significant observation on the respondent's description of the ways in which the selected SSE initiative is empowering rural/marginal areas (please add relevant quote from the respondent)?
17. Any significant observation on the respondent's description of the challenges faced by their SSE initiative (please add relevant quote from the respondent)?
18. Anything about the interview guide/process that should be improved.
19. Did the respondent express interest in seeing the results of this study?

Annex 1: Case study protocol and CS report structure (provisional)

Note on usage of this Annex: A case study report is a narrative document that synthesizes the overall data collection for one case study. This report may be between 6500 to 9000 words (excluding references and other supplementary material). Specific deadlines for the delivery of CS reports will be defined by each CS Teams in the preliminary phase, to be concluded by the end of February 2025.

The report may be broadly divided into 5 subsections that include the following:

1) Summary (300-500)

2) Introduction, background, and relevance (1500-2000)

3) Methodology and plan of action (700-1000)

4) Main findings (Case study description) (3500-4500)

5) Conclusion (500-1000)

6) Reference list

(Broad structure and key themes to be included)

Note: The case study teams are free to design a questionnaire suitable to the stakeholders. The case study report may include a response to the questions mentioned below. The report follows a narrative style, and the case study partners are free to organise their data in the way they want, keeping the broad headings.

Specific deadlines for the delivery of CS reports will be defined by each CS teams in the preliminary phase (January-February 2025)

1. **Comprehensive summary**

2. **Introduction, background, relevance**
   - 2.1. Problem description in relation to research questions (This part could be a more refined version of what has been defined in the CS Factsheet (T3.1) and Tool 1 – STEP 1b)

   - 2.2. Rationale for the choice of this case study (add map of the area if relevant)

3. **Methodology, research design and plan of action**[15]

[15] Here, a narrative description of the updated research design developed at the beginning of data collection could be used.

3.1. Approaching the case study (who was contacted and how) (CS Teams can refer to Tool 1 – STEP 1a and STEP b)

3.2. What kind of data is collected and why (qualitative/quantitative, focus groups, interviews, ethnographic/participant observation etc.) (CS Teams can refer to Tool 1 – STEP 5)

3.3. Typology of participants (how many, from which stakeholder groups) (CS Teams can refer to Tool 1 – STEP 3)

3.4. A note on intersectionality and ethical considerations (if marginal/vulnerable groups were contacted and interviewed or not, why?) (CS Teams can refer to Tool 1 – STEP 1a, STEP 1b, STEP 1c)

4. Case study description

4.1. Challenges for vulnerable and marginal communities

4.1.1. Who are the marginal communities and individuals in the case study region?

4.1.2. What are the challenges marginal groups/individuals are facing (social, political, cultural, economic determinants of vulnerabilities)? what are the main drivers of these challenges (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity), class, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation...)? How do they interact?

4.1.3. How are challenges and vulnerabilities determined (through secondary data, interviews with experts and marginal groups etc)?

4.2. Pathways created by SSE initiative

4.2.1. What is the main goal of the initiative/organization?

4.2.2. When was the initiative/organization started? Is it still ongoing or finished? How many members?

4.2.3. What is the basis on which these initiatives can be characterised as SSE?

4.2.4. In what ways the initiative/organization diverse from traditional (economic) models and service provision in rural/marginal areas?

4.2.5. Does the initiative/organization address any gaps/shortcomings of the existing policies (on rural areas/marginal communities)?

4.2.6. Who are their main target audiences of the initiative/organization? How many target audiences the initiative has engaged with so far? List all the activities and target audiences that are relevant for SERIGO.

4.2.7. What kinds of opportunities/pathways for vulnerable groups are created by this initiative/organization?

4.2.8. How do the opportunities/pathways address vulnerabilities at the individual and community level (mechanism of action)?

4.2.9. How does the initiative/organization function (public-private partnership/NGO/community network/others, international/national/regional/municipal level)?

4.2.10. Are these initiatives scalable? If yes, to what extent? If no, what are the challenges for scaling?

4.2.11. What is the main source of funding?

4.2.12. What are the main strengths of the initiative/organization?

4.2.13. What are their main challenges?

4.3. Envisioned long term outcomes

4.3.1. What are the short-term and long-term vision of the initiative/organization regarding empowerment of vulnerable communities?

4.3.2. What is the action plan to achieve these visions (for example advocacy, community development, education and training and a combination of these and more approaches)?

4.3.3. Do the activities under the initiative/organization address questions of social (and spatial) justice, community resilience, and rural empowerment? How?

4.3.4. Do the activities of the initiative/organization contribute in redefining the meaning of good life and well-being for all through alternative pathways (beyond the dominant visions of economic growth led rural development)? How?

5. Conclusion

6. References

Annex 2: Sample interview(s) questions

Sample Interview Questions: Stakeholders

Note on usage: *each CS Team shall adapt this sample to their own CS. When doing so, WP3 coordinators recommend including questions that enable to collect information on intersectionality (see* Intersectional approach for data collection*). To do so, it is proposed to do what Matsuda (1991) defines as "asking the other question" as a way of identifying how diverse social factors could be present, intersect and determine the lived experiences of exclusion/discrimination/oppression experienced by people. For instance, if a CS team identifies a situation of ethno-racial discrimination, it is encouraged to also ask "Where is sexism in this?"; and when facing a situation of sexism, "where is classism in this?". This exercise operates as a reminder of the interlocking systems at play.*

Challenges

1. What are the main challenges that the local community/locality is facing/trying to address?
2. What would you identify as the key causes for this situation and these challenges, and what has been done to address them?
3. Who would you consider is (the most) vulnerable in the local community and why?

Pathways

1. How did the initiative begin and what were the aims?
2. What are the main activities and how were they planned and implemented?
3. Who was involved and how? Who funded it and with what amount?

Impact

1. How would you assess the successes and failures? What worked and what did not?
2. To what extent did it support the target group? Would you say they are "less vulnerable"?
3. Are there plans for continuation and has there been any cooperation with other communities/localities facing similar challenges?

Template Interview Questions: Community Members (including vulnerable groups)

Challenges

1. What are the main challenges and problems you are facing in the locality?
2. Who is most impacted from the community?
3. Is anyone trying to help?

Pathways

1. What was your experience with the initiative?
2. What activities were you involved in?
3. What was your role? What did you do and who did you work with?

Impact

1. Did the initiative help you and your community?
2. If yes, how did it help?
3. Do you still need the programme, or would you welcome other type of support?

Annex 3: Sample participation information sheet, consent form and data privacy statement

Note on usage of this Annex: *Based on the different types of consent listed in the section 6. Ethical Considerations, the researchers may decide how Annex 3 documents will be delivered to the research participants:* 1. physical form *(in that case, two copies of the documents must be present – one for the researcher, one for the research participant);* 2. online/digital form *(in that case, one copy will be sent to the research participants in advance and their consent will be recorded online based on the instructions in 6. Ethical Considerations);* 3. oral form of the consent *(in that case, the researcher reads or summarizes the information in the Annex 3 to the research participants and the consent will be recorded). For cases of* 4. passive/tacit consent *or* 5. no consent at all*, researchers should refer to the instructions in 6. Ethical Considerations.*

INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project: SERIGO - Social Economy for Resilience, Inclusion and Good life in Rural areas

Institution:
Name of the Researcher:
Contact Email:

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in this research.

The research project **SERIGO - Social Economy for Resilience, Inclusion and Good life in Rural areas** studies the challenges, pathways and impact of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in relation to rural vulnerabilities. SERIGO is pursued across 12 EU countries and funded by the European Union. We are collecting this data for research purposes and to inform policies in these areas. The overall project runs from 2024 to 2027, with this case study taking place throughout 2025.

You have been selected to take part in this study because your knowledge and/or personal or professional experience are relevant to the researched topic. We are interested in your knowledge and experience as [initiator/volunteer/user/other - *select one or adapt]* of the SSE initiatives named _____.

Your participation in the interview and this research is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

Participation in this research will require a time commitment ranging from approximately 2 hours to a maximum of 6 hours for activities involving enabling methods. The potential risks associated with participation are limited to the disclosure of

personal and sensitive data shared during the data collection process. All risks related to data disclosure are thoroughly mitigated through robust data management measures that fully comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

This research has been approved by the ethical committee of *[name of the institution issuing the ethics clearance]*, and your answers will be treated with confidentiality in line with your consent in the attached form, and any information provided will be treated in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

If you are interested, you will be provided with an interview transcript for review, that will be shared with you in a secure manner to be agreed upon. Upon request, we would be glad to share with you the final report and/or policy briefs resulting from the project. In case video or photographic material is collected, explicit consent will be asked from your side. If you have any further questions, please feel to contact me.

[Name of the researcher]

[Title and Institution]

[Name of the Data Protection Officer at PP institution]

SAMPLE INFORMED PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Title of the project: SERIGO - Social Economy for Resilience, Inclusion and Good life in Rural areas

Name of Researcher:

Contact Email:

☐ 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and have had these answers satisfactory.

☐ 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any question(s), I am free to decline.

☐ 3. I understand that the information collected during the interview (or focus group) will be used to support the research and may be published and/or shared.

☐ 4. I wish that my responses remain anonymous. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give my permission to the researcher to have access to my anonymized responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

☐ 5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

☐ 6. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

DATA PRIVACY STATEMENT

Research project SERIGO

In accordance with current data protection regulations, we hereby provide you with information about how your data is processed. All personal data is dealt with in compliance with EU Regulation No. 2016/679 (GDPR) and the national legislation. The processing of personal data by researchers is based on principles of integrity, legality, transparency, and confidentiality.

1. Data Controller and Data Protection Officer (DPO)

Data Controller: [name of your institution], in the person of the legal representative. You can contact the DPO under the following e-mail address: *[email of DPO at your organization]*.

2. Purpose and Legal Basis for the Data Processing

Any and all personal data that is in the possession of the Controller, or that may be requested by the Controller, is necessary for the following purposes:

- Participation in the research study and thus use of the data for research purposes, as specified in the Information and Consent Form to participate in the study.

- Communications by e-mail, i.e. in case the research participant expressed the will to receive materials resulting from the project itself.

- documentation (audio recording) for transcription and archiving purposes.

In order not to be filmed or recorded during virtual meetings, you will always be able to disable the webcam and/or mute the microphone.

The personal data that are processed are specified in the Information and Consent Form to participate in the study. Within the framework of the project, special categories of personal data may also be processed in accordance with Art. 9 GDPR (personal data revealing ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation or personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences). The data collected are adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary for the purposes of the processing.

The legal basis for the processing of your personal data for the purposes indicated above is your consent to the processing of your personal data (art. 6, par. 1, lett. A, and art. 9, par. 2, lett. a GDPR).

3. Recipients of the Data Processed and transfer of data

The recipients of the data are the employees of the [insert name of your organization] - persons in charge of data processing activities, authorized and instructed by the data controller to data processing activities.

Personal data may be communicated to external service providers (e.g. sending e-mails), which typically process Personal Data on behalf of [insert name of your organization] as data processors.

The scientific results (e.g. publications of scientific papers) may be communicated to the project partners and disseminated only in aggregated and anonymized form only or rather in such a manner that it is impossible identify the individuals.

Your data is stored within the European Union and *[insert name of your organization]* does not intend to transfer Your data to third countries or international organisations. Some personal data could be transmitted to third countries outside of the EU but only if the transmission of personal data is connected to the performance of the institutional activities of *[insert name of your organization]*. Where data is transferred to a third country, this will be done on the basis of the European Commission's standard contractual clauses (SCC) with supplementary measures and in according with the legal requirements.

4. Information on the Retention Period of Personal Data

Personal data will be stored no longer than for the time strictly necessary to achieve the purposes indicated and, in any case, to comply with the Applicable Law. Raw data will be destroyed after the completion of the project (on 31 December 2027). Elaborated data will be retained for a period not exceeding 5 years after the completion of the project. At the end of this period, the data shall be deleted or made anonymous.

5. Mandatory or Voluntary Communication of Data and Possible Consequences of a Failure to Provide it

The provision of personal data is voluntary, but refusal could interfere with the correct performance of the purposes, thus rendering the participation in the project impossible.

6. Automated decision-making processes

There are no automated decision-making processes that could produce an adverse legal effect on the data subject or have a similarly significant negative impact upon them.

7. The Data Subject's Rights

At any time, the data subject has the right to request access to their personal data, and to correct or delete that data, or to limit its processing. In addition, the right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. When the data processing is based on consent, the data subject has the right to withdraw that consent at any time. The data subject may also exercise all other rights pursuant to current data protection regulations

(art. 15 et seq. GDPR) by writing to the e-mail address: *[email of DPO at your organization]*.

I. CONSENT to the processing of personal data

The Undersigned

_____

DECLARES to have read the Information about personal data handling and is aware of this notice as drawn up pursuant to UE Reg. 2016/679 and national legislation and CONSENTS to the processing of his/her personal data and in particular special categories of personal data (personal data revealing ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation or personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences).

Place, date_____ Signature _____

II.AUDIO RECORDING AUTHORIZATION FORM

The undersigned authorizes hereby, according to art. 96 and 97 l. n. 633/1941 (Copyright law) *[insert name of your organization]* to take sound recordings of the undersigned during the interview/focus group on ……., in the framework of the project SERIGO, which will take place on ……. for the purposes of this project, and may be used for transcription purposes only.

The undersigned hereby grants *[insert name of your organization]* permission to use the audio recordings free of charge for an unlimited period.

The undersigned declares that he/she will have no claims against *[insert name of your organization]* with respect to the above and waives all rights, claims and/or actions arising out of the present authorization.

Place, date_____ Signature _____

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