



UNISECO

UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING  
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF  
AGROECOLOGICAL FARMING  
SYSTEMS IN THE EU

# Deliverable 7.3 Report on the Assessment of Transdisciplinary Tools and Methods

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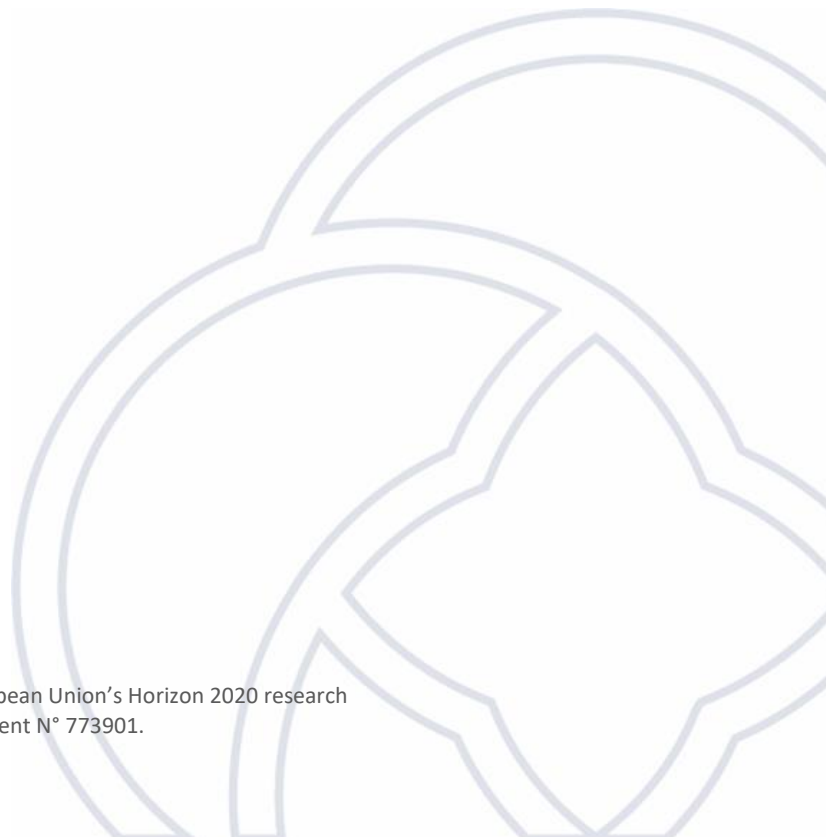
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACRONYMS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1. DEFINING TRANSDISCIPLINARY AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES .....	8
3.2. EVALUATION OF TRANSDISCIPLINARY AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES .....	8
<b>4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1. UNISECO MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK .....	11
4.2. SELECTED EVALUATION CRITERIA AND METHODS .....	12
4.3. OPERATIONALISATION OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK.....	16
<b>5. APPLICATIONS OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK – ON- GOING EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>16</b>
5.1. APPLICATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK AT EU LEVEL .....	17
5.1.1. EVALUATION OF STAKEHOLDER REFERENCE GROUP WORKSHOP, HELSINKI, FINLAND .....	18
5.1.2. EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP IN BASEL, SWITZERLAND .....	19
5.1.3. EVALUATION OF ONLINE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP, MAY 2020 .....	22
5.1.4. EVALUATION OF ONLINE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP, NOVEMBER 2020 .....	27
5.2. APPLICATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK AT CASE STUDY LEVEL .....	29
<b>6. FINAL EVALUATION.....</b>	<b>41</b>
6.1. FINAL EVALUATION AT EU LEVEL .....	41
6.2. FINAL EVALUATION AT CASE STUDY LEVEL.....	43
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>9. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>ANNEX 1: DEBRIEFING/REPORTING SHEET.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>ANNEX 2: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>ANNEX 3 FINAL EVALUATION OF CASE STUDY MAP MEMBERS WITH MULTIPLE PARTICIPATIONS.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	
FIGURE 1. UNISECO ACTIVITIES WITH ACTORS HELD AT EU AND CASE STUDY LEVELS.....	17
FIGURE 2. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS AT THE WORKSHOP IN HELSINKI, FINLAND, MAY 2019. ....	18
FIGURE 3. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS AT THE WORKSHOP IN BASEL, SWITZERLAND, NOVEMBER 2019.....	20



FIGURE 4. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF UNISECO PARTNERS AT THE WORKSHOP IN BASEL, SWITZERLAND, NOVEMBER 2019.....	21
FIGURE 5. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS AT THE ONLINE WORKSHOP, MAY 2020. ....	23
FIGURE 6. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF UNISECO PARTNERS AT THE ONLINE WORKSHOP, MAY 2020. ..	25
FIGURE 7. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS AT THE ONLINE WORKSHOP, NOVEMBER 2020.	28
FIGURE 8. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF UNISECO PARTNERS AT THE ONLINE WORKSHOP, NOVEMBER 2020. ....	29
FIGURE 9. OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF UNISECO PARTNERS OF GROUP DYNAMICS ACROSS ALL PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES HELD IN THE 14 PARTNER COUNTRIES. ....	32
FIGURE 10. RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS ABOUT THE OUTCOMES OF MEETINGS (STATEMENTS 8 TO 16, ANNEX 2). 39	
FIGURE 11. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS TO THE FINAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS ON DISCUSSION ABOUT UNISECO, USE OF MATERIALS, PARTICIPATION IN OTHER ACTIVITIES, AND MEMBERSHIP OF ANY NEW INITIATIVES. ....	45
FIGURE 12. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ANSWERS OF RESPONDENTS TO THE FINAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NETWORK EXPANSION, LEARNING OF NEW KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION, USE OF NEW INFORMATION, AND CHANGES IN ATTITUDE. ....	47
LIST OF TABLES	
TABLE 1. EVALUATION ASPECTS AND KEY QUESTIONS.....	12
TABLE 2. EVALUATION CRITERIA .....	13
TABLE 3. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK.....	16
TABLE 4. NUMBER OF PARTICIPATORY PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN EACH PARTNER CASE STUDY.....	30
TABLE 5. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL PARTICIPANTS WITHIN THE CASE STUDY ACTIVITIES (GENDER, AGE AND MAIN ACTOR TYPE).....	31
TABLE 6. DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES BY PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITY IN EACH PARTNER CASE STUDY.....	34
TABLE 7. DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES BY GENDER AND MAIN ACTOR TYPES WITHIN EACH CASE STUDY ACTIVITY.....	34
TABLE 8. EVALUATION BY RESPONDENTS OF THE PREPARATORY PHASE OF CASE STUDY ACTIVITIES, IN RESPONSE TO THREE STATEMENTS.....	35
TABLE 9. RESPONSES TO THE RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION ACCORDING TO THE MEETING THEME (STATEMENT 2, ANNEX 2) (“THE INFORMATION WAS RELEVANT TO THE ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MEETING”).....	36
TABLE 10. RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT REGARDING THE CLARITY OF OBJECTIVES ACCORDING TO THE TYPE OF ACTOR (STATEMENT 1, ANNEX 2) (“THE OBJECTIVE(S) OF THE MEETING WAS/WERE CLEAR TO ME”).....	36
TABLE 11. EVALUATION BY RESPONDENTS OF THE PROCESS OF CASE STUDY ACTIVITIES (NOTE: THE RESULTS ARE PRESENTED FOR THE STATEMENTS IN EACH COLUMN) .....	37

TABLE 12. OPINIONS ON MISSING VOICES ACCORDING TO GENDER (STATEMENT 5, ANNEX 2) (“I THINK THAT THERE WERE GROUPS, ASSOCIATIONS, PERSONS THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION TODAY BUT HAVE NOT BEEN INVITED.”). .....	37
TABLE 13. AVERAGE SCORE OF RESPONDENTS OF THE MEETING OUTCOMES (STATEMENTS 8 TO 16, ANNEX 2, IN ORDER OF THEIR AVERAGE SCORE). .....	39
TABLE 14. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE CLARITY OF THE OBJECTIVES AND ROLES OF THE ACTORS DURING THE CASE STUDY ACTIVITY (STATEMENT 8, ANNEX 2) (“WHEN TODAY’S MEETING STARTED, THE OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING AND MY ROLE WERE STATED CLEAR TO ME”).....	40
TABLE 15. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR (STATEMENT 11, ANNEX 2) (“THE FACILITATOR WAS ACTIVE IN ENSURING A GOOD FLOW OF THE DISCUSSION.”). .....	41
TABLE 16. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE RELEVANCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE MEETING CONTENT WITH THE NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS (STATEMENT 9, ANNEX 2) (“THE CONTENT OF THE MEETING WAS RELEVANT AND CONSISTENT TO MY NEEDS AND INTERESTS”). .....	41
TABLE 17. DISTRIBUTION OF FINAL EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES BY GENDER AND MAIN TYPE OF ACTOR IN EACH CASE STUDY. ....	44



## ACRONYMS

AEFS	Agro-ecological Farming Systems
DST	Decision Support Tool
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
MAA	Multi-Actor Approach
MAP	Multi-Actor Platform
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PAG	Project Advisory Group
SRG	Stakeholder Reference Group
UNISECO	Understanding and Improving the Sustainability of Agro-ecological Farming Systems in the EU



# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UNISECO H2020 project employed a Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) within a transdisciplinary framework in order to strengthen the sustainability of agro-ecological European farming systems. Throughout the operation of the UNISECO project there were several opportunities for knowledge exchange and co-learning which had the potential to build capacity for collaborative working through participatory processes with key actors. This ongoing involvement was mainly performed through the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) which are the pools of relevant actors who were engaged in the activities of UNISECO at European and case study levels.

This deliverable aims to present the design and application of the monitoring and evaluation framework for assessing the process and impact of interactions with the MAPs and relevant actors involved in the various participatory activities held during the course of the project at the EU and case study levels. The evaluation criteria used are grouped into three sets, applying to the different phases of the project activities: preparation, implementation, post-implementation.

The participatory events were evaluated throughout the project, including feedback from project partners and the external actors involved in activities carried out at European and case study level.

At the EU level, a total of 36 questionnaires were collected from external stakeholder across the four stakeholder workshops, representing an average response rate of 43%, and 61 responses from project partners.

At the case study level, there were 282 participations of actors in 33 participatory activities that took place in 14 partner case studies. Of these 282, 232 evaluation questionnaires were received, representing an average response rate of 82%. In general, farmers, representatives of science and advisory services, authorities and administration were involved in the participatory activities run at EU and case study levels.

The lessons learnt from the on-going evaluation highlighted the importance of:

- Sharing information among participants;
- Fair representation of key actors including diversity of interests and knowledge;
- Balancing power and building trust within a group;
- Careful design of the project activities and effective facilitation;
- Providing adequate time and resources to support participatory processes.

In the final stages of the UNISECO project, a final evaluation was carried out which aimed to explore the influence of participatory processes on the policy-science dialogue, and on the capacities of the case study actors. Findings from five interviews with members of EU-level MAP revealed that the UNISECO project provided conditions for free and open discussions, but some of the knowledge generated was not perceived as applicable and relevant for policy development.

At the case study level, 89 local actors and case study MAP members, from 13 partner countries, provided feedback on aspects related to the networks and capacity building. Feedback received indicated that involvement in the UNISECO project had the potential to improve network building and capacities for collaboration and information exchange with various actors at the local level. Nevertheless, care should be taken in order to meet the expectations and needs of case study actors.

The monitoring and evaluation framework developed in the UNISECO project provided a form of validating the approaches taken and the challenges faced in designing and undertaking research activities that aimed at supporting co-learning and knowledge sharing amongst the actors involved.

The on-going evaluation provided valuable information about the design and implementation of participatory processes that enabled the identification of weaknesses, and the types of improvements required, throughout the project duration. The findings and experience show that effective participatory processes require time and energy of organisers and participants. The outcomes of such processes are improved by the on-going evaluation, which requires commensurate resources to be allocated for the purpose.



## 2. INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of the UNISECO project is to strengthen the sustainability of EU farming systems through co-constructing practice-validated strategies and incentives for the promotion of improved agro-ecological approaches. UNISECO addresses the challenge of assessing complex systems by employing a Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) within a transdisciplinary framework that integrates the knowledge of the partners from their different scientific backgrounds with the experiences of the actor groups.

Those backgrounds relevant to the aims of UNISECO included: scientists from humanities, social and life sciences; farmers, technical advisors, farm business consultants; environment experts and groups; actors in the relevant value chain; consumer representatives; and actors involved in designing and implementing market incentives and policies (Vanni *et al.*, 2019). These groups were brought together to develop innovative approaches and better understand the socio-economic and policy factors that are barriers to, or drivers of transitions towards agro-ecological farming systems (AEFS) in the European Union.

The transdisciplinary processes of UNISECO are operated through three key mechanisms: 1) the consortium composition; 2) the setting-up of networking and knowledge sharing platforms; and 3) the inclusion of participatory methods in all project phases. The transdisciplinary collaboration is mainly focused on the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs), i.e. pools of key actors associated with agro-ecological farming systems are established at two different levels, one at EU-level and one for each of the 15 case studies. The MAPs created at the outset of the UNISECO project are a key element of the transdisciplinary character of the UNISECO project that provide ongoing involvement and meaningful interactions for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge with end users and stakeholders.

In addition to the MAPs, two other mechanisms are used to facilitate knowledge exchange, and to enhance cross-level interactions: 1) the Project Advisory Group (PAG) consisting of experts who provide guidance and advice on the core scientific coherence of the project; and 2) the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) formed from representatives from case study MAPs, to provide a forum in which the views of local stakeholders are heard on wider issues relating with the transition to agro-ecological farming systems process.

Guidelines were developed by UNISECO to provide a framework and create the conditions for effective processes of engagement, the aims of which were to ensure that the real needs of stakeholders are met, knowledge is co-created, and then incorporated into all stages of the research and dissemination. Processes for the recruitment to the MAPs were developed and implemented (Budniok *et al.*, 2018), and a guide to transdisciplinary working was provided to UNISECO partners (Irvine *et al.*, 2019).

Deliverable D7.3 is the final deliverable within the Work Package on “Multi-actor engagement” (Work Package 7), reporting on the assessment of the transdisciplinary tools and methods (Deliverable D7.3). The main objective of this deliverable is to present the design, implementation and results of a framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the MAPs in the participatory processes and the overall transdisciplinary approach.

This Deliverable is structured as follows: Section 3 includes a short review of literature on the evaluation of transdisciplinary and participatory approaches, identifying the need to consider both the process and outcomes of participatory activities. Section 4 presents the monitoring and evaluation framework developed in UNISECO, and its operationalisation. Section 5 presents the results of the application of the framework to the evaluation of participatory project activities carried out at EU and case study levels. Section 6 presents the application of the framework to the final evaluation of engagement of actors in the UNISECO project. Conclusions from the Task are presented in Section 7. Copies of the evaluation forms used for collecting feedback are provided in the Annexes.





## 3. BACKGROUND

### 3.1. Defining Transdisciplinary and Participatory Approaches

Tackling complex problems such as sustainability requires perspectives from different scientific fields, combined with collaboration between academic and non-academic actor groups (Brandt *et al.*, 2013). Such approaches are transdisciplinary and participatory, encouraging collaborative working to co-create solutions (Lang *et al.*, 2012). Participatory research is defined by Blackstock *et al.* (2007) as “participants collaborating on problem solving and produce new knowledge in an ongoing learning and reflective process”. Through participatory processes, stakeholders have the opportunity of shaping what affects them and to develop solutions.

The knowledge generated by the interactions between the scientists and actors in transdisciplinary research can be differentiated into four levels: i) “one-way information” (information transferred only by one side); ii) “mutual one-way information” (information transferred by both sides at the same time); iii) “collaborative research” (shared new knowledge generated through knowledge exchange); iv) “joint decision-making” (scientists and actors interact also with policy and decision makers) (Wiek, 2007).

In a policy context, the European Commission aims to address the major challenges for sustainable management of natural resources, food security and economic viability of the farming sector. One element of achieving its aims was the creation of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), established as a new way to foster innovation and enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of European agriculture (European Commission, 2012). A second element is the adoption, in the European Commission Strategy for EU agricultural research and innovation (European Commission, 2016), of a Multi-Actor Approach, linking science and practice, to encourage the co-creation of knowledge via meaningful collaborations between researchers and relevant actors such as farmers, advisors, businesses, and NGOs.

Consistent with the strategic approach to EU agricultural research and innovation, the Horizon 2020 research framework programme (H2020), supports this interactive innovation model through the implementation of multi-actor projects in which various end-users and practitioners are engaged throughout the lifetime of projects (EIP-AGRI, 2017). That approach is reflected in calls of H2020, aiming to stimulate transdisciplinary projects, bringing together knowledge from different perspectives in research, business, policy and civil society (European Commission, 2017).

### 3.2. Evaluation of Transdisciplinary and Participatory Approaches

Evaluation is defined as an assessment of worth or merit of an object, such as a project, programme, policy etc., and it has to be a systematic process of inquiry (OECD, 2005; as adopted by the American Evaluation Association, Joint Committee on Standards, 1994). Monitoring deals with the collection and analysis of information about an on-going activity or project.

Evaluations can be: i) strategic, with aims of examining whether intended results are achieved and are consistent with the overall objectives of a project; or ii) operational, in which the focus is on the timing, costs and quality of the planned activities.

The purposes of evaluations are to prove (focus on efficiency or value), to control (check quality control), to improve (reach objectives), and to learn (transform the individual participant). When the purposes of evaluation are to record experiences, and to disseminate the knowledge accumulated and lessons learned, then it is considered an instrument of learning (OECD, 2005). When the evaluation is of participatory processes, its output should be to inform the improvement of their design and operation (Blackstock *et al.*, 2007).

In general, evaluation can be differentiated into ex-ante or ex-post, depending upon when the evaluation is being conducted, i.e. before or after the implementation of the project, programme, policy, activity. Process



evaluation pays particular attention to the process of operating and progressing a project and how outcomes are produced rather than on the outcome itself (Blackstock *et al.*, 2007). Process evaluation usually examines the activities of the project, the team composition, the involvement of the actors, the integration and transfer of knowledge through interviews or surveys using qualitative questions about the quality of knowledge and information exchange, leadership of the group, and communication (Holzer *et al.*, 2018).

A process evaluation is referred to as a formative evaluation when it is done in a reflexive way and provides information and ongoing feedback for use in revising and improving a process. By comparison, summative evaluation is ex-post, at which time critical views can be taken on what worked and what did not. From this, conclusions can be drawn to inform future actions.

The objectives of the evaluation should inform the identification of evaluation criteria and the choice of methods. Selecting evaluation criteria is a crucial step in the evaluation process, in accordance with the type of evaluation and its objectives. Their selection determines the choice of methods and requirements for data (Blackstock *et al.*, 2007).

The methods should be context-sensitive, and consider issues of the timing, purpose and focus of the evaluation (Blackstock *et al.*, 2007). Options include qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches and tools, such as stakeholder analysis, interviews, surveys, document analysis, media analysis, observation notes, participant expectations before and after workshops, and impact assessments. Hassenforder *et al.* (2016) recommend that each criterion is collected by different approaches.

Written questionnaires and interview-based surveys are commonly used. Questions are designed to deliver information relevant to the research objectives, knowledge integration, quality of scientific research outputs, quality of knowledge and of technology transfer, and competence of project management or operational issues (Holzer *et al.*, 2018).

The evaluation of transdisciplinary and participatory approaches is complex (Klein, 2008), requiring consideration of issues relating to the integration of knowledge from various disciplines, and the development of dynamic methodologies that are context and problem-specific and involve non-academic actors (Carew and Wickson, 2010). It is argued that these challenges have delayed the development of widely accepted criteria for assessing the quality of transdisciplinary research and identifying when transdisciplinary research is successful (Jahn and Keil, 2015).

The literature on the evaluation of transdisciplinary and participatory approaches cover a range of research interests. Two broad groupings have been reviewed: i) frameworks for evaluations, such as those of Holzer *et al.* (2018), Blackstock *et al.* (2007) and Hassenforder *et al.* (2016); ii) assessing the quality of transdisciplinary research, with proposals for guidelines and specific quality criteria (e.g. Lang *et al.*, 2012; Bergman *et al.*, 2005).

Blackstock *et al.* (2007) developed a framework that reflects the significant characteristics of the evaluation concept. They note the importance of considering the timing, purpose and focus of the evaluation in turn determines the type of evaluation to be used. They also provide a comprehensive list of evaluation criteria compiled from literature for the measurement of the research process, outcome and context. They describe the application of this framework to a post summative evaluation of a regional sustainability project in Australia, involving a broad range of participants. The methods used were, primarily, document analysis and face to face semi-structured interviews which enabled an iterative and inductive analysis.

Hassenforder *et al.* (2016) discuss the challenges faced when selecting and implementing methods to monitor and evaluate participatory processes in the field of environmental or natural resource management. They underline the need to assess the “key moments” of participatory processes, i.e. those “moments when participants get together to work on a collaborative endeavour” (p. 508). They developed a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of a participatory process in Uganda, suggesting ways to combine methods that are mixed, qualitative and quantitative, static and adaptive, theory-based and participant-based, process and outcome-oriented.



Holzer *et al.* (2018) present a framework for the evaluation of transdisciplinary socio-ecological research projects synthesising existing approaches. This was based on reviews of literature to identify the important attributes of transdisciplinary research of socio-ecological systems, and the evaluation methods for use in assessing the quality of these attributes of transdisciplinarity. They developed a six-stage, adaptive evaluation framework. The framework for evaluating outputs, outcomes and impacts of socio-ecological research consisted of in-depth interviews with researchers and non-research stakeholders, using qualitative analysis, a survey tool, the visual representation of findings for use in focus groups with stakeholders.

Walter *et al.* (2007) report on the evaluation of the societal effects of transdisciplinary projects which relate to the knowledge and decision-making capacity that stakeholders can gain through their involvement in transdisciplinary processes and their collaboration with the scientists. The authors proposed a model applied in an ex-post evaluation of a transdisciplinary project (two years after its completion) using a quantitative approach to testing relationships between the three types of social effects, summarized below:

- i) outputs - the direct results of the transdisciplinary process (such as communication through workshops and meetings) and its tangible products (such as report, publication), which influence the involvement of stakeholders;
- ii) Impacts - the intermediate effects of the transdisciplinary process on stakeholders such as changes in their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge due to their involvement;
- iii) outcomes - the long-term effects of the transdisciplinary process on stakeholders affecting their decision making capacity.

The correlation between the involvement of stakeholders in projects and the social outcome of the increased capacity of stakeholders for decision-making was found to be statistically significant, and mediated through the social impacts of the network building and the use of transformation knowledge (Walter *et al.*, 2007). Reed (2008) reports on how decisions made by stakeholders are influenced by engagement processes, identifying principles for use in practice and key criteria that can facilitate effective stakeholder participation.

Lang *et al.* (2012) present a set of design guidelines for transdisciplinary research in sustainability science, based upon a conceptual model of how an ideal / typical transdisciplinary research process can be planned and conducted. The transdisciplinary research process is separated into three phases: (a) recognition and structure of the problem, and the composition of the research team for developing a common understanding of the problem addressed; (b) joint creation of knowledge which is transferrable and solution-oriented through synergistic research work; (c) implementation, review and adjustment of the project results taking into account the practical use for the society and science. For each of the three phases, they formulate a set of design principles for transdisciplinary research with questions for use in guiding evaluations. They placed emphasis on the necessity for continuous and formative evaluation, i.e. to evaluate the process of operating and progressing a project in a reflexive way, providing useful information and ongoing feedback to revise and improve learning and research quality.

For undertaking process-oriented evaluation, Bergman *et al.* (2005) propose a set of specific and detailed evaluation criteria arranged according to project timeline, examining quality assurance and success throughout the course of a project.

Belcher *et al.* (2016) present an evaluation framework for use in defining and assessing research quality of transdisciplinary processes. They arranged criteria under principles of relevance, credibility, legitimacy and the effectiveness of the use of assessment rubrics. They propose the framework is adjusted to fit the specific characteristics of the transdisciplinary research under consideration, with feedback on issues of quality informing reflection, adaptation and on-going learning.

Jahn and Keil (2015) explored the issue of quality assurance of transdisciplinary research that deals with policy making for sustainable development. They defined policy relevant sustainability research as “the transdisciplinary research that aims at bringing specific knowledge to bear on policy issues relating to sustainable development” (p.197). As the quality of transdisciplinary research is dependent on the



collaboration and shared learning between scientists and non-scientific actors, the design of transdisciplinary research processes should take particular account of the effective integration of knowledge, perspectives, and of the needs and values of the different actors and stakeholders involved (i.e. researchers, programme managers or donors and policymakers).

Three highlights are apparent from the review of evaluation approaches:

- i) evaluation methods and criteria should be tailor-made to the aims and context of a project, taking into account the objectives, expectations and interests of participants.
- ii) when evaluating transdisciplinary approaches, the emphasis should be put on the “key moments” for knowledge co-creation, and thus the processes facilitating the involvement of the external actors, and the practical applicability of the results.
- iii) amongst the evaluation tools reported, written questionnaires and interview-based surveys are the most commonly applied due to their clarity, flexibility and ease of use.

The terms “stakeholders” and “actors” are not distinguished in the papers reviewed and are used interchangeable. Other terms used are practitioners, and non-academics/scientists. In UNISECO, the word 'actor' is used as abroad, encompassing umbrella term to refer to the non-consortium individuals who will be involved in the project. Therefore, this differs from that of the European Commission (EC) which uses it to refer specifically for individuals in the chain of activities / outputs within, for example, a farming system, and who may not necessarily be someone who has a 'stake' in the issues at hand. (Irvine *et al.*, 2019).

## 4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

### 4.1. UNISECO Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Informed by the literature review, a monitoring and evaluation framework was designed for UNISECO the aim of which was to guide the steps for assessing the interactions with actors through the various participatory processes within the UNISECO project. The framework sets the objectives of the processes, specifies the evaluation questions, and selects the assessment criteria. It also proposes a method for the assessment by defining a systematic process for collecting, analysing and reporting the data.

The details of the engagement activities of the Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) were reviewed to understand their purposes. In UNISECO, the aims of engagement activities, types of actors involved, methods of engagement, intended outputs and outcomes are set out in Budniok *et al.* (2018, D7.1), and the principles of participatory research, and operation of the transdisciplinary process in Irvine *et al.* (2019, D7.2).

The methods of engagement include written consultations, interviews, focus groups and workshops. Primarily, the objectives of these interactions are to:

- obtain information for the completion of project tasks;
- collect feedback, consult and validate the research findings;
- collaborate with the members of Multi-Actor Platforms, and to empower them to co-construct knowledge with the UNISECO team, and to enhance their capacity to use this knowledge.

The findings from the literature review have been synthesized and adjusted to the purposes of UNISECO, aiming at developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for assessing the opportunities and “key moments” for knowledge exchange involving actors in the research process. The framework was designed to handle the research activities in which members of the Multi-Actor Platforms and Project Advisory Group are involved in participatory processes at EU-level, and the case studies. At each level, both the process and impact of the transdisciplinary and participatory events were considered.

The first aim was to enable a process of evaluation that would be on-going throughout the lifetime of the project. The means of evaluation was to analyze the quality of the activities that included participation at the



EU and case study levels, and to identify the positive and negative aspects of their implementation. The outcome sought was improved quality of the engagement processes, through their adaptation based on on-going learning of the project team through evidence and insights to the effectiveness of their design and operation.

The monitoring and evaluation process was reviewed by the project partners every six months, at the project meetings, and proposals for amendments discussed and implemented as appropriate.

The second aim was to draw conclusions about the impact of the transdisciplinary research activities. These impacts were in relation to the policy domain and on the empowerment and capacity building of local actors.

A consultation process internal to the project identified key research questions to be addressed for the elicitation of information required for the evaluation. Those questions are provided as in Table 1.

**Table 1. Evaluation aspects and key questions**

Aspects Addressed		Key Questions
<b>Assess the effectiveness of the Multi Actor activity</b>	Engagement of participants	Did the research activity reach all relevant target groups?
	Achievement of intended objectives and outcomes	Did the actor engagement meet its objectives? Did the actor engagement achieve the intended outcome?
<b>Methodological appraisal</b>	Method(s) of engagement selected	Were the selected method(s) useful? Constraints/difficulties occurred through planning
	Preparation and execution process	What worked well? Challenges faced during the implementation process
<b>Impact appraisal</b>	Estimate of the degree to which the Multi Actor activity promoted transdisciplinarity and facilitated mutual learning	Did the activity promote mutual learning amongst participants and the co-construction of knowledge?
		What were the lessons learnt for the project team and participants involved?
		What should be changed for future activities?

## 4.2. Selected Evaluation Criteria and Methods

Evaluation criteria were identified in the literature reviewed, compiled and grouped into three sets corresponding to the different phases of the research activities: preparation, implementation, post-implementation. The criteria have been adapted from Blackstock *et al.* (2007), who presented a detailed list of criteria used for the evaluation of participatory approaches, in turn drawing on papers on stakeholder participation (e.g. Rowe *et al.*, 2000; Richards *et al.*, 2004; Grant *et al.*, 2004). These were combined with criteria proposed in other relevant publications (Holzer *et al.*, 2018; Hassenforder *et al.*, Walter *et al.*, 2007; Reed, 2008).

The evaluation criteria covered the steps of preparing and conducting the research activities in which actors have been involved, and the feedback from actors on the effectiveness of the process. The members of the MAPs were not involved in the design of the evaluation process, to avoid influencing the evaluations by awareness of criteria being developed whilst they were also working on other project activities.

The tools chosen for collecting data include participant observation, a Reporting and Debriefing sheet completed by project partners and a feedback questionnaire completed by event participants. At the later



stages of the project, semi-structured interviews with selected MAP members were chosen to collect in depth qualitative information.

The sets of evaluation criteria applied to the evaluations of research activities are summarised in Table 2. Each set of evaluation criteria, together with how and when to obtain data on participatory processes, are described in more detail below.

**Table 2. Evaluation criteria**

On-going evaluation		Final evaluation
Operational	Process	Impact
Participant' profiles	Representativeness	Network building
Design of the process	Access to resources	Capacity building
Level of involvement	Group dynamics	Policy outcome

### **A. Operational criteria set**

At the end of group project activities (i.e. focus groups, workshops), a Debriefing/Reporting sheet (Annex 1) was completed by event organizers to provide quantitative and qualitative information on the quality and effectiveness of the practicalities of each interaction.

This sheet included information on:

- **Participant profiles:** Quantitative information about the number of actors engaged in the activity, proportion of actors by gender, age, professional background, and geographic location.
- **Design of the process:** Description of the preparation of the activities, including aspects related to information provision, identification and selection of actors, establishing transparent and objective justification of who is involved in the research activity and how the activity was planned and executed.
- **Level of involvement:** The consistency and loyalty of participation of each MAP member, in the case of multiple project activities.

### **B. Process criteria set**

On conclusion of group activities (i.e. focus groups, workshops), questionnaires were distributed to the actors involved, to provide feedback on the activity in relation to representativeness, access to resources and group dynamics. The questionnaire comprises 16 questions, using a five-point Likert scale approach, with answers ranging from 'strongly disagree', to 'strongly agree'. Respondents could also make comments in responding to each question for further explanations and insight (Annex 2).

Questions about the interactions and dynamics of the events were answered by the project partners who organized the activities. Group dynamics were assessed using 10 questions with a four-point Likert scale, answers to which were in the range: not at all, to a small extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent. They could also record comments alongside their responses (Annex 1: section on group dynamics).

Three factors were considered under process criteria:

- **Representativeness:** When a participatory process takes place, it is essential to ensure that representatives of the key actor groups are involved, and that their legitimacy is recognized and respected by all participants. This contributes towards the representation of diverse viewpoints, interests and values within the discussion.

Key issues:

- The participants should have a legitimate reason for involvement.
- All relevant stakeholder groups should have been identified.



- All stakeholder groups should have the opportunity to participate equitably in the activity.
  - The most appropriate participants should be invited to the event.
  - The nature of the participation should be fair.
  - All processes must adhere to the relevant ethical standards and follow the processes for which ethical clearance has been granted.
- **Access to resources:** Relevant and appropriate research information should be available and accessible to everyone participating. This is to aid the effectiveness of their participation. Sufficient time should be allocated for actors to be able to access the information, use it, and follow-up with any queries about its content.

Key issues:

- To ensure the flow of relevant information to all actors -
    - Actors are provided with sufficient information about the project activity and their expected role in a timely manner;
    - Relevant information is provided in clear and understandable language;
    - Information is appropriate and of interest to all participants;
    - Objectives of the activity are clearly stated and presented.
  - During the event, sufficient time should be scheduled to enable interactions, responses, and asking questions.
  - The facilitator successfully guided the discussion.
- **Group dynamics:** Actors should have the opportunity to participate and influence the process and its outcomes, with sufficient time allocated for interactions between all participants.

Key issues:

- Participants should follow the principles of participatory involvement, including those of respect, sharing, listening, attention and teamwork (Irvine *et al.*, 2019)?

### **C. Impact Criteria set**

At the final stages of the UNISECO project, two distinct approaches were followed for the evaluation at the EU and case study levels. The first approach, used with the EU level MAP, focused on the influence of the overall project activities on a policy-science dialogue. The second approach, used with the local level MAPs, primarily examined issue related to the capacities and empowerment of participants.

#### **i. At the European level**

The EU level MAP has provided an important interface for science-policy interactions, and co-production of knowledge. The framework of Frantzeskaki and Kabisch (2015) was used in the design of assessing the processes of the co-production of knowledge. Voorberg *et al.* (2014) define co-production of knowledge as “the active involvement and engagement of actors in the production of knowledge that takes place in processes either emerging or being facilitated and designed to accomplish such active involvement”.

In-depth interviews were carried out with selected members of the EU level MAP, to explore the prospective influence of the participatory processes on policy making. These were designed to obtain the views of actors on aspects of the processes such as openness, inclusivity of actors from different levels and sectors, the legitimacy of the knowledge, and usability of the co-produced knowledge.

- **Policy outcome:** Conditions are created that influence the co-production of knowledge, and generate values or benefit from co-produced knowledge for policy making and governance practice (Frantzeskaki and Kabisch, 2015).

Key issues:

- Conditions that relate to the way knowledge co-production processes are set-up



#### Openness

- development and use of an open discussion format with a common language;
- a free and safe environment that allows open discussion;
- willingness for engagement throughout the process;
- needs from both sides are openly discussed and clearly presented from the outset;
- a process of repeated interactions between science and policy.

#### Inclusiveness

- all types of knowledge are accepted (experience, scientific, tacit...).

#### Legitimacy

- credibility (level of technical detail etc.);
- reduced uncertainty and filling knowledge gaps;
- flexibility (adaptability to changing agendas).

- Conditions that relate to the expected value or benefit that the co-produced knowledge will bring across society, policy and practice

#### Usable knowledge

- timeliness;
- iterativity, described by Dilling and Lemos (2011) as “the purposeful and strategic interaction between ... so as to increase knowledge usability” (p. 681).

#### Actionable knowledge

- applicability;
- issues addressed at the appropriate level;
- linkages to agendas/networks (policy, business, research).

## ii. At the local level

To avoid “stakeholder fatigue” and to allow for flexibility throughout the data collection process, case study partners used either questionnaires to or semi-structured interviews with members of their Multi-Actor Platforms. The aim was to assess the extent to which there were changes in their networks, skills or knowledge, associated with their involvement in UNISECO.

The questionnaire used comprised eight questions (four dichotomous questions and four using a five-point Likert scale). Respondents could also make comments in responding to each question for further explanations and insight (Annex 3).

The same questions served as a basis for the closed-ended questions posed during the semi-structured interviews.

- **Building networks:** Professional opportunities can be created through the strengthening of existing social networks, or the formation of new networks or collaborations as a result of involvement in the project.

#### Key issues:

- Size and strength of network -
  - How many new people did they meet during their involvement in the project?
  - Did they participate in any other meetings or projects on related topics due to their involvement in the activity?

- **Capacity building and learning:**

An outcome of the process and content of the co-creation of knowledge, and its application in practice, builds capacity and learning. This leads to changes in knowledge, skills, relationships, understanding, and the development of trust which can lead to changes in behaviour, and engagement in on-going learning.

#### Key issues:

- Whether there is evidence -





- that the behaviour of actors changed, or the knowledge and skills of actors improved;
- of enhanced professional opportunities;
- of practical engagement and possible application of project results in the future;
- that project results meet the needs of the actors, and can be used by them in their everyday contexts;
- of a sense of ownership of project results.

### 4.3. Operationalisation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The monitoring and evaluation framework was designed to enable consideration of both the process and impact of participatory research activities at the level of the EU and case studies. Insights to the effectiveness of the on-going process of engagement through an assessment which used two sets of criteria, for considering the operational and process aspects of participation.

Feedback was obtained from the actors participating in activities at European and case study levels, and the relevant project partners.

At the EU level, a debriefing session followed each stakeholder workshop. At this, partners discussed and reflected on the positive and negative points of the process, providing written feedback with their observations of the interactions amongst participants during the workshop sessions. The actors who attended the workshop also filled in a questionnaire to provide their feedback on the effectiveness of the process.

The aim of this assessment procedure was to revise the process and operation of the event based upon the lessons learnt, aiming for continuous improvement and better engagement of actors in the research process.

Towards the end of the UNISECO project, a final evaluation was undertaken with respect to the set of impact criteria of the transdisciplinary approach, and on the overall process. The elements of the monitoring and evaluation framework, evaluation aspects and criteria, are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Operational framework**

Aspects addressed	Criteria	On-going evaluation		Final evaluation
		Operational	Process	Impact
<b>Engagement of participants</b>	Participant profiles		Representativeness	Network building
<b>Accomplishment of intended objectives and outcomes</b>	Level of involvement		Group dynamics	Capacity building
				Policy outcome
<b>Method(s) of engagement selected</b>	Design of the process		Access to resources	Capacity building
<b>Preparation and execution process</b>			Group dynamics	
<b>Transdisciplinarity and mutual learning</b>	Level of involvement		Group dynamics	Network building
				Capacity building

## 5. APPLICATIONS OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK – ON-GOING EVALUATION

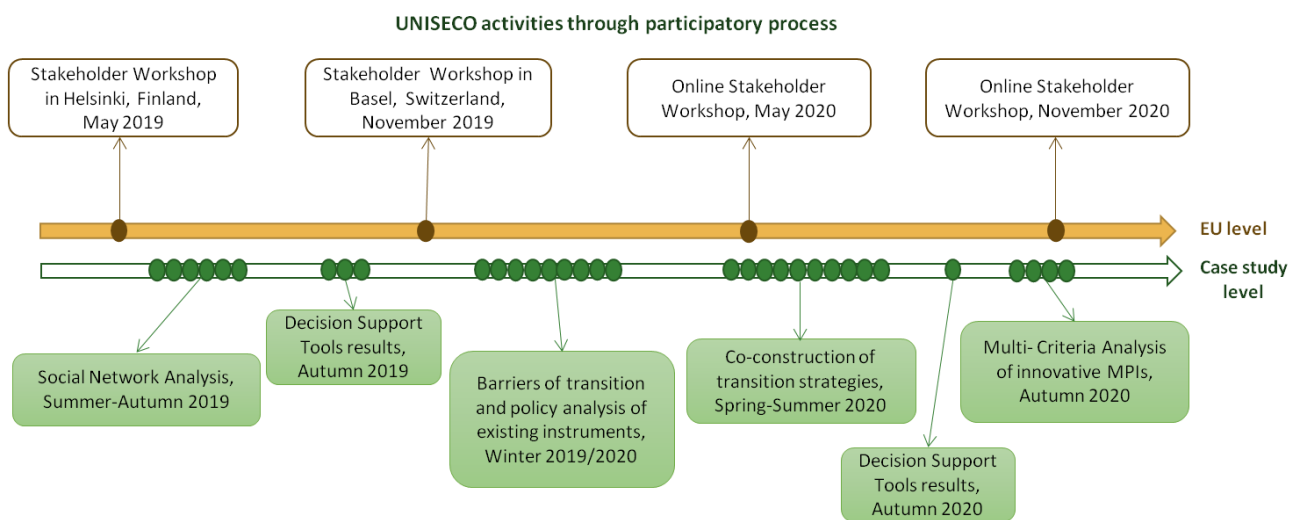
A pilot application of the framework was tested at the stakeholder workshop of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Project Meeting of UNISECO in Helsinki, (May, 2019), at which all project partners had the opportunity to become acquainted



with the framework in the debriefing session of the stakeholder workshop, and feedback was obtained from members of the EU-level Multi-Actor Platform, Stakeholder Reference Group and Project Advisory Group.

The framework was used at three stakeholder workshops with the EU-level Multi-Actor Platform, Stakeholder Reference Group and Project Advisory Group, and in 33 activities at the level of the case studies in partner countries. The results of the evaluation of the project activities associated with actors at EU and case study levels are presented in sub-sections 5.1 and 5.2 respectively.

Figure 1 illustrates the UNISECO occurrence of activities with actors held at points in time at EU and case study levels (each activity represented by a point on the EU and Case Study level lines).



**Figure 1. UNISECO activities with actors held at EU<sup>1</sup> and case study levels<sup>2</sup>.**

## 5.1. Applications of the Framework at EU level

A total of 36 questionnaires were collected across the four workshops held at European level, an average response rate of 43%. The two-day workshops engaged members of the EU-level Multi-Actor Platform, Stakeholder Reference Group and Project Advisory Group, all with a broadly similar format of plenary sessions with presentations, and break-out group discussions. In general, the objectives of workshops were to discuss, review, share and validate research results, and to consult the groups on strategic issues of research and dissemination.

At the end of each workshop, the Project Coordinator sent the evaluation questionnaires, by email, to all participants, ensuring that all of feedback received complied with the ethics process of the UNISECO project.

The number of completed questionnaires received from participants in each workshop was as follows:

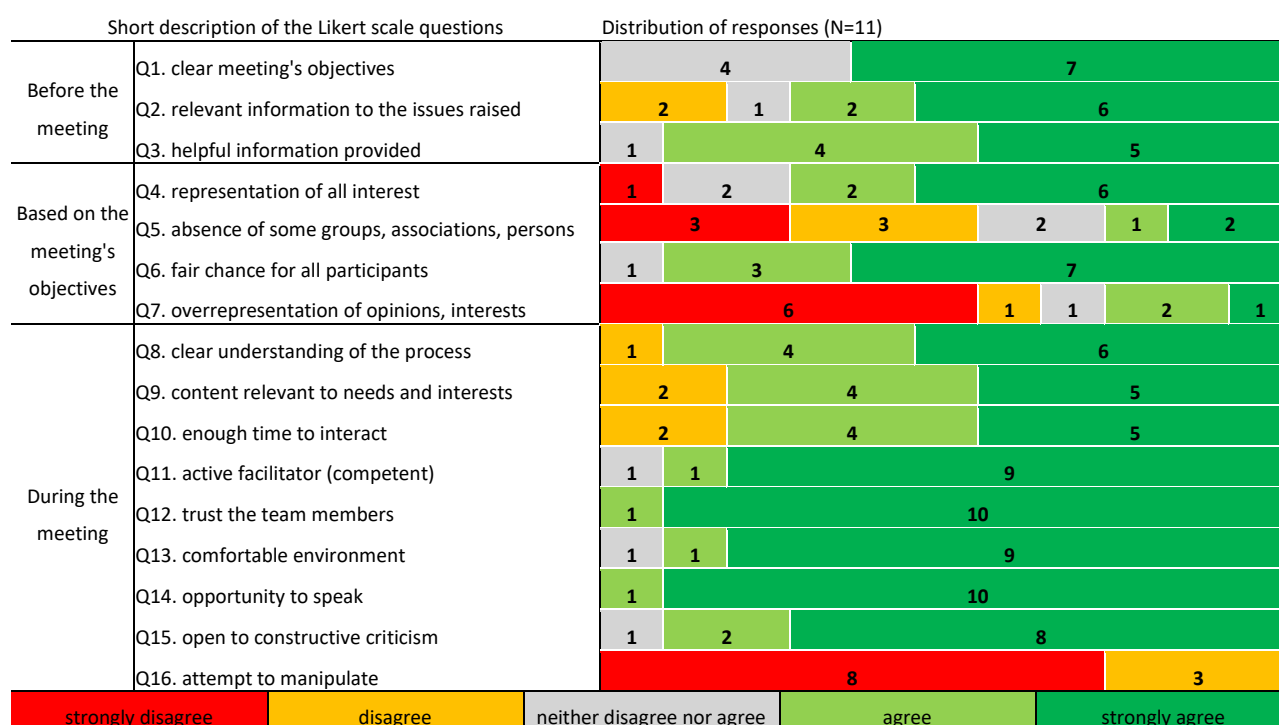
- Helsinki, Finland, May 2019: 11 completed questionnaires;
- Basel, Switzerland, November 2019: 6 completed questionnaires;
- Online workshop, May 2020: 13 completed questionnaires;
- Online workshop, November 2020: 6 completed questionnaires.

<sup>1</sup> In addition, further workshops with the EU-level MAP were held before and after the initial use of the evaluation process (e.g. scenario development in Brussels, Belgium, March 2019; project synthesis online workshop, February 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Each green circle represents a unique participatory activity carried out in a partner country, evaluated in feedback collected from the actors involved and case study partners.

### 5.1.1. Evaluation of stakeholder workshop, Helsinki, Finland

Of the 14 participants who attended the workshop in Helsinki, Finland (May 2019), 11 responded to the evaluation questionnaire. The respondents were four EU MAP members, four PAG members and three SRG members, while they were six males and five females coming from across Europe. Their feedback on the workshop process is summarized in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Overview of the answers of respondents at the workshop in Helsinki, Finland, May 2019.**

In addition to the score, a total of 91 comments were received from respondents. Almost half of the comments (43 comments) were contributed by members of the Project Advisory Group.

Comments received from three respondents stressed that the agenda was received just a few days before the meeting, thus they did not have sufficient time to prepare themselves for the event. Four respondents reported that the agenda was incomplete as it did not cover all of issues to be raised at the meeting. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“didn't receive the full agenda beforehand” SRG member;*

*“the stuff we were asked to comment on could all have been sent before the meeting” EU MAP member;*

*“What information? Maybe it would have been positive to receive the presentation by email” SRG member.*

Regarding the workshop content, the outcome of the analysis suggests that it fulfilled the needs and interests of the majority of attendees (9 positive responses), although two respondents remarked that they were not familiar with the workshop topics. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“...a part of the workshop content... was not easy to understand” SRG member;*

*“it is marginal to my work; but I felt like some of my comments were useful” EU MAP member.*

Regarding the representation of interests and interest groups in the workshop, three respondents indicated that the representation of stakeholders was not ideal, and five respondents suggested that some groups of relevant stakeholders should have also been invited to the workshop. Comments received focused on the

absence of representation of farmers and policy-makers. Comment was also made regarding the dominance of some male researchers and academics. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“a male participation” PAG member;*

*“few if any policymakers” EU MAP member;*

*“domination of researchers and scientists” SRG member;*

*“More farmers should be present” EU MAP member.*

Regarding group dynamics, with very few exceptions, respondents fully agreed that they had always been given opportunities to express their viewpoints and felt comfortable in sharing them. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“everybody had a chance but not everybody took the chance” SRG member;*

*“I felt very limited by the language and my knowledge” SRG member;*

*“in plenary not everybody feels as comfortable as in small groups” PAG member.*

Attendees at the workshops had opportunities to raise additional issues and make comments. Apart from comments of appreciation, one member of the Stakeholder Reference Group recommended clarification of the terms used in order to ensure that everyone involved in the UNISECO project has a common understanding.

Another member of the Stakeholder Reference Group member criticised the light lunch served to the attendees in the bus on the way to the field trip, as not being consistent with an agro-ecological approach, in contrast to the food offered during the field trip to Palopuro Agro-ecological Symbiosis, Finland, May 2019.

Key issues that emerged from the pilot evaluation results are summarised below:

- The information provided seemed to be insufficient. Participants need more supporting information, (e.g. background material, agenda with clear objectives of the event and their roles) in order to participate effectively.
- The representation of stakeholders was deemed unbalanced, as some respondents felt that farmers and policy-makers were underrepresented, and that there was an overrepresentation of male researchers and academics.
- A tight time schedule combined with complex topics, lack of expertise, and language barriers may have adversely impacted on some contributions, particularly in plenary sessions. Discussions in small groups in which relationships, trust and confidence could be developed more easily, enabled participants to participate and communicate more effectively and openly.

During the debriefing session for project partners, the proposals for a Debriefing and Reporting sheet were explained, and the requirements of the reporting process discussed for their application at the case study level.

### 5.1.2. Evaluation of the workshop in Basel, Switzerland

Feedback from participants in the workshop in Helsinki provided lessons upon which to act for the workshop that followed, held in Basel, Switzerland, in November 2019. The agenda of the workshop, explaining the objectives of the workshop, its main sessions together with background materials relevant to the topics discussed during the sessions, were sent to the participants in advance.

The workshop was designed with additional break-out discussion sessions, and to encourage interaction and active participation by reflecting on the field-trip, taking notes on flip charts and leaving opinions about the impact of UNISECO results on Post-It notes.

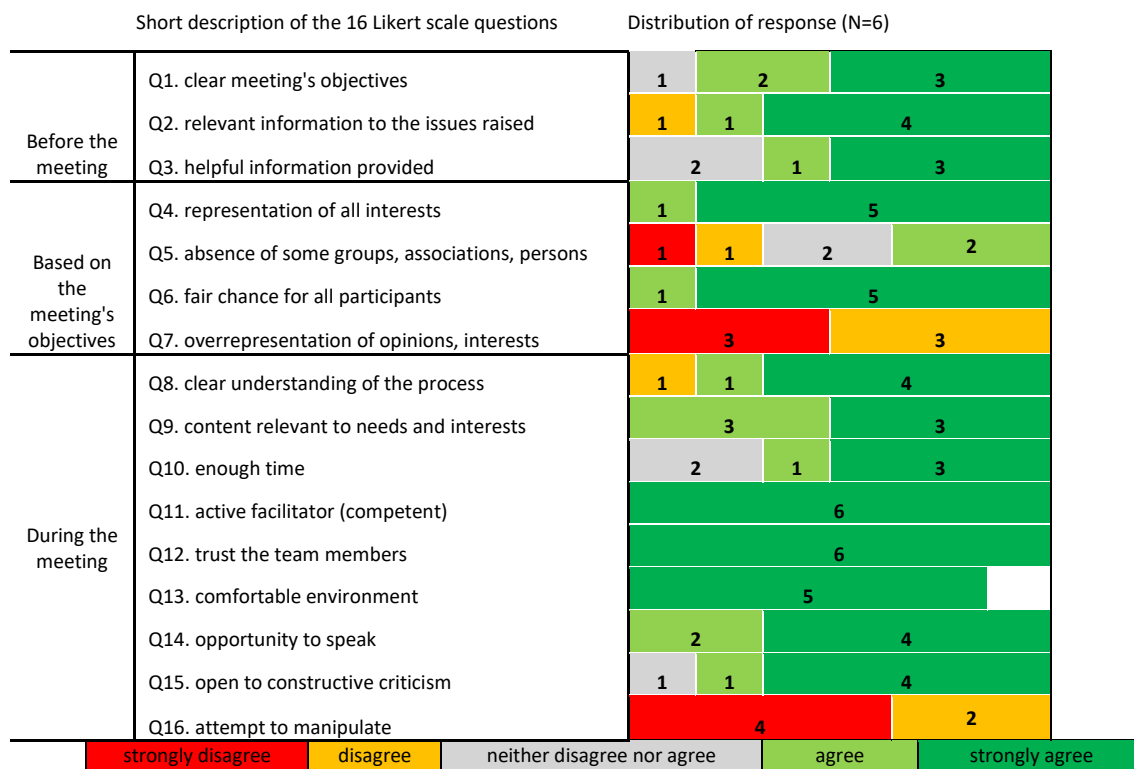
#### *Evaluation feedback from actors*

The response rate to the evaluation questionnaire was low (6 out of 21). The respondents were three females and three males, five of which were representatives from case study MAPs who are members of the



Stakeholder Reference Group, and one member of the Project Advisory Group. For four of the respondents, the workshop was their first participation at an event at an EU level. The respondents were representatives of farmers, managing authorities, science and advisory services.

Responses to questions on the preparation and implementation of the workshop are presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Overview of the answers of respondents at the workshop in Basel, Switzerland, November 2019.**

Based on the answers to question which used a Likert scale, and the 23 written comments received from respondents, overall, there was positive feedback regarding the workshop process. Almost all the respondents acknowledged benefits obtained from attending the meeting. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Overall very well organized and moderated, everyone had the opportunity to share their views”;* SRG member;

*“The possibility to be allowed to provide input to the fine-tuning was very positive and a very good example for the participatory approach followed throughout the project”* SRG member;

*“I also very much enjoyed additional information given by FAO”* PAG member;

*“The common interest on agro-ecological practices/systems allowed interesting exchanges and possibilities for future collaborations with UNISECO and beyond”* SRG member.

Some comments (6 comments) reported that the time available was very short, and that presentations and discussions had been rushed. Actors could not contribute as much as they wanted, and consequently discussions could not cover more detailed aspects and did not reach a conclusion. One member of the Stakeholder Reference Group stressed it was only at the event that the objectives of the workshop and information given were specified clearly. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Everything had to be presented, a little in a hurry”* SRG member;

*“the time was limited so it was not easy to have everything expressed”* SRG member;

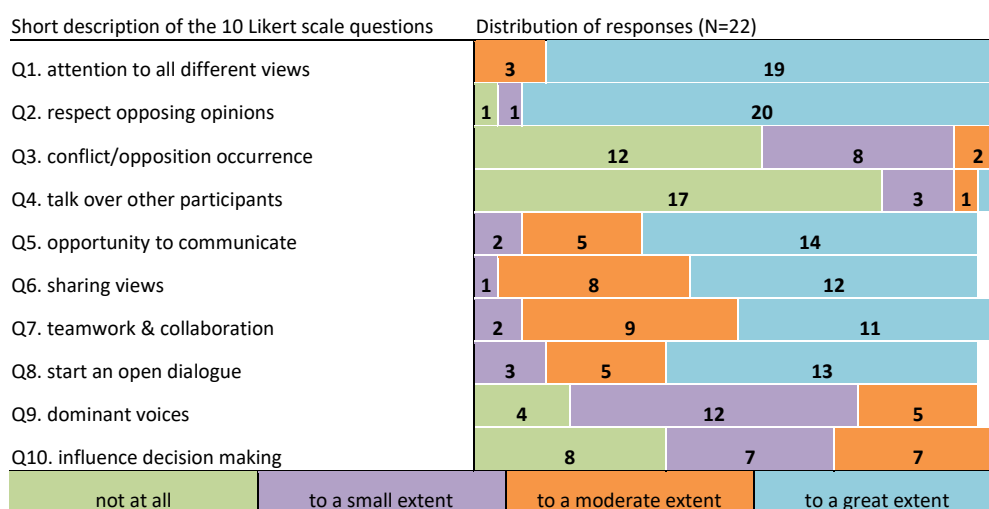
*“within the time frame there was no time to go deep enough to get to criticism”* SRG member.

The answers to questions about the absence of groups and interests (see Question 5 in Figure 3) revealed differences of opinions amongst respondents. Almost all respondents identified a group they considered could contribute to the discussion, but the specific suggestions varied (e.g. DG AGRI policy makers, representatives of the organic farming private control body, representatives of farming associations, EU level stakeholders). One member of the Stakeholder Reference Group reported a view that the proportion of attendees in the meeting was too imbalanced towards scientists, adding that the use of the UNISECO Multi Actor Platform Networking Facility (MAP NEF) might re-balance this asymmetry.

### Evaluation feedback from UNISECO partners

In addition to the evaluation feedback received from participants, UNISECO partners were also asked to provide feedback on the process of sessions, and to assess the group dynamics and interactions they observed during the workshop (see Debriefing/Reporting sheet, section on group dynamics).

A total of 22 assessment forms were completed by individual project partners or partner teams, giving their personal or collective views on the group’s performance, relationships and communications in the workshop sessions. Figure 4 shows the answers obtained from the UNISECO partners to issues relating to group dynamics during the workshop in Basel.



**Figure 4. Overview of the answers of UNISECO partners at the workshop in Basel, Switzerland, November 2019.**

In addition to the evaluations using the Likert scale, more than 100 written comments were collected from the UNISECO partners. Based on these comments, it appears that nearly all UNISECO partners perceived that all views were well taken into account and appreciated by others, participants were polite listeners showing respect and without interrupting the speaker. In the few cases where there was evidence of opposing opinions, those did not result in conflict. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Good and respectful discussion climate”;*

*“There was a very good predisposition to understand each other and enrich each other’s interventions”;*

*“this was due to good facilitation, but also respect of participants for each other”;*

*“is there a risk we agree too much or avoid conflicts that would contribute to better outcomes?”;*

*“There were not that many controversial discussions in the workshops”.*

The workshop was designed to enable several of the activities to be held in small groups, providing opportunities for all participants to communicate and express their positions. However, half of the UNISECO partners commented that, especially during plenary sessions, and despite the efforts of facilitator, there was

little interaction between some participants. Only a few participants voiced their views, while many seemed reluctant to contribute to the discussion. Feedback stressed that the more vocal contributors did not deliberately dominate in the discussion during the plenary. Rather, there were several participants who were silent. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“in plenaries only 2-3 stakeholders participated actively”;*

*“I do not think that every stakeholder contributed”;*

*“some very quiet and some mostly working on their computers during discussions”;*

*“some people are naturally more talkative and comfortable with speaking in a large group”;*

*“Some dominating voices, but good efforts from moderators to balance this”;*

*“there was not much discussion among invited experts”;*

*“Perhaps the more vocal individuals had a greater influence”.*

Possible explanations reported that could hinder external participants from joining the discussions were differences in personalities, levels of confidence, knowledge, experience, language barriers, and time constraints. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“I am not sure if the overall time for stakeholders was enough to grasp all the details of the intended objectives of the exercises/discussion topics of this complex topic”;*

*“probably time constraints do not allow a deeper discussion on some issues”;*

*“Very varying. How can we engage better with participants that might struggle with language or speaking in a large group”;*

*“Some people have clear opinions, more experience on a given topic, and a confident attitude”.*

A range of engagement methods and tools were required during project meetings, such as discussions in groups of a small number of participants, written feedback in forms, world-café formats, and the use of cards designed to help participants in expressing themselves. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“the depth of engagement is related to the length of the meeting and fatigue ... changing forms of discussion (not just frontal presentation) helps a lot”;*

*“sometimes it would take more energy and effort to get more input from the experts”;*

*“Maybe a world-café format could be more efficient”;*

*“a better preparation of the sessions”.*

Project partners valued the willingness of participants to exchange views in informal ways, such as during coffee breaks and field trips. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Lots of interesting lunch, coffee and dinner discussions”;*

*“there seemed to be good and open discussion between participants both during formal (e.g. small group discussion) and informal (e.g. field trip) events.”*

### 5.1.3. Evaluation of online stakeholder workshop, May 2020

The stakeholder workshop in May 2020 was organised as an online event, reflecting the constraints on travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Carrying out workshops online which kept stakeholders engaged and motivated was a challenge. Informed by the evaluation feedback from previous, in situ, event, time and planning was dedicated to the preparation of the workshops.

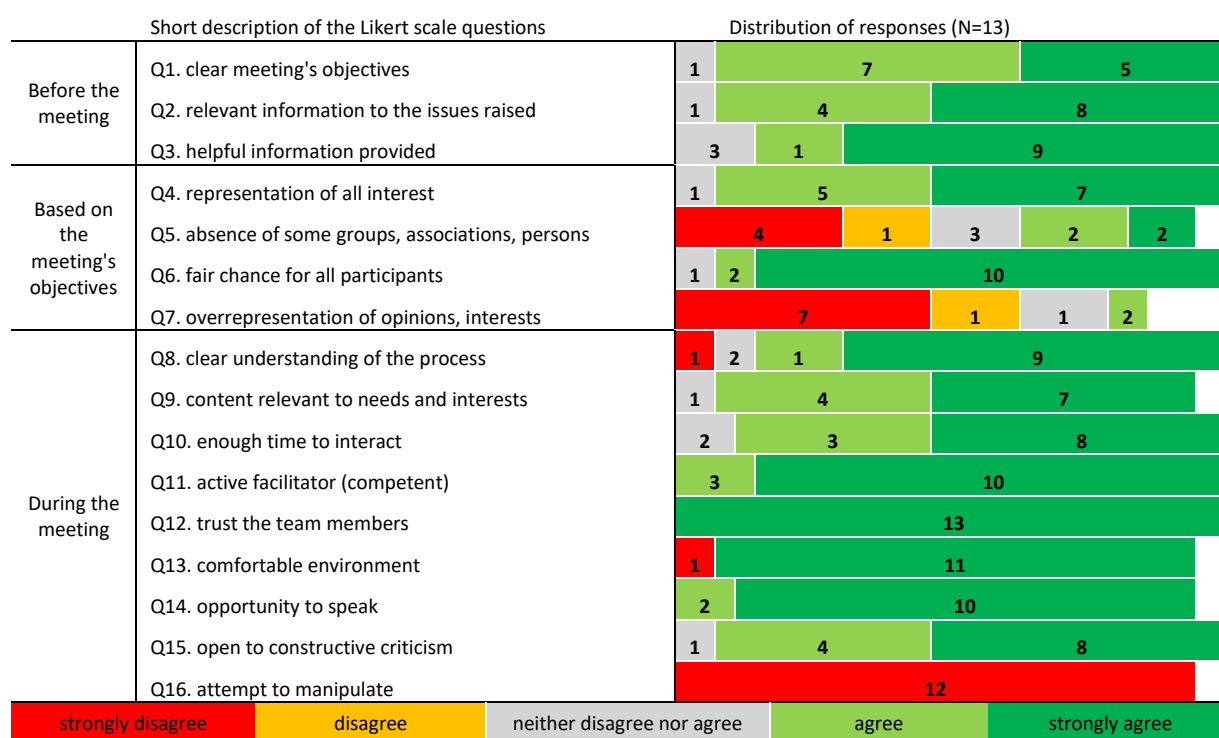
An aim was to avoid lengthy presentations in the online environment, increase the proportion of participant engagement. Actions identified as significant for a positive experience of all participants were to circulate: i)



reading materials to everyone well in advance; ii) detailed outlines of the workshop sessions, as the questions proposed for discussions. Discussions were organised to take place in small break-out groups, with careful allocation of actors according to their expertise and interests, and for frequent comfort breaks to reduce the time viewing screens and using audio equipment.

### Evaluation feedback from actors

A total of 13 evaluation questionnaires were completed by stakeholders who participated in the online workshop, in May 2020, representing a response rate of approximately 43%. Two were members of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform, three of the Project Advisory Group, and eight were members of the Stakeholder Reference Group. There were six female respondents and seven male respondents; nine respondents could be classified under science and advisory services group, two were representatives of a managing authority and two represented the interests of farmers. The answers given by the participants are shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Overview of the answers of respondents at the online workshop, May 2020.**

Approximately 60 written comments were collected, of which more than half (58%) came from five respondents. Overall, the respondents reported the workshop to have been well organised, informative and interesting. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Not easy to do on a Zoom conference with so many people, but you did it!” EU MAP member;*

*“It was like a break in this tragic situation to think about the agroecological transition in an inspiring way” SRG member;*

*“Despite the problem of not being physically present, I felt a great sense of shared purpose” PAG member;*

*“Interesting and useful initiative” SRG member.*

The majority of respondents appreciated that sufficient background information was circulated ahead of time, aiding the level of engagement in the workshop. A few comments (4) noted deficiencies in materials, or suggested the use other mechanisms of communication, such as the MAP-NEF platform.

*“I was prepared with the case studies and the prereads” SRG member;*





*“helpful information circulated before the workshop” PAG member;*

*“The agenda sent out ahead of the meeting gave a good overview of the topics to be addressed in the meeting” SRG member;*

*“for someone who does not follow closely the project more analytical information quite in advance was required” EU MAP member;*

*“it would be good to see more contributions posted on the MAP-NEF platform as this seems a bit of an under used resource so far” PAG member;*

*“my role was not specified” EU MAP member.*

Comments were received from participants on the topic of the under- or over-representation of specific interest groups in the workshop, for example farmers, value chain actors and policy makers or researchers, respectively (8 comments). Based on the evaluation results, the topic of the absence of groups that could contribute to the workshop had the largest variation in responses, with respondents polarized in their opinions (see Question 5 in Figure 5). In addition, some respondents commented that the format of the meeting was not conducive to getting to know each other, and so it was not clear to everyone as to who was participating. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“I suspect that farmers were not represented” EU MAP member;*

*“I am not sure about all the participant profiles connected at zoom... It is relevant to invite farmer representatives/unions as well as stakeholders involved in the design of market and policy instruments” PAG member;*

*“I think researchers dominated the discussions” EU MAP member;*

*“The voice of farmers in local MAPs was missing” SRG member;*

*“It would be interesting to have more buy in from the food and distribution sectors” EU MAP member.*

Concerning the process of workshop, group dynamics and opportunities for sharing thoughts and opinions, most respondents valued the flow of discussions, the break-out groups formation, and the use of chatbox. They acknowledged that the role of facilitators is more demanding in virtual than in physical meetings. Three comments implied some limitations in the facilitation (e.g. the difficulty of stopping irrelevant comments, and presenters not respecting the time limit for their presentations). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Very relevant to create the small groups” PAG member;*

*“As usual, discussions seem to reach an interesting stage when the time comes to an end” PAG member;*

*“small groups helped the opened and diverse comments from participants” SRG member;*

*“My participation in the sub-group was quite satisfactory although some did not make any relevant contributions and detuned the dialogue” EU MAP member;*

*“for the most part all participants were respectful of the need for others to join in the discussion” PAG member;*

*“it was great how the chat box comments were considered by the facilitators” SRG member.*

Concerning the online format of the workshop, some respondents acknowledged the benefits of holding a virtual workshop, irrespective of the reason being the restrictions due to COVID-19. More such online events would be beneficial in terms of reducing fossil fuel consumption due to project activities.

There were few comments about difficulties of engaging in an online meeting, and consequences such as the lack of social contacts or the need for extra efforts to concentrate and focus on the discussions compared to those of an in situ meeting. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“maybe Zoom is not very comfortable for everyone to speak” SRG member;*

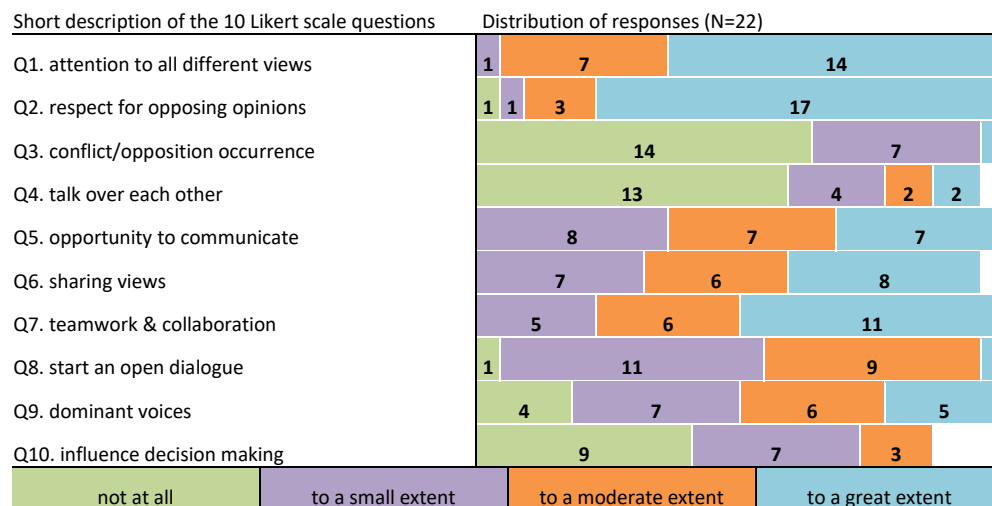
*“The on-line meetings with so many participants prevent open dialogue due to technical and time constraints” EUMAP member;*

*“a new forum that we have to get used to it” PAG member;*

*“most important social contacts were missing” SRG member.*

### Evaluation feedback from UNISECO partners

A total of 22 assessment forms were submitted by project partners relating to group dynamics and the interactions of participants during the workshop sessions, individually or collaboratively (the part of Debriefing/Reporting sheet concerning the group dynamics). Responses to questions on opportunities for communication, sharing views, teamwork and collaboration (see Questions 5 to 9 in Figure 6) have the greatest variation in responses on the Likert scale, showing a divergence of opinions. Figure 6 shows the answers obtained from the UNISECO partners to issues relating to group dynamics during the online stakeholder workshop, in May 2020.



**Figure 6. Overview of the answers of UNISECO partners at the online workshop, May 2020.**

Approximately 100 written comments were received from partners following the online workshop. These were in line with the responses provided in the evaluation forms. Almost all partners stated that, in comparison with an in situ meeting, online workshops have limitations, restricting the collaboration and open dialogue between attendees. For example, participants found it harder to engage in discussions with other stakeholders, and to interpret the communications of other participants (e.g. not being able to interpret body language and non-verbal signals). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“due to the online form of the meeting it was difficult to signal who wants to tell something,... not all who had something to tell had finally the opportunity to speak”;*

*“If some views were taken into account less than others was due to the common limitations and problems of online meetings”;*

*“hard to follow who is speaking”;*

*“Partially impossible to say without seeing body language”;*

*“the virtual conditions of the meeting did not facilitate communication (not easy to really exchange, debate etc.).*

Feedback was received regarding weaknesses in the workshop, such as break-out groups in which partners outnumbered stakeholders, the domination of sessions by some moderators through long presentations and limited amounts of time for discussion or inefficient use of the chatbox. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Too long presentations and too short time for discussions”;*

*“in one group discussion, facilitator didn’t intervene when someone was more talkative and dominated the conversation”;*

*“there was no communication of the person responsible for the chat and the facilitator”;*

*“Some moderators over moderated/ dominated their sessions taking valuable discussion time away from others/ from the session”;*

*“I had the feeling that the moderators sometimes became a bit dominant”;*

*“Perhaps some MAPs felt frustrated to provide feedback by the number of project people being present”.*

More than half of the partners provided suggestions and ideas for improving the online engagement with the stakeholders, which are summarised below:

- i) Reduce the number of discussion topics and design the composition of groups according to the expertise of stakeholders. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“One topic per day (if online workshop) leads to more time for break-out groups and more in-depth discussion”;*

*“all stakeholders (and partners) do not need to participate in all workshop sessions”;*

*“everyone is an expert in a different area”.*

- ii) Design the workshop to have short presentations, circulating supporting information in advance. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Even shorter presentations might be desirable”;*

*“Send all information in advance, prepare adequately the information sent, avoid lengthy presentations”;*

*“The presentation of project outcomes could be reduced to the essential elements, provided that stakeholders are given the possibility to read a more extensive, albeit simple, summary beforehand”;*

*“the purpose of the meeting should be the interaction only”;*

*“The objective and desired output of the workshop sessions needs to be clearly defined”;*

*“In my opinion the task abbreviations (e.g. T3.4, 5.3. etc.) were too often used, ... not forget that the guests are not so familiar with the project structure”.*

- iii) Design sessions in detail, with clear objectives and questions to be addressed, communicating specific instructions and tasks to organisers, partners and participants. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Detailed staging of the workshops, with clear questions, that can be answered in a few words”;*

*“Organise better the breakout groups, avoid the presence of many muted persons”;*



*“clear objectives and problem-solving orientation of the sessions may help, e.g. by giving specific tasks to the organisers and participants”;*

*“Use the chat properly, by systematically following it”;*

*“smaller groups with stakeholder dominance. Even at the cost of limiting the participation of project partners”.*

One feedback expressed concerns about the connectivity between project partners, implying a lack of communication and sharing of views on the case study tasks and future work. Their recommendation was to undertake a debrief in the same way as when debriefing stakeholders after their workshops. A quote from the feedback was:

*“.. there is a lack of support for communication between ourselves (project partners). Basically, we meet only twice a year and in the meantime we do not communicate (of course, except for communication with the task leader) - we have no common platform, only possible bilateral emails... the connection between us as partners in the project is weak... I would like to share my observations ... questions in case studies or discussions on publications (eg. now it was nice to say online - how we will proceed with the second workshop - which tool we will choose, similarly we can agree on joint articles) ... support ourselves within the project in difficulties or ambiguities.”*

#### 5.1.4. Evaluation of online stakeholder workshop, November 2020

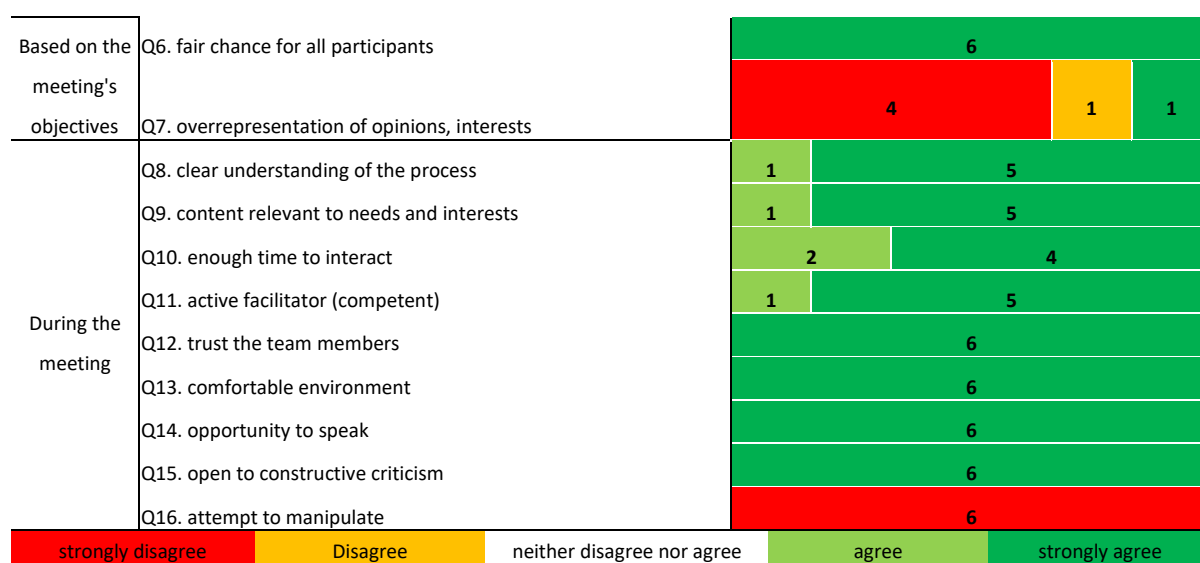
The evidence from the full set of evaluation feedback was that the online workshop in May 2020 was very effective. It benefited from UNISECO having good communications and relationships through the previous in situ meetings earlier in the project.

For the stakeholder workshop held in November 2020, the lead teams and workshop organisers took into account the experience gained from the first online workshop, and the comments received from participants and partners. A list of registered participants was circulated before the workshop, as were the background materials and guidance for the workshop sessions. Only one theme was presented per day, structured into small break-out groups. Online polls were used to stimulate engagement through active responses and follow-up discussions. The closing of the workshop included a roundtable discussion on the wider policy context of the EU agricultural sector and related strategies. Selected participants were invited to make opening statements before the wider discussion, broadening the range of insights and providing more diversity to the content of the event.

##### **Evaluation feedback from actors**

Twenty-six individuals and members of the different UNISECO platforms participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> online stakeholder workshop, in November 2020, a response rate of 23%. Of these, one was a member of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform, two were members of the Project Advisory Group, and were members of the Stakeholder Reference Group, all of whom had participated in previous project events. The responses were from two females and four males; four responses were from agricultural and environmental specialists, one representative of managing authority, and one representative of farmer groups. Figure 7 shows the answers provided by the stakeholders to the 16 Likert scale questions.

Short description of the Likert scale questions		Distribution of responses (N=6)		
Before the meeting	Q1. clear meeting's objectives	1	5	
	Q2. relevant information to the issues raised	6		
	Q3. helpful information provided	2	4	
	Q4. representation of all interest	1	5	
	Q5. absence of some groups, associations, persons	3		2



**Figure 7. Overview of the answers of respondents at the online workshop, November 2020.**

A total of 15 comments were provided by three respondents, who were members of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform or Project Advisory Group. The evaluation feedback received indicated agreement that the workshop was well designed, and that the way it was conducted led to a very positive and supporting atmosphere. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Conference held by video link (Zoom), which is not so easy with many participants and break-out groups. However, the result was excellent. Well done” EU MAP member;*

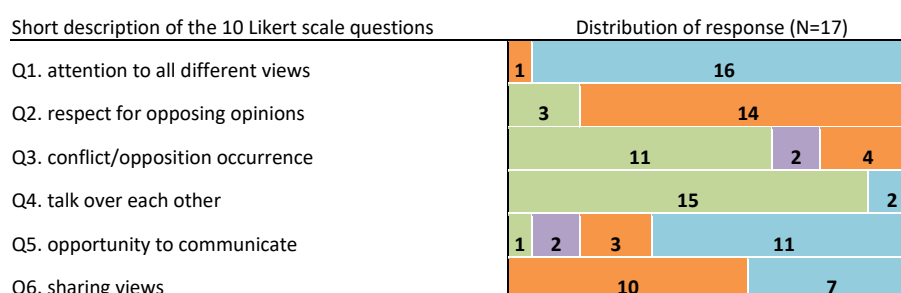
*“Discussion seemed open and fair. The facilitators did a good job, within the constraints of a virtual meeting. Breakout groups drew out the main issues” PAG member.*

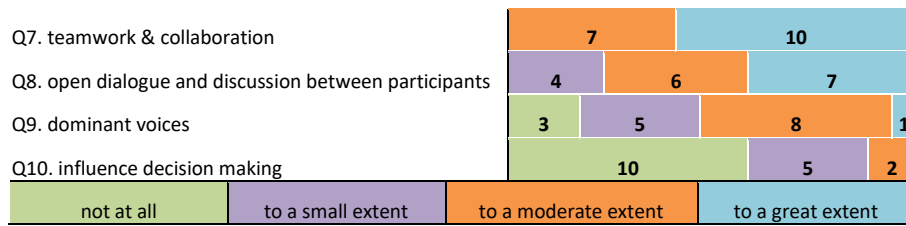
The responses to the evaluation indicated that the aims and process of the workshop were clear, and that the interactions during discussion sessions were constructive. However, there was some concern expressed about the over-representation of some interests and gaps in representation of others (e.g. see Questions 5 and 7, Figure 7). An example quote from the feedback was:

*“While all “players” were represented, I think that those with a policy brief could have been more vocal on this second day regarding the way transition policies could be implemented and likely difficulties” PAG member.*

### Evaluation feedback from UNISECO partners

Seventeen assessment forms were received from project partners relating to group dynamics and the interactions of participants during the workshop sessions. These were either individual responses, or collaborative (i.e. from the Debriefing/Reporting sheet on group dynamics). Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of answers received from the UNISECO partners regarding issues of group dynamics during the online stakeholder workshop, in November 2020.





**Figure 8. Overview of the answers of UNISECO partners at the online workshop, November 2020.**

In addition to the responses to questions using Likert scales, a total of 40 written comments were collected from six partners. Evaluation feedback revealed that participants were good and respectful listeners, and that only on a few occasions did opposing opinions arise. Few partners perceived that opinions from specific representatives were missing or were not communicated. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“the opinions of some groups (farmers, consumers ...) were missing, but it is difficult to invite these representatives”;*

*“the discussion was interesting, but in my opinion it could have been more dynamic”;*

*“(about the absence of conflict) This not always a good sign... sometimes lively discussions are more interesting and reveal a stronger commitment and involvement of participants”;*

*“just “concerned” participants were willing to share their opinions and interact with each other”.*

A few feedback comments noted that some participants were more active contributors, although the intensity of engagement varied depending on the session, language constraints and, probably, the character of the participants. Some voices were heard more often, especially in plenary sessions, but this was perceived as an acceptable level of imbalance. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“most participants were hesitant about sharing their views in plenary”;*

*“Some people were more vocal – but that doesn’t reflect “dominance” – rather engagement”;*

*“Just some participants actively participate in the discussions”;*

*“It is evident that there are language barriers and online meeting may prevent this interaction”;*

*“(about discussion and open dialogue) this differed a bit between different sessions”;*

*“Due to the nature of participants some were more active than others”;*

*“This always happens but online meetings can exacerbate it”.*

A few partners considered the structure of the workshop to have worked better compared with that of the previous online meeting. Some proposals were received for creating more interactive engagement. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“The balance between the number of topics/sessions and the allocated time seemed to have worked better than in May”;*

*“It was useful to clarify the roles of external experts and ours as project partners as listeners”;*

*“have simpler and shorter sessions in remote meetings, with narrower aims”;*

*“allocate more time to the group discussion”.*

## 5.2. Applications of the Framework at Case Study level

At the case study level, the framework was applied to monitor and evaluate the case study level Multi-Actor Platforms across the participatory activities of the project. For many of the forms of participation at the case study level, project partners could choose between different methods of engagement with a view to the most

appropriate to fit local circumstances. For example, for the Social Network Analysis, each partner could choose between three different options (i.e. individual interviews with at least 3 actors; interviews with at least 2 key actors, followed by a workshop; interviews with at least 7 actors).

**Table 4. Number of participatory project activities in each partner case study<sup>3</sup>.**

Participatory Project Activities	Social Network Analysis	Decision Support Tools Results <sup>4</sup>	Barriers of Transition and Policy Analysis of Existing Instruments	Co-construction of Transition Strategies	Multi Criteria Analysis of Innovative MPis
<b>Czech Republic</b>			(9)	(9)	
<b>Finland</b>		(10)			(3)
<b>France</b>	(10)	(8)			
<b>Germany</b>	(8)		(7)	(8)	(6)
<b>Greece</b>	(7)		(5)	(6)	
<b>Hungary</b>		(10)	(10)	(10)	
<b>Italy</b>	(10)		(6)	(5)	
<b>Latvia</b>				(14)	
<b>Lithuania</b>	(11)		(5)	(9)	(7)
<b>Romania</b>				(7)	
<b>Spain</b>			(9)	(8)	(8)
<b>Sweden</b>			(9)	(31)	
<b>Switzerland</b>		(8)			
<b>United Kingdom</b>	(4)		(5)		
<b>Total no of participants (N=282)</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>24</b>

Note: The coloured cells in the table refer to unique project activities in which actors in case studies and local Multi-Actor Platforms were engaged. The number in brackets indicates the number of participants in each activity.

At the local level, all of the case study partners chose to use focus groups or workshops with the Multi-Actor Platforms for one or more of the: Social Network Analysis (Task 5.2), presentation of the results of the Decision Support Tools results (Task 3.2), identification of barriers of transition and policy analysis of existing instruments (Task 5.3), co-construction of transition strategies (Task 3.3), and Multi-Criteria Analysis of innovative Market and Policy Incentives (Task 5.4) (Table 4). After each of these participatory events, UNISECO partners completed the debriefing/reporting sheet (Annex 1) and distributed the evaluation questionnaire (Annex 2) to all of the actors involved.

### **Feedback on case study activities from UNISECO partners**

Based on the information received from the debriefing and reporting sheets, there were 282 participations across the 33 project activities. Of the participants, 60% were male, representing a higher proportion of men

<sup>3</sup> In Spain, interviews were used as the method of engagement with the case study Multi-Actor Platform for the Multi-Criteria Analysis of innovative MPis. The activity was still evaluated, with members of the Multi-Actor Platform completing the relevant part of the evaluation questionnaire. In other case studies, additional interviews with members of the Multi-Actor Platforms were conducted before and after the workshops which are listed in Table 4.

<sup>4</sup> In some case studies, the presentation of the results of the Decision Support Tools was incorporated into the programme of one of the other workshops.

than those involved in the case study activities. Of these participants, almost 80% were aged between 30 and 60 years, representing a broad range of ages.

Farmers, and representatives of science, innovation, advisory, capacity building (accounted for 33% and 29% respectively) were engaged most frequently, although it is noted that individuals can be in more than one type of actor group (e.g. a representative of an authority can also be a farmer; a farmer can also be an advisor). The profiles of the participants in the participatory case study activities are summarized in Table 5 by gender, age and main actor types. Gaps are apparent in the actor types of consumers and in the agri-food chain.

**Table 5. Demographic characteristics of all participants within the case study activities (gender, age and main actor type).**

Participatory Project Activities	% Social Network Analysis (N=50)	% Decision Support Tools Results (N=36)	% Barriers of Transition and Policy Analysis of Existing Instruments (N=65)	% Co-construction of Transition Strategies (N=107)	% Multi Criteria Analysis of Innovative MPIs (N=24)	% of Participants in all Activities (N=282)
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	42	17	40	45	46	<b>40</b>
Male	58	83	60	55	50	<b>60</b>
<b>Age<sup>5</sup></b>						
<29	6	3	6	8	4	<b>6</b>
30-39	26	11	20	24	8	<b>21</b>
40-49	22	25	32	38	46	<b>33</b>
50-59	40	19	29	18	25	<b>25</b>
>60	6	14	12	7	4	<b>9</b>
<b>Actor's type</b>						
Farmers	24	75	28	31	8	<b>33</b>
Authorities and administration	16		22	20	33	<b>18</b>
Agri-food value chain	6	6	8	9		<b>7</b>
NGOs	16	3	14	7	13	<b>10</b>
Science, innovation, advisory, capacity building	36	17	29	30	33	<b>29</b>
Others	2			3		<b>2</b>

Participants were recruited by project partners and stakeholder champions based on the specific characteristics of each activity and the selection criteria for MAP membership. Suggestions of other stakeholders of potential relevance to a specific activity were made by existing participants or, in the case of organisations and companies, an alternative representative attended. The combination of origins of participation contributed to the development of relationships and networks.

Participants were contacted by email and/or telephone approximately 20 days before each event, ranging between 7 days and several months. Generally, partners informed participants and raised awareness about

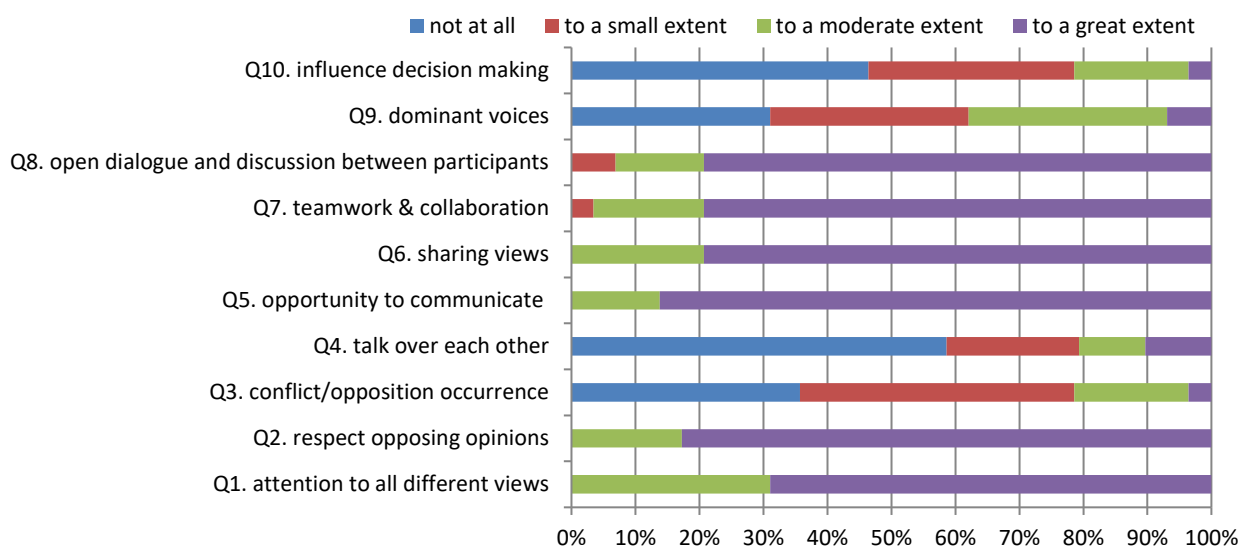
<sup>5</sup> Non-response 6%.



upcoming activities, asking them to ‘save the date’, especially in cases when farmers were involved, followed up with reminder emails and calls. The average participation rate, i.e. number of individuals participated/number of individuals invited, was approximately 68%.

Project partners facilitated the group discussions of all of the activities, except the workshop on Decision Support Tools results, in France at which the Regional advisor of CUMAs (French farm machinery cooperatives) was the facilitator. Where appropriate, information for prior reading, and dissemination materials, were also provided.

Apart from reporting the practicalities of each interaction, partners were asked to indicate the quality of group interactions they observed during the activity, completing questions relating to group dynamics, using a four-point Likert scale (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. Overview of the answers of UNISECO partners of group dynamics across all participatory activities held in the 14 partner countries.**

Approximately 130 written comments were submitted by project partners. Based on the evaluations, different views were heard equally and taken into account by all participants. Most activities accommodated diverse groups of types of actors, and participants were willing to share their expertise and listen to the arguments of other contributors. Those arguments were built upon collectively, or different perspectives were offered, creating an environment with good spirit of collaboration (e.g. see responses to Questions 6, 7 and 8, Figure 9).

In most cases, conflict did not occur (almost 80% reported “not at all” or only “to a small extent”, Question 3, Figure 9), although there were lively discussions with exchanges of opposing opinions. Such exchanges were mainly when the participants felt that they had to represent their own groups, but it was done in a polite, civil and constructive way.

The discussions between local actors were fruitful, with a high level of interaction, and most meetings were structured in ways such that everybody expressed their opinions, with approximately 90% of respondents assessing the opportunity to communicate as “to a great extent” (Question 5, Figure 9). A few cases reported the presence of dominant figures that had “a vocal personality”, “being off topic” or “felt being more knowledgeable”. These figures were interpreted as trying to influence the opinions of others, and control the discussion (e.g. approximately 7% reporting there were “dominant voices” “to a great extent” in responding to Question 9, Figure 9). In such cases, the role of facilitators was crucial to balance any asymmetry in power, by intervening to promote dialogue, seeking wider involvement in the discussion, using a question to which everyone was invited to respond individually, or using a voting procedure.

Out of all participatory activities, there was only one case in which tension and conflict arose within discussion between two types of actors (value chain actor and farmers). Partners believed there was a good balance between the different groups of actors, leading to stimulating discussion and exchanges of diverse opinions. In the feedback received, it was noted that some participants felt that the behaviour and viewpoints of another participant prevented the progress of the discussion from moving forward, and discouraged others from expressing opinions or concerns. This experience reflects the importance of developing the quality of the collaborations and sense of teamwork at the case study level.

Case study activities had to adapt to new regulations and public health guidance relating to COVID-19. This led to many events being organised to run online (or virtually), such as workshops for Task 3.3 in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Spain, UK and Task 5.4 in Lithuania.

In the Greek case, all participants were present on-site, and project partners were the only attendees who were not physically present, links between whom were via Skype. In the online meetings, project partners found that facilitation needed more effort to keep meetings on track, since participants followed the discussion in the room on-site and often overlooked the remote participants. Spanish partners commented that the online workshop has limitations when it comes to enabling a fluid debate, which in turn can reduce the quality of the interactions and data, and thus some results obtained should be treated with caution.

Other general points raised by partners were:

- i) difficulty in planning activities and engaging, especially with farmers, when the seasonal agricultural activities coincided with project tasks, and having to fit the tight timetable of project activities.
- ii) stakeholder fatigue is increased when there are insufficient key actors within the case study region to avoid repeat invitations to events (e.g. in Spain);
- iii) gender imbalance in the group composition, and the limited options to involve female actors (e.g. in Germany).
- iv) the complexity of topics during the workshop for Task 5.3, and the lack of individuals with detailed knowledge was a cause of concern for some participants, who expressed uncertainty in terms of their contributions in specific areas (e.g. in Sweden).
- v) the guidelines provided for the workshop for Task 5.3 were reported as being a bit unclear and confusing, especially for someone who is not fully embedded in the project or is not an experienced facilitator.
- vi) a need to change the wording of the scoring exercise (e.g. in the United Kingdom).

### ***Evaluation of feedback from actors regarding case study activities***

A total of 33 participatory project activities took place in 14 partner case studies, from which 232 completed evaluation questionnaires were received, representing an average response rate of 82%. Table 6 summarises the distribution of questionnaires received by participatory activity in each partner case study.

The questionnaires were completed by 136 males and 94 females. The most noticeable imbalance in gender was in the participants in activities relating to the results of the Decision Network Tools. Of the responses received, 35% came from farmers, and 28% from representatives of science, innovation, advisory services and capacity building. The distribution of completed questionnaires by gender and main actor types in each case study activity is summarized in Table 7.

**Table 6. Distribution of completed questionnaires by participatory activity in each partner case study.**

Participatory Project Activities	Social Network Analysis	Decision Support Tools Results	Barriers of Transition and Policy Analysis of Existing Instruments	Co-construction of Transition Strategies	Multi Criteria Analysis of Innovative MPis
Czech Republic			9	9	
Finland		10			3
France	8	5			
Germany	8		6	7	6
Greece	5		5	5	
Hungary		7	6	9	
Italy	10		6	5	
Latvia				10	
Lithuania	11		4	9	6
Romania				2	
Spain			8	4	5
Sweden			9	24	
Switzerland		7			
United Kingdom			4		
<b>No of completed questionnaires (N=232)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>20</b>

**Table 7. Distribution of completed questionnaires by gender and main actor types within each case study activity.**

Participatory Project Activities	Social Network Analysis	Decision Support Tools Results	Barriers of Transition and Policy Analysis of Existing Instruments	Co-construction of Transition Strategies	Multi Criteria Analysis of Innovative MPis	No of completed questionnaires (N=232)
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	21	4	22	38	9	94
Male	21	25	35	45	10	136
Non-response				1	1	2
<b>Actor type</b>						
Farmers	9	26	18	26	2	81
Authorities and administration	7		12	17	9	45
Agri-food value chain	1	2	5	7		15
NGOs	7		4	7	3	21
Science, innovation, advisory, capacity building	17	1	18	25	4	65
Others	1			2	2	5

In addition to the scores, more than one third of participants who completed the questionnaires (38%) provided further information via written comments. In general, nearly all comments were very positive and constructive stressing some aspects that should be addressed better in order to enhance the co-learning. Only one respondent focused on the format of the evaluation questionnaire implying that an online survey would be more preferable, quoted below:

*“There are also electronic platforms for such queries, ... that would be more pleasant and anonymous to use”.*

### Quantitative analysis

#### Evaluation of the preparatory phase

To evaluate the preparatory part of the project activity, dealing with the information they received in advance to enable them to prepare for the meeting, participants were presented with Statements about whether the objectives of the meeting been made sufficiently clear, and whether was the information provided relevant, and helpful (Statements 1 to 3, Annex 2). The responses to the 3 Statements were overwhelmingly “agree” or “strongly agree” (Table 8).

**Table 8. Evaluation by respondents of the preparatory phase of case study activities, in response to three Statements.**

Response (Score)	S1. The objective(s) of the meeting was/were clear to me		S2. The information was relevant to the issues raised during the meeting		S3. The information helped me understand the issues at stake	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Disagree (2)</b>	3	1.4	2	1.0	4	1.9
<b>Neither-Nor (3)</b>	18	8.3	18	8.6	22	10.5
<b>Agree (4)</b>	116	53.7	93	44.5	87	41.6
<b>Strongly Agree (5)</b>	79	36.6	96	45.9	96	45.9
<b>Total</b>	216	100.0	209	100.0	209	100.0
<b>Average score</b>	4.25		4.35		4.32	

To express the responses quantitatively, the options on the scale were given a score from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 5 for “strongly agree”. From this, average scores were calculated to each question (Table 8). There, the average scores of responses for each of the questions is provided, based on the answers of participants of all activities evaluated. The average score in the case of objective clarity was 4.25 and the number of respondents that stated strong agreement (36.6%) has been lower than in the other cases, thus the agreements are the prevailing answer in that question (Figure 10). The average score in the case of the question on the relevance of the information provided in advance was 4.35, the prevailing answer in that case was “strongly agree” (45.9%) the same as when asked about the usefulness of the information provided, while the average of the answers here was slightly lower (average score 4.32). The above suggests that although the information provided was considered very useful and relevant, it helped to a lesser degree in clarifying the objectives of the meetings to participants.

Based on the written comments received, respondents appreciated and welcomed the information sent in advance so that they could prepare themselves and contribute effectively to the discussion. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“The background documents previously received gave a good basis for the discussions”;*

*“It was very useful to receive the discussion questions in advance, so that we could prepare better”;*

*“The information was provided clearly and in detail”.*

Two-way cross-tabulations were created to identify any relationships between: i) the theme of the interaction; ii) gender, and iii) the type of actors and their responses. The finding was that the responses on whether the information was relevant to the issues raised during the meeting depended upon the theme of the meeting (Table 9).

**Table 9. Responses to the relevance of information according to the meeting theme (Statement 2, Annex 2)** (“The information was relevant to the issues raised during the meeting”).

Meeting Theme	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Decision Support Tools Results	0	1	17	4	22
	0.00%	4.50%	77.30%	18.20%	100.00%
Co-construction of Transition Strategies	1	4	29	44	78
	1.30%	5.10%	37.20%	56.40%	100.00%
Social Network Analysis	0	9	17	16	42
	0.00%	21.40%	40.50%	38.10%	100.00%
Barriers of Transition and Policy Analysis of Existing Instruments	1	2	25	24	52
	1.90%	3.80%	48.10%	46.20%	100.00%
Multi Criteria Analysis of Innovative MPis	0	2	5	8	15
	0.00%	13.30%	33.30%	53.30%	100.00%
Total	2	18	93	96	209
	1.00%	8.60%	44.50%	45.90%	100.00%

Contingency coefficient 0.331 Approximate significance 0.011

In the case of the presentation of the results of the Decision Support Tools, participants were not convinced that all of the information was relevant, while in the case of Social Network Analysis a larger proportion of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. With the exception of advisors, more than 50% of each type of actors reported that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the objectives of the meeting were clear (Table 10).

**Table 10. Responses to the Statement regarding the clarity of objectives according to the type of actor (Statement 1, Annex 2)** (“The objective(s) of the meeting was/were clear to me”).

Type of Actor	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Advisor	0	1	12	12	25
	0.0%	4.0%	48.0%	48.0%	100.0%
Agri-food value chain	0	0	6	9	15
	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Science, innovation, capacity building	0	1	18	14	33
	0.0%	3.0%	54.5%	42.4%	100.0%
Farmers	2	9	39	16	66
	3.0%	13.6%	59.1%	24.2%	100.0%
Authorities and administration	1	6	23	14	44
	2.3%	13.6%	52.3%	31.8%	100.0%
NGOs	0	1	4	13	18
	0.0%	5.6%	22.2%	72.2%	100.0%
Total	3	18	102	78	201
	1.5%	9.0%	50.7%	38.8%	100.0%

Contingency coefficient 0.332 Approximate significance 0.052

### Evaluation of the process

The second objective of the evaluation of case study level activities was to evaluate the process. For this, participants were presented with four statements to which they were asked to state their level of agreement (Statement 4 to 7, Annex 2). The statements were:

- S4: I think that all interests have been represented in today's meeting.
- S5: I think that there were groups, associations, persons that could contribute to the discussion today but have not been invited.
- S6: I think that all participants had a fair chance to express their opinion.
- S7: I think that there was overrepresentation of opinions, interests.

The summary of responses to the statements is provided in Table 11. The average score to the Statement whether all participants enjoyed a fair opportunity to express their opinion is relatively high (4.76). By comparison, the answers in response to the statement of regarding the representativeness of all interests produced a considerably lower value (3.75).

**Table 11. Evaluation by respondents of the process of case study activities** (Note: the results are presented for the Statements in each column)

Response (Score)	S4. I think that all interests have been represented in today's meeting.		S5. I think that there were groups, associations, persons that could contribute to the discussion today but have not been invited.		S6. I think that all participants had a fair chance to express their opinion.		S7. I think that there was overrepresentation of opinions, interests.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Strongly Disagree (1)	3	1.4	14	6.6	0	0.0	58	28.0
Disagree (2)	19	8.8	42	19.9	0	0.0	68	32.9
Neither-Nor (3)	49	22.7	65	30.8	3	1.4	49	23.7
Agree (4)	102	47.2	64	30.3	46	21.3	24	11.6
Strongly Agree (5)	43	19.9	26	12.3	167	77.3	8	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Average score</b>	<b>3.75</b>		<b>3.22</b>		<b>4.76</b>		<b>2.30</b>	

The average scores of responses for each of the questions is provided, based on the answers of participants of all activities evaluated. The comments that not all interests were represented adequately are corroborated by responses to statements. Since 42.6% of participants agree or strongly agree that there were groups and/or persons that could contribute but were missing and a 15.5% stated their agreement that some interests have been overrepresented.

Male participants tend to have also rather polarized views considering the voices/interests missing (Table 12)

**Table 12. Opinions on missing voices according to gender (Statement 5, Annex 2) ("I think that there were groups, associations, persons that could contribute to the discussion today but have not been invited.")**

Gender	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female	7	13	28	29	4	81
	8.6%	16.0%	34.6%	35.8%	4.9%	100.0%
Male	7	29	35	35	22	128
	5.5%	22.7%	27.3%	27.3%	17.2%	100.0%
Total	14	42	63	64	26	209
	6.7%	20.1%	30.1%	30.6%	12.4%	100%

Contingency coefficient 0.212 Approximate significance 0.043

Issues of representation are considered very important at the local level, since close to half of the written comments received (42%) were related to the questions about the representativeness of groups and interests. They noted that either a group was absent or another group was over-represented (Statements 4, 5 and 7). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Lack of representatives of consumers and regional government”;*

*“I have in mind several associations that could give interesting contribution to this discussion such as the producers association...”;*

*“Representatives of processing sector were missing”;*

*“the majority of participants were agronomists”;*

*“a lot of researches”;*

*“Perhaps too few farmers”.*

### **Assessing the outcome**

The main purpose of the last element of the evaluation of case study level activities was to assess the outcomes of the meetings. For that purpose, participants were asked to state their level of agreement with nine statements (Statements 8 to 16, Annex 2):

- S8: When today’s meeting started, the objectives of the meeting and my role were stated clear to me.
- S9: The content of the meeting was relevant and consistent to my needs and interests.
- S10: There was enough time allowed to express views and pose questions.
- S11: The facilitator was active in ensuring a good flow of the discussion.
- S12: I felt that I could trust the team members with whom I collaborated.
- S13: I felt comfortable in sharing my viewpoint.
- S14: I had always the opportunity to express my point of view.
- S15: I felt that all participants were open to constructive criticism.
- S16: I felt being manipulated by powerful participants to accept their views.

The first four Statements related to the evaluation by the participants of the organization and content, and the last five Statements were in regard to the relationships created between members of the group participating, and the spirit established within the group.

The differences between the mean values are small. The exception is the mean for the answers to Statement 16, regarding whether the respondent felt they were being manipulated.

Across the answers to all of the statements (Statements 8 to 16), the lowest mean value was observed for Statement 8 on the clarity of the specific objectives of the meeting. The highest mean value was for the answers to Statement 14, their assessment on the opportunities to express their own point of view (Table 13).

**Table 13. Average score of respondents of the meeting outcomes (Statements 8 to 16, Annex 2, in order of their average score).**

Statement	Average score
S14. I had always the opportunity to express my point of view.	4.59
S11. The facilitator was active in ensuring a good flow of the discussion.	4.56
S13. I felt comfortable in sharing my viewpoint.	4.53
S12. I felt that I could trust the team members with whom I collaborated.	4.47
S9. The content of the meeting was relevant and consistent to my needs and interests.	4.33
S15. I felt that all participants were open to constructive criticism.	4.29
S10. There was enough time allowed to express views and pose questions.	4.27
S8. When today's meeting started, the objectives of the meeting and my role were stated clear to me.	4.25
S16. I felt being manipulated by powerful participants to accept their views.	1.48

Based upon the comments received, it appears that the atmosphere created amongst participants during the meetings was one of mutual respect and trust. Example quotes from the feedback were:

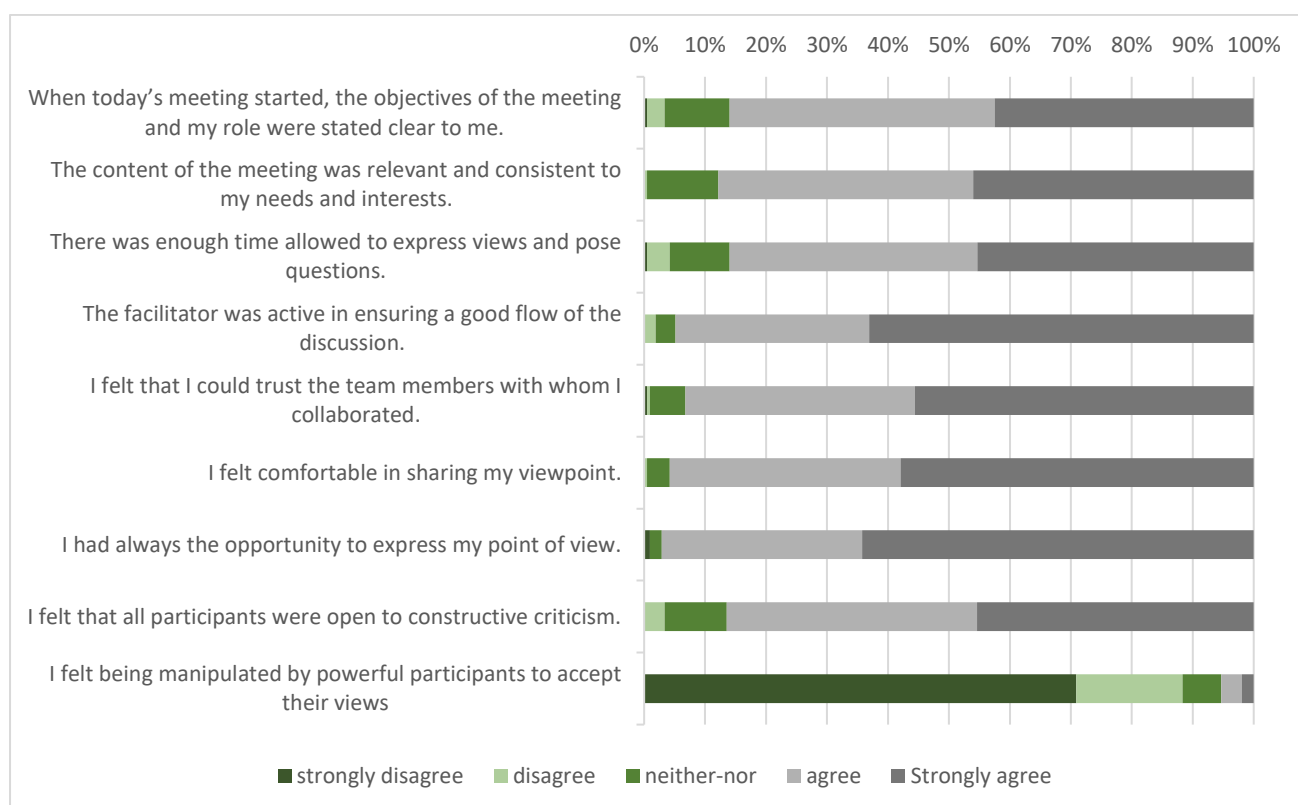
*"Democracy, openness, without manipulation";*

*"Continuity of the group has created trust";*

*"It was worth attending. I learned a lot out of it";*

*"the discussion was constructive, all participants expressed their views".*

For the organizational aspects of the meetings (Statements 8 - 11), the mean scores (apart from the role of the facilitator), were slightly lower (Table 13).



**Figure 10. Responses to Statements about the outcomes of meetings (Statements 8 to 16, Annex 2).**



This observation is corroborated by the findings presented in Figure 10. Answers of “agree” or “strongly agree” were over 93% in three out of four statements (Statements 12, 13, 14), regarding the atmosphere created.

Based on the written comments, respondents report they had fewer opportunities for interaction and opportunities to express their opinions in online meetings. Examples of reasons were problems with internet connections and the communication tools used. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“the internet connection speed is our problem”;*

*“Apart from the fact that some of us were on videolink and lost some parts of the discussion in the room”;*

*“Zoom was not properly working for me, I had technical difficulties in getting connected, the line frequently broke”.*

Only a few written comments provided clarification of the nature of organisational deficiencies, highlighting that the purpose of the meeting was not sufficiently explained (two comments) and the need for additional time for the meeting (three comments). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“it would have been good to receive more information about the methodology and processes of the workshop”;*

*“...as I participated in the project discussion for the first time,... it wasn’t very clear at the beginning what the event was about”;*

*“tight schedule for complex topics”;*

*“Time seemed to be a bit short”.*

The important role of the facilitator during the case study activities was highlighted in some written comments received, for example:

*“Thanks to the moderator, the discussion was appropriately streamlined”;*

*“The facilitator presented and asked for consent on the agenda and timing, and perfectly kept the workshop accordingly”.*

After further analysis on the same group of statements against gender, type of actors and the main objective of the meeting, the only cases where statistically significant differences were observed are in relation to gender plotted against the questions concerning the organisational aspects.

**Table 14. Distribution of responses to the clarity of the objectives and roles of the actors during the case study activity (Statement 8, Annex 2) (“When today’s meeting started, the objectives of the meeting and my role were stated clear to me”).**

Gender	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female	0	6	4	31	40	81
	0.0%	7.4%	4.9%	38.3%	49.4%	100.0%
Male	1	0	16	59	48	124
	0.8%	0.0%	12.9%	47.6%	38.7%	100.0%
Total	1	6	20	90	88	205
	0.5%	2.9%	9.8%	43.9%	42.9%	100.0%

Contingency Coefficient 0.263 Approximate significance 0.004

Female participants had the most favourable responses to the effectiveness of the facilitators in ensuring the flow of the discussion (Table 15).

**Table 15. Distribution of responses to the role of facilitator (Statement 11, Annex 2) (“The facilitator was active in ensuring a good flow of the discussion.”).**

Gender	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female	0	3	4	17	57	81
		3.7%	4.9%	21.0%	70.4%	100.0%
Male	0	0	3	50	78	131
		0.0%	2.3%	38.2%	59.5%	100.0%
Total	0	3	7	67	135	212
		1.4%	3.3%	31.6%	63.7%	100.0%

Contingency Coefficient 0.227 Approximate significance 0.009

Finally, female respondents were more positive to the statement on the relevance and consistency of the content to their own needs (Table 16).

**Table 16. Distribution of responses to the relevance and consistency of the meeting content with the needs of participants (Statement 9, Annex 2) (“The content of the meeting was relevant and consistent to my needs and interests”).**

Gender	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither-Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female	0	0	9	25	47	81
		0.0%	11.1%	30.9%	58.0%	100.0%
Male	0	1	16	62	51	130
		0.8%	12.3%	47.7%	39.2%	100.0%
Total	0	1	25	87	98	211
		0.5%	11.8%	41.2%	46.4%	100.0%

Contingency Coefficient 0.190 Approximate significance 0.048

## 6. FINAL EVALUATION

At the end of the project, the on-going process of evaluation and feedback was augmented by a final evaluation exercise, the aim of which was to determine the effect of participatory activities on policy-science dialogue and the capacities and networks of the actors involved. This section reports on the final evaluation feedback at the EU and case study levels.

### 6.1. Final Evaluation at EU Level

The aim of the final evaluation at EU level was to explore the influence of the transdisciplinary process on the policy-science interaction. It sought to identify evidence of whether the design of participatory activities supported the opportunities for knowledge co-creation, and if engagement brought new knowledge and contributed to policy making (Frantzeskaki and Kabisch, 2015).

One-to-one interviews were carried out with five actors drawn from the EU Multi-Actor Platform who reflect the EU level perspective. These interviews were to assess the efficiency of processes and mechanisms for engagement to foster knowledge exchange for co-learning and co-creation with actors who are associated with policy processes. The selection of members of the EU Multi-Actor Platform was based on their availability,

the level of engagement in the research process, and different types of stakes in agro-ecology. The interviews were conducted in February 2021, lasting approximately 40 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed.

The members of the EU MAP were asked to assess whether the structure for interactions provided them with opportunities for free and open discussions. They had opportunities to provide comments and feedback at different stages in the project.

Overall, the feedback suggested that the way meetings were organised, with plenary sessions, and discussions smaller groups, provided all contributors with opportunities to express their opinions, worries and positions. It also suggests that the role of facilitators and project partners was very supportive, with particular attention paid to ensuring that all participants could express themselves. Those efforts were acknowledged and appreciated.

Interviewees reported that they felt their contributions were valuable and more useful in in situ meetings (i.e. in Helsinki and Basel), when face-to-face discussions, field trips and social events took place. During those meetings, there was more time to discuss and exchange views between participants, and thus to better understand the complexity of the work being done and its contexts.

However, two participants reported that it was challenging, in a single session or in a short period of time, to become familiar with the project and understand its progress. The challenge was greater due to the large number of people at the meetings (e.g. *“it doesn't work well, when you hold meetings of 60-70 people”*). A suggestion made by one participant was whether it would be better to reduce the number of invitees to approximately 15 people with whom lead partners discussed very specific issues. This observation was followed-up through the organization of smaller workshops with the members of the EU Multi-Actor Platform for discussing specific tasks of the project.

One interviewee commented that *“there was a lack of clarity of purpose of the group”*, and that communication needed to be clear about the role of external actors and how project activities address their needs. Also noted was *“the lack of a ‘local’ partner with which to engage on locally specific issues”*. The last point reflects the importance of providing a forum for EU-level and local actors to meet and share knowledge. However, difficulties were experienced by most of the case study MAPs in being able to have a representative attend these multi-level meetings.

Concerning the inclusivity of different knowledge holders, one reported that representatives of farmers were missing, or not active at the EU level meetings. This was considered as *“a gap in communication”*. A suggestion was to *“have one session on one side the EU level MAP and on the other side the local MAPs in order to exchange ideas with the primary actors”*.

It was generally perceived that the experiences and expertise of invited actors were used well, with different opinions heard and that interactions added value to the working with actors from outside the project. The process was reported as being open and inclusive, although the structures of a Multi-Actor Platform were not considered unique.

One interviewee felt that their expertise was not sufficiently used as the scope of discussions was limited to comments on proposals from researchers, which missing a broader context of policies in the EU, about which further information could have been provided. Another comment raised a question of how the project team interpreted comments received from stakeholders, asking *“to what extent you created a common culture about agro-ecology, territories, frameworks... do you have any ability to integrate the different knowledge and what was coming from other perspectives into the routine of the project, does it change anything in your framework”*. A further opinion was that during the first workshop in Helsinki, *“the discussions were too academic and the arguments too conceptual”*, expressing worries about the role and contribution of non-academic partners.

In general, almost all of the interviewees stated that the project had placed particular emphasis on promoting agro-ecology as a new way of producing food and ecosystem services, bringing examples from the ground and empirically-based evidence from the case studies. One member of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform reported



that “*the project by design or the way you managed it, it generally gave me a kind of food for thought ... looking at the multiple angles of agro-ecology, the different dimensions, the drivers, and that types of projects ... helped us structure our own logics*”.

Another observation was that it was important to recognise that political, economic, and social solutions are required, in addition to those which are technical.

Actors noted that agro-ecology is at centre of several the new policy initiatives that arose during the project, notably the Farm to Fork and Green Deal. However, some opinions were that the emerging policy agenda was not analysed in sufficient depth. One member of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform commented that it would have been beneficial for there to have been more explanation of the thinking of the European Commission, proposing “*maybe we should have break-out sessions saying this is the EU policy strategy or context, from different stakeholders’ point of view what do you see as problems, the impediments to doing it*”.

As of mid-February 2021, various opinions were expressed about the usefulness and applicability of the proposals formulated at the level of activity of the actors. One member of the EU level Multi-Actor Platform appreciated gaining familiarity with the Socio-Ecological Systems framework, and the application of the Decision Support Tools, as these affect the training of farmers and how advisory services should be adjusted to the tools, while another member deemed that the valuable contribution of UNISECO was the consideration of the territorial level “*you really put forward the territorial dimension, I think this is one of the positive angles ... that you add within this project*”.

By comparison, one individual commented that some proposals could not be used, where they were too abstract. They recommended that greater consideration was needed on who it was that the project sought to influence “*Where does the project want to make a difference. Is it with farmers, rural development, knowledge transfer, etc.*”. They recognised it would have been of interest to learn more about the Decision Support Tools and the links to results-based management, “*I would have liked to see a run through of current agro-ecological farm practices, relevant to the case studies, and links created, such as how monitoring and measurement could feed into results based approaches*”.

EU MAP actors were asked about the strength of their network and the opportunities to establish links with other actors as a result of their involvement in the UNISECO project. Nearly all respondents agreed that they extended their networks and new contacts had been made, particularly at in situ meetings. The importance of networking was acknowledged, especially with individuals who have the same interests and knowledge on the topic of discussion. In situ, face-to-face discussions and field trips to farms, enriched the experiences of participants. In comparison, the online events do not enable close interactions and exchanges, and consequently it is hardly to meet other actors and expand networking.

## 6.2. Final Evaluation at Case Study Level

At the case study level, the aim of the final evaluation was to explore whether: i) engagement had any effects on case study participants; ii) there was any change in the knowledge and networks of participants that can be linked to their involvement in the project. Case study partners conducted the final evaluations, engaging those actors and members of local Multi-Actor Platforms who were involved throughout the duration of the project.

Partners had the option of collecting the final feedback using a written questionnaire consisting eight questions (provided in an online or paper format), or asking the questions during a one-to-one interviews with an additional aim of obtaining further comments (Annex 3). The final evaluation survey took place during the last three months of the project (January to March 2021).

Overall, 89 local actors and members of the case study Multi-Actor Platforms, from 13 partner countries, provided feedback on aspects related to the network and capacity building. There were 45 responses from males and 31 from females. Approximately 65% of responses were from farmers, scientists and advisors, and



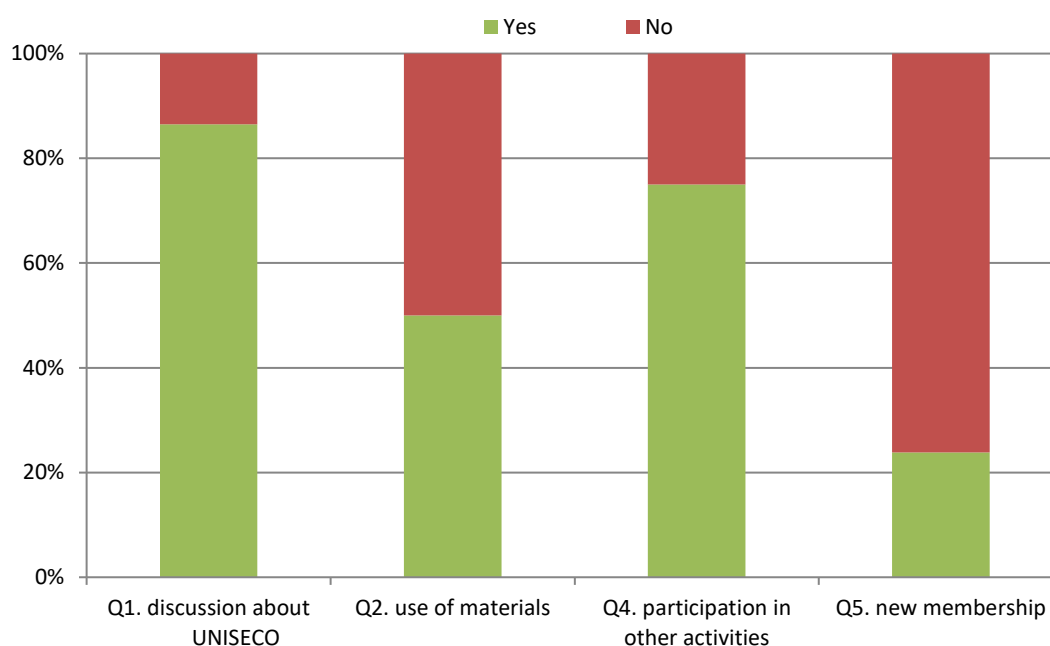
representatives of authorities. Table 17 summarises the distribution of final evaluation questionnaires according to gender and main type of actor, by case study.

**Table 17. Distribution of final evaluation questionnaires by gender and main type of actor in each case study.**

Case study	CZ	FR	DE	GR	HU	IT	LV	LT	RO	ES	SE	CH	UK	No. of Completed Final Questionnaires (N=89)
<b>Gender</b>														
<b>Female</b>		1	1	2	4	3	4	5	1	4	5		1	<b>31</b>
<b>Male</b>	4	3	4	2	4	3	3	2	2	10	2		6	<b>45</b>
<b>Non-response</b>												13		<b>13</b>
<b>Actor type</b>														
<b>Farmers</b>	1	1	1	1		1	1	2		7	1		5	<b>21</b>
<b>Authorities and administration</b>	1		2	1	4	1	2	2		4				<b>17</b>
<b>Agri-food value chain</b>				1	1					1	3			<b>6</b>
<b>NGOs</b>		1	1		1	1	3	1	2	1	1			<b>12</b>
<b>Science, innovation, advisory, capacity building</b>	2	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	1	1	2		2	<b>20</b>
<b>Non-response</b>												13		<b>13</b>

The final questionnaire included four dichotomous questions (yes/no) that asked whether: i) UNISECO activities were discussed and communicated by local actors; ii) its resources have been used; iii) local actors have engaged in further events or activities as a result of the network or project; iv) joined as a member of any new initiatives or other activities in topics related to agro-ecology and sustainable agriculture (Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 of Annex 3). At the end of each question, respondents were invited to provide additional information and elaborate on their experiences. Approximately 400 written comments were received.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of answers of respondents to the final evaluation questions on discussion about UNISECO, use of materials, participation in other activities, and membership of any new initiatives.



**Figure 11. An overview of the answers of respondents to the final evaluation questions on discussion about UNISECO, use of materials, participation in other activities, and membership of any new initiatives.**

The evaluation results revealed that the majority of respondents (87%) had discussed project activities and findings with colleagues and other experts within their professional network, and family members (Question 1 in Figure 11). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“I shared relevant information from the project with colleagues during the discussion of the action plan”;*

*“I have referred to UNISECO results in various presentations at practice conference and seminars”;*

*“with colleagues with a focus on the methods applied in the MAP, but also with experts about possibilities to implement environmental measures”;*

*“I have communicated with the representatives of farmers”;*

*“I have shared inputs in both professional and family contexts...”.*

Half of the respondents (50%) used information provided to them in communication with other people (Question 2 in Figure 11). The resources which were used most were the deliverables hosted on the UNISECO project website, the story maps, the Social Network Analysis tools, and the case study results in general. These responses were primarily from representatives of authorities and science/capacity building. Of the 21 farmers who responded, six have made use of project resources. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“I looked at the website and read some deliverables”;*

*“I used the netmap of the actor assessments showing the linkages between actors...”;*

*“Story maps are used as samples to illustrate the project activities”;*

*“My organization will use information provided by UNISECO activities in order to substantiate the following LEADER local development strategy”;*

*“Mainly the results of the domestic case study, but also the opinions of other countries heard at the webinars.”;*

*“Informed discussions with peers in farming (and scientific) community regarding direction of future policy and subsidy”.*

Two comments stressed the importance of providing material in national languages, and the limitations of only providing materials in English. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“Only to some extent yet, e.g. the website, but we will use the resources more once more material including briefs is available in ..., English is often problematic for us”;*

*“In order to use the website, key findings would need to be available in ...”.*

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) reported that, besides UNISECO, they had participated in at least one meeting, activity or campaign for agro-ecological farming practices or wider topics of food system sustainability (Question 4 in Figure 11). This was true for almost all of scientists, advisors, NGOs, and approximately half of the policy actors and farmers. Examples of such activities included events organised by the European Commission, international bodies, or national authorities, for example:

*“online conference organized by the EC or meeting in building AKIS”;*

*“working groups on envi policies, Eco schemes, OF”;*

*“expert discussions on the ... CAP Strategic Plan 2021-2027”;*

*“meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture on the implementation of the Green Deal”;*

*“discussion within the local Biodiversity Partnership Action Plan”.*

Other related activities or events were also referenced, such as:

*“Events on low input animal husbandry, social farming, initiatives on conscious consumption”;*

*“regional knowledge transfer networks on the use of fertilizer”;*

*“Webinar about digitalizing farming”;*

*“FAO Food safety project”;*

*“Oxford Real Farming Conference Global 2021”.*

Approximately a quarter of respondents (24%) joined at least one new group, organisation, network, or partnership on agro-ecological farming practices or sustainability related topics, in addition to UNISECO (Question 5 in Figure 11). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“the working group for the CAP Strategic Planning”;*

*“the Result Based Payments Network”;*

*“a new collaboration with a company that deals with smart farming and precise applications”;*

*“I have participated in a project on building bridges between environmental and agricultural actors with the aim to jointly design and implement environmental measures on farms”;*

*“I joined the EIT FOOD RIS<sup>6</sup> Council”.*

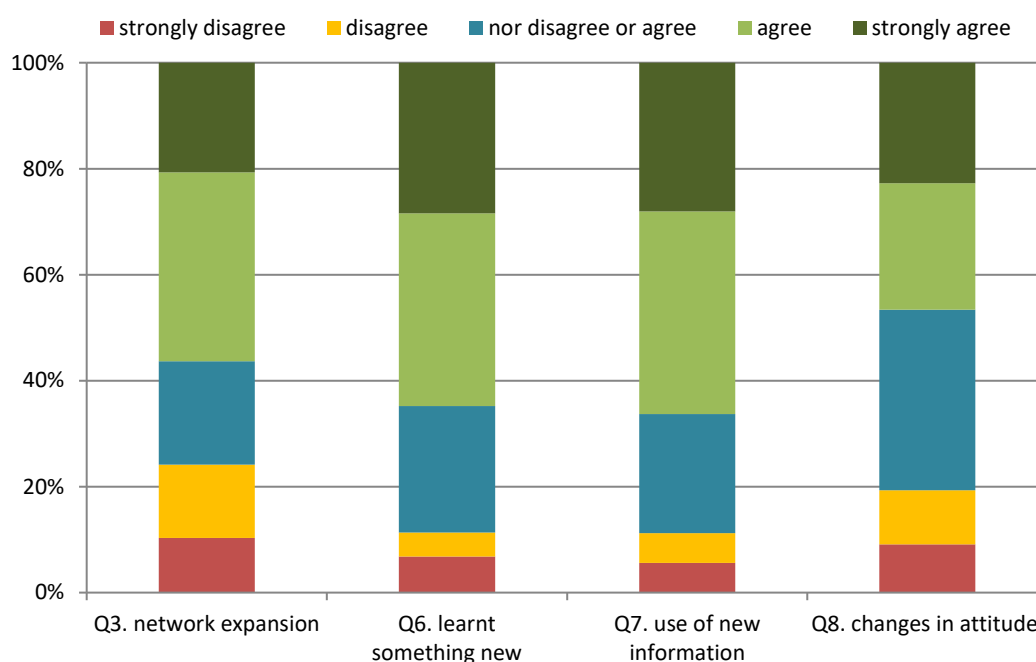
The responses to the other four questions of the evaluation questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. The aims were:

- i) to explore the extent to which local actors have expanded their networks, learnt something new, or will use the new knowledge;
- ii) whether a change in attitude has occurred as a result of involvement in UNISECO (Questions 3, 6, 7, 8 of Annex 3).

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<sup>6</sup> Food Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) established by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT).

Figure 12 shows the distribution of answers by respondents to Questions 3, 6, 7 and 8 of the final evaluation questionnaire.



**Figure 12. An overview of the answers of respondents to the final evaluation questions about the network expansion, learning of new knowledge and information, use of new information, and changes in attitude.**

More than half of the respondents (56%) to the questionnaire expressed either agreement or strong agreement on the establishment of communication links with people with whom to share information and experience on agro-ecology, and so improving their professional networks. Most comments received reported that new links were made with other actors involved in UNISECO activities, highlighting the benefits of joining the Multi-Actor Platforms at the local level (Question 3 in Figure 12). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“As a consequence of the discussions in UNISECO I had contacts with new regional actors, such as composting plants who play an important role in transitions”;*

*“have initiated new communication links with the water management association who are also involved in the multi-actor platform”;*

*“new links were created with the participating farmers and researchers”;*

*“During the project workshops, I had the opportunity to have a wide-ranging exchange of views between the participating colleagues...”.*

One respondent commented that engagement was limited only to information provision, without a continuous interaction between project partners and external participants. This implied that there were too few opportunities to establish networks with other local actors. An example of feedback was:

*“after the activities to provide data on our exploitation, there have been no more meetings to inform us or raise awareness, maybe because of covid but the truth is, we have not felt very involved except for the data we have provided”.*

In relation to the acquisition of new knowledge and/or information, most respondents (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt something new about agro-ecological issues (Question 6 in Figure 12). Some comments reported that respondents had gained a better understanding of broader issues relating to agro-ecology, for example:



*“in general about the great scope of agro-ecology”;*

*“Clarification of the whole concept of agro-ecology and the possibility of its development in practice”;*

*“Before the project, I don't think I could confidently say I knew what the term agro-ecology meant. I now have a greater understanding”;*

*“The support structure, economic development and priorities ... from country to country”.*

Respondents also made reference to the value of information contained in specific UNISECO outputs and Deliverables, for example:

- the Social Network Analysis (Task 5.2) *“The importance of analyzing the roles and potential influence of the various actors is an important knowledge for me”;*
- the analysis of barriers and drivers (Task 3.1) *“I received very useful information about factors that encourage and inhibit farmers from adopting agro-ecological practices”;*
- the farms assessments with the Decision Support Tools (Task 3.2) *“I learned a lot by using the DST tools (CFT, SMART and COMPAS) when field data was gathered”;*
- the assessment of Market and Policy measures via the Multi-criteria analysis (Task 5.4) *“The proposed assessment method of MPIs (mixed method: MCA and qualitative assessment)”.*

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (66%) agreed or strongly agreed that they intend to use the information and knowledge acquired in their professional activities. Examples are in agricultural and rural advisory services, the design of policy, research projects, and networking with other types of actors (Question 7 in Figure 12). Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“I can advise farmers about sustainable practices based on agro-ecology”;*

*“design of different models of the agri-food systems”;*

*“working on the strategic planning documents of the Ministry of Agriculture”;*

*“develop the territorial economic plan of the...”;*

*“In other ongoing projects where the target group will be farmers and land owners”;*

*“I will take the positive experience in the networking with different actors”;*

*“Regarding methodology, the MAP approach itself as well as the stakeholder mapping exercise...”.*

A few respondents commented that they need more time to consider the information in detail, and to examine its potential use.

*“I need more time to correctly read and interpret the results”;*

*“Ideas formed from involvement in the project will be considered - implementation will be based on available opportunity and viability”.*

Other respondents reported that the project did not make meaningful contributions to their areas of responsibility. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*“There was no particularly new knowledge for me”;*

*“Sustainability tools currently do little to make a quantum leap. It still plays a small role in consumer behavior and politics. The rest was little new to me”.*

Over four in five respondents (81%) declared that they were already involved in sustainable agriculture. It seems that UNISECO partners mostly engaged with actors with relevant expertise and genuine interest in agro-ecology and sustainable farming. Therefore, the actions or attitudes of most of the respondents were not changed by their participation in the UNISECO project. Example quotes from the feedback were:



*"My attitude towards sustainable agriculture has been very positive for a long time";*

*"I am motivated to CONTINUE working towards sustainable agriculture";*

*" My motivation and interest in this topic was already high, as agrobiodiversity is an important theme for the advisory service we provide".*

Most of the comments received were positive, constructive and appreciative of the opportunity to participate, with several indicating benefits accrued from engagement in UNISECO. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*"meetings and conferences have given a great insight into issues all across Europe and it has been a privilege to contribute";*

*"Participation gives us more enthusiasm and confidence to believe that we can find sustainable solutions for our lives";*

*"It is very useful to get acquainted with the opinion of other experts ...";*

*"We believe that by raising the awareness we can make a big change...";*

*"The more you hear and know about agroecology, the more you understand that it is important in changing agricultural practices and policies".*

Some comments provided a critical perspective towards the process and the project as a whole. The low scores on Likert scale questions, together with accompanying comments, indicate that the expectations and needs of some actors were not addressed, and that, at the local level in case studies, practical solutions were not the principal output from UNISECO. Example quotes from the feedback were:

*"Unclear objectives... Alternatives to animal agriculture? How can we help farm families?";*

*"Unfortunately, I wonder if the study will do anything in practice and in the region".*

Two principal lessons were drawn from the final evaluation exercise at the case study level, summarised below:

**i) Engagement can create opportunities for network building, interactions and information exchange with various actors at the local level, which in turn can enhance collaboration and trust between the various actors.**

Example quotes from the feedback were:

*"Thanks to UNISECO I have established new contacts with colleagues, experts, researchers...";*

*"the engagement between the different actors... open and constructive exchange was an important contribution of the project";*

*"I had the opportunity to meet specialists in the field of agroecology and to participate in network activities, and this is the biggest benefit of participating in the UNISECO project for my organization";*

*"The topic of agro-ecology is hardly talked about in (my country), so I found people who know this topic among the project partners.";*

*"one of the main contributions of this project was the very good and open exchange of views in the various workshops. This is an important trust-building measure and maybe this is even the main impact of the project.";*

*"... learned about the importance of permanent network coordination in integrated nature protection concepts that bring together farmers and other key actors".*

**ii) Research outputs should be aligned to the types of actors and their needs.**



*“Some of the tools/software used to collect data (e.g., CFT) are not very relevant for the features of agriculture in my area”;*

*“The topic of the project is quite complex... simple language is important”;*

*“There was no particularly new knowledge for me”;*

*“... it is the project that benefits from our participation since agro-ecology is our daily routine and we have been working on it for years”.*

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Multi-Actor Platforms are forums which have been central to the transdisciplinary approach in the UNISECO project. They were designed to enable meaningful co-learning amongst the project partners and all actors involved in the research activities, and the on-going involvement of individuals drawn from across sectors and at different levels.

A monitoring and evaluation framework of the stakeholder engagement and operation of the Multi-Actor Platforms was established. This was to gain insight to the effectiveness of these forms of engagement, to learn lessons, and to adapt the processes used in the project.

The main objective of the framework was to assess the performance of the Multi-Actor Platforms in co-learning on the topics of the project at case study and EU levels, knowledge exchange, and building capacity. An on-going evaluation was developed and applied following each instance of engagement and interaction with the relevant actors, with particular attention paid to the processes of the participatory events carried out at European and case study levels. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used, through observations, reporting sheets, debriefing sessions and written questionnaires. Feedback was obtained from partners and external actors in order to adjust and improve the participatory processes as the project progressed, with the aim of fostering constructive multi-actor engagement.

Based on the evidence from the evaluations, the participatory activities involved a good balance between male and female actors, of different age groups, across different types of geographical areas of Europe.

Overall, the evaluation findings indicate that UNISECO had considerable success in creating conditions of openness and fruitful exchanges in which actors and project partners could interact with each other effectively.

Responses to the design and implementation of the participatory processes revealed deficiencies, mainly in the composition of the groups due to the under-representation of some types of actor groups, which in turn led to stronger representation of other groups. This was also reflected in responses to the Statements relating to representativeness of groups (recorded on a Likert Scale). Some personalities were also noted as being more dominant than others, especially at EU level workshops.

The results highlight the importance of the inclusion of key actors who represent diverse knowledge, values, interests, and perspectives in participatory processes. A well-balanced and fair representation of actors in the process is important in establishing a balance of power, and the development of trust within a group, which in turn can influence the environment of collaboration and the relations between all of actors involved.

Although UNISECO partners sought to ensure a sufficiently wide range of different groups and interests, there was still an under-representation of actors in the value chain and consumers in the Multi-Actor Platforms, and in events at EU and local levels. Feedback identified that the voices of representatives of farmers were not sufficiently well represented at the EU level workshops. However, at the local level there was a more balanced mix of different groups involved in project activities.

Weaknesses identified were on the provision of information, time pressures on events and for attending events, the complexity of issues and topics discussion, and that not all topics were relevant to all actors (in

terms of their interests and knowledge). As the project progressed, these issues were tackled by the project partners, and stakeholder responses reflected that improvement.

A clear lesson learnt is that participants need to have sufficient information about the activity, and the role expected of them, in advance of any event so that they can participate effectively, and benefit from the participatory process.

Project activities should be tailored to group composition, ensuring sufficient time for interactions, and that the briefing of the facilitator should include information on any potential power imbalances.

Whilst recognising the weaknesses identified, the participatory processes and means of engagement appear to have contributed to building capacity and expanding the networks of the actors involved. In particular, the findings of the final evaluation at the local level revealed that more than half of respondents (>56%) established new links for the sharing of information and experiences on agro-ecology. They perceive they have learned something new and they plan to use this new information and knowledge gained from the project in their professional activities, especially when it becomes available in the relevant national languages. However, the evaluations did not provide sufficient information to confirm a link between project involvement and having a positive effect on the capacities and networks of local actors.

The members of the EU Multi-Actor Platform acknowledged the opportunities the forum had provided for exchanging ideas and establish links with other actors, especially during the in situ meetings. At the time of the interviews (mid-February 2021), it was not clear that the interim proposals formulated from the project were applicable at their level of activities. Limitations appear to be a lack of clarity of purpose, gaps in the level of common understanding and shared interests, and processes involving discussion groups which were too large.

A key lesson learnt was that of the effort required for the design and execution of project activities with the engagement of multiple actors, especially when such engagement is at different levels (i.e. EU and case study).

The on-going evaluation provided valuable information about the design and implementation of participatory processes that enabled the identification of weaknesses, and the types of improvements required, throughout the project duration. The findings and experience show that effective participatory processes require time and energy of organisers and participants. The outcomes of such processes are improved by the on-going evaluation, which requires commensurate resources to be allocated for the purpose.

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# ANNEX 1: DEBRIEFING/REPORTING SHEET

(to be filled out by the UNISECO partner/organizer after the end of the project activity)

Team member/organiser	
Activity/Task	
Purpose/objective of the meeting	
Date and location of event	

## Participants' profile

1. Total number of participants involved in the activity (#)

2. By gender (#, %)

Female	Male

3. By age category (#, %)

<29	30-39	40-49	50-59	>60

4. By participants' types (based on their professional background) (#, %)

Farmers	Authorities	NGOs	EU, international bodies	Advisors	Consumers	Retailers

Other...

5. By origin (#, %)


Other...



6. Level of involvement: For each participant, was it the first, second, third presence in an event?

### Design of the process

7. Participants' identification/selection

*Were all participants appropriately identified and selected from the pool of MAP members according to the selection criteria?*

Yes

No

*Please clarify if some participants were self-selected or proposed by other participants.*

8. Invitation process

a. *Number of invitations sent*

b. *Invitation type selected (email, phone, mail, etc.)*

c. *Number of days before the event invitations sent*

9. Participation rate

*Number of individuals participated / Number of individuals reached (proportion of persons participate in the activity)*

10. Practicalities

a. *Did the meeting exceed its planned duration?*

Yes

No

*If so, please explain why this happened.*

b. *Was there a facilitator who coordinated the discussion/activity?*

Yes

No

*If so, please specify who was.*

c. *Was background information/material sent prior to the meeting?*

Yes

No

11. Other issues that need to be considered/reported





**Concerning the group dynamics, please indicate to what extent... (1. Not at all /2. To a small extent / 3. To a moderate extent/ 4. To a great extent)**

	①	②	③	④	Comments
were all views well taken into account by others?					
did participants respect opposed opinions?					
did conflict/opposition occur during the activity					
did participants talk over each other?					
did all participants have the opportunity to communicate their opinions? (facilitator made a roundtable)					
were participants open to communicate and share their views with the project member (asking questions, providing feedback)?					
did participants collaboratively and constructively work?					
did participants start an open dialogue and discussion between them?					

were some voices more dominant than others?					
did certain individuals have more influence over the decision-making process than others?					



## ANNEX 2: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Activity/Task: [.....]

Code: [.....]

Gender: Female

Male

Prefer not to say

Professional background:

Origin:

Please indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements, we would really appreciate a brief explanatory text with your evaluation.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Comments
<b><i>Based on the information that was given when I was invited...</i></b>						
1. The objective(s) of the meeting was/were clear to me.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
2. The information was relevant to the issues raised during the meeting.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
3. The information helped me understand the issues at stake.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
<b><i>Considering that the [theme, objectives, ...] of the meeting was/were [.....]</i></b>						
4. I think that all interests have been represented in today's meeting.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
5. I think that there were groups, associations, persons that could contribute to the discussion today but have not been invited.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
6. I think that all participants had a fair chance to express their opinion.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
7. I think that there was overrepresentation of opinions, interests.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
<b><i>During the meeting</i></b>						



8. When today's meeting started, the objectives of the meeting and my role were stated clear to me.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
9. The content of the meeting was relevant and consistent to my needs and interests.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
10. There was enough time allowed to express views and pose questions.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
11. The facilitator was active in ensuring a good flow of the discussion.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
12. I felt that I could trust the team members with whom I collaborated.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
13. I felt comfortable in sharing my viewpoint.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
14. I had always the opportunity to express my point of view.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
15. I felt that all participants were open to constructive criticism.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
16. I felt being manipulated by powerful participants to accept their views.	①	②	③	④	⑤	
<b><i>Other comments, issues you would like to mention</i></b>						



# ANNEX 3 FINAL EVALUATION OF CASE STUDY MAP MEMBERS WITH MULTIPLE PARTICIPATIONS

**Gender:**      **Female**                      **Male**    **Code:** [.....]  
**Professional background:**    **Origin:**

**As a result of my involvement in the project activities**

1. I have discussed the activities and outcomes of the project with colleagues, experts, family, etc.

Yes    No  
   

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

2. I have used the resources provided to me over the course of the UNISECO project (webpage, briefs, newsletters) in order to communicate, inform or discuss with others issues related to my professional activity.

Yes    No  
   

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

3. I have established communication links with persons for sharing information and experience on agro-ecology.

Strongly disagree                      Strongly agree  
 ①                      ②                      ③                      ④                      ⑤

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

4. I have participated at least in one meeting/activity/campaign for agro-ecological farming practices and sustainable agriculture (apart from the UNISECO workshops, meetings).

Yes    No  
   

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

5. I have joined at least one new group, organisation, network, partnership on agro-ecological farming practices (apart from the UNISECO project).



Yes

No

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

6. I feel that I have learned something new about agro-ecological issues.

Strongly disagree

①

②

③

④

Strongly agree

⑤

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

7. I will use the information/knowledge I acquired in my professional activities.

Strongly disagree

①

②

③

④

Strongly agree

⑤

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

8. I feel motivated to change my actions/attitude towards sustainable agriculture.

Strongly disagree

①

②

③

④

Strongly agree

⑤

Could you please give some examples? .....

.....

***Another more general or more specific comment you would like to mention:***

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Thank you very much for your collaboration**

