



Rubizmo

Report on usefulness, usability and acceptability monitoring for Business Tools 3 and 4



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¹ PU = Public

PP = Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)

RE = Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)

CO = Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)

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Summary

This report provides a short summary of the evaluation process (Usefulness Usability Acceptability monitoring) of the Network tool and the Transformation tool developed during the Rubizmo project.

The evaluation's purpose focused on the tools' full dynamic and the main objective was to ensure the usefulness (end-users have a real relevance to use this tool), usability (the tool is convenient, easy-to-use) and acceptability (guarantee that there are no social, political, internal barriers to limit its use) of the tools.

The evaluation was conducted using online surveys sent via email invitation to two focus groups. The "internal" group was constituted of project partners while the "external" group was constituted of National Stakeholder Panel members.

In this report the participants' replies are presented in summary using charts followed by a short explanation/comment. Final remarks on the evaluation process and the tools are presented in the conclusion section.

Disclaimer

This report reflects only the views of the authors. The European Commission and Research Executive Agency cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Introduction

The Rubizmo project has, as one of its specific objectives, to develop a set of tools in order to support entrepreneurship in rural areas. These tools include the Network tool (<https://www.biobased-networks.eu/>) and the Transformation support tool (<https://www.rural-businessinnovation.eu/>). The aim of the tools is respectively to assist clustering and networking in rural areas and to support the current and future rural entrepreneurs.

In order to achieve the efficiency of the RUBIZMO business tools, the project adopted a multi-actor approach involving stakeholders from different areas. 11 National Stakeholder Panels (NSPs) were created representing partner countries aiming at different target audiences (policy makers, rural development agencies, businesses and entrepreneurs, research community, investors and general public). Members of these stakeholder panels benefited directly from the knowledge created in RUBIZMO and got the opportunity to test the tools.

These NSPs were also the main audience for the validation of the tools. A task was dedicated for the evaluation of the tools. The ‘Usefulness, usability and acceptability monitoring’ of the results. The aim was to ensure that the results really meet the needs of rural communities and the key bodies (rural businesses and intermediaries).



Methodology

In order to successfully deliver a set of tools that will support entrepreneurship in rural areas, and will be used by entrepreneurs and innovation support entities, a monitoring process was defined and implemented. A collection and analysis of information took place to measure the performance of the tools against the project's expected results.

The 'Usefulness, usability and acceptability' monitoring was conducted by one of the project partners (CluBE) which organised a multidisciplinary team focused on this task. Its aim was to ensure the usefulness (end-users have a real relevance to use this tool), usability (the tool is convenient, easy-to-use) and acceptability (there is no social, political, internal barriers to limit its use) of the tools and thus their sustainability.

Two separate monitoring phases were designed in an attempt to facilitate both the development of the tools and the finalisation of the tools.

Phase one: internal monitoring

In an initial stage of the development of the tools, an evaluation process was proposed to take place. The targeted audience was the project partners. This served two main goals, to engage the partners at an early stage and to receive their comments on the design of the tool according to the needs identified through the project ongoing development and to not present empty tools, in terms of content, to the stakeholders in order to avoid receiving feedback concerning specifically that (the absence of content). Moreover, an issue of intellectual property was raised if the tools were to be presented during the design stage.

Once the internal monitoring phase was agreed upon, the partners were fully included in the design phase of the tools. Numerous presentations were given in all stages of the process (during project meetings and dedicated meetings both physical and -due to COVID 19 situation- digital) while partners had the opportunity to provide feedback.

As soon as the tools reached a beta version phase, an online survey was conducted. Partners were requested to participate by completing two short questionnaires (one for each tool). The questionnaires were built on Google Forms. A number of close end questions, each followed by an open question were the main structure of the form. The aim was to address specific areas of the tool in order to have a clear understanding of participants' view of it but at the same time provide the opportunity and space for general comments and proposals.



The Google form that was used for the UUA monitoring is available here: <https://forms.gle/ZFyuGgkD3mD53yZcA>

Phase two: external monitoring

The second phase of the monitoring followed both timely and conceptually the internal monitoring conducted within the project consortium. Having the beta version uploaded on the project's website and once content was added to the tools, members of the National Stakeholders Panels (up to 3 NSP members per country per tool) were requested to participate in the survey. In many cases project partners in direct contact with the NSPs provided guidance to the responsible members prior to the survey participation. In other cases, NSP members attended a tutorial video for the use of the tool available through the tools' website. Finally, in a few cases the members were solely accessed directly with the tools and then answered the survey questions.

Similarly with the survey form prepared for the project partners, NSP members were requested to participate by completing two short questionnaires (one for each tool). The questionnaires were again built on Google Forms. A number of close ended questions (the same questions as in the case of the internal monitoring), each followed by an open question were the main structure of the form in this case too. The participating members were able to provide feedback on specific areas of the tool in order to have a clear understanding of their view and at the same time to make general comments and to give their opinion.

The Google form that was used for the UUA monitoring is available here: <https://forms.gle/Yc7Te46wL8jqktYN7>

Results of UUA monitoring

As indicated in the methodology part, the monitoring process began with an internal (project partners) evaluation followed by an external (NSP members). In an attempt to have easily measurable results, the questions in the Google form were the same.

In this part of the report, the responses' results are presented using charts. The NSP members' responses are provided in red/blue charts, and the project partners' responses in orange/light blue.

In each question the charts are in parallel and a short explanation is given. As it is described, following the close ended question, an open one collected various comments. It is not the report's objective to present the comments themselves. The

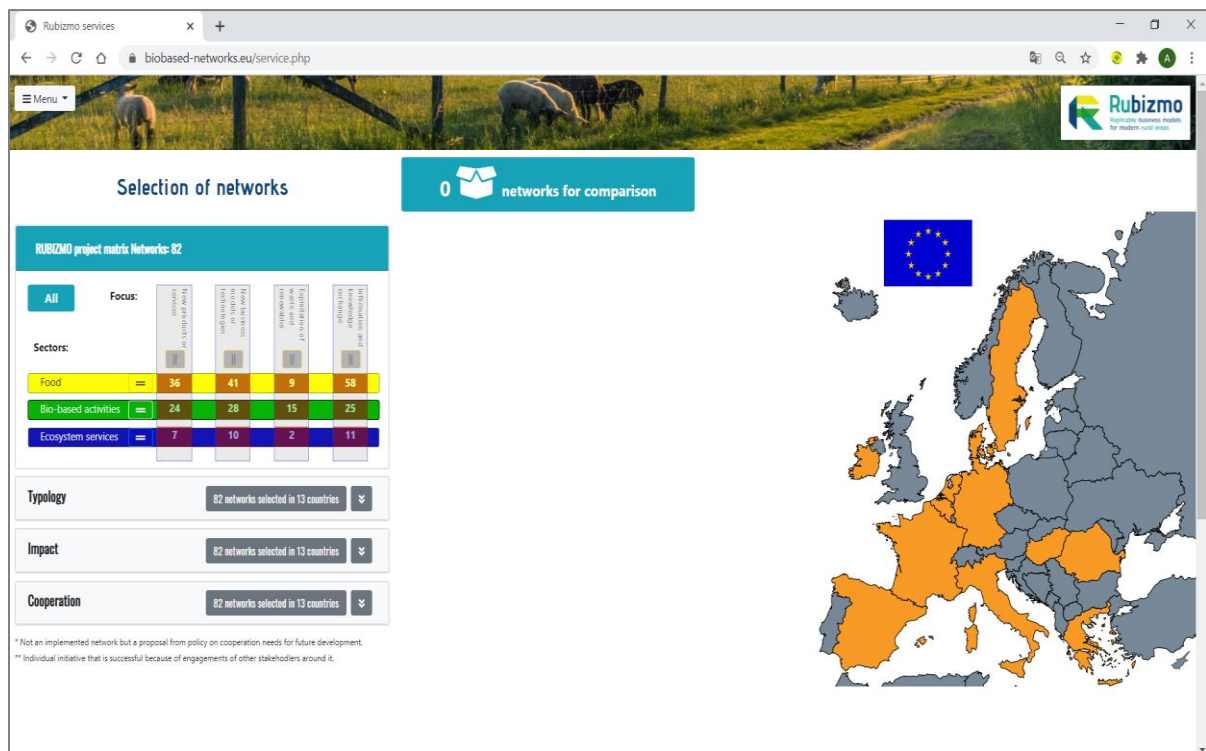


partner responsible for the development of the tools took them in consideration and adjustments were made. In some cases, the comment had the form of request and it was addressed specifically.

Network tool summary responses

In this section of the report, a summary of the responses is presented via the following charts and a short analysis is provided. In order to support the receivers of this report in having a visual of the Network tool, an image of the first page of the tool is presented here (available at <https://www.biobased-networks.eu/>).

Figure 1. Network tool opening page



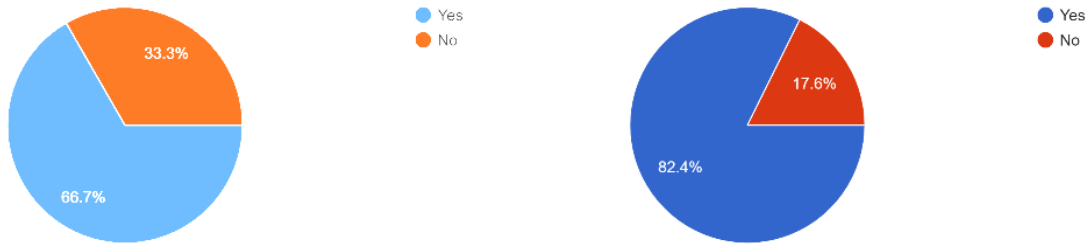
Question 1. Did you find "Home" page comprehensive?

The "Home" page is the opening page when the user enters the tool. The majority of the responses both from the internal and external process indicated that the "Home" page tool is simple in its use and easy to navigate.

Project Partners

NSP Members

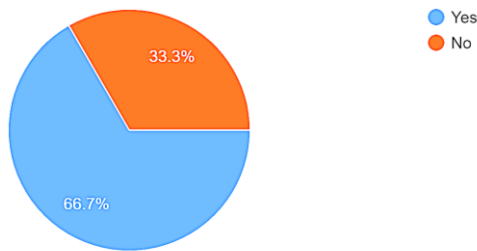




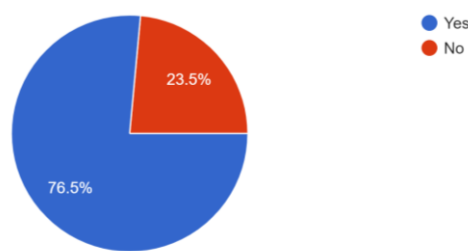
Question 2. Did you find the three categories (Typology, Impact and Cooperation) easy to understand?

When entering the tool, three categories are available for selection under the headings *Typology*, *Impact* and *Cooperation*. Both the responders’ groups found the three categories straightforward.

Project Partners



NSP Members



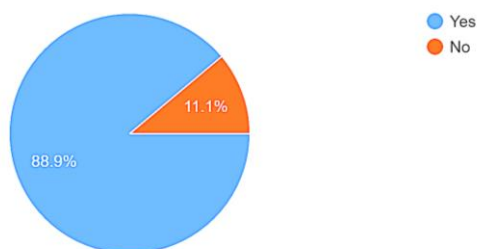
Question 3. Would you like to propose an additional / different category? If yes, please indicate which one(s).

This was one of the non-obligatory open questions and in total only two proposals were made (one proposed adding local/national dimension and the other proposed adding target groups).

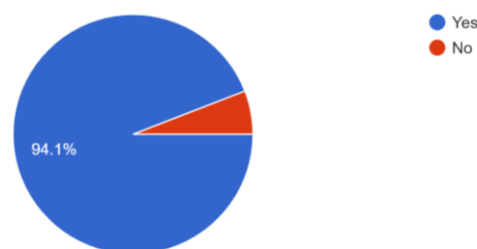
Question 4. Did you find the use of the map helpful?

An alternative way of selecting networks is through the EU map the features the tool page. The responders indicated the map as one of the most useful functions in the tool. It provides an easy process of selection of networks on a country-based map.

Project Partners



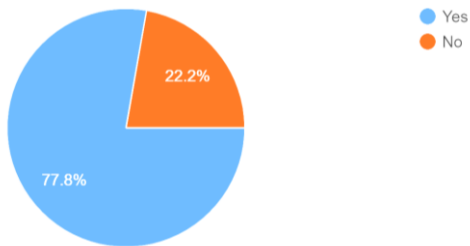
NSP Members



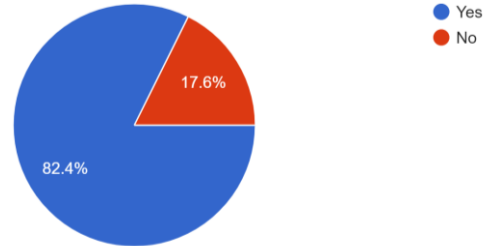
Question 5. When choosing networks the use of the matrix is required. Would you find also helpful a “select all” option in order to navigate through the map?

This specific question aimed at identifying the responders view towards an additional new function. The majority of both groups accepted it as a positive development and it was decided to be added to the tool.

Project Partners



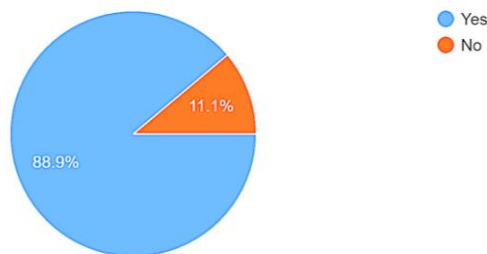
NSP Members



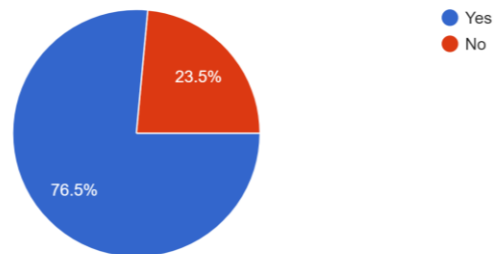
Question 6. When choosing a network, is there enough information appearing?

This question referred to content. Having the networks selected the user receives an overview of them. Although most of the responders were satisfied with the information provided, more data was added during the weeks after the UUA monitoring process took place.

Project Partners



NSP Members



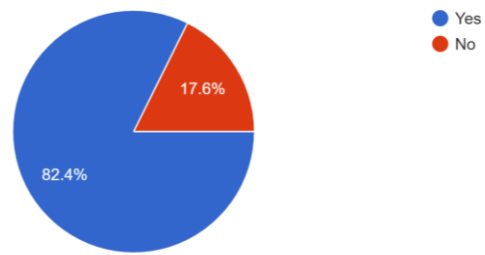
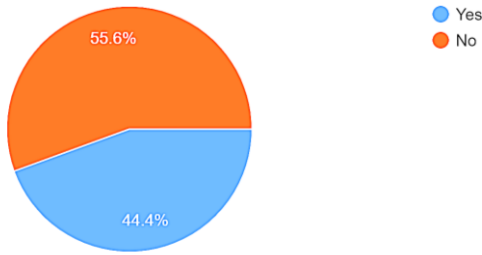
Question 7. Once chosen the networks for comparison, is it clear how you need to proceed?

The comparison function seemed to trouble more of the responders. It appeared problematic in appearance and participants who engaged in the evaluation had difficulties with this part of the tool. The development group focused on making it clearer on how to proceed when choosing the preferable networks.

Project Partners

NSP Members

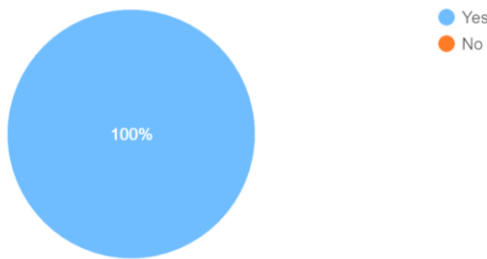




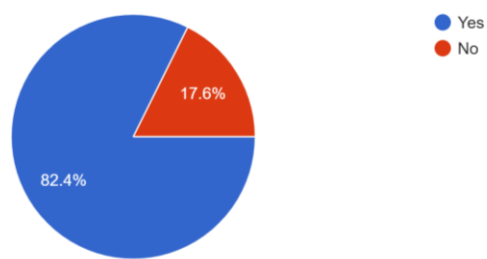
Question 8. Do you find the comparison table helpful?

Continuing in the tool, the selected networks are placed in a table that presents their characteristics in a comparison format. It is clear that for both groups this section was very easy to understand and especially for the project consortium participants.

Project Partners



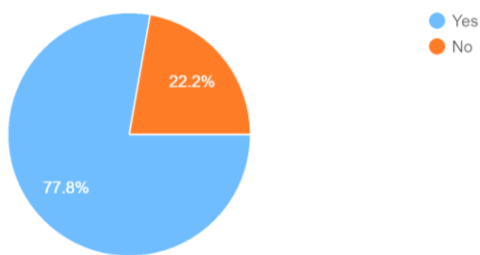
NSP Members



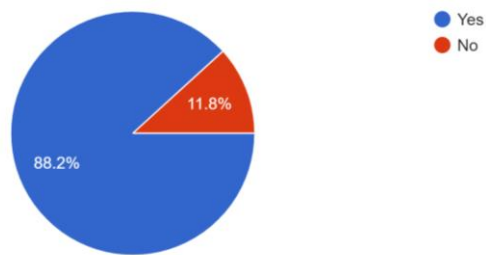
Question 9. After selecting a network, did you find the final information helpful?

For each one of the networks in the comparison table, information is available (reports in pdf form, video, web link etc). For the best part of the participants the data is adequate. However, in some cases more information was added.

Project Partners



NSP Members



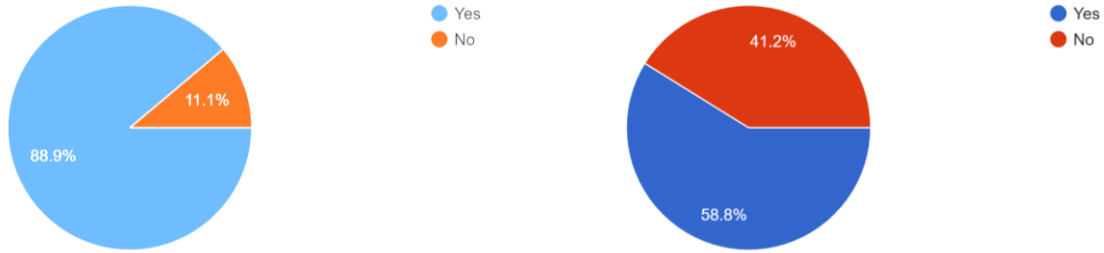
Question 10. Would you be interested in sharing/submitting your network specifications?

The development partner is considering an additional functionality that would allow users to present new networks as content to the tool. The participants in the survey were reluctant to engage in this process especially the NSP members.

Project Partners

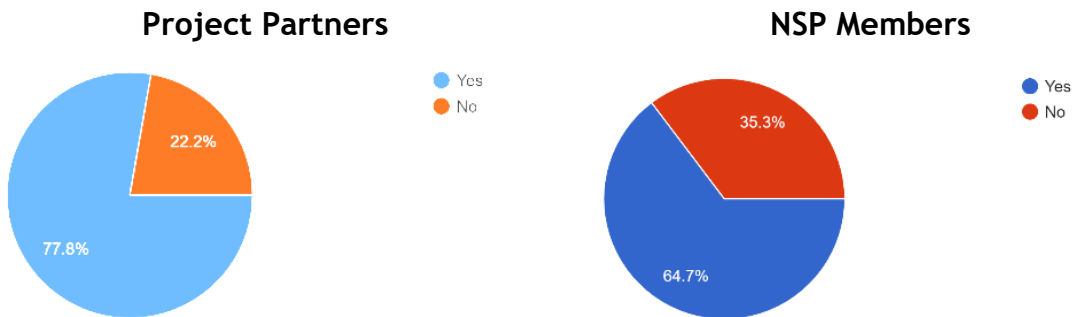
NSP Members





Question 11. Would you feel comfortable filling the following form?

For this question, an example of network’s information was provided to the survey participants. For the NSP members the percentage of the participants not willing to share information on new networks declined once they witnessed the required data. However, for the consortium partners it increased.

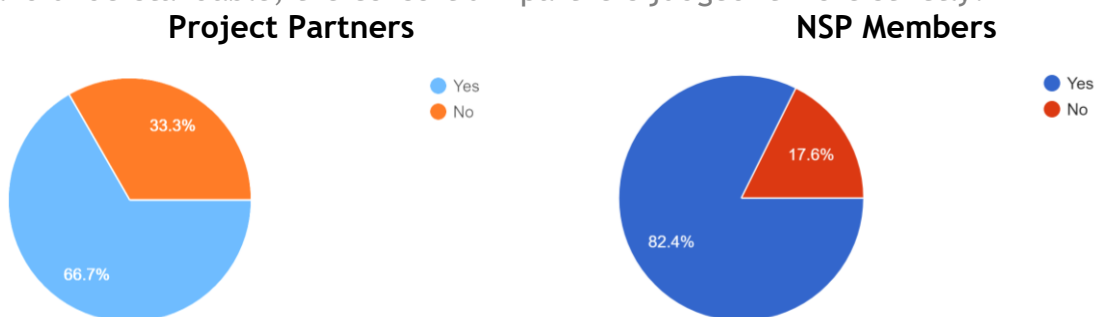


Question 12. Which part of the form you would not fill in?

In order to identify issues relating to sensitive data an open question collected free replies from the participants. The responses varied from requesting assistance in filling in the available information to expressing direct unwillingness to provide information concerning CONTENT and LESSONS LEARNED.

Question 13. Did you find easy to navigate through the Tool n3 website?

Following the questions on content and functionalities, a question on appearance followed. Although most of the participants found the section titles obviously named and understandable, the consortium partners judged it more strictly.

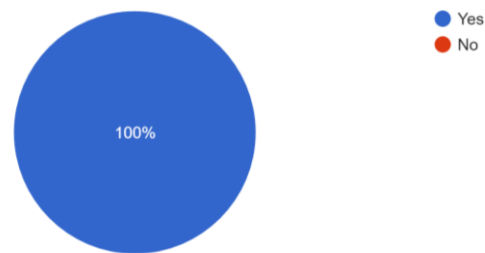


Question 14. Would you recommend the tool to others?



This question concerned NSP members only. It is obvious from the chart that they would be keen to engage and make other prospective users aware of the tool.

NSP Members



Question 15. Do you have any additional comments, questions, or concerns you would like to share?

The final question was open to any comments the participants of both groups may have that they were not able to provide through the previous questions. To mention indicative some of them concerned the importance of keeping the tool updated and adding more guidance or explanations.

The Development group's comments on the evaluation survey of the Network tool

The network tool is supposed to provide a dynamically growing database which provides in the first case information about European networks and in a second case guidance on issues relevant for creating and organizing networks. Both elements of the database are subject to continuous adaption to new developments and insights.

The presentation of networks is based on a variety of functionalities:

1. A complex network search procedure allows a dedicated identification of networks of interest. It allows to focus on:

- the sector, including food, bio-based activities or ecosystem services;
- the network orientation, focusing on new products or services, new business models or technologies, the exploitation of waste or renewable resources, and the exchange of information or knowledge;
- the network organization (typology), distinguishing between a selection of alternatives;
- the network impact, distinguishing between a selection of impact aggregates;
- the network participation, including enterprises, research and the public sector; and
- the country of origin.

2. A description of networks summarizing as much information from the individual networks as publicly available, including contacts, internet links, references, videos and more.



The challenge was especially the organization of the search procedure in a way which reduced the complexity to a level which could be dealt with by inexperienced users while staying attractive for more experienced users. This was approached through a combination of textual and graphics elements.

The result of the survey suggests that a good balance has been reached in serving the different levels of expertise in working with the tool.

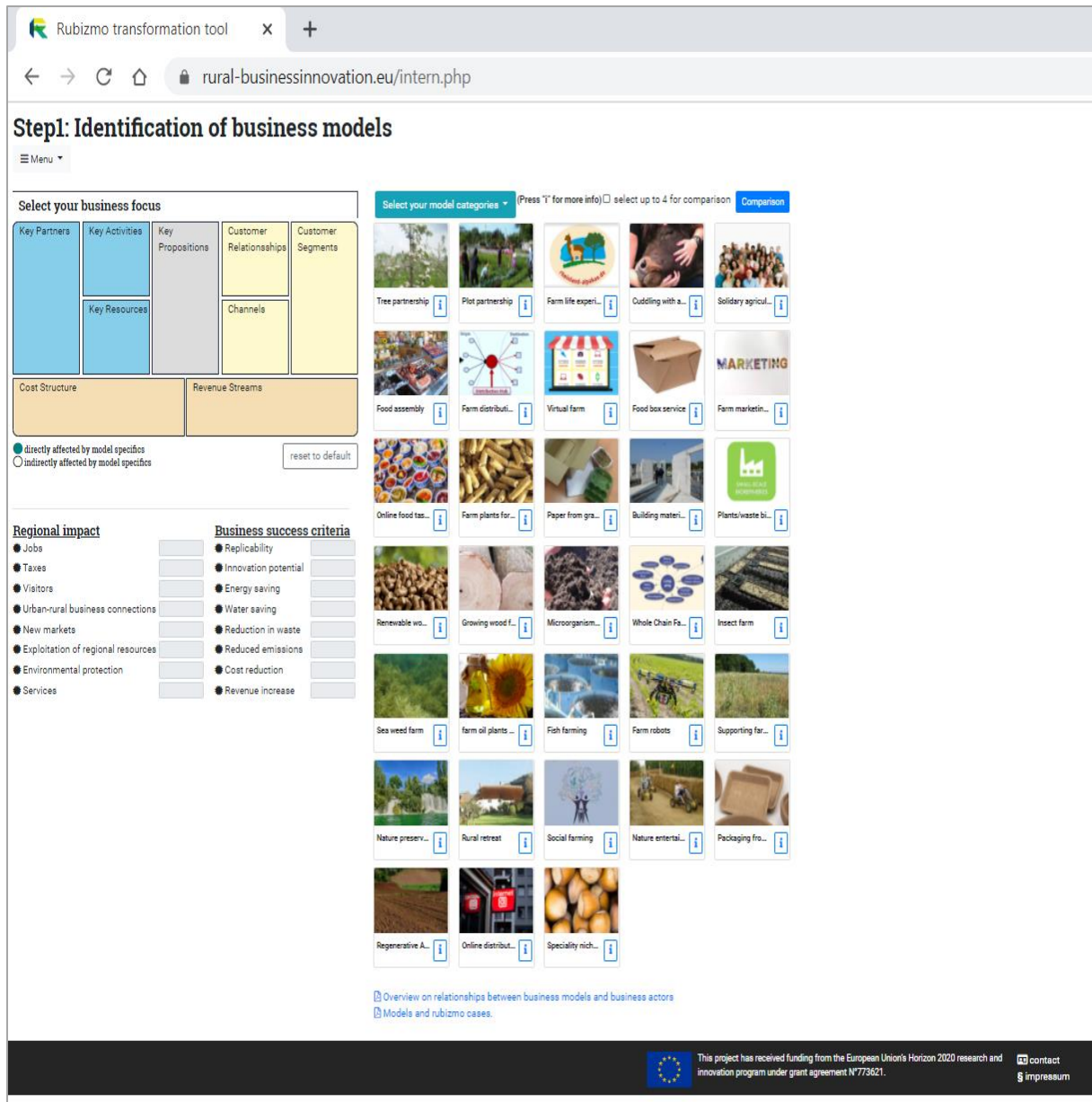
The survey could not judge the relevance of the content collected for the different networks. This would be the responsibility for a continuous update activity. Within the project, a first update initiative had been organized where all networks were contacted for checking the validity of the information. Such an update activity will have to be (and will) organized on a regular basis.

Transformation tool summary responses

In this section of the report, the responses are presented in a summary format using the following charts and a short analysis. Similarly with the network tool, in order to support the receivers of this report in having a visual of the transformation tool, an image of the first page of the tool is presented here (available at <https://www.rural-businessinnovation.eu/index.php>).

Figure 2. Transformation tool opening page





The screenshot shows the 'Step 1: Identification of business models' interface of the Rubizmo transformation tool. The browser address bar shows 'rural-businessinnovation.eu/intern.php'. The interface includes a 'Select your business focus' section with categories like Key Partners, Key Activities, Key Resources, Key Propositions, Customer Relationships, and Customer Segments. Below this are 'Cost Structure' and 'Revenue Streams' sections. A 'Regional impact' section lists various criteria like Jobs, Taxes, and Services. A 'Business success criteria' section lists criteria like Replicability, Innovation potential, and Revenue increase. The main part of the interface is a grid of model categories, each with a representative image and a title, such as 'Tree partnership', 'Plot partnership', 'Farm life exper...', 'Outdilling with a...', 'Solidary agricul...', 'Food assembly', 'Farm distribul...', 'Virtual farm', 'Food box service', 'Farm marketin...', 'Online food tas...', 'Farm plants for...', 'Paper from gra...', 'Building materi...', 'Plants/waste bl...', 'Renewable wo...', 'Growing wood f...', 'Microorganism...', 'Whole Chain Fa...', 'Insect farm', 'Sea weed farm', 'farm oil plants ...', 'Fish farming', 'Farm robots', 'Supporting far...', 'Nature preserv...', 'Rural retreat', 'Social farming', 'Nature enteral...', 'Packaging fro...', 'Regenerative A...', 'Online distribut...', and 'Speciality rich...'. At the bottom, there are links for 'Overview on relationships between business models and business actors' and 'Models and rubizmo cases'. The footer contains the European Union logo, funding information, and contact/impressum links.

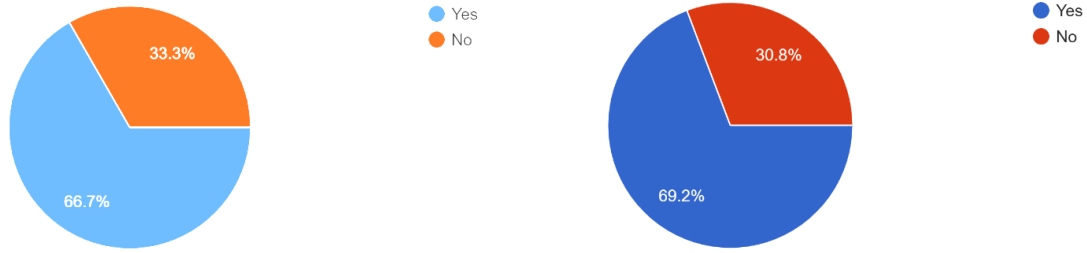
Question 1. Did you find "What to use the tool for?" (support) page comprehensive?

When opening the tool, the first page provides a link to a support page. This page provides information on how to use the tool in accordance to the business canvas model. Although a large part of the survey participants found it easy to understand, some comments provided useful feedback and that led to renaming the support page to "Model selection through business CANVAS".

Project Partners

NSP Members



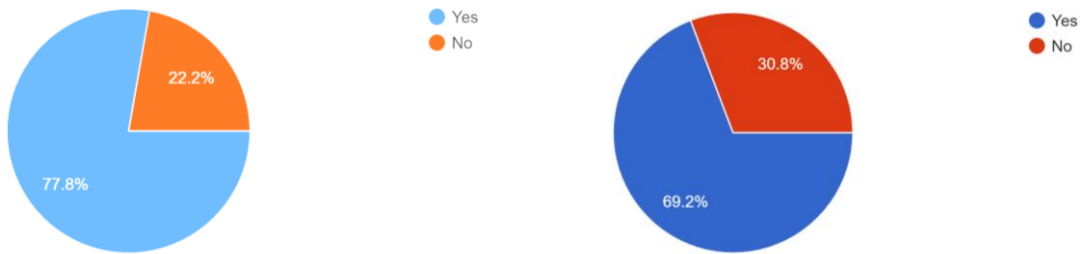


Question 2. Are the "steps" mentioned in the support page easy to understand?

The support page provides a series of actions in order to proceed with the business canvas. The participants raised some issues in the opening question so a few changes were made in the titles and a short explanatory video was added.

Project Partners

NSP Members

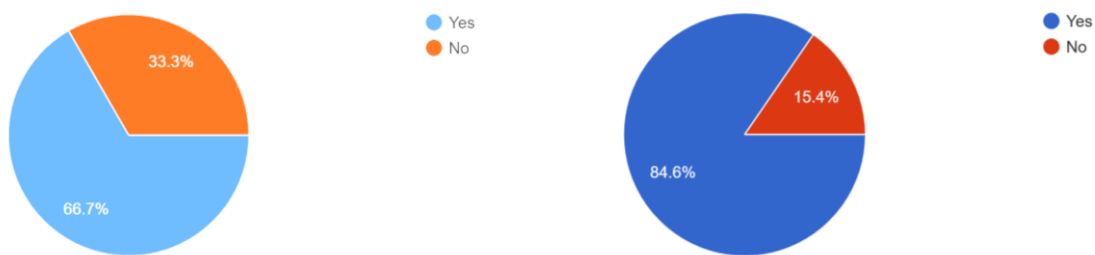


Question 3. Did you find the Business focus table easy to use?

When entering the main page of the tool (Model selection through model categories), the user can select the preferable models through the business focus table. (left side of the page). The survey participants found clear the selection process, though some issues/comments were mentioned in the open question focusing on multiple selection options and guidance.

Project Partners

NSP Members



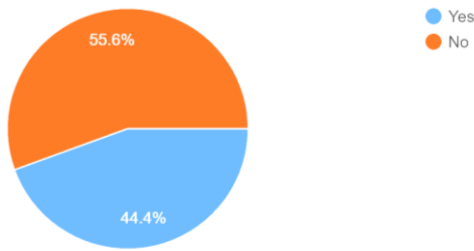
Question 4. Did you find the "Regional impact" and "Success criteria" info adequate?

A short description on impact and success criteria pops up when moving over the title. This acts as a short guide on how to proceed with choosing the preferable

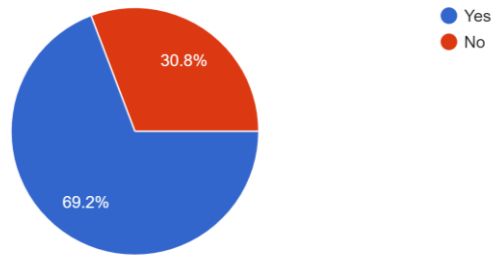


models. Initially, this was not very clear to the participants of both groups. Some alterations were made.

Project Partners



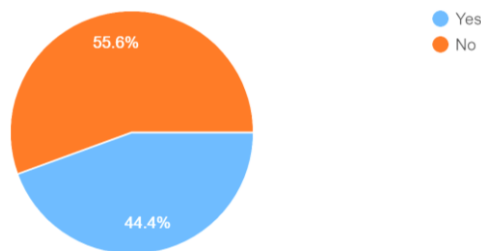
NSP Members



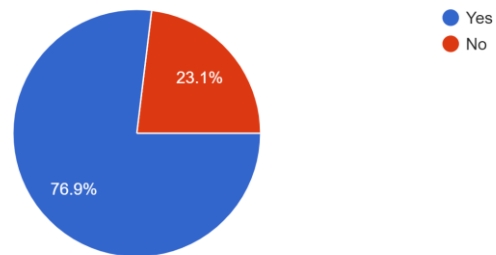
Question 5. When selecting models did you find the "section" option comprehensive?

Once the user has a short overview of the models available in the tool, one may select up to 4 models that might be of further interest. In order to do that a "select" function is available. However, this did not seem very clear to the participants (mainly from the project partners' group). The partner responsible for the development of the tool is making some alterations to reflect these responses.

Project Partners



NSP Members



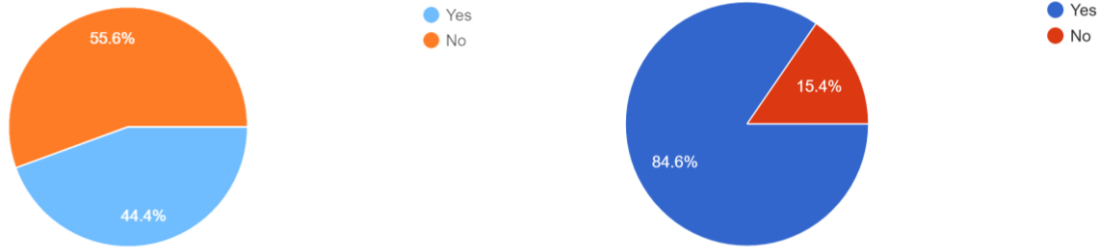
Question 6. Once chosen the models for comparison, is it clear how you need to proceed?

An extra action is needed in order to proceed to the comparison of the selected models. This was rather clear for the NSP members participating in the survey. However, the project partners found it difficult to move to the next step. Once again, the partner responsible for the development of the tool is making some changes.

Project Partners

NSP Members



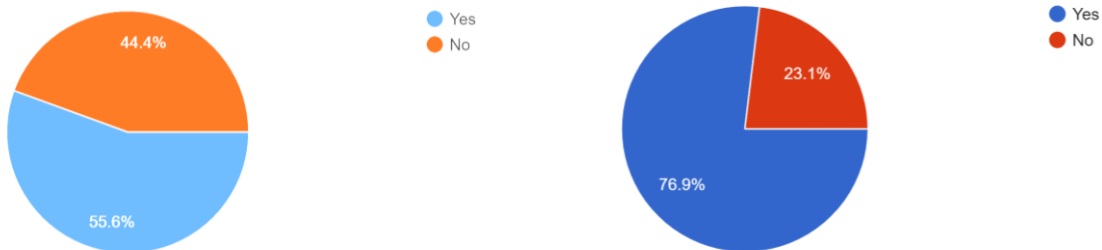


Question 7. In the table appearing with the model’s information, is the analysis comprehensive?

All the characteristics of the selected models appear in a table. This is quite clear for the survey participants. In the case of the project partners, although they found the table clear, some comments were added (most of the “no” answers had a following comment that made it clear that the answer is “yes” but had a comment).

Project Partners

NSP Members

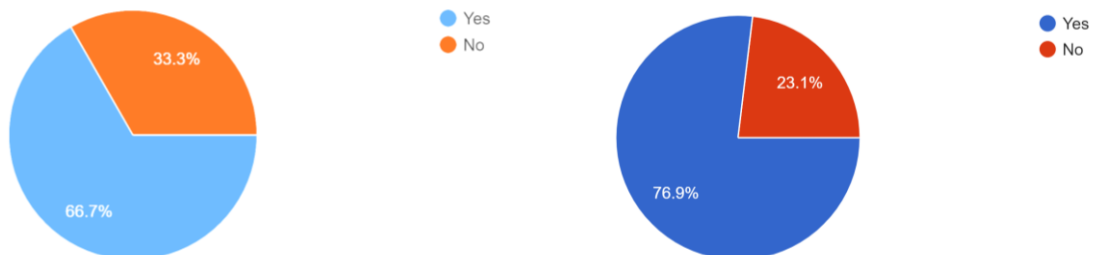


Question 8. Do you find the comparison table helpful?

This question concerned the comparison table overall (appearance and content). The majority of the participants of both groups were satisfied however, some comments were made concerning the need for more information.

Project Partners

NSP Members

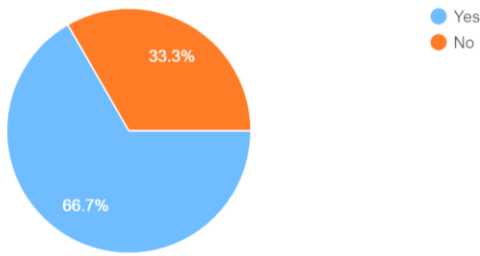


Question 9. In the “Impact categories” section, did you find the final information (pdf) helpful?

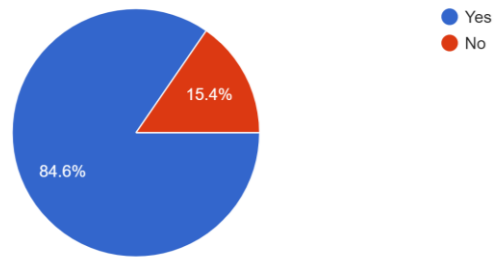
Once the comparison table is opened, a detailed description (in PDF form) and other information (web pages and videos) are available to the user. The survey participants, both the NSP members and project partners, found the information helpful.



Project Partners



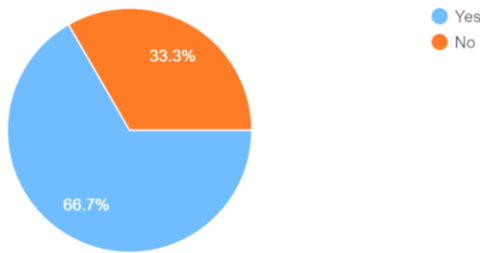
NSP Members



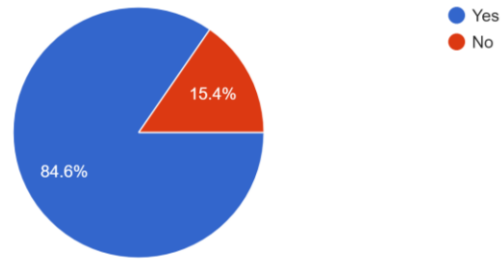
Question 10. In the "Impact categories" section, did you find the canvas analysis helpful?

In the comparison table, a canvas analysis is also available to the tool user. The survey participants, both the NSP members and project partners, found the information helpful.

Project Partners



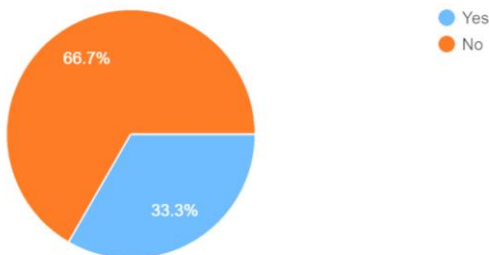
NSP Members



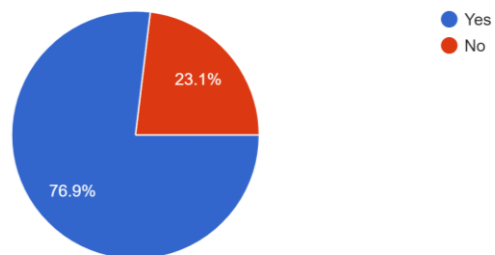
Question 11. In the table appearing with the model's "Requirements / Challenges", is the analysis comprehensive?

In order to proceed to the next step, the user needs to select one of the compared models. Once the choice is made, the tool presents the necessary actions for the user to fulfil the needs of the selected business model. This is probably the most important page in the tool. The survey participants understood this information very differently. For the NSP members it was rather easy to understand (a few comments on appearance and function were made), while the project partners had a number of comments and concerns.

Project Partners



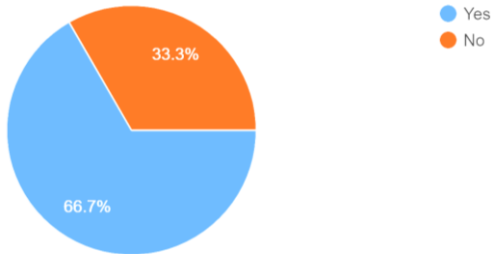
NSP Members



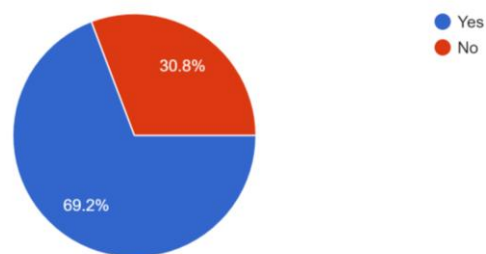
Question 12. Did you find the "deficiencies", "Action" and "Effort" parts easy to use?

In this page, the tool provides actions for minimizing deficiencies together with a basic evaluation of efforts required. Participants from both survey groups had a clear understanding of this function, yet had some proposals and comments.

Project Partners



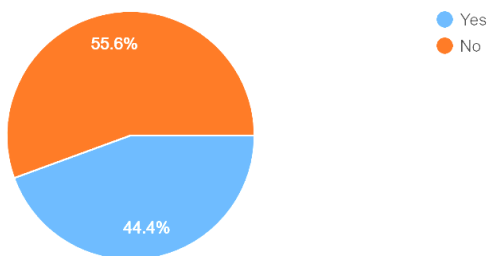
NSP Members



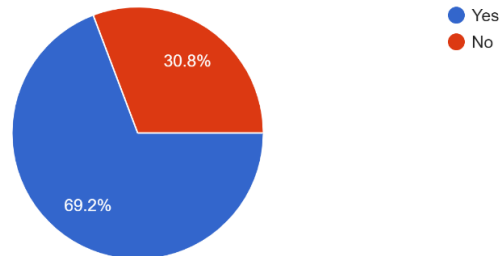
Question 13. Did you find the "Action" analysis adequate?

For each action identified for the realization of the selected model, a short explanation and link is provided. In this section, similarly with the section mentioned above, the survey participants made comments and suggestions.

Project Partners



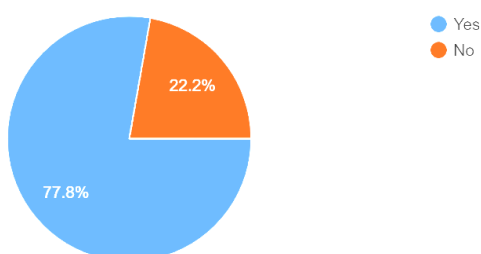
NSP Members



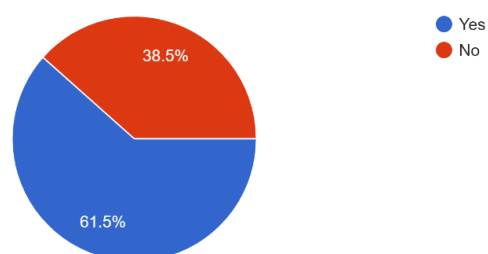
Question 14. Did you find the "summary" to include all the above information?

A "summary" table provides the results of the tool. A part of the participants would prefer this table to be more inclusive.

Project Partners



NSP Members

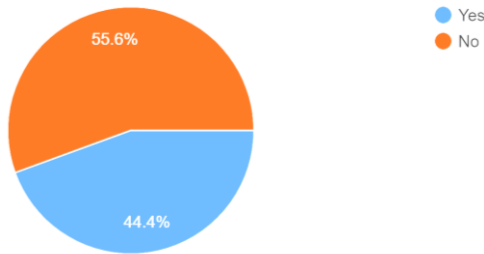


Question 15. Did you find easy to navigate through the Tool n4 website?

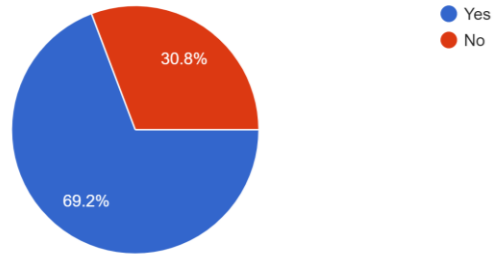


This question referred to the tool as a total in terms of appearance and sequence of steps. It is clear from the chats that the NSP members found it easier to navigate through the tool’s website than the Project Partners.

Project Partners



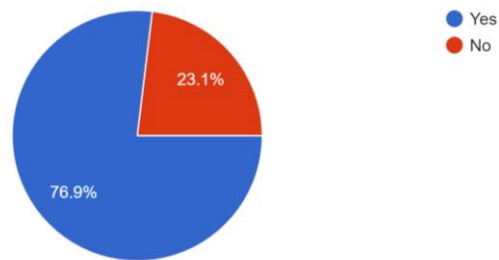
NSP Members



Question 16. Would you recommend the tool to others?

This question was addressed to NSP members only. The majority of the participants would propose to others to use the tool.

NSP Members



Question 17. Do you have any additional comments, questions, or concerns you would like to share?

The final question gave the participants the opportunity to provide any comments they may had and were unable to express them in the previous questions. The participants commented on the need for more explanations/info, the need for the tool to be more intuitive, and the need to simplify some of the selection options embedded in the tool.

The Development group’s comments on the evaluation survey of the Transformation tool

The software solution combines a number of features which are supposed to provide a tool for especially advisory groups in supporting enterprises in moving towards new and sustainable business models. The features include:

1. A *database of business models* that are emerging in the sector through efforts of farms, food processing or marketing groups for coping with changing markets and the need for assuring sustainability in a society’s request for shorter chains, regionalization of production, closer interaction between production and



consumption, environmental protection and the avoidance of negative effects on the climate.

2. An *analytical feature* that supports enterprises in aligning their own situation to a model's external and internal requirements providing, in addition, first hints on possible opportunities for eliminating deficiencies.

3. A *personalization option* that offers for selected users the possibility to enter own models together with their external/internal requirements and the opportunities one might propose for eliminating deficiencies allowing a personalization of the tool for different groups.

With the third feature, the solution provides a tool that could be adapted to a wide variety of needs, scenarios and user interests. The evaluation of the tool did focus on the first two features, as the third one was developed at a later project stage and, in addition, is not supposed to be used by unexperienced advisory groups.

Any development of a software tool has to provide functionality and content that fits the needs of users. Functionality is the first impression a user is confronted with. In consequence, new users are evaluating primarily the functionality while a deeper analysis of the content requires more time and engagement. As the evaluation of the tool was based on an early beta version, the evaluation results can be primarily linked to functionalities with a limited reference to contents.

Providing functionalities and content for a potentially wide variety of different users with different backgrounds and levels of expertise is a challenge that requires to find a “best” balance between interests. A simple example may explain the challenge. A first-time user might want to be guided step by step in moving through the tool. Users with more experience might want to be able to move through the functionalities in the most efficient way.

As the evaluation included people with slightly different levels of user experience, it was expected that the evaluation results show some variation. However, from a general perspective, the variations are limited and confirm the “best balance” approach.

There is one exception. The evaluation of regional impact and business success criteria by project partners show a significant (however not dominant) high negative outcome. This needs some explanations. The initial list of criteria and their relevance for individual models is based on the judgement of a small expert group linked to the tool development group. It was supposed to be improved and stabilized by the analysis of project groups engaged in such tasks. However, developments in the Corona crises hampered the organization of suitable activities for further analysis



in enterprises and expert groupings which could have provided data with a more solid data collection base.

In deciding between the option of deleting the impact criteria part from the tool or leaving it as a first hint with an appropriate comment in the tool, the development group decided for the second option keeping the data in a continuous improvement process depending on feedback from users and expert groups. A comment linked to the data in the tool make users aware of the situation and motivates feedback for improvement.

Conclusion

This evaluation set out to assess whether the Network tool and the Transformation Tool are suited to their stated purposes. The development target for both tools is to reach their full potential and ensure the usefulness (end-users have a real relevance to use this tool), usability (the tool is convenient, easy-to-use) and acceptability (guarantee that there are no social, political, internal barriers to limit its use) of the tool, as described in the project's contract.

The evaluation found the tools to fulfill their target and has to report several positive aspects. Both the design and the functionality of the tools were well accepted by the survey participants. In the open questions, the comments requested mainly additional actions in order to point out sequence to the tool users or to provide information. Moreover, the content of the tools was sufficient for the evaluation process.

In general, the Network tool was perceived as clearer and more comprehensive from the survey participants in contrast with the Transformation tool that part of the participants found difficult to use. Although the Transformation tool is a tool for both entrepreneurs and policy agencies, it becomes evident that entrepreneurs must have at least a basic knowledge on business models and supportive business actors.

Another aspect to mention is that in both the survey forms, project partners were stricter in their replies in relation to the NSP members. On the other hand, it could be the result of project partners having more feedback and suggestions for developing the tools. This could only reflect the consortium's high expectation and need for both the tools to be exceptional in their function and content.

Finally, as mentioned several times, the developing partner continues to improve and update the function and the content of the tools. Partner's ambition is to deliver fully operational, inclusive and well comprehensive tools that will overpass the project's duration.



