



ENGINE Newsletter

July 2026 (No. 3)

*Shaping the future of rural
entrepreneurship and
innovation through education*



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Introduction



DRIVING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION From Analysis to Action: ENGINE Moves Towards EDUPACK

Sustainability, multifunctionality, endogeneity, entrepreneurship and innovation are widely recognised as key drivers of rural development. They help rural areas respond to emerging social, economic and environmental trends while addressing challenges specific to rural contexts. A holistic approach to rural development relies on mobilising endogenous potential – knowledge, skills and resources – and linking it with targeted initiatives.

In this context, entrepreneurship and innovation are essential tools for unlocking underused capacities and fostering locally tailored growth. Higher education institutions can play a crucial role by designing academic programmes that connect education with rural needs. Although many EU university programmes address entrepreneurship and innovation, they often remain urban-centric and do not fully reflect the realities of rural regions.

The ENGINE project (ENTrepreneurial rural Growth through exchanging of Good practices wIthIn Network Education), co-funded by Erasmus+ (KA220-HED, Project No. 2024-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000244962), addresses this gap. It identifies the entrepreneurial and innovation potential of rural regions and reviews current university programmes to identify competence gaps. At the heart of the project is EDUPACK – an educational tool designed to strengthen rural entrepreneurship and innovation. By integrating EDUPACK into higher education curricula, ENGINE aims to equip students with the competences needed to support sustainable rural development.

This third issue focuses on a key transition in ENGINE: the move from analytical work towards practical educational design. Across partner institutions and rural communities, the consortium is identifying inspiring teaching methods, relevant educational content and real-life rural examples that will inform the development of EDUPACK – a practical learning package for future leaders of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas.



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What ENGINE is building now

ENGINE is now moving towards the development of EDUPACK – an educational package for rural entrepreneurship and innovation. It will bring together teaching methods, learning content, real-life case studies and good practices that can be used by higher education institutions to prepare students for the role of future rural leaders.

The work currently focuses on selecting teaching tools that support active and practice-based learning, identifying case studies that help students analyse rural development challenges, reviewing relevant teaching content, collecting new examples of entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives from rural communities and preparing the basis for a modular course to be developed in the next stage of the project.

FOR STUDENTS, LECTURERS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES



For students

ENGINE will provide learning materials based on real rural challenges, helping students develop practical competences in entrepreneurship, innovation and local development.



For lecturers

EDUPACK will offer adaptable teaching tools, case studies and content that can be integrated into higher education curricula and courses.



For rural communities

The project connects academic knowledge with local experience, stakeholder engagement and examples of entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives from rural areas.



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Highlights from the ENGINE Project

Finalisation of the groundwork and preparation for EDUPACK

The ENGINE consortium has completed an important stage of analytical and conceptual work and is now preparing the ground for the development of EDUPACK. The focus is shifting from diagnosis and framework-building towards the identification of practical teaching materials, learning methods, case studies and stakeholder-based resources that can support education for future rural leaders.

The results developed so far provide a concrete foundation for the next stage of the project. They include the Academic Standardized Content Plan for Rural Entrepreneurial Education, which defines the planned structure of the EDUPACK course and its 20 modules; the Academic Profile of Rural Entrepreneur, which describes the expected competences of future EDUPACK graduates; and the Stakeholders of Rural Growth Database, which identifies external actors who can support teaching and learning processes.

Building on this foundation, the consortium is now working to identify and select educational resources that can be further developed into EDUPACK and used by higher education institutions across diverse rural and academic contexts.

Towards EDUPACK

ENGINE is moving from diagnosis and framework-building towards the design of practical learning materials for future leaders of rural entrepreneurship and innovation.



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A foundation for rural leadership education

In February 2026 ENGINE has completed an important stage in the preparation of EDUPACK by developing a coherent framework for rural leadership education. This framework brings together three complementary elements: the Academic Standardized Content Plan for Rural Entrepreneurial Education, the Academic Profile of Rural Entrepreneur and the Stakeholders of Rural Growth Database.

The Academic Standardized Content Plan for Rural Entrepreneurial Education defines the planned structure of the EDUPACK course and outlines 20 educational modules addressing key areas of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas

Planned course structure

20 modules organised into 5 thematic blocks



A

Foundations of Rural Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Developing understanding of the rural innovation context and personal entrepreneurial competences.

Modules 1-5



B

Entrepreneurship & Innovation Ecosystems and Rural Collaboration

Understanding the institutional, territorial and partnership context of rural entrepreneurship and innovation.

Modules 6-10



C

Management, Finance and Marketing for Rural Initiatives

Providing essential managerial, marketing and financial competences for small-scale rural enterprises.

Modules 11-14



D

Digitalisation for Rural Transformation

Developing practical and strategic digital competences for innovation in rural environments.

Modules 15-16



E

Sustainability, Quality and Social Innovation

Linking entrepreneurship and innovation with sustainability, quality assurance and community wellbeing, including adaptation to climate change and the strengthening of local resilience.

Modules 17-20



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The Academic Profile of Rural Entrepreneur describes the competences expected from future EDUPACK graduates, helping to link course content with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by future rural leaders.

The Stakeholders of Rural Growth Database identifies and characterises external stakeholders who can support teaching and learning processes in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas. It consolidates information on stakeholder type and sector, potential roles in education, levels and forms of engagement, territorial scope, and experience and competences in rural entrepreneurship, innovation, local development and regional development.

Together, these outputs provide a foundation for EDUPACK by linking course structure, competence development and stakeholder engagement.

How this supports EDUPACK

- It provides the planned 20-module structure of the future EDUPACK course.
- It defines the competence profile of future EDUPACK graduates.
- It identifies external actors who can support teaching, mentoring, fieldwork and practice-oriented learning.
- It links curriculum design with real rural development stakeholders and challenges.
- It helps partners involve experts in a comparable and coherent way.

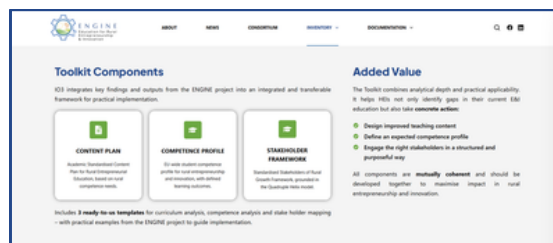
Local Leadership Toolkit

Between February and March 2026, the ENGINE consortium consolidated the results of the project's analytical and conceptual work into one coherent intellectual output – a toolkit supporting the development of local leadership.

The toolkit brings together the key results developed so far, including the planned structure of the EDUPACK course, the competence profile of future rural leaders and the mapping of stakeholders who can support teaching and learning processes.

The toolkit translates these results into a practical guide for higher education institutions. It describes a sequenced set of actions showing how universities can design and deliver entrepreneurship and innovation education aimed at preparing future rural leaders. The process ranges from reviewing study programmes and defining students' competence profiles, through developing a corresponding curriculum framework, to identifying and engaging rural stakeholders in educational processes.

The toolkit has been designed for application and scalability across diverse higher education contexts and rural settings. Its structured approach can be adapted and implemented by universities across the European Union, contributing to the development of entrepreneurship and innovation education in rural areas.



[Read more on ENGINE' website](#)



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EDUPACK development in progress



The overarching objective of current stage of the ENGINE project is the development of EDUPACK – an educational package for leaders of rural entrepreneurship and innovation. WP4 activities were launched in April 2026 and will continue until January 2027. The implementation of this work package is led by Krakow University of Economics (UEK).

Current stage of the project encompasses five closely connected activities:

- developing methodological foundations for the design of EDUPACK;
- analysing educational tools embedded in study programmes with regard to their applicability in the education of rural leaders;
- analysing case studies and educational content addressing rural development within entrepreneurship and innovation curricula of partner universities;
- conducting field research and developing case studies on entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives in rural areas;
- developing a catalogue of best practices to be incorporated into EDUPACK.

These activities will culminate in the development of EDUPACK as a universal educational tool designed in accordance with the established methodology and based on identified teaching methods, educational content and case studies.



Methodological foundations of EDUPACK

As of April 2026, the ENGINE consortium launched a new stage of work focused on preparing the development of EDUPACK. By June 2026, a methodological framework had been developed to guide all subsequent tasks and to support the development of EDUPACK.

The development of the framework involved a review of relevant academic literature, source materials and reports, the selection and adaptation of quantitative and qualitative methods and the formulation of guidelines concerning evaluation criteria and research tools to be applied in later stages of this workpackage.

The document establishes a common methodological framework for the partner institutions involved in ENGINE. It defines procedures and activities necessary for the development of EDUPACK, facilitates the implementation of individual tasks, supports the standardisation of activities and strengthens effective cooperation among partners.



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How ENGINE is turning project results into a practical learning package

1. Analytical and conceptual stage (WP3)



The Academic Standardized Content Plan for Rural Entrepreneurial Education
planned 20-module course structure



The Academic Profile of Rural Entrepreneur
defines the competence profile of future EDUPACK graduates



The Stakeholders of Rural Growth Database
maps external actors who can support teaching and learning



Local Leadership Toolkit
brings together the earlier results into a practical guide

What this provides



what should be taught



who can enrich practice-oriented learning



which competences should be developed



how universities can design rural entrepreneurship education

2. Current stage (WP4)



Methodological framework for EDUPACK



Analysis of case studies



Analysis of teaching methods



Field research on rural entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives



Analysis of educational content



Comparative analysis of good practices

EDUPACK

A practical learning package for entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas. It includes:



20 modules



teaching methods



educational content



case studies



best practices

For future leaders of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas



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The Methodology of creating EDUPACK provides

- structured and replicable frameworks for the development of EDUPACK across partner institutions;
- quality and coherence of educational content, teaching tools and case studies through standardised criteria and evaluation procedures;
- a transparent basis for inter-institutional comparison and the selection of relevant educational materials;
- a foundation for developing a catalogue of good practices of universal relevance from the perspective of rural development.



Teaching tools, case studies and teaching content

In June 2026, the consortium initiated two parallel workstreams running until August 2026: educational tools, case studies and teaching content analysis.

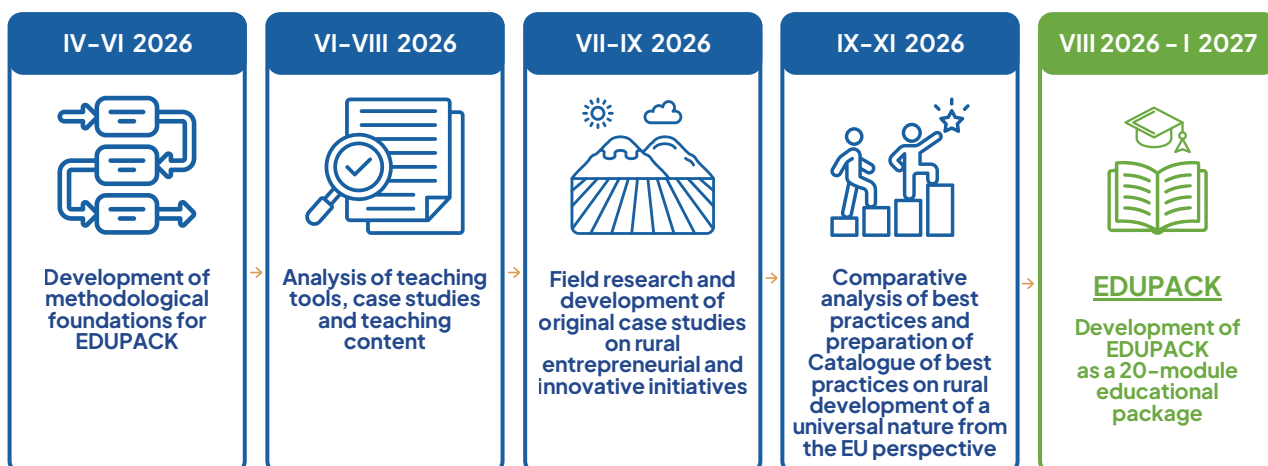
Workstream	Focus	Contribution to EDUPACK
Teaching tools	Analysis of teaching and learning tools embedded in entrepreneurship and innovation study programmes.	Identification, comparative assessment and selection of educational tools that can support the education of rural development leaders.
Case studies and teaching contents	Analysis of case studies and teaching contents related to rural development and embedded in entrepreneurship and innovation study programmes.	Review and selection of valuable, adaptable case studies and other educational materials for EDUPACK.

Across these workstreams, partners undertake a systematic review of entrepreneurship and innovation study programmes delivered by partner institutions. This includes the identification of teaching tools, case studies and teaching content, as well as consultations with academic staff in entrepreneurship and innovation. A comparative analysis is then conducted to select the most effective and adaptable learning and teaching solutions.



Roadmap to EDUPACK

Main stages leading to the development of the educational package



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What lies ahead

Beyond the ongoing analysis of teaching tools, case studies and educational content used in the study programmes of partner institutions, two further activities are planned before EDUPACK is developed in January 2027. Both focus on the preparation and analysis of case studies, reflecting the core premise of the designed course: relevance, practice orientation and close alignment with real-world challenges of rural development.

Field research and original case studies

Between July and September 2026, field research will be conducted on entrepreneurial and innovative initiatives implemented in rural areas, followed by the development of case studies. This will involve establishing contact with rural stakeholders and collecting data on selected entrepreneurship- and innovation-related initiatives in rural areas.

The collected material will serve as the basis for original case studies illustrating contemporary challenges, opportunities and success factors related to the development of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas. Particular emphasis will be placed on identifying and analysing initiatives that have not yet been addressed in the academic literature. This will enable the creation of unique, fieldwork-based teaching materials reflecting real-world experiences and practices in rural contexts.

The developed case studies will constitute a key component of the EDUPACK course, enabling students to analyse authentic situations, strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of entrepreneurship and innovation in practice.

Comparative analysis of best practices

Between September and November 2026, the consortium will conduct a comparative analysis of best practices with regard to their applicability to the development of EDUPACK. At this stage, the most relevant case studies will be selected from two sources: those identified in partner university curricula and those developed through field research in rural areas. This activity will culminate in the preparation of a Catalogue of best practices on rural development of a universal nature from the EU perspective. It will constitute the final essential step before the development of EDUPACK.

What will make a case study useful for EDUPACK?

The most valuable case studies will be selected with attention to five key criteria:

1. Alignment with educational objectives
2. Relevance to widely recognised rural challenges
3. Transferability across EU rural contexts
4. Didactic completeness / potential
5. Student engagement potential

Together, these criteria will help identify cases that are relevant to the EDUPACK course, grounded in real rural challenges, adaptable to different EU contexts and engaging for students.



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Events

Third ENGINE consortium meeting in Krakow and initiation of EDUPACK development

22-23 April 2026 | Krakow University of Economics

Krakow University of Economics hosted an in-person ENGINE consortium meeting that provided an opportunity to review the project's achievements to date and discuss the objectives of the subsequent work package focused on the development of EDUPACK. The meeting marked the beginning of the project's most advanced and creative phase of implementation, in which the results achieved so far constitute the foundation for innovative teaching and learning materials intended for use by higher education institutions across the European Union.

Why it matters?

The meeting helped align partners around the transition from the project's analytical and conceptual outputs to the practical design of EDUPACK.



ENGINE engages with stakeholders during the #Futurismo consultation event

4 February 2026 | University of Foggia

Representatives of the ENGINE project participated in a dialogue with regional stakeholders during a consultation event organised under the #Futurismo initiative. The ENGINE team – Prof. Mariantonietta Fiore, Dr. Fedele Colantuono and Ms Juliana Carina Bagetti – joined researchers, citizens and representatives of SMEs and start-ups to discuss innovative development strategies for the Province of Foggia, with particular emphasis on the tourism and hospitality sectors. During the event, the team presented progress on EDUPACK as an educational toolkit designed to enhance students' entrepreneurial and innovation competences in response to the challenges and opportunities of rural areas.

Why it matters?

The event connected EDUPACK development with regional stakeholder perspectives and highlighted the role of entrepreneurship education in fostering sustainable tourism and rural economic development.



[Read more on ENGINE' website](#)



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Dissemination of ENGINE results during the Open Days at Krakow University of Economics

25-26 March 2026 | Krakow University of Economics

During the Open Days of the Krakow University of Economics, members of the ENGINE project carried out dissemination activities addressed to prospective students. The event gathered a large group of young people considering higher education and created an opportunity to present the project's assumptions, objectives and achievements. Project members introduced key concepts related to rural entrepreneurship, emphasising the need for more context-sensitive, inclusive and community-oriented approaches to innovation and entrepreneurship. Informational materials, presentations and direct interactions supported knowledge exchange and inspiration.

Why it matters?

The activity helped present ENGINE to prospective students and showed how rural entrepreneurship and innovation can be embedded in higher education.



[Read more on ENGINE' website](#)



Virtuous synergies between national and international projects: an outdoor learning experience

6 May 2026 | Fattoria Rovello, Province of Foggia

Fattoria Rovello, an educational farm in the Province of Foggia, hosted an experiential learning activity grounded in the synergy between the NRRP-funded GPSeducation project and the Erasmus+ ENGINE project. GPSeducation aims to strengthen international academic cooperation through teaching and research in sustainable development, while ENGINE focuses on fostering rural development through entrepreneurship and innovation. The event, attended by students and academic staff, explored the role of educational farms as instruments promoting social inclusion, wellbeing and place-based learning. Fattoria Rovello itself represents a model of social entrepreneurship by implementing animal-assisted therapy activities for children and residents of a nearby nursing home.



[Read more on ENGINE' website](#)



Why it matters?

The event illustrated how agricultural functions, education and community wellbeing can be integrated in practice-oriented rural entrepreneurship learning.



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Blisko Nauki hosts a dissemination event on ENGINE and rural development

7 May 2026 | Blisko Nauki Association

A meeting with members, supporters and collaborators of the Blisko Nauki Association was dedicated to disseminating information on the international ENGINE project implemented under Erasmus+. The event combined inspirational and workshop-oriented elements and created a platform for discussion on international cooperation, European project management and rural entrepreneurship development. In her presentation, Prof. Katarzyna Żmija of Krakow University of Economics, coordinator of the ENGINE project, emphasised that the project addresses significant social and economic challenges, including rural depopulation and the mismatch between higher education programmes and the specific characteristics of entrepreneurship outside urban centres. Participants were introduced to how ENGINE supports future rural leaders through educational resources tailored to the realities and potential of rural regions.



[Read more on ENGINE' website](#)



Why it matters?

The meeting strengthened dissemination beyond the university context and linked ENGINE with public discussion on rural development challenges and educational responses.

Next consortium meeting in Greece

The next ENGINE consortium meeting will take place on 14–15 October 2026 in Greece. The meeting will be an important opportunity for partners to move forward with the development of EDUPACK, discuss the next steps in preparing its educational modules, and align the work leading to the pilot phase, which will be carried out at each partner university in the next stage of the project. This will help ensure that the package is practical, adaptable and relevant across different academic and rural contexts.

Stay connected

The ENGINE Newsletter shares project updates, partner activities, regional insights and resources developed as part of the project. Follow the next stages of ENGINE as the consortium moves towards the development of EDUPACK and the preparation of practice-oriented learning materials for rural entrepreneurship and innovation education.



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ENGINE
Education for Rural
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