

Sustainability of rural areas: a participatory approach

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- Objective: to understand what the stakeholders think about sustainability of rural areas: Participatory approach
- First general overview of some rural areas in Europe
 - Employment changes used as an indicator of the industry structure in rural areas (secondary data research)
- Second, results of a survey of the opinions and priorities of rural stakeholders about sustainability (Delphi-type approach)
- Further research

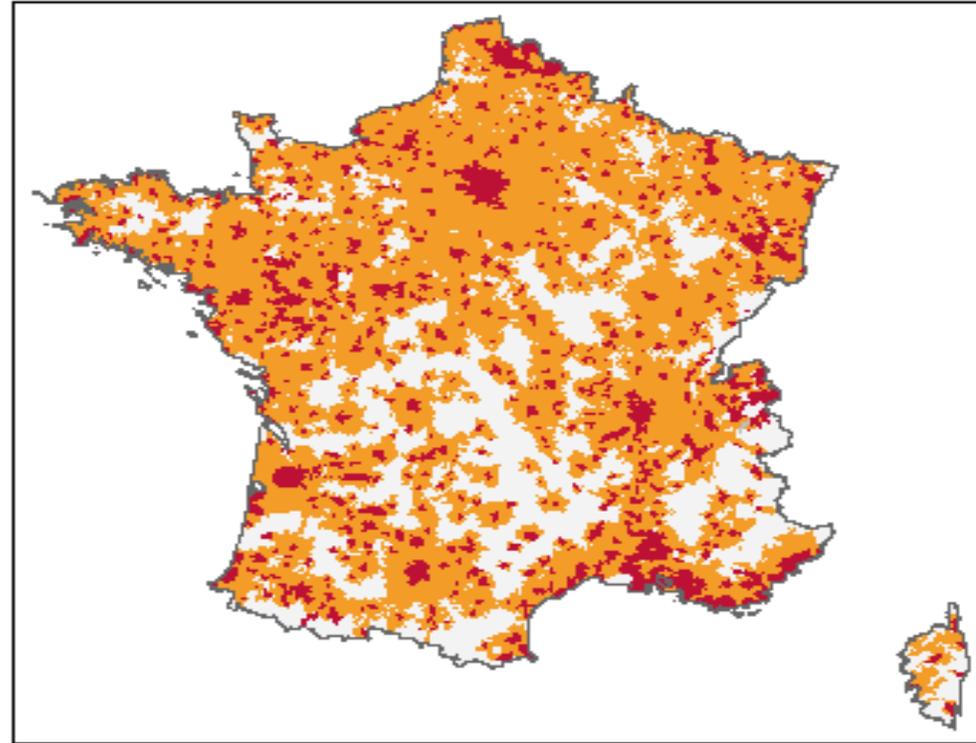


Rurality in Europe

- Approximately 44% of land in the EU is classified as rural
- In some EU Members states majority of population is rural (Slovenia, Romania, Ireland), but on average in 2021 only 25.2%
- Rural areas undertake both structural and geographic transformation
 - Structural - decline in the relative share of agriculture in rural economy and in employment
 - Geographical – rural-urban divide not a clear cut - transition dynamics– many people live/work in the so-called hybrid areas - peri-urban, suburbs, peripheries (H Ducros, 2020)
- Issues concerning rural development require interdisciplinary research approach

To exemplify some trends from rural regions we studied

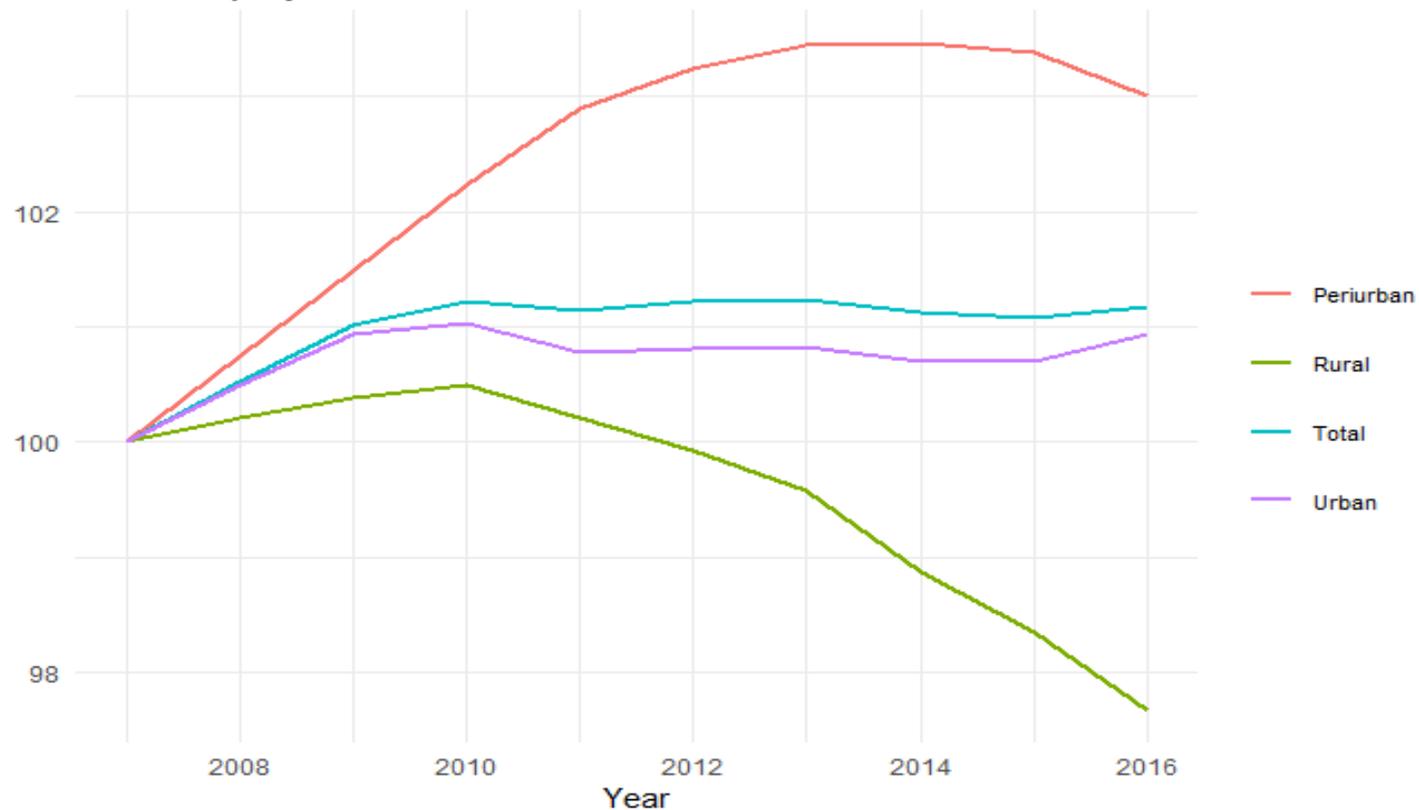
- France



Degree of urbanization

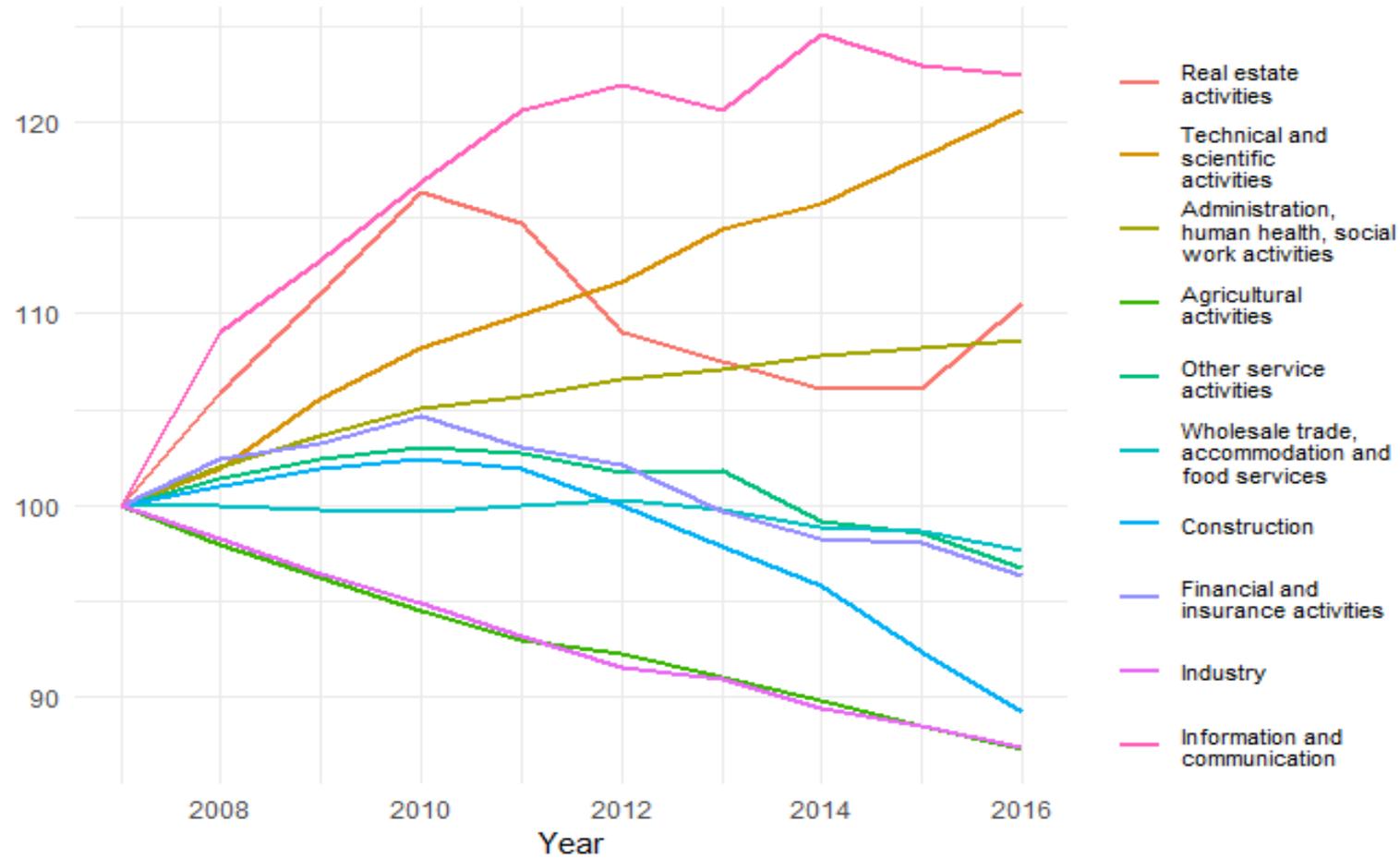
- Periurban
- Rural
- Urban

France evolution of employment depending on type of municipality (index base 2007=100)



Source: Verdine, L., Desjeu, Y., Larmet, V., Latruffe, L (2020)

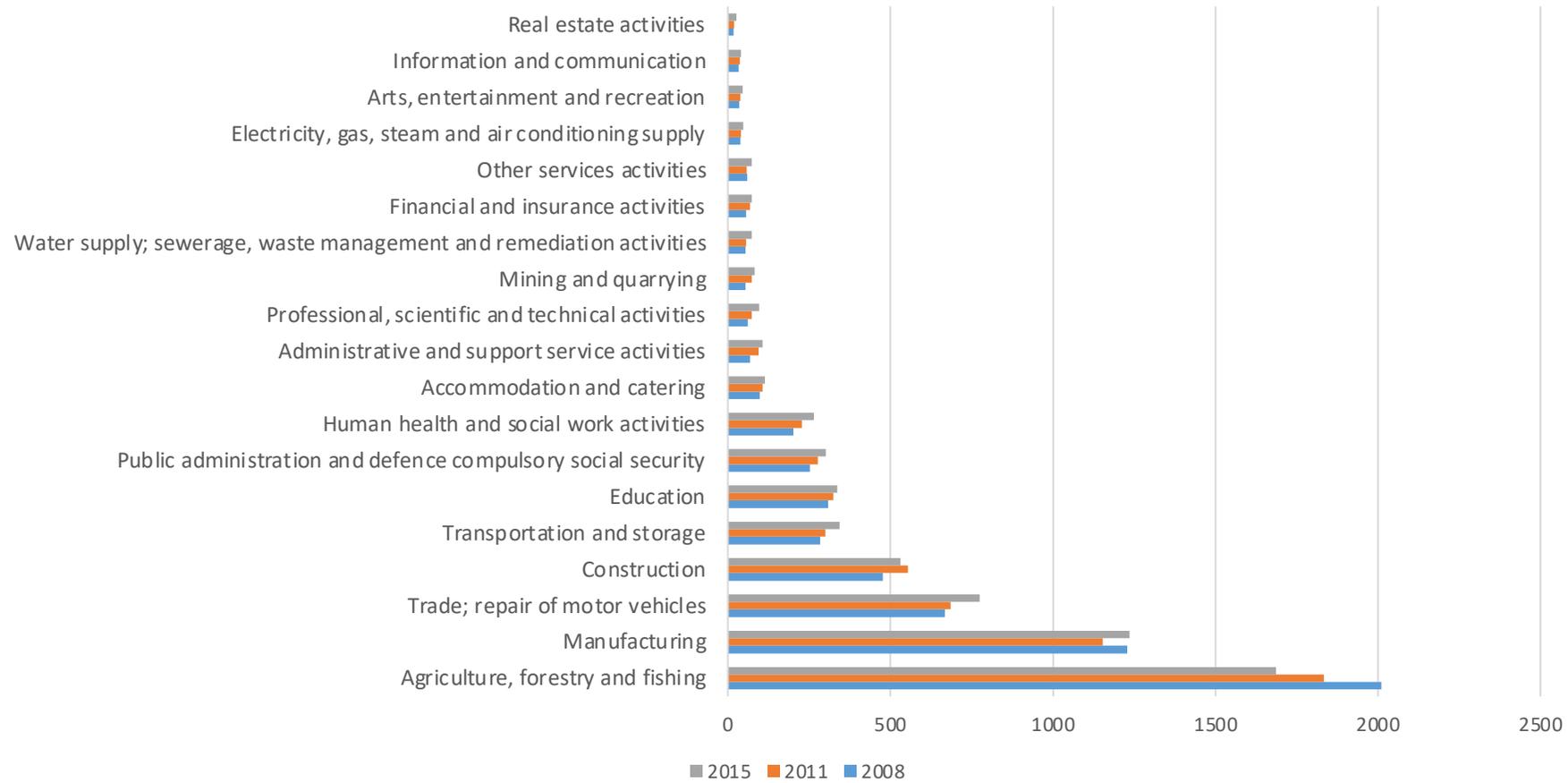
France: evolution of employment by sector (index base 2007=100)



France: Public policies for rural development

- Two major policies targeting rural areas
- First, rural development policy (2nd pillar of the EU CAP) structural changes in agriculture, preservation of the environment and integrated rural development
 - Almost two thirds of the policy expenditure spent to protect or enhance the environment and the countryside
 - Almost a quarter supports the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry
 - Almost 10% of expenditure dedicated to support the improvement of living conditions in rural areas and the promotion and diversification of economic activities
- Second policy - a tax exemption programme targeted at firm creation and employment in rural areas (a wage subsidy in the form of employer payroll tax exemption)

Poland: Employed persons in rural areas by selected NACE (Statistical Classification of economic activities in the EU) sections (in 1,000)

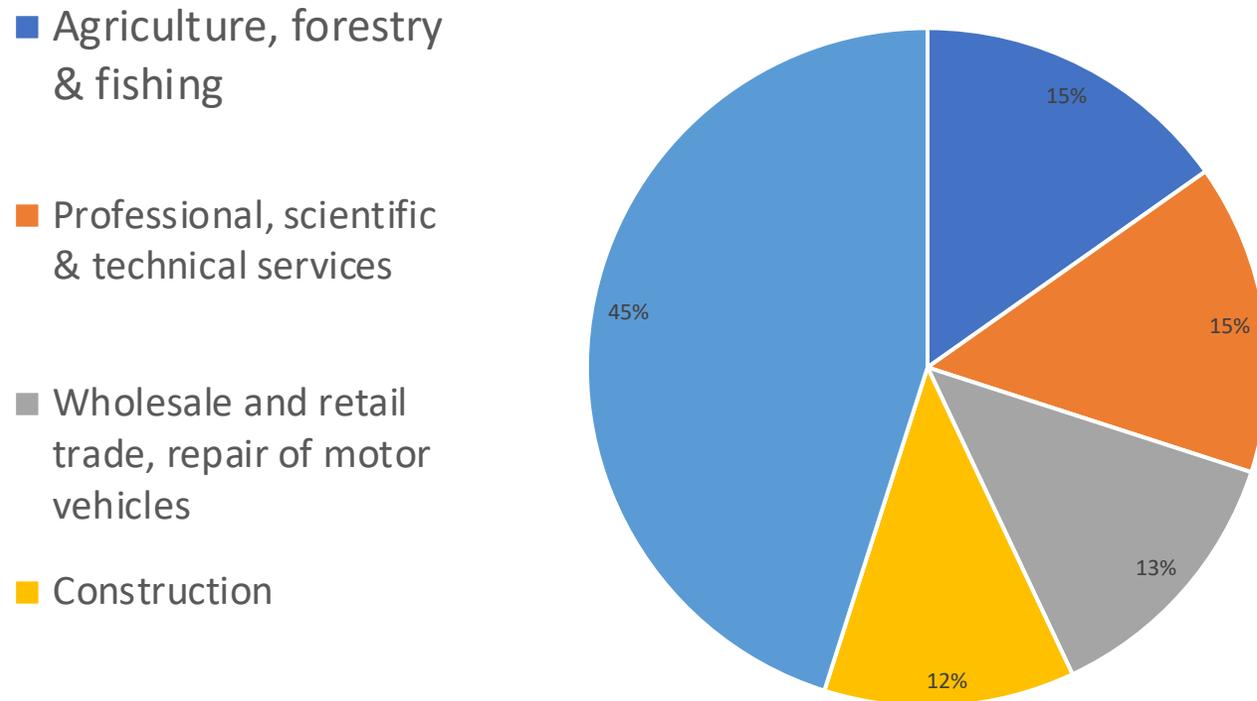


Source: (Statistics Poland, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017)

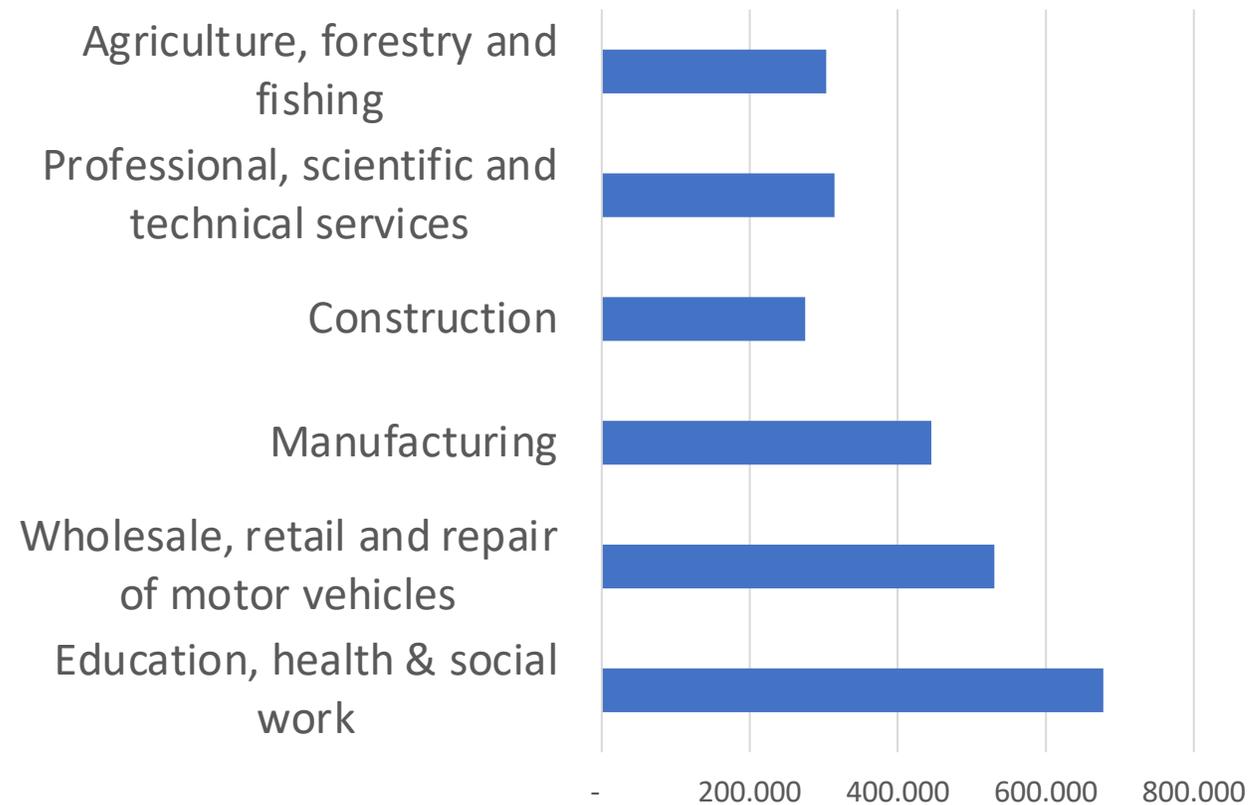
Poland: Policies for rural development

- Special social insurance scheme for farmers (national)
 - Highly beneficial in comparison to the common scheme in respect of contributions
- LEADER for small projects in rural areas (EU) average Euro 1.300
 - Focused on rural areas; bottom-up approach; Local action groups
- The biggest amounts of funds were paid on less-favoured areas
- A significant percentage was also paid on agri-environmental-climatic action (18.3%) and organic agriculture (6.9%)

United Kingdom: Rural sectors according to the registered rural businesses (%)



Number of people employed in rural areas by businesses registered in rural areas



Policies

- Still mainly for agriculture (Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University)
- EU LEADER
- The specific objectives of the programme include supporting small businesses and farm diversification; boost rural tourism; increase farm and forestry productivity; provide rural services as well as cultural and heritage activities
- Between 2015 and 2020, as part of the Rural Development Programme for England, there was a total of Euro 155 million available

Comparison between the cases

- Economic structure of rural areas is becoming more diversified and less reliant on agriculture
- Agriculture not anymore the largest employer in rural areas (exceptions in most agricultural countries as e.g. Poland)
- There are different EU level and national policies to support rural development and rural employment, but predominantly based on the second Pillar (Rural Development) of the EU Common Agricultural Policy

What are the views about sustainability of these rural areas

- We wanted to see the desirability, feasibility and priorities of rural sustainability
- Focused on the three pillars of sustainability (Economic, Social and Environmental) and attributes within the pillars
- Touched upon political feasibility according to groups that may support or oppose a further drive to sustainability
- Used Delphi type approach to investigate the priorities of rural stakeholders that can inform policies that may generate support

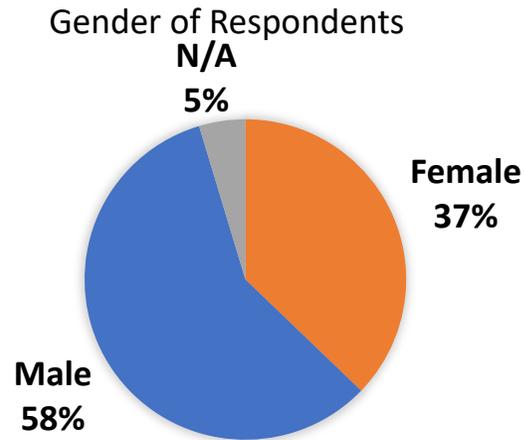
Some definitions of sustainability that have guided Delphi

- The ability of humanity “to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future, 1987)
- “The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems” (Agyemang et al., 2003)

Implementation

- Two rounds of questionnaires
 - First – priority Pillars, political economy
 - Second – more details of ranking attributes within Pillars of sustainability
- Send to approximately 200 stakeholders from a list compiled by project partners
- We provided information to stakeholders about the study
- Provided feedback - a summary of answers after each round
- Anonymity – different rounds of responses only electronically linked by tokens without researchers knowing who is the respondent

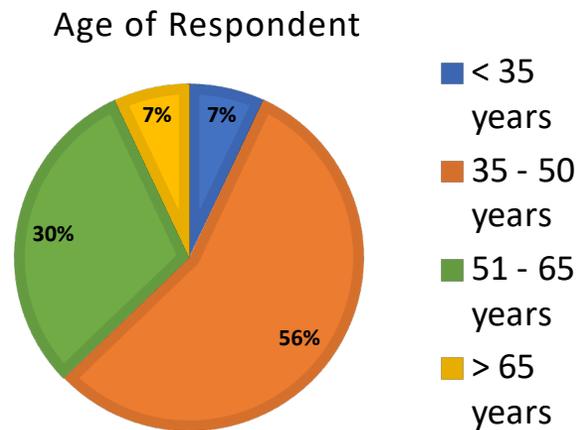
Respondents' characteristics



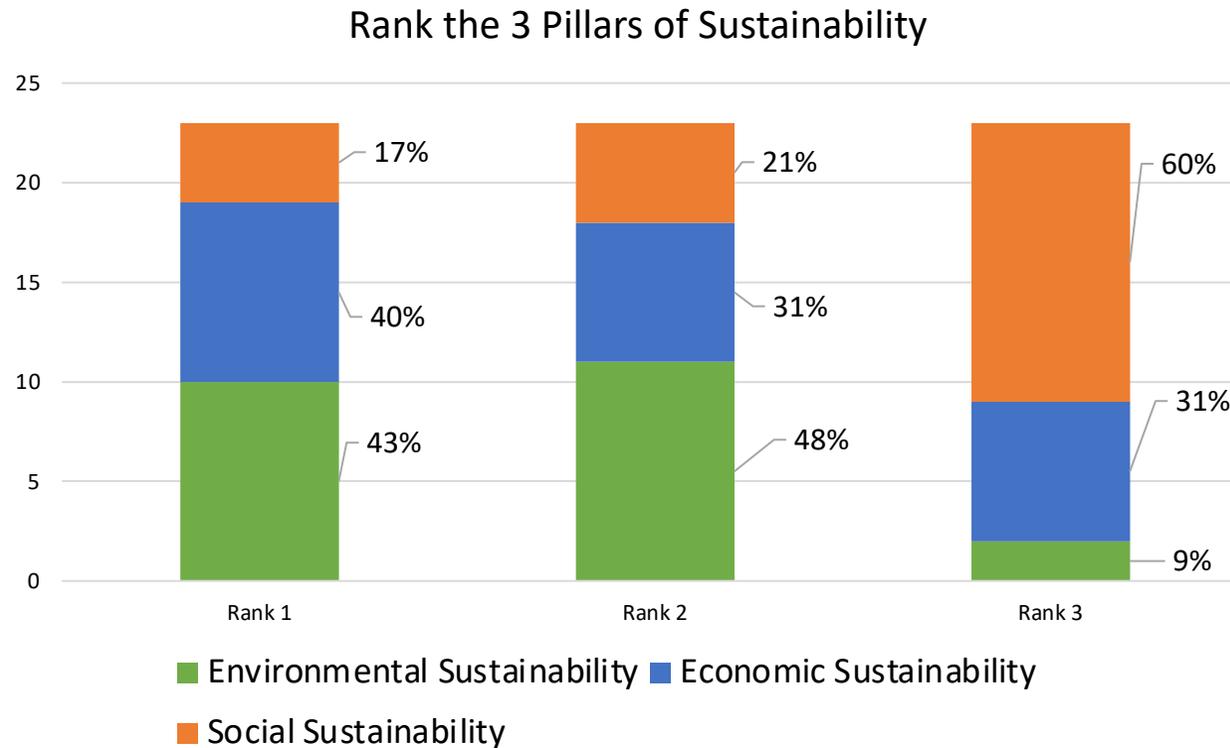
Majority researchers, 35 - 50 years of age

The second group that responded were people working for NGO

The third was the so-called 'Other' group including consultants, project managers, employees in business support organizations, public local administration and government organizations

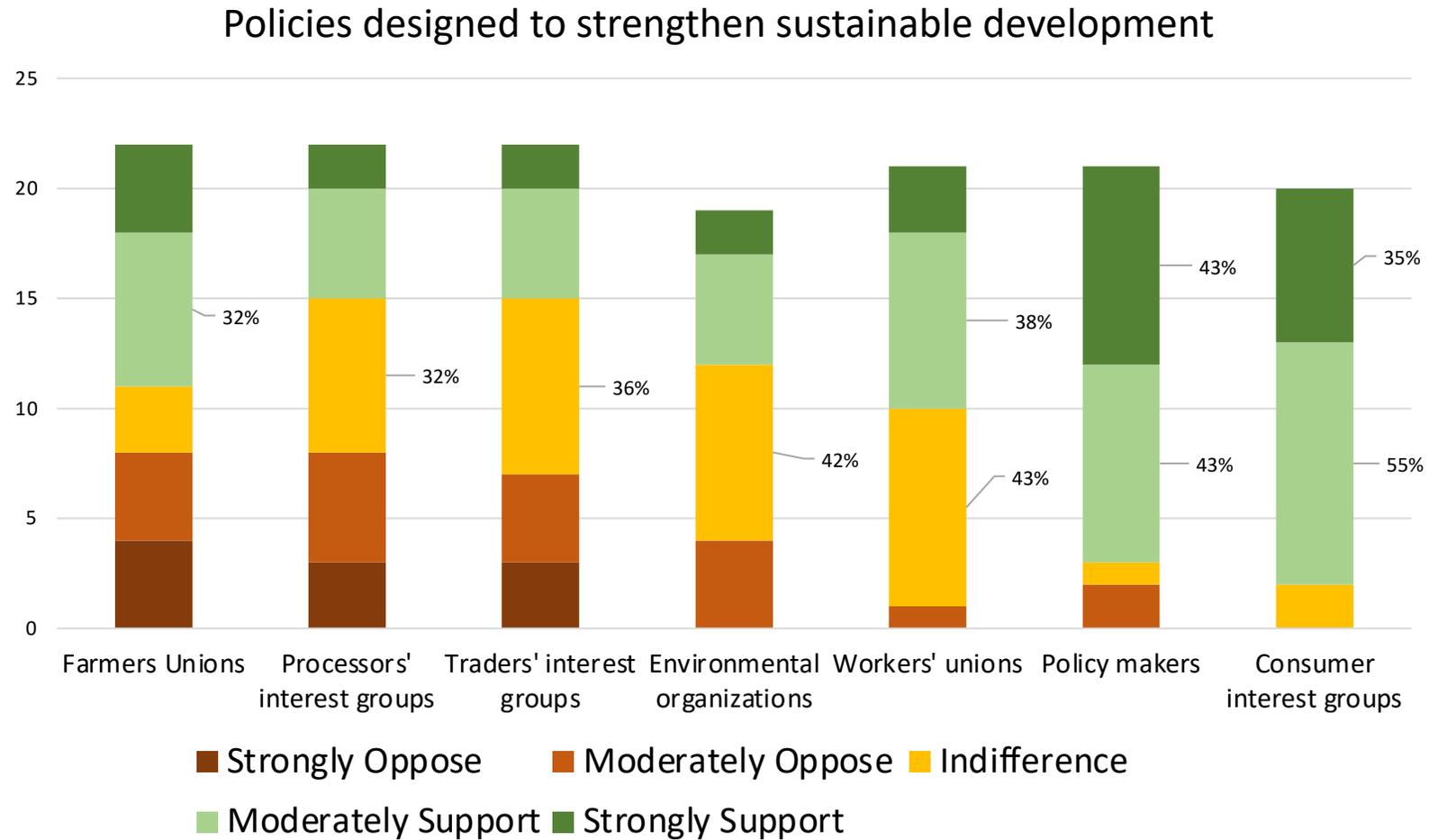


Visualisation Round 1: Pillars of sustainability

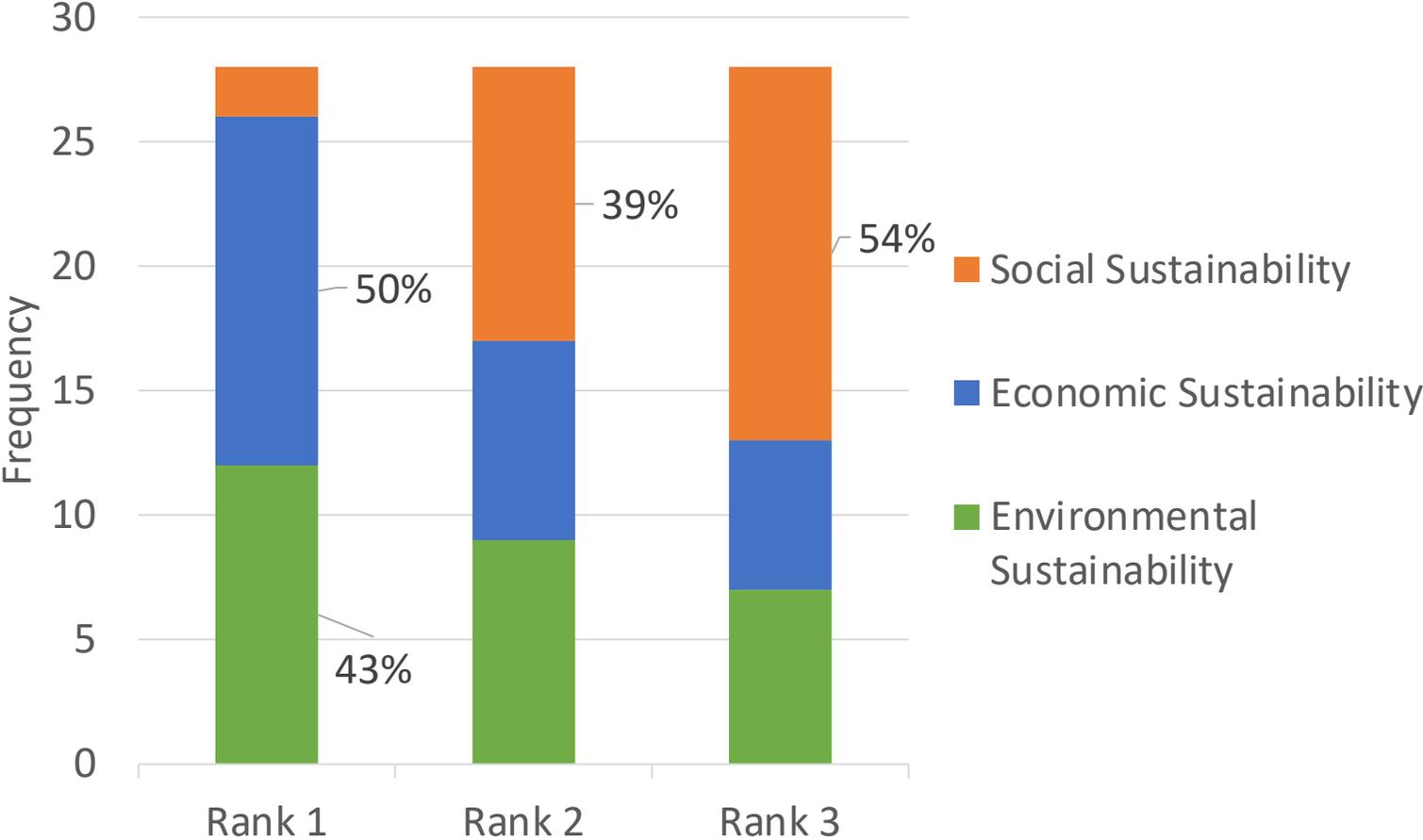


These rankings did not appear to differ by age group or area of work experience in any noticeable pattern

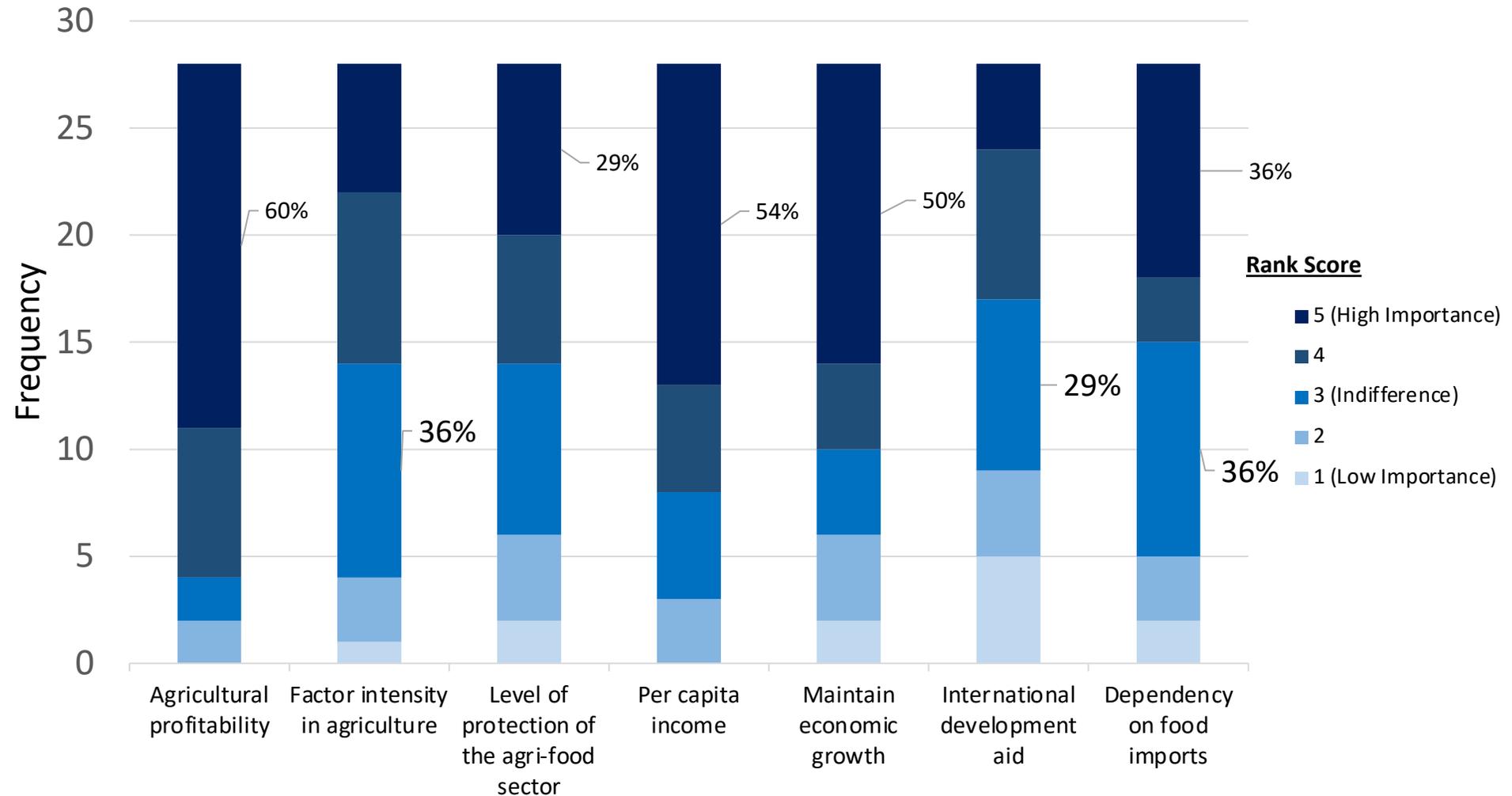
Visualisation: Political economy aspects



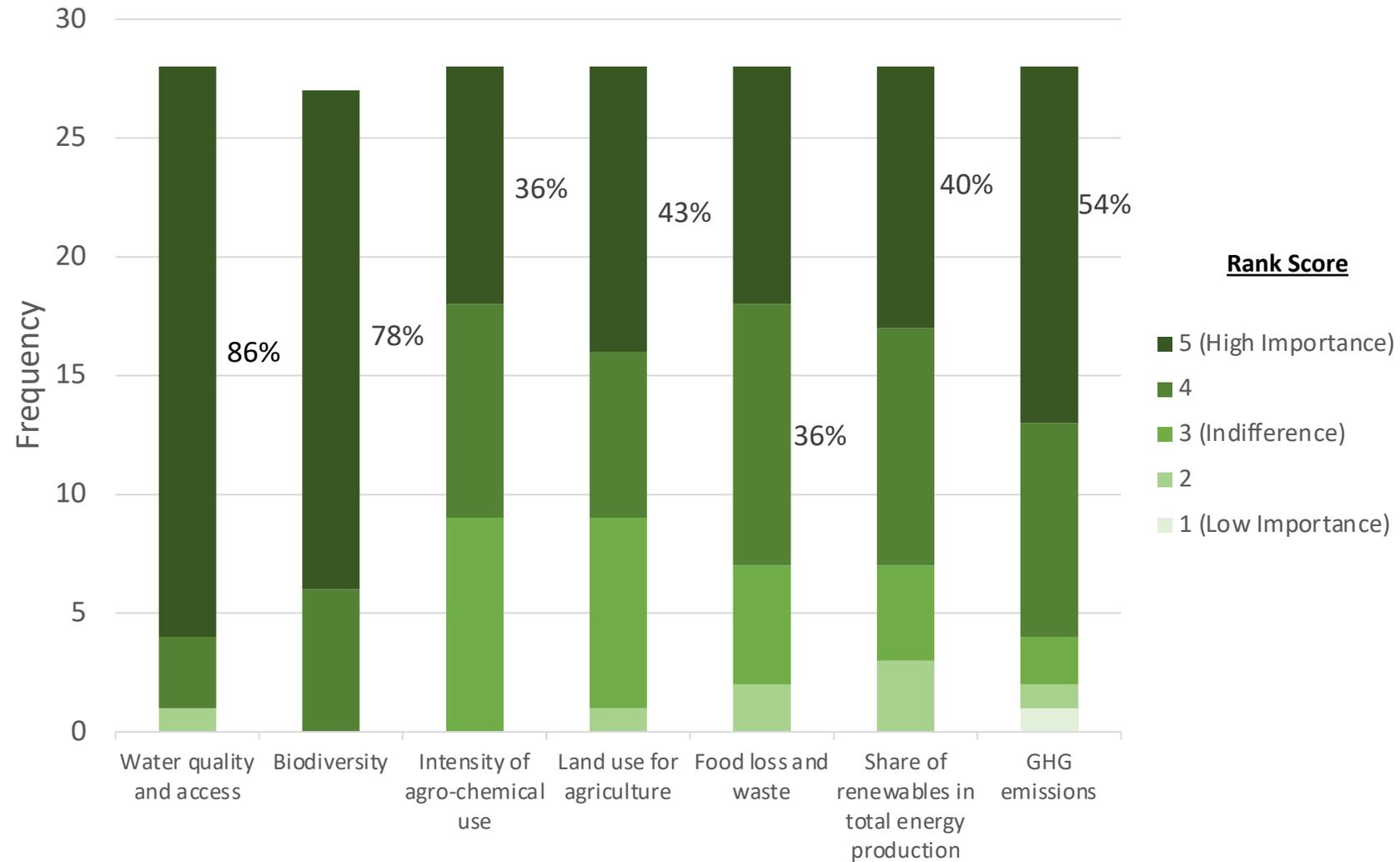
Visualisation: Round 2 Ranking of pillars of sustainability



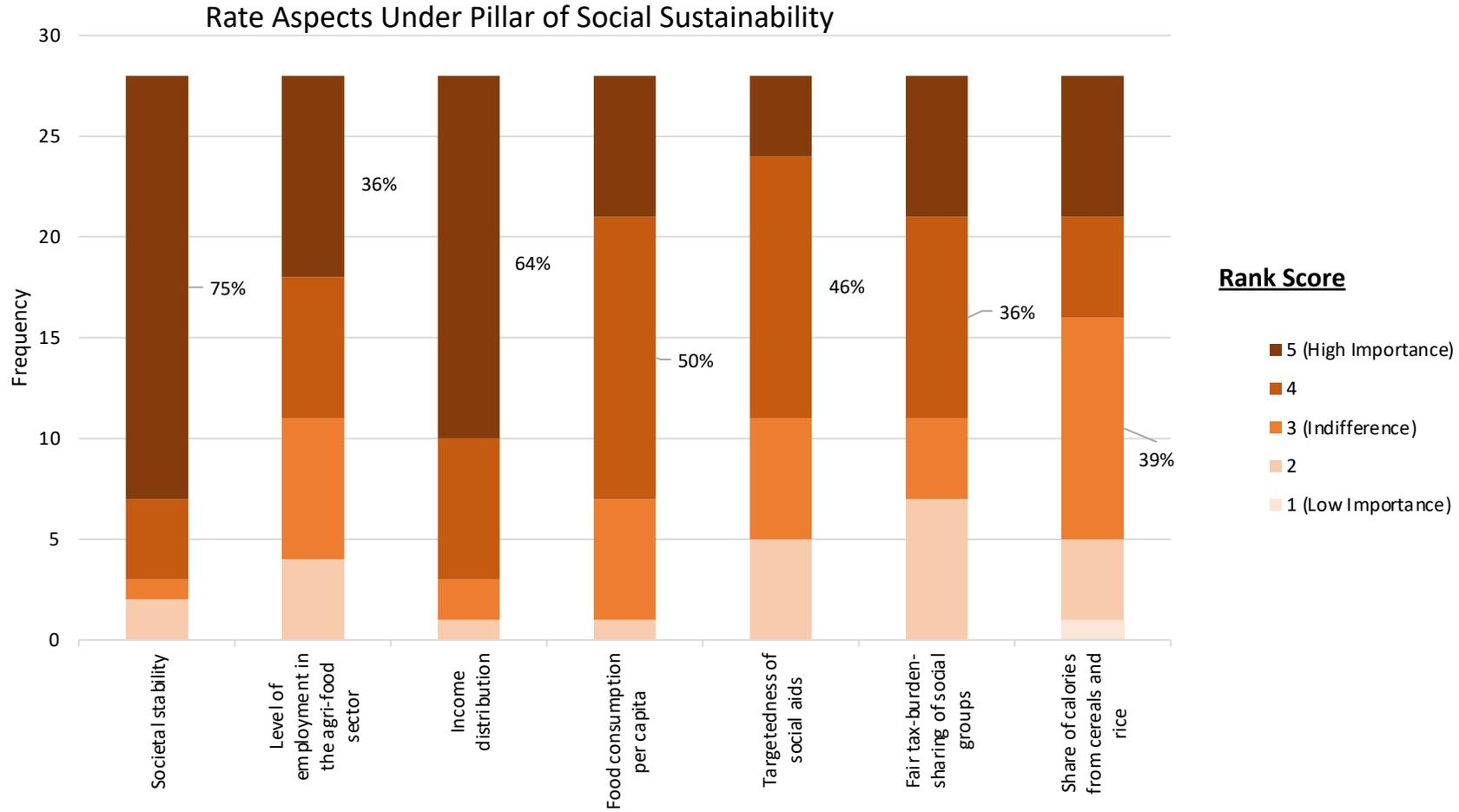
Visualisation: Attributes within economic pillar



Visualisation: Attributes within environmental pillar



Visualisation: Attributes within social pillar



Conclusions and further work

- Participatory approaches useful to provide new evidence on priorities and concerns of different stakeholders
- Our study shows change of opinions on the most important pillar of sustainability due to costs of living crisis and decrease in real disposable incomes - switch of priorities from environmental to economic pillar
- Researchers and policy community working on sustainability have to bear in mind that under poverty and raising costs the short-term interests prevail over longer-term environmental concerns
- Education of stakeholders should be a continuous task
- Main limitation of our research - low response rate (21% R1, 12% R2)
- Further research
 - study the general of public opinion – panels of 1000 respondents stratified by age, occupation, place of living in the Germany, Hungary and the UK
 - expanding to developing countries to investigate differences in preferences according to poverty

Thanks for your attention!