



Extending LEADER Innovation Workshop highlights

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From its inception LEADER has sought out, enabled and cultivated rural innovation. This role has increasingly been challenged by LEADER's wider application, cases of rigid interpretation, evolving rural needs and the emergence of other instruments in an increasingly crowded field. Recent events such as the Cork 2.0 Conference stress the importance of rural innovation and its wider contribution; but what is the LEADER niche today and how can LEADER best adapt and contribute more? Informed by selected LAG experiences this workshop focused on how LAGs and other actors can strengthen and improve rural innovation in LEADER at all levels, extending its scope and raising ambitions.

Event information

Title: Extending LEADER Innovation

Date: 22 February 2017

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 90 representatives of Local Action Groups (LAGs); Managing Authorities (MAs); and National Networks

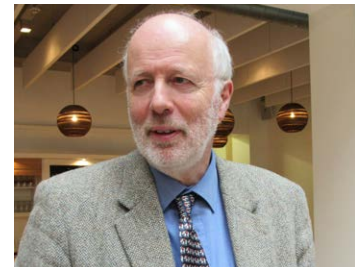
Outcomes: A series of action points and agreement to form an innovation practitioner led working group

Web page: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-seminar-smart-leader_en

WHY DO WE NEED STRONGER RURAL INNOVATION IN LEADER?

Bill Slee: James Hutton Institute

Bill highlighted that innovation is central to economic recovery and creating growth, both incremental and radical innovation forms are needed. Although innovation can arise through serendipity, major challenges require policy driven innovation support frameworks. LEADER won't be a major player in commodity scale or disruptive innovation. LEADER needs to find a niche in the 'innovation ecosystem', using its modus operandi strategically, pursuing its local priorities, developing new local (innovation) alliances across multiple constituencies, piloting new methods, exploring and stimulating new ways of doing things. Each LAG needs to face the challenge, accepting that innovation is risky but managing that risk, showing that things could be done differently and producing enhanced outcomes. LEADER support for tourism, local food etc. is typical incremental innovation. Does this add enough; do we need more innovation or better roll out of known knowledge? LEADER must renew and revitalise itself to recapture its edgy, pioneering spirit. It must engage with innovation or it will become marginalised, must find its niche, but not grow complacent in it, create added value, be an enabler of innovation, the midwife not the baby!



CONNECTING THE DIFFERENT WORLDS OF RURAL INNOVATION Inge van Oost (DG AGRI, Unit B.2)

Getting 'ideas into practice with success' is the key aim of innovation. It is essential to 'stop talking about problems, instead spend time talking about the solutions'. Inge stressed the importance of 'interactive innovation' and 'cross-fertilisation' particularly in tackling complex challenges by 'connecting actors, making them work together and find solutions which work in practice', developing opportunities for innovation. That is why the interactive innovation model applies both in EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

and H2020 Multi-Actor projects. Activating Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) is a key support to innovation. EIP networking and the use of "practice abstracts" fuels knowledge flows between regions' and countries' AKIS thus incentivising innovation and connecting science, practice and relevant innovation actors. The Operational Groups differ from LAGs, they involve a specific mix of complementary actors to target a specific practical problem/issue, no common local territorial link is necessary.

THE LEADER NICHE: WHAT DOES LEADER DO BEST, WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE BETTER

Working in small groups, participants identified those aspects where they thought LEADER did best in rural innovation and those where it most needs to do better.

Does Best:

- Linking different actors and sectors, brokering
- A 'midwife' for local innovation
- Is an experimental space, pilots new approaches
- Place based strategy drawn up using local knowledge
- Supports the transition from idea to project
- LAGs create the space for discussion and sharing ideas
- Open to taking a risk
- Involves local people to identify local needs

Could do better:

- Allow room for risk, possible failure and the unknown
- Communicate innovation results better
- Innovate in how LEADER does things
- Broaden involvement - link with universities and researchers to identify innovators
- Link with other EU funds, act as enablers
- Improve synergies between LAGS and EIP OGs
- Get out more and meet people face to face
- Strengthen innovation focus within strategies

EXPERIENCES OF LEADER INNOVATION ON THE GROUND

Three LEADER LAGs presented their distinctive approaches to working with and promoting rural innovation, their full presentations are available on the event web page.

Joaquin Lopez Munoz, Tagus LAG (ES): SMART LEADER



'Innovation doesn't come spontaneously; LAGs can help' and tackle the 'rural mile', those factors such as peripherality, loss of young people and lack of critical mass which can inhibit rural innovation.

Tagus LAG's LEADER Smart Specialisation method strengthens governance and links to other innovation support, e.g. RIS3, H2020 and Operational Groups. It involves focusing on a territory's clearly defined competitive advantages, concentrating on one priority and being 'excellent at one thing, rather than OK at many - finding your niche'. Such channeling can enhance innovation and catalyse clusters of economic activity. Tagus focused on the local cheese, 'La Torta' which linked multiple local sectors and led to the creation of a 'bank of ideas', a 'European and regional cheese route' and shepherding development along with 'collateral effects' on local innovation capabilities.

Andreas Kupfer, Trauinviertler Alpenvorland LAG (AT): Nature of Innovation



NOI involves three rural LAGs and one city. By cooperating they seek to bring greater diversity,

exchange and new experience to innovation, pushing boundaries by combining resources, boosting and driving innovation culture, addressing key topics and delivering new solutions.

Their participative user oriented 'Design thinking' method involves working in 'problem' and 'solution' spaces in six main stages, from comprehension through development to testing. Individuals and organisations from different disciplines are now working together in one innovation platform for the first time to develop 10 projects contributing to CLLD strategy priorities. This approach encourages continuous refreshing of the stakeholders involved (focusing more on end-users and customers). The project offers a toolbox of over 100 methods and principles to LAGs.

Nynne Larsby Friis, Midt-Nordvestsjaelland LAG (DK): Experiences of Innovation



Innovation is not only a way of thinking, it is a way of acting, 'doing things in a new way' this LAG acts as architects

to create the innovative environment and stimulation. Working within a focus and framework around which innovation can be built is essential e.g. a local resource such as a landscape, an experience or a network. 'Edge of the box' innovation rather than thinking out of the box and taking a leap into unknown space increases the chances of practical delivery and success.

The LAG's method comprises three steps: brainstorming focused on selected topics, selecting the best ideas, then piloting and 'maturing' the best projects. The focus is provided by their Local Development Strategy, focusing on Midt-Nordvestsjaelland as Copenhagen's 'creative backyard', a breeding ground for innovative solutions to optimise living conditions and create jobs.

LEADER AND THE WIDER SCOPE OF RURAL INNOVATION



A lively panel discussion involving innovation practitioners, Inge van Oost (EIP AGRI & H2O2O), Adrien Guichaoua (SCAR AKIS), Martina Pertoldi (JRC), James O'Donnell (Copa-Cogeca), Jean-Marc Gautier (SheepNet H2O2O and Robustagneau OG) and Rein Dessers (Agropol) strongly supported greater integration in innovation support systems. These mechanisms need to be more actor based and driven. These should be capable of adapting to the diversity of rural areas and their specificities and should also contribute to one EU wide and well interlinked AKIS. Sharing and interacting is central to innovation processes with a need to gather knowledge from multiple actors, working together to find solutions and share results. LAGs can play a major role by providing a critical mass of local connections, expertise, knowledge and ideas but they themselves need to look beyond a solely local focus towards wider opportunities.

WORKING GROUPS AND THEIR OUTPUTS

Three working groups explored different rural innovation themes identifying factors which conditioned LEADER's contribution and the actions which could strengthen this.

Workshop 1 – Building synergies and strengthening links

This workshop looked at strengthening LAG partnerships, building links both local and regional and working with other rural innovation actors. Anne-Charlotte Legras (Seine Aval LAG FR), Christina Kalatha (Paronas LAG GR) and Kriistina Jokelainen (Arctic Rural Communities Cluster FI) shared their innovation experiences with the group.

Immediate actions identified were to:

- Share examples of LAGs working with other parties, set up a Practitioner Working Group to exchange and learn from one another.



LEADER stakeholders should create a platform involving all rural innovation stakeholders in sharing knowledge and encouraging them to work in a common direction. Broaden LAG partnerships and engage with or include Operational Groups, academic researchers and other sectors of the RDPs to improve synergies. This may be challenging as OGs and LEADER work in different worlds and are often not aware of each other. LEADER needs to strengthen its innovation credibility and identify its Unique Selling Point to enable it to work in that niche. Improving the communication and information flows and building connections with participants met and engaged with at this event will aid this.

Workshop 2 – Synergies and Partnerships

Practical experiences of innovation and involving different types people of were provided by Albert Puigvert Tuneu (LAG Ripolles ES), Anni-Mari Isoherranen (LAG Keskipiste FI), Vasilieios Bellis (LAG Karditsa GR) and Pierre-Bernard Van Acker (LAG Hageland+ BE).

Immediate actions identified were to:

- Establish Thematic Groups under the LAG to focus on topics such as youth, migrants, minorities;
- Proactively go out into each area to promote LEADER and identify local ambassadors;
- Cooperate with more university faculties and researchers – use the rural area as a 'testing platform'.



'Innovation is the LEADER Yeti, more talked about than seen', how can this be addressed? Participants encouraged the use of multiple funds to deliver strategies. They saw the empowerment of groups as essential along with encouraging new, especially young people to get involved. Continuity can be good, but 'aged partnerships' can narrow perspectives and frames. New people 'come up with surprises' new ideas and ways of doing things, explore experiences from other areas. Bureaucracy and administrative burdens can sometimes be seen as an obstacle to innovation and the ability to access knowledge.

Workshop 3 – From innovatory strategies to innovative projects

Practical examples of how to turn innovatory strategies into innovative projects were given by Tonny Selles and Mireille Groot Koerkamp (LAG De Kracht NL), Maris Cirulis (LAG Zeid Zeme LV), Hanna-Leena Talvensaaari, (LAG Pohjoisin Lappi FI) and Thomas Wallrich and Philippe Eschenauer (LAGs Moselfranken and Miserland DE).

Immediate actions identified were to:

- Deliver local Innovation Workshops for LAG Boards to identify what innovation looks like at local level and emphasise the need to turn ideas into successful practices.
- Animate exchanges about inspiring examples, share information about innovative projects from other funds or other areas to generate and nurture innovative ideas.



A good innovative strategy and supportive LAG Board is essential in providing a strong and solid innovation support structure. The LAG has to be brave initially and fund innovative projects and should look back and keep learning from past or even from failed innovations. Outreach is needed to discover bankable projects and they may need a lot of support to develop into viable projects. LAGs need to be encouraged to think beyond LEADER and act as a 'brokerage' across the whole innovation system, accepting some projects may go elsewhere. See the evidence of interesting results when 'innovators are put with innovators'.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The rural innovation policy landscape is very diverse. The understanding and definition of innovation should not be top down and prescriptive. LEADER has huge potential to address new challenges, find synergies and add value but needs to find its own niche.

Information flows are key to innovation, LAGs contribute local knowledge but need to look beyond the local, their enabling role can be critical in closing the gaps. Improved LAG capacity, tools and conditions are needed to strengthen links, synergies and information flows with other rural and regional innovation stakeholders e.g. Operational Groups and the other ESI funds.

Questions were raised regarding the extent to which LEADER actually delivers rural innovation. LEADER actors can't be complacent and must intensify their rural innovation actions identifying small quickly implemented practical steps, inside and outside LEADER. This applies as much to the current LEADER strategies as it does to the future.

The ENRD CP will initiate a Practitioner Led Working Group to investigate, exchange and roll out ways of bringing LEADER's rural innovation model and tools up to date, improving the rural innovation contribution through new and different ways of working fit for today's needs and beneficiaries.

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