

## Pre-Conference Highlights

### Parallel Session: Supporting Businesses to Innovate

Moderator: Edina Ocsko, ENRD Contact Point

#### BACKGROUND

This workshop explored practical examples of methods and tools to support business innovation, the integrated use of public policies for business innovation, and ways of leveraging private investment.

The [Cork 2.0 Declaration](#) and OECD's [New Rural Policy 3.0](#) (NRP 3.0) recognise that rural businesses, including farms and forest holdings, of all types and sizes, need access to appropriate technology, state of the art connectivity, as well as new management tools to seize the opportunities and avoid the dangers of transformations taking place in rural areas.

The NRP 3.0 also suggests that innovation support actions should include smart specialisation strategies to increase productivity in economic fields where rural areas have specific advantages. The Cork Declaration adds that there is a need for strengthening social innovation, peer-to-peer exchange, networking and cooperation amongst farmers and rural entrepreneurs, as well as ensuring that these be better reflected in research agendas.

In this context, many EU Member States are experimenting with a range of more flexible policy tools such as accelerator programmes, digital hubs and partnerships between businesses and researchers to support rural entrepreneurs in their journey from early business ideas to successful scale-up.

#### PANELIST PRESENTATIONS



[The business accelerator approach](#)  
**Jan Willem van der Schans** Wageningen University The Netherlands

Business accelerators enhance start-up businesses by providing a structured environment involving peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, shared services, common space and face-to-face contacts.

Lessons from various accelerators around the EU indicate that they should be organised around challenges rather than sectors, support committed initiators with a passion for entrepreneurship and innovation and offer multiple sources of funding. Accelerators may not yield immediate results, there should be scope for piloting and refining programmes to adapt them to the specific needs of rural areas.

« *One of the key challenges is to understand the extent to which public funding (such as EU Rural Development Programmes) is able to facilitate these flexible accelerator approaches.* »



[Programmes & strategies to provide business innovation support in the Basque Country](#)  
**Jone Fernandez** HAZI Foundation, Spain

The Innovation Support Ecosystem set up by the Basque Government provides integrated support to business innovation by involving a wide range of institutions, programmes and funds. Their success relies on networking and good coordination among relevant stakeholders and public programmes.

The Basque Rural Development Programme provides a range of tools and measures which work in synergy to foster and facilitate innovative projects, build a culture of innovation and cooperation and transfer knowledge. This ecosystem is key to attracting new ideas and innovative businesses to rural areas.

« *Business innovation can best be supported through an Innovation Support Ecosystem that integrates and offers support to businesses and addresses their needs at different stages of development.* »



### Agri-food sector business innovation in remote rural areas in Portugal

**Gonçalo Amorin,**

Building Global Innovators, Portugal

In the small rural municipality of Indanha Nova in Portugal, an Agri-Food Accelerator Programme is achieving outstanding results in the face of major challenges. Indanha has lost almost 70% of its population over the past 50 years. However, the municipality and its citizens found that digital innovations in agriculture and food can offer new opportunities for the development of their territory.

The business accelerator programme supports both high-tech and more traditional, low-tech-based businesses. The programme managed to attract 32 applications and support six start-ups that successfully commercialised their products.

*« We need to work on identifying the right incentives that leverage private investment and engage private actors in supporting rural businesses. »*

### MAIN OUTCOMES FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

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- **Provide space to experiment** and public tools which allow failure.
- **Create a culture of innovation** building on local assets from early on.
- **Use smarter tools to support innovation** (such as peer-to-peer learning, innovation brokers, enablers).
- **Provide early public support** to create the conditions for private investment to take over.
- **Offer demand-led innovation support** based on identified business needs. Provide support throughout the life cycle, not just one-off. Avoid directive programmes.
- **Create synergies** between programmes and measures. Skills development must prepare for the future of work and life in rural areas.

More information at <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu> & <http://www.oecd.org/rural/rural-development-conference/>