

REPORT

Multi Actor Approaches: a key device for speeding up innovation

ROUND TABLE

23° European Seminar on Extension and Education – “Transformative learning: new directions in agricultural extension and education”

Mediterranean Agronomic Institute, Chania, Crete (GR) - 7 July 2017

Report of the Round Table

“Multi Actor Approaches: a key device for speeding up innovation”

Chair:

Simona Cristiano and *Patrizia Proietti*, Researchers at CREA- PB, the Council of Agricultural Research and Economics – Centre of Policies and Bioeconomy, Italy.

Panellists:

- *Lisa van Dijk*, Research Manager at the University of Bristol.
- *Riccardo Bocci*, Managing director of the Network of Rural Seeds.
- *Eelke Wielinga*, Independent consultant (Link Consult).
- *Michael Kuegler*, EUFRAS Board Member.

**Document produced within the National
Rural Network Program - file 25.2**

Managing authority: Ministry of Agricultural,
Food and Forestry Policies
DISR2 Office - Executive: Paolo Ammassari

Author: CREA

Scientific supervisor: Simona Cristiano and
Patrizia Proietti

Coordination: Simona Cristiano

Review of the document: Simona Cristiano,
Mara Lai and Patrizia Proietti

Video shooting: Mara Lai

Technical support, revision of texts and
layout: Laura Guidarelli

Editing video: Francesco Ambrosini

INDICE

1. Abstract	4
2. Goals of the Round Table	4
3. Results	5

1. Abstract

The socio-economic and environmental dynamics affecting agriculture and rural development (demand of global markets, quality and safety problems, provision of public goods, urban-rural relationships, climate changes, etc.) require an open and responsive system for generating innovation, based on user-centric and multiactor approaches. These approaches focus on cross-fertilisation of different types of knowledge (scientific, technical, organisational, practical) and involvement of potential users in knowledge sharing and development of innovations, which is beneficial for the construction of ownership and, consequently, for their implementation.

In terms of policy designs and arrangements, the concept of co-creation of innovation calls for a shift from research to innovation policies, which emphasize the role of governments in preparing the ground for specific context innovations driven by farmers, through supporting the establishment of networks and multiactor partnership.

According to Horizon 2020, the European Commission fosters trans-disciplinary and multi-actorial interrelations between enterprises, research and education, through research and innovation actions and thematic networks, with the aim of encouraging new integrated and sustainable development models.

Particularly, the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) is aimed to speed up EU research and innovation in agriculture and rural areas by linking policies, instruments and actors through an interactive innovation approach undertaken by operational groups.

The Round Table addresses practical issues pertaining how multiactor approaches work under different policy frameworks and respective delivery systems, their added value, the extent to which such approaches enable effective interactive innovation and bridge the gap among AKIS actors.



2. Goals of the Round Table

Discuss the key elements of multi-actor innovation projects to:

- get tips to improve the design and implementation of multi-actor approaches and instruments; and
- accelerate the use of results.

The discussion focuses on four main areas of interest:

- Enabling environment
- Effective interactive innovation
- Dissemination and impacts
- Multi-level governance framework



3. Results

What kind of environment do better enable the implementation of multi-actor approaches for innovation?

What type of policies and delivery systems better enable the AKIS to implement multi-actor approaches on innovation? What type of support is needed to boost capability development of AKIS' actors for interactive innovation? Which suggestions could you give to the public institutions involved in policy and delivery systems?

Different innovation paradigms coexist: innovation can be driven by science and research, by the market, or co-produced through multi-actor approach. The last enables to get solutions concretely useful for farmers, because co-created by them with all other actors. Different paradigms generate different meanings and understandings about innovation.

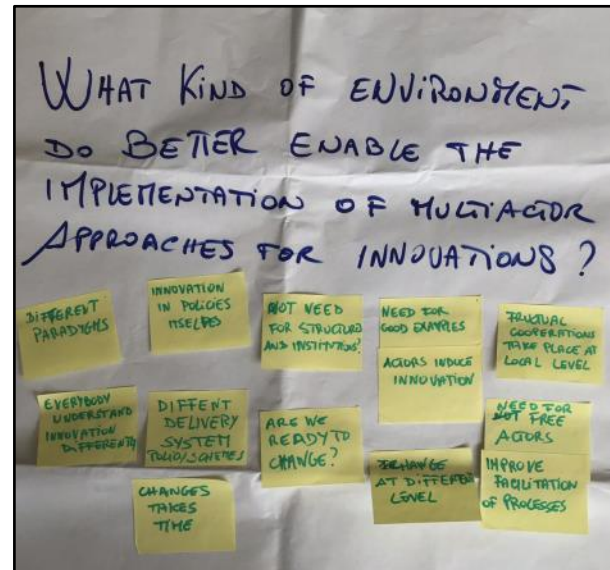
The multi-actor approach entails changes but not all the actors involved in the agri-food sector are ready to undertake these changes.

Local stakeholders show a greater responsiveness and are able to promote fruitful cooperations and to induce innovation. On the other hand, local policy makers still haven't a clear understanding about the multi-actor approach and its usefulness in terms of improving agricultural and food sectors' performance. Hence, the difficulty to implement multi-actor approach and, particularly, to put in place more appropriate tools that can help create an enabling environment for innovation.

Changes take time and have to involve different levels ([watch the video](#)).

Innovation should concern the same policies and procedures. In many cases, traditional procedures are applied to innovative measures (such as M16.1), creating barriers both in terms of access to support for new potential beneficiaries and time-efficient implementation of the measures themselves. Moreover, Countries using a regional programming approach experiments issues in creating an enabling environment, due to different delivery systems and policy schemes.

Creating the right environment entails the changing of actors' behavior, the creation of a common understanding about the meaning of innovation and a more power balance among actors of the food chain. To this aim, some actions could be useful:



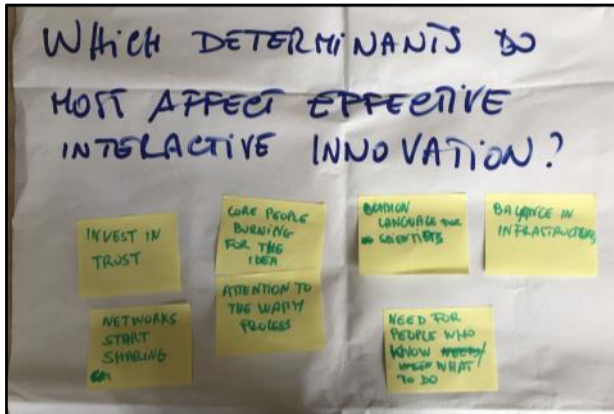
- **Collection of good examples** to be shared and **exchanges at different levels** can help creating an enabling environment and, particularly, getting through the message about the importance of the multi-actor approach to channel innovation.
- **Connection of resources and knowledge** already existing in a specific area. This might start from people who already know each other, without need for structures and institutions, although creating some space for farmers to participate and to take some risks when implementing a project can help raising their participation and boosting innovation.
- **Presence of intermediates** able to connect people, facilitate processes and foster the sharing of common understandings and languages. There's the need for free actors able to induce innovation. Today, links between farmers and researches had become weak and the reason lied mainly on the absence of third parties, the intermediates, who in the past were keeping together the networks (think to the strong advisory systems of the '80). Those people, mainly advisors, were not paid anymore by the government and as such they did not have time anymore to keep the networks running and contribute to enable the environment.

Which determinants do most affect effective interactive innovation?

In your experience (projects, thematic networks or operational groups), do multi-actor projects carry out a real interactive innovation? Which approaches/methods better support effective co-creation, co-production and co-ownership of innovation?

Interactive innovation is more likely to be successful when behind the planning and description of a project there is a 'core people burning for the idea', namely a **network of passionate people** really convinced about the value of an idea and willing to implement it.

Hence, the attention has to be focused on 'the warm process': the ignition of the idea, the group composition and its participants' willingness and engagement in developing it. Starting with a big group since the beginning is not necessary a good strategy. A big group who do not yet understand the idea and where not all actors are committed can contribute creating confusion and slowing down the process. It is



advisable to start with a small and enthusiastic group that define the details about the idea and that can motivate the others in a second stage.

Intermediate actors are often key players for connecting the right players in the system. They need to learn how to recognize if a group of actors has good potential, the patterns that can lead to innovation and how to create and support them ([watch the video](#)).

Trustiness is a key point. Indeed, most part of actors are not ready to participate in multi actor

projects: farmers often do not have the capacities to participate or to structure a project. On the other hand, researchers can perhaps write good projects but they struggle creating trust relations with farmers and other actors, and this results in projects that are not often really multi-actor. Effective interactive innovation asks for investing in trust.

The presence of **good infrastructures** that can support interactive innovation processes are also important. It is important, though, to find a good balance in relation to that, because in some countries there are too many infrastructures involved in innovation and that can create, to a certain extent, overlapping.

Networks are crucial, as they allow to share ideas and to initiate working together. Even though, actors have many available resources and the innovation process is likely to start independently, networks can contribute speeding up the process

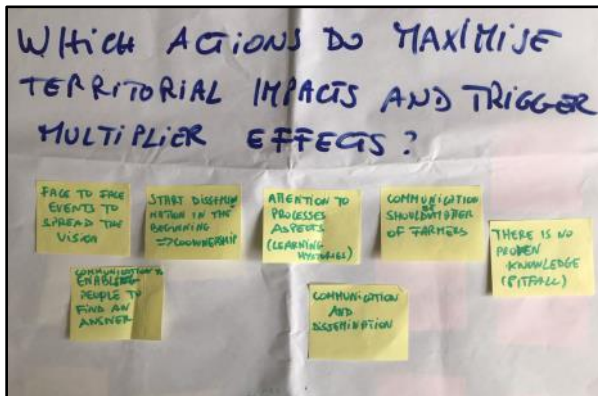


Which actions do maximize territorial impacts and trigger multiplier effects?

Which actions need to be strengthened in order to improve the territorial impact of multi-actor innovation projects and trigger multiplier effects? What institutional actions are required in order to support and give echoes to multi-actor processes?

Communication is very important as it enables people to find an answer. To be more efficient, “**communication should be matter of farmers**”, meaning that the potential users learn more easily from each other. Also, it should be clear that **there is no proven knowledge**: the essential element of dissemination is the connection between actors, the possibility to know and learn. Need for experiential communication.

Face-to-face events and fairs, where some space is created for actors to interact, is one of the best tools to improve dissemination. These events are important to spread results, but also to allow sharing a vision between different actors. The lack of common vision, particularly among farmers, is often considered an



issue in terms of creating interactive innovation.

Study visits for farmers or other activities that entail interaction with other actors should be envisaged in an innovation project, particularly for OGs. Unfortunately, the costs for such events are often not eligible for funding or reduced as much as possible, while these networking activities can have a positive impact in the development of the project.

Communication about a project should not be the simple description of what it has been achieved but it

should include also some additional guidelines and information to allow a better understanding of the project and its usefulness.

Dissemination should be planned and organized since the beginning of the project and embedded in the design of it, thus fostering a co-ownership process.

It should be targeted to different stakeholders. Special attention should be paid in disseminating information to policy-makers (administrative capacity building). Usually they do not know much about agriculture and research, while a better understanding of the importance of them would help also to frame policies more oriented to support innovation.

Need to **pay attention to processes** features. Dissemination should include information about the project's implementation process and not only focus on results. Sharing knowledge about implementation mechanisms and schemes (i.e. by using Learning histories) might increase efficiency and, also, quality of the results.

Information is a pitfall for dissemination. Pay attention to the difference between a communication aimed at informed and a communication aimed at disseminating: Communication and dissemination are often used with the same meaning. More attention must be paid to the difference between communication and dissemination: the first it has to be aimed at increasing the visibility of the project, the activities it carries out and the results it is producing, the second has to be addressed to transfer the results of the project and facilitate its practical use.



Which elements do hamper or speed up EIP innovation approaches?

Have you experienced effective linkages between multi-actor projects and thematic networks (Horizon 2020) with operational groups (rural development policy) and other innovation projects based on national / European policies? Which elements (political, administrative, bureaucratic, or other) hamper or speed up possibly synergies? What are your suggestions?



The **regulation concerning OGs is not appropriate** for encouraging interactive innovation, as it shapes a strictly project driven cooperation. There isn't enough time to develop innovation. Really, it is important to allow some space to the innovation process to happen. The results of an innovation process cannot be foreseen at the begin, hence it is important to envisage more **flexibility in implementing the project**. Interactive innovation asks for a space to understand/learn ([watch the video](#)).

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) should provide some **mechanisms for applying to the cooperation measure** aimed at rewarding those OGs connected to H2020 multi-actor projects or that implement their outputs at territorial level. This depends very much on the capacity of RDPs Managing Authorities (MAs) to understand the usefulness and the opportunities of implementing H2020 outputs at local level ([watch the video](#)).

Cross-border cooperation among OGs is key to increase their added value on Europe. It would be important to make an additional effort to facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing among them. The important lesson learnt with LEADER should not be forgotten ([watch the video](#)).

There's a **lack of skills and awareness about interactive innovation**, both in research and in RDPs Managing Authorities. Researchers difficulty understand their role in social relationships with other partners of multi-actor projects and hardly involve end-users in co-innovation process. Also, RDPs Managing Authorities are not aware of interactive innovation and this reflects on its implementation. There's a gap in what they think is needed and what is really needed.

Cultural change also includes the need to recognize the importance of intermediaries. **Guiding the innovation process is a separate job** and it is more than simple project management. This should be part of the project itself and often the MAs do not understand this and tend to underestimate the effort and capacities needed to run such projects.

Reporting about innovation projects may also be an issue in speeding up synergies. The experiences made during the innovation process should be gathered and reported, but it is very unlikely that this can be done using the traditional reporting templates. These experiences, though, are important to improve the implementation process. Some tools to allow reporting these lessons and experiences should be envisaged since the beginning of the project. Learning histories are an example. They tell the story, the actions and the results, in participants' own words (by means of



These experiences, though, are important to improve the implementation process. Some tools to allow reporting these lessons and experiences should be envisaged since the beginning of the project. Learning histories are an example. They tell the story, the actions and the results, in participants' own words (by means of

different documents, particularly in audiovisual form), in a way that helps the others move forward, without having to "re-invent" what a group of learners have already discovered ([watch the video](#)).

[Watch the complete video](#)



RETE RURALE NAZIONALE

Autorità di gestione
Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali
Via XX Settembre, 20 Roma

www.reterurale.it
reterurale@politicheagricole.it
www.facebook.com/reterurale