

A Multi-Actor Framework for Agro-Ecological Farming Systems in the European Union

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Introduction

The challenges of producing enough food and biomass while preserving soil, water and biodiversity cannot be solved only by dominant types of conventional agriculture. Agro-ecological approaches and eco-functional intensification are fundamental for sustainable food production in the future.

However, the provision of public goods together with market or private goods is not in balance and frequently not sustainable at farm or farm systems levels. The dilemma is how to produce public goods whilst having viable production of private goods, securing economic and social sustainability at a farm level which is not overly dependent on public funds. This dilemma has specific characteristics in different farm systems.

Understanding and Improving the Sustainability of Agro-Ecological Farming Systems in the EU (UNISECO) is an EU H2020 project aiming to strengthen the sustainability of European farming systems. It is co-constructing improved and practice-validated strategies and incentives for the promotion of improved agro-ecological approaches.

Intended impacts:

- improved methods to assess sustainability of agro-ecological approaches
- co-constructed mechanisms and policy instruments for delivering public goods through economically viable AEFS
- improved knowledge base of agro-ecological farming in the EU for use by actors, stakeholders and end-users
- inform the process of the CAP post-2020, revising environmental, social and economic policies

Multi-Actor Approach

The Multi-Actor Approach is a mechanism adopted by the European Commission's strategy for EU agricultural research and innovation¹. The aim is to 'boost demand-driven innovation and the implementation of research, creating synergies between EU policies', and increase impacts through process of genuine co-creation of knowledge.

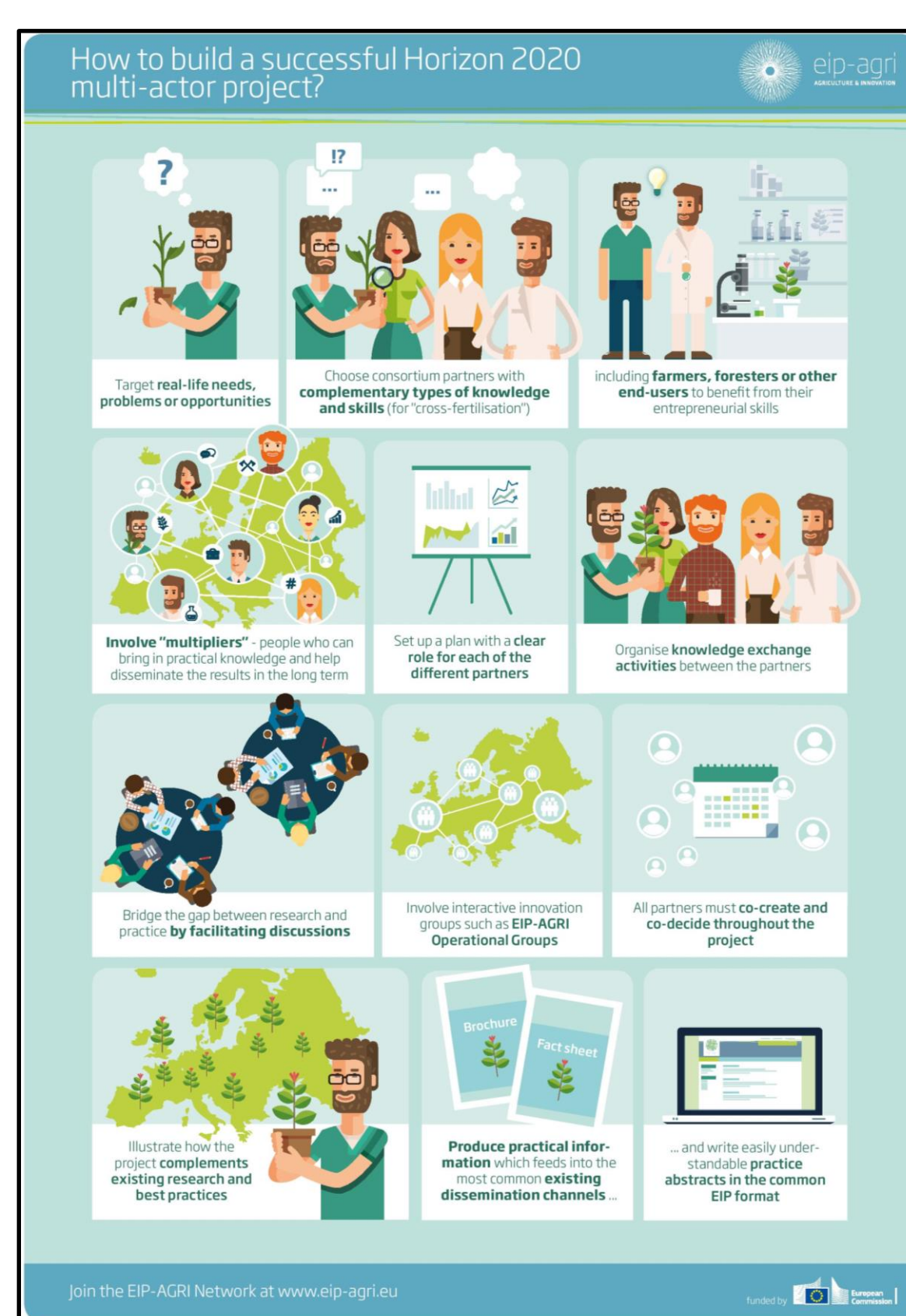


Figure 2. EIP-AGRI (2017). Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects.

The **Multi-Actor Approach** requires projects to focus on **real problems or opportunities** for farmers, foresters or other actors in value chains who need a solution ("end-users")².

The **Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)** will enable ongoing involvement and two-way exchange of ideas for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge with actors at European and local levels³. MAPs are a core part of the transdisciplinary approach of UNISECO.



Figure 1. European Commission Guide to Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects.



Figure 3. Translation of research into practice: Potatoes in Practice, James Hutton Institute, Dundee, UK, August 2015.

Transdisciplinary Multi-Actor Platforms in UNISECO

The MAPs and research consortium, across disciplinary boundaries and non-academic organisations, form an integrative transdisciplinary framework⁴.

The MAPs will co-create knowledge with actors in agro-ecological farming systems to implement sustainable management practices, develop and apply decision support tools, and policy support embedded in transdisciplinary research.

Forming the MAPs required criteria for membership, and establishing principles and processes of operation taking account of methods used, equitability, rights of participation, and purpose of research activity, including contemporary and emerging ethical issues.

Criteria for selecting members of the Multi-Actor Platforms

- Interest
- Availability
- Relevance
- Appropriateness
- Representativeness
- Willingness
- Gender
- Geography
- Age range

Figure 5. Criteria for selecting members of the Multi-Actor Platforms

Principles for operating Multi-Actor Platforms

- Respect
- Sharing
- Listening
- Attention
- Teamwork

Figure 6. Principles for operating the Multi-Actor Platforms

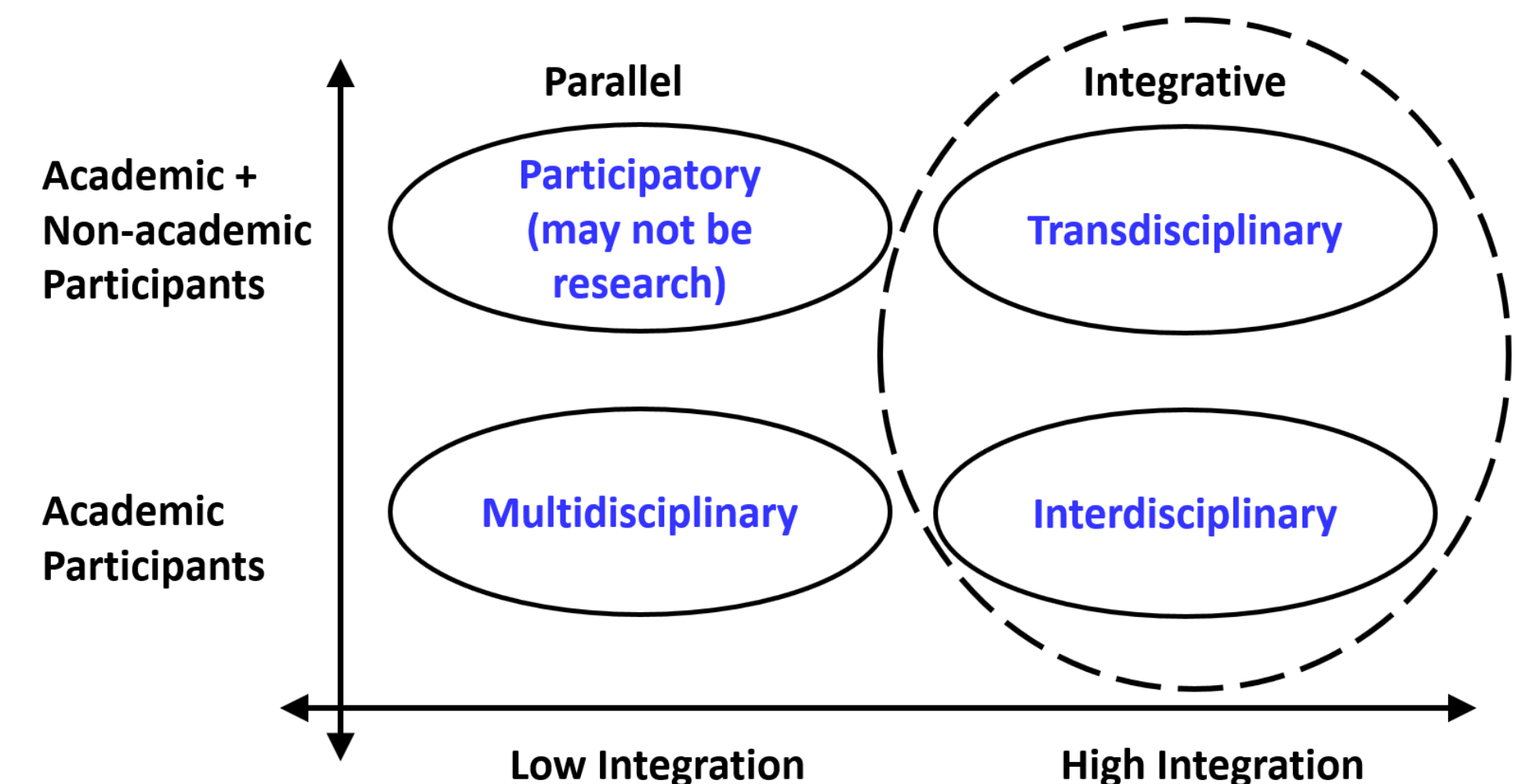


Figure 4. Degrees of integration and stakeholder involvement in integrative and non-integrative translation of research into practice (Source: Tress et al., 2004).

Next Steps

- Develop guidance for research projects working with Multi-Actor Platforms
- Co-develop the concept and implementation of Multi-Actor Platforms with the community of actors in agriculture and environment sectors
- Engage with members of the Multi-Actor Platforms on issues of policy and practice
- Evolve the membership of the Platforms to reflect changes in themes and their timing
- Monitor and evaluate the process

References

¹ European Commission (2016). A Strategic Approach to EU Agricultural Research & Innovation: Final Paper. European Commission, DG Agri, EIP-Agri, pp. 40.

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³ EIP-AGRI (2015). EIP Participatory Approaches for Agricultural innovation. European Commission, DG Agri, EIP-Agri, pp.12.

⁴ Tress, B., Tress, G. and Fry, G. (2004). Clarifying integrative research concepts in landscape ecology, *Landscape Ecology*, 10.1007/s10980-004-3290-4

More information about the project is available at www.uniseco-project.eu

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