UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGROECOLOGICAL FARMING SYSTEMS IN THE EU

A Multi-Actor Framework for Promoting Agri-environmental Governance in Rural Areas in the EU

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Multi-Actor Platforms

- **Multi-Actor Approach** adopted in European Commission Strategy for EU agricultural research and innovation
- Aim to ‘boost demand-driven innovation and the implementation of research, creating synergies between EU policies’
- Increase impacts through process of genuine co-creation of knowledge
- Focus on **real problems** or opportunities for farmers, foresters or other actors in value chains who need a solution (“end-users”)
A **transdisciplinary Multi-Actor Approach** was used to co-construct practice-validated strategies and incentives for promoting agro-ecological approaches

- **The aims are to produce structured co-constructed strategies** and policy instruments for delivering public goods through economically viable agro-ecological farming systems

- **The impacts sought were**:
  - Instrumental, through influencing the development of policy, practice or services
  - Increase capacities leading to operational changes in farming practices
  - New, or strengthened networks
• Membership of the **Multi-Actor Platforms** is designed to cross boundaries of disciplines, expertise and roles, in academic and non-academic organisations.

• They form an integrative transdisciplinary framework.

• ... and strengthen capacity of project partners and actors to assess the sustainability of agro-ecological farming systems.

Co-construction by actors ...

- Farmer – Knowledge of equipment and land
- Research – Knowledge of problem process
- Agricultural advisor – Extension to other farmers
- Policy team – Compliance with support measures, relevance of policy innovations
- Value chain – Market requirements and opportunities

Knowledge Exchange ...

- On site, in field, explanations of practices
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Promotion of best practice in research and businesses

Swedish Case Study: Co-creating solutions for sustainable food systems
### Principles for operating Multi-Actor Platforms
- Respect
- Sharing
- Listening
- Attention
- Teamwork
- Ethics

### Criteria for selecting members of the Multi-Actor Platforms
- Interest
- Availability
- Relevance
- Appropriateness
- Representativeness
- Willingness
- Gender
- Geography
- Age range
- Representativeness
- Willingness
- Gender
- Geography
- Age range

### Plus …
- Build on existing relationships, with established trust
- Develop new relationships

**Experience showed**
- Good composition, and operation of the Platforms created atmosphere of constructive working
Multi-Level Multi-Actor Platforms

EU level Multi-Actor Platform, e.g. Brussels, March 2019

Workshop to discuss scenarios of future food systems, general methodological approach, and requirements for certain outputs.

Different functions or focus

- **European Union level**: Focused on relevance of approaches and findings to EU and international policy and practice
- **Local level**: Focused on national or regional/local policy and practice, within those biophysical, political and social contexts
- **Cross-level**: Stakeholder Reference Group, drawn from both levels
• **Actor roles**
  - Beneficiary, innovator, investor, facilitator of knowledge exchange ... and user of knowledge

• **Actor relationships**
  - Power relationships between actors are different in and out of project roles:
  - e.g. equals within project, seeking permission for development externally

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*Same actor, multiple roles: innovator, investor, facilitator*

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*Roles of actors within MAP are equal*

*Roles of actors outwith MAP*

  - **Regulator** – provide policy framework/instruments to guide practice
  - **Farmer** – plans a practice
  - **NGO** – support/oppose practice

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*Keeping it small and extensive: the way to a sustainable future in Lithuania...*
• **Local understanding** of the farming systems and transitions in the diverse range across UNISECO
• Working closely with actors to **understand** supply chains and networks

**Case Study of Peach Growers, Imanthia, Greece**

Local actors: agricultural co-operatives/Producer Groups, fruit-industry group, local authority and agronomists consultants

Social network of connections in farming system identified by actors
Example of Platform Insights

- Eliciting information about networks of flows of knowledge and information, and products

Experience showed
- Shared recognition of benefits of joint working
- Added value of strengthening networks between actors
Members of Multi-Actor Platform Explaining Issues

Organic dairy farming

“Our farm looks a modern dairy cattle herd with a mechanized milking system, a manure storage facility, a feed distribution system and a milking room, if my daughters and their families, who now live off farm, decide to continue organic dairy farming, the CAP Policy is Firm. Modernisation and investment measures would be useful for financing many of the required upgrades.”

Photograph courtesy Juris Maskalans

Artisan cheese production

“In our village, there is a place of their own, they keep on working hard with the tax in their hands, as they try to celebrate and the local farmers. “In 1999, farming was about to deal with Sweat and the environment,” he kept and share the happenings with others.”

Photograph courtesy Valdas Kavaliauskas and Rasa Linauskaite

Biodiversity and farmland

“There is currently too much conflict between the various objectives of countryside support.”

“The more you encourage farmers to produce, the more you will put pressure on other conflicting users in the countryside and the more you will have to compensate the farmer to sacrifice land to biodiversity.” [UK]

Video courtesy Ewen Cameron

Knowledge and Advice

“Knowledge exchange, monitor and strategic farms a great way to get the message across. Farmers need to see ecologically focused farms working in the flesh. Farmer to farmer learning most powerful tool in my book.” [UK]

Video courtesy Peter Chapman
Members of all the platforms, reference and advisory groups continued their enthusiastic engagement, online, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unkowns:
- Would dynamics of feedback have been different?
• Adherence to principles and best practice in research ethics contributes to creating outputs and impacts sought
• Take time to identify suitable actors for Platform
• Take time to recruit actors: ‘no surprises’ for them or project
• Need for shared understanding of ‘rules of engagement’ in the Platform
• Co-developing concept and implementation of Multi-Actor Platforms with actors contributes to developing long-term relations and networks
• Operation of the Multi-Actor Platforms increases the shared capabilities of members in policy, practice and science

“The project has been valuable to me in all that I have learned, as it has opened the door to agro-ecology which I may not necessarily have been aware of, and to see the outputs from across Europe has been fascinating.”
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Project website: https://uniseco-project.eu/