



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

David Miller, Gerald Schwarz, Katherine Irvine,
George Vlahos, Alexandra Smyrniotopoulou

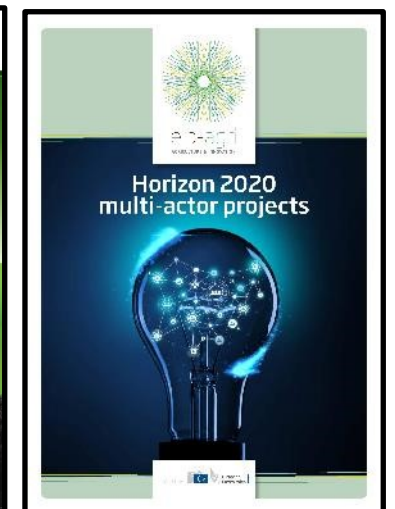
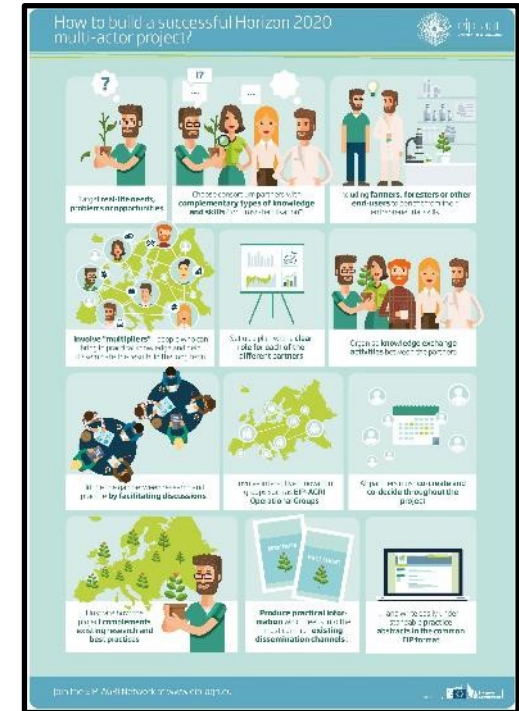


This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 773901.



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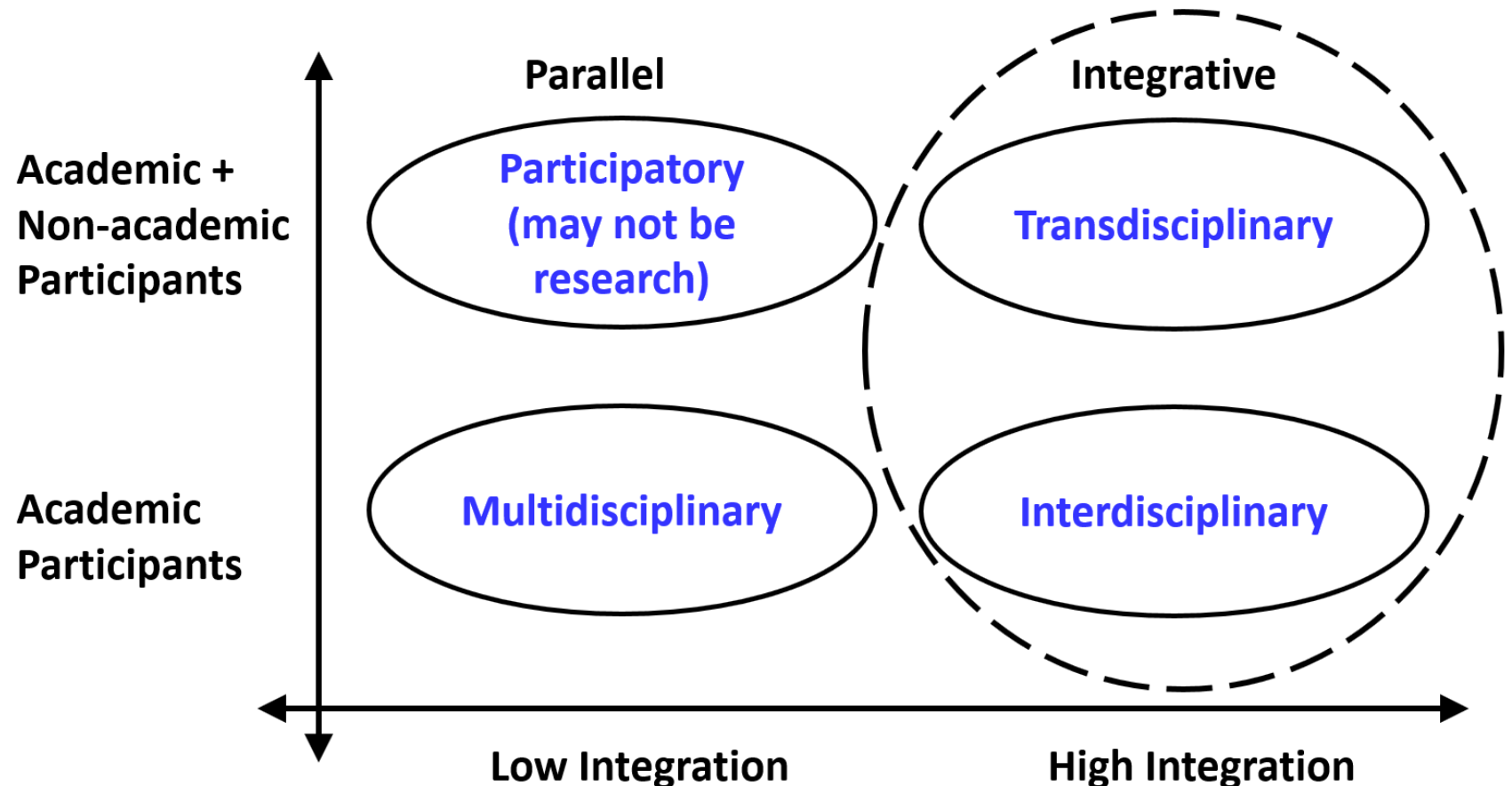
- **Multi-Actor Approach** adopted in European Commission Strategy for EU agricultural research and innovation
- Aim to ‘boost **demand-driven innovation** and the implementation of research, creating synergies between EU policies’
- Increase impacts through process of genuine **co-creation of knowledge**
- 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



Criteria for selecting members of the Multi-Actor Platforms

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

Plus ...

- Build on existing relationships, with established trust
- Develop new relationships

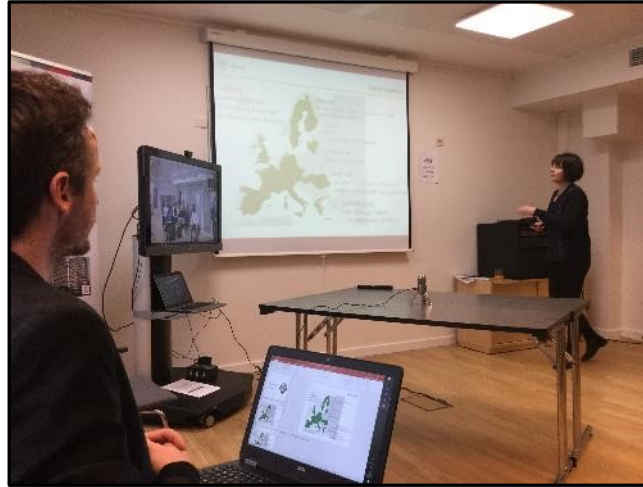
Experience showed

- Good composition, and operation of the Platforms created atmosphere of constructive working

Principles for operating Multi-Actor Platforms

- Respect
- Sharing
- Listening
- Attention
- Teamwork
- Ethics

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**

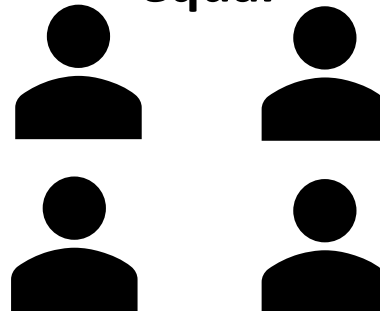
- Power relationships between actors are different in and out of project roles:
- e.g. equals within project, seeking permission for development externally

Keeping it small and extensive: the way to a sustainable future in Lithuan...

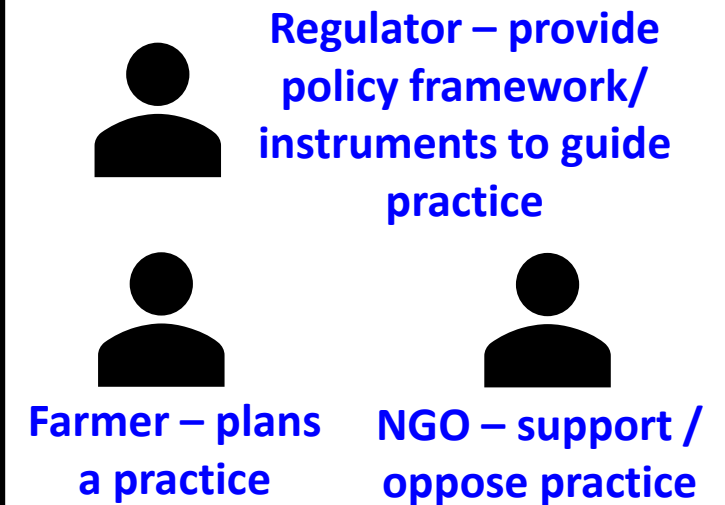
**Same actor,
multiple roles:
innovator,
investor,
facilitator**



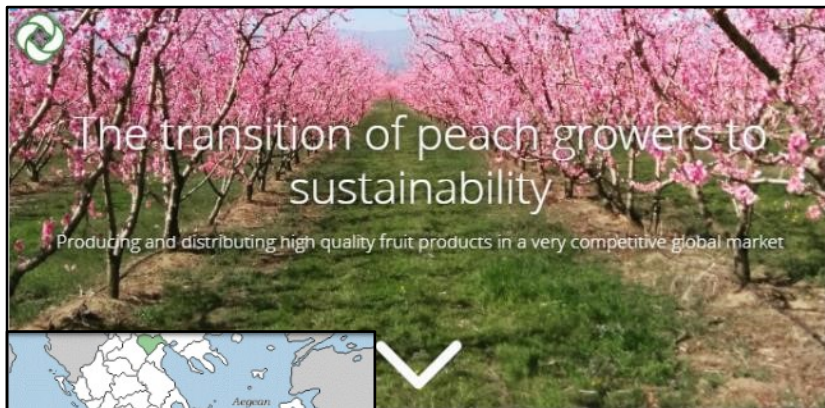
**Roles of actors
within MAP are
equal**



Roles of actors outwith MAP



- **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**

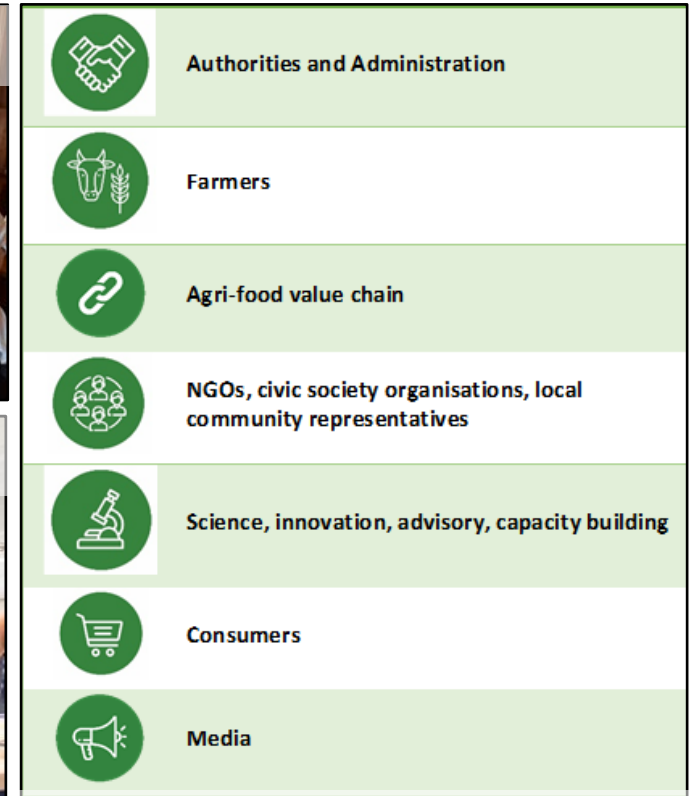
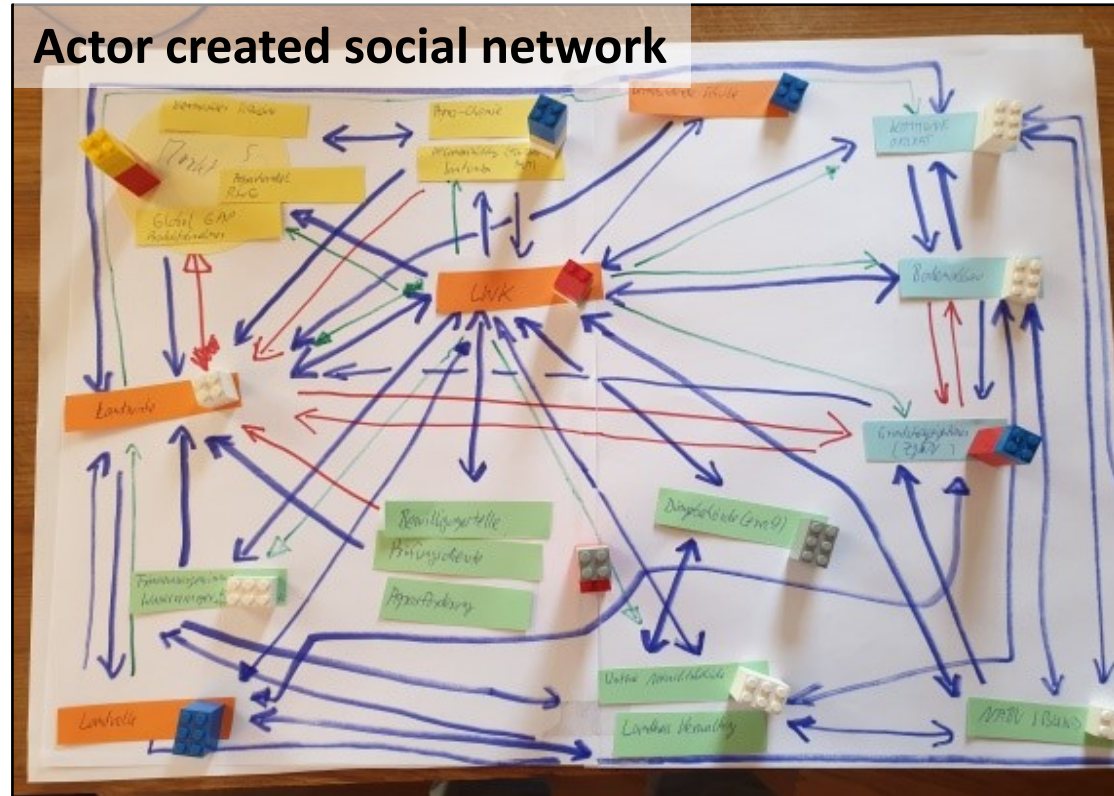


**Local actors: agricultural co-
operatives/Producer
Groups, fruit-industry
group, local authority and
agronomists consultants**



**Social network of
connections in farming
system identified by
actors**

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



UNISECO-wide Network Actors

Experience showed

- Shared recognition of benefits of joint working
- Added value of strengthening networks between actors

Members of Multi-Actor Platform Explaining Issues

Improving the sustainability of grassland based organic dairy farming in Latvia

Juris Mackalans, Manager, Organic Dairy Farm "Tomini"

Organic dairy farming

"Our farm lacks a modern dairy cattle shed with a mechanized mucking 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 Pillar II Farm Modernization and Investment measure would be useful for co-financing many of the required upgrades."

Photograph courtesy Juris Maskalans

esri Keeping it small and extensive: the way to a sustainable future in the Lithuan...

Looking at it from a farmer's perspective: Valdas Kavaliauskas and Rasa Linauskaite are among the best and most successful producers in Lithuania

Artisan cheese production

Now settled in a place of their own, they keep on working hard with the smile on their faces, as they stay true to themselves and to their motto in life: "While farming, we strive to be at peace with ourselves and the environment, to be happy and share this happiness 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." [UK19]

(For the audio, please right click in the video image, press 'show')

Video courtesy Ewen Cameron

Knowledge exchange

Knowledge and Advice

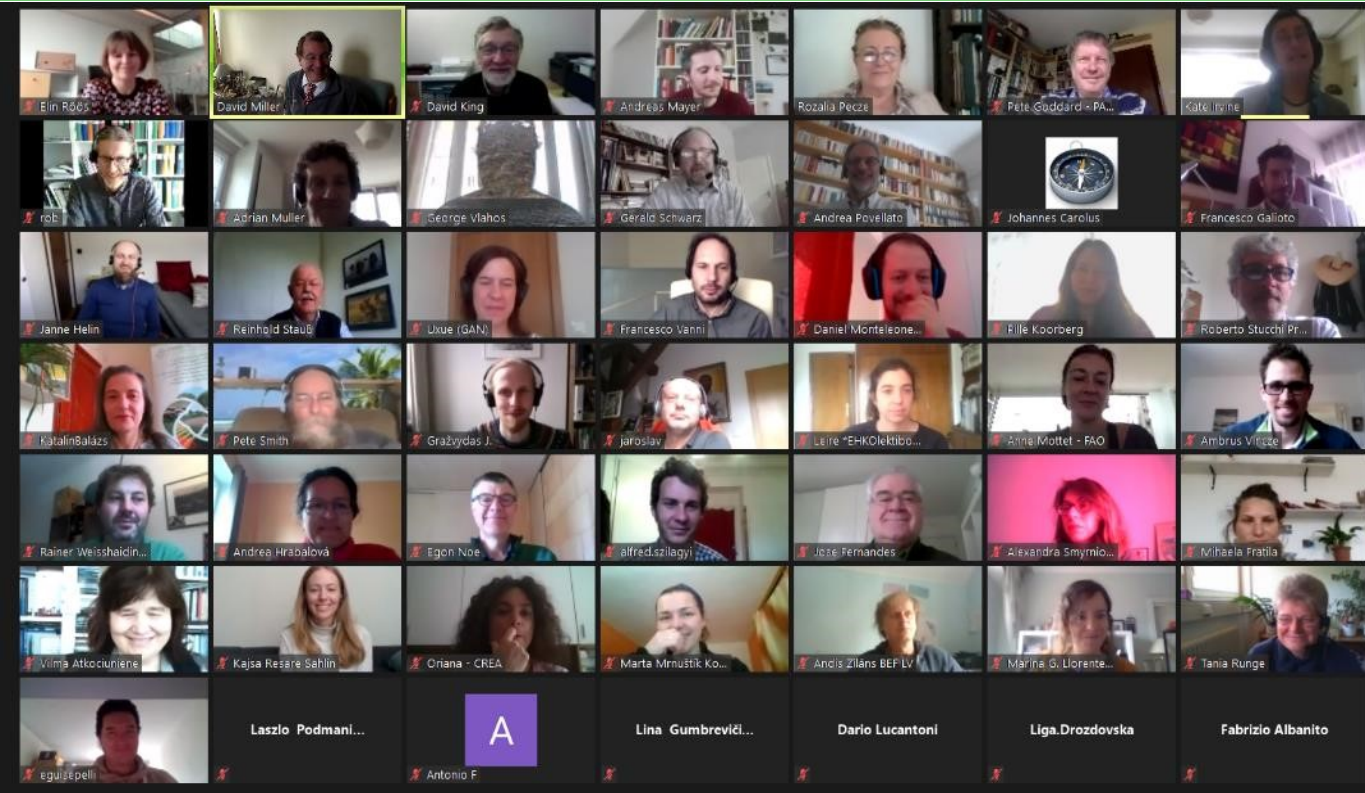
"Knowledge exchange, monitor and strategic farms a great way to get the message across. Farmers need to see ecologically focussed farms working in the flesh. Farmer to farmer learning most powerful tool in my book." [UK24]

(For the audio, please right click in the video image, press 'show')

Video courtesy Peter Chapman

Stakeholder Reference Group: Meeting Online

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



Meeting online, May 2020

Unknowns:

- Would dynamics of feedback have been different?

Meeting online,
February 2021



- 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.”

Thank you to all the contributors to the Multi-Actor Platforms in the UNISECO project

James Hutton Institute: David Miller, Katherine Irvine: David.Miller@Hutton.ac.uk; Kate.Irvine@Hutton.ac.uk

Thünen Institute: Gerald Schwarz: gerald.schwarz@thuenen.de

AUA: George Vlahos, Alexandra Smyrniotopoulou: gvlahos@aua.gr; alex_smyr@aua.gr



More details accessible at:

<https://zenodo.org/record/4646090#.YHKzOujdt9M>

Project website:

<https://uniseco-project.eu/>



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