



SCALE UP
community-driven
bioeconomy development

WS5 Training Programme Protocol

Social innovations in rural areas:

**Session #2: Fostering Novel Collaborative Approaches
for Boosting Social Innovations**

4 June 2024

Session number 2 in the field of Social Innovations in rural areas focused on Fostering Novel Collaborative Approaches for Boosting Social Innovations. The session took place on June 4, 2024, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm CEST.

The session began with a welcome and introduction to the project, emphasizing the potential of social innovation to drive positive change in rural areas. Katarzyna RullQuesada from UNIMOS delivered a keynote with the title "Boosting clusters of social and ecological innovations", highlighting also the history and development of clusters in Europe. This was followed by two case studies: Silvia Caneva, WIP presented the Social Innovation Handbook that was developed in the SCALE-UP project and showed some practical examples of social innovations. The last presentation was a case study from Upper Austria: Seeds of Change: Innovating Rural Communities through agenda.zukunft Netzwerk Upper Austria which was presented by Johannes Meinhart & Lena Füßberger from Regionalmanagement OÖ GmbH. Agenda.zukunft is a support programme by the government of Upper Austria and the two presenters highlighted several inspiring social innovation projects that were accompanied by them in the last years.

After a brief coffee break, participants engaged in breakout room discussions focused on experiences with collaborations, advantages and disadvantages of different levels (EU, national, regional). Each breakout room presented its findings, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and strategies.

The session concluded with a feedback segment, where participants shared their insights and responses to the discussions. Upcoming sessions were announced, including "Recreating the Food System through Social Innovations" on June 25, 2024. The event wrapped up with a short survey to gather attendees' feedback, ensuring the training program's continuous improvement.

Overall, the session successfully highlighted the transformative potential of social innovation in rural communities, providing valuable knowledge and fostering collaborative discussions among participants.

BREAK-OUT ROOMS

NORTH MACEDONIA

The collaborations on national and regional level varies and are predominantly project-based rather than forming consistent, long-term partnerships. While certain collaborations have been undertaken, they have often lacked sustainability, aligning more with specific project needs rather than ongoing activities.

One notable experience involved Local Action Groups (NGOs) similar to NGOs focused on agriculture and rural development. For instance, a study on biomass availability in the South-East planning region, including Strumica region, was conducted within their organisation. Close coordination with various stakeholders is always required to gather and analyze data effectively.

Additionally, a joint project of the Rural Development Network of North Macedonia with different donors (such as USAID) are good example of collaboration. This initiative was aimed at building capacities, piloting new measures, and collecting relevant data. Through these efforts, the effectiveness and impact of rural development programs in the region should be enhanced.

The advantages and disadvantages of different levels of collaboration (EU, national, regional) present a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges.

One of the primary advantages of collaboration at various levels is the transfer of knowledge from more advanced to less experienced countries. Additionally, collaboration at the EU level facilitates the governance and introduction of certain methods and schemes that align with EU requirements, ensuring that participating countries adhere to high standards and regulations. Another significant advantage on national level is the establishment of a feedback loop between the government and municipalities in designing relevant policies and strategic documents for rural development. This collaborative approach ensures that local needs and insights are considered in national and EU-level policymaking. Furthermore, improved inter-municipal cooperation is a notable benefit, as it fosters the replication of good practices and enhances the overall effectiveness of rural development initiatives.

However, these collaborative efforts are not without their disadvantages. One major drawback is the lack of follow-up, further mentorship, and twinning that is often needed but not provided. While initial collaborative efforts can yield positive outcomes, the absence of sustained support and guidance can lead to challenges in maintaining and building upon these successes.

Some of the main collaborations activities that the stakeholders would like to be involved and that combine direct impact with strategic influence are:

Training programs: These enable the transfer of essential skills and knowledge, empowering local stakeholders and fostering community growth.

Policy advocacy movements with public authorities in Strumica: This allows for influencing policy decisions and ensuring community needs are addressed in rural development strategies.

Clustering municipalities and associations with similar needs: This fosters cooperation, resource sharing, and replication of best practices, enhancing the effectiveness of development initiatives.

POLAND

Collaborations encompass a wide range of activities, from boosting innovations and sales for companies to shaping policies with policymakers, fostering better connections between research and education, and engaging in multi-actor cooperation such as short food supply chains and consumer involvement.

Cluster collaborations involving activities for:

- companies (boosting innovations, sales, visibility, partnerships),
- policymakers (recommendations, policy briefs, participation in shaping policies),
- research and education (fostering better interconnections between academia-research, testing new tools for cooperation)
- and multi-actor cooperation (short food supply chains, consumer involvement).

Within clusters, we have witnessed the power of cooperation in fast-tracking knowledge circulation, sharing information and advice, and engaging in joint activities like R&D to lower costs and improve quality.

However, with every collaboration comes a set of advantages and disadvantages at different levels - be it at the EU, national, or regional scale. While EU-level collaborations offer access to significant funding through programs like Horizon Europe, they also pose challenges in navigating complex bureaucratic processes. It is crucial to strike a balance between leveraging the resources available and managing the administrative hurdles effectively.

In our regional context, we have seen the emergence of clusters like the metal cluster in Radom focusing on skills development and engaging with educational institutions to promote technological advancements among the youth. Clusters play a pivotal role in orchestrating collaborations, bridging gaps between various stakeholders, and driving regional and sectoral development through shared experiences and cross-fertilization

As we navigate the evolving landscape of collaborations, it is essential to address key challenges such as actively engaging the majority, listening to the needs of SMEs, and optimizing the use of available funding to ensure tangible outcomes. Facilitating cluster activities, fostering innovation, and promoting social clusters can pave the way for transformative regional economies and sustainable growth.

In conclusion, let us embrace collaborations as spaces for experimentation, change, and collective growth. By sharing knowledge, staying connected beyond project timelines,

and fostering a culture of learning from academia to business and vice versa, we can create a thriving ecosystem of collaborations that drive innovation and prosperity in our region.

SPAIN

There are many types of possible collaborations between different stakeholders, e.g. the development of regional platforms such as the one created during the SCALE UP project. Some of these collaborations were discussed during the break-out room. Other possible collaborations are possible through hackathons or citizen labs. The speaker of our regional break-out room presented his experience with the citizen lab as a perfect way to activate collective thinking.

Another point of discussion was about the advantages and disadvantages of different levels of collaboration. The discussion was focused mainly on national collaborations and collaborations between individuals. In this respect, the main advantages were:

- Increased competitiveness: thanks to different points of view.
- Internalisation of strategies.
- Access to new information and knowledge.
- Activating collective thinking easily and cheaply.
- Decrease social conflict. Thanks to active listening to different stakeholders and especially the importance given to society.
- Providing tools to compare methodologies. Development of new methodologies to ensure these collaborations.

In relation to the disadvantages, we could highlight the following:

- Lack of knowledge about the importance of collaborations or what is the best methodology to promote it.
- Difficulty depending on the collective and lack of initiative on the part of the population to participate in these collaborations.

In the Spanish break-out room they were asked about the different types of collaboration they would like to participate in, some of the main points and experiences discussed were, for example:

- Canvas methodology to develop ODS in a community.
- Methodologies based on open collaboration. The importance of participation and cooperativism.
- Working in open source.

UPPER AUSTRIA

There are many opportunities for innovators to put their new ideas into practice. One way to do this in Linz is to use the Innovation Centre as an example of a good way to initiate social innovations in a city. Ideas can be realised both in larger projects and directly in communities, with a particular focus on the direct support of social innovations. Innovators can submit their concepts on special platforms, and workshops at schools are also promoted to support the flow of ideas.

A central aspect is networking with suitable contacts who can be useful for the realisation of the respective ideas. There is no guarantee that submitted ideas will be realised, but networking makes it possible to access various funding pots and to inform and involve various investors in the project. Continuous dialogue and the opportunity to submit ideas at an early stage before displeasure arises are essential and create a basis for positive change.

In the various activities in Upper Austria, whether at the innovation hub in Linz or by Regional Management Upper Austria, but also the LEADER programme, care is always taken to ensure a constant flow of ideas and innovations, taking into account the topics and concerns of the participants. However, the financial issue is important, as not every municipality can raise the necessary funds for such initiatives. Although the support is time-consuming, it offers many opportunities to interlink different subject areas due to the broad basis. The supervision of the projects and sustainable implementation in the region is an important step that must also be taken into account in the long term.

In order to make the European Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) understandable at municipal level, they are used as a middle ground. Concrete proposals from direct neighbours help to improve understanding and the perception of how people are affected. Climate fund projects could also play a role here. EU projects should be presented in such a way that they are easier for communities to understand and are based less on complex concepts. A suitable translation of the terms and concepts for the population is crucial here.

The local population often sees the work of the EU as too distant and intangible. For many citizens, the EU's objectives do not appear to be recognisable or visible in their daily lives. The EU's altitude, with its overarching political and economic goals, often seems too high and abstract.

The challenge is to bridge the gap between the European level and the local reality. It is necessary to communicate EU objectives in such a way that they are understandable and comprehensible to citizens. This could be done through concrete examples and projects that are implemented directly in the municipalities and make the benefits of EU policy visible. Such projects are implemented by networks such as the Innovation Centre or Regional Management Upper Austria.

Only through better communication and a closer link between EU objectives and the needs and expectations of the local population can the EU's vision be made tangible and worthy of support. People need to see how the work of the EU improves their daily

lives in order to understand the European vision and take it into account in their own actions.

It is recommended that successful examples (best practices) be adopted from other cities. However, EU funding is still underutilised as there is often a lack of expertise and resources. Co-operation with institutions such as Biz-up, universities and companies is of great importance. Companies often think in terms of narrow target groups, while citizens often only think of their immediate surroundings.

Effective co-operation within and between municipalities and with regional players such as LEADER is essential. The dependence on personal relationships should not be underestimated. Co-operation with LEADER offices is helpful at various points during project implementation. Long-term implementation of the projects, ideally with external support, is the aim in order to achieve sustainable results.

Cross-regional conclusions/learnings

Collaboration efforts in North Macedonia, Poland, Spain, and Upper Austria reveal distinct strategies and challenges in fostering effective partnerships for rural and regional development. In North Macedonia, collaborations are primarily project-based, focusing on specific needs without sustainable long-term partnerships. Notable initiatives include Local Action Groups and joint projects with international donors like USAID, aimed at capacity building and data collection. Advantages of such collaborations include knowledge transfer, policy feedback loops, and improved inter-municipal cooperation, although challenges remain due to the lack of sustained support and follow-up mentorship. Desired collaboration activities among stakeholders include training programs, policy advocacy, and clustering municipalities for shared resource use and best practice replication.

Poland's collaborative efforts span from boosting innovations and sales for companies to shaping policies and fostering connections between research and education. Cluster collaborations, such as the metal cluster in Radom, exemplify the benefits of joint activities, knowledge sharing, and innovation. However, navigating bureaucratic processes at the EU level and balancing administrative hurdles with available resources remain significant challenges. Emphasizing cluster activities, listening to SMEs' needs, and optimizing funding usage are essential for sustainable growth. The goal is to create a thriving ecosystem of collaborations that drive regional innovation and prosperity through shared knowledge and continued engagement beyond project timelines.

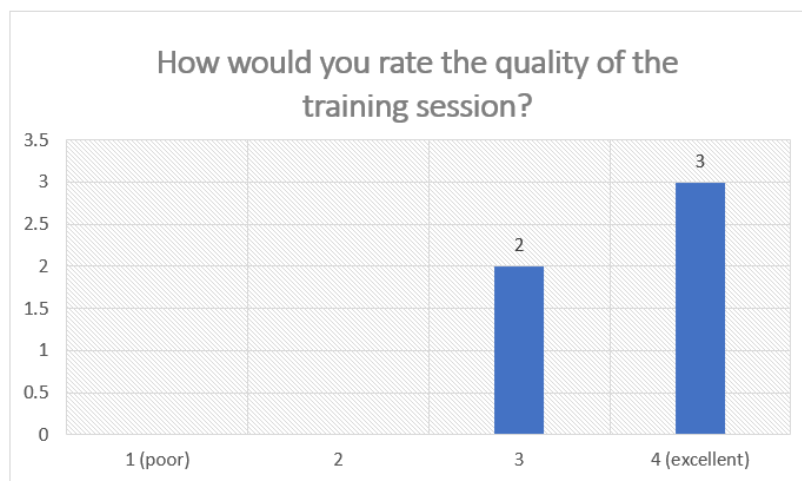
In Spain, regional collaborations, such as those facilitated by the SCALE UP project, highlight the benefits of diverse perspectives, strategy internalization, and activating collective thinking through citizen labs and hackathons. Key advantages include increased competitiveness, access to new information, and reducing social conflict through active listening. However, challenges include a lack of collaboration knowledge and public initiative. Emphasizing open collaboration methodologies and cooperativism is crucial for effective participation. Upper Austria focuses on social innovations facilitated by networks like the Innovation Centre in Linz, emphasizing the need for continuous dialogue, funding access, and sustainable project implementation. Bridging the gap between EU objectives and local realities is essential for tangible benefits, requiring better communication and showcasing successful examples to enhance public understanding and support.

Participant feedback

At the end of the training session, the participants were asked to fill in a short survey to evaluate the training session. In the end, 5 participants responded to the survey, of which 3 from Poland, 1 from North Macedonia, and one from Spain. This gave the following results:

1.1 Quality

The participants were asked to rate the quality of the training session on a scale from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). 3 out of 5 participants answered this question with a 4, meaning they found the training session to be of excellent quality. Two participants answered this question with a 3.



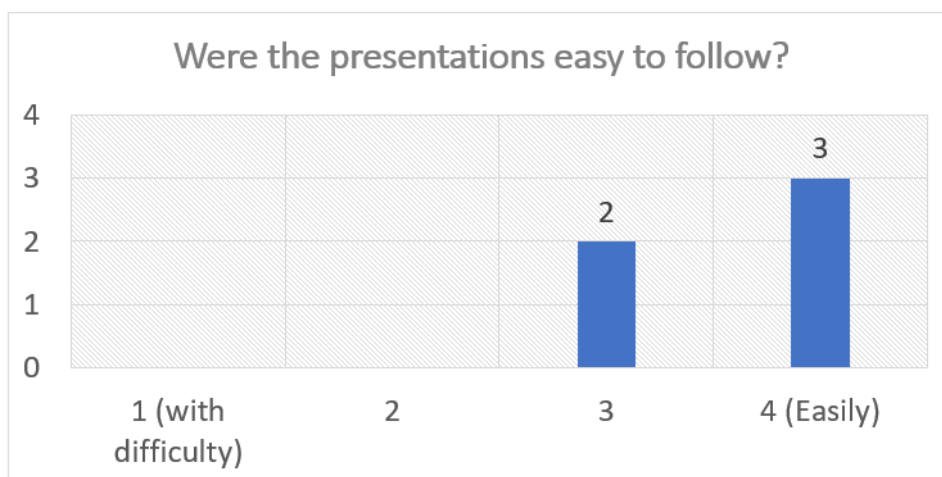
The participants were then asked what went well during the session. The participants found the topic and presentations to be very interesting and inspiring. Additionally, they appreciated the new practical knowledge provided.

Next, the participants were asked what could have gone better. The participants mentioned that the session is a bit too long, and that they would appreciate a more condensed form. Additionally, there was a comment regarding the breakout sessions being too long.

When asked how the second session compared to the first, the participants mentioned that they found the session to be just as well.

1.2 Understandability

The participants were also asked whether the presentations were easy to follow. They were asked to rate this on a scale from 1 (with difficulty) to 4 (easily). Out of the 5 responses, 3 were a score of 4 (easily) and 3 people gave it a score of 3.



1.3 Topics

When asked which topic was most interesting, we received the following answers:

- Clusters
- The role of clusters in the bioeconomy
- Local grassroots initiatives (valuable practical examples)

1.4 Field of occupation

The survey concluded with an optional question regarding the participant's field of occupation. Two of the participants stated to be working in agriculture.

Participants:

If you wish to get in touch with one of the participants from this session, please contact someone in the SCALE-EP consortium.

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