

Understanding AKIS – How to ensure we do not overlook key actors and their interactions?

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1. Introduction (incl. conceptual background/literature review)

European Union (EU) Member States (MS) are required to draft their post-2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDP) in 2021. The underlying Regulation on establishing the rules on support for National Strategic Plans to be drawn up by MS highlights that the strengthening of the national Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) will be a core requirement. *“The Communication on ‘The Future of Food and Farming’ mentions the exchange of knowledge and focus on innovation as a cross cutting objective for the new CAP [Common Agricultural Policy]. The CAP should continue to support the interactive innovation model, which enhances the collaboration between actors to make best use of complementary types of knowledge with a view to spreading practical solutions. Farm advisory services should be strengthened within the AKIS. The CAP Strategic Plan should provide information on how advisory services, research and rural networks will work together.”* (COM 2018, paragraph (46)). Moreover, it says, farm advisory services *“shall be integrated within the interrelated services of farm advisors, researchers, farmer organisations and other relevant stakeholders that form the AKIS.”* (COM 2018, Art. 13). It also asks MS to describe *“the organisational set-up of the AKIS designed as the combined organisation and knowledge flows between persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge for agriculture and interrelated fields.”* (COM 2018, Art. 102). This shows that the European Commission understands the AKIS policy concept to be defined by two elements, the static structure of persons and organisations as well as the dynamic interactions between them.

The LIAISON Research and Innovation Project, funded under the European Commission's Framework Programme Horizon 2020, aims to study enabling and challenging factors for the Interactive Innovation Model (IIM), an EU policy concept that aims to contribute to speeding up innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. Therefore, LIAISON focuses on the analysis of (policy) processes and measures that enable partnerships for innovation and aims to make a significant and meaningful contribution to the delivery of currently applied and future EU policies. With this paper, we provide an analysis of the structure of AKIS actors in case study consortia, which implement the IIM. The objective is also to study the interaction between these consortia and other (external) stakeholders and networks. A particular focus will be on the role of advisors and actors from other kinds of organisations providing support for the co-design of innovative solutions in agriculture, forestry and associated value chains. The leading question for this paper is: *“How to ensure that we do not overlook actors and their interactions when we aim for the strengthening of the AKIS?”*

2. Methodology

The methodology of the case study analysis consists of a mixed-method approach with interviews and workshops with selected representatives from the projects and their environment (stakeholders from policy, administration, value chain etc.). This paper's analysis is based on a 'light-touch' review of 37 Operational Group (OG) projects from across Europe, and on six in-depth case studies of co-innovation projects funded under the RDP of Flanders (Belgium), France, Hesse (Germany), Poland and Veneto (Italy), thereof four OG consortia.

A concentric circle model provides the analytical framework. The project consortium members are located in the centre while the stakeholders interacting with the core group represent the outer circle(s). The wider their 'distance' from the centre, the fewer interactions take place. The analysis for this paper distinguishes between consortium actors and external stakeholders only.

The actors listed in the case studies are coded as follows: A - Farm advice (classical), Farm Advisory Services (FAS), R&D; B - Business (e.g. consultancy, accountant); E - Education and training (schools, academies etc.); F - Producer (farming, forestry, bio-economy); G - Public body (e.g. managing authority, local administration); M - Processing or marketing SME; N - NGO (e.g. nature conservation, regional marketing/tourism); O - Producer organisation (e.g. farmers' cooperative); R - University, research institutes (e.g. national research centres); S - Representative/supporting organisation (e.g. farmers union); X - Others such as consumers.

3. Results

The 'light-touch' review of the OG consortia showed that many of the OG (35%) have 6-10 consortium partners, around 20% of the OG are either smaller with 0-5 partners or bigger with 11-15 partners ($\approx 13\%$ with >16 partners). In nearly 84% of these 37 OGs, researchers are members of the core group, and more than 80% of the OG have farmer members. The percentage for the other types of AKIS organisations involved in the OG are as follows: 68% classical private or public farm advisors; 51% support organisations; 46% non-processing/marketing SME businesses; 32% public bodies; 30% AKIS related NGOs; 27% educational institutes; 24% professional organisations (e.g., farmers union); 14% processing/marketing enterprises. The analysis of the coordinating organisation shows that only 2% of the OGs are coordinated by a farmer or any other producer business. There is no typical kind of OG coordinator organisation. Instead, a variety of organisations are coordinating: 24% research institutes; 19% supporting organisations; 16% AKIS NGOs; 11% farm advisors; 11% professional organisations; and 5% each are businesses, public bodies and other types of organisations. (Fieldsend et al. 2019) This 'light-touch' review of 200 interactive innovation projects indicates that a variety of AKIS individuals and organisations drive and implement interactive innovation projects. The analysis also shows that the roles of these actors differ depending on whether they are leading, participating or supporting the co-innovation processes with farmers, foresters and associated entrepreneurs.

The subsequent in-depth case studies of OGs and other RDP funded projects focused also on the representation of the different types of organisations and their role in or for the consortia. Table 1 presents the results from the application of concentric circle model with 'inner' and 'outer' circle(s) of AKIS actors.

Three out of the four OG consortia are coordinated by a support organisation, one by a university researcher. One of the other innovation projects is very small with only two partners; it is coordinated by a farmer. The other RDP funded project is an industry network coordinated

by a consultant’s business specialised in facilitation and network management. Closely related stakeholders also play a key role for the project group. They come from various kinds of organisations. However, classical public or private farm advisory services are a member of the core team in one of the in-depth analyses, and they were listed as relevant stakeholders interacting closely with three of the six projects.

Table 1: Number of AKIS organisations in the consortium (inner circle) and stakeholders (outer circle) of the projects

| LIAISON Case Study | Country | Funding | Actor vs stakeholder | A | B | E | F | G | M | N | O | R | S | X | Total |
|------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------------------|----|-------------------|---|----------------|----|---|----------------|---|----------------|-------------------|---|-------|
| Hemp producers | DE | OG | Consortium actors | | 1 | | 4 | | 2 | | | | 1 [⊕] +2 | | 10 |
| | | | External stakeholders | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Tous paysans! | FR | OG | Consortium actors | | | | | | | 1 [⊕] | | 1 | 1 [⊕] | | 3 |
| | | | External stakeholders | 13 | 12 | 1 | 14 | 14 | | | | 26 | | | 7 |
| AncientGrain | PL | OG | Consortium actors | 1 | | | 5 | 1 | 2 | | | 1 [⊕] | | | 9 |
| | | | External stakeholders | | | 1 | | | | | | | | x | |
| Farmers Lab | IT | OG | Consortium actors | | 4 | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 1 [⊕] | | 7 |
| | | | External stakeholders | | | 1 | | 4 | | | | | | 1 | |
| 24 Hour Hops | BE | Other RDP | Consortium actors | | | | 1 [⊕] | | 1 | | | | | | 2 |
| | | | External stakeholders | 1 | | | x | | x | | | | | | |
| Estonian Dairy Cluster | EE | Other RDP | Consortium actors | | 1 [⊕] +7 | | 12 | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | | 16 |
| | | | External stakeholders | 1 | | | x | | | | | | | | |

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of studied persons and organisations shows that coding is relatively easy for primary producers and public bodies. However, the role of semi-public organisations such as Chambers of Agriculture potentially engaged in individual farm advice, applied research and training as well as the representation of the industry complicates the coding. The diversity of private profit and non-profit AKIS organisations in the field of input supply, processing, marketing or specific services such as professional organisations (e.g., farmers’ unions, producer organisations) or business consultants offering specialised advice can also be very difficult to capture.

Since researchers and individual farmers or foresters are consortium partners, both are identified key AKIS actors driving and engaging in interactive innovation projects. Supply chain and other businesses as well as innovation support organisations including AKIS-related NGOs emerge also as relevant actors or stakeholders depending on the individual structure and innovation process of the consortia. Classical public or private farm advisors are in a similar position, they are listed but there is now evidence from the LIAISON fieldwork that they play a more prominent role than the other innovation service providing organisations. Since funding programmes tend to explicitly require the involvement of farmers, researchers and advisors in co-innovation projects, the variety of the other types of organisations indeed risk to be overlooked although they are not less prominent than the farm advisors.

5. References

COM, 2018. Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the Common agricultural policy [...]. Eur-lex, Brussels. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:aa85fa9a-65a0-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

Fieldsend et al. 2019. LIAISON D3.2 Discussion paper on key issues emerging from ‘light-touch’ review <https://liaison2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LIAISON-Deliverable-3.2-Discussion-paper.pdf>