LIAISON
Optimising interactive innovation

L'atelier paysan
COOPÉRATIVE D'AUTOCONSTRUCTION

L'Atelier Paysan

Empowerment: more autonomy for farmers

Social innovation: by involving citizens

62% Self-financing
21% Private funding
17% Public funding

France (nationwide)

20 employees, 2 managers and founders

2009 - ongoing

No budget. It's an open-ended project

A little bit more about L'Atelier Paysan

"L'Atelier Paysan" (AP) is a French cooperative that works with farmers to design machinery and buildings, mainly around the concept of self-building. They organise trainings and promote all their farmer-led innovations on a free access website.
But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, the aim of the AP is much broader – it is a political project. Through technical activity, it aims to promote a certain type of agriculture (agroecology on small farms) and development (practical, accessible innovation centred on farmers' needs).

Concretely, L'Atelier Paysan has:
- identified more than 1,000 tools
- Create more than 80 tutorials
- Trained more than 1,600 people on self-building
- Facilitated new entrants strategies for young farmers (also for those from outside the agricultural sector)
- Developed local groups throughout France.

The long-term objective of L'Atelier Paysan is not to become bigger with hundreds of employees, but rather to have more impact by generating the creation of other similar structures wherever the demand is present.

"It is an agronomic, social, political project."

"It permits us to settle more cheaply. Avoids indebtedness or over-indebtedness."

"The short version of the AP is a bit of a peddling story. It's about identifying what 'agris' have been able to do or helping agris to make the tools they dream of to improve working conditions, their efficiency; assisting the AP to bring these innovations to light."

Highlights!

Important place of activist engagement

Funding from civil society and foundations

Mobilisation of external knowledge and skills even from outside of agriculture (e.g. political science)

Interesting links/videos/reports

https://www.latelierpaysan.org/

AgTechTakeback - L'Atelier Paysan on Self-building Communities in Farming: https://www.arc2020.eu/agtechtakeback-latelier-paysans-tolled-up-french-farmers/

https://goo.gl/photos/b9JxZpZsTeaVyBNL7

A Weekend at L'Atelier Paysan:

https://youtu.be/dBXx1_GY94c

Innovation and co-creation in L'Atelier Paysan

Innovation in L'Atelier Paysan

There are 3 innovations at different stages of evolution:
- Technical and radical innovation is occurring: "innovation by the users, with the farmer in the centre".
Innovation which is connected to end-users' needs for agricultural equipment at the beginning and more widely afterwards. Innovation starts from the farmer, not from the engineer or technician.
- Social (political) innovation is expected: "changing agricultural development".
This involves the political ambition of radically transforming agriculture and agricultural development.
- Organisational innovation is rising: "internal rules to regulate the work of employees".
Due to the intensity of the commitment expected by the managers and the high turnover of employees, they decided to write a cooperative agreement to specify the rules applicable to them, e.g. employment and working conditions as well as social guarantees.

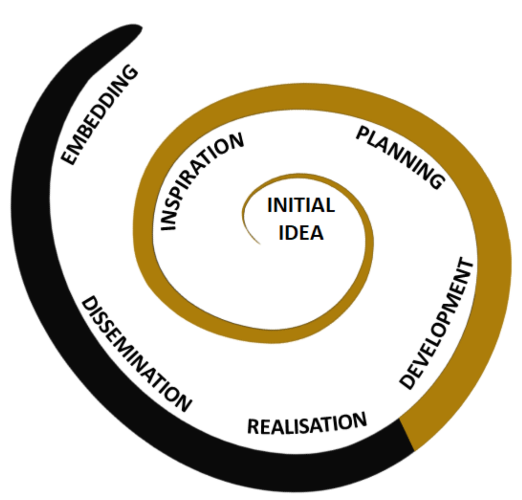
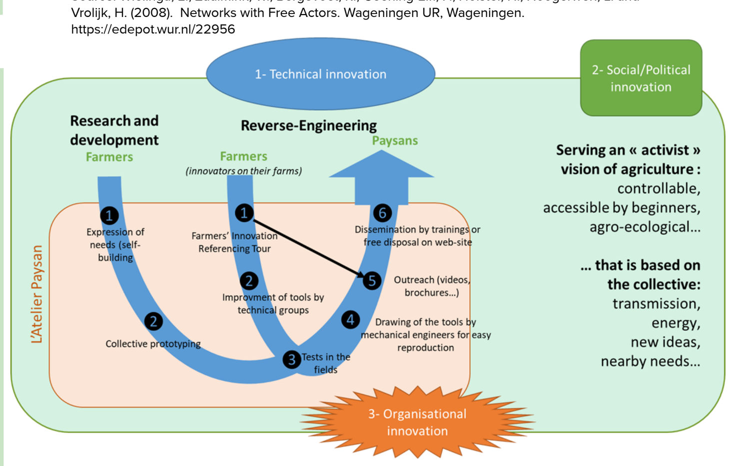


Figure: The stages of the innovation spiral the case has moved through are highlighted in brown
Source: Wielinga, E., Zaalmink, W., Bergevoet, R., Geerling-Eiff, F., Holster, H., Hoogerwerf, L. and Vrolijk, H. (2008). Networks with Free Actors. Wageningen UR, Wageningen. https://edepot.wur.nl/22956



Co-creation in L'Atelier Paysan

Within the L'Atelier Paysan cooperative, various trades may be found. They range from very technical jobs (mechanical engineer) to animation. People come from various backgrounds (some were farmers before), but none of those interviewed had experience in co-creation. Some did have experience in group management though.
The organisation itself, with autonomy in the day-to-day work of the employees, a flat hierarchy, informal communication, etc., therefore acts as a tool to encourage co-creation.
To produce technical innovations, they use reverse-engineering (see figure opposite) as an innovative way to innovate. With this approach, farmers are the innovators and the base of co-creation. The external stakeholders then help complete the innovation. Indeed, they innovate in a lot of different areas, e.g. viticulture, market gardening, slaughter on-farm. External actors can be members of the technical groups (see step 2 of reverse-engineering), bringing skills and knowledge that the internal actors don't have.
To strengthen the co-creation and disseminate their innovations (technical, organisational and political), they have developed the swarming strategy. L'Atelier Paysan facilitates the formation of local groups for self-building along the initiative's lines but in accordance with the needs and demands of the different territories. It trains and advises them. Then, they share the innovations created through an online platform with free access, but the groups stay autonomous.
This approach towards co-creation has promoted significant results with regard to training, dissemination, self-build innovations and group formation to be achieved by the cooperative.

"But in fact, the work we are doing is very territorial. Quite simply because the driving force behind the work, or rather the compass, is the farmers themselves."

"They are member associations of L'Atelier Paysan, but they have their proper functioning and extremely close working relationship with us (people or association supporting them through the swarming strategy)."

Good Practices & Lessons Learned

Interaction with the funding mechanism	They involved civil society and foundations (this is rare in agriculture) in financing the cooperative, though they still have difficulties involving them concretely in the life of the cooperative. Their involvement strengthens the collective aspect of the project.	AP is always looking for funding. As a result, their financial stability is weak and can create internal tensions and uncertainty as to the continuation of the cooperative.
Interaction between the case study partners	Uniformity in the political ambitions and ideology. This can have downsides (exhaustion, unquestioning or lack of confrontation of ideas, etc.), but it offers advantages for decision making, advancement, overcoming difficulties, etc. This commitment strengthens their collective power and allows for strong dynamism.	The 20 employees of L'Atelier Paysan have important autonomy in their day-to-day work, are complementary and non-hierarchical, communicate informally and the team is managed by a duo with strong charisma. These characteristics facilitate the employees' involvement, but risk over-involvement rather than by internal stakeholders.
Interaction with external stakeholders	General assemblies of the cooperative reiterate the need to stay open, discover needs in the field and innovations and confront ideas. This is the DNA of L'Atelier Paysan: stay connected to the field and farmers, even if it's not so easy.	The decision to disseminate their model (technical, political and organisational) by a swarming strategy and not by becoming bigger has permitted involvement of actors throughout the enabling environment and stakeholder network-building.
Interaction with the case study context	All technical innovations developed by L'Atelier Paysan are available on a free access website even for people who are not linked to the cooperative. This is new in the agriculture machinery area as a way to disseminate their technical innovations.	Public R&D in machinery was very weak and farmers had few means of accessing machinery proposed by industry. The cooperative filled this gap with completely free resources and support.
Contribution to societal challenges	L'Atelier Paysan is completely aligned with societal expectations, which aim to encourage small farms, healthy agriculture, respect for the environment. This has permitted them to access funding from citizens and foundations as well.	L'Atelier Paysan has the overarching ambition of replacing the existing agriculture system as opposed to only being an alternative.

ILVO

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