RAPIDO

Rural Areas, People & Innovative Development

SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

eco logic

Policy Brief N° 2 – February 2009

Welcome to the 2nd issue of the RAPIDO Policy Briefs.

The aim of this Policy Brief is to inform policy makers and interested stakeholders about the objectives and analysis results of the RAPIDO project and options for future policy making, derived from project results.

Content

1. Background

This second RAPIDO Policy Brief marks the last part of our FP 6 research project on innovation as a means to promote sustainable development in European rural areas. The overall objective of the RAPIDO-project is to facilitate innovation and knowledge transfer in European rural areas through scientific analysis of current processes and actors in this field across Europe, the identification of key actors and sectors to focus on in the future and finally, scientific advice on how to better integrate the Lisbon objectives into rural development policies. The latter will be the focus of this second policy brief and will be illustrated by means of case study examples analysed throughout the different work packages of the RAPIDO project.

On the EU-level, rural development, including innovation and job creation, are addressed through a number of policies, initiatives and funding instruments. Our focus in the RAPIDO-project has been especially on the following:

- The Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas, which address issues such as knowledge-based societies, the creation of new and better jobs in Europe, economic growth, together with sustainable development and ongoing cohesion – among countries and regions, and among urban areas and rural areas.
- The European Spatial Development Perspective (1999), which is based on the EU aim of achieving balanced and sustainable development, in particular by strengthening economic and social cohesion. This means, reconciling the social and economic claims for spatial development with the area's ecological and cultural functions and, hence, contributing to a sustainable, and at larger scale, balanced territorial development.
- The Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) addresses the promotion of new environmentally friendly technologies.
- The Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP), which provides funding to stimulate and promote innovation. This includes particular funding mechanisms to achieve the goals of the Lisbon Agenda without compromising the Gothenburg objective of protecting the environment.
- The European Rural Development Policy, which is a growing component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is aimed at improving competitiveness, knowledge and innovation of the agricultural and forestry sectors as well as meeting the

broader needs of rural areas: respecting the natural environment, diversifying the economy and improving quality of life. The LEADER approach of the European Rural Development Policy is an instrument for mobilising rural communities to consider the potential of their area and to encourage the implementation of integrated projects for sustainable development. Results from the RAPIDO project repeatedly supported the LEADER approach and many of the successful case studies were launched through this instrument.

During the process of the CAP Health Check in 2008, new challenges faced by agricultural policy were identified and appropriate policy responses were sought and initiated. These new challenges include climate change, the need for better water management, the protection of biodiversity, and the production of green energy.

The ongoing reviews of the Rural Development Policy, the Lisbon Agenda and the Sustainable Development Strategy towards 2013 provide an occasion for a thorough analysis of the successes and failures of these policies and their integration as far as rural areas are concerned. The RAPIDO project offers a look into the various factors which contribute to the success or failure of innovative initiatives and transfer of knowledge. It should however be noted that the following policy recommendations and their focus are not unprecedented: other previous (RUREMPLO, 2000)[1] and present (IN-SIGHT, 2008)[2] research projects have identified similar policy emphases.

A recurring question during the project was how to define innovation, and especially what criteria define successful innovation in rural areas. As a single definition of innovation cannot appropriately render the existing diversity of situations from which innovation can emerge, the best way to obtain a sense of the meaning of innovation in rural areas is by means of examples.

For this reason, in this policy brief, first a few frequent and key characteristics of successful innovation are described and demonstrated by way of case study examples. Then the research needs that still remain to improve our knowledge of innovation are identified. Finally, the policy brief contains recommendations to facilitate innovation processes, illustrated with case study examples.

2. Characteristics of successful innovation in rural areas

Diversity of contexts and diversification of activities

Rural areas generally are characterised by a very large diversity of situations, ranging from declining population, limited accessibility, lack of factor endowments in terms of human, physical (e.g. infrastructure), knowledge as well as capital resources. In this context, rural areas' ability to innovate faces particular challenges.

In addition to the well-known regional societal, economic and environmental disparities of European and national rural areas, an important feature of the innovative initiatives identified by the RAPIDO project is their "multiple-activity characteristic": 70% of innovative initiatives in rural areas covered by our survey have a secondary activity and 30% have a tertiary activity, confirming the importance of multiple-activity in rural firms and projects (figure 1). New activities often come up as a result of innovation strategies based upon the development of new products and services. These multiple-activity rural businesses are mainly a result of on-farm diversification strategies. Another trend identified by the surveys is the presence of multiple activities within rural development organisations. A significant number of organisations integrate

[1] Terluim, I. and Post, J. (1999). Employment in leading and lagging rural regions of EU; Summary report of the RUREMPLEO project. The Hague, Agriculture Economics Research Institute (LEI). Report 4.99.10.
„Agriculture and employment in the rural regions of the EU" EU research programme FAIR (CT 96 1766)

[2] Bourdin, D. (2007). The IN-SIGHT project: Strengthening innovation processes for growth and development. Final Conference of project IN-SIGHT, Brussels, 15th October, 2008

activities of the three major economic sectors (agriculture, industry and services).
These strategies have been discussed, promoted and supported by rural development policies for the past 15-20 years, but they still need to be strengthened by further acknowledgment and support through targeted and flexible innovation policies. Also, diversification strategies are not necessarily in contradiction with regional specialisation strategies. On the contrary, they can have a synergic effect, e.g. regional strategies of local cooperation and organisation aimed at diversification of on-farm activities towards the production of particular regional products and/or services.

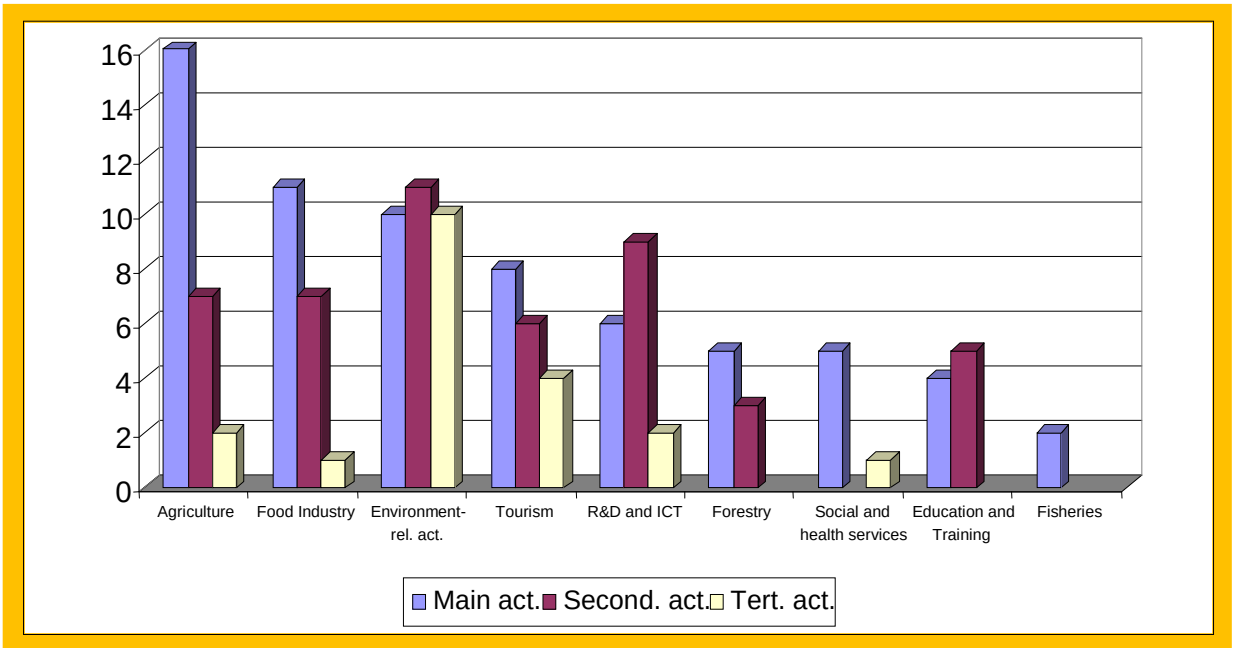

Figure 1: Innovative initiatives by activity sector, including secondary and tertiary activities
Source: Data from WP1 database (RAPIDO 2007)

Multiple benefits

It has been generally recognised along the project that the implementation of innovative initiatives, such as environmental technologies, in rural areas generates multiple benefits, which can be interpreted as indications of sustainable development. While financial benefits, often generated on a long-term perspective, are in some cases more difficult to assess or play a minor role, positive environmental as well as socio-economic impacts provide a wide variety of clear non-monetary values that boost rural development. Those values can comprise of, but are not limited to, improvement of water quality, preservation of landscapes, sustainable use of resources, climate-friendly production methods (from an environmental perspective) as well as improvement of self-confidence of the general population and their identification with the region itself, increasing stakeholder engagement in associations and improvement of social relations (from a social-economic point of view). An appropriate marketing and knowledge transfer of benefits that can be generated via the introduction of environmental technologies in rural areas is required.

Case study example: **Bioregional Minimills – Paper out of straw, UK:** *an example of the multiple benefits of innovation in rural areas.*

Bioregional Minimills Ltd. is developing a new technology that can produce paper from agricultural residue. This new environmental technology could help replace 20% of wood pulp used by industry, reduce electrical energy used, and reduce water use by 80%. The use of black liquor waste as fuel and the recycling of pulping chemicals make the technology virtually a closed loop.

Multiple benefits:

Income generation and development: the costs of paper production could significantly be reduced (less energy and water used) The MiniMills can prevent companies from closing their smaller mills and promote the establishment of new small non-wood mills.

Pressure on forest resources is reduced: The MiniMill technology will reduce pressure on the world's forests.

CO_2 emissions are reduced: Compared to burning straw and importing pulp, pulping straw in a 10,000 TPA (tonnes per annum) MiniMill saves 48,000 tonnes of CO_2 p.a.

Use of local resources and value from an otherwise waste material is generated: The small scale and flexibility of the MiniMill allows the use of locally available cellulosic raw materials, from agricultural residues e.g. wheat or rice straw, or crops such as abaca, bamboo, flax, hemp, reed, sisal or wood from sustainably-managed forests.

Resource efficiency: The MiniMill uses 50% less energy than the latest conventional wood mill and 90% less than traditional non-wood pulp mills. Water use is low, 80% less than for traditional non-wood pulp mills. The MiniMill is thermal energy self-sufficient through recovering energy from organics in the black liquor. Pulping chemicals are recovered for re-use.

Eliminating pollution: MiniMill technology provides a solution for small mills that previously discharged toxic black liquor effluent to watercourses. This allows local industry to continue functioning in a way which does not generate environmental costs for local populations.

Regional knowledge & Endogenous potential

The innovation system in rural areas is presumed to differ in several respects from innovation within urban agglomerations. Successful innovation in rural areas – in order to be able to benefit from economies of scale - must focus much more on intangible assets such as conscious behaviour, cooperation and collective learning than on the classical determinates of competitive advantages (such as physical and capital resources, and accessibility). Co-operation through conscious behavior and strengthening of endogenous potentials (or regional core competences) is nothing else than setting clearly defined developing priorities to enhance spill-over effects.

Endogenous potential or core competences describe what a certain region is able to do better than others, as well as its ability to renew and augment its core competences over time. Such a capability can either be achieved by the establishment of a skilled regional labour force or through the direct establishment of co-operative relationships between individual firms. Specific regional knowledge is therefore the basis for regional competences and capabilities no matter whether this knowledge is related to product- or process innovation, or even to innovation in the fields of organisation or marketing.

Case study example: **Steirisches Vulkanland - Creation of a common regional brand, Austria:** *an example of regional co-operation and focus on endogenous potential.*

The Styrian Vulkanland promoted regional identity by creating a common label. The regional brand "Vulkanland" combines regional manufacturing traditions, food production, tourism as well as food and wine culture.

Located in the periphery of Styria, the major objective of the 77 Styrian municipalities which united to form the Styrian Vulkanland is to create an innovative and liveable region by developing a regional awareness for the cultural, resource-based and innovative potential of regional producers and inhabitants. Strongly relying on traditional values concerning a respectful attitude towards nature and living beings as well as on the direct responsibility of each individual and local firm, a regional development strategy was created, strengthening the three core competences of the Vulkanland: quality food, handcrafts and health and tourism. With the aim of supporting an endogenous regional development, these three core competences are integrated within the major economic offensive which emphasis the regional strengths under the headings "Culinary region", "Handcraft region" and "Region of vital force".

The creation of a common regional brand: Additional to the concentration on the further development of regional strengths, the Vulkanland initiated a specific marketing strategy innovative to the region – the creation of the common brand "Vulkanland". The development of a regional brand resulted from the decision of a regional process orientation instead of a project orientation. In the course of strengthening regional core competences and firms operating within these areas, five parameters characterizing a successful brand have been identified:

(1) Identification and the creation of a sense of belonging,
(2) orientation (by providing a thematic fortification of the brand)
(3) trust,
(4) competence (concerning the belief in the regional economic potential for further development) and
(5) the creation of a positive regional image (by transforming a former peripheral area into a liveable, innovative region).

As a consequence, the common regional brand "Vulkanland" not only eases marketing for local firms, but also contributes to a changing perception of the region itself (within and outside the Vulkanland). The establishment of a common brand therefore plays a key role in the regional transformation process within the Vulkanland as regional firms and inhabitants start to identify themselves with the common vision of an innovative, upcoming region.

3. Improve the knowledge about innovative projects

Collect and disseminate statistical data about innovation in rural areas

While attempting to collect systematic knowledge about how innovation works within rural areas, significant gaps in data availability became evident. The available evidence is scarce and mainly case-study-based, while representative and even more importantly, cross regional comparative evidence, can be based only on regional level data, which is not readily available; thus, the findings of the RAPIDO project had to be mainly based on case-studies.

Currently, statistical information on innovation is collected by the CIS (Community Innovation Survey), which only surveys firms from industry and services (on the national level) and only reports the principal activity of the firm, and therefore fails to account for diversification strategies. For a systematic approach to the assessment of innovation in rural areas, the CIS needs to be adjusted, or alternatively, a similar survey must be developed to gather the data needed to characterise, analyse and monitor the progress of innovation in the EU rural areas.

The gathering of these data could be implemented in a systematic way, e.g., through homogenous reporting criteria as a condition for funding and support or through an information sharing platform requiring the entry of particular project data.

Standard statistical indicators that enable the identification and assessment of the effects of innovation, in particular on rural employment,

need to be developed. Also, to improve knowledge on the characteristics of actors, processes and activities of innovation in European rural areas, systematic and homogenous data are needed. Such data should be based on specific and efficient indicators of success and sustainability, comparable to the indicator set identified through RAPIDO (see below).

Research on successful innovation and its effects in rural areas, as well as policy advice in this area, would be greatly enhanced and facilitated by this kind of statistical information on innovation. Moreover, provided that this information and its analysis is disseminated and made accessible and comprehensible to a broader public, it would be a very useful and adequate tool for knowledge transfer and a source of inspiration for local actors.

The RAPIDO sustainability indicators

RAPIDO identified 26 indicators to evaluate the success of an innovative project.[3] It represents a first attempt of defining common criteria for the assessment of innovative initiatives that needs to be consolidated with further research.

If innovation is to serve sustainable development, then a range of conditions must be fulfilled in order to qualify. Furthermore, sustainable innovation in rural areas can be of very different territorial scale and act in different sectors or across different sectors.

The RAPIDO set of indicators can be used in order to assist policy makers in evaluating and monitoring innovative initiatives in rural areas. The implicit criterion of this indicator set for measuring the success of initiatives is their capacity to contribute to the sustainable development of rural societies.

Considering the multi-functionality of innovation and the different parameters of sustainability, the indicators have been grouped into thematic areas and should not be aggregated if the question of weighing individual criteria and areas is to be avoided. Instead of delivering a mono-dimensional result, the assessment allows for depicting strengths and weaknesses of single initiatives in relation to each area of sustainability.

The indicators chosen are simple and easy to calculate, at the same time each of them conveys meaningful and clear directional information, indicating items and trends that are obviously relevant in terms of sustainable policies for rural areas.

The result of the evaluation must be considered as the sum of the single trends signified by the indicators for the single areas.

Sustainability indicators facilitate communication about complex realities, provide a measure of progress towards sustainable economic, social and environmental development, and assist the evaluation of development and policy impacts on different territorial scales. By translating reality into manageable units of information, indicators become useful tools for the measurement of complex policy aims, for which data from different policy areas have to be confronted and for which communication to stakeholders from different scientific backgrounds is of fundamental importance.

4. Facilitate the innovation process in rural areas

Strengthen local networks

In order to guarantee a minimum of viability for projects without an immediate economic return, key support can be provided through networking with public (local and non-local) institutions. The generation of ideas, and even the early stage of the implementation of the project, can be carried out with limited resources and with the support of local networks. Nevertheless, in the medium term

[3] The RAPIDO indicator set to evaluate successful innovation in rural areas can be found here: http://www.rapido-fp6.eu/results.html

the support network of local non-public actors (and, where appropriate, also private) is essential for the viability of the project.

Therefore, policies should further provide incentives and facilitate the creation of structures which support comprehensive networks for innovative projects in rural areas to guarantee that a variety of actors can be involved to ensure the success of the project.

Local Development Agencies are structures which could play this role of support and promote networking among economic, social and public agents.

Integrate public actors into networks of innovating actors:

Local and regional governments, in addition to the functions of administration and management, are taking an increasingly active role in the implementation and development of innovative projects. Maintaining and strengthening the mechanisms of support is therefore an important aspect, but not enough. The efficiency is limited because of individual and unidirectional relationships between public actors and potential innovators. The experience from the analysed projects, but also from other analyses, shows that effectiveness is greater when the degree of integration of regional and local governments into the networks of actors directly linked to innovative projects is increased.

Formalise cooperation, networks and partnerships:

It is necessary and advisable to support innovative projects not only by enhancing or creating networks of informal actors, but especially by formalising these networks in the form of partnerships with a clear commitment for the project. In this way, the external actors can not only be better involved, but direct interrelationships can emerge between the various external actors, clearly resulting in greater efficiency in the implementation and development of the project.

Case study example: **Organic Food Valley, Poland:** *examples of internal and external networking activities.*

The Organic Food Valley is an economic cluster or network of cooperating organic food producers, companies, social organisations, knowledge centres and local authorities. It was started by the pilot project of the Regional Innovation Strategy for the Lubelskie Region in Eastern Poland. The project lasted two years and was finished in 2006. It was co-financed by the European Social Fund and the national budget of Poland. The experience of the Organic Food Valley shows that a network can get stronger through the activities initiated inside the structure as well as through the development of external relations.

The endogenous development covers:

- The establishment of new organic farms, herewith increasing the supply base for the organic food market and developing the base of organic knowledge and forms of its popularisation.
- Spreading the idea of ecology to other products and services as the important attributes of the regional identity (clothing, gastronomy, agro-tourism in the region, numerous meetings e.g. fairs or events with organic products).
- Strengthening the demand for the organic food through the education of children and youth, promotion of healthy lifestyle in mass media.
- Developing forms of cooperation among the participants of the network (including producers, scientists and local authorities) and with other networks in the region to search for synergy effects.

Strengthening the network beyond the region relates to the following activities:

- Exchange of experiences and mutual promotion among networks from other regions. (through mutual visits, participation in conferences, seminars, workshops, the exchange of publications, inviting to common realization of European projects)
- Participation in international fairs and exhibitions.
- Introduction of organic products to big chain shops across the country and support to export.

Invest in rural people

It is essential to invest in rural people and the improvement of quality of life standards in rural areas. Investing in rural people requires the creation of opportunities to strengthen knowledge and skills of different groups of rural actors: entrepreneurs and business promoters, farmers, rural workers and the rural communities in general. Focusing on the entire community is the only way to encourage and to implement rural innovations at a broad level.

To make rural areas attractive to its inhabitants, newcomers, visitors, and advanced technology firms, it is necessary to provide access to infrastructures (namely ICT) and basic services such as health care, education and public transportation.

Education and support to raise the awareness of the own regional potential:

Most often people are not aware of their own or their region's potential. Frequently the innovative potential of a region is already present in regional habits or traditional processes, products or knowledge. Innovation is not just about the generation of new knowledge, but also making use of tacit knowledge, of traditions and specific skills, even on a very low technological level this may lead to a fruitful and highly competitive atmosphere, especially in rural areas. Education, training and targeted support can transmit a sharpened perception and awareness of latent innovative potential.

Training and education as an answer to local needs:

The deepening of the cooperation of firms and secondary educational institutes can be the basis to establish a skilled and stable labour force within the region, as most of the firms strongly rely on internal education of trainees and employees. The establishment of a labour market providing specific skills demanded by firms within a certain organisation often allows a common training, further education and employment of regional workers.

For this reason the needs of regional firms and the special requirements to the labour force should be a core element of the regional education system.

Case study example**: ALICERRA– Action Learning for Rural Identity:** *an example of raising the awareness of rural regions' potential through education.*

ALICERA Interreg3c network project of Action Learning for Rural Identity:

The motivation behind the ALICERA project was the fact that currently used instruments for regional development are not sufficiently appropriate to mobilise specific endogenous potentials of rural regions. In order to promote the development of human resources in rural areas, the new and innovative strategy of "Rural Action Learning" (RAL) is applied in the ALICERA project. RAL is an education instrument designed to strengthen both the regional identity and action competence of the people in rural areas. The identification of people with their region is a prerequisite to motivate them to engage in sustainable development activities in the region. In a second step, action competence is required for active participation in this task.

The ALICERA project aimed to test the RAL-instrument in different European rural regions and to assess its effectiveness by carrying out a large-scale evaluation with a focus on on-farm-learning for normal school classes of all levels. The results give insights into the significance and potential of educational instruments like RAL for the rural development. The implementation of RAL is based on regional co-operation structures between actors from the sector of the agricultural and food industries and from the educational sector. The close connection of both sectors is the unique characteristic of this new approach.

The project ended in 2007 with full success including cross-sector policy transfers: e.g. on-farm-school-support became an element of rural development programming in some regions

Increase the receptivity and targeted support to small initiatives

The promotion of innovative environments in rural areas is a global goal, but realistically, it is also somewhat complicated to implement. In this aim several options can be considered:

First a more receptive culture to potential innovative projects should be promoted in local and regional administrations. In addition it is necessary, especially for regional governments and other agencies (for example associations), to develop structures of staff to promote and adequately assess the potential initiatives. And third, it is the responsibility of regional administrations, and sometimes also national governments, to facilitate the administrative and bureaucratic mechanisms in order not to hinder the implementation of potential innovative projects. In this context, it is necessary to create or improve the technical and local capacity to asses and inform the social, environmental and economic viability, as well as the global potentialities and possible effects and impacts on the area.

Beyond the direct involvement of regional governments, Local Development Agencies (mentioned above in the context of strengthening local networks) dedicated to rural areas could develop this role.

The regional scale is the one in which the proximity of promoters and management is greatest, and also allows for "economies of scale" to provide advice and support to a relatively high number of potential promoters. Some cases show that the cost is relatively low in relation to the impact that such a centre can have on the social and business structures in rural areas. Such a Local Development Centre should not only provide logistical support and information, or conduct analysis of economic and technical feasibility (for example, working in a project basis), but it would also have a role in becoming the "facilitator" of relations and contacts between prospective developers and various external actors (from national governments, to consultants or research), and could eventually also give support in any phase of the project.

Case study example**: Saint-Hilaire du Maine – local heating system fuelled by wood from farmland hedgerows, France***: an example of the importance of targeted support for innovative initiatives*

This LEADER+ project consists of establishing a regional network of sustainable heating based on a local resource: wood from farmland hedgerows. The town of Saint Hilaire and its residents were the first to manage to set up their own pilot project and to share this experience with the rest of the region (Pays de Haute Mayenne).

Overall the implementation of this local pilot project was successful. The Saint Hilaire project invites farmers to sell the wood generated from the trimming of their hedges. Once collected, the wood is chipped, dried and becomes the raw material for one of the two wood-fired boilers which have been installed by the local council. Saint Hilaire du Maine has also created a public structure responsible for buying the wood from farmers and then selling the energy produced to residents. Eventually, the objective was to provide heating and warm sanitary water to an entire housing estate "Les Lilas" (23 lots) by using a local resource which is being preserved through its consumption. (source: "Working together to build a heating network", Leader+ Magazine, Nbr 6, European Communities, 2006, pp. 32-33.)

Nevertheless, the municipality had no experience with the new technology and assigned a specialised development bureau to implement the technical aspects of the project. Even though this experience was mainly positive, a few technical details were overlooked or miscalculated by the agency. This now could have negative repercussions on the municipal budget and on the clients/residents trust. In addition, these problems bring about contradictions with the initial idea of the project, i.e. the environmental aspect (important loss of energy), and the social aspect of providing low-price heating AND warm water).

Targeted support and/or financial means would have been needed to avoid this situation.

Cultivate an environment of trust and co-operation

The creation of mutual trust is the basis for establishing co-operations among firms and serves as a driving force for firms to organise themselves. Successful regional development policy has to establish trust, first of all people have to talk, they have to communicate.

Once co-operation is arranged on low levels it is rapidly strengthened. Strong organisation usually leads to formal co-operation, and so to partnerships of firms and educational institutes or to co-operation among firms and customers, which results in long-lasting and stable relationships.

Collective innovation activities among firms and customers, hence the introduction of mutual developing processes is going beyond an atmosphere of trust. Positive feedbacks from the innovation process reinforce the elements of continuity; therefore co-operation can increase the number of innovative firms.

Competition in the context of a high degree of co-operation and organisation is usually conducted via quality and not via price. Firms therefore try to provide high quality products and services in order to stay competitive.

Case study example: **The Wine Route of Navarra (Local Action Group Consorcio Zona Media de Navarra**): *an example of co-operation and trust between actors.*

The project emerges around the idea of wine and tourism as two complementary quality products. The initial financing for the initiative came from the LEADER + and Equal initiatives. The project aims at building partnerships to boost the local economy through sectoral co-operation (wine) as well as across sectors (wine-tourism-business).

Based on the natural resources and touristic services in a wine producing area, the actors involved try to strengthen the identification of the wine with the territory and vice versa (territorial image). The aim is to promote the entire area, offering a high level of satisfaction to the demand, while supporting the whole economic and social development of the territory.

LEADER + has contributed to the promotion and training for the winery tourism, e.g. by improving roads, the touristic adequacy of the wineries, and the quality of retail sellers of wine. Through Equal (Vincual project) the actors have worked to facilitate changes in the training of workers in the wine industry and also from companies participating to the "Wine route".

This example stresses the importance of cooperation across strong regional sectors. Indeed, the Wine route is an example of very strong networking at local level between different private and public actors, but also beyond the local level (involving regional public actors as well as other areas specialized in wine and touristic activities). This cooperation is linked to a process of creating new alliances among actors, based on mutual trust and the leadership of local stakeholders.

This project emphasizes the importance not only of having an innovative product with great potential, but also a network of local actors based on trust and on an effective leadership of the process. These are crucial elements characterising and innovative milieu.

Improve ETAP

The European Union's action plan for the promotion of environmental technologies has as an overall goal to reduce pressure on natural resources, while at the same time improving the quality of life for EU citizens and stimulating economic growth. ETAP aims to streamline the Member States efforts to improve conditions for the uptake of environmental technologies and focuses on reducing the economic, regulatory, technological and social barriers to innovation across a broad range of thematic areas.

Currently, the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) has limited visibility and its voluntary nature limits its effectiveness. In addition to

making ETAP compulsory, improvements could be made to the requirements of the national roadmaps to enhance implementation and communication between countries to overcome shared challenges. For example, the current toolbox of possible instruments to support environmental technologies could be enhanced by a requirement to introduce strategic objectives, targets and milestones to the national roadmaps. More measurable objectives and standardized guidelines for reporting would help to monitor progress and increase awareness of the technologies and ETAP itself.

Furthermore, the link between ETAP-related initiatives and rural areas often remains unclear. Thus it is difficult to determine how those initiatives support environmental technologies relevant to rural development. By setting up the development of rural areas as an ETAP-target this link could be strengthened.

In addition, the variation in the extent and focus of ETAP-related activities in individual Member States suggests that further exchange of experience and best practice approaches among Member States is necessary, particularly to boost support for environmental technology, development and promotion in the new Member States.

Relevant Links

RAPIDO-project: Rural Areas, People & Innovative Development

www.rapido-fp6.eu

INSIGHT-project: Strengthening Innovation Processes for Growth and Development:

http://www.insightproject.net/

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We will attempt to answer your enquiries as soon as possible. Thank you in advance for your time and interest.

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