

Stakeholder involvement practice / example

RUR@L INOV - Innovation in rural areas (NRN project) – Portugal

The project aims to understand and disseminate good practices on innovation in rural areas and to develop the tools to systematically collect information about innovation and its impacts. Over a hundred of innovative initiatives were worked on, contributing to a better understanding of innovation in rural areas, to define the profile of innovators and to identify the key variables to facilitate or hinder innovation processes.

A network was created to link the community of innovators and entrepreneurs operating in rural areas, through meetings, focus groups, workshops and a website.

A participatory methodology was adopted ensuring an active participation of stakeholders in all key phases of the project, integrating their vision and expectations.

Stakeholders concerned

The project promoters:

- UTAD – University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (academic researchers)
- DGADR – Directorate General of Agriculture and Rural Development (*national public agency*)

Other stakeholders:

- Innovators representing innovative companies (different rural activities and different regions)
- Public and private organizations directly related to innovation (rural development associations)
- Business associations, other types of associations and cooperatives
- Local or central public authorities
- National and European researchers and academic experts (Spain, Sweden, UK)

Main lessons for others

- Having a voice in the project strengthened the innovators motivation and valorisation. The same happened with their organizations and communities. This has facilitated networking to collect and disseminate information in the context of the project
- Involving policy makers in the different project phases helped them towards a better identification with the discussion issues and to be more receptive to some of the conclusions
- Working together with different stakeholders made possible to demystify the strict concept of innovation (innovation strictly linked to technology and research) and to extend this concept to cover diverse types of innovation in rural areas, the so called “hidden innovation”
- Distinct perspectives were brought up for discussion by different stakeholders involved. In consequence, their awareness of this diversity has increased.

Achievements & results

- Innovation in rural areas is now a better understood subject in consequence of the reference framework established by the project
- Good practices on innovation in rural areas were identified, described and disseminated
- Tools to collect information about this subject were developed (indicator system, database)
- Impacts of innovation in rural areas were evaluated
- Policy recommendations and guidelines to promote innovation in rural areas

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