

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples collected by the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer and Innovation. The case studies describe practices and approaches that EU Member States and Regions have put in place in order to promote Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, mainly but not exclusively, through their Rural Development Programmes in the current period. These examples aim to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in supporting innovation through the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the programmes.

Developing a methodology to promote innovative enterprises in rural areas, Catalonia Spain

SUMMARY: A pilot project was implemented in two LAG areas in Spain aiming to develop a transferable methodology for fostering innovative enterprises in rural areas using bottom up approaches and establishing synergies and networks between the local entrepreneurs.

1. Why the approach has been put in place

The Centre for Integrated Rural Development of Catalonia (CEDRICAT) is focused on stimulating the rural economy by promoting rural innovation and entrepreneurship.

The impetus for new economic activities in rural areas is often a challenge. It is vital to design methodologies to foster innovative rural businesses in a holistic way covering the entire entrepreneurial process, from the generation of a new business idea up until its implementation.

Entrepreneurship promotion programmes are not new. However, in most cases they are limited to offer assistance in the preparation of business plans. The project “Establishing a Methodology for rural innovation enterprises promotion” took a step further. It provides guidance, advice and conducts enterprising people from the first phase, when the business idea is just starting up until the implementation process where the idea is put into practice. This full trajectory of support made the project stand out as particularly innovative.

2. How it was achieved in practice

The aim of the four-year pilot project (2010-2013) implemented by CEDRICAT was to develop a methodology for fostering innovative enterprises in rural areas. Though the creation of new jobs in-migration would be encouraged and the local economy would

be strengthened in a sustainable way. In addition this methodology should be transferable to other areas.

The project focused on three specific objectives. Firstly, promote the creation of innovative companies and promote multi-

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functionality in rural areas. Secondly, develop the entrepreneurial spirit of people living in rural areas and create a network of entrepreneurs. Thirdly, facilitate the generation of innovative, creative and imaginative business ideas, from the application of specialized methodologies and professional advice.

In order to achieve these objectives as starting point cooperation was established with local authorities and entrepreneurs were identified and attracted. In a series of meetings / workshops new business ideas were generated. The ideas produced were then presented in a seminar to potential clients and / or investors.

The part of the process where new ideas were identified named “Turning an idea into an Enterprise” was developed through two 2-day workshops for generating and developing business ideas. The workshops were held in 2 locations in Catalonia. During these workshops future entrepreneurs were incited to think out, stand out and improve their ideas through teamwork exercises, motivational techniques, learning activities that stimulate creativity and presentation of prototypes.

When new ideas were selected to become a project, entrepreneurs were supported in the preparation of their business plans and also received advice and financing for their new enterprises. New businesses were guided and supported throughout the whole implementation of their project and were

guided in performing assessment and validation of their progress.

Another aspect of the project was managing and maintaining a portal for entrepreneurship. The portal provided services for social networking, online library and exchange area for members, tools, training etc.

The dissemination of information was ensured through the implementation of a communication strategy that included among others the design of promotional material such as information leaflets, media planning, a press conference etc.

A strategy was also developed in order to ensure the transferability of the above methodology. The strategy established a process through which the methodology would be adapted to the specificities of different territories using the knowledge of local officials.

To design this project CEDRICAT collaborated with a number of different partners. They were supported by the company Tecnalía, Research and Innovation that contributed to the design, planning and performance of the “Turning an idea into an Enterprise” using their experience in stimulating creativity and motivation. Local Action Groups offered their knowledge and expertise on revitalization processes of rural areas which informed the design and supported the implementation of the project. The foundation Andanatura from Andalusia also offered working methodologies and advising techniques.

3. Lessons learnt for the future

Results: In the framework of the project 8 new businesses were created and another 11 initiatives that had already started added innovative elements in their activities. The

businesses were covering a broad spectrum of activities including guidance services, forestry planning, marketing of local and/or organic food, cultural activities, gastronomy-

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accommodation-leisure, as well as marketing, design and management, engineering and technical services.

Implementing the methodology for promoting rural innovation enterprises in different areas proved that replication is possible. However, the specific characteristics of each territory have to be taken into account. The methodology doesn't work as a blueprint and it needs to be adapted to the local circumstances. The application in different territories has led to detect specific parts in

the methodology that need to be adapted to each territory thus ensuring transference and replication.

As a result of the project an entrepreneur's network has been developed. The combination of content and the dynamic element of these workshops (workshops design, exchange among entrepreneurs, etc.) proved successful. It led to the creation of an active network of entrepreneurs who are creating synergies and helping each other.

Lessons learnt:

- ⇒ Organising workshops with groups of entrepreneurs/stakeholders can play a crucial role in establishing synergies among them and creating networks. The workshops held as part of the project were highly appreciated by participating entrepreneurs and were considered as the true added-value of the project.
- ⇒ For implementing a project in different regions, it is vital that the project is developed together with local stakeholders. Collaboration from the design phase of the project to its implementation and completion is indispensable in order to avoid duplication, to create synergies and to define the best formulas for engaging new entrepreneurs/stakeholders.
- ⇒ The approach will need to respect the socioeconomic characteristics of an area and take into account also timing issues. For instance in Ibiza many potential entrepreneurs participated in the initial stages of the project. However, very few people followed the whole program, probably due to the lack of available time during the summer period.

Information included in this fiche is primarily coming from the case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer & Innovation. The fiche is compiled by the ENRD Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and Regions and takes into account views expressed at the European, national and regional level. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.