DERREG

Developing Europe's Rural Regions in the Era of Globalisation

An interpretative model for better anticipating and responding to Challenges for regional development in an evolving international context.

WP4:
Work package 4: Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems

Deliverable 4.4
Summary report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The leading research question in Work Package 4: Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems of the EU-funded DERREG project was how to (best) arrange support for joint learning and innovation in rural grassroots development initiatives. This research question was analysed along three sub-questions: 1) how public support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives is arranged across the various case study areas; 2) how beneficiaries and supporters evaluate these arrangements; and 3) what makes arrangements work well.

The aim of this empirical study was to get a better understanding of interfaces operating between three more-or-less self-contained 'worlds': a) grassroots (or place-based) development initiatives in various fields of activities within rural regions; b) diverse public policies formulated and implemented at different governmental and administrative levels; and c) the heterogeneous 'knowledge' support structure of public institutes and private agencies that potentially can or in cases are facilitating joint learning and innovation through education, research and consultancy.

At first relevant policies and the knowledge support structure were mapped for all the six case study areas: Alytus County (Lithuania), Comarca de Verín (Spain), Direktionsbezirk Dresden (Germany), Roscommon County (Ireland), Saarland (Germany) and the Westerkwartier (Netherlands). Subsequently 61 grass roots development initiatives were inventoried across the six case study areas and a comparative analysis was done focussing on: a) the type of support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation provided and received; b) how the support and facilitation was arranged including the mediating interface; c) how the support and facilitation and the working of the interface were evaluated by both the beneficiaries and supporters. Finally, a selection of 33 well-working interfaces was analysed in-depth to understand better what makes an interface work well, given the contextual differences across the case study areas.

Rural areas across the European Union are highly diverse, also in their development, and so is the support for and facilitation of joint learning and innovation and its arrangements. Arrangements are context dependent and differences reflect, to a certain extent, the political arena and the institutional evolution of a case study area and the country of origin at large. This implies that one cannot simply transfer arrangements and well-working interfaces from one country to another, not even within countries: arrangements have to be contextualised.

The comparative analysis, however, reveals a repertoire of promising practices that can be draw upon as showcases and learned from in improving arrangements and the working of interfaces. In addition to the context, three basic components have to be considered in arranging public support for joint learning and innovation at grassroots level: a) the *shaping of the operational space*, b) the *scale of operation* and c) *the delegation of specific operational tasks and roles to agents and agencies*. The working of an interface, and as a consequence the effectiveness of supporting policies, depends on a well-targeted composure of these components, tailored to the specific context, and, not in the least, the political commitment to do so.

The types of targeted beneficiaries and the geographical reach of an interface differ between rural areas, suggesting different development priorities in different regional contexts (e.g. depending on demography, geographical characteristics, history and local sense of place).

Types of support and facilitation include: 'financial support' (i.e. different kinds of subsidies and procedural support), 'knowledge and skills' (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), 'physical infrastructure' (for example meeting spaces, information centres), and 'social infrastructure' (for example network incubation and cluster forming.

Operational interfaces can be long-term, commissioned assignments; short-term or project based assignments; institutional agreements; and recruited professional services.

Encountered operational agents and agencies included regional development networks (e.g. NGOs, associations and community members), public-private partnerships, public institutes (including institutes of research, education and advice) and professional services.

The delegated tasks and roles (for example decision power) is arguably a crucial factor, which determine the operational space of an interface. The delegation of tasks and roles determines the ability of an interface to mediate effectively between the 'worlds' of supporting policies, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives.

In each case study area, joint learning and innovation is already to a certain extent supported, but better arrangements can improve the working of interfaces and effectiveness of public policies. An interface needs to be visible and made accessible for the targeted beneficiaries or development activities. It is recommended to invest public funds into creating low-threshold, single gateways to integrate different types of support, which are trusted by the targeted beneficiaries, and which may help to connect and mediate between supports and beneficiaries. This is a demanding task, crossing various institutional boundaries. To work more efficiently and effectively, operational agents and agencies need more operational space to make their own in order to circumvent difficult bureaucratic procedures. This asks for a further delegation of decision making power to operational agents or agencies, but this raises the question of accountability.

Policymakers are advised to acknowledge the diversity of operational agents and agencies, ranging from regional development networks (such as local key players and community members, associations and NGOs) to public-private partnerships, public institutes and professionals. The diversity of operational agents and agencies can be acknowledged by empowering both private and public operational agents and agencies to support and facilitate learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives.

Existing policy frameworks, directives and public-funded education and research programmes can be directed more towards encouraging a long-term cooperation between the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. This may help to create trust and allow the setting of mutually benefitting research agendas.

Although of major importance, the role of public policies as driving force of place-based development should not be overestimated. The involvement of charismatic, informal agents, able to bond denizens with various, possibly conflicting interests and able to bridge and connect different worlds, is equally important. Charismatic, informal agents act as spiders in the networking web. They are generally seen as crucial in coming to a common understanding and in the formation of a public-private partnership that is willing to constitute proper working interfaces.

The framework of 'rural learning regions', offers the prospect of an integrated perspective on the governance of joint learning and innovation in rural regions. It provides a tool for reflexive monitoring and evaluation in and across rural areas. Its potential has been explored in this research project, but realizing the promising potential needs further proving.

1 INTRODUCTION

In regional and rural development policies, capacity building, elevating the 'capacity to act' and self-efficacy of inhabitants individually as well as collectively, is generally seen as key to promote more resilient, robust and inclusive European rural regions in an era of globalisation with economies depending ever more on knowledge creation and innovation.

Different public policies along different administrative levels are implemented to support various capacities & skills built by various inhabitants engaged in various development activities at various places across the EU. Some (e.g. regional or economic) policies aim to support the development of 'globally' competitive business activities in a region, other (rural renewal) policies specifically aim at the development of predominantly rural areas based on place-specific assets and resources, and yet another set of public policies aims to support local community development by facilitating grassroots development activities and supporting knowledge creation, empowerment, education, learning and innovation.

Aside from the political question what kind of development activities need public support, the question is how public support can be best arranged to be effective and beneficial to the development activities of choice, and particularly: how to best support joint learning by doing by those engaged in grassroots development activities. To be effective in supporting grassroots initiatives, policies need to interact with actors in place, their on-going activities and their motivations as well as their concerns and goals. In order to engage public administration and the knowledge infrastructure in rural regional grassroots development initiatives, specific operational arrangements can be made with regard to interfaces operating between supporting policies, learning and innovation supporting facilities and grassroots development activities.

Research in *Work Package 4: Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems* of the EU-funded DERREG project has focussed on this question. The actual arrangements to support joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives is investigated in six rural regions situated across the European Union: Alytus County in Southern Lithuania, Comarca de Verín in Galicia, Spain, County Roscommon in the West of Ireland, Direktionsbezirk Dresden in the East of Germany, Saarland in the West of Germany as well as the Western part of Groningen Province in the North of the Netherland (thereafter named Westerkwartier). The case study areas differ greatly in their geographical, economic and demographic structure and dynamics. The different case study areas are described extensively in respective contextual reports[1]. Therefore, only a snapshot is presented here.

Alytus County is situated in the South of the Lithuania, bordering Poland and Belarus and comprises 5 municipalities– one city municipality and four district municipalities. It has a size of 5,425 km², a population of 177,040 with a density of 32.6 people/km².Forests occupy 44 % of the County, rivers and lakes a further 4.3 % of the territory. It has numerous protected features such as the unique nature, mushroom forests, architecture and cultural heritage. It is considered

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[1] D5.2 contextual reports are available at www.derreg.eu.

a less favourable area in the EU, due to population decline, high unemployment rates and economic regression. Nevertheless, the County is ascribed great potential for agro-tourism[2].

The Comarca de Verín, an EU convergence region, is located in the South of Galicia (Spain). In Galicia, a Comarca has only limited official recognition and no administrative function as they are not recognised as official administrative units (they are land division units based on a traditional Iberian system). Galicia has a total population of 2.762.198 inhabitants, 29.575 km² (approximately 6% of the Spanish territory), thus a population density of 93,40 inhabitants/ km² which varies significantly from more than 100 inhabitants per km² in the Atlantic Axis to less than 25 inhabitants per km² in other parts, as it is in the case of our area of study. The Comarca has maintained a population below 30,000 inhabitants over the last decades (28,672 in 2006). It has a surface of 1,007 km² and 158 nucleus of the population belong to 8 municipalities.

The Direktionsbezirk Dresden is located in the East of Germany, bordering Poland and the Czech Republic and has a size of 7,931 km². The population density in Direktionsbezirk Dresden (excluding the cities Dresden, Hoyaswerda and Görlitz) is 1,060,400 people with a population density of 151.4 persons/km². The development of the Direktionsbezirk Dresden is marked by an on-going process of economic catch-up to the German national level. After a period of economic down-turn in the early 1990s and a consequent out-migration of the regional population towards more prosperous regions in Germany, today it struggles with above average shrinking and ageing of its population. In addition, the first sector activities (agriculture, forestry, fishery) are declining more rapidly than in other regions in Saxony and in Germany.

County Roscommon in the West Region of Ireland is classified as a traditional agricultural area. In 2006, the population of County Roscommon stood at 58,768 people which is 14.1% of the 415,500 living in the West Region, with 55.7% (231,035 people) living in County Galway and 30% (126,000 people) in County Mayo. This places Roscommon 22nd out of the 26 counties in terms of population size and gives it a relatively low population density of only 23.1 persons per km². This is slightly lower than that for the whole West Region, where a population density of 30.5 persons per km² places it third lowest across the ten DERREG case study regions. Agriculture has been the main economic activity in the County, being slowly replaced by the service economy (including tourism), high tech and construction industry in recent years.

Saarland shares its borders with Luxembourg and France and is therefore engaged in many transnational ties. It is typical of a 'post-industrial rural region', where extractive industries and manufacturing have always been more important than agriculture economically in the modern era, and where deindustrialisation in the late twentieth century has presented major social and economic challenges. It has overall population of 1,024,000 million inhabitants and a population density of 357.1 persons/km², excluding Saarbrücken. The service sector is the most important economic activity, with agriculture accounting for only 1% of the regional economy.

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[2] Description taken from D1.1 Case Study Region Annex

The Westerwartier is a predominantly rural area in an urban setting situated in the West of Groningen province in the North of the Netherlands. It comprises an area of 345 km² -of which 80 % is agricultural land- and includes the municipalities Grootegast, Marum, Leek and Zuidhorn. It has been identified as a LEADER region in 2007 but since it is not an administrative unit, does not have any authoritative or regulative powers. The landscape of the Westerkwartier is nationally acknowledged for its small fields and diversity. The region possesses a good infrastructure, including train and bus services as well as a motorway connecting the Westerkwartier with the provincial capital Groningen. Accordingly, the Westerkwartier is an attractive residential area for young families, leading to a younger age average than in the rest of the province.

Furthermore, the size of the different case study areas vary greatly. The Westerkwartier, the Comarca de Verín and County Roscommon are located at a relatively localized scale of governance (LAU I-II. In Galicia, Comarca have only limited official recognition and no administrative function. Alytus County and the Oberlausitz are located at NUTS level III. Alytus County, however, comprises only five municipalities, and its size is therefore comparable to other case study areas in the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain. Oberlausitz with 118 municipalities and Saarland with 32 municipalities are thus the largest case study areas. All case study areas belong to one or more LEADER regions. In addition, they also form part of one or more region-specific rural development programmes. As table 8.3 shows, in addition to LEADER programmes, the Oberlausitz and Saarland form part of the ILE and REK programmes, County Roscommon takes part in the "Local Development Social Inclusion Programme" and the Comarca de Verín in PRODER (National Rural Development Programme).

In this report, research findings of WP4 will be presented, returning to the key question how to best arrange the support and facilitation of joint learning at grassroots level contributing to rural regional development. Chapter 2 presents the analytical framework of a 'learning rural region' underpinning and guiding the research with its focus on interconnections and interfaces operating between the domains of 'public administration', 'knowledge support structure' and a 'region'. Next the research methodology will be briefly explained in chapter 3 outlining the different research steps and output. Chapters 4 to 9 present successively for each case study area a map of supporting policies and a rough sketch of the knowledge support structure on hand that possibly can or actually does facilitate joint learning and innovation in the case study area[3]. Subsequently an overview is given of the type of support and facilitation actually received by a selection of various grass roots development initiatives, how the support and facilitation was actually arranged and, finally, how beneficiaries, and in some cases supporters, do evaluate the support and facilitation and its arrangement. Chapter 10 presents the findings of a comparative analysis highlighting three basic components in arranging support and facilitation of joint learning and innovation effectively: a) the formal shaping of an arrangement, b) the scale of governance and c) the delegation of roles and tasks to operational agents and agencies. This has been the onset for a subsequent in-depth study of a selection of well-working arrangements and its operational features and practices. The results are presented in Chapter 11. Finally research

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[3] See *D4.1 Deliverable 4.1 Overview of learning and innovation support strategies*, available at www.derreg.eu.

proceedings and results are reflected upon in Chapter 12, going back to the key question how support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation can best be arranged. Its ends with a set of policy recommendations.

2 GOVERNANCE OF LEARNING AND INNOVATION IN RURAL REGIONS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Effects of globalisation are significantly contributing to the (re)shaping of rural regions. These processes are often accompanied by social learning and negotiation processes: *"The impact of globalisation in reshaping rural places is manifested through processes of negotiation, manipulation and hybridization, contingent on the mobilization of associational power and conducted through but not contained by local micro-policies"* (Woods, 2007, p.502). Several studies have looked at the mechanisms of social learning processes and the role of mediators in rural regions e.g. (Leeuwis, 2004; Wals, 2007). An integrated view on the effect of globalisation on rural regions, however, has not yet been considered and connections remain largely unknown (Woods, 2007). As Dargan and Shucksmith (2008) argue, innovation policy and science is focussed on businesses and business networks. Since rural regions usually lack a high density of businesses and business networks, frameworks to study regional learning and innovation are focussed on urban-centred economic core regions (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008). Learning and innovation taking place in rural regions is thus not well incorporated into standard approaches defining and measuring innovation (Shucksmith, 2010).

In urban-centred economic core regions, support and facilitation of regional learning and innovation has received considerable scientific attention (B. Asheim, 2007; B.T. Asheim, 1996; Bjørn T. Asheim & Coenen, 2005; Busa, Heijs, Martinéz Pellitero, & Baumert, 2005; Huggins, Johnston, & Steffenson, 2008; Lawson & Lorenz, 1999; Rutten & Boekema, 2007a, 2007b; Storper, 1993). Here it is defined as the support and facilitation of a rapid exchange of new scientific, tacit, regionally embedded knowledge and human capital between academia and industry which aims to ensure a leading role of regions in the globalising economy (Lawson and Lorenz 1999). Successful support and facilitation of regional learning and innovation is argued to depend on well-working linkages between the industry, the state and academia (Storper 1993). Their collaboration is facilitated through spatial proximity (Asheim 1996) [4].

The study of these linkages has given rise to at least two theoretical frameworks, the 'learning region' (Rutten and Boekema 2007; Storper 1993) and the 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz, 2003; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Spatially clustered 'learning regions' are thus defined by Rutten & Boekema (2007) as "[the space where] regional actors engage in collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit, resulting in a process of regional learning. Regional characteristics affect the degree to which the process of regional learning leads to regional renewal" (p.136). The authors of both theoretical frameworks argue, as illustrated by the example of the triple helix in figure 1, that the industry, the state and academia all have separate functions but they interact with each other similar to the DNA strings of a triple helix (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000). The industry, for example, is associated with the site of production, academia acts as a source of new knowledge and human capital and the state ensures stable and contractual relationships (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000).

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[4] This section is an amended version of a paper submitted to the journal 'European Countryside' and will be published in 2011.
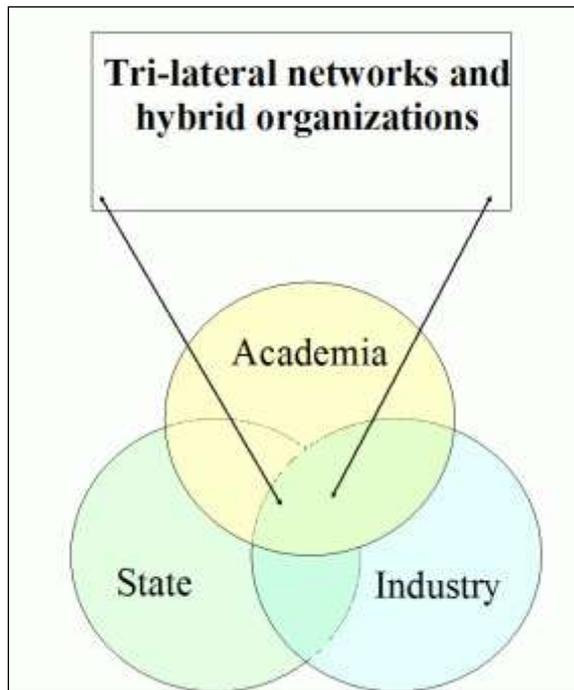
Figure 1 The triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000)

There are two ways in which regional learning and innovation is supported and facilitated in economic core regions. One way is by supporting and facilitating knowledge spill-over and volarization of knowledge from academia towards industries in order to commercialise it into innovative products in order to create competitive advantages for regional businesses (Keeble, Lawson, Moore, & Wilkinson, 1999; Morgan, 1997; Storper, 1993). Examples of this are the close collaboration of Cambridge University and business in Cambridge business park in England (Keeble et al. 1999) and the knowledge transfer between Stanford University and businesses in the science park of Silicon Valley, California (Rutten and Boekema 2007). A second way is to focus on the support and facilitation of developing human capital, arguing that it is crucial for understanding and using new, scientific knowledge that can lead to a successful competition in the globalising economy (Wolfe & Gertler, 2002). Wolfe and Gertler (2002) thus argue that the key to successful regional learning and innovation does not lie in supporting and facilitating knowledge spill-over and valorisation but in providing businesses with the abilities to develop skills and capacities to filter and use new, scientific knowledge to their competitive advantage.

Both interpretations of regional learning and innovation have influenced the formulation of supporting regional (and to some extent rural) development policies. Some policies aim to facilitate a copy-pasting of the 'Silicon Valley' example (Gustavsen & Ennals, 2007). It is therefore argued that support and facilitation of regional learning processes do not deal with supporting 'learning' but with transforming new, scientific expertise into commercial goods (Cooke, 2007). Other policies focus on support and facilitation of developing human capital, as for example the 'Lernende Regionen' concept in Germany, Austria and other European countries.

Support and facilitation of learning and innovation in rural regions

In contrast to the industry-based economic core regions, development in rural regions is characterised by a high diversity of actors and activities (Roep, Horlings, & Eelke, 2009). Investigations within the European research project DERREG have shown that development activities in rural regions cover a wide range of development aspects. Inventoried initiatives dealt with activities as diverse as nature, landscape & environment, civic & community development, SME support and culture & history. To a lesser extent the inventoried initiatives also deal with (multifunctional) agriculture, agriculture & forestry, tourism, and education, training & employment (Wellbrock et al., 2011). As illustrated in figure 2, these different actors all operate within an "arena" and their actions contribute jointly to the development of a versatile and vital countryside (Roep et al. 2009).
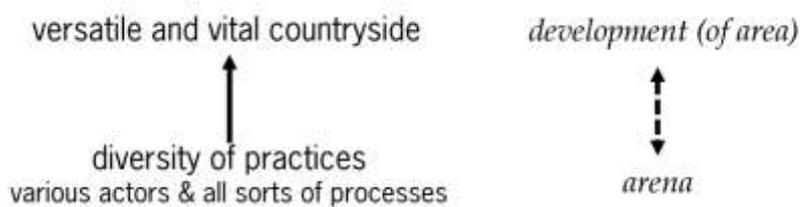
Figure 2 Diverse actors and processes engaging in rural regional development (Roep et al. 2009)

Like economic core regions, rural regions also need to have a strong support system for innovation, including structures that facilitate knowledge transfer between research, education and the industry (Crevoisier & Jeannerat, 2009; D. Doloreux, 2003; David Doloreux, 2004; Skuras, Meccheri, Moreira, Rosell, & Stathopoulou, 2005). At the same time, however, the high diversity of actors and activities arguably also demands a higher diversity of knowledge and human capital than in economic core regions. Tovey (2008) thus argues that learning and innovation processes in rural regions do not only require support and facilitation of spill-over of technological, expert knowledge and related human capital from academia to industry, but support and facilitation also needs to address the use and acquisition of indigenous knowledge about local places and locally-embedded resources. It is further argued that local and lay knowledge is also important, for instance, to encourage novelty production and to develop endogeneity (Ploeg & Marsden, 2008) or to secure the enrolment of local resources in global networks by using knowledge about local markets, cultural preferences and sustainable resource management (Jasanoff & Martello, 2004; Skuras, et al., 2005; Woods, 2007).

The investigations within the DERREG research project have revealed five different categories of support and facilitation which appear necessary to stimulate learning and innovation in rural regions, namely: "financial support" (i.e. different kinds of subsidies and procedural support), "knowledge and skills" (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), "physical infrastructure" (for example meeting spaces, biosphere reserves and information centres) and "social infrastructure" (for example in form of network incubation and cluster forming (Wellbrock et al. 2011). The empirical results thus show that learning and innovation needs more than new, scientific expert knowledge to be supported and facilitated.

Arguably, instead of focussing on high-tech, industrial knowledge and its related human capital as in economic core regions (Woods 2007), the study of support and facilitation for learning and innovation in rural regions requires a place-based approach. Using a place-based approach to the study of support and facilitation for learning and innovation in rural regions, could help to provide an integrated view on how rural places deal with globalisation, taking into account differential geographies of globalisation across space (Woods, 2007). In addition, a place-based approach will be able to account for the heterogeneity of activities caused by globalisation and account for the diversity of identities and interests in a particular space (Massey, 1991). It is therefore questionable whether the normative focus of the current theoretical frameworks on linkages between the industry, the state and academia (B.T. Asheim, 1996; Busa, et al., 2005; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Huggins, et al., 2008; Rutten & Boekema, 2007b) can account for the diverse support and facilitation needed to ensure place-based learning and innovation in rural regions (Tovey, 2008).

Support and facilitation of place-based learning and innovation in rural regions has received little scientific attention so far. Hitherto, the literature has focussed more on aspects of actual learning and innovation processes rather than their support and facilitation. For example, at least three studies have analysed the role of extension services for agricultural development (e.g. Leeuwis 2004), while others (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010) focussed on participatory processes and the formation of social capital through programmes such as LEADER while still others e.g. (Ellström, 2010; Fenwick, 2010; Wals, 2007) looked at the underlying social learning processes and the role of so-called 'knowledge/ innovation brokers' (Howells, 2006; Klerkx, Hall, & Leeuwis, 2009; Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009; Suvinen, Konttinen, & Nieminen, 2010). An integrated, place-based approach as offered by the triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000) and 'learning region' concept (Rutten and Boekema 2007) in economic core regions is, however, still missing to study the governance of support and facilitation of learning and innovation processes in rural regions. Since the current focus of the theoretical frameworks on industry-state-academia linkages as well as support and facilitation for scientific, technological expert knowledge, its use for studying support and facilitation of learning and innovation in rural areas must be challenged (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008; D. Doloreux, 2003; Terluin, 2003).

Revising existing frameworks
The 'learning region concept' (Boekema & Rutten, 2007) and the 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) both focus on studying linkages between the industry, academia and the state. Arguably, this focus is too narrow to account for the diversity of actors and activities which contribute jointly to place-based development in rural regions (e.g. Roep et al. 2009). Besides these frameworks, other studies focussing on learning and innovation in rural regions have looked at the learning and innovation process itself but not its support and facilitation, therefore posing no alternative for the study of the support and facilitation of place-based learning and innovation in rural regions. It is thus necessary to revise the existing frameworks in order to offer a different theoretical perspective to the study and understanding of linkages and interactions supporting and facilitating place-based learning and innovation in rural regions.

To revise the existing frameworks, it is necessary to consider on the one hand their focus on linkages between industry, academia and the state, and on the other hand their focus on scientific, expert knowledge spill-over and the provision of related human capital.

First, the linkage industry-academia-state appears to be too narrow in scope to account for the high diversity of actors contributing to rural place-based development in rural regions. It is therefore necessary to broaden the 'DNA strings' of the triple helix. As figure 3 shows, the string 'industry' will be replaced by the term 'region' and its diverse grassroots development initiatives. Following Nyhan (2007) and Roep et al (2009), the region can thus be regarded as an 'arena' which comprises diverse actors and their different grassroots development initiatives.
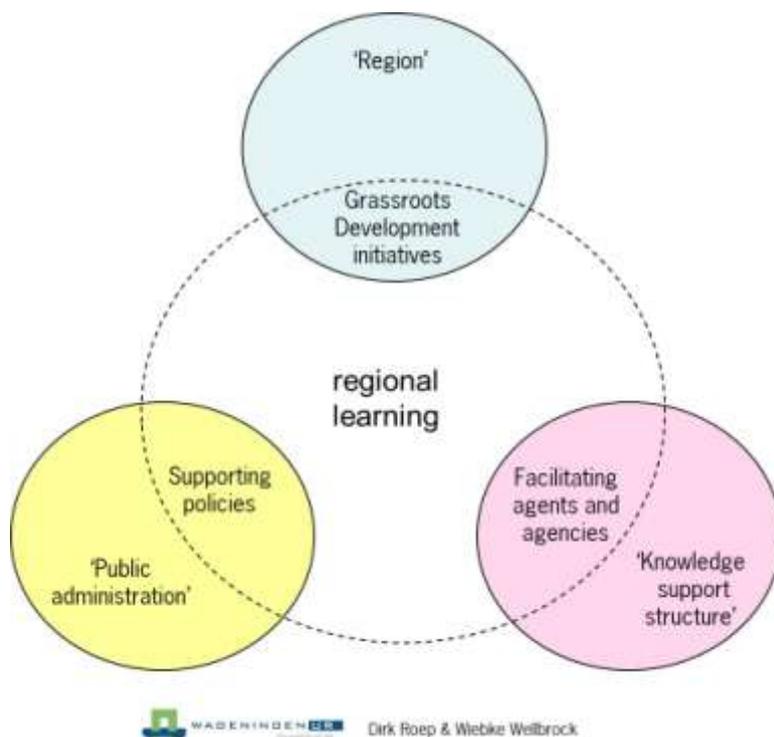
Figure 3 Governance of rural regional learning; a revised framework

Akin to regional learning and innovation in economic core regions, also in rural regions education and training facilities are considered to be the 'spider' in the web of support and facilitation for learning and innovation (Nyhan, 2007). Education, training and research, however, can arguably also be provided to grassroots development initiatives by other knowledge institutes than academia. The research within DERREG has shown that across the different case study areas public and private knowledge facilitators, private consultancy services. state agencies, NGOS, private development experts as well as grassroots development initiators themselves were engaged in the facilitation and support of place-based learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives (Wellbrock et al. 2011). Instead of using the string 'academia', the revised framework will therefore include the string 'knowledge infrastructure', comprising all kinds of facilitating agents and agencies within it. This way, the revised framework will be able to account for the diverse actors and agencies able to provide support and facilitation of learning and innovation in rural grassroots development initiatives. Finally, the string 'state' will be replaced by 'public administration', including supporting policies and operational actors that implement

these. In contrast to the element state in the triple helix thesis of Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000), the term public administration will again allow to consider a wider range of actors and activities supporting and facilitation learning and innovation in rural grassroots development initiatives.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the type of interactions studied. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) and Rutten and Boekema (2007) both focus on studying the support and facilitation of the state for a knowledge spill over and the provision of relevant human capital to industry from academia. In rural regions, place-based development depends highly on interactions between diverse actors and their on-going development processes (Roep et al. 2009). Since many, diverse actors are trying to carry out different development activities in the same rural place, they need to learn to work together (Roep et al. 2009). This occurs through "joint learning-by-doing" (Wielinga, Horlings, & Roep, 2009). These processes cannot be understood as formal learning settings with a sender and a receiver but they are informal, interactive, social, learning-by-doing processes (B.T. Asheim, 1996; Glasser, 2007; Roep, et al., 2009; Wals, 2007).

In contrast to the need for developing skills and capacities to filter and use new, scientific knowledge (Wolfe & Gertler, 2002), the study of place-based learning and innovation in rural regions is argued to require a shift from focussing on forms of knowledge towards focussing on knowledge processes, exploring dimensions of knowledge building, collaborative social learning and the re-embedding of local knowledge (Bruckmeier & Tovey, 2008). The key focus of the revised framework is therefore analytical and centred on identifying linkages that aim to support and facilitate knowledge processes, exploring dimensions of knowledge building, collaborative social learning and the re-embedding of local knowledge in grassroots development initiatives as opposed to the transfer of new, scientific, expert knowledge.
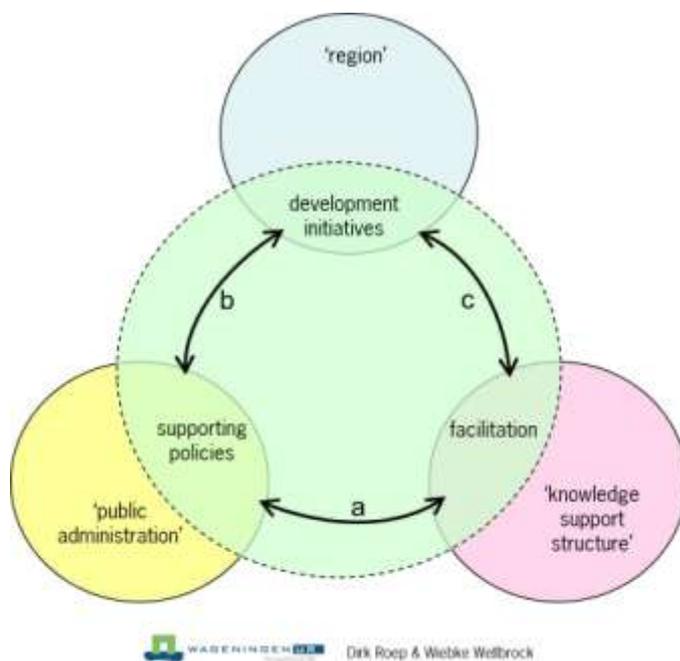

Figure 4 Rural regional learning is supported and facilitated by interfaces operating between the three 'pillars'

Linkages to support and facilitate learning and innovation cannot only be made between the industry and academia as suggested by the previous theoretical frameworks but between any of the three strings of the revised framework as indicated by the arrows a, b, c as shown in figure 4.

Partnerships, arrangements and operational interfaces

Support and facilitation of place-based learning and innovation in rural regions is argued to be provided through linkages between public and private actors of public administration, the knowledge infrastructure and grassroots development initiatives. These linkages can be referred to as arrangements. By making arrangements to support and facilitate learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives, these actors form partnerships with different degrees of formality. According to (B. Asheim, 2007) and (Florida, 1995), the success of support and facilitation of regional learning and innovation depends on effective, co-operative and operational partnerships. Since the introduction of rural development into the common agricultural policy, partnerships have also become an increasingly common mean to govern rural development processes in the European Union (Derkzen & Bock, 2007).

The empirical investigations of DERREG have shown that partnerships come to constitutive agreements about how to support and facilitate what type of rural development actors and activities, including the rules and procedures attached to obtaining the relevant support and facilitation as well as the selection of operational agents and agencies who actually provide the support and facilitation and their roles and tasks (Wellbrock et al. 2011). Thereby, it can be assumed that the various partners have different expectations and interests. Coming to constitutive agreements on what development activities to support thus requires each partner to make compromises. To make compromises and to reach a constitutive agreement involves arguably an exchange and negotiation of meanings, goals, stakes and strategies as well as values, norm and codes of conduct. Codes of conduct, norms and values are referred to as institutions: "[Institutions are] a set of common habits, routines, established practises, rules or laws that regulate the relations and interactions between individuals and groups" (Edquist and Johnson, p.4 as cited in Wolfe and Gertler 2002). Partnerships can thus be argued to come to institutional agreements on how to support and facilitate place-based learning and innovation in rural regions. Agreeing on a common institution requires the partners to reflect on existing, shared codes of conduct and to change them accordingly (Wolfe and Gertler 2002). Partnerships are thus characterised by an on-going process of negotiation amongst the different partners. This process is referred to as institutional learning (synonym for institutional reflexivity) and occurs through learning-by-learning (Wolfe and Gertler, 2002). Hence, in order to support and facilitate learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives, supporters and facilitators engage in continuous learning processes themselves.

In economic core region, institutional arrangements between partners of different helix strings are operationalized in so-called operational interfaces (Etzkowitz 2003). These operational interfaces are defined as critical focal points, enabling people to learn together and from one another thereby acting as channels for dialogue and cooperation (Nyhan 2007).

The empirical investigation within the European project DERREG have shown that the shape of operational interfaces is also of crucial importance to support and facilitate place-based learning and innovation in rural regions. The investigations have further shown, that there are three different aspects which are important to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of operational interfaces, a) the formal shaping of the interface, b) the scale of governance (e.g. a territory, a business sector, a community or a specific group or development topic) and c) the delegation of specific operational tasks and roles to agents and agencies. Depending on the scope of the policy (fields of development, specific development activities, target groups or business sectors and so on) a well balanced mix of these three components has to be composed to make it work (Wellbrock et al. 2011).

Following the empirical results, the key focus of the revised analytical framework is thus on identifying, mapping and analysing operational interfaces through which support and facilitation is provided to grassroots development initiatives in rural regions.

Application of the revised analytical framework

In economic core regions, the 'learning region concept' (Boekema & Rutten, 2007) and 'triple helix thesis' (Etzkowitz, 2003), are used to study the knowledge spill- over from academia to industry and the provision of related human capital. The aim is to facilitate and improve a rapid conversion of new, scientific, expert knowledge into innovative products to ensure a leading position of the regions in the knowledge-based economy (Woods, 2007). Economic core regions are all constructed according to the same principles: firms settle in spatial proximity to universities and focus on the production of technological innovations. The theoretical frameworks as proposed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) and Boekema & Rutten (2007) are thus applicable to study the support and facilitation of regional learning and innovation processes in all kinds of different economic core regions.

Rural regions differ from each other and show unique dynamics (Roep et al. 2009). Their specific development processes co-evolve with socio, economic and ecological processes (Stagl, 2006). Some rural regions are referred to as "cold-spots" of development and are often faced with problems such as becoming interchangeable and losing their regional identity in the globalising economy (Wiskerke, 2007). The consequences are perceptible in multiple ways. For example, economic and non-economic activities become spatially disentwined (Wiskerke 2007). Inhabitants feel less connected to their living area and are less interested in investing time and capital in sustaining the liveability of their rural habitat. Furthermore, possibilities for inhabitants to seek attractive employment opportunities in disadvantaged rural regions are small, forcing them to leave their areas in search for job opportunities (Stockdale, 2006). In this regard, it was argued that highly educated persons are often the first to leave, causing a so called "brain-drain". Left are rural areas with low potentials to develop and a lack of opportunities to participate in the globalising market (Stockdale 2006). Other rural regions are performing well in seizing opportunities arising from globalisation and are thus referred to as "hot-spots" of development (Wiskerke 2007). These regions are often characterised by population and economic growth (Terluin 2003). In both cases, however, it is argued that in order to enhance rural economies, producers and consumers need to be reconnected within the region, products need to be re-

embedded in the region, economic activities diversified and non-economic and economic activities entwined (Wiskerke 2007). Support and facilitation required for learning and innovation in rural regions is therefore highly context dependent and problem specific (Tovey 2008). Development processes that contribute to the quality of and vitality of particular rural regions can thus be of natural, social and technical value and the required support and facilitation may differ between different locations, goods and services (Roep et al. 2009). The DERREG investigations have thus shown that each arrangement to support and facilitate place-based learning and innovation must be attuned to the specific regional context to make the interface actually work, bridging and connecting the different 'worlds'. It is therefore not possible to single out one good practise in arranging support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in rural areas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, unlike the previous theoretical frameworks, the revised analytical framework is able to accommodate contextual differences between rural regions because it has not been developed with a particular region in mind but independent of regional characteristics. The analytical framework will thus help to investigate the operationalization of support and facilitation of place-based learning and innovation in different rural regions, enabling an identification of what type of actors and agencies are involved, the shape of the operational interfaces, the scale of operation as well as the tasks and roles the operational agents and agencies fulfil. The analytical framework will then allow mapping, analysing and comparing different operational interfaces between different rural regions, considering the different regional contexts. Eventually, the analytical framework will help to identify communalities of well-working operational interfaces from different rural regions, thus providing valuable insights for policy makers and other supporting agents and agencies to improve existing support and facilitation of place-based learning and innovation in rural regions.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The leading research question for WP4 was how public support and facilitation of joint learning and innovation within and between grassroots rural regional development initiatives can be best arranged, i.e. how operating interfaces can be best created between a) public policies, b) grassroots development initiatives and c) learning and innovation facilities, considering the contextual differences across the case study areas. The focus was on mapping and analysing actual arrangements and operational interfaces and an evaluation of support received by the beneficiaries. The research is limited in scope. It does not comprise an evaluation of the policies or whether the policy objectives have been met. Neither does it include an assessment of what actually has been learned by the beneficiaries or the novel practices or which innovations have been realised as a result of the support given.

The research focusses on arrangements that aim to support joint learning and innovation in grassroots development activities initiated in the case study areas. Given the rather new heuristic perspective on 'learning rural regions', the complexity and difficulty to disentangle the web of interrelations between the constitutive domains of supportive policies, rural regional development activities and facilitation of learning and innovation, the research has been mainly explorative. The core of the findings is about what arrangements and, more specifically, what operational interfaces work well from the perspective of its beneficiaries given the contextual differences across the six European case study areas: Alytus County, Lithuania; County Roscommon, Ireland; Comarca de Verín, Spain; Direktionsbezirk Dresden, Germany; Saarland, Germany; Westerkwartier, Netherlands.

From February 2009 till June 2011 the three subsequent research tasks were carried out in each case study area. These will be explained briefly.

1. Mapping and analysing policy strategies to support joint learning and innovation
Through extensive literature reviews and semi-structured expert interviews with 10-15 informants per region, different rural and regional development policies and public funded educational or training programmes that somehow aim to support joint learning and innovation in the respective case study areas were mapped. It was specifically described what kind of development activities these policy arrangements aim to enhance and support. The following questions were addressed:
- What kind of support is offered to which sectors and which actors?
- Which fields of knowledge and sets of skills are prioritized?
- What is the extent of collaboration with local organisations in the formulation and implementation of these governmental strategies and initiatives?
- Is gender-equality among the objectives and how is it operationalized?

Additionally, the potential 'learning and innovation support structure' was mapped, made up by public funded knowledge institutes and agencies involved in education, training, research and advise located in or nearby the case study areas. This was done by internet research and interviews with key informants, focussing on the questions:

- which fields of knowledge
- for which sectors and
- directed towards which kind of development activities or actors

Finally, the engagement of knowledge institutes and public as well private agencies and agents in various grassroots development activities, as a web of internal and external support relations, was mapped as an indicator of the active support for joint learning and innovation in the case study area. This was based on semi-structured interviews with key informants. Next to the type of support, the research focussed specifically on how the support for learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives was actually formally arranged (institutional arrangements). This research task aimed to address the following questions:

- The extent and kind of cooperation between (public and/or private) agencies within the region;
- The extent and kind of cooperation between (public and/or private) agencies between(neighbouring) regions;
- The extent and kind of cooperation between (public and/or private) agencies across national borders;
- The accessibility of supra-regional agencies for regional actors in which fields of knowledge for which sectors

The results of this first research stage were mapped out in tables and figures and presented in *D4.1 Overview of learning and innovation support strategies*.

2. Mapping and analysing regional development initiatives

Subsequently, in each case study area 10-15 grassroots development initiatives receiving some kind of public support for joint learning and innovation and reflecting different kinds of development activities were inventoried with regard to their aim, the initiators, the actors engaged, the type of support received, the supporting arrangements and, in this respect, specifically the constitutive agreements and operational interfaces. This was done using semi-structured interviews, focussing on the following questions:

- Who initiated the initiatives?
- Who are the key actors involved and how are they organized?
- How are they embedded in local civil society?
- What are their objectives and towards which sector?
- What is their orientation – locally or globally?
- Which knowledge is used and produced and in which way?
- How are their linkages to public and private agencies of capacity-building, learning and innovation (at regional, national and international level)?
- How are they embedded in regional development policies?
- What are their relationships with public authorities? (key-actors and embeddedness in local civil society)

Initiators or representatives of these supported grassroots development activities were also asked to evaluate the types of support received and specifically the practical features of the operational interface or operational agents that actually supported or facilitated their activities. In addition, a joint workshop of both beneficiaries and supporters was organised to interactively discuss and evaluate the operational features of arrangements. This has revealed detailed information on how various interfaces work. Issues discussed included:

- The accessibility of the regional infrastructure for capacity-building, learning and innovation;
- Cooperation in knowledge production, use and dissemination across regional initiatives;
- Cooperation in knowledge production, use and dissemination between private and public agencies and the initiatives

This information was used to create a typology of inventoried grassroots development initiatives highlighting their main differences and similarities. Subsequently 4-6 initiatives were selected for further in-depth study in each case study area. The typology was based on distinctions such as activity, participants, learning and innovation related activities, type of support and facilitation received and the evaluation of the support and facilitation received. The in-depth study involving face-to-face interviews with selected key informants focussed on factors that supported and/or constraint their achievements. Specific attention was given to issues like how self-efficacy was built, how joint learning and innovation was enabled by supporting operational agencies or agents and the type of knowledge and skills considered as most important for the actors involved. The final aim of this task was to identify promising or well-working arrangements or sets of operational supporting practices based on the joint evaluation by both beneficiaries and supports. The results of this research stage are presented in *D4.2 Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives: operational quality of arrangements.*

3. Analysis and synthesis of crucial features of well-working arrangements
Finally, the research team selected a set of apparently promising or well-working arrangements and operational practices across the six case study areas for a comparative (i.e. across the case study areas), in-depth analysis of promising or well-working operational features and practices of the respective arrangements. An analysis was made with regard to their contribution to the accessibility of the support structure for capacity-building, (joint) learning and innovation; collaboration in knowledge production, use and dissemination across development initiatives within and beyond the case study area and the active engagement of public institutes and agencies in this. The results of this in-depth analysis are presented in *D4.3 Summary of good practise examples: Well-working arrangements for support of joint learning and innovation in Europe's rural regions.*

Interviewees and others involved in research proceedings, operating as stakeholders, were debriefed about the purpose of the research and informed about the outcomes of the different research stages. In addition, feedback events were held in each case study area to present and discuss the research findings, to help stakeholders reflect on their involvement and activities, and formulate recommendations on how to best arrange the support and facilitation of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development activities and by that, enhance the self-efficacy.

4 SUMMARY: ALYTUS COUNTY, LITHUANIA

The majority of available regional learning and innovation support structures in Alytus County are concentrated in the regional centre Alytus city and smaller towns of the region Druskininkai, Lazdijai and Varėna. The investigations have further shown that a lot of support is directed towards realizing innovation ideas within rural/regional businesses (SMEs). Due to the economic decline period, however, their activities have become more limited. Alytus County is also rich in natural, cultural and recreative resources providing favourable conditions for tourism. Consequently, joint learning and innovation in Alytus county is linked to forestry and tourism, i. e. some regional objectives, policy measures, development projects, local initiatives as well as certain regional learning support facilities are targeting these activity areas too.

Overview of learning and innovation support strategies

Actors and policies that influence the design and implementation of policy objectives related to joint learning and innovation can be categorized into five governmental levels: the European Union, the state (Government of the Republic of Lithuania), the region, the municipalities and lastly the smallest administrative level seniūnijos. Accoding to the recent administrative reform the regional governmental body Governor Administration of Alytus county was liquidated in July 2010 and more functions were delegated to municipality (and national) administrations. Lithuania represents NUTS 2 administrative level and is considered as one region from the EU policy perspective. In Alytus county, similarly like in other Lithuanian counties, there are no separate programmes for regional learning and innovation. Instead, the concept is incorporated into general (as well as special) development programmes of the region and manifested in forms of separate policy objectives, tasks, measures and selected projects. Support for joint learning and innovation is embodied already in the national operational programmes and strategies, but at regional level it is brought closer to realization.

As figure 5 shows, rural regional development in Alytus County is guided by rural and regional (including cohesion) policies. These policies frame the administrative and operational space for support of learning and innovation within rural grassroots development initiatives. The strategic goal of **Lithuania's regional policy** is to improve territorial social cohesion until 2013. The strategy suggests that five regional centres surrounded by territories of low living standards, which, due to their economic potential may perform the functions of regional growth centres, namely Alytus, Marijampolė, Utena, Tauragė and Telšiai, with integrated surrounding territories would be developed by 2013 (Alytus Regional Center Complex Development Investment Programme for 2008-2013). Besides this, it is aimed to improve the quality of life in 14 problematic municipalities (with worst social development indicators) of the country through implementation of Problematic Territory Development Programmes. In Alytus County, two municipalities have prepared and are implementing these programmes (e.g. Druskininkai and Lazdijai district). Within the regional policy framework, Lithuania receives EU structural assistance for developing human resources, economic growth and cohesion during the period of 2007-2013, financed by the *European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund* and *Cohesion Fund.*

With regard to joint learning and innovation, it is particularly interesting to look at the *European Social Fund* which ensures high-quality employment and social inclusion in Lithuania through promoting lifelong learning, increasing the capacity of researchers and boosting the efficiency of public administration. The Lithuanian ESF programme aims to address the faced shortage of quality labour force by mobilising available human resources and upgrading skills and qualifications. This includes investment in the neediest sections of society: people in areas of high unemployment and those who have been out of work for over a year. Helping workers adapt to new market conditions by providing tailored training schemes is therefore key – as is improving the quality and accessibility of this training. Lithuania is also looking to exploit the high end of the employment market, investing more money in research and development and science professionals, as well as attracting more young graduates to the field and boosting their mobility. Investing in young experts, while encouraging an international outlook, is crucial to keeping them in the country and helping them put Lithuania on the map. It is seen as a key way to beat the 'brain drain' effect. In addition, the programme aims to improve Lithuania's civil service, increasing administrative efficiency, while cutting red tape so as to help business grow without hindrance. More public-private partnerships are also on the agenda, as well as improving capacity to implement the EU legislation and programmes. Partnership, international cooperation (the sharing of information, good practices and people, joint inter-institutional actions), and promotion of innovations are used as horizontal principles in implementing activities of the priorities when the application of these principles is an efficient way of achieving the set goals.

The strategic goal of the **Lithuanian rural development policy** is to ensure growth through improving the competitiveness of agri-food and forestry sectors as well as creating possibilities for diversification of economic activities and improving the quality of life in rural areas, meanwhile enhancing the human, environmental and other countryside values and reducing disparities between rural and urban areas as well as separate regions (RDP 2007-2013). As figure 5 shows, the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 has been prepared at national level and the National Paying Agency through its divisions in the different counties, administrates the rural development support and facilitates the implementation of the RDP (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). With regard to learning and innovation, the Rural Development Programme focuses on implementing innovations; joined, cooperative initiatives including producer groups; improving marketing and production of high value added products; increasing broadband coverage in rural areas; activities benefiting the environment including protection of biodiversity, well-balanced water supply and production of the energy by sustainable usage of renewal energy resources; actions creating new working places, additional income sources with a special focus on the regions lagging behind; diversification of activities in the less favoured areas as well as less economically developed regions; actions strengthening human capital in rural areas; actions promoting local initiatives; actions strengthening the business development skills and abilities. Furthermore, Alytus County is a recipient of LEADER funds and four local action groups envisage measures under RDP development axis 3: improving the quality of life.

European Commission

National Government (LT)

Ministry of Interior	Ministry of Agriculture
Regional development policy	Rural development policy

Regional Development Programme of the Republic of Lithuania (2006)	National Rural Development Strategy 2007-2013
Regional Policy Strategy of Lithuania until 2013	**Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007-2013**
Programme for Reduction of Regional Social and Economic Differences 2007-2010	State Support to Rural Communities (2006 onwards)

National Regional Development Council

Lithuanian Rural Network

LAG Network

Governor Administration of AlytusCountyNational Paying Agency, Alytus Division

General Plan

Regional Development Plan

List of Alytus Regional Development Plan Measures for 2008-2010

Alytus Regional Development Council
Governor Administration of AlytusCounty, Municipalities: Alytus c., Alytus d., Druskininkai, Lazdijai d., Varėna d., social and economic partners

Alytus city municipality	Alytus district municipality	Druskininkai municipality	Lazdijai district municipality	Varėna district municipality

Each municipality prepares Strategic Development Plan, Strategic Action Plan and Programmes for it's Strategic Action Plan for municipality territory

Alytus Regional Center Complex Development Investment Programme for 2008-2013		Druskininkai municipality – Problematic Territory Development Programme 2008-2010	Lazdijai district municipality – Problematic Territory Development Programme 2008-2010	

Alytus district LAG	Druskininkai LAG	Dzūkija LAG	Varėna district LAG

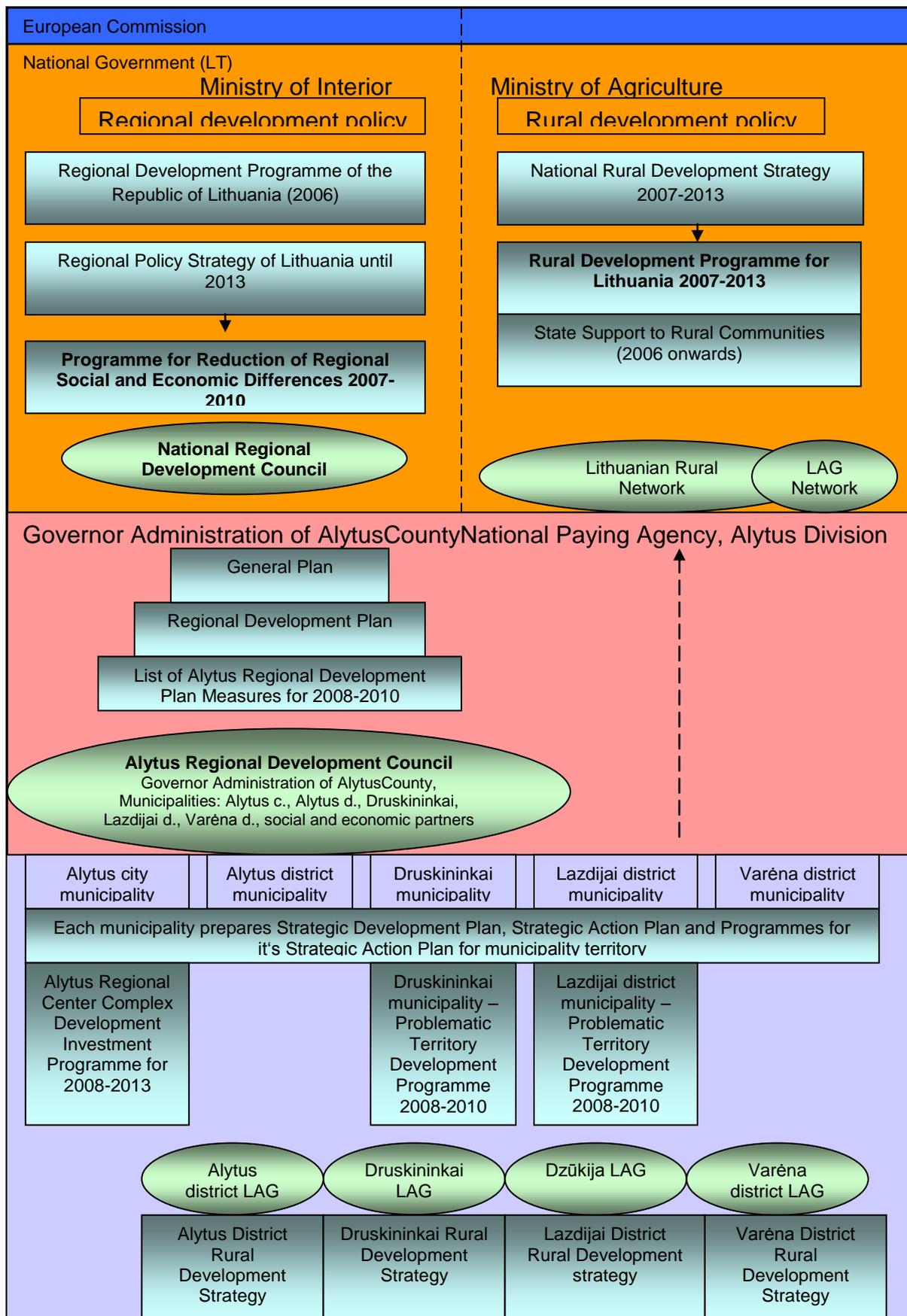| Alytus District Rural Development Strategy	Druskininkai Rural Development Strategy	Lazdijai District Rural Development strategy	Varėna District Rural Development Strategy

Figure 5 Relevant representatives and policies in public administration (LT)

Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives

The inventory of the different grassroots development initiatives in Alytus county revealed that out of the four targeted development aspects - rural economy, agriculture, nature and landscape and civil (cultural) development, arrangements to support joint learning and innovation were most typical in the area of rural economy. The civil (cultural) development area demonstrates first arrangements - LAGs, initiatives - rural communities, associations, public institutions with focus on rural/regional development as well. In agricultural and environmental areas grassroots development initiatives were more concerned with their interest representation, but did not demonstrate special regional learning arrangements within them. Furthermore, the concept of joint learning and innovation is still new for Lithuanian grassroots development initiators, therefore public institutions involved in regional development often help as intermediates to connect the initiatives with public administration and/or knowledge infrastructure.

In order to bring the available public support for joint learning and innovation to beneficiaries at grassroots level, operational agents and agencies are necessary. These can either be members of public administration, grassroots development initiatives or the knowledge support structure. As figure 6 shows, with regard to direct support from public administration, an important interface in the regional governance is Alytus Regional Development Council, consisting of representatives from Governor Administration of Alytus County (Governor), Alytus city, Alytus district, Druskininkai, Lazdijai district, Varėna district municipalities (Mayors) and delegated members of municipality councils. It discusses and approves the Regional Development Plan, provides conclusions about its implementation to the Ministry of Interior and National Regional Development Council, gives them proposals concerning the Programme for Reduction of Regional Social and Economic Differences, problematic territories and other programmes, makes decisions about regional projects, forms working groups, etc. Partnership between public administration (Governor Administration of Alytus County or municipality administration) and knowledge institutions also occur through collaboration in regional development/research projects or by sharing responsibilities for implementation of certain Regional Development Plan measures. LEADER is regarded as a separate rural learning and innovation programme. The LEADER initiative was introduced in Lithuania as LEADER+ Type Measure in 2004, when the country joined the EU. It was new to Lithuania after the centralized (Soviet) governance and coincided with the civil society building movement. In our study region, Dzūkija LAG was established the same year and at that time covered the whole Alytus county rural territory (Alytus district, Lazdijai district, Druskininkai and Varėna district municipalities, excluding Druskininkai and Varėna towns). In the next period the LAG split into smaller rural territories and since 2008 there are 4 LAGs in all 4 rural municipalities of Alytus county. LAG functions at community (local project) level - support at every project stage, information and consultation (for rural communities and other NGOs), qualification improvement of project organizers, mediation and search for funding possibilities, project supervision. In Lithuania such arrangements are complemented by public advisory organizations (national technical support), established by the state to cooperate with regional initiators, such as regional offices of the Lithuanian Agricultural Advisory Service, National Paying Agency, Programme LEADER and Farmers Training Methodology Centre, etc. These organizations often have budget or public institutions status – they receive targeted public funding to provide advice, guidance and training to regional

development initiators and actors. Public institutions are non-profit limited liability public entities, whose objective it is to meet the public interest through education, training, scientific, cultural, health, environment, sports development, social or legal assistance, as well as other activities in the public interest. Founders of public institutions can be the state, a municipality or private non-profit oriented persons. The funding sources of public institutions are contributions of partners, grants for implementation of public institutions objectives, objective contributions to implement concrete objectives (support to implement the programme), budget funding for educational institutions and income from economic-commercial activities (profit obtained by a public institutions can only be used for statuary defined activity objectives). Since grassroots development initiatives in rural areas have little capacities (due to population age structure and density, emigration, unemployment), and experience in project management, their activities are also facilitated by privately founded public advisory institutions (for example, Alytus Business Advisory Centre, Alytus Region Development Agency, etc., see figure 6). Both state and privately founded public advisory institutions are intermediates between the regional government and grassroots development initiatives, facilitating the delivery of the programmes. They represent the knowledge infrastructure pillar in Alytus county.
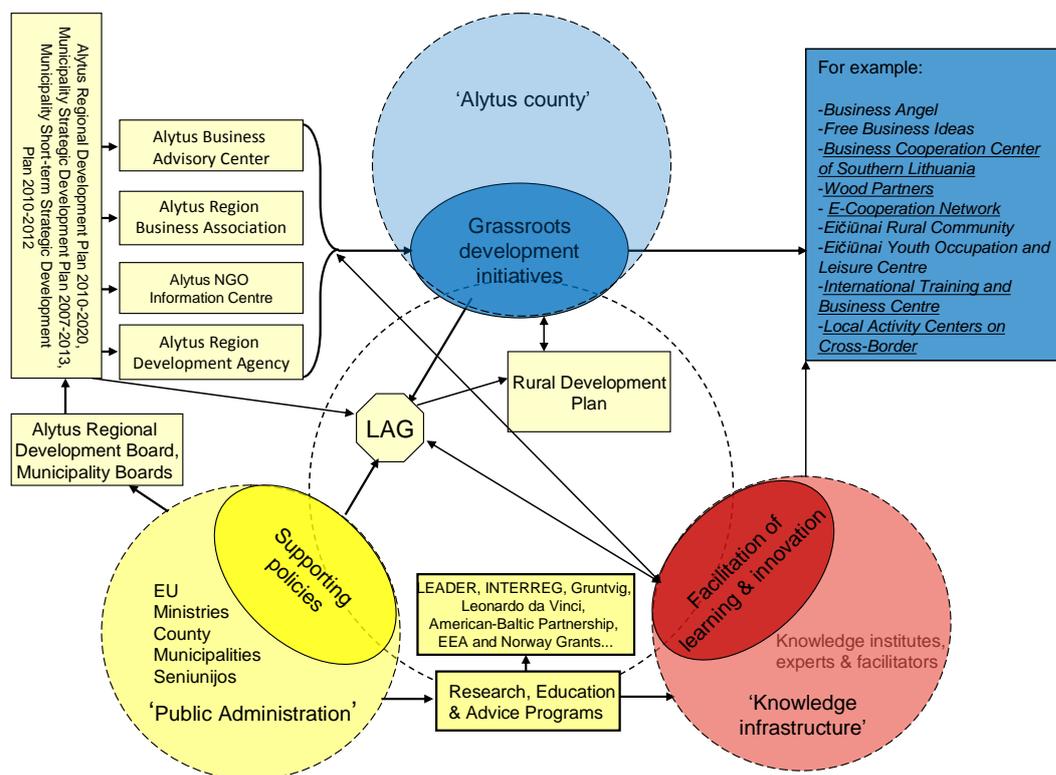
Figure 6 Arrangements for support and facilitation of learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives in Alytus county

Further arrangements between regional grassroots development initiatives and the *knowledge support structure* are mainly made through the use of available public and private advisory services. In Alytus County there are various potential supporters and facilitators present in forms of education facilities, research facilities, consultancy services and advice bureaus, information centres, project development agencies, business incubators, associations. Even though the region

has no university, higher education and professional schools play an important role in joint learning and innovation process through participation in regional councils, development projects, consulting, vocational training orientation to labour market, continuous grown-up training, events, etc. These are capacity building and social centres in the region. Concerning rural development consultants it can be noted that so far such individual consultants are only in two municipalities of Alytus county: Alytus city and Lazdijai district municipalities (Druskininkai and Varėna district municipalities don't have them), which to some extent reflect geographical rural development support availability. Also Kaunas, the second largest city of Lithuania situated 66 km away from Alytus County has an important knowledge support structure for joint learning and innovation, including universities, public institutions and some others. Of course these knowledge institutions do not focus specifically on Alytus County, but may provide support if needed. As figure 6 shows, in some cases knowledge infrastructure - public advisory institutions were facilitators of grassroots development initiatives (underlined), in other cases the initiatives were organized by regional initiators themselves. In first case the initiatives benefited more from public support, in second case the initiatives had strong local leaders, were less dependent on public support programmes and more dependent on voluntary work.

Operational quality of arrangements

Public administration supports grassroots development initiatives in Alytus county along three lines: *initiation, advice*, *partnership* and *finances*. These forms of support and facilitation appear to be particularly relevant regarding the focus of developing and pursuing a collective development aim.

Initiation

The basic issue is not enough employable people in rural areas. Due to ageing of population, emigration to cities and abroad population structure changed dramatically. Due to unemployment in rural areas, others are too busy to drive for work to the closest cities. Therefore when establishing initiatives, only few capable people are carrying out the work. Usually these are rural intellectuals – people with high education, working in the local knowledge and culture centres.

It was also mentioned that although initially there is usually enough incentive to establish an initiative, later on volunteers appear to be too busy with daily works and hardly find time for keeping an initiative going. Therefore, permanent and compensated workers/managers are needed. Furthermore, the manager should know that his wage will be paid on a regular basis, so he/she can plan activities ahead. In general, initiators have enough available technical support for initiation of activities from public administration, public advisory institutions as well as private consultants.

Advice/Expertise/Facilitation

The only official arrangement between grassroots development initiatives and public administration domains in Alytus county is the LAG. The LAG board consists of representatives from rural communities, public administration and rural business and provides advice, expertise, trainings and financial support for rural initiators and regional NGOs. Though the introduction of LAGs was evaluated positively by public administration, some rural initiators were raising an issue of too strong public administration voice in the LAG decision making. Many LAG

chairmen are public administration representatives. One of the regional initiators said that to apply for a LAG is similar as to apply for municipality administration - the application still has to be approved by public administration. This brings a complex problem - on the one hand, there is a lack of human capacity in rural areas to deliver LEADER programme, where public administration comes to help, but on the other hand, rural inhabitants do not feel that the LAG represents their interests. It should be noted that Alytus county only has first examples of arrangements in Lithuania introduced through LEADER programme. It was thus argued that Lithuania is still learning. After LAGs, the new arrangements will be formed when needed. However, both supporters and support receivers are sceptical about introducing too many support structures into practice, because it may result in inefficient use of means and function duplicate. It may also cause confusion for rural initiators. Therefore, it is important to define the role and separate the functions of arrangements very clearly.

Privately founded public advisory institutions have to fight constantly for financial support from public administration to deliver advice, expertise and facilitation, but they usually come to an agreement. The role of advisory institutions is important in the region – they enable initiatives to formalize, to prepare and manage the projects, thus to become independent actors in regional development. ABAC and ARBA are also organizers and facilitations of cluster networks in Alytus county, allowing business networks to expand beyond the border.

Finance

Regional development initiatives work mainly on voluntary basis, using subsidies for their activities. The main sources of financial support are coming from three levels: EU funds (EARDF, ERDF, ESF), national funds (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs) and municipality funds for economic and cultural development. Lithuania belongs to NUTS 2 level of administrational unit classification and many programmes are administered at national level. Therefore, grassroots development initiatives can participate both at regional and national competitions/calls for applications. The majority of received funds are, however, small, making it necessary for grassroots development initiatives to approach several funding bodies simultaneously. The preparation of many small applications is time consuming and some initiatives claimed the lack of human resources for application or report preparation.

With regard to LEADER, there were rural activists who stated that they did not intentionally participate, because the programme itself and its goals are very unclear and not result oriented, too much means go for programme administration instead of supporting good activities. They decided to apply for other funds instead. Since funds are usually only paid to legal entities, the prospect of receiving subsidies appear to be the driving factor for the development initiatives to become legal entities. During the workshop with rural initiators, participants mentioned this as an issue because sometimes one person is working for the sake of the community. In this case he/she should be an eligible support receiver and not forced to establish an organization in order to get funds for his/her activities. A person is more motivated to act in his name, if he is running the activity using personal skills. Operating regional internet TV, weaving material for regional folk closes are examples of such individual activities for public good. One initiator also stated that a good regional project was not supported only because of the opinion of some persons of prevailing political colours in the local government. With a different local government, the project could have succeeded. Some initiators also pointed out the lack of financial resources for

operational costs and office maintenance expenses, because they don't have enough funds to maintain the premises.

Support and facilitation by the *knowledge support structure* seemed to be important both in developing and pursuing a collective development aim and in acquiring joint learning capacities to jointly achieve development goal. Support and facilitation from the knowledge infrastructure was received along the four lines: initiation, expertise/seminars, consultancy/facilitation and training/skill development. Within these different lines of activities, grassroots development initiatives inventoried were on the one hand supported by publically funded organizations and on the other hand by private knowledge facilitators. In contrast to arrangements between public administration and grassroots development initiatives, no official arrangements between the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives were identified in Alytus county. However, this does not mean that these two domains do not interact, they cooperate in common projects as partners, are coordinators of the networks/initiatives, advice and facilitate, provide methodological help and technical assistance, organize/provide trainings for the initiatives, cooperate as project experts or assessors. Usually, the knowledge infrastructure is represented by regional advisory institutions (intermediates) and regional education centres, for more demanding tasks national advisory institutions are involved, for expertise and assessment – universities/institutions.

Conclusion

The common ways of arranging joint learning and innovation between public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives are through partnerships in projects, when special support and expertise is needed, or through established boards for specific regional issues in the process of policy making. Joint learning and innovation is also practised in the form of approved councils (for example the Alytus County Professional Training Council) and/or working groups with different partners involved (public administration, knowledge institutions, economic and social partners). Such groups are formed for specific themes or questions, in order to solve certain issues learning from each other and coming to an agreement during regional planning, identification of needs, evaluation, etc. Local action groups, rural communities, NGOs, knowledge institutions often represent regional social partners.

Majority of regional learning and innovation support structures in Alytus county (as well as the rest of Lithuania) are public institutions founded and financed by state or by private bodies. Public means are used to carry out the support activities – budget, various regional/National/EU programme project means, to less extent private (when founded by the private bodies) and combinations of the mentioned ones. Public institutions in Lithuania are quite successfully replacing regional arrangement functions working as intermediates between public and private actors, pooling expertise in the activity area, facilitating knowledge exchange and programme delivering.

In Alytus county regional learning and innovation support structures – public institutions, associations or simply networks developed through the projects are most common in business and social development areas.

5 SUMMARY: COMARCA DE VERÍN, SPAIN

Overview of learning and innovation support strategies

The Comarca de Verín is an administrative entity formed by 8 municipalities (Castrelo do Val, Cualedro, Laza, Monterrei, Oímbra, Riós, Verín and Villardevós). They share some history but keep their own character and characteristics. The Comarca is a rural area, and from the organising perspective and intervention, is subdued to different levels of "public" governance: municipality (*concello*), province (*Diputación provincial de Ourense*), Autonomous Community (Galician government or Xunta de Galicia), Central (Spanish) government, and European Union. As regards development, two main political and funding "public" sources contribute to it: *regional development policy* and *rural development policy*, which is formulated by the region, central administration or Europe. As a *convergence region*, Galicia will benefit from the initiatives and financing of the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), as well as the Cohesion Fund in the period 2007-2013. Those funds will mainly drive rural and regional policies in our area of study.

Regional development policies have been implemented through regional development programmes. As regards regional development programmes, during the period 2007-2013 Galicia might benefit from several national, multiregional, regional (specifically for the Galician region), cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation programmes. Especially interesting for learning and innovation are the operational programme 'knowledge based-economy', the operational programme 'Spain-Portugal (POCTEP)', and the Galician operational programme, which is indeed the most specific one for the region as regards both regional and rural development.

Rural development policy is implemented through rural development programmes (RDP) which are established at regional level by the autonomous communities. In this respect, 17 regional programmes, and 2 horizontal programmes related to the national framework have been established. The Fondo Español de Garantía Agraria (Spanish Fund of Agricultural Guarantee), an autonomous organism belonging to the Ministry of Environment and Rural and Marine Environment (MARM), is in charge of controlling the right application of the CAP funding to the specific goals. The Dirección General de Desarrollo Sostenible del Medio Rural is in charge of coordinating the managing authorities of the different rural development programmes co-financed by EAFRD, as for example, Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Rural y del Marco Nacional de Desarrollo Rural (Strategic RD Plan and National RD Framework, respectively). The Dirección General cooperates and collaborates with the autonomous communities and other entities related to these matters. It also elaborates Spanish proposals of RD for the European Union. Development programmes formulated at regional level, as it is the case of Galicia, may only contain additional information in accordance with the six horizontal measures. The overall objective of the RDP, which derives from the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) and the National Strategy Plan, is to "resolve the imbalances between the Atlantic Axis, where growth is concentrated, and the trend to abandon the rest of the Galician territory, especially the mountain areas and inland territories". The overall aim is Galicia is to achieve a sustainable, strong and viable rural environment by 2013.

The LEADER programme is one of the four strategic axis of the RDP and Galicia is the only region within the EU with its whole territory under Programmes managed by LAGs. Galicia has been a recipient of LEADER money since 1991. Besides the LEADER initiative, other programmes of development have been carried out (PRODER, PRODER II and AGADER), especially in those areas that did not benefit from LEADER. AGADER, for example, was created as an instrument of economic diversification and development in the rural areas, based on the principles of endogenous, sustained and integrated development. The main goal was to contribute to an integrated rural development through the implementation of different measures. The programme has strategic aims in five different fields: social participation, improvement of life standard conditions, promotion of human resources, environment and improvement of local economic activity. AGADER is similar to PRODER and LEADER, but totally financed by regional funds. Furthermore, the Comarca is also benefiting from other projects financed by European Funds, from different European programmes as Interreg III and Urban: the VIARRAIA project, the Eurocity Chaves-Verin project, and the ARRAIANO project.

Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives
In the Comarca, 9 active grassroots development initiatives were inventoried. They cover different domains: rural economy, agriculture (combined often with nature and environment protection) as well as civic and cultural development. Most of them are directly or indirectly related to farming, because of either production or commercialisation. Those that are mainly focused on commercialisation have been classified within rural economy.

With regard to *public administration*, the support provided for grassroots development initiatives inventoried is coming from three main sources: EU funds, Regional Ministry of rural environment (before agriculture) and National Ministry MARM (before agriculture). The Comarca has benefitted from different regional and rural programmes which have been implemented mainly through the action of the LAGs (currently RDGs) which, as figure 7 shows, is the one of the most important hub for different local organisations, public and private stakeholders. RDGs work as any other non-profit association and must obey the principle of "open doors", i.e., any organisation of the area that wish to participate in the project has the right to be admitted. Any professional, non-professional, agrarian, commons may join the RDG. Only individuals may not join the group directly. Stakeholders from the private sector must be the majority within the GDR. This group must elaborate a strategy of comarcal development where the main possibilities, opportunities and necessities of the territory must be included, as regards productive, socio-economic domains and services. Their application must be addressed to Agader (Galcian Agency of Rural Development). The municipality and the diputación provide information and technicians in order to facilitate knowledge transfer and access to development programmes financed by European, national and regional funds. Support from local government- given that members work for the municipality, materializes further in rooms for meetings, announcements, and so on.

With regard to the *knowledge support structure*, there are numerous private agencies which are also relevant for rural regional learning and innovation processes in and around the Comarca. Consulting offices, for example, write proposals or reports concerning the Comarca in order to concur the information into European, national or regional project calls. These private agents are

located at regional or even national level which is perceived as resulting in significant delays of development in comparison with other rural regions in the European Union. A further, significant with regard to private agents and agencies is the case of the NGO Portas Abertas (see figure 7). Portas Abertas was able to create a network of personal contacts that survives until today. When speaking about fostering, promoting, and starting grassroots development initiatives, the name of Portas Abertas appears frequently. Besides necessary personal contacts within the knowledge infrastructure, a grassroots development initiative also needs to have access to necessary funds in order to be able to engage with knowledge facilities. Many of the grassroots development initiators argue that being a real initiator means that you would pursue your initiative, even without subsidy and looking for the necessary knowledge formally and informally.
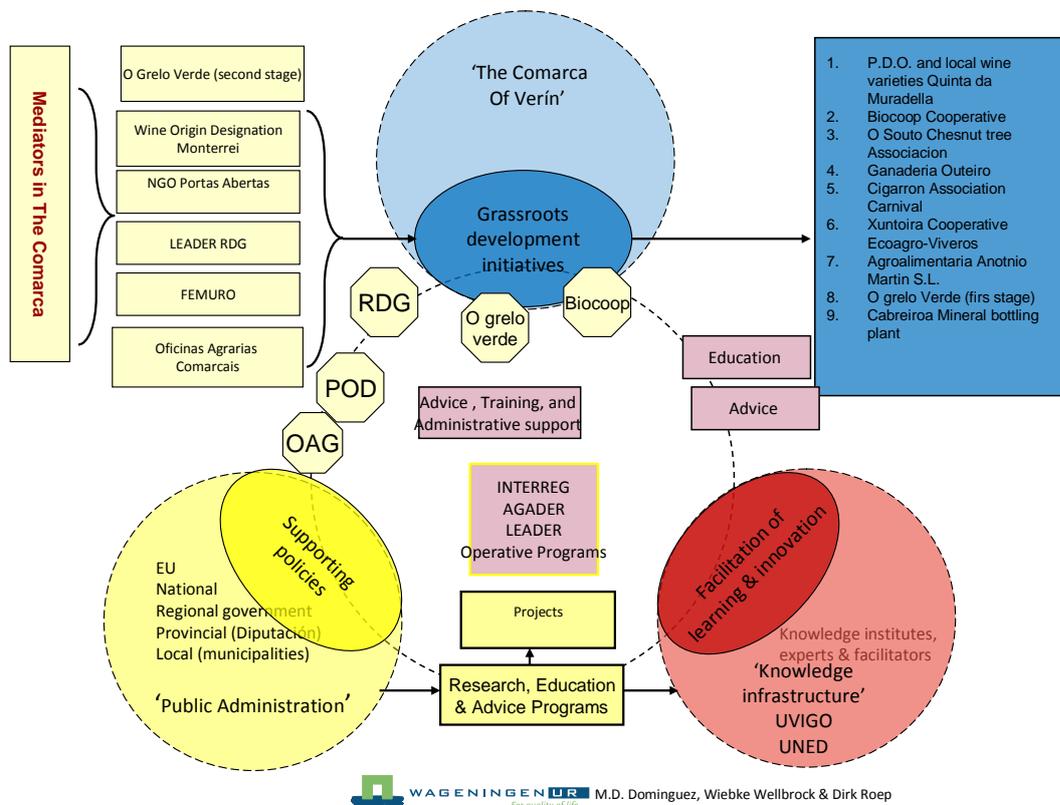
Figure 7 Arrangements to facilitate and support learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives in the Comarca de Verín

Operational quality of arrangements

Public administration supports grassroots development activities in the Comarca through different lines, mainly initiation, advice, expertise and facilitation and finances. These forms of support and facilitation appear to be particularly relevant regarding the general focus of developing and pursuing a collective development aim.

Initiation

In Galicia there has been a strong process of transformation to scale up farms, with the need of strong investments in infrastructure and machinery. These investments have been generally financed by European funds. In the case of the Comarca, however, as regards the initiatives

inventoried, LEADER programmes have played a key role. Thus, funding from the EU (especially through LEADER), regional and national government has been basic to set up all the grassroots development initiatives with the exception of the Cigarróns, and Cabreiroá. Local administration, in contrast, seems to have a smaller role in the initiation of these activities except in the case of O Souto, and Ecoagro. In the case of the first one, the municipality plays an active role to foster the association providing all the means at reach: infrastructure, announcements for meetings and financing if applicable. Other initiator highlighted that there were better times as regards the collaboration with the municipality. Nowadays the relation is broken because of conflicts of interests and power struggle.

Advice, Expertise and Facilitation

With regard to advice, expertise and facilitation, every initiator was very keen on the role played by the old Agrarian Extension Service (nowadays Oficinas Agrarias Comarcales OAC, see figure 7). In LEADER I and II the OAC was an external advisor and played an important role in the programme. Nowadays they follow separate trials since the OAC must cover lines that are not covered by LEADER (from interview with Castor Gago, director of the OAC in The Comarca). Furthermore, grassroots development initiatives seek contact with public administration in their aim to look for information about the possibility of financing, normative and measures of support. In other cases, public buildings are used as meeting place. Another initiative is using an office in the Centre of cooperative development which was created in Verín with funding from different European and national and regional fund.

Financing

The role of LEADER in financing grassroots development initiatives in the Comarca must be highlighted. The initial two programmes run by LAGs, GDRs, Portas Abertas and OAC have been very significant for the area. Associations and cooperatives also have membership fees and fees for activities in order to generate an own budget. In the light of the current crisis and reluctance of banks to give out loans, however, new initiatives are being cut since the start, even when their projects are already accepted by the program. It was thus stated that public administration provides good and clear communication about their requirements to give out subsidies. Provision of subsidies, however, could be faster especially in the current context of crisis. Bad management of the funds has also been pointed out by most of the initiators. Funding seems to be mostly oriented to activities that only generate punctual benefits (employment, good image in front of the community) and are not really fostering a more long-term development. Some also pointed out that subsidies should be in fact loans without or with lower interest to avoid misuse. Furthermore, a negative evaluation is given about the current way of understanding development processes which in the end might jeopardise projects that are in process or future projects. This is a consequence of the increasing power of local governments within the different development programmes. Currently, this pessimism appears to extend to some initiators regarding their future development. Public support- or the lack of it- is also criticised regarding policies related to land structure, a limiting factor in the area (and most of the Galician region). The lack of decision to implement a clear policy that helps abandoned land to re-enter in the productive system seems to be closely related to the possible negative consequence in terms of re-election. Other demographic and economic factors (infrastructures,

lack of services) as well as a lack of training and education are argued to be jeopardising development without regional or local institutes doing something.

Support and facilitation from the *knowledge structure* is very relevant in the initiative's focus on acquiring joint learning and innovation capacities to jointly achieve a development goal. The knowledge infrastructure provides support and facilitation by expertise, seminars, training, and skill development. When asked, some initiators deny in the beginning having had support from the knowledge support structure. In the course of the interviews, however, it popped up that practically all of them had used this sort of support at least in the beginning of their activity. It was either through attending courses organised by the university or when some mediators brought experts to the area to give conferences. In some cases, visits of students were organised to raise awareness of development problems and to encourage an exchange of knowledge, new ideas, etc. This made us think about the disconnection between public knowledge institutes (education, research and consultancy) and society, especially in rural areas. Universities are still seen as something out of their scope, distant, and with no use, although it is present. As an interviewed professor said *the connection is lost when we left, or when the course is finished.* Some initiators also commented that they had already participated in other interviews for European or national projects, or have given information about their enterprise but in the end, they do not see any improvement as a result of it. Another important way of informal support is the assistance to go to fairs or meetings. The contact with occasional encounters and informal networks are also important. When asked, interviewed initiators stated to get information about available expertise through informal talks with other members, through lectures giving by professors and technicians who came to the area or attending courses organised by private enterprises or the university. This also served to receive suggestions about potential knowledge facilitators. The OAC, despite being a public organism, is stimulating informal networking opportunities by creating needs of cooperation.

Conclusion

Individual or cooperative grassroots development initiatives are both able to foster local development, although cooperation reinforces their power of negotiation. In some cases, development reaches only one socio-economic domain while in other cases environmental or traditional knowledge and culture are part of the equation, too. As the interviewees stated, individuals are the key of these initiatives but often different forms of support and facilitation are needed, especially to set up the project, to broaden the scope of the activity and to enlarge its scale. Most of the initiators are of the opinion that local governmental institutes are currently limiting real development because local politicians have taken profit of European, national and regional funds to finance their re-election: *"to buy votes".* So support is not always granted to the most appropriate development initiatives. The future perspectives of the initiatives mapped are generally good, despite the structural permanent problems related to rural areas that keep on reproducing in the Comarca over the last decades: ageing, low employment levels, inadequate land structure and difficult to access land.

6 SUMMARY: DIREKTIONSBEZIRK DRESDEN, GERMANY

Overview of joint learning and innovation support strategies

Generally, there are three major political fields- rural and regional development policies, and innovation and learning policies- which define opportunities for rural regional learning and innovation.
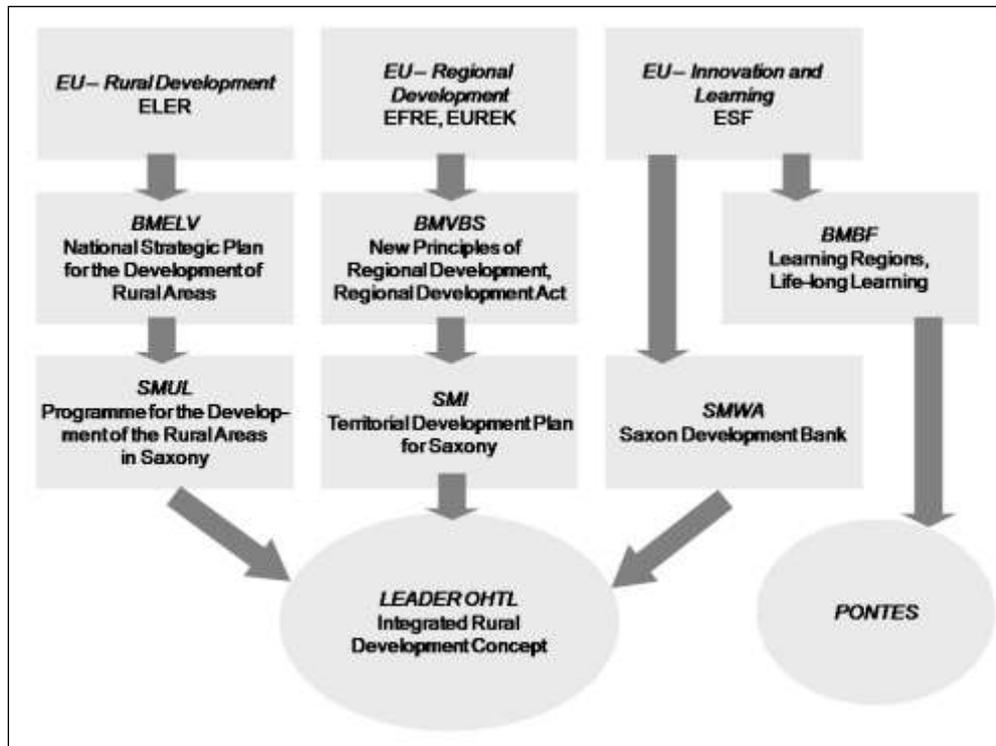

Figure 8 Organisational scheme - Learning and innovation policies and strategies in the Direktionsbezirk Dresden

Figure 8 shows, the opportunities for developing strategies and implementing policies and political measures are organized in a hierarchical way. The local level is thus strongly dependent on the thematic orientation on the EU Commission. This is due to the fact that large parts of financial subsidies are transfer capital, originating from the major EU funds. Throughout the funding period 2007-2013, the case study area was part of the 'Convergence Regions' of the ERDF. One could thus imagine that this mechanism is somehow restrictive for the design of local innovation and learning strategies, because although the local circumstances vary strongly, all development projects on the local level have to fit standardised EU criteria. The regional level develops concrete measures and distributes the financial resources that are being transferred from higher administrative levels. Finally, the local level (municipalities, counties, associations, private companies, or individual persons) use the financial resources to implement strategic measures.

Figure 8 shows, with regard to **rural development policy**, the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) is an important actor at national level. The Ministry is involved in the organisational management of the National Strategic Plan for the Development of Rural Areas which is the national level interface between the European Rural

Area Development Fund (ERADF) and the regional level development concepts of the Bundesländer in Germany. Furthermore, the Ministry hosts the action task GAK (Joint Task for the Improvement of Agricultural Structures and Coastal Protection), a conjoint working field between the Federal Government and the regional Bundesländer governments which aims at financing local public or private institutes which are involved in rural development initiatives. Figure 8 further shows that at Bundesland level, the Saxon State Ministry of the Environment and Agriculture (SMUL) develops future rural development strategies for the state of Saxony. On the level of the Bundesland, the main political task is called the '*Integrierte Ländliche Entwicklung*' (integrated rural development). As tools to follow this objective, the local level administrations (counties, municipalities, etc.) need to develop '*Integrierte Ländliche Entwicklungskonzepte*' (ILEK: integrated rural development concepts). Given the problematic demographic change in the Direktionsbezirk Dresden in the last decades, the major aim of the integrated rural development is an 'adapted and flexible development instead of resignation'. Next to this, the LEADER community initiative encourages the implementation of integrated, high–quality and original strategies for sustainable development with a strong focus on partnership and networks to exchange experiences. There are seven ILE-regions and three LEADER-regions in the case study area Direktionsbezirk Dresden.

With regard to **regional development policies**, figure 8 shows that the main reference is provided by the European regional development structural funds (ERDF). On German federal level, the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BMVBS) is the responsible authority for developing policies concerning regional development. The BMVBS is involved in the definition of Germany's "New principles for regional development" ('*Neue Leitbilder der Raumentwicklung*'). Furthermore, Direktionsbezirk Dresden is subject to the EU's 'Convergence' policies criteria. It is therefore an expressed aim of the BMVBS to secure equal quality of life in every German region. Especially rural regions with difficult economic and demographic character such as the Direktionsbezirk Dresden might therefore profit. Furthermore, the aim of enhancing urban-rural partnerships represents the implementation of the concept of the '*Regionale Verantwortungsgemeinschaft*' (mutual regional responsibility between large metropolises and their rural surroundings). Further aims are to cope with the demographic change in Germany and to preserve the natural habitat. These guidelines for the spatial development strongly influence the German *Raumordnungsgesetz* (Regional Development Act - the major legal framework for regional development). In this legal package the guidelines are represented, and it is the legal basis for the *Raumordnungsplan* (Regional Development Plan) for Germany. As indicated in figure 8, the Saxon State Ministry of the Interior (SMI) is responsible for the territorial development strategies of Saxony. The most important political framework is the *Landesentwicklungsplan* (LEP: Territorial Development Plan). The LEP contains the overall regional development strategy for Saxony.

With regard to **joint learning and innovation**, the Free State Saxony will receive 9 per cent of all European Social Funds (ESF) financial aids given to Germany; thus it is the most funded of the Bundesländer. This fund is particularly important for the Direktionsbezirk Dresden. The ESF funds can be given to public administrations, NGOs, socio-cultural associations or private enterprises but also private persons in case of being part of or dealing with a target group (unemployed, elderly, young, women, disabled). Co-financed by the ESF, the Federal Ministry of

Education and Research (BMBF) initiated the programme 'Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks', running from 2000 until 2007. This programme was integrated into the Ministry's broader research action programme of 'Lifelong learning for all'. In an open call, regional partners could suggest their networking projects to learn innovating within their region. In the Direktionsbezirk Dresden two projects were chosen by the 'Learning Regions' programme: the cooperative project '*Regionales Lernforum im Wirtschaftsraum zwischen Elbe und Elster e.V.*' (Regional learning forum economic region Elbe-Elster) and the PONTES project in the East Saxon district of Görlitz. On the regional level, the State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Transport (SMWA), and the *Sächsiche Aufbaubank* (Saxon Development Bank) as executive agent, interpreted the ESF guidelines and identified seven specific tasks. Within these seven tasks, projects will be funded for different durations. Furthermore, the SMWA engages in the fields of promotion of innovation and technological development for the regional enterprises with own funding programmes.

Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives

The inventoried initiatives mirror a broad range of development characteristics. Some initiatives arose out of economic problems and work, in close relationship with local companies, on regional solutions. Others have their origins in regional cultural settings and pursue socio-cultural concerns. Then, there is a range of initiatives that focus on ecological issues. Also demographic problems are dealt with. Each of the inventoried initiatives deals with the development problems of the case study region *Oberlausitz* in an integrated way.

Public administration provides the most important support for joint learning and innovation to grassroots development initiatives. As figure 9 shows, the Saxon Development Bank (*Sächsische Aufbaubank*) acts as an interface in the distribution of European Money (e.g. ESF). Initiatives can use the Saxon Development Bank as a one-stop agency to get consultancy about the best funding source and apply for subsidies. Besides this, the Saxon Ministries also developed own funding programmes (e.g. 'Demography'; 'Cultural Area Act'; 'University and Research') in which own tax revenues as well as federal and European money are distributed. The counties and municipalities only play a minor role as financiers as they have to design their annual households in rather restrictive ways in order to reduce the financial costs of their debts. LEADER and ILE (Integrated Rural Development Programme) have to be mentioned, too. The approach consisted in a competitive model, in which municipalities and regional development initiatives could form consortia which presented rural development concepts to the Saxon Government. The best were picked as LEADER regions which have higher subsidy rates than the ILE regions. However, both LEADER and ILE regions could use money for rural development more or less autonomous within their territory – only being restricted to small extent by implementation guidelines of the Saxon government. In LEADER regions, the regional managers / LAGs are very important drivers of development. As figure 9 shows, also in the LEADER-OHTL, the regional management office is one key actor channelling information and keeping the individual activities together under the umbrella of the LEADER region's topic. The LAG is formalized as an association called '*Verein zur Entwicklung der Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft*' (Association for the Development of the Upper Lusatian Land of Heaths and Ponds). In the LAG's member board all municipalities within the LEADER region as well as different private companies, single development initiatives, public companies from the County of

Bautzen and private persons are represented. The LAG association instructs the regional management and pays for the regional management staff and infrastructure (e.g. office). The regional management provides feedback about the general development of the OHTL to the LAG, so that the LAG can revise its orders to the regional management. The single member development initiatives try to lobby for their issues within the LAG and at the regional management office in order to be supported by OHTL's LEADER funds. Other relevant operational agencies are EU organizations, the Federal Ministries, the Free State of Saxony (especially in LEADER: definition of Saxon implementation guidelines), surrounding counties (through cooperative projects with County of Bautzen, e.g. joint regional planning). Also the UNESCO plays a role in terms of providing the UNESCO Biosphere status to the OHTL's Biosphere Reserve.

With regard to the *knowledge support structure*, there is a wide range of educational facilities and publicly funded/privately funded institutes in the Dresden region which offer advanced training for rural actors and support rural development by scientific and applied projects or consulting services. An example of support from public administration to the knowledge support structure to facilitate learning and innovation is the '*Sächsische Bildungsserver*', an online platform developed jointly by the Saxon Ministry for Cultural Affairs and the Dresden TU, which provides information about all educational offers in Saxony. As figure 9 shows, especially the University of Applied Sciences Zittau-Görlitz, the IHI Zittau and Dresden Technical University are scientific partners for a lot of regional development initiatives or even create own development projects. Arrangements with grassroots development initiatives focus on formal and informal agreements to involve development initiatives into the curriculum of the universities and schools (theme days, workshops in knowledge institutions; student interns, thesis topics in development initiatives). There are two main ways in which the regional 'knowledge support structure' supports grassroots developments. The first is to send students to the development initiatives as interns / or when writing degree theses. These students are a well-educated and cheap labour force for the initiatives. In addition, they bring in state-of-the-art scientific knowledge about processes and approaches in relation to the initiatives' issues. The second way of providing support to learning and innovation consists of the provision of latest scientific knowledge. Here, the role of professors/scientists is more important than the role of students. The experts often have positions in the advisory board of initiatives or act as external experts in the organisational structures of the initiatives. Another form of this support is the authoring of scientific expertise by order of an initiative. Knowledge experts or institutes might also be active parts of the initiative, for example as founders or active members of an initiative. They contribute in terms of fulfilling certain tasks or providing conceptual input. A final, but rather subordinated aspect of support might be considered the involvement of development initiatives into scientific or knowledge institutes' debate (academia, scientific networks). This provides the opportunity to gain outreaching publicity in the region, academia and in other regions of the EU.
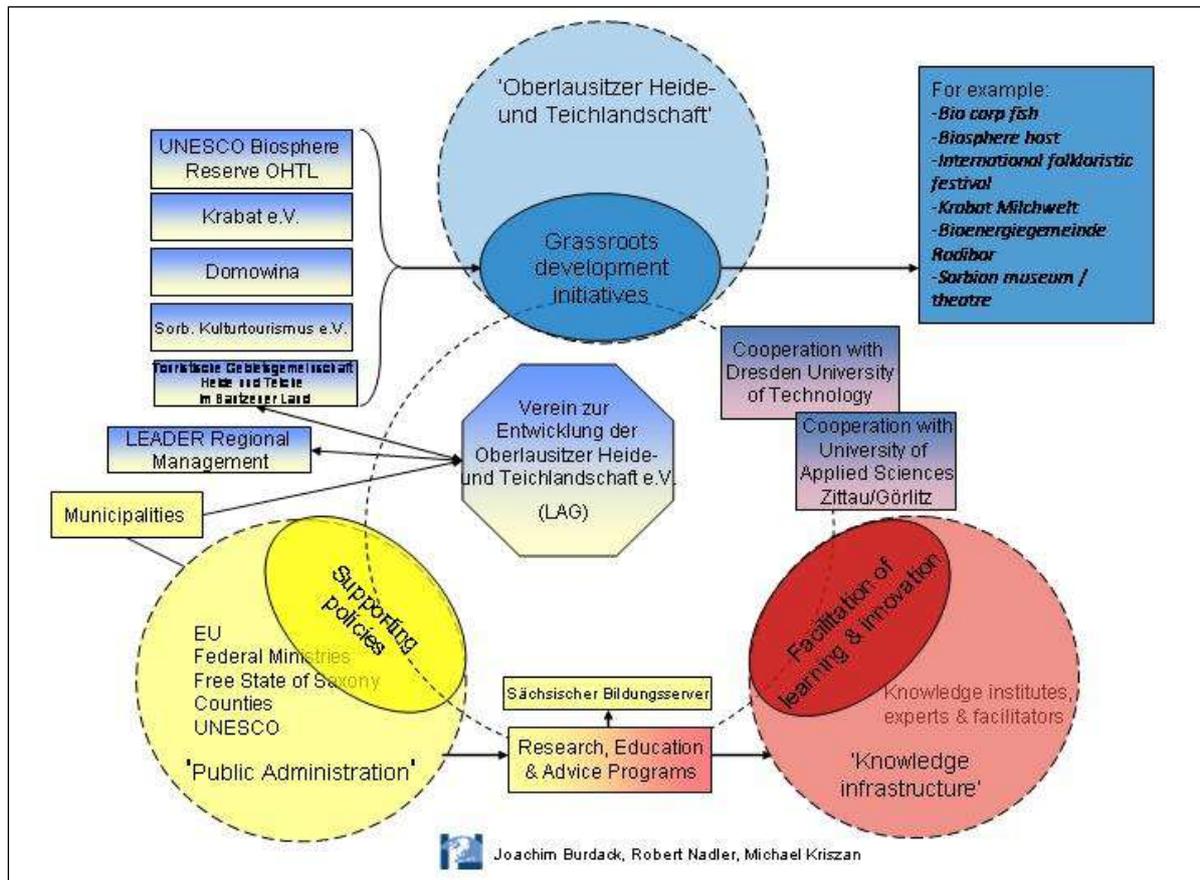
Figure 9 LEADER region Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft three-pillar model of regional learning (source: IfL, 2011)

Operational quality of arrangements

Public administration provides support and facilitation to grassroots development initiatives in terms of *finances, public policy frameworks, infrastructure* and *networking* opportunities.

Finances

A large portion of development initiatives in the Oberlausitz heavily rely on public funding. In the OHTL there are no other financial sources (e.g. bank loans, private donations, etc.) available. This means that self-sustaining initiatives are the exception. A great deal of initiative work could only be initiated because of a public funding scheme was available. This also leads to the common pattern that in the Oberlausitz the thematic orientation of development initiatives is focused on the contents and design of public funding programmes. In particular the Saxon Government thus has a very strong influence on what actually will happen on the regional and local level, as they are the major public financiers in the Oberlausitz. Many development initiatives were initiated because a certain call for proposals was published for public funding. Structures and contents of initiatives are then adapted to the needs of the call. Thus, organically grown, grassroots development initiatives, which practice autonomous agenda setting, are scarce. They mostly act on a smaller geographical scale, e.g. within selected counties of Saxony, and they are run by small organizational units. Since federal programmes and direct funding by EU includes strong competition, and complex bureaucratic procedures are not manageable for the often small grassroots development initiatives, the Saxon state-level is the most important

operational interface for grassroots development initiatives in applying and receiving public funding. However, this form of support includes difficult bureaucratic procedures and long application phases for short funding periods. Also the reporting and financial audit is very difficult to handle for the often small initiatives, which do not dispose of own financial control units. Furthermore, the development initiatives report a cognitive distance to the superior levels of public administration. Whereas one could easily maintain personal contact to representatives of the Municipalities and County administration, it is more difficult for initiatives to get contacts to the Saxon and federal Ministries as well as to EU officials. Thus, the distribution of public money from these superior, extra-regional levels is often an incomprehensible and rather abstract process from the perspective of regional initiatives. Also, a simple thing such as arranging appointments with officials from superior public bodies is considered difficult. Initiatives' representatives always have to travel to the capital cities (which produces costs) and once they are received, the discussion time is limited and the officials do not pay enough attention do the initiatives' issues. Another problem arises from the short funding periods that initiatives have to deal with. As public funding is the main financial source for the initiatives they frequently have to re-orientate their own activities according to the revision of topics for funding programmes. Therefore, the content of initiatives' work depends to a large degree on political agenda setting. Development initiatives are not free to define their own topics. On the other hand, the short funding periods are a major problem as funding finishes mostly when project structures are set up and first trust among project partners has been established. The implementation of the projects' actual content then often falls short. In addition, this continuous revision of public policies prevents regional structures between development agents to be stabilized. The organizational setting of regional development initiatives is subject to on-going change induced by political actors. Then, financial subsidies are often only approved for expenditure in Germany. Thus, the important establishment of a tri-national cross-border region PL-CZ-D lacks financial resources although cross-border activities are an important issue in the region. Therefore, initiatives would prefer more flexible cross-border arrangements. Also financial resources are cut in the last years. This leads to the problem for regional initiatives to ensure their services. A final problem is the orientation on 'hard investments'. Public programmes are often focussed on subsidies for infrastructure investments, e.g. new road connection, physical appearance of rural villages, buildings for public services. Most regional development initiatives mention that this is rather inefficient, as the long-term operating costs could not be financed by the rural communities as population and tax revenues are supposed to decrease in the near future in the Oberlausitz. Thus, the initiatives would prefer 'soft investments' in community work and innovative solutions of cost-efficient and sustainable public service provision as well as social integration. These are the important issues in the Oberlausitz, not the installation of more 'hard' infrastructure. However, for funding public bodies hard infrastructure is a visible and measurable good, which proves the 'good policy' made.

Also the private sector supports the regional development initiatives and their learning and innovation by financial means. These financial contributions mainly consist of membership fees in initiatives organized as associations or also of donations to the initiatives. However, the private equity base of regional companies is rather underdeveloped. This is mostly due to the economic structure of the Oberlausitz, with a lot of SMEs and less large, multinational companies. Furthermore, the companies are often branches of larger industrial groups which

have their headquarters elsewhere. Thus, profit from within region often has to be transferred outside the region. The availability of private financial capital, however is very limited for regional development initiatives. However, some initiatives are supported by the private sector in the form of services, products or infrastructures that are provided for free or at reduced prices. Also ideational and conceptual input through being an active member (as opposed to passive membership with mere financial contributions) in a development initiative is an important form of support. In particular, the expert knowledge of private companies and also individuals is an essential asset for successful implementation of development goals

Public policy frameworks

Certain revisions of laws, defining standards in the provision of public services, for example, could facilitate the social and economic revival of the region. Concerning the design of the policy framework, however, the initiatives bemoan that public administration does not understand itself as a facilitator in the sense of providing a service to the tax payers, but it considers itself a mighty controller protecting the citizens from themselves. In particular, the level of Counties and the Saxon government are accused for defective internal communication between the different departments. While there is a major intent to organize policy design more and more in an integrated, comprehensive way, including all specialized departments, the political practice still looks different. The single departments compete for budgets and communicate with each other only if necessary. Therefore, public financial resources are often spent in a redundant way for the same issue by different departments. For initiatives it would be more efficient to have one agency managing the public funding programmes of all departments in a comprehensive way, with standardized procedures of bureaucracy (as is already tested with the Saxon Development Bank). A problem is also seen in the periodicity of policy making, which is related to legislators' terms. This leads to the fact that politicians and administrative clerks do not support regional development initiatives' long-term visions and development ideas for their region. Public administration, oriented at election periods, is short-term (4 to 5 years) and thus could never adapt the long-term strategies that development initiatives elaborate and need for their success. The risk to lose voters inhibits politicians to take unpopular decisions that might develop positive effects for the region only in the long run. Thus, development initiatives – from their external perspective – could identify errors in the political framework that are often causal to negative regional developments, but they are not supported by regional politicians to improve the political framework, if it might bear the risk of losing the next election.

Infrastructure

Public administration also supports and facilitates joint learning and innovation through providing rights for initiatives to use its infrastructure. The interviewees state that this is a very helpful form of support. However, it is also a rather short-term orientated model. Contracts or arrangements are often only thought of as being an initial help for a development initiative. From the public decision takers' perspective, initiatives should become self-sustaining in the long-term. However, from the initiatives' point of view, this is often impossible. They cannot abandon these forms of support. A further specific situation – due to high rates of unemployment in the Oberlausitz – is that people have sparse temporal capacities for civic engagement, as they have to commute over long distances. The development initiatives in the Oberlausitz are thus mostly staffed with professionals who earn their income with engaging in

the initiative, often also because there were no other jobs available in the region and the engagement in a development initiative provides a perspective for a (public sector) job. Hence, in the Oberlausitz support from public administration (in particular the financial subsidies eligible for staff costs) plays an important role for keeping initiatives active and providing them with motivated labour force.

Networking

Most of the larger public funding programmes are framed by a mediated networking process in which the governmental funding offices initiate get-togethers and meetings between funded initiatives during the funding period. This is, for instance, the case for the participants in LEADER/ILE, where Saxon and national networks were established (e.g. DVS *Netzwerk Ländliche Räume*). Also the Saxon governmental directive 'Demography' is accompanied by an internet platform, an electronic newsletter, and an award for the best project. Other forms of support might include the exertion of influence as a shareholder. Also, public authorities might be active members or participants in regional development initiatives. Public networking is a form of support which the development initiatives evaluate as a positive intent of public administrations. However, they do not think that these forms of artificial networks have significant impacts. They often bring together geographically distant actors that do not have contact in the everyday life. These networks are thus interesting spaces for knowledge exchange, but they do not facilitate the everyday work in the region. According to the initiatives, networks only work well if participants join voluntarily, with the individual perspective to have a certain value added through joining this network. Furthermore, network participants have to know each other in order to develop trust and mutual solidarity. This works better on a small geographic scale. Also structures of a network need to be flexible, and the network needs to be managed by a lead participant. This is often not the case for political networks that are part of funding programmes.

With regard to the knowledge support structure, knowledge institutes play a rather minor role. Knowledge institutes are often only subordinate or even only external partners to development projects. In some cases, they only participate temporarily; in others they are part of the continuous organizational structures but become active only if there is need for their involvement. Thus, malfunctions in the relationships were not perceived as directly as with the more intensive everyday relations to the public administration sector. Evaluations showed up rather indirectly during the interviews. For example, the education sector in the region is increasingly networked because a shrinking market makes it more necessary to cooperate when it comes to designing educational offers. Education is both an important regional development topic as well as a big economic sector in the region. Therefore, the cooperation between regional development initiatives and knowledge facilities is working well – somehow like an arranged marriage. Indeed, the provision of students is evaluated as positive side-effect. However, the central issue linking the knowledge support sector to the regional development initiatives is the topic 'demographic change' in the Oberlausitz. In particular two fields become more and more important here: first, guaranteeing a high-quality school education in depopulating rural areas; second, the establishment of efficient links between school graduates and private businesses offering vocational trainings in the region. In future, the lack of skilled labour will affect regional economic productivity. Also the rapid ageing of the population makes 'gerontology' an

important regional knowledge field. It is thus essential to keep the young people in the region after school graduation. Here, the development initiatives see fields that should be worked at in cooperation with the knowledge sector as well as with private companies. According to the interviewees, both partners, knowledge institutions and private businesses, have already realized this necessity. Yet, so far efficient networks and work structures have not been established and first attempts of collaboration are tested currently. In sum, they also have a low importance in transferring new knowledge to the regional development initiatives. Most initiatives reported not to have specific interests in intensified relations with the knowledge institutes, and they look for new knowledge preferably in peer networks, i.e. exchange with other development initiatives. Nonetheless, students are important actors building bridges between the regional development initiatives and knowledge institutes (interns, theses writing, double affiliation in knowledge institute and development initiatives). One could thus expect, that in the Oberlausitz the knowledge sector will have a growing role in the near future.

Conclusion

The Oberlausitz in Direktionsbezirk Dresden is characterised by a shrinking and ageing population as well as a brain-drain of the young, well-educated people, and persistent high unemployment rates. It is not supported by a strong dynamic of the private sector and strongly dependent on shrinking public subsidies. Even if today efficient networks and links between the three pillars of the DERREG learning region would exist, they would be endangered by a social perforation, as more and more potential stakeholders leave the region. This limited pool of social activists has positive and negative effects. On the one hand, work relations between certain actors are based on mutual trust and informal work routines. However, these positive effects only provide advantages for the ones involved. The interviewees mention that there are always the same people being involved as no others are present in the region or do not immigrate as new actors. Nonetheless, the region is too large for individual actors to know all other potential partners for development issues. The activity range of individual development initiatives is still smaller than the Oberlausitz territory is in total. Thus, there is still potential for new links and new development partnerships. Yet, building new partnerships is impeded by the fact that the regional development initiatives compete for the limited public funding. Thus, own development projects and ideas are kept secret within the already established partnerships. There is a latent fear that actors outside the own established networks might copy the own idea and receive public funding for it.

Another problem related to the size of the Oberlausitz is the lack of a common regional identity. Identification works on a level below the area of the two counties of Bautzen and Görlitz. Even in the County of Görlitz, the people in the largely flat and sandy areas in North, characterized by brown coal mining, have a different understanding of what the Oberlausitz is than the people in the County's South, which is characterized by hilly forests and tourism industry. Equivalently there is no common regional development agenda or strategy which would unify the single initiatives from the different parts of the Oberlausitz. Furthermore, there is no mutual solidarity between the various networks in the different parts of the Oberlausitz. This might also be related to the fact that the Oberlausitz is divided in two counties which have strong influence on regional development funding within their different territories.

Nonetheless, from an external perspective the Oberlausitz could be a single region. In the perception of Saxons and Germans from outside the Oberlausitz, this region is referred to as the rural parts East of Dresden and reaching to the Polish and Czech border. Thus, the internal conflicts of development initiatives (competition for public resources, missing cooperation across county borders) might have hindering impact for the future development of the Oberlausitz. It is very important to create an internally shared identity and development strategy – a common goal – for this area situated in the German periphery yet in the middle of Central Europe. Only bringing all actors and initiatives together and working cooperatively in an agreed direction, the Oberlausitz might become a learning region. First attempts might be seen in the joint regional planning by the two County administrations, or in the shared Cultural Area according to the Saxon Cultural Area Act.

7   SUMMARY: COUNTRY ROSCOMMON, IRELAND

Overview of learning and innovation support strategies

This section focuses on the nature and range of policies identified as having a learning and capacity-building remit. It makes a distinction between policies devised and delivered at different levels: i) those set at national level with a presumed dissemination of associated funding supports to the regional and local level (either directly or through intermediary bodies); ii) those with a more explicitly-declared regional focus; iii) those with a specific local remit. As well as revealing the range of policy proscriptions, this is also relevant to an illustration of the different decision-making levels that pertain in an Irish context, and the potential impacts of governance structures that remain predominantly top-down when devising and delivering certain development strategies to the regions and to the more local levels. In this regard, it also draws attention to the nature and impact of funding sources, particularly the significance of EU funding.

At the *national level* the principal, overarching strategy for economic and social development in Ireland is the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013. It contains four main strategic policy themes, two of which are Regional Development, and Rural Economy. Within these there are five key investment priorities. Although broadly set, all of these are relevant in certain ways to learning and capacity-building; the two strands reflecting a more specific and significant range of commitments to enhancing learning, knowledge and capacity-building are identified as 2) Enterprise, Science and Innovation; and 5) Social Inclusion. Two of their sub-programmes arguably hold specific relevance for rural areas, including the West Region – the Agriculture and Food sub-programme, and the Rural Social Economic Development sub-programme. The latter contains a number of measures of direct relevance to the West Region, for example CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais), providing for regeneration measures targeted at rural areas of specific population decline. Most of County Roscommon is under the remit of CLÁR. Another measure, the Western Investment Fund, is also specifically directed towards the West Region. It is designed to provide capital to assist enterprises in the region. The fund is delivered by the Western Development Commission. LEADER funding is also channelled through this sub-programme. Roscommon Integrated Development Company is the single entity delivering LEADER for County Roscommon. In terms of spatial planning strategies, the National Development Plan sets out a framework for the promotion of regional development through the strategic investment in larger urban centres, or 'Gateways' and smaller centres, or 'Hubs'. Within the West Region, a series of 'Hubs' have also been identified; however, Roscommon Town, as the main town in the County, is not included.

The *regional-level* policy strategy most clearly identifiable as pertaining to the West Region is the BMW Regional Operational Programme. The BMW Region currently qualifies for assistance under the EU's Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective (i.e. for the period 2007-2013). The BMW Operational Programme is itself underpinned by a number of national-level strategies which incorporate the objectives of building a competitive economy through the development of learning and innovation. The three principal strategies are: a) the National Reform Programme (Building Ireland's Knowledge Economy); b) the National Research & Development Action Plan; and, c) the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-

2013. Since its establishment in 1999, the BMW Regional Assembly has undertaken several reviews to establish the region's status across a range of socio-economic and structural dimensions which would in turn impact upon its ability to be competitive within an increasingly globalised environment. One of the most significant reports was its Audit of Innovation, conducted in 2004. This report highlighted a range of factors that potentially mitigated against the region's capacity to sustain and further expand innovative and entrepreneurial activities within the region. Its Regional Foresight Exercise 2005-2025 particularly mentioned the need to enhance the existing role of third level institutions within the region, especially the Institutes of Technology which traditionally had a weak research remit. In the BMW Operational Programme, support for innovation and capacity-building is strongly associated with enterprise development and economic activity. There is also the clear association with third level institutes within the region in terms of developing these capacities. Learning or innovation and its potential in the context of social or cultural dimensions of regional or rural development is not emphasised in policy pronouncements. In many cases, these are a reflection of national-level policies that are delivered by organisations and agencies representing or funded by central government at the *local level*. However these also now reflect an increasing set of national priorities given that EU funding is at a reduced level in the Irish context.

Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives
The initiatives in question can be divided into 3 main development aspects, including a) rural tourism; b) food production; c) community development. In relation to rural economy, the first initiatives are dated from 1990, reflecting in large part the new availability of various sources of European funding. Initiatives relating to community development commenced in 1991, and those involved in food production commenced in 1995. This section draws on the more in-depth findings of the 4 selected case study initiatives: Kilbride Community Development; Una Bhán Tourism Co-operative Ltd.; Roscommon Home Services; Gleeson's Townhouse and Artisan Foods.

Figure 10 shows public organisations and agencies supporting learning and innovation policies and strategies within the region. The focus is predominantly on publicly-supported organisations and agencies, even though there is also a wide and arguably increasing network of private organisations operating on a consultancy basis which are frequently enrolled by these agencies on a short term basis to provide additional, specialised supports in the form of training, mentoring, audits and assessments.

Within *public administration*, the principal organisation after the BMW Assembly is the Western Development Commission. It is primarily a policy research and analysis organisation which aims to promote the position of the region in development initiatives. It places particular emphasis on measures that promote the rural dimensions of the region, especially diversification of the rural economy. Its operational remit is narrower than the BMW Assembly, and falls under the auspices of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It provides one form of financial support for local initiatives, through the WDC Investment Fund. One of their major initiatives has been to attract population to relocate from the Dublin region to the West of Ireland, particularly those with skills or in employment. A range of organisations also either directly try to influence government policy with regard to knowledge, learning and capacity-building, or deliver on national policies in this regard within a regional and local context. These

include Teagasc (The Agriculture and Food Development Authority), FAS (the National Training and Employment Authority), Enterprise Ireland (promotion of Irish enterprise) and WestBic (EC Business and Innovation Centre). Teagasc has a very specific agriculture and rural development focus, and is under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. Driven by EU policies, one of its main areas of concern is promoting diversification of agriculture and farm-related activities. This is pursued in two ways – through research activities and through its direct advisory services to farmers. At local level, relevant organisations include County Development Boards, County Enterprise Boards and Vocational Education Committees. Funding is channelled to these organisations from central government. Organisations that set their own local development agendas would include Local Action Groups (including those delivering LEADER Programmes and Local Development Social Inclusion Programmes). The RIDC is a new initiative formed in 2009 by the joining of the Arigna LEADER Company, the Mid-South Roscommon LEADER Company and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, following directions by the co-ordinating government Department (Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs). County Roscommon thus has a single access point for local development. The company focuses on delivery of two main programmes to the county, Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and LEADER. Apart from these two principal programmes, the RIDC is also involved in supporting a number of other schemes which have capacity-building and knowledge-generating dimensions. These organisations would all provide certain kinds of support to learning and capacity-building in the form of direct financial supports, training, advice, mentoring, etc.

Supporting and facilitating agencies and agents of the *knowledge support structure* can be divided into three different 'levels'; the first includes educational institutes with knowledge and capacity-building remit; the second regional and local public agencies; and the third, other regional and local, private and/or professional agencies. The West region has one university (National University of Ireland Galway) and three Institutes of Technology. Athlone Institute of Technology, in Athlone Town, is situated on the Roscommon border and as such the county would form part of its catchment area. Other organisations such as Teagasc and FAS operate on a networking basis throughout the region and the county, providing a range of services. Co-operation is evident amongst agencies and organisations at all levels in terms of promotion and facilitation of learning and capacity-building initiatives (e.g. through Líonra Network, Skillnets Learning Network etc.).

A strong level of on-going direct and indirect support and facilitation from national and local knowledge institutes and agencies is reported. The local Pobal facilitator is particularly referred to by all initiatives in receipt of Pobal funding, in relation to direct on-going advice and guidance on achieving development objectives, on self-evaluation of the process, on organisational issues and on required training or specific support needs. However ther the valuable input of other organisations has also been cited, e.g. Teagasc (Una Bhan Tourism Co-operative, Roscommon Home Services), RIDC (Gleeson's Townhouse and Artisan Foods, Suck Valley Development Co-operative, Kilbride Community Development), FAS (Crossna Community Co-operative; Una Bhan Tourism Co-operative). Several initiatives have referred specifically to the composition of their Boards of Directors as key sources of knowledge and guidance, particularly where these are also members of staff of statutory agencies.
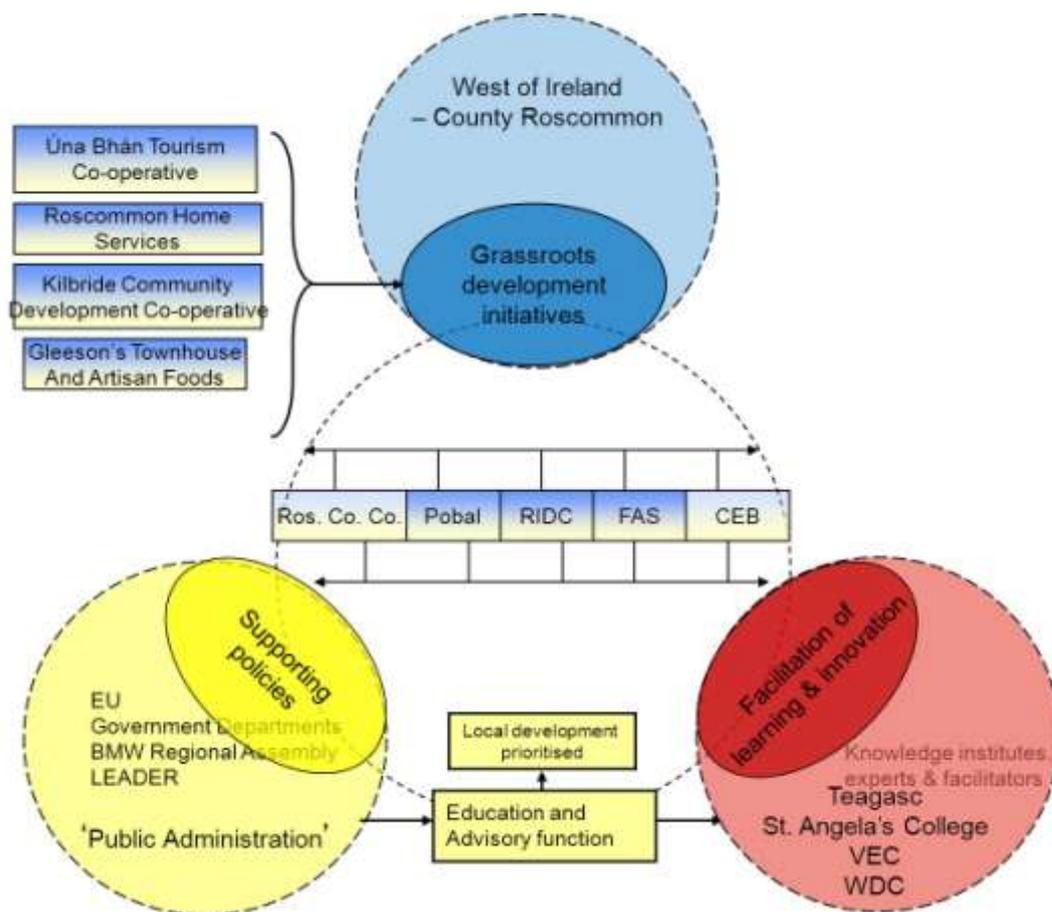
Figure 10 Arrangements for support and facilitation of learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives in Roscommon

Operational quality of arrangements

Support from *public administration* in terms of formal support is mainly provided in relation to *initiation*, *advice, expertise and facilitation* and *finance*. These forms of support are considered extremely important for the actual realisation of development initiatives, to move them beyond the stage of identifying the development issue towards that of implementation of action.

Initiation

The majority of the grassroots projects were not initiated on foot of funding opportunities per se. Setting up initiatives and continuing to provide them with momentum is described as very demanding. However, none of the four initiatives in question here used funding or the intervention of public agencies to initially become established, but first organised themselves and then made decisions around their development aims and objectives, how assistance ought to be sought, and from which agencies.

Advice, expertise and facilitation

The majority of initiatives first made decisions around the most suitable outside organisations that could be approached to lend support to their initiative. In certain cases, these were approached to become stakeholders in the initiative, for example, being a member of a board of

directors or an advisory board. In such cases, advice and guidance is an on-going arrangement. In many cases, support was by way of providing a meeting place, or sourcing relevant expertise and mentoring. Other initiatives have received support from RIDC in the development of business plans. Initiatives such as Kilbride Community Development Group (see figure 10) would seek more specific interventions such as information seminars on particular aspects of development initiatives; for example, tax refund schemes as part of certain development projects. Once they had become established, the initiatives approached different agencies for support and advice, depending on their development objectives and what the different agencies provided. It was felt that a lot of support was readily available from the agencies, in the form of help for example, for business plans, from the County Enterprise Board, Teagasc, and from LEADER. Two of the initiatives, Una Bhan Tourism Co-operative, and Roscommon Home Services, cited the support from Teagasc, particularly in the earlier setting phase, as being vital. Una Bhan similarly cited the invaluable support they received from FAS and from Failte Ireland. More recently, and as a result of a change at government level in the way funding is provided, Pobal is also cited as an agency that provides excellent support and advice through the local agency representative.

One of the main difficulties cited by initiatives is when government makes decisions to change the structure of agencies, and to reallocate support programmes and responsibility for them to other agencies, or to discontinue certain supports and set up alternatives, but also with somewhat changed remits. Changes have also occurred in the case of local employment support programmes which have been a very important source of support for grassroots initiatives. These were originally delivered by FAS, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and targeted the long-term unemployed living in the local areas in question; however, over the years, this programme has been changed to include a more specific social inclusion focus. It has also been taken over by another agency, Pobal, on behalf of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. These employment schemes are reported as being vital to the on-going success of initiatives, as they enable them to take on workers, and reduce the reliance on voluntary effort. It is agreed across the initiatives that reliance on voluntary effort alone is not sufficient to sustain activities in the longer term, and the need for staff who can take on the day to day running of activities is seen as essential. However, the changes with regard to agencies take time to absorb, there is the requirement to become familiar with new rules and regulations, and with new personnel from another agency. It was also mentioned by one interviewee that it is necessary to take account of what may be a changed focus attaching to these programmes, in terms of whether they continue to reflect the aims of the initiative, or draw it in another direction that is not central to these aims. The other difficulty is that it may not be possible under the remit of these schemes to look for staff with specific skills needed to support the initiative; this then implies that the initiative must undertake staff training for the person who is taken on. It was reported by all those interviewed that the agency personnel provide as much support possible in helping them to negotiate these changes. The ability to retain staff who can be employed under these schemes is seen as moving the initiatives to a position where they can develop some financial stability through their various activities. The need to maintain a business-like focus wherever possible was also cited as a reality if they were to succeed. It was clear that a voluntary approach alone was not adequate to maintain momentum. As it was, it was felt that the level of commitment had to be well outside of conventional hours

to make an initiative work. Another side to this related to having a bigger picture perspective on the initiative that did not revolve solely around obtaining funding to stay operational. This flagged again the necessity of expanding the capacity of the initiatives so that they could become self-sustainable in the future, but the importance of support that was not necessarily financial for the period of time needed to get to that point. The provision of adequate information around existing sources of support and facilitation were also raised.

Finance
Support in the form of funding is received through a range of levels including the local, regional and national, and from a range of sources, with knowledge and facilitation sources being mainly sourced at the local level, although in some instances this might be through the local co-ordinator of a national level funding programme. This depends on the nature of the grassroots initiative; community development initiatives are supported by a mix of national and local funding programmes; those relating to the rural economy and food production may draw on some of the same funding sources, but also seek specific knowledge and advice from more expert bodies.

All initiatives drew on various sources of public funding, with others availing of both public and private sources. Many of these were from the LEADER initiative, which was administered through RIDC. Some reservations are raised about the level of bureaucracy involved in making applications. For example, it was commented that LEADER funding criteria had become extremely onerous, with the need to obtain three quotes for every piece of work to be carried out, and for receipts and tax clearance certificates, even for very small amounts of work. It was felt that this was proving a disincentive to voluntary groups who did not have the time to pursue all of this, and that there were ways of ensuring transparency that were much more straightforward. However, it was also accepted that these demands were not being imposed in the first instance by the LEADER companies. These changes were felt to be regressive in other ways, in the sense that the trust and integrity around those involve in LEADER seemed to be under question. The result was that both LEADER and the groups they wished to fund were struggling to achieve the desired development goals on the ground where it mattered. The comment from one interviewee was that when it comes to actually putting enterprises into place, it is almost impossible without access to additional financial support. In the case of sourcing LEADER funding, the project promoter still had to come up with the matched funding, which continued to be a challenge. The Social Economy Programme, provided through Pobal, was also seen as a vital source of funding, but again, the administration attaching to it was seen as extremely onerous. Funding sources changed over time; such changes were mainly associated with restructuring at the level of national government Departments, and the reallocation of certain responsibilities. For example, funding for a scheme that enables initiatives to take on and pay for a small number of employees who have been registered as unemployed and in receipt of state support, was moved from FAS (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment) to Pobal (Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs). This also changed the remit of this funding, which has presented certain challenges to initiatives to meet altered development objectives. Those initiatives that are also set up as co-operatives normally charge a membership fee. This entitles members to access certain services provided by the projects at reduced rates or to receive some other form of advantage from being part of the co-operative (e.g. increased

tourism business). Recent funding cuts resulting from Ireland's current economic difficulties, particularly at the level of local agencies, has given rise to an increasingly difficult environment for local development, with concerns expressed on the part of agency personnel as well as project promoters about the future survival of certain initiatives. In cases where grassroots initiatives can replace the local state in terms of service provision, the prospects are seen to be more optimistic. There is general overall concern about the future of funding sources in the current economic climate. All agencies that would traditionally provide funding have had their own resources severely curtailed. Also, every time the remit of funding programmes change, local initiatives must also try and adapt if they wish to continue receiving that funding. This raises the problem around what is incentivising activity, and the extent to which an initiative should alter its core mission in order to ensure a stream of funding. Concerns were also expressed about the continuation of funding sources. The wish was expressed that initiatives could become free of this kind of funding, but that initiatives could not manage without it in the early stages.

Support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation is also frequently provided through those involved in initiatives who also have involvement with other organisations and agencies. For example, members of grassroots initiatives may also be members of the Board of Directors of other local groups and initiatives, or on the boards of local development agencies such as the County Development Board, RIDC, or the County Enterprise Board. Along with their official remit, these groupings constitute informal networks for exchange of information, and meetings of these groups provide face to face opportunities for access to and discussion with agency officials who can clarify the most up to date situation, particularly with regard to official development policy and funding issues. Developing formal and informal information networks was thus considered vital. All of the initiatives had representatives of their own organisations on the boards of various agencies or their subcommittees, or had developed close working relationships with them over the years. Having key personnel on the management committees or boards of initiatives was also considered extremely important. This could include individuals from the agencies, who in turn can advise on issues from a wider development perspective but which also have an impact on the initiative. They also helped to keep initiatives focused on their development objectives and operate in an efficient and business-like way.

Another, related point of contention around support was directed at those within communities, including other groups and initiatives, who failed to see the value in local initiatives and did little to give them support and assistance. This reflected a perceived resentment towards local leaders who took an initiative that would support a local area in terms of providing facilities, services and employment. There was felt to be a significant gulf between what local people saw as the problems in their own rural areas and the potential solutions being offered by many local, grassroots initiatives. In this sense, an important potential source of support that would improve overall capacity of these initiatives was being identified, but with more questions than answers about how this situation could be improved

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Support from the *knowledge support structure* is based mainly around provision of training and expertise. This can be tailor-made as required, for example, specific training can be organised by the County Enterprise Board, RIDC or the VEC. Others had also gone for management training

with the County Enterprise Board and the VEC. These were programmes that were advertised, and which had to be paid for, but the point to be made is that these facilities were in place and could be availed of locally. Other forms of support include the provision of venues to hold meetings, particularly through the County Enterprise Board, and organising speakers on specific issues when these are requested. Another important factor is that the management boards of agencies in County Roscommon share representation, in other words, a representative of RIDC sits on the board of the County Enterprise Board, while the manager of the County Enterprise Board is also a member of the RIDC board, etc. This greatly improves information-sharing not only about initiatives, but also leads to a valuable pooling and maximising of ideas and resources which work to the benefit of initiatives.

All of the initiatives have paid for research and consultancy at some point from private knowledge facilitators. This might be in the form of a feasibility study, or other plan preparation. However, the cost is always an issue here, and it would only be undertaken as part of achieving a key development objective, or, in the case of feasibility studies, as part of preparing a larger funding application. Some initiatives have made use of private knowledge facilitators, for example, to carry out feasibility studies or to provide a lecture or seminar on a specific area in which their expertise is lacking. At least one group states that it pays for training of staff as it is required, because it is viewed as more cost and time effective than taking on the responsibility internally. Others however would operate on a more informal basis, conducting in-house training where required as a form of exchange of internal knowledge and expertise. In other cases, this is facilitated or seen as an added advantage of the Social Economy Programme, where an employee may come with a range of skills that can then be passed on to other members of the organisation, and where that employee is in turn provided with certain knowledge and skills held by those already within the organisation.

Conclusion

Currently, much of the language surrounding discussions of learning, innovation and knowledge generation tend to reflect very definite discourses of 'production' of goods or services. One of the concerns arising from this review is overwhelming emphasis on policies to achieve a form of economic development rooted in the knowledge economy, and on high-end innovation and technological advancement through research and development which can only ultimately serve a very small section of the population in rural areas. The notion of a rural learning region in which this becomes a primary focus of knowledge-generation raises concerns about those who are excluded from such a model of development and the fate of other forms of knowledge. The central role of third level institutions in such a model also raises concerns of a geographical nature, with the reality that there is an inevitable clustering of high-end research around the vicinity of these institutions. The location of Business Incubation Units within the campuses of the relevant institutions is a small case in point. On a related note, the exclusion of Roscommon Town as a hub town in the NSS framework could be perceived as a reflection of its low status in the wider scheme of development objectives for the country as a whole across a range of dimensions; an emphasising of its dependency status that makes the process of building capacity all the more difficult.

The review of publicly-funded institutes and agencies relevant for supporting regional and rural knowledge focused in the broadest sense on organisations that provide education, training and other related supports that contribute towards these outcomes in the region and study location. As such, it has sought to establish as comprehensively as possible the potential nature and extent of knowledge development and approaches to capacity-building within the region and the case-study area. In the context of promoting learning and innovation from a regional and rural perspective, the number of publicly-funded institutions might be regarded as relatively extensive; however, reviews conducted by bodies such as the BMW Regional Assembly have already established that levels of knowledge transfer and capacity-building are weak within the region. Along with the existing situation of infrastructural and other resource deficits in the region (already outlined in earlier reports) it could be argued that the predominantly top-down nature of public policy support for knowledge and learning initiatives creates inflexible conditions for those operating at the regional and local level in terms of goal-setting and decisions around funding. This in turn leads to a particular range of outcomes that can mitigate against learning, knowledge transfer and capacity-building, particularly by fragmenting efforts and reducing incentives for networking between institutions and agencies (thus reducing synergies on the ground). Situations relating to fragmentation of resources and efforts have been outlined in interviews with representatives of local organisations such as Roscommon County Enterprise Board and Roscommon County Council. Concerns have also been expressed about reductions in funding allocations to implement programmes and initiatives that would support learning and capacity-building. Whilst overlap in some areas was acknowledged, it also emerged that very good but informal working relationships had been developed at the local level among many of these organisations. This had led to constructive exchanges of information and pooling of resources to maximise the benefits that could be achieved for clients using their services. What was being clearly illustrated was the importance of informal networks of communication to bring value-added to an existing but scarce resource base, at least in financial capital terms. The issue of long-established staff leaving their positions and essentially truncating these informal networks of knowledge and information was also discussed as an issue. In terms of understanding this situation through the conceptual framework, the evidence suggests the availability of a certain level of resources and facilities in the form of financial allocations from the relevant government departments, put in place via the associated NDP-driven policy, but with a preoccupation on safeguarding rigid financial mechanisms set from the top. These then tend to be too inflexible on the ground when put into operation in a situation that requires a (justifiable) level of latitude in their interpretation. The wider concern would relate to the impact of very rigid conditions attaching to grant aid and other supports where the object is to encourage and promote innovation. Arguably, the introduction of a level of regional governance in the Irish context would prove beneficial.

The effective absence of a regional layer of governance in Ireland has generated on-going concern about the effectiveness of policies that are formulated and delivered from the top down. A series of submissions to government from the BMW Regional Assembly which seeks to make explicit the inherent structural weaknesses within the region, points up the difficulties in applying 'one size fits all' policy prescription for regions, and areas within regions, in which markedly different infrastructure and resource conditions prevail. In other words, it contends that a level of regional 'proofing' is required. Another argument advanced by one interviewee, however, is

that given Ireland's geographical size, population density (around 5 million persons) and their situation as an island nation, the idea of a regional strategy is an inherently problematic one. From a regional learning perspective, the absence of a regional tier of governance mitigates against the development of more formal networks of co-operation and information exchange, making the task of developing local synergies all the more difficult. It also creates disincentives for other potential actors, typically the third level sector within the region, which must still compete on a national basis with all other institutions for the same sources of funding without being able to make a case for the strategic importance of the regional level. The BMW Regional Assembly, as an extension of central government, arguably presents the most effective body to undertake a regional governance role in terms of co-ordinating with the diverse range of actors and stakeholders who would be part of this complex governance framework. Meaningful and more formal links between the initiatives surveyed and third level institutes are almost non-existent. Support from within local communities for local initiatives is regarded as an important dimension that would ultimately help to build capacity and ensure success. However, it would appear that levels of local awareness and support vary and are not by any means assured. If there is not support and buy-in from the local community, then an important layer in the knowledge and capacity-building process is missing.

8 SUMMARY: SAARLAND, GERMANY

Overview of learning and innovation support strategies

To give an overview of public strategies for capacity building within the domain of rural regional development in 'Saarland', a documentation of regional learning supporting (public) policies (strategies and instruments) was drawn up by examining *rural development policies, regional development policies* and *learning and innovation policies*. Similar to the Direktionsbezirk Dresden, rural as well as regional development policies determine rural regional development in Saarland. These policies are translated into programmes and initiatives which are funded by the European Union and/or the German government and/or the federal state. The learning and support strategies and their implementation correspond to those available in 'Direktionsbezirk Dresden' (see Chapter 6). Unlike Direktionsbezirk Dresden, however, Saarland is not considered a disadvantaged region and does therefore not receive additional cohesion and convergence funds like Direktionsbezirk Dresden.

Support for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives

In Saarland, a large proportion of measures concerning support for learning and innovation stems from projects funded through regional learning and innovation policies. These projects are financially supported by the German government and the European Union (e.g. ESF) and related national funds. With the help of the 'Learning Region' programme, many projects were realised by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as for example the Weiterbildungsdatenbank Saar (database for further education) or the project "Lernort Ich" in Greater Saarbrucken which runs a kind of educational management. Today, these projects are run independently, without federal or EU funds. In addition, there are self-study centres as a new form of learning which try to attract new learners who – for whatever reasons - have not used the course offerings of other institutes so far.

Depending on the type of educational institute, different forms of support and facilitation are available from the *knowledge support structure*, including counselling and further education within the field of environmental and quality management or language courses. According to the Saarland Ministry of Education- the leading voice in education at federal state level- support is requested both from congested areas as well as from rural regions. Requests for support come from educational institutes and individuals and deal substantially with counselling or funding opportunities. Public knowledge institutes cover different fields of educational opportunities concerning general and vocational further training. After the OECD's educational survey PISA and the subsequent political discussion, the need for the creation and/or increase of abilities and competences has been recognised. For this reason, providers of further education are not bound to instructions where to put their main focus on. A broad offer supplied by qualified staff is the only thing which is required and regulated by law.

An important basic idea of public knowledge institutes is the idea of networking. The cooperation with local actors, with public administration and knowledge institutes is principally set up by law. The main cooperation partners of the Ministry of Education, for example, are organisations of further education. Knowledge institutes mainly work together with the German

Institute for Adult Education (DIE) and the Institute for Development Planning and Structural Research (IES) in Hanover. Due to this general networking, ever new ideas and strategies are emerging. The most important institutions for further education are adult education centres and the Catholic Adult Education, because they offer educational opportunities in remote rural regions. Both are funded by the Saarland Ministry of Education. They supply the local population with so-called small-scale education. The basic idea is that further training is provided on the spot so that interested people do not have to travel to more centrally located institutions. Therefore, these projects are of great interest in many different respects. Adult education centres and the Catholic Adult Education are the main providers of education to rural Saarland because they can be found in small towns and villages. There are several further public and private institutes and association involved with supporting and facilitation joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives, e.g. FORUM EUROPA, the European Academy of Otzenhausen, the State Office for Political Education Saarland, GeBIT Company, The Chamber of Employment, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the German Federal Employment Agency. Furthermore, authority cooperates with schools in Saarland and with the "SaarLernNetz" (Saar Learning Network), a kind of educational market place for new learning with new media has been developed in the region. Finally, the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Bliesgau offers environmental education in terms of competitions for schools and nursery schools, further training for educators and a school project "Mixed orchard". The SaarLernNet (SLN) Education network of the Saarland offers an online educational portal with search functions for further training courses, jobs and literature. The cooperation with universities, in contrast, is relatively low.

With regard to *public administration*, the cooperation between ministries is very productive. The network of the Ministry of Environment of the Saarland includes, for example the network 'Environmental Education' with the work group "Solar" in the energetic-technical sector, the BUND (Association for Environment and Nature Protection; German branch of Friends of the Earth) with its "KunterBUNDMobil" ('kunterbunt' means motley) for the ecological exploration of the environment, the LAGS (professional association for health promotion and prevention) which support healthy school feeding, the State's Youth Welfare Office (which provides further education in the pre-school sector), the Landesjugendring Saar (a youth association of the state) as an umbrella organisation and contact for many extracurricular youth organisations, the Ministry of Education, Family, Women and Culture which is responsible for the content and composition of instruction, among others, the 'SaarForst' (a state company running commercial forests) State Office which committed itself to Forest pedagogy, or the NABU (German non-governmental nature conservation organisation). Other examples of networks include the association of conversation project "Saar-Blies-Gau/Auf der Lohe" which supervises a centre of cultural landscape in Wittersheim, the so-called 'Lochfeld', in cooperation with the district of Saarpfalz and works together with the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Protection and Reactor Safety, Berlin, the state of Saarland, the Saarpfalz district, the municipality of Gersheim, the municipality of Mandelbachtal, Naturlandstiftung (a foundation) Saar, the City of Saarbrücken. Due to the protection of the environment in the project area the association boosts informal regional learning as an additional advantage.

In order to find out more about the operationalisation of available support and facilitation for learning and innovation, four grassroots development initiatives were inventoried in-depth. Figure 11 illustrates the available support and facilitation for the grassroots-development initiative KuLanI (Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land). The main focus of KuLanI is on preserving and further developing the cultural landscape 'St. Wendeler Land' (North-East Saarland), protecting and using natural resources and the cultural heritage. For this reason there are three spheres of activity: awareness raising, local commodity market and tourism. These focal points decree the support and facilitation of the grassroots development initiative. Of great importance is the implementation of the regional development concept 'Lokalwarenmarkt St. Wendeler Land' (REK) (local produce store) that is to support the rural development of the St. Wendel region due to development strategies, information platform and partner farms (see Figure 1). Especially, the use of the inherent potentials 'natural resources', 'cultural heritage' and 'local population' are thereby the focal points. Some measures follow the tourism conception as 'St. Wendeler Land – Steinreich' (see also below) or arrangements for construction and establishment of a self-reinforcing market of local products and service. Concerning the three pillars of learning and innovation there are local schools and school camp 'BiberBurg Berschweiler' for knowledge infrastructure as well as supporting policies from EU, federal ministries, Saarland ministries, districts and municipalities to denote in the Case Study Region.
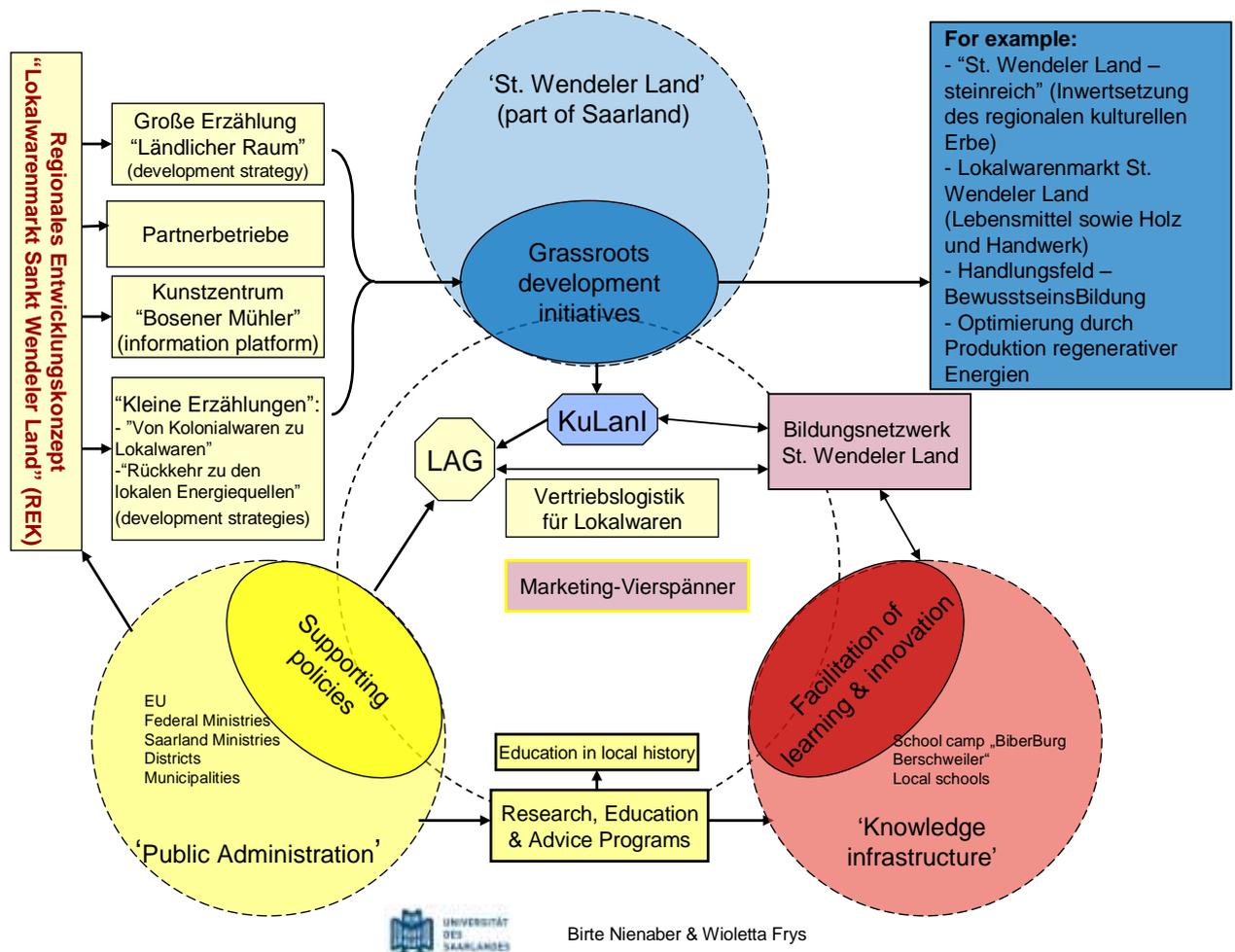

Figure 11 KuLanI as an example of support and facilitation for grassroots development initiatives in Saarland

Operational quality of arrangements

The important and really effective form of support and facilitation from *public administration* appears to be the financial support by means of formal subvention contracts, e.g. LEADER, ILE. The special purpose association 'Renaturation of the Ill', for example, applied for becoming an 'Integrated Rural Development Concept (ILEK)' -region. The 'Integrated Rural Development Concept (ILEK)' offers a new financial base. Because of the disposition as an ILEK-region, the initiative has been supported referring to the ILEK subsidies directives of Saarland. Furthermore, the inventoried initiatives have been predominantly founded and developed by stakeholders of public administration. The nearness to superior public authorities (mainly to the Saarland ministries and the Saarland government) seems to be appreciated by the initiatives. The inventoried initiatives, for example, benefit from a high social reputation and are supported by politically independent circles. Such a support is being expressed for example through the personal presence of political representatives at special occasions. In contrast, administrative guidelines and guidelines for public expenditure appear to be very complex and therefore too complicated for users, specifically if different ministries bring out various guidelines which are contradictory. As a result, not many grassroots development initiatives in the case study areas use this the support of public administration as it is evaluated as too bureaucratic. The grassroots development initiatives also fear control of public bodies in the region because the public bodies with their policy framework are seen as controllers (e.g. LEADER projects). Regrettably, facilitating support suffers from a too short-term and often is adaptive only for a specific funding period (e.g. 2007-2013) with no guarantee of support afterwards which hinders long-term innovation processes.

Public information and advisory service were evaluated as partly complex and difficult for users. Sometimes there are different contact persons in different authorities that all have to be included as each authority has different information strategies and different regulations that have to be followed. The provision of information on educational opportunities, e.g. by database or educational portal in the internet brings the drawback of restrictions of an individual advisory service. The high accessibility and availability of new information, however, are the most important advantages of this support form available in rural Saarland. The most important and sustainable support for grassroots development initiatives in the future is the establishment of networks mediated by public authority. Even if some networks have artificial character, the networking in the region facilitates knowledge transfer, dissemination of support forms and sustainable development. Most of the networks are evaluated to be very sustainable after being established.

With regard to the *knowledge support structure*, especially universities and academies in Saarland and neighbour regions collaborate with the grassroots initiatives in the case study areas, e.g. Saarland University, University of Kaiserslautern or the European Academy of Otzenhausen. With regard to this co-operation, specifically the provision of scientific knowledge and of access to scientific publicity and networks runs successful. The project 'Steinreich', for example, in which different topics are brought together and discussed, the cultural initiative St. Wendeler Land aims to work more closely with the European Academy of Otzenhausen. This collaboration with one of the key knowledge institutes in Saarland also contributes to a positive evaluation of the initiative.

Furthermore, the creation of a network is especially helpful for women in rural areas. They have then the possibility to make collective undertakings and learn from each other. The ideas for support arise by the analysed initiatives mostly at the level of the members. There are board meetings, where everyone can suggest new proposals. This creates ideas for workshops and trainings, e.g. members suggest what they could offer by knowledge transfer.

The grassroots development initiatives appreciate the opinions of external experts, which they mostly know personally, and obtain the newest knowledge available in this way. Also, scientific studies concerning grassroots development initiatives are seen as professional and efficient. The high costs of scientific research and resources, however, do not allow the grassroots development initiatives to use this form of support very often. Similar aspects apply to various stakeholders from other knowledge institutions of public authorities. Consultants at the federal state level, for example at the ministries, render their work for the initiatives also gratuitously, because they are paid by the state within the scope of their position.

Furthermore, skilled labour provided by students which are doing internships and writing thesis is very useful for grassroots development initiatives as they receive the newest knowledge. However, it is a short-term support, as the students often leave the initiative after finishing the project. The partially high fluctuation of employees and low-cost labour (if students work for initiatives within their research project and are not paid for) are disadvantages of this form of support. Even if the cooperation with knowledge institutes, which are official partners of initiatives (as members, founders or partners of initiative) appears very useful due to good knowledge exchange on a not-scientific basis, there are too less co-operations like the mentioned in Saarland.

Lastly, among the chosen initiatives occurs a process of learning from each other as well as a mutual exchange. The members' learning process includes not only the work within their own initiative but also the cooperation with partners of other projects, whether established or potential ones. For this reason, it is also a question of a learning process in which the participants can broaden their horizons and where they can casually proof which new cooperation partners are good to work with (e.g. other communes). Apart from this fact the employees and members join different advanced training courses, meetings, conventions or skill enhancement workshops. One example is the strategy meetings which are organized every half year by the regional manager (cooperation partner of the initiative). One of the initiatives is supported by the University Kaiserslautern. This assistance is project-oriented and based on specialist counselling and a research project. There are also trainings, workshops, meetings with experts and referees, etc. for the members of the initiatives concerning certain topics, e.g. medical science, insurances, communication or legal matters. Then the acquired knowledge is passed to other members. Furthermore, according to the initiative, support exists from their own ranks, allowing information and knowledge exchange at different levels (e.g. local or national level). Often, knowledge institutes offer an advisory support free of charge, e.g. by means of the already mentioned research project and the supervision via the professors of the University Kaiserslautern. Something similar applies to varied stakeholders from other knowledge institutions of public authorities. The consultants at the federal state level (e.g. at the ministries) render their work for the initiatives gratuitously too, because they are paid by the state within the

scope of their position. Finally it has to be noted that the thematic oriented training, meetings with experts and referees as well as the educational advancements are determined by daily routine respectively the spatial location and the project obligation. It is of great significance to incorporate the professorship of Kaiserslautern which will accomplish a specific research project. Furthermore a continuous search for new ideas is as important as to follow up mentioned wishes. Thus the selection of topics is carried out in a system-oriented, project-oriented and territorial-oriented way.

Certainly there will be a demand for additional support, for example by charitable foundations. This could assume the shape of cooperation. A definite know-how is the condition for a successful collaboration, as well as the consideration of further cooperative domains with other organisations or institutions. One important support refers to the acquisition of new members who would join just because of the project itself. Moreover the acceptance of the population is of great importance at all. Depending on the topic the initiatives implement regional identity which can only be recognised seriously through acceptance. To receive this support the initiatives require the encouragement of public institutions in order to appeal potential cooperation partners and members by public campaigns.

Conclusion

In summary it can be said that there is a good support from public administration and knowledge infrastructure in Saarland. The grassroots development initiatives in rural Saarland have a good developing progress, depending on the acceptance of the stakeholders and other persons being involved. Support from the public sector and knowledge support structure for grassroots development initiatives in Saarland is very relevant for their development. Even if more support would mean more efficiency of the initiatives the facilitation is commendable. Besides that, the developing initiatives mostly provide self-support and facilitation to their members as well as to interested inhabitants and visitors. These activities are evaluated especially well as they account for regional development in the rural Saarland.

9 SUMMARY: WESTERKWARTIER, THE NETHERLANDS

Overview of learning and innovation support strategies

Actors and policies that influence the design and implementation of policy objectives related to regional learning in the Westerkwartier can be categorized into five different governmental levels: the European Union, the state (national government), the region, the province and lastly municipalities and water boards.
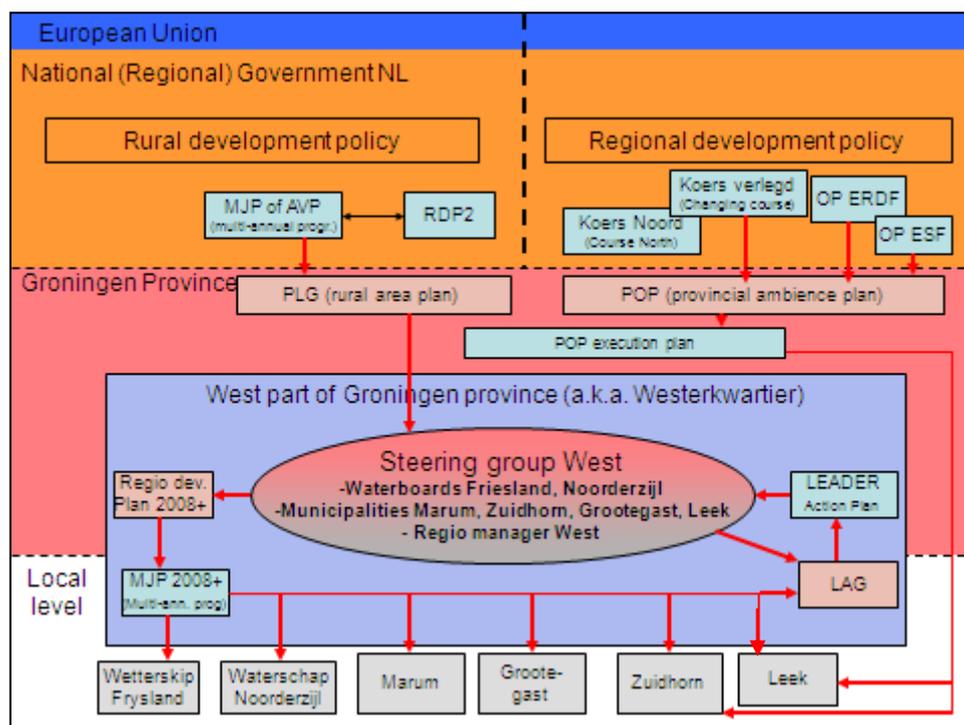

Figure 12 Relevant representatives and policies in public administration (NL)

As shown in Figure 12, development in the Westerkwartier is framed by *rural* and *regional development policies*. At each governmental level, a development agenda with development objectives is formulated. At European and national level, agendas are still formulated very broadly and only state general objectives which should be aimed at by stakeholders at lower governmental level. Furthermore, general development steps are suggested which should lead to the fulfilment of the desired objectives in the different members states. These agendas are passed down the administrative hierarchy and at every level they are reformulated in a more precise way in order to fit the specific development needs at the different public administration levels.

Regional development programmes are formulated for and by the region North Netherlands which comprises the three Northern provinces Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen. Of these, the policy agenda "Koers verlegd" (Changing course) explains how North Netherland should be transformed into a knowledge-based economy. It focuses on high-tech industry clusters. In addition, European policy objectives, also with regard to stimulating initiatives related to learning and innovation, are incorporated in the OP EFRO (ERDF). The executive programme "Koers Noord" (Course North) follows up on the OP ERDF and presents a programme to strengthen the spatial economic structure in North Netherland. The *European Social Fund* is complementary

to the EFRD policies and used to build human capital for a transition into a knowledge based economy. The EFS objectives have been taken on as national development goals, implemented through the operational programme ESF. As figure 12 shows, regional policy objectives formulated at higher governmental level, including those related to learning and innovation, are summarised and reformulated in the POP Groningen (Provincial ambience plan Groningen).

Looking at **rural development policies,** there is only one nationally applicable rural development agenda, namely the agenda "Vital countryside AVP" (see figure 12). This agenda integrates the RDP 2 and hence objectives of the European CAP 2 (amongst others the LEADER approach, axis 4) and national rural development objectives. Development objectives specified in the agenda "Vital countryside" were translated into strategies which are summarised in the operational Multi-annual programme vital countryside 2007-2013 (MJP).

The POP Groningen and Agenda Vital Countryside form the basis of the Development Programme West Groningen (a.k.a. Westerkwartier), a policy document formulated and implemented by the Steering Group West (see figure 12). This steering group is comprised of members from the municipalities Leek, Marum, Grootegast and Zuidhorn, Groningen Province, water boards and the regional manager of the agenda "Vital countryside". The Westerkwartier is further a LEADER region with a Local Action Group. It consists of members from the Steering Group West, the Westerkwartier Initiative Group and business partners, and acts as consultant to the Steering Group West regarding the socio-economic vitality of the Westerkwartier. The Local Action Group has elaborated a LEADER action plan 2007-2013 which has been taken into consideration by the Steering Group West in formulating an Integrated Regional Development Programme West 2008. Projects outlined in the Integrated Development Programme West 2008 are partially financed through European rural funds, national rural funds and provincial funds and partially through funds made available by the different municipalities. Nature, soil, water and other development is mainly financed through national funds. Socio-economic vitalisation, in contrast, is financed by LEADER, build mostly on European funds with an additional fund of Groningen province and partners. Development concerning the landscape and cultural history is funded almost evenly by the European Union, national government, the province and partners. The DLG acts as central financing organ of the perennial programme Region West Groningen 2008+ (including LEADER). Together with the Regional programme manager West, who is a member of the Steering Group West, the DLG also supervises the realisation of development goals within the RDP 2. Regional development funds play a less significant role as they are only applicable to parts of Zuidhorn and Leek which form part of regional development projects (e.g. Regio Groningen-Assen).

Support of joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives

Figure 13 gives an overview of different arrangements found in the Westerkwartier to support and facilitate rural regional learning and innovation. A distinction can be made between operational interfaces providing support from public administration and the knowledge support structure.

With regard to support from *public administration*, the Foundation Westerkwartier Initiative Group (WSI) seems to be an important hub for representatives of public administration to make arrangements with grassroots development initiators and to create partnerships. As an umbrella

for different grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier, it arguably acts as a platform of innovation and is therefore a key actor for creating direct and indirect operational interfaces to support and facilitate learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier. The Foundation WSI is also represented in the Local Action Group (LAG), an example of a public-private partnership between representatives of public administration and regional initiators. The LEADER action plan acts further as a formal agreement and operationalizes arrangements that are aimed at supporting and initiating learning and innovation processes within grassroots development initiatives. Looking at figure 13, at the time of investigation all operational interfaces (except the Association Groningen Villages which receives funds from Groningen Province) between public administration and regional grassroots development initiatives (coloured in yellow-blue) were co-financed by LEADER funds. This raises, of course, the question about their continuity after 2013 when the current LEADER phase is terminated.

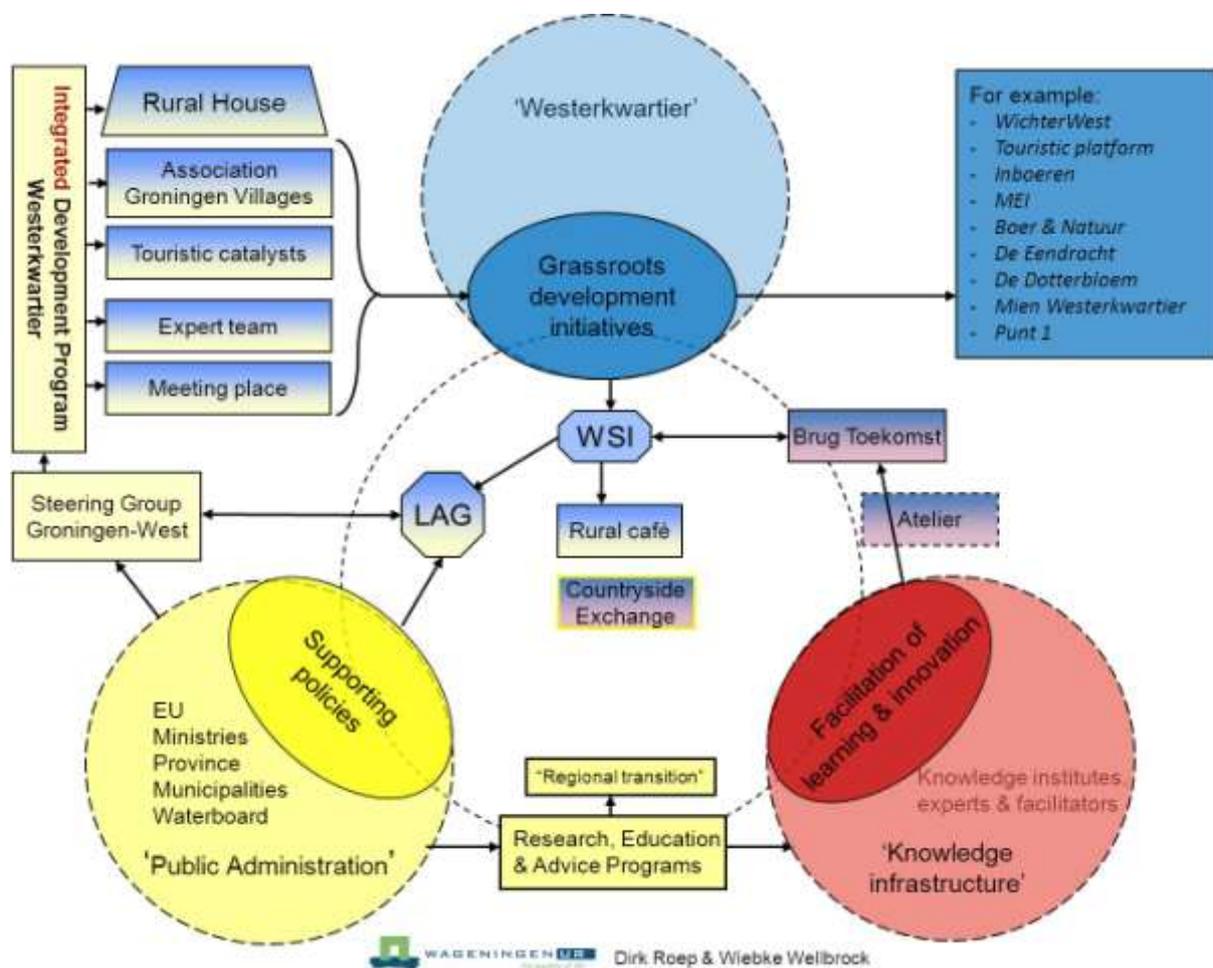Figure 13 Arrangements for support and facilitation of learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier

For example, LEADER funds have been used to open a rural house in the Westerkwartier in order to offer an easy accessible counter for initiate and support ideas in their development towards becoming a LEADER project. In the rural house, different supporters and facilitators

can be found, namely a representative of the municipalities, the province, the LAG, the Association Groningen Villages, the touristic catalysts and the WSI, which offer direct support and facilitation to rural grassroots development initiators from the Westerkwartier. The rural house is accessible everyday by telephone and, if necessary, appointments are given out with representatives in the house. Furthermore, the different representatives of the rural house meet regularly as the Expert team (except the WSI) to ensure a knowledge exchange between the different levels of public administration, to communicate development issues back to public administration organs and to evaluate the contribution of incoming proposals towards the LEADER development goals. In this function, the Expert team is able to grant subsidies of up to 10,000 Euros from the Living Villages Window fund. This money is mostly used to conduct feasibility studies of bigger project plans. The Expert team also acts as advisor to the LAG for LEADER subsidy requests that are larger than 10,000 Euro. In addition, the rural house can also be used as a meeting place by rural grassroots development initiatives. Box 8-7 provides a short description of the different direct operational interfaces found between public administration and the Westerkwartier.

With regard to the *knowledge support structure*, there are numerous potential support facilities for rural regional learning and innovation in the Westerkwartier, in form of education facilities, research facilities, consultancy services, advice bureaus, professionals, organisations, private persons, etc. In fact, the number appeared to be so large that only present publically funded knowledge institutes involved (or potentially relevant) for regional learning processes in the Westerkwartier were inventoried. Public administration offers support and facilitation for the knowledge infrastructure to engage within grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier. Indirect support and facilitation is provided in two ways. On the one hand, LEADER and other public and private administration funds are provided to organize events such as the countryside exchange or rural cafés to facilitate an informal networking and coincidental encounters amongst regional stakeholders. Furthermore, provided LEADER funds can be used by grassroots development initiatives and arrangements to form agreements and partnerships with (public or private) knowledge institutes (such as education, research and advice).On the other hand, public administration enables support and facilitation of learning and innovation through providing education, research and advice programmes to fund the engagement of knowledge institutes with rural grassroots development initiatives. Here, programmes are made available for 'green' knowledge institutes by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and for 'other' knowledge institutes by other ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Economic Affairs. To enable the involvement of 'green' knowledge institutes, there are several programmes available for different aspects of rural development including, for example, multifunctional agriculture, nature and landscape conservation and regional transition. A great share of funds available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is given to Wageningen University for research activities (e.g. B009). Another example of how these funds are managed is the Green Knowledge Cooperation (GKC) which is promoting an involvement of knowledge institutes with regional research questions. Here figure 13 shows the programme Regional Transition is particularly interest for rural regional development. Funds provided by the Green Knowledge Cooperation (GKC) are thus a further example of an arrangement for indirect support of rural regional learning and innovation processes. As figure 13 shows, two arrangements are indicated which

have benefitted from indirect means for support and facilitation of learning and innovation activities, these are the terminated project Brug Toekomst and the to-be-approved arrangement Atelier. The project Brug Toekomst (2003-2008) aimed to test the cooperation of Wageningen University, Van Hall Institute and Larenstein University of Applied Science in a practical research setting. Through contacts within Larenstein University of Applied Sciences, the Westerkwartier was chosen as a research area. The first year of the project was exclusively financed by Wageningen but the remaining three years, the project also received funds from the Regional Transition Programme of the Green Knowledge Cooperation (GKC). The arrangement Atelier has been set up in various rural regions across the Netherlands. It aims to form a link between regional research question and the knowledge infrastructure. Apart from the mentioned funding possibilities, there are other, indirect means for supporting and facilitating learning and innovation activities within grassroots development initiatives, for instance, university funding, private investors and other public administration funds.

Operational quality of arrangements

Public administration supports grassroots development activities in the Westerkwartier along three lines: *initiation, advice, expertise and facilitation* and *finances*. These forms of support and facilitation appear to be particularly relevant regarding the focus of developing and pursuing a collective development aim.

Initiation

Out of the 11 grassroots development initiatives inventoried, four received help from operational interfaces in their initiation phase. As it was remarked by two of the initiators, setting up an initiative and keeping it running means a lot of work for its voluntary members. Necessary activities involve the securing of funds, making future plans and planning activities. The initiators remarked negatively that these activities take a lot of time from the volunteers and should therefore be compensated. It was further stated that volunteers are often too busy with their own business so that they do not find time for setting up and keeping an initiative running. It was therefore concluded that process managers are necessary to initiate development activities and keeping them running.

Advice, Expertise and Facilitation

Grassroots development initiatives that initiated their initiative themselves started to seek contact with public administration in their aim to create a joint development plan. In this process, the Rural house, Expert team, Association Groningen Villages and touristic catalysts appeared to be of particular importance. Landscape and nature management activities received advice on subsidy regulations, provincial management plans and possibilities to purchase nature protection land directly through members of public administration. The initiators remarked that it is necessary to have clear contact points (within the municipality) where advice on subsidies and regulations can be obtained. In the Westerkwartier, this function is arguably fulfilled by the rural house. In the rural house, initiators are able to receive support and facilitation all under one roof and they do not have to go to communicate with different persons within the region to get support and facilitation. The support and facilitation offered to initiators is further enhanced by an internal knowledge exchange between different stakeholders within public administration. The rural house also transfers knowledge about on-going rural development issues to the

municipalities. The people in the Westerkwartier are said to have an aversion against public administration. The low accessibility of the countryside house is therefore a good solution to counteract this aversion. It was, however, remarked that the rural house needs to be more pro-active and that it needs initiative own projects than merely re-directing people. It was further remarked that although public administration provides good and clear communication about their requirements to give out subsidies, help could be provided faster and that despite a good cooperative tenor, the process of receiving support was hampered by too much bureaucracy. The strict rules and regulations are thus argued to create a 'bottleneck' for rural development in the Netherlands. Furthermore, administrative boundaries have been argued to pose unnecessary obstacles for grassroots development initiatives. These boundaries of administrative units do not only slow down requests for subsidies but also the cooperation across borders of administrative units.

Financing
Within the developing fields of economy, agriculture and society, all but one initiative stated to receive or to be in the process of applying for finances through LEADER funds. It was therefore argued that LEADER funds play an important role for enabling the development of grassroots development initiatives in the Westerkwartier. Nevertheless, all initiators stated that the processes of receiving funds from LEADER was difficult. On the one hand, difficulties are related to obtaining shares from the municipalities, due to different interests or financial restrictions. On the other hand, the process of applying for subsidies was regarded as difficult, too. For example, writing a subsidy request means a lot of additional work to the volunteers of a grassroots development initiative. Also, in order to receive money from LEADER, grassroots development initiatives need to form a legal entity. According to some initiators, however, forming a legal entity has negative consequences on the willingness of members to join their activities. LEADER funds were either administered directly to the initiative or it was administered indirectly by providing money to operational interfaces with the task to enable the development of grassroots initiatives. Apart from LEADER, several initiators also mentioned other subsidy bodies, such as local financial institutes, the national farmer's organization or membership fees. It was further remarked that there are too many rules attached to applying for subsidies and that more funds should be made available from the province.

Most of the contacts between grassroots development initiatives and the *knowledge support structure* are established through informal networks and coincidental encounters. All initiators thus stated that the maintenance of informal, regular contacts with the knowledge infrastructure is important. Furthermore, learning and innovation was argued to occur when people meet and start to exchange knowledge and ideas. To stimulate the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people, all initiatives stated to organise network meetings or excursions for their members. Public administration also stimulates informal networking opportunities by organising themed rural cafés. Also opportunities to exchange informally with visitors from other regions, as organised by the Countryside Exchange, are valued for obtaining new knowledge. According to the questioned initiators, seeing the region through stranger's eyes has helped to stimulate new ideas. In addition to facilitating the establishment of informal networks and coincidental encounters, a number of persons (so called brokers) were identified as being active in the region to establish connections between the region, public administration and the knowledge

infrastructure. These connectors were regarded as important to elaborate ideas. The question is, however, whether these connectors are known in the area.

Support and facilitation provided by the knowledge support structure seemed to be highly relevant in the initiative's focus on acquiring joint learning capacities to jointly achieve development goal. Arguably, during this phase support and facilitation from public administration became less important and the relevance of the knowledge infrastructure for the grassroots development initiatives increased. The inventoried grassroots development initiatives were on the one hand support by publically funded knowledge institutes and on the other hand by private knowledge facilitators. The involvement of student researchers from publically funded knowledge institutes with grassroots development initiatives appeared to be least expensive due to public funding opportunities (see fig. 2). Other initiatives stated to make use of private and public knowledge facilitators such as experts, advisors or professionals with specific knowledge on certain topics. For these services, the grassroots development initiators paid the knowledge facilitators for their services through own resources or budgets taken from subsidies received. One can thus argue that besides necessary personal contacts within the knowledge infrastructure, a grassroots development activity also needs to have access to necessary funds in order to be able to engage knowledge facilities. Support and facilitation from the knowledge infrastructure was received along four lines: *Expertise/ Seminars, Research & Consultancy, Student research training* and *Training/ Skill development.*

Expertise/Seminars & Training/Skills provision
With regard to expertise/ seminars and training/skill provision, all grassroots development initiators stated to make use of experts from all kinds of backgrounds. It was thus stated that it does not matter where the expertise comes from, universities, professionals, advice bureaus, as long as the person providing knowledge is an expert in the relevant field. These experts are usually drawn from the extended network of the different grassroots development initiatives. Building networks was, however, regarded as effortful. Consequently, at least two initiators regarded the establishment of contacts with the knowledge infrastructure as secondary. The first priority was clearly seen as securing funds.

Research & Consultancy
In order to receive research & consultancy services from private knowledge facilitators, all grassroots development initiators stated to pay the experts for their involvement. Accordingly, the willingness of private knowledge facilitators to participate is always very high. For the grassroots development initiatives, however, the payment for private knowledge facilitators can be unaffordable.

Student research training
Most contacts between the public knowledge infrastructure and grassroots development initiatives occurred within the development field of landscape & nature management. Here, also the project Brug toekomst was active. It seems that many contacts between grassroots development initiatives and the region are established by coincidence. Also the contact with the public knowledge institutes that took part in the project Brug toekomst occurred through coincidence and was established through informal connections and built on trust.

Conclusion

The results of the Westerkwartier suggest that establishing contact with the public knowledge infrastructure is difficult. Furthermore, involvement with public knowledge institutes from outside the region is relatively low because universities have a too high level of abstraction. Nevertheless, it was agreed that cooperation with the public knowledge infrastructure is important for a mutual benefit. Research projects can, for example, facilitate the collaboration of regional stakeholders. Collaboration between a grassroots development initiative and public knowledge institutes was argued to require good coordination and communication. However, if there are more than one knowledge institute engaged with regional development questions, organisation and communication may become a problem and projects will not run well. Furthermore, it is very important for students to have structure and continuity, although not enough energy has yet been put into the process of installing a structure and continuity amongst students, lecturers and the region. Problems occurs when students and lecturers who usually work within school buildings start working outside the school building. Furthermore, working outside school structures is costly in terms of money and time. It is necessary to reward lecturer for this extra effort. Also, often questions are imposed on a region by public knowledge institutes and not vice versa. The new arrangement 'Atelier' could help to solve the mentioned problems.

10 WELL-WORKING ARRANGEMENTS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

After an inventory of 61 grassroots development initiatives across six case study areas, a comparative analysis was done on a) the type of support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation provided and received; b) how the support and facilitation was arranged including the mediating interface and c) how the support and facilitation and mediating interfaces were evaluated by both the beneficiaries and supporters[5]. Subsequently a selection of 33 well-working operational interfaces were analysed in-depth to understand what makes an interface work well, given the contextual differences across the case study areas[6]. In this chapter the results are synthesised.

From an analytical perspective, the support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives has to be put into practise or has to be mediated through an operational interface. To make an interface work, founding partners need to come to a *constitutive agreement* concerning three basic components: *the scope of operation* (i.e. the type of beneficiaries targeted and geographical position), *the formal shaping of the operational space* (i.e. the type of support and facilitation provided, rules, regulations and procedures attached to obtaining it, and the resulting shape), and the *delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies*. The composure and working of the interface and its overall arrangement reflects a particular mode of governance.

Constitutive agreements can be made by public administration as part of their governmental tasks. This was, for instance, the case in Alytus County. In each of the other case study areas, also private agents were invited to become partners in constitutive agreements. When public and private partners are making a joint agreement, a public-private partnership is formed. These public-private partnerships may become formalized, as for example in form of Local Action Groups.

The scope of operation
The scope of operation refers to the type of beneficiaries targeted and the geographical position of the interface. To investigate the scope of operation, in all case study areas a variety of arrangements to support an facilitate learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives was inventoried. The inventoried arrangements supported and facilitated learning and innovation within a variety of commonly discussed development fields such as agriculture, nature & landscape development, civic & community development and economic activities. As table 10.1 shows, in Alytus County, the Comarca de Verín and County Roscommon, the majority of inventoried arrangements focussed on economic activities (mostly in the primary sector). In Saarland, the majority of arrangements focussed on specific development topics (e.g. women, cultural landscape). In the Westerkwartier, half of the arrangements focussed on various development fields (e.g. through one regional window for support (rural house) and one expert

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[5] See *D4.2 Support of joint learning and innovation* for detailed information available at www.derreg.eu.
[6] See *D4.3 Summary of good practise examples: Well-working arrangements for support of joint learning and innovation in Europe's rural regions* for detailed information available at www.derreg.eu.

group), thereby taking a territorial approach. Finally, in the Direktionsbezirk Dresden arrangements were proportionately equally often found to focus on either specific development topics (e.g. the Sorbs and cultural landscape) or taking a territorial approach (e.g. through providing support for all kinds of initiatives via the Saxon Development Bank and the regional manager). The results thus show that the scope of operation differs between the case study areas, suggesting different development priorities in different regional contexts.

Table 10-1 Proportion of scope of operation in different case study areas (%)

	Alytus	**Comarca**	**Dresden**	**Roscommon**	**Saarland**	**Westerkwartier**
Development topic	0	17	**33**	14	**67**	0
Territory	0	0	**33**	29	33	**50**
Business sector	**80**	**50**	17	**43**	0	17
Community	20	33	17	14	0	33
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

When talking about the scope of operation, it is also necessary to consider the geographical position of the interface, because it determines the visibility and accessibility of the support and facilitation provided. The geographical position from which to best target the beneficiaries varied between the different case study areas, due to different regional contexts (e.g. demography, geographical characteristics). In the relatively large Direktionsbezirk Dresden, for example, support and facilitation was located at a much larger geographical position than in the relatively small Westerkwartier, which is characterised by short connections between people and places. In other case study areas, however, the history of the region and the local sense of place was more important than the size of the region. The citizens of Saarland, the largest of the case study areas, showed a strong sense of place, based on their history. Even though the Saarland is a large region, support and facilitation still reached its beneficiaries, because of strong ties between citizens within the region. The geographical position depends also on the type of beneficiaries targeted (e.g. development group or topic, business sector, community or territory). Business sectors, for example, might operate at a regional level and need to be targeted at regional level, whereas communities need to be addressed at local or even village level.

The results suggest at least two ways to increase visibility and accessibility of an operational interface. Visibility and accessibility can be increased by providing a single gateway through which support and facilitation from different policy schemes and the knowledge support structure can be accessed. In the Westerkwartier, for example, the rural house serves as information and support centre for all initiatives active in the region. The presence of the house is known throughout the region and initiators will turn towards this house in search for adequate information and advice. In Roscommon County, the Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd. (RIDC Ltd.) operates all support and facilitation for community development. Also the Saxon Development Bank in Direktionsbezirk Dresden acts as a gateway to financial support from different policy schemes.

Visibility and accessibility can also be enhanced by creating low-threshold access points. The rural house in the Westerkwartier, for example, was open every morning during weekdays for

initiators to drop in and pose informal questions. A further way of creating low-threshold access points is by organizing informal meetings where members of public administration, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives can meet. In the Westerkwartier, thematic rural 'cafés' were organised where initiators are able to present their activities; inviting all kinds of stakeholders to network, exchange ideas and to make arrangements. These meetings were evaluated highly positive. In County Roscommon and Direktionsbezirk Dresden such meetings were organised by funding organisations. These meetings were, however, not helpful for grassroots development initiators as the results of the evaluation showed. The results also showed that the creation of singly gateways and low-threshold access points are associated with additional costs and therefore public funding is always questioned, certainly in times of shrinking public budgets and deficits. As a consequence, the future of the rural house in the Westerkwartier, for example, is uncertain.

Formal shaping of operational space
Founding partners agree upon the way in which support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation should be made available for the targeted beneficiaries. To provide the agreed upon support and facilitation, an operational interface connecting support and beneficiaries, is needed. The formal shaping of an operational space was defined as the type of provided support and facilitation, the procedures, rules and regulations attached to it and the resulting shape of the operational interface.

The results showed different types of support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation activities: 'financial support' (i.e. different kinds of subsidies and procedural support), 'knowledge and skills' (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), 'physical infrastructure' (for example meeting spaces, information centres), and 'social infrastructure' (for example network incubation and cluster forming). In all case study areas, 'financial support' was most commonly referred to, followed by 'knowledge and skills', 'social infrastructure' and 'physical infrastructure'.

The results provided little information on procedures, rules and regulations; except that there are too many of them, leading to too much bureaucracy, which is making it difficult for the targeted beneficiaries to apply for help. In relation to this, the difficult grant-writing terminology was often stated as too much work for what are voluntary members of grassroots development initiatives. In some cases, as for example in the Westerkwartier or Alytus County, it was stated that the formation of legal entities was a pre-condition for eligibility of support and facilitation. This was often regarded as a de-motivator for volunteers to continue with their grassroots development activity.

Concerning the resulting shape of operational interfaces, the results have shown that operational interfaces can either be established in form of *long-term, commissioned assignments*, *short-term, project based assignments*, *institutional agreements* and *recruited professional services*.

As table 10.2 shows, the majority of operational interfaces were long-term, commissioned assignments. The proportion of interface-shapes, however, differed between the different case study areas. Long-term, commissioned assignments were proportionately most often found in

Saarland and the Comarca de Verín. Short-term, project based assignments were proportionately most often found in the Westerkwartier, institutional arrangements were proportionately most often found in Direktionsbezirk Dresden, and professional services were proportionately most often recruited in Roscommon County and Alytus County.

Table 10-2 Proportion of operational interfaces with different shapes in different case study areas (%)

	Long-term, commissioned assignment	Short-term, project based assignment	Institutional arrangement	Professional services	Total number
Alytus County	0.0	0.0	33.0	**67.0**	**3**
Comarca de Verín	50.0	16.7	16.7	16.6	**6**
Direktionsbezirk Dresden	33.0	17.0	**50.0**	0.0	**6**
Roscommon County	43.0	0.0	14.0	**43.0**	**7**
Saarland	**66.0**	0.0	33.0	0.0	**3**
Westerkwartier	17.0	**83.0**	0.0	0.0	**6**
Total	**34.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**22.0**	**32**

Long-term assignments were evaluated positively as they helped to build trust and set research agendas. Short-term or project based assignments, in contrast, were regarded as too short to build trust and often failed to link research questions to regional needs, not contributing to the development of grassroots development initiatives. Short-term, project-based assignments also mean a lot of bureaucracy for initiators due to changing requirements and objectives which also mean an adaption of development activities at grassroots level.

On the contrary, the results also suggested that short-term, project based interfaces may also be able to foster long-term development. In this case, projects or short-term assignments are designed as 'catalyst' functions of form self-supporting, independent initiatives that are able to sustain themselves without external support and facilitation. In the Westerkwartier, for example, three development specialists (touristic catalysts), were hired on project-base for three years to initiate the formation of a business association. After gathering business(wo)men of the Westerkwartier and chairing their meetings for the past three years, they facilitated their formation into a formal association, giving them legal status and providing the basis for a self-sustaining future, independent of external support and facilitation. The long-term efficacy of the three-year facilitation period still remains to be seen. Also the Association Groningen Villages (NGO) was contracted for a limited time period by Groningen Province to form business-women networks throughout the province. In the Westerkwartier, the network is now operating as a legal entity, independent of the support from the Association Groningen Villages.

Delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies
The founding partners also agree upon the shape of the operational interface and the type of operational tasks and roles which will be delegated to them. Agreements concerning the delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies are thus crucial as they define and delimit the operational space of an arrangement.

The operational interfaces were operated by different types of operational agents and agencies, such as: *regional development networks* (e.g. NGOs, associations and community members), *public-private partnerships*, *public institutes* (including institutes of research, education and advise) and *professional services*.

As table 10.3 shows, overall, regional development networks were proportionally operating most of the support and facilitation. This was also the case in the Comarca de Verín and Saarland. In Saarland, tasks and roles were mostly delegated to associations whereas in the Comarca, an NGO, an association as well as community members all acted as operational interfaces. In the Westerkwartier, public private partnerships operated proportionally most of the support and facilitation whereas public institutes and professional services where the most frequent operators in Roscommon County. In Alytus County, all types of operational agents and agencies were found proportionately equally often.

Table 10-3 Proportion of operational agents and agencies in different case study areas (%)

	Regional Development Initiatives	Public-Private Partnerships	Public Institute	Professional service	Total number
Alytus County	25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	4
Comarca de Verín	**50.0**	16.7	16.7	16.6	6
Direktionsbezirk Dresden	33.3	33.3	33.3	0.0	6
Roscommon County	0.0	0.0	**57.0**	**43.0**	7
Saarland	**66.0**	33.0	0.0	0.0	3
Westerkwartier	34.6	**50.0**	0.0	16.3	6
Total	**31.0**	**25.0**	**25.0**	**19.0**	**32**

In some cases, well-established grassroots development initiatives were seen to evolve into operational interfaces to foster new grassroots development initiatives. As a result, a clear demarcation between an operational interface and a grassroots development initiative could sometimes not be made.

The delegated tasks and roles are arguably a crucial factor that determines the rise and fall of an arrangement to support and facilitation joint learning and innovation. One the one hand, one can argue that it is necessary to equip operators with some (delegated) decision power in order to help them support grassroots development initiatives in line with their needs. If not, the support and facilitation processes may become 'politicalized' and grassroots development initiatives have to adapt their development aims to changing political agendas. This constrains the support for bottom-up development initiatives. On the other hand, it is necessary to find persons which can take up leadership functions and networking roles in order to connect the different 'worlds' of rural development initiators, public administrators and members of the knowledge support structure.

All operational agents and agencies stated their main role as network brokers. Often, these network brokering activities were carried out by citizens, active in one or more development initiatives and possessing connections with members of public administration and the knowledge

support structure. These persons were thus not assigned as network brokers from outside the region but searched for amongst the dynamics within the region, taking advantage of already existing bonds between people. In the Westerkwartier, for example, a member of the foundation 'Westerkwartier Initiative Group' is the director of an agricultural technical school. He has been involved in the project 'Brug Toekomst' and works now as manager of the project 'Atelier', linking regional research questions with agendas of the knowledge support structure. A further example, also from the Westerkwartier, is a member of the national forest and nature agency. Initially, this person came to the Westerkwartier with the task to turn agricultural land into nature protected areas, causing a lot of hostility between the agency and local farmers. Eventually, he managed to gain the support of the local farmers and this person now acts as a connection between different grassroots development initiatives (as chairman of the Westerkwartier Initiative Group) and as connector between the region and public administration. Also in other case study areas, persons with leadership and networking abilities were highlighted as important. In Saarland, for example, the 'Cultural Landscape Initiative St. Wendeler Land' is run by a person who is able to network between the different 'worlds', therefore being regarded as an important figure in the support and facilitation of grassroots development initiatives. Other network brokering activities included visits and exchange of information between board members of the different grassroots development initiatives and the participation of grassroots development initiators in public administration meetings. These kinds of examples were most commonly found in Roscommon County and Direktionsbezirk Dresden. The results therefore suggest that a charismatic person with network functions is crucial to provide support and facilitation for grassroots development initiatives. These persons are then also able to act as leaders in creating new initiatives (i.e. such as the Atelier in the Westerkwartier) and may be referred to as the 'spider' in the networking web.

Also the provision of skills and knowledge was a frequently stated task. It included the provision of courses, trainings, research questions and students and information. The evaluation of support and facilitation related to the "knowledge and skills" category differed between the case study regions. In County Roscommon and Alytus County, for example, public institutes (or private institutes paid through public funds) were commissioned on a long-term basis by the state to provide research, education and advise to grassroots development initiatives. Their support was generally evaluated positive by the beneficiaries, because the long-term relationship between supporters and beneficiaries helped to create trust. In the Westerkwartier, Saarland and Direktionsbezirk Dresden, public knowledge institutes (for example universities or research institutes) were engaged on short-term, project-based assignments to provided research, education and advice. In these areas, the use of getting involved with public knowledge institutes was often questioned by the beneficiaries, since the link between research questions of grassroots development initiatives and scientific research programmes appeared to be missing. In addition, professional services were hired by the grassroots development initiatives. Their support was generally evaluated positively, although their services were not affordable to all inventoried grassroots development initiatives.

Operational agents and agencies were further given the task of financial support and advice. These tasks were carried out in form of providing subsidies, support for writing subsidy requests and advising on different kinds of subsidies. Especially with regard to financing, the results

showed that in some case study areas, like the Comarca de Verín and Alytus County, public administration often exerted strong control over the delegation of tasks and roles in order not to lose control over rural regional development. In the Comarca de Verín, for example, support and facilitation mechanisms have become politicalised, creating clientelism. Also in Alytus County, public administration exerts strong control over the operational agents and agencies, probably following past political ways of working in the country. The results therefore suggest that even though public administration has an important role in the delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies, they need to ensure that these are also provided operational agents and agencies with sufficient tasks and roles to provide ample support and facilitation to beneficiaries at grassroots level. Assigning existing regional development initiatives with more roles and tasks, seeking other funding sources or providing space for informal networking activities may thus be a welcomed alternative to arrangements dominated by public administration.

Further tasks included the facilitation, initiation and management of grassroots development initiatives and development ideas. These tasks were often carried out by regional development networks, such as the NGO Association Groningen Villages in the Westerkwartier and the NGO Puertas Abertas in the Comarca de Verín, but also by professional services such as the touristic catalysts in the Westerkwartier. Professional services were also hired for commercialisation processes.

In conclusion, a well-working operational interface is crucial for the efficacy of an arrangement to support and facilitate joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives. To design well-working arrangements, constitutive agreements have to be made concerning: *the scope of operation* (i.e. the type of beneficiaries targeted and geographical position), *the formal shaping of the operational space* (i.e. the type of support and facilitation provided, rules, regulations and procedures attached to obtaining it and the resulting shape of the interface), and the *delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies*. Depending on the scope of the policy (fields of development, specific development activities, target groups or business sectors and so on) one can argue that a well-balanced mix of these three components is crucial to make the support and facilitation work. In addition, an arrangement must be attuned to the specific regional context to make it actually work, bridging and connecting the different 'worlds' or grassroots development initiatives, public administration and the knowledge support structure. There is no single approach to govern joint learning and innovation, but the way of arranging support and facilitation depends largely on the regional contexts. It is therefore not possible to single out one good example of arranging support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in rural regions.

11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we will outline the key conclusions of *Work Package 4: Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems*, coming back to the initial research question of how to (best) arrange support for joint learning and innovation in rural grassroots development initiatives. This research question was analysed along three sub-questions: 1) how public support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives is arranged across the various case study areas; 2) how beneficiaries and supporters evaluate these arrangements; and 3) what makes arrangements work well.

The aim of this empirical study was to get a better understanding of interfaces between three more-or-less self-contained 'worlds': a) grassroots (or place-based) development initiatives in various fields of activities within rural regions; b) diverse public policies formulated and implemented at different governmental and administrative levels; and c) the heterogeneous 'knowledge' and joint learning and innovation support structure of public institutes and private agencies that facilitates learning and innovation through education, research and consultancy.

A better understanding of how interfaces work could lead to a better way of arranging support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives. If support for joint learning and innovation is arranged well, policies for place-based development will become more effective. Ultimately, the research findings can help to increasing self-efficacy of rural regions by recommending improvements for the 'governance of joint learning and innovation' in various rural places across Europe.

In the following, we will first outline several conclusions of how to (best) arrange support and facilitation for learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives. Secondly, (policy) recommendations based on our conclusion will be presented.

Conclusions

1. Support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation is mediated through interfaces.

2. The composure and working of an operational interface reflects a particular mode of governance, which may differ between rural regions.

3. Operational interfaces are designed through constitutive agreements made by public administration as part of their governmental task or together with private agents as public-private partnerships.

4. Constitutive agreements are made concerning three basic components: *the scope of operation* (i.e. the type of beneficiaries targeted and geographical position), *the formal shaping of the operational space* (i.e. the type of support and facilitation provided, rules, regulations and procedures attached to obtaining it, and the resulting shape), and the *delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies*.

5. The types of targeted beneficiaries and the geographical position of an interface differ between rural regions, suggesting different development priorities in different regional contexts (e.g. depending on demography, geographical characteristics, history and local sense of place).

6. Visibility and accessibility of an operational interface can be increased by providing a single gateway to support and facilitation from different policy schemes and the knowledge support structure.

7. Visibility and accessibility can be enhanced by creating low-threshold access points.

8. Single gateways and low-threshold access points are associated with additional costs, so funding may be questionable.

9. Types of support and facilitation include: 'financial support' (i.e. different kinds of subsidies and procedural support), 'knowledge and skills' (for example advice, facilitation, education and research activities), 'physical infrastructure' (for example meeting spaces, information centres), and 'social infrastructure' (for example network incubation and cluster forming).

10. Too much bureaucracy and the need to form legal entities to become eligible for support complicate the application process and can be a de-motivator for voluntary initiatives.

11. Operational interfaces can be long-term, commissioned assignments; short-term or project based assignments; institutional agreements; and recruited professional services.

12. Long-term, commissioned assignments build trust between supporters and beneficiaries and succeed in setting research agendas.

13. Short-term or project based assignments, are too short to build trust and may fail to link research questions to regional needs, therefore offering little support for grassroots development initiatives.

14. Short-term, project based interfaces may, however, succeed in supporting grassroots development initiatives on a long term basis, if they are functioning as catalysts to embed initiatives institutional.

15. Operational agents and agencies encountered: regional development networks (e.g. NGOs, associations and community members), public-private partnerships, public institutes (including institutes of research, education and advice) and professional services.

16. Stakeholders with leadership and networking roles (especially informal) are important to connect the different 'worlds' of rural development initiatives, public administration and the knowledge support structure.

17. The involvement of charismatic, informal agents, able to bond denizens with various, possibly conflicting interests and able to bridge and connect different worlds, is equally important. Charismatic, informal agents act as spiders in the networking web. They are generally seen as crucial in coming to a common understanding and in the formation of a public-private partnership that is willing to constitute proper working interfaces.

18. The delegated tasks and roles (for example decision power) is arguably a crucial factor, which determines the operational space of an interface. The delegation of tasks and roles determines the ability of an interface to mediate effectively between the 'worlds' of supporting policies, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives.

19. To be effective, operators need some (delegated) decision power to attend to the needs of grassroots development initiatives. If not, support may become too bureaucratic or even 'politicalized'. Grassroots development initiatives need to adapt their development aims to changing political agendas.

20. If public administration exerts strong control over operational agents and agencies, support and facilitation can turn into clientelism.

Recommendations: arranging support for joint learning and innovations in rural regions

The conclusion suggests that there are elements of support for joint learning and innovation throughout each of the case study areas. The effectiveness of these arrangements, however, leaves room for improvement. One can therefore argue that in order to support learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives more effectively, arrangements need to be optimized. Based on the conclusion, recommendations which may help to improve existing arrangements will be provided:

1. Arranging support and facilitation for learning and innovation effectively is highly recommended. The results suggest that well-working arrangements to support learning and innovation will increase the effectiveness of policies for place-based development.

2. Regional characteristics such as demography, geography, history and local sense of place need to be taken into consideration when designing well-working operational interfaces.

3. Policy makers are advised to take into account that the composure and way in which operational interfaces may work well can vary between different rural regions.

4. To empower citizens and stakeholders, agreements to arrange support and facilitation for learning and innovation should be made by public and private agents in public-private partnerships.

5. To design well-working operational interfaces, a well-balanced, regionally differentiated mix of the following components has to be made: the scope of operation (i.e. the type of beneficiaries targeted and geographical position), the formal shaping of the operational space (i.e. the type of support and facilitation provided, rules, regulations and procedures attached

to obtaining it, and the resulting shape), and the delegation of tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies.

6. When designing operational interfaces, the types of targeted beneficiaries need to be taken into account, because it determines the geographical position of an interface.

7. An operational interface needs to be visible and accessible for the targeted beneficiaries. It is recommended to invest public funds into creating low-threshold, single gateways to integrate different types of support, which are trusted by the targeted beneficiaries, and which may help to connect supports and beneficiaries. This is a demanding task, crossing various institutional boundaries.

8. Empowering operational agents and agencies with more decision making powers, and therefore creating space to manoeuvre, may circumvent difficult bureaucratic procedures.

9. Existing policy frameworks, directives and public-funded education and research programmes could be directed towards encouraging a long-term cooperation between the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. This may help to create trust and allow the setting of mutually benefitting research agendas.

10. It is advisable to design operational interfaces independent of development programmes, spanning longer periods of time.

11. Support in the start-up phase of initiatives through catalysts could help to incubate long-lasting, self-running development initiatives through short-termed interfaces.

12. A follow-up study on the efficacy of short-term, project based operational interfaces inventoried in this study is recommended to evaluate their efficacy on a long-term basis.

13. Policymakers could be advised to acknowledge the diversity of operational agents and agencies, ranging from regional development networks (such as local key players and community members, associations and NGOs) to public-private partnerships, public institutes and professionals. The diversity of operational agents and agencies can be acknowledged by empowering both private and public operational agents and agencies to support and facilitate learning and innovation within grassroots development initiatives.

14. The involvement of charismatic, informal stakeholders increases the effectiveness of operational interfaces because these persons are often involved in many networks and can therefore function as a spider in the web of support and facilitation, making connections (bond and bridge).

15. Operational agents and agencies that are already involved with supporting grassroots development initiators need to be given decision power to manoeuvre in order to support and facilitate joint learning and innovation in rural grassroots development initiatives.

16. Public administration is advised to provide that operational agents and agencies with sufficient tasks and roles. This way, they can provide ample support and facilitation to beneficiaries at grassroots level.

17. Assigning existing regional development initiatives with more roles and tasks, seeking other funding sources or providing space for informal networking activities may be a welcomed alternative to arrangements dominated by public administration.

12 GOVERNANCE OF JOINT LEARNING AND INNOVATION: SOME REFLECTIONS

There is a lack of coherence and integration from the perspective of rural areas or rural places, and a lack of intermediate practices and agents (or agencies), which can interconnecting and interacting between the 'world' of those that make and implement policies, and the 'world' of those making a living in rural areas. Proper working interfaces are needed to make policies more effective.

This is even more relevant for those policies studied here: policies that aim to support joint development efforts in rural regions, such as the building of individual and collective capacities to foster self-efficacy and resilience of rural regions in times of globalisation. Policies that aim to support place-based development need to be place-based themselves. If support for joint learning and innovation is arranged well, policies supporting place-based development will become more effective.

Support and facilitation is mediated through interfaces operating between the domains of public policies, the knowledge support structure and grassroots development initiatives. A better understanding of the working of interfaces and their arrangements can be used to prove and improve their working and help to make better arrangements.

From an analytical perspective, the support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives has to be put into practise or has to be mediated through an operational interface. The composure and working of the interface and its overall arrangement reflects a particular mode of governance.

A lack of well-working arrangements and interfaces to support and facilitate joint learning and innovation can be framed as an institutional void. This institutional void can be covered by developing and proving new forms of governance in dialogue and in partnership between representatives of public authorities at various levels and representatives of various (rural regional) interests that can act as stakeholders for a more general interest. They can come to a joint agreement on how to make supporting policies better available and thus improve its effectiveness by creating and delegating specific operational tasks and roles to operational agents and agencies. This way, well-working operational interfaces can be created. The creation of well-working interfaces can become part of a more formalised (institutional) arrangement. This, however, requires leadership from either a public official or someone able and capable to link up various, sometimes even competing or conflicting interests, with an overall interest in a rural region.

Across the case study areas, different forms of governance in the support and facilitation for joint learning and innovation have been mapped and analysed, and promising or well working practices have been revealed. These can serve as a showcase on how to best arrange the support for joint learning and innovation in grassroots development initiatives, considering contextual differences. These showcases can become the basis for joint learning and innovation within and across rural regions, concerning the best way to govern place-based learning and innovation.

This joint, reflexive monitoring and evaluation can give a real impetus to the rather abstract notion of a 'learning region'.

The conceptual framework developed offers an integrated perspective on the governance of joint learning and innovation in rural regions, focussing on the arrangement and working of actual interfaces. Specifically with regard to facilitation of joint learning and innovation by the knowledge support structure, the framework helps to demonstrate that the involvement of the knowledge support structure in rural development is rather underdeveloped. In addition, the framework also helps to identify that there is potential to get the knowledge support structure, in terms of education, research and consultancy, more involved in rural regional development by means of targeted public funding and (new) arrangements.

The case studies showed that it takes quite an effort to map the relevant policies, the various development initiatives and the differentiated, if not fragmented, knowledge support structure, with its' numerous (public) institutes and (semi-private or private) agents and agencies that depend to various extends on public and private funding. A complete overview is difficult to establish, even for those professionals operating in the domain of policies, and it is dynamic as well. Furthermore, the distinction between initiatives, arrangements and interfaces is not always clear. Some agents do not only interconnect the three domains but even belong to more than one domain at the same time in different roles, such as the well-known example of a farmer who is a teacher and an aldermen at the same time. Informal networks and not formalised tasks and roles are very important, especially in bridging and getting things going, but these are even more difficult to map.

Nevertheless, the framework of 'a learning rural region' can serve as a heuristic device or tool to map actual arrangements and interfaces, to monitor and to evaluate their working, and develop better working interfaces to make policies more effective.

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