

## AGROPOL WORKSHOP LISBON 13/10/2017

### Cross-border cooperation in agro-food - Regional good practices and lessons learnt

Fishbowl panel discussion moderated by Rein Dessers

Conclusions based on minutes by Adrienn Molnar and Evelien Lambrecht (UGENT)

Participants: see list of participants

#### 1. Motivation and reasons for cross-border and interregional cooperation

- ▶ The first added value for cooperation and exchange across borders is the mutual learning from different contexts and ways of doing things. However, exchange and learning cannot be the final aim of cooperation, but rather creating a setting for joint realisations based on common needs and challenges
- ▶ In cross-border cooperation usually the main motivation and background is a common geographical and economic context and conditions, generating similar challenges and issues to be tackled jointly. Sharing and pooling resources in relative proximity has advantages in terms of scale and critical mass, leading to more effectiveness and efficiency in dealing with joint challenges and realising joint ambitions. In economic terms this can lead to cross-border cluster development, although in practice this is rare.
- ▶ Furthermore, cross-border cooperation, certainly also in rural context, is well suited to support emerging sectors and activities with many small companies, who can maximally benefit from (shared) critical mass to assure quality, stabilize the market, and cope with external competition.
- ▶ The proximity and scale argument is obviously less important for interregional cooperation. Engaging in this type of cooperation is less self-evident, and is more often focused on information exchange and joint representation.
- ▶ More intensive economic cooperation is often the result of a strategic decision. Here it's not the similarity but the complementarity between regions that offer most important advantages to achieve joint strategic objectives. This is more relevant for more mature industrial sector, e.g. the agro-food industry.

#### 2. Policy instruments to stimulate cooperation

- ▶ Interreg has had a huge contribution in facilitating and institutionalizing cooperation, creating structures and networks to mobilise and organize actors and initiatives. However, it is also a top down structure that is now unavoidable to engage in cross-border cooperation. The project-based financing and difficult administrative conditions (e.g. number of partners) make it hard for smaller, emerging players and cross-domain initiatives to enter into cooperation, and continue after the project-funding is finished.
- ▶ Question is if Interreg can sufficiently capture new economic dynamics, can include such initiatives, and can continue to play its role of policy experimentation framework, certain in the era of smart specialisation in which cross-sectoral niches are emphasized.
- ▶ Within the rural development context Measure 16 in RDP is available to stimulate cross-border and interregional cooperation, but is hardly used. E.g. there are no interregional/cross-border operational groups so far. DG AGRI will organise a workshop on this topic in 2018. EIP service point also organises Interregional exchange between thematically linked Operational Groups (thematic networks)

- ▶ In Finland there is good experience with transnational cooperation with the LEADER cooperation measure (in similar principle as INTERREG, but for LAGs.)
- ▶ Possibilities to further stimulate cooperation in rural context increased mainstreaming of the cooperation measures and opportunities in the existing framework and programmes. More harmonization (on e.g. eligibility rules) between the funds and between Member States will make it easier to facilitate and engage in cooperation, combining the RDPs with Interreg and H2020
- ▶ However, a need is expressed for broader strategic frameworks steering cross-border or interregional public-private cooperation. ERANET within the H2020 was mentioned as example of such a framework with compulsory elements for implementing public-private transnational research projects. On a smaller scale, more targeted initiatives can be organised in joint undertakings to tackle complex specific issues and better capture new developments

### 3. How to move from institutional level of cooperation to more practical cooperation (with businesses)?

- ▶ Essential is to make it immediately relevant and interesting to entrepreneurs, and make the direct connection to their market situation, challenges and opportunities. Some practices: design the meeting and its setting specifically to facilitate in meeting collaboration, take care of good mix entrepreneurs (farmers, processors, researchers...), organise joint missions to foreign countries or foreign fairs in order for them to travel together and have the time to talk
- ▶ Exchange programs for agricultural students, young farmers and small entrepreneurs (even without funding)

### 4. Use and content of an Agropol Blueprint

- ▶ Blueprint should show how to go beyond institutional cooperation in agriculture and food, and involve businesses and practitioners more directly. Blueprint should focus on HOW:
  - Who to involve in which way (research, training, universities, NGOs, farmers, etc.)
  - Which partners are the most important, and how can they be structured and organised (to make it sustainable).
  - How to ensure actual realizations and continuity (multiple networking or ecosystem approach?,...)
  - In second order inspiring good examples, as there's sufficient channels for this

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### Participants

Name		Country	Organisation	Function
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