

# Policy Learning Platform

*Research and innovation*

## Event report

**Thematic workshop on enhancing rural innovation capacity  
and performance**

5 December 2018

Hamburg, Germany



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## Summary

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform Thematic Workshops are aimed at bringing together stakeholders and relevant experts to share experiences, good practices and exploit synergies to enhance policy learning. This workshop focused on rural innovation stakeholders and attracted 26 practitioners (two additional contributed via Skype), including 18 representatives of Interreg Europe projects, experts from the OECD, the European Commission's DG AGRI, the JRC S3 Thematic Platform for Agri-Food, the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat and thematic experts from the Policy Learning Platform. The event agenda is included in Appendix A and the presentations are available [via the Policy Learning Platform](#). The participating projects are listed in Appendix B.

Some of the **key messages** that emerged from the workshop:

**Policy makers** should regularly review the research done on rural development paradigms, as well as the associated statistics and datasets that can be accessed to help support the design of innovative and state of the art policy instruments and enhance policy-maker skills. The [recent work of the OECD](#) is of particular relevance here;

**Regional business support ecosystems** and development models need to be tailored to the specific needs of rural businesses, for example regarding issues on transport/mobility, access to skilled labour and finance etc. Helping SMEs become more competitive is common to all regions in Europe but rural based SMEs often require tailored and additional support to adequately access RDI resources. Interreg projects, such as [RUMORE](#), have developed approaches that can help bridge the gaps between urban and rural networks and support the deployment of new sector or business concepts adapted to rural economies such as circular economy, thus tackling regional development disparities; Sector led initiatives and policies such as those supported by DG AGRI and product branding schemes can also help strengthen territorial marketing efforts. Meanwhile facilitating cross sectoral opportunities, as experienced by the [STRING](#) project, can help identify and launch new rural business niches;

**Stakeholder engagement** experiences require innovative approaches to ensure that the diversity of rural actors participate in rural development actions. Some of the projects showcased during this workshop have developed specific methodologies such as the [Tipping Wheel self-assessment tool](#) developed in the [Islands of Innovation](#) project whilst others have implemented tools to improve stakeholder engagement and capacity building in rural areas with direct benefits regarding co-creation and greater organisational sustainability;

**Youth** (retention and attraction) and depopulation issues are considered major challenges for rural areas. Project partners present were able to demonstrate many interesting and innovative techniques for tackling these issues that are sometimes summarised under the heading "preventing brain drain". Skills issues, particularly access to life-long learning resources are further challenges facing rural workforces and businesses in general and lie at the heart of some of the policy instruments and good practices explored by the [P-IRIS project](#);

**Digitalisation** has a key role to play in reducing the "rural/urban" divide in many spheres of life including for example helping businesses access RDI resources, doing business or simply ensuring the delivery of a range of services to the population. The experiences of the [EURDITE](#) project are of particular interest, as are those in [RATIO](#), for example through the creation of digital led growth centres in rural areas (see [Ludgate Hub](#) example below). Digitalisation can also help facilitate cross sectoral

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collaboration and create new business niches that can thrive in rural locations and enhance accessibility to RDI resources. Such actions can help broaden the economic choices in rural territories;

**Investment models** need to be adapted to reflect rural business and community needs and public funding models should ensure specific rural categories/conditions are included;

**Capitalisation** activities are an important dimension regarding project work but also between projects. Thematic workshops can help but some other systematic measures could be added, for example regarding sharing Action Plans that are considered “good practices”. Challenge based exchanges are also of interest to the partners and the Policy Learning Platform. As highlighted by the participants present at the workshop, **Peer Learning** activities are a welcome step in this direction, with particular relevance to the rural territories of Europe. During the meeting, especially the break out groups, participants were able to identify other projects with whom they would like to intensify cooperation and exchange actions, the [RATIO](#) project was highlighted as being of interest by a number of attendees;

A number of the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform [tools](#) have been designed to help respond to these challenges notably those related to sharing of policy good practices, exchanges of project experiences and hands-on support through workshops or Peer Learning actions. Policy briefs such as the one on [rural Innovation](#) can also provide more in-depth insights into the problematics faced by stakeholders in rural regions and indicate links to relevant networks and other funding programmes.

**Complementary to the services and inspiration offered by the Policy Learning Platform, accessing and utilising existing thematic** (rural) or sector networks and relevant programmes ([DG AGRI EIP](#)) are considered important enablers and sources of good practices and can help engage with stakeholders and managing authorities (learn by seeing).

## Workshop sessions

### *Session one: Updates on European level policies and research findings*

This session focused on presentations from Expert Speakers from the OECD, the European Commission and the JRC Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food. The key points of the experts’ presentations are summarised below. More information is available in Appendix C.

#### **OECD: Innovation in low density economies**

[Mr Andres Sanabria](#), of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Local Development and Tourism, presented an overview of the findings from OECD’s [Territorial Reviews](#). Some important remarks included:

- Rural entrepreneurs are important sources of innovation – it is not limited to urban areas. In fact, as outlined during the discussion, rural businesses tend to have a strong entrepreneurial spirit which could be better exploited as help to identify business niches;
- Rural growth relies largely on the tradeable sector;
- A high enough population density to provide public services depends on people having jobs;
- The rural development paradigm is changing from agricultural support towards the well-being of rural areas, equally addressing the economic, social and environmental pillars of regional development.

### **DG AGRI: Policy instruments for rural development and innovation**

Ms Ingeborg Zaiser, DG AGRI, gave an update on current EU level policy instruments targeting rural development and rural innovation, including for example the 118 Rural Development Programmes that have been supported by DG AGRI. Some points of particular interest:

- [EIP-AGRI Operational Groups](#) bring together agricultural and forestry stakeholders to advance innovation;
- [European Network for Rural Development](#) (ENRD) is a structure of key importance to achieve rural development progress;
- DG AGRI will double its funding from EUR 5 million to EUR 10 million in Horizon 2020.

### **Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food**

Representing the Joint Research Centre's [S3 Thematic Platform on Agri-Food](#), [Ms Katerina Ciampi-Stancova](#) joined the session via Skype and highlighted:

- The Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform support interregional cooperation, provide tailored networking advice and help regions develop shared testing infrastructure;
- The Agri-food platform comprises five partnerships focussing on innovation, development and digitisation in agriculture and the food industry.

### ***Session two: Project presentations of Good Practices and Action Plans***

Putting good practices of the Interreg Europe community into spotlight, this session offered insights into concrete answers and solutions to the challenges faced by rural innovation stakeholders.

Showcasing good practices and sharing experiences from the action plan design process. More information, including the Q&A panel discussion points, is available in Appendix D.

### **Presentations of Good Practices**

- The professionalisation and development of innovation services and the adaption of good practices from other regions can help rural business development agencies deploy appropriate services to meet the needs of their business communities. The experiences of the [P-IRIS](#) project led by [Sogn and Fjordane County Municipality, Norway](#),) illustrates how experiences from many other regions can be combined to help develop a new conceptual approach such as the [node-hub policy approach](#) that strengthens linkages between centres of knowledge and competences.
- Policy exchange and learning is a complex process but if well managed it can pay dividends in the long term. The experiences of the [Islands of Innovation](#) project partners led to the design a bespoke tool called the [TIPPING Wheel self-assessment tool](#) to help them better translate what partners learnt from each other in the policy exchange phase and thus adapt the policy making process.
- Identifying and adapting good practices for rural development challenges was central to the working philosophy of the [RUMORE](#) project. For example, the detailed analysis of [two good](#)

[practices “Agrodesign cluster” and the “DNA certification”](#) have enabled partners to strengthen territorial marketing and product branding policy instruments that will have a direct impact on boosting business competitiveness in rural economies;

- Through the combination of co-working spaces, incubations services and high-speed broadband infrastructure, local business ecosystems can be revitalised and turned towards new entrepreneurial spirit and digitalisation-driven business opportunities. Having facilitated the creation of 100 direct and 140 indirect jobs, the [Ludgate Hub](#) from West Cork, Ireland, the [RATIO](#) project, serves as valuable inspiration in this regard.

### **Presentation of Examples of Action Plan Implementation Challenges**

The next session sought to highlight and share practical experiences that regional partners have encountered whilst preparing Action Plans.

- The role that digital support actions can play in maintaining a high quality level of services in rural areas was highlighted by Jose Manuel San Emeterio (ERNACT, Ireland, [ERUDITE](#)) . The investments and time needed require early stage engagement from policy makers and stakeholders if co-investment decisions are to be made during the project period.
- [Romina Magni de Antonio](#) (FAMCP Federation of municipalities regions and provinces of Aragon, Spain, [RATIO](#)) presented the project partners’ finalisation of the Action Plans process, and the support received from the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat team.
- The ability for a region to absorb a particular good practice is a challenge faced by all project partners and lies at the heart of the problematic facing policy makers and the success of the Action Plan process. Both [Artūrs Penčura](#) (Zemgale Planning region, Latvia, [INNOGROW](#)) and [Ninetta Chaniotou](#) (Kainuun Etu Oy, Finland, [SKILLS+](#)) presented the good practice transfer process noting the particular skills needed in the design and the preparatory phase of the Action Plan process and the importance of involving stakeholders in developing innovation support measures in rural areas;

The discussions following the presentations highlighted additional points linked to the good practices, for example:

- Tourism can have a significant crowding out effect on cheap housing in island and rural regions and restrict the ability to attract and house local workers;
- Solid infrastructure (traditional and digital) is needed to retain and draw in new businesses;
- Access to finance and financial markets is often difficult for rural businesses and regional agencies often deploy specific financial tools to meet their specific needs;
- Communicate and spread the message about innovative people in the countryside can help present a positive and progressive image of rural economies;
- Challenges faced by rural business networks, notably in terms of number and density of actors remain a high priority for policy makers.

### ***Session three: Project partner breakout sessions***

Building on the insights gained during the first two sessions of the day, group discussions on rural innovation challenges and identifying opportunities for exchange took place in two parallel sessions followed by a closing plenary session. More information, is available in Appendix E.

During the discussions, the participants emphasised the following rural innovation challenges and, consequently, stressed the urgent need for action and continued interregional exchanges:

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- The urban focus in decision- and policy-making needs to be counter-balanced by proactive rural development initiatives and networking and through enhanced urban-rural linkages;
- A general lack of critical mass in rural regions due to de-population remains a critical challenge that some rural regions are tackling through the deployment of digital based tools and solutions;
- The negative image of rural areas needs to be tackled through the design of state-of-the-art territorial marketing strategies and greater promotion of success stories through networks;
- The importance of retaining youths and talents, access to lifelong training need to be addressed as a high priority with the creation of dedicated policy actions;
- Fostering SME competitiveness through links to RDI centres or cluster-like structures;
- Strong sectors like agriculture, agri-food and craft industries but low innovation take up;
- The importance of digital infrastructure and services for competitiveness and attractiveness is acknowledge by all but poor infrastructure can hinder/slow uptake and deployment of adequate solutions;
- Participants expressed a strong desire to continue bi-lateral or multi-lateral exchanges between projects, the [RATIO](#) project was of particular interest as was the [Ludgate Hub](#) good practice with its focus on digitalisation support for rural businesses and communities.

## Conclusions

Interreg Europe projects are playing a key role in supporting the innovation and research dimension of rural development policy development and are providing a testbed for learning and implementing new policy approaches. They can also provide a focal point for facilitating engagement with other relevant European networks and programmes thus ensuring synergies and providing further cooperation opportunities.

## Other relevant information and useful links

- OECD, [Territorial Reviews](#)
- OECD, [Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation](#),
- [European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability](#)
- [European Network for Rural Development](#)
- [Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food](#)
- Policy Learning Platform, [Article on the Ludgate Hub](#)
- Policy Learning Platform, [Policy brief on rural innovation](#)
- European Commission, [EU Action for Smart Villages](#),
- European Commission, [Rural development policy](#),
- European Commission, [Digital Agenda for Europe](#)

## Contacts

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## Appendix A – Workshop agenda

08:45-09:15	<b>Registration and coffee</b>
09:15-09:30	<b>Welcome and introduction from Interreg Europe JS Team and host region</b> <b>Erwin Siweris</b> Programme director, Interreg Europe <b>Monika Scherf</b> Head of regional development office Lüneburg
09:30-09:45	<b>Welcome from the Policy Learning Platform Research and Innovation Team</b> <b>Marc Pattinson and Carl Arvid Dahlöf</b> Thematic Experts - Research and innovation
09:45-10:00	<b>Participant introduction</b> Interactive introductory exercise where participants introduce briefly their projects using “key words“ to the other attendees.
10:00-11:15	<b>Updates on European level policies and research findings</b> Presentation/panel session with representatives from OECD, European Commission and the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform on Agri-Food. Followed by questions from thematic experts and audience. <b>Andres Sanabria</b> Regional and Rural Policy Unit Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Local Development and Tourism OECD <b>Ingeborg Zaiser</b> DG Agriculture and Rural Development European Commission <b>Katerina Ciampi-Stancova</b> (via online link) Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform on Agri-Food
11:15-11:30	<b>Coffee break</b>

<p>11:30-12:45</p>	<p><b>Good Practice presentation and exchange on methods to enhance exchange experiences and impact on policy development</b></p> <p>Presentations of good practices by Interreg Europe projects, followed by questions from thematic experts and audience.</p> <p><b>P-IRIS</b> (Lars Hustveit, Sogn and Fjordane County Municipality, Norway)  <b>Islands of Innovation</b> (Simon Tijmsma, Province of Fryslân, Netherlands)  <b>RUMORE</b> (Galya Vladova, Hafencity University Hamburg, Germany)  <b>RATIO</b> (Michelle O’Sullivan, Cork Chamber, Ireland)</p>
<p>12:45-13:45</p>	<p><b>Networking lunch</b></p>
<p>13:45-14:45</p>	<p><b>Sharing experiences on the design of regional Action Plans</b></p> <p>Presentations of Action Plan design experience by Interreg Europe projects, followed by questions from thematic experts and audience.</p> <p><b>RATIO</b> (Romina Magni de Antonio, FAMCP Federation of municipalities regions and provinces of Aragon, Spain)  <b>SKILLS+</b> (Ninetta Chaniotou, Kainuun Etu Oy, Finland)  <b>INNOGROW</b> (Artūrs Penčura, Zemgale Planning region, Latvia)  <b>ERUDITE</b> (Jose Manuel San Emeterio, ERNACT, Ireland (via online link))</p>
<p>14:45-15:00</p>	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
<p>15:00-16:15</p>	<p><b>Project Partner Session discussion on specific thematic areas</b></p> <p>Parallel discussion groups to discuss complementarities, ways to cooperate, and support measures from the Policy Learning Platform.</p> <p>A set of guiding questions will be prepared for each working group.</p>
<p>16:15-16:30</p>	<p><b>Reporting back from the break-out groups by experts/group rapporteurs</b></p>
<p>16:30-17:00</p>	<p><b>Concluding remarks and end of workshop</b></p> <p><b>Marc Pattinson and Carl Arvid Dahlöf</b>  Thematic Experts – Research and innovation</p>

Contact:

**Carl Arvid Dahlöf**

Thematic Expert – Research and innovation











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## Appendix B – Participating projects

 <p><b>RUMORE</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Rural-Urban Partnerships Motivating Regional Economies <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/rumore/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/rumore/</a></p>
 <p><b>P-IRIS</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Policies to improve rural areas' innovation systems by professionalising networking activities and use of innovation tools <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/p-iris/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/p-iris/</a></p>
 <p><b>RATIO</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Regional Actions To Innovate Operational Programmes <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/ratio/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/ratio/</a></p>
 <p><b>ERUDITE</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Enhancing Rural and Urban Digital Innovation Territories <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/erudite/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/erudite/</a></p>
 <p><b>Islands of Innovation</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Innovation Policies for Sustainable European Islands <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/islandsofinnovation/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/islandsofinnovation/</a></p>
 <p><b>REGIONS 4FOOD</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>REGIONAl Strategies 4 FOOD 4.0 Revolution <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/regions4food/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/regions4food/</a></p>
 <p><b>STRING</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Strategies for Regional Innovative Food Clusters <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/string/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/string/</a></p>
 <p><b>INNOTRANS</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Enhancing transport innovation capacity of regions <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/innotrans/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/innotrans/</a></p>
 <p><b>INNOGROW</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Regional policies for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/innogrow/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/innogrow/</a></p>
 <p><b>Rural SMEs</b> Interreg Europe</p>	<p>Policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/ruralsmes/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/ruralsmes/</a></p>

	<p>Save Rural Retail <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/sarure/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/sarure/</a></p>
	<p>Supporting knowledge capacity in ICT among SME to engage in growth and innovation <a href="https://www.interregeurope.eu/skills/">https://www.interregeurope.eu/skills/</a></p>

## Appendix C – Detailed notes from Session one: Updates on European level policies and research findings

This first session aimed at providing attendees with an insight into some of the current research and policy findings regarding rural areas, as well as policies implemented by the European Commission DG AGRI. The session also aimed to familiarise the projects with the JRC S3P Agri-Food and the opportunities for synergies with the platform’s partnerships which already involve a number of regions already engaged in Interreg Europe projects.

### OECD: Innovation in low density economies

Mr Andres Sanabria, of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Local Development and Tourism, presented an overview of the findings from OECD’s [Territorial Reviews](#), with a particular focus on innovation in low density economies. Mr Sanabria outlined the different types of rural areas, how their economic growth correlates with proximity to large cities, and the effects of demographic changes. While remote economies face a number of difficulties, a key point made by Mr Sanabria is that innovation is not just an urban phenomenon and in rural areas entrepreneurs are equally important sources of innovation.

Thus, the challenges can be overcome through proper support and actions. Key messages included:

- The tradable sector and its linkages beyond the local market is crucial for long-term growth;
- Keep people in the labour market – maintain density to provide high quality public services;
- Specialise in absolute advantages (e.g. energy and resource endowments) and provide an enabling environment to support SMEs and start-ups;
- Complementarities and synergies are critical – aim for simultaneous improvement in policies, infrastructure and human capital;
- Importance to rethink the rural development paradigm (see below).

	Old Paradigm	New Rural Policy (2006)	Revisited Rural Policy (2015-2016)
<b>Objectives</b>	Equalization. Focus on farm income	Competitiveness of rural areas	Wellbeing of rural areas based on the economic, social and environmental pillar. Requires the elaboration of complementarities.
<b>Key target sector</b>	Sector based (resource sector)	Holistic approach to include various sectors of rural economies	Low density economies and differentiating types of rural areas. Borrowed density are key for rural areas close to cities. Convergence forces are key.
<b>Main tools</b>	Subsidies	Investments	Complementarities are key tools. Governance structures to construct the design of policies.
<b>Key actors</b>	National governments, farmers	Multilevel-governance	Rural urban partnerships across levels of government, private sector and citizen participation

Lastly, Mr Sanabria pointed to some examples of how OECD's policy approach has evolved in recent years. Moving from a traditional resource sector-based focus, via a holistic approach, policy now differentiates between types of rural areas, based on their growth capacities for example. Likewise, in terms of key actors targeted by policy, focus has moved from national governments and farmers to rural urban partnerships, private sector and citizen participation. Future OECD publications on rural innovation issues will showcase good practices and Mr Sanabria welcomed proposals from the Interreg Europe regional community.

### **DG AGRI: Policy instruments for rural development and innovation**

Ms Ingeborg Zaiser, DG AGRI, gave an update on current EU level policy instruments targeting rural development and rural innovation, including for example the 118 Rural Development Programmes that have been supported by DG AGRI. Ms Zaiser underlined that support to rural development is characterised by programmes that offer various measures from which Member States can choose what to implement. The European Commission is trying to take a step back and give more subsidiarity to the Member States concerning the implementation aspects.

Among the policy measures, Ms Zaiser highlighted the [EIP-AGRI Operational Groups](#) (already some 800 in existence) intended to bring together multiple actors such as farmers, researchers, advisers, businesses, environmental groups, consumer interest groups or other NGOs to advance innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors. Further information on the EIP can be found [here](#).

DG AGRI will double its funding from EUR 5 million to EUR 10 million in Horizon 2020.

Ms Zaiser also highlighted the importance to participate and learn from other networks such as the [European Network for Rural Development](#) (ENRD) is the structure that brings together all the stakeholders aiming to achieve improved rural development results in the EU. Lastly, she expects that DG AGRI will continue to target rural development issues and that in the future programming period Member States will be given more freedom to identify priorities and actions.

### Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food

Representing the Joint Research Centre's [S3 Thematic Platform on Agri-Food](#), Ms Katerina Ciampi-Stancova joined the session via Skype. She outlined the concept of the Thematic Platforms and their key objectives:

- Support to interregional cooperation in new growth areas, building a pipeline of bankable projects;
- Tailored advice and help to regions to establish links with business and research communities;
- Help regions develop shared infrastructure such as testing facilities, pilot plants etc.

Ms Ciampi-Stancova showcased the five current partnerships, involving 49 administrative units across Europe, of the Agri-food platform:

- Consumer Involvement in Agri-Food, involving consumers and end-users in innovation;
- High-tech Farming, exploring new technologies in agriculture;
- Nutritional Ingredients, accelerating development of novel and improved ingredients;
- Smart Sensors for Agri-Food, focussing on transition towards Industry 4.0 in the food industry;
- Traceability and Big Data, supporting innovation and digitisation of the agri-food sector.

Each partnership involves between less than 10 and up to 20 partners and includes regional authorities, research and technology centres and cluster type organisations.

Ms Ciampi-Stancova also highlighted the importance to ensure linkages were facilitated between projects and other funding programmes and noted that some of the above partnerships have also been selected as one of the Pilot Partnerships under the DG REGIO support Pilot Action launched in October 2017. She also highlighted the importance of Peer Learning workshops that have been deployed since 2013 to help regions design and develop their S3 strategies. The JRC also provides regions with methodological support and research papers and is currently preparing a handbook to support the design and development of S3 Thematic Partnerships.

### Q&A panel exchange with the participants

The discussions following the presentations touched upon a range of issues, some of the point raised included:

- Being able to exploit know-how linked to natural resources is an important advantage for rural areas;
- “Remoteness” is translated into “challenges” – policies are not made to target remoteness but to address challenges;
- Mobility as a service will be challenging to implement in rural areas.
- Europe has good general broadband coverage, but highspeed broadband is still lagging;
- Scope for innovation can be enhanced through cross-sectoral value chain cooperation, for example agriculture/digital/big data;

Rural businesses tend to have a strong identify/entrepreneurial spirit which should be better exploited as help to identify business niches.

## Appendix D – Detailed notes from session two: Project presentations of Good Practices and Action Plans

This session included four presentations of good practices and four presentations of experiences from the action plan design and implementation process. The presentations were followed by a panel format where the audience asked questions to the presenters.

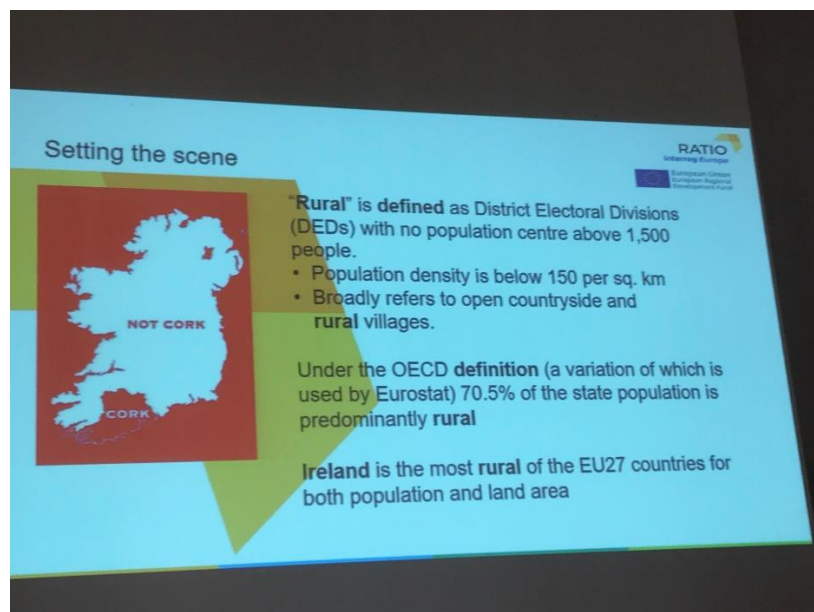
### Presentations of Good Practices

Lars Hustveit (Sogn and Fjordane County Municipality, Norway) representing the [P-IRIS](#) project lead partner presented an idea of node-hub cluster policy, inspired by good practices identified in the project, where incomplete but strong rural innovation networks could partner with mature clusters.

Simon Tijmsma (Province of Fryslân, Netherlands) representing the [Islands of Innovation](#) project lead partner highlighted the TIPPING (The Innovation Projects' Perspective for Islands' New Governance) wheel tool and its role as a self-assessment tool in relation to community building actions notably;

Galya Vladova (HafenCity University Hamburg, Germany) representing the [RUMORE](#) project advisory lead partner presented two good practices linked to rural-urban links. The “Agrodesign cluster” promoting partnerships between creative industries and the agri-food sector, and the “DNA certification” creating a trademark for rice based on DNA analysis. In addition to this marketing dimension and a search for high value-added products/services, the speaker highlighted the need for rural territories to take the time to design tailored solutions adapted their specific needs;

Michelle O’Sullivan (Cork Chamber, Ireland) representing a [RATIO](#) project partner highlighted the extent of the rural dimension in Ireland and showcased the “Ludgate Hub” good practice, a combination of co-working space, incubator and high-speed broadband infrastructure that aims to create an economic ecosystem via digital entrepreneurship. An [article](#) about the Ludgate Hub has been published on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.





### Q&A panel discussion with the audience

The discussions following the presentations highlighted additional points linked to the good practices, for example:

- Tourism can have a significant crowding out effect on cheap housing in island and rural regions and restrict the ability to attract and house local workers;
- Solid infrastructure (traditional and digital) is needed to retain and draw in new businesses;
- Access to finance and financial markets is often difficult for rural businesses;
- Communicate and spread the message about innovative people in the countryside!
- Challenges faced by rural business networks (number and density of actors).



### Presentations of Action Plans

Jose Manuel San Emeterio (ERNACT, Ireland) representing the [ERUDITE](#) project joined the meeting via Skype and highlighted the role that digital support actions can play in maintaining a high quality level of services in rural areas. The high level of investment required and the time factor means that policy makers and relevant stakeholders must be engaged in very early stages of projects that will rely on digital infrastructures, notably to allocate funding resources.

Romina Magni de Antonio (FAMCP Federation of municipalities regions and provinces of Aragon, Spain) from the [RATIO](#) project lead partner shared the partners' experience of finalising their Action Plans. In particular, the fruitful exchange with the responsible policy officer from the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat on how to improve the plans, was highlighted in the presentation.

Ninetta Chaniotou (Kainuun Etu Oy, Finland) representing one of the [SKILLS+](#) project partners focused on the good practice transfer stage of the Action Plan design process. The ability for the region to absorb the good practice was underlined. The speaker also noted that in some countries such as Finland, rural business were already highly digitalised but were not growing at the same rate as their urban counterparts.

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Artūrs Penčura (Zemgale Planning region, Latvia) representing one of the [INNOGROW](#) project partners highlighted the challenges currently faced in the early stage of the Action Plan design process. The speaker also highlighted the positive role played by networks, mentors, cluster organisations in developing innovation support measures in rural areas, where it is important to present a broad definition of the term innovation.

### Q&A panel with the audience

A number of questions for the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat were also raised during this session. The following points emerged in the discussions:

- Some partners highlighted the difficulty in ensuring Managing Authorities in the Action Plans design and financing/ implementing policy instruments and it was suggested that successful Phase 2 actions often relied upon the good degree of engagement in Phase 1 and the role relevant regional stakeholders can play in raising awareness of the needs, in this case of rural innovation;
- Plans for post Interreg Europe support should be developed during the Phase 2 and ensure connections with other relevant Programmes and Networks at an early stage;
- Project partners are encouraged to demonstrate the good linkages between what has been learned and shared in Phase One, notably how the Good Practices have been used to shape the action plan in Phase 2;
- Regarding the level of detail to be proposed in Action Plans, partners are encouraged to provide sufficient detail to facilitate monitoring and impact assessment;
- Regions are already looking at post 2020 strategies and actions and partners are encouraged to seek synergies and continuity where possible;
- Efforts to make Action Plans attractive in both content and **design/layout** are to be recommended to facilitate take up and interest from a cross section of stakeholders;
- It was suggested that the JS should collect and share Action Plan “success or good practices” notably those that impacted positively on the project indicators.

## Appendix E –Session three: Project partner breakout sessions

The final session of the workshop consisted of two parallel breakout sessions where the project representatives discussed challenges for rural innovation, how to exchange with each other, and how the Policy Learning Platform may support the follow-up to the discussions and the issues raised.



Group 1 included representatives from RUMORE, P-IRIS, RATIO, Islands of Innovation, INNOTRANS and SARURE.

The following challenges were highlighted during the discussion:

- Decision-making and policy-making issues. Both policy and smart specialisation often has a city-oriented focus, and there is often a stereotypical view on rural industry sectors; Furthermore, it can be difficult to get access to decision-makers and policy-making is sometimes a “black box” lacking transparency;
- Lack of critical mass. Examples mentioned include competence and capacity for project development, and difficulties creating networks of innovation partners to SMEs;
- Lack of positive marketing of rural areas and the problem of skills attraction to these areas;
- Insufficient transport links and SME access to markets.

Discussing interproject exchange, inspirational content was identified in all projects, but the Ludgate Hub from RATIO in particular was highlighted as a practice that others want to look into and possibly implement locally.

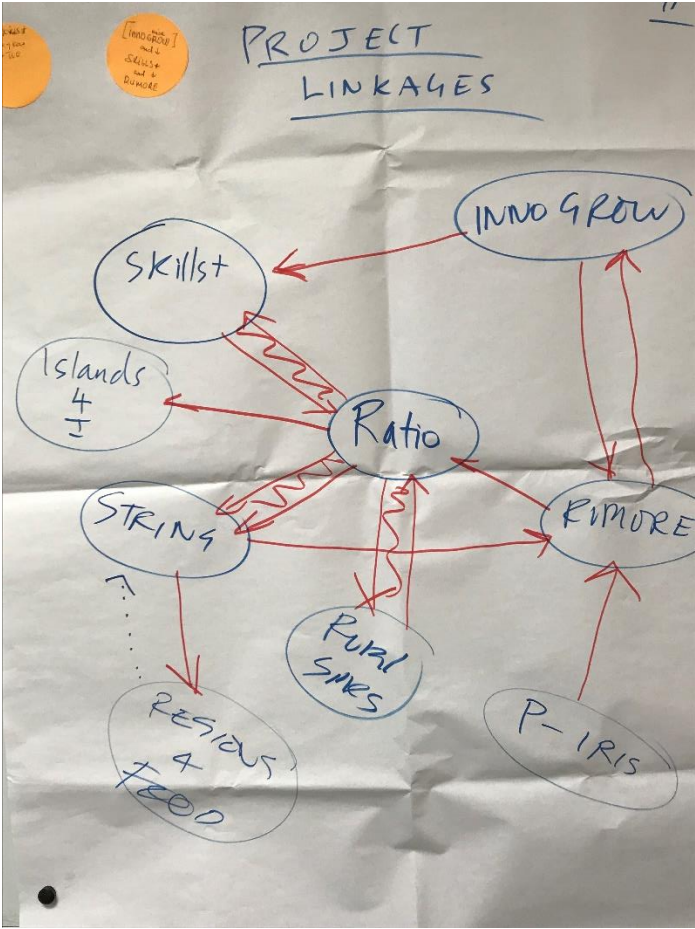
Group 2 included representatives from RUMORE, P-IRIS, RATIO, REGIONS4FOOD 4.0, STRING, INNOGROW, Rural SMEs, SKILLS+ and DG AGRI.



The following issues or challenges were highlighted during the discussion:

- Youth talent attraction and retention are considered key elements of rural community dynamics;
- Depopulation in general leads to critical mass difficulties;
- Rural areas lack critical mass in number of aspects (business eco-systems, often strong reliance on same stakeholders “usual suspects”, reduced number of cooperation partners, low density of RDI actors...);
- SME competitiveness: rural employees can often have stable and good working conditions, need additional help to engage with RDI or cluster-like structures and accelerate innovation absorption capacities;
- HR/Skills in general with access to life long training facilities a challenge, lack of HR critical mass in certain skills notably in smaller family run businesses;
- Sector strengths and dynamism in agriculture and agri-food and craft industries but innovation take up is below average, access to finance is difficult and agriculture/industry tends to be “conservative” in its approach to innovation;
- Digital deployment of infrastructure and services is essential if rural population/locations are to remain competitive and attractive, needs to be considered as relevant to all aspects of life not just businesses, include housing, transport, education ...

The group also spent some time discussing how they could reinforce cooperation between the projects and these aspects are summarised on the diagram below and shows strong overall interest in the work of the RATIO partnership and good interest in a number of shared and bi-lateral exchanges.



## Appendix F – List of Participants

Surname	First Name	Company / Organisation
Bertovic	Danijel	Local development agency PINS, <b>P-IRIS</b>
Bjorseth	Adrian Husabo	Sogn og Fjordane County Municipality, <b>P-IRIS</b>
Chaniotou	Ninetta	Kainuun Etu Oy, <b>SKILLS+</b>
Cvenkel	Helena	BSC Kranj, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF GORENJSKA REGION, <b>RURAL SMEs</b>
Dahlöf	Carl Arvid	Policy Learning Platform
De Boer	Pieter	Province of North Brabant, <b>STRING</b>
Hustveit	Lars	Sogn og Fjordane County Municipality, <b>P-IRIS</b>
Lecerf	Ariane	Pays de la Loire Regional Council, <b>REGIONS4FOOD</b>
Lukehurst	Tess	Coventry University Enterprises Ltd, <b>INNOTRANS, PE4Trans</b>
Magni	Romina	FAMCP Federation of municipalities regions and provinces of Aragon, <b>RATIO</b>
Martin	Mar	Interreg Europe
Mc Hugh	Thomas	Cork Chamber, <b>RATIO</b>
Nunes	Elsa	IrRADIARE representing CIMAVE, <b>Rural SMEs</b>
O'Grady	Ray	Sligo County Council, <b>SARURE</b>
O'Sullivan	Michelle	Cork Chamber, <b>RATIO</b>
Pattinson	Marc	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
Peņčura	Artūrs	Zemgale Planning region, <b>INNOGROW</b>

Surname	First Name	Company / Organisation
Sanabria	Andres	OECD, Innovation rural areas
Scherf	Monika	Office for Regional Development Lüneburg, <b>RUMORE</b>
Schwob	Insa	Office for Regional Development Lüneburg, <b>RUMORE</b>
Siweris	Erwin	Interreg Europe
Tijmsma	Simon	Province of Fryslân, <b>Islands of Innovation</b>
Toma	Raluca	Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
Verhelle	Etienne	Interreg Europe
Vladova	Galya	HafenCity University Hamburg, <b>RUMORE</b>
Zaiser	Ingeborg	European Commission DG AGRI