

# Rural Innovation Systems

**In Focus: Rural Innovation Capacities**

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# Talking about change, transition, transformation....



Complex challenges such as climate change, digitalisation, Covid19 require close cooperation of public institutions, academia, civil society, businesses within and across different levels of scale.

Humanity has experienced systemic transformation throughout its history: either as long-term shifts over several generations, or as violent disruptions. And the direction it took was mostly erratic.

What we are talking about today, is purposeful gentle systemic transformation in the short term into a concerted direction (sustainability).

**Something for which historic examples are missing.**



# The Austrian Rural Network...

- ...recognizes the importance of applying a systemic approach to innovation while devising strategies and development incentives to rural areas;
- ...organised an **Online workshop on regional innovation capacity (Oct 6th, 2020)** from which the main insights and outcomes are presented hereby;

...building on experiences with EIP (30 Austrian OPs), social innovation projects in LEADER, EU-Horizon Project SIMRA, CLLD multi-fund institutional innovation in Tyrol, a RD policy initiative for ‚Rural startups‘. (7 Mio. EUR since 2016, > 100 projects), the Regional Digital Innovation Challenge of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG)...

# Good practice examples

ranging from entrepreneurial to institutional, from economic to social innovation



- **Innovation network in the Kitzbühel area** (LAG Regio<sup>3</sup>, Tyrol): Coordination hub for innovation, digitalisation, cooperation and start-up support for SMEs.



- **Two-days festival for local pioneers** in the Austrian LAG Mühlviertler Kernland (Upper Austria).

- **EIP Healthy Lungau** (Dairy products, meat and cereals from the biosphere reserve, nature and species protection, farm management tools, cooperation between local actors).



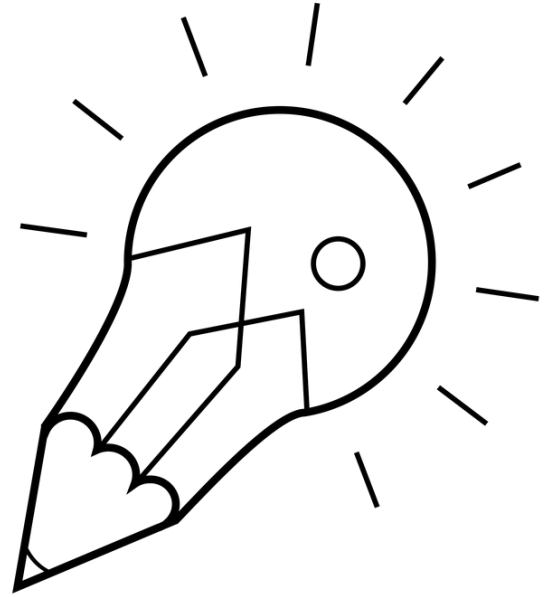
- **Hohe Tauern Health** – Integrated and cross-sectoral innovation project promoted by the Paracelsus private university around the Krimml waterfall (Pinzgau, Salzburg).

- **Vielö**, locally produced high quality bio-cosmetics (Upper Austria).

- **Creative Apprentice Worlds**, a job orientation project in LAG Oststeirisches Kernland (Styria).



....which eventually made us  
learn some lessons on...



# The meaning of innovation (1)



*Past - present*

In contrast to a rather outdated narrow technology-driven perception, the use of the term has gradually, but markedly shifted towards a more systemic, societal and solution-focused understanding whereby the solution space resonates the global sustainability agenda.

# The meaning of innovation (2)



*Wave - Particle*

Innovation points to both the process and the outcome of change.

# The meaning of innovation (3)

**Micro - Macro**



Innovations can be seen as the molecular ingredients of purposeful societal transformation.



# The meaning of innovation (4)

*Purpose - Chance*



Having a plan is good. But having it in a way that prepares you for chance is better.



# The meaning of innovation (5)

*Top down - bottom up*



Rather than being perceived as an elitist endeavor starting in a high-profile research lab, innovation is more and more recognized as an interactive, participative, emergent („open“) process which can be fostered by reducing social distance in a cooperative, partnership-based approach.



# Some takeaways

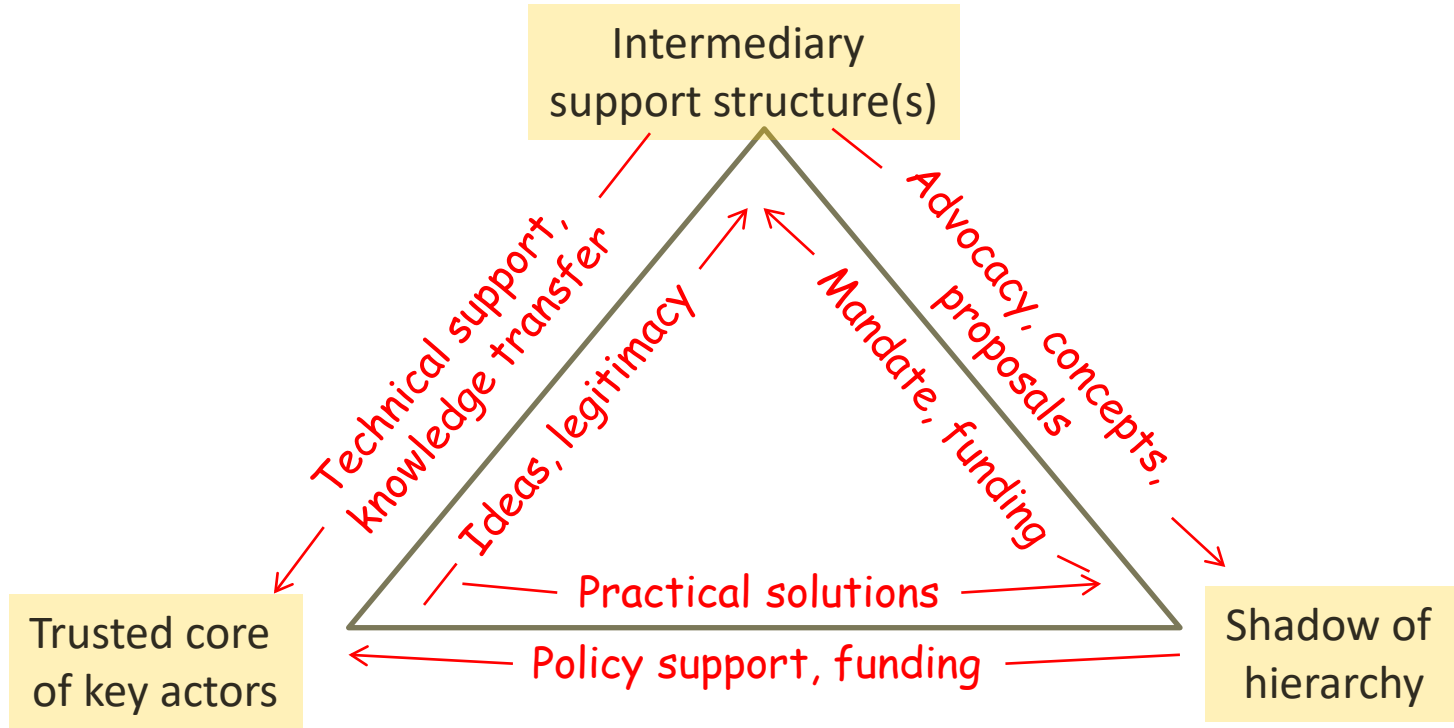
- From the outset: there should be a **clear and shared view** of what kind of change is needed.
- The theme should be **authentic** / connect to the rural area's heartbeat.
- It's less individual heroism than the **fruitful interaction** between open-minded, courageous and resilient actors which makes innovation possible – from the idea and prototype to scaling out and up!
- Consider the various facets of **capital**: financial, social (bonding-bridging-linking), cultural and symbolic. All are relevant!
- **Local infrastructure and services** DO matter (digital transformation!)
- Policy support should be **simple and transparent**. Start with low-threshold support, gradually shift up a gear at a time, and never stop looking at the big picture: Where are the bottlenecks in the local innovation ecosystem?
- **Create places** where different people can **meet** (but don't just invest in buildings). Yes, **really** meet!
- **Participation** increases the relevance and acceptance of change.
- Awake enthusiasm (**heart**), manage and monitor process (**mind**) and go for practical solutions (**hand**).

## To conclude...

- Sub-regional rural territories are appropriate reference spaces where innovation can be observed and fostered.
- Innovative actions use to cross sectoral and functional boundaries – including those of the territory itself!
- Watch out for the **TRIAD OF ACTORS**



# The triad of actors



*Thanks for your attention!*

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