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Photos: HNV-Link

HNV-Link: co-innovating for High Nature Value farming

HNV-Link is a multi-actor project and network of 13 partners and 10 High Nature Value (HNV) farming territories (`Learning Areas') in Europe that implement innovations and best practices to support HNV farmers.

Here, we present HNV-Link activities and share stories from several Learning Areas as well as our main recommendations. They have formulated with local actors sustainable development scenarios, and have identified the challenges and barriers to those. But more importantly, they are exchanging and applying innovative solutions to achieve their goals, improving social and institutional settings, policy and regulatory frameworks, farming techniques and management, as well as production and marketing. Sharing these innovations across diverse social, ecological and geographical contexts informs us how widely applicable they are and how they can be best combined.

Bearing in mind the range of public goods and services supplied by HNV farming (e.g. quality food, biodiversity, beautiful landscapes, etc.), policymakers must realise that biodiversity conservation objectives can't be fulfilled without supporting adequately HNV farmers. For this, EU countries should drive HNV-friendly adjustments in their agricultural and rural development policies, and governments should work closely with all actors along the agricultural value chain towards more sustainable agri-food systems for a prosperous and inclusive Europe.

The project is holding its Final Conference on 31 January 2019 in Montpellier, France. Its activities and key recommendations will be discussed then. Please, get in touch if you have a say on the issue! All other information is on our website!

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Innovation in its various forms — social, technological, economic, political, etc. — is needed at all levels, within and outside farming systems and from the local to international scales, to succeed in enhancing the viability of High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems in the long term. We know that innovation is driven by a mix of individual and collective creativity and intelligence and that it emerges from interactions and collaborations between multiple actors.

HNV-Link project supported all together 18 study trips or `cross-visits' in 2018 between its 10 Learning Areas (LA), thus encouraging the exchange of practical knowledge and best practices. The aim was to find solutions to the most urgent problems and to exploit opportunities that HNV farming has to offer. During the cross-visits, actors from the LA (e.g. farmers, practitioners, local authorities, researchers) learn from hands-on experience in innovating to increase the profitability of HNV farms while ensuring biodiversity conservation.

For example, stakeholders from Portugal, France, Romania and Sweden visited the Burren in Ireland to benefit from the experiences of the Burren Programme in running locally-led projects funded by European Innovation partnerships (EIP), and results-based agri-environment schemes for biodiversity. Likewise, a group of farmers and producers, researchers and local authorities from Western Stara Planina region in Bulgaria visited Mouzaki region in Greece to learn more about the Terra Thessalia Territorial cluster, Participatory Guarantee System, and GPS-tracking for monitoring and certification of extensive livestock farming. These innovations create added value and develop markets for HNV products.

Local authorities, non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives and farmers from La Vera of Spain and Thessaly region in Greece visited the Causses et Cévennes UNESCO Site in France to learn more about collaboration to maintain semi-natural biodiversity-rich landscapes and reconcile farming with nature protection. This includes, for example, collective land use and infrastructures, using livestock grazing to mitigate fire risk, valorising local products through direct sale on-farm or in cooperative shops, and diversifying through agro-tourism. Similarly, actors from Bulgaria and Croatia travelled to Romanian area of Tarnava Mare to discuss such innovations as a food processing unit, green infrastructure sheepfold model, farmer association and milk collection unit, farm and nature school, and SMS (text message) information system for farmers.

All exchanges provided participants with a better understanding of the factors influencing HNV farming viability, the key innovation gaps and possible solutions. They provided insight into existing innovations and the role farmers together with agricultural support services and authorities, can play in implementing and disseminating them. The visits were a source of inspiration and strengthened tires at professional and personal levels. Back home, cross-visitors are acting as innovation catalysers in their own areas and networks.

Despite their diversity, HNV farming areas share common challenges and opportunities, and have a wealth of successful initiatives worth spreading across Europe. The national application of European policies and regulations often appears to be a bottleneck. With favourable policies and well-organised stakeholder collaboration, HNV farming systems can thrive, and as such, society can continue to enjoy the benefits they provide.

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Cross-visits for peer-to-peer learning inspire innovation

Developing an HNV Vision

A strategic enterprise

Building a High Nature Value (HNV) vision has been a key element in the processes that took place in the HNV-Link Learning Areas. It was part of the `framing phase' of HNV-Link and designed to be a resource for HNV brokers.

The reason such visions are so important is found in the particular context of HNV conservation. Indeed, HNV areas, in their diversity, are frequently seen as remnants of the past, with the (frequently correct) image of elder farmers and marginal rural areas. Thus, the disappearance of HNV landscapes — which is happening in most places — requires changes in the development patterns, which is precisely what is addressed in the HNV-Link actions plans designed in each Learning Area.

The fundamental *raison d'être* for an HNV vision is to engage a set of actors towards the shared goal of HNV conservation. The word `vision' thus encompasses two ideas: (a) it should be somehow visual and propose a complete image of a future explicitly displaying HNV attributes, and (b) it should be inspiring and give positive reasons for HNV conservation. The HNV vision must encompass in some ways a description of a desired HNV landscape in a given area, in a close or medium term future, in relationship with biodiversity conservation. The issue is not only to describe a scenic landscape but to explain how this landscape is linked with the presence of rich habitats. Calling for a `mandatory' display of landscape/biodiversity elements in the vision seems necessary in light of the results-based approach at the landscape level which forms the basis of an HNV farming project and distinguishes it from other `natural resource management' or `rural development' projects (without discarding their value).

In strategic terms — adopting the reading of an HNV farming project as a strategic intervention in a given social configuration — the vision sets both the objectives (where is it desirable to go to?) and some means (under which conditions? with which innovations?).

In terms of content, the HNV vision should:

1. Show that another future for HNV areas is possible and desirable, as compared with the *business as usual scenario,* consisting in a combination of land abandonment and intensification;
2. Explore how the conservation of natural attributes — those forming the essence of HNV areas — are linked to the sound development of farming systems meeting the social demands of new and young farmers;
3. Identify the conditions for such an alternative development for farming systems in: techniques, markets, policies and wider rural development domains. This is the field of play for relevant innovations.

Although clear enough in principle, the building of the vision is a demanding exercise: it should combine rigor and expertise, mobilizing multidisciplinary approaches dealing with ecology, farm and rural economy, sociology… all that in a future-oriented perspective! Yes, it should not be an academic and technocratic exercise but, rather, inspiring and understandable for a variety of local and regional actors. It has to display a sensible dimension for the engagement.

Thus, there is no `one size fits all'; building a vision requires an individual approach. The experience from HNV-Link suggests that the HNV vision process is not a matter of undertaking a fixed methodology that would dictate the outputs and the project. If some methodological landmarks have proven universally useful for HNV brokers, it is that the HNV process mobilises an adaptive approach that utilizes local resources — research institutes, local experts (including farmers), and local groups.

Beyond the explicit landscape display described above, the extent to which the vision should aim and the degree of precision are open and subject to ongoing changes. Deducing from the desired HNV landscapes what should be the desired HNV farming systems is not an easy task and, in any case, should be undertaken with the involvement of a wide range of farmers. Even if the aim is less ambitious than a full picture at the first instance, the effort of formalisation can still address some key features for the farming systems and beyond for the wider development context of those farming systems. Exchange of ideas is key: if we approach grassroots social processes with ready-made, detailed visions without understanding farming systems, it is questionable whether local actors would embrace our vision. Arguably, it is important to bring some elements for a local debate, while keeping flexibility and rigor in their arrangement.

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An HNV vision sets both the objectives and some means to achieve the objectives

Spreading the word on HNV farming

How to reach various stakeholders about the meaning, values and potential of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland and farming? At best, most people in Europe on hearing of nature values, immediately think of forests as a place of nature. At worst, they would ask you `HNV? What kind of disease is that?'

As a networking project with a wide outreach ambition, HNV-Link thus faced a challenge of communicating not only to a classical trio of farmers, advisor, and local authorities, but to people most relevant to such farming. After all, any lay person is a potential consumer, and any agricultural student is a future decision-maker or advisor.

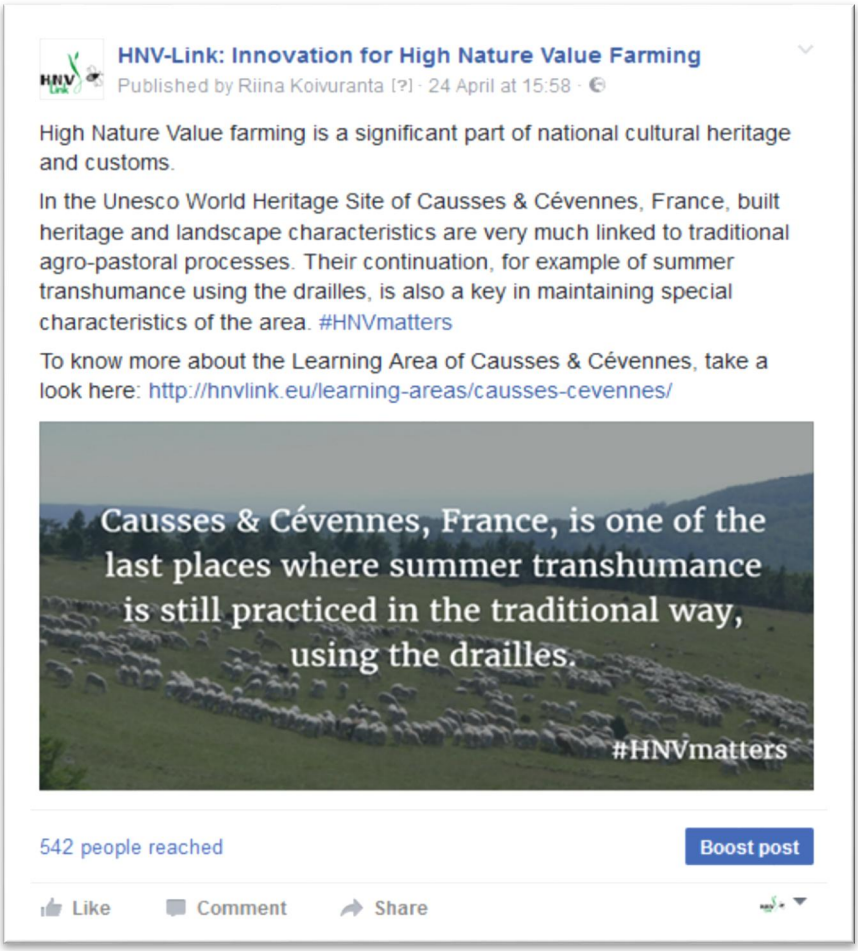
`...how we communicate this message to a range of audiences and how we ensure that that message is spread not just within our own country but across Europe' [Alison Kohler, Dartmoor National Park]

Using social media

The project team ran three thematic campaigns on Facebook and Twitter with the hashtags: #HNVresearch, #HNVmatters, and #HNVinnovation. Each campaign involved regular posting of visually attractive posts with simple messages. To make them live on after the newsfeed changes, we assembled the posts into two online slideshows: one illustrates the diversity of HNV farming practices, their ecological and other values, and the other showcases innovative solutions for HNV farming continuity.

Make people say it!

Bringing the message out in a simple and spontaneous way is important in reaching out to new audiences. We asked the key players of the project to explain their work rational and aims. Instead of having a professional gloss, the messages had to be, above all, approachable, embedded into the very context of an activity. And so several



Screenshot of a Facebook post

HNV-Link: Greetings from WP3

Screenshot of a YouTube presentation

presentations were born with a little nudging and support among the project team. The most important is looking for an opportune moment to make the speakers, who has never done this before, to perform.

As a networking project with a strong multi-actor mandate, HNV-Link had to mobilise collaborative groups on the ground, in each of its ten Learning Areas (LAs). In communication, we had to prove that every project output has been a fruit of such collaborative work. We created extensive accounts on the participatory process in each Learning Area (see the website under LAs and the YouTube playlist).

Support educators

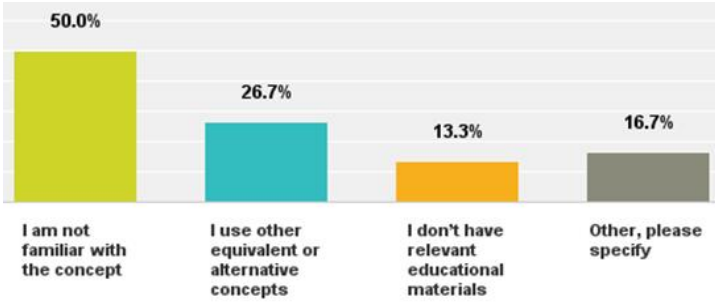
From early planning of the application, the team recognised that educators are critically important for building up awareness about and knowledge of the HNV farming for coming professionals in agriculture and rural development. The application evaluators especially praised the team's ambition for producing outputs designed for use of educators in vocational and higher education.

YouTube The High Nature Value farming channel has a broad selection of videos:

- The concept of High Nature Value farming explained (3:38 min).
- Innovations for High Nature Value Farming (5 min).
- High Nature Value farmland in The Burren of Ireland (8:38 min).
- Examples of the project innovations for Bulgarian users (10 slide shows).
- And 30 more short videos of testimonies and reflections.

If you do NOT use the HNV farming concept in teaching what are the main reasons?

Of the respondents, 30 (40%) stated that they did not use the concept of HNV farmland in their teaching.
The reasons for it are on the chart. It is mostly just not known or not seen as complementary or supporting the ones in use already. Lack of materials may also hinder the use. Others including lack of suitable studies in the respondent's department, or unrelated field. Think of how many students could gain some insight into HNV farmland and farming if all 30 educators would integrate the concept into their teaching, year after year!



`Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' [Nelson Mandela]

This would allow us encouraging educators with only little and no knowledge of the topic to work with it from various perspectives.

To make the future materials useful across Europe and relevant to many disciplines, the team conducted a survey to over 300 addresses across the European Union. We located some existing resources and people who were willing to share their materials, gained collaborators outside of the project and better understood the needs of the potential users.

It took a year of dedicated work to produce the HNV-Link Educational Package including:

Three sets of presentation slides

- General Overview of HNV farmland
- HNV farmland across Europe
- Role for Innovations in HNV farmland

Four sets of presentation slides on cases of HNV farming systems

- The dehesa agroforestry system (J. Santos & R. Alejano)
- Impact of abandonment on HNV pastures of Sardinia (E. Farris)
- Flood meadows of Angers, France (J. Pithon-Rivallain)
- Training for farmers about semi-natural grasslands in Latvia (So-Rūsiņa)

Ten assignments for class, field and farm

Database of resources on HNV farming theme.

All of the materials are in a ready-to-use format and are Open Source (under CC BY-NC-SA). Anyone may freely use them as they are or modify as necessary for non-commercial purposes.

The materials should be suitable for use in agricultural or rural studies, sustainable development, agroecology, and conservation biology. Some are more theoretical and some practical, more fit for use in vocational training. Advisors may also find ideas in the package.

Welcome to the treat!

`This is a brilliant initiative `
`Really impressive!! `
`Thanks for these great outputs! These will be very helpful in my yearly master course on European Landscapes…'
- First feedback from educators outside of the project team

Engage online

The main outputs of HNV-Link — Baseline Assessment and Innovation Compendium — are fairly large PDF files with a wealth of technical information. However, the project ambition was also to reach to a large and diverse audience by a user-friendly tool available after the project. The team integrated the information from all LAs and their 52 innovations into an Interactive Innovations Map.

The Map presents each Learning Area through three layers: Farming and Nature, Challenges, and Innovations. Pop-out windows under the key issues of each visual layer allows exploring the Area in-depth and looking for solutions within a specific context.

It is completed with a search engine with several filters such as innovation type, challenges addressed, scale of operation (e.g. cluster of farms). It is worth exploring!

English is not enough

Finally, in full awareness that change happens on local and regional levels, the project partners made major communication and dissemination efforts within and outside their networks, producing for example innovation leaflets in their national languages. These will be added to the website.

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Screenshot of the online interactive map

Pastando Garganta (`Grazing Garganta')

A local HNV-Link initiative in Extremadura (Spain)

The Spanish High Nature Value (HNV) Learning Area of HNV-Link project is the district of La Vera, on the southern slopes of the Gredos mountains in the northeast of Extremadura. The uplands are a mosaic of grassland, scrub and forest. The landscape structure is the result of extensive grazing by goats, sheep and suckler cattle, and terracing for olives, cherries, chestnuts, figs and other permanent crops. Most of the uplands of La Vera are designated under Natura 2000 as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The team (European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism EFNCP and Entretantos) faced a major challenge in assessing the baseline situation for the district as a whole. In particular, it was impossible to establish a clear evidence-based picture of the state of Natura 2000 habitats and species because there is no official monitoring or other data to draw on and because of the scale and diversity of habitats in the district.

We decided to zoom-in on one municipality – Garganta la Olla – to analyse in detail the current situation of pastoralism and of the Natura 2000 habitats created and maintained by pastoralism. EFNCP employed a project officer to engage with all the local pastoralists, as well as with hunters, foresters, and local and regional authorities to develop a set of recommendations, and Universidad Politécnica de Madrid provided specialist input for in-field habitat assessment.

Pastoral habitats in decline

Garganta la Olla Municipality covers 4,700 ha and is dominated by two large areas of common grazing, one public and one private, covering a total of approximately 3,700 ha. The vast majority of the common grazing land is within Natura 2000, and the habitats present on a significant scale are all associated with past or present pastoral use. These include Galicio-Portuguese oak woods with *Quercus robur* and *Quercus pyrenaica* (9230), Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands (6230*), Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals of the *Thero-Brachypodietea* (6220*), Mountain *Cytisus purgans* formations (5120), European dry heaths (4030) and Endemic oro-Mediterranean heaths with gorse (4090).

Official maps miss true story

The reality on the ground is that these habitats mostly exist in a complex mosaic. EFNCP butterfly monitoring has found this habitat mosaic to be extremely species-rich with approximately 60 butterfly species along a 500 m transect.

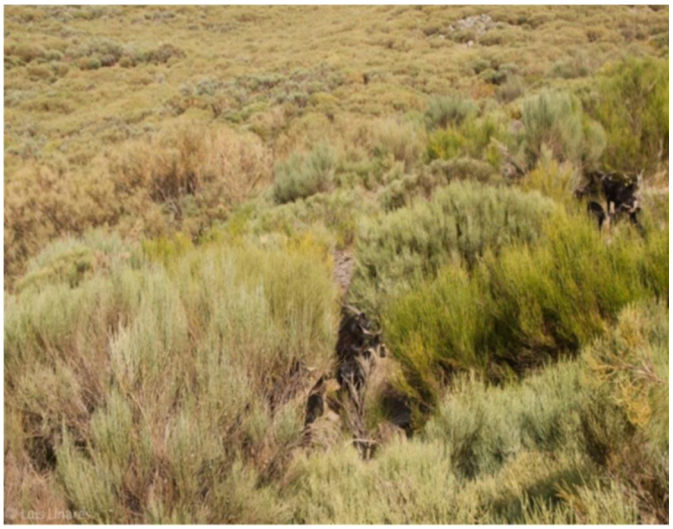
The official habitat maps divide the SAC into large areas according to the dominant habitat type and so are not able to reflect the reality of the fine-grained mosaic. Thus, these maps are not a sound foundation for determining or monitoring conservation status, nor for developing objectives and management measures. The great diversity of the habitat mosaic could be lost entirely without any significant change appearing on the official habitat maps. Revealing and documenting this reality is in itself an important innovation of the HNV-Link project.

We found that certain habitats are in clear regression, notably the two priority grassland habitats (6220* and 6230*). Concurrently, scrub and woodland habitats (5120 and 9230) are expanding to create dense, impenetrable areas of low biodiversity and high fire risk that are unsuitable for grazing.

Overall, there is a decline in habitat diversity, as scrub and dense woodland gradually eliminate smaller grassland patches (6220*) while the larger area of species-rich *Nardus* habitat (6230*) is clearly under-grazed and declining in quality. These tendencies reflect the considerable decline in grazing pressure in recent decades, especially by transhumant flocks in the summer. The recent conversion to chestnut production of a parcel of habitat 6220*, which forms the core of the EFNCP butterfly transect, reflects the same economic low-viability of grazing that drives abandonment.

Regional authorities have not taken measures to address pasture abandonment, or even to assess in the field the conservation status of the pastoral habitats. Two Natura 2000 planning documents, a regional plan and a SAC management plan, put strong emphasis on the need to maintain traditional pastoral

Official maps fail to capture La Vera's great habitat diversity



Dense broom is a fire risk and builds up when grazing ends

activity, but these form little more than a wish-list from conservation authorities who have neither the resources nor the competence to implement such measures.

Implementing the wish-list as practical funded measures would require action from the agricultural, rural development and forest authorities and use by them of rural development programme options of agri-climate-environment schemes (AES), Natura 2000 payments, and investment aids. The European Commission guidelines for habitat management from 2008 make clear that habitats such as 6220* need measures to incentivise the pastoral management that created and still maintains these last areas.

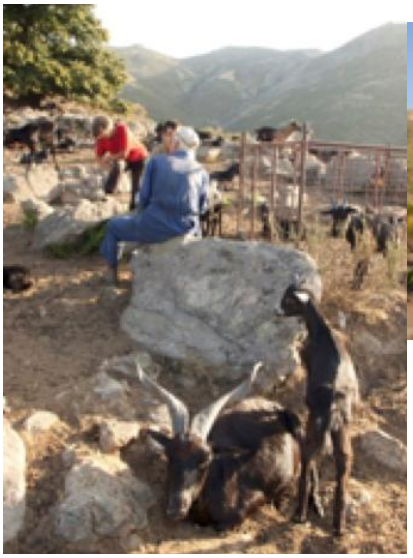
Rather than providing incentives for pastoral activity, the current approach of the regional authorities is to `protect' habitats through legislative restrictions on activities seen as `impacting', such as change of land use or removal of scrub or trees. Inevitably, this approach leads to abandonment and attempts to bend the rules to convert semi-natural land to fruit plantations.

A system close to disappearing

The small remaining community of pastoralists and their livestock, could still be enough to prevent the total loss of Natura 2000 pastoral habitats in the municipality. Currently there are 4 full-time goat farmers in the winter months, with a total of 700 goats, 3 seasonal graziers with a further 900 goats, and one farmer with suckler cows (80).

The pastoralists, and everyone else consulted, see a bleak future for their profession. Decline in the number of pastoralists and animals has accelerated, and the majority of pastoralists will reach retirement age in a few years.

The decline is unsurprising. In addition to the hard work and poor condition of the pastures due to scrub encroachment, the pastoralists face an unfair situation. Much of their land is excluded from the European Union's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) payments by the rules on eligibility of pastures with scrub and/or trees, which in Spain applies to Pillar I, AES, and Least Favoured Area schemes. That irrigated arable land in the neighbouring municipality is eligible for Pillar 1 direct payments of 1,430 euros/ha plus an AES for integrated tobacco cropping of 600 e/ha



Interviewing one of the last goat farmers in La Vera at his home.

just adds insult to injury.

Further, traditional pastoralist practices that were central to the grazing system, such as regular thinning of the tree cover and clearing scrub by hand or using fire, have been banned for `environmental' reasons. On-farm cheese-making, which was key to the economy of goat farming, was effectively stopped in the 1990s by inflexible implementation of EU food hygiene rules. Now, new dairies - however small - are blocked by environmental planning (cheese-making is treated as an `industrial' activity unsuitable for a Natura 2000 site). Seasonal movements of animals and, indeed the very use of common pastures is threatened by restrictive bovine tuberculosis containment measures that are not adapted to pastoral realities.

Innovation or back to basics?

The original and innovative idea of the HNV farming concept was that nature conservation in Europe cannot be achieved merely by `protecting' habitats and species through designations such as Natura 2000. It is essential also to ensure the economic viability of the farming systems that contribute most to nature conservation at a landscape scale, particularly extensive grazing systems on semi-natural pastures. This requires an integrated approach to policy design and implementation, as well as combining targeted economic incentives and investment aid to promote viability of the HNV farming system.

This joined up approach to support HNV farming is precisely what is NOT happening in La Vera. Nature conservation here focuses on restrictions rather than incentives, CAP and Rural Development Programme do not support HNV grazing systems and, crucially, there is practically no integration of policy design and implementation, or attempts to adapt policy to the conditions of HNV farming.

Making change happen

HNV-Link reveals for the first time with facts and figures the crisis facing extensive pastoralism and Natura 2000 habitats in this municipality. It has given pastoralists the opportunity to make their own proposals for change, including practical measures for their livelihoods and living environments. We have transmitted the critical situation and proposed solutions to the local and regional authorities who have the competence to implement them.

The project is coming to an end and, even though the different authorities showed willingness to listen and engage in dialogue, nothing has changed yet in policy terms, and the pastoralists have no more support than before.

It is clear that what is needed is a longer-term innovation `process' to gradually build a consensus and political commitment around the need to sustain the extensive grazing systems in the uplands of Extremadura, and then to get the different authorities to start making the concrete changes that are needed. Such a process needs to be driven from the local level. We found that authorities were especially interested to hear about the realities and practical proposals from Garganta la Olla, and potentially the work started by HNV-Link could be continued as a long-term pilot project.

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Western Stara Planina, Bulgaria

Socio-economic conditions

Western Stara Planina is an exceptional region from many perspectives. It is a High Nature Value (HNV) farming and forestry area with biodiversity richness of national, European and global importance. It is a mountainous area that hosts one of the first spa resorts in the country from early 20th century, as well as the famous Chiprovski carpets made from sheep wool and natural plant colours. Geographically, the region neighbours Sofia – the capital of Bulgaria. Yet, it is also part of the poorest NUTS II region in the EU, and depopulation is significant. Thus, there exists an overwhelming dichotomy of exceptional nature value and deteriorating socio-economic status.

At the same time, some of the most innovative HNV farming initiatives in Bulgaria have developed here, mainly due to the conservation importance of the region that attracted the focused efforts of multiple non-governmental nature conservation organisations[1]. Their approach is on promoting sustainable economic development that would keep farmers farming and, thus, maintaining the high nature values. This approach was welcomed by several local farmers who settled in the region after working abroad. These newcomers have acted as agents of change with `traditional' local farmers. Now, the territory has a particular social dynamic that nourishes various innovative ideas for development. This dynamic is of interest to the HNV-Link project.

Socio-economic challenges

Population decline, which began in the region in the 1960s, continues. In 2016, there were slightly more than 35,000 people, with 68% located in the four towns in the Learning Area (LA). The other 69 villages are small (between 101-500 people) and very small (less than 100 people). The average population density is 21.5 people/km^2 compared to 31.5 for all rural areas and 65.5 for the country as a whole.

The negative impacts of depopulation are many and feed into each other: a shrinking pool of people available for jobs, loss of job opportunities, worsening social coherence, further promotion of out-migration, loss of motivation and forward-thinkingness in many local people, deterioration of social and technical infrastructure, etc.

The percentage of unemployed is among the highest in the country - between 15% and 35% in the different municipalities. One of its side effects is that people lose their working habits and come to rely on social payments. At the same time, the public sector jobs (administration, education, social and health services) represent 35% of all jobs. Thus, the state has become the most important actor in the region both from economic and social perspectives.

Role of farming and farmers

Farming served, and still serves, as a safety net for many local people who produced for subsistence or semi-subsistence purposes during the 1990s and early 2000s. They were able to care for only a small share of all agricultural land, mostly around the villages, which created the mosaic landscapes of patches of small cropping, orchards and grasslands. Unfortunately, the farmlands further away from the villages, mostly pastures, were abandoned for more than a decade, thus decreasing their nature values.

Nowadays, only 5% of the local population are officially registered as employed in agriculture. They consider the potential for future development through European Union's (EU) Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) support and opportunities arising for other, innovative forms of development. Currently, subsistence farming and professional farming co-exist in the area.

Pavlin at Linbul farm describes his grassland management practices.

CAP support for HNV farming

Both `traditional' and `innovative' local livestock farmers[2] state that CAP support is important for keeping them in business but also add that, *`it would be much better if there were no CAP support at all because most of the payments go to large scale arable farmers, and we are in dis-advantaged position'*. This latter statement is rather emotional and not justified by evidence from experiences. Before joining the EU in 2007, Bulgaria offered no payments to its farmers, and the LA still suffers from the resulting land abandonment. However, the current system of CAP support needs to be adjusted to the needs of HNV livestock farmers.

There are multiple CAP schemes of high importance for HNV livestock farmers. Bulgaria introduced coupled-support scheme for livestock farmers in mountainous regions only in the last couple of years, and its support is highly appreciated. The other CAP measure that fits well with HNV farmers in Western Stara Planina is the compensatory payment for agricultural land in Natura 2000 zones (Measure 12 in the Rural Development Programme).

Western Stara Planina's HNV livestock farmers are not eligible for the dedicated agri-climate-environment scheme (AES) for HNV grasslands. The implementation rules of the two rural development measures state that farmers from areas designated as Natura 2000 zones can only apply under Measure 12. This is a rather disputable implementation because Natura 2000 payment is a compensation for management restrictions, while AES is for actions above the baseline requirements.

The most controversial scheme is the single area-based payment (SAPS) due to the 100-tree requirement for eligibility of agricultural land. Clearly, the pastures in the area are abundant in trees and scrub and, thus, only 60% of the grassland physical blocks in the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) are eligible for support. Furthermore, not all grasslands are included in the LPIS due to their long-term abandonment.

Role of innovations for HNV farming

CAP helps ensure survival of farmers in Western Stara Planina, but any further development and growth is linked to the conditions for doing business. The most critical challenge is the lack of farm workers. Depopulation has reduced the work force pool. The high share of unemployed people is not an option for the farms due to the lack of interest and/or motivation to work in livestock farms. As a result, most farmers maintain or reduce the farm business to a scale they can manage relying only on family members and one or two farm workers.

Social, marketing, and technical innovations help support farmers in their initiatives to reduce labour load or to add value to their products. For example, Linbul farm introduced controlled parcel grazing of the Angus herd, which ensures regular fresh grass for the animals and opportunities for species regrowth. The farmer uses electric fences and vitamin supplements to move the animals from one parcel to the other by himself. At the same time, he started a blog to share his farming experience with other farmers and with clients of the farm products.

Nine farmers and businesses from Western Stara Planina have formed a cooperative, representing several HNV farming specialisations, to pool their marketing efforts. They promote the region as an area of alternative tourism offering clean food, traditional products and crafts, food and wine tasting, and guided tours. A unifying factor is their willingness to preserve natural resources on which their businesses depend. The current joint activities receive no support, which makes it challenging, but the association members are hopeful and actively searching for funding opportunities for the marketing and promotion activities of the association .

Role of HNV-Link project

HNV-Link project made it possible for individuals working and interested in HNV farming in Western Stara Planina to meet (some of them for the first time) and enlarge their local network of like-minded people. The local network was further strengthened during the cross-visits to Greece and Romania, as well as during the hosting of the Romanian group in the Western Stara Planina LA. The innovations in HNV farming systems visited were motivational from several perspectives:

`We see that HNV farming faces challenges in every country and region, and we are not that far behind.' [representative of local agriculture office]

`Even small steps can make a big change as long as they continue over time and follow the same objective.' [farmer]

`EU policies can have different implementation in the different member-states, so we have to keep demanding a national implementation favourable to HNV farming. At the same time, some rules have change at EU level (eg. pasture eligibility).' [farmer]

`We want to come with you to other cross-visits that you organize in the future. We have never seen so many useful and interesting examples in so few days before.' [farm advisor]

`You have to promote and distribute widely the innovation examples for HNV farming collected in the project. People from other regions in Bulgaria have to see them too!' [participants in the LA regional meeting]

At the regional meeting, STEP's multiple roles as project coordinator, but also local facilitator, network communicator, HNV farming and policy topic leader, event organiser etc., were recognized and highly valued by people as essential for the smooth running of the activities in Western Stara Planina. Local partners said that the collaboration with STEP and HNV-Link project was important to them because it gave them wider perspective to their daily problems, as well as motivation to continue working and problem solving their farming.

People — the farmers, subsistence producers or small-scale nature-based business developers, as well as local agriculture officers and advisors — are at the heart of HNV farming. Losing them will significantly reduce the high nature values in the area.

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[1]Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP), Regional Environmental Center (REC), Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity (STEP) and WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme.

Making hay by hand in Western Stara Planina

Making hay by machine in Western Stara Planina

All photos: Yanka Kazakova

HNV-Link in Romania

a learning experience and story to share

Interest in finding ways to sustain High Nature Value (HNV) farming in Romania has been remarkable in recent years, with one of the main impacts coming from the HNV-Link project. A team of researchers from Romania (Department of Economic Sciences, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Cluj-Napoca) was engaged in the network built within the project and worked with the aim of finding sustainable ways to preserve HNV farmland at a local level.

Although Romania is ranked 5th in Europe for the amount of HNV land area and is especially well-known for its rich biodiversity kept over the years by the traditional low-intensity agricultural practices, it nowadays faces the same threats as other EU countries: the abandonment phenomena and the intensification of farming. In this context of searching and learning new ways to attenuate these destructive trends, a representative Learning Area was chosen in Romania – Dealurile Clujului Est. Located in the northwest region of Romania in the proximity of one of the largest cities, it covers a surface of 19.622,88 ha on eight communes. There is a Natura 2000 site in the middle of the Learning Area with the same name.

A typical landscape of Dealurile Clujui Est

High species richness

The Natura 2000 site is famous for the presence of *Maculinea* species of butterflies, mesophilic meadows with high plant diversity, and a unique cultural landscape (Management Plan, 2016). The presence of all four species of the so-called blue butterflies (*Maculinea nausithous*, *M. teleius*, *M. arion*, *M. alcon*), which are highly endangered at the European level (Rákosy and Voda, 2008), makes it unique. It also holds the global plant species richness records at the 0.1 m² and 10 m² scales (Wilson *et al.*, 2012).

Baseline assessment

The Baseline Assessment, conducted as an initial step of the project, used a participatory approach based on meetings with all key stakeholders from the studied area. Participants included the mayors from the eight communes; the farmers' associations Someș Arieș and Someșeana; the Local Action Group LAG Someș Transilvan; AgroTransilvania Cluster; and the Romanian Lepideptorological Association, which is involved in the management of the Natura 2000 site (Jitea et al., 2017). We conducted a field study between January and May 2017 to better understand the level of knowledge and perception of HNV farming on 132 respondents (local actors such as farmers, representatives from administrative structures such as City Hall, and the LAG). Overall, 75.8 % have knowledge about HNV farming. However, awareness is lower in the remote communes that have the most important land shares in the Natura 2000 site.

The HNV farming system in Dealurile Clujului Est is mosaic of low intensity agriculture and natural and structural elements. It is the result of traditional low-intensive agricultural techniques for grazing and mowing carried out by households. In recent years, alteration of traditional agricultural practices and, particularly, the intensification of land use caused by the increase of sheep livestock, have unfavourably impacted the HNV farmland. Nowadays, manual mowing is an exception due to its inefficiency and labour intensity. Regarding good governance, there are inconsistences both in administrative organization, as well as in the implementation of agricultural policies and, in particular, for the agri-environment measures. In the former, communes belong to different administrative associative structures, which have their own specific objectives and instruments. In the latter, not all communes are eligible for agri-environment measures even though they include or are encompassed by the Natura 2000 site.

The value chain of the HNV products is currently based on low-value-added products. On-farm processing of cheese and meat and direct sales are unable to develop due to rigid rules and bureaucracy. Basic rural infrastructure is also poor especially in the remote HNV areas (Beaufoy et al., 2017).

Cross-visits and information exchange for innovation

Learning and understanding the main challenges of HNV farming in Dealurile Clujului Est Natura 2000 was a crucial step in the process of identifying innovations applied in other regions from Romania and in the partner countries, which are considered examples of good practices that could be applied in

the studied area. Diverse stakeholders from the region – including farmers, producers, advisors, LAG representatives, and researchers – visited other HNV areas in Romania (Saschiz and Viscri – Tarnava Mare), Bulgaria (Western Stara Planina) and Ireland (The Burren) through the HNV-Link cross-visits for local stakeholders and learned about many innovations of relevance to the Dealurile Clujului Est Natura 2000 area, including: community food processing unit, tourist information centre, green infrastructure sheepfold model, milk collecting point, local farmer association, free information services for farmers via text messages, farm management techniques for HNV grasslands, on-line marketing and sale of meat, and local dairy processing unit.

The inspiring HNV innovations shared by the host groups of farmers, LAG members, NGOs, veterinary and advisory experts gave stakeholders the opportunity to acquire experience and develop new ideas to face the main challenges of the HNV system in Dealurile Clujului Est.

Key lessons

Florin Burzo (farmer) was impressed by the community processing unit in Saschiz (Tarnava Mare, Romania):

`Such a model of organization would solve many of the problems of capitalizing on the products in the rural area. It is possible to have such an authorized processing point in every commune in our country, certainly taking into account the specificity of the area and the products obtained locally. In my opinion, it would be a successful model to help the development of small farmers, as they would be able to add value to the products they obtain on their farms or even to those collected from the spontaneous flora.'

Life-long learning was also on display, with farmer Tibor Kiss commenting after visiting the Linbul Farm in Western Stara Planina Region, Bulgaria:

`First of all I liked the farmer as a person and what he is doing on the farm. I was impressed by the management of the farm, the cows and the way the farmer is managing them. I discussed with him the possibility in the future to come to the farm for a few weeks and learn how to manage it.'

During the cross-visit in the Burren in Ireland, Irina Muresan, manager of the Local Action Group Somes Transilvan in Cluj County, shared that::

`It was an excellent opportunity to participate to this event to see examples of good practice in sustainable agriculture and rural development. We will communicate to the local actors and farmers that their actions have a great impact on biodiversity and the environment. Moreover, we will also communicate the importance of cooperation between all stakeholders in the area.'

A natural question is what the future holds for HNV farming in Dealurile Clujului Est Natura 2000. It is probably too early to provide a firm answer, but we can assure that HNV-Link awakened the attention of stakeholders in the area, including farmers, local authorities and even consumers. Now is the moment to acknowledge that farmers need to be encouraged to use HNV innovations as a premise for the sustainability of their farming systems. This is the only way to overcome the mistake Romania is currently making of supporting intensive farming to the detriment of HNV farming systems. Unfortunately, this mistake was done by European Union founding members 30—40 years ago and, until recently, no lessons were learned to avoid its amplification.

The local research team intends to continue the collaboration with the stakeholders to provide consultancy and help develop sustainable and feasible local strategies for HNV farmers.

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Photo: Amanda Patton

Cross-visit in Burren, Ireland

Cross-visit in Western Stara Planina region, Bulgaria

Visiting the community processing unit on a cross-visit to Saschiz, Romania cross-visit

Land use plan

a tool for dialogue in Sweden

The amount of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland ín the Learning Area (LA) of Dalsland has, for a long time, been declining. What used to be species-rich grasslands has, to a large extent, become overgrown or planted with forest. (Figure 1).

A collective HNV-vision for Dalsland was produced during the HNV-Link project with the aim of stopping this negative trend and creating a more diverse and species-rich future for Dalsland.

There is a large gap between the vision and the current trend in land use. Some tools are needed to bridge this gap. Here, we describe one of the innovations from Dalsland which we find handy to use when a land owner is faced with decision-making on land management:

`How do I want to use my land in the short and long term perspectives? Which angles of approach are interesting for me when I make my decisions? Do I need partners to achieve my goals?´ These are complex questions but a good procedure exists to undertake finding solutions for them. In this article we would like to share what we believe has been a key to success in reintroducing and restoring HNV pastures in Dalsland, Sweden.

One of the primary ambitions in the projects already prior to HNV-Link in our Learning Area was to test new ways of collaborating for increasing the HNV farmland grazed in Dalsland. The approach was to achieve this through facilitation of practical, action-focused cooperation between for example: landowners, farmers, and authorities.

Land management involves several stakeholders

In many cases, landowners want to discuss all the land – arable, pastures and forest – on the farm with an advisor. Such conversations would often lead to an invitation for other stakeholders' participation in order to increase the possibilities of finding interesting solutions to land management. Examples of invited stakeholders variously include: an advisor from the forestry side, a neighbouring landowner or farmer, or perhaps someone engaged in a conservation association. In our projects, we call every such gathering of people connected to a place a group. In our projects, each place-focused group has had a unique constellation. Some groups have consisted of only a handful of people, of which at least one is a landowner. Most groups consisted of around ten people, but some have had up to fifty participants. In each group, one person has had the authority from the other participants to act as a leader of dialogue. This person has had the responsibility of structuring and catalysing the process. We have called this role the asset-person.

Finding the right scale

Common for all the groups has been to try and find the right scale suitable to solve their particular challenges. If the task is, for example, to explore whether it is feasible to reintroduce grazing around a lake, then it is natural for all the landowners around the lake who are interested to partake in the group. The next step would be for the group to invite more people concerned by the discussion or with competence to contribute to the solutions. Common for all groups is also that they try to discuss all types of perspectives with regards to land management – economic

Land use change in Dalsland, Sweden

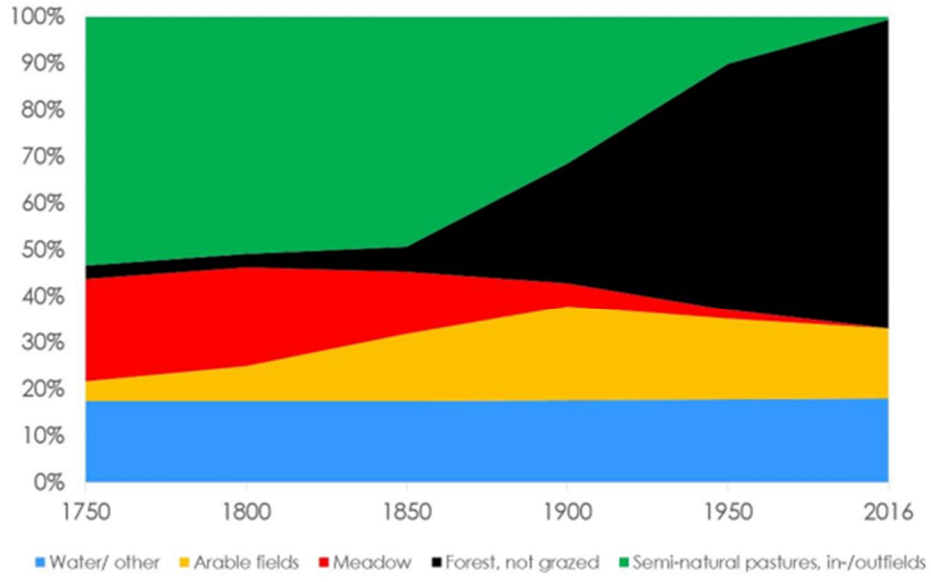
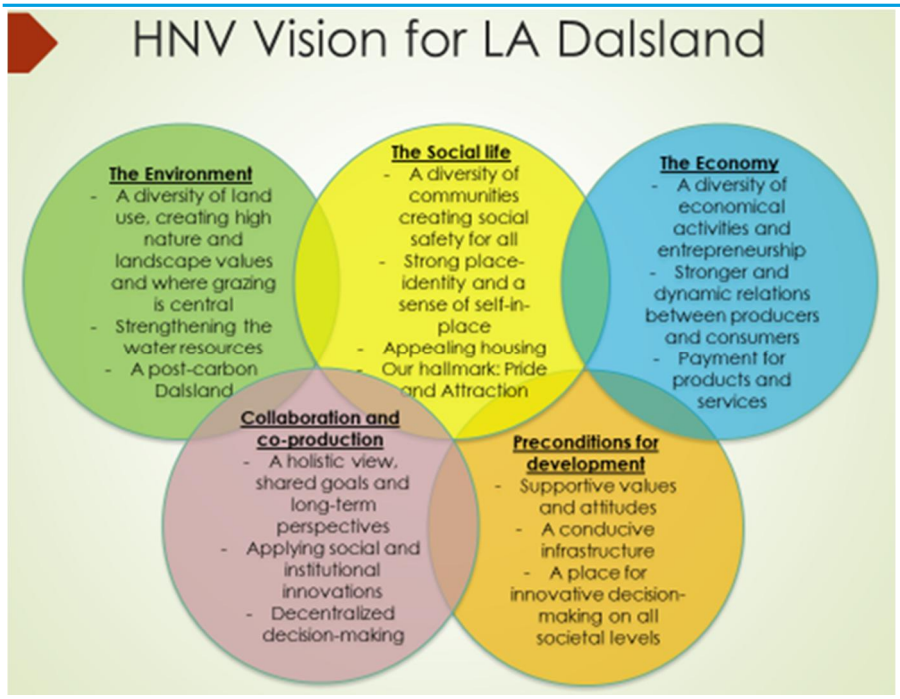


Figure 1. Change in land management over approximately 250 years.



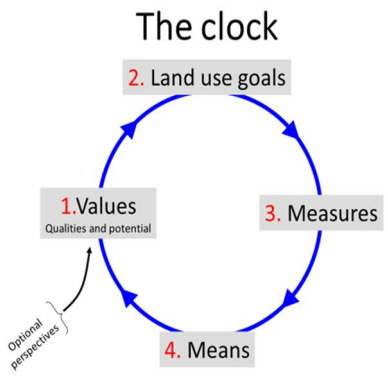
as well as social and environmental perspectives.

Visual results

The collaboration in the groups has led to a number of substantial results. One of the more visual ones is that 500 hectares of natural pastures have been restored and grazed. Another result is that several farmers have either started or expanded their cattle businesses. A third result, which the participants often highlight, is that unity and collaboration has increased during the work in the groups.

Four steps

After some time, we who worked as asset-persons in several groups noticed that conversation in the groups could differ a lot in terms of character between groups but, concurrently, there were always some similarities. To streamline the dialogue and avoid misunderstandings, we identified four concepts that we sensed to be crucial to the work of all groups. We also tried to find a sequence which would be useful for discussing the different concepts. We used a clock as a model (Figure 1) for the groups to visualize their process moving forward. We reassured group participants that their questions would be discussed but according to a certain efficient sequence.



Several laps around the clock

It usually takes groups several laps around the clock to go from when the participants have their first meeting to finding their common goal and deciding how to achieve it. Dialogue gets more detailed in each lap. By the end, the group usually has enough material to make decisions about measures.

1. Values: all perspectives that the participants in the group think need to be highlighted to understand each other and to build the foundation of finding common goals of land management.
2. Goals: all related to future land management.
3. Measures: which measures are required in the short and long term to reach the goals.
4. Means: which different types of support exist to reach the goals? This could relate to economic means handled by authorities or project financing from organisations or other means like education or advisory services.

The role of the Land Use Plan

A challenge in the work of the groups has been to record, in an efficient and simplified manner, the complexity of the issues discussed and what the group step-by-step is achieving. The solution to this challenge is a tool we call Land Use Plan. There is no long text document within this plan. All the questions and other material the group discusses are visualised in the shape of maps. We see the plan as the bone structure of the dialogue taking place in the groups. Together, the group builds on this structure and fills it with a unique content. Often, the result is a lively dialogue process with a lot of content and knowledge useful for achieving common goals.

What is next?

At the moment, we are working on developing further the Land Use Plan to make it even more efficient and easy to use for groups. It is going to be possible to have all the material completely digital and immediately accessible!

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The Dartmoor, UK

HNV farming in the age of Brexit

Dartmoor already had a national reputation for new ideas and for a farming community engaged in innovation when the case was made in 2015 for it included in HNV-Link project. And so, with the support by local farming groups and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. Dartmoor was the place selected as UK's Learning Area (LA) when the project launched in 2016.

The innovations in the LA selected for further investigation were often farmer-led and had arisen to address specific problems related to the management of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland. The experience that Dartmoor farmers have gained from over 30 years of participating in agri-climate-environment schemes, (AES) especially on common land, had encouraged dialogue and collective responsibility. However other very important contributing factors soon became apparent including providing a culture of trust to enable the farmers to contribute their skills and experience to the process of finding solutions, and the need for independent facilitation.

On the 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) held a referendum in which 52% of those who voted supporting withdrawing from the European Union (EU). The impact of this monumental decision on the UK's farming community, including farmers on Dartmoor, has been huge. In fact, over the last two and a half years concerns over the future of farming, especially in those areas rich in HNV farmland, have dominated conversations and thinking amongst the farming community.

Many of the innovations originally identified for inclusion in HNV-Link came to the fore and some were suddenly thrust into the limelight as the Government and its agencies struggled to provide clarity on what might replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the future. Some of this attention was fleeting and left the farmers confused over the future of their ideas and efforts. Worse was the significant loss of skilled and experienced staff from the agencies into what appears to be a bottomless pit of Brexit preparation work.

Most, if not all, the innovations require the participation of both farmers and agency staff if they are not only to succeed but to be seen to succeed. Many innovations are in a trial phase, steered by a partnership providing the essential assessment and monitoring. Today in practice if seems as if only the farming half of those partnerships remain – the farmers are left feeling abandoned at a time of crisis.

Against this background of confusion and concern, the innovations selected for the HNV-Link project have kept relevant – they have proved both robust and surprisingly timeless. Even in a climate seemingly hostile to innovative learning those innovations and ideas emerging from the other LAs will be even more important to farmers of HNV farmland if they are to continue to manage important habitats and other `public benefits' which is the mantra of those designing the measures which may (or may not!) support farmers in the future.

Russell Ashford demonstrating how to age a sheep after gathering the sheep from the commons.

Learning within Dartmoor's Learning Area

Farmers from within the Dartmoor Learning Area have used the opportunities created by the internal cross-visits to find out more about selected innovations. Visits to Ireland (the Burren) and Sweden (Dalsland) and to a forage innovator elsewhere in England proved to be both useful and thought provoking, providing the opportunity to discuss how innovation is encouraged in addition to specific innovations. Considering the situation in which the UK farmers find themselves, it is not surprising that the visiting farmers' interest often focused on the various support mechanisms and payment for delivering public benefits including HNV farmland.

The other theme that emerged was the pressing issue of promoting farming to the public and raising the profile of farming so essential to influence politicians who are usually focused on urban issues. Already one farmer has organised a successful event based on the Burren Winterage School; an event designed to inform the local non-farming community on the essential role of farming in the enhancement of the moorland by extensive grazing. The network of sites that demonstrate agricultural innovations especially for HNV areas is in place and knowledge transfer between these Learning Areas has already secured real benefits.

As well as showcasing its innovations in events outwith the area, Dartmoor has also hosted visits from farmers from Ireland (both from the Burren Learning Area and elsewhere) and from Wales to learn about the area's innovations, particularly:

- Dartmoor Farming Futures – a farmer designed outcome focused agri-environment scheme currently under trials,
- Meat marketing initiatives,
- The Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) Control Plans provided for the areas of common land,
- Fire Plans that enable farmers to work alongside professional fire fighters to tackle moorland fires,
- The Dartmoor Vision – capturing what all the statutory agencies want Dartmoor's moorland to look like in 25 years' time.

A strong message from the Dartmoor farmers is that the information exchange has not been only one way during these visits; the host farmers have really valued and benefitted from the various discussions. Indeed, they themselves have in the past imported ideas from as far afield as Switzerland; the first visit in 2005 led to the formation of Dartmoor Farmers' Association providing a strong voice for farmers on the newly formed Dartmoor Partnership - a tourism partnership and to the development of the very innovations they were explaining to the visitors.

Barriers to delivery

The long history of participation in AES within the LA is clearly linked to the evolution of some of the selected innovations. It was often the perception by the farmer that the AES agreement was flawed that created the impetus to find a better way of doing something.

Over the last 30 years, it has been the policy of successive governments to use AES agreements to attempt to secure better environmental condition for nationally and internationally-designated sites and for HNV farmland in the `wider countryside'. Take-up of AES on Dartmoor has been spectacular in the past with almost 90% of the eligible land under agreement (in 2005, during a previous programme), but today only about 30% of Dartmoor is in an agreement and this figure is falling; the latest AES is largely unfit for purpose for those farming in the hills.

This situation has been made worse by the loss of skilled and experienced advisory staff. The important role of advisers who are easily accessible by the farmers to guide, explain and support was very apparent during the visits to Sweden and Ireland. Unfortunately the important, if not essential, role of advisers appears not to be appreciated by government in the UK and fails to be recognised as a crucial component in the plans for the future.

In the early stages of all the selected innovations the focus was on how to empower the farming community to encourage them to suggest solutions and to develop ideas which would benefit the wider environment. Today ironically it is the loss of advisers and agency staff with the knowledge and confidence to understand the potential of an offer that appears to be stifling new innovation and the development of existing ones. This is particularly damaging when innovation is rejected or worse ignored by other players necessary for the innovation to flourish often demonstrating that it is their lack of ownership of the initiative that prohibits their engagement.

These uncertain times appear not to encourage or empower non-farming professionals to be open to new ideas or to recognise potential innovations; lost is the willingness to accept that the practitioners, the farmers, may well have a solution. Sadly that is just what is needed.

On Dartmoor, the original objective of the HNV-Link project, which was to tackle the complex issue of innovation in HNV farming, remains a challenge, but one well worth pursuing. Our review of some key innovations on Dartmoor suggests those farmers motivated and trusted to propose solutions are much more likely to successfully deliver environmental outcomes.

John Waldon
Chairman of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council, the UK
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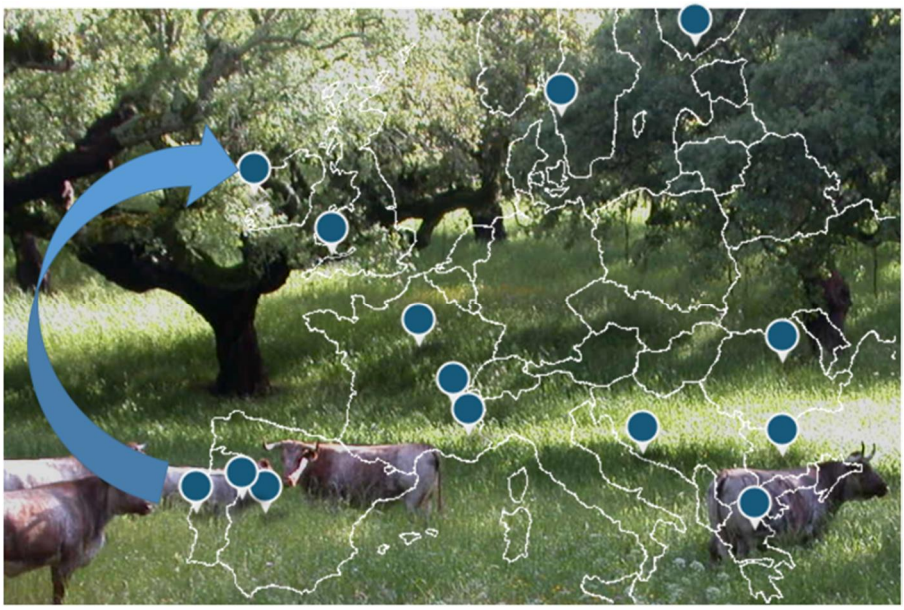
Knut Per Hasund of Swedish Board of Agriculture, notes there are similarities between value-based agri-environment payments currently being trialled in Sweden and Dartmoor's Farming Future trial.

The Montado case study

Co-construction of locally-led innovative solutions

The interactive relationship between society and science is one of the critical challenges of the modern construction of science. Two premises can be found in research aiming to be socially meaningful. The first premise is the involvement of enlarged peer communities for the co-construction of knowledge in order to enrich scientific research. The second premise is the acknowledgment of the central role of forms of human knowledge other than the scientific form, including that such inclusion may empower otherwise marginalized social groups. The discussion about these relationships is not new in the agricultural sector, especially with regard to knowledge transfer, which has historically been framed as `extension'. In recent years, the concept of learning and innovation networks for sustainable agriculture has emerged, and research and extension services have been experimenting with new methods and practices related to facilitation and brokerage within networks. The story we are about to tell is based on these premises and develops around the growing involvement of a multi-stakeholder network, as well as the adoption of participatory approaches where researchers embrace the roles of learning-innovation-change facilitators and knowledge brokers.



The agro-silvo-pastoral system Montado

The Montado is the dominant land use system in the Alentejo region, Southern Portugal, and is quite similar to the Dehesa in the Southwest of Spain. It is an agro-silvopastoral extensive production system with a variety of products and high levels of associated biodiversity. It is considered a High Nature Value (HNV) farming system. The open tree cover, mostly composed of *Quercus rotundifolia* and *Q. suber* in changing densities, provides forest products such as cork, acorns, and wood for charcoal. The trees provide shelter for the livestock grazing in the undercover both in summer and winter. The pasture undercover is composed of species-rich native or cultivated grasslands, combined with shrubs in varied densities. It is a highly multifunctional system providing multiple benefits to society. However, the decline of the Montado due to loss of tree density and a more or less extensive absence of tree regeneration, is now an unavoidable reality recognized by all actors actively involved with it – producers, researchers, public administration, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and users.

Agri-climate-environment schemes (AES) are one of the key practical tools to mitigate and reverse the growing loss of biodiversity and structural diversity of European farming systems. AES can bolster the conservation of complex systems such as the Montado and can directly support adaptive management for these systems. The AES currently available for the Montado are management-based in that they support management practices prescribed to the producers and which are expected to result in positive impact on the environmental status of the Montados. Alternatively or additionally to such AES, the European Commission advocates using of results-based approach. There is a paradigm shift in it: payments are given if a defined environmental result is achieved regardless of the undertaken management. Therefore, the producer has the freedom to decide on the management that he/she considers most appropriate to achieve the defined result. Further, this new results-based model is based on a close interaction with extension services for defining the management strategies for achieving specified environmental results. Nonetheless, the producer is the final decision maker.

Inspiring cross-visit to the Burren

In June 2018, a 20-strong group of farmers, researchers and public administrators, assembled through previously existing initiatives from ICAAM/ University of Évora[1], visited the Burren area in Ireland. The objective was to gain knowledge on the experiences of local co-construction of results-based AES through a multi-actor approach, and to discuss possible problems and applied solutions transferable to the Montado. The expectations were to learn about the actors and institutions involved and to see *in-loco* the implementation experience of a results-based approach supporting sustainable agriculture.

In the Burren, rural entrepreneurship builds on the unique characteristics of the local landscape, which is internationally recognized for the richness and diversity of its heritage and flora. In this context, the producer plays the role of guardian of the existing natural and cultural values while maintaining an economically viable business model. The visit to the Burren was carried out under the Horizon2020 HNV-Link project in collaboration with a regional project – ProAgriFor, funded by Alentejo

2020. HNV-Link is dedicated to the development and sharing of innovative strategies and practices to support HNV farmland systems, while ProAgriFor aimed to promote stakeholder involvement in the agroforestry sector. During the visit to the Burren, the Portuguese group had the opportunity to witness the joint production and conservation practices carried out in effective partnerships among farmers, scientists and public administration. The Burren has shown that the threats posed by ecosystem degradation caused by land abandonment or by intensification of agriculture can be overcome using agri-environmental approaches based on farmer-centred processes. The Montado has similar challenges and, therefore, the potential transferability of the Burren experience is enormous.

The take home message outlined by the Portuguese visiting group was two-fold:

- The environmental services expected from agriculture can be produced when the farmer has room for adaptive management backed by flexible policy tools.
- A continuous partnership among the different actors involved in designing, implementing and evaluating results-based AES is critical for the success of the programme.

At the end of the three-day visit, the group reviewed the experience and drew up an outline of the action plan for the construction of a AES with mixed results- and management-based elements for the Montado, aiming at the implementation of a pilot experience in the Montado.

Riparian gallery.

Multi-actor approach

After the visit to the Burren, we pursued a multi-actor approach, already a routine in the research we develop, with the objective of defining the measurable environmental results for the Montado programme and the possible indicators to be used to assess those results. According to our definition, identified environmental results would only be eligible if (i) they respond to agricultural management practices, (ii) they are a conservation priority at regional or national level, and (iii) there is sufficient previous scientific knowledge to support the selection of indicators for their assessment.

In order to facilitate the organization of the work, we established different groups dedicated to specific components of the Montado ecosystem (soil, pasture, trees, biodiversity and water). Each group identified the intended environmental results, management practices affecting those results, and possible indicators to assess the environmental results. This progress was achieved in 4 months through the group meetings and, when deemed necessary, with experts in the different subject areas involved in the programme.

The main environmental results we identified through this process are: (i) maintenance or improvement of a healthy and functional soil; (ii) conservation of biodiverse Mediterranean pastures; (iii) promotion of the long-term viability of the Montado through oak tree regeneration; (iv) conservation of temporary Mediterranean ponds; (v) conservation of water courses with riparian galleries (that is, buffer zones with trees).

In the meantime, we launched contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, in particularly with the Department responsible for policy design and monitoring. Researchers and farmers together presented the draft programme for the Montado and discussed its technical details with the technical team in the Ministry. Because results-based mechanisms to compensate farmers who deliver environmental benefits are likely to become commoner in Member States post 2020, the proposed programme addresses public policy needs. After finalising the indicator list, we hope that the proposed programme will be tested as a pilot in a local Natura 2000 site Montado area, and that ultimately the approach will become part of the Portuguese Rural Development Programme (RDP).

Our next steps in this collaborative process will be devoted to the harmonization of the objectives for the different environmental results, refinement and quantification of indicators in order to build a scoring system and, later on, establishment of the payment levels. We will continue to work through a multi-actor approach with a close collaboration among producers, researchers and public administration with the aim of achieving an implementation phase on the ground in the form of a pilot programme capable of delivering the desired environmental results.

Role of HNV-Link

Interactive innovation has good conditions to emerge when different and complementary knowledge, perspectives and skills are combined in a process where all involved feel empowered. The multi-actor process we have presented here reflects one of such situations – researchers took the lead as initiators of the process, and continue coordinating, but the results-based programme for the Montado has, step-by-step, been appropriated also by farmers and the staff from the central and regional administration. The platform facilitated by the Horizon2020 projects established the frame for this to happen. In this case, there was a fortunate combination of HNV-Link with the ongoing initiative of a bi-monthly regular discussion meeting of Montado stakeholders, facilitated by a researcher in ICAAM, and an already long history of science-practice interface within the Montado in Alentejo. Competitive research funding is a supporting mechanism, but long term investment outside of these projects is a pre-condition for the co-construction to take place, especially concerning the management of such a complex system as the Montado.

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[1]European funded projects such as Farmpath (FP7) and HNV-Link (H2020), Regional

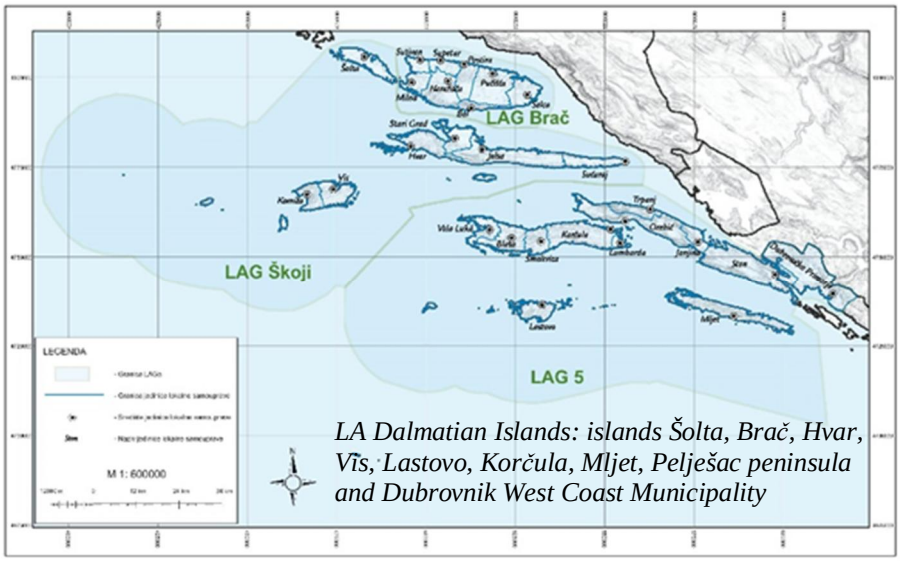
Dalmatian islands as HNV farming landscapes

A network to foster mosaic landscape preservation

Learning area of Dalmatian islands are considered a touristic ''hot spot'' due to its mild Mediterranean climate, crystal clear sea, remarkable landscapes and the rich natural and cultural patrimony (Lerin, 2018). It is the main characterization of these seven islands and one peninsula situated in the central and south Dalmatia in the Split-Dalmatia and Dubrovnik-Neretva region.

However, it is precisely due to tourism development, and tourism being a main economic activity that sustainable development and farming activities in this area are in constant decline. In this area, HNV farmland landscape provides setting for tourism that the islanders seek to use to support their small-scale HNV farms by producing added value agricultural projects for the niche market, for tourists visiting the islands in the search for ''authenticity'' and a ''unique experience''.

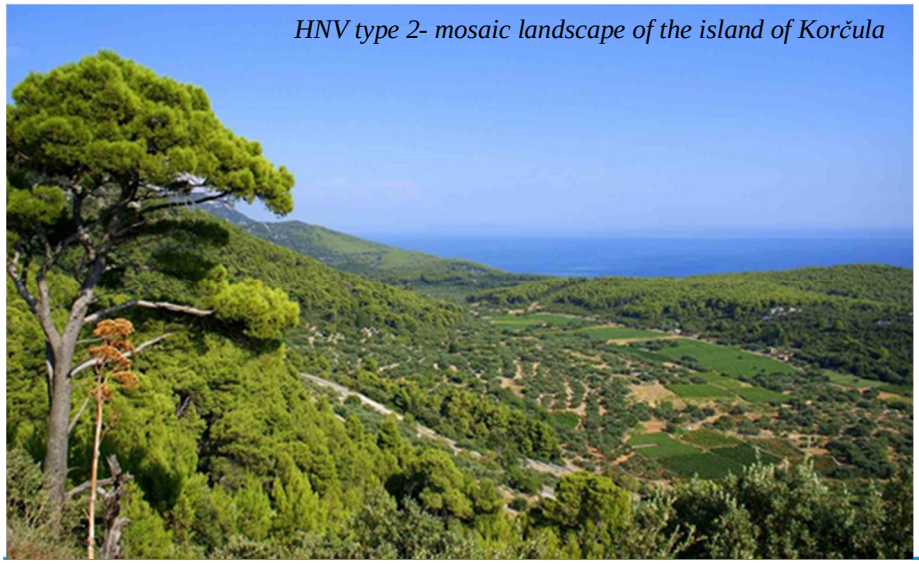
It is through the HNV-Link project that islanders covering the territory of three Local Action Groups: LAG 5, LAG Brač and LAG Škoji have come together with the aim to foster a multiscale and multi-actor network that will act as an active innovation broker able to sustain long-term territorial dynamics of HNV innovation in the islands. By building a socio-economic and environmental baseline through a participative process we have defined further HNV actions at local scale of an island, but also on the overall Learning Area (LA) in order to foster the preservation of the specific HNV territory of Dalmatian islands, mosaic landscape.



LA Dalmatian Islands: islands Šolta, Brač, Hvar, Vis, Lastovo, Korčula, Mljet, Pelješac peninsula and Dubrovnik West Coast Municipality

The High Nature Value of Dalmatian islands

Dalmatian islands represent a unique landscape that has been man shaped over the last 2000 years in long historical sequence of intensive and extensive agricultural practices. Shaped by constant island depopulation, land abandonment and a shift from farming to tourism activity agricultural land today covers only 6% of the overall land surface (186 000 ha in total) (Abdessater et al., 2017). Most of the surface is used for olive groves (53%), vineyards (21%), and karst pastures (15%) with marginal groves of almonds, figs, carob trees, medicinal and aromatic plants (Lerin, 2018). HNV farming in the islands is characterized by a mosaic landscape with a network of dry stone walls that produce agri-environmental, economic and safety benefits (fire prevention and improved water collection for fields) (Poux, Bernard, & Lerin, 2017).



HNV type 2- mosaic landscape of the island of Korčula

Multiscale and multi-actor approach to ensure implementation of the HNV vision

Baseline assessment of the LA was done based on a territorial approach that considers historical and socioeconomic components, environment issues and farming systems. This approach is not directly focusing on HNV types and practices but rather on the socio-economic and environmental component of and HNV territory as a whole (Plieninger & Bieling, 2013). It is starting from this approach in the framing phase of the project that LAG 5 as a coordinator has started forming a multi-actor islander network including actors from other scales that are able to contribute to the implementation of the HNV vision. In the shaping phase and thorough ought the using phase of the project activities have been steered towards developing a set of locally focused territorial projects that will kick start implementation of the vision. New projects that contribute to the HNV vision in LA

from other scales that are able to contribute to the implementation of the HNV vision. In the shaping phase and thorough ought the using phase of the project activities have been steered towards developing a set of locally focused territorial projects that will kick start implementation of the vision. New projects that contribute to the HNV vision in LA Dalmatian islands have already started. Rural 3.0, an Erasmus + Knowledge Alliances project that aims to improve the quality of education for a sustainable development and promote university-community partnerships in the rural areas through the innovative service-learning methodology started in January 2019. Projects that will engage valorising HNV landscape through a series of island roads, a LEADER cooperation project ''DalmaTIMski otoci'', is in its final shaping phase. In the programme of islander LAGs for 2019 are meeting with HNV farmers to kick start dialogue around the development of producers associations in the islands. Using the methodology of the french SMILO organization island committee of Lastovo has been set up and has started with its first activities in the sphere of HNV landscape valorisation. Long term Advocacy of the NGO Dragodid has bear fruit and dry stone walls as a key feature of the HNV mosaic landscape of the islands has been declared as UNESCO patrimony.

LAG 5 as a national coordinator has acted as an institutional entrepreneur who has framed the learning area as a hybrid space where different actors come together to create collective conditions that will induce change in the environment in which they operate. It will allow them to implement their vision in a way that will foster preservation of the HNV farmland territories in the face of tourist pressure that is becoming ever more prevalent.

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HNV innovation seminar: building HNV vision for the islands

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Fostering High Nature Value farming

Steps forward

HNV farms are multi-functional and must be supported according to their ecological, social and economic benefits.

HNV farms deserve to receive a stronger support as without HNV farming, biodiversity and semi-natural ecosystems cannot be preserved across sufficiently large scales, and EU Biodiversity Strategy goals cannot be reached.

HNV farmers apply low quantities of inputs, a prerequisite for biodiversity conservation and self-sufficiency. They take advantage of spaces and resources unused by more intensive systems and are therefore more resource-efficient. By their practices, they also slow down scrub encroachment onto open cultural landscapes. Thus, grazing land with shrubs or trees that are grazed directly or fed to livestock, should be considered eligible for CAP payments and other forms of support.

HNV farms, since they operate often in constraining and less productive areas, are usually less competitive and more fragile than more intensive farms. This "fragility" must be compensated if their contribution to biodiversity conservation, landscape maintenance, food quality, sustainability and society's welfare is to be recognised.

Suitable innovations they must be adopted more widely, considering national, regional and local contexts.

Farmers and NGOs undertake innovative activities to maintain HNV farming at varying scales, and some governments apply innovative approaches to supporting HNV farming. There is an urgent need to spread such approaches more widely across HNV farming areas.

EIP Operational Groups and locally-led projects can help kick-starting innovative processes. Successful initiatives exist in different parts of Europe and can serve to inspire new ones.

Institutional and regulatory barriers can prevent support from reaching HNV farming, whilst also blocking innovation on the ground from farmers and other actors in civil society. Consequently, social/institutional and regulatory/policy innovation must be encouraged at all scales.

Addressing HNV farming challenges through innovation is not merely a question of individual initiatives. Different types of innovation feed-off each other, creating synergies. In the most successful cases there is a long-term, multi-actor "HNV innovation process" involving a bundle of innovations in different themes (Fig. p 21). Nonetheless, driving and sustaining an effective HNV innovation process is challenging. Actors should agree on a shared vision of what the territory could look like in the future, and commit towards common goals. Then, active brokers with suitable skills must catalyse innovation processes and projects, working locally with HNV farmers to build trust and commitment. This in turn requires a continuity of institutional cooperation and support, with a continuity of personnel over the years.

Supporting HNV farmers' empowerment, organisation, and co-operation with other stakeholders is key.

Overall, HNV farmers' interests are poorly represented, both by mainstream farming unions (for whom profitability and competitiveness are priorities) and by some conservationists (whose interests may be purely environment-oriented). Supporting the empowerment, organisation and cooperation of HNV farmers is thus critical to advocate for change.

Multi-actor networks such as HNV-Link have a key role to play in boosting innovation & driving policy change, by fostering knowledge exchange, co-innovation and by bridging the gap between research and practice.

Thoughtful policies and regulations, in the agriculture, environment, food and rural development sectors, can strongly benefit HNV farming.

HNV farming has been a priority for EU rural development policy since 2005 and lots of work has been done and public money spent to support and monitor HNV farming since then. But the European Commission has dropped HNV farming from its proposals for the new CAP. This is a blow that needs to be reversed. The new CAP Regulations should make explicit reference to the need to prioritise HNV farming systems, emphasising their importance for biodiversity and ecosystems. HNV farming systems should be included in the objective on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Member States' CAP Strategic Plans should include an analysis of the state of HNV farming systems in their territories, a description of the main practices that characterise them and identification of the associated natural values, challenges faced by the systems and opportunities for their development, and concrete objectives for their maintenance.

The HNV farming context and impact indicators that have been developed and implemented so far by Member States in their Rural Development Programmes should not be abandoned, but improved and complemented by additional indicators (e.g., farming viability or incomes).

There is also scope to adjust national/regional implementation of food hygiene regulations to suit better local/artisan food production and processing, to help generate a greater added-value for HNV farm products, and enhance the viability of HNV systems.

As HNV farms are exposed to animal disease control measures (e.g. tuberculosis) and predators (e.g. wolf), which can seriously affect their viability, adapting animal health regulations and control planning to the realities of extensive grazing systems and offering greater support to alleviate predator conflicts is essential.

Overall, a long-term innovation process is needed to gradually build a consensus and political commitment around the need to sustain HNV farming systems across Europe, and to drive action in the field.

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High Nature Value farming: Learning, Innovation and Knowledge

Project in a nutshell

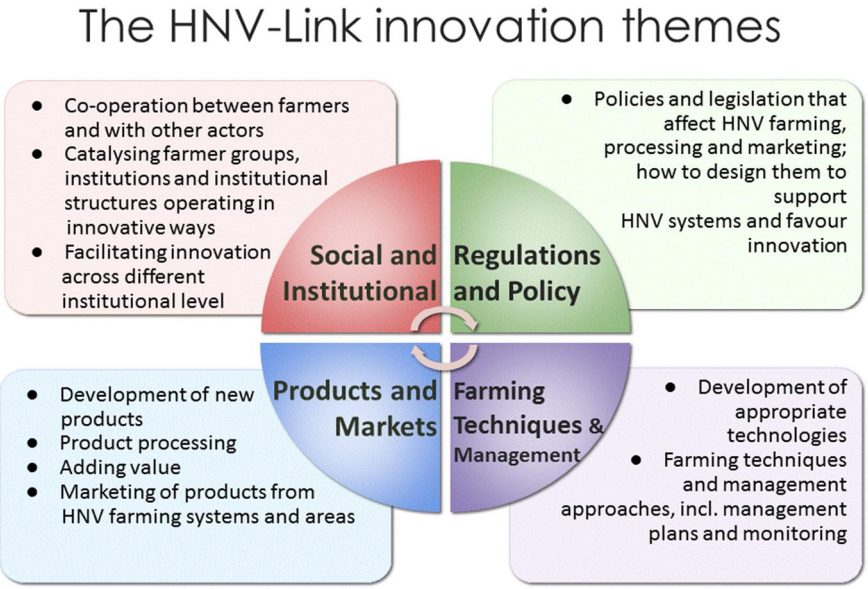
Groundwork: Baseline Assessment and literature review

Through a collaborative process with local and regional stakeholders, each HNV-Link Learning Area (LA) team produced a Baseline Assessment describing their area's characteristics in terms of ecology, farming systems, and institutional framework. They compared the `business as usual' scenario of the LA to a desirable `HNV vision'. The process identified issues and developed networks for working on solutions.

Having reviewed literature on innovations supporting socio-economic viability of HNV farms and communities, the team discovered more `wishful thinking' than practical experience, indicating a real need for innovation and innovation dissemination.

Identifying innovations

`HNV innovation' is defined in the project as a change in the social, institutional, regulatory, market or farming approach that raises the ability to conserve HNV farming and its characteristics. The project worked along the four themes of innovation developed by EIP-AGRI's Focus Group on HNV Farming Profitability (see Figure). These helped each LA understand and communicate the innovations they found in their areas and illustrate the relative balance of innovations for each case. Many innovations contribute to multiple themes.



HNV-Link identified 63 innovation examples of relevance in the LAs and another 80 examples from elsewhere. Of these, 43 are compiled into the Innovation Compendium.

Peer learning and support process

The project promoted peer learning and networking through the LAs, which used their expertise in participatory approaches to create and strengthen local and regional engagement. The key stakeholders are farmers, advisors, professional associations and consumer groups, NGOs, local authorities, education and research institutes.

Cross-visits among the LAs are instrumental in innovation transfer to new regions. The project compiled a Methodological note on conducting successful study visits.

HNV-Link's outputs are designed not only to serve the individual LAs but also to reach to any stakeholder in any area outside the project. The project also contributes to teaching of a new generation of professionals at the vocational and university educational levels on diverse issues of HNV farming.

www.hnvlink.eu

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policymakers.

This non-profit-making network exists to increase understanding of the high nature-conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems and to inform work on their maintenance.

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