



Learning and Innovation Networks for sustainable agriculture - LINSA

Adrian Muller

**Séminaire « Agriculture Biologique, aujourd'hui et demain »
3-5 décembre 2014**

INRA, Biovallée, FiBL



SOLINSA
Support of Learning and Innovation
Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition:
Towards a more effective and efficient support of Learning
and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

solinsa.net

1 project

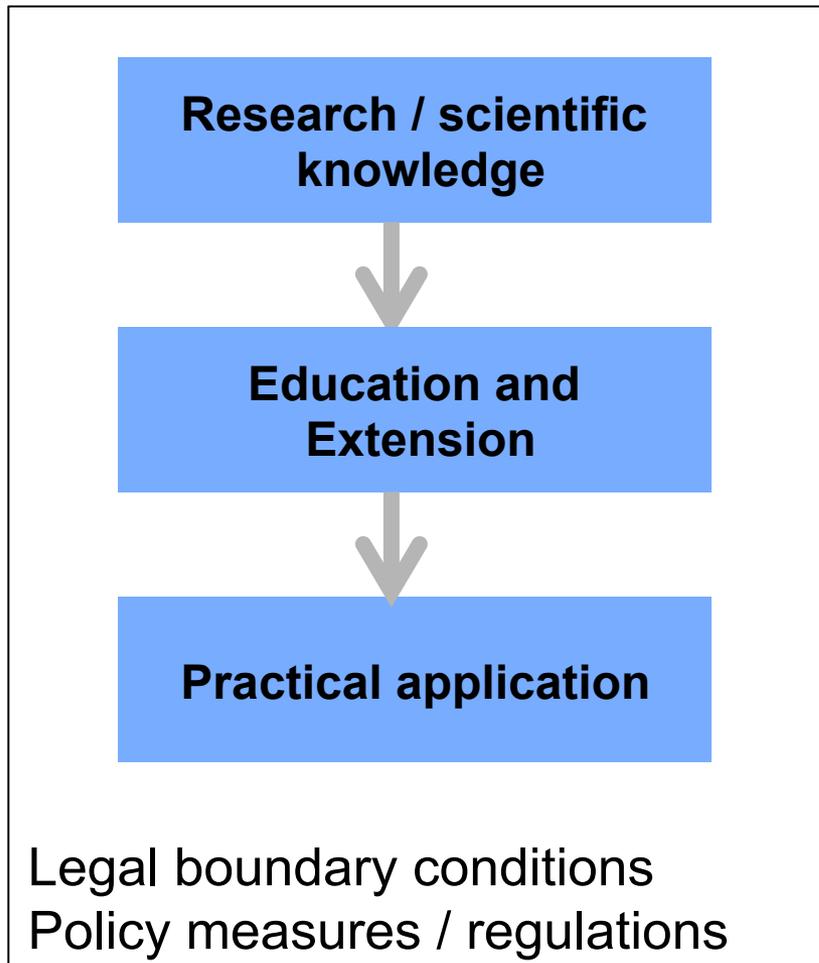
The SOLINSA Project: Support of Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

Heidrun Moschitz (PI)

solinsa.net

Background

› Current learning and extension systems



Current role model

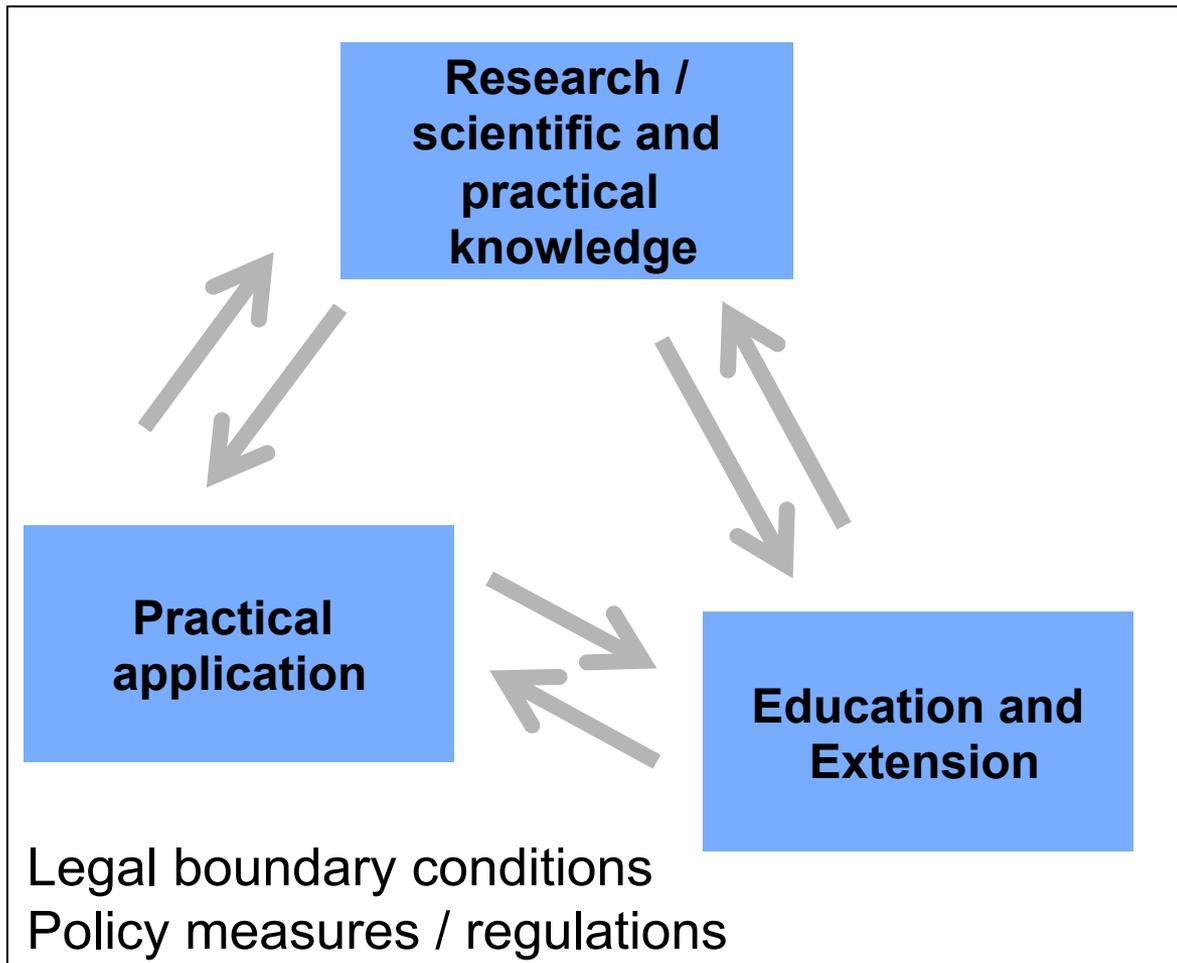
- > Increasing production: “productivity paradigm”
- > Results in a linear knowledge transfer

Background

- **New challenges for agriculture: sustainability of rural regions; changes in direct payment systems; AP 2014-17**
- **“Sustainable development” as a complex problem**
 - Innovation processes have multiple goals
 - Exchange between farmers and other stakeholders in rural areas is needed
 - It is a challenge for research and extension to identify the changed needs and to meet changed requirements

Background

› Future knowledge generation and transfer



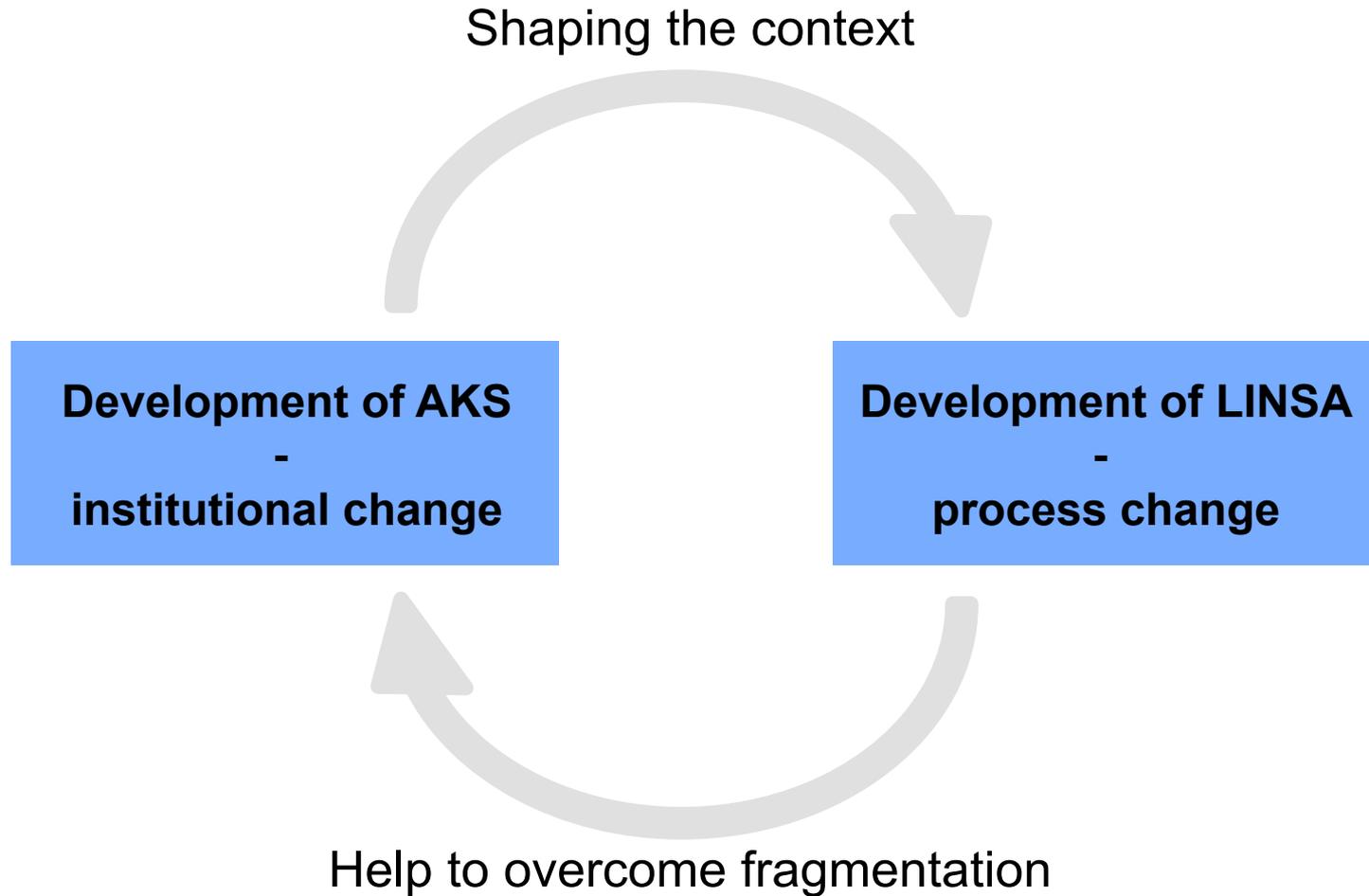
New role model

- > Scientific and practical knowledge are of equal importance
- > From information transfer to knowledge management
- > From agricultural production to “rural business”

Structural analysis of AKS and their potential effects on collaboration and social learning (Hermans et al. 2015 forthcoming)

	EN	FR	DE	HU	IT	LT	NL	CH	Potential effects on collaboration and social learning
Infrastructure, investments and funding									
few funds	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	More competition and more insecurity are not conducive for collaboration, sharing of resources and learning.
Legislation, rules and regulations									
Bureaucracy		X	X	X			X	X	Collaboration for collective goods are difficult to set up; Continuity/ stability of collaborative networks is threatened; long term effects are not invested in
Inconsistency		X	X	X	X		X	X	Learning experiences not fully incorporated
Norms, values and culture									
Decreasing trust	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	First steps towards collaboration is difficult
Internal competition	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	Can be a strong motivator: 'us against them', but can also easily lead to wasted time, energy and resources on political struggles
Interactions and networks									
Lack of coordination	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		Overview is missing of who does what; potential collaborations are difficult to establish if organisation are not aware of each other.
Capabilities									
Education and specific information skills are often missing (confusion of knowledge consumers)	X			X		X	X	X	Difficulty in formulating knowledge questions and information needs hampers learning.
Few science-farmer interactions	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	Individual goals and incentives of people with a different affiliations can be difficult to overcome
Market structure									
Lack of demand of information services			X	X			X		Dependence on embedded advice in commercial agro-industrial products discourages participation in innovative projects that might threaten these old products
Increasing competition between knowledge providers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Too many competing advisory service providers can create confusion, add to the bureaucratic burden and do not streamline the collaborative process anymore

What may help to improve this situation? – LINSAs!



Background

- **LINSA: Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture**
- **Networks** of producers, consumers, experts, NGOs, SMEs, local administrations as well as official researchers and extension workers, that are engaged in sustainable agriculture and rural development - **cooperating, sharing resources and co-producing new knowledge by creating conditions for communication.**
- **Process oriented:** individuals, organisations, institutions **learn together** and **co-produce knowledge** that is transformed in innovations

Background

› Six Features of a LINSAs

- › dynamic **balance of diversity and commonality**
- › **shared goal** of innovation
- › **mutual engagement** (participation, commitment(although not all actors participate to equal extent))
- › minimum level of **governance and organization** of network
- › **reflexivity**: network participants have to steward learning activities, reassess innovation objectives and evaluate sustainability performance
- › innovation and sustainability are to be connected and **embodied in LINSAs activities and practices** of their members

Research questions



➤ **There are many LINSAS around - and we want to know**

- how did they develop? How do they function?
- how do they learn and produce innovations?
- how can such groups and networks be supported?



Methods

- › **Close collaboration between science and practice: crossing boundaries**
- › **Experimentation of new methodologies and approaches**
- › **17 case studies**



Results: general opportunities and constraints

› Opportunities of the Linsa

- › Good volunteer spirit
- › Good relationships with the state, the public, the established institutions of the agricultural knowledge system

› Constraints

- › Limited financial resources
- › Not so strong in management and governance

› «Social learning», i.e. learning as a group is important

Shaping the context

Development of AKS
-
institutional change

Development of LINSAs
-
process change

Help to overcome fragmentation



Results: Challenges

- **Challenge 1: How can AKS support learning and innovation in LINSAs?**
 - Fragmentation of AKS, different interests, short-term goals do not fit LINSAs requirements
- **Challenge 2: How can AKS support LINSAs as drivers for bottom up innovations?**
 - The AKS can learn from successful LINSAs and embody achievements into their routines
- **Challenge 3: What are the specificities of research to support LINSAs?**
 - Research can open up a space for self-reflection and foster stepping out of daily routines. The form of this space and how this space is used is a matter of continuous negotiation

Recommendations: Summary

- › **LINSA should be included in teaching at agricultural colleges**
- › **Participatory research requires particular skills of researchers**
 - › Need to be learned and practiced
 - › Research policy can enhance such approaches
- › **Supporting social learning in LINSA**
 - › incorporate a strong focus on process, thus going beyond technical/content support
- › **Supporting LINSA to foster institutional innovation**
 - › Manage the link between LINSA and AKS to profit from LINSA as drivers for institutional change



Recommendations

- › **Education and Training**
- › **Advisory services**
- › **Research**
- › **Policy**

Recommendations: **Education and Training**

- **LINSA should be included in teaching at agricultural colleges**
- **Acknowledge that traditional teacher-led training will not always be appropriate**
- **Soft skills need to be trained to provide actors engaged with LINSA with the necessary competences.**

Rec. (cont.): **Advisory services and Extension**

- **Acknowledge diverse knowledge needs of learning and innovation networks**
- **Create opportunities for fostering knowledge co-creation**
- **Interactive, participatory, needs-based approaches that respect the ethos of LINSAs**

Recommendations (cont.): **Research**

- **Participatory research can assist LINSA in developing their potential**
 - include a phase of carefully approaching the networks before effectively working with them

- **Participatory research requires particular skills of researchers**
 - Need to be learned and practiced
 - Research policy can enhance such approaches

Recommendations (cont.): **Policy**

› **Supporting social learning in LINSAs**

- › incorporate a strong focus on process, thus going beyond technical/content support

› **Supporting LINSAs to foster institutional innovation**

- › Manage the link between LINSAs and AKS to profit from LINSAs as drivers for institutional change

› **Encourage and support participatory research approaches**

Rec. (cont.): **Changing perspectives...**

- **We need changing the attitude and the self-perception of researchers, advisors, farmers, policy makers...**
- **New concept: transition partners (in the AKS)**
 - support social learning and the related group dynamic processes through a methodological approach
 - can fulfil different roles and functions: facilitators, participatory researchers, boundary persons, experts, intermediary persons, or innovation broker as referred to by the EIP

