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SPECIFIC SUPPORT ACTION

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D 6 – “*Methodological lessons learnt from the whole project*” by Gerald Assouline

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Introduction

The ambition of this document is to put in perspective goals, methodology and results which have been committed by So Far research team and developed during the So Far project. The core methodology which has been implemented is induced by the platform concept, conceived as a space of deliberation to be created at national or regional and European levels.

So the project team organised two national or regional platforms and two European platforms, from spring 2007 to summer 2008.

To analyse this methodological process, we present three parts:

- So Far project initial intentions, as they were stated in the technical annex,
- The methodology development, as it has been concretely implemented,
- Some methodological lessons learnt, resulting from the observation of the platforms dynamics and results.

In appendix, we propose a presentation of the content and balance of the two national or regional platforms and the two European ones.

1. So Far project initial intentions

11. Recalling the technical annex: The work package description

Objectives

- To produce progressive acquaintance, comparison and interaction among participants, finally bringing them to produce shared position papers, at country/regional as well as European levels, which will contain strategic proposals for innovation ('innovation strategies')

Description of work

- Defining a common framework;
- Managing and supervising country/regional platforms (one per country) gathering researchers, representatives of public bodies, and rural players of the region (animating meetings and electronic exchange/debate) (months 8-16);
- Facilitating the participatory designing of country/regional innovation strategies, within these platforms;
- Managing and supervising a European platform gathering representatives of public bodies, and rural players of the participating regions (animating meetings and electronic exchange/debate) (months 16-24);
- Facilitating the participatory designing of a European innovation strategy;
- Drawing methodological lessons' learnt.

Deliverables

Producing:

- Country/regional innovation strategies (D4, month 16);
- 'European innovation strategy' (D5, month 24)
- Methodological lessons learnt (D6, month 24);
- Monothematic papers: D12, D13, D14, D15 (months 24)

Milestones and expected result

- *Milestone 2*: designing of country/regional position papers (innovation strategies) (month 16);
- *Milestone 3*: designing of a European innovation strategy (month 24)

12. A qualitative presentation in So Far Technical Annex ¹

Platforms at regional scale will be set up by each partner.

¹ So Far Technical Annex, 14.11.2005, p. 15

Country teams (part of coordination committee/expert group) will be directly responsible for their creation and management. Particularly, they will take care to organise platforms in a way that all diverse realities will be represented as well as respecting a proper dimension of the working group (i.e. 20-30 people).

Evolution of the project activities from the local level to the build-up of the European Platform

Enlarged international meeting on month 16

("European platform's meeting" -involving researchers and representatives of stakeholders/rural players working in the participating country/regional platforms) will mark a shift in project focus and activities – from regional/country to European level.

During this meeting the following tasks will be accomplished:

- Presentation and discussion of country/regional innovation strategies ;
- Sharing of objectives and workplan to designing a European innovation strategy .

European innovation strategy will particularly be targeted at reforming the Community agricultural policy (designing of CAP Programme 2007-2013), namely its so-called 'second pillar' (rural development area).

To this purpose, representatives of the relevant Commission services (DG Agriculture), will be invited to participate in the European platform's meeting, in order to contribute to the designing of shared specific objectives and workplan.

Following these outcomes, each country platform, during the period between month 16 and month 24, will work at elaborating positions to be brought/promoted at European level.

A new European platform's meeting on month 24 will contribute to final discussion and conclusions, allowing the drawing of an agreed document.

Outcomes

Swot analysis

A SWOT analysis, based also on new knowledge created during the first phase of the project will be part of platforms' work. Each platform will produce its SWOT, referring to conditions of its area. SWOT analysis will represent a new deliverable of the project. It will outline views on current situation and potential of social farming (strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats) representing a necessary basis for the following designing of 'innovation strategies'.

Monitoring of social, economic and ecological impacts

Innovation strategies will include also the designing of a methodology to determine and monitor social, ecological and economic impact of social farming – a monitoring system that could be implemented in the various participant countries/regions. On this purpose, a number of social farms will be selected in each participant country/region, to take part in a monitoring trajectory to quantifying social, economic and ecological features.

2. Methodology development

21. Timing and sequences

Between month 8 and 16,

- (i) Each country organised **one platform** which lasted one day or more;
- (ii) Between this country platform and the **1st EU meeting** (month 16), there has been a fine-tuning process, using email, web and sub-meetings with specific groups of stakeholders.

Between month 16 and 24:

- (iii) Each country organised **a second platform**
- (iv) Between this country second platform and the **2st EU meeting** (month 24), there has been a fine-tuning process, using email, web and sub-meetings with specific groups of stakeholders.

So there have been two plenary country platforms (month 8 – 16, month 16 – 24), supported, prepared and concluded by smaller meetings. In practice, those country platforms have been regional platform for the biggest countries (France, Italy, Germany) and smaller ones for the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Slovenia and Ireland.

One goal of the whole dynamic was to build a cumulative process : each of those meetings (regional or European), from regional to European ones had to contribute to the construction of :

- mutual knowledge of what's going on in each country,
- identification of « what do we have in common »,
- perception of « what we can learn from each other »,
- joint reflection on questions and issues to be addressed to policy makers, at European and at local levels.

All this process was supposed to be rooted on the experiences and shared interests of the many stakeholders concerned by the development of social farming in Europe, that we could mobilise in those different fora.

22. Country/regional platforms

The purpose of the workshop method was to formulate concrete solutions and action proposals based on the participants' own experiences so that they can put these into practice. It was also to make converge stakeholders' concerns and visions into a common strategic perspective. This method works best with 15-25 participants

This kind of workshop is a particular kind of meeting that follows certain rules. During the course of the workshop there is time for brainstorming, debate, presentation and proposition. The work alternates between plenary sessions and group work. workshop form and rules are there to ensure that everyone is heard, that all ideas are included in the debate and that participants work towards formulating an action/strategy plan.

Procedure description

The future workshop model used as a reference² for the platform development, incorporates a 3-phase work process:

>> Beginning with a critical analysis of the current situation (the critical analysis phase).

>> This analysis is then used to focus on future visions (the visionary phase) which are subjected to a reality check

>> And then finally transformed into action and policy proposals (the implementation phase).

The most common model is the 1-day or 1 day and half workshop, where:

- the morning is devoted to the critical analysis phase,
- the first part of the afternoon to the visionary phase
- and the last part of the afternoon (or following morning) to the implementation phase.

The workshop follows the 3 phases:

>> **Critical analysis** done by each stakeholders' group : focus is given to critical analysis of the current technological situation. This criticism is written down on paper. The most important points are selected and given themes. This session is concluded by a plenary where all groups present their diagnosis.

>> **Visionary phase** done by each stakeholders' group. The critical analysis in phase 1 forms the basis of a brainstorming session. Suggestions and ideas are noted down on large poster boards as draft action proposals, and these are given themes. This session is concluded by a plenary.

>> **Implementation/strategy elaboration** phase with mixed groups. This phase focuses on a critical evaluation of the draft action proposals. The possibility for action and strategy building is assessed and the elaboration is developed further, with emphasis on more concrete steps towards action or the implementation of a project or development strategy construction. The terms , from short to long term , should be clearly taken into account. A plenary concludes this session.

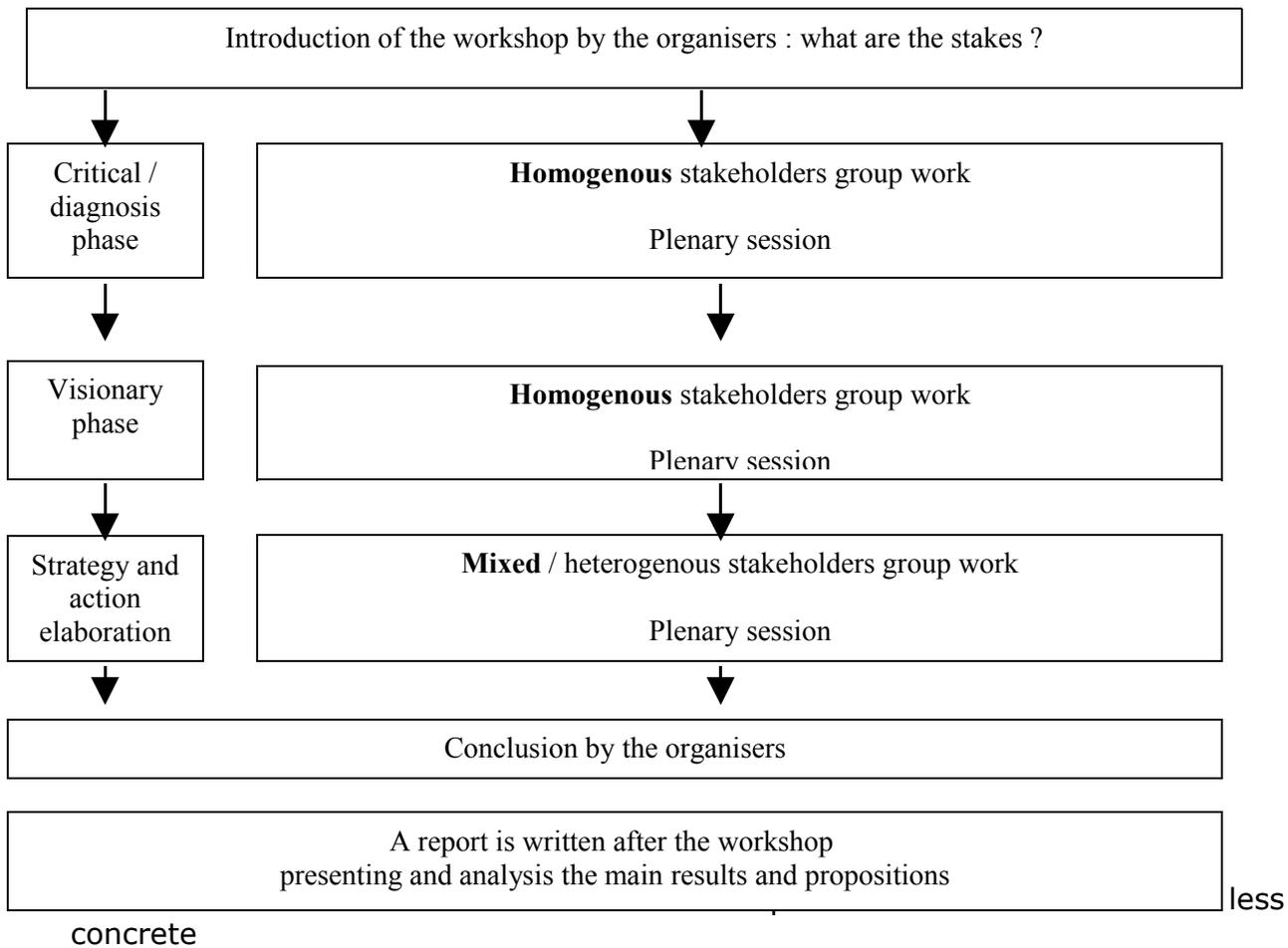
Results: Action/policy proposals.

² Experimented by the Danish Board of Technology, Copenhagen, Denmark. <http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=1235&toppic=kategori12&language=uk#future>

Indirect results: The workshop creates debate and dialogue, and this dialogue often continues beyond the framework of the country/regional exercise. New ties are forged and this can lead to further action on the part of participants through their respective networks.

Presentation of results: All workshop results should be gathered in a report in which additional aspects of the project can also be included. This input was crucial for the European platform.

The dynamic of the workshop



23. European platforms

1st EU platform programme : 18 – 19 October 2007

Thursday, 18th October 2007

13:00 – Lunch

14 :30

- 14 :30 – - Welcome by the scientific officer of EU VI Framework Programme - Massimo Burioni;
15.00 - Introduction to the meeting by “So Far” project coordinator - Francesco Di Iacovo (University of Pisa)
- 15.00 - The national views on social/care farming: basic features and main outcomes of
16:15 country/regional platforms - presentations by participants
16:15 – Break
16:45
- 16:45 – The national views on social farming (second part)
17:15
- 17:15 – Starting debate: “Building an EU perspective for social/care farming” - Gerald Assouline (QAP Decision) and Joost Dessein (Ghent University) moderate the
18:20 discussion
- 18:20 – Announcing the “video” initiative - Paolo Pieroni (University of Pisa)
18.30
- 20:00 “Social” dinner at the Restaurant *La Manufacture*

Friday, 19th October 2007

- 8 :30 – Insights into some cases across Europe – presentations by participants from
9.30 France, Germany and Belgium
- 9.30 – Social/care farming in Europe: an overview of basic features and key questions -
10.00 Jan Hassink (PRI, Wageningen)
10.00 - Break
10 :30
- 10 :30 – Debate : “Building a common EU policy perspective” - Deirdre O’Connor
12 :30 (University of Dublin) and Katja Vadnal (University of Ljubljana) moderate the discussion
- 12:30 Conclusions – Francesco Di Iacovo (University of Pisa)

2nd EU platform programme : 26 – 27 June 2008

Thursday, 26th June 2008

- 13:00 – Welcome lunch (informal in group session)
14 :30
- 14 :30 – ○ Introduction: Massimo Burioni Scientific Officer SoFar project
15.00 ○ The aims of SoFar project and 2nd EU platform, Francesco Di Iacovo (SoFar Coordinator)
- 15.00 - ○ The national views about innovation strategies: basic features and main
16:15 outcomes of country/regional platforms (presented by participants - 15 minutes for each country)
- 16:15 – Break
16:45
- 16:45 – ○ The national views on innovation strategies (second part)
17:15
- 17:15 – ○ Starting debate: “Building an EU perspective for social/care farming” Greet
18:15 Bloom (WUR)
(Thomas van Elsen (FIBL Germany) and Greet Bloom (WUR) moderate the discussion)
- 18.30 ○ Study visit to a social farm
○ Updating the “video” initiative - Paolo Pieroni (University of Pisa)
- 21:00 “Social” dinner at the farm

Friday, 27th June 2008

- 9.00 – 9.30 ○ An innovation strategy for Social farming in EU: basic features and key views
by country platforms – Gerald Assouline (QAP decision, France)
- 9 :30 – ○ Debate: “Building an EU innovative strategy for Social Farming” - Deirdre
12 :00 O’Connor (University of Dublin) and Katja Vadnal (University of Lubjana) moderate the discussion
- 12:00 – lunch (informal in group session)
13 :30

- 13 :30 – ○ A synthesis for the EU innovation strategy for social farming in EU Francesco Di Iacovo (SoFar coordinator)
- 14.00
- 14.00 – ○ Discussant on Social farming in EU and innovation strategies: Elena Saraceno
- 14.30 Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) European Commission
- 14:30 – ○ Reaction from invited stakeholders
- 15:15
- 15:15 – ○ Final debate and conclusions ("Role and strategies for social farming across Europe"):
- 16:20 (Guido van Huylenbroeck (UniGent) and Greet Blom (WUR) moderate the discussion)
- 16.20 – ○ Conclusion: Francesco Di Iacovo (SoFar Coordinator)
- 16-30

3. Methodological lessons learnt

31. Assessment

The assessment of the whole process should be focused on the main goal of So Far project methodology:

To produce progressive acquaintance, comparison and interaction among participants, finally bringing them to produce shared position papers, at country/regional as well as European levels, which will contain strategic proposals for innovation ('innovation strategies')

The platform participatory process has been fruitful

It has been a fruitful dynamic for:

- Involving social farming stakeholders in the making of the project,
- making emerge or consolidating local network which has been carrying out a diagnosis of the local situation and a joint analysis of the priorities,
- building a European space of discussion and elaboration,
- creating around So Far project a dynamic which needs to be transformed into policy making or policy 'weighting'.

This gradual construction took one full year : from Spring 2007 (1st platform) to Spring 2008 (2nd platform), with one European platform in between (the 1st one in autumn 2007). This means that collective learning at country and European levels need time for appropriation, deliberation and building of collective identity.

In this process, policy makers staid out

We could observe the weak representation of policy makers at local and European levels : despite invitation and policy agenda, policy makers did not appear with significant representation. This is true in a lot of local platforms and the 1st European platform. Some encouraging signals came up at the 2nd European platform. Nevertheless, even at this 2nd European platform, CAP officers did not appear (except a European policy adviser). Is it useful to recall that So Far project aimed at proposing to the European policy agenda the development of social functions of agriculture.

Stakeholders involvement: quantitative indicator

160 persons attended the first series of national platforms which happened during the 1st 2007 semester.

170 attended the 2nd series organised during the 1st semester 2008. From the 1st to the 2nd series, a

significant part of attendees were new ones.

Those people were mostly social farming professionals (from farms), social and health services workers, researchers. Politicians and representatives of the administrations did not appear in significant number in most countries.

3 to 5 persons per country emerged from those platforms to be involved in the European platforms, with almost 50% being different from one European meeting to the other.

Network building and consolidation

In some countries, those involved stakeholders knew already each other and were part of similar or close networks : cases of Belgium (Flanders), Netherlands, Slovenia and Italy.

In the other countries - Ireland, Germany, France - those So Far meetings facilitated the building of networks, and tackled the issue on how to make those networks develop after So Far project.

To assess the quality of those networks emerging or consolidating from So Far, only afterwards time will allow to follow their activity and impacts.

The evolution of the objectives of the national platforms : from diagnosis to projection

This evolution from the 1st national platform to the 2nd one has been similar in all countries and regions.

Examples³

In France

The 1st French platform

The objectives were presented as follows:

- To facilitate the dialogue and confrontation of actors connected to social and therapeutic farming in our region, with different professions and levels of intervention;
- To make them reflect in small groups and all together on the current situation, on perspectives and on strategic priorities to implement, in order to consolidate the development of social farming;
- To feed a broad debate and enlarge the networks;
- To produce and report after the platform which will circulate and nourish the European platform.

The 2nd French platform

- To present a short state of the art of So Far project and a summary of 2007 local and European exchanges , in order to build continuity,
- To reflect on and propose a set of priorities to be tackled at local and European levels,
- To agree on the content of what could be formulated at the next Brussels European forum.

In Germany

³ see much more details in the appendix below

The 2nd German platform

It insisted a lot on the importance and possible modalities to build up or consolidate networking strategies at European and local levels. The initiative to propose the collective discussion and adoption at European level of the Witzhausen manifesto on the added value of social farming came also from Germany, as a way to build a common basis for developing European networking.

In Italy

The 1st Italian platform

According to the goals of the project the general aim was to create "a platform around the topic (i.e. social farming) - bringing together key stakeholders and rural development researchers -, which can support the designing of future policies at regional and European levels".

As for all participating countries, specific objectives and expected results of the workshop were:

- To draw a (shared) diagnosis of social farming (SF) practices at present in our country (so called "SWOT" analysis);
- To elaborate visions for future development;
- To imagine some strategic actions that might be taken to make SF practices evolve in our country (so called "innovation strategy").

The 2nd Italian platform

The objective of the workshop was to foster this new "movement" growing around the topic in our country, by:

- providing a new European-wide perspective (information and knowledge achieved through the former steps of the project);
- providing new (structured and facilitated) room for exchange and confrontation – particularly, to discuss the 4 questions proposed by the international SO FAR coordination group.

In the Netherlands

The 2nd Dutch platform

Based on the results of the first national platform (June 2007) and the first European platform in Bruxelles (October 2007) we wanted to make a deepening on the results of the first platforms and come up with more concrete recommendations for international networking and concrete actions for international cooperation.

The objectives were made more explicit and presented to the participants as follows:

- To formulate a framework for a European research agenda,
- To make an action program for cooperation between different countries,
- To come up with an advice for the national ministries how to focus more on international issues, with respect to social farming.

Those examples show that stakeholders have been invited to follow a gradual construction process going from the diagnosis of existing situations and policies of their own context till the identification of priorities and actions, for their own context and for a broader scale, the European one. In that sense, the platform concept and tool has been very relevant :

- to structure locally a space of exchange, confrontation and collective elaboration, for researchers and professionals,
- to discover or deepen the knowledge of the reality of Social Farming in other countries,
- to make emerge gradually the awareness of the importance of the European dimension for the further development of social farming policies and initiatives in all countries.

The arrival point of the 2nd local platforms reflected the short term concerns of platform participants, by insisting on :

- the importance of European and local network strengthening,

- the necessity to tackle joint regulatory and policy goals at EU level,
- the importance of the valorisation of the territorial impacts of social farming for our regions and countries.

The scaling up process at the European platform level

The evaluation expressed by professional participants have been generally very positive on the interest of those EU platforms. Expectations of this kind of meeting are usually very high : participants of local platforms had a representative role at the European platform. And indeed those participants involved strongly in the debates and (in)formal exchanges. They went out of those events with a clear expressed ambition to continue the exchanges and formalise them beyond So Far project.

After both European platforms :

What have been positively assessed were :

- the knowledge and understanding of what is going on in other countries, and growing awareness of the rich diversity of experiences,
- the importance for social farming in Europe of the elaboration of a coherent and harmonized vision based on common definition, joint priorities and actions, policy objectives,
- the opportunity for participants to develop interpersonal relations, which could shift into cooperation.

What have been more severely assessed were :

- the difficulty to achieve concrete results, like common actions, and a circular dynamic which gave the impression of repetition, due to the difficulty to make emerge a shared joint vision of what is and should be social farming in Europe,
- the predominance of research logics and discourses in those European fora, by opposition to most local platform dynamics, where researchers were supposed to be observers and facilitators.

32. Unavoidable tensions contained in the technical annex

So Far technical annex as a contract

The development of So Far project had to follow the technical annex which has been the main reference for the project to be approved and funded.

- In the technical annex, the platform appears to be the core methodology to involve actors and make them express their visions of social farming, at local and European levels, to be used as inputs for producing So Far committed outcomes. So Far project has been based on an uncertain social process, as any social process is uncertain: uncertain in terms of dynamic and outcomes.
- In the same technical annex, the project team engaged in proposing innovation strategies and action plan for the development for social farming in Europe. The team project committed on this outcome. No space for uncertainty, and obligation of results.

After the 1st European platform, stakeholder assessment expressed the need for multiplying exchange of practices, better knowledge of other kinds of experiences and facilitating oral interventions of non researchers⁴.

There were some points that were not fully satisfying, especially when the relationships and the analysis of the practical activities are considered:

⁴ see below p. 48

- . It was expected that there will be more “social farmers” and more exchanges of experiences, more practical prospects, and more discussion on how and why to do social farming, that clear guidelines, as well as models of performing will be set down (SLO).
- . Farmers should be stimulated to enter in the discussion, but it is very difficult to find farmers willing to participate in these discussions
- . The exchange between participants was insufficient (NL).
- . For next time it is desirable to work on alliances that can help countries that are less developed in Social Farming (maybe new EU-members) (NL).

Some possible tracks were mentioned, according to participants⁵:

- to provide room for regular meetings of social farmers in order to exchange practical experiences and to have personal contacts.
- to promote and to support on-farm programs of social farming.
- to set down guidelines for legal regulation of social farming across EU.
- to define basic knowledge/expertise of social farmer.
- to define research priorities able to strengthen the outcomes.
- to define harmonised standards of performance .
- further exchange meetings in the participant countries.
- to broaden the number of participating countries.

Then after the 2nd European platform, the following questions was asked for the assessment⁶:

What did you expect of the Platform Meeting? Were your expectations fulfilled?

- I expected the formulation of more concrete actions . In this respect the meeting did not fulfil my expectations. Maybe I hoped for more tangible outcomes. But it all takes time...
- Contacts, exchange, nice people. Yes, this was satisfactory.
- The topic and goal was as difficult as the meeting itself.
- The elaboration of a definition of SoFar and the manifest had been started

Did they inspire you for your work?

- The outcomes of the local platforms were probably more enriching for continuing the work at regional level.
- At EU level, we should have focused our discussion on how and with whom consolidate EU network. This should have been the main strategy and action to propose to EU. This was on what people had worked in their local platform.

The difficulties expressed after the 2nd European platform point out that the gradual and cumulative construction that happened from the 1st to the 2nd series of national platforms, fed by the 1st European platform results, has been more difficult to achieve from the 1st to the 2nd European platform. The 2nd European platform did not succeed to back upon the 2nd series of national platforms which produced useful list of priorities and short / medium term propositions for actions. The bottom up process from country level to European level did not work so well, as it had worked previously.

One possible explanation can be found in the tension between two different logics :

- on one hand, the social participatory logic based on time for appropriation and deliberation,
- on the other hand, the project logic referring to the technical annex obligations and commitments (such as the production of innovation strategies and action plan).

It appeared clearly at the 2nd European platform that professionals who participated in, felt disconnected from the final exchanges which had to conclude by producing committed (from the beginning of the project) results.

⁵ see below p. 48

⁶ see below p. 78

