



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

SAGITER

Agroecological skills and Territorial ingenuity

Final Evaluation (6)

SAGITER project (November 2013 – November 2016)

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This final evaluation simply reviews the key points of the SAGITER research-action. During the past three years covered by this project, 'partial' formative evaluations have been carried out which can enrich and develop the present document. This is not a report, more a general review of three years of participation in, and observations of, the progress made by the project. I consider that such a project remains above all a question of the people that experience it and that the optimal functioning of this human factor throughout the period is essential and delicate.

The initial observation of this project is that training of, and on, agroecological skills goes beyond the sole perimeter of classic teaching. This observation serves to highlight the complexity of the issue at hand. In order to explore this hypothesis and co-construct a training pathway, a triple complexity of situations in relation to such skills has to be taken into consideration: training, teaching and consulting. These in turn involve several types of institutions: State bodies, inter-professional bodies, initial and professional training institutions, universities, associations and independents. In a European context where each partner has a different background with regards to agricultural policies and economic development, in order to create a real group dynamic it was necessary to begin by familiarising each participant on three fundamental aspects for the project: 1/ visions of agriculture and agroecology; 2/ the notion of training; 3/ the operations and objectives of each of the participating institutions. Further to this, over and above the different languages, it was necessary to develop a shared 'vocabulary' and vision through these three points.

The functioning of the evaluation method over these 3 years.

The aim of the SAGITER project was to develop support materials for agroecology train the trainer courses. For this, the group chose to deploy a sufficiently heterogeneous European partnership in order to be able to integrate cultural complexity and intercultural issues related to this subject.

In our conception of the formative evaluation, this aim is the result of a double process: both an ongoing 'training' process for human stakeholders throughout a project; but also a process of vigilance on not losing focus during the project. Through the feedback continuously collected from the different actions and interactions, this process was duly adjusted as required. This is the result of the approach retained by SupAgro, the SAGITER project coordinator. The said feedback, as proposed and applied, has a final objective of enabling a definition as to what measure the initial objectives have been met and, also, at each of the successive phases and milestones of the project, under what conditions they could still be achieved. This

means that the evaluation is based on the entire duration of the project. Through its specific nature, formative evaluation does not only focus on the results, but also on the human activity (ingenuity, exchange, participation) which the different actors put forward. This human activity was also, for certain, quite a challenge at time (radical change of vision and approach to training).

Also, this work which was carried out in collaboration with the project coordinator, fed into the internal evaluation done by the different working groups set up in response to the group needs and research-action projects: pilot committee and scientific and technical committee.

From November 2013 to October 2016, five partial evaluations were carried out on a regular basis as the project moved forward and were put on line in English and French on the SAGITER project intranet: eval 1- June 2014; eval 2: 1st June 2015 [3 documents including: the evaluation, a review of contributions to working groups; a slide show presented at the Cluj seminar (Romania)]; eval3: a slide show discussed during the Santiago seminar (Spain); eval 4: April 2016; eval 5: October 2016. The two slide show presentations were shown to the partners at the Cluj (Romania) and Santiago (Spain) seminars. They enabled the group to exchange, contribute and share the theoretical and experience based elements developed, notably with regards to research-action and training activities, in order to enable adjustments to be made and to formulate a projection (method and content) of the training path in relation to the progress confirmed during the seminar. I chose to draw up and propose these tools because from one seminar to another I remarked that the evaluations were not or very little read over and were not reacted upon by the partners. This method enabled shared thoughts on the subjects in hand.

The materials for feeding into the evaluations came in part from my participation in the seminars: formal and informal discussions with the partners, questions asked to me; and also from reading and monitoring the progress of the group as a whole. I received copies of all the e-mails (work sessions on the internet; working documents; seminar reports). Furthermore, during the three years of the project I met Marie-Laure Girault, the project coordinator, along with several other members of the SupAgro Florac team on several occasions. Telephone meetings were also held. On this basis, further to the proposal of 24 working days which corresponded to the financial allocation, the effective working production amounted to 56 days, including 30 days' presence at the seminars. Within the framework of this type of evaluation and given the importance and interest of the project, this real time of presence is significant but appeared to me to be necessary. I chose to take the time to fully experience the working situations with the partner, over and above the specifications given in my proposal; by keeping a certain distance from the actual debates, I was able to listen and note the questions being raised as the work and exchanges progressed. In order to complete a mission which could help the project to move forward it was important to remain as close as possible to the actual experiences as they evolved in order to get an insight into the complexity of the different situations-countries-institutions-visions related to agroecology and training, while in the presence of the group members. It was also essential to evaluate the 'invisible' and non-quantifiable part of the underlying individual transformations further to a veritable research-action. I personally benefited from the diversity and quality of the exchanges.

From the end of the last seminar, in October 2016, an evaluation method was put forward to the partners. Only two partners had returned something by the end of December.

In early December I met the Sup Agro team (Project Coordination team) to review the work achieved and finalised and also to set up a crossed and global auto-evaluation of the project. The high level of engagement on a daily basis throughout these three years must be noted with regards to adjusting and keeping to the project objectives, on the financial, pedagogical, theoretical and leadership aspects.

From its initial standpoint of Coordination, the SupAgro Florac acknowledges its sliding, against its

wishes, towards a function of 'pilot' of the production of the group. With regards to such a complex subject, the differences of visions and contributions between the partners (institution; professions; method of reasoning; working methods) were probably much more significant than those forecast during the project preparation phase. However, this team's significant experience in training trainers in agriculture and agroecology, enabled them to transform this unwanted position into a quality for the collective progress. All the more so in that this 'locomotive' effect was not detrimental to the time required for exploration, understanding, appropriation and innovation with regards to the SAE (Agroecological Skills) information collection and analysis tools in and for each participating country/structure. At the end of the day, where this partner maybe learned the least in terms of content (tools and methods) during the project, it certainly favoured co-construction, through permanent exchange and implementation of situations as close as possible to the reality of each partner. This was a period of questioning which it does not always give itself with regards to its own construction and experimentation of training trainers on SAE. Between an agroecological vision and educative/pedagogical vision, the balance was always present and respected, which rendered the project rich in terms of production and content, notably by proposing to the European partners who were able to, to take part in their 'test' training course held in May 2015: 'Mixed public: teacher, trainer and consultant: SAE, how to address these in agricultural teaching'. This shared period of practical work and exchange of skills enabled certain partners to view the issue in a new light. In order to understand this progression, one simply has to see the work carried out in Hungary by Apolka Ujj, a university lecturer, who although was not in the project from the very beginning, felt the difference of a new approach. Through this auto-co-training, she discovered and experimented and was able to introduce (and adapt) a pedagogical method very similar to that described in the file (see the SAGITER site) entitled: '*Silent walk-exploring the spirit of place (Genius Loci)*', within a course centred on a classic university approach to training on agriculture. If I mentioned this partner here, it is to illustrate the change (as I referred to in one of my evaluations) that several partners experienced. Each partner in question adapted the training differently and in close connection to their individual situations.

If the research-action was the best method for this type of issue, the existence of a predetermined objective would have been contradictory, even if this objective had been previously defined by the partners. The real objective is the deployment itself of the research-action in different manners by each member of the group. Consequently, the position of the coordinator could only oscillate between coordinator/accompanying party and coordinator/pilot given the its function with regards to the European financier committed it to producing tangible results. Paradoxically, it is also this difference which shows that the group really was following a research-action method which corresponded closely to the realities of SAE in order to develop tools together and not as part of a project process whereby the result alone justifies the means.

The stability/instability of the partnership.

It is true that the French partnership was important and that the role/contribution of each participant was not necessarily sufficiently clearly defined. This created a certain level of confusion, even frustration from other partners. There was an internal adjustment at the Gödöllő seminar in Hungary, but this only concerned the French partnership. These misunderstandings were chronic but fortunately did not impact the working space and dynamic. Indeed, the partners corresponded to sorts of 'local groups' providing feedback on data and experience of training on SAE. This is why in the 'our itineraries' tab, the French partners, excepting SupAgro Florac did not propose training path or itineraries. They contributed to other sections of the site in terms of presentations of their experiences, where retained for the project.

During the three year period, the history of the group shows that there are movements and stabilities/instabilities in terms of referent persons, for a number of reasons. But the questions of the presence/absence of a "duo" per partner country, as planned at the outset, is not a major problem in my opinion. What I retain is that while certain members were able to plan a replacement by displaying capacities of understanding and communicating the working method and what it involved, and taking on a research-

action is not an easy affair, others, on a more solitary basis, had to work excessively hard to achieve their objectives. In both cases, they rose to the challenge of being trained and changing.

However, for other referents/partners their presence was more evasive (notably through their absence and/or their level of contribution/concentration during the seminars). This type of absence was disruptive in that the group lost a certain level of diversity and skills that were supposed to part of the research-action.

Other referents have since changed structure. It is highly probable that the research-action method and the training question, which was not *a priori* their primary field of skill and intervention, will be transferred to their new situation. This is one of the invisible signs of the long-term progress of the SAGITER group. It is essential for ensuring the continuity of the working dynamic on training itineraries, initiated in 2013.

The seminars.

The seminars represented very important working periods. During the three years, from meeting to meeting, the progress made on the question of training on SAE and the exchange between each of the members led to co-production and cross-appropriation of tools and methods between the members. This was further developed through practical visits between members at members' sites. The resulting exchange fed into the research-action with a dimension of geographic and cultural diversity and the half yearly reviews highlighted the progress made on a group level and in each country visited.

A certain lack of clarity with regards to local groups.

With regards to the point on local groups, I remain prudent because I am not sure that I fully understood their function and mission from my professional standpoint. These groups should have, in my opinion, been autonomous in action and coordination. Certain partners did take care to ensure that these groups functioned as planned at the outset but generally speaking, the notion of local groups remained relatively unclear throughout the project. The situation did not change because the issue was not addressed by the partners. However, the actual missions that the local groups were required to carry out, those of anchoring the project into the reality of each country and experimenting training modules, were carried out extremely well.

The SAGITER training itinerary.

The project of an open itinerary for the train the trainer course on agroecological skills is an ambitious and pioneering project. A skill is not an object that can be transmitted. It develops throughout the lifetime of the person who uses it. Training on SAE means moving from transmitting stabilised agricultural skills via standard models for mastering real situations, to constantly moving and evolving agroecological skills in a given, and complex, environment. There will always be a subjective element in agroecological skills. This element forms part of the complexity of the transmission of agroecological skills and the question addressed is that of how to train trainers who accompany trainees in the acquisition of such skills?

In order to address this subjective element, an incredible volume of work on identification, regulation and vigilance has been carried out over the past three years, notably by the Coordinator but also by the entire team at SupAgro Florac and the research-action group. These three levels of investment and intervention/contribution have rendered this SAE train the trainer itinerary 'understandable' and possible to communicate. The real work carried out will not be visible on the site but it is an integral part of the individual training of each of the partners. This is already a first step in the multiplication of the project results, with seven partner countries deploying the said results. This is quite something.

Halfway through the project, the final support was debated and selected by the partners. For two

essential and coincident reasons, this will be an on-line support. On one hand to ensure that the itinerary brings together all the tools/methods/experiences which have been experimented and validated in order to create an open resource on the question of agroecological skills and training; and on the other hand, to enable the said users (trainers, consultants, universities) to reconstruct, according to their own situations and needs, a training itinerary which is in line with their practices and requirements.

The Spanish partner wanted to produce a paper support in Spanish for its different training centres and a PDF support on line in English, as was proposed at the outset of the project. The collectively experimented tools and methods were retained further to appropriation and exchange within SAGITER and the resulting support effectively reflects the different phases of the research action and represents a significant pedagogical potential with regards to the documents now on-line. This will be an important and founding document for the SAE train the trainer itinerary for the network of Rural Family Houses in Europe (1000 worldwide and 620 in Europe: <http://www.mfr.asso.fr/mfr-dans-le-monde/pages/les-mfr-dans-le-monde.aspx#titre3> – site consulted on 30-12-2016).

With regards to the validity of the experiences/references receivable for the SAGITER project, during the project deployment, I issued several alerts relative to the pertinence of certain videos (film/image/sound quality, pedagogical pertinence) and certain links to sites with approaches which were either very much on the fringes of agroecology and not validated by the group, or aimed at the sale of products and services. All the more so given that these tools are not always accompanied by an explanatory notice to help understand such choices. Their pertinence, from a pedagogical point of view for a trainer, the criteria that I retain for the train the trainer itinerary is not manifest for this type of project. But given that I have little experience in partnerships on European projects, perhaps my level of requirements and criticism is not entirely justified? Furthermore, the causes are neither an excessive use of French (language, culture as has been expressed), nor a deficit of working method, but rather a difficulty (even refusal) for certain partners to understand and accept the direction towards which the group as a whole was working and producing.

I must underline that this comment is related to a very minor share of the documents that are today available on the site. The theoretical and experimental points and the majority of the documents on the site are of high quality and validate the significant individual and collective progress made on this project, representing the development of a solid resource for train the trainer courses and/or agroecology consultants.

Openings for the future

Given the immense volume of work produced, on a regular, sustained and continuous basis over the past three years, in addition to the significant review work carried out during 2016 as can be seen in the supports presented on the site, it is certain that a process of change in the approach to training has been initiated. In order to consolidate and confirm this progress, it would appear necessary to plan for the future phases of the project, with the same partners, albeit in a lighter version, and this could give rise to the following objectives:

- an objective of propagating this co-constructed expertise through cross referencing of practical experience on agroecology train the trainer actions between participants-structures-countries-institutions between 2013 and 2016. It would be interesting to take some time to re-explore and re-inject into the site between the initial contributors. Notably by, as indicated previously, reviewing the documents placed on line and integrating any new experiences which could be shared in order to maintain a certain dynamic and maintain the foreseeable acceleration in the deployment of agroecological skills on a European level.

- the course for a 'mixed public / teacher-trainer-agricultural consultant' on 26/29 May 2015, run by SupAgro Florac and for which certain partners were present, showed that this mode of immersion and

exchange enabled a fundamental modification of the visions and practices used in training programmes. The key here is allowing the time required for such changes to operate while applying a structured methodology – for this, exchange and reflection are necessary. On this basis, an objective of working on the itinerary in order to enrich it and develop it to ensure that it evolves, both as a reference and a source of inspiration, towards a much higher level of awareness and creativity to enable ever more precise and innovative practical applications. Indeed, at the end of the project, the partners were conscious of their own level of change over the past three years having benefited from an individual and group process of change and not a simple integration of new methods and tools. At the last seminar, during their cross presentation at the Council of Regions in Brussels, and conscious of the level of change experienced, they asked those present and themselves this question: “How will the average trainer use and make the most of the content on the site?”. In order to develop this issue, the question of ‘accompanying’ the project further is perfectly pertinent.

Beyond the SAGITER partners alone, other European contacts have shown an interest both for the content (training and agroecology) and the method (research-action) of the project. For example, on 15th March 2016, Adela Vitkovska from Lithuania expressed an interest in cooperation and development.

Another point that would be pertinent to follow up on is the question of evaluation of training on SAE. This is a complex issue given the type of skills and the relationship between the skill and the training methods used, as highlighted by the SAGITER project. SAE mobilise theoretical elements which are either scientific or experience based but which are always related to the complexity of the agroecological activity. The learners must be trained to perceive and adapt to changes in systems which are rendered fragile by an environment (climate, training, phytology, micro and macro-economics, and sociology) which is changing in an ever-faster rhythm. Consequently, these skills, which integrate random events not as a constraint but as a given, raise questions with regards to the mode of evaluation of their content and training with time scales which are based both on the present moment and the long term.

These additional elements would be a form of support and accompaniment for taking the project further in the countries and/or for the partners, where SAGITER has enabled the initiation of a process of change which is still in a fragile phase.