

IFSA 2020 Conference – Évora, Portugal

Farming Systems Facing Climate Change and Resource Challenges

PROPOSAL (choose one option with “X”)

Abstract Panel session Paper session

THEME (choose one option with “X”)

Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3
 Theme 4 Theme 5 Theme 6

TITLE (must be in capital, bold letters and as short as possible) Collaborative learning and evaluation in the multi-actor context of an innovation intermediary

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Abstract (max. 400 words)

Context description

How can intermediary organisations be understood and developed through the lenses of complexity and learning theories?

It has been suggested that intermediary organisations are part of the solution to meet the urgent challenges of sustainability and competitiveness, in order to enhance multi-actor co-innovation. Hence, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the collaborative learning, process design and evaluation strategies that constitute core parts of an intermediary organization. With the help of complexity theory and practice-based narrative research, this study discloses the complex dynamic practices that are associated with intermediary organisations.

One empirical example of specific interest is an intermediary organization in southern Sweden, tied to the agricultural university, with more than 80 partners of private business and advisory actors and authorities. Starting 2004, it has a 15 year record of brokering innovation for enhanced profitability and sustainability of its members, as well as enhancing the research and education at the university, and has just been subjected to a close qualitative evaluation.

This study is based upon the literature streams of AKIS/AIS, learning and complexity theory and Community of Practice. The results emerge from the bending, breaking and blending of the theoretical approaches in combination

with our empirical findings. The number of studies with this approach is limited. A study of the literature established that there was an almost total absence of learning and complexity-theoretical perspectives together with a process based perspectives on actors interpreting and doing in praxis. We need a combination of theoretical approaches that take the complexity of both structure and processes seriously to understand and develop collaborative learning and evaluation in the multi-actor context of innovation intermediary.

Purpose, questions

The aim of this study is to explore and explain the core processes of a multi-actor innovation intermediary and its evaluation, for the support and improvement of AKIS/AIS, to boost the development of competitive and sustainable agriculture. The research questions address the collaborative and transdisciplinary learning, process design and its evaluation.

Design, methodology and analysis

Literature of the perspectives above is reviewed in order to refine concepts and adopt a framework, which is empirically tested on the case described above. Narratives were collected about the processes and results using qualitative interviews with the practitioners and researchers in collaboration, as well as observation and documentation of meetings.

Results and implications

The preliminary findings show that actors have to continuously deal with uncertainty, surprises and the unknown to learn and innovate. The actors have to make sense and take charge of complex dynamic events and manage complex relations and information.

While it is not possible to design for concrete outcomes, learning processes can be designed for enhancing the possibilities of creative and useful outcomes. Advisory service actors play key roles. The preliminary results imply that meeting and networking, combining public and private resources, brokering of ideas and consciously working with evaluation, are strategic phenomena that needs planning. The researchers argue that looking upon practice from the lenses of complexity theory and learning, and therefore accepting the complexity of practice, could facilitate the development of acting in intermediary organisations order to guarantee to be creative and innovative.

This proposal must be in English and saved as Microsoft Word or Open office file.

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