



**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

# NATURAMA ALLIANCE

## LINSA Case Study Report: Hungary

**Gusztáv Nemes, Ágnes Varga & László Ördög**



**OCTOBER 2013**

Project Number: 266306  
FP7 — KBBE — 2010 —4



This report only reflects the views of the author(s).  
The Community is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

<b>Project funded under the Seventh Research Framework Programme of the European Union</b>		
<b>Dissemination Level</b>		
<b>PU</b>	Public	X
<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

**Partners in the Solinsa projects are :**

- Heidrun Moschitz, Robert Home, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Switzerland
- Gianluca Brunori, Adanella Rossi, Antonella Ara, Elena Favelli, University of Pisa, Italy
- Julie Ingram, James Kirwan, Chris Rayfield, Nigel Curry, Damian Maye, CCRI (University of Gloucestershire and University of West of England), United Kingdom
- Dirk Roep, Laurens Klerkx, Frans Hermans, Wageningen University, The Netherlands
- David Bourdin, Kim Anh Joly, Niels Rump, Pierre Praz, AGRIDEA, Switzerland
- Dominique Barjolle, Loredana Sorg, Federal Institute for Technology, Switzerland
- Talis Tisenkopfs, Sandra Sumane, Ilse Lace, Baltic Studies Centre, Latvia
- Anne-Charlotte Dockès, Delphine Neumeister, French Livestock Institute, France
- Volker Hoffmann, Simone Helmle, Stefan Burkart, University of Hohenheim, Germany
- Gusztav Nemes, Judit Kis, Viktória Tési-Páll, Agnes Varga, Zoltan Bakucs, Institute of Economics of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>1. SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 METHODS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 The constraints and opportunities for LINSAs within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAs .....	7
3.1.1 Opportunities .....	7
3.1.2 Constraints.....	8
3.2 Mechanisms of network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKS systems.....	9
3.2.1 Mechanisms of network development .....	9
3.2.2 Learning processes .....	9
3.2.3 Innovation processes .....	10
3.2.4 Connections to the AKIS .....	10
3.2.5 The learning approaches, methods and tools used in LINSAs .....	11
3.3 Tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions .....	12
3.4 Support measures which are most effective and cost efficient.....	13
3.5 Evaluation criteria used for assessing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support measures that are exploited by LINSAs.....	13
3.6 Operational tools that AKS actors could use to improve support for LINSAs and to enhance the capacity of involved actors, in order to foster successful LINSAs .....	13
<b>4 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>17</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 .....	4
----------------	---

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	5
Table 2 .....	6
Table 3 .....	7
Table 4 .....	12

## 1. SUMMARY

NATURAMA Alliance is a loose, informal network of networks, thus 9 Hungarian LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs). Created through a transdisciplinary action research project in 2009, - NATURAMA soon became a self-maintaining domestic network, with a strong transnational interest. Its main aim – creating knowledge, learning from each other and from best practices in the EU – is in line with the LEADER method, however, Hungarian AKS did not support such activities. NATURAMA keeps regular meetings, organised study tours, ran shared development projects, organised big events and provided expertise on various levels of rural policy making and implementation.

NATURAMA Alliance is a loose, non-formal network of currently 9 Hungarian LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs), created during a transdisciplinary action research project in 2009, but very soon becoming a self-maintaining network on its own right. Formal AKIS in Hungary left large knowledge gaps (concerning domestic and transnational networking and the LEADER method) for rural development and often appears as a hostile environment for Local Action Groups (LAGs). NATURAMA was born to fill these gaps in the AKIS, coupled with a tangible knowledge demand from LEADER LAGs in these topics.

NATURAMA as a LINSAs is a multilayer network:

- (1) an alliance of LAGs, clearly functioning as a network of practice (NOP), creating, sharing, distributing knowledge; and
- (2) a close community of the managers of these LAGs functioning as a community of practice (COP), having mutual trust, shared understanding, etc.

Network activities are normally undertaken by the COP members: they meet regularly, communicate with each other, run projects and broker information within the network and towards the rest of the AKIS. However, the final aim is to 'take the knowledge home' and do better rural development at their own LAGs.

For the COP members NATURAMA means three different communities, also representing different opportunities/functions:

- (1) *learning community* - to improve rural development work (through animation, networking, innovation, etc.) and to establish structural development;
- (2) *professional 'trust community'* - where they can meet other LEADER LAG managers, share problems, get psychological, personal support;
- (3) *problem solving and information community* - to provide practical legal and procedural information required to implement the policy and channel public funds -essential for survival.

NATURAMA members first focused on *learning* and *advocacy*, aiming for significant regime changes. However, as rural development landscape became more hostile and NATURAMA more important for the members as a trusted community, they decided not to risk its existence with open conflict. Thus, organisational development of NATURAMA as a LINSAs stopped, it remained informal, almost a "hiding organisation". The initial 'shared network governance'

was never exceeded, not even to manage significant common projects. At the same time, COP members' intentions and energy to induce regime change took other ways (through other emerging networks, institutions). NATURAMA became gradually less important, differences in values, working styles, personal motivation intensified, leading to tension, management problems and the erosion of trust and co-operative capacities.

Compared to LEADER principles NATURAMA did nothing new, however for Hungarian AKIS its activities were radically novel. For NATURAMA NOP it brought significant internal innovation (a niche at least), however, as a 'hiding organisation' it had little effect on the formal AKIS. On the other hand, NATURAMA COP members (intentionally NOT as a network) have been champions of original LEADER values, acting as information brokers and boundary spanners, aiming for radical regime change (effective reformism).

Our action research co-operation with NATURAMA started well before SOLINSA. This had advantages (established trust, intimate knowledge, much interaction, etc.) and disadvantages ("too close relationship", strong involvement, etc.). During the course of the research, standard tools of qualitative sociology and action research were applied, participant observation, workshop methods, facilitation, mediation and participatory video played especially strong roles. SOLINSA facilitated the creation of boundary objects and interactions and achieved considerable success in identifying problems and setting long term objectives with NATURAMA. A methodological conclusion is that established relations greatly helped the project, however, involving an additional, new researcher (facilitator) and very strict and comprehensive documentation were essential circumstances.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

NATURAMA Alliance is a non-formal network of nine Hungarian local action groups (LAGs) that are formal associations working in rural development, financed by the EU LEADER Programme. The LINSAs took off as part of an action research project on co-operation in Hungarian rural development in 2009 February. Then, during the early days of RDR<sup>1</sup> implementation there was much enthusiasm and willingness to learn from each other and from European best practices. The researchers' contribution was mainly in bringing international contacts; information about the LEADER methodology (LAGs had no formal or informal training on that before); facilitating meetings and spreading a proactive, communicative, democratic working culture throughout the network. NATURAMA soon became an ongoing partnership on its own right, focused on domestic networking.

LEADER LAGs are rather complex local development networks representing certain geographical territories (micro-regions). Nevertheless, NATURAMA practically was started by the directors and project managers (some 15 people) of the local development agencies (LDAs) acting as the professional executive body of the LAGs. Normally the same people represent their subsequent LAGs at the NATURAMA meetings, however, other LAG members also participate occasionally. Activities mainly consist of:

- Personal meetings (3 days long, every 6-10 weeks, hosted by a different LAG each time) to build a professional community, learn, share problems, experiences, get personal support;
- Continuous sharing of information on the mailing list and telephone to solve everyday operational problems of the programme;
- Common projects (study tours, training and "real development projects" too) to get funding for running the network and to fill it with professional content.

Thus, NATURAMA can be seen as a multilayer network. Firstly, it is a loose alliance of LAGs, clearly functioning as a complex **NOP**<sup>2</sup>, creating, sharing, distributing knowledge, inducing social learning, etc. At the same time, LAG directors and project managers created shared understanding and mutual trust, and clearly have formed a **COP** amongst themselves. This is an informal network of individuals, and is not only an inner circle within the above described NOP, but endows its very basis, providing the space for communication, learning and co-operation. This duality (COP/NOP) is reflected in the following: from the outside NATURAMA is respected for professionalism, knowledge, working style and development results, but for the members NATURAMA's most

---

<sup>1</sup> Rural Development Regulation

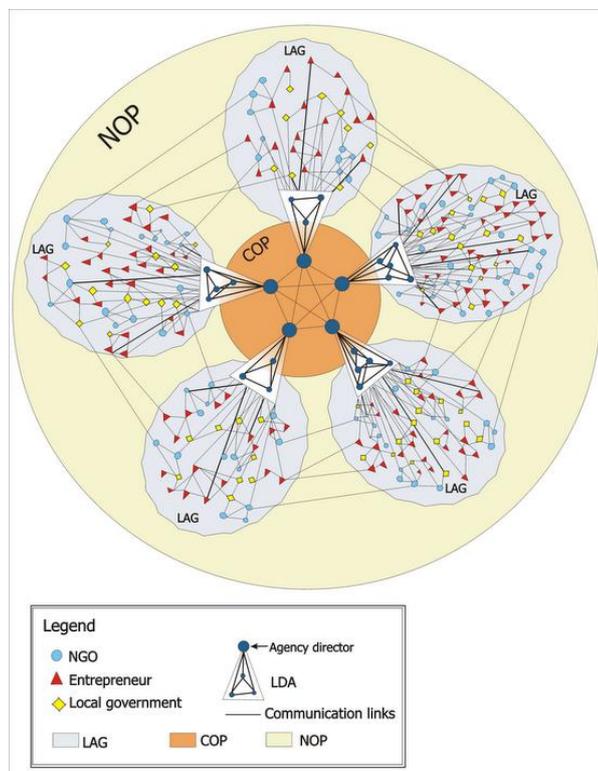
<sup>2</sup> NOP - Network of Practice, COP - Communities of Practice - SOLINSA Conceptual Framework (2011), Amin A., Roberts J. (2008)

important feature is the trusting relation and the psychological support.

The formal Hungarian AKIS of rural development (institutional and legislative environment, etc.) has been (and still is) rather unstable, appearing for LAGs often as a battlefield more than a supporting framework. Regulations are continuously changing; operating costs were several times cut back; new administrative tasks were laid on the LAGs etc. Genuine bottom-up co-operation efforts were not supported by subsequent governments, and there was no funding for international co-operation at all. Thus, NATURAMA was a genuine bottom-up process in a top-down hostile environment, fuelled by LEADER philosophy, the efficiency of local development managers, some external facilitation and the 'slightly underground nature' of the initiative. Its evolution has been an emergent process, based on a few common values and objectives and reacting to external threats and opportunities.

**Figure 1**

NATURAMA came to a turning point last year. External pressures and internal tensions have caused the loss of momentum and some of the trust. Without effective common projects and project management it has little chance to persist. At the same time, new domestic funding for co-operation became available, giving the opportunity to maintain local development activities and staff in the coming period, lacking most other financial resources. Thus, co-operation from a financial burden can turn into an opportunity to maintain LDAs for NATURAMA members in the near future. There are many ideas as to how to use this funding, whether it will create common projects with real and strong co-operation, or it will only be an element to ensure funding, will be the test of the level of trust and the strength of the network altogether.



There are many ideas as to how to use this funding, whether it will create common projects with real and strong co-operation, or it will only be an element to ensure funding, will be the test of the level of trust and the strength of the network altogether.

**The main goals of this study are:**

- To highlight and analyse why such LINSAs are important in Hungarian rural development;
- To explore what are (were) those internal and external barriers that hindered NATURAMA to be more efficient in influencing the rural development AKIS in Hungary;
- To explore possible scenarios and the kind of assistance (learning, capacity

building) that can help the work of the organisation in the future.

## 2 METHODS

Working with NATURAMA was a somewhat special case. It started well before SOLINSA, and was based on a long term co-operation between the LINSAs and the lead researcher of the Hungarian team. This had a number of consequences for SOLINNSA, both negative and positive:

**Table 1**

Advantages	Disadvantages
established trust, clear expectations and processes at the start of SOLINSA	"too close" relationship with the LINSAs and some of its members
intimate knowledge of the network from its birth	sometimes not getting enough respect and attention
many ways of interaction, occasions for meeting and working together	difficult to separate out SOLINSA work from other interactions, keeping track of results, etc.
additional resources (human and financial) invested in the process	difficult to maintain neutrality, being too involved

During SOLINSA we made a conscious effort to use these advantages and eliminate disadvantages. The project enabled our research group to provide NATURAMA with expertise in organisational development (employing a professional facilitator) in addition to help in rural development and LEADER implementation. It also allowed the long-term mentor of the network (the lead researcher) to step back and observe/analyze social processes and group dynamics. We also used SOLINSA resources for logistics, documentation and giving detailed feedback to NATURAMA through employing a very able PhD student on the project.

During the course of the research, standard tools of qualitative sociology and action research were applied. Participant observation, workshop methods, facilitation and mediation played especially strong roles, but we also made semi structured interviews (in and outside of NATURAMA), informal conversations and focus group meetings. Detailed minutes of meetings were made in Hungarian and shared with the LAGs, field log was kept, research meetings were held after workshops to discuss the possibilities related to 'second layer learning'. A special tool, participatory video (PV) was also very important in our work, used for community development, self evaluation, documentation and producing boundary objects to communicate to the outside world. We produced a number of videos on events, local tourism attractions, and three films (with English subtitles) on domestic and transnational co-operation and networking in

rural development<sup>3</sup>.

During the course of the project the most important workshops, meetings were the following. We made clear for NATURAMA which ones were held in the framework of SOLINSA (also indicated in the table), however, there was a considerable overlap between the different topics and events.

**Table 2**

	Date	Aim	Venue	Number of people present
1.	01-3. 12. 2011.	Organisational development workshop (+ NATURAMA meeting) - SOLINSA	Baracska	9 NAT. members (COP)
2	16-21. 01. 2012.	Study trip to Spain for European Territorial Quality Mark - partly facilitated by SOLINSA	Andalusia, Spain	32 NAT. members (COP + NOP)
3	21-22. 03. 2012.	First LEADER Congress of the Hungarian National Rural Network - with strong NATURAMA involvement - large boundary event	Lakitelek	400 participants from Hungarian rural organisations, appr. 30 NAT. members (NOP+COP)
4	11-13. 04. 2012.	NATURAMA meeting	Telklibánya	11 NAT. members (COP)
5	2-4. 07. 2012.	European Territorial Quality Mark training - SOLINSA	Sarlóspuszta	23 NAT. members (NOP+COP)
6	Sept. 2012 - Nov. 2013	Various meetings and workshops for the TRANSLEADER Project	Various locations	4 NAT. members (COP)
7	Dec. 2012	3 boundary events based on the TRANSLEADER Project	Various locations	Hundreds of Hungarian rural development actors
8	26-27. 10. 2012.	European Territorial Quality Mark - working on common application - SOLINSA	Hegykő	12 NAT. members (COP)
9	17-18. 01. 2013	Organisational development workshop - SOLINSA	Bánk	10 NAT. members (COP)
10	15-16. 04. 2013	Participatory Video workshop - films on co-operation - SOLINSA	Sarlóspuszta	8 NAT. members (COP)

<sup>3</sup> The films can be seen on the following link:  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/csicsorural/videos>

## 3 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

### 3.1 The constraints and opportunities for LINSAs within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAs

External and internal factors could be distinguished as follows:

**Table 3**

	External	Internal
<b>Opportunities</b>	Large gaps in the AKIS to be filled	Learning community
	Ready international contacts	Professional/trust community
	Quick first results and effects	Problem solving community
<b>Constraints</b>	Lack of - financial resources	Remaining a 'hiding' network
	- time and human resources	Energy and activities went to other directions
	- stability, future horizon	Failing project management, burnout
	Picking out NATURAMA members	Loss of trust, personal conflicts, tension
		Different values, skills, working style, etc.
<b>Support needs</b>	Small project funds - easy available	Capacity building
	Large funds for co-operation projects	Skills development
	Space and support for niche work	Organisational development and coaching

#### 3.1.1 Opportunities

**External opportunities** are provided by the national context.

- (1) Formal AKIS in Hungary left *large knowledge gaps* concerning domestic and transnational networking and even the LEADER method for rural development. At the same time, Hungarian rural actors, accustomed to EU rural development rhetoric expected social learning, co-operation and exchange. NATURAMA was born to fill the knowledge gap in the AKIS, coupled with a tangible demand, thus a small facilitation effort (an action research project) could generate significant results.
- (2) Readily available international contacts of the action research leader helped to fill another AKIS gap concerning assistance to EU level co-operation of LAGs.
- (3) Significant results of joint work, such as the density of trust, sharing operative tasks, and network level competencies quickly reached high levels within the organisation. This made NATURAMA LAGs tangibly

different (often more advanced) when many Hungarian LAGs were still struggling with finding their identity from the others.

**Internal opportunities** motivated LINSAs members to participate. At first, main motivation (opportunity) was to become part of a:

- (1) *learning community*, going beyond the Hungarian arena to see European practices, participate in projects, etc. This soon gave place to an additional opportunity of becoming part of a
- (2) *professional community*, where they met other LEADER LAG managers, could share problems and experiences and learn from each-other. They soon created an intimate, trusted community in a hostile environment, and the psychological, personal support they received in NATURAMA became a crucially important benefit. With increasingly stringent and complex bureaucratic environment the
- (3) *problem solving* and information gathering *community* became of vital importance for survival, providing practical legal and procedural information required to implement the rural development programme and channelling public funds.

### 3.1.2 Constraints

**External constraints were:**

- (1) very low available *financial resources* for networking and capacity building and the ones available normally coming late and heavily burdened with bureaucracy.
- (2) With the programme proceeding, administration growing and resources diminishing, the *lack of time and human resources* became crucial, further hindering co-operation.
- (3) There was also a *lack of stability* and future vision. LAGs were yearly threatened (mainly by politicians) to lose their budget, jobs or the LEADER Programme altogether, damaging willingness for co-operation.
- (4) Central institutions (Ministry, National Rural Network) never officially recognised NATURAMA, however, some of its members were appointed into important emerging positions of the rural development arena. This had both positive and negative effects on NATURAMA. External awareness and respect for the network grew significantly, however, false hopes about being able to achieve radical changes of the regime, jealousy, conceit and growing tensions amongst NATURAMA members and a diminishing interest of those who have not achieved such positions had damaging effects on former achievements of the network.

**Internal constraints** mainly originate from abandoned organisational development. At the beginning NATURAMA had the vision of becoming an organisation significant as part of (and challenge to) the AKIS. Members made common statements in important questions, showed up a common image on national gatherings and exhibitions, etc. However, as the landscape of Hungarian rural development became more hostile and NATURAMA more important for the members as a trusted community, they decided not to risk its

existence. Thus, NATURAMA as a LINSAs remained informal and mainly inward looking, almost a "hiding organisation", its organisational development stopped. No common project management was ever set up, no operational rules were laid down, thus co-operation, especially with starting projects together, suffered greatly. At the same time, the ambition to induce regime change took other ways (through other emerging networks, institutions). NATURAMA became gradually less important for the members. Differences in values, working styles, personal motivation intensified, leading to personal conflicts and the erosion of trust and co-operative capacities and an internal organisational crisis of the LINSAs.

## 3.2 Mechanisms of network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKS systems

### 3.2.1 Mechanisms of network development

NATURAMA started with an open call for transnational co-operation, and who became part of the network mainly depended on the attention and contacts of new LAG managers. After little negotiation 11 LAGs formed the network, but 3 (they never appeared on meetings) were dismissed within a year, after many debates and developing some simple rules to avoid free riding. By then the NATURAMA entered its "trust community phase" (see above) intending to structure, reinforce itself and start common projects before accepting new members. They also decided that NATURAMA should remain small and flexible, never having more than 15 LAGs as members. That would mean some 20-30 people at a meeting, considered as the upper limit for both logistics and a trusting community. However, these numbers were never reached, and the next significant extension (4 new LAGs) took place after many debates only 1,5 years later. Expansion was based mainly on personal connections and sympathies, but with some conscious elements (attention to spatial distribution, e.g.) and an established procedure of a written application, introductory material and a personal meeting with the new LAGs. By then, the first crisis (erosion of trust and raise of internal tensions) of NATURAMA was already tangible and new members were (rightly) expected to bring some fresh blood and enthusiasm into the organisation. On the other hand, it was difficult to include them in ongoing common projects, which created some unavoidable tension within the organisation. Since then, the idea of expansion was repeatedly put aside, though in theory they mostly agree in accepting new members and widening the network, and it is believed by various members that an extension could help to solve organisational problems again.

### 3.2.2 Learning processes

The most work invested and the most benefits gained concern individual learning of participating LDA members (the COP members in principle), learning skills, work culture, getting information, contacts etc. Organisational learning takes place on two levels: (1) NATURAMA improves as an organisation (this is not happening at the moment), and (2) managers take the obtained knowledge to their own LDAs and LAGs, improving their culture and capacity of

development work. Nevertheless, as a result of the centralised pattern of information flow, learning is filtered through the very few active participants of NATURAMA COP, knowledge can be lost. Where the agency and the LAG has a more democratic, decentralised institutional culture (more people participate at NATURAMA meetings) this risk is much smaller. Significant differences between NATURAMA members prevail. Social learning is also taking place on two levels. As a result of better local development, entrepreneurs, NGOs, local authorities in NATURAMA LAG areas develop personally and build networks, etc. Local society and rural development capacities improve and social learning can be observed. On the other hand, through actions of NATURAMA and its members (information brokering, boundary events and objects) social learning is also taking place in the Hungarian rural development community (members of the AKIS).

### **3.2.3 Innovation processes**

According to LEADER rhetoric' or to the wider European practice, NATURAMA has not brought anything new. Nevertheless, within the Hungarian AKIS their activities were novel, producing boundary objects and brokering information. All this changed the practices and the course of action of the member organisations of the LINSAs (NOP) significantly, and possibly did have the potential of at least becoming a coherent niche or even to induce significant changes of the regime. Hungarian AKIS and the landscape of rural development have little to do with the original objectives and values of LEADER, and co-operation was more prevented than supported by the system. Thus, the very existence of a bottom-up voluntary network, geared up for social learning and autonomous action could already be seen as a significant challenge to the regime. Nevertheless, as a result of incomplete organisational development (see above) innovation and NATURAMA's effect in the AKIS stayed on the level of novelty.

A number of boundary objects (BOs), events, interactions were produced by the network. During the first couple of years these were low budget, community based results of reification (exhibitions, information events, statements on rural policy, etc.). They largely contributed to self definition, NATURAMA identity and community building, but did not reach out very far or had great effect on the AKIS. More recent boundary objects and events (the first national LEADER Conference, the TRANSLEADER research project or the "NATURAMA Films") are much larger, got financed centrally and resulted from a NATURAMA COP member becoming an important figure of the National Rural Network. These BOs have had a much more pronounced effect on the AKIS, however, they were not based in the whole community and largely contributed to the erosion of trust and raise of tensions within NATURAMA.

### **3.2.4 Connections to the AKIS**

NATURAMA member organisations are LEADER LAGs, thus part of the formal AKIS. Their basic tasks include networking and channelling information between the central and local level of rural development. However, the dysfunctioning Hungarian AKIS left large knowledge and organisational gaps in the system, and NATURAMA intended to cover exactly these, meaning for radical change of the regime. However, as discussed above, NATURAMA as an organisation

decided to remain 'in hiding', never got into open conflict with the formal AKIS and its actions and never had significant tangible effects on it either. At the same time, NATURAMA COP members (intentionally NOT as a network) have been champions of supporting the original values of LEADER (decentralisation, participative democracy, local autonomy) at many forums. They acted as information brokers and boundary spanners, aiming for radical change of the regime. They were doing all this from within the system (effective reformism (WP2 Analytical Framework)), thus normally did not get into open conflict with the regime. However, the regime was still protecting itself against change on various ways:

- (1) putting difficult and very demanding requirements and everyday tasks for LAGs;
- (2) applying a tight control (retaliating any mistake, failure or deviation with immediate reduction of functioning money of the LAGs);
- (3) picking out resourceful people, giving them positions that bring along even more work and a false impression of influence, damaging both personal commitments and community spirit;
- (4) taking over the ownership of actions and intending other ways to 'conventionalise' the framing of NATURAMA.

### 3.2.5 The learning approaches, methods and tools used in LINSAs

NATURAMA operates primarily as a knowledge network. The four most important subjects of learning/knowledge creation are as follows:

- (1) **Technical learning/knowledge** - practical legal and procedural information, essential for implementing policy and administering funds and of vital importance for providing conditions of everyday work.
- (2) **Professional rural development learning/knowledge:** - to improve rural development work (through social animation, network building, co-operation, innovation, capacity building, best practices, etc.) establishing long-term structural and quality improvements.
- (3) **Democratic working culture, skills:** - workshop techniques, facilitation, mediation, communication skills, helping decisions, motivation, embeddedness and efficiency. Achieved through personal meetings, study trips and joint projects. The importance of these skills is not realized by all members. They perceive benefits during joint work, but do not apply them by themselves. Others promote this approach among Hungarian LEADER activists.
- (4) **Network learning/knowledge:** to whom to turn if help and information is needed, contacts, networks, etc. NATURAMA members recently do not always share this type of knowledge, causing tensions, segregation and loss of trust.

Different kinds of knowledge/learning require different channels and resources.

With NATURAMA we observed the following:

**Table 4**

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Function, type and significance of learning</b>	<b>Required resource, frequency, efficiency</b>
<b>E-mail-list, phone, skype</b>	Main channel for type (A)	Minimal resource is required, highly-efficient, enables permanent communication
<b>Personal NATURAMA meetings</b>	Main channel for type (C), also used to channel A and B, + maintain personal relationship and trust	Considerable resources are needed (time, money), every six weeks in the early phase, now every 8 to 10 weeks.
<b>Joint projects, trips, publications</b>	Main channel for type (B) (trips to abroad) + C is also important – it was the main pull in the starting phase of NATURAMA	Requires substantial resources. Started with low resources but plenty of enthusiasm, whereas more resources became available but efficiency decreased at later phases

### 3.3 Tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions

NATURAMA is a voluntary organisation, without external forces (obligations, financial incentives) keeping it together. Its persistence similarly to many other NGOs practically depends on the willingness of members (NATURAMA COP) to maintain the LINSAs. Thus, the level of trust and the personal feelings of active participants are crucial factors. If they are not satisfied for some reason, they are not likely to sacrifice time and energy for the network.

Also, there are no codified rules, strict structure, decision making procedures to help functioning at the time of conflicting interests, personal tensions or strong external pressures. As a result both, individual, personal skills and the capacity of the whole community - to discuss and solve problems, make decisions, empower others and delegate responsibility, as well as skills for project and change management, conflict resolution and assertive communication - is likely to become crucial. Without these the very basis of the LINSAs (the co-operative community) is endangered, it is likely to suffer crisis and not able to fulfil its role in education or training. Therefore, capacity development in this regard (both, individual and as a community) is crucial for success.

Transnational co-operation is often hindered by the language barrier and cultural intolerance (or 'illiteracy'), making difficult to build the personal relationships essential for shared learning. Intercultural and language training would, therefore, also be useful for networking.

### 3.4 Support measures which are most effective and cost efficient

*Financial support* under the Hungarian AKIS normally is low in efficiency and effectiveness too. Project support from LEADER comes with especially heavy and often irrational bureaucratic burden. (For example, when a LAG, as part of a long co-operation project asked finances for a study tour two years ahead, they had to point the exact date and place and have two comparable offers for the lunch, the transport, etc.) Small co-operation funds recently distributed by the National Rural Network are intentionally much easier to spend, however, they are controlled by the same paying agency and that can still cause severe problems when claiming expenses. The best option for financial support (efficient and effective) was paying for networking expenses from the LAG's functioning budget. However, that normally meant somewhat going around the rules, could only cover relatively small costs and was cut back with the overall budgets in latter stages.

*Soft support* by SOLINSA and other action research projects was both efficient and effective. They significantly helped NATURAMA to come alive and develop, fulfil its roles as a LINSAs, develop capacities, etc. Creative facilitation, capacity building through workshops and the use of participatory video proved to be especially effective.

NATURAMA, through its members receives information and political support from a number of domestic and international sources (NRN, ENRD, LEADER Subcommittee, ELARD, etc.) that, as effective and efficient support, also greatly assists NATURAMA functioning as a LINSAs.

### 3.5 Evaluation criteria used for assessing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support measures that are exploited by LINSAs

No feasibility studies have been conducted to evaluate the different types of supports so far. The only attempt to such kind of evaluation was done through the SOLINSA reflection methodology template.

### 3.6 Operational tools that AKS actors could use to improve support for LINSAs and to enhance the capacity of involved actors, in order to foster successful LINSAs

NATURAMA's main purpose (and main opportunity) is to fill a significant knowledge and organisational gap left by the formal AKIS. Any tools assessing that would foster the work of the LINSAs. For a more comprehensive exploration of the topic, please see the relevant point of our G7 report. Here we only have a few practical suggestions that could enhance the work of NATURAMA.

In general, a more stable legislative and financial environment for rural development would be essential. More specifically:

Central, hard support could include the following:

- (1) small funds for project management;
- (2) easily available small funds for networking and capacity building;
- (3) large sums to participate in transnational co-operation projects.

It is important that such supports should be available from the early days of the programme, not only at the very end (as it is the case now in Hungary).

Soft support to LINSAs could include financial and/or professional help for acquiring: (1) capacity building (skills on decision making, communication, project management, etc.); (2) organisational development; (3) coaching. This would provide LINSAs with ammunition in their work and would greatly enhance it. Treating LINSAs as partners (instead of potential threats for the system), providing them all the available information and 'political' support, using their services for delivering information and assistance to local communities, invitation, occasion and organisation by the AKIS to broker LINSAs knowledge would also help a lot. (This system works, even if not perfectly, in the case of ARA, the rural development network of Andalusia.)

## 4 CONCLUSION

### Gap in the AKIS

Formal AKIS in Hungary left large knowledge gaps (concerning domestic and transnational networking and the LEADER method) for rural development and often appears as a hostile environment for Local Action Groups (LAGs). In 2009 NATURAMA was born to fill these gaps in the AKIS, coupled with a tangible knowledge demand from LEADER LAGs in these topics, thus a small facilitation effort (an action research project) could generate significant results.

### Multilayer Network

NATURAMA as a LINSAs is a multilayer network: (1) an alliance of LAGs, clearly functioning as a **NOP**, creating, sharing, distributing knowledge; and (2) a close community of the managers of these LAGs functioning as a **COP**, having mutual trust, shared understanding, etc. Network activities are normally undertaken by the COP members: they meet regularly, communicate with each other, run projects and broker information within the network and towards the rest of the AKIS. However, the final aim is to 'take the knowledge home' and do better rural development at their own LAGs.

### Functions, activities, communities

For the COP members NATURAMA meant three different communities, also representing different opportunities/functions:

- (1) *learning community* - to improve rural development work (through animation, networking, innovation, etc.) and establish structural development;
- (2) *professional 'trust community'* - where they met other LEADER LAG managers, share problems, get psychological, personal support;
- (3) *problem solving and information community* - to provide practical legal and procedural information required to implement the policy and channel public funds.

### **Network development - hiding organisation**

NATURAMA members first focused on *learning* and *advocacy*, aiming for significant regime changes. However, rural development landscape became more hostile and NATURAMA more important for the members as a trusted community they decided not to risk its existence with open conflict. Thus, organisational development NATURAMA as a Linsa stopped, it remained informal, almost a "hiding organisation". The initial 'shared network governance' was never exceeded, not even to manage significant common projects. At the same time, COP members' intentions and energy to induce regime change took other ways (through other emerging networks, institutions). NATURAMA became gradually less important, differences in values, working styles, personal motivation intensified, leading to personal conflicts, management problems and the erosion of trust and co-operative capacities.

### **Innovation**

Compared to LEADER principles NATURAMA did nothing new, however for Hungarian AKIS its activities were radically novel. For NATURAMA NOP it brought significant internal innovation (a niche at least), however, as a 'hiding organisation' it had little effect on the formal AKIS. On the other hand NATURAMA COP members (intentionally NOT as a network) have been champions of original LEADER values, acting as information brokers and boundary spanners, aiming for radical regime change (effective reformism).

### **SOLINSA contribution, future scenario**

Action research co-operation with NATURAMA started well before SOLINSA. This had advantages (established trust, intimate knowledge, much interaction, etc.) and disadvantages ("too close relationship", strong involvement, etc.). The main methodological conclusion on this is that long term relation greatly helped the project, however, involving an additional, new researcher (facilitator) and very strict and comprehensive documentation are essential circumstances.

SOLINSA achieved considerable success in identifying problems and setting long term objectives with NATURAMA. Nevertheless, it could not help the network to fully overcome external pressures and internal tensions. NATURAMA is likely to persist, however, with somewhat

modified objectives, and membership, structured around a particular transnational co-operation project (the European Territorial Quality Mark) that is on the way now to get considerable domestic funding. This will solve management problems and enable the network to take new members on board and open up co-operation and learning possibilities for a more general rural development arena.

# APPENDIX



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

solinsa.net

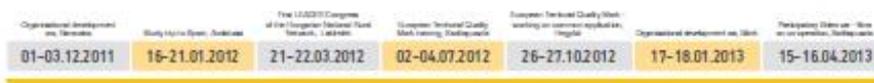
## NATURAMA ALLIANCE HUNGARY



### 01. THE LINSAs

- A. Aim:** Transnational and domestic networking in rural development, learn, innovate and 'take the knowledge home to improve everyday development work
- B. Membership:** 9 Hungarian LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- C. Organisation:** A multilayer network: 1. an alliance of LAGs, clearly functioning as a network of practice (NOP), creating, sharing, distributing knowledge; and 2. a close community of the managers of these LAGs functioning as a community of practice (COP), having mutual trust, shared understanding, etc.

### 02. INTERACTIONS WITH THE SOLINSA PROJECT TEAM OVER THREE YEARS



### 03. HOW TO SUPPORT A LINSAs ?

- Organisational development, self-evaluation
- Capacity building, training, supporting projects
- External communication of results, boundary events and objects

### 04. QUOTATIONS AND PICTURES

