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RETHINK

Rethinking the links between farm modernization, rural development and resilience
in a world of increasing demands and finite resources

Mid-term Report Annual Report #2

D7.2 | March 2015

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and all 14 national teams





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1. Summary

RETHINK is well into the final project year that is dedicated to the comparative analyses and joint paper writing.

Almost all case studies are complete; the largest part is really nicely developed and many case study reports have during finalization had two internal reviews and one external review by a member of the Advisory Board. The reviews were seen as a very important step for improving the reports. Reviews were to provide advice on:

- readability, storyline, information flow and its improvement;
- quality/soundness of analysis and its improvement;
- coverage of questions as required according to reporting guidelines;
- completeness, identifying gaps in provision of necessary information, in the analysis and/or in the argumentation if any.

Advisory Board members were also asked to help making the report relevant to current discussions and 'policy' developments.

National and international-level interest in the RETHINK project is substantial as the case studies address major societal and policy challenges related to agriculture, food, rural development and rural-urban relations. All final CS reports will be made publicly available on the project website in order to help making the project and its results known widely.

The RETHINK team organized workshops at a number of international conferences:

- Workshop 'Larger fields, a faster tractor, GPS, use of milk robots, automation in egg production ... When is agricultural change, and innovation, equal to development?' at 11th European IFSA Symposium 'Farming Systems facing global challenges - capacities and strategies', 1-4 April 2014 in Berlin, Germany.
- Workshop 'Towards a different and more future-oriented understanding of agricultural modernization' at XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology, Research Committee: RC40 Sociology of Agriculture and Food, 13-19 July 2014 in Yokohama, Japan.

A third workshop on 'Social capital, learning processes and social innovation in rural areas' is being organized at the XXVI European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS) Congress 'Places of Possibility: Rural Societies in a Neoliberal World', 18-21 August 2015 in Aberdeen, Scotland. In addition there have already been a significant number of conference contributions (see country reports).

The Advisory Board at its first meeting in Marseille, 22-24 September 2014, also confirmed that the project is highly relevant for current policy developments, in particular the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), the related work of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and of the European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-Agri); all of the above also in terms of national-level interpretation and implementation.

The innovativeness of the RETHINK project was also confirmed when a high-level jury selected the project as the winner of the science category of the 2014 competition 'Germany – Land of Ideas'. Partners in the competition are the Federal Government, the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The 2014 competition was devoted to the countryside – 'Innovative Country: Rethinking Rural Spaces'.

2. Progress of work in terms of deliverables

The following deliverables have been finalized in the reporting period:

- **D7.1 Consortium Agreement:** Drafted and finalized by IfLS (P1) in Month 2.
- **D6.1 Project website:** Drafted and finalized by IfLS (P1) in Month 2. URL: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/>
- **D6.2 Project flyer:** Drafted and finalized by IfLS (P1) together with BSC (P12) in Month 1. URL: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/reports-and-publications.html>
- **D2.1 Results of literature review and conceptual framework:** The conceptual framework was drafted and finalized by BOKU (P2) with support from IfLS (P1) and INRA (P7) in Month 5 (December 2013). The document can be downloaded from the project website. URL: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/reports-and-publications.html>
- **D1.1 National Stakeholder Groups (NSG):** The role of the NSGs was discussed at the kick-off meeting in Ghent under the direction of UGent (P3). In Month 6 NSGs were established by all partners. It needs to be noted however that the composition and implementation of NSGs differs very significantly between countries. Reasons are the nature of the particular case study, team ambitions and national circumstances. See national reports for more details on implementation.
- **D2.2 Analytical framework:** The Analytical Framework document was drafted and finalized by BOKU (P2) with support some from other partners in Month 7 (February 2014). The document 'translates' the conceptual framework into key issues, indicators and related methodologies. This document helped to focus the case studies and comparative analysis. It can be downloaded from the project website. URL: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/reports-and-publications.html>
- **D3.1 Case study profiles:** The 14 profiles highlighting the contribution to the common framework were elaborated by each team for its case study until Month 12 and updated during the second project meeting in Marseille. The case study profiles were designed to be elaborated further towards the complete case study reports. For a summary of key information on the 14 case studies see: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/case-studies.html>
- **D3.2 Brief summary reports on case studies:** The more detailed characterization of the case studies is an integral part of the final case study reports which were designed as a rolling document (Sections 1 and 2). The updated summaries were also made available on the project website in Month 14. Feedback on all reports available was provided by KU (P5) supported by IfLS (P1).
- **D3.3 Final case study reports:** Meanwhile almost all case study reports have been reviewed twice internally and once by a member of the International Advisory Board. Nine final case study reports are already uploaded at the project website, and the remaining five will follow soon (see: <http://www.rethink-net.eu/case-studies.html>).
- **D7.2 Mid-Term report for the 14 national funding agencies and RURAGRI office:** The report has been compiled by IfLS (P1) based on information received from all teams in March 2015. An interim report had already been prepared in Month 10 (May 2014) in order to better understand and communicate the differences in the conclusion of national-level contracts and actual start of case study work.

3. A first personal assessment of work processes

An **ERA-Net** means that a joint international research programme is to be implemented while national guidelines related to implementation and funding remain predominant. One consequence is that working conditions differ significantly between national teams and that financial and personnel resources available for project work are also very different. While as much as possible the national-level funding available had already been taken into account in project planning, this remains a continuing challenge. The management challenge is aggravated by the fact that after approval there had still been changes for individual teams that affect project implementation in ways that could not be foreseen at the time of planning. One resulting main task for the project coordinator was to almost continuously engage in the readjustment and harmonization of research activities, and in the related exchanges with individual teams.

Another general trend that affected project implementation is the **increasing pressure on senior researchers** to acquire new projects with third party funding. This and the rapidly increasing competition for funds, in particular in European framework programmes, means that senior researchers often invest less time in on-going research project work than originally foreseen. In the RE-THINK project there are notable exceptions to this tendency which help to ensure a good quality of project implementation and outcomes, but still.

As a result, the German coordinating team was more heavily occupied with the overall steering and management of the project which meant that **national-level** research engagement was at times partly neglected. The teams from Sweden, France, Spain and Turkey, in particular, had to cope with major and partly unforeseen constraints related to work funding (see also interim report from May 2014). For Ireland the orientation and timing of the case study remains a major problem, aggravated by limited funding. The team from Israel became really strong after the very significant reorientation of its work and the involvement of two social scientists supporting the experienced and very engaged R&D Arava manager and team leader.

Despite these basic challenges the **collaboration of the 14 national teams** has definitely been very productive and worthwhile. The national progress reports provide ample evidence of that. Particularly noteworthy is the – in many respects – excellent work of the Austrian team. The team was leading the elaboration of conceptual and analytical framework documents, and the quality of the case study and related reporting as well as stakeholder engagement has been exemplary. Outstanding are also the innovative approaches used in documentation and communication with comics and videos.

While the comparative analysis is only starting, it can already be concluded that the original **project planning** seems to have functioned well in balancing the significant degrees of freedom for national case studies and research with a common analytical framework, a common case study reporting structure and four carefully selected cross-cutting themes that provide an effective overarching analytical structure.

In order to maintain the momentum obtained, the **third and final year** is dedicated to the elaboration of a set of peer-reviewed scientific papers in mixed teams. All papers will be driven by personal interest and elaborated around one or more of the pre-selected cross-cutting themes. All papers will obviously also be based on and grounded in the deep insights obtained from the national case studies. The expectation is that younger researchers see the joint paper writing as an opportunity and take the initiative actually leading papers with more experienced researchers moving into a supporting role.

4. Outlook on finalization of project

4.1 Activities planned in the final year

The next major stepping stone in the implementation of the project will be the **project meeting in Frankfurt, 4-6 May 2015**. The agenda includes an update on the state of play regarding deliverables and remaining work; four 2-hour discussion rounds on the cross-cutting themes and the key results obtained and the related paper planning – all prepared by the theme leaders; a discussion on the overarching questions we addressed in RETHINK and the evidence we can and will deliver in the final year; an update on policy/practice papers/briefs; the planning of the final conference, with responsibilities for and input(s) from each team.

The central activity for all teams in the final project year will be the engagement in the comparative analysis and joint elaboration of **scientific papers**. Several abstracts have already been submitted to relevant conferences. They will be further developed towards publication in peer-reviewed journals. The aim is to have at least one core peer-reviewed paper for each cross-cutting theme that captures central ideas plus some surrounding/supporting papers. An update on the peer-reviewed scientific papers planned can be obtained from the project coordinator after the Frankfurt project meeting.

Emphasis in the RETHINK planning had always been not to reach out only to the research community but to also engage more directly with policy and practice, and with policy development and implementation. The elaboration of a set of **policy/practice briefs** is therefore another main task in the final year. During the Frankfurt meeting we will discuss that and also fix some specific topics for policy/practice briefs to be pursued further.

An activity not originally planned is the **international level video project** that is driven by a group of junior researchers from Austria, Belgium and Spain. The project was found worthy to pursue further by the project assembly and a related planning has been elaborated together with the project coordinator. The next task is to soon organize an additional funding for the project which would allow starting filming/interviewing already during the Frankfurt project meeting, supported by professional film makers. An outline of the video project is available from the project coordinator.

4.2 Final conference

The final conference of the RETHINK project will take place on **26 November 2015** in Brussels, 21 Rue Montoyer. The conference venue is located at the EU Representation of Hessen (Germany), Aquitaine (France), Emilia-Romagna (Italy) and Wielkopolska (Poland). The venue is close to key European institutions. Main agenda items will be a keynote speech on the (policy) relevance of the questions addressed in RETHINK, a brief presentation on key questions addressed and approach, and discussion rounds on overall results plus possibly a presentation of case studies through posters that will be displayed during the whole day. The agenda will be decided upon during the Frankfurt meeting.

A **post-final conference meeting** on 27 November 2015 in Ghent will be organized for all interested in a more informal exchanges and reflections upon the experience from our joint work, implications, follow-up action, research, etc. We assume that this second day could also be particularly interesting for RURAGRI funders coming from as far away as Israel, Turkey and the Baltic countries. Representatives from European institutions and all those participating in the final conference would be invited to join this more informal second day Ghent.



5. ANNEX: Individual reports from national teams

For a copy of individual national reports and contact persons please get in touch with project coordinator: Dr Karlheinz Knickel, IfLS Frankfurt/M.
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