Rainova Leonardo Thematic Networks Final Project Evaluation

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If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

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That it will ever come into general use, notwithstanding its value, is extremely doubtful; because its beneficial application requires much time and gives a good bit of trouble; both to the patient and the practitioner. Its hue and character are foreign and opposed to all our habits and associations.

ON THE USE OF
THE STETHOSCOPE BY DOCTORS

The Times, 1834

Introduction

Rainova has been an ambitious transnational project, which has sought to research, develop and trial a wholly new Innovation Management Model. It anticipated that this model would meet the needs of innovators working in a European context and sought to marry the needs of the end users – particularly vocational and educational training institutions and small and medium enterprises – with those of developers and researchers, in an efficient and timely manner.

This report comprises the final evaluation of the project. It builds upon and enhances the substantial interim evaluation prepared during June 2013, which has been updated throughout the project. The partners have been encouraged to take account of the lessons learned from the earlier part of the project and act appropriately on them.

There has been a good deal of agreement between the evaluation and monitoring team, the project leaders, the partners themselves and the Commission, which set out those lessons in its interim report. This happy level of agreement lends some extra credibility to the final conclusions in this report.

The final evaluation seeks to establish how much those points have been addressed, as well as the extent to which the project has succeeded in its key objectives. It is hoped that the report will serve as a summation of the work of the project during its three-year duration and as a guide to future partnerships that might seek to take this work forward.

The Rainova project has not been the only attempt at this kind of work, as evidenced by the investigations it undertook towards the Rainova Research Report during its first year. However, the research clearly showed that it is the first partnership to target the exercise to a specific European Union audience of VET organisations and SMEs. A key part of the task for Rainova has been to draw from the best of earlier studies concerning innovation management, to ensure that the new model has built on and enhanced earlier models, and to customise the model to the distinctive needs of its target audience. This in itself has been a challenging task.

The project partners represent a wide range of regions within the European Union and include both experts and those will less experience in this field, together with actors from a wide variety of organisations in both the public and private sectors.

Each partner has attempted to ensure that the new model being developed met not only the needs of the project, but also their own institutional needs in a regional, and in some cases national context.

It is not only the hard outcomes of the project that the evaluation has attempted to assess. It is also the value and benefit of achieving this task through transnational work in a European context and in a manner that has engaged all the partners, while at the same time ensuring that all the partners derived some benefit from the work and made a contribution consistent with their expertise and commitment.

Marketing has taken place throughout the period of the project. The previously mentioned Research Report has been successfully completed, after some false starts, the conclusions from its surveys have been fed into the wider project, and the Rainova Regional Innovation Observatory has been constructed and integrated within the overarching Rainova website. The project's online platform, which has been available from the outset as a tool for the partners' collaboration, has been increasingly well used and populated.

The Rainova Innovation Management Model (IMM), informed by the research, was already being constructed in anticipation of the full results of the surveys. The IMM is now complete and, at the time of writing (October/November 2014), is undergoing final testing by the project partners. The results of those tests will be the ultimate measure of the success of the project.

A robust post-project exploitation strategy is also in place. Consequently it is possible to confirm that all the practical and material outputs were delivered successfully and on time, with the sole exception of the research work, which was delayed at the outset and completed later than planned.

In accordance with best practice, this evaluation exercise has been ongoing throughout the project's lifetime, with the evaluator acting as a 'critical friend' to the lead partners and the partnership as a whole. Inevitably the interim evaluation report placed significant focus on the softer outcomes of the project.

This final evaluation, as mentioned, has sought to update the interim evaluation. It covers the same themes, thus providing an opportunity to examine the later outcomes more closely, especially the response from a variety of users who have piloted the IMM. It does, though, have to be said that these pilots partly overlap with the writing of this evaluation and are not all available at the time of writing.

The process of working effectively in partnership towards a common goal is at the heart of the Leonardo da Vinci partnership ethos. It is with this process that much of this review is concerned.

The impact of the research work, the IMM, the Observatory and Rainova website is becoming clearer now that these products and services have been refined, edited, piloted and scrutinised during the second half of the project by the individuals and groups for whom they were designed.

The hopes and fears of the partners were identified by way of interview in the kickoff meeting. How much those hopes were realised and fears overcome will form part of this final evaluation.

Hopes and fears

At the kickoff meeting in January 2012 each partner was interviewed and invited to discuss both their hopes for and concerns about the project. At this initial stage these impressions comprised the following:

Hopes	Fears
• Develop professional relationships, especially with European partners • Professional satisfaction • Contribute to the ambitions of my organisation • Provide a catalyst for further work • Learn to bring the abstract to the real world • Work doesn't end with the project • A network should emerge similar to EfVET • Improve our own model • Develop networks • Meet inspirational people • Improve education and training practice and link this to employment • I hope I can cope!!	• Conflict of interests • Ensure problems and changes are reversible • Do we have capacity to deliver? • Inconsistency between partners' different organisational levels • Gap between theory and practice • Might we develop an insufficiently robust model? • Differences in language and culture • Complicated project with a large partnership • Excessive bureaucracy • Overly ambitious aims • Innovation has insufficient priority in our government's agenda • How to convince senior managers? • There might be misunderstanding, language problems and chaos in the project!

Summary of the aims of project

The key aims of the Rainova project have been to:

- Analyse the role played by educational organisations in encouraging innovation
- Propose a common innovation model, which, with appropriate adaptations, can be used by all actors
- Shorten the time lapses that can occur from developing some form of innovation to implementing the innovative activity or product in a VET institution or company

The overall evaluation process has been designed to assess the extent of compliance with the declared project aims. Evaluation throughout the project was also designed to ensure that each partner understood that their contribution represented a clear undertaking and commitment to their other partners to engage in both a planned and consistent manner in carrying out those activities assigned to them.

The Interim Evaluation Report was concerned with identifying significant problems that arose or might have been anticipated. These issues and barriers to progress could then be more clearly identified and communicated to the partners so that they might act on them before they caused any irrevocable difficulty for the project. These potential barriers to success were identified in the first instance by the lead partners and included:

- Partner relationship breakdown or loss of trust
- Lack of support in-house within partner institutions
- Failure to meet deadlines
- Failure to meet financial report deadlines, with potential loss of or delay in receiving funds
- Failure to meet key interim and final targets
- An unsatisfactory interim report from the Commission's auditors, which might delay or suspend funding

Early feedback

The first stage of the project was geared towards building relationships and teams, preparatory work and research. This early phase involved the development of the communication tools, especially the online networking platform and the website, identification of innovative models, self-evaluation of progress, and carrying out and logging all dissemination activities.

It was also concerned with developing communication lines and the less tangible outcomes of the work, including the building of work teams and European networks in this specialised field of work.

Observed and reported early feedback from the project included:

- Thorough and creative partner presentations in the initial meetings using the summative and disciplined Pecha Kucha approach, which were all well received by the partners at the outset
- Satisfaction with the extensive preparation that had been completed by the project partners and especially by the project leaders and hosts
- Well-organised and managed meetings
- An impressive networking platform available for use online from day one
- A considered and thorough project management and quality plan
- Good empathy among partners

In the early stages it was felt that the start would have been 'even better' if:

- There had been more time for reflection by partners and more use of the online platform so that partners could share their views and raise their concerns from the outset
- There had been more workshop time and fewer presentations at transnational meetings so that they could engage as much as possible with one another. Sometimes 'less is more' in terms of presentations and lectures, and the real progress, as is so often the case, comes about from working in groups
- Partners were of the view, which we endorsed, that in meetings work that cannot be replicated on the online platform, such as one-to-one or group interpersonal connections, should take priority over other activities. In other words, as a general rule, group discussions, strategic planning and monitoring discussions should take precedence over presentations of reports that can be read on the online platform

- The use of what we have styled 'European English' (simple and concise English delivered at a sensible pace) is very important and should be used at all times. In fact we would argue that language and terminology can always be made more simple. The non-UK partners were encouraged to remind native speakers in particular when their speed of delivery became too challenging. Partners who do not have English as their native language can easily become tired during the course of overlong sessions and the quality of all the partner contributions can then be affected

- Sufficient break time and social time is essential to allow for informal introductions and updates at the start of meetings. The opportunity for informal meetings, encounters and free time is of the utmost importance

- Introduction to the local context is also very valuable and should be included in every transnational meeting

- Encouraging everyone to participate is crucial. Some partners can be very quiet during transnational meetings and it is difficult to assess whether this is due to lack of confidence or an incomplete understanding of the subject matter. As one partner noted: "How do we know what is silence?" In other words: how do we interpret silence? Project leaders and those presenting sessions and leading work groups should make every effort to ensure that all the representatives are included

- The gender mix is now more balanced and every opportunity to take on female representation should be used

- Materials and documents should be distributed in advance of meetings so that papers and documents are not being digested during the sessions and misunderstandings or poor preparation and technical malfunctions do not take up valuable meeting time

- Engagement with small companies during the formative stage to ensure their thinking has been built in to the research should be a strong feature of the project

Research

The Rainova Research Report is now complete. For the most part it is thorough and detailed. It represents the combined efforts of a number of partners. Initially it differed in style and content considerably and in common with other reports required significant editorial input to produce a fully coherent final draft.

It is to the enormous credit of the partners that the first draft of the work was delivered on time and the schedule did not need to be amended after it became clear that the original report was late and incomplete.

Despite this unexpected delay a number of the partners came together immediately and without prompting developed a strategy to complete the task and ensure its initial delay did not jeopardise the other key aims of the project, and that the draft was completed as planned.

The report was presented in Poland and, after several hours of group work supported by a comprehensive contribution from all the partners, was approved. Some missing data and other details were noted and partners were tasked to complete designated sections of the work and send them to the responsible partner to include in the final draft.

One consequence of the group-based creation of the research document is that there is a slight lack of consistency in style and approach in the writing.

Adastra, the UK partner responsible [inter alia] for the website and Observatory, agreed to undertake the task of editing the revised Research Report to ensure that coherence was achieved and lost time was made up. Key recommendations for the report from the partners and evaluators mostly centred on the need to emphasise clarity, simplicity and user friendliness – specifically to:

- Ensure that key lessons learned should be summarised at the end of each chapter in bullet points and a box so that they stood out
- Ensure that the unique contribution of Rainova in focusing on the relevance to the VET sector and its links with SMEs was properly emphasised within the report
- Provide a glossary for technical and unusual terms
- Discuss the barriers to innovation commonly described by SMEs. We are not convinced this topic is sufficiently well addressed in the report. In our opinion, the relevant section should

have been revisited to ensure that the issue was highlighted and emphasised so that it could more fully inform the Innovation Management Model

- Write a summarised version as a 'user guide' to be trialled with SMEs
- Make arrangements to divert available funding to the relevant partner chosen to provide a thorough edit of the work. This was sensibly and successfully done by the lead partners

Partners then made themselves available to provide timely responses to editorial questions so that the rearranged deadlines could be met.

Contributing partners provided examples of innovation management models and systems. Some of which are listed below. They represent some well-established models of innovation practice and management. Some have particular resonance for the partner regions involved. The project drew from these examples and others in formulating the IMM, the innovation model that finally emerged from this project.

Partners undertook the core content of the research via individual and group interviews, providing reports on each region and undertaking case studies and observations. Significant numbers of individual interviews were undertaken, but only two partners were able to organise group interviews. The summary starting on page 11 includes some key findings from the research.

Example: Denmark – Sønderjylland [Southern Denmark]

- Denmark had an overall strong position within OECD countries, comparable with Sweden and the Basque Country
- There were variations in national strengths, e.g., business education in Denmark was good
- Innovations based on and targeting customer needs were most successful in Denmark, although there was a need for further research into perceived customer needs
- There had been growth in all activity until approximately 2008, then a decrease
- There had been an increase in all countries, especially since the recession, in the numbers of young people identifying themselves as engaging in innovation-based self-employment. In Southern Denmark this figure was 20%
- Lower working hours for many people distorted the position In Denmark. Ironically this opened up opportunities to create new low-hours jobs

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Research responses were of mixed quality. Some partner regions provided highly detailed and comprehensive data. Some were less useful. Perhaps the original template was not sufficiently prescriptive, with a lack of guidelines that made it difficult to compare responses to some of the questions.

The chart of key factors below represents an agglomeration from all the partner responses representing the key issues raised as necessary pre-conditions to the successful development of an innovative environment, or the successful development of an innovative service or product.

It will be noted that the list is long and broad and represents a wide range of circumstances deemed necessary for good innovative activity to take place.

Key elements that gained the most prominence, occurred most commonly across the partner regions and were mentioned most often, featured the importance of clustering and networking (both of these being strongly aligned). When other featured elements were factored in, especially research centres and international and regional networking, the importance of collaborative working became by far the most cited and predominant feature of the research. Financing and cost awareness also featured prominently.

Key factors emerging from the research

Factor	Times mentioned
• Atmosphere and environmental management	1
• Awareness of global challenges	1
• Brain storming and subsequent filtering opportunities	1
• Business planning and opportunity development	1
• Business support	1

Factor	Times mentioned
• Capital access facilitation	1
• Catalysts (often facilitated by effective clusters)	1
• Client assessment and awareness	1
• Clustering	9
• Competitions (companies and students)	1
• Competitiveness	1
• Consultancy teams	4
• Cooperation and collaboration	1
• Coordination	2
• Cost awareness (outsourcing / energy / labour)	5
• Crisis management (international)	1
• Critical mass	1
• Culture of innovation	1
• Customer awareness, responsiveness and close contact	3
• Customer needs	2
• Customisation (of product or service for client)	1

Factor	Times mentioned
• Data availability and understanding and awareness of environment	1
• Design	2
• Diagnostic assessment of need	1
• Dissemination support and advice	1
• Entrepreneurial and innovation training (especially as a core subject in schools, colleges, etc)	4
• Ethical values maintenance	1
• Evaluation strategies	1
• Expertise (product knowledge)	3
• Financing, fundraising, grants and incentives	5
• Flexibility	2
• Forecasting	1
• Free access to an entrepreneurial environment	1
• Funding (risk capital)	1
• Government support	1
• Growth strategy	4
• Immersion in training environments ('innovation factory')	1

Factor	Times mentioned
• Innovative competencies	1
• Innovative products, which can eliminate competition	1
• Inspirational environments	1
• Institutional support systems	1
• Investment	1
• Leadership skills	1
• Local, regional, national and international networks (industry-specific)	4
• Logistical planning and organisation	1
• Management (flat, responsive and integrated)	4
• Market intelligence to be well developed and shared	1
• Monitoring systems to be developed to assess changes	1
• Networking and cooperation culture/database	8
• Open environment and economy	1
• Partnership development well advanced	1
• Philosophy (supportive of the needs of innovators)	1
• Professional boards supporting innovation	1
• Promotion, including press and publicity	1

Factor	Times mentioned
• Qualified and expert staff available	1
• Quality systems and focus	2
• Regional trade centres supporting innovation	1
• Research centres, R&D departments and research talent available	4
• Response times to meet with and exceed customer requirements	1
• Social opportunities to facilitate networking and cooperation	1
• Sponsorship available from government, companies and individuals	1
• Strategic direction clear	1
• Supply chain access, well developed and established	1
• Sustainability plans in place	1
• Tax (favourable regime)	1
• Technology parks to support clusters	1
• Testing calibration and certification facilities developed	1
• Testing opportunities for new products and services	2
• Trade shows available to showcase work	1
• Training (business training) well established	1
• Training (learner training) well established	1

Factor	Times mentioned
• Training (teacher training) well established	1
• Transfer of technology to be encouraged	1
• University research and testing available	1
• Venture capital access good	1
• Vocational training (strong and accessible)	1

Example: Swedish clustering research summary – Västra Gotäland and Dalarna

- Agglomeration was well developed in Sweden
- Clustering was one of the 9 key EU priorities (Competitiveness Council, 2006)
- All actions needed to be a means towards an end strategy of competitiveness
- What was needed was a 'local buzz with global pipelines!' (Bathelt/Malmberg/Maskell, 2002)
- Cluster policies needed to be further developed
- The clusters needed to be facilitated by specific science and innovation clusters and to include better management of rivalries. Also trade and linkages to world markets needed to be improved, with better integration of various initiatives and programmes and a level playing field supported, e.g., by EU institutions
- A strong cluster in this context was considered to be 15% of the workforce involved with innovative activities or a minimum of 1,000 workers, e.g., the Northern Central Sweden regional cluster
- Characteristics of a strong model would include advanced cooperation with companies, public sector involvement, and the effective utilisation of academic expertise and risk capital. This was usually (and ideally should always be) a bottom-up process stimulated by local companies
- Practices and potential training needs should be identified and put into practice
- And management, leadership and collaboration should be instituted in a regional context

Key factors in innovation management

The research identified the following key factors for the successful management of innovation:

- Good business development
- A culture of entrepreneurialism
- Research closely aligned with the needs of industry
- Improved provision of competencies
- Innovative environments that can be created by taking advantage of an often unique combination of circumstances, increasing business and encouraging international cooperation

Key factors in post-cluster innovation policy

The research highlighted three key factors needed to develop post-cluster innovation successfully:

- A high level of innovation orientation, with a focus mainly on competitiveness and integration
- Preparations to be in hand for the future stage of a knowledge economy
- The evolution of a future-oriented and sustainable innovation model

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Example: regional summary for Wales, UK

- The Welsh research identified problems of 'blind investment', e.g., the investment of GBP 260,000,000 in new innovation centres without a proper commensurate strategy and with insufficient consultation and planning
- Planning and strategies were needed to build on initiatives. These were not always forthcoming
- Strategies were required to ensure that personal and organisational innovation were encouraged
- Innovation education was urgently needed
- An innovation strategy for 2012 had been proposed (An Innovation Strategy for Wales, Federation of Small Businesses), but it was unclear whether there was the political will to pursue it. Nevertheless Wales had recently been judged by the Carnegie UK Trust to be the most innovative country in the *U*K

Example: Danish research summary – Sønderjylland [Southern Denmark]

- Denmark had the ambition that by 2020 it will be among the best in the world in innovation development

- The Danish model saw innovation practice as not just developing new initiatives but also finding new ways of applying and implementing existing innovation and knowledge

- Denmark ranked seventh on international patent applications – a good measure of international competition and innovation practice

- Strategies were most successful when they addressed identified and perceived customer needs

- Southern Denmark ranked second after the Copenhagen area in the number of people wishing to become entrepreneurs. In this region 20% had taken part in training for entrepreneurship. However, there was a lower commercial success with innovation than in other OECD countries

- But there were significant regional variations, e.g., between Northern and Southern Denmark

Example: technology and innovation strategy in the Basque Country

The Basque report emphasised the paramount need for effective leadership, the multiplier effect, the importance of providing finance (including support from high-net-worth individuals) and developing effective clusters within the region. The challenge they identified was the need to build on investment made, provide proactive support and stretch the ambition of all the participants.

Example: research summary – Aegean Region Izmir, Turkey

The picture regarding innovation in this Rainova region was distinctly mixed. The lengthy list of practical requirements included:

- Working with groups that enjoyed strong positions in international markets

- Establishing a 'favourable' business culture

- Developing an extensive network

- Being aware of global challenges

- Ensuring a 'correct culture' was present

- Overcoming any communication problems regarding innovation within companies

- Addressing the problems caused by very limited financial support

- Developing solutions that attempted to overcome insufficient investment in universities and research organisations

- Taking action to deal with a lack of dynamism and unexploited potential in organisations

- Challenging a perception of relative indifference towards scientific and technological development

- Working towards tackling underdeveloped innovative processes within companies

In the short term the problems in this region of Turkey seemed profound and in many ways intractable. And yet, with the strategic support of projects such as Rainova, the Aegean Region Izmir might yet emerge as one of the greatest beneficiaries of the Rainova project.

Despite the numerous studies already undertaken to identify and develop innovative management models, none has matched the targets and requirements of the Rainova project.

The development of this model together with its supporting Observatory has provided the focus for much of the activity during the second part of the project. The final outcome will be the development in each partner country of a Regional Innovation Network. This will draw upon the local research and use the Observatory to provide a comprehensive service to local SMEs and VET providers.

Particularly important were the research findings of the Italian partner CSCS, which concluded that a successful innovation strategy is about all-round good performance and stated specifically that successful innovation:

- is strategy-based
- depends on effective internal and external linkages
- requires enabling mechanisms to make change happen
- and only occurs within a supporting organisational context

Also influential were the conclusions of the **Innovating Regions in Europe** (IRE) Network's research and documentation. These were predictably lengthy and included the following recommendations:

- Consult stakeholders
- Engage different regional actors
- Encourage co-operation
- Avoid fragmentation
- Improve regional coordination
- Analyse, plan, finance, create and coordinate
- Communicate your initiatives
- Ensure strong and legitimate leadership
- Seek stability
- Facilitate regional empowerment
- Promote client-orientated innovation systems
- Develop a regional shared vision
- Link innovation policy to other policy domains
- Create new bodies to facilitate the development of innovation systems

- Prepare to be part of multi-level governance systems
- Plan to use EU structural funds where they are available
- Adopt a learning innovation policy approach
- Monitor and evaluate your achievements
- Benchmark

The **TeRis Project Model** (Technical University of Kemi-Tornio, Finland) proved to be yet another important source. It recommended closer ties between SMEs and educational and research institutions and identified the importance of developing a more customer-oriented approach by lowering the contact threshold of SMEs and learning to speak their language. It also recommended that the institutions should market their R&D services to SMEs and thereby increase the level of R&D subcontracting by SMEs.

Two other earlier examples of innovation management models shared by Rainova partners included:

- The **Seven Circles of Innovation** (Center for Ledelse og Fremtidstanken, Denmark, 2005), a model that emphasises a number of fundamentals that need to be in place to ensure success. These include creating the right team, ensuring the strategy itself is innovative and that the culture in which the work is being developed is empowering. Full co-operation, monitoring and a sound structure are other key fundamentals necessary to develop a robust model.

  A special characteristic of this model is the principle of ensuring that the customer and the market are at the heart of everything and that development progress not only involves these key 'clients' during the development of the work but also ensures their needs will be met by the outcomes.

  As the developers of the Seven Circles model put it : *"Innovative management is like being the conductor of an orchestra. If everything is orchestrated then all is in harmony. If not it can all be very discordant!"*

- The **Cave Model** (Von Hippel, 2009). He argued that good practice in innovation is not about being a lonely genius – an image that many hold in their minds. Good innovative behaviour is based on sound research and well-organised networks. Any model will be flawed and destined to failure if it ignores what he called the *Umwelt* (the surrounding world).

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If one common message, then, can be said to have emerged from all the partner regions involved in the Rainova research, it is this: work in clusters; obtain backing and support; and do not be cautious or hesitant!

A secondary message would be the need to *"Ensure that we are mapping the unexpected!"* and to always involve consumers when researching new products.

Viagra might be said to provide a near-perfect case study to demonstrate some of these messages. The involvement of consumers proved crucial in its evolution into the product that today is so well known. Data from patients, fed back by doctors during the drug's trials, led to the unexpected impact of Viagra. An equally unexpected benefit of the research was the promotion and legitimisation of an underlying condition that had previously been taboo to speak about, i.e., impotence, which thereafter became increasingly easy to discuss.

Another critical point identified by Rainova was that it is relatively straightforward to research and identify the barriers to innovative activity and the development of a working management model. What is far more challenging is to develop practical proposals and actions that will move organisations from their present position into that of becoming an innovative organisation.

The Innovation Management Model (IMM)

Work on the IMM began early in the project and has come to fruition as we reach the final stages. The first draft for the IMM was presented by the Basque partners in a paper titled 'Summing up on Ideas for the IMM' in Poland in June 2013. Since then a number of possible models have been promoted on the online platform.

The finished version of the IMM is thorough and well considered. Key areas covered include the importance of the user needs of prospective clients and the absolute necessity for a new model targeting regional VET and learning communities and focusing on the SME level. The process, culture and capacity to innovate are all clearly set out in the IMM. So too are a set of tools to assist organisations with the innovation process.

Clarity gradually emerged concerning the difference between the general concept of managing innovation and the specific practical use of an Innovation Management Model, which proved helpful for many of the partners, some of whom initially struggled to differentiate between the two.

Following the finishing work done on the IMM, the presentation and discussion during the meeting in Tuscany in June 2014 proved to be both extensive and very useful.

From the Rainova perspective it remains to be fully demonstrated how the IMM will link with the results of the Research Report. This issue has started to emerge with the piloting of the IMM being undertaken by the partners at the time of writing. Crucially the answer to how in practical terms clients will be helped to overcome various barriers in order to develop their own customised IMM will need to be further clarified.

In this respect the partners are very clear that the practical deployment of the IMM will have to be informed by the conclusions of the Rainova Research Report.
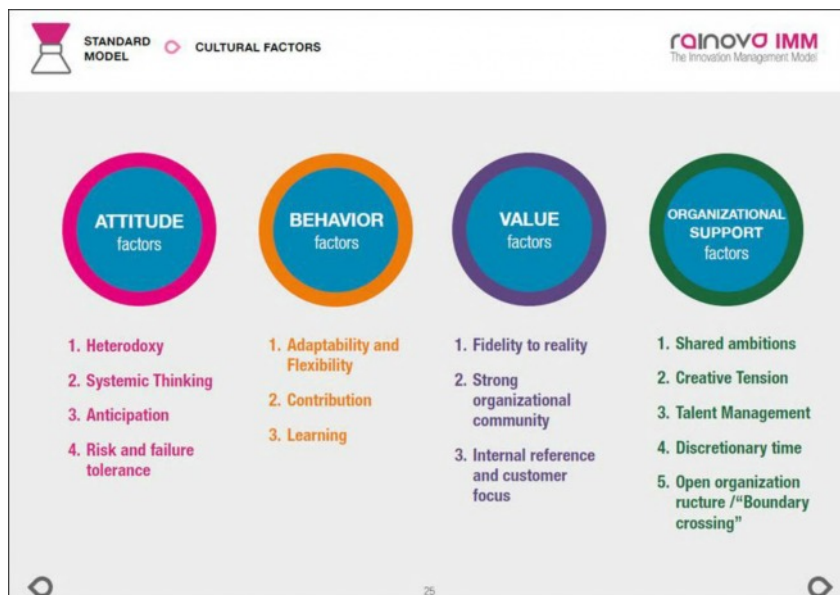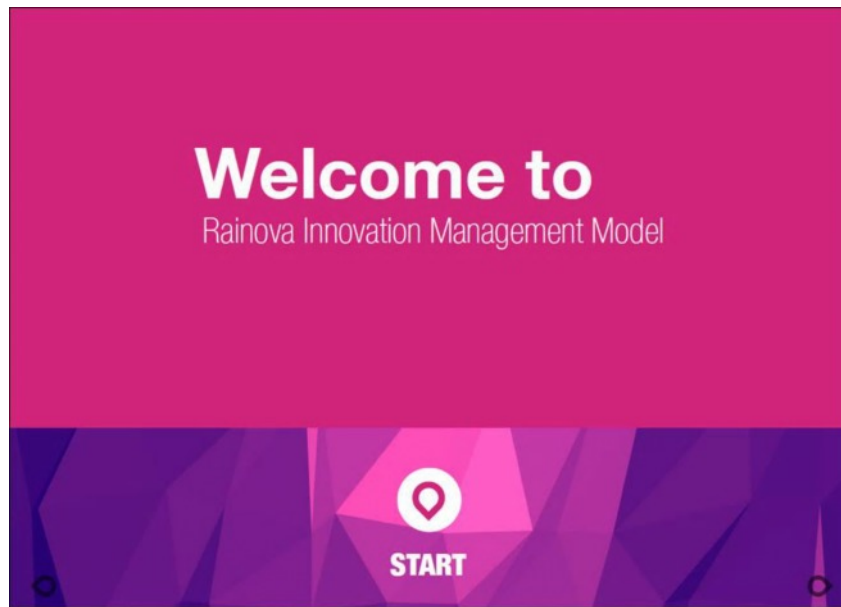
The Rainova Regional Innovation Observatory

The Observatory is another key deliverable of the project. The partners developed a common understanding of what shape it should finally take, what its prospective benefits would be and how it could operate sustainably beyond the end of the project. A number of prospective models for the Observatory were considered in the Research Report, from which the best and most useful elements were extracted and customised.

The delay in the publication of the Research Report had an initial impact on the development of the Observatory, but this was subsequently overcome.

The Rainova Observatory model provides a paradigm shift in how information sharing should take place. In the words of Jan Karlson (SAS), it can be described as: *"A networked service, an upside-down organisational pyramid which begins with enablers, contributors, users, members and finishes with visitors."*

Eleven regional observatories collectively make up the prototype Rainova Regional Innovation Observatory. They represent all of the partner regions in Rainova apart from England and Belgium. The regional character of the Observatory is a key differentiating characteristic that distinguishes it from other innovation observatories. Post-project, the long-term aim is to add large numbers of other European regions to a future live iteration of the Observatory.

All of the regional observatories have the same page structure. Five pages – European News, Case Studies, Innovation Systems, Organisations and Events – are single-topic pages. A further two pages – Regional News and Support – are multiple-topic pages, which expand respectively to:
- Policy News, News about SMEs, News about Clusters and News about Universities and VET Providers
- Technical Support and Financial Support

There is also a European News page, on which common content is shared between all the regional observatories. Finally there is a Networking page, which links to a networking service for registered members on the Rainova VCP online platform.
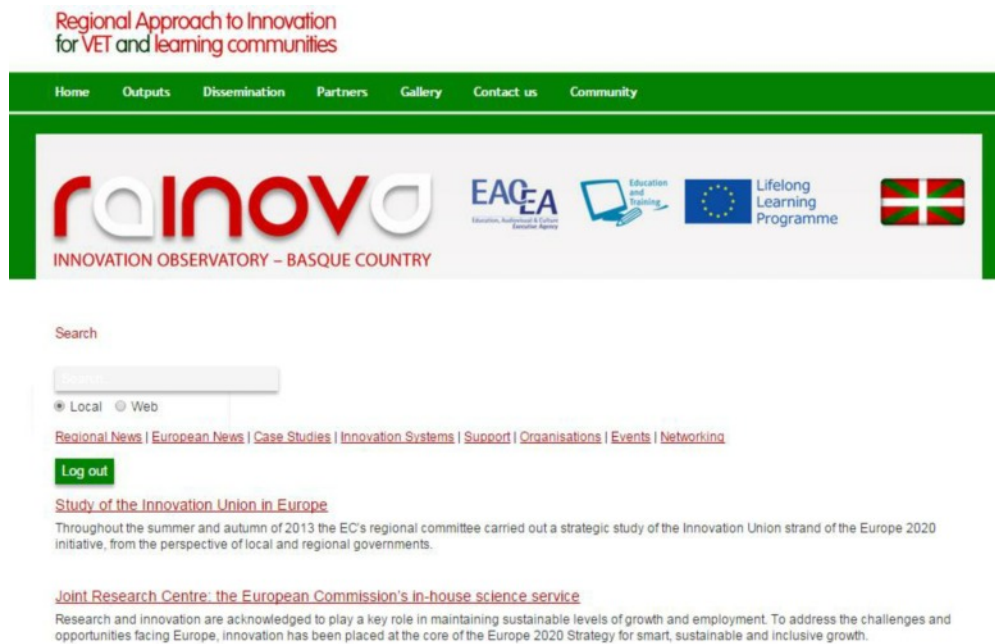
Partners were invited to decide what their role would be in terms of developing the Observatory, dealing with its content management and of course finding the resource allocation and commitment to undertake those roles. The latter issue will continue to be a key question for those partners who seek to maintain the Observatory beyond the end of the project.

Partners were also creative in identifying strategies for the future sustainability of the Observatory. Ideas include possible income from app sales and subscriptions. They also identified the need to ensure that the Observatory support role passes to a member of staff within an organisation that clearly sees how the outcome of making such an investment must be cost-effective.

One sustainability model suggested by the Swedish partner STPKC was to develop a project community of approximately 150 members and 1,000 guests who would engage at different service levels depending on their needs and willingness to subscribe on a varying cost-basis scale.

The Observatory is an exciting concept, which will be capable of developing flexibly and organically. It has the potential not only to be sustainable and to grow beyond the lifespan of the project but also to develop as a model that could form a central element of innovation development across the whole of the EU and beyond.

Mid-project partner progress summary: October 2012

I t is useful to provide a snapshot of the progress of the project at the mid-term stage in order to benchmark the extent of the progress made since then. The following table summarises the feedback from partner interviews carried out in Nyköping in October 2012. The number of partners who identified the same issues are stated, with the topics listed in numerical order, starting with those most frequently mentioned during the interviews.

	Themes and topics from the mid-project progress interviews	Number of times mentioned
General	General overall satisfaction with the progress of the project, although some anxiety that we could fall behind the identified schedules	7
Deadlines	Some deadlines have been missed. This has held up other work	6
Participation	Persuading companies to participate, and how to clearly articulate the benefits to the company	5
Management	Too much time spent on bureaucracy during meetings. We should be more interactive when we meet	4
Platform	Problems with the online platform are being used as a scapegoat. But some partners had the opinion that there was a need for more induction and familiarisation and that the platform was too complicated and insufficiently user-friendly for easy day-to-day use	3

|	Themes and topics from the mid-project progress interviews	Number of times mentioned
Research interviews	Concern that prospective interviews will be hard to obtain. Difficulty in organising group interviews	2
Strategic focus	Is there a strategic focus on which we can all agree? Are we all heading in the right direction together?	2
Clarity	Improving, although still a general lack of clarity about the project	1
Cohesiveness	The project does not feel as cohesive as it did during the early stages	1
Dissemination plan	Lack of clarity surrounding the dissemination plan	1

Case study: European innovation

The value of transnational EU cooperation in innovative areas was dramatically evidenced in the case of a person whose spine was severed after a stabbing incident but was repaired in a ground-breaking project between University College London researchers, Wroclaw University [an associate of DPIN, the Rainova partner in the Lower Silesia Region of Poland] and the Akson neuro rehab centre in Wroclaw using Polish surgeons and specialist physiotherapy teams. It was the result of over 20 years' research and collaboration.

The scientist leading the London team described the outcome and impact of the work, which involved transplanting T cells from the patient's own nasal passage as being, in his view: *"More impressive than man walking on the moon."*

Case study: Papermine, from CSCS – Rainova partner, Tuscany, Italy

http://papermine.com/

This case study concerns the piloting of the IMM by a start-up company in Florence. While applying the Rainova IMM, Mr Karlo Bernardi Kukavicic, a young Florentine entrepreneur, developed Papermine, an innovative content creation/publishing/ presentation tool. Papermine is a useful web app for creating online magazines, catalogues, booklets and lookbooks.
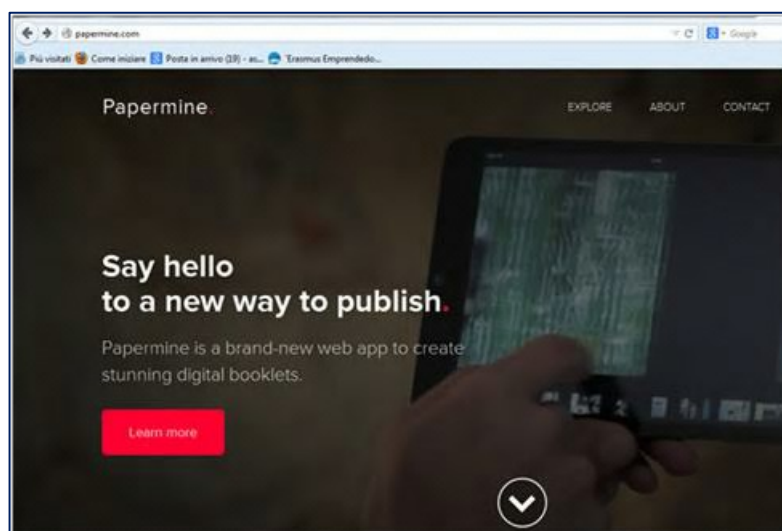
The link below is to one of the main galleries in Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, where many events take place throughout the year. The small company that runs the gallery was interested in innovation and was willing to try a new approach to enhance and promote their business. They decided to use the Papermine tool for their online catalogue for 2014: http://www.palazzostrozzi.org/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=2897
Link to the English version of the catalogue: http://papermine.com/pub/2260

The marketing of the Papermine tool has proved to be a success and there are now many users worldwide in a fast-growing community.

Summative project strengths

T he topics in this section are presented in alphabetical order.

Added value from third-party countries

The inclusion of regions in Canada (Outaouais) and China (Tianjin) in the Rainova partnership has freshened the group and helped to ensure that not just a European but a global interpretation can be placed on the final work. Their involvement has enriched this essentially European endeavour.

Both regions have vast experience in developing and managing innovative systems and have contributed strongly and enthusiastically to the process. A highly developed and relevant model of innovation management developed in Quebec was shared with and in part assimilated into the Rainova model. Canadian innovation management models match and in some respects exceed the quality of those presently used in the European Union, while the Chinese partner is developing innovative management models at a very rapid rate. Both partners have attended partnership meetings, with the Canadians attending twice and making valuable presentations.

The Rainova lead partners led a delegation to Tianjin in December 2013 to an educational conference where they had the opportunity to disseminate the work of the project to a very wide and diverse Chinese and international audience.

Atmosphere

The project leaders and partners were swift to establish a welcoming and purposeful environment, which assisted the process of settling quickly into the work. They are experienced in leading transnational activities and this experience helped the project get off to a good start. An atmosphere of friendly cooperation and diligence has persisted throughout all ongoing meetings. Partners have supported each other from the outset especially as it emerged that there was a wide range of expertise and experience within the group.

Awards for innovation and experience

Some partners brought a great deal of expertise into the project, having earned awards for the innovative training and practices within their organisations and the towns and regions where they operate. At its heart this has proved to be a very skilled partnership, which started from an already strong base.

Dissemination strategy and repository

An established dissemination strategy developed in previous projects by the partners CSCS from Tuscany and refined over a number of years has proved to be an excellent model for Rainova. It has been accessible via the online platform from the start and has provided a rigorous measuring and mapping tool for the project's dissemination activity.

However, it has been dependent on contributions from partners both in the form of their regional dissemination plans and actual examples of dissemination activity. Partners were encouraged to be both innovative and imaginative in their dissemination activities and their demonstrations of what they had achieved. Unfortunately the overall extent and range of the dissemination activity has not matched the original ambitions. In the case of one or two partners the level of activity has been extremely limited, despite the best efforts of the partner leading this work, and to some extent this has diminished the impact the project might have had.

Documentation

This was comprehensive from the outset and partners have worked hard on the quality of the papers produced. Final products have been thorough and well researched and the recently completed Research Report, now fully edited, is a comprehensive document that will make a significant contribution to future development in this field.

European culture

A clear commitment was made to work together to provide a 'European model' that all partners could customise and derive benefit from together with a declared wish to share, learn and understand regional possibilities and differences. It is to be hoped that a truly synergistic model

will emerge from this joint work. Partners throughout have worked hard to ensure that coherence was maintained.

Group work

According to most partners, working in groups during transnational meetings has been the most effective way of creating a joint model leading to the success of this collaborative enterprise. While this method of working was slow to be introduced initially, it became an important element of the modus operandi of the project.

It was accepted that research and desk work, which can be completed outside project meetings, should not take priority over work that can only be done during the meetings. This is where the method of working in groups came into its own.

The partners agreed early in the project to ensure that key documents were made available before the meetings to allow partners to absorb them and come to the meeting with suggestions and feedback. In general this approach has been followed. Nonetheless the tendency at meetings for presentations and lectures to become the main substance of the agenda was regrettable.

There is inevitably a flurry of activity before transnational meetings to meet all commitments and it is to the credit of partners that in the main they have succeeded in achieving their goals at each stage of the project.

Ideas, flexibility and problem solving

An innovative environment has been established within the culture of the project and partners actively pursued new ideas drawn from the experiences of other partners.

Some examples of this approach concerned the project as a whole. First, as the project matured, the transnational partner meetings came to be mapped out in an altogether innovative and synergistic way.

Second, when the partners realised that a key target for the research work might be missed, they prepared and enacted an intervention to ensure that the research component did not delay the

other work. This proactive and thoroughly planned action was successful and helped the project get back on track. It was an excellent example of collaborative and thoughtful joint work.

Management of transnational meetings by the lead partner

Throughout the running of the project the lead partners have been the source of much infective enthusiasm. They have made a demonstrable commitment to the leadership and current success of Rainova. They have steered the strategic direction of the project and maintained the flow of work and the management of time scheduling. The balance between full engagement and decision sharing and ensuring that everything is completed as promised is a difficult one, but it has been achieved. The project leaders also deserve credit for adapting quickly to a shift to a more collaborative working approach during the transnational meetings.

Management organisation and preparation

The lead partners constructed a thorough and well-organised management plan, which provided a strong focus for the project. Each transnational meeting was followed by a comprehensive and thorough quality management report, which gave detailed reviews of actions taken and set out the future programme and partner commitments and undertakings. This was an excellent example of management reporting.

The broadly based Basque representation (Ikaslan Gipuzkoa, Tknika and Tolosaldea Garatzen) in the project has brought a wide range of experience and expertise into the project. As mentioned previously, the comprehensive preliminary work done by these project leaders ensured that the project was not held up by unnecessary initial administrative delays.

Marketing

Leaflets customised for all partners and localised partner pages for the website were completed during the early part of the first year of the project. These gave Rainova a clear early profile and identity.

Marketing is a key aspect of the dissemination strategy and Rainova got off to a good start. All contributions have been met with helpful feedback and have been very promptly dealt with and uploaded to the website.

The project, with its strong emphasis on research and development, has occasionally been slow to engage with target groups because some of its products appeared later than planned in the project timescale. Such problems can sometimes make it hard for a project to make the desired impact on those it is trying to reach.

However, the final project will be well presented with an illustrated final evaluation document, multilingual partner leaflets (in some 20 editions), a well-populated website, a major research paper and, of course, the Innovation Management Model and Regional Innovation Observatory, all produced in a unified and distinctive house style.

Networking platform

The project has benefited considerably from the use of the established, comprehensive and sophisticated Virtual Community Platform (VCP) from the outset of the project. The VCP platform, which had previously been extensively developed and deployed by Swedish partners STPKC, has been critically important in ensuring that the fundamental communication and repository tools were available to partners throughout the project's lifetime.

The platform has not been used as much as it might by some partners and for some has proved complex to navigate. Nevertheless its impact has been considerable and it is difficult to imagine the project being successful without it.

Partners were encouraged to redouble their efforts to communicate more extensively on the platform and make use of the many and various functions offered by VCP. The document organisation system is especially clear and navigable.

It is unfortunate that the general forum in particular was underused as it was the one place on the platform that was the most 'highly visible'. Some partners have tended to communicate more often outside the platform bilaterally via email or phone, which has limited their engagement with the rest of the group.

Observation of protocols

The protocols of the project, which are so important to good partner working and trust, have generally been well observed. Attendance and punctuality at transnational meetings

have been good and the sessions have been run in a friendly and purposeful fashion. Deadlines throughout the project were generally met and confidence remained high.

Observatory

The Observatory has been designed and constructed for SME innovators in the European regions and the VET institutions who work with and support them. The Rainova Regional Innovation Observatory is designed as a practical tool to provide an essential information exchange for this community of organisations: what's happening, what's new, technical support, financial support, peer networking, and more.

Where it differs most from other innovation observatories is in being set up as a scalable portal to separate regional observatories. Each has its own distinctive local focus, although they also all share common reports and information at a continental level. Eleven partner regions are represented in the prototype Observatory and this demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. The Observatory is integrated into the wider Rainova website and as a result it will be relatively easy to add further regions via the site's Joomla content management system.

Plans for the sustainability of the Observatory have been well thought through. However, a full strategy and argument still has to be developed to clarify how future investment by partners in the Observatory might be matched by a return.

The Observatory is undoubtedly an innovative and exciting initiative and could possibly emerge as the most impactful element of the entire Rainova project.

Partner commitment and enthusiasm

The lead partners' enthusiasm and commitment has been shared by the other partners who have all showed sustained interest in the project. A number of partners have made contributions significantly in excess of their agreed designated tasks, with no additional funding. The networks between the partners have grown stronger, the level of partner trust has been high, and joint research and model development have been effectively shared.

Partner mix

There has been a good partner mix of northern and southern European partners including examples from new entrants to the EU and accession countries, as well as third-party partners from Canada and China.

While all the partners have good experience in this kind of work, some are more highly experienced than others, although all have different contributions to make and new environments to explore. Some partners with less experience have been able to learn significantly from others who have spent more time working in this field, while at the same time bringing their unique perspectives to the work of the group.

Web development

The public website (http://rainova-project.eu) is both attractive and sophisticated. It provides a valuable marketing tool and 'shop window' for the project. The responsible partner, Adastra Cymru, has wide experience of supplying this service for a range of European projects and has provided regular advice to the project leaders and partners on practical and technical matters concerning the project's web presence.

In general the public website has been well populated with relevant news reports, information about the project's outputs and dissemination activities and, of course, information about the partners themselves. Unfortunately not all partners have contributed as much as others. The dedicated website was an important opportunity for all the partners to ensure that their work within Rainova was well publicised and promoted, which formed a key element of the dissemination plan for the project. All partners were encouraged to ensure that as much relevant information as possible was uploaded to the website as well as the online platform.

Even better if...

T he topics in this section are presented in alphabetical order.

Agenda and participation

The agenda for transnational meetings was initially perceived to be too full and overwhelming for some of the participants. In many cases partners felt that it gave them only limited opportunity to become involved. This feedback was accepted and it is to the credit of the project leaders that subsequent meetings became much more participatory and inclusive.

Some partners felt there was an assumption that they all had a similar basis of understanding when some had highly tested systems already in place while others were still learning. This would have been drawn out sooner if there had been a wider and earlier opportunity for participation. There is no doubt this was a 'learning partnership', which actively monitored what worked best and adapted activities and procedures to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Nonetheless, in a project that has required significant expertise to follow the main agenda, some partners have struggled throughout**.** For example, some fundamental questions and anxieties were articulated during the early stages by some partners in trying to understand, when so many sophisticated models already existed, what the specific added value would be of this work and how it might be fully evidenced. Subsequently the detailed programme of research and proposals for the Observatory went a long way to illuminating the future progress of Rainova and the distinctive contribution it can make.

Budget pressures: sustainability

Ensuring that the work can be sustained will, as ever, be a challenge. As funding closes the relevant partners will have to agree how the website, Observatory and online platform are to be supported and serviced going forward.

It may fall to the specialist providers and project leaders who can most effectively combine their own activities to match those of the project and ensure the future of the work is preserved.

Clarity of ideas

Partners have sometimes struggled with ideas and concepts about which others feel more relaxed. For example, one partner could not understand the concept of a 'customised standard European model for innovation' for small businesses, because this did not translate well into their own language. Where concepts are difficult for native English speakers to understand and relate to, they are almost certainly more difficult for non-native speakers and prospective users. Therefore it is crucial to be sensitive about whether partners have fully grasped what was has been said and explained. This can be particularly important when developing new jargon and technical language.

Communication between meetings through the forum

The communication record of partners has been somewhat mixed. The online platform has not been used to its maximum potential and some communication opportunities have therefore been lost.

The VCP platform is a very comprehensive instrument. For some partners it has proved difficult to access, although this alone does not entirely explain the relatively limited level of usage by some partners. In particular the forum, which should be a very active communication tool, was insufficiently used by some. High levels of activity before transnational meetings were always valuable and went some way to compensating for quiet periods between the meetings.

In short, the platform, which is the key communication tool of the project, has not been fully exploited. This underuse and the resulting communication barriers have been arguably the single biggest obstacle in the process aspect of the project, and partners should have given this rather more urgent reflection.

Deadlines

During the early stages of the project some partners had concerns that deadlines had been missed on some occasions and that this caused a knock-on effect on other work. Compliance with requests, for example, for logos, monitoring reports and so on was very slow on a number of occasions.

Such deadlines can be important because key activities such as marketing and dissemination cannot be finished until every partner has completed their work. The Rainova partnership is very large and delays were easily caused by just one partner being late with work. Even so, all the main project deliverables were finally met.

Development of the IMM

A comprehensive and well constructed IMM has emerged from the work of the partners. It was partly influenced by research and written reflections and conclusions by the lead partner.

There was little opportunity to consult prospective users during the construction of the IMM apart from information gleaned during the research phase. It was left to the final testing phase towards the end of the project to determine the value of the IMM for prospective users.

Dissemination activity and repository

The dissemination process has been the responsibility of CSCS, the partners from Tuscany, who have a very successful record of delivering this work both comprehensively and imaginatively via transnational projects and national programmes.

All Rainova partners were committed to a dissemination strategy and were requested by CSCS to ensure their activities were properly logged on the platform and reported on the website. Not all of them complied with these requests as well as others. Much good dissemination work may be being done by a number of partners but until it is fully recorded it cannot ultimately form any part of the overall evaluation of the project. Lack of evidence may do some partners a disservice, but this cannot be helped. Partners were repeatedly reminded that it is essential that dissemination takes place throughout the life of the project and is comprehensively and fully recorded and shared with the work package leader.

Within this project it would also have been even better if the dissemination had been delivered in an innovative way!

It is to be hoped that in the last two months of the project still available to partners they will all be able to record all the dissemination work they have accomplished.

Horizontal communication

Communication and content flow between partners tended to be disappointing. There was ready access to all the documents produced and the website and online platform became steadily more populated, and yet the links and open communication between partners outside the scheduled meetings were often too limited.

Magnitude of tasks

Partners repeatedly talked about the magnitude and ambition of the tasks they faced and wondered aloud about how they would be fully achieved and rolled out. The Rainova partnership was very large and diverse and had a challenging agenda. For us there was never any doubt that the skill and determination of the group would prove to be more than capable of delivering the work. Nonetheless comfort to the whole partnership might sometimes have been provided by pausing to summarise the progress to date and provide an opportunity for partners to raise their concerns and questions.

Partners too varied in experience

It is in the spirit of Leonardo that more experienced and proficient partners can lead and inspire those with less expertise. Diversity of approach can be a great help in successfully concluding a project.

In the case of Rainova it has proved challenging for some partners with more limited experience to work effectively with those partners who already had extensive experience and leading positions in the area of innovation development.

This led to some nervousness from those partners and concern about their inability to make a significant impact. The sheer number of partners too was a management challenge in itself, with the commensurate need to ensure that the whole group was able to make a full contribution to the project's work and contribute to a more synergistic outcome.

Regional Research Report

This key deadline was missed. But a group of partners felt an urgent need to become involved because they felt such an important deliverable delay could severely prejudice the schedule. As a

result they ensured that the delay was made up. This was effectively achieved and the partners involved should be commended.

Research interviews

Some partners reported that the templates for the research interviews were not compatible with the target groups with whom they were dealing and did not meet all their requirements.

Research responses were of mixed quality. Some regions produced highly detailed and comprehensive reports, while some did rather less well. Perhaps the interview template was not sufficiently prescriptive. For example, the number of guideline questions made the responses difficult to compare. In total only two group interviews were carried out and, at the time of writing, some partners were hoping to organise more of these before the Research Report was finalised.

Responsiveness by partners

Partners might do well to reflect on how the project deals with feedback coming from prospective organisations – small businesses in particular. The overarching question is: how do we sell the project's benefits and especially the cost benefit of having a helpful IMM? For example, questions such as: "What am I getting out of this?" and responses such as: "We can't spare the time!" and so on are perennial concerns that arise with small businesses. The project will have to answer those questions in a convincing way if the work is to be implemented successfully.

Shared vision

The Basque partner Tknika has taken the lead in developing a comprehensive and detailed Innovation Management Model, which has drawn on research and been piloted by all the relevant partners.

Will this model be acceptable to the organisations with which it is being piloted? How flexible will it prove to be when tested? This is arguably the single biggest challenge that has faced the project, and the final results are not yet in.

The need to engage target groups at an early stage in the process was highlighted in a number of the studies put forward before the emergence of the final model and was a key conclusion of the research done by the project. Models that do not take account of the end user from the outset and involve them only towards the end of the process run the risk of being flawed. VET institutions and SMEs should whenever possible have been included in the development and formative phase of the IMM rather than waiting for a pilot phase of a model in whose development they had no involvement. Piloting is important and will test the effectiveness of the model, but there is no substitute for early engagement with end users.

Website engagement

All partners are responsible for the content and population of the project's website and it should not have been left to a significant few of the partners to create and build the main project narrative. It was important to ensure that information and activity was shared. Indeed the same activities that are part of the dissemination record could invariably have helped to populate the website. The work package leader has been tireless and patient in persuading partners to contribute news and outcomes but with only limited success.

Work is only really apparent when it is recorded and it would be a pity if some of the Rainova work ends up not being properly recorded.

Conclusions

The project has performed well across a broad front. Partners have been generally enthusiastic and capable. There was undoubtedly slippage in the key area of research, which prompted other partners to pick up the work, get back on track and ensure that momentum was not lost. As regards partner communications the overall record was somewhat mixed and uneven, with the main communication tool being not fully used by everyone. All the same, this did not prevent all the key tasks being completed.

In the best traditions of Leonard da Vinci projects there was a wide range of experience and capacity within a large partnership. The benefits for some partners were significant although other partners were challenged by the expectations placed upon them and the expertise required to fully engage with the project.

Nevertheless ultimately all the key deliverables have been achieved and a coherent and impressive list of outcomes has been completed.

There is significant scope now for key partners within this group to further develop the work of Rainova and place its Observatory and Innovation Management Model right at the heart of European innovation practice.

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