

HANDOUT

RESILIENT STRATEGIES FOR HAY MEADOWS CONSERVATION

INNOVATION
IN ACTION
SERIES

Prat de Dall © Joan Font

Xarxa per a la
Conservació de la Natura



CONTEXT

The Catalan Network for Nature Conservation (XCN) is an organisation that brings together XX environmental entities and local authorities. It fosters nature conservation initiatives amongst civil society, by leading actions related to knowledge transfer, funding, advising, and policy. One of XCN's members, the ecologist association IAEDEN is active in the conservation of hay meadows, which present high ecological and cultural values. These habitats have been historically maintained by livestock farmers but they are in serious danger of disappearing due to abandonment or intensification. IAEDEN engages with landowners to ensure the preservation or restoration of hay meadows and develops research and educational activities.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Effective action towards hay meadows conservation is especially hard: plots are small, isolated and scattered, landowners are elders or absent, political willingness is very low, among other obstacles. All this exacerbates the low economic yield of hay reaping and contributes to the abandonment or intensification of meadow plots. Nowadays, hay meadows preservation in the Albera area is too dependent on IAEDEN and on external funding sources. This action research thus aimed at finding ways to implement more definitive, resilient, self-sustained mechanisms to ensure that reaping is carried out and hay meadow values are preserved without over-involvement of IAEDEN.

"Innovation in Action". In 2020-21, six RURALIZATION partners conducted eight-month-long participatory action research projects to explore new solutions to leverage farmland in favour of agroecological transition, generational renewal, and rural regeneration. The results of their actions are presented in this series.



INNOVATIVE

- ✓ Study & promote multi-functional uses of farmland in an unfavourable context (low agronomic value, small plots, abandonment).
- ✓ Explore a long-term, self-sustaining approaches that promote synergies between agriculture and nature conservation.
- ✓ Involve a variety of actors in seeking levers for autonomous & efficient management of meadows (academia, policymakers, landowners...)



IMPACTFUL

- ✓ Generate knowledge and exchanges amongst stakeholders on sustainable conservation models
- ✓ Design policy proposals to review CAP agroenvironmental measures & other public aid to support hay meadow conservation. Deliver proposals in the framework of CAP reform.
- ✓ Raise awareness on hay meadows conservation through a communication campaign (social media, newsletter) and open debate.

OBJECTIVE

Improve knowledge and conditions to define and implement a resilient and self-sustained strategy for hay meadows conservation

ACTION PLAN

Task 1: Identify mechanisms that could contribute to a resilient and self-sustained conservation of hay meadows and analyse their potential effectiveness

- Review literature, existing initiatives, and contact experts with different profiles to list possible solutions
- Conduct brainstorming sessions to assess the potential of mechanisms identified

Task 2: Foster knowledge exchange amongst the stakeholders involved in hay meadows

- Identify stakeholders potentially involved in the management of hay meadows in l'Albera area
- Organise meetings and an open conference to share and debate on issues

Task 3: Improve the political willingness and commitment to conservation of hay meadows

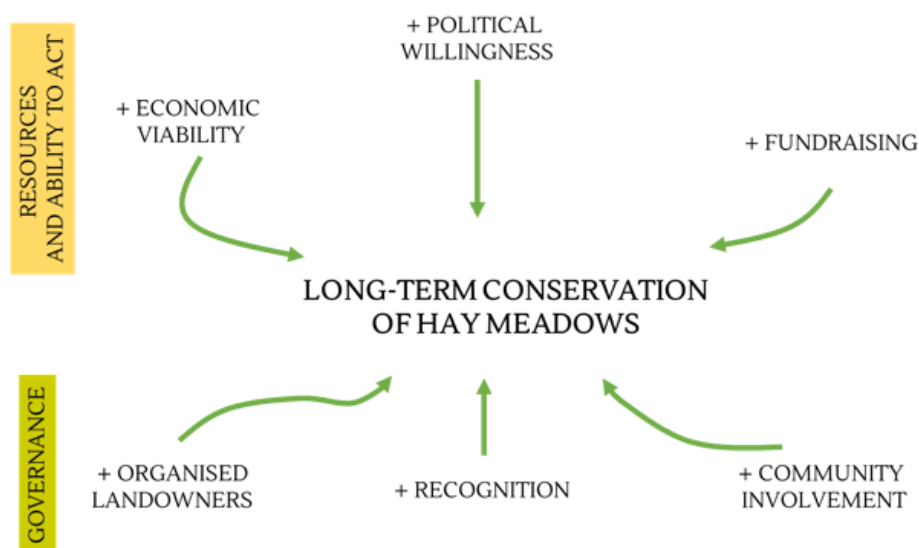
- Elaborate a set of policy proposals to review agro-environmental measures
- Engage with policymakers on these proposals



RESULTS

The different mechanisms identified to increase resiliency and sustainability of hay meadow management were classified in 6 categories, as illustrated in Figure 1. Some of these categories related to mechanisms that could increase practitioners' resources or ability to act (e.g. by reinforcing economic viability of the reaping activity). Meanwhile, other categories related to mechanisms that would improve the chances of success at the governance level (e.g. by increasing institutional recognition for the value of this habitat).

The exercise aimed to think “out of the box” regarding possible mechanisms that could be implemented. Thus, the final list is varied and not all mechanisms documented are relevant. Yet, some of them relate to core challenges, such as increasing the viability of the reaping by exploring other products or uses, conducting other economic activities, fundraising, fostering the coordination amongst landowners, etc.



A special focus on mechanisms to increase political commitment was chosen to take advantage of the window of opportunity opened with the current reforming of the CAP. In this regard, the agro-environmental measure on hay meadows was assessed and debated with different stakeholders, and possible improvements were identified and delivered to policymakers. Amongst others, the proposals were: to better define the habitat to which the measure is targeted (current definition lacks specificity and resources are channeled towards grassland pastures in general), increase the territorial scope (current scope is mountain counties, thus mid-land and low-land hay meadows are excluded), increase the minimum eligible surface (so that it is consistent with the rather small and scattered nature of hay meadow plots), improve some management commitments, include landowners associations and land stewardship organisations as beneficiaries and encourage collective approaches.

Other proposals referred to more underlying issues of the CAP. For instance, current legislation does not allow or facilitate the logic of actually paying for conserving a natural asset (only management costs and the loss of earnings are being paid). This should be changed so that farmers are the acknowledged and remunerated according to the public goods they provide. Results-based payments should also be explored an approach possibly better suited to hay meadows conservation.

TIPS FOR PRACTICE!

BUILDING LEGITIMACY

- **IAEDEN's long term conservation practices and local anchorage** (local contracts with 22 landowners) was the first step to identify precisely needs and challenges related to hay meadow conservation
- **Enlarging the circle of actors concerned with conservation goals (e.g. involving volunteers, policymakers, retailers...)** is a key aspect of more resilient strategies but this requires building knowledge-based arguments and articulating them in a convincing communication plan.

LEVERS & OBSTACLES FOR ACTION

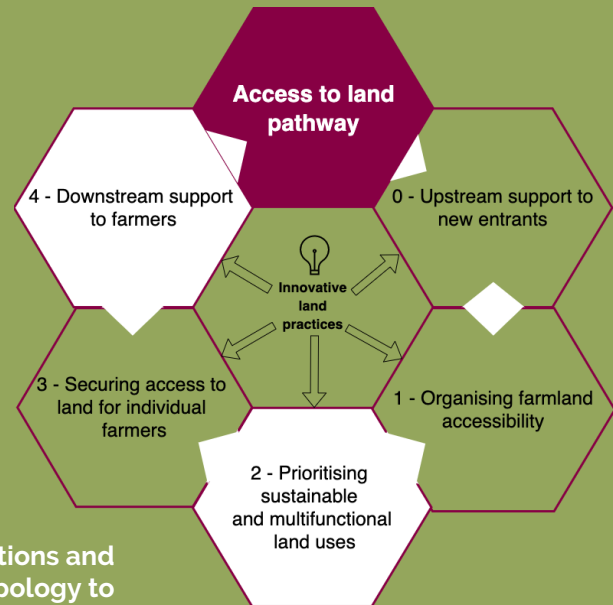
- XCN works jointly with members. At the time the action was led, IAEDEN was in the middle of a major reorganisation, so that **people holding the main knowledge ("human capital") were short of time.**
- Working on land stewardship goes against main trends in agriculture. **Stakeholders must be aware and ready for an uphill battle** with ill-adapted public aid.



AN ADAPTED RESPONSE TO LOCAL LAND CHALLENGES

The action tackles the organisation of the accessibility of farmland. It mobilises private landowners and explores strategies to ensure that land remains available for farming and as a natural and cultural asset.

The action also steers land control towards specific sustainable and multifunctional uses, since the ultimate objective is to maintain and foster the natural value of hay meadows. This is a strong lever for developing agroecological approaches and for fostering rural regeneration beyond farming. Finally, this action encourages the diversification of activities and it provides practical support in the management of the meadows, thus tackling aspects of downstream support to farmers or landowners through increased farm viability.



What is the "Access to land pathway"? Innovations use a wide range of actions and strategies to provide effective access to land. The pathway provides a typology to categorise innovative practices' different modes of action.

XARXA PER A LA WHO WE ARE CONSERVACIÓ DE LA NATURA

XCN is an second-level organisation that fosters nature conservation initiatives amongst civil society, by leading actions related to knowledge transfer, funding, advising and policy. XCN's members are usually local land stewardship organisations, such as IAEDEN, that work together with landowners in order to preserve the natural values and ecological processes of their estates.

Learn more at: www.xcn.cat

ACCESS TO LAND NETWORK

The Access to land network brings together grassroots organisations from across Europe to share experiences and promote the significance of access to land for agroecological transition and generational renewal. Established in 2012, it functions as an informal network of about 15 organisations.

Learn more at: www.accesstoland.eu

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CONTACT

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Learn more at : ruralization.eu



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