



SMACS – FABER – CLEAN-ER

“The future of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: challenges, opportunities and existing support services”

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Application procedure

The Operational Groups for these three projects were funded in the rural development funding of Region Emilia Romagna, north Italy. They lasted from 2020 to 2023 – and were impacted by the COVID pandemics. The group included research organisations, an experimental farm, the consortia managing forests in the Appennine mountains and a formation centre.

Some main ideas were to estimate the forest biomass with remote sensing, combined with conventional measurements, as a tool for calculating carbon storage. We developed a chipping machine adapted to mountain areas. The biomass was then subjected to pyrolysis to obtain biochar, which was brought back to the wood as amendment in forest soil. We performed a comparison between two pyrolysis approaches to check for their effectiveness in the specific territory.

Generally, the partnerships came from previous experiences and knew how to work effectively. In my experience, in the projects for OG some kinds of partners are “mandatory” and so the partnership has to find the right solution for including the required companies or persons and integrate them in the whole picture. This might be a source for opportunities but also a source of problems.



Implementation phase

In our projects CLEAN-ER and FABER, the main idea started from specific requests of foresters regarding management of woody residues and clean up of forest ground. We added our own ideas to develop the research project including analyses of soil health and economic evaluations. The co-design process was important, and non-scientific partners were involved from the start. It is not always so straightforward, sometimes the end-users need to be informed of the innovations before they can understand they need some improvement.

I found that the activities for formation and consultancy were effective in keeping the farms and companies engaged. For the whole OG, regular meetings and email communications are necessary. Starting during COVID, online tools became the preferred tool.

In our most recent projects, I participated to study trips with farmers and to training courses online. I could see that they were very interested, and I imagine that in future they could be interested in doing more and joining an OG. This kind of involvement can be beneficial.



Overall assessment

From my side, I would have needed more support in the reporting activities, procuring documents, uploading them in the system. The same is true for other partners, especially farmers and foresters.

The administrative burden was indeed very heavy in the reporting periods. But I have no idea how it could be decreased. For sure, the number of documents we need to provide for every item of cost is too high.



Further exploitation

The new Living Lab and Lighthouse approach could be a good way to involve farmers and foresters, ask them to be demonstrators and showcase the innovative solutions to other stakeholders.

Our recent projects had some overlap with Horizon2020, PRIMA and ERA-NET (Partnerships) projects involving the main partners, mainly because we used the same materials for experiments. This has been mentioned in the scientific publications we produced.

Now we have other projects on similar topics, with Regional and European funding, focused on Appennine mountains, carbon, ecosystem services.

Collaboration in Action: Unlocking the Potential of OGs



Thank you!

