

Session 1: Understanding Innovation & Co-Creation (09:30–10:45)

Objective

Establish a common understanding of innovation processes and the advisor’s role in fostering co-creation. By the end of this session, participants should grasp that innovation is more than a single event – it is a journey through stages. They will be introduced to the **Spiral of Initiatives** model to visualize these stages, and learn about different modes of collaboration (from one-way knowledge transfer to full co-creation). Participants will reflect on where their projects stand in the innovation spiral and how they can shift their approach from simply transferring knowledge to facilitating collaborative innovation.

Content Overview

Start with a short interactive presentation defining *innovation*. Highlight that innovation in agroforestry can be a new practice (e.g. a novel silvopasture technique), a new organizational approach (a cooperative marketing agroforestry products), or a social innovation (a policy change driven by stakeholder input). What makes it *innovation* (as opposed to just routine change) is that it is something novel **that adds value** – and often it is generated through the interplay of many actors. Emphasize two key points: (1) Innovation is **process**, not just a product; (2) Effective innovation in agriculture is usually **participatory**.

Introduce the concept of **three modes of collaboration** that extension advisors can engage in: **transfer**, **exchange**, and **co-creation**. Define each briefly:

- *Transfer* – a one-directional flow of knowledge from expert to farmer (the classic “teach the new practice” model).
- *Exchange* – a two-way interaction where advisors and farmers share knowledge and adapt ideas (more interactive, but each party mostly sticks to their own knowledge domain).
- *Co-creation* – a fully collaborative mode where multiple actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, etc.) work together from the start to define problems and develop solutions jointly.

Ask participants: **“Which mode do you think leads to more lasting agroforestry innovation?”** Of course, co-creation is the goal – research and EU policy both push for this interactive innovation. Summarize: *In this training, we are moving from transfer to co-creation.* Advisors need to facilitate processes where **farmers are partners in innovation**, not just recipients of advice.

Now delve into the **phases of an innovation process**. Explain that innovations typically go through recognizable stages, though not always in a straight line. Introduce the **Spiral of Initiatives** (also known as the innovation spiral) as a framework.

This spiral model outlines seven key stages an initiative may pass through: **Initial Idea** → **Inspiration** → **Planning** → **Development** → **Realisation** → **Dissemination** → **Embedding** akiconnect.eu. Unlike a linear timeline, the spiral shows that you may sometimes loop back or repeat stages as the idea evolves.

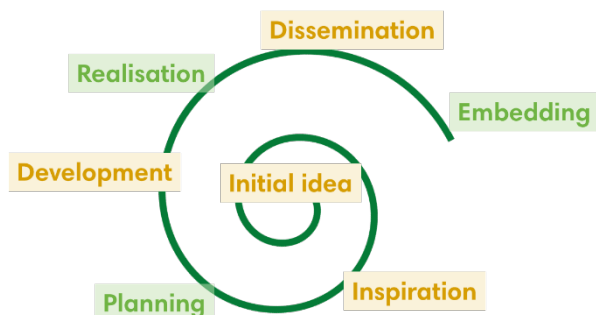


FIGURE 2. Spiral of initiatives (modified from CECRA)

Briefly describe each stage in plain terms, relating them to agroforestry examples:

- **Initial Idea:** Someone (a farmer, advisor, researcher) thinks “*What if...?*” – e.g. “*What if we use sheep to control weeds in our orchard?*” It is a spark, often from thinking outside the box or exposure to a new perspective .

- **Inspiration:** The idea is shared informally and starts to **attract like-minded people**. A loose network forms as others get excited and add their dreams to it. (In our example, a few farmers and an advisor start meeting over coffee, energized by the potential of silvopasture.) This stage builds *ambition and energy*.
- **Planning:** The group becomes more organized. They plan how to test or implement the idea, identify resources needed, and perhaps seek support or permission (For example: writing a simple project plan or applying for a small grant to trial grazing sheep in an orchard.)
- **Development (Experimentation):** Trying it out – pilot projects, on-farm trials, gathering evidence that the idea works. Iteration is key: they refine the practice through learning. (Our farmers graze sheep in a few orchards, monitor the effects, and tweak the approach.)
- **Realisation:** Scaling up and making it real beyond pilots. Larger implementation and negotiation with broader stakeholders occurs. Power dynamics come into play; convincing sceptics or gatekeepers is critical. (The group might now negotiate with an agricultural cooperative or local authorities to support rolling this practice out region-wide.)
- **Dissemination:** The innovation spreads to others who were not originally involved. This could be through field days, networks, publications – others see the success and adopt it. (Sheep-in-orchard practice is featured in agricultural journals; more farmers start doing it after hearing of the results.)
- **Embedding:** The new practice becomes “the new normal” – incorporated into standard practice or policy. Structures (like policies, institutional support) adapt to accommodate it. (Eventually, extension recommendations and perhaps subsidy programs include managed orchard grazing – it is just how things are done now.) After embedding, the cycle may spark a **new innovation** (hence a spiral that continues upward) as new needs emerge.

Stress that *not every initiative reaches all stages*. Many ideas stall – maybe they gather some interest but never get funded (stuck between Inspiration and Planning), or pilots work but broader adoption fails. Understanding where you are in the spiral helps an advisor know **what support is needed**: e.g. if at Inspiration stage, focus on broadening the network and vision; if at Development, focus on experimentation and learning; if at Dissemination, think about communication channels, etc.. Each stage has typical pitfalls and success factors (for instance, a pitfall in early stages is not involving enough people or lacking a clear vision; a pitfall in Realisation is rigid opposition from gatekeepers).

Facilitate a **group reflection**: Ask participants to consider an agroforestry project or idea they are involved in (or know of). “*What stage of the spiral is it in right now?*” Have them turn to a neighbour and briefly discuss their examples. After 5 minutes, invite a couple of share-outs: “*We manage a community tree-planting initiative in ---; we think we’re between Development and Realisation – we have pilots and now need to convince the local council to adapt rules to support it.*” Use these to illustrate how one would apply the spiral concept in practice. Acknowledge that stages can blur, but the model gives a language to discuss progress.

Now link back to the advisor’s role: for each stage, advisors can play different roles. For instance, in **Initial Idea/Inspiration**, an advisor might act as an “*animator*” – encouraging people to dream and connect (often through **exchange** of ideas in informal settings). In Planning, the advisor might switch to a “*project manager*” mindset – helping structure the effort (which edges a bit into a “cold” role of bringing in formal agreements, as we will discuss later). Emphasize the need for **flexibility**: as the innovation evolves, the advisor’s facilitation style should also evolve.

Finally, summarize Session 1 by reinforcing the move from transfer to co-creation. One powerful way to convey this is through a metaphor given in innovation literature: *When stakeholders struggle or merely negotiate, they are just dividing or slightly enlarging a fixed pie; but in co-creation, they “bake a new pie together” that no one could*



have made alone. In an agroforestry network, this means the outcome of true collaboration can exceed what any single actor initially envisioned.



Activity - Innovation Post-Its (10 min)

- To wrap up, give each participant three sticky notes. Ask: “Write down one thing that an advisor should *do* to support an innovation at the **Inspiration** stage (on note 1), at the **Development** stage (note 2), and at the **Embedding** stage (note 3).”

For example: Inspiration – “*connect people, organize a farm visit to inspire*”; Development – “*help set up a trial and document results*”; Embedding – “*work with extension service to include practice in advisory curriculum*”.

Collect the notes on a flipchart under the three headings. This creates a rough toolkit map that you can refer to in later sessions (and correct/make more precise as they learn more tools). It also shows participants they already have intuitive ideas which we will build on.

Key takeaways:

Innovation is a journey that advisors can navigate using different approaches at different times. Our goal is to nurture the journey (co-create) rather than just hand out a map (transfer). This sets the stage for Session 2, which will delve into the *people* side: who is on this journey with us?