Practice abstracts: A new challenge for researchers participating in Horizon projects

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Abstract

The European Union's research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, requires multi-actor projects to generate practice abstracts. All practice abstracts are produced using the EIP-AGRI common format and made available on the EIP-AGRI website. Although practice abstracts can be valuable tools, they are associated with several challenges. These include issues related to clarity of content, format, timing, language and accessibility. This paper outlines these challenges and then provides recommendations for projects as well as EIP-AGRI and the EU in order to address them. We conclude that the EIP-AGRI website could benefit from some changes in order to achieve its goal – measuring the impact of research on practice. However, with some possible enhancements and the continuous integration of these tools into the projects in the European Union's framework programs, this goal can indeed be achieved.

1.   Introduction

The European Union's research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, requires multi-actor projects to generate practice abstracts. According to van Oost (2016), "the common EIP format for "practice abstracts" was developed building on Member States' experience" and is expected to "contribute to the visibility and rewarding of researchers' work in practice-oriented interactive innovation projects…" Van Oost also expects "the unique EU repository of practice abstracts on the EIP-AGI website may help measuring impact of research on practice, similar to the research abstracts in peer-reviewed journals" (slide 15).

Practice abstracts not only have the potential to provide valuable information to end users; they can also support advisory services, encourage discussion around important topics and increase awareness of EU project results (EU SCAR AKIS, 2019). However, the production of these abstracts often comes with several challenges, which are outlined below.

2.   Material and methods

For practice abstracts, the European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture (EIP-AGRI) has produced the EIP-AGRI common format which is available as an excel file. Researchers and project partners are requested to submit their abstracts in about 1500 characters in English as well the original language. Once submitted to EIP-AGRI via the Excel file, it is published in plain format on the EIP-AGRI website.

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) is responsible for dissemination in several Horizon 2020 projects (OK-Net Arable[1], OK-Net Ecofeed[2], DiverIMPACTS[3], and SoLACE[4]). In the OK-Net Arable project, which was mainly about information exchange and sharing existing knowledge, the partners agreed that in order to make the information available to practitioners, a different format would be needed. As a result, FiBL developed a MS Word template for the practice abstracts.

The template includes the information required by EIP-AGRI, but also adds other elements:

- An "applicability box", which explains under which conditions a certain practice is applicable,
- Pictures, tables, and/or graphs that illustrate the topic, and
- Links to further information about the topic.

This basic concept – i.e. MS Word template for practice abstracts with pictures and graphs –is/was applied in OK-Net Arable, OK-Net Ecofeed, DiverIMPACTS and SolACE. The results shown below come from our experiences producing the practice abstracts and from consistent feedback from the authors of the practice abstracts in the aforementioned projects.

3.   Results

The experience with the production of the practice abstracts has shown:

- The concept of practice abstracts is relatively new and is not always well understood by project partners. This may be, in part, due to the name – practice abstracts – which has been interpreted in different ways.
- Partners in research projects are often reluctant to share existing experiences because they feel only direct project results can be used.
- However, research results are often only available at the end of the project, which makes it difficult to review the practice abstracts and to communicate them adequately before the project is over.
- Similarly, project partners want to "save" their results for scientific journal articles.
- The quantity of practice abstracts is sometimes prioritized over the quality.
- Partners often find it difficult to summarize their results in way that is accessible to practitioners, especially in English.

- In order to make the practice abstracts available in both the local language and in English, they need to be translated. Due to limited dissemination budgets, this is often done using automatic translation, which is not always high quality.
- Even the best practice abstracts often do not reach practitioners.
- The practice abstracts on the EIP-AGRI website are not very easy to find.

Based on the feedback and experience from several projects, we find that there are several changes that can be made at the project level, by EIP-AGRI and by Horizon 2020 to help achieve the desired impact.

For projects, it can help to:

- make a simple but attractive word template that partners can easily use and which is also attractive and accessible for end-users,

- produce examples early on in the project,

- allocate practice abstracts to partners during the project planning phase so that the division of responsibility is clear, and include this in the dissemination plan,

- set up a clear review process, including a review by a native English speaker.

- make sure practice abstracts do not have overly scientific language or graphs and make reference to graphs and pictures in the text,

- ensure that practice abstracts are disseminated to all project partners, through project dissemination channels, and at the local level.

For EIP-AGRI, we suggest that the practice abstracts become easier to find. It would be good to have a database with all practice abstracts where users can browse them by theme, language, project and keyword. A model could be the Organic Farm Knowledge Platform[1] (Rasmussen et al. 2017, Willer et al. 2019). If this is not possible, it would be helpful if the links to the practice abstracts reflect the full title of the abstract and not just "Practice Abstract 1", etc.

Finally, it could be helpful if the EU encouraged quality of practice abstracts over quantity. Some projects attempt to produce 100 practice abstracts, which is not always realistic within the timeframe of the project, resulting in low quality.

4. Discussion

The production of practice abstracts is an important step toward making scientific knowledge ready and accessible for practice. However, practice abstracts come with several challenges. These generally reflect larger communication and dissemination challenges in multi-actor projects, which have broader implications for the long-term impact of projects. Many of these issues could generally be alleviated by allocating more time and importance to communications. For example, reserving a designated amount of time at the end of the project for publications and communications activities could alleviate some of the time pressure.

We conclude that the intended aim of the unique EU repository of practice abstracts on the EIP-AGRI website – helping to **measure the impact** of research on practice – has not yet been achieved. However, with some possible enhancements and the continuous integration of these tools into the projects in the EU's framework programs, this goal can indeed be achieved.

5. References

EU SCAR AKIS (2019) Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. European Commission Brussels.

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Willer, H. et al. (2019) The Online Platform "Organic Farm Knowledge". Paper submitted to the 20th Organic World Congress

6. Weblinks

[1] https://organic-farmknowledge.org/about/partner-projects/ok-net-arable
[2] https://organic-farmknowledge.org/about/partner-projects/ok-net-ecofeed
[3] https://www.diverimpacts.net
[4] https://www.solace-eu.net
[5] https://organic-farmknowledge.org