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Project Full Name: Enhancing the innovativeness of food SMEs through the management of strategic network behaviour and network learning performance

PUBLISHABLE SUMMARY
FINAL REPORT

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LIST OF CONTENT

Executive Summary Final Report

The NetGrow project was a 4-year European FP7 project (May 1, 2010 to April 30, 2014). It aimed at enhancing the innovativeness of food small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) through improved management of network learning and strategic network behaviour. The project combined scientific research with developing network learning tools of practical use to food SMEs, network organisations and policy makers. The project bundled the capacities of universities, research institutions and SMEs organizations from 9 different countries, i.e. Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, France and Germany.

This project combined research actions at two levels: 1) the focal company level, investigating how a food SMEs' attitudes and preferences towards networks determine its individual network behaviour in order to achieve its business objectives; and 2) the network level, investigating the functioning of the network as a whole and its effect on innovation and economic growth and how network stakeholders can make the network perform better. Based on this research, the project's main findings and conclusions are: 1) There is no network-that-fits-all due to the very diverse innovation and network preferences and needs of food SMEs. Hence, food SMEs and network managers need to set their focus carefully according to the firm's characteristics, experiences and innovation focus in order to achieve a good match of SMEs' needs and demands and the network's offer. 2) Measuring network performance is not straightforward and requires a holistic approach considering both the network and the firm level, because the determinants of performance at these levels can be different (e.g. network diversity has a positive influence on the food SME's firm performance, but not on the performance of the network). Furthermore different stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers, network managers, SMEs) have different perspectives on network performance. For certain stakeholders, only a few indicators are needed, while for others (i.e. the policy-makers) many are needed ('they need the bigger picture'). In the end, all research results were combined with insights from innovation and technology management, chain and network science, organizational and communication theory, and useful tools existing in other technology fields resulting in the NetGrow Network Learning Toolbox, which is available for download and usage on www.netgrow.eu/toolbox (i-depot, registration no. 054415). The toolbox was tested and validated by about 960 food SMEs, network managers, policy makers and researchers. Specific information and training was also provided to more than 3800 food SMEs and other relevant stakeholders all over Europe.

NetGrow's specific results were disseminated and can still be consulted on www.netgrow.eu, the six newsletters (http://www.netgrow.eu/index.php?hova=17), and by joining the consortium on LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/NetGrow-7429625. Towards the research community, more than 85 scientific papers as well as reports and books were produced. Most of these publications are also useful and interesting for food SMEs, industry associations, network managers and policy makers. In particular, we contributed to open-access special issues on NetGrow of two journals: a) International Journal on Food System Dynamics - Special Issue on Networks and Innovation (Vol. 3, Issue 3) and b) Journal of Chain and Network Science - Special NetGrow Issue (Vol. 14, Issue 2). Finally, a Food Industry Report was prepared at the end of the project, entitled "Open Innovation in the Food Industry: An Evidence Based Guide" and is also available on http://www.netgrow.eu/_doc/Industry_report.pdf

The impact of the NetGrow project's findings reach from a greater availability of usable know-how regarding European SME networks and the factors determining success in SMEs for all relevant stakeholders to the development of business tools to enable SMEs to assess their own network needs, interests, and preferences for to allow organizational change and strategic management leading to competitive and sustainable business networks, support the emergence of dynamic and sustainable SME networks capable of promoting and sustaining innovation in the food sector, and finally to support long-term KBBE strategies in the European Research Area (ERA). Furthermore, the project's result should create sustainable growth and further employment by food SMEs and enable policy makers to tailor their strategies in the fields of agriculture and food, competition, enterprise, regional policy, and research and innovation at regional, national and European level. Through the high level of engagement of relevant stakeholders during the project a strong platform for the adoption of the toolbox is provided.

1 Summary description of project context and objectives

The NetGrow project was a 4-year European FP7 project which started on May 1, 2010 and finished on April 30, 2014. It aimed at enhancing the innovativeness of food SMEs through improved management of network learning and strategic network behaviour. The project combined scientific research with developing network learning tools of practical use to food SMEs, network organisations and policy makers. The project bundled the capacities of universities, research institutions and SMEs organizations from 9 different countries, i.e. Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, France and Germany.

PROJECT CONTEXT

Strategic network learning is of crucial importance for innovation, and hence for company competitiveness and growth, as it enables the company to expand its resource base and to absorb new trends and technologies. In the food sector, which is characterized by 99% of SMEs, it is observed that companies often fail in establishing a strategic and efficient network; a network which is defined as a set of actors connected by a set of repeated interaction through formal and/or informal ties. The actors are firms (competitors, suppliers, customers, auxiliary businesses etc.), individuals (boundary spanners etc.) knowledge centres (universities and research centres etc.) and other actors (network organizations, governments, special-interest groups, industry organizations etc.). The ties are relationships between the actors; they may be formal (contractual, institutionalized etc.) or informal (social, trust-based etc.).

The project followed four main ideas set at the beginning of the project:

A. Network learning contributes to innovation, economic growth, employment and sustainable competitive advantage

As products become increasingly modular and knowledge is distributed across organizations and increasingly specialised, innovation has become highly dependent on interaction in networks, both on the local and regional level as on the global stage. Innovation involves exploring new trajectories and anticipating new trends and technologies which requires stocks of knowledge and experience not solely found in-house (Gellynck et al., 2007; Gemunden et al., 1996; Kaufmann and Todtling, 2001). Network relations exist in several forms and in this project a broad definition of the network was used. Our definition of networking encompasses both networking with competitors, suppliers, knowledge centres and with a variety of actors through formal and informal linkages. The NetGrow project generated a profound insight into the relationship between the design of networks and their contribution to innovation in SMEs and sustainable competitive advantage with a particular interest in the interaction between SMEs themselves and also between SMEs and multinational companies (MNCs).

B. Fostering network learning by food SMEs

Obviously, network intensity differs between domains of the economy. Our focus on food SMEs is underpinned by following arguments:

The food industry is fundamental to the EU's competitiveness, being the world's largest exporter and importer of food products.

On the other hand, the food sector is characterized by a low rate of innovation coupled with a high new product failure rate after market introduction (Stewart-Knox and Mitchell, 2003).

In food SMEs, particular barriers are experienced due to their smaller resource base, having an impact on their network behaviour and the effectiveness of network learning (Aragon-Sanchez and Sanchez-Marin, 2005; Asheim et al., 2001). However, it should also be acknowledged that the population of food SMEs is a diverse group ranging from highly to non-dynamic companies.

Although this project's main focus was on food SMEs, strongly linked activities in the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE) also deserved attention.

C. Success in network learning depends upon network behaviour and underlying preferences, attitudes and skills

There is convincing evidence that particular groups of companies lack the skills and competences to benefit from networks and network support (Pittaway et al., 2004; Vermeire and Gellynck, 2007). While many companies are aware of the value of networking, they face difficulties when it comes to identifying and exploiting the opportunities present. One part of the explanation lies in the efficiency and effectiveness of policy interventions. The other part of the explanation lies in the attitude of companies towards public network support and networking in general. As such, the NetGrow project developed scientifically underpinned business tools aimed at helping companies to improve their network effectiveness through organisational change and strategic management.

D. Policy strategies for simulating networking

It are not solely successful networks that increase the innovation capacity and performance of the participating companies and their environment, but also the institutional context is a factor in the creation of networks as it embeds knowledge and allows for knowledge creation by enhancing interaction between the available physical and human resources (Malmberg and Maskell, 2006). Characteristic to innovation policies is the emphasis on cooperation between policy domains and disciplines. A particular interest was hence paid to regional policy on the one hand and to EU policy on the other. The research of the NetGrow project delivered efficient policy instruments to EU and regional policy makers, which will help to enhance the creation of dynamic, sustainable and competitive networks in the short term and therefore provide assistance to food SMEs to contribute to economic growth, employment and sustainable development.

CONCEPTS

The four main ideas presented above shaped the foundations of this project, which are synthesized in the conceptual framework presented in figure 1:

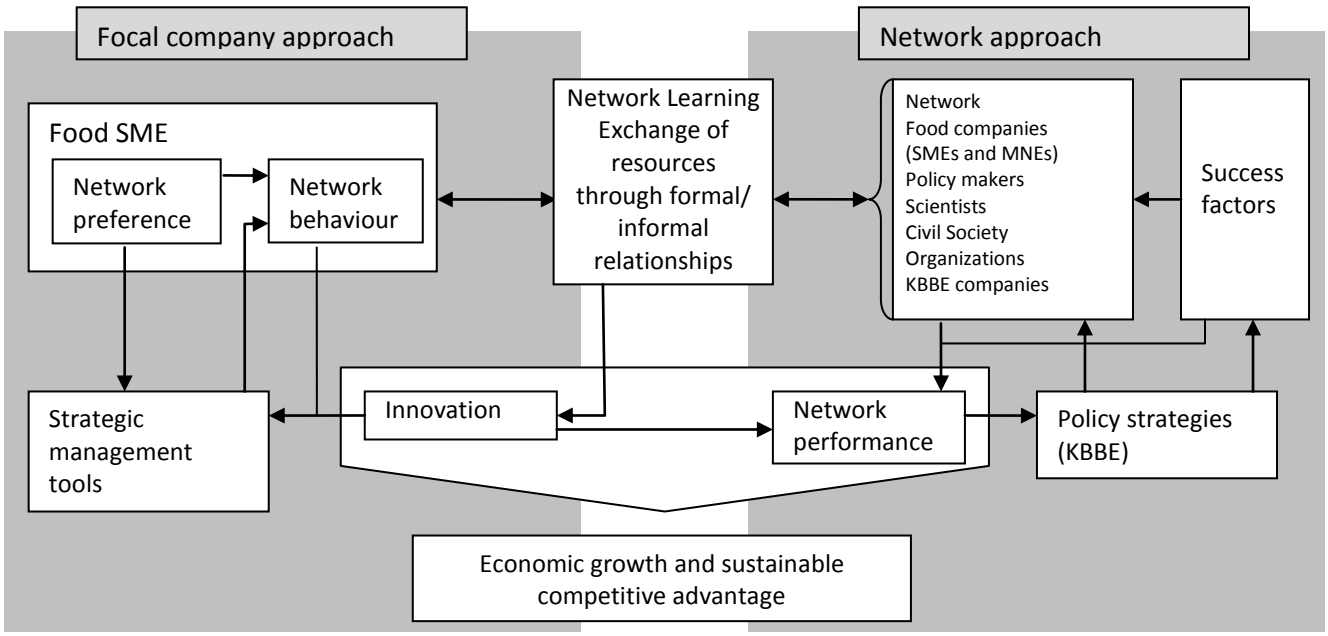

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the NetGrow Project

In our project, *network learning* was defined as the exchange of resources between food SMEs and a variety of relevant network actors, vital for developing innovation and hence sustainable economic growth. These exchange relationships can be both formal and informal and are usually a combination of both.

To analyse this, two approaches to network learning were combined, in order to address the two perspectives envisaged: the SMEs' perspective on the network and the policy maker's and network organization's perspective on the network of as a whole:

- On the left side, the focal company approach, taking the perspective of SMEs using the network to exchange resources in order to develop innovations and increase profit.
- On the right side, the network approach, taking the perspective of the network as a whole, with the aim of improving performance in fostering innovation in the food sector as a whole.

This distinction reflects the two major different perspectives, stakes and instruments with respect to network learning.

Following these main ideas and concepts, the NetGrow project formulated an answer to the following question: How can networks, by enhancing strategic network behaviour of food SMEs on the one hand and by assessing network performance at the network level on the other, become more innovative and perform better? The response can be found in the NetGrow Toolbox (www.netgrow.eu/toolbox, i-depot, registration no. 054415).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the NetGrow project was to enhance network learning leading to increased innovation, economic growth and sustainable competitive advantage for food SMEs. Instrumental for achieving this is usable know-how about network learning, the attitude of food SMEs in different EU member states and the functioning and performance of different types of networks.

The following specific objectives of the project have been addressed and achieved:

- To organise and safeguard the methodological integration between the WPs
- To understand the success factors and barriers of network learning, its antecedents and contribution to innovation & economic growth and sustainable competitive advantage
- To understand attributes of networks and their respective attribute levels which contribute to effective network learning by SMEs (focal company approach)
- To define the optimal design of networks based on segmentation of food SMEs reflecting their preferences for networking (focal company approach)
- To develop a prototype tool for measuring the learning performance of networks in the food sector (network approach)
- To test the assessment tool, to fine-tune it and to make a first identification of low and high performing networks (network approach)
- To effectively enhance the capacity of food SMEs, formal network organization and policy makers in managing their network strategically
- To communicate the project findings and network learning toolbox to food SMEs, formal network organizations and policy makers
- To coordinate and manage the project from an administrative, technical and strategic point of view

2 Description of the main S&T results/foregrounds

To improve innovation, economic growth and sustainable competitive advantage in European food SMEs, the NetGrow project combined scientific research at company and network level by investigating the drivers and barriers for network learning and strategic networking behaviour, which are crucial skills required to support innovation.

Within the NetGrow project, scientific research has been conducted in seven work packages (WP) with each WP depending to a certain extend on the input of the preceding one. **WP2** formed the basis for all following WPs, **WP3 and 4** focused on the company approach, and **WP5 and 6** focused on the network approach. All results were then combined in **WP7** where the NetGrow Network Learning Toolbox was developed. **WP1, 8, and 9** were horizontal work packages, assuring scientific and project-administrative management as well as dissemination.

WP2 investigated the success factors and bottlenecks of network learning in formal, informal and global networks through a case study approach with 28 networks. These case studies conducted were compiled in a book entitled "Mapping formal networks and identifying their role for innovation in EU Food SMEs", which is available on http://www.netgrow.eu/_doc/wp2_d2_1book.pdf.

Focal company level: First, in **WP3,** the 5 most relevant attributes and levels were identified based on an extensive literature review on SMEs' innovation and network preferences as well as relevant network attributes and their levels. These were then validated and adapted based on brainstorm sessions and Delphi rounds with experts and stakeholders from the food industry.
Subsequently, the top 3 identified relevant attributes and levels were considered as the starting point for developing a quantitative web-survey in **WP4**. The survey was sent to 8175 food SMEs in six countries i.e. Belgium, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Sweden between October 2012 and April 2013. About one third of the food SMEs responded to the web survey, but only 231 responses could be used for the choice-based experiment due to the fact that not all food SMEs filled in the questionnaire completely (i.e. a 3% response rate of eligible questionnaires). The data were analyzed and a report on network preferences (D4.3b) was prepared based on preliminary results. The data analysis turned out to be more difficult than expected due to non-linear relationships and interlinkages between the network attributes and firm characteristics. Further analyses of the choice-based experiment data were performed which constituted the basis for an academic paper in an A1 international, peer-reviewed journal (D4.3a). This scientific paper includes an extensive literature review on network attributes and firm's networking behavior. The results show that in general food SMEs prefer networks with supply chain members, confidential information sharing and where they get support in building their network of partners for innovation. However, when taking firm characteristics and innovation focus into account the preferences change. Food SMEs with collaborative experience prefer networks with research institutions and where they get support to develop innovation (e.g. market information, pilot facilities, etc.). Food SMEs with a focus on market innovation prefer networks with open information sharing and where they get support on how to manage their network of partners for innovation.

Network level: In **WP5** a prototype tool for measuring network performance at network level was developed. The indicators were first indicated through an extensive literature review and subsequently validated at discussion sessions with experts and stakeholders from the food sector (network managers, funding agencies and researchers). The outcome was a list of indicators suitable for measuring network performance at network level.
In **WP6**, the inputs from WP5 were used to develop three questionnaires: Questionnaire 1a (Q1a) was administered to the network manager and Questionnaire 1b (Q1b) was administered to the network

members (food SMEs) in form of an online questionnaire. This approach was selected to ensure the collection of accurate, high quality data relating to a specific network whilst minimising respondent fatigue. The second questionnaire (Q2) was a semi-structured questionnaire and adopted a means-end chain approach. The data were collected in six countries (Belgium, Ireland, The Netherlands, Hungary, Denmark, and Germany). First, in October 2012, Q1a was administered to the network managers (D6.2). These network managers subsequently sent the adapted online questionnaire (Q1b) to their members between January and June 2013. Obtaining a sufficient response rate of members per network was challenging (despite modifying the questionnaire following piloting, sending reminders etc. via the network manager) and meant that project partners undertook exhaustive activities (personal contact, attending industry events, etc.) to increase the response rate. However to facilitate the data cleaning and subsequently data analysis process, data collection ceased in June 2013. Data collection was also undertaken within this period for Q2 with food SMEs, network managers, policy makers and other stakeholders of the food industry. To ensure adequate investigation of four aspects of network performance without excessively overburdening respondents 3 partners (UGent, FV and IFAU) addressed the consequences of 2 dimensions of network performance (knowledge sharing and relationship quality) and 3 other partners (TEAG, DEB and UBO) addressed the consequences of 2 further dimensions of network performance (goal attainment and collaboration) (D6.3). Data analysis for Q1a+b was undertaken by using SPSS and AMOS. Data analysis on Q2 was undertaken using Laddermap. Based on the preliminary results of Q1a+b and Q2 and additional sources of documentation, D6.4 was prepared discussing the evolution of the input-output-outcome model (arising from WP5) in coherence with the findings in WP6. After further data analysis a report on high/low performance and associated determinants and consequences (D6.5a) and an academic paper (D6.5b.) were prepared.

In general the results of WP6 indicate that food SMEs' participation in network activities and social interactions within the network are most strongly linked to network performance: just receiving newsletters or other kind of "passive" information is not sufficient to achieve good network performance. Hence, initiatives and tools should focus on promoting participation in network activities (network managers should request feedback from their members in terms of satisfaction, whether the network fulfils their needs, etc.), foster social mechanisms (i.e. culture of shared goals/values/etc.), and assist participant-governed networks to manage their external relations. Furthermore, the network manager's capabilities matter for network performance and because measuring network performance is not straightforward, instead a holistic approach needs to be followed. Different stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers, network managers, SMEs) have different perspectives on what network performance means for them. For certain stakeholders, only a few indicators are needed, while for others (i.e. the policy-makers) many may be needed ('they need the bigger picture'). In conclusion, in the holistic approach both the firm and network level of performance should be considered as the determinants of performance at these levels may be different (e.g. network diversity has a positive influence on the food SMEs' firm performance, but not on the performance of the network).

The overarching **WP7** developed a network learning toolbox based on the outcomes of WP 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. The first draft of the business implications of the research outcomes from these WPs was discussed and refined among the project partners. Additional inputs from WP4 and WP6 were further used to refine the business implications. This was combined with insights from innovation and technology management, chain and network science, organizational theory and communication theory with insight in the food sector and useful tools existing in other technology fields to produce the NetGrow Network Learning Toolbox (D7.1a).

Based on the business implications the framework of the network toolbox was distilled. Subsequently field experts (food SMEs, network managers, public actors, etc.) were consulted through in-depth interviews in all countries in order to verify that the framework of the toolbox is in business language. Based on the confrontation, refinements and adaptations a prototype toolbox was developed (D7.1b). In the following stage a training method (D7.2) was developed to market-test the prototype toolbox. The market-testing was done in four regional food networks in The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Hungary following a two-stage testing. In a first workshop, the toolbox was explained to the participants (food SMEs and innovation network stakeholders), who were then asked to provide feedback on their first impression and to apply the toolbox in the time between the first and second workshop. The insights and feedback were used to improve

the toolbox prototype and resulted in the toolbox prototype B that was presented in the second stakeholder workshop, where the toolbox and its improvements received further evaluation and suggestions for improvement. The result of this is D7.3 Draft publication 'Description of the network learning toolbox', which was edited into a book and web format in WP8.

At the overall project level, **WP1** (methodological integration), **WP8** (dissemination) and **WP9** (project management) carefully monitored the scientific and project-administrative management as well as the progress of dissemination in the form of newsletters, other promotional material, and scientific publications (see project website). Furthermore, specific efforts were conducted to produce and disseminate a report targeting policy makers (D8.2a - 4 issues, see website).

The **main outcome of this project is the NetGrow Toolbox** (developed in WP7 and 8) which is available on www.netgrow.eu/toolbox (i-depot, registration no. 054415). The final NetGrow Toolbox was presented at the NetGrow Network Learning Day on April 10, 2014 in Brussels, Belgium to 65 participants from food industry, innovation networks, policy and research. A public report is also available at our project's website.

The NetGrow toolbox consists of a set of nine tools (guidelines, questionnaires, recommendations), including links to the NetGrow website. Target groups are food SMEs (including food producers, and manufacturers of technology, equipment and services for the food industry), network managers and policy makers.

The NetGrow Toolbox Book consists of 32 full coloured pages and contains 9 tools:

1. Why networks work?
2. Find your network.
3. Identify your needs.
4. Define Innovation Process Steps.
5. Evaluate your network.
6. Match your needs with the services/activities of your network.
7. How to develop, build and maintain a well-performing network?
8. Customer satisfaction.
9. Recommendations for policy makers.

Why this toolbox

It is observed that SMEs in the food sector often face difficulties in establishing a strategic and efficient network. The NetGrow project focuses on the kind of formal networks typically used by food SMEs that consist of a wide variety of actors such as competitors, suppliers, knowledge centres and a variety of other actors through formal and informal linkages. The NetGrow toolbox has been developed based on the identified business implications of the research carried out in work packages 2-6 of the NetGrow project as well as the feedback from experts and by a two-stage testing by food SMEs, network managers and policy makers of the toolbox. Every NetGrow Partner has contributed with observations, knowledge, experience and advice.

For whom & How to use this toolbox

The NetGrow Network Learning Toolbox is made for food SMEs (not only food producers, but also manufacturers of technology, equipment and services for the food industry), Network managers and policy makers. Food SMEs and Network managers can benefit directly from the use of the toolbox through the embedded tools. Also, policy makers can benefit from the toolbox through the feedback from networks and SMEs on network learning. This will provide policy makers with better insight into where and how networks and food SMEs can be better supported for innovation.

The toolbox is presented as a recipe book which can be consulted to find inspiration and the "right" recipe for the user's personal network capabilities. The toolbox is in particular tailored for SMEs and Network organizations in the food sector. The NetGrow Toolbox book is supported by a website that contains all tools

that are available in the NetGrow Toolbox Book as downloadable pdf. Furthermore the website offers additional information material, secondary literature and links to informative websites that relate to the content of the toolbox. The website gives also access to a database of innovation networks in Europe with relevance for the food sector. The aim of this database is to support SMEs in their decision making process before joining a network and to provide a better understanding about the different types of network and the services /activities that networks are offering. Managers of food networks can provide their network details, their offered activities and services to the database for profiling and policy makers will gain a better understanding of the variety of networks needed to serve the variety of needs of food SMEs.

A total of 1500 hardcopy books “NetGrow Toolbox – Tools for open innovation in the food industry” were printed and can be ordered via Karen Hamann, IFAU, www.ifau.dk (ISBN: 9789081609395) or any other partner of the NetGrow consortium (see below for contact details).

3 The potential impact and the main dissemination activities and exploitation of results

3.1 POTENTIAL IMPACT

Five main areas of impacts were identified in the beginning of the NetGrow project:

1) Greater availability of usable know-how regarding European SMEs networks
Within NetGrow, know-how was created through state-of-the-art scientific research and subsequently made available by structuring and transforming the created know-how according to the dissemination plan to European SMEs, associations, policy makers and scientists. The final result is the NetGrow toolbox available on www.netgrow.eu/toolbox (i-depot, registration no. 054415), which was market-tested and received good feedback from about 960 food SMEs associations, network managers and policy makers. Furthermore, a Food Industry Report was prepared at the end of the project, entitled "Open Innovation in the Food Industry: An Evidence Based Guide" and is also available on http://www.netgrow.eu/_doc/Industry_report.pdf

2) Develop business tools to enable SMEs to assess their own network needs, interests and preferences and to allow organisational change and strategic management leading to competitive and sustainable business networks
The research conducted in WP3 and WP4 focused on the food SMEs' perspective in order to assess the food SMEs' network preferences. The results formed the basis for three tools within the NetGrow Toolbox: "Find your network", "Identify your needs", and "Match your needs to the services/activities of your network".

3) Support the emergence of dynamic and sustainable SMEs networks capable of promoting and sustaining innovation in the food sector
The main impact of the NetGrow activities refer to stimulating the strategic networking behaviour of food SMEs, network organizations and policy makers and in developing these networks. Thereby the complexity of these networks is taken into account (WP5 and 6) and consequently specific actions are proposed and targeted for the different network actors in the network learning toolbox. The according tools in the NG Toolbox for food SMEs and network managers are as follows: "Evaluate your network", "Create excellent networks", and "Customer satisfaction".

4) Provide information and advice to policymakers and regulatory bodies regarding the factors determining success in SMEs
The research activities in NetGrow also aimed at increasing the policy maker's understanding of food SMEs in relation to their network preferences, behaviour and needs. A third and fourth issue of "relevant results to policy makers" (D8.2) was produced based on the findings of WP3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. These reports are available on www.netgrow.eu – publications. Furthermore, the NetGrow Toolbox contributes to the implementation of the EU innovation policy in particular to the ambition of stimulating cooperation between public and private stakeholders.

5) Support long-term KBBE strategies in the European Research Area (ERA)
Since the network concept is inherent to all KBBE policies for the intensive exchange of knowledge and resources between sectors and stakeholders, the final results of the NetGrow project support the long-term KBBE strategies in the ERA by providing clear indications on how to enhance strategic network behaviour and learning, and efficient network management in order to improving the innovation capacity of European food SMEs.

3.2 SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

The NetGrow project engaged with societal actors beyond the research community, such as governments, public bodies, policy makers, network managers, food SMEs and other industry stakeholders. Through communication, dissemination and encouraging the usage of the project's results, the consortium aimed to enhance the strategic network behaviour of food SMEs and consequently their innovation capacity, and at improving the network's offer towards more successful innovation and better performance for their members. In the long-term improving the innovative capacity of food SMEs should create sustainable growth and hence further employment. Furthermore, the generated project results should enable policy makers to tailor their strategies in particular in the fields of agriculture and food, competition, enterprise, regional policy, and research and innovation at regional, national and European level. This high level of engagement provides a strong platform for the adoption of the toolbox.

3.3 MAIN DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS

The NetGrow consortium has developed 2 main electronic media tools to facilitate the dissemination of the scientific outputs from NetGrow, which are the NetGrow project website and the NetGrow newsletter.

At the end of the project, the **NetGrow website** had 3327 visitors (56.9% new visitors, 43.1% returning visitors in the last 18 months of the project). Most of the visitors to the website come from the Netherlands (22.06%), Ireland (12.77%), Hungary (11.27%), Italy (10.37%) and Belgium (10.04%). However, the website has also attracted visitors from France, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, United States, Spain, United Kingdom, India, Brazil, Japan, Thailand, Ukraine and Romania (See Figure 2 below). To complement the NetGrow website, a specific web page[1] was created for the NetGrow Network Learning Day Event which took place on April 10, 2014 in Brussels, Belgium. FV, as leaders of WP8, also created and manages the LinkedIn page[2] for the NetGrow Group.
In additions to the NetGrow website and NetGrow's social media a database search engine was included into the website where registered users can search for different kinds of learning and innovation networks within the NetGrow Toolbox area.

The 'flagship' mode of communication to relevant stakeholders has been the **NetGrow Newsletter**. Six issues of the NetGrow Newsletter were published, made available on the NetGrow website (http://www.netgrow.eu/index.php?hova=17), and disseminated to over 198 subscribers via e-mail. The NetGrow Newsletter has maintained the interest of its readership based on the proportion of newsletter emails opened and specific articles clicked upon. Thirty-seven per cent of subscribers (in the last 18 months of the project as against 40% in middle 18 months of the project) browse the newsletters that arrive in their inbox, of which the same proportion as per the middle period (46%) click to read specific contributor articles.

[1] https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/383026/netgrow/index.html
[2] http://www.linkedin.com/groups/NetGrow-7429625/about

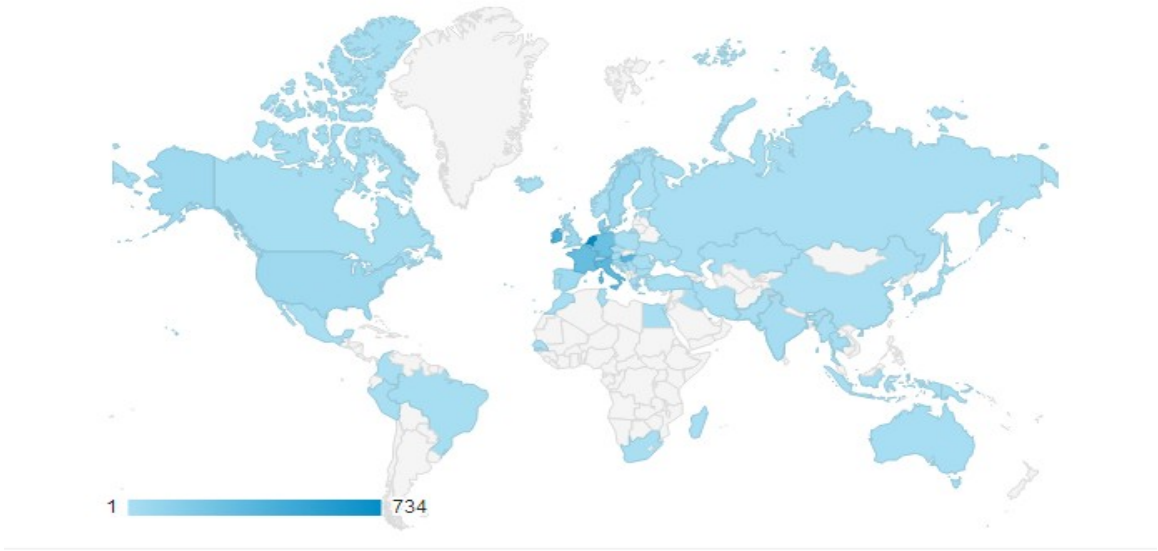

Figure 2: Location of visitors to the NetGrow Website

In addition to these main channels, the NetGrow consortium also published several articles in industry and scientific magazines.

Addressing industry stakeholders, network managers and policy makers around the globe, the NetGrow consortium prepared the article "Seeds of innovation – Netgrow in the picture" published in the International Innovation Magazine, issue "Enhancing the innovativeness of food SMEs" (March 2013, open access via www.researchmedia.eu).

The NetGrow consortium also supported the EC's efforts in publishing the NetGrow Results in Brief "Sustainable growth for food firms through networking" (http://cordis.europa.eu/result/brief/rcn/11520_en.html).

In order to promote the NetGrow Toolbox to the target audience of our project, i.e. food SMEs, network managers, and policy makers, the consortium organized a Network Learning Day on April 10, 2014 in Brussels, Belgium. Additionally, in particular focused on food SMEs, specific sessions were organized in the nine participating countries between January and May 2014 reaching more than 3800 food SMEs and other relevant stakeholders, to introduce them to the background and usefulness of the NetGrow Toolbox.

With regards to dissemination towards the research community, more than 85 scientific papers as well as reports and books were produced for scientific conferences and academic journals. Most of these publications are also useful and interesting for food SMEs, industry associations, network managers and policy makers. In particular, the consortium contributed to open-access special issues on NetGrow of two journals:

a) International Journal on Food System Dynamics - Special Issue on Networks and Innovation (Vol. 3, Issue 3. URL: http://centmapress.ilb.uni-bonn.de/ojs/index.php/fsd/issue/view/15)
b) Journal of Chain and Network Science - Special NetGrow Issue (Vol. 14, Issue 2. URL: http://wageningenacademic.metapress.com/content/k76rx2v84856/?p=1dff27de5ee446bc95e0933168bab7d0&pi=0#.U7KxiEDuaId, guest editor: Loic Sauvee)

At the end of the project a Food Industry Report was prepared, entitled "Open Innovation in the Food Industry: An Evidence Based Guide" (http://www.netgrow.eu/_doc/Industry_report.pdf).

4 The address of the project public website

The project website has been designed at the beginning of the project to offer a platform for communicating the results and achievements of the project to food SMEs, associations, network managers, policy makers, and the wider public. Up to 24 months after the end of the project, the website will continuously be updated and inform about the further results linked to the project. This website is located at a domain specifically registered for the project:
www.netgrow.eu

5 Project logo

6 List of all beneficiaries and Coordinator contact details

The NetGrow Consortium:

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