

# How the HibriturSelva partnership promotes economic development through tourism innovations

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**Organisation:** La Selva Comarque Council

**Country:** Spain

**Level of government:** Regional/State government

**Sector:** Recreation, culture and religion

**Type:** Partnerships

**Launched in:** 2013

**Overall development time:** 1 year(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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La Selva is a district in Catalonia located between the mountain range known as the Serralada Transversal and the Costa Brava. In 2013, the Comarque Council (representing about 170 000 inhabitants) took the lead in developing the HibriturSelva partnership, which aims at diversifying tourism in the region of La Selva and supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises through a set of innovations.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- The tourism sector of this picturesque county has a rather fragmented structure: Tourists flock to the coastal area, but there is not much tourism inlands.
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## Objectives

Improve effectiveness, Support economic growth

- The partnership HibriturSelva seeks to promote the development of innovations within the local tourism sector by harnessing the knowledge of local stakeholders.
  - Specific objectives are improving the innovation capacity of local SMEs in the tourism sector.
  - Fostering a culture of collaboration between actors working in tourism through a network approach.
  - Harnessing the experience and knowledge of the local actors in order to launch new tourism initiatives.
  - Generating "improbable connections" between actors through "open innovation" and "hybridization" approaches.
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## Main beneficiaries

Businesses, General population, Government bodies

- The tourism industry of La Selva
- The Comarque Council

# Results

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## Effectiveness

- So far, nine Innovation Labs have been launched dealing with art, sports, gastronomy, tourism 2.0, education, history, etc.
- In the most recent call for projects, participants developed 34 new products and services (<http://www.hibriturselva.cat/productesturistics2014>) and 12 new packages for travel agencies (<http://www.hibriturselva.cat/paquets-agencies>).
- Some examples of the new products and services include: a course on micro-breweries: a full day course at the craft brewery "La Selvaseria", located in a traditional Catalan farmhouse, to learn all the processes of making this local beer; a movie experience: a weekend in a house where you can enjoy the experience of making a short film, including writing the script, designing the costumes, doing the makeup, and recording; and crafts and legends of the Montseny: a guided tour around Montseny mountain: discover pottery made in Breda, and the magnificent Castle of Montsoriu. Meet the legends of the castle: knights and ladies, nobles and peasants, stories of love and war.

# Development

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## Design

The approach used within the project HibriturSelva combined three key elements. The "Eco-System" concept stresses the importance of establishing connections between local actors, which is only possible when genuine needs are addressed and synergies between the actors involved are taken into account. This enables new partnerships to make joint bids for grants and to launch joint initiatives.

The second pillar, "Open Innovation", responds to the fact that business and public sector organisations do not have sufficient resources, acting alone, to develop and deliver innovations.

The third pillar of the project is "Hybridisation" which promotes a multidisciplinary approach, including the development of "improbable connections" between actors who may never have worked with each other before, as they have not perceived each other as potential partners.

These social innovations have been triggered by a multi-stage innovation process including an annual call for projects, innovation Labs to develop proposals, launch of project teams, incubation projects, development of products and services, mainstreaming of new products and services in the local offer.

Design time: 4 month(s)

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## Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- The innovation process has been supported by a range of communication and training activities, such as:
- The creation of the website which provides information about new products and services and resources for the tourism sectorCoordination and dissemination of the network meetings;
- Development of a digital platform with 306 members, organised in 29 groups (<http://plataforma.hibriturselva.cat>) ;
- Dissemination of the monthly HibriturSelva Newsletter;
- Training sessions for SMEs on the creation of tourism services and products.

### Resources used:

- The project has been led by Comarque Council and involves two phases: Phase 1 (December 2012 - December 2013): ~ EUR 190 000. The first phase was financially supported by the Employment Service of Catalonia and the European Social Fund, through the granting subsidies for innovative and experimental projects from the Employment Service of Catalonia.
- Phase 2 (December 2013 - December 2014): ~ EUR 149 000. The second phase was financially supported by the Employment Service of Catalonia, the State Public Employment Service and the European Social Fund, through the granting subsidies for innovative and experimental projects from the Employment Service of Catalonia.
- In addition, the project received the suport and funding of La Selva Comarca de l'Aigua Tourism Association, the municipalities of Lloret de Mar, Sant Hilari Sacalm and Hostalric. It is difficult to account fully for the savings that this project has brought in monetary terms. What is clear is that it has enabled the possibility of improving and strengthening the tourism sector in La Selva by changing the management methods in many SMEs and fostering a collaborative environment that enabled the production of better outcomes (34 new products/services and 12 new packages/activities for travel agencies).

Implementation time: 8 month(s)

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- Focus on the key objective: In our experience working groups tend to multiply the objectives originally set for them and may open too many strands of activity. While some degree of flexibility will be needed, there is a real risk of not being able to produce visible results. Therefore, it is important to focus on one key objective and to deliver quick-wins.
- Money? Later!: A common problem of this kind of project is that stakeholders have the expectation that participation in such a project should provide their organisation with public funding, especially if such project is promoted by a public sector organisation (such as the Comarque Council of La Selva). However, it was made clear from the very beginning that HibriturSelva project was not intended to fund projects but rather to develop viable projects.
- Management of the digital platform: Improving the quantity and quality of the online participation has become a key challenge, due to the fact that the platform has been established as a digital meeting point where the majority of interactions between the network's members will take place. Moreover, the network's "digitalization" has allowed significantly lower costs than would have been involved in the organization of events and workshops. However, work had to be done improving the visibility of the members in order to promote digital interaction.

## Conditions for success

- Facilitation vs. intervention: This is one of the most complex points: our experience tells us that it is necessary for the management teams to watch carefully its degree of intervention. The management team should not restrict the initiatives of members but must ensure a good flow that enables the development of the project. The degree of intervention will depend partly on the collaborative tradition between the actors involved - but it should also depend on the ability to foster an active group of members who are able over time to assume more of a role in the leadership of the initiatives (which is initially likely to be located mainly with the management team).
- Start by attracting the most active local actors: At the beginning of the project we created a core group within the HibriturSelva network, mobilizing those members who were willing AND capable of contributing to the project and using their network to engage others in the project. This core group of members may include: members who seek an opportunity to add value to their business through this initiative, members who believe in collaborative networks per se and members who are rooted and committed to the territory and are willing to collaborate in order to strengthen the local identity.
- Hybridisation and improbable connections: The concept of hybridization has proven to be a powerful and differentiating element within the development of this project. Moreover, the linkage of open innovation with the concept of "improbable connection" has been an attractive feature for many actors. HibriturSelva project has enabled such connections with the creation of spaces and hybridization mechanisms aimed to connect very different actors, while focusing on the creation of innovative products and services.