

GRASS CEILING



D6.9

Practice abstracts
batch n.2
Scotland



Scotland

Scottish Living Lab case study overview

Introduction

This abstract summarises the case study about the Scottish Living Lab, written as part of WP2, task 2.3, to understand what drives and inhibits women from developing innovative initiatives.

The women engaged in the Scottish Living Lab were all based in the Highlands and Islands. The Scottish Living Labs took place in Ullapool, a village on the west coast, with all but one session taking place in-person. The women travelled to the Living Labs by ferry from Stornoway or driving from the Isle of Skye. Some were closer to Ullapool, but in general they had quite a distance to travel which involved overnight accommodation.

Case study results and learnings

Composition and organisation of the Living Lab

The eight participants of the Scottish Living Lab are between the ages of 30-65. Most of the women were either at an initial stage of their innovator journey or had early-stage but established businesses. Two of the women had advanced businesses. All of them are involved in crofting, a type of agricultural land holding particular to Scotland. A Scottish croft is relatively small (averaging around 5 hectares), normally held in tenancy, and may or may not have buildings or a house associated with it. Most of the women lived on their crofts and their innovations were related to the croft.

Most of the women in the Scottish Living Lab were at the beginning of their innovator journey. Few of them considered the activities they undertook as being a business. Those that did see themselves as being businesswomen were still open to developing their skills.

Innovation process and observed changes

Interestingly, most of the women had multiple innovations developing and running at different stages. As the Living Lab process progressed, some ideas would fail and be replaced with new ideas. It was a creative, evolving and non-linear process. One driver for this innovation is necessity. Very few people croft full-time and make a sustainable living from their crofts. Developing a diversified business model with multiple products and services is essential to maximise income from a croft and reduce waste. However, the women in the Scottish Lab were also proactive and thoughtful in their engagement with their environment, sustainability, and their local communities, with their innovations often designed to deliver both additional income and co-benefits for these elements. This included educational activities, youth engagement, re-use of surplus products, and collaborations with other local farmers and businesses.

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Having a second job outside the croft business, plus the other unpaid community roles that our innovators took on, meant the women had less time to innovate and learn new skills, and less opportunity to be exposed to other businesses' ideas and processes. A range of other factors affect the capacity of crofting women to engage in or develop innovative initiatives. These are remoteness, transport infrastructure, and distances to travel (e.g. to abattoirs, markets, training sessions), all of which affect the women's businesses and their capacity to innovate and network. The women involved in the Scottish Living Lab preferred meeting face-to-face, and staying overnight together to socialise, due to their day-to-day isolation.

Stakeholder interaction

Most of the women took time revising their ideas, processes and business models through testing and discussion, both within and outside the Living Labs. Were we to run the Living Labs again, we would factor in more time in sessions for the innovators to give updates on their businesses and ask questions. Some of the women used these sessions to prototype and test products, and to share challenges and receive advice on how to overcome them.

Perceptions and collective learning

We feel that the mentoring talks were invaluable to the women, to personalise the Living Lab learning and advice, tailoring it to each woman's business and life. It helped the women to use the innovation skills in their own business, as well as combining personal development support and more traditional business coaching methods. In turn, the mentoring enabled the Living Lab co-leads to identify emerging needs and tailor upcoming sessions to meet them.

Conclusion

We found women innovators benefit from personal development and confidence building to get to a point where they recognise themselves as business owners and feel empowered to access mainstream business advice and innovation support. This also helps women to feel confident carving out time for their businesses, and to assert themselves financially in their personal lives.

For women involved in crofting in Scotland, we recommend innovation support initiatives that encompass all or some of the following elements:

- One to one support from a dedicated crofting business advisor, from start-up to growth. The advisor could also play a brokering role signposting to crofting grants and opportunities.
- Appropriate finance available at every stage of the business growth.
- More local networks could be stimulated – to support businesses generally with place-based advice.
- Mentoring – even informal mentoring, with some personal development support.
- Sustained support and resource from government - Scottish government offers great support for women in agriculture which should be maintained long-term.

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Scotland

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