

CECRA – Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas. IALBs¹ Rural Advisory Methods Trainings Expand throughout Europe. An innovation story.

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Abstract: If an advisor wants to support a farmer or a farmer's family effectively, she/he needs training in advisor methods. Since 2009, CECRA, the Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas, offers a European wide certificate for agricultural and rural advisors who want to improve their consulting skills. Particularly advisory services in Central and Eastern European Regions show great interest in CECRA and formulate a need for competence development of consulting personnel which generally shows good technical qualification but however largely lacks competences in the methodical and social field. The foundation of the Rural Advisor Services' Network EUFRAS in 2013 canalized and catalyzed the CECRA expansion process. EUFRAS member organizations recognized the importance of methodological and communicative skills for their rural consultants and agreed to take over the CECRA-System from the German speaking agricultural advisors' network IALB and to cooperate in developing this cross-sectional competence. The networks IALB and EUFRAS (and the organizations represented in the networks) are the providers of the CECRA Certification. One important step for a successful accreditation as CECRA partner and/or CECRA Module provider is the education of CECRA trainers. In January 2017, EUFRAS started the first CECRA Train-the-Trainer Program with 13 participants from Croatia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain. The basis for the successful realization of this first CECRA TTT-Program is an extraordinary history of cooperation between many agrarian advisory services all over Europe.

1 Somewhere in rural Central Europe

The farm lies a bit outside the little pre-alpine town named after the local saint, exposed on a hill with a magnificent view from the historic farm house's terrace. The regional construction style breathes tradition and a long line of memories from former generations of the current farmer's family.

Winter time is farm advisor's time. As outdoor activities rest, farmers manage more easily to visit consulting meetings and conferences. For individual advice, specialists come by for a farm visit. In this special case, the farmer asked for information on biogas plants in the regional office of the advisory service.

Noticing the ice on the road leading uphill to the farm, the advisor hits the gas pedal and strengthens the grip to the steering wheel. The momentum takes him up half the hill, then the wheels loose grip. The last 50 m on foot.

„You are the first advisor entering our farm since 24 years.“ said the farmer as a welcome warning. And he explained why. „This colleague of yours was a real expert in dairy farming. Knew everything about cows and also could design stables free handedly. But as we asked him to draw a plan for a free stall system instead of a tied-up barn, he wouldn't. Then he completely freaked out about our chose for Jersey cows.“ The advisor asked to see the stable. The first free stall system where cows weren't tied up in the county, maybe even in the country, had grown old. The light situation not satisfying as half of the building is literally digged into the hill. With a renovation of the interior equipment, dairy production could be continued with a minimal

¹ Internationale Akademie land- und hauswirtschaftlicher Beraterinnen und Berater (www.ialb.org)

investment. Rentability guaranteed. In the stable only three of the delicate golden brown Jersey cows with their expressive eyes were left. The decision to end milk production had obviously been taken already, the advisor noticed.

„We built the free stall system stable without consulting, designed it ourselves.“ The farmer went on. „We didn't want to have us talked into an obviously outdated technique and my father would under no circumstances discuss the cow race, he knew Jersey cows from his stay in Ireland as a young man.“

Finishing the tour around the farm facilities, back in the farmhouse parlour, the advisor summarizes the situation and builds the bridge to the actual request: „You've been very innovative at a time where all cows were tied up and it required a lot of courage to go a new way. I'm sure your stable served as an example for a lot of fellow farmers. Your father must have been quite a pioneer and a progressive thinker. Not every advisor can handle the visions of innovative farmers. And now, you obviously stopped milking and you would be once more at the innovation forefront, being one of the first farms intending to build a biogas plant on your farm.“ „So please“, he addresses the farmer, the farmer's wife and their 19 year old successor one by one, „how can I help you today?“

In the two hours counseling session, the idea to gain the main family's income with biogas was discussed. The economic calculation was only made after the motivations, life conceptions and interests of every family member in relation to this farm business reorientation were expressed. After the recent death of the grandparents, both had been in nursing care on the farm, the farmer's wife wants to engage herself in social activities. Additionally, her cow hair allergy grew insupportable lately. The farmer himself tends to expand the external machine use and is happy about his son's interest in biogas, having experimented for ten years on his own with self-constructed fermenters and various gas motors. „May I tell you, that I notice a strong family cohesion and mutual support despite or maybe because of the difficult times you went through. Is that so?“ The advisor phrased the atmosphere he sensed among his dialogue partners, the whole family nodding approvingly.

Due to the difficult family situation, almost no farm income was generated the last two years. Pros and cons of two possibilities were discussed, a standalone plant or a co-operation project with the municipality. „No way in financing this investment immediately without own resources“, is an uncomfortable truth that had to be spoken out by the advisor and is a starting point for further consideration. „Do you have ideas, how and when you could be able to contribute with the required sum to the planned investment?“



Consultation session with a farmer's family: Successful advisors need professional training in advisor methods and communication skills

On his way out, the advisor asks with a twinkle in his eye: „I'd be interested in a short feedback: Could you benefit from our dialogue or will it take another 24 years until the next farm visit of the advisory service?“ The farmer laughs: „No! I will call your colleague for the technical counseling and your partner from the machinery ring first thing tomorrow morning. This was a really cooperative counseling with practical results. You respect our decisions and don't force nothing on us. Although it was hard to hear we can't start immediately, your economic assessment was very important and helps us to take the right decisions.“ His wife adds:

„It was good to have someone who listened and understands and respects our situation. We never sat together as a family like that and talked in such a structured way about this strategic topic that affects all of us. Where did you learn all this – leading a conversation as professionally as you did?“

2 CECRA – professional training for rural advisors

At best, the biogas advisor in the counseling situation described above was CECRA trained. The advisor working with the farmer's family on a biogas solution obviously disposed of professional training in advisor methods and communication skills. His predecessor a generation before probably had access to good technical education and training, but soft skill trainings had been unknown by then. In today's farming world, where the context has become more complex and societal and technical change is speeding up, being an expert is not enough, to have a positive effect as advisor. Nowadays, advisors work in interdisciplinary teams and have to recognize and respect correlations and interdependencies. Innovations and individualized solutions as well as

cooperative actions demand the command of communicative skills and a methodological toolkit to be able to adapt and use the advisors expertise adequately in different situations. The demands towards farm advisors shift from pre-fabricated solutions to innovation support by systemic counseling.

CECRA, the Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas is a qualification and competence development system for consulting personnel in the rural areas of Europe. Since 2009, CECRA offers a European wide established certificate for advisors in agricultural, rural home economics consulting service and further regional protagonists in rural areas, like regional managers and leader-managers, who want to improve their consulting skills.



Pablo Asensio in a training on rural extension

The IALB is the owner of CECRA and serves as roof for the initially six rural training institutions in Germany, Austria and Switzerland: AGRIDEA, Lindau (CH), Führungsakademie für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten, Landshut (Bayern) ; Hochschule für Agrar- und Umweltpädagogik, Wien (A) Landesanstalt für Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft und der ländlichen Räume Schwäbisch Gmünd (Baden-Württemberg) ; Landesbetrieb Landwirtschaft, Bildungsseminar Rauschholzhausen (Hessen) ; Abteilung Land-, forst- und hauswirtschaftliche Berufsbildung (I, Südtirol).

These six educational institutions and further accredited module providers deliver the modules of the CECRA competence development scheme according to a harmonized curriculum, based on a charter of cooperation and considering IALB standards. Each organization delegates a representative to the IALB CECRA Working Group (CECRA-AG). That's the institution, where decisions concerning CECRA are elaborated among the cooperation partners. This cooperation allows the IALB to award a European certificate (CECRA) to graduates.

Special modules tailored to the needs of the consulting personnel (2 mandatory and 3 optional mandatory modules), requirements, prerequisites, corner points and standards are integrated into a standardized competence development scheme at a European level (see box). For details, please read more here: www.cecra.net

CECRA competence development modules

2 mandatory modules

- Personality development / my advisor profile
- Communication / customer relation

13 optional mandatory modules

- Working in and leading in a team
- Rhetoric, presentation skills
- Self and time management
- Project management/ project advising
- Arrangement of consulting processes
- Dealing with difficult consulting situations/change management
- Moderation and meeting management
- Marketing/public relations
- Education and event management
- Counselling and accompanying groups
- Essentials of mediation
- Consulting and assisting enterprises in strategic questions
- Introduction to coaching

How, applying CECRA, do we make a difference on innovations that affect farmers' practices? We think, that methodological and communicative skills are decisive for making specialist scientific and financial expertise and knowledge usable for farmers and other actors in rural areas. Extension methods are a key competence for the 40,000 professional rural and farm advisors in the EU working directly with farmers (not counting sales oriented consultants). Systematic education and training on agricultural extension methods and communication skills for rural advisors is widely neglected at undergraduate level and often doesn't appear at all in curricula. In many regions and within a lot of rural advisory services, the capacity to train methodological competences is inadequate, underprovided or missing entirely.

Currently, there is an interesting development in Baden-Württemberg, where CECRA modules are implemented as a requirement for advisors under the conditions of the new EU rural development program. Advisory services can be supported with EU co-funding for the first time, an appropriate training has to be provided.

Also ongoing, the CECRA system expands to further non German speaking countries in Europe. Particularly advisory services in Central and Eastern European states show a need for competence development of consulting personnel which generally shows good technical qualification however largely lacks competences in the methodical and social field. This expansion is an exciting innovation process worth taking a glance in the next chapter. Some of the actors are presented.

3 CECRA goes Europe

„How do we proceed?“ was the question among the three facilitators early in the morning at the second day of the CECRA Workshop in April 2015 in Landshut. A decision had to be taken

urgently, as the second halftime of this European meeting for rural advisory services was about to start in half an hour.

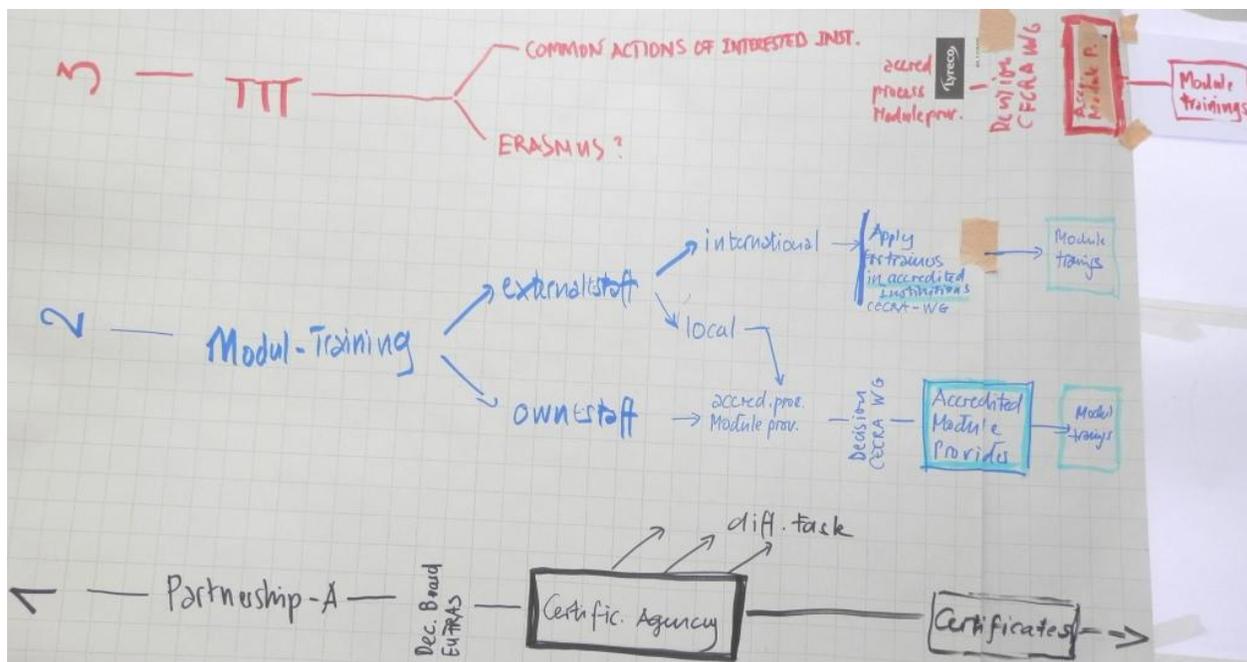
Representatives from six rural advisory services from Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and two agrarian Universities (from Hungary and Spain/Galicia) were present, expressing their serious interest to engage in farm advisor method qualification, using the CECRA concept.

The CECRA Workshop was initiated by Jürgen Käßer (Baden-Württemberg), head of the responsible working group CECRA-AG, to meet, channel and handle the rather unexpected strong demand on European level outside the German speaking area in the rural advisor qualification standard, originally developed by the German speaking farm advisor network IALB as a cooperation project of six German speaking rural educational institutions. Berlin January 2015

At the EUFRAS conference during the green week in January in Berlin, Jürgen Käßer speaks out the invitation to interested organizations, to come together in a workshop to deal with the organizational steps for the implementation of CECRA.

Together with Jürgen Käßer, Erich Waldmeier (Switzerland), former IALB president and Pablo Asensio (Bayern), EUFRAS board member, formed the facilitating team for the workshop. Peter Bucher represented the Swiss IALB and CECRA partner AGRIDEA. The second day's workshop program announced the „Development of concrete steps towards the implementation of CECRA in your respective region/ organization/ advisory service” and “Identification of a short number of concrete common actions with potential of realization”. How exactly could this be done in the limited workshop time for eight institutions, including the integration of the information and expectations the institutions pronounced the day before?

The question „How do we proceed?“ produced a short puzzled silence. This was the moment when Erich Waldmeier produced his drawing with a decision tree, that illustrated all possible options for farm advisor and rural training institutions interested in CECRA in a comprehensive manner. Relief mixed with admiration. Relief as there was no doubt, that this concept was the perfect introduction into the second day of the workshop as it would give orientation to the participating organizations on the options they had and the decisions they had to take. Admiration from his co-facilitators, two experienced workshop designers, for the analytic clarity and the professional geniality of Erich Waldmeier, making use of his long year experience to guide the workshop process into the right direction. If the decision-tree was prepared late at night or very early before breakfast remained unspoken.



How to start with CECRA? Decision tree with 3 different tracks to define for each country

The concentrated half an hour until the participants entered the conference room was exactly what was needed to copy the decision tree to the flip chart and to agree on the group work following its presentation. The workshop ended successfully at noon with a list of clear results, a foundation stone for a European CECRA was set.

Looking back at the first day of the workshop, one could say it was packed or maybe even overcrowded with about 15 short presentations in a row. The eight organizations presented their institutions and explained their specific interest in the CECRA qualification system. The facilitation team took turns in presenting the draft for the future partnership agreement among potential CECRA partners organized in EUFRAS, explaining the CECRA system with its certification process, the minimum requirements for participants and module contents and informing on the current status of the licensing negotiations between IALB and EUFRAS.

Adding his travel-time to the workshop program, this made the first workshop day a long day for Tom Kelly, EUFRAS president and Director of Knowledge Transfer in the Irish farm advisory service Teagasc. Starting from Limerick Ireland at 3.30 in the morning, dealing with a time-shift of two hours it was no wonder, he ordered coffee to keep awake at 11 pm in the Augustinerbräu known for its authentic Bavarian Beer and Food, situated next to the impressive Martinskirche in the historic city center of Landshut.

As it turned out, medieval Landshut in the proximity of Munich Airport, was the ideal location, central for an all European meeting - starting at noon and ending the next day at midday again. Slovenians and Hungarians could come by car, the Swiss by train, Latvians, Lithuanians and Irish flew in in the morning and back in the afternoon the next day.

The State Academy – the training institution for Bavarian farm advisors and teachers and home of the IALB office traditionally hosts IALB board meetings due to its central position. Half a year before the CECRA-Workshop, again in Landshut, the IALB-Board, decided in October 2014 to support the involvement of EUFRAS in CECRA aiming at a partnership, where EUFRAS takes the full responsibility for CECRA outside the German speaking area in Europe. Since the

founding of EUFRAS in 2013, initiated by IALB itself, interest in CECRA as advisor method training concept was pronounced from more and more EUFRAS member organizations forming and organizing themselves in the new network. Supporting advisor qualification is defined as a goal in the EUFRAS Statutes and CECRA focusing on rather universal methodological competences would provide a cross-sectional cooperation field for EUFRAS with benefit for all member institutions.

The story of the foundation of EUFRAS is told at another place and can be read at <http://eufRAS.eu/index.php/about-us/history> , but it should be mentioned here, that Erich Waldmeier, facilitating the CECRA Workshop, has been one of the founding fathers of EUFRAS and for a long time he has been a main supporter of the idea of a European network of rural advisory services.

To find a way to the institutional involvement of EUFRAS in CECRA, the IALB-Board installed the IALB Project Group “CECRA Europäisieren”, with Josef Wein, head of the Education department at the State Academy taking responsibility as coordinator of this working group. The Project group met in February in Landshut, headed by Josef Wein, with the participation of LianeKaipel (Hochschule für Agrar- und Umweltpädagogik Wien, CECRA-AG), Edgars Linde (EUFRAS Vice-President), Andis Kursitis and Kristine Zepere (Rural Advisory Center Latvia) and with the already presented Jürgen Käßer, Erich Waldmeier, Pablo Asensio. The Latvians once more proved to be a motor in European cooperation in the collaboration of farm advisor services and offered to host the future EUFRAS CECRA Office. Latvia had already been very actively engaged in the EUFRAS foundation, EUFRAS being registered as a NGO under Latvian law and the Latvian Rural Advisory service hosting the EUFRAS-Office,



The IALB –project group CECRA goes Europe prepared the upscaling process of the certification system CECRA in February 2015: Josef Wein FÜAK Bayern, Edgars Linde EUFRAS

Vice President, AndisKursitis LLKC Latvia, Pablo Asensio, Regierung von Niederbayern, Jürgen Käßer LEL Baden-Württemberg, Head of CECRA-AG, LianeKaipelHochschulefürAgrar- und Umweltpädagogik Wien Austria, Kristine Zepere LLKC Latvia, Erich Waldmeier IALB Switzerland.

This group of IALB-representatives and EUFRAS-delegates drafted corner stones for a licensing contract among IALB and EUFRAS in an extremely concentrated effort as a proposal for the IALB and EUFRAS Boards. These corner stones and a first draft of the contract titled “Cooperation and Usage Agreement” could directly be fed into the CECRA-AG meeting and was discussed in the IALB Board Meeting in late February 2015. The IALB-Board widely accepted the proposals of the project group and decided to introduce a license fee for CECRA-modules carried out by EUFRAS partners after a two years introduction phase and encouraged completion in the first semester of 2015. The bilingual paper circulated several times among IALB-Board members and was sanctioned by the EUFRAS Board, the Project group redacted and integrating further refinement until May 2015 and proposed to conclude the contract in a little solemn ceremony at the IALB-Conference in June in Solothurn (Switzerland) by signature of both Rural Advisor Networks’ presidents.

In this very working group, Jürgen Käßer’s initiative for a CECRA-Workshop was concretized and the organization and facilitation team was formed.

A critical mass of organizations who were willing to integrate the CECRA system into their rural advisor qualification concepts was reached in early 2015, as 10 partners mandated the Bavarian State Academy to hand in an Erasmus+ application for 300 000 € of EU funding for a CECRA Train-the-Trainer program. The Erasmus+ application was submitted in March 2015, a decision is expected in July. Additionally to the organizations present in the CECRA-Workshop in April, the Polish CDR and the Croatian State Advisory Service are part of the consortium.

A critical mass is meant to be understood as a significant number of partners on European level, who together, applying CECRA-standards, might have the impact of making CECRA a generally accepted standard in Europe for farm advisor qualification. This implies the vision, that the status of the profession “rural advisor” and “farm advisor” is sharpened, as the term advisor is not protected and there is no general orientation or obligation until today for professional minimum requirements.

The process of upscaling CECRA is a typical innovation process itself, exemplarily a process which sometimes crunches and where quarrels and controversy is lived. A quote out of an Email, meant to straighten out some rough seas, might illustrate the tensions: „ *...I recognize a movement in quick and propulsive rapids and on the other hand a drift reminding to be rather careful and prudent, calling for more coordination*”. Lines of Conflict are also expressed in statements like this: „*We don’t share the concept, that missing method-Trainers are the bottleneck for the expansion of CECRA to EUFRAS level. Rather it is more important that institutions and organizations who want to integrate CECRA go through an organizational process.*” If criticism, like in this case, is pronounced early, it can direct the innovation process into a constructive direction. The fact, that the CECRA Cooperation and Usage Agreement is generally agreed on in a relatively short time, is maybe due to the harsh reminder, that an extended European Certificate absolutely needs a clear institutional anchoring. Conflict is a good sign to affirm that something new is negotiated, that you are in the middle of an innovation process.

4 How do we think about innovation in agriculture?

IALB and EUFRAS, two international rural advisor networks, repeatedly point out, that there is a profession that deals professionally with innovations in agriculture: That's the rural or farm advisor, organized in private or state-driven rural advisory services. Innovation is generally understood as a change and learning process. Advisory services, besides counselling, often are engaged in adult education and rural vocational training and have a facilitator's role in innovation processes.

A lot of innovations can't be achieved reasonably and successfully with a concept that focuses on farms only. Today, innovations usually require a cooperative strategy. Examples in advisor practice are: finding new channels to process and market agricultural products, the cooperative use of machinery to enable the use of technical and digital progress or ideas to promote rural tourism in a region or the activities of farmers' working groups in many different fields.

This means, that rural advisory services automatically find themselves in situations where they have to facilitate and steer cooperative learning processes, where interests of different partners have to be mediated and handling social learning, conflict management, organizational development and negotiation professionally become important tasks.

To foster innovations in agriculture, rural advisory services should fill out a broad set of roles, as described in the GFRAS position paper „New Extensionist“

Following this concept leads to the conclusion: Extension is innovation management.

This includes:

- Development of networks,
 - Linking producers,
 - Mediate the access to credits, to equipment, operating materials and marketing opportunities,
 - Create innovation platforms,
 - Support gender sensitive extension approaches
 - organize knowledge management,
 - foster the adaption to climatic change and
 - spread new knowledge via training and vocational education.
- (GFRAS: „New Extensionist“)

To meet these demands, rural advisory services need new competences on the individual, organizational and sector level. rural advisory services have to adjust to rising requirements in the qualification of their staff, especially concerning the personal, methodological and communicative competences of their advisors. That's where CECRA comes into play.

Innovations don't spread automatically by themselves. In Europe, a long list of agrarian Universities and State Research Centers produce new knowledge in countless research projects and practical on field experiments. At the same time, many pioneers among farming practitioners and from the up- and downstream industry create innovations that are meant to be spread. The Farm Technology sector is a remarkable hotspot for innovations and pioneering spirit. Well-trained advisors ensure this knowledge and innovation transfer, called for from many sides. Rural, Farm and household economy advisory services offer professional innovation management. In this sense, counseling farmers mediates accurately individualized knowledge, competences and learning possibilities.

New things do not integrate without conflict in existing patterns. Professional brokerage and negotiation between interests and among different players become more and more important for a successful implementation of innovations.

5 CECRA Train-the-Trainer activities

Well-qualified advisory methods trainers are an important prerequisite to the implementation of successful CECRA trainings for rural consultants. Therefore EUFRAS, kindly supported by the Ministry for Rural Areas in Baden-Württemberg (Germany), offers a sound TTT-Program in 2017/2018 – as a first essential step towards the success of CECRA trainings.

A first successful test was the FastTrack Training of Trainers in Dublin, Ireland from 6th to 10th October 2015, organized by Teagasc. The CECRA TTT 2017/18 in Baden Württemberg takes into account the experiences made in the FastTrack and addresses further advisory services who want to elaborate a fundamental basis for CECRA Trainings.

The participants of the CECRA TTT Program will be enabled to independently carry out all mandatory CECRA modules, as well as some of the optional modules in a participant-oriented and effective way. Thus the foundation for a certification of consultants according to CECRA standards are laid.

The practice-oriented training process consists of three one-week classroom-based seminars over a period of 13 months. Between these face-to-face training blocks, the participants will work on assignments in self-organized learning groups and will be supported by the trainers in internet forums. The participants' tasks between the face-to-face events (Seminar 1, 2, 3) are an integral part of education and must be allocated with approx. ten working days. Training language will be English.

Training Dates

Seminar 1	16.01. - 20.01.2017
Seminar 2	15.05. – 19.05.2017
Seminar 3	15.01. – 19.01.2018

Basic principles relevant for the seminar-room practice and scientific models of communication and pedagogy, which are helpful for the planning and implementation of trainings with adults, are introduced in the three training sessions. These are, in Seminar 1, key principles of human learning and basic didactic rules for the most important forms of group events, thereby laying the foundations for the capacity of an independent planning and execution of training events. In Seminar 2, this process of systematically planning the content and methods of events is taken up and transferred into the actual development of training guidelines. Work is carried out mainly with the CECRA Modules two and nine. The third seminar deals with specific issues and questions of the participants for the planning, execution and evaluation of trainings (further training methods, trainer personality, designing the training environment, materials and media, back-home: transfer and implementation strategies, evaluation of training effects).

The tasks of a person providing rural advisory services are getting more and more divers and increasingly complex. For rural consultants, methodological and communicative skills are essential. Whilst different ways of qualification do exist, they mostly cover technical approaches. The "Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas" (CECRA) is the first European competence development program with an international certificate meeting the rising demand for advisor method training.

IALB and EUFRAS (and the organizations they represent) promote the process of establishing methodological skills in rural advisory services in Europe by supporting EUFRAS member organizations in their efforts to establish CECRA trainings in their home regions. CECRA is more and more becoming a standard for methodological training of advisers in rural areas.

One important step for a successful accreditation as CECRA partner and/or CECRA Module provider is the education of CECRA trainers. Rural advisory services and education institutions in Europe are invited to join the CECRA system to raise the overall quality of advisory work.