



## Arts and culture in rural areas

Background material for the 5th NRN Meeting & Amsterdam Rural Forum  
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### Introduction

Arts and culture can play an important role in improving rural areas and the quality of life of people living there. Among others, they can help to create new connections and bring together different communities (e.g. urban and rural, farmers & customers, rural communities and administrations), improve communication about rural areas, contribute to the improvement of shared cultural identity and engage disadvantaged groups (such as youth or migrants). This paper presents some rural arts and culture initiatives that are primarily supported through the Rural Development Programmes.

### Shannon Arts Development (Ireland)

The project's development area, Shannon Town, County Clare and its rural hinterland, has a population of approximately 10,000 persons.

The project's aim was to develop community capacity through culture and the arts, as well as enhance opportunities for the creative sector to act as an economic driver in the locality. The project targeted locally-based creative and cultural workers to deliver training programmes, which are provided to local enterprises that include traditional enterprise owners as well as those involving the creative/cultural sector.

To date, training has been provided by cultural workers and artists to approximately 30 enterprises in areas such as community capacity-building, entrepreneurship in the arts and creative sectors, community arts facilitation, and community heritage auditing.

A second aim of the project has been to develop a multi-functional civic, community and arts centre for Shannon. Shannon is home to over 30 creative, civic and community groups currently operating in a highly fragmented way across a range of (often unsuitable) venues. The lack of a central venue has meant that the creative energy and initiative that emerges from such groups is not being synergised in ways that would deliver greater momentum and innovative capacities in a local development sense.

Through the project, an empty unit in the local shopping centre has been provided free of charge and is being fitted out by a local artist who specialises in working with recycled materials.

**Budget:** The entire funding package, which includes the Arts Development Project and Shannon Venue is €40,000 and it is part of a larger Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) funding programme (€185,000).

**Contact:** [www.Shannon.ie](http://www.Shannon.ie) , [www.ShannonVenue.com](http://www.ShannonVenue.com)



### 'Story Telling' (Portugal)

'Story telling' is an inter-territorial cooperation project that uses arts and culture to promote the territory, resources, culture, gastronomy, wines and wine trails in the participating areas of Portugal.

Project activities have included: theatre plays in the local wine cellars, farms, castles and monuments; dance performances in the vineyards; culinary performance, etc.

This project aims to foster a process of artistic creation, resulting in the strengthening of the identity and visibility of the territories. It actively involves the local communities in the enjoyment of colours, aromas and flavours, all of which recall local rural traditions.

Through the performances, popular and extravagant characters tell their tales of tenderness and cruelty, of boldness and hesitation, of abstinence and drunkenness, in a form of entertainment that is festive in tone and totally down to earth.

With added video clips, the spectator gets to know the villages and wine cellars along the way, while theatre adds to the experience of enjoying regional wines and other local products.

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## Culture as a Lever for Sustainable Development (Greece)

This is a LEADER inter-regional project of networking on cultural **cooperation among 11 Greek local development agencies**, all of which act as Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the framework of LEADER. The project is based on the concept that Culture is a tool for expression of the local communities and it can depict the common feeling among different areas and bring closer many of the Greek Islands. Each LAG, had to work on a different theme. Lesvos LAG chose Fine Arts. The aim is to introduce the idea that **art, culture and development are inseparable variables for sustainability**.

As part of the project, from May to June 2015 a series of 11 events/workshops were organised in Lesvos, at which over 150 artists and many LAG members participated. The events coincided with the beginning of the intensification of the refugee crisis, so participants from islands which do not have such a big problem, were very much affected. In this circumstance, inevitably the artists involved in the event were heavily influenced, therefore the artistic outcome depicted this situation in a way only art can.

The overall result, apart from the positive networking aspects, has been to bring to the surface the need **to raise awareness and to communicate the problem of refugees and immigration to the wider public**. This is vital in order to find solutions to deal with over 400.000 asylum seekers, who have arrived in Greece since the beginning of 2015.

The works of art created during that time are presented in 3 albums produced by ETAL S.A. These are a graphic novel titled "The Seagulls", an album of artwork titled "INSULARITY – Study in a Place", Fine Arts Masterclass, and a depiction of the local situation of the refugees' crisis in an artwork album titled "The Passage". These albums, in a time of socio-economic crisis for Greece, demonstrate through art the tragedy of the refugees and immigrants, recalling memories to the people of Lesvos from their history. They demonstrate the solidarity and positive activism of the people of the island and active citizens from all over the world.

**Budget:** 67.500 EUR from the EAFRD

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## LEADER projects on 'culture & arts' in Wallonia (Belgium)

Linking art and rural development is an area of interest for many LAGs in Wallonia.

The association Re-Affect in the collaboration with LAG Culturalité (Province of Walloon Brabant) and the Regional Cultural Centre of Walloon Brabant, offers walking trails where tourists can admire the works of contemporary art. The **collaboration between inhabitants, artists and cultural operators** aims to create links between different land users but also to discover the cultural heritage of the region.

**"Sentes" is a project to create a network of contemporary art trails along the walking paths and roads in the east of Walloon Brabant.** The association Re-Affect launched a call for proposals for artists with different backgrounds and perspectives. The jury, composed of residents of the municipality and professionals of contemporary art, selected the works but also the tourist paths offered.

Local people welcome artists who are invited to create their work on site. Their stay in the region is also an opportunity to organise a week of festivities with a range of different events and activities. Several works have also been created in schools or during the holiday season.

Other LAGs in Wallonia have also experimented with similar projects in the field of arts & culture. Among others, **the LAG Pays des Tiges et des Chavées organises the 'May Festival – Art trails in the nature'** (La Fête de Mai, Sentiers d'art dans la nature). This event involves a range of artists who display their art works in a rural settings.

LAG Romana's initiative on **'Taking roots in the stars'** ("Prendre racine dans les étoiles") is a project of collective creation with the artist Xavier Rijs for the establishment of tree sculptures. A range of parallel activities are organised around the sculpture exhibition, including networking of cultural actors, associations and residents of three communes of the LAG, courses for children and young people and road shows.

To revitalise villages, some Belgian LAGs focus their work on multidisciplinary events covering tourism and folklore. For instance, LAG Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse offers several initiatives around **folklore and traditions**, including folkloric walk gathering village's inhabitants, farm visits, architectural and heritage tour.

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## Supporting transnational cooperation in culture and arts (Austria)

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management in Austria (Managing Authority of the Rural Development Programme) is collaborating with the Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery with regard to identification and selection of transnational cooperation (TNC) projects within LEADER. **The Arts and Culture Division is involved in the selection of TNC projects** and also provides the national co-financing.

The two ministries, as well as the paying agency cooperated with regard to defining the selection criteria, which consist of a set of criteria for all TNC projects, and additional criteria for cultural projects. The projects supported are expected to benefit the region through bringing new ideas and perspectives. **Culture is seen as an excellent tool for communication.** The approach also strongly builds on the use of international networks of cultural actors.

It is planned that projects will be supported in key thematic areas including:

- Transformation of work and jobs in the country
- Connection between the global world and local region
- Social creative innovation
- Multimedia and artistic transformation
- Other themes that contribute to positive change in rural areas through the means of arts & culture.

This is still a new approach in Austria and therefore, some further planning and preparatory work is required. The Austrian ministries recognise that **LAGs will need information and support to be successful with their applications.** For this purpose, the Arts and Culture Division organised an information day involving stakeholders from the cultural sector, representatives of ESI Funds, LEADER representatives (including LAGs) and project beneficiaries involved in the 2007-2013 RDP with the potential interest in future culture projects. The NRN is going to provide support through bringing together cultural actors and LAGs within a separate specific workshop in June 2016.

The project selection process started recently and is ongoing. Among others, there is emerging cooperation between two LAGs in Upper Austria and Bavaria with regard to a film academy for young people.



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## INLAND Project (transnational)

The INLAND Europe network sees **socially engaged art practice** as a crucial component for community empowerment in rural development. It is based on the strong belief that creative investment can contribute to the revival of declining rural areas.

INLAND started in 2010 initially as a three-year project with support from the Spanish Rural Network. It developed **art projects in 22 villages**, driven by the manifesto of 'art, agriculture and territory', and has since extended to other European countries, creating a transnational network.

INLAND project locations include a forested area in northern Finland, vineyards in southern Italy, an island of Denmark and high moorlands in Scotland. All of these are relatively remote places, with limited access to cultural production and distribution and often at high risk of progressive abandonment and decay.

The art projects start by bringing **artists together with rural communities**, as well as other stakeholders such as policy-makers/ governance bodies, farming organisations, art institutions and various rural associations.

The projects consist of different phases: (1) an analysis and mapping of the local situation and needs; (2) an open call and invitation to artists; (3) training for artists and local stakeholders, (4) production of individual or collective artist works and methodologies of 'co-creation'. In this process, the **artist is the catalyst for the work** in which the **rural community plays a full part**, not only providing 'material' for the artist's work.

It is important that the art works and projects are meaningful and useful in the local context: for example, by offering opportunities to young generations facing increasingly competitive forms of urban life or by exploring responses to rural challenges – such as the delivery of rural services.

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## Key recommendations with regard to the role of arts & culture in rural areas

(5<sup>th</sup> NRN meeting, Amsterdam, 11-12 May 2016)

The 5<sup>th</sup> NRN meeting and Amsterdam Rural Forum formulated a series of recommendations with regard to the use of arts & culture in rural areas, at local, national and European levels:

### At the local level:

- Arts & culture can be better integrated into the **work of LAGs and transnational cooperation** among them: Arts & culture can provide inspirational ideas and stimulate community actions. LAGs can play a key role in creating dialogue between various local stakeholders, such as local policy-makers, artists, NGOs, universities and farmers organisations.

### At the national level:

- **National Rural Networks (NRNs) have an important role in supporting LAGs** with regard to implementing their local development strategies: providing opportunities to exchange about inspiring ideas, identifying local challenges and help LAGs to unlock local development potential through using arts & culture.
- **Cooperation among various ministries**, especially ministries of culture and agriculture & rural development can help to create better synergies between policies and enhance the role of arts & culture in rural development.
- Arts & culture can be **better integrated into the everyday work of policy-makers** (e.g. used as tools & methods during events).
- **Awareness-raising** is important in order to make policy-makers more aware of the **role that arts & culture can play in rural development**. Rural arts forums can help to enhance the dialogue between policy-makers, rural networks, artists and local development stakeholders.

### At the European level:

- European-level stakeholders can play a key role in **identifying and sharing examples on the role of arts & culture in the rural development context**. Good practices identified can be made available through projects databases, during exhibitions and events, or through other create platforms (e.g. virtual museum of art).
- **Rural networks** and networking should play a key role in **bringing together in a common platform relevant stakeholders**: policy-makers/ ministries (from national and EU-level), LAGs, cultural workers/artists, etc.
- **Platforms for further exchange** (e.g. through a dedicated community of practice) could be set up to continue joint work of networks and other interested stakeholders with regard to arts and culture in rural development.