Added Value of Networking Case Study

Supporting Local Action Groups to develop inter-territorial and transnational projects in Lithuanian

Lithuania

March 2014

ENRD *Connecting Rural Europe*

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu

AVN Case Study: Supporting Local Action Groups to develop inter-territorial and transnational projects in Lithuanian

Executive summary

After some years of experience in implementing inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects in Lithuania, the NSU identified that if tailored support was provided to LAGs at the planning stage of their cooperation project a far higher level of approval could be achieved resulting in more cooperation projects being delivered throughout the country.

In order to help with the implementation of inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects the 'Centre for the LEADER Programme and Agricultural Training Methodology' supported LAGs through specialised conferences and trainings to support project development.

Methodology

This case study has been developed with the support of the Lithuanian Network Support Unit (NSU), the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and Internet based sources of information.

Background

In 2011 LAGs in Lithuania started to implement their first inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects. These were very diverse and related to many topics including youth, crafts and entrepreneurship. These projects created added value in rural areas and inspired new ideas, many of which were also later implementation as local projects. However, despite these positive successes, not all inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects were approved by the Lithuanian Managing Authority as not all of them were innovative or clearly met local goals. It was felt that if tailored support was provided to LAGs at the planning stage of their cooperation project a far higher level of approval could be achieved resulting in more cooperation projects being delivered throughout the country.

Participants of networking

The project was developed and delivered by the Centre for the LEADER Programme and Agricultural Training Methodology and supported by the Lithuanian NSU.

Objectives

In order to help with inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects the Centre for the LEADER Programme and Agricultural Training Methodology supported LAGs through specialised training to support project development and conferences. Two international conferences in Klaipėda and Druskininkai w ere organised in order to help LAGs to learn from experience, meet potential partners and identify new ideas for inter-territorial and/or transnational cooperation (TNC) projects.

These focused on:

- 2010 "International cooperation projects through the LEADER approach", and

- 2011 "Building bridges for transnational cooperation".

The process and main activities

To increase the quality of cooperation projects and to share best practices and examples from Europe the Centre prepared a special training programme entitled 'Development of Cooperation Projects for Local Action Groups'. During this training a practical approach was taken with LAGs receiving individual consultations, analysis of best practice examples from European LAGs and the preparation of applications for inter-territorial and/or TNC projects. Ten LAGs participated on the courses with some LAGs taking part twice but with different LAGs as a partner. Training participants analysed best practice examples of European cooperation projects, and discussed their project ideas and how to implement them. A SWOT analysis was undertaken for each project to support the partners to assess all aspects of the project, build on weaker areas and make the most of the strengths identified in order to help them prepare the most successful project application possible. Every participant found new, more robust ways to implement their cooperation projects; one LAG completely changed the idea of a project.

A series of national and international experts were invited to present at the conference to support the LAGs to understand more about the national context and explore European examples of best practice. An overview of the existing situation for cooperation projects in Lithuania was provided including budget, type, spend and location. A member of ENRD outlined the support available to LAGs looking for cooperation partners. This included promotion of transnational projects, the ENRD Cooperation Corner of the website, an Integrated European Transnational Cooperation Guide and various additional features of the ENRD website including support to LAGs to formulate their cooperation project offer. A presentation was delivered on the Polish context providing delegates with details on Polish LAGs, information on the legislation for cooperation projects in Poland, and a guide to TNC projects which had already been established. This highlighted the types of projects that had received funding and been successfully delivered, inspiring further ideas for TNC with Lithuanian LAGs.

A presentation from Finland provided an overview of Degerby, a town with a history steeped in the cold war. A photographic journey from it's historic background to life in the town today gave a real insight into the area in the hopes delegates may recognise similarities with their own LAG areas and be interested in developing a TNC project. A broader overview was provided on TNC projects in Latvia, Hungary and Estonia including aspirations for the number of projects and the types of activities that were permissable.   The Estonian NRN also provided examples of existing TNC projects and the partners involved to provide more detail on the sorts of projects Estonian LAGs were seeking.

During the confere nces a 'Cooperation Corner' was also organised. This enabled participating LAGs to present their current activities, highlight any topics of themes they had for cooperation ideas and share contact details with other LAGs, especially potential partners.

The 'added value' of networking

The networking activities delivered through the conferences and training sessions added value to LAGs and their cooperation projects in a number of ways. Participants of both conferences received the latest information about TNC projects in Europe, found new partners for cooperation projects, presented their future plans and potential themes and activities for cooperation. The first conference welcomed participants from five different countries where they presented their LAGs and the cooperation opportunities. The Second conference was attended by participants from 8 countries and even included participants from Moldova which is not yet a member of the EU.

The special training programme "Development of Cooperation Projects for Local Action Groups" was created for those LAGs which were already planning to apply for an inter-territorial and/or transnational cooperation project and also to stimulate new project ideas. As a result of this training 4 inter-territorial and 2 transnational cooperation projects were developed.

What supports networking?

The main reason for choosing training courses was to have all the LAGs in one place, to share their expectations, to learn about the main mistakes that are made, and to help LAGs identify their strengths and how these could be used in project implementation. The innovative approach which increased participant's benefits was the idea of using common mistakes as a learning opportunity and identifying the strongest aspects of a LAGs local area that could not only benefit the Lithuanian LAG but also the project partners. Two LAGs prepared transnational cooperation projects with non EU member state partners in Ukraine, which were accepted by the MA and so enabled other Lithuanian LAGs to explore cooperation ideas with third countries. One of the most important benefits of these training courses was that LAGs set further cooperation aspirations for new projects and developed new good practice examples in inter-territorial and transnational cooperation.

Future challenges

The main elements which enabled the activities to become successful were the use of skilled and experienced tutors, the homework assigned to LAGs and the communication between the course tutors and LAGs, from basic project ideas to the ready-made project proposal. The main challenge was the fear of taking a risk, for LAGs to develop new ideas which were completely different from their initial concept. Another challenge was to convince LAGs to change the approach of their cooperation projects by exploring different means of implementation.