



European Commission

Leader+ Magazine



SPECIAL FOCUS

Adding value to local products

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Leader+ Magazine



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This European Commission magazine seeks to promote access to information about the Leader+ Community initiative. Our goal is to provide accurate and up-to-date information. If errors are brought to our attention, we will try to correct them. However, the Commission accepts no responsibility for the information contained in this magazine, especially regarding financial data on the projects described, and in particular on the eligibility of expenditure. Readers should therefore take all necessary precautions before using these data, which they do entirely at their own risk.

Cooperation in Leader+

by **Mr Dirk Ahner**, Deputy Director-General,
Directorate-General for Agriculture and
Rural Development



As the Leader+ initiative progresses, it is encouraging to see that there is more and more evidence of cooperation activities taking place between the different Member States. Indeed, Action 2 of the initiative expressly provides for the encouragement and support for cooperation between rural territories, and foresees cooperation taking place between regions in the same Member State (inter-territorial cooperation) and between at least two Member States (transnational cooperation). Cooperation is also possible with non-EU countries.

Cooperation projects generally have three aims which are often complementary. These are: to pool resources in order to achieve the critical mass which makes the project viable; to encourage complementary actions; and to facilitate innovation. In this magazine there are two such examples of projects dedicated to transnational cooperation. 'Villages of tradition' is an action which began under Leader II and has now developed under Leader+ to include additional partners covering initially three and now five Member States. It is a project which is based on interterritorial cooperation and at the transnational level each national scheme has the potential to support the other. The second example 'Euro land art' is still at its early stages, but shows an innovative way of how two regions in different Member States are working together to achieve common goals by enhancing their own respective regional identities.

Of course, cooperating at transnational level cannot function without strong efforts by the different partners, and the Leader+ Observatory and its national partners are conscious of this. For this reason the Leader+ Observatory is working to facilitate transnational cooperation by providing a variety of tools. A partner search tool, available on the European Leader+ website (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/leaderplus>) helps to identify suitable partners for cooperation projects. In addition, there are a variety of documents to be found in the site's 'library' which provide methodological support and ideas about best practice gained from experience in implementing transnational projects. I encourage you to use these resources.

However, there is no substitute for 'face to face' cooperation. Under Leader+ several 'cooperation fairs' have already been organised by a variety of different national organisations, for example national network units. These events not only provide an exchange and transfer of experiences, but also help in facilitating cooperation, providing information, and drawing lessons from the use of cooperation tools.

Given the importance of these activities, the Commission also took the decision to organise at the European level a large two-day cooperation fair in the summer of 2005. This event was not only for those rural actors currently participating in Leader+, but was also to provide an opportunity for rural actors in the 10 new Member States who are keen to develop contacts for their own future programmes. We must not forget the wealth of knowledge and experience that Leader+ and its predecessors have accumulated and the opportunity that such 'cooperation fairs' present to our new partners.

Since the Leader approach is soon to be mainstreamed into future EU rural development policy, it is extremely important that we do not lose sight of the importance of transnational cooperation as a means to promote innovation and exchange of best practice in rural development in the EU of 25 and beyond. The cooperation currently taking place under Leader+ is a testament to the willingness of rural actors to look beyond national boundaries and to work together for a better way of life for all their citizens living and working in rural territories.



Providing quality care on Dutch farms

Member State: The Netherlands
Region, district: Zuid Holland
Name of the LAG: De Waarden

Project total cost: EUR 318 180
EU: EUR 140 372
Other public funds: EUR 167 876
Private funds: EUR 9 932



Every week in the Netherlands, assistant farmers travel to farms in the regions of Alblasserwaard, Vijfheerenland, and the Krimpenerwaard, where they spend their time in a useful and pleasant way, helping out with the different tasks that can be found on every farm.

However, these assistant farmers are a little different to the average agricultural employee: they come to the farms because they require 'care'. This group of people or 'patients' varies from youngsters with behavioural disorders, to mentally handicapped people, to elderly people who suffer from dementia. The general idea is that these people are supported in their tasks by the other regular farm employees. The design of the farms is deliberately small in scale. Peace and quiet, free space, individual attention, and respect, are core themes in this approach.

Having individual tasks and responsibilities positively affects the well-being of the 'patients', and clearly this arrangement has benefits for the farm owners as well. In an environment where it becomes increasingly difficult to generate sufficient income based on purely agricultural activities, providing such a service in a farm setting is an opportunity with much potential.

Den Hâneker is a society that aims to broaden activities and opportunities in Dutch rural areas through nature conservation, rural tourism, agriculture and 'care'. To facilitate initiatives like this, den Hâneker advises and supports farmers in setting up such farms. It brings together farmers and care institutions, and helps to match expectations with possibilities, and is yet another innovative project which is receiving support from Leader+.

Name of contact person: Bart Soldaat
E-mail: bart.soldaat@planet.nl
Website: <http://www.leaderplus-dewaarden.nl/>

Photograph provided by the Den Hâneker Foundation



Same sky — 5 x Eden

Member State: United Kingdom
Region, district: The Weald
Name of the LAG: WARR partnership

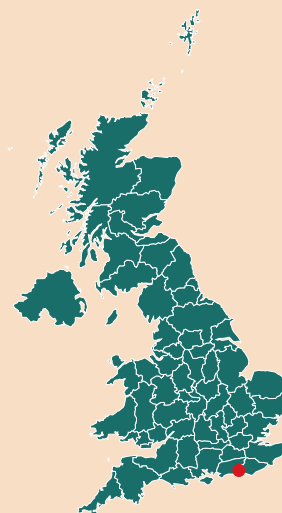
Project total cost: EUR 71 904
EU: EUR 32 354
Other public funds: EUR 39 550

The 'Same sky — 5 x Eden' project was, in fact, a large-scale travelling show designed to celebrate the unique qualities of five isolated East Sussex villages: Bodiam, Camber, Rye, Staplecross and Darvel Down. It highlighted and developed the unique character of each village, and in doing so: engaged the community; raised awareness of local landscapes and heritage; and provided an opportunity for whole communities to work together.

The project increased the social cohesion in five areas of the rural Rother region by producing large-scale cultural projects which were accessible to all groups and ages. This then generated a greater sense of community which also led to improved communal activities and created actions for the future.

The village events were centred on the creation of five community gardens, which entailed: day- and night-time parades; a host of diverse workshops; talks and exhibitions; planting; harvesting; feasting; a puppetry performance; and many other spectacles. The travelling shows were a great success among the local village communities. The project was highly innovative, working actively with communities and capacity building. Since the end of the project the community groups involved have been inspired and continued to meet and work together.

Name of contact person:
Bec Britain
E-mail: info@samesky.co.uk
Website: www.samesky.co.uk



Photograph provided by the UK national network unit



Settlement of Sarakatsanos

Member State: Greece

Region, district: Ellassona

Name of the LAG: Development Agency of Ellassona — Kissavos SA (AN.EL.KIS.S.A)

Project total cost: EUR 64 091

EU: EUR 48 076

Other public funds: EUR 16 015

This project concerns the creation of a ‘Sarakatsanos’ settlement in the form of a rural and folklore tradition museum, open to the public, and located in the city of Ellassona. Sarakatsanos are nomad shepherds that live in continental Greece, and more specifically near the mountain range of Pindos. They move seasonally. In the summer months they live in the mountainous regions and in the winter they move to the lower-lying countryside. They have a particular economic and social organisation, a special culture, and a traditional way of living. Their traditions have existed for many thousands of years and their dialect is close to the ancient Greek spoken by their ancestors.

This Leader+ funded settlement will include huts, such as: a ‘teacher’s cabin’ (for teaching children how to read), ‘strouga’ (place for the needs of milking), ‘frizato’ (place where the residents gather for chatting and rest), ‘tseligata’ (sheep-pen); all to be replicated in the traditional Sarakatsanos’ way of life. The huts will be built in the same way and using the same materials that were used historically. Inside, they will display the items of domestic use, including the clothes, blankets and tools that were used in the daily life of Sarakatsanos.



Name of contact person: Mrs Hatzouli Eleni

E-mail: anel-ae@hol.gr

Photograph provided by the LAG Ellassona-Kissavos

A craft industry: preserving regional food

Member State: Spain

Region, district: Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid

Name of the LAG: Aracove

Project total cost: EUR 60 859

EU: EUR 17 632

Other public funds: EUR 5 383

Private funds: EUR 37 844

A craft industry based on a food processing plant which prepares organically grown food is also the first of its type in the region. It is a Leader+ project which has been promoted by a woman from the town of Colmena de Oreja (in the region of Madrid), and production is based on a variety of crops grown by her husband, such as garlic, lentils, chick-peas and melons, and the results are a variety of dishes with a regional flavour. The project’s chief customer requires high-quality and traditional products based on food which has been organically grown. Food deliveries are centralised in Madrid, from where they are distributed to the supermarkets of the city’s large department stores which are also the main retail outlets for the product range.

So far employment has been created for three people, and the local action group (LAG) has provided them with the special training necessary for the preparation of canned vegetable products. The project is fully operational and has met with great success. A production cycle takes account of the availability of the different crops to ensure that there is year-round activity. This starts in April when the young garlic arrives, followed by other seasonal vegetables which are produced during the year.

Name of contact person: Mónica Rabadán Aránguez

E-mail: aracove@aracove.com

Website: www.aracove.com





Leader+ Observatory

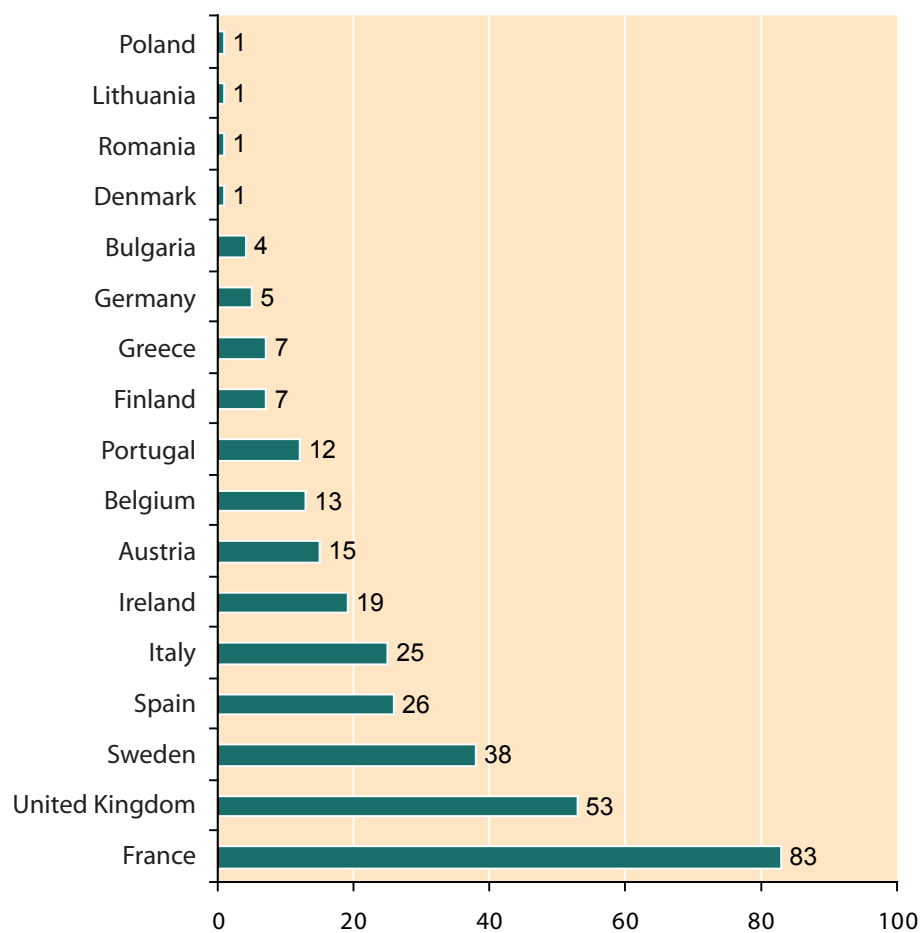
The 'partner search' tool: promoting cooperation

Although cooperation under Leader+ can take place in many different ways and places, a web-based facility offers the best chance to reach as many interested parties as possible. In the early stages, understanding the different possibilities for cooperation at the transnational level is important for future project orientations. With this in mind, the Leader+ Observatory has developed a 'partner search' tool which is available on the Leader+ website (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/leaderplus>) as well as on the sites of the different Leader+ national network units.

More is now known about how the partner search tool has been used and by whom. However, it should be noted

that these findings cover the early part of the Leader+ initiative and do not reflect the activities which have taken place since the launch of the Leader+ Observatory and its Contact Point. Nevertheless, this information helps with understanding the kind of projects which are of interest to local actors, where they are located, and in which other countries they are seeking partners. It also makes it easier to decide where resources need to be allocated in order to ensure as many people as possible are informed about and engaged in Leader+ over the remainder of the programming period.

Number of partner search offers per country of origin



Out of **the total number of projects proposed**, almost 75 % come from five countries: France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain and Italy.

Among the four **main Leader+ themes**, 'making best use of natural and cultural resources' with 44 % and 'quality of life' with 26 % were the two most popular.

An interesting finding was that over 30 % of entries were towards countries in eastern Europe — including Turkey. This trend is likely to increase as both the new Member States and the candidate countries become better known to the old EU-15, and they themselves become more knowledgeable about the available opportunities under the Leader+ initiative.

In terms of **keywords** ⁽¹⁾, tourism stands out as the primary area where **proposers** are looking to cooperate, followed by: culture, nature and environment, social and community building, and economy. These account for nearly 70 % of the keywords entered, although it should be noted that several keywords per project are possible. By contrast, new technologies account for less than 4 % of keywords which appears to underline the lack of popularity for the Leader+ theme 'use of new know-how and new technologies' in the projects selected by LAGs under Action 1.

A wide range of countries have been targeted for cooperation proposals.

As to the **most requested project proposals**, they include: ecocentres, museum sustainability, themed tourist trails, women in enterprise, and regional brand/quality trademarks for approved goods and services.

⁽¹⁾ Examples of fields covered by some of the proposed keywords:

Agriculture: experimental farming, special plants, quality of food production, organic farming;

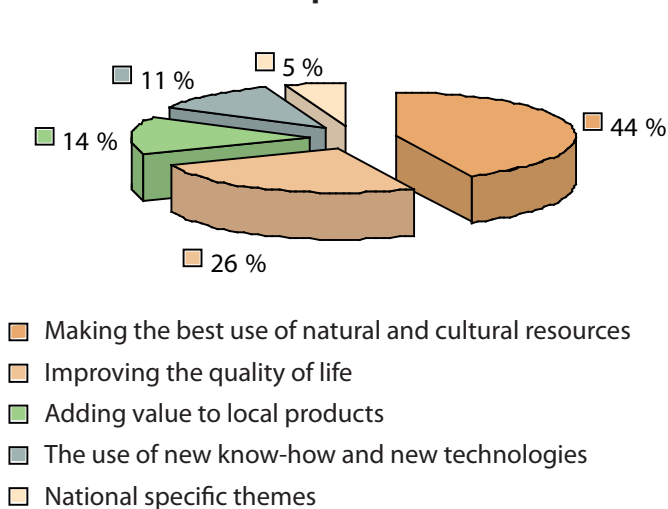
Economy: creating enterprises, SMEs, economic management, improving production;

Products (food): direct marketing, brand development, food quality;

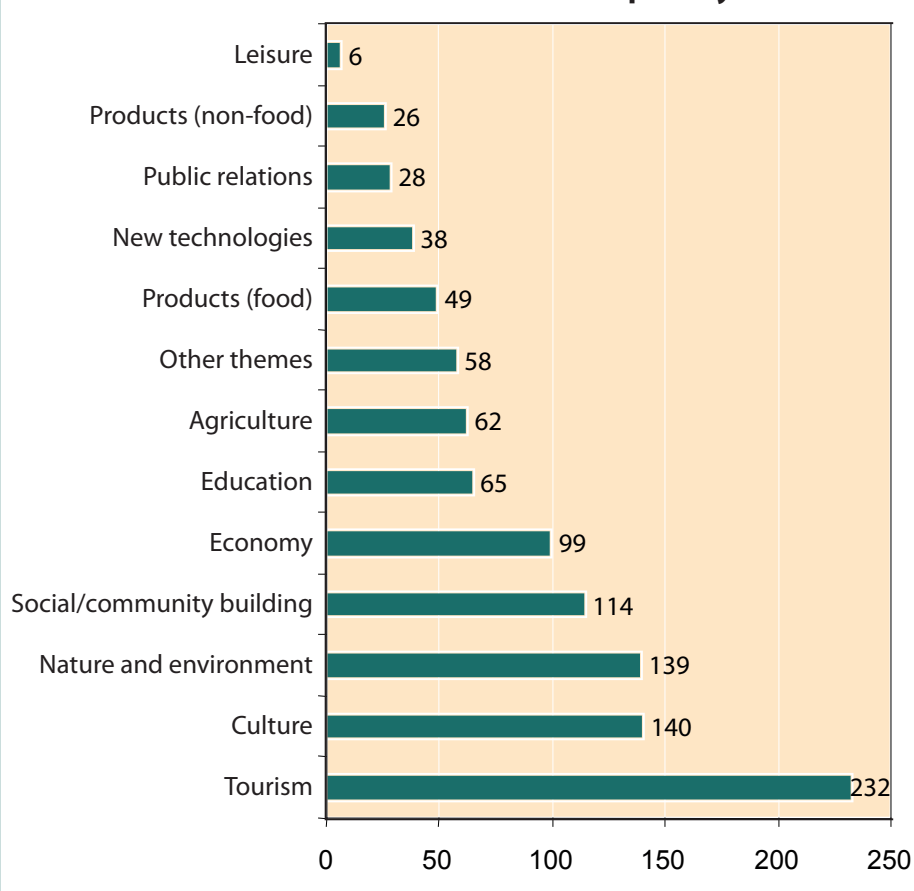
Public relations: new media/radio/television, events, print media;

Social/community building: networks, development of public activities, services, transport, village renewal.

Partner search offers per theme



Partner search offers per keyword



Conclusions

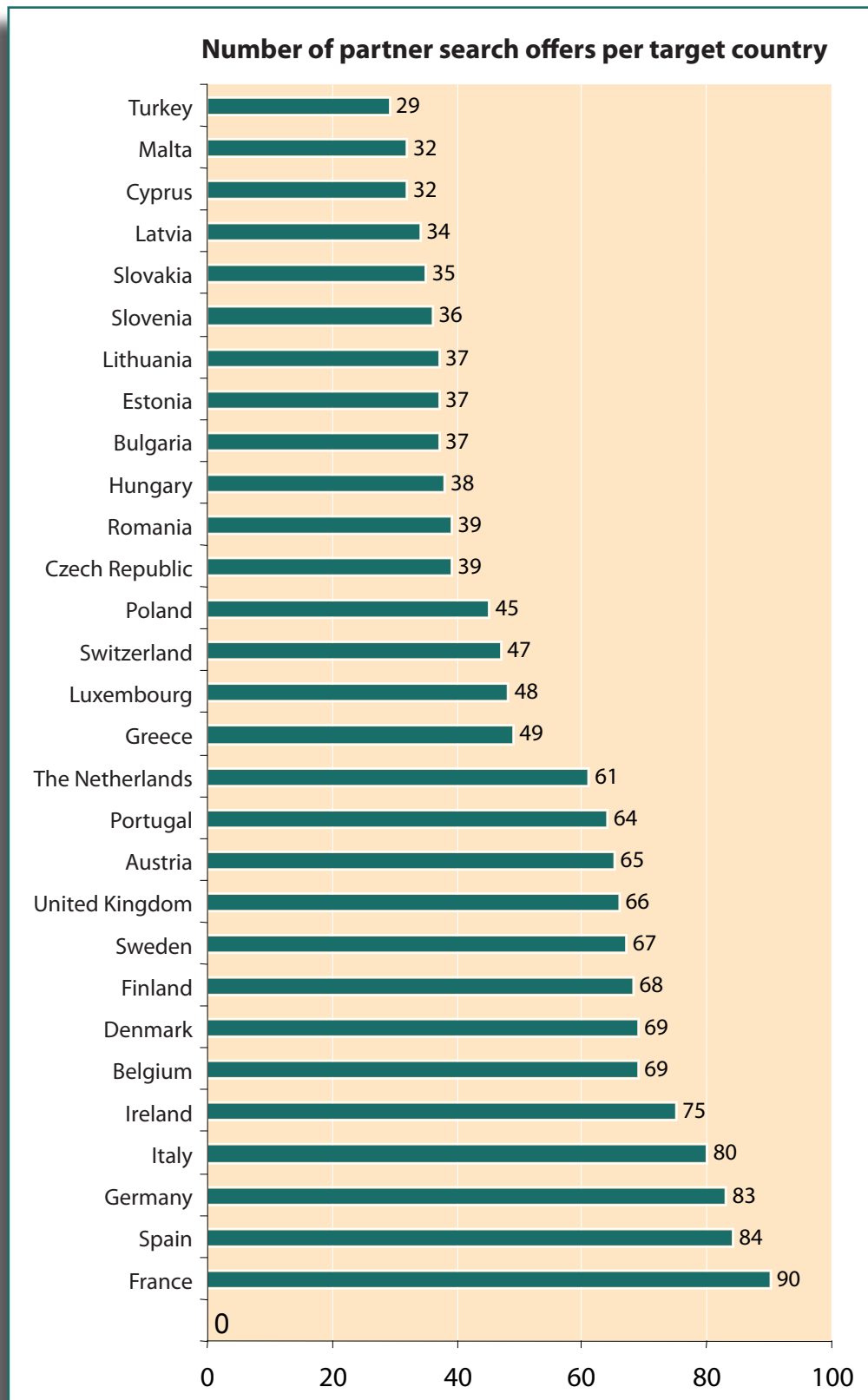
The partner search tool is one way for LAGs and other rural actors to initiate a search for a prospective project or partner. However, its use and efficiency is only as good as the information which is uploaded onto the system. In this respect, all rural development actors, and especially the national network units, should ensure that they update project information on a regular basis. As the Leader+ initiative matures, and more project information becomes available, the more useful it will become.

It is also a tool to be used in conjunction with other ac-

tions such as: the various cooperation fairs taking place in the different Member States and candidate countries; publications concerned with methodological support available on the Leader+ and other national websites; and announcements in Leader+ publications, produced both by the national network units and the Leader+ Observatory, and so on.

If you have any experiences about cooperation, which you feel are useful good practice examples, please send details to the Leader+ Contact Point at:

contact.point@leaderplus.org



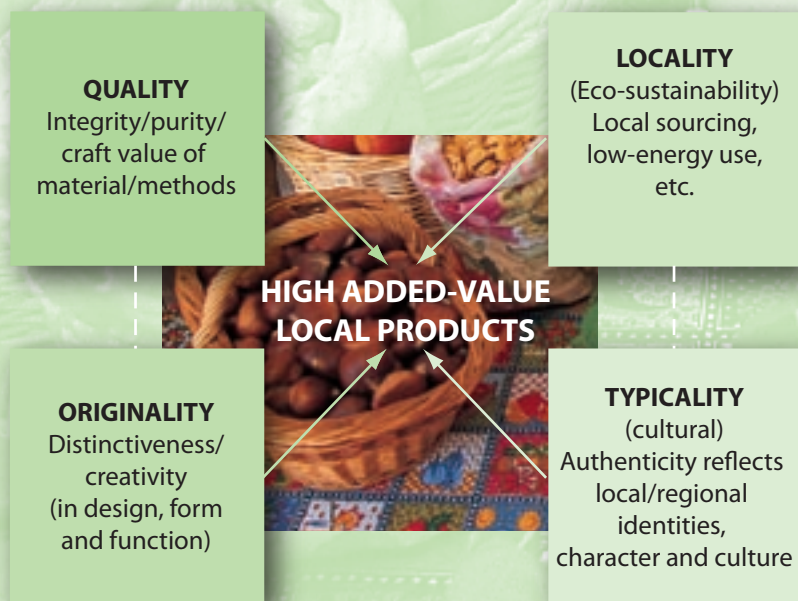
Special focus: Adding value to local products

Within the Leader+ initiative, the theme 'adding value to local products' is chosen by 20 % of local action groups, making it the third most popular of the four Leader+ themes. In fact, within Leader+ it is not only about 'adding value to local products' but also 'facilitating their access to markets for small production units via collective actions'. This second element is important since it places emphasis on local products reaching a wider market, and this is a critical aspect in terms of profitability and long-term sustainability for many such projects. The case studies presented in this section show not only the importance of adding value but also the need to reach a wider public through the development of marketing initiatives and associated branding activities.

Adding value comes not only from the originality and quality of products but also from locality. Here there is the opportunity for Leader+ projects to emphasise what makes a product typically local and thereby authentic. It is also important to show how the various products take account of environmentally sustainable criteria in their production and distribution. Ideally, in developing and evaluating a strategy around local products, all factors which can add value should be considered and where possible incorporated. This also includes incorporating an innovative approach, for example, in the processing, marketing and distribution of locally grown crops. All these elements are illustrated in the Leader+ projects presented in this section, and can be depicted as below.

Many Leader+ projects are, not surprisingly, concerned with adding value to local food initiatives. In recent years there has been a greater awareness about the intrinsic value and additional benefits of the local food economy, not only in terms of its contribution to the future viability of farm enterprises but also in environmental sustainability, public health, local and regional culture and rural tourism, and so on. Thus, projects often have set out to encourage and support the interaction of the producers, retailers and consumers of distinctive and often high-quality products, which leads to a degree of cooperation around the processing, marketing and distribution activities. This is well illustrated in the case study from Austria.

Initiators of local food linkage projects are normally from self-start groups of farmers and producers who cooperate around farmers' markets or supply to larger retailers and wholesalers. Under Leader+ there is a movement for such local food producers to become more involved in networks promoting local food, such as the case study from Belgium. This kind of activity can also be considered as a response to an increasingly centralised system of food production, and supply dominated by large-scale retailing and manufacturing interests. Under Leader+, this shows the 'bottom-up' approach of the food supply chain in action. This is shown in the two projects which have been developed by the Mallorcan LAG, which, as often happens, has implications for the region's culture and tourism.





A farm shop is open to the public

BELGIUM

A strategy for farm-fresh products

A Flemish rural area develops a strategy for delivering regional products to a wider public and sustainable development to its rural communities

Introduction

In the countryside around the city of Bruges you are never far away from an urban environment. The city has a population of over 120 000, and being a world heritage site it attracts many more tourists. The urban fringe extends as far as the Belgian coast and touches the tourist resorts such as Knokke-Heist and Blankenberge. Nevertheless, this region also contains valuable man-made landscapes, including medieval polders and country estates. Its history and landscape in combination with its gastronomy and culture provide the basis for promoting this region as an ideal place to relax. In terms of the region's gastronomy, a number of farm enterprises sell home-produced or processed food such as beef, milk, cheese, and ice cream. They are now looking for new ways to bring their products to market in order to reach a new public.

Project background

The LAG 'Brugse Ommeland' (the countryside around the city of Bruges) has developed a strategy to deal with the various pressures of the surrounding urban areas. It sees tourism as a means for visitors to experience the landscape and at the same time develop sustainable agriculture. These are both seen as key for the future prosper-

ity of the area. Making it possible for people to remain in this rural area also ensures that there is a sufficient critical mass to maintain local services and fuel further economic development. In this respect farmers are regarded as important players. Agricultural production represents an important part of the rural economy around Bruges. In order to maintain their economic viability some farmers want to become multi-functional businesses. This means that they deliver products that represent more value added per unit because the products fit better with the demands of the consumer. Farm-based processing of primary products combined with direct retailing, such as farm shops, are well-known components of this kind of strategy, and the investments for doing this are mostly done on an individual basis and with support from the common agricultural policy.

Defining the market orientation

While developing a strategy for the region, LAG discussions highlighted the need for a common promotion and distribution network in the area. This network is intended to support the development of sustainable agriculture with a high added value by extending the production and marketing of high-quality products. Nine entrepreneurs



The region's gastronomy is put on display

started with the help of the LAG and formed a network of farm products called the 'Netwerk Hoeveproducten Brugse Ommeland'. Some officers of the province West-Vlaanderen act as technical staff.

The main activities are joint advertising, marketing campaigns and the provision of information and advice for members. A common label for the collective presentation has been developed, albeit using the same logo and tagline which is currently used to attract tourists. This integral approach, promoted by Leader+, relates the promotion and marketing of the farm-made product(s) to the image of the LAG's region. The values of the products are therefore used to support the identity of the area.

The actions dealing with farm products are also part of another of the region's Leader+ projects: 'Stimulating a broader development within agriculture' (Stimulatie van de verbreding in de landbouw). The project started in January 2003 and will run until the end of 2008.

Direct marketing

The network is gradually exploring new ways to market its products. Direct contact with consumers brings the opportunity to respond more directly to specific consumer demands through the product range in terms of specification and quality. Freshness is of vital interest and must be guaranteed. Supply chains must be short and direct. Selling through farm shops, retail markets and at fairs/social events is already done. Mail order or selling via wholesalers to specialist delicatessens, local retailers, caterers and upmarket department stores has been considered. Local restaurants are also interested. The main concern now is to connect the existing cycle and hiking trails to the different farm shops and farm gardens: especially for the summer months.

As the farmer Pascal Brusselse from Klokkhof said: 'It seems difficult to convince the local authorities that a signpost can help. I will provide it myself, but first they have to give their permission.' Another possibility the network is thinking of is to produce a map of the area where all relevant information is presented.

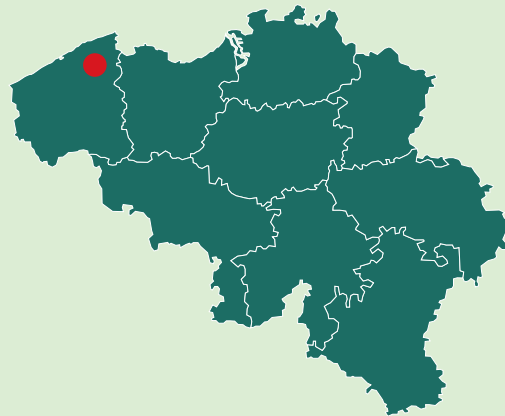
Since no amount of marketing can compensate for a poor product, quality criteria have been defined and

members must guarantee they will be met. The network also has the possibility to regulate products and to apply new rules.

Group dynamics

With 24 members the network is growing. Drieke Beuselinck, the coordinator, is confident: 'The network is slowly beginning to have momentum because the members feel they can trust each other. The organisation of meetings where members had the opportunity to discuss their experiences has contributed a great deal.'

This is the first, and perhaps the most important, direct gain of working together. Or in other words: 'Unity means strength', which indeed is another message for rural development coming from the Leader+ approach.



A strategy for farm-fresh products

Member State: Belgium

Region, district: Flanders

Name of the LAG: Brugse Ommeland

Population: 98 500

Surface area: 492 km²

Project total cost: EUR 362 536

EU: EUR 181 268

Other public funds: EUR 181 268

Name of contact person: Drieke Beuselinck

Address: Streekhuis Kasteel Tillegem

Tillegemstraat 81

B-8200 St Michiels (Bruges)

Tel. (32-50) 40 70 18

Fax (32-50) 40 31 41

E-mail:

drieke.beuselinck@west-vlaanderen.be

Website: www.onthaalopdeboerderij.be

Photographs provided by the Belgium national network unit



Meals are prepared to local recipes for a regional flavour ...

SPAIN

Renewing tradition in the Balearic Islands: Recipes for success

Island initiatives develop and preserve a culinary heritage by using innovative approaches to reach new consumers

Introduction

'A tasting centre', 'the sale of ecological local products', and 'a cooperative association that delivers pre-cooked meals using traditional recipes', are three initiatives that renew old traditions in order to adapt them to new market demands.

Several development groups in the Balearic Islands are determined to give their region a diversified future, in which coastal tourism will be just an additional rather than a main resource. Combining tourism with the other available resources strengthens the results of existing activities such as a reassessment of local products.

Taking the initiative

Mr Francisco Blasco, manager of the LAG 'Mallorca Rural', sums up the group's proposal for Leader+. 'Only nine municipalities out of 36 are coastal ones, and so apart from the beach, there are many other possibilities for economic development based on local products. There are still some misunderstandings about this, and so we have tried to support those initiatives which will generate employment and add value to our local products.'

'Can Cotanet' is the centre for two of the initiatives: the 'Local products' tasting' and 'Sale of ecological local products'. It opened its doors in the middle of August 2003 in San Juan. Its managers, Mr Bartolomé Gari and Ms Montserrat Payeras, planned to revive the traditional gastronomy, based on seasonal products, and to offer it to

their customers in a property located in the heart of the Majorcan countryside.

'We had a farm that was about to collapse and we decided to renovate it. The property, which stands on three and a half hectares, gives us the possibility to cultivate our own ecological products; we even planned to allow our customers to collect from the fields the products that they wanted to buy. With this project in mind we opened on 16 August, and by September we had already served 1 250 meals.'

Evidence of this success was the recognition by the island producers. 'It is not easy for ecological farmers to distribute their products; this kind of centre could open new doors for them. Normally, if a customer enjoys a meal and has the possibility of taking the product back home, he or she is likely to buy it.' The centre has 74 seats and will provide a varied choice. 'There is no limit imposed by working with seasonal products; on the contrary it allows us to work with first-rate quality products. The gastronomical heritage of the island is very rich but not very well-known', Ms Montserrat Payeras points out.

For example, on the menu there are such dishes as: 'frito mallorquín', 'escalduns', assorted cakes, grape tomatoes with herrings, and 'arroz brut'. Barbara, the project's cook, left her home kitchen to join the team: 'I just do the same as when I was at home, but here my work is much more appreciated. These recipes were not in danger of disappearing until now, because they were previously passed

...and kept fresh thanks to vacuum packaging, and ready for distribution



on from mothers to daughters, but now people have no time for cooking, or the means to transfer the knowledge. Furthermore, you need first-quality products and also to know how and when they can be cooked, which is not that easy'. Together with Barbara, the team is made up of the managers and two other staff.

'Now we plan to set up an art exhibition because we think that art would match well with the place and the food. We already have some interesting proposals. In addition, some tour operators have proposed to include our business in their packages', says Ms Montserrat Payeras.

Tradition in a 'vacuum'

The third initiative is with a cooperative association called 'Be de Sal' who is responsible for tradition in a 'vacuum'. The thousands of tourists who visit Mallorca each year are attracted not only by the sun and beach activities but also by its rural character. Agro-tourism is increasingly in demand and local businesses are constantly improving their range of goods to match this increase.

Rural areas can progress in many different ways including the way in which their products are packaged and presented. The project supported by the cooperative association Be de Sal from the municipality of Porreres is a good example of this. 'We are four people from the grass roots level that have always worked in the restaurant business. From our experience, we realised that there was a significant lack in the provision of meals in small rural establishments. Indeed, due to their small size there is no possibility for these places to employ a cook, so they prefer not to serve meals. Our project can fill this gap. We prepare traditional island recipes using local raw materials that we get straight from the producers. We cook and vacuum-package the meals, then we deliver it to these rural establishments, where the final stage of cooking takes place and the dish is served', explains the promoter, Mr Miguel Sureda Està, together with Mr Juan Egidos, Mr Salvador Vadell and Ms Carmen Pinteña.

'The raw materials are selected from where they are produced and then shipped to 'Be de Sal' facilities, which cover an area of 300 m². Raw materials are stored and then cooked according to the traditional recipes, and then placed in a special cold store at 3° C. Although at the beginning we planned to work only for small agro-tourism houses, we do not exclude providing our range to public or private consumers because nowadays either people do not have time to cook at home or, in most cases, traditional recipes are simply lost'.

The cooperative association 'Be de Sal' will also promote trainings and tastings for agro-tourism house managers.

The training should help small agro-tourism establishments to make the most of the meals delivery service.

From the promoters' point of view, the Leader+ group played a key role in this project. 'We had this idea already a year before starting but we did not know how to implement it. Thanks to the support of the Leader+ initiative we have now been able to develop our project as we wanted'.



Renewing Balearic traditions

Member State: Spain

Region, district: Balearic Islands, Mallorca

Name of the LAG: Associació Mallorca Rural

Population: 105 479

Surface area: 1 247 km²

Can Cotanet

Project total cost: EUR 295 396

EU: EUR 44 309

Other public funds: EUR 44 309

Private funds: EUR 206 778

Be de Sal

Project total cost: EUR 136 922

EU: EUR 20 538

Other public funds: EUR 20 538

Private funds: EUR 95 846

Name of contact person:

Mr Francesc Blasco Querol

Address: Cavallers, 22, 2°

(Casal Pere Capellà), E-07210 Balears

Tel. (34-971) 66 54 04

Fax (34-971) 66 54 83

E-mail: info1@leadermallorca.org

Website: www.leadermallorca.org

Photographs provided by the Spanish national network unit



Bergholz (1) features in a variety of buildings and quality products

AUSTRIA

Bergholz: Building a common platform for cooperation

Leader+ funding provides the means for regional cooperation in developing and promoting a range of local wood products

Based on an article written by Luis Fidschuster, Austrian national network unit, and Andreas Neuhauser, Manager of the LAG Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg (Natural and Cultural Heritage Vorarlberg).

Introduction

Inter-sectoral cooperation is an important measure for successful rural development. In 2002, regional manufacturers in the Leader+ region Vorarlberg (2) founded a range of products made with Bergholz. This brought together municipalities and agriculturalists who in turn worked together to develop a joint strategy to sell wood and other products originating from the biosphere reserve 'Großes Walsertal'.

The following types of wood: white fir, spruce, and maple, are called 'Bergholz' in the Großes Walsertal. At first sight timber from these trees is rather unpopular since it grows slowly and has to adapt to steep mountain sides.

However, it is important to the region because the trees provide a natural protection against avalanches in winter and against mudflows after intensive rainfall. The slow growth rate of the trees also gives the wood a natural and wild beauty.

The success of companies using it has had an impact on the entire Leader+ region. For example, many houses in the region are made from the local timber. The new community centre of Blons has been built as a wood construction with Bergholz and the entire interior of a well-known 'wellness' hotel has been redesigned with furniture using these different woods. A regional alpine dairy has also been renovated with it, and now there are already some exports resulting from a strong demand for Bergholz houses and furniture in Germany.



On a doctor's initiative

The trigger for the project was a request from a doctor wanting an ecological and sustainable house made from wood. Consequently four companies from the Großes Walsertal, including a joinery, carpentry, saw mill, and a forest enterprise, came together to execute this order.

The success of this cooperation led to further demand. With the support of Leader+ (see below) a concept for large-scale regional cooperation was created. At the time of writing, nine local manufacturers, all of the eight valley communities, and four agrarian communities participate in the project. Their common aim is that the native Bergholz will be used to produce high-quality final products. The cooperation has founded a common marketing organisation which already sells these products.

Funding Bergholz with Leader+

Leader+ offered three main advantages to the project initiators.

- It focused funding on 'the idea through to the project's conception' without too much bureaucracy in the very important initial phase of a project.
- As an inter-sectoral project, Leader+ is the most comfortable way for funding projects which involve organisations or stakeholders from different sectors such as SMEs, agriculture and local government.
- The LAG or the LAG management is often well-known among local people as an organisation offering support for innovative ideas and projects. Therefore, in the case of Bergholz, the project was only possible because Leader+ funded the support structure at the local level.

Guaranteeing ecological quality from the raw material to the final product

The project development which has been financed by Leader+ includes workshops to develop the necessary organisational structures and the criteria for the common marketing of the Bergholz cooperation. These are as follows:

- advice for establishing the initial phase of the operation of the marketing organisation;
- development of marketing strategies;
- development of communication strategies;



- development of new innovative products and of concepts for their implementation.

The first step was to create the organisational structure for marketing the Bergholz brand. Work then started on a marketing strategy and on product innovations. The basis of all these activities is a clear commitment for both comprehensive and extensive quality. The core of the strategy is the 'Bergholz certificate' which obliges all members to respect the following guarantees:

- origin, ensures that all wood used comes from the Großes Walsertal;
- manufacturing, that all products are manufactured only by Bergholz enterprises;
- processing, stands for the use of organic material and that the entire production line follows these criteria;
- disposal, means that Bergholz products do not become hazardous waste after their removal, and that the material can be totally recycled.

In addition to all of this, the Bergholz enterprises guarantee absolute integrity. That is to say that every client can check the processing of their order at any time. An independent controlling body checks the compliance of the above quality criteria. In practice, this means that the wood delivered by the forest enterprises gets a label and will be sorted by quality and its planned use. Then the wood is collected by local joineries that then produce high-quality furniture and houses. The product selection covers tables, stools, benches, beds, wardrobes, windows, ovens, garden furniture and innovative office furniture.





Innovative design and client orientation

The Leader+ region Vorarlberg is well known for its innovation in the field of architecture. For many years it has been a destination for study trips from other areas of Austria and abroad. Following this tradition the Bergholz initiative cooperates actively with architects in the field of interior design and architecture.

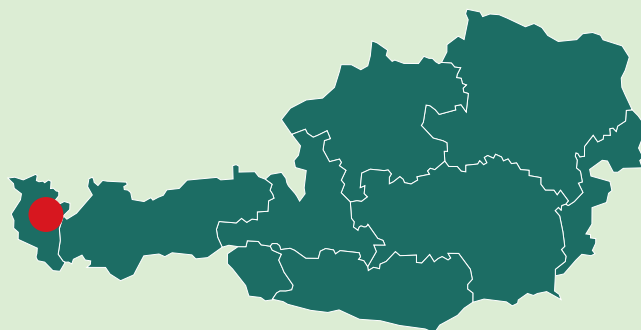
Besides the ecological quality, the innovative design and the cooperation play a vital role in the success story of Bergholz. The cooperation of forest enterprises and manufacturers makes it possible to handle large and complex orders efficiently, since the client has only one contact person from receipt of the order to the final payment. The joint marketing is another success criterion of the project. Trade shows, public relations and other marketing activities have resulted in broad market acceptance, which would never have been achieved by one single player.

Establishing a regional loop

At the start of the project was the big question, how to market and promote wood of the Großes Walsertal. Local manufacturers have previously bought a lot of raw material on the international markets, because of their cheap prices, availability and clearly defined qualities. 'We had to stop this development', said Mr Rudi Lerch, chairman of the LAG, 'and we did it with the project Bergholz. Today, three years later, we can proudly say that it has worked out in many fields. The use of local wood increased significantly. A value chain, from forest enterprises, a saw mill, carpenteries, joineries and architects, has been created.' And Mr Lerch knows that this project could only have been realised by the support of Leader+. The final word goes to Rudi Lerch. 'The Bergholz project is not only important for sustainable economic development of the enterprises but it has also a social dimension for the entire valley. The SMEs have been able to secure their existence and more than 50 qualified jobs have either been safeguarded or newly created.'

It seems others share his opinion. In 2002 the Bergholz project was awarded the Innovation Prize of the Province of Vorarlberg.

- (¹) Bergholz means 'mountain wood'.
- (²) Vorarlberg is a province in the west of Austria. The Großes Walsertal is one of the valleys in the Vorarlberg co-financed by the Leader+ programme.



Bergholz

Member State: Austria
Region, district: Vorarlberg
Name of the LAG: Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg
Population: 64 468
Surface area: 1 716 km²
Project total cost: EUR 91 504
EU: EUR 38 432
Other public funds: EUR 2 745
Private funds: EUR 50 327

Name of contact person: Artur Müller
Address: Buchholz 33, A-6731 Sonntag
Tel. (43-5554) 200 80
Fax (43-5554) 200 40
E-mail: artur.mueller@aon.at
Website: www.bergholz.at

Photographs provided by LAG Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg

MAKING BEST USE OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



ITALY

Implementing an integrated approach: a new angle on old squares

People can again enjoy street life as historic squares are renovated in several historic hamlets around Lucca in the region of Tuscany

Introduction

In the small municipality of Fabbriche di Vallico, a significant investment has been carried out under Leader+ for the renovation of five small historic squares. Two of these are located in the town centre of Fabbriche and the remaining three in neighbouring mountain hamlets. The area comes under the influence of the LAG Garfagnana Environment and Development, which is situated in the Lucca Province.

These squares, which were built in front of fine historic buildings, were asphalted over in the 1970s, and subsequently used to provide parking spaces for the local inhabitants. This was done without much consideration for the environment or indeed the conservation of the community's heritage. Over the last few decades, the whole municipality has suffered from depopulation and urban decay, and local residents have experienced a decline in their living conditions and quality of life. The regeneration of these village squares is part of an overall integrated action plan which at the same time enhances the natural and cultural heritage and with it the quality of life for the region's population.

Realising a cultural potential

In spite of the problems outlined above, the municipality of Fabbriche di Vallico offers great economic potential, not least due to its rich cultural heritage and local resources. It is a region which is fully encompassed by the Apuan Alps Park, which among other things is famous for the marble used by Michelangelo in his sculptures. The park already has a network of well-engineered and long-trodden tourist trails. These lead from Fabbriche itself to the edge of the Apuan Alps, and now provide the main and most urgent environmental challenge for the area. Indeed, there are many tangible opportunities for the development of tourism in the area. Suffice it to say that the area's natural beauty combines very well with the historic and architectural heritage of the town centre and its surrounding hamlets. All of these can become tourist attractions provided that suitable initiatives are in place to protect and develop the different attractions.



Renovation gives a new look to some of the region's hamlets

Given the variety of places of interest in the region, the municipal government has seized the opportunity provided by Leader+, and in cooperation with the Garfagnana Environment and Development LAG, is now coordinating a variety of projects (either planned or in progress).

A key priority of the approach was the restoration of some of the urban squares back to their former glory. This meant not only taking into account their original purpose as meeting places, but also making them sufficiently attractive in order to realise their true tourist potential. This initiative therefore included the rebuilding of typical historic elements such as paved and planted areas, and the restoration of original architectural features. The existing street furniture, which no longer suited the style of these rebuilt squares, was also replaced. Subsequently, the refurbished areas were once again made available to local residents and neighbouring shops, and for a variety of uses, such as venues for exhibitions, fairs and other cultural events.

Expected outcomes of the integrated approach

In terms of results, the project is of special interest since it is by no means an ad hoc example of such regeneration



within this Leader+ territory, but rather an integral part of a wider network of initiatives being carried under the strategy initiated by the LAG. Given the number and scope of regeneration projects planned in these peripheral and marginal areas, the project not surprisingly overlaps with other activities being carried out by the LAG. This also demonstrates a close link between two Leader+ themes: 'best use of natural and cultural resources' and 'improvement of the quality of life in rural areas.'

The strategy of the LAG's plan has resulted in a regeneration process covering the whole of the local territory and also takes account of the development of local business activities. The LAG has put into place an interesting method of programme implementation, which is closely linked to the natural resources of the region, and has defined a series of 'area projects' which are jointly promoted by a number of local organisations and authorities. Such a methodology may prove to be really successful as its effects and impacts are enhanced by an accurate and well-targeted strategy for the pooling of local resources.

Transferring best practice

In line with this approach, the work carried out by the municipality of Fabbriche di Vallico forms part of the 'area pilot programme' for the Media Valle del Serchio mountain community. Their ultimate goal is to prevent further depopulation and improve certain aspects of village life within the region. This will be achieved through a set of coordinated actions which are meant to provide better sustainable economic and social opportunities for the local population.

The early results, in terms of methodology and transferability, are already visible as similar initiatives have already been planned in another four neighbouring locations, and are likely to be carried out elsewhere in the future.



Renovating village squares

Member State: Italy
Region, district: Toscana, Lucca
Name of the LAG: LAG Garfagnana
 Ambiente e Sviluppo
Population: 112 266
Surface area: 1 651 km²
Project total cost: EUR 250 000
EU: EUR 61 275
Other public funds: EUR 81 225
Private funds: EUR 107 500

Name of contact person: Stefano Stranieri
Address: Via V. Emanuele, I-55032
 Castelnuovo di Garfagnana (Lucca)
Tel. (39-058) 364 44 49
Fax (39-058) 364 44 74
E-mail: gal@garfagnana.it
Website: www.galgarfagnana.it

Photographs provided by LAG Garfagnana Ambiente e Sviluppo

SWEDEN

Swedish youth 'in tune' with nature and culture

Hälsinge Låtverkstad: 'the Hälsinge workshop for tunes and melodies' safeguards and develops a region's musical folklore

Introduction

The 'Hälsinge workshop for tunes and melodies' (in Swedish 'Hälsinge Låtverkstad') was one of the first large projects to be carried out by the LAG, Intryck Hälsingland. Back in the autumn of 2001, the adult education and training organisation 'Bilda' undertook a project feasibility study. On the basis of the results, they presented, together with the Hälsingland folk music association, a plan and an application to Leader+ Intryck Hälsingland. The aim was to give young people interested in music, and/or playing a musical instrument, the chance to be trained in the traditional folk music which has very strong roots in the region. It was planned to give these young musicians the opportunities to meet and learn from each other, and to meet established and well-known professional musicians and fiddlers. The project would also show how to make music demos, perform in public, demand reasonable fees, and build a network with other musicians.

The start of a new musical awareness

To understand the impact of the project since its start in autumn 2002, one needs to appreciate the strong tradition and culture of folk music in Hälsingland: an area in which folk music has always maintained a strong presence. In the nearby region of Dalarna, tradition and staying close to the original tunes and performances has always been important, and this has created a rich but conservative repertoire of folk music. By contrast, in Hälsingland, there has always been freedom to interpret the folk music in new ways and to develop a personal style and identity, although the original music always remains in the background. During the 1960s there was a small decline in the interest in traditional music, but the 'green wave movement' (or rural revival) during the following decade brought with it an increasing interest in folk music and traditional culture, thereby creating a renaissance for local music and songs.

Playing to the market

Primary schools and evening classes provide training and education which cover most kinds of music, from classical to rock to heavy metal, but not folk music! Instead folk music has been traditionally passed down through the generations, and in villages where once it was commonplace for children to play an instrument, often the fiddle, from a very early age. Since the places and opportunities to meet have steadily declined, so has the transfer of music and culture, even though there has been a steady increase in the demand for traditional music and fiddlers.



One of many rehearsals before performing in public



Swedish folk musicians on tour in the UK...



...as well as a little nearer to home

The feasibility study carried out by the Bilda training organisation in 2001–02 highlighted a large number of young people interested in becoming folk musicians. It also proved that there was a demand for folk music, and confirmed that many professional folk musicians were interested in training and helping their younger counterparts. The project had therefore the potential to create economic and social development, as well as to strengthen and enhance the area's regional identity.

Leader+ funding hits the right note

Starting in 2002, Leader+ Intryck Hälsingland's plan was to fund 15 young musicians. The initial idea included a number of weekend activities where young musicians could meet and train together, as well as to practice with some established professional folk musicians. This included workshops, and the chance to gain experience of making 'demos' and performing in front of live audiences. The plan was to continue this project over a four- to five-year period with a further 15 new young musicians each year as funding allowed. Leader+ Intryck Hälsingland became the

main contributor with additional funding coming from the Bilda training organisation and other partners.

A strong musical interest

With some 40 young musicians wanting to take part in the first year, Bilda decided to expand the group from 15 to 24 (the maximum possible). Consequently, more than 100 young musicians have, since the project started, received both musical training and had contact with established musicians. They have also had a base from where they can continue their involvement in folk music, they have learned how to edit and record music, and also how to market their performances. Several networks have since been created. From the contact with their younger counterparts, the established musicians have also acquired some new musical inspiration. The youth group from the Låtverkstan project is frequently asked to provide a group of musicians, not just in their Leader+ area, but elsewhere in Sweden.

Some musical influences

Since the results of the first year were so good, the project was able to develop a special training course for the folk music singers, which has a waiting list of young singers wanting to join. In this part of the project, the singing traditions of the rural society are brought together and presented to a wider audience.

The Låtverkstan project and its youth group is very much appreciated and even mentioned in the national media. Other groups, not involved in the project, have since expressed an interest in being part of the vitality and energy which the project gives. Consequently, Låtverkstan has organised several large and open public events where it is possible to learn the old songs, traditional singing techniques, better skills as a fiddler, the basics to play the fiddle, and the old Nordic violin.

Playing to a wider audience

A transnational cooperation project, SNAP (Sweden, North Pennines and Ploërmel), is a direct result of this project, and involves Intryck Hälsingland (Sweden), Leader+ North Pennines (United Kingdom), with GAL Pays de Ploërmel — Coeur de Bretagne (France). It involves youth groups from these three areas taking part in a project about traditional folk music, based on the Hälsinge tune workshop.

The cooperation, which started with a couple of visits, will lead to the production of one CD per year, made by the youngsters from the three regions. There will also be an annual tour in each area, and a website for the project will also be established. This project is expected to lead to a revival of interest among young people in traditional local music, and it may also influence the musical education within the regions.

The tours in each area will increase the tourist potential, not only as a result of the participants visiting the area themselves, but also by the potential knock-on effect of families and friends visiting or revisiting the area following these workshops. The website will also include details about the local area and its attractions.

Young people from the rural areas will benefit from meeting their contemporaries from other European countries, which will provide an opportunity to improve language skills and increase self-confidence. The project will promote new methods of teaching folk music and new networks that could lead to an even bigger folk musical network with participants from all over Europe. It is also a way for each area to display its local culture and traditions.

A cultural force for the whole region

The Låtverkstan project, which started almost four years ago from a simple request has, in 2005, grown into a musical force which complements and enriches large parts of Hälsingland's cultural heritage. The youth involved are mostly less than 20 years of age, and thanks to the project have a better chance to pursue a musical career. The music they play appeals to a wide audience and they have also learned with Leader+ how to transfer the region's musical culture to the people living there as well as outside the area.



Hälsinge Låtverkstad

Member State: Sweden

Region, district: Hälsingland

Name of the LAG: Intryck Hälsingland

Population: 55 595

Surface area: 11 993 km²

Project total cost: EUR 797 602 (*)

EU: EUR 152 082

Other public funds: EUR 228 124

Private funds: EUR 417 396

(*) Not including SNAP project.

Name of contact person: Lena Bergils

Address: Kulthammar, S-82040 Järvsö

Tel. (46-651) 76 70 51

Fax (46-651) 402 08

E-mail: lena.bergils@intryckhalsingland.nu

Website: www.intryckhalsingland.nu

Photographs provided by the Swedish national network unit

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS



UNITED KINGDOM

Never too young to be involved: improving community play facilities

A bottom-up approach and Leader+ funding provide village children with a chance to create their very own showcase playground

Introduction

The Standlake recreation project children sector arose out of a major effort from the Parish Council Recreation Committee to provide additional recreation facilities for the village. There was a time when children were able to play safely in the street but times have clearly changed and this is no longer possible. However, Standlake Parish Council felt that children and young people in the village ought to have access to better play facilities and therefore have embarked on a review of the available youth services.

Standlake village is six miles from the nearest play facilities. Although it has a private tennis club and a cricket club, there was until recently very little for younger people, yet 16% of the population is under 16 years of age. Moreover, the village felt it was lacking social interaction as it is a commuter village with only a small amount of local employment and children go to several secondary schools. With a perceived need for integration, the Parish Council Recreation Committee thought that involving the local schoolchildren in a major part of the overall scheme would encourage them to own and use the resulting facilities thus providing opportunities to meet and interact.

Leader+ has enabled this involvement to be greater than just consultation. It has also ensured that the toddlers' playground was part of the overall refurbishment rather than a project for later.

Celebrating children's creativity and partnership working

Having decided to refurbish the toddlers' playground, the committee talked to suppliers about what they could offer. None had a specific toddler range and they could only suggest resizing existing children's play equipment. Not satisfied with the answer, the committee decided to approach the school to see whether they could work together on the problem. A class of seven to nine year-olds was asked to work in groups, each being asked to think about size, colour and what would appeal to the under fives, and to produce a model.



Children can now enjoy the results of their work in complete safety

The children decided on a willow tunnel and several wooden items such as a 'friendship car', 'chicken steps' with platform, mushroom stools, and a multi-coloured tunnel. The quality of the work was so good that it was exhibited in the village hall for the whole community to see. It also encouraged the committee to support the transformation of the models into reality. They approached West Oxfordshire Network (WON) and also organised for the children to present their work to the Leader+ programme manager. Each group took it in turns to explain what they had designed and why.

Supporting innovation

The project was very well received by the WON. It reached out to a group which had not so far directly benefited from Leader+ funding but most importantly involved the beneficiaries in the delivery of the project. Parish councils are not always as open to the views of young people and the contribution that they can make to communities. However, the WON was so interested in this unique approach that it asked the group to write-up their experience. It also offered additional funding to provide adult seating. This has been very useful and many parents and grandparents make use of it.



This project was entirely supported by the WON, with Defra (the managing authority) money matching funding from Leader+. This was justified not only by the level of innovation and low level of cost, but also by the level of partnership working between the school and the parish council, without which the project would not have been possible. Moreover, the parish and local community had already fund-raised significant amounts of money towards the rest of the recreation project. By providing support for this small part of the project, Leader+ ensured that nobody was left out in the village and every young person, regardless of age, had appropriate playing facilities.

Getting on with it

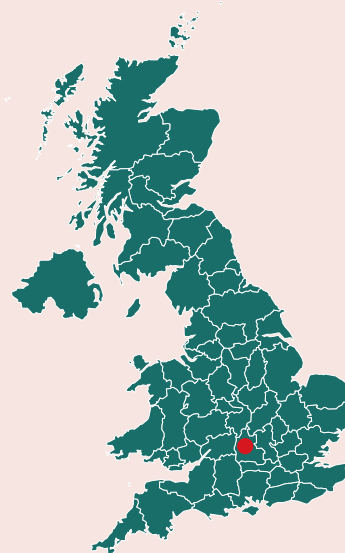
In December 2004, the shape of the willow tunnel was marked out and a group of children was invited to plant and tie the willow, which was sourced locally. The parish council contacted local craftsmen linked with the rural crafts network, another Leader+ funded project, to fashion the equipment and worked with the Oxfordshire Playing Field Association to ensure compliance with health and safety standards. Once ready, the children were invited to come and paint it all. The committee had a job to prevent them from playing on it until the paint was dry!

The project officially opened in November 2004. The Parish Council Committee has reported increased usage. They have noticed a large group holding a toddler's birthday party at the site, users from the 'Brownies' (junior Girl Guides), the 'Mothers and toddlers group' and the local campsites. A school for children with special needs even came along on a special outing. The school children are proud of their project and bring along all their friends and relations from other areas. An indirect benefit of the project has been the involvement of two local businesses.

A showcase project

Standlake recreation project remains unique in the district but the idea of community design is catching on. Finstock Jubilee Committee (another Leader+ funded project) has also looked at ways to upgrade its play facilities and decided to follow the route of community building. The whole community has been involved in designing the new play area and will shortly be lending a hand to assemble it all. Again, young people's views have been taken into account and they are being encouraged to take part.

This reflects the WON's commitment to bottom-up participative approaches. This was recently crystallised when it reviewed its priorities: the steering group agreed to favour projects where beneficiaries were involved in the delivery, thus putting substance to their belief that it is never too early or too late to be involved.



Standlake recreation project

Member State: United Kingdom
Region, district: West Oxfordshire
Name of the LAG: West Oxfordshire Network
Population: 95 640
Surface area: 715 km²
Project total cost: EUR 2 165
EU: EUR 1 083
Other public funds: EUR 1 082

Name of contact person: Caroline Bellanger
Address: Leader+ Programme Manager, WON, Rural Development Section, WODC, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB, United Kingdom
Tel. (44-1993) 86 14 83
Fax (44-1993) 86 14 50
E-mail: caroline.bellanger@westoxon.gov.uk
Website: www.won.org.uk

Photographs provided by the UK national network unit

DENMARK

'The school by the moor. The moor by the school'

A meeting place strengthens the development of two villages in rural Zealand

Based on an interview carried out by Karsten Lægdsmand, LAG Leader+ West Zealand with Mogens Rossing, Project Coordinator



Giving the place its own special character

Introduction

A local village association with help from the Municipality of Dragsholm has been supported by the Leader+ programme to carry out a project called 'The school by the moor. The moor by the school'. This project provides a meeting place offering outdoor activities for both children and grown-ups. It also links together the kindergarten, the school, the after-school childcare centre, the tennis court and the sports centre. The project also strengthens the development of the villages of Herrestrup and Grevinge in northwest Zealand.

Setting the scene

Herrestrup and Grevinge have many problems in common with many other villages in Denmark. This is especially so with regard to the structure of the village population which has relatively few young and a large number of old people. This trend is now to change. The meeting place is the first step in the regeneration process since it will encourage young people with children to move to those two villages. This is also likely to happen when a new highway to the west of the villages is opened.

From his office on the first floor of the after-school childcare centre, which is in the middle of the meeting place, Mogens Rossing, the project anchorman, talks about the importance of this project for the two villages.

How did you get the idea?

'A new Danish regulation concerning the construction of playgrounds turned out to be the driving force behind the idea. We made a quick assessment of our playgrounds, and

it became clear to us that hardly anything from the existing playground could be approved under the new regulation. The after-school childcare centre had already put aside EUR 9 460 (DKK 70 000) for the renewal of its playground, but the money was not enough considering the fact that a climbing frame alone costs EUR 3 378 (DKK 25 000). So we then had to look at the project in a totally different way.

We decided to bring all the people interested in the project together in order to discuss the playgrounds. This meeting quickly turned into a debate about the future of Herrestrup and Grevinge, and what could be done to reverse the population trend?

Many interesting ideas surfaced, but behind all of them was a dream of creating a network of meeting places between the kindergarten, the school, the after-school childcare centre, the tennis court and the sport centre. In fact, a network which could be used by both children and adults in the villages.

It was in this context that the EUR 9 460 (DKK 70 000) was useful. It could be used for drawing-up a detailed project description in order to provide a clear connection between the ideas and the amount of money required.'

Was it difficult to get started?

'Yes, I must admit it was difficult in the beginning. We came up against a lot of negative responses — one after the other. I clearly felt the energy trickle away but then Leader+ saved us at the last minute. Although we still had to fight to continue, the Leader+ support really helped to open doors. Due to the Leader+ programme, the municipality decided to support us, practically and financially.'



It also made the Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities and the Danish Football Association decide to supplement the project by providing a climbing area and an artificial lawn.'

How is the completion of the project progressing?

'We have been working on this project for a little less than two years now, and we celebrated the opening of the facilities on 30 April 2005, so, on the whole, we have kept to the agreed time schedule. But this would have not been possible without the voluntary support and effort given to the project, both in terms of work and machinery. The help was there when we needed it.

It has also confirmed the fact that we can do something when we want something. It's been a good experience which we can use again in the future.

The meeting place is in use 24 hours a day, although we still need to tie up the loose ends. It is a big pleasure for us to see that it is often father, mother and children, coming here together. Everybody can join in.'

What are the perspectives of the project?

'It was important that our two villages were given a boost. We have now got a place to meet and which everybody can use. That in itself is enough. But this meeting place has made the municipality decide to build a multi-sports centre of 1 200 square meters close by, continue the seventh and eighth grades in the school, and to produce a local plan which gives the possibility of making other large plots of land available in Herrestrup.

But the most important thing is that we have now gained valuable experience which can be used again. We are now ready to start the work to attract newcomers to the area, especially young families with children, and with the new highway open in a few years time, our villages will become more attractive places to move to.'

Are you a genuine project maker?

'I come from Mullerup in western Zealand where I grew up on a farm, and later I trained as a carpenter, so this is not where my interest in project development comes from. I worked as a carpenter for some years, but due to health problems I had to change job and became a teacher. Since then I have worked with children and young people: the last 25 years as head of unit. This is exactly right for me.

My interest in working with projects has developed gradually. Once you have been involved with project development, it gets into your blood and one project follows another. But 'The school by the moor. The moor by the school' is probably the biggest one I have been involved with so far.'

What will your next project be?

'We are already evaluating the use of the meeting place, so that we can develop other activities in relation to it. I would like now to finish this project. Currently I have no projects on the horizon, but I'm sure that they will come along!'



Laying the foundations for a better quality of life



A place for children to play



Meeting place in Zealand

Member State: Denmark

Region, district: West Zealand

Name of the LAG: Leader+ West Zealand

Population: 60 000

Surface area: 789 km²

Project total cost: EUR 486 486

EU: EUR 175 676

Other public funds: EUR 310 810

Name of contact person: Mogens Rossing

Address: Ordrupvej 72B, DK-4540 Fårevejle

Tel. (45) 59 68 98 58

E-mail: mro@dragsholm.dk

Website: www.grevingecentralskole.
skoleintra.dk

Photographs provided by the project photographer:
Steen Heinrichy

USE OF NEW KNOW-HOW AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES



GERMANY

Regional development in the classroom — Yes, it is possible!

Combining two projects with the use of new know-how and new technology enhances regional awareness, develops new teaching skills, and engages the youth of the region and beyond

by Andreas Kurz, new media advisor

Introduction:

The project 'Data pool Auerbergland'

Time and again the local action group Auerbergland thought about how it could involve young people in its region's development. At the same time the LAG's task group 'New media' decided to update the obsolete municipal data on the World Wide Web by introducing new ways of using the Internet for regional needs.

'We started from a situation where citizens and 11 local authorities expressed their strong interest to create a virtual network for a joint citizens' information system', explains Stefan Boos, spokesperson of the task group 'New media' of the LAG Auerbergland. No sooner said than done! In 2003, a system was established within the framework of the project, allowing local authorities, all the interested local actors, and specific working groups, to store the contents of their activities centrally on a joint server and to place it on various websites (www.auerbergland.de). At the same time, new media advisor, Andreas Kurz, developed in collaboration with teachers Sabine Saalwirth and Franz Mödl a didactical concept for using new media at elementary and secondary schools in the region. Thus 'Data pool Auerbergland' was also able to support the creation of 'School Net Auerbergland' (www.schulnetz-auerbergland.de).

The long way towards a joint network

Four years ago nobody would have imagined such a development. At this time only a few village schools had the necessary technical equipment to give pupils computer access. Donations of second-hand hardware meant that all schools could be equipped, and afterwards the necessary pedagogical tools on how to use new media had to be developed. In 2003, a pilot project began to virtually connect 11 elementary and secondary schools and one special needs school. Already during this testing phase it became clear that the introduction of new media in the classroom not only opened ways to new didactical approaches, but also encouraged pupils to get more deeply involved with their own region.

Pupils become information multipliers

As the project continues, 20 teachers together with 18 classes from 11 schools are using the school network during lessons, as well as for networking between the schools. This has led to the creation of 11 school websites, a central



School children learn about some of the project's more technical aspects

website and a joint mail server. Fifty per cent of the support for this project comes from Leader+, with the remainder being financed by the local authorities as part of their responsibility to cover the schools' material expenses. The funds are used to support training activities, project management, and the purchase of specific technical equipment, such as digital cameras, network cards and scanners.

Apart from the introduction of new media, the aim is to integrate, into school lessons, the concept of regional identity and awareness of the region's strengths and weaknesses. As pupils take their knowledge as well as their questions home to their families they become perfect information multipliers! Thus they indirectly facilitate the discussion about regional issues and the process of regional cohesion. Integrating work with a computer and the Internet into school lessons represents a new didactical approach. In addition lessons can become more attractive, since the new teaching platform enables teaching staff to exchange modules they have developed for their lessons, present new suggestions to their colleagues, and participate in the implementation of joint themes and projects. The improved collaboration of teachers and pupils coming from different villages and different types of schools

within the geographical area of the LAG Auerbergland is a desirable side-effect.

A welcome concept

Pupils are enthusiastic about the chance to use computers during lessons, since it has added an interesting aspect to daily school life. New teaching concepts support them in developing initiatives independently, and to improve their ability to express themselves and their media competence. Local authorities have realised that the activity is beneficial for the region and they therefore strongly support the school network. Motivating the teaching staff nevertheless proves more difficult. Not all the teaching staff in the school network take part, since the use of new media has not been made an obligatory part of the annual curriculum. The fact that teachers are free to decide whether to participate in the project requires significant efforts by project management to motivate them in becoming involved. The elementary school of Burggen was the first one to develop an internal curriculum for 'New media' (www.grundschuleburggen.de).



'Samson' inspires the children's imagination

Sustainable results for all parties involved

The direct benefit derived from the school network to teaching staff and their lessons represents a critical measure for success: the numerous tools offered had to be designed in a way to allow their introduction into lessons without much effort. Field knowledge was

the sole key factor for success, with pedagogical experts putting forward proposals which could be used by their colleagues. The fact that children find working with a computer exciting also helps to generate enthusiasm. Finally, 'School network Auerbergland' has helped to improve the quality of the schools' technical equipment.

Providing a link between education and the ongoing process of regional development has so far shown a lot of promise for the schools involved. New didactical methods have given pupils the chance to get acquainted with new media, and have thus contributed to raising the level of qualification within the region. Therefore, the project 'School network Auerbergland' is sustainable.

The 'test' has turned into an export success story

School network Auerbergland's success has led to the development of a transnational cooperation project with the Regio-Plus-Group, 'Personality Werdenberg', from Switzerland. The school network Werdenberg is currently organised on the same technical basis as the one from Auerbergland and both school networks are to be linked (www.schulnetz-werdenberg.ch). A virtual presentation of both regions to get to know each other will be followed by a real exchange, where pupils will meet each other as part of a mutual exchange programme. Thus, step by step, more and more organisations will be actively working with chil-

dren and young people in both regions, and they will also be included in the project.

The school network in practical terms

The school network offers children various levels of participation. One example is the 'virtual knowledge-rallye Auerbergland', where participating schools developed questions about the region's history and answered each other. As a result, children better understand their region and the use of the Internet. 'Samson, the Aurochs' is a stuffed toy animal who is travelling for a year through the Auerbergland, and who serves as a project focus for the children, who can document his experience with pictures and texts on the Internet. The project 'children news' has also encouraged pupils to write texts for publication on the website. Another project 'Story writing within a virtual group' supports capacity development in written expression and also helps to motivate pupils to write. During lessons new chapters of an ongoing story are developed and read out to others. The possible story lines are discussed before the final sequel is written together by the whole class as the next chapter of the story.



Regional development in the classroom

Member State: Germany

Region, district: Bayern

Name of the LAG: LAG Auerbergland

Population: EUR 19 500

Surface area: 25 000 km²

Project total cost: EUR 17 000

EU: EUR 8 500

Other public funds: EUR 8 500

Name of contact person: Andreas Kurz

Address: c/o Auerbergland e. V., Marktplatz 4, D-86975 Bernbeuren

Tel. (contact person) (49-0) 8860-86 55

Tel. (LAG) (49-8367) 913 90 24

Fax (LAG) (49-8367) 913 90 25

E-mail: info@auerbergland.de

Website: www.auerbergland.de,
www.schulnetz-auerbergland.de

Photographs provided by the German national network unit



Examining the crop's fuel potential

IRELAND

Oil from the soil: the seeds of renewable energy

Introduction

Biogreen energy products is the name of an innovative project undertaken by a group of farmers from County Wexford in the south-east of Ireland. The emergence and development of biogreen energy shows just what can be achieved through the combination of the Leader+ programme, rural communities, and committed people with innovative ideas.

Planting an idea for a source of energy

The seed that led to the emergence of this project took root when a number of cereal farmers were discussing the future of their business at an IFA (Irish Farmers Association) meeting. The farmers talked about declining incomes from their conventional agricultural produce and of their uncertain future. They discussed the need for alternative crops to be grown and the need to develop substitutes for fossil fuels.

In 1999, two members of the group attended a renewable energy course organised by their local Leader company (LAG), Wexford Organisation for Rural Development (WORD), in conjunction with Teagasc, a body providing research, training and advice for the agri-food industry in Ireland. This course highlighted the potential for the development of renewable energies. After completing the course, the group did further research into the bio-fuels

sector. Bio-fuel is pure plant oil that is used as a fuel oil, and the farmers became very interested in the production of bio-diesel from rapeseed oil.

Starting up with Leader+

The concept of producing bio-fuel from rapeseed oil was pioneered in Bavaria, Germany. When this group of farmers first approached WORD in 2002 with an application for funding, contact was made with the local German LAG, Regina, which was very helpful in the project development.

Research undertaken by the group showed the potential to transfer the bio-fuel idea to Ireland, and so the farmers quickly set about starting up their business in County Wexford.

With funding from the WORD Leader group the company was able to buy its first seed mill. In addition to this grant, WORD also helps to fund the cost of converting three cars to bio-fuel, since rapeseed oil fuel can also be used in modified diesel vehicles. Mr Anthony Browne, a partner in the bio-fuel energy company, acknowledges the support received from Leader+ groups in Bavaria and the Netherlands in setting up the operation, as well as the role of Teagasc, the Irish agriculture and food development authority, in providing a lot of technical information.

Harvesting an energy resource

The first bio-fuel harvest in 2002 produced 60 tonnes of

oilseed rape, which by 2004 had risen to 200 tonnes. In 2005 they are committed to processing nearly 5 000 acres of the crop which will yield between 5 000 and 7 000 tonnes. The fuel that has already been produced is being used to run farm and other equipment on an experimental basis.

There is no waste in the process of crushing rape oilseeds as the by-product, a high-protein 'cake' of seed, can be substituted for soya in animal feed. At the moment the 'cake' is the most lucrative part of the operation. Nevertheless, the promoters are confident that due to the clarification of the national position on excise, its oil will prove just as profitable.



After extraction, the oil which eventually becomes bio-diesel...

...eventually looks something like this

Challenges for the project

The story is one of great success so far, and the zero excise rating on the bio-fuel allowed by the Irish government for two years is an opportunity for the project. Further challenges for the project include:

- cash-flow management: farmers must be paid for their crop up-front, before the bio-fuel has been produced and sold;
- time commitment: the partners in the project have taken on this work in addition to their normal farming activities.

Benefits from the project

Along with the provision of an alternative source of income for the partners in this project, there are a number of other benefits and potential benefits:

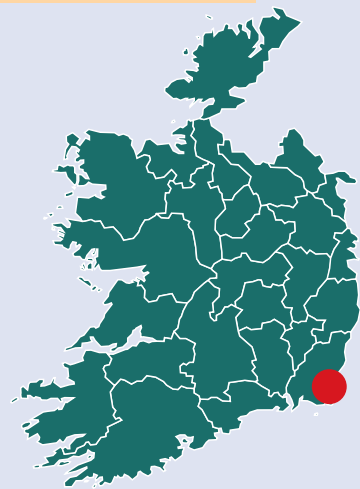
- local farmers grow oilseed rape crop to supply the project. As well as receiving payment for their crop, they can also buy back the animal feed by-product at a competitive price;
- the fitting of conversion kits to vehicles could lead to an

increase in skills available locally, while also providing a source of further employment;

- it is planned that 100 vehicles would be converted to run on bio-fuel. It is estimated that this would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 1 000 tonnes per year.

In Ireland, oilseed rape has the potential to be grown in both winter and spring, with yields of 1.5 tonnes per acre in winter and 1 tonne in spring. Oilseed rape is also an excellent rotation crop to 'rest' tillage ground. The crop can be grown on set-aside land, with an extra payment of EUR 45 per hectare available from the EU for growing energy crops on arable land.

In the Irish context, this project, with its catchphrase 'oil from the soil', is leading the way in the area of renewable fuels.



Oil from the soil

Member State: Ireland

Region: Wexford

Name of the LAG: Wexford Organisation for Rural Development (WORD)

Population: 117 000

Surface area: 2 350 km²

Project total cost: EUR 129 334

EU: EUR 68 211

Other public funds: None

Private funds: EUR 61 123

Name of contact person: Yvonne Byrne

Address: Wexford Organisation for Rural Development, Johnstown Castle, Wexford, Ireland

Tel. (353-53) 464 53

Fax (353-53) 464 56

E-mail: info@wexfordleader.ie

Website: www.wexfordleader.ie

Photographs provided by WORD

COOPERATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT



FRANCE AND GERMANY

Euro land art: transnational cooperation under the sky

Interpreting a region's natural and cultural identity through 'land art' provides common ground for cooperation in two countries



Introduction

Two local action groups, one French and one German, found a common interest in giving their regions a more modern and creative image to a wider audience. Both regions with their open tracts of land and intensive agriculture have a desire to maintain their wide open spaces as a basis for sustainable economic development. For its part, the LAG Beauce Dunois had the idea to create large works of art known as 'land art' linked to the region's natural heritage, to provide impact. The German LAG Mittlere Altmark had a long-term plan, involving the construction of an artists' centre, which would enhance the region's artistic status.

The two LAGs met during a national cooperation day held in Lyon in January 2004 and quickly realised that they shared a common interest in the concept of land art, which could be used as a basis for cooperation under Leader+. Land art, which can also be described as 'environmental art', encompasses all kinds of art, including massive sculptures. It aims to provide a vision about the region's cultural heritage, such as wide open spaces: exactly the kind of thing which the project wants to develop.

Project objectives in the framework of transnational cooperation

The creation of an international festival of land art between the two regions is a central part of the whole project, since it provides the necessary link between the two regions. Transnational cooperation is reflected in the way that the festival is organised, and gives the project a European status in which all the various partners get a wider visibility. It also allows for an exchange of artists from the two regions. In fact, given the special nature of land art, the planned multilateral conferences and debates are important aspects in understanding the land art concept.

Procedure and expected results

The Pays de Beauce and Pays de Dunois supervised the organisation of the first festival with the help of the local tourist committee from the 'Eure et Loir' region, and also coordinated information about the project. Similar work will be carried out by the German LAG for the 2006 festival.

Firstly, patronage for the festival was secured at the European level. Then in August 2004, a call for land art



projects was announced by the 'Pays Beauce et Dunois', and by the end of August, the artists who had expressed an interest in the project were invited to hear about the plans for the festival. The artists were then asked to provide information about the costs of their project by mid-September in order to estimate the total festival cost. These proposals

were then validated by the project managers. At the end of July, the LAG manager visited Germany together with two other officials in order to strengthen the political links with the region. A similar visit by the German partners to France followed.



Land art opens up new fields of interest

State of the art

The project will develop over several stages, and includes the following.

- The land art festival, hosted by the French in 2005, will then take place in Germany in 2006. 'Europe on the horizon' is the theme of this first event. Land art sites will be spread throughout the two regions, and will provide a means for visitors to discover the region's attractions. In France, tourists may follow the established circuit called the 'Route du Blé'. In the 'Pays de Beauce et Dunois', eight plots of land, covering several acres, will provide the base for the works of art. They will be open to visitors during the months of May to September according to the specific nature of each 'land art' work. In Germany, visitors can discover the region, either using the region's cycle routes or by caravan.
- An exhibition, called GALAG, is planned for each region, and will travel through both of them simultaneously. The exhibitions will highlight the partnership aspect of the two LAGs, and with the message that behind the two regions' differences, there are important similarities, and that these areas have their own identities which can be best shown by the regions themselves.
- An artistic exchange is to be developed, where German artists take part in the French festival, and vice versa in 2006. It is foreseen that, for 2006, there will be





Visitors can get a closer view on foot...



...or, viewed from above, get a different artistic impression

a request for works of art made to artists from major art colleges in Europe. Eventually these artists will be accommodated by the LAGs (in an artist's residence in each region), with the expectation that it will provide a catalyst for the creation of a network of international artists.

- In order to give a 'sky view' appreciation of the festival, a group of 'microlight' aircraft

will be organised on four half-days in the month of July. Hot air balloons fixed to the ground at each land art site will offer an additional aerial appreciation.

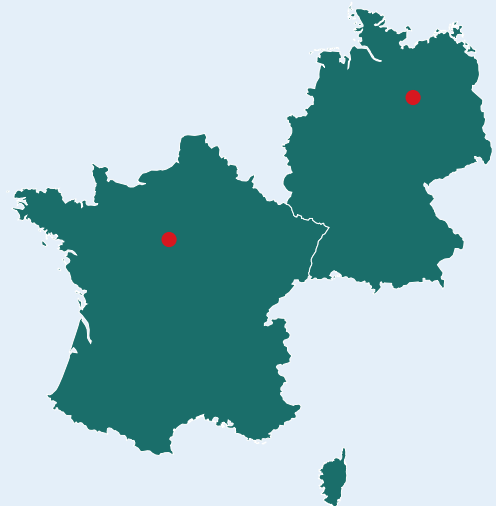
- A joint communication is to provide wide-scale publicity about the 'Euro land art', whose name and logo will be the copyright of the two LAGs. The two LAGs will use a common branding in all marketing materials. For the first festival, leaflets will be widely distributed via tourist fairs both in France and abroad, and each work of art will be described and located within the region. A similar action will be duplicated in Germany. The GALAG exhibition as well as the coming year's festival in Germany will be widely promoted, with materials printed in both languages. It is also proposed that a delegation from Germany could travel to the inauguration of the festi-

val in France, and would be able to stop at the different land art sites, adding to the visibility of the project. Other activities involving food prepared by local chefs, writers and naturalists, and so on, will create awareness about the specific characteristics of the two regions.

Project evaluation

At the end of the first festival, the operational aspects will be evaluated in order to help organise future festivals. This first evaluation will be made by the two LAGs in close cooperation with the respective partners. At the end of the second festival, a more general analysis will decide whether to continue the festival until the end of the period for Leader+ project expenditures (2008). The LAGs will also encourage visitors to give their comments and impressions in order to facilitate the evaluation process.

Leader+ will finance all aspects of this project. This includes renting the land from the farmers, materials for the marketing, with the associated costs of printing and publicity. Without Leader+ the project would probably not have been possible. The provisional funding for the period 2005-06 is shown below.



Euro land art

Member State: France

Region, district:

Centre, Département d'Eure et Loir

Name of the LAG: GAL Beauce-Dunois

Population: 78 773

Surface area: 2 142 km²

Project total cost: EUR 349 100

EU: EUR 174 550

Other public funds: EUR 104 730

Private funds: EUR 69 820

Name of contact person: Franckie Venet

Address: 1 rue des Empereurs, F-28200

Chateaudun

Tel. (33-2) 37 96 93 96

Fax (33-2) 37 96 93 94

E-mail: franckie@pays-dunois.fr

Member State: Germany

Region: Sachsen-Anhalt

Name of the LAG: LAG Mittlere Altmark

Population: 241 000

Surface area: 4 700 km²

Project total cost: EUR 446 500

EU: EUR 223 250

Other public funds: EUR 133 950

Private funds: EUR 89 300

Name of contact person:

Anne-Marie Guignard-Kessler

Address: c/o Verwaltungsgemeinschaft

Kläden – Am Schloss, D-39579 Kläden

Tel. (49-39) 00 19 09 971

E-mail: AAAeVT@t-online.de

Photographs provided by the French national network unit



One of many of Portugal's traditional villages

PORTUGAL, ITALY, THE NETHERLANDS, IRELAND AND SPAIN

Villages of tradition: transnational tourism from a Portuguese point of view

As transnational cooperation continues to develop under Leader+, the need for strong local and national partners with a clear European vision and management becomes imperative

Introduction and project background

Tourism is considered to be one of the basic pillars for the development and the preservation of the rural world. In rural areas, tourism has great importance as both a source of alternative income for the people living there, and at the same time as a means to preserve the landscape. However, having in place a strategy to develop and add value to these resources is a key element of success.

'Villages of tradition' is an established project which continues under Leader+. It is a project which is both present and funded in several countries: Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain, and is a good example of what may be expected in large transnational cooperation projects. It started life in June 1999 under the Leader II initiative where it was launched as the 'Villages of tradition — cooperation project.' In Portugal it is regarded as an





Typical rural properties...

integral part of a strategic plan for the transnational promotion of village tourism.

In reality, the story began with three Portuguese LAGs with adjoining territories: Adril, Adriminho, and Atahca. Between them they took the initiative of organising a series of projects in their respective mountain villages. This involved rebuilding and adapting houses for tourism, as well as classifying and legalising these houses according to the regulations applying to tourism. Their goal was to create 'tourism in villages' based on quality accommodation in old and rural dwellings.

Developing transnational cooperation

The 'Aldeias de Portugal' (villages of Portugal) brand was used to develop a cooperation project with the same name, and the ATA (Associação do Turismo de Aldeia) (Tourism in Villages Association) was created with the intention to guarantee village tourist promotion and management. To promote the new transnational partnerships, the ATA was put at the centre of the activity. This involved an enlarged group of partners from European regions in Italy and the Netherlands. This became the first version of the 'Projecto de Cooperação Aldeias de Tradição' (Villages of tradition — cooperation project).

Within the scope of this project are a set of activities which promote, at the transnational level, the tourist accommodation available in the traditional villages as defined by the LAG, as well as the exchange of experiences and practices between the entrepreneurs of the different villages. This is achieved by contact between the national equivalents of the ATA in the partner countries, namely: in Italy the 'Associazione Italiana per lo Sviluppo del Turismo

Rurale — I Villaggi delle Tradizioni'; and in the Netherlands the 'VOT — villages of tradition'.

By the end of Leader II, through the ATA (Associação de Turismo de Aldeia) and the Associazione Italiana per lo Sviluppo del Turismo Rurale — I Villaggi delle Tradizioni, this partnership had culminated in the creation of an economic interest European grouping called 'Villages of tradition'.

Continuing with Leader+

The project 'Villages of tradition — transnational cooperation project', as it is currently known, was launched mid-2002, in the framework of Leader+. Its aim was the further strengthening of tourism in these traditional villages, with further promotion and exchange of experiences and good practices. This would also give greater visibility, strength and dynamism to the project. With these aims in mind, the various associations pledged to make new partnerships on a national and transnational level, and Ireland and Spain joined the project.

The redefinition of the 'Villages of tradition cooperation project' broadened the initial concept of tourism in villages to include not only the promotion of tourist accommodation, but other aspects which would add value to the name 'Villages of tradition'.

This new strategy had clear actions designed to achieve the following objectives:

- realise the tourist potential and resources of the villages;
- improve the quality of life of the rural population;
- promote the historical, cultural and environmental heritage;



...built with local materials

- strengthen the cooperation network by involving new partners and territories;
- organise and orientate the natural, cultural and historical resources towards conservation and recreation;
- stimulate the organisation, certification, promotion and commercialisation of regional products, and promote their local quality compared with 'globally produced' alternatives;
- harmonise the criteria for village selection;
- promote the authenticity and quality of the region's image in order to improve its visibility, and to stimulate the recognition of its identity with the local population;
- implement the economic interest European grouping.

Experiencing cooperation

All the different stages concerned with the preparation of this second stage of the 'Villages of tradition' project, such as the establishment of partnerships between the LAGs to achieve common objectives, the demarcation of strategies, the definition of the actions, the respective budgets, and responsibilities of each partner, were relatively easy.

Only with the planned execution of the project, and the official signature for the cooperation protocol did problems emerge. Essentially difficulties arose out of the use of a different calendar for Action 2 (support for cooperation between rural territories) procedures in the different partner countries.

The different timings practised by each Member State resulted in a big reduction of the time available to carry out such a large and complex project. Consequently, difficulties arose in terms of coordination and management.



A place to relax *en route* and focus on cultural heritage

In reality, not all partners had Action 2 approved in their countries or regions and so they were not in a position to begin. Therefore, the official start was delayed for several months, and the project had its official beginning on 1 July 2004, with the signature of the cooperation protocol and with the first activity the 'Meeting of the villages of tradition/entrepreneurial missions'.

Progress as part of an integrated development strategy

In order for an integrated development strategy to move forward, progress is very much linked to the different stages being completed at the local level of the project. Ongoing problems may arise from lack of project coordination and management, and the fact that some partners are more eager to progress than others. However, by working closely together, the national associations and the LAGs can provide the local services necessary to promote rural tourism in these villages. In the long term it is hoped that such activities will be self-sustaining.

Although the project is not over, 'Villages of tradition' is nevertheless seen as testimony to realising complex projects by cooperation at the European level.



Villages of tradition — transnational cooperation project

Member States: Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland and Italy

Name of LAGs

Portugal

Vale do Minho — Adriminho
Vale do Lima — Adril
Vale do Cávado — Atahca
Vale do Ave — Sol do Ave
Terras de Basto — Probasto
Vale do Sousa — Ader Sousa
Baixo Tâmega — Dolmen
Serras de Montemuro, Arada e Gralheira — Adrimag
Vale do Douro — Beira Douro

The Netherlands

Flevoland

Spain

Comarcas Condado e Paradanta — Adriconpa
Ribeira Sacra Lucense — Grupo de Desarrollo Rural Ribeira Sacra Lucense
Portodemouros — Asociación Grupo Local de Desarrollo Rural Portodemouros
Val do Limia — Terra de Celanova — ADIM

Ireland

Blackwater Resource Development

Italy

GAL Partenio
GAL Terre d'Irpinia
GAL Alto Casertano
GAL Colline Salernitane

Project total cost: EUR 545 509

For Portugal

Project total cost: EUR 177 009

EU funding: EUR 101 515

National funding: EUR 54 660

Private funding: EUR 20 834

For other project partners — total cost

The Netherlands: EUR 37 500

Spain: EUR 132 000

Ireland: EUR 37 000

Italy: EUR 162 000

LAG coordinator

Designated: Adril — Associação de Desenvolvimento Rural Integrado do Lima

Name of contact person:

Francisco de Calheiros

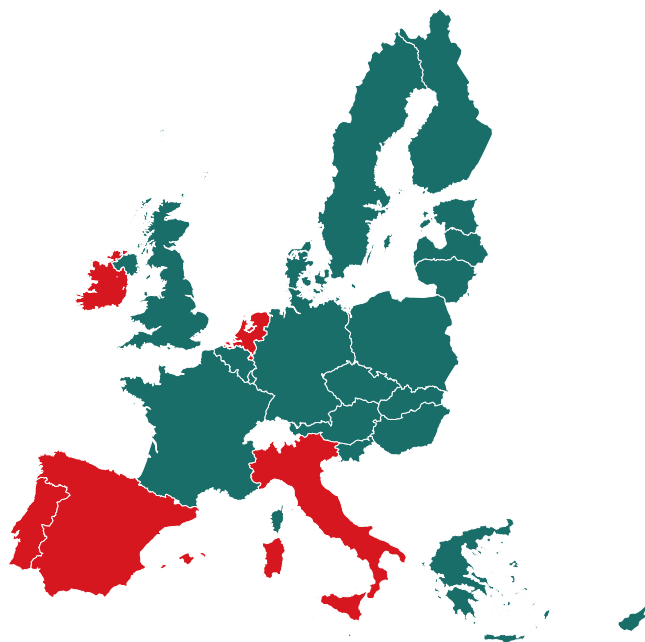
Address: Praça da República,
P-4990 — 062 Ponte de Lima

Tel. (351) 25 89 00 600

Fax (351) 25 89 00 609

E-mail: adril@mail.telepac.pt

Photographs provided by the Portuguese national network unit



WOMEN AND YOUTH IN LEADER+



THE NETHERLANDS

An interview with Mrs Ali Edelenbosch carried out by the Leader+ Observatory

Introduction

In the last 10 years, Ali Edelenbosch has been responsible for rural development and nature, which includes Drenthe's three well-loved national parks: Drentsche Aa, Drents-Friese Wold, and Dwingelderveld.

Whenever possible she has always given high priority to the development of Drenthe's rural regions. Her main focus has been to turn these areas into good places to live and work by reference to Drenthe's key characteristics: nature, beautiful little villages, forests, quietness and hospitality. 'Nature, agriculture, tourism and industry should not be seen as enemies. They are all part of a society in which people can feel at ease', she says.

About the territory of East Drenthe

East Drenthe is widely regarded as one of the Netherlands' most beautiful areas, famed for its picturesque countryside, peace and tranquillity. It also plays host to a wide range of activities, such as cycling, horse-riding, camping, canoeing and walking. In the western and northern part of East Drenthe, the landscape is hugely diverse. Wetlands surround the Drentsche Aa River, while there are also larger and smaller forests, and arable pasture.

The Hunze Valley runs from north to south through East Drenthe. This is where new landscapes are being developed. In the east of the region are the Peat Colonies which are home to some of the province's biggest arable crop farms. Agriculture and tourism are the main employers in this area. Most firms in East Drenthe are small businesses.

East Drenthe has never participated in the Leader programme before. It is thought that the Leader initiative can help to improve the connection between the area's natural resources and economic development, by focusing resources on: small businesses, agriculture, rural tourism, and to improve the quality of life in local towns.

The Leader+ action group tries to combine the potential of the national rural development programme, the economic development programme for the northern part of the Netherlands, and the Leader+ initiative to achieve these goals.



Mrs Edelenbosch, giving high priority to Drenthe's rural regions

How did you first get involved with the Leader initiative?

'I first got involved when I became deputy for rural development and agriculture on the Executive Council of the province of Drenthe in 1995. I chaired the Leader II programme, which covered the south-western part of Drenthe. The project had a very small budget, but I really liked the Leader method because we ended up funding a lot of very innovative projects. The day-to-day running of this programme was easy because everything, like funding, was done by our Leader manager. I work with her very closely, so there are short communication lines and you can get things done very quickly and effectively.'

What in your view have been the main changes between Leader II and Leader+, and how have these made a difference to rural development at the grass roots level in your region?

'The main change between the two, I would say, is the level of bureaucracy involved. We run the Leader+ programme in the northern part of the Netherlands. I think the bottom-up approach of Leader and the restrictions it puts on its participants do not necessarily combine very well. For example, it is very hard for an organisation run by volunteers to meet all the demands needed to qualify for a Leader+ grant. We have therefore tried to work with bigger organi-



Naturally discovering the region by bicycle

sations and cluster projects. When we do give out grants to a voluntary organisation, we make sure that they get extra help from their local town or our Leader+ manager.'

Is there a particular project that you are currently involved in which you consider 'special', either by its approach, content or target group? Can you explain why this is so?

'Well, there are a lot of projects I am proud of, but I think the 'art houses project' really stands out because it is so innovative. It allows tourists to enjoy their holiday in a house that is also a work of art. The idea came from a group of local people, and they now work with a number of tourist organisations on this project.

The other things which I think are important are the so-called 'branding projects' for rural tourism and regional projects. We are trying to put all the small-scale tourist accommodation, activities and rural products under the same brand name. It is a difficult process but we think that for small-scale activities on the countryside, it is essential to work together.

A totally different project takes place in Buinen. In this small village, we started with a so-called 'village development plan'. This was a very bottom-up process. Together with the municipality and the village, they developed a project aimed at improving the quality of life of the villagers. One of the actions is the reconstruction of the village's small harbour.'

As a woman working in Leader+, are you aware of any particular issues affecting women who live and work in rural areas? If so, what are they, and how do you think they should be tackled?

'Women play an important role in rural development. Of-

ten, women come up with really good ideas. Although we do not have many projects aimed especially at women, we do try to give special attention to women once the projects are under way. In most projects, women participate just as much as men do. We funded one project especially for girls. This project is called Cyberspace. The aim of the project is to teach girls in the primary school how to build a website and become more familiar with web technology.'

Do you necessarily look to other women working in rural development for support and ideas? Do you perhaps regard yourself as a role model in any way?

'I don't see myself as a role model. What I do notice is that, since we consequently stimulate the 'bottom-up' approach and show its effects, other regions do see us as an example.'

Cooperation is an important aspect of Leader+. What cooperation activities, either at the national or transnational levels have you been involved in or are planning? If not, has there been a reason for this?

'Cooperation with other regions is very important. We have three levels on which we act. The first thing we do is to try to learn from other regions and to let other regions learn from us. Therefore, we use the national Leader network and the contacts we have in the northern part of the Netherlands. It is important that the people who run the projects swap experiences. We had a lot of very useful activities in Leader II which we can use to our benefit in Leader+.

Secondly, we run three projects together with the other Leader area in Drenthe. One of them is the branding project I mentioned earlier. We are trying to put all the small-scale



tourism activities under one brand name and it makes a lot of sense to do this together with the other Leader area. Together, we are stronger and cover a bigger area.

We are also a partner in one transnational project. One of the goals of the Leader action group is to strengthen local businesses by boosting investments, setting up network activities, and giving management support. Therefore, the LAG has developed the STIPO project (Stimulation of rural businesses) and participates in the transnational project 'Transnet'. Transnet is an initiative being supported by eight rural regions of the European Union, and is a pilot project that aims to develop the capabilities of rural entrepreneurs through networking and training. Rural businesses will also be helped with exporting and marketing their product in the various participating EU regions.

Transnational cooperation is difficult. In my opinion, participation in a transnational project must benefit the development in your local region. For example, under Leader II, learning from each other was seen as a goal, but transnational cooperation in Leader+ should be more than that. A transnational project should ideally lead to concrete results. It must be more than managers meeting each other and exchanging experiences. When the LAG takes a decision on what project it wants to approve, one of the key criteria is: do we get enough value for money? Participation in transnational projects is costly because of travel costs and the time it takes.'

If you could choose one aspect of the Leader+ programme that you would like to see continued post-2006, what would it be?

'To me, the regional approach is very important. Together with the different players in the region you try to realise the aims you have. Flexibility and accountability are keywords. I hope

that Leader will earn itself a grown-up place in the rural development policy of the EU. A good regional approach is only possible when there aren't too many restrictions from Brussels or from the national government. The communication lines

between the people executing the projects and the decision-makers must be very short. I also think it is important to give us the possibility to combine Leader projects with the use of other funding, such as those in national programmes.'



What do you see as the main challenges for rural development policy in the years ahead?

'I think it is important that decision-making takes place in the region. The people in the rural area themselves know best what actions must be taken. The regions, the EU and the national government should have strategies for the objectives they want to achieve with the rural policy. The region should be free in deciding how they want to achieve these. The EU and the national government must be restrictive in what rules and regulations they put upon us. We must reduce bureaucracy. Sometimes I have the feeling that we pay the same amount for funding as for the control of the programme. It must be possible to make this aspect more cost-effective.'





Young school children are also encouraged to be creative

PORTUGAL

Providing a future for the youth of south-west Alentejo

A strong history of youth development provides a future for regional projects

Introduction

Esdime is a cooperative working in the south-west of Alentejo in southern Portugal. The region is comprised of the counties of Ferreira do Alentejo, Aljustrel, Ourique, Castro Verde and Almodôvar along with some other small communities (Grândola, Santiago do Cacém and Odemira). The region covers an area of some 3 500 km² and with around 45 000 inhabitants has a population density of 13 per km². It is mainly a rural region characterised by high unemployment, with the consequence that many young people leave the region to find work which also worsens the region's ageing population structure. Whilst the region has a great diversity of physical and human resources the service-based economy suffers from a low level of entrepreneurial spirit.

A history of youth development initiatives

Against this background, Esdime (the agency for local development in south-west Alentejo; it has been the local action group since Leader II) has established a local development plan using different initiatives and programmes, notably Leader. The idea is to offer training for people and organisations working in what can be called the 'non-formal education' sector. Young people are a special target group of these initiatives since they are particularly vulnerable to changes, but at the same time, they have a very important role to play in the region's future. In Leader II, youngsters

were seen as a priority with the creation of a special action to finance their activities. Now, with Leader+, the same path is being followed, with funds being made available for the development of these goals.

The programme's main objective, promoting 'initiative' between young people, is being achieved in the following ways:

- ensuring young people have access to qualified information, based on local professional knowledge, in order to set realistic expectations about the available opportunities in the region;
- creating favourable conditions that will give young people a better introduction to working life;
- identifying new professional training opportunities for young people in the region;
- developing projects in the rural primary and secondary schools by identifying the school as a resource for local development and implementing actions that involve children, teachers, families, institutions and local councils;
- publicising information for funding about youth initiatives and promoting the contacts between the youth group and the relevant political organisation;
- actively participating in activities designed and organised by the young people themselves;
- establishing active partnerships and dialogue between



young people and regional institutions in order to identify and take advantage of common local resources.

An appreciation of Leader+ projects

The 'School and local development' project is promoted by Aljustrel Secondary School. It receives technical support to achieve its aim of providing a new and strong link between the secondary school and the wider community (local authorities and enterprises) as well as creating a new awareness of citizenship. These will be achieved by developing a new subject for students named 'Citizenship and development', creating a volunteer programme for teachers, and creating a bimonthly forum with partners to discuss education and school affairs.

Another project called 'Promote the youngsters initiative' aims to give youngsters information about national and international programmes that may give a financial support for their activities. These include youth exchanges, and national and international projects funded by the 'Youth for Europe' programme.

In these two projects, the flexibility of the Leader+ approach, and the local strategy and management, have strengthened the 'future citizens of Alentejo' which is an ongoing strategy developed by Esdime in the early 1990s. The partnership approach has brought together different ideas and perspectives as well as providing more resources for the common purpose of addressing the needs of the region's youth.



Supporting initiatives with designs on the future

Youth development in Alentejo

Member State: Portugal
Region, district: Baixo Alentejo
Name of the LAG: Esdime

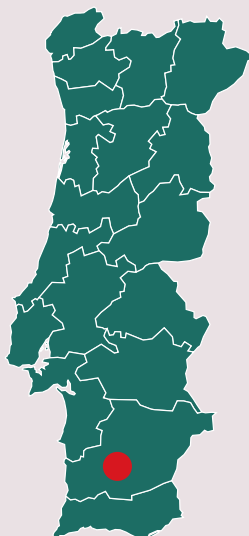
Population: 42 688
Surface area: 3 271 km²

School and local development
Project total cost: EUR 21 667
EU: EUR 13 000
Private funds: EUR 8 667

Promote the youngsters
Project total cost: EUR 19 162
EU: EUR 11 497
Other public funds: EUR 958
Private funds: EUR 6 707

Name of contact person: Isabel Benedito
Address: Rua do engenho, 10, P-7600
Messejana
Tel. (351) 28 46 50 000
Fax (351) 28 46 55 274
E-mail: esdime@esdime.pt
Website: www.esdime.pt

Photographs provided by the Portuguese national network unit



THE NEW MEMBER STATES

Hungary and the Leader experience

Abstract from a study by:

Mrs Hajnalka PETRICS, PhD candidate at the University of Bologna, Faculty of Agriculture

Mrs Anikó NÉMETH, European Commission — Desk Officer, Unit E.I.4 — Rural development programmes: Hungary, Italy, Malta



Introduction

Hungary has already some experience with Leader type activities. An experimental Leader type programme was launched in 2001 with the purpose of preparing the necessary documents and procedures, and to gain the necessary experience for implementing the Leader+ measure immediately after accession.

Hungary chose to implement the Leader type measure in the framework of its 'Agriculture and rural development operational programme' co-financed by the Guidance Section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and by the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance. With the experience gained during the experimental Leader type pilot programming, it allowed for a limited number of rural communities to be established as local action groups. Cooperation for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation is also included in the Hungarian agriculture and rural development operational programme, and it will be carried out in accordance with the principles of the Commission's official notice on this matter.

An overview of local rural development approaches in Hungary

Hungary is one of the more advanced countries among the 10 new Member States with experience in Leader type activities. To accompany its agricultural policy, aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural production, the Ministry of Agriculture launched a scheme with an element of rural development. This opportunity was given to micro-regional level groups to develop an analysis of the situation in their region, and to develop a strategy based on their particular needs and desired benefits. In the period 1999–2001, micro-regional level-based agricultural and rural development programmes were detailed and implemented following a participatory approach. As a result, a voluntary 'association of rural settlements' was established in Hungary and a number of local initiatives were developed strengthening local partnership and the necessary management capacity.

Following this first step in the approach of integrated programming, an experimental Leader type pilot programme was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Hungary in 2001, in order to allow for Leader+ to be implemented immediately after Hungary's accession to the European Union. The main objectives were to select appropriate local partners to experiment with the implementation of a pilot programme following the basic principles of the Leader initiative and the provisions according to its guidelines.

The pilot programme was financed by the national budget in the framework of the rural development target programme for 2001–02, with an overall budget of HUF 432 million (approximately EUR 1.7 million) out of which each local action group received approximately EUR 120 000 as support.





The operational territory of the LAGs of the Leader type pilot programme

The pilot programme focused on the preparation for the three actions of the Leader+ initiative:

Action 1: implementing territorial rural development strategies of a pilot nature based on the bottom-up approach and horizontal partnership;

Action 2: interterritorial and transnational cooperation between rural territories;

Action 3: networking.

The LAGs prepared their local rural development plans in early 2002 which had to focus on one of the three pre-determined target groups: support for large families; co-operation between Roma and non-Roma populations; and the training of young people living in rural areas.

Conclusions of this first phase

The Leader type pilot project was not without some problems. The main issue was the limited participation at local level: people were unconvinced due to the lack of resources, and it was difficult to mobilise and to convince them to take part in the local initiatives. The process was also hindered by a lack of human capacity at all levels and due to the novel and experimental nature of the programme there was insufficient administrative experience concerning the programming methods and administering public funds at local level. Taking into account the introductory phase of the programming, the projects did not follow in all cases the features of the Leader type projects, such as being complementary or innovative.

Despite the difficulties described in the launching of the experimental programme, 14 LAGs were established, and they developed and implemented their local rural development programmes which supported a total of 272 local projects. These focused, for example, on the organisation of trainings and local events, village renewal, and the development of local economy. It has been a considerable achievement that the necessary skills and experiences have been gained at all levels in implementing Leader type programmes, and that, in rural areas, a growing interest in joining Leader + has become apparent.

Possibilities after accession under the agriculture and rural development operational programme

Building on the experience gained during the pilot programme, Hungary has chosen to include a Leader+ type measure in their agriculture and rural development operational programme for the programming period of 2004–06 co-financed by the Structural Funds. The contribution of the European Union during the programming period is EUR 317.2 million, out of which EUR 312.8 million is from the Guidance Section of the European Agricultural

Guidance and Guarantee Fund and EUR 4.38 million from the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance. As far as the envisaged allocation of the Leader+ type measure is concerned, the European Union would contribute approximately EUR 14.3 million which would be accompanied by national public funds of EUR 4.7 million during the period 2004–06.

The measure implements the following activities: acquisition of skills; the setting up of pilot integrated territorial rural development strategies; inter-territorial and transnational cooperation activities which complement and reinforce each other; networking at European, regional and national levels.

The Leader+ type measure envisages the selection of a maximum 40 LAGs under the second action. The LAGs will represent between 10 000 and 100 000 people, and will be a homogeneous unit in physical, geographic, economic and social terms. The selection criteria include the assessment of the administrative capacity and experience of the LAG to administer public funds. Selection also takes into account the content and quality of the strategy for the development plan, including feasibility and justification, as well as the needs and the synergy between specific programme components.

The Monitoring Committee for the agriculture and rural development operational programme was formally established on 6 July 2004, and on this occasion the committee members approved the programme complement of the operational programme.

The implementation of the Leader+ type measure under the operational programme was launched in the early part of 2005. According to the indicative timetable set by the Ministry of Agriculture, the pre-selection of the first round of local action groups is envisaged for the second half of 2005. Preparing strategies and the implementation of the local development plans is also planned for the second half of 2005, and the second round of pre-selection of local action groups for the first half of 2006. The preparatory work for programming, partnership, and implementation of their strategies is foreseen to start in 2006.



Photographs: EPA PHOTO; Peter Orosz, Mario Dudar

Conclusions

The introduction of the experimental 'bottom-up' type of programming between 1999 and 2001, and later the introduction of a Leader type pilot programme in Hungary between 2001 and 2004, resulted in the development of voluntary associations of rural settlements. These now cover a significant part of the country, as well as a number of local initiatives. This learning process of the pilot programming has enabled some of the rural communities to establish and operate local action groups in line with the principles of Leader+ and to develop and implement local rural development strategies.

The Leader type pilot programme contributed in complementing the impact of the centrally managed domestic agricultural support systems. Previously, focus had been on supporting individual projects, which did not sufficiently mobilise the internal resources of regional actors such as entrepreneurs, non-government organisations, and local governments. The programme-based Leader type pilot programme helped to activate local actors by enhancing the approach of participation and by bringing together individual project initiatives, establishing partnerships, and strengthening synergies and supporting each other.

Moreover, the Leader type experimental programme served as a learning process to help Hungary to prepare the necessary documents and procedures, and to gain experience which would be necessary for the successful implementation of the Leader+ type measure after accession.

Hungary still has to deal with old social structures and a weak civil society in its rural areas. For this reason rural societies need time and specific support in order to understand and adapt the principles of territorial, integrated and partnership-based rural development. They also need help in learning about methods, ideas, and practices necessary to prepare and implement projects aimed at local development. Cooperation between rural areas is an alternative to transfer and exchange of knowledge and experience, and results in a learning process with tangible benefits.

Transnational cooperation under the Leader+ initiative is an ideal way for the new Member States to acquire skills and build capacity to develop their vulnerable rural territories. The added value of cooperation can be very significant between rural areas. It can provide them with a unique opportunity to put their activities into perspective, and to contrast their practices with other cultures. It can also offer them a chance to benefit from the experience of others in order to develop their local resources and skills.

NEWS - NEWS - NEWS



Delegates are welcomed to the opening plenary session

Leader+ cooperation fair in Brussels

‘Cooperation fair: rural development through networking and transnational partnerships’ was the name of a two-day event organised by the Leader+ Observatory. It took place in Brussels on 27 and 28 June and provided the means for interactive cooperation for all those taking part, which included more than 300 LAGs from 27 European countries. The various presentations, working groups and round tables combined with an exhibition, the online partner search tool, and partner search advertisements, created a unique opportunity for transnational cooperation under Leader+.

The participants were welcomed by Mr Dirk Ahner, Deputy Director-General of the Agriculture and Rural Development DG, who referred to the last cooperation event, organised under Leader II in 1998. This previous event provided the basis for many transnational projects to be realised, and Mr Ahner made reference to the fact that he hoped Leader+ would be able to achieve at least the same number of cooperation projects (around 250) as had been carried out under Leader II.

In his address, Mr Nikiforos Sivenas, Director of the Agriculture and Rural Development DG, emphasised the role of the managing authorities in helping local action groups to undertake transnational cooperation which, as Action 2 of Leader+, has some EUR 500 million allocated to it. Acknowledging the difficulties involved which stem from the

different rules amongst the Member States, Mr Sivenas then referred to the work undertaken by the Observatory in helping to clarify these different national procedures. He also mentioned the methodological workshops available in the fair which would also help LAGs overcome some of these challenges, as well as the function of Leader+ as a laboratory which allows for new and integrated approaches to rural development. He acknowledged that no single cooperation model currently exists, and that some projects have to deal with complex organisational structures. However, he also noted the analysis carried out by the Observatory which would help LAGs to understand the different kinds of cooperation activities being developed. In conclusion, he urged the LAGs to go and develop their cooperation projects, and in doing so not to forget



More than 300 LAGs were present at the event



Taking a close look at the cooperation advertisements

the new Member States which have a great need to share experience and know-how.

To provide a flavour of what transnational cooperation means for those involved in such projects, three case studies — ‘Cultural guiding and management of regional museums’ (Austria/Germany); ‘A network of European wetlands’ (Italy/Finland/Greece); and ‘Euro land art’ (France/Germany) — were presented during a plenary session. Participants were then able to attend a variety of parallel mini-plenary sessions where they could learn about the different stages of transnational cooperation through additional case study presentations, as well as thematic round tables and workshops, which were concerned with different Leader+ themes. The round table sessions were repeated on the second day, and the exhibition which was comprised of the different national network stands and advertisements for cooperation projects was present throughout the whole of the fair. This provided a further opportunity for delegates to develop ideas and contacts for cooperation.

Conclusions from all the working sessions were reported back in the final plenary sessions, and these can all be found on the Leader+ website (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/leaderplus>). The event was concluded by Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel, Member of the Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development. In her speech, the Commissioner made reference to the negotiations on the rural development regulation for the next programming period 2007–13, and the importance of a strong rural development policy in achieving the EU’s new growth and employment strategy (the Lisbon strategy).

Moving to the role of the Leader implementation axis under the new EU rural development strategy, the Commissioner spoke about how Leader had already proved to be an efficient means of supporting rural economies and creating local employment. The role of Leader in the future would not only continue this process on a larger scale but also play an important role in certain key actions: building local capacity; promoting private–public partnerships; improving local governance; promoting cooperation and





A visit to a national stand offers plenty of material

Several plenary sessions and workshops provided a forum for debate



The Commissioner, Mrs Fischer Boel, receives warm appreciation following her concluding remarks



innovation; and as a school for rural cooperation.

She also spoke about how cooperation projects play an important role in connecting people to new ideas and approaches, how they also encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, and how transnational cooperation provides the first steps to even wider perspectives. Transnational cooperation will therefore continue as a means to spread the Leader method between rural territories, especially in the case of the new Member States. Mention was also made of the long-term effects of cooperation which can be seen from former Leader II projects.

In her conclusions, Mrs Fischer Boel spoke about the need to improve the administrative rules applying to cooperation in order to ensure innovation and bring the maximum value to rural areas. The seminar had, she said, enhanced her conviction that 'the local action groups have the capacity and the imagination to promote innovative solutions'.

This was to some extent confirmed by the Chairwoman, Mrs Véronique Weyland-Ammeux, team leader, Leader+ Contact Point, who had earlier established that several LAGs had already found partners for their transnational cooperation projects during the course of the last two days.



Leader+ Magazine



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Editorial board: European Observatory of Rural Areas

Person responsible at law: Mr Joern-Uwe Lerbs, European Commission, Agriculture and Rural Development DG, Unit F.3, Rue de la Loi 130, B-1040 Brussels

Contributors to this issue: Leader+ national network units

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For further information: Leader+ Contact Point, Rue du Marteau 81, B-1000 Brussels
Tel. (32-2) 235 20 20; fax (32-2) 280 04 38; e-mail: contact.point@Leaderplus.org
Website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/leaderplus>

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Leader+ profile



Name

Leader ('Links between actions for the development of the rural economy')

Programme type

Community initiative

Target areas

Leader+ is structured around three actions:

- Action 1 — Support for integrated territorial development strategies of a pilot nature based on a bottom-up approach.
- Action 2 — Support for cooperation between rural territories.
- Action 3 — Networking.

Priority strategic themes

The priority themes, for Leader+, laid down by the Commission are:

- making the best use of natural and cultural resources, including enhancing the value of sites;
- improving the quality of life in rural areas;
- adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions;
- the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive.

Recipients and eligible projects

Financial assistance under Leader+ is granted to partnerships, local action groups (LAGs), drawn from the public, private and non-profit sectors to implement local development programmes in their territories. Leader+ is designed to help rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region. It encourages the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development as well as national and transnational cooperation. In order to concentrate Community resources on the most promising local strategies and to give them maximum leverage, funding is granted according to a selective approach to a limited number of rural territories only. The selection procedure is open and rigorous.

Under each local development programme, individual projects which fit within the local strategy can be funded. All projects eligible for funding under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) are eligible under Leader+.

At the decision-making level of the LAGs, the economic and social partners and associations must make up at least 50 % of the local partnership.

Duration of the programming period

2000–06.

Community grant

The total budget for programmes is EUR 5 046.5 million, of which EUR 2 106.3 million (EUR 2 143.5 million after mid-term indexation) is funded by the EAGGF Guidance Section and the remainder by public and private contribution.

