



European Commission

# Leader+ *Magazine*



**SPECIAL FOCUS**  
**The future of Leader**

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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 this data, which they do entirely at their own risk.**

## The new rural development regulation

**A**lthough there is still much to do under Leader+, not least concerning transnational cooperation projects, it is quite normal that, as we move towards the end of this programming period, our thoughts begin to focus more on the future period 2007–13.

On 20 February 2006, the Agriculture Council adopted EU strategic guidelines for rural development — five months after the adoption of the Council regulation on support for rural development by the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). These guidelines set out a strategic approach and a range of priorities and options which Member States could use in their national strategic plans and rural development programmes.

At the European level, these strategic guidelines are also important in relation to other EU priorities; notably the Gothenburg sustainability goals, and the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. Rural development policy which can fund growth and create jobs is indeed a lifeline for rural areas, which, in the enlarged European Union, make up 90 % of its territory. Thus, a special fund established by the new regulation, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), will become the single source of funding under the future rural development policy 2007–13<sup>(1)</sup>.

I would like now to bring your attention to certain areas of the strategic guidelines, and how they relate to the different axes under EAFRD, and in particular where Leader has become mainstreamed, namely under Axis 4 or the 'Leader axis'.

Under EAFRD, policy is focused on three key areas: the agrifood economy, the environment, and the broader rural economy and population. For this reason, EAFRD provides for three main axes which are also complemented by the 'Leader axis' as Axis 4:

- Axis 1 — improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors;
- Axis 2 — improving the environment and countryside;
- Axis 3 — improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification;
- Axis 4 — building local capacity for employment and diversification.

The importance of the Leader method in the context of a local development strategy has already been clearly demonstrated, and there are plenty of examples under Leader+. Indeed, in this magazine, case studies from the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece and Sweden, all show how local development strategies can be developed with Leader+

<sup>(1)</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

by **Nikiforos Sivenas**, Director, Horizontal aspects of rural development, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission



funding, and how they may continue to have an impact well into the next programming period. This is important, since the value of the previous Leader initiatives, as drivers of rural development, is of strategic importance to the success of future rural development policy.

Mainstreaming of Leader is also crucial for maintaining the skills which have been acquired during three consecutive Leader initiatives, particularly those related to building local partnerships, public and private partnerships, cooperation and innovation, and improving local governance. There is a wealth of experience in the old Member States within the present 893 Leader+ local action groups, many of which go back to the earlier Leader initiatives. With the right guidelines in place, this experience can continue to make valuable contributions to future rural development, and to the benefit of those new rural actors in the EU of 25. In this respect, it is important that Member States take this legacy into account when developing their national strategies. For example, integrated approaches involving all rural actors, whether they are farmers, foresters or local enterprises, can, as we have seen, contribute enormously to a region's ability to derive sustainable benefit from its natural and cultural heritage. This is also important for tourism and environmental awareness, especially in terms of renewable energy and efforts being made to tackle climate change.

Of course, we need to remember the other Community instruments which also apply to rural areas. These include the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Fisheries Fund and the new market-oriented CAP, which, in conjunction with EAFRD, can ensure the link between local and regional levels. It is up to the different Member States to ensure that their national plans take advantage of synergies between the different policy areas.

I do not wish to understate the challenges that Europe's rural areas face in the years ahead. I am confident, however, that with the resources available to all rural development actors, along with the experience that many have gained under Leader, these challenges will be met. I am equally convinced that Europe's rural areas will continue to play a vital role in helping Europe achieve its wider objectives of sustainable growth, job creation and competitiveness, as outlined in the Lisbon strategy.



## Svinø leading the way



Historically, Svinø near Vordingborg has always had a special relationship with the rest of Zealand, which stems from the time when it was physically separated from it. Now its farmers, in co-operation with Sjællandske Familielandbrug (Zealand family farming), are at the forefront of a process which will integrate farming, nature and environment with wider rural development.

With financial support from Leader+, the Svinø farmer has been given a key role in the future management of the region's cultural landscape. Forty-five farmers, representing some 3 035 hectares of land, have established an association for the purpose of creating a common nature and management plan for the area. The association aims to establish an overall, coherent framework as well as providing individual plans for each property. The general goal is to give the impression of Svinø not only as a unique place, but also one which has an attractive and dynamic environment in order to attract new settlers.

The association's work shows how to carry out rural development in practice, and how to consider several interests for the benefit of both business and population alike. The farmers are aware that the general public must be involved in their plans and that if the rural areas are to be revived,

they must become more attractive to a larger part of the population. As part of this process, a major foot and bridle path system of more than 60 km is being established.

The project has given Svinø a more optimistic outlook, with the new initiatives now forming a natural part of daily life for the area's inhabitants. The success that Svinø has had in putting the project's key concepts of influence and ownership into practice, has resulted in the association being awarded the 'Initiative prize' from Dansk Landbrug (Danish Farming).

**Member State:** Denmark

**Region:** Storstrøms

**Name of LAG:** Falster, Moen and South Zealand

**Project total cost:** EUR 87 860

**EU:** EUR 30 168

**Other public funds:** EUR 32 316

**Private funds:** EUR 25 376

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Photo provided by the Danish national network unit



## Tourist routes for the whole region

The local action group 'Sviluppo Valli di Ponente', located in the region of Liguria, on the French border, has its local development strategy with the following aims:

- creation of a network of non-traditional accommodation;
- realisation of thematic routes based on the region's natural heritage and local products;
- improvement of the marketing network to support local products;
- promotion of the territory and its local products;
- ecological certification of these products, including flowers.

The territory of the LAG, in spite of its proximity to the coast, displays many of the characteristics typical of other Italian rural territories, namely: population migration, abandoning agricultural activity, general lack of employment opportunities, poor provision of services to the local population and businesses, and little networking and cooperation.

Under Leader II, two thematic routes based on local products and typical food had already been realised. Leader+ has provided for their final implementation, and the integration of these other two routes, as part of a network approach which joins together the four different routes, and thereby promotes the whole region at once. This means that when the work is completed, the territory will have a total of four routes: the wine and oil route, the 'flavours and the colours route', the 'white cooking' route (based on starchy and dairy foods), and the olive oil route. Leader+ has helped to promote the region's typical products in several ways, including a website where information of where and how to buy is given, and ISO certification for certain products.

These routes, which are focused on the region's local products and cultural resources, are ways to promote tourism and are designed to increase the demand for the region's

goods and services. However, the creation of these routes has not been without difficulty and the LAG has done well to draw on the 'best practice experience' of those who have already developed such thematic routes. This included the route definition, working with public administrations for coordination and support, understanding how to avoid duplicating existing services, and cooperation between the private and public sectors.

**Member State:** Italy

**Region:** Liguria

**Name of LAG:** Sviluppo Valli di Ponente

**Project total cost:** EUR 556 500

**EU:** EUR 167 000

**Other public funds:** EUR 167 000

**Private funds:** EUR 222 500

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Photo provided by the Italian national network unit





## Walking through treetops



Since June 2005, the Austrian Leader+ region of Sauwald, which borders the German region of Bavaria, has been home to an unusual hiking

path, known as the 'treetop walk'. There are two routes to choose from: one which leads through the young woods and reaches a height of about 10 metres above the ground; and a second one which covers a distance of 170 metres (a little longer than the first) and reaches a height of up to 24 metres. The treetop walk consists of various elements, which include a suspension bridge, a 60 metre-long 'dry slide', a wooden maze, two 'Tarzan houses' with accommodation facilities (36 beds), a fox's den, and 'secured' places to practise balancing. There is also a sound system to amplify the sounds from the woods.

Apart from the obvious entertainment aspect, the treetop walk also has an educational value. The nature trail provides information on the biology of trees, the various types of wood and their economic use, as well as the natural cycle in the woods.

The 'treetop walk' was developed by different interest groups, in collaboration with a local farmer and a regional master builder, along with other experts. The project owner is the non-profit-making Treetop Walk Association which is founded on sustainable development criteria. The walk has an innovative wood construction and uses the traditional handicraft skills of local carpenters, which has also created considerable regional added value. In its first season, June–November 2005, the project attracted 162 000 people, far exceeding the estimated 25 000 visi-

tors. The money earned from these visitors is already being used to extend the treetop walk.

The project has so far provided work for 17 women in the areas of catering, maintenance work, guided tours and collection of fees. This number of newly created jobs is likely to increase in the coming season, due to the increased demand for guided tours and special arrangements for group visits.

The overwhelming success of the 'treetop walk' became apparent even before it opened. During its construction, thousands of visitors flocked to the construction site, which resulted in a large amount of word-of-mouth advertising at an early stage. This, together with media reports at home and abroad, ensured that the treetop walk was well publicised at an early stage.

**Member State:** Austria

**Region:** Upper Austria

**Name of LAG:** Regionalverband Sauwald

**Project total cost:** EUR 762 153

**EU:** EUR 299 464

**Other public funds:** EUR 185 512

**Private:** EUR 277 177

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Photo provided by Sauwal LAG



## Cooperativa La Fageda

This project concerns the work of the 'La Fageda' cooperative, which was set up in 1982 and formed with 117 partners. It aims to support people with a variety of mental disorders and does this by providing work, and thereby social integration, leading to an improvement in their quality of life. Its headquarters are located within the natural park of the volcanic zone of the Garrotxa region.

The cooperative's activities cover four sectors:

- the dairy, which represents one of the most important activities, and produces high-quality yoghurt using milk from its own farm. Production is around two million units per month. The plant uses advanced technology and is accredited by the EU;
- the dairy herd comprising 225 heads of cattle;
- a garden and nursery area where forest and native plants are grown to help with conservation and reforestation work;
- an occupational therapy service whose main aim is to socially integrate patients and maximise their quality of life. This particular rehabilitation service works with the more disturbed patients, and looks after the 40 or so who cannot be employed in other activities. There is also a resident's block for those who are unable to lead a normal daily life. In this respect, the cooperative offers a variety of social activities during the weekends and holiday periods.

Under Leader+ there have been significant improvements in the qualitative aspects of these activities. Funding has been used for building and construction work (such as changes made to the office and visitor's centre, as well as some new furniture and equipment), new machinery and equipment for the farm and dairy, and a redefinition of the marketing policy by taking part in local events. There is also training for those who join the cooperative.

Through the above, Leader+ has helped to strengthen the existing jobs, and has created six new ones. In total, 'La Fageda' now employs 105 people, of whom 78 are handicapped, and the remaining 27 are professional staff.

**Member State:** Spain

**Region:** Cataluña

**Name of LAG:** Fundación Privada Garrotxa Lider

**Project total cost:** EUR 330 500

**EU:** EUR 49 575

**Other public funds:** EUR 49 575

**Private funds:** EUR 231 350

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Photo provided by Ministerio de Agricultura Pesca y Alimentación



# Special focus

## From Leader I to Leader+ and beyond to the Leader axis

By John Bryden (1)

### Introduction

The 1987 reform of the Structural Funds introduced the concept and practice of 'Community initiatives', which enabled the Commission to allocate special funds for measures of particular interest to the Community. Leader (*liens entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale*) was one such initiative. The Leader programme was announced by the Commission on 19 March 1991, following consultations in 1990. It was much welcomed by people working in local development circles in the different EU countries, and built on successful initiatives undertaken in Europe (including some countries outside the EU at that time) since the 1970s. However, certain Member State ministries, and indeed some Commission officials, were sometimes less enthusiastic, and some did not wish to engage with it at all.

Although the emphasis has shifted during the history of Leader, the main features of Leader to date can be summarised as follows.

- It is 'top down' in the sense of being a (European) Community initiative.
- It is 'bottom-up' in terms of planning and execution of decisions.
- It aims to find innovative and integrated or multi-sectoral solutions to rural problems.
- It has a territorial/place-based approach, with an emphasis on the sub-regional level.
- It requires local partnership — a 'local action group' or LAG containing key local development actors from the public and non-public sectors.
- It stresses networking between LAGs and (initially transnational, now national and transnational) cooperation.
- It used a new financing instrument at the local level — the 'global grant' mechanism. This was extremely important in providing 'up-front' or ex-ante funding for

the LAG programme of actions, with control by ex post monitoring and evaluation.

The Leader I programme was coordinated by DGVI (now Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development) but financed by three Structural Funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Guidance Section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF). It was allocated Community expenditure of ECU 400 million over the period 1991–93. A total of 217 Leader I LAGs were approved, and EU funding totalled ECU 450 million, leading to a total investment of ECU 1 115 million.

The follow-up Leader II programme was announced in July 1994, with initial funding of ECU 1 400 million for the (longer) period 1994–99. This was later increased to ECU 1 700 million. Over 1 000 LAGs were approved within Leader II, this time within national and regional programmes.

Leader+ was envisaged in Agenda 2000 and announced in 1999, and had an EU budget for 2000–06 of EUR 2 105.1 million for the seven-year period. As of December 2004, national and regional programmes with a total of 893 LAGs had been approved. This followed publication of a positive ex post evaluation of Leader I, positive mid-term indications of Leader II, and strong support for Leader as a key mechanism for sustainable rural development expressed at the Cork Conference in 1996.

Leader+ placed more emphasis on quality projects, sustainable impacts, strategies developed on the basis of a unifying theme that complement the mainstream programmes and that are transferable, and actions that encourage job creation. Leader+ could also be applied in any rural area, including those outside the priority regions defined by structural and cohesion policy.

In 2005, the new measures to be funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development were agreed. Paragraph 50 of the preamble to the regulation states:

'The Leader initiative, after having experienced three programming periods, has reached a level of maturity enabling

(1) John Bryden is Emeritus Professor at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and Director of the UHI PolicyWeb in Inverness. He is also Chairman of the International Rural Network and Programme Director of the Arkleton Trust. He had a close involvement with Leader I and Leader II, and was coordinator of the Future Prospects Group of the European Leader Observatory, 1995–2000. He took part in the EU-wide evaluation of Leader I, and undertook or collaborated in a number of evaluations of Leader II in Scotland and Ireland.





John Bryden

rural areas to implement the Leader approach more widely in mainstream rural development programming. Provision should therefore be made to transfer the basic principles of the Leader approach to the programmes, building a specific axis in them, and provide a definition of the local action groups and measures to be supported, including partnership capacity, implementation of local strategies, cooperation, networking and acquisition of skills.'

### The transition from Leader I to Leader+

Progress with Leader I was rapid because, in general, there was a good deal of freedom and a relatively low level of bureaucracy, as well as a very short implementing period. Leader II was much slower in starting up than expected due to administrative and matching funding problems. Leader+ appears to have been even slower. With the main exception of Germany, there was a general view that Leader II was much more rigid and less flexible than Leader I <sup>(1)</sup>. Pre-

<sup>(1)</sup> This point became very clear at the European Leader Symposium, Brussels, 1997 and the preceding survey undertaken by the European Leader Observatory which I analysed with Almu Buciega. Just under half of the LAGs responding to the survey agreed that bureaucracy was the main difficulty and obstacle to the good performance and implementation of the programme.

liminary studies of Leader+ available to the author suggest that LAGs regard it as yet more bureaucratic in the sense of being controlled by the ministries and with less freedom of action and decision with the local actors than Leader II, although the ministries prefer it because it is more defined in terms of themes and activities, and also because it involves a single EU fund.

Leader I funding was earmarked for Objective 1 and Objective 5b regions although, to meet certain 'boundary problems', adjacent areas were eligible under certain circumstances.

Leader+ was a 'single fund' initiative coming entirely within the remit of the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, but was still able to fund expenditure eligible under the former three Structural Fund rules. It had a different range of eligible activities, and sought both to focus on key themes and target groups and ensure greater linkage between Leader+ and the other EU regional programmes, especially those under



Objectives 1 and 2 of the Structural Funds. However, all rural areas in the EU were eligible for Leader+.

The four themes identified in Leader+ were:

- new technologies and know-how for the competitiveness of products and areas;
- quality of life in rural areas;
- adding value to local products;
- making the best use of natural and cultural resources.

Leader+ also named women and young people as priority target groups.

Leader viewed local people as the principal asset of rural areas, and the distinctive characteristic of Leader projects was the reliance placed on the people who live in rural areas, and on their ability to discover what was best suited to their environment, culture, working traditions and skills. Accordingly, the key concepts of Leader included the development of self-help to provide people with the skills to manage and plan projects, the co-financing of integrated rural development (such as in the tourism, crafts and agri-marketing sectors) and the pursuit of a policy of identity in order to strengthen the image of the areas. Although the first two measures are relatively straightforward, the latter was a recognition that many of the traditional values and culture of rural areas were under threat. More positively, it also recognised that new 'niche' markets were developing in Europe which could be exploited for the benefit of rural areas and people.

Three types of measures could be funded under Leader I and II. Firstly, the technical support for rural development, including training and assistance for employment, rural tourism, small firms, craft enterprises, local services and agri-marketing. Secondly, measures to equip the Leader groups, which were to be made up of local partnerships in the rural areas. Thirdly, measures to provide an EU-level network to link the different Leader groups. This became known as the European Leader Observatory, which ran transnational seminars on key issues for Leader groups and others, stimulated transnational cooperative projects, published a multilingual *Leader Magazine* and a regular newsletter, and produced a number of guides for Leader groups, all of which was accessible through the widely used website. After some delays, the Leader+ Observatory took forward this work with stimulating events, publications and exchanges, as well as renewing the website.

## Some key innovations and successes of Leader

Leader I was the European Commission's first significant experiment with endogenous or 'bottom-up' local rural development. It was introduced at a time when the process of 'globalisation' was widely felt to be intensifying as a result of the collapse of the USSR both as a political reality and as an alternative model of social and economic organisation. The key practical question for rural areas in this period was how to get beyond the perception of globalisation as a set of threats and opportunities and assess how best to pursue a rural development strategy based upon a relationship between the local and the global.

As the academic authors Peck and Tickell pointed out in 1994, the most common tactical response by local areas to globalisation has been to 'sell the local to the global' through competitive strategies to attract increasingly mobile (public and private) investment. Such 'beggar-thy-neighbour' strategies (to gain an advantage at the expense of the other party), were increasingly doomed to failure, and rural development practitioners concluded that the competitive advantage of 'their' rural area increasingly depended on less mobile and less tangible resources which were locally rooted and were hence better protected from global competition. Any inspection of Leader-supported projects over the years will demonstrate that Leader itself became the main vehicle for developing, enhancing and commercialising these 'less mobile' resources. This can be seen from any innovative local actions undertaken as part of the European Commission's Leader programme, many of which have been reported in the *Leader Magazine* and elsewhere <sup>(1)</sup>.

Particularly important have been Leader projects that have reinforced local identity and self respect (cultural capital), for example through development of regional products and local labelling, linked local sectors formerly isolated from each other such as farming and tourism, commercialised cultural and environmental assets such as nature parks and cultural festivals, developed new applications of information and communications technologies, and revived particular local skills such as boatbuilding or stone walling and linked these with youth training or tourism <sup>(2)</sup>. In essence, many Leader I, II and + projects have helped to

(1) Under Leader II, the Leader European Observatory also produced a directory of 80 case studies of innovative actions located in various rural areas of the European Union (Leader European Observatory, 1996).

(2) The case studies that I examined with Shirley Dawe for the OECD seminar in 1998 were grouped in five categories: methodology, environment, local products, new activities and new services, and tourism.

reinforce social capital, cultural capital, environmental capital, and local knowledge capital, all of which have turned out to be key 'less tangible assets' leading to higher incomes and quality of life in more successful rural areas of the EU <sup>(1)</sup>.

### Some of the key issues that arose during Leader programmes to date

The issues that have arisen during the various Leader programmes include the following.

1. The nature and success of the local partnerships. Partnerships have several roles: to capture local financial, human and knowledge resources; to integrate or 'join-up' sectors; to engage public and non-public actors in a common endeavour; to develop new ways of working; and to build 'social capital' through networks and trust. Different countries had a different history of local development practice and partnership working. It could not therefore be expected that the experience with LAGs would be even across the European Union. A particular issue was how to prevent the programme being 'captured' by the most powerful groups and used to reinforce the 'status quo' <sup>(2)</sup>.

2. What the concept of 'innovation' meant in practice. There was limited guidance provided at the start as to what was an innovative project, or what was meant by innovation. However, a special issue of the *Leader Magazine* was devoted to clarifying the concept of innovation for LAGs. This argued that the notion of a bottom-up approach to development, based on the ideas of local people, was in itself innovative (*Leader Magazine*, No 7, 1994, and *Leader+ Magazine*, No 5, 2006). This was referred to as 'method innovation' which, it was argued, led to many innovative projects. One example stated that 'the reintroduction of traditional know-how is an innovative action of several Leader groups'. This may appear to be contradictory and illustrates the problem of defining what is innovative.

3. The notion of community involvement also required clarification. The first edition of the *Leader Magazine* stated

<sup>(1)</sup> A point confirmed by the EU Framework 4 project 'Dynamics of rural areas' (DORA) which compared more and less successful rural areas in eight regions of four EU countries between 1999 and 2001. See Bryden, J. and Hart, J. K. (2004), *A new approach to rural development in Europe: Germany, Greece, Scotland and Sweden*. The Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>(2)</sup> Malcom Moseley and his team of colleagues in the 'PRIDE' project examined the experience of partnerships in eight EU countries, many being LAGs. See Moseley et al. (2003). *Local partnerships for rural development*. CABI.

that, 'if a Leader project is to be successful, it must rise to the fundamental challenge of involving the local community and ensuring that it is an integral part of all stages of the development project' (*Leader Magazine*, No 1, 1992).

Again, the actual experience on the ground varied according to the nature of the LAG partnership and the context in which it was located. In some cases, there was little previous experience of community involvement, and guidance was needed on how this could be achieved.

4. Other Leader aims included transferability and networking. The former implied that successful projects in one rural area could be transplanted to other parts of Europe. Whilst this recognised that rural areas face a number of similar problems, it failed to reflect the different social, political and economic contexts in different rural areas. A further problem with this concept was that it required a longer timescale than was feasible to both determine whether a project was successful and then to transfer it elsewhere. The concept of networking implied sharing knowledge and experience and was therefore linked to the notion of transferability. This was fostered by a Leader coordinating unit and also by individual ad hoc efforts of the groups themselves.

5. Some critics have argued that the overall Leader aims were therefore rather vague, and that this was reflected in some of the individual projects supported. Whilst a clearer definition of the aims of Leader might have avoided false expectations and ensured that all participants had similar rationales for involvement, this would however have been at the cost of flexibility to respond to innovative projects and different contexts, which is fundamental to the philosophy of supporting 'bottom-up' initiatives.

### The future of Leader

It is so far unclear how Member States will implement the new EAFRD regulation at local levels <sup>(3)</sup>. In some cases, it is understood that some or all EAFRD rural development Axes 1–4 will be delivered through a 'Leader approach', meaning a local development partnership, since only in this way can sufficient mass of funding and animation be organised at local levels <sup>(4)</sup>. In others, only Axis 3 and 4

<sup>(3)</sup> Finland has, however, already finalised its local development strategy for 2007–13.

<sup>(4)</sup> The regulation makes it clear that 'the Leader approach' involves, at a minimum, sub-regional area-based local development strategies; local public–private partnerships; a bottom-up approach with a decision-making power for local action groups concerning the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies; multi-sectoral design and implementation of the strategy; implementation of innovative approaches; implementation of cooperation projects; networking of local partnerships. OJ L 277/25, 21.10.2005.

will be implemented through a 'Leader approach'. In yet others, it seems that only Axis 4 itself will adopt a 'Leader approach'. Moreover, it is not very clear how the 'Leader approach' will be interpreted by the Member States. In some cases at least, the concept is to 'mainstream Leader' by which seems to be meant its absorption into general farm-based programmes or elaborated land management contracts. In others, however, LAGs will remain as the central implementing tool, and focus mainly on traditional Leader strengths of supporting collective actions, cross-sectoral actions, and new uses for rural public goods, all largely beyond the farm gate itself, and generally involving a much wider group of rural actors. In most Member States, the consultations on the draft rural development programmes are still under way at the time of writing, so it is still early days.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is the parent regulation, and has four axes referred to above. Minimal percentages of the overall funding have to be devoted to each of these axes, and for Axis 3 the minimum is 10 % and for Axis 4 it is 5 %. A number of Member States are unfortunately planning that only the minimal funding is devoted to Axis 3, which is the most relevant in implementing the horizontal Leader axis.

My own hope is that most will take the opportunity to strengthen the local partnerships or LAGs by allowing them to plan and implement at least Axes 2–4, and hopefully also Axis 1, at local level. In this way, a certain critical mass of

activity and funding can be devolved to the local level, the actions can be more integrated and 'joined up' and local people and organisations can have a real say in how all activities and expenditure in pillar two of the common agricultural policy should be prioritised. The objections to this come mainly from within certain bureaucracies, reluctant to devolve real power and decision making to sub-regional levels and nervous about their responsibilities for pillar two; and from interest groups and national NGOs who lack local representation and want to retain as much influence as possible on prioritisation within pillar two. However, Leader has been one of the main examples of a successful European Union initiative that has reached out to local areas and people, as well as 'joining up' farming, food, local development, environment and quality of life, and at times when the Union is politically fragile, it is very important to

remember this. Few other EU programmes have been able to make comparable connections, and thus establish similar popular legitimacy.

I also hope that Leader can return closer to its roots in terms of flexibility, geographical and population scale, and scope for innovative action. The more that themes and actions are closely defined at the centre, the less freedom there is for LAGs to innovate. The larger Leader areas become, the less their connection to local people and institutions. Some Leader+ areas are just too large to relate to local people and identities. Equally, it is important to recognise that Leader was mainly about less tangible outcomes often described as 'local capacity building', and that direct outcomes in terms of employment were not necessarily sought or achieved. The local capacity building outcomes are very important for the more fragile rural areas and for the new Member States.

Leader has achieved much since 1991, especially in terms of these 'less tangible' outcomes that are hard, but not impossible, to measure. It has done so with a very small fraction of the funds spent on agriculture and rural development, and the Structural Funds. Thus, the current Leader+ budget set at about EUR 300 million per annum compares with an overall CAP commitments budget of over EUR 54 billion in 2006 and a budget for structural operations of just under EUR 40 billion per annum. In other words, the fact that Leader accounts for roughly one third of one percent of the EU budget for agriculture and structural operations makes its achievements all the more commendable.

Finally, the influence of Leader has extended to national policies which have adopted a 'Leader approach', such as

Proder in Spain and POMO in Finland. If Leader is not 'rural development policy' it is certainly influencing thinking about 'horizontal coordination' at local and regional levels, not only within the EU, but across the OECD countries and beyond.

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS



A place where women can meet and discuss local actions



## BELGIUM

# Coordinating culture and rural development in village life

Local communities develop a common platform in order to ensure cultural coherence at the regional level and a long-term strategy aimed at improving the quality of life.

### Introduction

The territory covered by the local action group (LAG), De la Botte, is located in the southern part of the Province of Hainaut, in the west of the Walloon region. Four of its five municipalities are located on the French border. The area consists mainly of forests and pasture land, with 30 000 or so inhabitants from local communities based in small villages, which are typically built up in the centre and extend outwards in small, more widely dispersed groups of dwellings.

The area's LAG, also known as Botte du Hainaut, has taken onboard the innovative aspect of Leader+ in a development project which has a focus on culture. Within the framework of the LAG, a cultural project was set up by the three cultural operators recognised by the French-speaking community of Belgium <sup>(1)</sup>: the cultural centres of Chimay, Momignies and Sivry-Rance. In the past, cultural projects were carried out on a case-by-case basis, without necessarily any consideration of other projects and with no firm territorial basis.

Now with Leader+ funding, the LAG has carried out a project designed to improve the quality of life for those living in the region's rural communities by implementing a regional cultural development strategy. This project has clearly involved a change in thinking and approach towards cultural matters, particularly on the part of the

local institutions, where there was already a strong regional identity amongst the local population.

### Defining the project action lines

In defining its approach towards cultural matters, the project has had to take into account the following: an absence of a fully developed communications network; the relative remoteness of the target groups compared to the existing socio-cultural infrastructures; the fact that local women have traditionally been isolated from the social, cultural and professional scene; and that young people have problems embracing the local cultural identity.

Consequently, three lines of action have been developed to deal with these different issues.

- The first line of action, which is fundamental to the whole project and which provides a basis for the other two, is the creation of a system for cultural coordination. This system, which is applied at the local level, is aimed at developing a concerted cultural policy which covers all the various work of the different cultural centres. This includes encouraging expression and creativity, enhancing the cultural heritage, and organising opportunities for further education etc. The resulting consultation brings about a better exchange of information, expertise and good practice.
- The second line of action is concerned with adding value to and sharing in actions initiated by women's movements on a sub-regional scale. This concerns initiatives centred around the World Women's Day, on 8 March of each year.
- The last line of action consists of mobilising young people and reinforcing their knowledge of their environment. This requires bringing together institutions with a social objective around a common platform, such as

<sup>(1)</sup> The government of the French-speaking community is responsible, in particular, for culture and education.



Mobilising young people  
around a common objective

non-profit-making associations and young people's movements. By acting together and being based on clearly identified and specific observations, a project for the benefit of young people aged 15–25 has been developed. The objective of the project is thus to make young people more aware of and responsible for their own actions.

### The partnership

The partnership was formalised with the ongoing involvement of cultural leaders who could provide ad-hoc support and methodological support throughout the entire course of the project. Collaboration between the partners is also seen as a relay-structure at the local level. This involves the mobilisation of local groups, dissemination of information, promotion and monitoring of meetings, and coordination of working parties.

The LAG provides an open space where cultural aspects can be formalised between private and public partners. While this allows the regions' inhabitants a chance to discuss their cultural aspirations, it also requires an ongoing awareness and involvement of individuals. The formal requirement to structure the LAG <sup>(1)</sup> in the form of a non-profit corporation helps to ensure a balance between the 'public' and 'private' sectors, which, in turn, increases the level of local and cultural democracy.

At the outset, the cultural players added a clause in their 'Leader' activities which consolidates their partnership and allows them to prolong actions beyond the period of the current programme. This structure will therefore continue even after Leader+ has ended.

### Involving women in rural development

A second project, managed by the same LAG, is intended to help women to overcome their isolation, maintain their well-being and in so doing improve their quality of life. This involves providing a place to meet and exchange experi-

ences, and helping them to help each other to contribute to their own personal development.

Initiatives concerned with women's issues and which respond to their expectations and aspirations have been developed, including thematic meetings, creative workshops, etc. The LAG also takes care to ensure that there is an awareness of outside issues, by organising 'field trips' which provide a knowledge of the realities of women from other regions and abroad. There is also a newspaper which is managed and supplied by women, which discusses the difficulties experienced by women working in a rural environment.



**Member State:** Belgium

**Region:** Wallonia

**Name of LAG:** Botte du Hainaut

**Population:** 29 285

**Surface area:** 54 km<sup>2</sup>

**Project total cost:** EUR 187 400

**EU:** EUR 84 330

**Other public funds:** EUR 84 330

**Private funds:** EUR 18 740

**Period of project eligibility:**

January 2004–December 2007

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Photos provided by Botte du Hainaut LAG

<sup>(1)</sup> Obligation incumbent upon the LAG to structure themselves as legal entities.

# Planning Dutch development: a tale of two villages

Employing Leader+ methods as a basis for integrating local and regional rural development plans gives villagers a better say about how they wish to live.

## Introduction

Over recent times, citizens as well as government bodies have been trying to find new ways of working together. Government representatives have tried various methods to involve people in local decision-making, and communities also look for new ways to have a stronger say about the area in which they live.

Now with support from the Leader+ LAG Oost Drenthe, inhabitants from villages in the province of Drenthe have designed their own village development plans, and so have a better voice about local issues which affect their quality of life. These plans cover things that either need to be kept or need to be changed, and concern not only the village itself but also the surrounding area. They are also an excellent example of bottom-up planning that has had a real impact on regional policymaking.

## Taking account of the bottom-up approach

Generally, it is widely accepted that villagers have probably the best understanding and vision about the area where they live. Moreover, when asked to define their local territory, they often agree on the parameters that define where they live. These parameters tend to be related to the natural habitat, about which it is felt they have some influence and knowledge, and which may be quite different from the official administrative view. A village is also a reservoir of local knowledge concerning social, cultural and economic factors. When introduced into a local action plan, this knowledge has an enormous potential for regenerating village communities.

In this Leader+ project, the LAG Oost-Drenthe was able to inspire the villagers of Buinen to successfully set up their

own village action plan. In doing so, they were supported by a professional organisation, and, using a variety of participatory methods, people were asked to talk about their village identity, by focusing on present qualities and shortcomings. These included meetings at people's homes, and field trips together in order to take photographs to show which aspects of their village and the surrounding environment were important to them, and which ones needed to be kept or changed. Drawing on the visions and knowledge of the villagers, a plan was drawn up that called for, amongst other things, improved road safety, improvements to the village's appearance, and the development of the village centre.

## The challenge of local development

Combining the villagers' local action plans with regional planning policy at the municipal and regional levels was one of the main challenges of this project. Often such local plans can miss the link at the regional level either because they are written in the wrong (not the official) language, make unrealistic proposals, or are simply not supported by politicians. Thus, the challenge is to draft village action plans in such a way that they can be dealt with by common administrative and political structures.

In Drenthe, the process did not stop only at the point where the 'wishes' of the community were drawn up. One of the strong points of this particular village plan was that local and regional government representatives had been involved from the very start of the process. This proved to be a key to success. The villagers of Buinen were able to explain why they wanted to restore the old harbour in the centre, and the planners were then able to explain within which regulations this was possible. As a result of this cooperation, the projects proposed by the residents could be

Renovation work on the harbour is complete and ready for use



A new bridge improves village access



Local children have their say on local developments





tied in with those measures that the local and provincial governments wanted to implement. This resulted in coherent combinations of plans and budgets, which implied a total investment of EUR 2.7 million in a village as small as 800 inhabitants. This meant, for example, that with several Leader+ projects, the village of Buinen could reconstruct the small harbour that once gave life to the village, and to re-use it for tourism, such as canoeing routes, while at the same time creating an area for river water storage. In addition, the village's appearance was enhanced by tree planting and installing traditional forms of street-lighting.

### A regional template

The success of the project in Buinen did not go unnoticed by the provincial government. The province of Drenthe has since incorporated the idea of the village action plan, and made it an official part of its spatial planning procedures. Consequently, other villages in the province are now drawing up similar plans.

In another Leader+ project, called 'Rural development new style', three villages have made development plans, and two villages have created their own village agenda+ (with the '+' indicating that the area around the village will be taken into account as well).

One of these villages is Zuidlaarderveen. In this village, which has a population of 320, there were several areas of concern that were behind setting up the agenda. For instance, the village hall had lost its sense of purpose and had all but disappeared, and it was also feared that the local school would have to close down. By contrast, there were also some positive ideas and plans for the future.

As in Buinen, the process of setting up the 'agenda+' was truly participative. The villagers were also supported by two professional organisations: Stamm Centre for Social development and TRIAS, a local welfare organisation, located in the province. An 'agenda committee' consisting of village representatives from different so-called life-style groups, made a list of their concerns and wishes in order to arrive at a village 'agenda'. These views resulted from a questionnaire in which 80 % of the local population took part. Steps were also taken to ensure that the local government and local welfare organisations participated in the process, and were committed to the outcomes.

The villagers of Zuidlaarderveen took immediate action, even before the agenda was formally published. The process of agenda-setting itself stimulated enthusiasm: for instance, there were as many as 60 volunteers to help the local school with various activities in order to give it a more central role in the village community. Here, Leader+ helped with the cost of producing the 'agenda' and will also help to realise some of the proposals, such as improvements to the community building.

A clearly visible result emerged in spring 2006: the project task force dealing with 'roads and roadsides' distributed

packages of flower bulbs for every household in the village. The planting of these bulbs was a positive and colourful start to putting the agenda+ into action.

### Local plans successfully integrated

The Dutch experience suggests that working with villagers in the village planning process leads to better social cohesion, more socioeconomic activities, greater awareness of village history and life and landscape, a higher quality within the spatial plans, and a better integration between the policies and plans at the regional and municipal levels. The focus of Leader+ methods — the bottom-up approach, experimenting with responsibilities, and investing in new administrative processes — has proved instrumental in creating practical interfaces between village inhabitants and government. Put another way: the villagers provide the content; formal procedures and the authorities provide the context or structure where this content can grow. There is a clear mutual benefit to all concerned.



**Member State:** The Netherlands

**Region, district :** Drenthe

**Name of LAG:** Oost-Drenthe

**Population:** 82 300

**Surface area:** 697 km<sup>2</sup>

#### **Project village development plan: Buinen**

**Project total cost:** EUR 560 785 (\*)

**EU:** EUR 186 928

**Other public funds:** EUR 373 857

**Period of project eligibility:**

December 2004–December 2006

(\*) Includes more than one project.

#### **Project rural development new style village agenda+ Zuidlaarderveen**

**Project total cost:** EUR 155 123 (\*)

**EU:** EUR 51 190

**Other public funds:** EUR 62 025

**Private funds:** EUR 41 908

**Period of project eligibility:**

February 2005–December 2005

(\*) Includes more than one project.

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Photos provided by the Dutch national network unit

# ADDING VALUE TO LOCAL PRODUCTS





Selected logs at the start of the value chain ...

GERMANY

# At the cutting edge of timber

By funding three different projects related to the region's timber sector, Leader+ helps to secure the local economy by maintaining employment and reinforcing the identity of local products.

by Sabine Weizenegger, LAG Manager, Altusried-Oberallgäu

### Introduction

The local action groups of the Allgäu region are proving that it is not only Scandinavian companies who can market pine and beech woods: their 'timber value chain' projects are not only enhancing the image of this local raw material, but also providing an income for the region.

In the Allgäu region, the timber industry provides employment for around 6 000 people. According to estimates, up to one third of the Allgäu population is dependent one way or another upon the woodland, forest or timber sectors; either directly as their primary or secondary income, or indirectly as linked to one of the many associated upstream or downstream industries. It is no surprise then that the 'timber value chain' should play a key part in the regional development plan of the local action group (LAG) Altusried-Oberallgäu, with its emphasis on local products and services. One objective is to give a boost to the local timber industry, but it is also intended that the population should learn to appreciate the diversity and value of this local raw material.

Since the LAG started its operations in February 2004, a number of timber-based projects have been implemented. With the support of Leader+, two inter-territorial cooperation projects have been initiated; the 'Allgäu 05' timber construction fair, and the 'in.silva' timber marketing association. Moreover, in the Oberallgäu municipality of Wildpoldsried, Germany's first timber-built multi-storey car park has been built with support from Leader+.

### From basic woodwork to master carpentry

The 'Allgäu 05' timber fair was organised by an association based in Kempten (Allgäu), established in mid-2003. This association now has over 100 members, including woodland owners, saw-mill operators, carpenters, architects and planners. The aim was to organise the first regional timber construction fair which would make the 'timber value chain' concept clear to everybody. The target groups of this fair were not only the end users, but all of the value chain's





... are eventually transported for processing

### In harmony with traditional trading relations

Founded in 2004, the 'in.silva' cooperative began commercial operations in the early summer of 2005. This cooperative brings together organisations of small private forest owners, and provides on their behalf, marketing services for fixed lengths of timber to large customers, together with the necessary delivery to factories. Regional sawmills continue to be supplied directly by forestry cooperatives and forest owners associations, so consequently there is no conflict of interest. The sales volume achieved by 'in.silva' is growing steadily, and is now operating internationally following the appointment of the Austrian Federal forestry operator Österreichische Bundesforste AG. Leader+ support has been provided in the form of an initial one-year funding for the business premises and administration of the cooperative, and self-generated funding has been provided from the cooperative's own resources.

interested parties. The fair was seen as an opportunity to provide and obtain information, and exchange views and network, since previously there had been a lack of knowledge and awareness of the potential of the region's timber.

The trade fair, which was held in Kempten (Allgäu) under the slogan 'Short cuts — lasting pleasure', attracted several thousand visitors. More than 50 companies were present as exhibitors. The event included specific presentations and was supported by a lively fringe programme, including demonstrations of historical saws and ornate saw workings. Such was the success of the event that both fair organisers and exhibitors repeated it in September 2006.

Leader+ has been supporting the public relations and project management costs, while self-generated funding has been made available from exhibitors' fees. Additional resources have also been made available by a German fund for the sale of timber. Four LAGs are involved in this regional development project: Altusried-Oberallgäu Regional Development, Kneippland® Unterallgäu, Impuls Westallgäu 10+ and Ostallgäu.

### Timber producers join forces

A further cooperation project involving these same four LAGs is the establishment of the 'in.silva' timber marketing cooperative. The impetus for this came from developments in the round timber sector over recent decades, which has seen a number of mergers in the sawmill industry and, at the same time, an increase in the number of forest owners. Currently, the needs of regional sawmills can be met by pooling the supplies of the different forestry cooperatives and forest owners' associations. However, it is a different matter to ensure supplies to large customers, who require a constant, year-round supply of timber of a consistently high quality, and preferably delivered to the factory. This problem is compounded by the need to stockpile significant quantities of timber, especially from small private woodlands, which gave rise to the idea of establishing 'in.silva'.

### Natural parking

Even before the days of Leader+, the municipality of Wildpoldsried had already made a name for itself in the world of timber. In 1995/96, the elementary school was extended using a stacked board construction, while the Wildpoldsried sports hall, also of timber construction, was completed in 2004. Leader+ has now delivered a further project in the form of the 'Wildpoldsried timber garage'.

Since 2002, the local authority has been operating a 'sheltered housing' scheme. Some of the scheme's senior citizens, who drive their own cars as a means of maintaining mobility, experienced difficulties with the wintry conditions, and many requested help for garaging their cars. A solution presented itself when the local authority had a chance to acquire a dilapidated farmhouse, which it was able to transform into a multi-storey car park for the sheltered housing scheme.

So, the summer of 2005 saw the opening of Germany's first timber-built multi-storey car park. The aim was not only to provide suitable parking places for senior citizens, but also to serve as a demonstration project in order to encourage other project owners to adopt timber construction, thereby promoting sales of local timber. A requirement for the project was the supply of information material about the timber-built car park, and the provision of access for visitors. Leader+ support has been provided for investment and public relations work, while self-generated funding has come from the municipality of Wildpoldsried.

### Cooperating at a regional level

In the case of the two cooperation projects, 'Allgäu 05' and 'in.silva', both were commissioned and supported under the overall management of the Altusried-Oberallgäu LAG



A sharp eye and a steady hand are important attributes

for regional development. Projects were discussed, firstly with the relevant LAG managers and the Leader manager as intermediary body between LAG managers and the ministry, and then were referred to the decision-making authorities of all the participating LAGs prior to the filing of applications. The LAGs have not invested their own funds in either project, but have only released development funds from their respective quotas. The geographical proximity of the cooperating LAGs is such that no separate preliminary project costs have been incurred.

A particular feature which is conducive to inter-territorial cooperation in the Allgäu is the fact that it is a region with a strong identity. For many projects, having a single LAG therefore made no sense: extensive areas of the Allgäu fall within the fringes of the Leader+ area, while towns constitute separate administrative areas; the western part of the Lindau district and the southern part of the Oberallgäu are only small dots on the development funding map. It is also important to note that the Leader manager is responsible for all the four LAGs, what has simplified the administration of inter-territorial cooperation.

**Member State:** Germany

**Region:** Bavaria

**Name of leading LAG:**

Regionalentwicklung Altusried-Oberallgäu

**Population:** 82 000

**Surface area:** 684 km<sup>2</sup>

**Holzbaumesse Allgäu 05**

**Project total cost:** EUR 150 565

**EU:** EUR 13 200

**Other public funds:** EUR 28 200

**Private funds:** EUR 109 165

**Period of project eligibility:**

April 2005–October 2005

**'in.silva'**

**Project total cost:** EUR 105 273

**EU:** EUR 8 771

**Other public funds:** EUR 8 771

**Private funds:** EUR 87 731

**Period of project eligibility:**

May 2005–April 2006

**Wildpoldsried timber garage**

**Project total cost:** EUR 183 242

**EU:** EUR 91 621

**Other public funds:** EUR 91 621

**Period of project eligibility:**

October 2004–November 2005

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Photos provided by the German national network unit





## GREECE

# Local products with an organic flavour

**Organically grown local products are marketed on a commercial footing to provide sustainable economic development and a regional brand.**

### Introduction

This project is located in the county of Kozani in the region of West Macedonia, in an area well known for its electricity production due to the region's deposits of lignite. However, the region is also home to other local products, including cereals, saffron, wine, apples and peaches. There is also a significant livestock farming sector which provides a rich variety of dairy products.

The project, which is implemented by the ANKO LAG in the municipality of Servia, aims to produce a range of organic products, and to market them commercially. An enterprise has been created specially for this purpose, which is in line with the LAG's theme of 'entrepreneurship and environment in the light of quality and innovation'. The final product is prepared from locally grown food, cultivated on a large scale and under organic conditions in the region of West Macedonia.

### Importance for the region

Apart from the environmental aspects of the project, the previous Leader experience of the enterprise involved in the project is an important factor, since the investment will create a high added value to the local products, and will have a multiplier effect for the whole local economy. In this respect,

the creation of the enterprise complements the more general objective of the national Greek Leader+ programme, which is to help alleviate the isolation of its mountainous regions and other disadvantaged areas. In addition to the elements that characterise every declining region, the region of West Macedonia has, over recent years, also experienced some of the highest rates of unemployment, not only among the 13 Greek regions, but in the whole of the EU.

### Reflecting the local product range

Even though production capacity is still not fully developed, the first signs of success are clear: there are already 27 employees working at the ultra-modern processing plant, while many other local and small manufacturers are working as suppliers. Accordingly, the enterprise is supplied with local organically grown vegetable products which are used to create meals using traditional recipes which are then packed without the use of preservatives. Over the last decade, many of these suppliers (cheese and milk factories, etc.) have received subsidies under Leader I and II, and now continue their activities successfully.

The final products sold to the market are assorted pies (cheese, pumpkin, etc), stuffed peppers and tomatoes, pasta, dried beans, jams, sweets, wine and honey. All these



... and a place to come and learn about the different products available

products have links with the region's tradition, culture and history. For this reason, on the packaging, there are short descriptions about the regional product, while on the label there is a description about the way the product has been produced and the ingredients used. It is also emphasised that the ingredients are from certified producers of organically grown produce.

### The commercial approach

The aim is that these food products will reach as many consumers as possible within a short time-frame, with no compromise on quality and yet at a competitive price. The idea is simply to provide a range of quality products which will reflect well upon the image of the region (as well as Greece) as a quality food producer. In this respect, it is necessary to demonstrate the quality and organic certification aspects in order that the product range can compete against the lower-priced mass-produced food available elsewhere. This marketing strategy has been developed in collaboration between the LAG and local businessmen, where the LAG has given the enterprise technical support in order to focus on specific target groups as described above. This takes into account certain factors such as market sector, population density, retail volume, economic prospects (based on GDP indices etc.) and the level of local competition.

It should be noted that the enterprise does not aim to deal with the large food retail chains since this may limit the variety and identity of production. It is also important to have some control over the sale of these products in terms of the way they are transported and stored, since these factors can greatly affect the quality of the product sold to the consumer.

Currently, the food products are distributed on the market by specially employed salesmen who deal directly with the final consumers and/or with selected shops who specialise in selling organic food products. However, since the brand

name of these products is patented, it will also be used when the franchising process starts. This will cover different parts of Greece, beginning in West Macedonia and eventually expanding abroad. There are also plans to buy, with private funds, a further 800 hectares of land in the region of Serbia, with the aim of extending the range of organically produced food.

In the project, Leader+ funding has been mainly used to invest in infrastructure, construct the processing plant, and in the direct purchases of machinery necessary to start up the production process.

**Member State:** Greece  
**Region, district:** West Macedonia, Servia  
**Name of LAG:** ANKO SA  
**Population:** 90 542  
**Surface area:** 3 401 km<sup>2</sup>

**Project total cost:** EUR 430 000  
**EU:** EUR 215 000  
**Other public funds:** EUR 43 000  
**Private funds:** EUR 172 000  
**Period of project eligibility:** June 2003–July 2005

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Photos provided by the Greek national network unit





# MAKING THE BEST USE OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES







Music is the extra ingredient in the paint mix

## FINLAND

# Painting the town red: the Hiirijärvi village

A village community works together to promote a more attractive image and to provide a base for tourism.

### Introduction

In a project funded by the Karhuseutu Leader+ LAG, villagers of Hiirijärvi wanted to develop the road running through the village into an alternative route for tourists travelling through the municipality of Harjavalta. From a tourism perspective, this more beautiful and traditional country road will also help to create a better image for the whole municipality.

Hiirijärvi is a traditional Finnish rural village in the municipality

of Harjavalta, some 30 km east of the city of Pori. It has 165 households and some 400 inhabitants. Normally regarded as an industrial municipality, its attractive countryside and potential as a holiday resort has been largely ignored.

In 2001, a landscape management plan had already been drawn up for Hiirijärvi, and, in conjunction with a village plan drawn up by local inhabitants, many issues concerning the landscape and environment had been raised. The project is administered by the village association, with the help of a part-time project administrator, who is funded by Leader+. This administrator is responsible for organising the various activities and for the dissemination of information, both in the village itself and at various fairs and events outside the village. Most of the work, however, is done by volunteers.

### Dissemination of information

An important aspect of the project is to provide information to various third parties. The village's Internet pages





Harmony of colour is restored to these roadside buildings



were already in place before the project started, but they have since been redesigned and have been given a better tourist focus. The external image of the village has also been improved by promoting the village in fairs and events, and this has contributed to creating a more active 'tourism-related' image for the whole municipality.

Another important part of this communication task is the coordination of volunteers, since keeping people regularly informed about what is happening tends to keep them committed to the project. The core group of volunteers is always the same 20 or so villagers who, according to need, may also enlist the help of other people.

### Opening up the village landscape

Several simultaneous actions have been carried out in order to improve the landscape. Bushes, for example, have been cleared both by volunteers and hired workers. The traditional countryside features have been opened up, and old pastures are again in use. Animals from three farms have been involved in the landscape project and a flock of sheep has been acquired for this purpose. Now, both highland cattle and sheep graze on the old traditional pastures as well as some new ones.

Farmers have also played an important role in landscape management, having been informed about the possibility of obtaining environmental subsidies for their landscape management work. Since the work on landscape management has been done by the village association and individual farmers, the project has also increased cooperation and social contacts between the two groups.

### Strong local culture

The village has several relics including kettleholes (glacial features), house museums, a grain-dryer museum and plenty of traditional buildings. The different layers of history are a visible part of the life and landscape of the village. Several years ago, the National Board of Antiquities

and Historical Monuments made a list of the kettleholes and provided signposts that are now in a bad state of disrepair. As part of the project, both the Board and the Museum of Satakunta have provided the villagers with expert assistance in refurbishing the relics and museums. New signposts are also being prepared for the kettleholes, and the road will have additional new signs to help tourists discover the areas of interest. A map and a tourist guide are also planned for the village, along with information about the sites of historical interest.

### A new look with red ochre

In summer 2005, the villagers, under expert guidance, mixed 600 litres of red ochre paint which was used to give the traditional wooden buildings a new look. Not all this work could be carried out at once and so a second phase has been planned for 2006. The results though are already impressive, and anyone travelling on the road will notice the uniform colouring of these old wooden buildings which are a visible testimony to the history and traditional building culture of the village, while forming part of the traditional village scenery too.

Opening up the village landscapes, painting the buildings and refurbishing the historical sites all contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the village for tourists. The local entrepreneurs have formed a special team that will help to develop and improve those services on offer, as well as ensuring that the village itself benefits from its visitors. The entrepreneurs and the village association work together, and the voluntary work by villagers are part of a common social capital that also benefits local businesses.

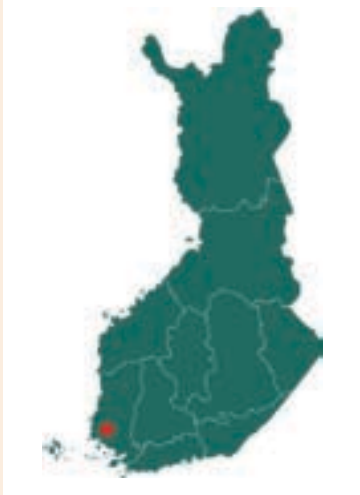
A village video, which will help tourism, has now been prepared as part of the LAG's 'Mediavaunu project' and it incorporates old photographs provided by the villagers themselves.



... and getting just the right tone requires a little extra

### The village school

The project also includes improving the school playground and the safety of the 30-plus children who attend Hiirijärvi's schools. For example, the copse in the playground was fenced into a small park, and sheep now graze there from spring to autumn, helping to keep the area in good shape. Planting and playground landscaping have been carried out to improve the safety of children playing there, which, along with a tidying-up activity, has helped to improve the whole village setting.



### Results of the project

The operation has been based on traditional cooperation between villagers. However, in order to meet the many different objectives of the project, it required both effective communications and organisation of work that would not have been possible without external assistance. Although some aspects of the operation could have been carried out without finance from the project funding, it would have taken such a long time to complete that there would have been little added value for the villagers' livelihood.

On the other hand, the project funding granted to the village community will have knock-on effects in terms of social capital produced by the cooperation and the villagers' skills. The farmers, entrepreneurs and villagers have all worked together, and their voluntary work is an important and traditional form of community spirit. Cooperation amongst the villagers will also improve the sustainability of project results as people will take pride in the results of their own work, and be more inclined to maintain them.

External funding, particularly from Leader+, is considered by the villagers as evidence that they and their achievements are appreciated. Awareness of this will increase the number of people participating in the project, thus also adding to the social capital.

**Member State:** Finland

**Region, district:** Satakunta

**Name of LAG:** Karhuseutu

**Population:** 56 067

**Surface area:** 2 253 km<sup>2</sup>

**Project total cost:** EUR 78 294

**EU:** EUR 27 402

**Other public funds:** EUR 27 402

**Private funds:** EUR 23 490

**Period of project eligibility:**

October 2004–December 2006

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Photos provided by the Finnish national network unit



Restored lakes are now a major fishing attraction for the area

## IRELAND

# Castlecomer development projects

A combination of Leader+-supported tourism-related projects have given a new lease of life to the community's cultural heritage.

### Introduction

Castlecomer is a medium-sized rural town with a population of around 2 000. The town, located in the south-east of Ireland, has suffered economic decline over a number of years. However, recently there has been a change in its economic fortunes thanks in part to a number of Leader+-supported projects that have capitalised on its natural and cultural resources.

The town's strong tradition of coalmining dates back to about 1640 when the mines were the major source of employment in the area. At this time, the mines and lands around Castlecomer were owned as part of a family (Wandesforde) estate and consisted of courtyards, extended gardens and artificial lakes for recreation. In 1969, however, the coalmines closed and along with it the town's major industry. Consequently, the estate fell into disrepair and was eventually transferred to state ownership.

At the end of 2002, the town suffered a further blow when a major employer pulled out of the area, resulting in the loss of a large number of jobs. In response to this, the community came together with various local and state agen-

cies to develop a strategy that would address the issue of unemployment. A forum was established that included the county council (local government), the Barrow Nore Suir Rural Development (BNS) LAG, and a number of other local agencies who had a responsibility for enterprise support. A business development executive was also appointed in order to lead the regeneration of Castlecomer through a number of projects. At the same time, Leader+ funded a broad-based feasibility study for the area.

In consultation with the local community, tourism was identified as an area which had a significant potential for growth. On this basis, a number of projects building on the history and resources of the town were developed, and BNS was able to play a crucial supporting role in these projects.

### Leader+ supporting the tourist potential

The broad-based feasibility study on the Castlecomer area was a key element to the future development of the town, providing the basis for many subsequent projects. These projects included a series of tourism workshops, where the townspeople came together to look at what they had to offer tourists. It was important for them to look at the town



from the perspective of an outsider, and to identify those developments necessary to exploit its potential as a tourist destination. The workshops were followed by a full tourism training course and this in turn led to the development of Castlecomer's 'tourism action plan'.

The tourism action plan was a key document in setting out a strategy for the successful development of the tourist potential of the town. It brought together a number of existing ideas for projects that could exploit the natural and cultural resources of the area and give them coherence and direction. This ensured that each project would contribute towards the overall goal of developing Castlecomer as a tourist destination. Projects identified included the development of a tourism logo and a tourism website. Alongside raising the visibility of the town, this was a key activity in instilling a sense of pride of place for residents. BNS Leader accessed national funding support that underpinned this project. The tourism action plan identified further projects that exploited the resources of the Castlecomer area. These included the redevelopment of parts of the old Wandesforde country estate and the development of a museum and visitors' centre that celebrate both the mining history of Castlecomer and the area's natural history.

### Developing the action plan

The tourism action plan identified a flagship project within this initiative, which involved the transformation of two major lakes on the lands of the old Wandesforde estate into fishing lakes. The lakes had dried up and had become completely overgrown. A manager for the project was employed along with four workers. The lakes have now been restored and re-stocked, and provide a major fishing attraction for the area. One of the lakes is devoted to coarse fishing while the second is for fly fishing. The lakes project is operating successfully as a commercial community enterprise with revenues of around EUR 2 000 per week. Once again, BNS Leader provided the necessary capital support for re-establishing the lakes, while a national funding scheme was used to support the employment of staff.

A second project identified in the tourism strategy involves the construction of a visitors' centre, where the town's long association with mining for over 300 years will be commemorated. Moreover, the mining activity has resulted in the discovery of many fossil deposits in the region that are of significant historical importance. The visitors' centre will explore the natural history of the area around Castlecomer as revealed in these fossils. While the project to build the visitors' centre will be largely funded through a national funding programme that is complementary to Leader+, it is important to note that the idea for the project itself came from the tourism action plan which was developed with Leader+ support, and it was the bottom-up approach which helped to identify the potential in the area as seen by the local community. This crucial input from Leader+ has resulted in a number of developments that are locally owned, locally managed and sustainable.

### Spin-off benefits

A separate project to emerge, and which is based on the use of local resources, is the development of a series of small craft enterprises in the courtyard of the Wandesforde estate. This project was initiated privately without Leader+ support, and, as such, is a clear example of the spin-off effect that the strong Leader+ investment into Castlecomer has achieved. As a result of this further development, Leader+ has supported a marketing initiative with additional funding of EUR 10 000.

### Positive outcomes

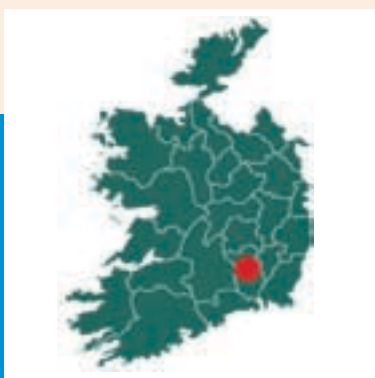
Leader+ support was made available to the community in Castlecomer at a critical time when the town was seeking to overcome some serious setbacks. Now there are a number of local projects such as the lakes initiative, visitors' centre development, development of craft enterprises in the courtyard of the estate, and the development of an 18-hole golf course. All of these have made a significant contribution to Castlecomer's status as a tourist destination. Without the support provided by Leader+ for the devel-





opment of a local tourism strategy, it is unlikely that these projects would have been as successful. In this respect, the role of Leader+ has been to support the local community in finding a way to use an undervalued resource. Once this work was done, the community was then in a position to develop many of the projects themselves and access funding from a number of public and private sources. An equally important contribution from Leader+ resulted from BNS's participation in the forum that was established to address the initial crisis in Castlecomer. The LAG's intimate knowledge of the local community, along with their commitment to Leader principles, ensured that the outcomes from the forum's work were both successful and sustainable.

When asked to identify the key successes in this project, Declan Rice (Manager, BNS Leader+) noted the economic and social benefit: 'But more important than that is the feeling of well-being and community identity. The people see Castlecomer as something to be proud of. People feel part of that success. From the point of view of rural development, I think that's important.'



**Member State:** Ireland

**Region, district:**

South East Tipperary and County Kilkenny

**Name of LAG:** Barrow Nore Suir Leader

**Population:** 81 000

**Surface area:** 3 000 km<sup>2</sup>

***Broad based feasibility study***

**Project total cost:** EUR 8 850

**EU:** EUR 7 080

**Private funds:** EUR 1 770

**Period of project eligibility:** May 2004–May 2005

***Marketing of Craft Yard Enterprises***

**Project total cost:** EUR 19 336

**EU:** EUR 9 668

**Private funds:** EUR 9 668

**Period of project eligibility:** June 2004–June 2005

***IT centre***

**Project total cost:** EUR 22 577

**EU:** EUR 11 288

**Private funds:** EUR 11 289

**Period of project eligibility:**  
November 2002–November 2003

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Photos provided by the Irish national network unit



# USE OF NEW KNOW-HOW AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES



# Working together to build a heating network

Leader+ acts as a catalyst for network creation and helps a region's natural resource to become a source of fuel for local heating systems.



**The initiative reaches to the heart of the local community**

and using it as a source of fuel for heating. Today, a totally ecological and economical network has been set up to supply heating and hot water to a housing development of 23 homes, with plans to extend it to a second development with a further 12 dwellings.

## Use and preservation of hedgerows

The typical landscape of the Pays de Haute Mayenne is characterised by meadows bordered by thick hedgerows. Hedged farmland is part of the local heritage, and plays a vital role in conserving flora and fauna, as well as reducing erosion. However, this rich environmental resource has been under threat. The hedges and copses require a great deal of maintenance work from farmers who

## Introduction

In the area around Saint Hilaire du Maine (region: Pays <sup>(1)</sup> de la Loire), cuttings from pruning its farmland hedgerows or copses are collected and converted into raw material for heating. Before this Leader+ project started, farmland hedgerows were in danger of being wiped out, but these natural resources are now being harnessed, recycled, maintained and, consequently, protected.

Everything started in 2003, during a trip to Germany organised in the context of the Leader+ programme. A group made up of some 30 elected representatives, technicians and members of civil society from the Pays de Haute Mayenne in France travelled to Augsburg, a place which has been at the leading edge of renewable energy. Here, for the past 30 years, sun, wood and wind have been treated as valuable resources. The Mayor of Saint Hilaire du Maine, Christian Quinton asked himself: 'What can we do back home?' That was when he came up with the idea of collecting the wood prunings from the farm hedgerows,

consider them too costly, and consequently they considered getting rid of them. Now, the Saint Hilaire project invites farmers to sell the wood generated from the trimming of their hedges. Once collected, the wood is chipped, dried and becomes the raw material for one of the two wood-fired boilers which have been installed by the local council. Saint Hilaire du Maine has also created a public structure responsible for buying the wood from farmers and then selling the energy produced to residents. Eventually, an entire housing estate will be heated by a local resource which is being preserved through its consumption! This is a real sustainable development success story.

## Warming homes and the community

While the Saint Hilaire project is itself both economical and ecological, for local councillors it also represents a human adventure and therefore is very much in line with Leader values. That is to say, by encouraging the creation of an association, the mayor hopes to unite both residents and farmers in support of the 'heating network'. Through meetings, the association will raise residents' awareness of the constraints faced by farmers and of the value of the work done by farmers in preserving the hedgerow land-

<sup>(1)</sup> The term 'pays' refers to an area which has a certain uniformity in respect of geographical, cultural, economic and social indicators, within which the municipalities develop a common development strategy.



One of the wood-fuelled boilers providing year-round warmth



scape. Council members will also be present to discuss the running and cost of the project. Everyone involved contributes at every level to the smooth operation of the network, keeping each other informed of its progress, and in this way the population has been brought together. The majority of Saint Hilaire's residents have enthusiastically welcomed this project, and, with the promotion by the council, now feel proud to be part of an innovative municipality.

Awareness-raising efforts need to be continued as some farmers still need to be convinced. However, the Saint Hilaire initiative is already proving to be an inspiration. Numerous delegations have asked to visit the installation and similar projects are currently being prepared in the surrounding area. Three neighbouring boroughs are planning to heat a swimming pool, social housing, a media library and a school, all using this system. The Pays de Haute Mayenne is already considering creating a common structure for collecting and storing chipped wood to serve local needs. The creation of new jobs is envisaged. Meanwhile, the team at Saint Hilaire council, which is strongly committed to renewable energies, is maintaining the momentum with the installation of solar panels on the village hall roof, and is also looking at setting up a vegetable oil-based heating system for the school.

### Leader+ is much more than financial support

More than EUR 360 000 has been invested in the wood chip-fuelled heating system, a large part of which has been accounted for by the purchase of two wood-fuelled boilers. The initial plan was for one large one, but, for reasons of efficiency, it was realised that to run a large single boiler at a low output during the summer months would be wasteful. Thus, it was decided it was better to be able to switch to a smaller 'summer boiler'. The rest of the money was spent on building the premises, laying an underground network of insulated pipes and buying sub-stations for the individual boilers that supply each dwelling. The contribution from the Leader+ programme represents some 22 % of the total budget. However, the Leader+ contribution is not only financial. Firstly, the Leader+ programme had a catalytic effect, by organising the fact-finding trip to Germany, and in providing local training on all the energy aspects. Secondly, Leader provided assistance in assessing the feasibility of the project. However, the main contribution has been the official backing of the Leader+ programme, which had had

a clear leverage effect, and has stimulated contributions from other financial partners, notably at the state level. The commitment of Leader+ and of the region prompted the engagement of other partners in this particular initiative.

### A collective reflection

The Pays de Haute Mayenne has also played a crucial role. The verification of the project's financial process, and the environmental impact and sustainable development considerations would not have been possible without a strong local drive, where councillors and representatives of civil society work together. It is this participatory approach which creates the enthusiasm without which it would be difficult to implement innovative projects in rural settings. In adopting the project, the residents of Saint Hilaire showed that, at the local level, the Leader+ process was able to support such a 'grassroots' initiative.

#### Member State:

France

#### Region:

Pays de la Loire

#### Name of LAG:

Pays de la Haute-Mayenne

#### Population:

90 821

#### Surface area:

2 176 km<sup>2</sup>



#### Project total cost:

EUR 364 000

#### EU:

EUR 79 315

#### Other public funds:

EUR 284 685

#### Period of project eligibility:

October 2004–June 2006

#### Contact person:

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Photos provided by the French national network unit



The visitor is guided around the region's exhibitions ...

## AUSTRIA

# The 't-guide' story: creating a cultural link

Mobile phone technology provides a region with an innovative cultural tool to realise its tourist potential and much more.

### Introduction

The 't-guide', is a product developed by the Austrian LAG Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg, which uses the Internet or mobile telephony to provide tourists with access to relevant regional tourist information.

In this Leader+ project, 'stories' or interesting tales are told from the past and present and covering the region's cultural history, architecturally interesting buildings, unique cultural and natural landscapes, and other innovative projects. The project covers the specific areas of Montafon and Klosters, which are located in the Vorarlberg region.

### Alpinism, Hemingway, mining and modern architecture

In the framework of the project, stories covering a walkabout in the historic town of Gaschurn have been collected and prepared for tour. The route takes in an old dance arbour, which is the only original one left in the country. Dance arbours had an important function in village life during the 13th–19th centuries, and were the places where official speeches, trials, meetings, theatre and dance events were held. In just a few minutes' walk, the tour passes by old guest houses from the 17th century, which gives an appreciation of early tourism, and an ancient mass house that was built in the old 'Walser house' (1)

(1) Walser houses are blockhouses weather-boarded with shingles and with a shingle roof. The first Walser houses were built in the 15th century.

style. Here, the tourist also learns about alpinism: notably the first ascent of the 3 312 metre-high Piz Buin and the development of the mountain area with its many shelters in the Silvretta and Rätikon areas. Later, the tourists learn about the history of the ski, historical winter clothing and the personalities that visited Montafon, such as the famous author Ernest Hemingway who not only stayed in the house but also wrote some of his works while in Montafon.

Other anecdotes concerning the cultural and natural landscapes, or interesting walkabouts still to be developed, are being prepared, as are archaeological places of discovery, mines in the Silvretta, gothic art in Montafon, myths and legends, modern architecture, etc. The region contains a wealth of information, and so it was very important for the project team to find a suitable means of communication, which makes the region's knowledge available to the local inhabitants and guests alike.

### An innovative way of relaying information

After several meetings, the mobile phone was selected as the communication medium for the 'story-teller and tour guide' (which at the time of writing is available only in German) and it was consequently called 't-guide'. The 't-guide' works very simply: those tourists who are looking at a historical building or any other regional feature of interest, just have to dial a number which is either in a specific folder or on the object itself, and they then receive



... and some examples of modern architecture are explained

detailed information on their mobile phone. For example, by calling the number (43-5556) 90 81 02 20, the visitor can hear the story of the village walkabout in Gaschurn as described above.

### Developing product innovation

The development of the 't-guide' was an integral part of the 'stories' project. Behind the easy use of the mobile phone as a tour guide, is an innovative technological solution which includes the following three modules:

- module 1: content management system (CMS);
- module 2: mobile telephone service in combination with Internet telephony;
- module 3: Internet-interactive voice response.

The various cultural stories are recorded on to audio files, and a special content management system makes these audio files (mp3 format) available to the caller via the audio server. New information and other audio recordings can be transmitted and saved in a data bank (provided access authorisation exists) in the form of audio files via the Internet, for example, [http://montafon.telesis.at/tourismus\\_montafon/dorfrundweg](http://montafon.telesis.at/tourismus_montafon/dorfrundweg)

Another element of the 't-guide' is the Internet (VoIP) telephony system that can be scaled as required and is therefore able to cope with numerous calls at the same time. The Internet audio server was configured exclusively for the 't-guide', and is permanently linked with the content management system. Audio information can also be loaded directly from the website to an mp3 player with the 't-guide'. This function is intended mainly for schools or groups and gives the user the chance to load information about the entire sightseeing trip and exhibitions on to their personal mp3 player.

### The 't-guide' in use

The 't-guide' was developed in the framework of a pilot application for places of interest in the town of Gaschurn, Tel. (43-5574) 90 83 02 20. In the meantime, the t-guide is used for relaying information about other projects and also acts as a guide for three specific tours: architecture, the forest and energy. They are as follows.

**Architecture guide:** Vorarlberg is well known for its wood architecture, and with the 't-guide' the visitor can take a special tour about timber construction in the town of Hittisau. The 't-guide' provides detailed information about specific buildings of interest and the user can even hear a recorded interview with the architect. When viewing an architectural object, the guest receives competent and detailed information ('t-guide' number: (43-5574) 90 83 03 50).

**Forest tours:** While hiking through the forests, the 't-guide' gives information on the types of trees, the different forestry operations and wildlife ('t-guide' number: (43-5574) 90 83 03 60).

**Passive-energy house:** In Ludesch, a small regional town, Europe's largest public building using the 'passive house' standards<sup>(1)</sup> and ecological criteria has been constructed. Using the 't-guide', the visitor receives detailed information about the building materials used, the passive house technique, the architecture and the local development concept (t-guide number: (43-5574) 90 83 03 30).



<sup>(1)</sup> A 'passive house' (Passivhaus in German) is an ultra-low energy building that meets the rigorous, voluntary, Passivhaus standard for thermal performance. It results in buildings that have a very low use of energy for space heating.



A bridge forms part of the forest tour



Traditional wooden construction stands testament to the region's architecture

It is also planned that the LAG Vorarlberg will use 't-guide' with the following projects:

- fir tree country: timber architecture in Vorarlberg and the wood type, silver fir;
- professional excursions: visiting the best-practice examples of regional development;
- countryside path: nature adventure path in Partenen-Galtür;
- GSUND (healthy): an outdoor fitness programme in the countryside where the 't-guide' gives instructions.

### With support from Leader+

Leader+ has been important in developing the 't-guide' whose potential within the programme goes well beyond its current use as a tour guide. For example, visitors from outside the region could receive valuable information in their own language about filling in forms, or advice about who to go to should certain problems or questions arise. There is also a potential application for hotels and guest houses to be able to inform their guests about current recreational activities using this technology. With respect to the 't-guide' the Leader funding supported:

- creating a concept for the project stories;
- collecting and editing information about regional curiosities;
- technical development of the 't-guide' prototype;
- compiling texts and audio files;
- pilot application in the town of Gaschurn.

Beyond Leader+, the product has been taken up and further developed into a national research and network project (protec-netplus) with numerous companies taking part (<http://zielleitung.pvl.at>). There is also a language identification system being developed for the menu navigation of the 't-guide'. In addition, the developers of the



't-guide' were invited to take part in a European project, which could involve developing an application in the area of location-based services.

**Member State:** Austria  
**Region:** Vorarlberg  
**Name of LAG:** Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg  
**Population:** 64 500  
**Surface area:** 1716 km<sup>2</sup>

**Project total cost:** EUR 99 000  
**EU:** EUR 49 500  
**Other public funds:** EUR 15 000  
**Private funds:** EUR 34 500  
**Period of project eligibility:**  
 January 2002–December 2004

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**Website:** [www.leader-vlbg.at](http://www.leader-vlbg.at)

Photos provided by LAG Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg

# COOPERATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT



With a little help even sheep make the crossing



SWEDEN, FINLAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

## SISU: small islands for survival and understanding

Developing a strategy for island networking may help to secure the future for the residents of isolated island groupings.

### Introduction

'How can you survive on a small island?' was a question the project asked itself, and to which some answers are now being received. SISU (small islands for survival and understanding) was set up in order to establish an international network for the inhabitants of small islands. This would, in turn, increase their chances of finding new solutions to a variety of problems, especially in those cases where there are no permanent road links to the mainland.

It was decided that, in order to be eligible for the project, the particular island should have a permanent population normally considered too low to maintain services such as small grocery stores, schools, doctor's services etc. It was also important that the island could demonstrate that, despite its low population, it could still provide and maintain those basic services which would allow people to remain there, or at least demonstrate the possibility to do so.

A network has now been developed between islands in the Leader+ areas of 'Carpe Mare', Sweden, 'In the same boat', Finland and the 'WHELK' area in Scotland. By early 2006, a total of 13 islands were taking part — from Sweden, the islands of Klädesholmen, Dyrön, Marstrand, Kalvsund, Asperö and Köpstadsö; from Finland, the islands of Salavainen, Högsåra, Hiitis and Vartsala; and from Scotland the islands of Jura, Colonsay and Tiree.

It was also important that the project engaged people from the private, public and voluntary sectors. Consequently, most islands have three representatives, one from each sector, who speak and act on behalf of the rest of the islanders. Most of the work is carried out on a voluntary basis, which means that much of the islanders' spare time, and occasionally time during normal working hours, are devoted to the SISU project. In total, it is estimated that well over 7 000 voluntary hours will have been invested.

### Understanding strengths and weaknesses

Working in small groups, each island carried out their own SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, and at the same time highlighted successful projects that had already started or were in the process of starting. By April 2005, 13 SWOT analyses had been compiled by the islanders, and were publicised on SISU's own website [www.sisunet.info](http://www.sisunet.info), which enabled the islanders to be prepared for a planned project meeting in Sweden. In fact, the SISU website is regularly updated with information supplied by the participants themselves,



Many small islands face isolation in winter

and this provides the means for the different partners to communicate project ideas, articles, etc.

The project meeting, which took place in June 2005, was very successful and triggered debate around several 'island issues'. It was soon realised that, although the 13 islands are in many ways quite different, they also have much in common, thus providing a sound basis of issues around which to collaborate via the island network. During the group discussions, 17 issues were raised, including the use of natural resources, help for the elderly, communication and transport, and future island development, etc. It was decided that, in order to concentrate on a key number of these issues, a further meeting should be organised, and this took place in Scotland during September 2005. This visit also highlighted the differences between the Scottish islands compared to those in Finland and Sweden.

Network discussions about the project issues are ongoing, and are facilitated by video conferencing and the Internet etc. One action already agreed is that the islanders should lobby for equal policies within the EU, especially with regard to the costs for transporting goods and people to islands. This means that more SISU participants will be involved directly in the debate.

### Project feedback

According to a mid-term project evaluation, most participants are so far very satisfied, and indeed many islanders have been inspired to start work on other (neglected) projects. Another important feedback is the agreed need to continue with the networking activities. This is to be addressed partly by a more active use of the SISU website,

and also by taking part in videoconferences to be organised by the project. The first such videoconference, on the subject of 'multipurpose buildings', was very successful and participants from five different islands took part. Videoconferences on topics such as renewable energy, how to stabilise and maintain a permanent population and waste management have also been planned.

Outcomes and findings of the project will be presented at a conference in Finland held during September 2006. Politicians and policymakers from all the participating countries, as well as other interested ones will be invited, and a report presenting the findings and outcomes, to which all SISU participants will have contributed to, will be made available.

### Coordination of project information is key

Coordination of the project is a key task, and the project coordinator, who is funded by Leader+, plays a vital role in ensuring that information is communicated to the various island groups. Apart from the setting up of a website, which is updated by the project coordinator and the project participants, part of the budget has also enabled the Leader+ areas to examine different ways of communication. After a few months, videoconferencing has proved to be the best method. Therefore, in addition to the website, the islanders have begun regular videoconferences as described above.

These videoconferences have turned out to be very useful and inspiring, and they are encouraging the islanders to put forward certain ideas and an exchange of knowledge. Project networking has already improved (the prime aim of the SISU project), and more joint and individual projects will materialise.

### Developing island issues and some results

So far, the issues which the islanders consider to be important include developing multi-purpose centres where a mix





## Ferries are a crucial island link



of services can be provided, renewable energy and energy efficiency schemes, working towards maintaining a permanent population on the islands and waste management.

The Scottish island of Tiree is very keen to develop renewable energy, whereas the neighbouring islands of Jura and Colonsay are more concerned with developing their existing multi-purpose centres and are planning to expand the services they already offer. The island of Jura will, for example, establish an old people's home and an elderly care facility adjacent to the existing centre. The Swedish island of Köpstadö, despite only having around 100 permanent residents, has managed to get funding to build a small multi-purpose centre. Kalvsund has developed its sports club house into a multi-purpose centre, and Asperö also plans to develop a multi-purpose building, having been inspired by what has taken place at the neighbouring island of Köpstadsö, and also the Scottish islands of Jura and Colonsay. All these planned and existing multi-service centres will reflect the needs of the particular island and its population.

Dyrön has worked hard to attract tourists by developing its harbour, a nature trail and a sauna with sea view etc. and this in turn has inspired the Scottish and Finnish islanders to look at similar ideas. Again in Sweden, the islanders of Marstrand got together and developed a very modern broadband system when they couldn't find anybody else to do it. This is something which many of the other SISU islands are keen to learn more about.

The Swedish island of Klädesholmen has worked hard to convince its part-time residents to become permanent residents, or at least spend more time there in their 'second homes'. They have also been successful in getting the different herring companies to work together in order to survive in a competitive market. In Finland, the island of Salavainen in the Åboland archipelago has its own multi-purpose 'Kummeli centre', which provides a range of services despite a low permanent population. It was a subject which impressed Swedish and Scottish islanders during a recent videoconference.

### For the future

Some future project targets include a total of 20 networks with 240 participants, three education and training programmes for 20 participants, one project aiming to pre-

serve the natural and cultural heritage, and a total of 20 SWOT analyses from the participating islands.

**Member States:** Sweden, Finland, United Kingdom  
**Regions:** Västra Götaland (Sweden), Pargas (Finland), Scotland (United Kingdom)  
**Name of leading LAG:** Sweden, Carpe Mare  
**Population:** 37 000  
**Surface area:** n.a.

**Project total cost (\*):** EUR 527 394

**EU:** EUR 197 773

**Other public funds:** EUR 226 779

**Private funds:** EUR 102 842

(\* National splits are calculated on a percentage basis of the project total and as a result may include rounding errors.

**Period of project eligibility:**

October 2004–December 2006

**Sweden project cost:** EUR 163 492

**EU:** EUR 61 310

**Other public funds:** EUR 70 301

**Private funds:** EUR 31 881

**UK project cost:** EUR 300 615

**EU:** EUR 112 731

**Other public funds:** EUR 129 264

**Private funds:** EUR 58 620

**Finland project cost:** EUR 63 287

**EU:** EUR 23 733

**Other public funds:** EUR 27 213

**Private funds:** EUR 12 341

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Photos provided by the Swedish national network unit





One of the spectacular animal figures on display

## FRANCE AND GERMANY

# The Aurignacian period: the origins of art in Europe

Two regions with a shared archaeological past are brought together in a transnational cooperation project to promote their historical legacy.

Based on an article by Birgit Beyrle and Josefine Bauer, Brenzregion LAG, Germany

### Introduction

Around 35 000 years ago, hunters produced Europe's first known works of art on cave walls which depicted, amongst other animals, horses, lions and mammoths. Now a Leader+ Franco-German cooperation project has been initiated by the German LAG Brenzregion, which will allow each participating region to enjoy the benefits of these ancient treasures.

The culture which heralded the New Stone Age in Europe some 35 000 years ago dates from the period known as the 'Aurignacian era'. Two of the most important European Aurignacian settlements are to be found in the Alps of eastern Swabia in Germany, and the French Pyrénées. The Vogelherd, Hohlenstein-Stadel and Geissenklösterle caves lie in the south of the Leader+ area in the Brenz region of Baden-Württemberg, and are renowned throughout the world for their archaeological treasures. There is also significant evidence of Aurignacian culture in south-western France. With a view to exploiting the enormous wealth of this historic legacy, representative LAGs from the two countries came together in the autumn of 2004. Dr Harald Floss, a professor of ancient history at the University of Tübingen, was given the task of getting this transnational cooperation underway.

### From the initial talks ...

Given their common heritage, the areas provided the perfect match for such a cooperation project, within which a

key role was played by the local authority of Aurignac: the small village which gave its name to the ancient period. On 20 September 2004, representatives of the interested areas met for the first time in Aurignac. This was to investigate the possibilities of implementing a joint project, and to understand the potential linguistic and cultural barriers. On the basis of a clear understanding of each other, and a strong commonality of interest, an initial cooperation agreement was concluded between the two French Leader+ LAGs of 'Pays d'Ariège-Pyrénées' and 'Pays Basque Intérieur', 'Pays de Comminges/Aurignac' (1) and the German LAG Brenzregion.

### ... to transnational cooperation

Following the early and successful conclusions of the initial project meeting, the real work on the project could begin. Apart from the language barrier, there were many differences which needed to be overcome regarding the way that Leader+ projects in France and Germany are implemented. It was also necessary to familiarise the local authority of Aurignac with the particular characteristics of the Leader method. That these were overcome by the different project partners was a result of clear and



(1) The Pays de Comminges represents the Commune of Aurignac and is an area with a national Leader-like status.

common objectives which were pursued by all parties with great enthusiasm. In January 2005, the detailed planning of the project began at a meeting held in Heidenheim, and later that summer the approval for the transnational project 'The Aurignacian period and the origins of art in Europe' was given by Germany and France. However, a precondition of the project, at the request of the French managing authority, was that the lead LAG should be the 'Pays Basque Intérieur'.

### Working together to highlight archaeological treasures

The most important tasks of this project are the reconstruction of human history in Stone Age Europe, the further investigation of world-renowned archaeological sites and the sustainable exploitation of these resources for the purposes of regional development. It is intended that these actions will reinforce popular knowledge and awareness of the regions' cultural heritage and, by using state-of-the-art methods, the archaeological treasures will be made accessible to a wider public.

A European-wide network of archaeological sites is to be established, and their tourist potential developed. The world-famous cave sites in the Brenzregion include the 'Vogelherd caves' in the Heidenheim district, the 'Hohlenstein-Stadel' and the 'Geissenklösterle' in the Alp-Danube district. Here, archaeologists have excavated large numbers of animal sculptures carved from mammoth ivory, which rank as some of the oldest examples of figurative art yet discovered. Other spectacular finds include the 'lion man', a human/animal figure which is nearly 30 cm tall, and which is a unique relic of the spiritual and religious world as seen by Stone Age man, and a mammoth ivory flute which is among the oldest musical instruments in the world. The partner regions of Ariège, Aurignac and the French Basque Country are renowned for their Stone Age sites featuring wall paintings, engravings, musical instruments and jewellery. The 'Mas d'Azil' caves, where evidence of an Aurignacian-period settlement has been found, and 'Isturitz', where an Aurignacian flute has been discovered, are particularly significant.

### International symposium as a project kick-off

As a prelude to the cooperation project, the tiny village of Aurignac in south-western France became a key focus of archaeological interest in September 2005. This was part of the Leader+ cooperation initiative, and, under the scientific direction of Dr Harald Floss, and Nathalie Rouquerol of the Aurignac Museum Forum, Aurignac was the venue for a unique conference on Stone Age art. A panel of internationally renowned scientists discussed the origins of art in the Aurignacian period from various points of view, with key conference themes being the natural living conditions



Project partners come together for the first time



This mammoth ivory flute is one of the oldest musical instruments in the world

and culture of the Aurignacian people. In this context, the earliest surviving pieces of artwork and their methods of production were discussed. Figurative artworks from the Aurignacian period were compared with cave paintings and engravings from all over Europe. Following the conference, which aroused substantial interest, a visit to the Isturitz cave in the French Basque Country was organised. In the darkness of the cave, and to the tones of an authentically reconstructed Stone Age flute, participants were transported back 35 000 years.

### With a look to the future

In the wake of the international symposium, more events are planned. The results of the conference will be published in an illustrated, bilingual conference report, and the special archaeological features of the participating project regions will be presented in a trilingual tourist brochure. A common Internet portal is being developed, which will give information on the project regions, as well as serving as an archaeology portal for a broad exchange of information. In cooperation with the French project partners, the Brenzregion LAG is to exhibit at the 2006 Heidenheim Regional Garden Show, where a travelling exhibition of Stone Age Aurignacian discoveries will be on display.

The cooperation project has already had a discernible positive impact upon the regions involved. Both existing and planned archaeological projects, such as the Aurignac Museum and the Giengen-Hürben 'cave experience', have been promoted by this cooperation project, allowing the best possible use to be made of the knowledge gained and the latest media technology.



The Geissenklösterle  
in the Alpe-Danube  
district

**Member States:** France and Germany  
**Regions:** Aquitaine (France) and Baden-Württemberg (Germany)

**Name of leading LAG:** France, Pays Basque Intérieur  
**Population:** 69 049  
**Surface area:** 2 507 km<sup>2</sup>

**Name of German LAG:** Brenzregion  
**Population:** 121 852  
**Surface area:** 1 168 km<sup>2</sup>

**Other LAGS:** France, Pays d'Ariège-Pyrénées, Pays de Comminges (non-Leader)

**Project total cost:** EUR 184 741  
**EU:** EUR 92 371  
**Other public funds:** EUR 88 578  
**Private funds:** EUR 3 792  
**Period of project eligibility:** October 2004–December 2006

#### France

**Total cost:** EUR 135 894  
**EU:** EUR 67 942  
**Other public funds:** EUR 64 160  
**Private funds:** EUR 3 792

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#### Germany

**Total cost:** EUR 48 847  
**EU:** EUR 24 429  
**Other public funds:** EUR 24 418

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Photos provided by the French national network unit



**WOMEN AND YOUTH IN LEADER+**





Angela Ciliberti

## ITALY

## An interview with Angela Ciliberti

LAG Manager, Le Macine, Basilicata, Italy

### Introduction

After having gained a degree in foreign languages in 1998, Ms Ciliberti started to work with the Le Macine LAG during the Leader II initiative. Here, she was responsible for the LAG's transnational cooperation activities. Then in March 2003, she was appointed LAG manager and started working in a team involved with defining the local action plan for the Leader+ initiative.

Her experience of Leader II and Leader+ has led her to develop an ongoing relationship with both public and private sectors in order to ensure that the 'bottom-up' approach becomes an appropriate way of enhancing rural development in the area of Montagna Materana.

### The Le Macine LAG area

The local action group 'Le Macine' works in the most internal part of the region of Basilicata, the so-called Montagna Materana area, located in the south of Italy.

The area is characterised by hills dedicated to the cultivation of cereals and olives, and mountains covered by forests. From a social and economic point of view, this is the most marginal area of the region, and is populated by 33 867 inhabitants spread over 13 municipalities, giving a density of 28 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

Economically, the number of people working in enterprises accounts for 14 % compared to the regional average of 25 %. Very small companies, defined as those with only one employee, represent 70 % of businesses, compared with the regional average of 62 %. Two thirds of those businesses working in agriculture are involved with cereal production. There is also quite a widespread cultivation of olives, and the breeding of sheep and goats has become popular in recent years. Traditional and typical foods such as sausages, cheeses and honey are also produced.

As at the regional level, the weak points of the area's agriculture relate to the isolation of farms, the associated problems of an ageing farming population, the gap between the old farmers and the younger generation, and a low level of mechanisation.

The area is divided into two resource structures in order to develop the protected area of the Regional Park of Gallipoli Cognato, with its lush forests and 'Natura 2000' sites, and the hilly area which is dominated by quite strong cultural elements linked to its rural life.



## The interview

**Contact Point: What first attracted you about working in rural development? Have your expectations been realised? If not, why not?**

Angela Ciliberti: My career in rural development started within the area of transnational cooperation and this for me represented a very attractive area of work because of the possibility to keep in contact with other regions and other cultures. My work then shifted to looking at the whole process of rural development, involving SMEs, environmental and cultural activities, and tourism. This represented an interesting part of the Leader programme because it gave me the opportunity to develop a multilevel experience and to manage a multisectorial activity.

I am still involved in the challenge of creating a network of resources among all these activities, and so my expectations are realised day by day, even if each day a new challenge or expectation arises.

**CP: Regarding your daily work, what are the most common issues you have to deal with, and what kind of work does this involve?**

AC: The work of a LAG manager varies day by day: it moves from the planning activity to the monitoring, to the evaluation. Leader+ actions need to be followed from the bottom-up level when a manager has to listen to the demands of the area and its local population. Then these demands have to be translated into financial actions such as writing a call for proposal or call for funds. Following the implementation of the actions agreed in the local action plan, we then need to transform ideas into projects which have to be monitored and eventually evaluated, in order to understand if what was planned has been satisfactorily implemented. All this work establishes a series of relationships with local entrepreneurs, public bodies, cultural associations and young people. It involves all the different components of rural development which add to the wealth of the rural development experience.

**CP: Within the framework of the regional Leader+ programme, what type of projects are you involved with? Is there a particular focus either on themes or target groups, and why were these chosen?**

AC: The Leader+ programme, in the area of the Le Macine LAG, is trying to develop an integrated system of resources able to link the natural and environmental elements with the cultural heritage of the area. For example, there is a particular focus on those enterprises working in the eno-gastron-

omy (food and wine) industry and tourist sector who, with their strong links to the area's cultural resources, can play a role in both increasing the potential of these resources and in so doing contribute to the area's economic growth.

**CP: Has cooperation, either inter-territorial or transnational, been an important consideration for your LAG? What were the reasons for this? What experiences have you had?**

AC: In the financial plan of our LAG, 20 % of the total budget has been dedicated to cooperation: both inter-territorial and transnational. This high allocation of resources shows a clear choice in our LAG's strategy in terms of working with other areas, and in its desire to try to overcome the area's history of marginalisation. The expectations from cooperation are that we can also embody the spirit of Leader, that is to say, a programme of cooperation and association not only in rural areas but also among rural areas.

Le Macine LAG is, at the moment, involved in two inter-territorial cooperation projects: one with the north of Italy, aimed at creating new touristic products in hilly and mountainous areas; and another one with three LAGs from Basilicata and two from Puglia aimed at creating a 'service centre' that works to create commercial opportunities for the areas involved in the project.

On the transnational side, with Finland and Spain, there is a project called 'MAP — moving around the provinces' in which we are working to define a common tourist offer able to move tourists from established tourist areas towards less well-known ones in the rural interior.

**CP: Could you consider any projects that you have been involved with to be 'best practice' ones? What do you think makes a project 'best practice'?**

AC: Under Leader+, our LAG has implemented a series of activities aimed to innovate and qualify agri-alimentary quality products. The project is about 'quality innovation'. We can consider this project 'best practice' because it comprises different steps that link together and which have contributed to the area's general growth. Firstly, we carried out market research in order to understand the area's quality products; then, after many meetings and 'bottom-up' dialogue with local businesses, we were able to define their needs in order to improve the quality of their produce.

A call for tender was published and the businesses presented projects aimed at improving the production cycle by using new machinery, and equipment, even if production remained closely linked to traditional ways.

These businesses have undergone this innovation work together as a network of SMEs in order to sell not just one product but a 'basket' of local products. We can define the whole project as 'best practice' because it has enabled the:

- creation of a 'basket' of quality products, including products under threat of extinction, and in so doing has also safeguarded the biodiversity of the area's production;
- innovation of the local production system with improved structures and new machinery;
- increase in the income of the SMEs;
- creation of a network of SMEs and associations;
- start-up of projects and cooperation activities.

The project 'quality innovation' shows that a project can become best practice if it:

- is strongly linked to the territory;
- respects and follows the traditions and the culture of the area;
- improves the local economy;
- can create new networks.

**CP: In the national context, what more would you like to see done in order to improve your region's competitiveness, and why? How important to you is regional identity within this?**

AC: From an economic point of view, competitiveness arises from infrastructure, investments and social satisfaction.

The national policy should be more focused on serious structural investments such as an airport and new highways, both in the physical and ICT senses, even in a small region such as ours which is characterised by small demographic numbers. All this implies a heavy flow of inward investment which, coupled with actions carried out at the local level, will help the mobility of labour, increase employment opportunities, and give a strong boost to regional competitiveness.

The regional identity plays an important role in this framework because the development of specific economic and cultural aspects allows even the small and isolated areas to reach the wider market economy. In other words, the rhetoric of 'thinking global — acting local' should become reality.

**CP: Do you feel that initiatives such as Leader+ have been widely understood by the local community? If not, what more do you think could be done to raise awareness and engage people?**

AC: All European initiatives, including Leader+, have to be taken seriously in terms of their clear message to the re-

gions, and their potential to deliver concrete regional development. In this respect, the role of the local community is to define, in terms of opportunities, what the European tools can help them achieve, and how they can be an opportunity for growth for the different sectors of the rural economy.

The point at which such good European policies break down, especially in Italy, is when they come up against bureaucracy (which such instruments are obliged to do) before they even reach the local population. The excessive slowness of intermediate levels of bureaucracy (at a Member State level and then at a regional government level) generates confusion and sometimes lack of faith in the European institutions and their activities.

What could be useful is direct contact between European institutions and local communities, with the only intermediary being the local action group.

**CP: How has the public/private partnership worked in your LAG?**

AC: The presence of the private sector in the LAG partnership, as well as on the LAG board, has represented an important innovation. The private sector's speed and method of work has, in conjunction with the exchange of experience, provided a stimulus to the activities and speeded up the 'reaction times' of those public bodies involved in Leader+: times and methods that previously were slow and complex.

# Georgie Harris: creating business by design

**Leader+ not only provided finance to develop local creative talent, but also helped with the necessary commercial skills.**

## Introduction

An enterprising young designer from Derbyshire's rural Peak District is making her mark on the world of fashion, thanks to help from the Leader+ project.

Working from her studio near the market town of Bakewell, 30-year-old Georgie Harris specialises in high-quality cushion covers, bags, scarves and throws, individually crafting each product from hand dyed silks and velvets. Her screen printed designs take their inspiration from local flowers such as peonies, orchids and ramsons (wild orchids), with their delicate textures and colours reflected in the intimate and elegant feel for every piece created.

Georgie studied at Central Saint Martins College in London, and, on graduating with a degree in textile design, her collection was bought by a well-known London-based store. She then gained valuable commercial experience designing furnishing fabrics for a large textile producer before moving to the Peak District in 2004 to set up on her own.

## Developing business skills with Leader+

'I wanted to run my own textile business,' Georgie explains, 'but I needed help establishing a business structure. In this line of work you have to know your buying seasons, when to build up your stock and which trade fairs to attend, and it was great to be able to turn to Leader+ for advice and assistance on how to proceed.'

Georgie's first contact was with Youth Enterprise, which is based at the Prince's Trust<sup>(1)</sup> and is one of six projects run by Leader+ LAG, Peak, Dales and Moorlands. They arranged the necessary funding, and, through a low-interest loan, she was able to buy dyes, prints and fabrics to set her on her way. With their help, she put together a business plan and underwent training in business start-up, encouraging her to focus her thoughts on what she wanted to do and where she wanted to go.

Georgie then went on to further develop her financial and commercial skills by attending a course entitled 'Focusing creativity'. It was run by another Leader+ project, 'College of the Peak', through which local people are provided with

learning opportunities and training in the skills, crafts and cultural traditions of the Peak District. Delivered by industry specialists in a deliberately jargon-free manner, the aim is to strike a balance between managing your own creativity and artistic skills with the more practical business aspects of your profession. Here, Georgie learnt about useful matters such as spreadsheets and bookkeeping, and was delighted at the end of the project when the course's accountant passed her work. In addition, Georgie's skills were further enhanced by assistance from Business Link Derbyshire, who arranged specialist training in website design and e-commerce.

## Working with other Leader+ actors

Apart from learning core business skills, Georgie was also prepared to give something back to the local community by sharing her professional knowledge and expertise. She therefore agreed to help with another local Leader+ project, called Gateway, which is a community-based art programme that targets isolated groups in such rural areas as the Peak District which are sometimes hard to reach. Georgie ran a screen printing workshop for women from a neighbouring village who were looking to raise money for their local school. She showed them not just how to produce original and beautiful prints, but also explained the whole process — from initial ideas and designs all the way through to the actual printing. The aim was to encourage these women not just to learn new skills and techniques, but also to use them on new projects and develop their talent.

## Staying with the local market

Georgie hopes to expand her current collection, and, over the last year, her business has enjoyed a steady growth, with new interest from a reputable company in London. Her work has been featured in leading interior design publications as well as the national press. In 2006, Georgie will be exhibiting at 'Pulse' in London, which will be her first major trade show.

However, the various Leader+ projects that Georgie has been involved with have clearly helped her recognise the importance of the local market. She is developing a new workshop in a barn at the back of her cottage, which will also include a showroom for visitors. Georgie's work has been exhibited at nearby Chatsworth, one of Britain's most historic houses and estates, and she has also been commissioned to produce new designs for scarves and ties for the prestigious Bakewell Show. Despite the need to get her name known, and to be aware of the current trends

<sup>(1)</sup> The Prince's Trust was founded in 1976 by The Prince of Wales. The Trust has become the UK's leading youth charity, offering a range of opportunities including training, personal development, business start-up support, mentoring and advice. <http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>



and designs in the fashion world that inevitably centres on London, Georgie wants to stay in the Peak District. 'It might be a long way from the London designers and leading fashion houses, but I find living in a rural setting such as this inspirational. The flowers I use in my designs are those that I see around me every day, and I view the Peak District as a strong label and a positive influence.'

### An inspiration to Leader youth

Such has been Georgie's involvement with Leader+ that she also took part in a series of networking events run by Women's Enterprise, another local Leader+ initiative that seeks to encourage rural women to use their skills in order to create and take advantage of business opportunities. 'It was simply great to meet like-minded people,' Georgie says. 'Getting over the perceived sense of isolation in a rural spot such as this has been vital. Sharing problems, issues and challenges has been a breath of fresh air.'

Leader+ Youth Enterprise Coordinator, Mark Rushworth, says that Georgie has been a true success story. 'Georgie is a great example of the many young people who wish to start up a business in the Peak District and enjoy the benefits of remaining and living in the area. She has attended every course and workshop and taken every opportunity that's been provided. In 2006, I expect the business will continue to grow, providing Georgie with a living wage, whilst also boosting the local rural economy.'

For more information about Georgie's work visit [www.georgieharris.co.uk](http://www.georgieharris.co.uk)

**Member State:** United Kingdom  
**Region:** England  
**Name of LAG:** Peak, Dales and Moorlands  
**Population:** 52 526  
**Surface area:** 1 282 km<sup>2</sup>

#### Project total cost:

EUR 2 100

**EU:** EUR 498

#### Other public funds:

EUR 202

**Private funds:** EUR 1 400

#### Period of project

**eligibility:** May 2005–May 2008

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Georgie Harris, many of whose designs are inspired by nature

Photo provided by the UK national network unit

# NEW MEMBER STATES

## COUNTRY FOCUS:

# Estonia: implementing a Leader+-type measure

By Ave Bremse, Estonian Ministry of Agriculture, Bureau of Rural Policy, responsible for Leader+-type measures



### Introduction

Estonia is one of the smallest of the EU's new Member States with an area of 45 000 km<sup>2</sup>. It stretches 350 km from east to west and 240 km from north to south. Archipelagos form one tenth and lakes about a twentieth of the country's total territory. The population is only 1.36 million, of which nearly 70 % is urbanised. From 1989 to 2004, the number of people working in rural areas was halved. Despite this, people living in rural areas are actively engaged in finding new employment and alternative incomes; also the tertiary sector is strongly developed in the rural areas. They are helped by a general increase in the level of rural activity and a growing network of non-governmental organisations. This provides a strong base for the Leader+-type measure in Estonia.

### Leader as part of the national development plan, 2004–06

In Estonia, as in other new EU countries, Leader will begin as one measure in the national development plan, known as Measure 3.6: local initiative-based development projects. This measure's general objective is to support local-based activities that enable the creation of new jobs, generate

additional incomes and facilitate economic activities in general in rural areas. These will be achieved as follows:

- developing the institutional framework and the skills-base required to implement projects that have the development potential for rural areas, and which are targeted for community development;
- building a model for local development in the form of functioning local action groups, who in turn represent partners at the local level;
- funding pilot projects devised by local action groups which are aimed at engaging the interest of the local population, and which demonstrate the opportunities for implementing local initiatives such as Leader and their related impacts;
- promoting cooperation and the exchange of information and experience.

This procedure already started in the second half of 2005.

### An active village movement and partnerships provide good bases for Leader

A strong countryside sector which brings together volunteers and community-based organisations interested in the development of rural life in Estonia, provides a good basis for Leader-type activity.

Estonia has a strong sector of volunteers and community-based organisations who are active in rural development, and who come together under the umbrella organisation known as Kodukant: a movement of Estonian villages working together as an association of non-governmental organisations. Kodukant's mission is to support the survival, revival and the harmonious development of Estonian rural life and villages. This includes supporting the rural economy and national culture, and bringing together the various village movements. Kodukant is one of the strongest social partners for the Ministry of Agriculture, and representatives of Kodukant have been involved in constructive dialogue concerning the most important rural development plans, including Leader.

In south-east Estonia, there are some areas which have already had experience in applying 'bottom-up' integrated strategies and the partnership principle. In the framework of the rural partnerships programme (RPP), three partnerships in three counties, Põlva, Valga and Võru, have been established, which have already been operating along very similar principles as local action groups under Leader+.

The rural partnerships programme (for sustainable rural livelihoods) was a three-year project financed by the UK Department for International Development in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The programme started in September 2000 and ended in December 2003. The south-east region of Estonia was, as a result of this project, able to gain substantial experience in carrying out locally based development and social inclusion strategies through the partnerships which were set up.

At the heart of the project were the area-based partnership and the preparation and implementation of an area-based strategy. Each partnership was allocated a small global grant intended for demonstrating the impact of small but strategically focused actions. The partnership invited proposals from the communities in target areas, and, following their appraisal, it was decided whether to allocate financial support or not. As a result, there were many very successful projects and activities which were brought into life, and, most importantly, the concept of 'cooperation', involving all the relevant sectors for local development, was born.

### Implementing the Leader-type measure

The intention of the Ministry of Agriculture of Estonia is to use both Option 1 and Option 2 of the Leader-type measure. The public contribution will be divided between these two options as follows: Option 1 (70 %) and Option 2 (30 %).

#### Option 1: Acquisition of skills

The aims of this option are:

- building and developing local action groups (know-how, training, support for studies etc.);
- drawing up integrated development strategies (including technical support for studies of the local area and diagnosis of the territory);
- cooperation between both the internal and international rural regions (exchange of knowledge).

Under this measure, the local action group will receive support for carrying out the steps required to develop a local area strategy based upon local needs. This financial support will provide for facilitation and consultation in the strategy building process, including the local area audit, formulation and setting up of priorities, programming and starting to build up internal and international networking.

#### Option 2: The adoption of integrated territorial rural development strategies

It is expected that some of the applicant groups will have had prior experience of Leader working methods. They should already have a suitable local area strategy, and be able to start projects and investments in their area.

As for Option 1, they can also update their local area strategy, and receive technical assistance for preparatory studies on the local area. In addition, work can start with establishing international relationships and participation in pan-European rural development networks.

The themes for the integrated local area strategy must be along the following specific strategic themes:

- new technologies and know-how for competitiveness of products and areas;
- quality of life in rural areas;
- adding value to local products;
- making the best use of natural and cultural resources.

#### Eligibility criteria for applicant and application

Eligibility criteria for Leader+-type measures were developed and approved in the single programming document of the Estonian monitoring committee.

Both applicant and application must follow the main criteria of the Leader programme, meaning:

- the area must have a population of between 10 000 and 100 000, only properly justified exceptions may be accepted;
- the area of the LAG must be a homogeneous unit, both physically (geographical), economically and socially;
- local action groups must consist of a balanced and representative selection of partners drawn from the different socioeconomic sectors in the area (for example, one municipality can belong to only one LAG. etc.);



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

In addition, there are national criteria:

- the LAG must operate as a legal entity with the status of a non-governmental organisation;
- the area of one LAG should be made up of at least two local municipalities;
- each municipality should 'bring' with them at least two partners from the socioeconomic sector — this means that each municipality should be represented by the municipality itself, an NGO and an entrepreneur;
- the activity of the LAG should be open to new members;
- for the local area strategy, some of the most important aspects are an integrated approach, economic viability, sustainability, internal coherence and the innovative nature of the strategy, and international and inter-regional cooperation.

### Preparation and Leader info-point in Tartu

In 2004–05, the main stress was on the training and information campaigns designed to spread the philosophy and principles of Leader. The Ministry of Agriculture organised some seminars and ministry officials attended others, including info-days and meetings with the municipalities and people living in the countryside. The largest of these seminars took place on 30 November 2005 in Saue.

In cooperation with the ministry, Kodukant organised 10 special seminars around different parts of the country in 2004. Their aim was to promote the integrated, territorial and partnership-based approaches to rural development with the help of experts, especially from Finland and Sweden, already working in Leader+, who could share their experience with potential Estonian LAG managers.

There has been a Leader info-point operating in Tartu since August 2005, which opened as a result of an open call for tenders, and which was awarded to the Institute of Rural Development in Tartu. The info-point provides basic information on the Leader principles, and organises training courses, seminars and consultancy. The institute will also be responsible for national and cross-border networking.

A survey has also been conducted on 'Development of local initiative — Leader-type measures' and, according to this survey, 75.6 % of non-profit associations, 77.5 % of

local governments, 62.7 % of entrepreneurs and 51.7 % of inhabitants are willing to participate in the implementation of the regional strategy. Awareness of Leader is also quite high, with 59.3 % of non-profit-making associations and 56.4 % of the representatives of local governments being aware of Leader.

### LAGs in Estonia

The first Estonian LAG-type association, the Pärnu Gulf Partnership, was founded in December 2003 and was made up of eight local government units. As of March 2006, intensive discussions and negotiations have taken place between different areas, municipalities, entrepreneurs and associations. This will determine who could join together, and in what areas, and establish future LAGs.

On 5 June 2006, Ester Tuiksoo, the Minister for Agriculture, signed the Leader+-type measure, and an open call for tenders was expected in August 2006. It is expected that more than 20 LAGs will apply for both Option 1 and Option 2. It is hoped that around 70–80 % of the whole of Estonia's rural area will be covered by Leader+ LAGs, who will prepare local development strategies for the next programming period, and three LAGs will implement the existing strategies.

## Useful contacts

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## LEADER+ OBSERVATORY SEMINAR

**'Making the best use of natural and cultural resources',  
25-29 April 2006, Schruns, (Vorarlberg), Austria**

### Introduction

The town of Schruns, in the Vorarlberg region of Austria, was the venue for a seminar on the Leader+ theme 'Making the best use of natural and cultural resources'. It was organised by the Leader+ Observatory and hosted by the local LAG Entwicklungsverein Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg. As with the previous Observatory seminars, the event provided an occasion for some 100 LAGs to learn more about the importance of the selected strategic theme through a series of presentations, workshops and roundtable discussions. Representatives of the 19 Member States present were also offered an excellent opportunity to look for new partners for their transnational cooperation projects, or seek interesting projects to join. The second day of the event was also a chance to see at first hand several local Leader+-funded projects, as well as to appreciate how Leader+ is indeed 'making best use' of the regions' abundant natural and cultural resources. The Vorarlberg region is very much a distinct Austrian region, which has much in common, not least its local dialect, with neighbouring Switzerland.

### Leader+ in a local setting

A brief introduction was made by several dignitaries, including Erich Schwärzler of the Landesrat (member of the provincial government) and Peter Hauk, Minister for Agriculture from the Baden-Württemberg *Land*, Germany. Both underlined the importance of involving local people and those elements which give a region its unique identity. Rudolf Lerch, LAG president, and Andreas Neuhauser, LAG director then gave a brief history of their LAG, its place within Leader+, as well as an overview of the development of some its projects (see below). All who spoke shared



Rudolf Lerch, president (right) and Andreas Neuhauser, director of the hosting LAG, Entwicklungsverein Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg, address the seminar



Jean-Baptiste Lanaspèze, APARE, France, gives his views on making best use of cultural resources



'Involving the local population' was the theme of the presentation given by Marie Langhendries, Culturalité en Hesbaya Brabantonne LAG, Belgium





Some key messages given by Jean-Michel Courades, European Commission, Leader+ Observatory

the same view about the success and contribution of the Leader+ programme in creating jobs, and thereby how it has helped to secure the future of the Vorarlberg region. The 'bottom-up' approach is considered very important in making people feel that they have a say about the future of their region, and the flexibility of this particular regional programme provides for this. An overview of the conference theme, and its implementation under Leader+ was presented by Jean-Michel Courades of the European Commission.

Transnational cooperation which began under Leader II, now continues under Leader+, and is considered to be an important element in the plans of the hosting LAG Entwicklungsverein Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg during the forthcoming period. By using Leader+ funding to develop infrastructure and small businesses, many jobs have been created and have now become permanent. The LAG has supported some 50 projects, and there are several key ones which exploit the region's timber and water resources, while others are concerned with developing other things such as 'tourist culinary paths'. In particular, the region's mountain timber has been used in a transnational marketing initiative, and this has led to a greater awareness of the region's existing resources. The LAG has also focused on web-based technologies which offer a quick and flexible communication strategy, which will facilitate the transfer of knowledge to the next programming period.

### Three different thematic approaches

Three experts, with different approaches to 'natural and cultural resources', were invited to express their views. First was Jean-Baptiste Lanaspeze of APARE, France, who talked about the interaction between a region's cultural resources and local development in a rural context, and in particular with respect to architectural and landscape issues. He emphasised the need for educating people about the environment, engaging young people (especially for voluntary work), creating awareness, the need to 'export' the region by establishing links with other regions and countries for developing similar projects and the importance of being commercial and using all available channels, such as distributors, for this purpose.



In keeping with the theme, Professor Kaj Mickos, was suitably innovative in his approach to the subject

Martina Fleckenstein, from the WWF Germany, spoke about the challenges that Natura 2000 sites face in maintaining their biodiversity, and, in particular, achieving sustainable development and opening up new areas whilst preserving a region's nature. This requires a balance between ecology, the economy and social aspects. In Germany, six regions were selected to show the opportunities for nature conservation within the Leader+ framework. The most common type of project accepted for Leader+ funding has been environmentally friendly tourism. Available results about Leader+ show that it has contributed to raising public awareness of environmental issues, the significance of local resources, the value of an area-based strategy to raise income from nature, environment being a base for developing regional identity, and the creation of new jobs in new areas of work. Taking these factors into account, the Leader approach is considered appropriate for nature conservation in the future programming period.

Another approach which concerns the relationship between local development and the cultural landscape was presented by Wolfgang Pfefferkorn, Rosinak & Partner, Austria. His presentation centred around the research project 'Regalp' (regional development and cultural landscape change: the example of the Alps, evaluating and adjusting EU and national policies to manage a balanced change) [www.regalp.at](http://www.regalp.at), which looks at different scenarios for analysing spatial development trends in the alpine region. The research can equally apply to other mountain regions, and examines the differences in regional performance within the region, notably the more 'urbanised' valley floors compared to the higher altitude areas, bi-seasonal changes, population migration and the future effects of climate change.

On the basis of research findings, certain measures were recommended for implementation, which could raise awareness of the landscape issue, and which would provide new opportunities for public participation and decision making in regional planning and research. The results showed close links between the Regalp findings and the Leader+ criteria, namely: the area-based approach (taking into account local aspects); the bottom-up approach



The community centre in the village of Ludesch was the first stop on the cultural tour

(taking account of the views of local stake-holders); innovation (combining local knowledge based on culture and tradition with external expertise); local action group (having someone in place to translate ideas into a local action plan); the integrated project approach; and networking and transnational cooperation (exchange and transfer of experience and ideas).

### Appropriating local resources

Participants also heard about two different approaches to making best use of natural and cultural resources from Belgium and the Netherlands. From the Belgian LAG Culturalité en Hesbaye Brabantonne, Marie Langhendries gave information on a theatre project 'La noce du fils', a project emphasising rural environment, and a project about local heritage and landscape 'Terroir et patrimoine'. All three projects were designed to make the local area more attractive by developing high-quality tourism alongside economic initiatives, as well as creating a greater awareness amongst the population of their regional and cultural heritage. In terms of Leader+, the projects demonstrated the need to involve the private and public sectors and then bring the different parties together. This had been done by implementing a communication strategy which could inform the different communities about what was being done by the other, thereby helping to unite the region.

An innovative approach was presented by Aly Wisse, Societeit Noord Beveland, concerning a Leader+-funded project through the Dutch LAG Noord en Midden Zeeland. By working with an external consultancy, the Countryside Exchange, the local organising committee (LOC) could develop a regional planning tool. This approach shows how an external consultancy, with no initial knowledge



The 'Holzkultur Hlittisau' exhibition centre uses white fir wood to provide the perfect back-drop





Regional crafts from some 100 companies are exhibited in the 'Werkraumdepot' in Schwarzenberg

of the region, can help local people to see their area in a new light, and provide them with the necessary impulse to develop their existing resources (natural landscape and scenery).

### What innovation means for natural and cultural resources

The first speech in this part of the plenary session was given by Kaj Mickos, professor at the University of Mälardalen, Institute for Innovation and Design, Sweden. Here, the focus was on methods that can be used to promote innovation and to motivate people to innovate. He gave the example of a region with little natural resources which could import, innovate and then export the 'value added' product back to the importing region and elsewhere. He also emphasised that regions need to adjust to change and that this impetus needs to come from the people of the region.

In his talk, Christian Husak, from the Austrian national network unit, referred to the importance of certain processes — socio-cultural structures, open-mindedness, economic diversity and 'self-belief' — as being important for innovation in regional development. These were important in or-

der to overcome factors which can hinder a region's development, such as the lack of incentives, and a lack of support for 'visionaries', dependence on public funding, and a misunderstanding about the meaning of innovation.

Key messages and a synthesis were then presented from the morning's plenary sessions, before the conference resumed for the afternoon. There then followed a series of parallel workshops covering the different horizontal themes related to 'natural and cultural resources', as well as 'innovation.' Here the attendees were able to hear about relevant case studies and exchange their ideas and experience with other LAGs. There was also an opportunity for delegates to find cooperation partners via 'roundtables' on specially selected themes, informal meetings, the use of the 'partner search tool', as well as the project exhibition. The key messages were then presented in the afternoon plenary session.

Conclusions from all working sessions (days one and three), along with other conference documentation, speeches and project presentations, can be found on the Leader+ website (<http://ec.europa.eu/leaderplus>).





Adriminho LAG, Portugal, discusses 'human resources as a cultural resource'

### Local field visits

During the second day of the conference, delegates were able to see at first hand several local Leader+ funded projects within the territory of the hosting LAG. These project trips were also facilitated by a 't-guide': an MP3 player which provides the visitor with a personalised account of the different projects. This innovative guide for tourists is also a Leader+ funded project which is featured in *Leader+ Magazine* No 5, which can also be found on the Leader+ website under 'publications'.

On the first stop, and in addition to what had been pre-recorded on the 't-guide', there were presentations about two Leader+ projects: 'Holzbau Kunst' (art in timber construction), which trains young carpenters, and 'Bergholz', a project which has developed the potential of a regional brand, based on local timber, and which is also featured in *Leader+ Magazine*, No 3 (see above website). Subsequent stops included an appreciation of the work of the master builders of the Baroque style 'Barockbaumeister', a studio of regional craftsmen 'Werkraumdepot', project 'Weißtanne' (white fir), where three LAGs work with the timber of the region's local tree, and 'Holzkultur Hittisau', a project which demonstrates the different aspects of the local wood.

### Some final thoughts and conclusions

On the third morning, there were more themed workshops, roundtables and further opportunities for cooperation. There was also a chance to hear from Jean-Michel Courades of the European Commission about the funding possibilities for the seminar theme, under the Leader axis 2007–13. Afterwards, the results of the individual workshops and cooperation roundtables were presented, as

well as a synthesis of results from the conference workshops, including those of the first day, in the form of key messages as follows.

- Awareness raising: it is important to involve local people in the consultation process, and, in particular, try to engage the most active part of the population, for example, youth, enterprises etc.
- Innovation: the pilot nature of Leader+ should be exploited. People should not be afraid of criticism or failure.
- Commercial benefits: ensure that the project results can be translated into tangible commercial benefits. This may mean using experts for training, marketing or business development.
- Future: consider the project's sustainability and the projected outcomes, such as the number of people employed. Link the project's development with the available resources and try not to be too ambitious.
- Leader approach: this is a listening approach linked to 'bottom-up', and requires constant attention and monitoring. It therefore implies creating appropriate forums to stimulate interaction and cooperation.
- Human resources: this is often the most important 'natural and cultural resource' that a region has.

More seminar information concerning the presentations project visits and workshops can be found at the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/29042006\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/29042006_en.htm)

Further information on Leader+ together with a range of useful interactive tools can be found on the Leader+ website:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/leaderplus>



# Leader+ Magazine



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# Leader+ Profile



## Name:

Leader (links between actions for the development for 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.

