

FRANCE

Local development

Location

Ardèche mountains

Programming period

2014 - 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 1.5 m (estimation)

EAFRD 420 000 (initial commitment)

National/regional 897 480

Private 108 000

Project duration

2015 – 2018

Project promoter

LAG 'LEADER Ardèche 3'
& Regional Nature Park Monts
d'Ardèche

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<http://www.lepartagedeseaux.fr/accueil-partagedeseaux.html>

A LEADER project used artistic creations to increase the attractiveness of a remote rural area and stimulate economic activity.

Summary

In order to revive a remote mountainous area with harsh conditions and stimulate economic activity, a LEADER funded project facilitated the creation of a new touristic offer. This new offer was based on artwork inspired by the surrounding landscape, accompanied with an integrated package of activities, such as the organisation of artistic events, studies, advisory services and promotional activities.



Results

During the summer of 2017, over 50 'escape events' were organised in the area.

The Ardèche Tourism Board carried out a feasibility study, reaching an estimate of 50 000 visitors per year. Considering that the average person spends around 15 EUR per day, the economic impact is estimated to be around 750 000 EUR per year.

Contemporary creation inspired by the landscape has become an ongoing process in the area and every year, a new artistic programme is proposed, involving more and more cultural venues in the area.

Lessons & Recommendations

- A LAG can be ambitious with its local development strategy provided that it can overcome delays before the funding arrives.
- Art is fully compatible with rural development and opens up genuine opportunities for remote areas.
- It was a challenge to include public bodies in the project., but they are nevertheless critical to ensure that the project reaches its full potential.

Context

The Ardèche mountains is a 'man-made' mid-mountain rural area that contains many valleys that are difficult to reach. With an altitude of over 1 000 m, it also includes a vast plateau that is scarcely populated and has tough climate conditions. The valleys used to be overpopulated at the turn of the 20th Century. People lived from subsistence agriculture and a range of small industries benefitted from low-cost but agile manpower and the 'free' energy of watercourses. The plateau was mainly dedicated to ovine breeding.

Rural exodus and the gradual disappearance of industrial activity in the valleys had a great impact on the area until the 1970s. Around that time, the valleys experienced a renaissance with new populations seeking alternative ways of living. Newcomers contributed to many innovative experiments in the fields of agriculture, environment, culture and services. However, the plateau continued to experience desertification due to the enlarging of farms and the disappearance of basic services. The constant efforts to promote quality products (meat and milk) and the development of outdoor tourism (hiking, Nordic skiing, etc.) hasn't been able to reverse this trend.

A far-reaching and large-scale innovation was necessary to shift the image of this part of the Nature Park, in order to open up new perspectives. This is precisely the rationale behind this artistic route along the watershed line. The watershed line between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic crosses over 120 km through the Regional Nature Park at an altitude of more than 1 000 m. It intertwines with the national hiking trail GR7, which crosses France from the Vosges to the Eastern Pyrenees. The itinerary includes admirable geological sites and some emblematic heritage buildings.

This symbolic and geological line inspired six artists, a designer and three landscape architects. The art concept is based upon the idea of exchange and contrast. On the one hand, water is a natural element that circulates and it symbolises the element of exchange. On the other hand, the watershed line is a symbol of contrasts in climate, geographical diversity and cultures. The ambition was to combine these two components of 'exchange' and 'contrast' and translate them into a tangible outdoor art gallery by inviting artists, designers and landscapers to create a unique work of art.

Objectives

The ambition was to radically transform the image of this hard-to-access part of the Park. Ardèche attracts 500 000 visitors every year to the Chauvet caves in Pont d'Arc, and several hundred thousand tourists to the Ardèche Gorges. The idea was to capitalise on this interest and shift it towards an original and outstanding cultural offer in a remote area.



Activities

The LEADER support stemmed from the operational goal entitled 'Transforming our assets into development drivers'. Under this heading, the following types of intervention were supported: ·

- Building and production of art work;
- Landscape and road development to host the works of art;
- Studies, expertise and advisory services related to the artistic route (i.e. landscaping, legal expertise, etc.);
- Facilitation and coordination related to the launch of the artistic route; and
- Information, communication, promotion and dissemination activities, including the organisation of events and exhibitions in relation to the artistic route.

The artistic route 'Partage des Eaux' was launched in July 2017. Hikers and mountain bikers, who cross the Park following or crossing this route, will discover original outdoor furniture designed by Eric Benqué and made of local natural resources (chestnut timber) with local know-how. As for motorists and cyclists, the collective of artists Toplamak has designed a GPS (GeoPoéticSociety) to accompany travellers from one site to another, while telling them about the landscape through space and time.

Main Results

The main artistic spots are being complemented by artistic 'escape events' (*échappées*) in the surroundings. For instance, the nearby town centre of Aubenas organised a 'pop-up boutique' during the summer months, hosted in a prestigious inner city building, gathering over 50 arts and crafts professionals from the Ardèche region. The event was promoted and publicised through the 'Watershed line' communication campaign, as well as the traditional dissemination channels of the tourism board.

During the summer of 2017, over 50 'escape events' were organised locally. In the future, the idea is to multiply these events and combine them with a sports' offer along the watershed line: hiking, cycling, cross-country skiing, etc. Beyond this tourism and leisure offer, the aim is to encourage people to develop new economic activities.

The Ardèche Tourism Board carried out a feasibility study, reaching an estimate of 50 000 visitors per year. Considering that the average person spends around 15 EUR per day, the economic impact is estimated to be around 750 000 EUR per year. This is without taking into account the direct impact of creating the art route. Overall, it was anticipated that 60% to 70% of the budget would be directly reinvested locally.

Contemporary creation inspired by the landscape, has become an ongoing process in the area. Every year, a new artistic programme is proposed, involving more and more cultural venues in the area. Public and private partnerships are getting stronger.

Key lessons

The message is twofold: you can be ambitious with LEADER while staying committed to the principles of citizen involvement and local empowerment.

On the negative side, an investor needs to be in a strong financial position because financial support comes on a refund basis. Such large investments require significant cash flow capacity over a long period of time. It would not have been possible to ensure financial stability of the project without the back up of the Nature Park and a very committed and professional staff.

The main challenge was to include the major public players in the loop (local and regional government) in order to give a new opportunity to the remote rural area.

Art is fully compatible with rural development and opens up genuine opportunities for remote areas.

The commitment of local citizens in support of the preparation and implementation of the project was a positive surprise. On each of the sites, groups of local people made proposals to develop complementary activities in order to extend the visitors' time in the area.



Additional sources of information

www.parc-monts-ardeche.fr/

http://www.parc-monts-ardeche.fr/images/phocadownload/synthse_strategie_gal_ardeche3_070416.pdf