

FRANCE

Promoting economic development in rural areas

Location
Bergerac

Programming period
2014 - 2020

Priority
P6 - Social inclusion & local Development

Measure
M19 - LEADER

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 61 224
EAFRD 30 292
National/Regional 30 932

Project duration
2015 – 2016

Project promoter
Web Association
Bergeracoise (WAB)

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Website
<https://la-wab-bergerac.fr/>

LEADER support helped establish a web school for local businesses providing them with the tools to better organise their work and market their services and products.

Summary

Existing training for local businesses offered by local authorities in the area of Dordogne, France, did not focus enough on digital aspects. In 2016, a new social enterprise was created to help change this. The social enterprise called the Wab, aimed to boost digital use among small rural businesses and has the wider ambition to install a digital city in Bergerac.

The 'Wab' is designed to boost the use of digital tools among small rural businesses in the area. It is a 'web school' that teaches local businesses to design effective strategies that incorporate digital aspects in organising work, communication and marketing.



Main Results

48 local business managers attended a 4 day (28 hours) crash course on digital tools for business development.

A free, confidential and personalised report was delivered to 120 small rural businesses in the LEADER area, providing them with a comprehensive analysis of their digital status, including recommendations for digital business development.

Key Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Training offered to rural businesses must focus on digital aspects to improve the organisation of work and marketing.
- ❑ Carrying out a survey in the initial stages of a project helps target where digital training is most needed.
- ❑ Tourism and agriculture both benefit from digital marketing.

Context

Job creation and economic development have always been at the heart of the LEADER strategy for the [Pays du Grand Bergeracois](#), located in Dordogne (New Aquitaine region). Conventional training offers displayed by consular chambers and other local operators seemed insufficient to meet the demand for digital training stemming from small enterprises, especially in the field of rural tourism.

The Wab, a social enterprise created in 2016, was the perfect project promoter to boost digital use among small rural businesses located in the area.

With the wider ambition to install a digital city in Bergerac, the Wab's idea to create a web school in Bergerac, Dordogne, came from tangible needs stemming from small rural businesses. They expressed their lack of capacity to design effective strategies that encapsulate digital aspects in the organisation of work, communication and marketing. Fieldwork to accompany them into a better mastering of digital tools for their professional development seemed essential.

Objectives

The aim of the project is to accompany small rural businesses through a digital transition, to help them define coherent digital strategies and identify new opportunities and markets for their business development.

In operational terms, the initial goals were (i) to organise an online survey, (ii) to undertake technical analysis of digital uses in 120 rural businesses, (iii) to deliver individual roadmaps for digital business development.

Activities

The project was implemented in 2016 in three successive strands of activities:

(i) Online survey

An online questionnaire using Google forms was prepared and addressed to 2 000 companies in Dordogne, among which 1 200 located in the LEADER area. This part of the project is conducted in partnership with the Government department of Employment at sub-regional level ([Dordogne](#)). The survey consisted of four main categories of questions: (a) perception of digital tools; (b) equipment & budget dedicated to digital tools; (c) digital needs and (d) challenges. The most salient results of this survey are summarised below (see Results).

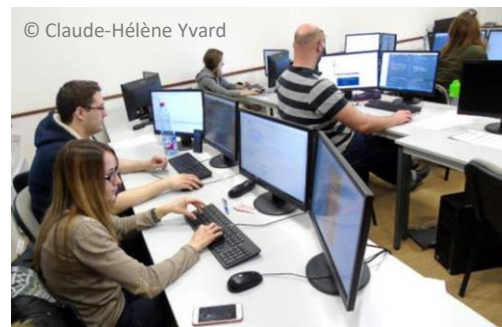
(ii) Digital audit

A digital audit is the result of a 2 hour interview with the business manager. In return, the manager gets a free report summarising the state of his/her company in terms of digital equipment and skills. A SWOT analysis of the digital transition path is also performed on the basis of the identification of difficulties and challenges, prioritising the needs of each individual company.

(iii) Digital roadmap for digital business development

On the basis of the digital audit, each business manager can enter a 4 day individual training path coordinated by the Wab. Each digital training path includes a combination of courses selected among a portfolio of 30 vocational training courses on digital skills. After this 'crash course', if necessary, the Wab provides information on available public funding schemes for digital investment.

New ideas and projects abound at the Wab: the launch of the creation of an Employers' Alliance system (groupement d'employeurs) (spring 2017) – also supported by LEADER, a 'tiers lieu' or co-working space (September 2017), an incubator, etc.



More recently (March 2017), the Wab launched a training module called 'Digital master key' (Sésame Numérique), displaying 700 hours in the classroom and 168 hours on the job, for anyone over 16 years old interested in engaging in a digital job. This training module has been labelled as 'Digital High School' (Grande Ecole du Numérique), a national scheme launched in 2015 with the aim to train 10 000 people in France by the end of 2017.

The transition to the digital area remains a very promising avenue for the Bergerac area, where rural tourism is increasing since the opening of the International Centre for Cave Art in 2016 at the foot of the Lascaux hill. Meanwhile there is increasing demand from the agricultural sector to get digital advisory services and skills training for their activities.

Results

(i) Online survey

The response rate varies between 10% and 25% according to the category of questions. The most salient points can be resumed as follows:

53% consider digital tools as an opportunity for business growth;

82% of small rural businesses have a web presence;

54% of small rural businesses use social media for their business promotion and marketing;

42% only have a formal digital strategy;

28% only have planned specific expenditure for their digital development.

In terms of needs and challenges:

53% of small rural businesses would like to improve existing tools;

44% would like further coaching and training, including free digital audit;

71% lack of time to engage into digital transition;

50% think their knowledge on digital tools is too poor to make good decisions;

46% think digital tools are too expensive.

(i) Digital audit

A free, confidential and personalised report was delivered to 120 small rural businesses of the LEADER area, providing them with a comprehensive analysis of their digital status, including some early recommendations for digital business development.

(i) Digital roadmaps

As a direct consequence of the digital audit, 48 local business managers attended a 4 day (28 hours) crash course, allowing them to grasp the key aspects of digital tools for their business development.

Lessons

- The Wab is registered as a training and apprenticeship operator. Participants are trained through Apprenticeship contracts or Training-on-the-job contracts ('contrats de professionnalisation' in French), which are subsidised contracts aiming to upgrade skills.
- Another interesting aspect of this initiative is that LEADER support intervenes only on a specific part of the project: the full scope of the digital audit covers the whole of Dordogne (2 000 businesses), whereas the LEADER support covers only the digital audits of businesses located in the greater area of Bergerac (1 200 businesses), corresponding to the LAG area. The target indicator is thus adjusted to 60% of the total, corresponding to the percentage of business located in the LEADER area. This allowed for a dynamic partnership between the national, regional and sub-regional stakeholders in charge of training and social inclusion.

"We proceeded to 210 audits of local companies, mainly small rural businesses with less than 10 employees, in all kinds of sectors. Tourism professionals were well represented. We realised that in terms of digital use, Dordogne is slightly behind, although the level of equipment is rather good"

Alban Brettes, the Wab manager"

Additional sources of information

www.aqui.fr/politiques/a-bergerac-la-wab-une-ecole-pour-les-passionnes-du-web_15198.html

www.pays-de-bergerac.com/le-pays/programme-leader/index.asp