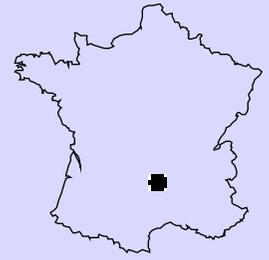


UPPER LOIRE AND MEZENC VALLEY (Auvergne, France)



# Archéo-Logis: a link between research and development

## The action

In a rural area particularly rich in archaeological heritage, researchers and local players were unaware of each other's activities for nearly 25 years. In 1997, under the impetus of LEADER, the situation changed radically with the creation of Archéo-Logis (Archaeological Centre), which combines conservation of the local heritage activities with research, information and awareness-raising activities. As a result, the area has a new élan and is acquiring a new image, thanks to the development of cultural and scientific forms of tourism.

## The key elements

- > Overcoming the absence of linkage between the scientific world and local development, whose approaches to action are different.
- > Creation of a research centre that encourages researchers to work locally.
- > Transfer to and ownership by the local population of local heritage-related scientific knowledge. Development, in the rural areas, of scientific activities usually confined to urban areas.
- > Modification of the area's image through the dissemination of scientific knowledge relating to local heritage.
- > Opening up the area to Europe and the world through the universality of science.

## The context

Human presence in the upper Loire and Mézenc valley is more than 90 000 years old. The volcanic nature of the soil has preserved traces of prehistoric human life. The valley, rightly, prides itself on its outstanding archaeological heritage.

Since 1973, this heritage has been the centre of archaeological research carried out in the framework of French research policies (within the CNRS [National Centre for Scientific Research]) but without a direct impact on the local economy and development.

Additionally, in the face of the demographic decline that rural areas in this region are experiencing, local players are concerned about the future of their area. The forming, in 1992, of an inter-district syndicate bringing together 19 districts - which later became a joint association involving 26 districts - is evidence of the local public authorities' willingness to find common solutions to their problems. In 1996-97, the project went a step further with the launching of a LEADER II programme, which involved 31 districts. For the first time, a partnership-based approach was put in place at a local level. It brought together a local development agency and a wide range of local public and private players.

## Starting point

With the aim of promoting the area's prehistoric and volcanic resources on the basis of work carried out by researchers, the (LAG) LEADER group undertook the initiative to organise an initial meeting with archaeologists and the association CDERAD (Centre de documentation, d'étude et de re-

cherche archéologique départemental - Departmental Centre for Documentation, Consultancy and Research in Archaeology). The idea was to facilitate collaboration between researchers and development agents in the design and implementation of a cultural and scientific tourist project. The archaeologists were in search of significant logistical means and appeared particularly keen on finding original ways of disseminating the findings of their 25 years of research. On the basis of this transfer of knowledge, local development players aimed to create a new identity for the area.

## Implementation

The LAG's main concern was to attract researchers and to provide them with laboratories and space for storing the materials they had collected. The materials were to be made accessible to the public.

The LAG discovered a former convent building that had been abandoned. The new layout of the building was agreed on by a convention between CDERAD and the district association. Part of the building was to be used as a depot where prehistoric or geological materials discovered during excavation exercises would be itemized and stored. To create this space, the parties involved were required to sign a convention with the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs specifying the role of each partner.

The scientists, under the directorship of one of the chief archaeologists, made a commitment to provide the LAG with a programme whereby knowledge would be transferred on a yearly basis on renewable themes. The CDERAD was charged

with managing and facilitating the activities taking place in the building. It was on this basis that the centre was created in 1997. Archéo-Logis undertook its first activities in 1998.

Very quickly, the Archéo-Logis project grew beyond its national borders and turned into a cross-border co-operation project co-ordinated by LEADER's Auvergne co-operation unit.

### **Financing**

In 1998, the total running cost of the centre was EUR 44 275, to which should be added another EUR 23 200 spent on organising an international colloquium on the scientific dating of ashes. Three sources of funding bore the majority of these costs:

- > the CNRS bore 37% of the activity costs and 24% of the colloquium costs;
- > the joint district association financed 32% of the activity costs;
- > LEADER provided 28% of the funding for activity costs and 50% for the organisation of the colloquium.

Some of the actions were financed by Auvergne and Aquitaine regional councils and by the French Ministry of Culture. The LEADER and LEONARDO programmes facilitated the participation of trainees in the colloquium.

### **Elements of innovation for the area**

#### ***Mobilisation and social cohesion***

The creation of the archaeological centre has radically modified relations between researchers and local players and stimulated reciprocal interest:

- > while pursuing their research activities, scientists and trainees actively collaborate in public information and awareness-raising activities thus giving another dimension to their work;
- > the centre has generated a growing interest among development agents and improved their knowledge of the local heritage. It is today perceived as a real development opportunity and a potential source of considerable revenue for the area. The combined activities of the centre attracted nearly 2 000 visitors in its first year of activity (1998), thus increasing the turnover of certain hoteliers by 12 to 20%.

#### ***Activities and employment***

In the framework of the agreement established for the creation of the centre, various scientific activities have been conducted, notably:

- > archaeological research proper, e.g. scientific analysis of gathered materials and preparation of monographs describing prehistoric sites;
  - > exhibitions, guided tours and initiation and demonstration days are prepared for groups on request. Two exhibitions were opened for public viewing in 1998; one entitled "The Prehistory of Fishing" and the other "Images of Man and Volcanoes". A third on "Prehistoric Hunting" was scheduled for 1999. The exhibitions can be converted into a travelling exhibition to be taken around the area;
  - > six conferences based on various archaeological disciplines and targeting specialists were organised in 1998 and four more in 1999.
  - > the centre hosts international colloquia of which the first ("Ash Dating and Man-Volcano Coexistence"), held in 1998, was organised in collaboration with the ISPP (International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences) and the INQUA (International Association for the Study of the Quaternary).
  - > various films, publications and brochures targeting the scientific community and the public were produced.
- These scientific and cultural tourism activities, based on the exploitation of local prehistoric and geological resources, constitute a premise for a new form of development.

#### ***Management of space and local resources***

While the archaeological centre has a conservation function, its creation has enabled the local heritage to be safeguarded and promoted locally, thus avoiding the transfer of this cultural asset to museums in large cities. The rehabilitation of an abandoned historical building, that was unwieldy to convert for any other purpose, has also enhanced the objective of promoting local heritage.

#### ***Migration and vocational rehabilitation***

The centre has encouraged researchers involved in the project to settle in the area. Furthermore, the centre's activities attract scientists from all over the world (70 researchers from 11 countries participated in the colloquium held in 1998) and student trainees who, apart from their research activities, also welcome visitors or facilitate certain activities.

### **UPPER LOIRE AND MEZENC VALLEY**

About 20 000 people live in this LEADER area situated in the centre of France. The area lies between the valley of the Loire River and the volcanic massif of Mount Mézenc (1 754 m). The LEADER area comprises 31 districts. The average altitude is 1 000 m. Nearly exclusively dependent on agriculture, the population of this area, currently undergoing economic decline, has considerably diminished in the last twenty years. This has obliged the local players and elected representatives to search for development alternatives, notably in tourism. In the early 1980s, a large dam project undertaken on the Loire and later abandoned for ecological reasons, had already contributed to creating an initial mobilising effect in this direction.

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