



Réseau wallon
de Développement Rural

Walloon Network for Rural Development

Design, management
and relevant practices
of networking

October 2012



Wallonie



Fonds européen agricole pour le développement rural : l'Europe investit dans les zones rurales.

Rural Development in Belgium

Rural Development in Belgium is managed on a decentralised basis by the two main regions of the country, Flanders and Wallonia, each of which has responsibility for rural development policy implementation in their region. In Wallonia, overall responsibility is undertaken by the General Directorate of Agriculture, whilst in Flanders the responsibility lies within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. There is one National Strategic Plan which provides the overall framework for rural development policy in Belgium and then for each region there are separate Rural Development Programmes, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies for each region. The Belgian National Strategy Plan includes a national chapter and two regional chapters.

Rural development policy objectives

The main strategic objectives for rural development in Belgium are similar in both Flanders and Wallonia, primarily focusing upon improving the competitiveness of the agri-food sector by improving skills and encouraging investment in the sector, improving the environment, diversifying the rural economy, increasing rural employment opportunities, preserving the rural heritage, maintaining quality landscapes, protecting traditional rural villages and enhancing the quality of life in rural areas.

Priorities for each axis on the Walloon strategy

- encourage the creation of added value in the agriculture and forestry, and business processing and marketing of agricultural and forestry by encouraging the improvement of quality, innovation and diversification;
- improve the recovery of agricultural and forestry by encouraging their transformation through agribusiness development and enhancement of all products

- of agriculture and forestry in bioenergy;
- enable farmers and agribusiness firms to adapt quickly to changing environment and improve their working conditions;
- encourage skills development and training;
- encourage complementarity of agriculture and forestry with the environment;
- preserve and develop areas of high natural value;
- protecting biodiversity;
- contribute to achieving the objectives of the European directive on water and climate change mitigation;
- create economic activities and jobs in rural areas by supporting the diversification and development of non-agricultural activities;
- improve overall quality of life in rural areas through the establishment of local services, trans-communal partnerships and the development and revitalization of heritage buildings and natural areas;
- develop and implement local development strategies;
- improve governance and mobilize the endogenous development potential of rural areas.

Taking into account the additional financing provided by the CAP Health Check, the European Economic Recovery Package (EERP) and Modulation, greater strategic priority is given to the new challenges noted above.

In Wallonia, strategic priority is being given to initiatives that contribute to water management (37%), climate change mitigation and adaptation (25%), biodiversity (25%) and additional support for the restructuring of the dairy sector (13%).

Measurement code	Entitled	Funding
Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector		222 millions
111	Vocational training and information actions	
112	Setting up of young farmers	
121	Modernisation of agricultural holdings	
123	Adding value to agricultural and forestry products	
132	Participation of farmers in food quality schemes	
Axis 2 - Improving the environment and the countryside		188 millions
212	Payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas	
213	Natura 2000 payments and payments linked to Directive 2000/60/EC	
214	Agri-environment payments	
224	Natura 2000 payments	
Axis 3 - Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy		37 millions
311	Diversification into non-agricultural activities	
312	Support for business and development	
313	Encouragement of tourism activities	
321	Basic services for the economy and rural population	
323	Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	
331	Training and information	
Axis 4 - Leader		20 millions
411,412,413, 421 et 431	Implementing local development strategies	

Design of Walloon Network for rural Development

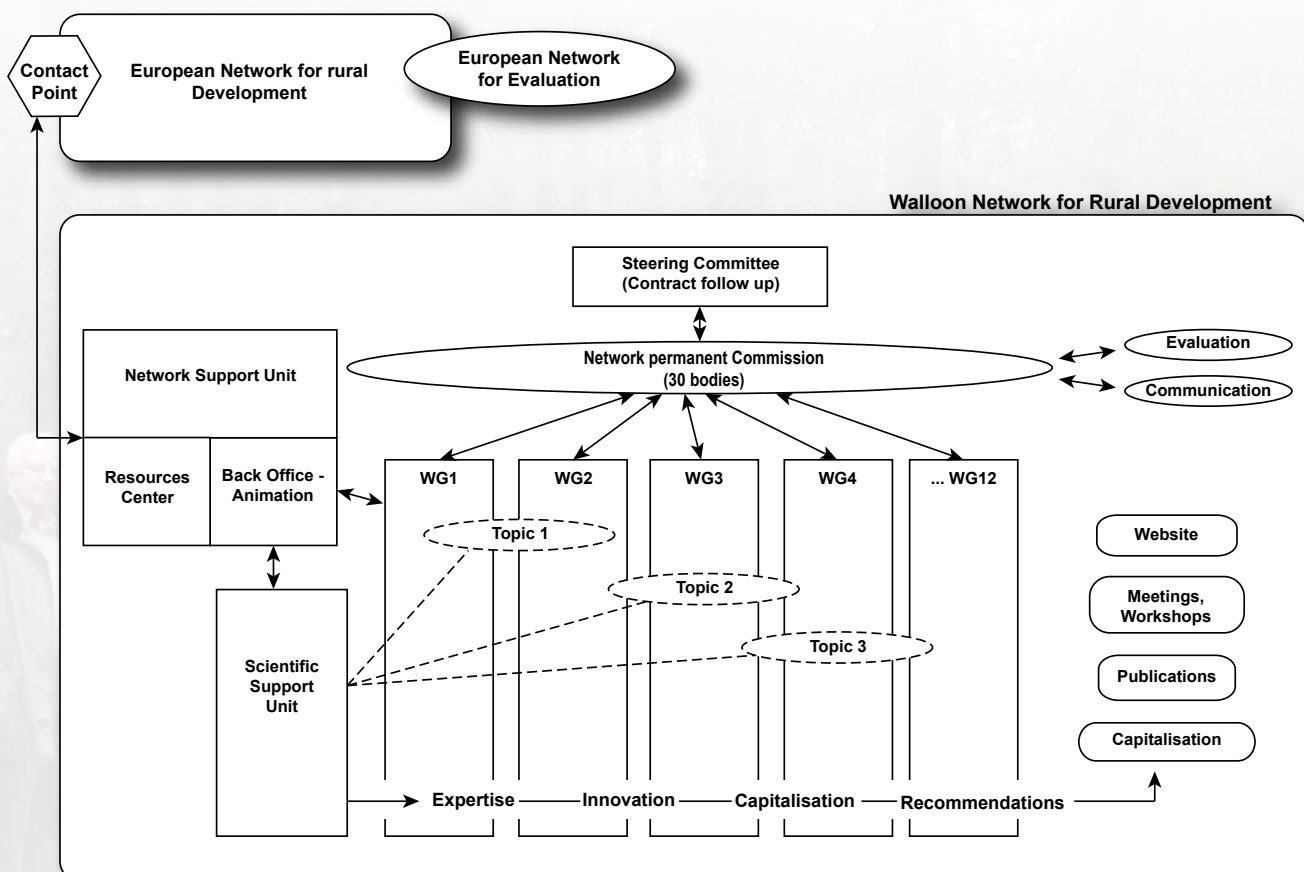
The Walloon Network for rural Development consists of a number of concentric circles. It is officially composed of around thirty members (the first circle) representing public administrations, associations and professional organizations involved in rural affairs.

The composition of the Network was officially endorsed in 2009 by the Minister of Agriculture. These thirty members form the Network's permanent commission. A network support unit is formally assigned by the administration to co-ordinate the Rural Network and therefore to network, communicate, make use of and encourage collaborative interactions with other member states.

The permanent Network Commission defines the priorities in terms of initiatives, plans their implementation over time, establishes and tracks thematic groups. In a wider context, the Commission is also responsible for analysing the progress of the Walloon Region's policies on rural development and for ensuring the treatment of information from the European Network.

The Network consists above all of the beneficiaries of the Rural Development Program (agricultural producers, foresters, associations, communes, companies, training organisations, citizens, young people and women, etc.). These are the prioritised target-groups of coordination and communication initiatives.

Thirty associations or administrations are members of the permanent Network Commission: *Association des Centres culturels, Accueil Champêtre en Wallonie, Commissariat Général au Tourisme, Fédération des Parcs naturels, Fédération de l'Energie d'origine renouvelable et alternative (EDORA), Fédération des industries alimentaires (Fevia), Fédération des Jeunes Agriculteurs, Fondation Rurale de Wallonie, Fédération Unie des Groupements d'Éleveurs et Agriculteurs, Fédération Wallonne de l'Agriculture, les Groupes d'Action Locale (3), Gîtes de Wallonie, Inter-Environnement Wallonie, Ministères de la Communauté Française et de la Communauté Germanophone, Nature Terres et Forêts, Les Plus Beaux Villages de Wallonie, le réseau des Agences de Développement Local, DG Agriculture, Ressources Naturelles et Environnement (3), DG Aménagement du Territoire, Logement, Patrimoine et Energie, DG Economie, Emploi et Formation, Union des Classes Moyennes, Union Wallonne des Entreprises, Valbiom.*



«Key instances of mobilisation are thematic oversight groups, management board meetings, general assemblies, federating events which bring partners together. It is essentially on these occasions that partners express themselves on the opportunities and assessments of projects.»

GAL Culturalité en Hesbaye brabançonne

For several partners of the Network, it was necessary to have a clear view of networking practices. As preparatory work, a study was conducted and results were presented to stakeholders during a regional seminar (June 2012). It introduced a wide reflexion on networking : added value, partnerships, mobilisation, management of a network, innovation,...

A systemic picture of the networks involved in the Walloon Network for rural Development

In order to obtain a clear view of the way members of rural network interact and develop their own networking, the Network Support Unit found it useful to conduct a small-scale systemic analysis of the functioning of network members in respect of their own networking practices.

The method chosen was the systemic approach. This allows the observer to obtain a view of the complexity of systems, and in practical terms, to identify the interactions between the individual components, to avoid simple linear relationships of cause and effect, and the expression of value judgements..

This was undertaken by means of a questionnaire designed to define this functioning and identify the key issues relevant to networking.

The functioning of Network members

Nearly all the members involved are aware of the context in which they are acting. They are conscious of social development, and of everything which could influence their activities or interest their members. The more an organisation sets out to be useful to its members, to address their needs, to justify its existence, the more open it has to be to the context.

Aims and activities, and their relation

Many of the bodies which have been analysed are developing the same type of activity: training, information, field visits, needs assessment, supervision and support, networking, project implementation, oversight, etc. The training courses at the disposal of members are numerous. In view of the lack of feedback on this subject, the question is raised: who is taking part? How is it implemented in practice? What is the resistance to change? How are they perceived?

In a general way, the activities are adapted to the aims of the structures which have been assessed.

Members

Members can be divided into generic types: individuals or legal entities (individuals as legal entities, public or private). In the case of individuals as legal entities, their identification and classification appears to be easier.

Most organisations need to maintain geographical proximity to their members. This requirement translates into an "informal organisation" in the form field visits or decentralised meetings and/or an organisation formalised through the management of decentralised units (by province, cantons, etc.).

Certain structures identify problems in mobilising and motivating their members.



«The work of the Federation consists of networking various participants, providing information on different programs, and ensuring representation in other networks.»

Fédération des Parcs Naturels

Some mention the absence of strategy or method in mobilisation. Mobilisation is mainly brought about:

- through federating events (Les Plus Beaux Villages de Wallonie, Fédération des Parcs naturels)
- through formal events in the structure's calendar (management board meetings etc.), (Groupes d'Action Locale)
- through the introduction of innovative themes or those which attract a wide interest (current affairs etc.) (Fédération des Gîtes de Wallonie)
- because the structure has an official role and is therefore of specific interest to potential members (Walloon Union of Enterprises/UWE)
- at the annual assessment meeting required in the framework of LEADER procedures (Local Action Groups)
- around the design of common products (Fédération des Gîtes de Wallonie)
- through the electoral system at local, regional, or provincial levels, allowing the regular renewal of representatives and the assignment of time-limited mandates (FWA, FJA, UAW)
- by communications tools which "bring to mind good memories", offer advice and services in order to foster member loyalty.

Most of these structures have few or no tools at their disposal to measure either mobilisation, the reception or the perception of the information sent. Some have established a statistical record on the transmission of their information newsletter. On a qualitative level, the returns are more difficult to measure: exclusively if there are returned mails, direct contacts, etc.

In regard of the expression of members' needs, this is brought about:

- during the gatherings which take place at various levels, working groups, meetings, etc.
- in the context of internal debate, such as management board meetings, the Comité des Contacts of the UWE, where chief executives of sector associations meet
- through questionnaires distributed during meetings
- through direct requests.

Networking and its added value

The interactions are numerous. Members of the Walloon Network for rural Development act within several networks operating at different levels (local, regional, supranational) or are collective members of other entities. Apart from "networking", they collaborate on the implementation of one-off projects, jointly-developed products, etc. Networking can take place horizontally (across networks) or vertically (within them).

The added-value of networking can be expressed in the following ways:

- bond of solidarity
- exchange of experiences between peers

- exchanges of information on practical projects
- exchanges of good practices, techniques
- launching of new initiatives
- synergies in the implementation of practical projects
- improved mutual understanding

The Network Attitude

One of the conclusions of the analysis is that internal networking between the members of an organisation is predominant relative to external networking, which means outside the network created by the organisation.

We can conclude that the *Network Attitude* can be characterised by the following features:

- this networking is brought about according to affinity (convergence of objectives, shared values, etc.)
- this networking takes place between peers
- this networking addresses needs which are relatively easily identified
- this networking takes place within a limited physical area (there has to be a certain proximity), as if organisations were looking for a local optimum without being aware of the existence of a global optimum.

First conclusions

We have collected evidence allowing us to assess partially the functioning of the Walloon Network for rural Development (RwDR). In fact, we have, at this stage, collected information on the functioning of members, but it is difficult to consolidate these operations to draw conclusions at the level of the RwDR (systemically). However, analysis of the evidence gathered so far allows us to formulate certain hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Member organisations network with organisations close to their needs identified in terms of affinities. Here, the Walloon network for rural development modifies the rule for functioning by saying: "We all sit round the table even if no common need has been identified or if no great affinity exists", and promote a broader networking with one or several less easily identifiable aims. This is one of the features on which the RwDR should capitalise to allow new needs and new collaborations to emerge.

Hypothesis 2: The RwDR would operate as a wider network between peers. It would reproduce on a broader scale that which already exists between its members. The challenge there would be to discover other optimum local solutions – or would it just be a case of getting out of one hole to find yourself in another ?

Furthermore, as far as this analysis is concerned, it could be refined/completed by the experience and knowledge of those closely involved in the RwDR: the two visions have to be complementary.



Focus on our 12 working groups

WG 1 - The rational use of energy and renewable energy in agriculture

This working group aims to network participants from Wallonia involved in providing assessments and advice on the energy performance and production of agricultural producers, notably by undertaking a typology of agricultural producers based on technical and economic parameters, in order to provide recommendations on rational energy use adapted to different producer profiles. Database assembly and the compilation of information sheets to support investment decision-making in the realm of REU/RE and energy efficiency is also included in the work of this WG (initiative undertaken in partnership with Valbiom, the CRA-W, the CER, the FWA/CGTA, the FUGEA and the SPIGVA). This work was the topic of a regional workshop on “Diversity and catalysts for the improvement in the energy performance of agricultural producers”. It is intended that the information sheets will be updated according to developments of regulatory requirements and advances.

In the near future, the WG will organise visits to agricultural producers which have made progress in their energy performance, and will closely examine the territorial approaches to energy management: analytical tools, methods, etc. This WG liaises with the European network dedicated to renewable energy ELREN2, together with the European network for small rural communes for energy neutrality RURENER of which the LAG Burdinale-Mehaigne is member.

WG 2 - Erosion, mud-flows and floods (On hold)

This working group has considered the fight against water erosion of soils, mud-flows, and floods, notably through analysis of existing resources in Wallonia, and has also considered the types of public/private partnerships with the potential to drive new initiatives which can deliver measures and tangible developments in the field.

A typology of existing situations in the Walloon Region relating to the fight against water erosion of soils, mud-flows and floods, the identification of good practices to be disseminated, the analysis of methods and tools available to local stakeholders, agricultural practices and measures, as well as alternative techniques (toolbox for local administrations) in sustainable and integrated management of rainwater, have all been considered by this WG, which has notably consisted of exchanges of good practices between the Flemish Region and the Walloon Region (legislation, incentives, an erosion coordinator, public/private partnerships, subsidies, etc.)

The members of this WG subsequently drew up the key recommendations of the WG with regard to institutions, legislation, awareness-raising, information and training, co-ordination of stakeholders, and research. The different undertakings and results of this WG are presented in the Network’s first information booklet.

WG 3 – Young farmers and multi-functional agriculture

This WG is addressing a number of issues and tasks:

- Development of a professional frame of reference and an index of skills associated with the profession of agricultural producer today and tomorrow.
- Production of videos, testimonies of young farmers from Wallonia. This serves both as a presentational support, and as a showcase for Walloon agriculture and the role which young agricultural producers will play. Different topics are addressed: farm purchases, multi-functional agriculture, the environment and energy, networks, the role of the entrepreneur and company manager, regulatory aspects.
- Creation of an educational toolbox for use by instructors in the field of agriculture and by students and future agricultural producers who wish to examine the different skills of agricultural producers and their experiences in this context (training, personal projects, supervision).

WG 4 – Eco-systemic services, public goods, and territorial metabolism

This WG is addressing a number of issues and tasks:

- Analysis of the willingness of (young) agricultural producers to adopt new environmental management techniques
- Examination and dissemination of the concepts of public goods and environmental services linked to 1) agriculture, 2) the multi-functional forest, and 3) environmental services provided by enterprises and the methods of remuneration which have been implemented.
- Economic assessment of eco-systemic services (SES) provided in the context of rehabilitation of quarries.

Through field visits (Ferme Grignon-énergie positive, expérimentale d'AgroParisTech, ISO 14000 farms, the Terr'Avenir association, and the club biomasse Ile de France) the WG is undertaking a task of awareness-raising among rural stakeholders based on the themes of "Eco-systemic services, Public goods and territorial metabolism".

The WG will also examine assessment methods used to determine the value of environmental public goods through the analysis of studies conducted on this subject and the dissemination of their results as well as CO2 compensation mechanisms.

WG 5 - Agro-forestry

This working group aims to network participants from Wallonia involved in agro-forestry and/or implementing agro-forestry projects in Wallonia and to undertake in-depth thinking on this topic.

Notably through field visits to agro-forestry and silvo-pastoral experiments in France (Pas de Calais and Picardie) and the organisation of a regional workshop dedicated to the identification of benchmarks to be considered in launching an agro-forestry project in Wallonia, a first draft technical guide (CEDAF) and institutional recommendations have been drawn up. The WG is currently following up the creation of the AWAF (Walloon agro-forestry association) and is identifying existing agro-forestry projects in Belgium in order to record and pool experiences. It will also focus on measures and frames of reference allowing implementation of agro-forestry projects in Wallonia, as well as in Flanders and elsewhere in Europe (for instance through French case studies involving environmental leasing). The search for private funding tied to carbon compensation is also envisaged.

WG 6 – Multifunctional forestry

Through field visits and seminars, in close collaboration with the existing European thematic group dedicated to this topic, the working group is addressing the issue of innovative, multifunctional, collaborative and participative forest management and the future role of forests in the rural context.



WG 7 – Food production and territory (On hold)

This working group aims to network participants from Wallonia from the food production sector (producers, processors, distributors), notably with the objectives to bring the areas of quality production closer to the areas of consumption – either by introducing food production in territory, reducing the number of intermediaries and increasing the added-value for producers, developing new ways of structuring the stakeholders and sectors to ensure better stakeholder control over the sectors. Through field visits and thematic meetings and seminars, the working group has notably addressed the following themes: short supply-chains, collective catering, distribution platforms, the promotion of local products, production, transformation and commercial development, credit, support (training and finance etc.), access to land ownership, territorial development, diversification, research and development, marketing, health standards and legislation, logistics.

WG 8 – Tourism and recreation

Through field visits and thematic meetings and seminars, the working group is addressing the touristic aspects in the context of urban-rural relations, tourist circuits, the use of GPS in the design of tourist products. The WG is also focusing on the integration of new technologies in the existing tourist product range. The future of eco-tourism in Wallonia, the ways of developing family tourism in Wallonia, (European benchmarking, « family-with-children » tourist products, etc.), awareness-raising of the dynamics of tourism in forested regions and of the work undertaken by the different GALs on the topic « Tourism and heritage » will be included in the themes to be addressed by this WG in the future.

WG 9 – New forms of mobility

This working group aims to network operators implementing different projects on alternative mobility in rural areas and notably the LAGs: mobility centre, community taxi, improvement in public transport services, development and improvement in the slow road network, car-sharing or lift-sharing networks (VAP), « Mobility » databases for the Brabant Wallon, etc. The WG aims notably to list the local alternative mobility stakeholders and services, to identify the challenges in improving regional mobility services, to improve the consistency and co-ordination of services, to exchange good practices and to formulate recommendations. The WG is also focusing on tools for the assessment of needs/demand of a territory and transport-on-demand, the connection points, etc.

WG 10 – Cooperation between local communities and data sharing on the territory

This working group is addressing the three aspects of trans-communal collaboration:

- The mechanisms (territorial stakeholders, concepts of collaboration, practices, participation, long-term mobilisation process and management technique);
- The skills of managers of trans-communal mechanisms. The WG agreed on a common definition of trans-communality and a typology of skills deployed by managers of trans-communal collaboration projects. The WG has notably collaborated in the development of a frame of reference for skills based on the analysis of strategies implemented by the territories/trans-communal mechanisms, as for example managing and structuring the diversity, complexity (levels, profiles, areas of intervention etc.) of stakeholders and situations, bringing together and ensuring the continuity of a multidisciplinary and transversal team, establishing the legitimacy of processes and mechanisms, and maintaining the relationships between the stakeholders concerned. The key functions to be established, future capacities, management and the anticipation of change, governance, training of the stakeholders and decision-makers of the territory, public/private team and partnership management, management and assessment of turnover of team members have equally been examined, as have the conditions for success and the added-value of trans-communal collaboration for the different parties concerned (stakeholders in the territory), together with the impact of public policies on its implementation;
- The tools to support and to develop a trans-communal approach notably in order to establish a common approach and means of assessment, a common vision, a trans-communal strategy, to support a deep involvement on the part of stakeholders, participation, the collaborative construction of the territorial project, to enable networked team-work as a means of training/development of “meshed” skills.

The WG will next undertake the definition and development of a training scheme for the managers of trans-communal collaboration mechanisms.

WG 11 – Prospective – Future of Walloon rural areas

Today, Wallonia should meet a number of important societal challenges: population increase, rise in energy costs or climate change for example. For the Walloon Network for rural Development, these challenges should be addressed as a matter of urgency in order to anticipate the current and future needs of rural areas. The Prospective working group brings together the network members who wish to conduct a prospective exercise on the Walloon rural territories.

As a preliminary step, the working group has agreed to work on the understanding of societal challenges facing rural areas in future decades and to define the questions which will have to be addressed in the framework of this exercise by calling on experts on every key topic.

Through the WG Prospective, the RwDR intends to focus on the possible and/or desirable futures for Walloon rural areas, and notably:

- To define the key challenges of tomorrow which Walloon rural areas will have to face, and to prepare for them;
- To contribute to the positioning of rural areas in matters of major developments in Wallonia (updating of the Regional Planning Scheme, core residential zones, etc.) and to raise the profile of rural areas in current decision-making;
- To allow a proactive participation of the RwDR in the preparation work of the next programming period.

WG 12 – Economic activity in a rural context and diversity

This working group has been called upon to address the following aspects of economic development in rural areas:

- Transfers of companies and transfers of agricultural holdings: networking of sellers/future buyers and study/development of tools/schemes to support the transfer of agricultural holdings (sponsorship, etc.)
- Mode/type of territorial organisation (employers' associations, micro-zones of economic activity and tele-working, support schemes for the development of a local economic fabric, provision of guidance for project initiators, etc.) and studies of options for the organisation of co-operative/collaborative schemes between agricultural producers
- Improvement of the economic attractiveness of a territory
- Sustainable and concerted economic development: factors in the economic development of a territory: creation and implementation of economic development strategies
- Role of the LAGs in involving key stakeholders and supporting economic activity
- Property: Means of enforcement, the issue of access to land-holdings, etc.
- Multi-functionality of agricultural landholdings and diversification



Self-assessment of activities of the Network

The FEADER 2017-2013 programming includes a common assessment system for the entirety of its entities. Each national and/or regional Development Program is subject to assessment in due and proper form. Common benchmarks have been established, making up a framework to which each can refer. The assessment of rural networks is, for its part, little covered at the macro level. Which is an additional reason to establish a self-assessment initiative. A brief overview...

The Walloon Network Coordination Unit is responsible for coordinating, communicating and capitalising on



measures and themes addressed in the framework of the Rural Development Program (PDR). Since March 2009, it has regularly been organising activities such as working groups, seminars, field visits, publications etc., on themes as varied as young agricultural producers, food production, erosion, mobility, energy and agriculture, public goods, trans-communal collaboration, etc.

The Network, from the very beginning, set itself a three-year work program. In September 2011, the Coordination Unit established a self-assessment process with two aims: on the one hand, to identify the strong and weak points of networking, and on the other, to prepare the program of activities for the three coming years.

A collective approach

The mission of the Coordination Unit is developing on the basis of six main objectives established by the Walloon Region: support for the implementation of the PDR 2007-2013, stimulation of collaboration and the exchange of experiences between rural stakeholders and beneficiaries of the PDR under Walloon and European plans, stimulation of the implementation of territorial projects, improving access to information, tracking of territorial development, and anticipation of change. These six objectives have undergone an assessment by members and have been subjected to the rigour of questioning: what added-value is there to be gained from networking? Which initiatives, locations and forms of exchange, what tools, should be favoured? How should the functioning of the Network's component entities be improved?

The Coordination Unit has organised a large-scale brainstorming session and produced a MindMap on the way its members understand the different elements of networking. Three key notions have been used to obtain a complete picture: the situation without the Network, the existing situation, and the desired situation. This first stage produced a fairly complete framework of logic. The remaining task was to list the objectives and initiatives and rank them according to priority. Initially, all Network members were required to respond individually, by submitting their contributions and their opinions on priority initiatives. Once a synthesis of these submissions had been obtained, the Coordination Unit organised a final meeting whose aim was to define the contents of the various working groups and to detail the subjects to be dealt with, the initiatives to be implemented, the results to be expected, the roles and responsibilities of the diffe-

rent members of the Network, the support required of the Coordination Unit and, of course, the calendar.

At the end of the process, what has emerged is a detailed work program for 2012-2014, which takes into account all the assessments and submissions. A collective initiative, therefore, which clearly guarantees a high level of feasibility as well as an appropriateness to the needs of the Network members. Certain working groups which were active during the first phase will be put on hold as their objectives have been reached in terms of results and conclusions; other groups will be invested with new themes to be addressed; and others still are coming into being to tackle new preoccupations. These essentially concern two topical themes: future prospects for the development of rural areas, and the rural economy. If you want to know more, visit the Network website...

Networking – Self-assessment

Réseau wallon de Développement rural

Partners: Network members

Website: <http://www.reseau-pwdr.be>

Email: info@reseau-pwdr.be

The *Interface LEADER*: support for LAGs and training courses

The Rural Development Program also aims to provide technical assistance on the implementation of the different measures proposed. As part of this mission, two partners (FRW and CER) are responsible for supporting the Local Action Groups LEADER. Known as Interface LEADER, this structure works to reinforce the skills of the LAG teams, to act on project committee tracking and the development of theme 4. It also provides considerable support in the financial management of local programs.

A founding contribution

The Interface LEADER made its contribution for the most part prior to the selection of the fifteen Walloon Local Action Groups (LAGs). Its very first assignment consisted of informing the rural world of the possibility of creating LAGs based on a development theme and strategy. Information sessions together with a handbook for LAG candidates were produced at the very start of the 2007-2013 program. "A network of relay agents (development agents in proximity of the LAG) providing services such as: the submission of project applications to the relevant administrations, project tracking, support in the preparation and coordination of meetings, etc. They established synergies with other policies and more specifically with rural development operations."

From the time the LAGs were selected,

the Interface supported the administration in matters of tracking the implementation of projects, particularly in the areas of technical advice on project planning, the internal organisation of ASBLs (non-profit entities), the organisation of project committees (committees which meet at regular intervals to bring together the LAGs to examine their progress) and the submission of regular reports. A large part of the support provided by Interface was at the level of financial control. The Interface put highly valued tools at the disposal of the LAGs: a handbook on the eligibility of LEADER expenses, financial tracking tools (calculator), and verification procedures for expense claims prior to payment. This is practical, day-to-day support whose virtue is to increase the speed of handling of expense claims to the Région Wallonne and, resultingly, in the speed of payments to the beneficiaries.

On the training

The Interface organised a number of training courses for the benefit of the LAGs. Every year, the LAGs were invited to submit their suggestions on training course topics. We can observe, even at that time, a fairly diverse range: managing a project, setting up a collaborative project, the correct planning of assessment procedures, designing a communications strategy for the purposes of the LAG, planning a func-

tional website, eco-consumption, managing a meeting, team leadership, conducting a poll, drawing up specifications. All the topics embraced contributed in a real way to the successful implementation of a LEADER program and of its initiatives.

To draw benefit from the lessons of these training courses as well as ensuring a follow-up, the Interface produced a blog. Temps-fort consisted of a document addressed to the LAG teams: coordinators, mission leaders, as well as partners such as operators in the field and members of the Board of Management. It provides tips and tricks mentioned during the training sessions and in the summary tables. A tool, therefore, for linking the Interface and the LAGs in identifying new needs arising from their day-to-day operations.

Enjoyable training courses address needs identified by the LAGs themselves

Technical support – Interface LEADER

Fondation rurale de Wallonie et Centre d'Economie Rurale

Website : <http://www.frw.be>

Email : leader@frw.be



Progress of LEADER axis in Wallonia

The FEADER 2017-2013 programming includes a common assessment system for the entirety of its entities. Each national and/or regional Development Program is subject to assessment in due and proper form. Common benchmarks have been established, making up a framework to which each can refer. The assessment of rural networks is, for its part, little covered at the macro level. Which is an additional reason to establish a self-assessment initiative. A brief overview...

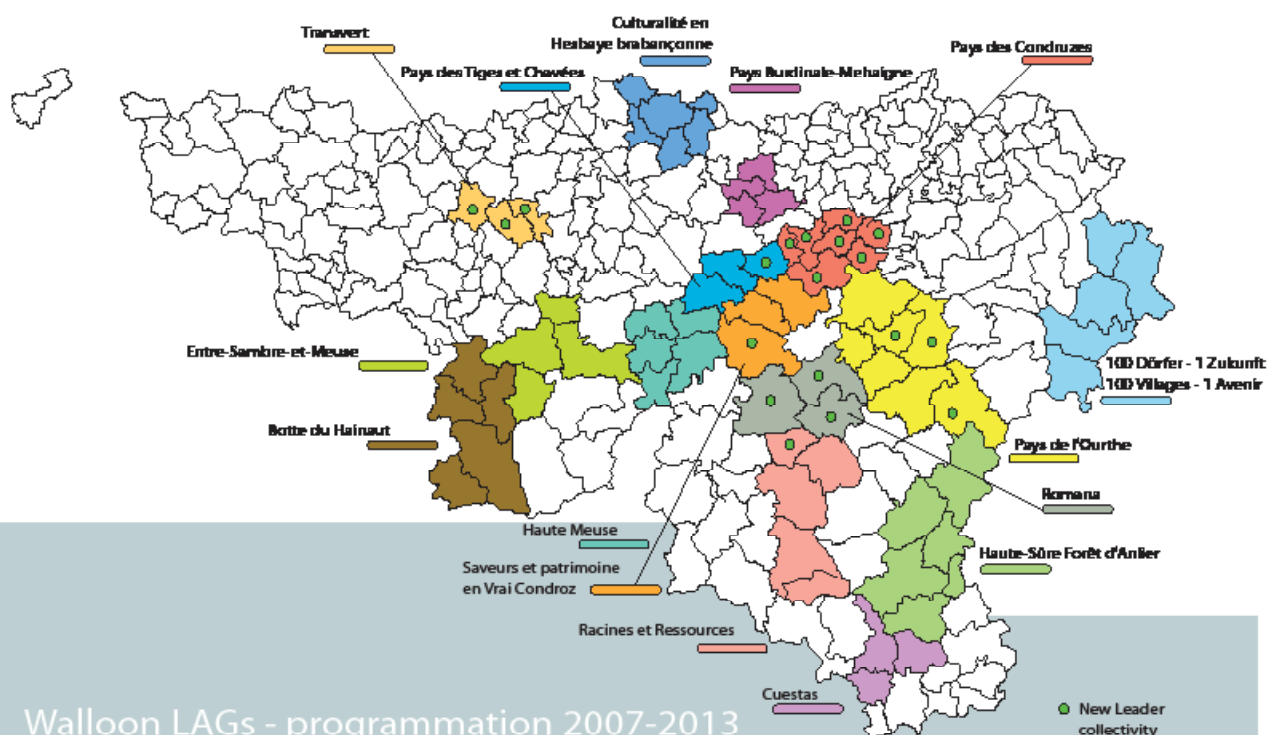
The 2007-2013 Leader 'axis 4' is the fourth Leader phase in Wallonia. After Leader I (1991-1993) and Leader II (1994-1999), most recently fifteen areas have benefited from opportunities under Leader + (2000-2006). Today, Leader has become an integral part of regional development instruments and is the fourth axis of European rural development policy. Local Action Groups (LAGs) bring together public and private partners from different socio-economic sectors. Through a 'bottom-up approach', LAGs are responsible for developing and implementing territorial development strategies.

The results produced by the combination of these characteristics constitute the added value of the Leader approach. The territorial approach enables the initiation of the process based on the resources and special requirements of each area. The bottom-up approach gets local stakeholders to participate, while taking each area's situation into account.

It creates a new, shared vision of strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities of their own territories, influencing the establishment of objectives and actions. The local group is organised into a horizontal partnership, bringing together local stakeholders and institutions. The innovative nature of actions, links between them and the multisectoral approach have an influence on the type of actions and methods chosen. Networking opportunities and transnational cooperation, influence relationships between the local environment and the outside world (sharing of information and knowledge, and the development of common projects). The financing method ensures a certain flexibility in implementation and it guarantees, in most cases, the development of cross-sectoral projects: territorial mobilisation, organisation of local stakeholders, analyses of feasibility and drive, etc.

2011 - A Key Year

The implementation of the Strategic Development Plan requires time. Time to set up the field teams, mobilise partners, and take the administrative steps linked to each project. Today, the 15 LAGs, which have been set up, show an increasing number of visible and concrete actions. Most of the local projects are engaged in local and regional administrative procedures. This necessary step enables LAGs to proceed with implementing actions and mobilising their area, set up communication actions, and even participate in European events or transnational cooperation projects.



Self-Assessment Exercises

The annual self-assessment, set up by the Leader Administration and Interface, is an important process for LAGs. It constitutes a real opportunity to carry out an evaluation with the team, partners and project managers. The assessment is made up of databases and instruments providing an overview of results, thus enabling LAGs to see the problems that need solving, areas that need improvement and projects that need to be reorganised. During this key year, selfassessment should also help to identify the projects that will benefit from complementary financing, in the rebalancing between the further-advanced and less-advanced LAGs.

The Added Value of the Leader Approach in Wallonia

Although it is still too early to measure the precise impact of the fourth Leader axis in Wallonia, the first 'strong points' of this programming period can now be identified. Various elements indicating the added value of the Leader method illustrate how the [particular] characteristics of the Leader approach have been taken into account, and show clear signs of success in Wallonia.

Creating links, the new local partners, regional Coordination Platforms, Discussion Forums and Working Groups, as well as the recognition of LAGs as relevant regional development actors, all constitute visible results of the Leader delivery system.

Something that is harder to evaluate is the position of rural areas with regard to the challenges of globalisation. However, this is still [possible] for example, through the recognition of local potential and local knowhow to retain or attract entrepreneurs to rural areas, the comeback of local products and services as well as the local use of raw materials. Another factor is the optimisation of movements within an area. The movement of tourism, materials, waste, or simply the water that flows through an area all play different roles. There is an art to channelling these, managing them and developing them ethically and sustainably.

Moreover, rural areas are taking on new functions, as highlighted by LAGs in their role as observers of trans-communal potential, as regards regional development and the development of landscapes, services, mobility, culture, etc.

Transfer of experiences and communication (internal, external, etc.) relates to

the large amount of information about an area and the structures that support its population – all of which can be obstacles to citizen ownership. Leader provides strong support for the use of the media and the internet, events, knowledge sharing, and the strengthening of rural areas and their products, especially when these lack strong elements of differentiation.

The position of LAGs within a European Network of rural territories enables them to transcend their strong local roots. Transnational cooperation helps them widen their horizons and understand how to position their area at European level. This, therefore, constitutes a strong added value in terms of acquiring and sharing experience, achieving critical mass and boosting their image.

Co-construction, participation, a trans-sectoral, trans-community approach, the mobilisation of partnerships, and decision-making tools for elected representatives are all elements used by LAGs to implement their development strategies. These factors guarantee the improved governance of the area, greater transparency and, in many cases, greater accountability among local stakeholders and citizens.



A working group on *food production and territory* within the Walloon Network for rural Development

Initiatives are being taken as much in Belgium as in other member states on the reinforcement of links between consumers and producers. The aims of this type of initiative are multiple: support for family agriculture, the fostering of trust between consumers and producers, relocation of agriculture linked to the territory, the organisation of distribution, access to landholdings, partnerships with community catering, etc. The Network Support Unit is co-ordinating a working group on the theme of "Food production and Territory".



Initiated in 2009, the working group "Food and Territory" has implemented a comprehensive range of initiatives based on the relationships between town and country: how should this proximity be turned to advantage? Which sectors should receive support? How should local production be integrated in peri-urban zones? How should the metabolism of a territory be analysed (flows, relationships, alliances, etc.)?

The initiatives undertaken by the working group are:

- a partnership with two Groupes d'Action Locale (GALs) to undertake a study on "Short supply-chains, a future for agriculture in Condroz-Famenne?"

- a visit to and meeting with the members of Hartenboer, a fruit and meat production and sales network for urban communities.
- a workshop for food production professionals from the Namur area (producers, restaurant-owners, canteen managers, etc.) in search of ways of developing collective catering with a strongly territorial dimension.
- a seminar on "Town/country: a marriage of convenience?": How should the supply of local produce be co-ordinated? Through what kinds of support? How should supply be centralised and updated? What answers are currently available? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these systems?
- field visits in France: Auvergne Bio Distribution, initiatives in the Lille area (Norabio, la Ferme du Sart et Au Panier Vert).
- a meeting with the representatives of the franchisee tradesmen's association (APLSIA) on selling local produce through small and medium-scale retail outlets.
- a regional seminar "Food and Territory" organised at the Halle de Han in Tintigny on the question: how should the chain actors be organised? What synergies should be developed? And on what scale? Recommendations were produced aimed at professionals from the sector and institutional partners.
- topical publications: accounts of meetings, the special issue of "Ruralités"(november 2011), fact-sheets, bibliographies, etc. (available on the www.reseau-pwdr.be website)

The added-value of networking

What the participants of this working group remember is the substantial added-value gained from field

visits and presentations of first-hand accounts. These openly accessible group activities allow new partners to obtain information on the issues under discussion and to contribute their own expertise. The interactions between the different participants from the sector and networks increased as a result. Another positive aspect which was highlighted: the collective access to information by experts who are more difficult to mobilise individually, as in the case of the franchisee tradesmen's association (APLSIA).

The sustainable foods sector is organised and supported by public authorities. The current objectives of the work undertaken by the group "Food production and Territory" takes into account the thinking of organisations which are active in the field, and particularly the Réseau Wallon Alimentation Durable (the Walloon Network for sustainable foods) which includes several members of the rural Network. In the second phase of networking 2012-2014, the working group will address the following topics: dual training for producers, associations of employers, and the land access.

Networking – Food and Territory Working Group
Working Group for Themes 1 and 3

Partners: Network members (SPW, agricultural professional organisations, local action groups, private operators, industry councils)
Website: <http://www.reseau-pwdr.be>
Email : info@reseau-pwdr.be

Communication tools

The Network Support Unit set up several communication tools : Ruralités magazine, monthly newsletter, website, information alert system, resources center, social networks (Facebook and Twitter), videos,thematic leaflets,..



www.reseau-pwdr.be

Events, study visits, workshops

The Network Support Unit organizes, linked to working groups preoccupations, several events, study visits in Wallonia or other countries. It attends to European working groups on multifunctional forest, LEADER transnational cooperation, communication,..



Linking young farmers from Wallonia and Flanders



With Dacian Ciolos, as Member of jury for the competition «Images of Rural Europe»



Agroforestry projects in France (study visit)

Network Support Unit

The mission of Network Support Unit (NSU) is entrusted, by the Region Wallonne, to Trame SCRL, consultancy in territorial development, and Cible Communication. The NSU takes over four main tasks .

Organising activities - Activities are initiated by means of organised encounters based on needs and aspirations of Network members. Activities are organised around different products developed by NSU as well as networking events : thematic workshops, study visits, working groups, regional and international seminars.

Adding value - With the support of a scientific committee, NSU collects and analyses relevant experiences, innovative topics,...

Communication and Capitalisation - Promoting the network, its initiatives and events, projects of various beneficiaries, working groups on actuality topics, production of recommendations,... Information circulates by a quarterly magazine, newsletter, website and specific publications.

Cooperation - NSU supports the implementation of cooperation projects between LEADER wallon territories and other European areas.



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