

Rural Development Programme (RDP) of Flanders, Belgium

Programma voor Plattelandsontwikkeling Vlaanderen 2007-2013¹

(Rural Development Programme of
Flanders 2007-2013)

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Other useful links:

Rural Development Programme (RDP):
[http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/country-information/
programming/en/programming_home_en.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/country-information/programming/en/programming_home_en.cfm)

Flemish National Rural Network (NRN):
<http://www.ruraalnetwerk.be/>



Map of Flanders

(© European Commission)

General socio-economic situation in rural areas in the Flanders region

Flanders has a population of about 6 million people, covering a territory of 13,522 km² of flat to undulating land. It is located in the northern part of Belgium and about 41% of the population is residing in peri-urban areas. One quarter of the land area is used for urban functions and the remaining three quarters can be characterized as open space. GDP per capita has been consistently greater than EU average values at least since 1996 and the unemployment rate is around 5%.

The main socio-economic strengths of the rural areas include well educated farmers and above average productivity. Further strengths include relatively high added value in agriculture. There are two main types of farms: i) those that make the best out of conventional farming and ii) other farms that have diversified, for example, into tourism, on-farm sales of produce, involving people who need care (so-called green care or social farming) etc.

On the other hand, the number of farms is decreasing and about 50% of the farms are managed on a part-time basis. The contribution of the agricultural sector to the national economy is considerable, but farm incomes lag behind. Since much farming is intensive with high levels of inputs there are problems with the loss of nutrients to water, reduction of soil organic matter and soil erosion. Biodiversity is decreasing as well. Unemployment in rural areas is a real problem, particularly amongst youth, although a considerable number of rural people are unofficially engaged in some sort of economic activity. Except for cultural facilities, the level of social services in rural areas is generally considered sufficient but lags behind in

¹ Latest updated RDP, following the adoption of the CAP Health Check and European Economic Recovery Package and additional funds from Modulation.

small villages. In some areas public transport is inadequate.

In terms of rural land use, 11% of the region is covered by forests and about half the land area is used for farming: 59% fodder crops, 32% arable crops and 8% horticulture crops.

RDP strategic objectives

The RDP's overall objectives as approved by the Flemish government are independent from the ones in neighbouring Wallonia. They are:

- 1) Support the economic viability of farms through diversification, spreading of risks and promoting multifunctional land use;
- 2) Promote quality throughout the agro-food sector taking the environment, animal wellbeing and social acceptance into consideration;
- 3) Accelerate broadening the range of activities and promote the transition to biological farming;
- 4) Involve farmers in improving the natural quality of farmland and of other designated areas (reserves);
- 5) Further elaborate sustainable forestry policies;
- 6) Increase the economic importance of rural areas through the diversification of the rural economy and the promotion of multi-functional land use;
- 7) Improve the quality of life in rural villages with special emphasis on the integration of susceptible groups;
- 8) Redirect water management to higher levels of sustainability.

Following the CAP Health Check, and in recognition of the greater emphasis now being given to the "new challenges" facing agriculture and rural areas proposed by the EU strategic guidelines, the RDP was revised in 2009 to place additional emphasis on climate change, water management, renewable energies, biodiversity and restructuring of the dairy sector. Flanders decided to reinforce existing measures (particularly measures 121, 214 and 311) instead of creating new ones due to the fact that the EU funding was lower than expected. No additional measures related to the development of broadband access were implemented since it was evaluated that the Flanders territory was already well provided (70% with internet connection and 66% with broadband). The RDP strategy also takes into account the current economic crisis and the multiple impacts it has had on various agricultural sectors. As such, Flanders proposes to allocate new resources in order to economically support those sectors.

In addition, funds previously allocated to support the Common Market Organisation (CMO) for the fruit and vegetable sector is being reallocated to investments aimed at the modernisation of infrastructures and agri-environmental measures.

Expected impact / outcomes of the policies

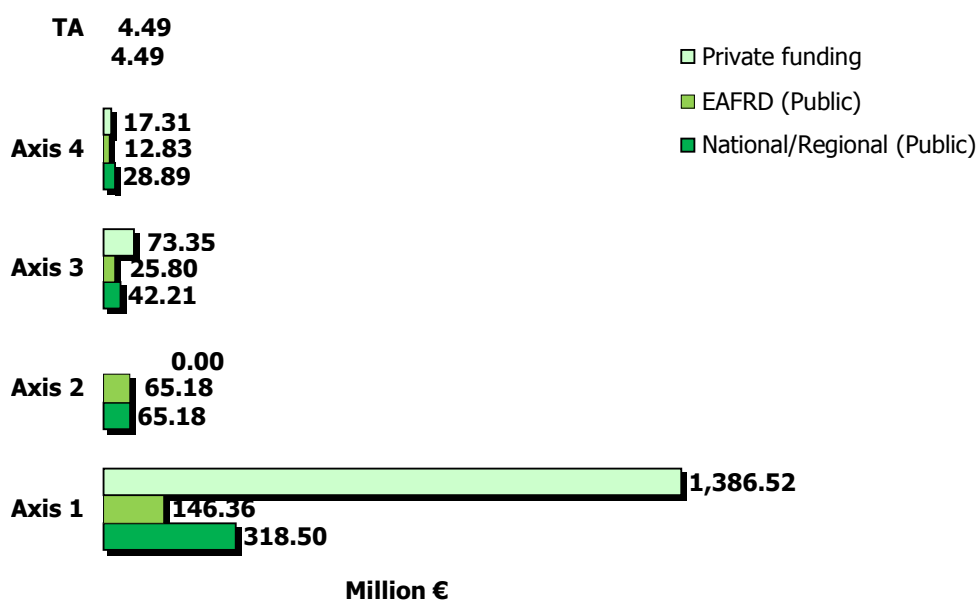
The expected outcomes of Flemish rural development policy can be summarized in three main categories as follows:

1. Economy - increased incomes, employment rates and labour productivity throughout the agro-food sector, plus improved quality of produce and processes in the agro-food chain;
2. Environment - improved environmental quality in terms of the maintenance of flora and fauna, increased soil quality, protection of landscapes, sustainable land management,

- improved water quality and pollution from nutrients, ammonia emissions and greenhouse gases;
- Rural life - improved quality of life in rural areas with increased secondary employment, improved infrastructure and social services. Plus an increase in the general appreciation of rural areas.

The expected impacts of the 2009 RDP amendments relate to improving the environmental sustainability of agriculture and the economic development of rural areas. Modifications in output and results indicators are presented below under each axis.

RDP budget breakdown by axis: Total expenditure (including national/regional + EAFRD + private funding) of €2,190,667,622



The RDP budget allocations are broadly divided into four main areas of expenditure, known as axes (namely: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; Improving the environment and the countryside; Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and Leader). A total of 85% of the overall RDP budget in Flanders is allocated to axis 1 (€1,851,377,784 million); 6% is allocated to axis 2 (€130,355,194 million), 6% to axis 3 (€141,368,336 million), 2.6% to axis 4 (€58,585,479 million), with 0.4% remaining to fund Technical Assistance (€8,980,828 million).

Within axis 1, national/regional public funding represents approximately 17% share of the axis funding, EAFRD 8% and private funds 75%.

Within axis 2, national/regional public funding represents approximately 50% share of the axis funding, EAFRD 50% and no private funds.

Within axis 3, national/regional public funding represents approximately 30% share of the axis funding, EAFRD 18% and private funds 52%.

Within axis 4, national/regional public funding represents approximately 49% share of the axis funding, EAFRD 21% and private funds 30%.

Within technical assistance, national/regional public funding represents 50% share of the technical assistance funding and EAFRD 50%.

As a consequence of the RDP revisions in 2009, the Flanders region has been assigned an additional budget totalling €45,343,240 (including €29,507,430 of EAFRD and a further €15,835,810 of regional/national public funds).

Axis Information²

Axis 1 objectives – Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

The table below summarises the RDP's axis 1 priorities.

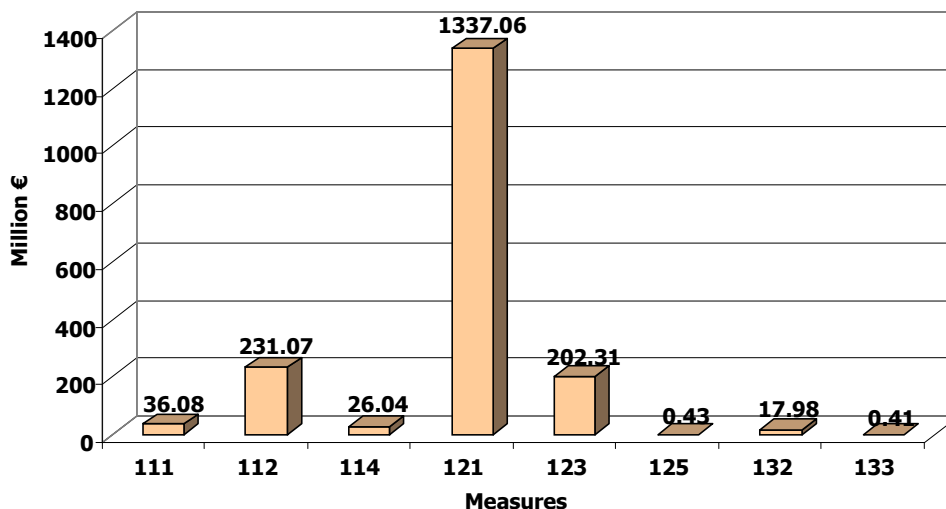
Strategic objectives	Specific objectives
- Strengthen the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and biological farming in particular, using sustainable development awareness programs, advisory services and financial investments;	Provide education in general
- Competitive agricultural production with young farmers as special target group;	Provide education in general and biological farming in particular, using sustainable development awareness programs, advisory services and financial investments;
- Encourage young, well educated farmers to innovate, increase competitiveness and sustain the sector;	
- Encourage sustainable investment in the agro-food sector to increase rural employment and competitiveness	
- Improve agricultural income and reduce gaps with non-agricultural income	
- Special emphasis on adding value to produce and support collaboration, innovative product development and marketing	

In relation to HC/RP spending result targets for axis 1 include the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions (561 participants and €56,900,000 invested); the progressive replacement of fossil fuels to the use of agricultural biomass as a way to produce renewable energy (23 participants and €11,750,000 invested); uptake of several measures intended to improve water use, storage, quality, etc (764 participants and €20,140,000 invested), and; specific targets concerning the transformation and competitive increase of the dairy sector (8 participants and €9,950,000 invested).

Specific modifications to output and result indicators have been made to take account of amendments to the RDP. This particularly involves certain investments in solar cells which account for half of the investment in technologies for renewable energies. Under the HC/RP modifications the aid intensity for measure 121 was unchanged, for 123 it was decreased, for 112 it does not apply)

² A full list of the RDP measures can be found in Annex I.

Axis 1 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €1,851,377,784



Following the 2009 RDP update, the total budget for axis 1 is €1,851,377,784 including an additional €15,343,240 (€11,507,430 EAFRD + €3,835,810 regional/national public funds) under measure 121 (modernisation of agricultural holdings: €10,009,906 total with 75% covered by EAFRD) and measure 123 (adding value to agricultural and forestry products: €5,333,333 total with 75% covered by EAFRD). Apart from the environmental "new challenges" these new funds will also assist producers in the dairy sector to adapt to market changes occurring with the disappearance of the milk quotas regime. Changes under axis 1 also include a €38,095 transfer from measure 133 to measure 111; a €800,000 transfer from measure 132 to measure 112, and; a €3,167,733 transfer from measure 132 to measure 121. Measures 132 and 133 are not in place due to the lack of regulatory framework.

Axis 2 objectives - Improving the environment and the countryside

The table below summarises the RDP's axis 2 priorities.

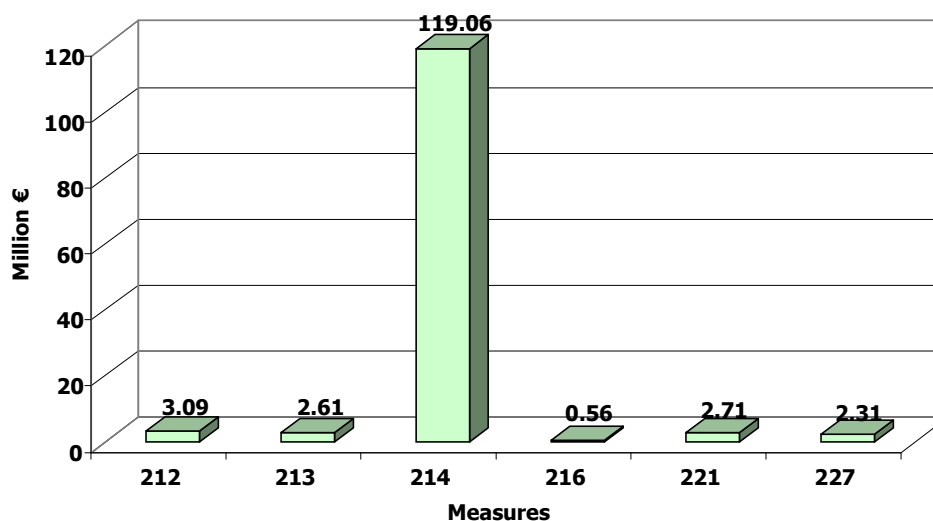
- | Strategic objectives | Specific objectives |
|--|---|
| - Sustainable development of agricultural and rural development | Involve farmers in achieving environmental objectives, especially regarding flora, fauna, habitats (also in Natura 2000 areas) and water (Water Framework Directive); |
| - Support the use of environmentally-friendly management of crops and vegetation (using less agro-chemicals, growing special crops or varieties); | |
| - Improved water and land management to control erosion, sustain quality and preserve cultural history | |
| - Afforestation and sustainable management of farmland and forests (not for wood production only, but also contributing to multi-functional rural development) | Use gained experience to shift from conventional farming and encourage biological/sustainable farming |

In relation to HC/RP spending result targets for axis 2 include several dedicated to the

protection and improvement of water quality (3,144 contracts and 10,562 ha of agricultural land receiving support); increased competitiveness in the dairy sector (1,390 contracts and 4,360 ha of agricultural land receiving support); protection of fauna and flora (512 contracts and 656 ha of agricultural land receiving support), and; improving efficiency in waste management (434 contracts and 7,290 ha of agricultural land receiving support).

Specific modifications include a new sub-measure 214-B that aims to improve water quality and biodiversity by encouraging less polluting orchard management. The target indicators linked for this sub-measure will be the total number of contracts plus the total area of agricultural land receiving agri-environment (ha) support and contributing to the improvement of biodiversity/water quality. There was also a change in the EAFRD co-financing rate back to 50%.

Axis 2 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €130,355,194



Following the 2009 RDP update, the total budget for axis 2 is €130,355,194. This includes an additional €18,000,000 (€9,000,000 EAFRD + €9,000,000 regional/national public funds) that is targeted at the “new challenges” under measure 214 (agri-environment payments).

Axis 3 objectives - The quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

The table below summarises the RDP’s axis 3 priorities.

Strategic objectives

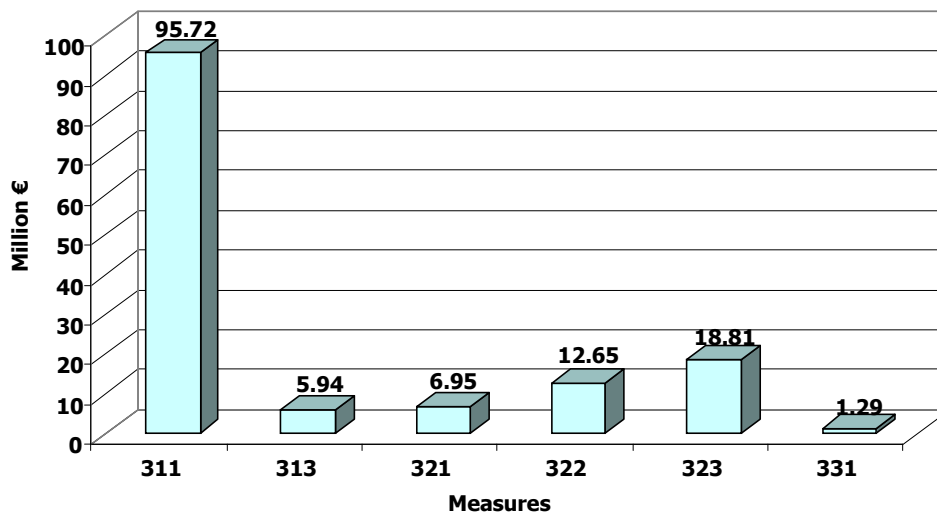
Specific objectives

- Diversification of agriculture with non-agricultural activities Encourage investments, preserve traditional varieties and combine farming with the provision of health-care;
- Setting-up basic social services (for example related to culture, leisure, tourism);
 Provide extension on relevant topics and development of human resources
- Improve the quality of life in rural areas Promote an attractive and multi-functional countryside;
- Preserving and upgrading of rural cultural heritage, especially in designated areas (reserves);

- Promote other services that create job opportunities;
- Creation of advisory services for economic development and the related infrastructure.

In relation to the HC/RP result targets for axis 3 include building infrastructures aimed at producing renewable energy from biomass and other sources of clean energy (1000 beneficiaries and €40,000,000 of investment).

Axis 3 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €141,368,336



Following the 2009 revision of the RDP, the new total budget allocation for Axis 3 is €141,368,336 including €12,000,000 additional funds for measure 311 (€9,000,000 EAFRD + 3,000,000 regional/public funds) which will focus on encouraging alternatives to fossil fuels.

Axis 4 objectives - Leader

Axis 4 (Leader) is devoted to quality of life and diversification actions. These include implementation of the local development strategies under measure 413 which was allocated 84% of the total expenditure for axis 4. Running Local Action Groups (LAGs), skills acquisition and animation (measure 431) accounted for around 13% and implementing co-operation projects (measure 421) only 2%.

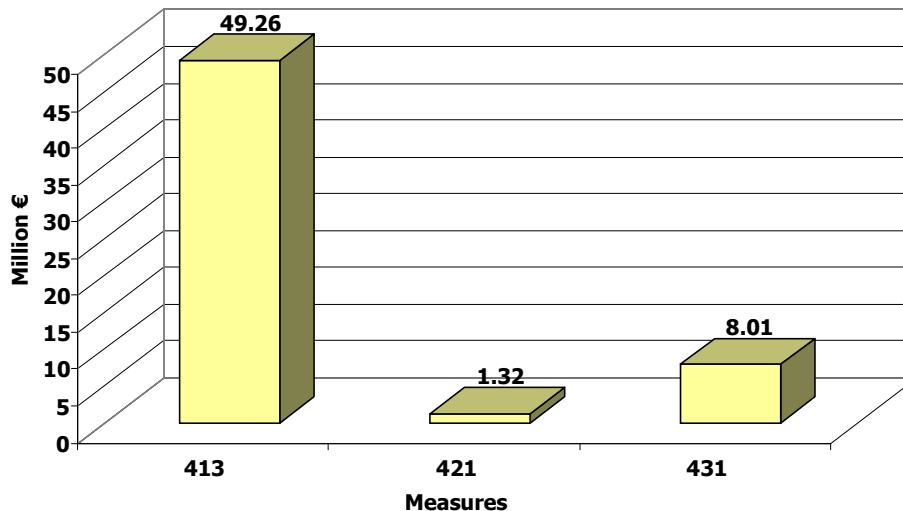
The table below summarises the RDP's axis 4 priorities.

- | Strategic objectives | Specific objectives |
|--|---|
| - Develop local strategies | Promote strong regional identity that contributes to a strong regional economy; |
| - Assess area-specific problems and local opportunities; | |
| - Promote economic diversification, improving social services and the quality of life in rural areas | |
| - Support the functioning and promotion of LAGs | Efficient functioning of LAGs; |
| - Improved capacities and promotion of the territory | |
| - Improved local governance aimed at developing and implementing strategies; | |
| - Share experiences with other regions and groups. | |

The number of LAGs operational in the RDP areas as of March 2010 was 10.

There were no modifications to axis 4 indicators following the RDP update in 2009.

Axis 4 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €58,585,479



There were no financial modifications in relation to axis 4 following the 2009 RDP update.

Monitoring and evaluation strategy

Monitoring and evaluation are important management tools to analyse outputs and results and to find out whether or not the RDP reaches the envisaged beneficiaries and achieves its objectives. Financial inputs to the RDP are subject to audit by the Paying Agency. Monitoring and evaluation are continuous processes ensuring that remedial actions can be taken immediately if required. According to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF), indicators are defined for the baseline situation and for all anticipated outputs, results and impacts. In addition, a few RDP specific indicators have also been defined.

Progress with implementation is monitored annually and reported to the European Commission with a financial overview and a description of any changes in context. Progress in achieving the strategic objectives is reported bi-annually.

The ex-ante evaluation defined the initial situation and influenced the original design of the RDP. The mid-term evaluation offers an opportunity to redirect the programme. The ex-post evaluation will review and evaluate the final outputs, results and the impact of the programme. A supervisory board plays an important role in overseeing the programme.

Communication and publicity

The main aim of the communication strategy is to make the RDP known and to bring out the role of the parties involved. The contribution of the RDP to quality of rural life is the central

theme. Specific target groups of the communication strategy are (in order of their increasing need for more detailed and specific information) the general public, prospective beneficiaries and actual beneficiaries. At institutional level, information is targeted at governmental organisations (provincial and municipal), socio-economic partners and NGOs. The Rural Network is responsible for providing general information on the RDP and the managing authority is responsible for more specific information on measures etc.

Tools used to directly disseminate information are: a) dissemination to groups; b) communication like regular mail, e-mail, phone calls, and; c) the website of the Rural Network for interactive communication. Tools used to passively disseminate information are: a) the website of the Ministry of Agriculture and the website of the Rural Network; b) involvement of local administration, and; c) providing links to the Managing Authority. Beneficiaries of the RDP are obliged to use signs and billboards etc. to declare the EU support for their activities.

Annex I – Measures

Measures selected by the RDP Measures selected by the updated RDP

Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector	<i>Promoting knowledge and improving human potential</i>	111	Vocational training and information actions
		112	Setting up of young farmers
		113	Early retirement
		114	Use of advisory services
		115	Setting up of management, relief and advisory services
	<i>Restructuring and developing physical potential and promoting innovation</i>	121	Modernisation of agricultural holdings
		122	Improvement of the economic value of forests
		123	Adding value to agricultural and forestry products
		124	Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in the agriculture and food sector and in the forestry sector
		125	Infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry
	<i>Quality of agricultural production and products</i>	126	Restoring agricultural production potential
		131	Meeting standards based on EU legislation
		132	Participation of farmers in food quality schemes
	<i>Transitional measures</i>	133	Information and promotion activities
141		Semi-subsistence farming	
142		Producer groups	
Axis 2 - Improving the environment and the countryside	<i>Sustainable use of agricultural land</i>	143	Providing farm advisory and extension services
		211	Natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas
		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
		215	Animal welfare payments
	<i>Sustainable use of forestry land</i>	216	Non-productive investments
		221	First afforestation of agricultural land
		222	First establishment of agroforestry systems on agricultural land
		223	First afforestation of non-agricultural land
		224	Natura 2000 payments
		225	Forest-environment payments
		226	Restoring forestry potential and introducing prevention actions
		227	Non-productive investments
Axis 3 - Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy	<i>Diversify the rural economy</i>	311	Diversification into non-agricultural activities
		312	Support for business creation and development
		313	Encouragement of tourism activities
	<i>Improve the quality of life in rural areas</i>	321	Basic services for the economy and rural population
		322	Village renewal and development
		323	Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage
		331	Training and information
Axis 4 - Leader	<i>Implementing local development strategies</i>	341	Skills-acquisition and animation measure with a view to preparing and implementing a local development strategy
		411	Competitiveness
		412	Environment/land management
		413	Quality of life/diversification
		421	Implementing cooperation projects
431	Running the local action group, skills acquisition, animation		