



European Commission

# Leader+ Magazine



## SPECIAL FOCUS

**Leader achievements:  
A diversity of territorial  
experience**

EN  
11 • 2008



# Leader+ Magazine

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This European Commission magazine seeks to promote access to information about the Leader+ Community initiative. Our goal is to provide accurate and up-to-date information. If errors are brought to our attention, we will try to correct them. However, the Commission accepts no responsibility for the information contained in this magazine, especially regarding financial data on the projects described, and in particular on the eligibility of expenditure. Readers should therefore take all necessary precautions before using this data, which they do entirely at their own risk.

# In a word ...

by Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino, Deputy  
Director-General, Directorate-General for  
Agriculture and Rural Development



This is the last edition of the *Leader+ Magazine*, and while it comes at the end of the Leader+ initiative, we certainly have not heard the last of Leader. There has been an enormous investment made in implementing the different stages of the Leader initiative. Leader I, Leader II and now Leader+ have all played a vital role in giving rural territories an opportunity to develop for themselves solutions to their particular problems and to take responsibility for their own development strategies. At EU level, we are very much aware that without the efforts of rural actors at all levels (national, regional and local), and from all sectors (public, private and voluntary), then much of what we take for granted as being a 'Leader success' would just not have been possible.

For this reason, I was very pleased to be able to attend the final Leader+ Observatory conference held in Évora, Portugal, in November 2007. The location provided a fitting setting for an event which set out to show the diversity of Europe's rural development and Leader's contribution to it. It was an excellent opportunity to come 'face to face' with representatives and observers of Leader, not only from EU territories, but from much further afield too. It was interesting to learn that the Leader method is not only widely known in far away places such as Brazil, the USA and South Africa, but that Leader-like programmes are also being considered elsewhere. As they say, 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!'

Turning attention closer to home, the conference in Évora highlighted 16 EU territories in which the Leader method has made a clear contribution to rural development. Through the films that were shown, it was clear that Leader's area-based approach had allowed local people to come together and fill gaps in other funding streams in order to develop their very own innovative methods and projects. For those involved, this has contributed to many tangible results, such as new and innovative goods and services,

creation of new jobs, and not least a better 'quality of life' for those living there. For obvious reasons, tangible results are often those with which policymakers are concerned. Certainly Leader has plenty of examples, and this is important in the context of some of the EU's wider goals, such as those related to competitiveness and sustainability as set out in the (revised) Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas. However, non-tangible results are equally significant, and the way that Leader has contributed to better levels of governance is one such striking example of this.

The diversity of Leader's achievements was perhaps best illustrated by the territories themselves. Here, LAGs representing 16 territories, some with a long history of Leader, and others with only a very recent experience, demonstrated the capacity of their Leader communities to reach out beyond regional and national boundaries, include all sectors of the economy and society, be inventive in developing new tools and capacities, work with other funding streams and also be concerned with some of the wider challenges such as climate change and bio-energy. So it was only right that some recognition of achievement by other peer-groups was given, and I was therefore very happy to be a part of that recognition.

There are, of course, many others who have contributed to Leader's success who are not always recognised. However, by mainstreaming the Leader method in the new European rural development programmes, we are in fact able to pay tribute to all those who have been involved in Leader, and indeed rural development in general. The achievement and contribution of Leader to rural development was particularly well articulated in the various conclusions and reflections made by the experts and 'external eyes' during the closing plenary session of the Évora conference. This kind of recognition is very heartening to hear and gives us all a positive boost in our work in meeting the future challenges of mainstreaming the Leader method in the new rural development policy.

In closing, I wish all of you involved in rural development all the best in realising your full potential, and not to lose sight of all those Leader features which have contributed so much to the benefit of Europe's rural territories.



## An overview of the final Leader+ Observatory conference: *Leader achievements: a diversity of territorial experience*

Évora, Portugal, November 2007

### Introduction

The final Leader+ Observatory event was a conference which attracted 400 participants. It took place in the rural setting of the local action group, LAG Monte, located close to Évora in Portugal's Alentejo region. Over two days, the purpose of this conference was to give Leader territories an opportunity to show the diversity of rural development that has taken place. While not part of the official programme, there were also several field visits to local projects which gave an additional picture of how Leader+ finance is addressing the diverse local needs of rural development.

To help participants appreciate the contribution of Leader to rural development, and indeed the diversity of this experience, the conference was structured around a series of plenary and mini-plenary sessions, which included the presentation of films, awards and an exhibition area. All of these were designed to allow an exchange of ideas and experience, and, at the same time, provided the means to communicate clear and strong political messages, not only about the legacy of Leader, but also as a sound platform for the future.

In order to give a wider appreciation of the Leader method, and its contribution to rural development at the territorial level, this conference took the opportunity to present 16 territorial films covering both old and new Member

States. These films provided a testament to the way that Leader has worked with rural actors and other funding agents to bring a positive contribution to sustaining rural territories, and the lives of those living there. To give an objective view, several rural development experts and 'external eyes', some of whom live outside the European Union, were also invited to give their views on what they had learned about the Leader experience during the course of the conference.



To mark the contribution of those territories selected to act as national ambassadors of the Leader method, an awards ceremony, where locally crafted products were specially produced for the occasion, was very much a 'bottom-up' way of recognising territorial achievements.

### A series of welcome messages

The conference was officially opened by Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development who, in welcoming the participants, referred to the video message from Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel. In this video message, the commissioner emphasised the importance of the role and success of local communities in dealing with their own problems, and the part that Leader has played in this, notably by bringing different groups together in the form of local action groups (LAGs) across both regional and national boundaries. In this respect, she confirmed that Leader had been one of the success stories of EU policy, and that in joining the 'mainstream' of EU policy it now had a big role to play in meeting the challenges to be faced by the European Union.

In his welcome speech, Mr Carlos José São Simão de Carvalho, General Director for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Portugal, made reference to the contribution of Leader in Portugal, which had created 4 000 jobs, and the level of accountability which had increased. He emphasised the future importance of diversity and sustainability and Portugal's high expectations for the next programming period. The participants were also welcomed to the conference by the Mayor of Évora, José Ernesto d'Oliveira, and the president of the hosting LAG, Monte, Jorge Manuel de Oliveira Pinto. In his speech, Mr d'Oliveira highlighted the importance of the European Commission in listening to and reflecting upon civil

society, where the experience of the LAGs under Leader had been very positive.

'A retrospective look at the Leader Community initiative' was the theme of the speech given by Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino. Here she spoke about the different phases of the Leader initiative, and the features that have allowed it to target actions, and to mobilise and make best use of local resources. Mention was also made of Leader's contribution to innovation (and to taking risks) and also to local governance. All these aspects have had positive influences on social and economic capital, not least by helping to integrate women and youth, as well as changing the behaviour and mindset of local communities. This has led to new ways of approaching rural development, new activities and a lasting improvement in the quality of life in rural areas.

### Widening the debate

The state of play regarding the Leader axis in the rural development programme 2007–13 was outlined by Mrs Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, Head of Unit 'Consistency of rural development', Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission. This was followed by a global perspective of Leader-like methods provided by Mr George McDowell, from the USA. He presented the idea that all rural communities are unique, and that it is their assets or 'community capital', made up of human capital, human-created capital, social capital and natural capital, which are the building blocks required for development to occur. Examples of rural development from Thailand, Bangladesh, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico and the USA illustrated these points. In terms of Leader+, he used his analysis to show how 'community capital' had been achieved, and with reference to specific LAG examples explored the issues of strategy, governance, the role of the private sector and mainstreaming.





'We get to share it — the legacy of Leader' is the title of a study which was presented by the authors Robert Lukesch and Bernd Schuh, and is based on the 16 territorial synopses presented in the mini-plenaries, and elsewhere in this magazine. Their analysis discusses the seven strategic principles of the Leader method, termed as 'seven drivers of success'. Regarding mainstreaming, they identified some key risks and challenges, and provided some ideas for keeping the legacy of Leader alive at the programme, partnership and European level. Further details of this report are presented below.

### Providing a territorial view

The purpose of the mini-plenaries was to provide a showcase of rural development and the specific contribution of Leader at the territorial level. The LAG representing the territory was selected on the basis of not only the seven Leader criteria, but also taking into account the use of other complementary (non-Leader) methods which had formed part of the territory's overall rural development strategy. Once selected, a synopsis paper outlining the distinctiveness of the territory (physical, cultural, social and economic attributes), LAG history and structure, key points concerning Leader and concrete outputs resulting from the selected strategy was produced. This synopsis paper also provided a complementary reference for the films which were made about the territory and for the presentations and discussions which took place during the individual mini-plenaries. The reports from the individual workshops

are posted on the Leader+ website (see address at the end of this article).

### Leader achievements: some key messages, reflections and conclusions

Following the 16 mini-plenaries, the final plenary session brought together all the participants to hear a variety of expert opinions related to what had been presented and discussed. For the mini-plenaries, these key messages were grouped around four specific themes.

The first of these themes was concerned with 'governance and territorial achievements' and was presented by Jela Tvrdoňová. In terms of the Leader approach, good governance depends on the quality of local partnerships and networks, local development strategy, management structures, and the framework of regional and national governance systems. The main lessons learned in order to have 'good governance' under Leader include the importance of the territorial identity, a multi-sectoral partnership, social inclusion, building up social capital and sustainable use of public/private resources. In combination, all these strengthen the local democratic processes.

There was also thought given to the likely threats to governance under Leader. At the territorial level, it was considered that local authorities could question the legitimacy of the Leader approach, coupled with a lack of trust in transferring administrative responsibility to the level of the LAG.

In addition, there was a fear that mainstreaming could exacerbate the centralised approach, coupled with a lack of vertical cooperation between various sectors. At the LAG level, Leader risks becoming considered as an appendix to existing institutions or agencies, more concerned with administration rather than acting as a development opportunity, building an unbalanced partnership by not creating space for additional stakeholders and being only for the 'rural elites'.

However, the experience under the three Leader initiatives is that Leader has supported a very innovative approach to governance in rural areas, and provides, in a single package, the possibility of being tailored to meet the needs of specific rural areas.

Under the heading of 'territorial strategies and complementary non-Leader+ development processes', Elena Saraceno gave her summary. Apart from Leader, territories had often been involved with other European funding sources and development processes, such as Interreg, URBAN and EQUAL, and, in the case of the new Member States, Sapard. At national level, there are many examples where LAGs have cooperated with researchers in universities, with 'nature parks' and with a variety of national and regional funding

programmes. Such complementarities often require territories to optimise policies and exploit existing synergies. As a result, territories become more efficient and effective and there is also an increase in the working capacity of LAGs in terms of accessing and deploying different sources of funding across one or several projects. There is also still a need to develop more transfer of experience between the groups at regional, national and EU level.

Michel Dubost presented some conclusions about 'improvement of competitiveness and sustainability' based on the experience of the different territories, and in this respect it was necessary to consider economic, social and environmental aspects. For many territories, Leader has provided an additional understanding about rural development issues and has created a climate of innovation. This has been particularly apparent for sectors related to tourism and cultural heritage, and Leader has certainly helped to put businesses in a position where they can compete successfully. It is also the case that many territories include environmentally sensitive sites, such as Natura 2000, and so, at LAG level, the environmental consideration is already included as a filter in project selection. Nevertheless some challenges remain. For all territories, identity is central to competitiveness and sustainability, and in some cases



there are specific issues such as the relationship between rural and urban areas, and immigration, that need to be addressed.

A report on networking and cooperation was given by Jean-Pierre Vercruyse, which confirmed the importance of networking and cooperation in the local development strategies of the different territories. While there are some marked differences in the levels of cooperation and networking, it is nevertheless possible to draw some common conclusions. Generally, networking, as facilitated by the national network units, has been important in increasing the levels of local activity. Transnational cooperation has provided many territories with a means to access 'know-how and know-who', by giving them an understanding of the broader picture of rural development. However, there was a feeling that 'thematic' networking could be better developed, and that some of the rules and regulations concerning transnational cooperation could be improved in order to facilitate the process. For some territories in the new Member States, transnational cooperation under Leader has enabled territories to have access to a lot of expertise and has brought significant results in capacity building at the local level, where knowledge is then disseminated to the rural actors through networking activities.

### Some 'external eye' views

There follows a brief summary of some of the views on their conference experiences as presented by eight 'external eyes', four of whom were evaluators of national/regional Leader programmes — Fernandes (Portugal), Raue (Germany), Schuh (Austria) and Luckesch (Austria) — and four experts in non-EU rural development matters — Arns (Brasil), McDowell (USA), Pellissier (France) and Stroebel (South Africa).

Paulo Arns viewed the conference as an event which confirmed Leader as the most appropriate approach for supporting rural development. It therefore confirmed Leader's ability to reach out to the more isolated sectors of the rural economy and support local social, economic and political activities. Pedro Alfonso Fernandes drew attention to the view of local strategic planning as a process, whereby experience proves that 'good planning = good projects', and this is linked directly to the seven features of the Leader approach. He also referred to the importance of the ongoing evaluation of LAGs as a major determinant for the high levels of performance and innovative strategies, the involvement of all partners (including those from the private sector) and the way that Leader was able to generate further synergies as a result.

The views of Robert Lukesch were concerned with the different roles of the LAG, and, based on several examples,



he pointed out their role as being able to act as a 'link' broker. This means facilitating links between different parties such as between craftsmen, entrepreneurs and markets, and the past and the future. The LAG is also able to work as a real local development agency bundling together different sources of funding, and can also act as an 'incubator' for non-profit organisations. His final observation dealt with the potential loss of autonomy faced by some LAGs, and the danger they could face by a gradual loss of decision-making power, particularly within the framework of the new funding period. George McDowell emphasised the importance of each LAG's uniqueness. He also talked about the importance of LAGs being able to access private funding in cases where the 'credit risk' for projects is considered too great from traditional sources.

Jean-Paul Pellissier noted the enthusiasm that he had heard for Leader amongst all territorial actors, both old and new, which seemed to acknowledge the relevance of the 'bottom-up' approach, as well as the diversity of the LAG activities. The contribution of networking to allow people to learn from each other and gain confidence was viewed as important in implementing local development strategies. In this respect, the Leader method could also play an important role in cooperation with third countries, especially in the Mediterranean area. Keeping the spirit of Leader alive was the focus of Petra Raue's reflections. She stressed the important contribution of LAGs in developing ideas and solutions to local rural development challenges, and the need to maintain this 'spirit'. At programme level, this means keeping the autonomy of the LAG for decision-making and programme implementation, ensuring the quality of the programmes through



standards and providing the necessary support, and keeping the administrative process simple. At the local level, this involves ensuring transparency and accountability in the procedures of the local partnership, inclusion of all relevant stakeholders (and being open to newcomers) and maintaining good relations with local authorities.

The conclusions given by Bernd Schuh were along three lines of advice to all rural actors. Firstly, to prepare for future challenges by making sure that 'knowledge and human capacity' is established and reserve time and money to do this. Secondly, he advised rural actors to 'take a step back and take an external view of the local partnership' when building capacity, in order to allow for a critical look at routines that have been established. His last piece of advice concerned the individual, who he advised to be aware of the pressures and demands involved in working in Leader, and thus to take care to avoid 'burn-out'. The final reflections came from Aldo Stroebel who expressed his appreciation of being invited to provide a non-EU perspective. He viewed Leader as a unique European initiative, and in particular stressed the importance of the partnership formation as

being a strategic determinant, and the role of transnational cooperation with its potential to be extended to developing countries where rural development has many different challenges. He also mentioned the potential role of the higher education sector as a partner in rural development strategies, and the need to have a strong monitoring and evaluation system in order to more concretely show the progress and results of projects, in terms of economics and human capacity building. Such a system would also play an important role in achieving long-term sustainability, at a time when perhaps external public funding would not be available.

### Leader awards and some concluding words

To mark Leader achievements in a more formal way, an award ceremony gave a chance for recognition from other peer groups, and the awards themselves also showed the character and diversity of the territories. Each of the 16 territories had been asked to provide a handcrafted object, typical of their territory, to be awarded to another territory. The donor and recipient territories, represented by the





LAGs, were asked to present themselves, whereupon they received their award, along with a certificate of achievement from Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino. A full list and photos of the awards can be found on the Leader+ website.

Mr Manuel dos Santos, Vice-President of the European Parliament, spoke about the importance of rural development at the level of the European institutions, and the need to keep the interests of rural areas firmly on the political agenda. These sentiments were echoed by Mr Rui Nobre Gonçalves, Portuguese Rural Development and Forestry State Secretary, who stressed how pleased the Portuguese government had been with the implementation of the Leader programme. He hoped that the benefits that Leader had brought to Portugal's rural areas would continue under the new rural development programme, for which they had high expectations.

The final words went to Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino, who, on behalf of the Commissioner, Mrs Fischer Boel, praised all those involved in the Leader projects and films that had been presented during the conference. Looking back she spoke about how effective Leader had been as a laboratory for ideas, and how it continued to cut across sectoral

boundaries to bring together a variety of resources, including people, who together had been able to solve specific problems. She also mentioned the high level of private funding through the involvement of the private sector, and the valuable contribution of networks which allow people to learn from each other. In looking ahead, she talked about the challenges that rural areas face, such as the environment, competitiveness, climate change and bio-energy, and the contribution that Leader can make to these challenges as a part of mainstreamed policy. For this reason, there is a minimum spend level attributed to the Leader axis, which amounts to around EUR 5 billion of EAFRD contribution (compared to EUR 2 billion under Leader+). The importance of having the right conditions for Leader-type projects to work well was also stressed. This means having the right relationship between national and regional authorities, training for Leader-related work and the sharing of lessons learned. To achieve all this requires a special balance, that is, having the right amount of encouragement and support provided at the central level — and this Leader seems so far to have managed.

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/22112007\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/22112007_en.htm)

# The territorial <sup>(1)</sup> overview

The following territorial overviews are based on the territorial synopses (which were provided by the territories themselves) for the final Leader+ Observatory conference, 'Leader achievements: a diversity of territorial experience', Évora, Portugal, November 2007. The individual synopses used in the mini-plenary sessions can be found at the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/22112007\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/22112007_en.htm)



<sup>(1)</sup> The concept of 'territory' as used for the Évora conference and in this present issue is used in a broad sense: it covers not only the LAG geographical delimited area with its natural resources but also its rural community and territorial organisation (representative institutions/organisations/local networks) as well as its local identity influencing the local actors in their decisions.



## Austria: Ausserfern

Population (inhabitants)	31 922
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 237
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	25.8
Number of municipalities	37
Composition of LAG	non-profit association
Leader+ budget	EUR 5 180 178
LAG website/e-mail	<a href="http://www.allesausserfern.at">www.allesausserfern.at</a> <a href="mailto:rea@allesausserfern.at">rea@allesausserfern.at</a>

The territory of Ausserfern is Alpine with high mountains and deep narrow valleys, and its landscape is also characterised by lakes and rivers. Dairy farming, cattle breeding and forestry dominate the land use. Isolated from much of Austria and accessible only from mountain passes, the territory is just as socio-economically dependent on southern Bavaria in Germany, with which there are several border crossings.

In 2001, the LAG was designated eligible for the Leader+ programme, although a non-profit association called Regionalentwicklung Ausserfern has existed since 1995.

The local development strategy reflects the LAG's overall theme of 'improving the quality of life in rural areas', and includes three main objectives: networking and cooperation in the field of education and new technologies; enhancing the attractiveness of living spaces; and strengthening local value chains. The distinctive approach of this LAG has been to widely interpret the theme of improving quality of life and thus implement a holistic development strategy. It has not only concentrated on diversifying agricultural activities and developing tourism, which although important do not ensure the future vitality of the territory. The development strategy has also integrated a social element, including gender mainstreaming, youth activities, childcare facilities, integration of excluded groups such as the disabled and immigrants, and care for the elderly.

Another factor which has contributed to the success of the LAG has been its inclusive and transparent governance. For example, in order to foster a widespread understanding of bottom-up rural development, LAG meetings rotate between villages. Also, members can be substituted at any time, allowing more people to become involved in decision-making, including women and youth.

Regarding cooperation, Ausserfern has been involved in both interterritorial and transnational projects. It led a project involving several Austrian LAGs on regional governance in order to strengthen management and planning competences. Given the proximity and interdependence with German territories, the LAG has cooperated regularly with Bavarian LAGs, including a training project for cultural guides and museum managers.





## Czech Republic: Posazavi

Population (inhabitants)	90 078
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 271
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	71
Number of municipalities	99
Composition of LAG	non-profit association
Leader+ budget (1)	EUR 1 091 020
LAG website/e-mail	www.posazavi.com leader@posazavi.com

(1) Leader+ type measures of the Objective 1 programme, 2004–06.

Located in the south-east of central Bohemia, the LAG territory enjoys a strategic location with good accessibility. It is connected to the main road and rail system, and Prague is only 80 km from its southern boundary. Bohemia itself is a region at the heart of Europe, close to both Germany and Poland. These factors give the territory significant economic potential, although there are some parts of the territory which are isolated and face difficult development conditions.

One of the territory's most valuable assets is its picturesque, typically Czech landscape characterised by rolling hills with lakes and rivers, hedgerows, flowers and forests. Its clean air and unpolluted environment attracts urban dwellers from Prague. However, the growth of second homes is emerging as a problem for community cohesion, and the permanent local population is declining and ageing rapidly. The quality and nature of the tourist sector is therefore a big issue for the LAG. Specifically, the development strategy aims to preserve and enhance the natural and architectural heritage, promote the territory's profile as a place to live and visit, encourage participation

in civic life through associations, and support infrastructure and social services, especially for children and young people.

A LAG was formed officially in October 2003 and was in a position to implement the Leader+ programme as soon as the Czech Republic joined the EU in May 2004. Its origins, however, date back to 2000 when discussions took place between a local community association and nine entrepreneurs. The group was enlarged in 2001 to include the regional information centre and its work concentrated mainly on tourism. The following year, a greater outreach working with the community began and the scope of activity increased. A first priority was to build capacity for integrated rural development. The main activity was to strengthen cooperation and encourage partnership working, which has been mostly successful. In addition, experience has been gained through the exchange of good practice with other territories in the Czech Republic. This has given the LAG a strong desire for further cooperation in the new programming period, including with transnational partners.





## Denmark: Vestsjælland

Population (inhabitants)	60 225
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	789
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	76
Number of municipalities	7
Composition of LAG	association
Leader+ budget	EUR 5 206 980
LAG website/e-mail	www.kalundborg.dk kalm@kalundborg.dk



Located just outside the capital and known as the 'green garden of Copenhagen', Vestsjælland is Denmark in a nutshell: beautiful beaches, idyllic towns, peaceful woods and small lakes and rivers. The territory has a coastline of 200 km and includes several protected nature areas. It is divided in the middle by a large moor called Åmosen that is currently being developed as a nature park. The territory's location and natural beauty offers many advantages but also creates several challenges related to planning, especially from the pressures of commuting. Furthermore, despite being close to Copenhagen, it still suffers from the common problems associated with rural areas, including low self-esteem, an ageing population, low levels of education, seasonal economic dependence and a weak entrepreneurial culture.

A Leader+ LAG was formed in 2001 by 12 local development actors who took inspiration from neighbouring Sweden during the Leader II programme. Together they launched a territorial development strategy that would: develop new products, activities and events based on the natural and cultural resources; establish new networks to

strengthen the coherence of the region; foster a strong entrepreneurial spirit; develop businesses through innovation; create awareness about the uniqueness of the region; and bring new ideas to local development through cooperation. Regarding the latter, there has been a very successful project with Danish LAGs to develop a strategy around production and marketing of local quality foods. In addition, Vestsjælland has been a partner in three transnational projects involving partners in Finland, Sweden and the UK.

Given its relative lack of experience, the LAG made a point of training all its members in the Leader method from the outset. This included a series of seminars on the partnership approach, cooperation and evaluation/future planning. Moreover, it made a particular effort to attend national network unit and European Leader+ Observatory events to learn from other territories with more experience of Leader. As such, Vestsjælland is confident about its future. The LAG hopes to continue its activities within both the Leader axis and the common fisheries policy in the new programming period.



## Finland: Joensuu

Population (inhabitants)	53 917
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	5 692
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	10.5
Number of municipalities	7
Composition of LAG	non-profit association
Leader+ budget	EUR 6 070 030
LAG website/e-mail	www.joensuu-leader.net oensuu.leader@pp.inet.fi

The LAG territory encircles the city of Joensuu (excluded for population threshold reasons), whose name is also shared by the region. It is known as the 'forest capital of Europe' due to its expertise in research, management and exploitation of forests, which along with rivers and lakes characterise the physical landscape. The influence of the city distinguishes an increasingly popular commuter belt from remoter and isolated areas on the periphery. Overall employment and income levels are significantly lower than the national average, largely due to a reduction in the primary sector following an amalgamation of farm units. Another serious problem facing the territory is access to services, since there have been large-scale closures of post offices, schools and shops. This trend is especially negative for the elderly since distances to basic services can be up to 25 km and public transport is limited.

The LAG was established in 1996 at the beginning of the Leader II programme by a group of active individuals, including farmers, volunteers, entrepreneurs, municipal officers and academics. It has a board of directors elected from the membership which makes funding decisions. The board is advised by a pre-evaluation team nominated annually, which includes both LAG members and external experts.

The Leader+ development strategy reflects the territory's characteristics, focusing largely on cooperation between rural and urban areas. It also provides scope for projects related to the plurality of values in rural areas, local life, the development of micro-enterprises and stimulation of an active civil society. There is a good working relationship between the LAG and local authorities, where each respects the other's role. Although the authorities officially sanction funding, they cannot influence the decisions of

the LAG's board, an arrangement that has proved crucial to the success of the programme.

A particular feature of this LAG has been its strong participation in cooperation projects, both within Finland and abroad: it has been a partner in seven interterritorial projects, ranging from village planning to the mapping of small arts enterprises, and two transnational projects with Spanish and Portuguese LAGs, relating to forestry management and village radio stations.





## France: Haut Jura

Population (inhabitants)	82 000
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 651
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	113
Number of municipalities	113
Composition of LAG	regional park authority
Leader+ budget	EUR 3 491 434
LAG website/e-mail	www.parc-haut-jura.fr ph.andlauer@parc-haut-jura.fr

This LAG territory, which incorporates the regional park of Haut Jura, shares its eastern border with Switzerland and is equidistant from the two urban settlements of Besançon and Lyon. Its physical landscape is characterised by a series of limestone plateaux separated by steep river valleys and covered by forests. Socio-economically, it has experienced opposite trends to many other rural areas in Europe. The population is increasing and there is a tendency for migration from towns located in the

valleys to smaller settlements on the plateaux, where it is sunnier and land for development is more abundant. The area boasts a number of specialised industrial clusters, including plastics, metal treatment and spectacles, which together account for 50 % of jobs. There is also a large pool of local handicraft know-how, such as in the production of wooden toys. In addition, tourism is an important source of regional income, both in the summer and winter (ski) seasons.



The Haut Jura natural regional park was established in 1986 in order to protect and enhance the local heritage (natural, built and cultural) as well as develop the local economy. It has been a LAG for almost 20 years, participating in all three Leader programmes. Although the regional park authority is constituted exclusively by municipalities, for the purposes of Leader+ a programming committee made up of 18 members was established: nine from the private sector and nine elected officials. Establishing a LAG within an existing large public authority has both advantages and disadvantages, but one of the main benefits is that administration costs are kept to a minimum, since the required human and physical resources are already in place.

The territorial development strategy during Leader+ has been an extension of that pursued by the regional park, though with an increased emphasis on handicrafts and industry. It has sought to follow a multidimensional approach that links economic development to local culture and the environment. Other advantages of the Leader approach have been to create more of a focus on the territory, provide financial security for project promoters through multiannual allocations, and the opportunity for innovative ideas to be valued and realised. Finally, the LAG has also participated in two transnational projects related to tourism, hiking and audio guides.





## Germany: Upper Swabia

Population (inhabitants)	118 832
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 108
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	107
Number of municipalities	45
Composition of LAG	association
Leader+ budget	EUR 10 000 000
LAG website/e-mail	www.donaukalender.de leader@irasig.de



Upper Swabia is located in the state of Baden-Württemberg, bordering the Alps in the south. It is a sparsely populated area with the largest town of Sigmaringen numbering only 17 000 inhabitants. The territory is split in two by the Danube which flows from west to east and has two major tributaries, the Lauchert and Kanzach rivers. Land use is almost entirely agricultural, with cereals in the north and dairy in the south. There is a rich cultural heritage and local people are known for being creative and innovative. The economic strength of the region is based on successful SMEs, especially those producing precision parts for industry. The tourist sector is also significant and is growing, based on the territory's attractive landscape, thermal baths and proximity to the Alps and Lake Constance.

The territory has benefited from all generations of the Leader initiative and the current LAG continued from the previous programming period. However, prior to the start of Leader+ an intensive consultation process took place to ensure that the objectives of the development strategy matched the expectations of local actors. An overall objective was set to increase the value added of tourism

and to diversify agriculture. More specifically, this included networking of tourist attractions (especially around the theme of the river Danube), better use of the natural and cultural heritage, and direct marketing of local products.

Transnational cooperation has also been an important and productive part of the development strategy. A project to create a network of museums along the Danube allowed Upper Swabia to link up with two other LAGs in Germany and Austria. Another project with an Italian LAG developed an innovative system of education used in museums. Finally, the LAG worked with three Spanish groups to develop synergies between health, tourism, ecology and thermal water use.

A particular feature of this LAG is that development actors have worked together to ensure that different institutional levels are joined up and that all sources of available funding are coordinated. Synergies have been created between other EU programmes such as LIFE and EQUAL, which are all part of a regional development programme that is both publicly and privately funded.



## Greece: Development Agency of Thessaloniki

Population (inhabitants)	61 329
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	2 089
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	29
Number of municipalities	15
Composition of LAG	local government agency
Leader+ budget	EUR 14 293 694
LAG website/e-mail	www.aneth.gr aneth@aneth.gr

This LAG enjoys an advantageous location just outside Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city. The territory's proximity to a large population centre as well as its rich cultural heritage and natural landscape offers the potential for growth in the tourist sector, especially alternative forms such as ecological, health and spiritual holidays. There are a number of underexploited resources, including typical local products, protected nature reserves, historic sites and a significant geothermal field. Building on the territory's economic potential is important to halt growing unemployment, especially among women and young people. There is also a great shortage in basic infrastructure and social services, as well as in administrative and institutional capacity.

The Development Agency of Thessaloniki was founded in 1992 and has acted as a LAG across all three generations of the Leader initiative. It is made up of representatives from local government, the prefecture of Thessaloniki, the central Macedonian regional development fund, agricultural and fishing cooperatives and associations of social interests. In addition to Leader+, the agency manages other funds for integrated rural development, notably a Leader-like initiative of the Greek Ministry of Agriculture. In this context, an important task of the agency recently has been to support human capital in the region, and especially to help

vulnerable groups (such as immigrants and women) to enter the labour market.

The Leader+ development strategy has focused on the economic opportunities offered by the territory's proximity to the urban area of Thessaloniki, in particular its high-quality traditional products and services and easy access to the natural environment. In addition, the LAG had the aim of reversing the flow of economic and human capital to the city by strengthening the territory's identity as a dynamic area with a large amount of untapped natural resources. One of the main challenges that the LAG faced in implementing its development strategy was the hesitancy, on the part of investors, in launching innovative activities in the territory, and in cooperating with other partners. The LAG responded through an ongoing communication campaign to brief potential investors about the opportunities offered through Leader+, and awareness-raising about the Leader method with presentations of best practices and networking events.

Regarding cooperation, the agency acted as the lead partner in a project with 15 other Greek LAGs to develop a northern Greece wine route, integrating the main vineyards of the region with other tourist services and leisure activities. It has also been involved with projects to develop high-quality tourism with partners from other countries in southern Europe.



## Hungary: Összefogás Sárrét Jövőjéért

Population (inhabitants)	53 115
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	955
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	55
Number of municipalities	13
Composition of LAG	association
Leader+ budget (¹)	EUR 400 000
LAG website/e-mail	www.oske.hu bnebildiko@freemail.hu

(¹) Leader+ type measures of the Objective 1 programme, 2004–06.



This territory is located in the centre of the country on the Great Hungarian Plain and benefits from its position at the nexus of the main national transport routes. It has been populated for a long time and has a rich cultural heritage that provides inspiration for further development. There are proud traditions of animal husbandry and craft production which are also reflected in local folklore. There is a higher-than-average level of civic life and community cohesion. Non-governmental organisations complement local government well and are becoming increasingly important partners in the development process. The territory was therefore well positioned to take advantage of the Leader programme when Hungary joined the European Union in May 2004.

The LAG was formed after discussions in 2005 and covers the whole of the Sárrét region. The membership, which is composed of the region's municipalities and civil associations, has continuously increased and currently numbers 38. All members had submitted comments and suggestions during the tendering process which formed the basis for the territorial development strategy. This 'bottom-up' strategy includes: developing

human capital (employment, cooperation, entrepreneurialism); increasing the competitiveness of the local economy (diversification of agriculture, rational use of natural resources); and protecting the environment and cultural heritage (landscape inventory, village renewal). This strategy complements other non-Leader activities, particularly through the national rural development plan.

By adopting the Leader method, the LAG has become one of the most significant regional institutions, cooperating with a wide variety of actors in different sectors. Its priority has been education and training, ensuring that as many people in the territory are aware of the advantages of integrated rural development and particularly the opportunities offered by the Leader programme. Moreover, despite being a relatively new LAG, Összefogás Sárrét Jövőjéért has already participated in two cooperation projects: one with another Hungarian LAG aimed at contact building with nascent development groups in Romania; and another with a German LAG which is concerned with a historic cattle-driving route and its cultural significance in the two countries.



## Ireland: Arigna

Population (inhabitants)	62 000
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	3 290
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	20
Number of municipalities	n/a
Composition of LAG	limited company
Budget (1)	/
LAG website/e-mail	www.arignaleader.org arignaleader@iol.ie

(1) Arigna has been funded through the national rural development programme.

The LAG's territory is located not far from the border with Northern Ireland and covers some of the most rural and depopulated areas of Ireland. It has a traditional dependence on the land through agriculture, fishing and forestry, which, along with construction, account for 25 % of all jobs. The territory was known for the Arigna coal mines, which were closed in 1990 causing devastation to the area and furthering rural decline. However, it also provided the motivation for community development that resulted in the LAG's creation. Despite the buoyant national economy of the 1990s which helped absorb job losses in the primary industries, the area has struggled against population decline and under-investment. There is a growing problem with service provision after the failure to replace schools, post offices, shops and police stations. State-subsidised services such as public transport and health continue to fall behind the rest of the country.

The LAG itself was one of the first established in Ireland and has gained considerable experience over a period of 15 years. This has included close working relationships

with other agencies and government bodies implementing EU and national development programmes, such as Interreg, Pobal, PEACE and those funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Leader+ strategy itself has concentrated on developing the following activities: rural tourism, rural enterprise, community-based projects, renewable energy, creative industries, alternative agriculture and local food production. There has been a particular emphasis on family farms, women and young people.

Arigna has been one of the most active promoters of cooperation in Europe, having been the lead LAG in five transnational projects. This has included: a project involving partners from Northern Ireland and Sweden that encouraged individual creativity to maximise opportunities for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property; a project with a Polish partner to create an English language school in the territory; and a project with an Austrian LAG aimed at marketing rural and agri-tourism across Europe.





## Italy: Appennino Genovese

Population (inhabitants)	99 868
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 368
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	73
Number of municipalities	56
Composition of LAG	public body
Leader+ budget	EUR 5 311 776
LAG website/e-mail	<a href="http://www.appenninogenovese.it">www.appenninogenovese.it</a> <a href="mailto:info@appenninogenovese.it">info@appenninogenovese.it</a>



The LAG territory covers a narrow strip of land between the sea and the foothills of the Apennines, stretching along the coastline for 35 km. Only mountainous areas of the coastal municipalities are included in the Leader territory. There is a sharp contrast between the coast and the interior that defines the socio-economic context. The coast is heavily built up with little space for transport infrastructure, but the interior is poorly connected to the sea and other parts of the territory. There are several valleys within the area in which services and economic activities are well developed, whereas others are sparsely populated and only used for farming. Recent growth in the service sector has been unable to reduce unemployment which has risen following the loss of several important manufacturing industries.

LAG Appennino Genovese is a quasi-public body that aims to develop the non-coastal areas of the province of Genoa and improve links between town and country. The Leader+ development strategy supports activities to improve public services and the quality of life of those living in the rural areas concerned. The LAG was formed at the beginning of the Leader II programme period and has since expanded to incorporate several smaller LAGs. The reason for this amalgamation was to achieve the required

critical mass in terms of human and investment capacity to undertake long-term goals. Furthermore, the increased interest in improving rural tourism demanded a larger territory to allow a stronger and better integrated tourist offer to be developed.

The first aspect of the LAG's development strategy focused on improving quality of life, especially through services for women and the family such as childcare. The second aspect focused on tourism, supporting projects that increased the quality and quantity of accommodation and local products, developed activities to extend the season, focused on the cultural uniqueness of the territory and promoted the area through new tools. A general objective of the strategy was to build trust and networks that will lead to sustainable and cooperative development.

Finally, the LAG has participated in two very rewarding transnational projects. One involved several LAGs in the German state of Baden-Württemberg to develop activities related to the promotion and understanding of their territories ('TransInterpret') and included a useful relationship with Freiburg university. Another concerned the networking of several geo-parks across Europe in which the territory's Beigua natural park was heavily involved.



## The Netherlands: Kromme Rijn

Population (inhabitants)	17 500
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	108
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	161
Number of municipalities	4
Composition of LAG	Advisory Council to the Provincial Executive
Leader+ budget	EUR 3 050 000
LAG website/e-mail	www.leaderpluskrommerijn.nl marieke.leentvaar@waaloord.nl

Located 25 km from the city of Utrecht, Kromme Rijn lies on the banks of the Rhine and half the area is land reclaimed during the Middle Ages. The river was diverted in the 12th century by the bishop of Utrecht and a small river still meanders through the territory, following the Rhine's previous path, hence the LAG's name. It has a rich historical and cultural heritage, shown by the many castles and manors built by the bishop's vassals on the reclaimed land. It also has several Roman fortifications, since the territory marked the boundary of the Roman Empire for many years. Today the area is largely agricultural (cattle and fruit farms), and, at 4.5 %, the level of employment is considerably higher than the national average. Its favourable location and accessibility has also attracted considerable new business investment in the fields of transport, food processing and manufacturing. The majority of people who live in the territory, however, are employed in services, and many commute to Utrecht where there is a strong financial services centre, a university and several hospitals. This keeps unemployment to a minimum but causes traffic problems and pressures for urbanisation within the territory.

The diverse socio-economic context and lack of a common regional identity has made it very difficult to bring together community stakeholders and pursue sustainable territorial development. A number of strategies had been implemented in the 1990s but tended to focus exclusively on particular sectors. At the end of 2001, the province of Utrecht took the initiative to promote Leader as an area-based bottom-up solution to meet the needs of Kromme Rijn. Due to the inexperience of the territory with the Leader method it was initially very difficult, but an important impetus came from a group of foundations linked to private entrepreneurship which applied for Leader+.

Although the region has an attractive landscape with historic architecture, tourism is underdeveloped. Marketing local products and services is now one strand of the development strategy, whose theme is 'improving the quality of life in rural areas'. The other strands concern the physical aspects of quality of life, which aim to improve the level of services in the remoter parts of the area. There is also a further focus on social aspects of development aiming to foster better community cohesion and cooperation. Kromme Rijn did take part in one cooperation project on 'imagining rural identities in Europe', involving partners in Ireland, the Czech Republic and Italy. However, perhaps more cooperation and exchange of experience from other territories are needed for a more successful strategy in the future.





## Poland: Krajna and Paluki partnership

Population (inhabitants)	84 458
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	1 120
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	75
Number of municipalities	5
Composition of LAG	foundation
Leader+ budget (¹)	EUR 145 502
LAG website/e-mail	www.fundacja-krajna-paluki.pl partnerstwo.naklo@wp.pl

(¹) Leader+ type measures of the Objective 1 programme, 2004–06.

The River Noteć runs through the middle of the LAG's territory, separating the Krajna and Paluki areas, and is its most characteristic feature. The Noteć valley, a Natura 2000 site, is very beautiful with rich meadows and pastures. For generations, the economy of the territory has been closely connected to the river, but in the second half of the last century it was neglected. It was both unprotected and underexploited despite its fragile environment and potential as an economic resource. Recently, efforts have been made to enhance and promote its value, especially as a tourist destination. Its attractiveness and accessibility to nearby urban settlements is also leading to inward migration. Although this trend has some benefits, the affluent newcomers from the cities do not share the same traditions and interpersonal relations as the long-established residents, which has been detrimental to community cohesion.

The LAG has aimed to build confidence and trust within the community, both across social groups and between public and private actors. It originated in 2001, when participation in local development was virtually non-existent. Informal groupings at village level generated several renewal projects, which not only improved the quality of life, but more importantly resulted in local people working together. This bottom-up dynamic was formalised in 2005 with the creation of the 'Partnership for Krajna and Paluki' and it applied for several funding streams, successfully receiving a grant from the Polish Academy of Philanthropy.

After preparing a local development strategy, the partnership received Leader+ funding at the beginning of 2007. The main focus of the strategy is on the River Noteć and the natural resources of the Noteć valley. It also aims to: rediscover the territory's cultural heritage; improve

infrastructure to increase the quality of life; encourage cooperation for development; and train local people to be proactive and entrepreneurial. Given Poland's late entry into the Leader+ programme, just 16 projects are currently being funded. However, the LAG is focusing on capacity building with the hope that the new rural development programme will continue the momentum of bottom-up activity in the future.





## Portugal: Monte ACE

Population (inhabitants)	92 294
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	5 384
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	17
Number of municipalities	10
Composition of LAG	non-profit association
Leader+ budget	EUR 5 841 397
LAG website/e-mail	www.monte-ace.pt monte@monte-ace.pt

The landscape of central Alentejo is characterised by large open areas with occasional cork trees. Agriculture dominates land use, and currently wine production is increasing as well as the rearing of Iberian pigs fed on acorns. The territory has a rich heritage, being influenced by both Roman and Arabic cultures which can be seen in its architecture and local traditions. It has a Mediterranean climate with long hot summers and little rainfall, causing difficult agricultural conditions and a dependence on the water supply for irrigation and public consumption. Infrastructure across Alentejo is underdeveloped, especially the road system, although Monte ACE does benefit from its proximity to the A6 motorway linking Lisbon to Spain. The area is facing the two major demographic problems of a rapidly declining and ageing population. Also, despite one of the oldest universities in Portugal being located in the town of Évora, a lack of education and low levels of formal qualifications is a big obstacle to local development, made worse by the loss of graduates to urban areas such as Lisbon.

Four local development associations came together and applied for LAG status in 1996 at the start of the Leader II programme. The LAG is a wide-ranging partnership

and has a particularly good relationship with the University of Évora that provides the scientific experience and research capacity for innovative activities. Another distinctive feature of this LAG is its understanding that existing organisations can help deal with difficult social issues, since they have the trust of local people and can promote participation.

The overall aim of the LAG is to 'promote and add value to products, services and local know-how' focusing on the creation of wealth, equal opportunities and employment in the territory. Specifically, the aims of the development strategy are to: increase the quality and quantity of human capital through training and qualifications; promote technical assistance to support entrepreneurial activities; diversify product lines; strengthen marketing and commercial networks; preserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage; and encourage partnership both within the LAG and with other territories.

Regarding cooperation, several projects among the eight LAGs in Alentejo have been very productive, and Monte ACE has also led a transnational project with a development group in Brazil.







## Spain: Asociación para el Desarrollo Rural de la Comarca de Guadix

Population (inhabitants)	48 967
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	2 039
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	24
Number of municipalities	32
Composition of LAG	non-profit association
Leader+ budget	EUR 13 046 724
LAG website/e-mail	www.comarcadeguadix.com guadix@cdrtcampos.es



Guadix is a clearly defined territory in the eastern part of Andalusia and is a mountainous area that includes the Sierra Nevada natural park. Its high altitude and topology pose challenges to development, but can also be considered as opportunities since the dramatic landscape and bio-diversity attract visitors and outdoor sports enthusiasts. The town of Guadix is the regional hub around which all economic and commercial activity revolves. It is well connected to major centres in Andalusia by the A92 motorway, including Granada. Malaga and the main regional airport are just 90 minutes away. Its natural and cultural heritage and strategic location are significant advantages, but the territory also suffers from serious negative trends such as depopulation, ageing and unemployment. Agriculture still accounts for over 40 % of employment and the local economy is finding it difficult to diversify. Other sectors continue to be characterised by micro, often family run, enterprises which in many cases use simple production techniques and low levels of technology.

The LAG has a long history dating back to the late 1980s when an association of municipalities was formed for the specific purpose of managing a jointly owned set of

machinery. It later widened its objectives and from 1991 to 1994 it administered the EU's LEDA (local employment development action) programme, which aimed to identify good practices in job creation and local development. This programme already involved forums of local stakeholders and thus the association was well positioned to become a Leader II LAG in 1994. Since then it has focused on the delivery of the two Leader programmes. In addition, it has also implemented the Spanish Proder (*programa operativo de desarrollo y diversificación económica de zonas rurales*) programme, the Integra <sup>(1)</sup> Community initiative, and recently the NERA project of the Regional Ministry of Agriculture, which has generated a strategic plan for Andalusia's rural areas based on a common methodology of community participation.

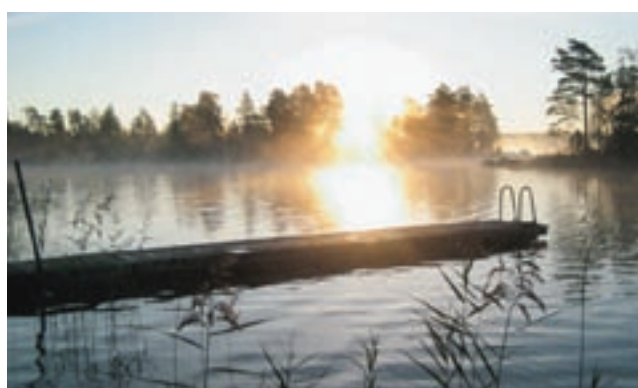
The Leader+ development strategy in Guadix is integrated with other regional priorities: Natura 2000 has several designated sites within the territory; and the rural development plan which is agreed with the regional ministry of agriculture. This allows for complementarities between the different funding streams and avoids duplication. The overall theme of protection of the natural and cultural heritage includes several measures that preserve and enhance the territory's resources and also raise awareness among the local population. A further theme is the promotion of the area to visitors. Protection and development are equal objectives that ensure the territory's long-term sustainability. In order to learn from other experiences, the LAG has taken part in eight interterritorial and two transnational projects funded by both Leader+ and Proder.

(1) This is geared towards the integration in the labour market of disadvantaged groups with specific problems, such as immigrants and refugees, drug addicts, inmates and former inmates, ethnic minorities, homeless persons and others in a situation of social exclusion.



## Sweden: Smålandsgruppen

Population (inhabitants)	88 661
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	7 977
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	11
Number of municipalities	8
Composition of LAG	association
Leader+ budget	EUR 13 055 745
LAG website/e-mail	<a href="http://www.smalandsgruppen.se">www.smalandsgruppen.se</a> <a href="mailto:smalandsgruppen@hogsby.se">smalandsgruppen@hogsby.se</a>

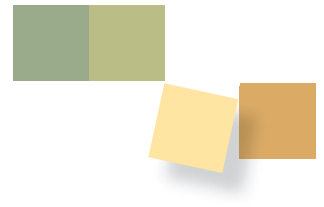


The territory of Smålandsgruppen is located in the highland area of southern Sweden, bringing together several small ancient kingdoms. Forests cover much of the area and many companies in the forestry and related timber sector are located there. In addition, a long-established crystal industry, known worldwide, is a source of great pride for the local inhabitants. The territory has a relatively new aluminium industry and it also boasts three successful industrial clusters that are drivers for economic growth. However, despite these advantages, this inland area of Sweden suffers from the same problems of rural isolation as the north of Sweden. In particular, the population is steadily decreasing and there is a particular problem in relation to young people of working age. There is no university in the area and despite the local characteristics of perseverance and ingenuity, low levels of education are a big obstacle to innovation and development.

The LAG was established for the purposes of administering Leader II, officially being formed in November 1996. It has benefited from other Swedish and EU funds, including: Objective 2 for business development; Objective 3 for *ex-ante* scoping projects; and the CAP for agriculture and

forestry initiatives. Leader+ has continued the aim of making Småland a 'modern rural area', to think in new ways and remain flexible to market conditions.

The local development strategy focuses on the development of businesses in the hardwood, aluminium and crystal sectors and in addition in the emerging creative design industry. In this way, Smålandsgruppen is an example of a LAG that focuses heavily on the competitiveness of its traditional economic strengths while fostering new specialisations. In particular, it aims to facilitate access to markets for small production units through collective actions. To achieve this, the LAG stimulates cooperation between individuals, companies and the public sector. It supports projects that develop clusters and build connections to urban areas, market the attractive local area and affordable housing, increase the influence of young people and strengthen entrepreneurship and new skills. Smålandsgruppen has a history of leading successful transnational cooperation initiatives, including two projects related to hardwood with partners in Finland and Denmark, and one relating to innovation in tourism with partners from Ireland and Latvia.



## The United Kingdom: Scottish Borders

Population (inhabitants)	108 280
Surface area (km <sup>2</sup> )	4 731
Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	23
Number of municipalities	1
Composition of LAG	voluntary partnership
Leader+ budget (¹)	EUR 4 297 000
LAG website/e-mail	<a href="http://www.scotborders.gov.uk">www.scotborders.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:mmackenzie@scotborders.gov.uk">mmackenzie@scotborders.gov.uk</a>

(¹) Represented by one local authority.

The Scottish Borders is a geographically, administratively and culturally unique area within Scotland covering a high-quality landscape stretching from England to the main urban settlements in the centre of Scotland. With the exception of the east, which is bounded by coastline, the territory is defined by the Lammermuir, Moorfoot and Pentland Hills in the north, the Tweedsmuir Hills in the west, and the Cheviot Hills in the south.

In addition to farming, forestry is an increasingly important land use, having more than tripled in the last 50 years. This has provided important job opportunities, though the area still lacks a large-scale wood processing plant, with most timber being sent to England or continental Europe. Socio-economically, the territory has many advantages, including its civic pride and community spirit, low unemployment and a wide and varied voluntary sector. However, the population is ageing since many young people move to urban areas and those who do stay have not been to university and lack skills. The area is also

disadvantaged by its reliance on road transport, with no rail links and little public transport. Furthermore, the local economy is overly dependent on only a few industries, leaving it vulnerable to sudden economic change and resulting job losses.

The LAG's overall development strategy is to empower and enable communities, individuals and businesses to take advantage of the many opportunities related to the sustainable use of the territory's natural and cultural resources. The four themes within the strategy are: wood, water, land and culture. In implementing its strategy, the LAG gives particular priority to the empowerment of women and young people and their participation in decision-making processes that affect their future well-being. Youth has also been a significant aspect of its many cooperation activities within Scotland, the UK and across Europe. It has participated in six transnational cooperation projects with different LAGs in Sweden, including three on youth, and a total of 13 interterritorial projects.

# The Leader legacy

'We get to share it — the legacy of Leader'

A synthesis of the report written by Robert Lukesch (ÖAR) <sup>(1)</sup> and Bernd Schuh (ÖIR) <sup>(2)</sup>



Bernd Schuh (ÖIR) and Robert Lukesch (ÖAR)

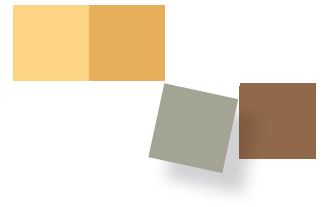
## A time to pause, to think and to celebrate

Although the Leader initiative is ending, the evolution of it is not. With Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on rural development, the Leader method has been integrated into mainstream rural policy. The EC strategic guidelines for rural development note that resources for the Leader approach should contribute to the priorities of all three EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) axes as well as improving governance and promoting

endogenous development. It is therefore apposite to recall the main achievements of the Leader initiative having been implemented in three funding periods between 1991 and 2006. These achievements will be juxtaposed in opposition to the risks which might be inherent to the integration of the Leader approach into mainstream rural policy. Finally, the main challenges to be considered for keeping the Leader method alive, as a firmly integrated component spurring innovatory practices at local and regional level, will be listed.

<sup>(1)</sup> Independent business and development consultant and active partner of ÖAR Regional Consulting Ltd, and also working as a thematic expert for the Leader+ Observatory.

<sup>(2)</sup> Consultant in regional economy and environmental economy at ÖIR, a non-profit association active in basic research, planning and policy consulting, and the management of complex planning processes, and also working as a thematic expert for the Leader+ Observatory.



## The main achievements of the Leader initiative to be kept and developed

### *Seven aspects of development*

It can be considered that the Leader initiative has addressed seven primordial aspects concerning the sustainable development of rural areas, which are listed below.

- ▶ It has addressed and fostered local identities, the sense of belonging and feelings of allegiance, and turned them into drivers for local development.
- ▶ It has empowered local people by strengthening them and their representatives' capacity to articulate their needs, and to have access to adequate resources to achieve their aims.
- ▶ It has provided an organisational framework to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate territorial development concepts at local level, as well as the possibility to hire and train professional management and advisory staff for the benefit of local people.
- ▶ It has unleashed new options and entrepreneurial dynamics for local development by putting the emphasis on the linkages between different sectors, as well as between private, public and civic activities.
- ▶ It has fostered social interaction and cooperation between different actors, contributing to a more balanced representation of interests at local level.
- ▶ It has prompted local actors to create positive images and strategic visions based on endogenous resources and values, thus improving the competitiveness of their area in the context of a globalised economy.
- ▶ It has contributed to building up local governance structures capable of coping with complex tasks and assuming responsible roles with regard to sustainable development.

This wide spectrum of positive results is commonly ascribed to the effects of the combined application of seven operational principles and one programmatic principle, which are commonly epitomised as the 'Leader approach' or 'Leader method'.

### *The seven operational principles*

The seven principles should be brought into effect at local level, as well as in the interactions between the local partnerships, on a regional, national and European scale. These are the area-based approach, the bottom-up approach, the local partnership, the multi-sectoral (integrative) approach, innovation, territorial cooperation and networking.

The principle of the programme is one of decentralised management and financing, which largely defines the scope of action of the local action group in respect of the Leader initiative.

### *The seven drivers of success*

By addressing the abovementioned seven development aspects, and by applying the operational principles of the Leader method, it is possible to identify some typical programme features which can be tagged as the 'seven drivers of success':

1. The micro-regional scale is small enough to address the identities of local communities as a driving factor of local development, and at the same time is large enough to gather capacity for attaining a critical mass for tangible projects and to effectively perform as a partner in global networks.
2. The valuation of local skills and knowledge not only boosted the self-awareness of local people and changed their perception of the area in which they live, but it also fostered innovative solutions and competitive advantage of value-adding activities, and ultimately of the territory itself.
3. The low-threshold and demand-oriented funding allowed new actors to benefit and to become active contributors to local development.
4. The local partnership is a most appropriate instrument combining broad bottom-up participation of local citizens with decentralised top-down support and funding from regional and national programmes.
5. The quest for linkages and synergies between different sectors, strands of activities and thematic networks of actors has encouraged the local actors to adopt a systemic view on problems, potentials and solution paths.
6. The thrust to innovate was probably less important with respect to the actual innovative content of projects but rather as a constant fillip to search for novel, hitherto unseen and sometimes even bold solutions.
7. Interterritorial cooperation and networking bestowed a European dimension upon local development in rural areas from the very start.

*...and perhaps an eighth!*

8. The relative autonomy and role of responsibility of local partnerships in programme implementation, and leaving strategic choices and the selection of projects to the local action group constituted an invaluable incentive for individual and organisational learning.



### *The benefits of the Leader initiative*

The benefits of the Leader method relate to the three axes of rural development.

- ▶ **Agriculture, forestry and the food chain:** Leader has raised awareness on the concept of value added chains, specifically concerning quality and small-scale food chains.
- ▶ **The environment and countryside:** Leader has operated successfully in and around protected areas, and in connection with protected species.
- ▶ **Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy:** Leader has brought forth a considerable number of actions in providing new services for the rural population. Disadvantaged or marginalised people have been specifically addressed, and there have been many projects aimed at improving the situation of women, youth, new residents and immigrant communities. There have also been linkages to different sectors of the economy, for example in the case of rural tourism.

### *The five 'D's*

The widespread effects reported so far seem to reveal a specific pattern of success inherent to the Leader method, which can be called the five 'D's. These five keywords summarise the effects of good Leader implementation on the social capital of an area.

- ▶ **Dignity:** The Leader approach addresses local people, individually and collectively, not only as users, but also as subjects and contributors. It addresses emotions and feelings, and values personal experience, social ties and the intrinsic value of places.
- ▶ **Distinction:** Leader conceptualises rural areas as 'reservoirs of distinctiveness'. Local actors pursue a development model which bears their own specific rural traits and foster uniqueness which they can turn into competitive advantage.
- ▶ **Dialogue:** Putting the partnership principle and bottom-up development into practice, requires local partners to invest a lot of time in order to reach a mutual understanding, find an appropriate common language, understand what fellow citizens think and why they do things in the way they do.
- ▶ **Democracy:** Leader has, with the local partnership, provided a powerful and versatile instrument to local communities in the context of decentralised governance.

- ▶ **Delight:** It is unthinkable that people get together and discuss development strategies and projects without communicating emotionally. The mind-opening experience of putting oneself under the regard of others is immeasurable, and as many local actors confirm — fun!

### **Leader spreading to other policies and programmes**

Leader throughout its lifetime has never been a 'significant' programme in terms of other EU-funded policy programmes and initiatives. Therefore, in terms of size, it has stayed under the threshold of visibility of many decision-makers. Nevertheless, the Leader philosophy and methodology has had an influence on a considerable number of other policies and programmes at EU and Member State level.

Although the mode of action of the Leader method is far from being sufficiently explored and codified, it has had effects on policy shaping in urban areas (URBAN Community initiative), in the realm of human resource development (Equal Community initiative), and in numerous other European and national support and funding schemes (POMO in Finland, national Leader in Ireland, Regionen Aktiv in Germany, etc.).

### **The risks of mainstreaming Leader into rural development programmes**

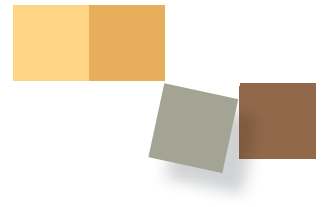
The main risks can be concisely grouped under two headings:

#### *1. Under-use and marginalisation of the Leader method*

**Submission:** The Leader method is seen only as a mandatory add-on and unwillingly executed in order just to maximise EU co-funding. LAGs would have little incentive to evolve and become sustainable, and to develop beyond the narrow limits of the role that rural development programme provides for.

**Backstreaming:** The Leader axis is incarcerated by the logics and inherent constraints of the rural development measures they have been attributed to, such as village renewal, and any innovatory character trickles away.

**Degeneration:** The Leader method is mainstreamed only in parts. For pragmatic or other reasons, more complex components such as interterritorial cooperation and networking are emphasised less, or even discouraged by



the administration. However, experience shows that the Leader principles only achieve their full potential when applied as a package.

## 2. Overstraining of the Leader method

**Overload:** Local action groups are assigned functions in programme implementation for which they do not have the necessary skills and capacities.

**Tick-over:** If there are too many contingencies built into the Leader programme, for example a minimum percentage of funding for cooperation projects or overly complex controlling loops for project approval and funding procedures, there is then the risk that the n+2 rule will not be met.

### **The main risks that can be identified concerning Leader and other EU policies (territorial cohesion, urban policy)**

Basically, EU policies face the same challenges as national sector policies, meaning that 'sectoral' thinking dominates political behaviour in the national and EU administrations. Very often this leads to synergies in the territorial effects and counterproductive/competitive acting in the regions being neglected. This is clearly illustrated by weak interaction between urban and rural-oriented policies.

There is, however, an increasing awareness that rural and urban development should be regarded as 'communicating vessels' in respect of sustainable territorial development. In this respect, cohesion policy may be an important and useful partner for Leader, as the real world of regional development and community life has to cope with such daily rural-urban interlinkages as commuting, value-added chains, supply chains, leisure and tourism, etc. On the other hand, it might be useful for cohesion policy to 'learn' about the Leader methodology and the application of its principles.

#### *The main challenges that should be considered for keeping the Leader method alive*

In those rural areas where no large-scale, highly mechanised agriculture is possible, the Leader method has a concrete mission to foster economic diversification and sustainable development. However, it also has a mission in areas where highly productive activities (mass tourism, crop monocultures) threaten the existing natural, socio-cultural and economic diversity in the area, resulting in

monotonous landscapes characterised by a lack of economic buoyancy and a reduced quality of life for the remaining population.

In view of the results achieved by the Leader method, and the risks inherent to the actual process of mainstreaming, the following challenges for policy and programme-makers in the near future can be considered.

- ▶ While the old Member States can look back on 15 years of Leader experience, it must not be forgotten that there are a large number of countries, national and regional administrations and local actors who have very little or no experience in dealing with the Leader approach. Thus this 'experience gap' constitutes an enormous challenge to the regional, national and European networks.
- ▶ Another challenge is that there is no understanding about whether or not the mainstreaming of Leader will lead to a loss of its pilot character.
- ▶ In many areas, the local partnership will have to integrate new partners and address new actors in order to comply with the enlarged scope of tasks. This means too that LAGs should orient their activities to local/regional needs.
- ▶ Cooperation between rural and urban initiatives will increase and investments in urban areas might turn out to be just as essential as for rural-based projects.
- ▶ Mature LAGs may be confronted with the problem of 'early ageing' either because they had brilliant success in their early days and missed out on working on their own evolution, or because they became 'old' without ever being 'young' (composed of powerful local actors who came together without any great ambition to facilitate change, but rather to avoid unexpected changes).
- ▶ Local actors should not use the LAG as an arena to fight out political conflicts. Therefore, good local public administration is a prerequisite for a consolidated public-private partnership as an intermediate structure between the active population and the public sector.
- ▶ Mainstreaming of the Leader approach is feasible if there is good vertical (rural policy) integration, or good horizontal integration (between intermediate structures at local level). It cannot be durable in those governance contexts in which the Leader approach does not hold a specific position in the range of rural policy measures, nor will local action groups get a chance to establish themselves as relevant players at local level.
- ▶ Well-established LAGs will develop the ability to open up and tap additional support and funding schemes,



in order to consolidate and broaden their scope of activities so as to service the local population. If a LAG in this situation has neither acquired a sufficient level of acceptance nor has an acknowledged key role among other institutions at local level, then this could turn out to be a risky endeavour, and maybe its last one.

### **Measures to keep the legacy of Leader alive: the method itself and the local actors**

What should be done in order to keep the legacy alive and to inoculate rural development and other territorial policies with the Leader philosophy:

*Set the sails (!) for an appropriate learning environment*

- ▶ **Networking:** The proposed setting-up of the European and national networks for rural development, in which the European, national and regional Leader networks will be embedded, seems to provide an appropriate framework.
- ▶ **Twinning** between 'more' and 'less' experienced local groups and actors can be a means to bridge the 'experience gap', understanding learning as a two-way process.
- ▶ **Personal mind shifts** are important drivers for local development.
- ▶ **Territorial cooperation** is a funding instrument to let all these things happen.

*Put emphasis on quality assurance concerning the following*

- ▶ **Sustainable local development strategies:** There are advanced instruments for strategic development in businesses, organisations and administrations. Local development strategies will have to include and find answers to upcoming challenges for rural areas.
- ▶ **The local partnership:** The tripartite partnership according to the formula of one third public, one third private and one third civic partners is certainly not the only way to attain good practice, but it is an interesting and most promising formula.
- ▶ **Project selection:** At the level of each programme, and of each local development strategy, there should be a shared vision and a sound definition of what rural areas really want to achieve in applying those principles.
- ▶ **Accompanied self-evaluation:** Despite some piecemeal experiences, there lacks a wider dialogue on this issue. The Leader networks as well as the programme administrations will have to invest in the methodology, whereas local groups should make use of this tool, at best accompanied by external facilitators.
- ▶ **Ongoing constructive dialogue** between local actors and programme officials: Decentralised financing and management requires close coordination between local partnerships and programme makers. These links should be characterised by a climate of mutual respect and exchange with the aim of personal collective and organisational learning.

(!) 'Virtual European Leader Academy' would be a good name for it. Its acronym (VELA) is the Italian word for 'sail'.



# Five specific achievements explained

## Governance and territorial achievements in the EU Leader approach

By Jela Tvrdonova, independent rural development expert, Slovakia (!)



### Introduction

The EU Leader approach has now reached a new phase in its evolution. It has reached maturity, and has now become a 'full adult member' of mainstream rural development programmes. Observing the developments concerning Leader, and taking account of political statements made by senior-level EU officials and those published in the EU framework documents in the area of rural development, local action groups (LAGs) across the EU can be very optimistic about the future.

The best proof of the recognition of the full legacy of the Leader approach is seen through the current rural development policies where the Leader method is included in the priority axes of the EU strategic guidelines for rural development 2007–13. These are as follows.

- ▶ Focus on the human capital aspect (knowledge, training, information and entrepreneurship) and on the participation of particular groups such as women and

young people because of the specific role they can play in rural development.

- ▶ Increase integration of rural areas into the information society (use of broadband technologies and ICT).
- ▶ Improve governance (coherent programming, integrated approaches, integration of regional and sub-regional development strategies and in particular of the Leader approach in overall programming).

This high level of recognition of the Leader approach did not happen just by accident or only because of the commitment of EU decision-makers. It happened primarily because of the many successful cases of the Leader method being implemented, and the successful working of LAGs across rural areas of old EU Member States in the Leader I, II and + periods. However, it was also in response to the growing enthusiasm of rural actors in the new Member States which joined or observed the Leader + period after 2004. This commitment and enthusiasm has shown that an integrated approach towards rural development brings additional value to diverse European rural areas. It also brings sustainable solutions based on local resources, and specificities for challenges and changes which they have faced over recent decades.

During the conference 'Leader achievements: a diversity of territorial experience' in November 2007 in Évora,

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Portugal, the Leader+ contact point together with the European Commission facilitated the recognition and presentation of achievements. This took account of both the positive and negative experiences of the LAGs representing 16 EU Member States before the European Leader community. The timing was perfect. In hearing and analysing 16 very different case studies, there was much to summarise, learn and think about in terms of the future of the Leader approach in the EU.

### **What does 'governance within the Leader approach' mean?**

Leader is the most comprehensive EU instrument for supporting integrated, cross-sector and the endogenous approach for rural development. While broad rural development policies within the EU were always sector oriented, and seen more as an appendix to the common agricultural policy, the Leader approach, launched in 1991, brought a substantial innovative change in rural development support. As with any other innovation, at the beginning of its life it represented the unknown with a low level of credibility. It was considered to be a 'laboratory' of new approaches towards rural development with a rather limited budget and a lot of hesitation from national rural development authorities. From the other side (and very soon after recognition of this opportunity), the local rural actors quickly grasped the idea of Leader, understanding its viability, and started to use it as an innovative way of governing their rural territories. Their success gradually increased the commitment to rural development of national/regional authorities and raised the levels of ongoing support. The best evidence of this is not only the constantly growing number of local action groups arising in the EU Member States, but also in the dissemination of the 'Leader method' outside of the EU, e.g. in the western Balkans, Latin America and elsewhere.

Why were Leader and the integrated rural development approach so successful? Leader has brought a new way of governance to rural areas, pulling together many different types of stakeholders at each level, and across levels in combination with strategic thinking and acting as well as with flexible management of rural resources.

#### *The Leader type of governance is more than just local government*

In rural areas, Leader reaches beyond the normal decision-making processes and the capacity of the traditional hierarchical structures of local and regional self-government. In many cases, it fills the gap between them, but mostly

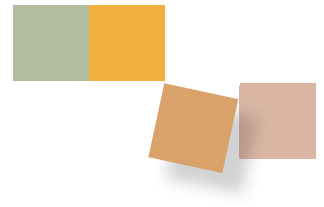
it creates new structures and institutions. The LAG and its decision-making body, acting as the local cross-sector partnership, helps with social inclusion of the area, and opens the door to participation from many more local actors than just local government representatives. This reflects one of the basic rules of the Leader approach: to diversify the composition of the decision-making body and involve a maximum 50 % of representatives from the public sector. It also supports one of seven of the recognised Leader features, namely the 'bottom-up' approach, and encourages more people to participate and take responsibility for the area's further development, than if just elected or appointed authorities. In this way, it broadens local democracy and makes it more participative, by not limiting a citizen's right to intervene in development only during an election period.

#### *The Leader type of governance is more than just management*

The Leader approach brings additional value to the management of an area by being based on the local partnership, which plans, implements, monitors and evaluates decisions formulated in local development strategies, and creating/developing the area's strong identity. This is important for its survival and further development. Leader means governing the area rather than just managing it. It means seeing links among various sectors, integrating them into the system and evaluating endogenous resources and adding value to them. It also means introducing a communication and partnership culture into the everyday decision process at each level.

#### *The Leader type of governance is more than just finance*

The Leader approach is very often seen only as another source of 'EU money for rural development based on an integrated and partnership approach'. Too much focus on the financial aspect sometimes diminishes the approach itself, and encourages local actors to adopt the strategy of 'getting together because there is money for it'. Consequently, the method itself is then adopted as the obligatory component which is tied to the money. Those groups which have experience of the partnership approach in governing the area before they received the financial support from Leader understand that it is not only a very good instrument. In addition, they understand that it offers very good help in fostering an integrated, partnership-based development, and the opportunity to build the capacity to govern public money at the local level by the local partnership. It therefore develops the ability to seek sources of funding other than Leader.



## Good governance in the Leader approach: lessons learned

The experiences presented by the 16 local action groups during the conference in Évora have shown that good governance in the Leader approach depends on several factors. Of great importance is the overall framework of regional and national government structures, with its administrative, institutional and legal systems. This varies from country to country as does the degree of centralisation or decentralisation, the responsibilities and division of competences among national, regional and local levels. It also depends on the relevant managing authority of the particular State and the way that the Leader approach was designed at national level. The influence of the overall framework on the local action group autonomy in development decisions was very clear among all 16 cases. The situation varied from a fairly centralised situation with more top-down features. For example: in France, one unique priority theme imposed by the programme had to be selected by the LAG; Scotland's 'A working countryside', gives strategic directions within the Scottish Borders region; in the Netherlands, the provinces have the competence for defining priority themes for local development strategies. In other Member States, LAGs have more flexibility in the selection of several themes or in the selection of a theme more specific and focused than imposed from the European level. At project management level, there is a relatively decentralised situation with the bottom-up principle found in Ireland through the relative autonomy of Leader boards which have the competence to pay the final beneficiaries. In Austria, the specific conditions of particular regions are reflected and delivered by regional self-governments and should therefore be reflected in their local development strategies. In Portugal, there are autonomous decisions made for the selection of priority axes within local development strategies.

In the majority of cases, a clear recognition was given by representatives of the LAGs to the close cooperation among decision-making at local, regional, national and European levels. This is in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes, which is regarded as a very important point in governing Leader territories. This was expressed very well by the Austrian representatives (LAG Ausserfern, Tirol) as a 'multilevel governance' approach leading to strong cross-level partnership development and strengthening. This is extremely important especially for the current mainstreaming of the Leader approach at the stage of the national programme design. This requires an efficient consultation process in preparing realistic and effective framework conditions for

implementation. It will also be important during the monitoring and evaluation of national programmes, in order to keep the proximity of the LAGs to the decentralised decision-making process. LAG Joensuu (Finland): 'With mainstreaming, the authorities have the tendency to conceive LAGs as part of the public administration, with bureaucratic tasks, thus losing their independence and special nature, their added value for development. National strategies can limit local strategies.'

The experiences of LAGs present in Évora are clearly speaking about three important factors of successful governance at the local level (the level of the LAG). In line with it, the good governance in the Leader approach depends on the quality of:

- ▶ local partnerships and networks;
- ▶ local development strategy;
- ▶ management structures.

### Local partnerships and networks

LAGs are seen as the tool for building up the real local partnerships. The longer the group is involved in the Leader approach, the stronger it becomes, and the more solid the social capital the territory has. Experience suggests that the partnership shall be well balanced not only from the point of sector representation, but also geographically, institutionally and socially, in order not to create 'elites' or non-transparent implementation procedures within the local development strategy. In the case of the LAG Oberschwaben (Germany): '...key actors, economic, social and public to be present on the board'. This broad composition also followed within the decision-making body to allow the creation of transparent structures and performance of the local partnership and this is another very important feature of the successful governance in the Leader approach. For the LAG Kromme Rijn (Netherlands): 'Keep civilians and volunteers involved...' This means that to be open to new groups of stakeholders, to communicate with them without obstacles, to disseminate information openly and transparently and introduce 'visible' procedures, is one of the most important conditions in order to achieve the real bottom-up approach, and contribute to the dynamism of the territory.

It is very important that LAGs maintain independence in their decisions. According to LAG Oberschwaben: 'LAGs need to remain free to design their strategies, tailoring them to specific needs and providing temporary protection for the development of projects.' They need to keep and enhance their legacy within their territories in order to



have not only local problems and needs in their hands, but also solutions (the true 'bottom-up' approach).

'Trust' is the key word in building local partnerships. In the situation where the high level of decisions including agreement on development priorities, projects and financial flows must come to the table, the trustworthiness of relations is crucial, since they contribute to the development of territorial social capital and consequently good solutions. For LAG Kromme Rijn: 'Leader has helped in finding some common ground in bringing the whole region together... The LAG itself was a team of people who cooperated in a pleasant atmosphere.'

It is very important that the local partnership is equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and information, and is constantly seeking training opportunities. The required spectrum of general and specific capacities is very broad, from the skills required in the strategy design, through management, monitoring and evaluation. It also requires further business planning and project-cycle management skills, and knowledge, marketing, economic diversification, services and IT services. Although there is constant on-the-job training while designing and implementing local development strategies, intensive training is equally important, with other LAG representatives adding value by the exchange of experience, by encouraging networking and the preparation and implementation of cooperation projects. This has been the case of LAG Ausserfern, Tirol, with common training with Bavarian LAGs in strategic planning.

Networking represents a very special feature of Leader-type governance for the territory. According to LAG Appennino Genovese (Italy): 'Networking is important when human resources are scarce.... when networks become permanent — development becomes endogenous'. The experiences of LAGs stress both intraterritorial and interterritorial networking as the crucial factor for the good functioning of local partnerships and the successful governance of the territory. Intraterritorial networking among partners in the Leader area, project carriers, professionals, LAG members and people from outside the LAG is needed for the successful introduction of the local development strategy into real life. It strengthens the partnership culture and contributes to the enhancement of the territory's social capital.

A special type of intraterritorial networking appearing in the Leader approach is the rural-urban relationship, since many rural areas close to cities became 'rurban' in character, being neither rural, nor totally urban, and so

have mixed elements. This was mentioned by several LAGs, for example Kromme Rijn, Appennino Genovese, Development Agency of Thessaloniki (Greece) and Posazavi (Czech Republic). In such cases, cooperation can become a mutual advantage with many specific features in the governance of these territories, such as for example, 'Finding the win-win situation of the rural and urban interaction' (LAG Development Agency of Thessaloniki(Greece)).

Interterritorial networking with other LAGs at national and EU level contributes to capacity building as well as adding to LAG effort in terms of innovation and in gaining new experiences, knowledge and information. Specific innovative cooperation projects can be observed in various sectors, such as alternative energies, information technologies, farm tourism, creative works, training and education.

### Local development strategy

The bottom-up, participatory and integrated approach to the design of local development strategy as the governance tool was introduced by all LAGs present in Évora. LAG Guadix (Spain) expressed it very clearly: 'In Guadix district applying the development strategy under Leader + has led to a substantial improvement in the levels of internal governance and democracy for the local society as a whole'. Since it is quite a complicated and demanding process, the enhancement of strategic planning skills and necessary training of LAG members and managers in this area was presented as a positive example by the Austrian representatives (LAG Ausserfern, Tirol). Local strategies shall be integrated and shall reflect the real geographical and socio-economic context of the territory and its changes, as well as operate within the key priority development areas. They shall also combine several planning and funding opportunities, and provide enough space for the range of various projects, of course falling within well-selected priorities. LAG Guadix: 'The LAG must be able to build up integrated strategies with several programmes...at the same time strategies must be based on real things, tangible, affordable, keeping connection with local stakeholders'. Also, the national authorities should not limit the type and number of measures or themes. LAG Oberschwaben: 'Leader should not be constrained within the list of eligible measures but to solve the urgent needs of a rural area, whatever they are. In this way it would have an impact on people's needs, maintain high-quality results, goodwill and diversity of solutions.'

Well-developed local development strategies function in real circumstances, reflecting the change in development. LAG Arigna (Ireland): 'The subsistence and fatalist lifestyle



of the past, an ageing and declining population, may be replaced by optimistic communities composed of people from diverse culture and nationalities...’ Also, financial backstopping targeted to real needs, and being accessible to active rural stakeholders, with a good monitoring and self-evaluation framework. LAG Oberschwaben: ‘Self-evaluation ...the LAG is able to manage challenges with self-initiative, making things better...’

### Management structures

The LAG’s management structures need to be well equipped with skills and knowledge, with management, administrative and consultancy capacities, and always ready to help ‘real innovators’ and project beneficiaries. The LAG management should be ready to communicate, cooperate and network on various levels and directions, and be able to involve all human resources ‘in particular those people in the territory who may not act as active partners or leaders but may help and provide the area and the LAG with capacities for the future’ (LAG Kromme Rijn). They shall also serve as a facilitator and catalyst of the local strategy implementation, for example, LAG Arigna ‘developed good programme management experience, including procedures manuals, a multi-skilled staff, a strong independent evaluation committee, a strong impact measurement system, including area mapping of funding and return on investments analysis’, and they also have sufficient human resources for successful project implementation.

The ability also to obtain other financial sources beyond the EU Leader initiative, and integrate them into local development strategies was stressed by the majority of LAGs present in Évora, such national sources as, for example, CLAR <sup>(1)</sup> in Ireland, PEACE <sup>(2)</sup> including other European sources such as EQUAL <sup>(3)</sup>, other European Social Fund schemes and the Interreg programme.

<sup>(1)</sup> The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais), launched in October 2001, is a targeted investment programme in rural areas.

<sup>(2)</sup> The EU programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland (2000–06) is a distinctive European Union Structural Funds programme aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation.

<sup>(3)</sup> EQUAL is a European Social Fund (ESF) Community initiative, providing funds to projects which test and promote new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market.

### What is the added value of governance in Leader? (Lessons learned)

To conclude, the LAGs present in Évora underlined the following most important positive impact of Leader-type governance on their respective territories:

- ▶ encouraging and maintaining territorial identity, pride and ownership;
- ▶ creating and strengthening multi-sector partnerships and cooperation (new and innovative institutional development) in the territory and outside;
- ▶ sharing of values, information, networks, trust and money among local stakeholders;
- ▶ social inclusion of various groups in the development process going far beyond the traditional hierarchy of the society (and not only women and youth), including a variety of different actors;
- ▶ developing local democracy going far beyond election time; based on participation in ‘everyday’ decisions and existing hierarchical structures, and opening the door for more stakeholders in the decision-making process;
- ▶ building up valuable social capital and combining it with the natural, material and financial capital for the desired territorial change;
- ▶ bringing solutions for the 21st century in more effective, efficient and sustainable ways, and utilising all kinds of resources including public financial resources in combination with private resources;
- ▶ strengthening local democratic processes based on the participation of local actors in development, building civil society, participation and partnerships;
- ▶ increasing strategic management and administrative capacities of rural actors for the improved governance of their territories.

### What can threaten the added value of the ‘Leader type of governance’?

Several risks and challenges concerning the future of the Leader approach and its impact on governance were mentioned by LAGs during the conference in Évora.

- ▶ The major concern was the mainstreaming of Leader within new rural development programmes and the fear of centralisation of the approach, leaving more decisions in the hands of national and regional governments (e.g. limitation measures, selection of LAG themes; project selection criteria designed at national level, financial mechanisms transferred from LAGs to paying agencies etc.).



- ▶ Lack of communication between the local, regional, national and European levels could decrease the level of LAG autonomy and legacy after decades of successful development.
- ▶ LAGs in new Member States also see the danger of the situation that beneficiaries will not be able to pre-finance their projects and that this can threaten the implementation of the strategy.
- ▶ There is a concern that Leader networking can be 'lost' in European rural networks, and not provide enough contacts and support for cooperation projects.
- ▶ The concern that Leader may become more agriculture-oriented, thereby losing its integrated features, was also mentioned by several LAGs. Taking the point 'also farmers' rather than 'not only farmers' is very important for keeping the original character of the Leader approach.
- ▶ The danger of having Leader and LAGs only as an appendix to existing hierarchical structures was pointed out by several LAGs. The case of municipalities and their growing position in the Leader approach was especially seen as a weakening in the partnership and bottom-up spirit of Leader.
- ▶ An administration unit instead of a development opportunity? The fear that the LAG and its management could become 'just' another administrative or financial institution was mentioned by several LAGs.
- ▶ Building up un-balanced partnerships and not opening the space for additional stakeholders can create the situation of 'elites' taking non-transparent decisions.
- ▶ Undermining territorial capacity building can also be a threat for good governance under the Leader approach.

### The message

The presentations and discussions that took place during the conference in Évora have shown clearly that the Leader approach across the three programming periods has proven that it is the most comprehensive instrument of the EU policies in supporting the very innovative and sustainable approach towards governance of rural areas as established by the 'bottom-up' approach, being based on the integrated and endogenous use of their potentials. It delivers competitiveness, sustainability and quality of life in one package, with the possibility of tailoring it to specific needs of particular rural territories. Therefore it fills not only the gap of mainstreaming policies, but in its full capacity provides a valuable alternative to sector approaches for rural areas in all EU Members States.



# Territorial strategies

by Elena Saraceno,  
rural development expert and consultant,  
Brussels (1)



## Introduction

Territorial strategies have introduced the 'area-based approach' into rural policymaking. This approach considers, for planning purposes, the specific combination of resources and capabilities, economic, human, physical, cultural and administrative, which can be found within a given territory. On this basis, a strategy for development is prepared and agreed, with the participation of local actors and community interests. The result is an integrated strategy, comprehensive in its reach, indicating priorities and linkages between different dimensions in a particular rural area. This has two advantages in relation to 'sectoral' and the standardised 'one size fits all' approach to the preparation of strategies. The first advantage is that the economic, social and environmental dimensions are blended together in an appropriate way for the specific area concerned, reflecting the key local issues for sustainability. The second advantage is that the involvement of local actors in the preparation and implementation of the strategy gives a sense of ownership and empowerment to the local action group, that brings together individuals in sparsely populated areas, builds cohesion and a sense of common purpose.

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## Territorial strategies: an important achievement for the development of rural areas

The above approach has been an important topic for policy innovation throughout Europe. The sector-by-sector perspective, assessing, for example, agriculture, crafts, small and medium enterprises, tourism, services, transport, employment and welfare, separately and with a standard, undifferentiated approach for all rural areas, has been predominant for a very long time. Territorial strategies have introduced the principle of adaptation or tailoring of policies to local needs, expressed in the priorities made through the planning process by local actors. In this case, the innovative character lies in the recognition of the diversity of rural areas, of their differentiated policy needs and in the fact that those who are likely to understand these needs best are the local actors themselves. The 'area-based' feature is closely interrelated with the 'multi-sector' and 'integrated' feature of local programmes and owned by a partnership of local actors, the 'local action group' (LAG), which gives legitimacy and purpose to the territorial strategy and its implementation.

The Leader Community initiative, which has been implemented since 1991 in all eligible Member States, provides strong evidence concerning the achievements that have been made possible through the territorial strategy approach. In the following sections, these achievements will be identified and compared, in order to contribute to



a better understanding towards the mainstreaming of the Leader approach in the years to come.

The 16 territorial cases discussed during the Évora conference, varied in size, population, land use, degree of diversification, quality of life and services available, institutional context, composition and competences of the LAG, as well as the strategy chosen to overcome weaknesses and take advantage of opportunities. Each case showed, through local experiences, its own distinctiveness and specificity that made it unique. Rather than

searching for similarities with other rural areas, territories consider this distinctiveness as part of their competitive advantage, and are the starting point in the design of their strategy. I would also argue that the conference provided evidence that the same issues were dealt with by different groups and strategies. This could be seen, for example, in the creation of jobs in rural areas, and the demonstrated similarities and common elements of good practice which could be observed *ex-post*. These could turn out to be useful models in the design of future local territorial strategies.

***Developing distinctiveness as the starting point of a territorial strategy (Lessons to be learned)***

**Spain, Guadix:** The LAG used its natural and cultural heritage to build its territorial strategy. The different peoples that had established themselves in the area over time – the Romans, Iberians, Visigoths, Arabs, Christians – have all left their heritage on the landscape, gastronomy, folklore, events, in the arts and crafts (wrought iron, pottery, straw chairs, embroidery), the unusual caves used as dwellings and the use made of natural resources. Drawing upon this distinctive tradition has provided the basis for a reorientation of the local economy using endogenous resources, creating new activities capable of diversifying traditional tourism, and at the same time reinforcing regional identity and awareness of the need to preserve, restore and value such heritage.

**Sweden, Smålandsgruppen:** The LAG defined its territorial strategy on the basis of three different local products and adding value to them: hardwood, aluminium and crystal. It facilitated access to markets, innovative design, small production units, branding and trademarks. The number of jobs created through this approach surpassed expectations and targets. The capabilities of local actors were expanded by ad hoc training and the establishment of new networks. In addition, cultural activities increased improving social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

**Poland, Krajna I Paluk:** Although the Polish Leader+ programme has only had a short experience, its territorial strategy has focused on cultural events and

village renewal, as a way of promoting the participation and trust of local people in projects. The level of trust was very low due to previous experience prior to the transformation process.

**Italy, Appennino Genovese:** The area is characterised by the developed coastal area on the one hand and the often-abandoned hinterland on the other. The role of the public sector is shrinking with increased privatisation and sub-contracting. The choice of rural tourism as a priority provides a mechanism for the development of transportation links between coast and hinterland, preserving the environment, development of industrial areas based on micro-enterprises, improving the competitiveness of the whole area and reducing disparities within the territory.

**Lessons for the future:** The precise combination of factors which give distinctness to each territorial strategy is by definition unique. However, its impact on local development has been quite similar in the examples illustrated. In each case we can see that distinctness identified through the territorial strategy approach helps to create a break with previous top-down approaches. Through this approach it has been successful in attracting the engagement and participation of local actors, in linking previously fragmented sectors of activity, in stimulating innovation, new jobs and entrepreneurship, as well as strengthening the common identity for the area, and a positive image in relation to the outside world.





### *The multi-sector, integrated approach*

In the 16 territorial cases presented at Évora, no two situations were alike, therefore providing very visible evidence of the diversity of rural areas in Europe. The interrelationships between economic activities, services, environment, population trends, forms of governance, cultural and historical traditions, were very different and can be summed up by what was said by an external observer at the conference: 'when you have seen one rural case, you have seen... one rural case' (George McDowell).

The extreme diversity of rural economies is not usually reflected by mainstream rural policy. The Leader programme, however, has been able to respond to this situation through its non-prescriptive approach which leaves local actors relatively free to identify their needs and to design their own objectives and strategy. It has been very effective in giving visibility and policy relevance to rural territorial diversity. It is no surprise therefore that such diversity in physical, socio-economic and environmental characteristics has produced equally diverse territorial experiences in terms of projects and issues addressed through Leader interventions.

#### ***Multi-sector and multi-dimension approaches (Lessons from individual experiences)***

**Austria, Ausserfern:** The industrial and service sectors dominate the economy in one locality whereas elsewhere the tourism sector is the most important employer. Agriculture and forestry are declining but have proved important in maintaining the landscape and preventing natural disasters. The level of services is good with even the remote villages having their own schools and kindergartens. The chosen strategy is based on improving the quality of life in rural areas: promoting networking and education in the field of new technologies, strengthening the local value chains and improving the attraction of living space. The first priority is tourism, particularly in promoting cultural and natural heritage, training, information technologies; the second priority is product innovation, particularly goat milk products, and direct selling by local farmers; the third priority is social security and integration, including issues concerning gender equality, childcare facilities, care of elderly people, integration of the disabled and immigrants: 'none of these activities in the past were part of rural development policy'.

**Ireland, Arigna:** This began in 1991 when the territory experienced problems relating to the closure of mines, depopulation and also proximity to the troubles in Northern Ireland. Many sectors had to be included in the strategy to reflect very different types of need and this included a community festival, new manufacturing activities, a craft and tourism centre, projects for youth and older people, renewable energies, farm diversification, food chains, agri-tourism and innovative tourism enterprises. In total there were over 280 projects.

**France, Haut Jura:** The area included a wide range of diverse characteristics including a regional park, some important industrial sectors (such as plastics), metal treatment, spectacles, a tradition of production of wooden toys, tourist activities in the summer (lake) and winter (skiing), as well as a rich agricultural sector (farming and dairy with registered designation of origin). There were concerns about retaining some public services (for example, post office, tax office) and also the standard of level of healthcare services. Another feature of the area was competition from Switzerland offering higher wages and the loss of human resources from the locality. The area also has a diversified landscape with wet zones, dry pastures, natural meadows, rocky environments, high water quality as well as historic buildings. The development strategy chose to extend the regional park concept through a multi-dimensional approach linking tourism, the economy, culture and the environment, training in handicrafts and environmental management of enterprises.

**Lessons for the future:** Rural development territorial strategies deal most often with linking very small and diverse activities, which become unsustainable if they remain isolated. The necessary linkages between sectors and dimensions refer to both 'internal' linkages within the local rural area, as well as with products and markets outside of the area, through networking and product chains, with urban and other rural areas. Farming activities can be integrated within wider territorial strategies thereby improving their income and diversifying their activities and opportunities for employment for family members. These three examples show that no sector or dimension can be excluded a priori from a territorial strategy, and that the freedom of establishing links between sectors requires great flexibility in the definition of eligible actions.



The requirement by Leader that territorial strategies had to consider the local situation in a holistic way, including all sectors and dimensions relevant for development, has greatly assisted in ensuring that the diversity of rural areas has been properly acknowledged. Agricultural activities were considered together with forestry, food-chains, construction, crafts and industry, services, infrastructures and other relevant sectors. The analysis of each sector had to establish priorities and interrelationships between sectors, roles and potential for development. This comprehensive and interactive way of looking at the local economy was in itself innovative, and produced visions or goals for overall development that previous policy interventions had not achieved. Leader also addressed issues related to other dimensions of local life beyond the economy, including for example governance issues: at local level between different agencies, and between different institutional levels of government, from the local to the EU level. Leader also enveloped environmental sustainability, quality of life, the image of the area and its attractiveness for outsiders, education and training, integration of newcomers and culture and traditions. This holistic approach helped to change the traditional image of rural areas as mainly agricultural and disadvantaged, and provided a much richer and realistic vision of contemporary rural areas in Europe. These areas are made of many small and isolated activities, often without a sufficient scale of operation on their own, but capable of integration and innovation, of networking and finding synergies. Only a multi-sector and multi-dimension approach will achieve this comprehensive view of the local economy.

The 16 case studies contain some common shared features that are found again and again in rural areas: a low density of population; enterprises limited both in size and number; a low level of specialisation; and also the irregular and seasonal character of work opportunities. Rural areas across Europe are made up of many different and small-scale activities, often isolated from each other and not capable of achieving economies of scale alone to allow them to be competitive in the market. In this situation, a multi-sectoral integrated approach has proved appropriate because it coordinates and links these individual and isolated activities, looking for synergies and complementarities. It aims to find economies of diversification rather than of scale, looking for a critical mass in a diversified rural economy, which is better able to withstand external shocks and combine multiple activities, actors and resources rather than aiming at specialisation.

So-called 'soft' interventions rely on the same holistic approach to local development. These include strengthening of the local identity, improvement of the area's image and developing regional labels for products. For example, working with micro-enterprises and micro-initiatives allows them to link together through joint projects which contribute to a more attractive and comprehensive rural image to the outside world (and to themselves). Such approaches have succeeded where sectorally focused interventions in rural areas have failed and thereby have created a sustainable form of development. These achievements were made possible by the territorial approach and were particularly appropriate in sparsely populated areas with isolated micro-enterprises in different sectors.

#### *Decentralised decision-making: local action groups*

The multi-sector and integrated approach followed by Leader has determined the boundaries for the Leader actions and determining 'what' needs to be done as the basis of a strategy in a delimited area. On the other hand, the 'who' and 'how' were defined by the creation of the local action groups which provided the human capital for setting in motion and implementing the Leader approach. There are two key features of this approach. Firstly, the fact that decision-making was decentralised and shifted from the EU, national and regional level to the local, sub-regional level. Secondly, that the composition of LAGs reflects the local interest groups and gives a voice to them in all stages of the planning process. In this way, a more or less new level of administration was established. Key local actors were represented as partners or members of the LAG, thus reproducing in the composition of the management structure the variety of interests present in a particular area. The fact that private and public subjects had to be represented more or less equally in the partnership, gave a further innovative character to LAGs, and made the dialogue between public institutions and agencies and private local actors a central aspect of the LAG operation and the Leader approach.

LAGs have adopted various legal forms, and reflect the different norms and procedures that provide the regulatory context in each Member State. However, the most interesting aspect concerning decentralised decision-making is the real capacity that LAGs had for taking autonomous decisions, allocate resources to the different priorities chosen in the territorial strategy and to



act as paying agents. The Leader+ programme allowed considerable freedom for Member States and regions to define the procedures for LAG actions, reflecting different legal frameworks and political traditions. Furthermore,

the institutional and administrative arrangements within different Member States vary greatly, as do the levels of decentralisation. Some are more centralised, and, as a result, LAGs found themselves with few other institutional

### ***Decentralised decision-making (Achievements and lessons)***

**Germany, Oberschwaben:** The LAG has had excellent relationships with authorities and has been able to give a voice to local actors. This role has been appreciated by the *Länder* administration, which has hosted the LAG in his offices. For all projects presented in LAG meetings, members have a say (the final decision to support a project). In this way the administration knows the projects well beforehand and fast implementation is assured.

**Finland, Joensuu region:** The LAG is organised as a tripartite partnership, constituted by organised interests, public authorities and individual actors (who never get the chance of being heard in policy decision-making) and there has been a good division of labour with the authorities. So far, the LAG has enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, having the first say in decision-making about alternative projects.

**Greece, Thessaloniki:** The LAG has become a permanent support mechanism for rural policy at prefecture level, giving rise to a new form of governance, progressively acting as a development agency for other programmes too.

**Portugal, Monte:** The LAG was constituted on the basis of four development associations, non-profit and private, incorporating over time the public entities of the central Alentejo region. The LAG has been acting as an agent for the region. Local actors decide the actions to be implemented. LAG members include local agencies, farmers, entrepreneurs and local municipalities. A coordinating commission has been created.

**Netherlands, Kromme Rijn:** The LAG filled a gap in public provision as there was a lack of attention to

the problems rural inhabitants were facing, such as further urbanisation and the decline of local services. There was a growing sense of pride which had not been detected within the locality. The LAG was successful in bringing together different governing authorities and involving them in the future of the region. The LAG assists applicants in a regional office. Local authorities have to organise themselves in order to handle responsibilities delegated from national and provincial level.

**Denmark, Vestjaelland:** The LAG was constituted with an ad hoc group of 12 representatives of the most important actors in the area. This included the Danish Outdoor Council, gymnastics and sports associations, the business union, the Council of Trade and Industry, training school, farmers, tourism, social welfare, municipalities and counties. This has created a strong awareness of the importance of working together in a partnership for the good of the region.

**Czech Republic, Posazavi:** The LAG only started in 2003, with partners including tourist organisations, civil society bodies, municipalities and NGOs. The private sector has a two-thirds majority in the decision-making process, but final decisions are made by the Ministry of Agriculture.

**Lessons learned:** In all the wide variety of models identified, the LAG allowed members of the partnership to meet together and discuss projects and agree on priorities. The establishment of good working relationships with local authorities, regardless of the degree of autonomy granted to LAGs, is an important step to achieve an effective and efficient method of work. Where the regional institutional level is weak, as in the case of centralised States, the role of LAGs has tended to expand and become one of a wider development agency with a broader range of functions.



subjects operating at the sub-regional level. Others are much more decentralised, and here LAGs found themselves with a multiplicity of entities and agencies, acting both from a sectoral and a territorial perspective. The issue of LAG autonomy in decision-making is therefore a quite complex and politically sensitive issue, that has been resolved in practice in many different ways, and has had quite differentiated impacts in the results of Leader strategies.

The examples presented at Évora show that decentralised decision-making is considered as a key feature of the success of Leader. The loss of such autonomy with the mainstreaming of the approach has been seen by most LAGs as the greatest risk for the future programming period. LAGs are concerned that they will lose their ability to function separately from public administrations and therefore become progressively considered as an integral part of the public sector. Should this happen, it may weaken their capacity to represent and organise the needs of local actors. The level of autonomy enjoyed by the LAG and the capacity for decentralised decision-making are not always exactly the same thing. In some situations, for example, the LAG may have limited autonomy from the local administration but, at the same time, that local administration may have strong capacity for decision-making in relation to the national and EU levels.

## Conclusions

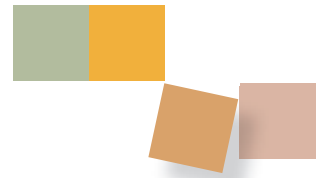
The preparation of territorial rather than sectoral strategies has provided a tool for the analysis and development of all the needs of rural areas in an integrated way, and without excluding a priori specific issues which may prove extremely important for the future of rural areas. The 16 territorial cases presented and discussed at Évora showed that territorial strategies have very often relied on the distinctive characteristics of the rural areas and thereby develop their unique features into their competitive advantage. This is quite a different choice from developing policy interventions for all rural areas which treat them as homogeneous and alike. The territorial strategy approach has operated with different assumptions

about rural development policy and has brought into consideration different elements including culture and heritage, and quality of life which have strengthened all sectors of the rural economy and its competitiveness as a whole.

Territorial strategies for rural development, as implemented through the Leader approach, have used a multi-sector and multi-dimension approach on the one hand and relied on decentralised decision-making on the other. Adopting a comprehensive view for the development of a rural area has proved extremely useful, because it has helped correct misplaced assumptions about the needs of rural people, which are more diverse and sophisticated than traditional policies would indicate. It has also shown that one of the common features described in most strategies is the multiplicity of small initiatives, which need to be linked and supported even when they appear marginal and modest in scope. All strategies have in fact turned out to be diversification strategies, in the most varied sectors and dimensions.

Decentralised decision-making has accompanied the multi-sector approach in a complementary way, by ensuring that all local interests are represented in the partnership. In addition, it is important that public administrations and private stakeholders have had a permanent dialogue concerning local strategies and priorities. LAGs have been important instruments in this task, acting as agents in facilitating networking between actors not accustomed to interrelating with each other. LAGs have, through their rural development animation activities, provided a degree of enthusiasm and engagement to local actors, and helped in overcoming passive and dependent attitudes. They have also accumulated experience and 'know-how' at local level about rural development, which is likely to be a source of innovation for a long time to come.

Even though the 16 territorial cases presented at Évora are just examples, there are many lessons that can be drawn for the future of rural development, and many similarities in the positive impact they have had, through different strategies, in terms of jobs, growth and sustainability.



# Concrete outputs and impacts regarding the improvement of competitiveness and sustainability

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## Introduction

Competitiveness and sustainability are core issues for the development of the rural areas of Europe. Leader+ offers a unique opportunity to address these critical issues at European level, and to draw lessons from a wide range of diverse experiences. Sixteen territories were presented and discussed during the final conference, 'Leader achievements: a diversity of territorial experience'. Based on an assessment of the main achievements and also the key messages from these 16 territories, some conclusions can be drawn, in terms of competitiveness and sustainability with a view to identifying new and important challenges for Leader in the forthcoming period.

## The three basic dimensions of competitiveness and sustainability

Competitiveness in the context of the Leader experience applies to whole areas or territories and not just to single businesses. Considering economic issues is necessary, but not sufficient to analyse all the aspects of territorial

competitiveness. For territories to be competitive, indeed there is a need at the same time to consider their:

- ▶ economic competitiveness: being capable of competing in the market, which means offering products and services which meet basic requirements, including quality and costs, but are different (specific, unique, innovative, traditional, of better quality);
- ▶ social competitiveness: being capable of attracting and maintaining residents, companies and visitors by offering social services of good quality, transport systems, communication, health, recreation, sports and culture, and education;
- ▶ environmental competitiveness: being capable of offering safe, protected, improved environmental conditions to residents, companies and visitors.

Therefore, when addressing territorial competitiveness, there is a need to consider together the three dimensions outlined above in the context of sustainability.

In many respects, competitiveness and sustainability are very closely interrelated. The Leader experience has proved



to be efficient and focused in developing the competitiveness of rural territories especially through the two main driving forces of change for these areas: innovation and integration.

Before giving evidence of the overall impacts of Leader in terms of territorial competitiveness and sustainability, there is a need to focus on the benefits in terms of innovation and integration.

### **Main outputs and impacts in terms of innovation**

Innovation denotes an action or process which brings something new: a new idea, method, product, etc. Introducing and promoting new know-how in the economic, social or environmental sphere is a key factor for territories to become more competitive. This is probably the most visible impact of Leader in many areas, but not the only one. The true impact of Leader is to link the development of new know-how, including the restoration of lost ones, to networking.

#### *Linking innovation to networking*

In the Haut-Jura area (France), Leader has created the conditions for the improved competitiveness of businesses, in particular through the 'training of craftsmen, which is essential to enable them to meet a new and growing demand within the territory for refurbishment by using natural and traditional raw materials. To reach craftsmen dispersed over the territory, and facilitate an exchange of know-how among them, the networking system was adopted'.

In the territory around Thessaloniki (Greece) the main innovative features introduced were: 'upgrading the quality of products and services, and networking among enterprises. The imposition of mandatory quality specifications for services providing enterprises (accommodation, catering facilities, recreation units, etc.) has rendered the area more attractive to visitors from Thessaloniki and other urban centres in the region. At the same time, improving the quality of local agricultural products and their use by local enterprises has led to a greater penetration of these markets'. Networking was essential to disseminate information and new methods of working in order to reach quality standards, and also to link enterprises from the agricultural and tourism sectors.

In Småland (Sweden), Leader has provided a key element in promoting a learning process in project management

in the context of networking: 'we have seen considerable capacity-building in relation to understanding how to work in projects. In addition, there has been a broad development of networks between local actors and different public authorities, organisations at different levels both nationally and internationally. This in turn has given opportunities for new activities in the rural areas'.

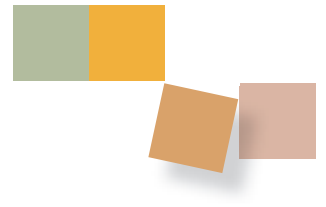
#### *Transforming the vision and landscape for rural development*

In addition to the introduction of new know-how, products and methods of working and acting together, Leader+ has changed the vision and the attitude of local stakeholders towards the development of their own area. A totally new conception of thinking and undertaking rural development has evolved at different levels, and this has probably been the main innovation provided by Leader.

In Ausserfern (Austria): 'Leader has led to a different understanding of rural development. Local actors became familiar with the Leader principles and its opportunities. Best practice examples have initiated a climate of innovation especially in the development elements of tourism, cultural heritage, social integration and direct selling and quality products in agriculture. Leader opened up a wider participation in rural development which had been previously more restrictive. The number of local actors participating in the Leader implementation process has risen tremendously over recent years.'

In Sarret (Hungary): 'The programme helps in responding to a rapidly changing society by meeting the needs of disadvantaged people and organisations through the more effective use of grant assistance provided by the sub-region. The programme is based on the principles of cooperation and this is a great advantage for the area, since this approach to cooperation has not been experienced in the past.'

In the Scottish Borders (United Kingdom), the heritage of Leader in terms of innovation has been the result of a multi-layered process, since 'innovation has been achieved at a number of levels : in the operation of the LAG, with new groups and stakeholders involved in the process; in individual projects, with new ideas and processes being developed and implemented; and across groups of projects with new levels of coordination and integration'.



## Main outputs and impacts in terms of integration

The first, main and probably most long-lasting impact of Leader is bringing people to work together who were not previously used to doing so and who never realised that this was the only way to make 'real' development in rural areas.

### *The magic triangle of the public, private and voluntary sectors*

Many examples of this specific output and impact of Leader to create and facilitate the integration of local stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors can be given: the magic triangle of partnership for local development.

This is not an easy task as some sectors often show reluctance to work with others. It is often the case that the voluntary sector is suspicious and sceptical about working with the public sector, especially with the municipalities. This is the case, for instance, in areas that have recently discovered the Leader approach, such as in the new Member States. The Krajny I Paluk area (Poland) provides impressive evidence of achievements in a short time period, following the introduction of the Leader approach 'although the cooperation between many associations, informal village groups and public authorities wasn't very popular before in the area'.

Some barriers also exist between the public and private sector who had generally cooperated to a very limited extent before Leader. Good examples of the contribution of Leader in breaking down such barriers are provided in the new Member States. In Posazavi (Czech Republic), for instance: 'in the framework of cooperation it was possible to initiate new partnerships among sectors for which cooperation was unthinkable in the past, and especially between the public sector and entrepreneurs. Community representatives have understood the importance of governing communities in the same way as for a business. At the same time, entrepreneurs have understood community interests and priorities. The result is cooperation which brings mutual benefit to both sectors. This double-sided cooperation is completed with the activities of non-profit-making organisations, which offer citizens a chance to see concrete project solutions'.

Sometimes it is also difficult for entrepreneurs to work with anybody else, as they have been used to working

alone. Leader has provided rural enterprises with new ways and opportunities to work with other businesses as well as with other sectors. In Alentejo, according to Monte (Portugal): 'The Leader approach has made it possible to enhance the advantages of an integrated approach. The advantages of integrating several sectors either in the conception plan or in the implementation plan seem evident, and we can confirm that in our territory several initiatives that use that methodology take place through the creation of partnerships for the development of projects at an economic and social level'. A major difficulty encountered in that area was the tendency of many enterprises to work separately, even if 'this is not a local specificity but a national characteristic still common to the enterprise sector. Nevertheless, the experience has shown that some of the region's entrepreneurs, especially the younger ones, accept the concept of working with others and to articulate ideas and projects.'

### *Integrating new actors, beyond the boundaries of the area*

In addition to the integration work undertaken at local level, among local actors and stakeholders inside the area, Leader has often facilitated joint working with partners and institutions from outside the immediate locality. Many partners working outside the area, such as regional agencies, professional groupings, research and technology centres and universities, have, or may have, an impact at local level for the development of rural areas. These external partners and institutions can have a critical contribution in introducing and developing innovation inside the area, and also to facilitate integration between local actors, through support for training or technical assistance for developing joint projects.

In Guadix, in Andalusia (Spain), in keeping with its role of catalyst for rural development, the LAG has carried out: 'a lot of joint work ... with institutions and organisations beyond the mere ambit of the district which have brought fresh experience and new perspectives into specific circles within the district. Here mention might be made of the numerous universities, the Andalusian Federation of Farm Cooperative Enterprises, the Spanish Geological and Mining Institute, the Centres for Farming Research and Training in Cabra and Granada, and the Granada Regional Development Institute. The integration of these institutions into the action taken by the LAG and the district's social and economic agents has strengthened them and improved the efficiency of development activities performed jointly in the zone'.



### *The decisive role of the LAG in promoting integration*

Linking stakeholders and projects and the 'L' of Leader is the most important and specific function of the so-called *Liens entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* ('Links among rural economy development actions') of the Leader Community initiative.

For successful implementation of Leader, the role of the LAGs in making links among actors and actions, to provide networking for innovation and integration, is essential and irreplaceable.

An example of this is provided by Ausserfern: 'The LAG has an important networking function. The LAG's overview of all activities in the area was essential and without these many actors would not have engaged with each other. Local actors appreciate this role of the LAG management. Each case of networking needs a certain management and coordination, in the form of a focal partner.'

The main long-term impact of the LAG's efforts in terms of continuing animation, networking and integration, is an improved social and economic cohesion within the territories. This is a key condition for sustainable development. As reported by the Scottish Borders area: 'there is an increased level of capacity building and networking which is likely to have a heavy impact on usually isolated workforces. In short, there is increased cohesion.'

### **Main outputs and impacts in terms of territorial competitiveness and sustainability**

#### *Main outputs and impacts regarding the economic dimension of competitiveness*

An initial major output of Leader is the development of new activities and employment opportunities, thanks to the improved capacities of local enterprises to manage their own businesses, deliver quality products and services and to find a place to compete in the market.

Many LAGs can show an outstanding record of achievement in the economic field, such as in Arigna (Ireland). 'The area has become more attractive for people to come, live and work, and even come back to... young people are returning', said Pádraig McLoughlin, chairman of the Arigna catchment area LAG. Thanks to the development of new projects, including innovation and training, skills have been improved in key sectors for

the future of the area (rural creativity, organic farming, renewable energies, multi-programme management) and there has been a significant improvement in competitiveness.

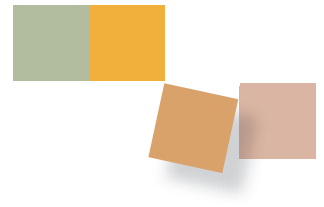
Another good example is provided by the Scottish Borders where in terms of local economy and territorial competitiveness, the Scottish Borders Leader+ programme has supported the following:

- ▶ 16 marketing plans;
- ▶ 2 510 training days provided;
- ▶ 564 micro-businesses assisted;
- ▶ 11 new products developed;
- ▶ 22 new markets accessed;
- ▶ 11 diversified enterprises/new businesses established;
- ▶ 32 648 new visitors;
- ▶ 34 joint community/business projects;
- ▶ 22 information bases established;
- ▶ 2 510 individuals trained, gaining new skills or re-skilled.

Efforts have been targeted by many LAGs to improve local skills, and develop professionalism in key sectors of the local economy. A good example was given by the Guadix LAG, where 'the population's lack of enterprise and capacity to innovate is one of the territory's weaknesses'. Therefore, 'support has been given to develop (in a more professional way) some sectors, such as wine-producing, which, although traditional to the area, were neither professional nor market-oriented. A commitment has also been made to define the Guadix district as a quality tourism destination'.

A specific feature of many rural areas is their economic fabric which is made up of very small-scale enterprises. The approach has emphasised introducing more professional behaviour in both local businesses and the economic sectors concerned. An innovative approach must be developed, sometimes through commonly agreed standards for the development of economic activities. New solutions have to be found case by case, in order to create or develop small-scale productions, and very often some initial support is provided by the public or voluntary sectors, until small businesses can reach economic viability. Here again, a good example of such an approach is provided by the Scottish Borders, which 'is now more competitive as a result of the Leader+ programme. Some of the projects have resulted in income generation for local businesses. Other micro-businesses have had the financial support to try to diversify, and often micro-businesses have been partnered with local volunteers or other micro-businesses to assist them in their goals'.





Another good example of the innovative approach is provided by the Joensuu area (Finland) where attention has been paid to projects at village or micro-enterprise level. In this case: 'funding the projects of the villages and microenterprises which offer services for local people was in the first place not supported by the local authorities.' For this reason, it was difficult for the LAG to implement its strategy in the beginning. The attitude has changed and now the LAG is thanked for supporting projects which raise the quality of life in villages through support for micro-enterprises offering services.

Finally, a major impact of Leader in making the territories more competitive is to improve their image and identity. This can be achieved through efforts made to develop innovation, quality products and services, better integration and cohesion. As reported by the Kromme Rijn area (Netherlands): 'Leader has helped in promoting the region and it is now more marketable.'

Also, in the Guadix area: 'The district's image has been greatly strengthened, as well as the population's sense of ownership, which is fundamental to improving joint work by people and institutions built around strategic development objectives which have been defined, accepted and pursued by everybody.'

Improving the image of the area is not only important for its visibility outside but also for positive benefits within the local economy such as the social, cultural and environmental aspects of local development. Evidence is again provided by Guadix: 'If one can point to one key aspect which has provided experience over this period ... it would be the significance of the district's image for its own inhabitants and the sense of belonging which can be generated. This constitutes the basis for conservation, protection and value enhancement of natural and cultural heritage resources, with the consequent assumption of responsibility for their care, and their role as being a key factor for the future development of the territory's economic and social development.'

### **Main outputs and impacts regarding the social dimension of competitiveness**

A major impact of Leader regarding the social dimension has been to offer locally new and (in particular) better, quality lifestyles. In Guadix: 'Leader has promoted the economic and social cohesion of the area. ... People have been informed about the value of their

heritage and offered opportunities for qualification and employment.' In this sense, the economic and social dimensions cannot be easily disassociated since the improvement in social conditions is often very closely linked to job creation, especially for disadvantaged target groups. Support given to projects involving associations, cooperatives or small-scale businesses is a good way to facilitate access for these target groups, so that they gain a greater social dignity through the development of new activities and jobs. In Joensuu, where priority attention has been given to micro-enterprises: 'These enterprises are very often started by women and they are a quick and necessary way to create jobs for women in rural areas.'

However, many LAGs strongly support the idea of considering social issues per se, and not to necessarily connect them with economic ones, as the satisfaction of basic social needs is equally essential to the longer-term competitiveness and sustainability of rural areas. As declared by the representatives of the Appennino Genovese area (Italy): 'A key condition is to base the local development strategy on two complementary major objectives, economic development on the one hand, and social development on the other hand: we need both.' With regard to the improvement of competitiveness, it must be underlined that the Leader process has, in general, not only been innovative in itself but also in introducing new ways of bringing innovation to the area — for example, by being 'technological' and making innovation more concrete, and also tangible for local people, with, for example, electrocardiograph equipment, and also in connection with the region's ongoing research projects.

A similar vision is advocated by the Arigna area, where the work developed with local communities, and attention paid to social issues are among the most remarkable, original aspects of this experience: to quote Claire Carty, projects promoter, 'social performance is as important as money and business...'

Another aspect regarding the impact of Leader on the social dimension of competitiveness is precisely the attention paid by many LAGs to village development projects. Villages are indeed the core of local communities, where people maintain direct relationships on a daily basis. This provides a more specific and tangible basis to consider both the economic and social dimensions of competitiveness when making and implementing local development plans.



## Main outputs and impacts regarding the environmental dimension of competitiveness

By far, the main impacts of Leader to develop the environmental dimension of competitiveness relate to improved awareness of the natural value of their area among local people and communities.

In Guadix: 'The LAG has improved environmental care among local people and enterprises, raising awareness of the value of the cultural and natural heritage of the area, especially towards young people, protecting and making the most of it, promoting organic farming and quality management in tourism. In relation to education and awareness, the district's inhabitants are starting to acknowledge and identify with the territory's natural and cultural heritage, thereby facilitating its conservation, improvement and enhancement of its value in the future.'

Another impact of Leader has been to develop a new consciousness among local people about environmental resources, especially to address challenging issues for the future, such as biodiversity or energy. For example, in the Arigna catchment area, environmental care is not only a condition for the area, to remain competitive, but it also plays a direct role in relation to the economic dimension of competitiveness.

### *Keeping the best balance between the three dimensions*

In relation to the achievement of sustainability, there is a need to consider the three dimensions of territorial competitiveness together. One of the most important benefits of Leader is to provide rural areas with many examples of local development processes which achieve the ideal balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of competitiveness. This is another major effect of the basic principle of integration, which is a fundament of the Leader approach.

Good strong evidence of the strength of the integration principle in helping territories to achieve balanced development through the three dimensions is provided by the Kromme Rijn area. In this example: 'Leader has helped to maximise the use of regional resources (human capital, economic resources or local products). Leader has helped to maintain diversified and balanced landscapes, activities and way of life, and to make the 'rurban' character an opportunity and not a threat, by promoting landscape and heritage protection schemes, traditional activities, such as traditional products-based agriculture, and new activities, linked to nature and culture-based tourism.'

As reported by the LAG Sarret: 'It does not make sense to separate social, economic and environmental interests as they should work together for one common goal, not considered separately on a sectoral basis during planning, implementing and monitoring phases.'

## Overall conclusions

These 16 Leader+ experiences as outlined above have provided significant evidence of the outputs and impacts of Leader in terms of competitiveness and sustainability.

The discussions at the conference have also helped to identify outstanding issues and key messages for the future. In particular, new challenges for the future of Leader can be identified in relation to its capacity to promote competitive and sustainable rural areas in Europe. Some of these challenges have already been identified, such as the need to concentrate on quality management, pay attention to identity as a major issue and the possible future development of the LAGs as local development agencies.

In addition, other new challenges have also been identified, related to the growing importance of rural and urban relationships, new social trends and forces of change (such as immigration) and the need to give greater priority to schools as major partners in developing longer-term impacts in terms of competitiveness and sustainability.

### *Keeping identity as the fourth basic dimension of competitiveness and identity*

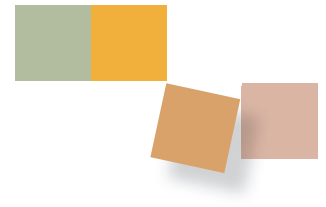
For rural areas, keeping and promoting identity is an efficient way to fulfil the requirements relating to the three basic dimensions of competitiveness and sustainability.

Delivering products with a local identity is part of the strategy to become economically competitive by offering something different to the market. In a global market place, local identity can strongly assist in differentiating products and services both of local businesses and localities themselves and thereby adding value and giving competitive advantage.

Improved local identity is not therefore an additional or peripheral aspect of local development but instead is a central issue for competitiveness and sustainability of rural areas.

### *Developing quality management as a major objective*

Quality is multi-dimensional in character, and essential to all dimensions of competitiveness and sustainability.



As such, quality products are essential to economic competitiveness; total quality management to economic efficiency; quality services to social competitiveness and social equity; and the quality of natural resources to environmental competitiveness and integrity.

However, quality needs to be managed. The dissemination of 'quality management know-how' into the rural world, to meet the small-scale business context, and for use by the LAG and local people as a routine project management, is a major task ahead for Leader!

*Paying attention to the possible development of some LAGs as local development agencies*

Leader provides many examples of where LAGs have been transformed into local development agencies. This is an opportunity for areas to develop integrated development strategies beyond the boundaries of Leader, combining several planning and funding opportunities.

This is a main result of Leader. Whatever the future of the present LAGs within the next programming period, they will be the ambassadors of Leader, as a spirit, a methodology, a think-tank, and be more than just a source of funding.

*Rural and urban relationships have to be addressed specifically*

Many rural areas close to the cities have become 'rurban' in character, being neither completely rural, nor totally urban. The population and way of life are therefore a mix of rural and urban elements. Among the four examples reported, Kromme Rijn is the best example of such a situation, but Appennino Genovese also raised the issue, since a part of its territory is distinctly urban. There were also many other examples of similar situations illustrated at the conference, such as Krajna Paluki in Poland, Posazavi in the Czech Republic, and the area around Thessaloniki in Greece.

Many of the problems and solutions in these 'rurban' areas are quite different from those found in more remote, true rural areas, and they need to be addressed specifically by developing targeted approaches and methodologies.

*Immigration as a major force of change in rural areas has also to be addressed*

Among the many examples presented at the conference, only one, Arigna, raised the issue of population change

due to immigration and the integration of new residents of different cultures and nationalities, as a major challenge and opportunity for the future of the area.

There is no doubt, however, that inward migration is a major force of change affecting rural areas in both eastern and western Europe, and also surrounding third countries. However, inward migration is an increasingly important issue for Europe as a whole, with particular issues for rural areas. Leader should help to address these issues and find new and appropriate answers for them, as far as they affect rural areas.

Immigration provides an opportunity for innovative cooperation within Leader, both in Europe and with third countries. Cooperation with third countries, especially those around the Mediterranean, should be given greater emphasis for the mutual beneficial exchange of experience and learning in terms of the rural development approach, and also through the development of cultural dialogue and complementary solutions to immigration issues.

*The local school as a key solution for all future challenges: innovation, social structure and identity*

The school is an important social structure where young people can be educated and ready to address critical issues regarding the competitiveness and sustainability of their locality. This includes issues such as environmental care as well as adaptation to social and economic change. School is also a powerful mechanism for the dissemination of innovation through children, towards their families and the territory as a whole. Consequently, there is a growing need to develop a new concept for the development role of the local school, through a joint consideration of both the pedagogical and local development dimension. This idea is well illustrated by a Leader+ good-practice example called 'The school of the area', which is a project originating in the Montagna Leader LAG area in Italy. The project shows how the local school and education system as a whole should become a critical partner in rural development. Leader should promote such partnerships among schools and other local partners as an innovative and efficient approach towards competitiveness and sustainability in rural areas. Details of Leader+ good practices can be found at the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/gpdb\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/gpdb_en.htm)



# Cooperation and networking in practice

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## Introduction

This article draws upon information made available concerning the 16 territories involved in the Évora conference. It is therefore only a sample of a much larger picture, as the remaining Leader+ areas have certainly been very active in this field as well.

Yet, this sample is sufficient to give a 'snapshot' on the situation, in order to look at a range of different aspects of cooperation and networking. This includes the type of projects that they decide to undertake, and the motivation which is more than just the financial incentive, to push the LAGs to undertake these complex projects. Other key issues include: Who is involved? Who are the promoters of these projects at the local level as well? What are the difficulties? What lessons can be drawn from these experiences?

The Leader+ initiative has foreseen a much wider range of possibilities for networking and cooperation than for



previous Leader programmes. For example, the period in which Leader+ has been implemented has also seen the enlargement of the European Union to include 12 new countries although six of these new Member States introduced Leader-type measures during the programming period. This has greatly broadened the range of opportunities for cooperation in Europe. Leader+ has initiated the new interterritorial dimension of the cooperation activity (i.e. not requiring a partner from another country) and this seems to have been very successful.

## What are they doing?

In this section, we will not aim at undertaking a full inventory of cooperation projects in which the 16 territories are involved. We will, however, try to show the variety of projects that are taking place at different territorial levels.

### (a) *Interterritorial cooperation*

Some LAGs have given a clear priority to interterritorial cooperation projects, because there are fewer problems with languages, administrative procedures, distance, etc. This can be very useful for many reasons. Undertaking a common project on a theme useful for different LAGs in the country or the region can lead to lower costs, a more integrated approach, and access to a better infrastructure than a single LAG could afford to support alone.

<sup>(1)</sup> Jean-Pierre Vercruysse has been involved in various technical dossiers on development methodologies and Leader *ex-post* studies at European level (typology of local action groups, analysis of Leader implementation, value added for LAG networking, etc.). In addition he has headed the support service for transnational cooperation projects and for the development of an evaluation methodology, and helped coordinate the Leader II networking device.



In Finland, the three LAGs in the territory meet regularly, and this gives them many opportunities for developing common projects. This has included: a project on aviation which needed a larger scale to be feasible; a series of 'workshops for the future' undertaken in the three areas by using the same method; and the development of common communication tools on Leader+ in order to share the costs. This last project has developed into a regular common press release in which the three LAGs announce the new projects that they have decided to support: it is well received by the press (which is pleased to receive just one press release instead of three) and leads to a good press coverage. In Italy, LAGs included in the Terre Alte area (a mountainous area in the north of Italy, which today spreads across three different administrative regions) have formed a common strategy for the promotion of this area as a place where people can live and not just visit. Common actions included communication, promotional activities, marketing, etc.

Other successful examples include the promotion of quality wines, which has been tackled jointly by 15 LAGs in Greece. The project known as 'Wine roads of northern Greece' involves the creation of wine trails linking the wineries opened to the public in the different areas. In Scotland, the priority is on interterritorial cooperation, looking for common actions with complementarities across adjacent territories (signposting, river management) whilst in Hungary, the Rural Tourism Days is an action undertaken by many rural development groups across the country for the promotion of rural tourism. Another interesting example can be found in Spain, where the LAG has implemented a series of interterritorial cooperation projects undertaken jointly with other LAGs (and Proder, which is another form of bottom-up rural development group in Spain) in the region of Andalucía. A very large consultation was undertaken with the support of all the Leader+ groups on future priorities for rural development in Andalucía for the 2007–13 period. With thousands of interviews of stakeholders and hundreds of thematic and territorial forums, this was an unprecedented exercise involving the local population in debating their future. Several other interterritorial projects were established at the regional level, involving several LAGs (including Proder) on specific thematic projects. Examples include work on heritage (training courses, setting up a geographical information system (GIS), promoting a network of volunteers, etc.), degraded mining areas (a common issue for several LAGs in the region, but not all), thermalism and megaliths (how to undertake an inventory of sites, common promotion, training etc.).

#### *(b) Cross-border projects*

These projects are in fact transnational, but have most of the characteristics of interterritorial projects as they are undertaken in adjoining regions across a common frontier. These cross-border projects are carried out by people speaking the same language, which makes them easier to implement than full transnational projects.

The Irish LAG, Arigna, has undertaken a number of cross-border cooperation projects with neighbouring areas in Northern Ireland. Despite the administrative difficulties of working across the border, their expectations were quite similar to interterritorial projects. These included the promotion of farmers' markets (training, mentoring, capital aid) and the promotion of alternative energies. In Germany, the LAG Oberschwaben has engaged in a project of scientific cooperation with a (German-speaking) cross-border area in Italy, where the study of medieval settlements showed that they had a fairly similar way of daily living. Another German project involves local museums and aims at organising exhibitions on themes of common interest (for example; 'Celts along the Danube') for areas situated along the Danube river in Germany and Austria. This cooperation allows costs associated with the exhibition to be shared, but it also gives access to a much larger collection of exhibits (and the associated know-how) than if only one area was involved. A cross-border link has been established between Hungary and neighbouring Romania, for the transfer of rural development experience to this new Member State.

#### *(c) Major transnational projects*

Several LAGs are involved in large transnational projects that were, in most cases, started under Leader II. These ambitious projects which count many partners in several countries require a long development time, as they combine all the possible difficulties: distance, language, culture, administrative set-up, etc. Yet, some objectives require such a scale, and the achievement of these projects could be of great importance for the future of rural Europe.

The Greek LAG from Thessaloniki is involved in two very large cooperation projects which were started under Leader II and took a long time to reach the implementation stage. Both the European territorial quality label and the Eurovillages projects involve many partners in different countries and have ambitious objectives. The creation of a quality label recognised across Europe and the development of new forms of rural tourism more respectful for the environment are both issues which could have



a large impact on the future of rural areas in general. The Italian LAG, Appennino Genovese, had been a partner in a Leader II cooperation project on the rediscovery of chestnuts as an important local resource in mountainous areas. This 'chestnut road', initiated by non-Italian LAGs, has led the way for a major activity in the Leader+ local plan. An association has been set up, numbering over 60 partners, ranging from restaurants providing meals based on chestnuts, to farmers using chestnuts to feed their cattle. The association has undertaken many promotional activities and provides training for young people on ancient skills associated with chestnut production.

*(d) Smaller-scale transnational projects*

Many projects are of a more limited scale, but embrace a transnational dimension as it is important for their success.

In Finland, a project on local radio was developed in partnership with a Portuguese group in order to give a wider perspective for the people involved. In France, the LAG Haut Jura has not been involved in interterritorial cooperation but has implemented two transnational projects. This was undertaken with an existing partner with whom they had already carried out a successful project under Leader II. The LAG has reached a stage of maturity (it is in its third Leader phase) and prefers to play it safe within an established partnership. In Germany, the LAG has developed several transnational projects, including one involving a village well known for the quality of its spa water which has entered into a cooperation project with similar villages in Spain. They are looking together for innovative solutions in answering customer needs.

Both LAGs from Ireland and Scotland have developed transnational projects with Sweden in relation to creativity and young people. Despite their differences, both projects aim at boosting young people's creativity and looking for new business opportunities in connection with a particular form of innovation (crafts, design, computers, the media, etc.). Transnational cooperation was also implemented by the Spanish LAG in conjunction with its many interterritorial projects. Examples include working on the troglodytic heritage with LAGs in Spain, Italy and France; and working on the promotion of tourism using the geological heritage with local groups from Ireland, Scotland and Morocco. In the Netherlands, the IRIDE (imaging rural identities in Europe) project was initiated by the LAG in order to promote the use of video and photography by local people who want to see their rural area in a different way.

### Why do they want to cooperate?

As well as examining what LAGs are cooperating on, it is also useful to investigate the motives behind cooperation between LAGs and their partners who have many different reasons to cooperate at several territorial levels.

(a) Cooperation projects are an integral part of the local strategy. Cooperation projects give the possibility to undertake actions and achieve objectives which could not otherwise have been possible on an individual basis. For example, the projects on 'wood and fashion schools' developed in Sweden, or the project on the use of media by young people in Scotland are examples of projects that are directly connected to the core of the local strategy. In Germany, the immediate usefulness of the project has been used as criteria for involvement of the LAG in cooperation activities.

(b) Cooperation is used to develop projects that complement the normal activity of the LAG, either because it is another type of action or because it gives access to supplementary funding (under Action 2). For example, in Greece, cooperation is a way of undertaking projects that could not have been done within the normal budget. The setting-up of an interterritorial project with many other Greek LAGs aimed at creating a common infrastructure for the promotion of quality wines. This could not have been done in a professional and sustainable fashion by a single LAG. All partners are benefiting from the new skills gained through this project. In Ireland, the possibility of cooperation with Poland was seen as an opportunity to create English language courses for the local population of Polish immigrants in order to facilitate their integration. These courses were set up in partnership with a LAG in Poland.

(c) Some LAGs give a more 'conceptual' explanation for undertaking cooperation activities: 'cooperation is good for you', it opens up the territory and broadens the outlook of the local actors. Several LAGs feel that the international dimension of a project makes people look at their local area in a different way. For example, in Finland, the 'citizen's journalism' project trains local people in radio techniques and gives them the opportunity to produce news for the local radio. This is done together with a Portuguese LAG, which gives an extra dimension to the local action. In Italy, the projects are seen as a way of 'connecting' the local area with the rest of Europe, and in Spain, cooperation is very much seen as a way of spreading a 'culture' of cooperation on more general rural development issues.



(d) Reaching a 'critical mass' is important for achieving economies of scale. This is done through sharing with other LAGs the development costs for some technological innovation, and can reduce the funding required from each group.

The French group has developed a new form of local tourism based on the interactive use of audio and video messages activated via a global positioning system. This system is also implemented in the area of their Italian partner, thereby reducing the cost of the project for each group.

(e) Exchange of good practice. The use of cooperation for transferring good practices from one area to another is not as present as could be expected. This could be linked to the fact that the eligibility of an action to the cooperation strand of funding has been made conditional on the realisation of a common action, going beyond the mere exchange and transfer of good practice. It is likely that significant transfers of good practice have probably taken place, but are not necessarily documented as such. This could be especially important in new Member States; for example, in the Czech Republic, the territory has benefited from the experience of a cooperation project concerning its own local action on river management. The cleaning of a polluted river used the experience of France and Poland.

### Who is involved?

Cooperation projects, especially transnational ones, are often undertaken by professional staff or experts from the LAG or board members with relevant expertise and experience, who bring know-how (methods) and know-who (potential partners).

In some areas, however, cooperation is considered as an opportunity for involving local people and therefore attracting new partners to the LAG. Sometimes, these local partners do not usually have enough time to devote to this type of project. The LAG's role is then to act as a facilitator for accessing co-funding and fulfilling administrative obligations. In Germany, the projects are implemented by a local museum (exchanges with other museums on the Danube River) or a village having a renowned spa (exchanges on a new approach to thermals in rural Europe). In the Czech Republic, cooperation has been the occasion to involve new people in local work. The project which involved cleaning a local river was an opportunity to involve all age groups in the activity. It also allowed direct

involvement in the tourism sector, of mostly private individuals. In Finland and in Portugal, the local radio project ('citizen's journalism') was undertaken by local activists and not by the LAG itself.

When looking at who is involved, a distinction must be made between the initiator and the secondary partners. Cooperation projects always start at the initiative of a LAG who has identified a specific need. The LAG looks around and finds partners ready to follow on a project idea.

### How does it work? (Lessons on difficulties and solutions)

The experience of the different types and approaches to cooperation projects, especially on a transnational basis, can lead to many lessons being learned.

(a) A key problem, evident in many places, is the existence of very different procedures between the different programmes. Different managing authorities apply different rules for co-funding, eligibility of certain actions, procedures for accessing EU funds, timing and calendars, monitoring requirements, etc. This is made more complicated by the fact that one administration might require the project to be approved by another authority first, leading to a 'vicious circle', where nobody wants to approve the project. The language issue makes this even more complicated, as some managing authorities will find it very difficult to base their decision on documents written in another language. Several possible solutions have been suggested by the LAGs.

- ▶ Appoint a coordinating LAG and agree on claims and monitoring procedures for the project at the very beginning. Even if these are not usually seen as a priority by enthusiastic project promoters, failing to do it could lead to very serious problems in the future.
- ▶ Translate every single document in all the languages of the partners and this will help to avoid misunderstandings.
- ▶ Use the support provided by external networks to finalise the project. Each Member State has a national networking unit, which liaises with the other networks across Europe. They can often help informally for overcoming language and administration problems.
- ▶ Some LAGs complained that the Leader+ European network started too late. The future contact point established for the 2007–13 rural development network will have a reinforced role in this respect.



(b) Cooperation projects take a long time to be established. The more complicated they are (transnational instead of interterritorial, many different partners, geographical distance, languages, different experiences in cooperation and in 'bottom-up' rural development, etc.), the longer they will take to reach the implementation stage.

This is made worse by the fact that cooperation activities normally start out very late, as LAGs give priority to the implementation of their local programme under Action 1, especially with the threat of the application of the n+2 rule that adds pressure to their local work.

The LAGs insist that projects need to start at an early stage, as this will give time to get to know each other and to overcome the administrative issues that will arise. For example, in the Netherlands, the LAG regrets starting too late in paying attention to the idea of cooperation: they had only two years left to identify, set-up and implement their project. In future, they will seek to join a more experienced group of partners.

## Networking

Networking is closely related to cooperation as it brings very much the same type of advantages at different territorial levels and is organised along a multi-level approach. Networking is useful as it helps to pick up new ideas and to improve the way that LAGs are carrying out their own projects.

(a) Networking begins at the local level, where it is very important for the success of the Leader approach.

(b) National and regional networking was intensive, especially since many LAGs have a common background and have known each other since the Leader II period.

- ▶ Regional networking in particular has taken on an important role in Spain, where the Andalucía Rural Association (ARA) has taken the key task of support for rural development in the region: publication of a regular magazine; dialogue with the administrations and between the LAG groups (Leader and Proder); training; legal advice and consultancy; documentation centre, etc. This is seen as a key for the success of cooperation projects undertaken between the LAGs in this region.
- ▶ A limited level of networking has taken place in the new Member States, with rural networks being established often with the help of external actors such as UNDP,

Prepare <sup>(1)</sup>, ELARD (etc.), whose limited financial means has so far limited their scope of action.

(c) Thematic networking has taken place within cooperation projects, although this was fairly limited and could have been further developed as it has been in EQUAL <sup>(2)</sup>.

(d) European-level networking has involved fewer conferences and events to attend, although there have been many visits between rural areas (this has been especially true for the new Member States). Many LAGs have underlined the role of the contact point in helping the groups to identify suitable partners for cooperation projects and helping to organise visits by foreign groups.

(e) In many Member States, the LAGs have developed their own 'informal' networks. These have often been around for a long time (since 1992 in Greece for example) and play a role of representing the group's interests, identifying specific difficulties and seeking solutions. They can also play a further role of coaching weaker LAGs to whom they provide technical assistance on management. They have set up an EU-level association called ELARD <sup>(3)</sup>, which is recognised as a stakeholder by the European Commission.

(f) Many LAGs are also active members of other networks, which brings them additional benefit. In France, for example, the Parc Naturels Régionaux (PNR) is a network of local development agencies sharing the same approach of rooting economic development in environmental protection. In some areas they are the beneficiary of Leader funding, but keep an active participation in the PNR network.

## Conclusions

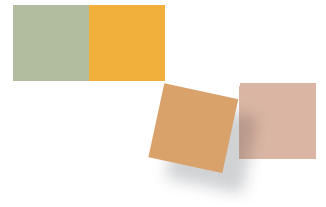
Coming at the start of the new programming period 2007–13, this rapid look at cooperation and networking activity undertaken by the 16 territories presented in the Évora Conference has confirmed that LAGs have had a great level of interest in this topic. From looking at our sample, it seems that the new possibility of undertaking

<sup>(1)</sup> UNDP: United Nations Development Programme; Prepare: Pre-Accession Partnerships for Rural Europe.

<sup>(2)</sup> Equal is a European Social Fund (ESF) Community initiative, providing funds to projects which test and promote new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market.

<sup>(3)</sup> ELARD, the European Leader Association for Rural Development.





'interterritorial' cooperation has been very well received, whilst the opening up of partnership to areas beyond the EU has met with more limited success.

The new programmes will maintain cooperation as a key action within Axis 4 of the new European rural development programme, and will extend the benefit of networking well beyond the limited scope of the Leader beneficiaries. Many other rural stakeholders will be invited to take part in the actions organised by the different networks and to become full members.

It will be important that these new stakeholders also become fully involved in the cooperation projects that arise in this new period. The LAGs should put into place communication strategies towards these new actors present in the territory (farmers, environmentalists, rural businesses, etc.), so that they are able to put forward cooperation proposals.

A new contact point will be contracted by the European Commission in order to support the establishment and operation of the European network for rural development. This contact point will play an extended role in supporting transnational cooperation projects. Activities will include the facilitation of partner searches, direct support for the implementation of projects, a 'clearing house' for administrative problems and a full set of actions implemented for supporting these projects. These actions will be mirrored in the tasks of the national networks, which will be in charge of supporting interterritorial cooperation and transnational cooperation in close liaison with the European level of administration.

With this new set-up based on the lessons drawn from the past, we can expect that cooperation will become an even more fully integrated part of rural development based on the Leader approach.



# A focus on women and youth

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Scotland



## Introduction

The challenges associated with optimising the role of women and young people in rural development, considered as priority target groups under the Leader+ initiative is a key issue which emerges frequently in the evaluation of Leader. The question underpinning this article is whether this role has progressed beyond such target group involvement, and has in reality attained full participation in governance, rural innovation and endogenous development?

The material and evidence presented by the 16 case study areas at the final Leader+ Observatory conference in Évora, 'Leader: ensuring Europe's rural diversity' forms the basis of this exploration. In each of these mini-plenary case studies, an introductory film was presented by the LAG delegation followed by a discussion which was structured around a common framework. This covered the positive results of Leader in the LAG area in terms of the Leader method, that is:

- ▶ the status of the local development strategy (area-based approach);

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- ▶ governance (bottom-up approach, partnership);
- ▶ territorial strategies (multi-sectoral integrated approach, decentralised decision-making and financing, innovation);
- ▶ networking and cooperation at Member State and European level;
- ▶ concrete results.

Below are some key messages regarding the role of women and young people identified by the LAG delegations and what it tells us about the success of Leader.

## The local development strategy

Few of the delegations highlighted specific youth or gender issues as headline considerations in their overall strategies. This is not to say that these were not key considerations, in fact these were frequently addressed within other horizontal or wider issues. For example, issues over an ageing rural population or the need for childcare were more frequently identified than specific youth or women's issues alone.

Amongst those LAGs tackling these issues on a wider basis, the Joensuu territory (Finland) highlights the ageing population of the area as being a particular threat to the sustainability of the area, since there are insufficient young people feeding through to the local economy. They have been particularly successful in supporting women and



young people's involvement through the support for the development of new businesses, thus bringing new blood into the area.

Gender equality is specifically targeted in Sweden's Småland LAG strategy as a horizontal approach, and here, the results significantly exceed expectations across the range of project activity. The French Haut Jura LAG acknowledges that there is an issue of trained young people leaving the area. In common with these other areas, it does not specifically target women and youth but seeks to involve them through a wider inclusive approach. Through addressing issues such as rural isolation, employment opportunities and much improved facilities at an area-strategy level, Arigna (Ireland) have greatly added to the quality of life for both women and youth. Although not explicit in their strategy, the Danish Vestsjælland LAG felt that the experience of their involvement in Leader demonstrated that it was vital that project activity should target the involvement of young people.

There were a number of more specific approaches highlighted. The Spanish Guadix LAG strategy is based on three main themes one of which is the inclusion of all possible social groups living in the area: specifically this includes women and young people. In the Netherlands, Kromme Rijnstreek successfully targeted greater social inclusion through the strategic priority of addressing the target groups of women and youth. The Czech LAG, Posazavi, has succeeded with a specific strategic action targeted at developing young people's involvement. In more specifically targeted approaches, the ANETH group from Greece reported success in enabling young people returning to the area to access redundant property as a means of establishing themselves. Within the Sárrét territory of Hungary, an ageing rural population was identified as a major issue. Their strategy identifies the difficulties in economic progression faced by women and newly qualified young people and a number of their project activities have this incorporated as a key objective.

## Governance

Two aspects of governance were considered, the bottom-up approach and the local partnership.

Firstly, let us consider the bottom-up approach. Experience reported here is interesting in that it tends to focus on bottom-up involvement in the whole Leader process rather than just the promotion of specific projects or initiatives from the community. For example, the Ausserfern

LAG (Austria) implemented a structured community-based process which led to a mission statement for social integration including gender mainstreaming and youth. This process has since been complemented by project development in the corresponding fields of action and Leader has thus opened their opportunities for participation. Joensuu LAG has an active civil society project promoting the involvement of young people whilst the German Upper Swabia LAG's approach is to work with young people, and not to create specific projects for them. The approach in the Scottish Borders similarly seeks to empower the local community through the work of the LAG and the specific projects undertaken. This is carried out both horizontally and through work with specific target groups including women and youth. The focus on the resources of the area has provided a natural route for involving people. The experience of the Guadix Leader LAG, where the integral involvement of women and young people in rural development actions has been validated and given added credibility in the community and public sectors, is a particularly important lesson.

Partnerships generally involve two different approaches, those which are targeted and those which are more generally inclusive, and within this there is some evidence of evolution from the former approach to the latter as LAG partnerships mature. A number of LAGs highlighted targeted or quota-based approaches to youth and women's representation or involvement. Upper Swabia has nominated youth and women's representation and the LAG comprises at least 50 % women. Guadix LAG has specific representation from youth and women's organisations within its membership structure, whilst Posazavi LAG has members who work specifically to involve women and youth.

Examples of more highly developed approaches include Austria where the non-profit association Regionalentwicklung Ausserfern was founded in 1995 and became a LAG in 2001. By 2007, their approach to gender mainstreaming and youth had moved from representation to positive empowerment, not a quota-based approach but one which, for example, includes a political education and empowerment training for women project. The Kromme Rijn LAG has had women and youth involvement from the outset and indicated that this involvement has been very positive, and in particular has helped wider engagement. The Småland LAG stressed the importance of youth involvement in their LAG where they have a specific representation as members in addition to their inclusion in the mainstream municipal membership groupings.



Involving young people was a significant challenge identified by the Scottish Borders LAG but once they were successfully engaged it was found that keeping pace with their involvement presented further challenges.

### **Territorial strategies**

The examples presented demonstrated different ways in which the involvement of women and young people was part of the integrated territorial strategy and the associated decision-making and innovation.

Arigna stressed the importance of the strategy, focusing on the overall attractiveness of the area as a means for encouraging young people to remain or return, thus combating youth out-migration. The Greek group ANETH's strategic approach allowed for considerably greater involvement by young people and women in the local economy encouraging them to remain in the community. This complements their active involvement in the delivery of other programmes supporting women in economic activity. Ausserfern LAG placed social integration as a key element of their strategy, recognising that demographic and social changes will affect rural areas which rely more on social integration as a priority than the well-being of a single sector such as farming.

Sárrét highlighted their pivotal 'house of generations' project which seeks to provide an integrated response to the breakdown in traditional social networks which act as barriers to the economic participation of women and youth.

Decentralised decision-making and financing is proving to be challenging in all areas and achieving real involvement and engagement of excluded social groups in local decision-making is seen as a major challenge for the future. Overall, it is recognised as a powerful element of the Leader approach which motivates involvement from all groups. Much of this is addressed in the general approach to governance, but a number of initiatives of note were highlighted by the example from the Appennino Genovese group (Italy). This group has taken positive steps to include women and youth in these processes and highlight the importance of the implementation of the Leader approach in facilitating this. The Scottish Border's LAG strategy focuses on empowering local people by bringing them together, and in providing them with tools such as in the VOMO ('voice of my own') project which actively engaged young people in driving their own development activity.

The involvement of women and the young in innovation tended to be addressed in terms of their involvement representing the innovation. The focus within this principally related to improving their participation in the economy and civic society and the benefits which they receive as a result. Sárrét LAG saw a critical role in finding new ways of retaining and encouraging young people to return to the area. Appennino Genovese encouraged municipalities to work together in projects to reduce barriers to women and young women's participation in the labour market. Guadix LAG has developed a detailed strategy for the inclusion of women in the development process, with which they have won various national and international awards for the provision of equal opportunities.

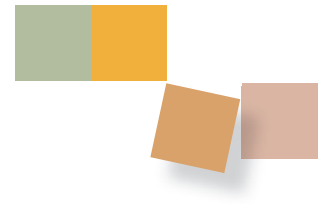
### **Networking and cooperation**

Women and young people's specific involvement in networking and cooperation were not addressed to any significant degree by any of the LAGs. As a general point, however, the vital importance of building such involvement from the bottom was highlighted, involvement in local networks and cooperation being the starting point. Specific examples were highlighted. For example, the Austrian national network unit has a working group on Leader and gender (equality) mainstreaming, the Czech LAG, Posazavi, actively promote networking and cooperation at the local level, thereby particularly increasing the participation of young people.

A number of the transnational cooperation project examples focused on young people. Two of the three Danish LAGs' transnational cooperation projects focused on youth. The 'youth shelter net' project involved LAGs from Rockingham Forest, England, the New Forest, England and Vestsjælland, Denmark in developing and delivering training in practical shelter building. The 'youth innovation' project involved the Vestsjælland LAG from Denmark along with Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd LAG from Sweden in working together on innovation camps for young people.

Finland was involved in a young farmer's transnational cooperation project linking their Joensuu region LAG with those in Vaara-Karjalan and Maaseudun kehittämissuhteiden Keski-Karjalan Jätina, in investigating the potential for young farmers cooperating with similar partners in Hungary.

The VOMO project in the Scottish Borders grew to involve a transnational dimension collaborating with young



people in other Scottish and Scandinavian LAGs. This involved two more Scottish groups, Cairngorms Leader+ LAG and North Highland LAG, and the Swedish Sjuharad LAG in an international youth media project providing training and events for young people. The same LAGs collaborated in the 2005 Highland Youth Voice event and film-making workshops as part of the development of this project and in the Swedish Youth Media project. The VOMO project was notable for the central involvement of its members in the UK delegation at this conference.

### The external perspective

The findings discussed above are largely those presented by the individual LAG delegations, but what are the external perspectives on what is being achieved? Each mini-plenary was observed by eye witnesses and the conclusions were discussed in open session, and the outputs were captured and reported back to conference. The following main conclusions were presented and are relevant to women and young people's role and involvement.

*Good governance depends on the quality of:*

- ▶ Local partnerships and networks, which should be well balanced and representative reflecting:
  - the social situation in the territory
  - the gender balance;
- ▶ local development strategy, which
  - is bottom up, participative and integrated
  - reflects and functions in the real situation
  - is accessible to active rural stakeholders;
- ▶ management structures, which
  - help
  - communicate
  - facilitate.

The objective here should be to coordinate or create partnerships leading to social inclusion beyond the traditional hierarchy and extending beyond just the inclusion of women and youth.

*In relation to territorial strategies and complementarity:*

- ▶ Leader governance approaches join up isolated actors in sparsely populated areas, drive rural development innovation, create links between actors and institutions, and facilitate differentiated decision-making;

- ▶ Territorial competitiveness can be addressed through social, economic, environmental and governance dimensions reinforcing each other.
- ▶ The sustainability concept should strongly address the role of the young.
- ▶ Leader's specific approach in finding the right solutions/actions for rural problems is vitally important in addressing rural women and youth.
- ▶ Leader governance is the critical factor, particularly the involvement of women and youth.

*In relation to networks and cooperation:*

- ▶ Cooperation and networking activity builds from local links and engagement, and the involvement of women and youth depends on this.
- ▶ Innovation areas based around the resources of an area are effective in achieving integration and engagement.
- ▶ Networking and clustering are effective approaches in rural regeneration.
- ▶ Settlement-based approaches are inclusive and effective.
- ▶ Decentralised approaches working with existing local organisations provide a basis for wider engagement.

*In relation to competitiveness and sustainability:*

- ▶ A competitive area is attractive and will encourage the young to return or to remain.
- ▶ A competitive area retains its identity and integrity.
- ▶ Social performance is as important as economic performance.
- ▶ Social and economic cohesion are a key component of an area's competitiveness.
- ▶ The environment and associated cultural and natural heritage is a critical link in involving the whole community in achieving competitiveness and sustainability.

### In conclusion

Overall, the evidence which was presented in relation to the role of women and young people was varied and sporadic. Each community differs and, as is expected in Leader, the local approaches differ too: nevertheless, in preparing this article I had hoped that the evidence might be more systematic.

In the context of equal opportunities for women and youth, there is certainly some evidence of successful mainstreamed approaches, particularly in the more mature areas or organisations. There is evidence of successful target



group approaches in other or less experienced areas. Within both these types of approach there are examples of specifically targeted actions and in general the feedback suggests that the results are positive. Some evidence of the latter approach, in helping to grow the former, as might be expected, can be seen. Effecting cultural change in Poland by using traditional culinary activity as a means of involving women, and then expanding that involvement into contributing to strategy development is a case in point. Through such involvement and the recognition of its value by all actors, women and young people gain increased respect as stakeholders in the future of rural areas.

In the best cases, we see the approach to involve women and youth is embedded beyond the Leader process, beyond mainstreaming, and beyond mere integration. It has become integral and as such is fundamental to the links which constitute the Leader approach. It may well be

that some of the evidence here is obscured by the apparent normality of the involvement of women and youth, since it is unremarkable, substantially mainstreamed and therefore not specifically commented on. This must be the aspiration but, as the incomplete evidence presented suggests, this needs to be actively monitored.

A box containing three DVDs on the Evora Conference is now available. Two of the DVDs present the 16 films produced by the territories for the event. The third DVD gives a general overview of the conference with the main speeches and the best moments.

If you are interested, you can order one copy of this box free of charge via the EU Bookshop website at the following address: <http://bookshop.europa.eu>

For several copies, please send an e-mail to: [agri-leaderplus-publications@ec.europa.eu](mailto:agri-leaderplus-publications@ec.europa.eu)

# Leader+ Magazine

**Leader+ Magazine** is published three times a year by the Observatory of Rural Areas.

**Leader** (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy) is a Community initiative launched by the European Commission and coordinated by its Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (Unit F3). The contents of *Leader+ Magazine* do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union institutions.

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**Cover photo:** Photo provided by the LAG Monte ACE (Portugal)

**Leader+ Magazine** is published in 22 official languages of the European Union and has a print run of 40 000 copies

**For further information:**  
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Manuscript finalised in May 2008

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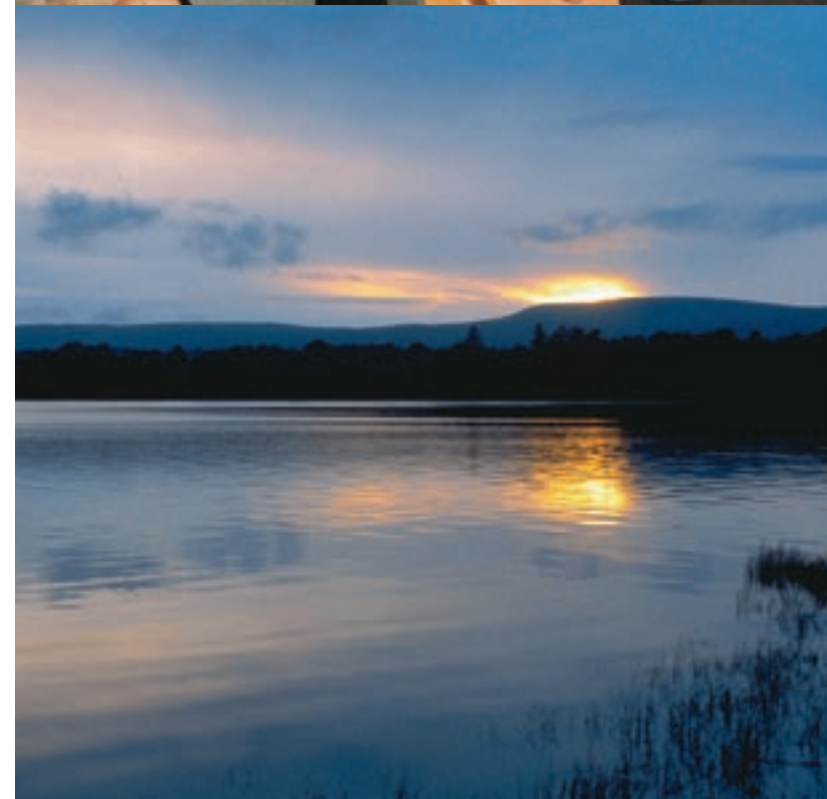
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## Name:

Leader (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)

## Programme type:

Community initiative

## Target areas:

Leader+ is structured around three actions:

- ▶ Action 1 – Support for integrated territorial development strategies of a pilot nature based on a bottom-up approach.
- ▶ Action 2 – Support for cooperation between rural territories.
- ▶ Action 3 – Networking.

## Priority strategic themes:

The priority themes, for Leader+, laid down by the Commission are:

- ▶ making the best use of natural and cultural resources, including enhancing the value of sites;
- ▶ improving the quality of life in rural areas;
- ▶ adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions and;
- ▶ the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive.

## Recipients and eligible projects:

Financial assistance under Leader+ is granted to partnerships, Local Action Groups (LAGs), drawn from the public, private and non-profit sectors to implement local development programmes in their territories. Leader+ is designed to help rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region. It encourages the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development as well as national and transnational co-operation. In order to concentrate Community resources on the most promising local strategies and to give them maximum leverage, funding is granted according to a selective approach to a limited number of rural territories only. The selection procedure is open and rigorous.

Under each local development programme individual projects which fit within the local strategy can be funded. All projects eligible for funding under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) are eligible under Leader+.

At the decision-making level of the LAGs the economic and social partners and associations must make up at least 50 per cent of the local partnership.

## Duration of the programming period:

2000–06.

## Community grant:

The total budget for programmes is EUR 5 046.5 million, of which EUR 2 106.3 million (EUR 2 143.5 million after mid-term indexation) is funded by the EAGGF Guidance Section and the remainder by public and private contributions.