



Name:

Leader (Links between actions for the development for 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 cooperation. 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 % of the local partnership.

Duration of the programming period:

2000–2006.

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 contribution.

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Leader+ Magazine



SPECIAL FOCUS

Leader's contribution to growth and sustainable development

EN
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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.

Leader+ Magazine

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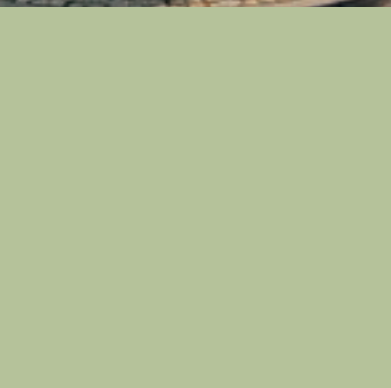
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Job creation and sustainable development in Leader+



By Mr Antonis Constantinou,
Director, Rural Development
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Rural Development,
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Rural areas face particular challenges as regards growth, jobs and sustainability in the coming years. However, they also offer real opportunities in terms of: their potential for growth in new sectors; the provision of rural amenities and tourism; their attractiveness as a place in which to live and work; and their role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes.

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With the adoption of the rural development strategic guidelines in 2006, the programming period 2007–13 sets a more strategic focus on growth and jobs (Lisbon strategy) and on sustainability goals (Gothenburg strategy). Being able to achieve growth, create jobs and remain competitive over time, while maintaining a balance with the environment, is a major challenge for all rural actors.

In relation to local development, the European Council of March 2005 concluded that greater ownership of the Lisbon objectives on the ground was necessary, involving regional and local actors and social partners. This is of particular importance in areas where greater proximity is essential, such as in innovation and the knowledge economy, employment, human capital, entrepreneurship, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or access to risk capital financing.

It is also clear that, in an open, globalised economy, tackling the growth and jobs agenda must be anchored in regional and even local development strategies. This is the level where most business networks are formed, where links are established with centres of learning and technology, and where local knowledge and expertise can best be mobilised.

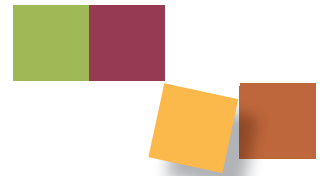
Both the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, and their role in rural development strategy, especially the link with respect to Leader+, are very clearly explained in the 'special focus' article provided by Mr Laurent Van Depoele. Here we see how Leader+ can meet, on the one hand, the goal of providing job creation and economic competitiveness (the Lisbon strategy) while, on the other, delivering this in an environmentally and sustainable way (the Gothenburg strategy).

Perhaps now is a good moment for us to dwell a little on the role of Leader+, and if we look towards the future, we can also see how the Leader method can continue to play a role in meeting these two priorities. While it is true that some of Europe's economic and environmental challenges require very large sums of money, such as those available under the Structural Funds, it is equally true that there are many relatively small-scale measures, such as those programmes funded under the Leader+ initiative, which are able to supply an important local multiplier effect. These multiplier effects, as illustrated by several of the projects highlighted in this edition of the magazine, show the breadth of Leader+, and its ability to reach out to many different sectors of economic activity, and thereby sustain often isolated communities living in Europe's rural areas. This is particularly true for some of the smaller 'low-cost' projects, which form part of wider local development strategies. The examples from the UK, Ireland and Germany all provide excellent models, albeit with a different approach, of how relatively small sums of money, which when well targeted, create and sustain new jobs, and go a very long way to meeting the Lisbon and Gothenburg priorities.

Of course this should not be a surprise, since after all Leader+ already had as one of its objectives 'sustainable development designed to encourage new ways of reinforcing the natural environment, in order to contribute to job creation' (1). There has also more recently been the common agricultural policy 2003 reform with its greater emphasis on market orientation rather than market support, and, with the latest enlargement to EU-27, there are additional economic and environmental considerations. This is especially so when we consider, amongst others, the need to restructure farm and food sectors, the remarkable biodiversity, and potential for green tourism in our two newest Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, which are also focused on in this magazine.

Under the EAFRD's Leader axis, the Leader method will be able to continue to deliver economic growth and jobs along the lines of the Lisbon and Gothenburg priorities. Just as we have often seen the legacy of Leader I and Leader II as the basis for Leader+ projects, this legacy, I am also firmly convinced, will provide a strong basis for building the future prosperity of our rural areas. For this reason the Observatory decided to address this topic in its seminar held in Corsica, April 2007, where the success of Leader+ and its contribution to sustainable development and job creation was very much apparent. More information about the outcomes from this seminar is available in the 'Leader+ news' section in this magazine as well as from the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/events/index_en.htm

(1) Commission notice to Member States of 14 April 2005, laying down guidelines for the Community initiative for rural development (Leader+) (2000/C 139/05).



Safeguarding natural practices

Making human activities compatible with nature is fundamental to preserving Minorca's environment and ensuring its 1993 Unesco 'Biosphere Reserve' status. In order to help meet the challenges of the demand for agricultural products, foodstuff quality and at the same time respecting the environment, this Leader+ project has published a guide.

The guide, called 'Agreements on sustainable agricultural practices in Minorca' (*Acuerdos de prácticas agrarias sostenibles en Menorca*), is based on the philosophy of the 'custody of the territory'. It is aimed at both owners and users of the territory. Before preparing the guide, a workshop was organised involving those actors concerned with the island's agricultural and environmental activities. There was also an examination of those agro-environmental measures applicable to Minorca, and from these, 28 measures covering five main groupings (type of cultivation; crop management; livestock management; management of natural resources; and other complementary activities) were selected. GOB (Grupo Ornitológico Balear and Defensa de la Naturaleza) is the custodian of these measures, and ensures compliance with the agreement, bearing in mind the production and the timetable agreed between the parties.

This initiative has several innovative aspects, one being that part of the budget has been devoted to compensate farmers for their contribution to preserving the Minorcan scenery. There have already been several successes, including: a cooperation agreement between a hotel on the island and local food producers; an educational tour of the island's primary schools; the setting-up of an agricultural shop; and the setting-up of a trademark for product commercialisation.

Sustainable agricultural practices

Member State: Spain

Region, district: Illes Balears

Name of the LAG: Associació Leader illa de Menorca

Population: 86 697

Surface area: 702 km²

Project total cost: EUR 21 734

EU: EUR 6 503

Other public funds: EUR 6 503

Private funds: EUR 8 368

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Photos provided by the Spanish national network unit.

LEADER+ in action



A new look for meat products

The nature and aims of this project fit quite well with the LAG's strategy of productive investments. It has been promoted by a company established by a young couple who, thanks to Leader+, can now continue with a small-scale activity involving the production of authentic regional meat products, such as sausages, which are used to prepare a variety of local dishes.

The Leader+ investment allowed the production facility to be remodelled and substantially improved, and several new pieces of equipment and other materials required for the manufacturing process to be purchased. This means that the traditional activity can not only be sustained and diversified, thus preventing its loss to the region, but also increased, as a result of the marketing and promotion of local and regional sausages resulting from the project.

The project adds significant value to the rural parish to which it belongs, and has had a considerable impact in terms of job creation. In addition to maintaining the three existing positions, another two are to be created, allowing for the project to have a local economic multiplier effect. In this respect, it should be pointed out that these posts are filled by youths, four women and one man, who are not only keen to make a career for themselves in this line of work, but have also taken up residency in the neighbourhood.

Artisanal meat products

Member State: Portugal

Region, district: Beira

Name of the LAG: RUDE — Associação de Desenvolvimento Rural

Population: 80 386

Surface area: 936 km²

Project total cost: EUR 61 614

EU: EUR 21 565

Other public funds: EUR 9 242

Private funds: EUR 30 807

Project eligibility: January 2006–June 2006

Contact person: Maria Celeste Valente

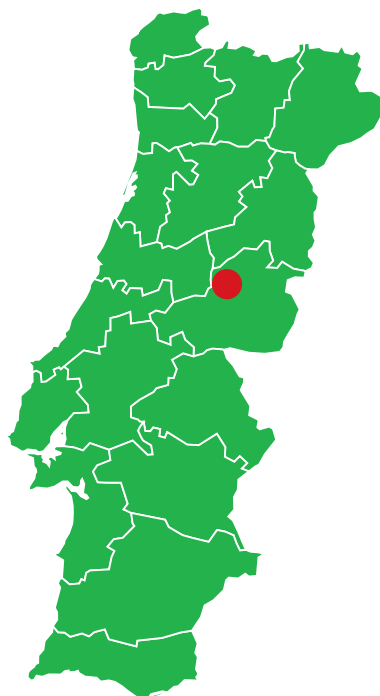
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Website: www.rude-adr.pt



Photos provided by the Portuguese national network unit.



More than just a place to fish

This project, which has been supported by the Leader+ Terra de Sousa LAG, focuses on several objectives. Other than providing local fishermen with an opportunity to practise their sport, it plans to: raise awareness of fishing among young people; teach different aspects of it (fishing with spinners or fishing lure, fly fishing, etc.); promote the region's products; and boost the number of local tourists.

The park has been achieved by redeveloping two existing lagoons, originally built to irrigate a kiwi plantation, which now provide a facility where it is possible to practise sport fishing, as well as promote other regional products. The fishing park consists of two rectangular-shaped tanks and is situated alongside the right bank of the Sousa River, which provides the water needed to feed these tanks.

The facility has an annual production capacity of around 30 tonnes of trout (rainbow or brown). With the help of Leader+, the entire surroundings of the park have been remodelled and improved in order to allow other activities to be developed (children's playground, picnic area, bar, shop for the purchase of regional products, etc.). Construction work involved a new layout of the area surrounding the lagoons, including building an access road. It also meant establishing a fleet of vehicles, and other infrastructure such as a picnic area and playground, as well as the necessary signs and indications.

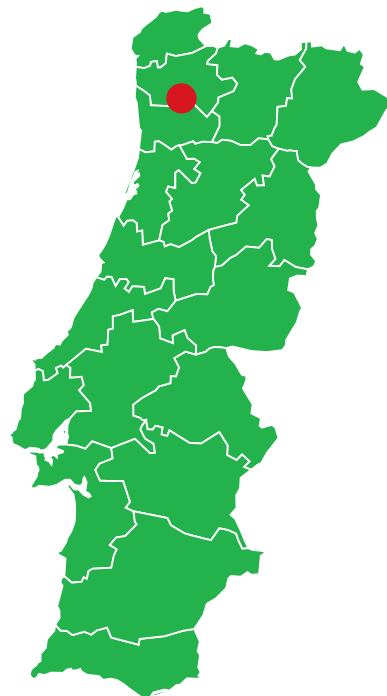
The nature of this project is quite innovative for the region, and has diversified activity into new areas using some of the existing infrastructure. It has also led to the creation of three jobs: one permanent and two seasonal.

Sport fishing park

Member State: Portugal
Region, district: Região do Vale do Sousa/Distrito do Porto
Name of the LAG: Ader-Sousa — Associação de Desenvolvimento Rural das Terras de Sousa
Population: 99 106
Surface area: 652.8 km²

Project total cost: EUR 199 834.10
EU: EUR 56 952
Other public funds: EUR 22 980.92
Private funds: EUR 119 900.40
Project eligibility: May 2006–June 2007

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Photos provided by Ader-Sousa

LEADER+ in action



A natural habitat once again!

The Viehdiecks meadows in the Leader region of Schwentine-Holsteinische Schweiz are the perfect habitat for a range of endangered species of birds. Besides the red-backed shrike and the whinchat, the corncrake has been observed in recent years. This particular crane, which is in danger of extinction all over the world, needs open plains with high bushes, a high level of groundwater and a small amount of woods for successful breeding. However, because of draining and decades of agriculture, its habitat has degenerated quite badly and, in order to secure the habitat, something had to be done urgently.

In spring 2003 the environmental association NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland) in Eutin bought, with Leader+ funding, 13 hectares of land with the aim of restoring it to its natural state as soon as possible. It took one year to prepare the groundwork: the hydraulic engineering had to be planned, the funding secured and the necessary authorisation obtained.

By autumn 2005, the project started with the construction of a 3-km-long willow-fence. Drains and other devices which could prevent the meadow from becoming marshy were destroyed. At the same time, five low ponds on a mineral-soil slope were excavated. These were constructed in order to help the tree-frog population from the southern region of Ostholstein move northwards.

One year later in the summer of 2006, where previously thistle and nettle-meadows had dominated, the higher water levels combined with the effects of grazing by a herd of 15 cows began to produce results. In May the corncrake and the red-backed shrike returned from their over-wintering in Africa, and sheldrakes bred for the first time at Viehdeck. Meanwhile the newly constructed lakes provided homes for a variety of amphibians, including the tree-frog. As the project was very successful, the zone will be extended by another 5 hectares.

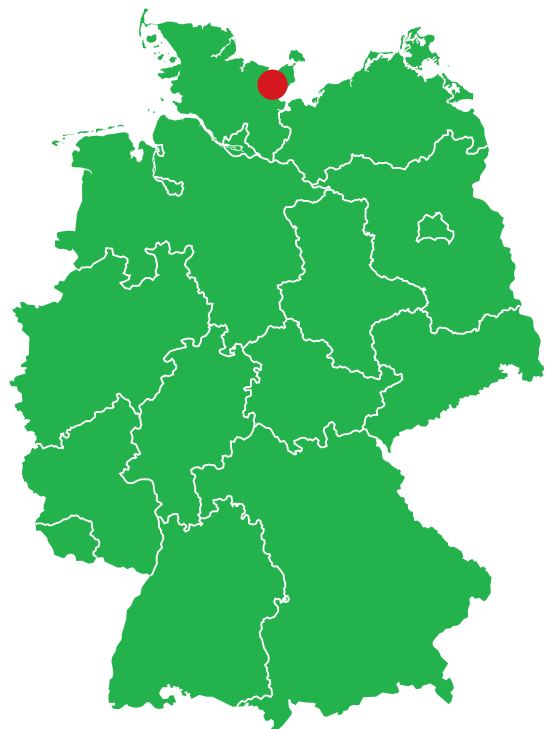
A natural habitat

Member State: Germany
Region, district: Schleswig-Holstein
Name of the LAG: Schwentine-Holsteinische Schweiz
Population: 57 546
Surface area: 459 km²

Project total cost: EUR 255 000
EU: EUR 64 000
Other public funds: EUR 136 000
Private funds: EUR 55 000
Project eligibility: 2005–06

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Photos provided by the German national network unit.

Leader's contribution to growth and sustainable development

by Laurent Van Depoele, former Professor at the Catholic University of Leuven and former Director for rural development at the European Commission



In light of the relaunched Lisbon strategy in February 2005 and the Gothenburg agenda, this article will focus on the contribution of rural development in general, and of Leader (1) (as a separate Community initiative for rural development) in particular, to higher economic growth, greater competitiveness, job creation and sustainable development.

Historical background (2)

In the early days of Leader I, in the beginning of the 1990s, we were living in a pre-globalisation era and were, in the context of the common agricultural policy (CAP), more worried about the competitiveness with the USA than with India or China. The decline in farm employment and the increase in part-time farmers inspired some Leader I groups to think about new jobs, however without real tangible results and without emphasising the sustainability and quality of jobs. Ten years ago, in November 1996, the Cork Conference introduced enduring new concepts which became shared truths such as the capacity of rural areas to become competitive with appropriate policies and the relevance and effectiveness of the Leader methodology. However, the Cork Declaration also had some limitations because it underestimated environmental concerns, which remained limited to agro-environmental measures, and missed the changing overall economic and social context in the EU.

In *Rural policy lessons from OECD countries*, Mario Pezzini (3) points out that the changes in nature, content and administration of rural policies in many OECD countries in the 1990s

concerned 'both shifts in policy focus and adjustments to governance structure'. This is particularly valid for the EU rural development policy which indeed shifted in that period from a sectoral to a territorial policy approach, from subsidising declining sectors to strategic investments, to one of developing new activities and focusing on local responsibilities and decentralisation of policy administration.

The Lisbon European Council (23/24 March 2000) agreed to a strategic goal to be pursued over the first decade of the 21st century, with the aim of boosting employment, economic reform and social cohesion, within the framework of a knowledge-based economy. This should be done by means of policies tailored to the needs of the information society and by research and development to increase competitiveness and innovation. The Gothenburg European Council (15/16 June 2001) approved a European Union strategy for sustainable development, which implies a coordinated development of common policies addressing the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability (4) and having sustainable development as their core objective. The

(1) The reference to Leader includes Leader I, II and +.

(2) See also John Bryden, 'From Leader I to Leader + and beyond the Leader axis' in *Leader + Magazine*, No 6, 2006, pp. 8–12.

(3) In *International Regional Science Review*, No 24, January 2001, pp. 134–145.

(4) Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.



Gothenburg agenda added an environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy. According to these two agendas the EU should create a globally competitive knowledge-based economy with a strong social dimension and a high level of care for the environment. It has to develop research and innovation as the key to long-term investment.

Leader+ was conceptualised during the 1998/99 discussions on Agenda 2000. Consequently it is only in the implementation of Leader+ that we may find contributions to the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives.

The Lisbon strategy and the increased competitiveness through growth and employment

Ongoing globalisation leads to increased exchange of goods across the globe, with more foreign products on the European market and hopefully more European products on the world market. Each European company has to find its way in this new global reality. Micro-enterprises, small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), service providers... all have to think about future perspectives, considering innovations and alternative solutions. Some of the EU policies may provide the necessary instruments. Recent academic debates on the approach of the EU's rural development policy and its implementation, in particular through the Leader initiative, have suggested that the capacity of any given territory to establish increasingly global processes of economic development partly rests on regional, social, cultural and institutional forms and supports. These approaches argue that good performance of individual actors is not enough for sustainable success in innovation but that economic development is facilitated by networking and interaction between a plethora of bodies that represent firms and local stakeholders. Structures of coalition building and coherence in identifying a common territorial agenda are key to economic growth. A territorial approach enables the consideration of rural space as a territorial entity with a local or regional economy comprising agricultural, industrial and services' activities.

Rural areas cannot be considered as a uniform territorial entity. Many of them currently enjoy a relatively favourable situation in Europe, mainly related to their proximity to big urban centres from which they directly benefit. Other European territories are still exposed to the risks of industrial recession related to specific economic circumstances, mainly resulting from the closure of a large firm. These are more often than not linked to the globalisation process, and there have been many recent examples in the textile and

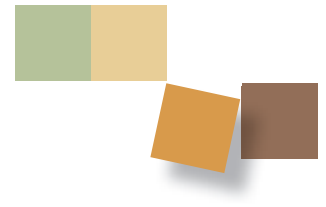
car manufacturing sectors or heavy industry. Some areas also have to cope with a certain number of geographical constraints that currently prevent them from having access to a fair share of resources required to increase their competitiveness. The development challenges are therefore greater when trying to establish or maintain a strong employment base in remote or peripheral areas.

The development of employment in rural areas is closely related to the development of the production structure of the regional economy. Since agriculture is no longer the engine of economic development of the countryside, rural development policy needs a strong direct focus on enhancing employment in off-farm and non-farm activities, but taking into account the necessary involvement of farmers in the multisectoral local development strategies. Both specialisation and diversification can be successful strategies. Indeed Leader supports the creation of micro-enterprises, SMEs and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The overall finding from the case studies analysed in the RUREMPLO project prepared by Ida Terluin and Jaap Post⁽⁵⁾ is that actors with the necessary capacity (knowledge, skills and attitude) are the essential and decisive factor for job creation. Under Leader+ we find a great many projects illustrating the role of local actors in this field. The diverse range of food products and value added primary products create significant employment in rural areas and are critical producers of jobs. A Leader 'small food business' programme in Ireland has played an important role in the ongoing development and growth of this sector according to its coordinator Isobel Fletcher⁽⁶⁾. In the Ardèche in France, two LAGs are working together on job creation by developing their religious heritage.

The Lisbon strategy also focuses, among other things, on improving education and training, research and development, and the creation of a 'knowledge-based' society. Using the opportunities for growth and employment requires investments in human capital and skills. A changing job market requires a changing workforce. Raising education levels, strengthening indigenous entrepreneurship based on local natural and cultural resources and upskilling the existing workforce are essential elements of the process of transforming the traditional economic bases of rural areas to a knowledge and service-driven environment. We find indeed many examples in Leader+ of funding on education, training and lifelong learning. The training course entitled 'Women in leadership' in north Cork and

(5) Agricultural Economics Research Institute, LEI-DLO, The Hague, 1999.

(6) See *Irish Leader Support Unit Newsletter*, Winter 2006, p.8.



south-west Limerick is a perfect illustration of the impact that Leader has on rural women in helping them to access employment⁽⁷⁾.

Referring to the 'Initial key findings of the Leader+ initiative'⁽⁸⁾, only some 11 % of the total selected Leader+ projects (2003) refer to one of the priority themes of Leader+ 'The use of new know-how and new technologies', which could be dealing with information, communication, distance learning and training, environmental management, healthcare, renewable energy, processing land-based and marine products, and the production of alternative crops and biotechnologies. The Leader+ project @CERCA, an innovative regional approach for an inclusive ICT strategy in Andalusia, is a perfect example of raising quality of life for Andalusia's rural population by developing the use of new technologies⁽⁹⁾. Another example is the coordination by a Leader+ group in the northern part of Luxembourg of 'Internet homes' in every municipality⁽¹⁰⁾. Some Finnish projects deal with new technology for clearing snow from the streets and for processing farm waste products.

The Gothenburg agenda and the environment

Integrating 'environment' into all relevant Community policy areas is the basic requirement of the Gothenburg European Council. Consumers require more and more food production that is safe and that comes from environmentally sustainable farms, which at the same time also deliver a 'public good' in terms of biodiversity gains, landscape enhancement, decrease of groundwater pollution, improved water management, and a reduction of CO₂ emissions. It is mainly through the agro-environmental measures of the CAP that this is economically possible. This illustrates that the scope of environmental concerns remains largely delimited within agro-environmental measures rather than to the whole of the rural area with all its activities. However, this does not exclude the fact that some Leader+ projects are dealing with the environment. 'Living landscapes' is one of the most successful Leader+ projects on the Isle of Wight, helping rural employers to create at the same time more environmental employment opportunities. 'Sense of place', a transregional Leader+ project in northern England, brings local people together to identify the value of their local heritage, culture and landscapes and to think about how these amenities can be shared and developed to the benefit

of the community as a whole⁽¹¹⁾. As far as renewable energy is concerned, Bavaria has been a pioneer in producing biodiesel from rapeseed oil⁽¹²⁾. Increasing the production of biomass and renewable energy not only helps to reduce greenhouse gas but equally creates new employment opportunities in rural areas. But also here the 'environmental' agenda is much more a question of the CAP than of Leader; for example, this is the case regarding the financing of farmers producing energy crops.

Some conclusions

Despite the rather limited use of funds for one of the strategic priority themes of Leader+ ('The use of new know-how and new technology'), the image of Leader+ in contributing to the Lisbon strategy is generally positive. The contribution to the Gothenburg agenda mainly comes from the CAP and the rural development measures. Consequently we have to recognise that the difficulties faced by rural areas as well as the requirements of Lisbon and Gothenburg are quite often going beyond the scope of Leader and the rural development regulation and therefore need joint efforts from a number of different funds. Coordination at regional level between rural development policy and regional policy is thereby essential as well as coordination with other instruments such as the research possibilities provided for in the seventh framework programme.

The Leader experience clearly illustrates that the success of the projects also depends on good management. We need young and intelligent people in the driver's seat and the best people should be on duty in the most fragile areas. The mainstreaming of all features of the Leader methodology (bottom-up, territorial, partnership, integrated approach, etc.) makes it better able to deal with the increased diversity in the EU-27 but it should not lead to the loss of the many excellent and extremely motivated animators and local Leader managers.

After 10 years, the '10 commandments' of the Cork Declaration are still valid. They aim at the creation of a living and healthy countryside by using a set of simple transparent instruments for agriculture, environment, job creation, growth and sustainable development in rural areas. This is based on a territorial approach which allows not only the development of the immense territorial diversity, but also preserves the cohesion of the EU. It does all this based on the involvement of local stakeholders and by serving as a European-wide example of participative democracy.

(7) *Leader+ Magazine* n° 2, 2005, p. 40

(8) *Idem* pp. 6-8

(9) *Idem*, p. 12

(10) *Idem* p. 13

(11) UK *Leader+ Newsletter*, Spring 2006, p. 15

(12) *Leader+ Magazine*, n° 3, 2005, p. 3



Improving the quality of life in rural areas



► GERMANY

Kellerwald: making business possible

► The UNITED KINGDOM

Enterprising ideas in the south of England



► GERMANY



Kellerwald: making business possible

To add value to the region, the Leader+ Kellerwald-Edersee LAG has helped to establish promising new businesses, as well as forming partnerships with other regional enterprises.

Based on an article by Lisa Küpper, LAG manager, and Isabell Friess, German national network unit

Introduction

In Kellerwald-Edersee, the agriculture and forestry sectors have for centuries been the main providers of employment in the area. Since the 1960s, more and more farmers have abandoned farm production, so now there are many parts of the region where only a few farmers continue to practise farming as their main occupation. This has meant that in many places the quality of life has been severely affected by the loss of infrastructure, notably banks, post offices, supermarkets and public transport, etc. Consequently many young people, mainly well-educated individuals, are leaving the area due to the lack of work prospects, and so there is also an ageing population.

Under their local development strategy, the LAG has selected the 'Promotion of regional business cycles' as a central sphere of its activity. This also includes the promotion and guidance of founders of new businesses. Handicraft constitutes one of the leading economic pillars in the region, and especially for small enterprises with up to five employees.

Support from the information phase...

In order to achieve the main objectives of the 'Promotion of regional business cycles' in the region, the LAG drafted, from

the very beginning, a comprehensive public relations plan. The Leader+ concept was presented in the local press on numerous occasions, and the LAG also regularly informed the public about the current funding opportunities, and presented individual projects, including the entrepreneurial measures, with their separate amounts. To obtain further information, all interested parties were provided with two leaflets (one from the LAG and one from all Leader+ groups in Hesse). The funding opportunities available for setting up businesses were explained to most of the local authorities at numerous meetings.

...to the complete concept

Once there is an idea in place to set up a business, the support process continues, with regular meetings being held with those behind the project idea and the LAG, in order to make sure that all the details of the plan conform. The Hesse region's Economic Rationalisation and Innovation Centre plays a key role in this process. Future entrepreneurs can attend seminars and sit their first business exam at the centre, and should the project be ready for implementation, then the Hesse Investment Bank is available to take another look at the business plan.



'Futterland': Products for the small animal market

As from 2002, the Leader+ programme has been able to support 15 enterprises in the Kellerwald-Edersee region. One of these is the project entitled 'Futterland: products for the small animal market'. Two years ago the project promoter moved back to his homeland in Hesse, with a plan in mind to establish a processing plant for the production of small animal products. His family's farmstead with its empty barns was ideally suited to his plans, and Leader+ funding of EUR 5 000 helped with the extension and conversion of the barn to a place of production. The market prospects seemed favourable and the business risk minimal, and today's success has proved the entrepreneur right. 'Futterland' packages primary agricultural products such as straw, hay and chaff (suitable for end-users), and subsequently delivers them to small and large clients (including a bulk buyer). In doing so the enterprise is able to provide one full-time and six part-time jobs.

Hoof trimming

A skilled painter and varnisher, Robert van Raemdonck became unemployed in 2003 due to the closure of the

place where he was employed. Seeing as the chances of finding a job in his line of work were poor, he decided to seek new prospects. He came up with the idea of working as a hoof trimmer for livestock farmers. This agricultural region with its considerable cattle farming activity was in need of a professional who could examine and care for the animals. However, there was no trimmer in the area, and the next town was approximately 70 km away. Generally, the hoof-trimming businesses that are active on a nationwide basis only visit farmyards if the number of animals in need of care exceeds a minimum quota. Similarly, it was hardly possible for smaller enterprises to provide prompt services and adequate care. In 2004, with the support of EUR 3 000 from Leader+, the project promoter purchased a trimming chute for the care of animals and invested in further equipment. As the son of a farmer he already had the necessary knowledge and background, and he obtained the required know-how by undergoing further training and obtaining the appropriate certification. Today the enterprise is working to capacity. Since agricultural enterprises and handicrafts work closely together, the project also helps to boost regional business cycles at the same time.

Old building materials are back

'Lehm und Farbe' (clay and paint) is active in the field of environmentally friendly building materials, construction methods and healthy living. This enterprise offers alternative construction methods which make use of natural building materials such as: clay as plaster; wall-fill, natural and mineral paint; as well as harmless insulating material, floor covering and plaster. Clay is not only one of the oldest, but also one of the most natural, building materials with outstanding biological properties. The ecological orientation of the enterprise appeals above all to environmentally conscious builders and renovators (who are constantly growing in number). With EUR 5 000 help from Leader+, a barn was converted into a storehouse for the building materials, and, in early 2003, the creation of this enterprise resulted in four new jobs. The business' order book is good, even at a time when the building sector is generally not at its best. This is also due to cooperation with the other craftsmen in the region, since networking has helped to generate jobs.

Food market relies on local products

'Traditional ways' have also generated jobs in Kellerwald! It has been a while since Waldeck last had a supermarket. However, after becoming unemployed due to the bankruptcy of his employer, the project promoter Claus-Peter



Kellerwald: making business possible

Member State: Germany
Region, district: Hessen
Name of the LAG: Kellerwald-Edersee e.V.
Population: 57 651
Surface area: 740 km²

Project total cost: EUR 695 000
EU: EUR 139 000
Other public funds: EUR 139 000
Private funds: EUR 417 000
Project eligibility: 2002–06

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Betzer decided, together with his wife, to reopen a vacant grocery store. The store focuses on supplying local products, and Leader+ has provided EUR 11 000 towards the cost of store refurbishment, including new refrigeration units, shelving and cash registers. Two full-time jobs and several part-time jobs have been generated through this project. The store is self-supported, since there are no other shopping facilities in the area (1 400 inhabitants). A future priority is to further develop cooperation with direct marketers. To this end, a conceptual basis is currently being developed in the framework of the project for the marketing of local products.

The greatest achievement: plenty of jobs created

As well as these four, there are many more examples of new enterprises in the Kellerwald-Edersee region — although not all of them are supported by Leader+. Many jobs were created through Hesse's rural tourism programme, such as: hay hotels; farm cafés; the corn maze; horse riding stables; farm holiday facilities; and a summer toboggan run. They not only attract tourists, but also create new jobs. In the last 10 years, around EUR 6.1 million in subsidies have flowed into the Kellerwald-Edersee region, which in turn has generated investments amounting to EUR 15.3 million. Nearly 200 projects have been or are being implemented, largely through public support, and 155 new jobs have so far been created by a variety of such actions.



Photos provided by the German National Network Unit

► The UNITED KINGDOM



Enterprising ideas in the south of England

Two LAGs join forces to find solutions to common problems and finance projects that create sustainable jobs and improve the quality of life.

Introduction

Separated by a stretch of water called the Solent, two neighbouring LAGs, the New Forest and the Isle of Wight, have been working together on a number of projects that seek to enhance their beautiful environment and improve the quality of life for local people.

In recent years, the New Forest practice of 'commoning' ⁽¹⁾ has become increasingly economically marginalised. Likewise, the Isle of Wight's rural economy suffers from 'severance': the effect of additional transport costs to and from the island, and the extra expense of having to support a small community with services. Supported by New Forest District Council and the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership, the two Leader+ groups decided to tackle the issue of rural marginalisation by seeking to stimulate the growth of small businesses, seen as the backbone of rural economies.

England's newest national park, the New Forest, is the last surviving medieval landscape in lowland England. It is a mosaic of heaths and commons, ancient woodland, streams and river valleys, interspersed with scattered smallholdings,

farms and villages. It is created and sustained by the traditional practice of 'commoning'.

About half of the Isle of Wight is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). This area is mostly within the Leader+ ⁽²⁾ programme area and represents a full variety of landscapes: grand chalk cliffs and rolling downs; muddy creeks and estuaries; lush green pastures; and trees and hedgerows. It also includes a designated heritage coast ⁽³⁾. Centuries of land management have shaped the existing landform to create today's landscape.

Encouraging local business

Both Leader groups involved in this project decided that a small grant scheme would encourage the growth of small and micro-enterprises, but what would be the best way to achieve this? The key was to focus on each area's strengths. The New Forest decided their grant scheme would seek to build on the capacity of existing businesses, particularly those involved in local products, whereas the Isle of Wight

(1) 'Commoning' refers to the practice of lawful grazing of ponies (as well as cattle, pigs, donkeys and sheep) upon the crown lands and adjacent commons of the New Forest in Hampshire, and is done by those known as New Forest Commoners.

(2) Isle of Wight Leader + is managed by the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership. Part of its work is to develop the local economy.

(3) The 'heritage coast' classification scheme was initiated in 1972 to protect coastline of special scenic and environmental value from undesirable development.



decided that start-up businesses were the key to success. Using grant incentives, both groups were able to offer the recipients ongoing business support, identified as being vital to the programme's success.

With a target market of existing businesses, many of whom required money to invest in new equipment, the New Forest decided to offer grants up to a maximum of EUR 7 000. On the Isle of Wight, it was felt that a smaller grant of EUR 700 would be enough to give a boost to new businesses at an early stage, by giving the means to: purchase a new piece of equipment; expand their advertising; or move to business premises rather than working from home.

Benefiting from a partnership approach

Given the different focus of the grant schemes, was there to be any benefit from making this an interterritorial cooperation project? Both Leader+ groups were convinced that, by working together, their schemes would be much stronger. A joint project would: enable a continual evaluation of both delivery methods and the success of the business support; encourage networking between both business advisors and local business people; and share best practice without the danger of any geographic competition.



Whilst the business advisors have evaluated their schemes on a regular basis, the Leader+ groups decided to conduct two evaluations, the first after one year and another at the end of the project. The first evaluation highlighted a certain reluctance of the New Forest businesses to complete a business plan, as they were already running existing businesses. It is, however, necessary for them to make a strong business case to the grant awarding panel and as a result the majority of businesses supported are flourishing. On the Isle of Wight, the grant panel insisted on business plans for the 'start-ups' and this policy seems to have paid off with 92 % of businesses still remaining active after one year – a time period considered crucial and well above the national average. The final project evaluation will enable a more accurate comparison of any increase in income as a result of both grant methods, since it is understood that it is likely to be a full year before any benefits are seen.



Quality of life and sustainable development are key to both Leader+ groups. The New Forest LAG has been keen to encourage grants that seek to promote sustainable land management and local products. On the other hand, the Isle of Wight LAG has followed a broader approach, in that money has been granted to start-up businesses that are considered to offer a greater range of rural services, and which get more women back into the workforce. After two years of a three-year project, New Forest Leader+ has created or safeguarded 54 jobs and 14 new products, while the Isle of Wight Leader+ has resulted in the creation of 72 new jobs.



henhouses in order to reduce poultry losses and expand the business. In addition the grant recipient now appreciates the benefits of having a business plan and has maintained contact with the business advisors.

...and jobs that improve the quality of life in rural areas

With seven years experience as a decorative/folk art painter, Julie Webb runs a new business from her studio. A Leader+ grant of EUR 700 means either that she can now run classes and workshops from her studio on the Isle of Wight or she can travel to other locations in the rural areas. Her classes are designed to enable the complete beginner with no painting or drawing skills to produce attractive results.

Nicola Henshaw is a wood carver who uses English hardwoods (specifically New Forest oaks). She has recently completed several large public art projects using New Forest green oak. Nicola needed a new weather-proof space for her work and Leader+ provided funding to allow her to convert a dilapidated stable block.

A theatre company delivers a schools programme on the Isle of Wight on issue or curriculum-based sessions where students can explore themes through practical drama

Creating jobs that promote sustainable development...

Julie Hodgson now has a new career working with her son in an innovative family-run business producing fine quality cheeses using unpasteurised milk. A Leader+ grant of EUR 700 has helped this new business to purchase specialised moulds. Julie has also taken part in workshops, networking and an exchange of best practice through a twinning process with another cheese producer in County Antrim (Northern Ireland), which is another Leader+ project.

Monique Gudgeon is processing the venison which her husband obtains as part of his stalking rights over several local estates. Using third parties to process the meat proved very expensive and they were concerned that the quality of their product was being compromised. A Leader+ grant of EUR 7 000 has enabled the business to purchase mobile butchery equipment, thus allowing them to expand their business while maintaining greater quality control.

Sharon Jackson's poultry business breeds and sells a variety of chickens most of which were free range using old henhouses and open grazing. A considerable number of hens were consequently lost to predators (mainly foxes). The business received EUR 1 450 to erect new fencing and





activities. Teachers can choose any theme or subject to explore, and the company will lead the students through drama-based activities to help them meet learning objectives and gain a greater understanding of the issues. Teachers may choose to use their workshops to: improve the confidence and team skills of their students; help create a pleasant working environment; or promote a positive attitude to learning.

In 2005, there was no fresh bakery in west Wight. Before opening his own bakery and café, David Mercer had 16 years experience as a baker, including a management position at a supermarket bakery in Ryde. Being a local man with the regeneration of the village in mind, he invested over EUR 5 600 of his own finances to help refurbish and revitalise the shop. He also used the EUR 700 rural grant to help purchase machinery and kitchen equipment.

Enterprise rural grants scheme

Member State: United Kingdom
Region, district: South-east England
Name of the LAGs: Isle of Wight Rural Action Zone and New Forest Leader+

ISLE OF WIGHT

Population: 63 000
Surface area: 841 km²

Project total cost: EUR 141 092
EU: EUR 30 632
Other public funds: EUR 55 160
Private funds: EUR 55 300
Project eligibility: January 2005–December 2007

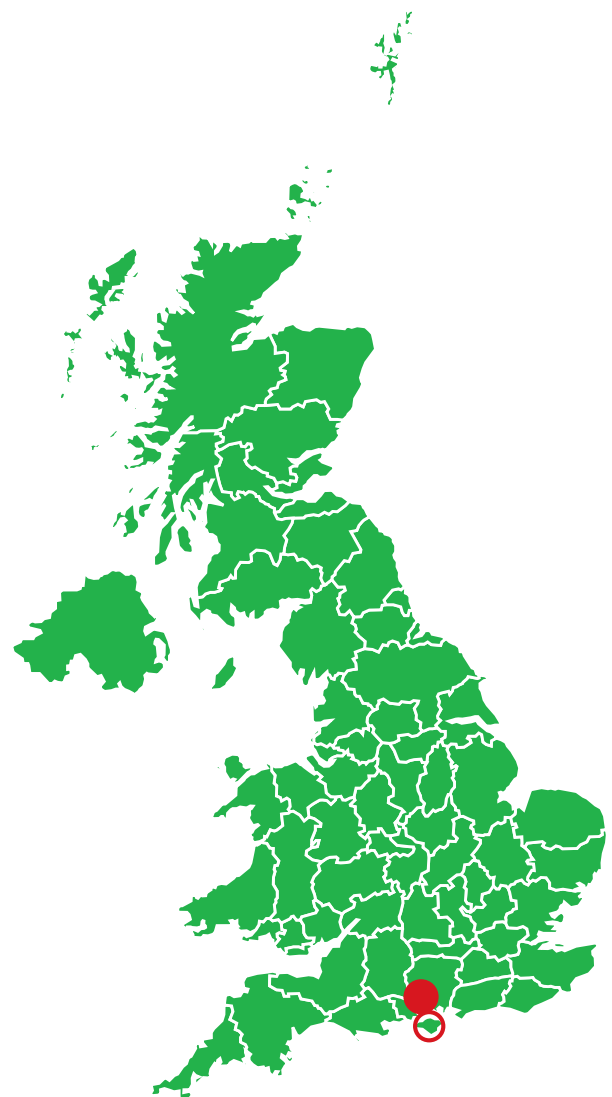
NEW FOREST

Population: 30 000
Surface area: 588 km²

Project total cost: EUR 406 314
EU: EUR 101 578
Other public funds: EUR 93 451
Private funds: EUR 211 285
Project eligibility: January 2005–December 2007

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Photos provided by the UK national network unit.



Adding value to local products



▶ DENMARK

Danish food: Emphasising the local identity



▶ BELGIUM

Meetjesland: developing and supporting regional products



► DENMARK



Danish food: Emphasising the local identity

Two Danish LAGs work together on a project which puts the emphasis on the identity of locally produced food.

By Hans Jørgen Jensen, LAG coordinator, Bornholm LAG, and Morten Priesholm, LAG coordinator, the Danish Small Islands LAG

Introduction

This article presents two separate Leader+ projects which eventually formed the basis for an interterritorial cooperation project: one is from the Bornholm LAG and another from the Danish Small Islands LAG.

Nowadays Danish consumers associate the island of Bornholm with high-quality foodstuffs. Similarly in the case of the Danish Small Islands, foodstuff producers have also realised the possibility of producing special products for consumers who demand quality, along with innovation and a local identity.

The development promoted by the two LAGs has led to a positive growth for their small enterprises producing quality foodstuffs. The Bornholm LAG has put emphasis on larger projects focusing on marketing and sales. The Danish Small Islands LAG has provided support for small, innovative foodstuff companies on the islands, and has also contributed to setting up a network of producers.

Developing foodstuffs on Bornholm

In 1995 a close cooperation began between Bornholm and Sydøstre Skåne (Sweden) in order to develop regional foodstuffs. These two influential tourist destinations were

already known for their beautiful nature and interesting cultural history. Now it was time to add a further dimension: food culture. First and foremost was the idea to make the regional food culture more visible. The Swedes had a well-developed network of farm shops, while the inhabitants on the island of Bornholm were more known for their many smokehouses and restaurants. This became the starting point of a long-term, close cooperation that has since developed into a European network called 'Culinary Heritage Europe' (www.culinary-heritage.com).





finally, linked to this centre, in setting up a showroom for regional foodstuffs.

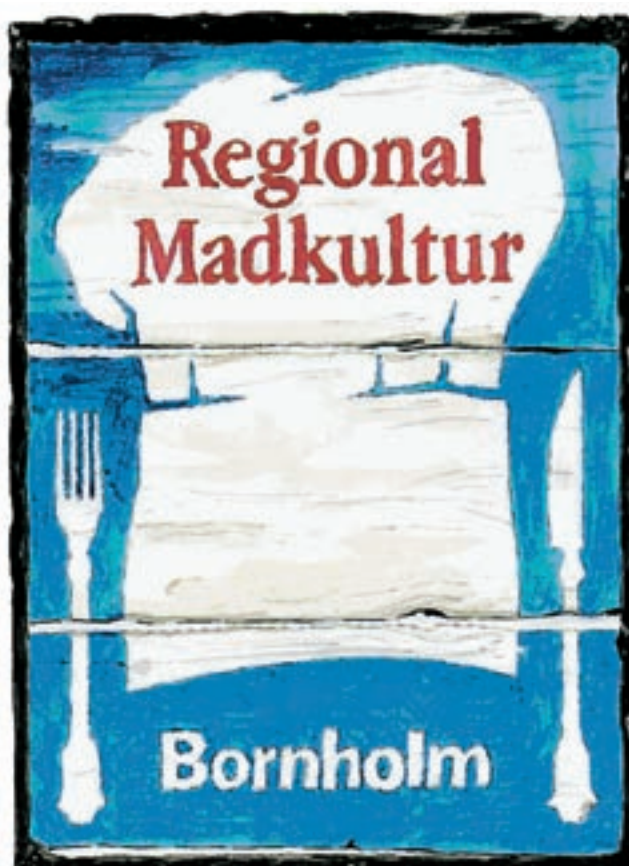
Upon completion of the SWOT analysis, which was financed by Leader+, the regional centre for food development was established and one staff member was employed whose main task was to act as an ambassador for foodstuffs from Bornholm, and whose presence had a great impact. Consequently, food from Bornholm became very well known in Denmark. The many local food producers underwent a process where they not only obtained a new and thorough knowledge of market mechanisms, but are also now better prepared for cooperating on matters of sales promotion.

The third stage in the development strategy for promoting local foodstuffs consisted in establishing a common showcase. An old windmill that originally functioned as a grain mill and, since the 1960s, as a conference room, has now been totally renovated, and appears (in more than one sense) to act as a beacon for Bornholm's foodstuffs. The mill is fitted out as a showroom, a shop and a demonstration kitchen on the two bottom floors, with an office and meeting room on the third floor. The mill has also in the first year of its operation become the focal point for tourist information for the island as a whole.

The cooperation within regional food culture has attracted more attention and put the focus on the possibilities rather than on the limitations. At the same time, the market has in general developed an increasing interest in foodstuff production, which is characterised by craftsmanship qualities and which is traceable directly back to the primary producer.

A local lighthouse showing the way

In connection with the preparation of the development plan for the Leader+ period for Bornholm, the Bornholm LAG planned a concentrated campaign. This consisted of a three-stage process: firstly in making a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the development potential of the local food sector; then in establishing a regional centre for food development; and,





the production and sale of new quality foodstuffs through sustainable and profitable enterprises.'

On the 27 Danish small islands, there are some 20 enterprises producing foodstuffs. Production typically takes place in small family-held businesses that are also engaged in agriculture or fruit or berry growing. In most cases production is 'low scale', with its main impact on crafts and local trades. The products produced include jam, apple cider, apple juice, apple vinegar, beer, ice cream, herbal salt, chutney and deli-meat products.

...supported by Leader+

The island's producers sell their products via local farm outlets (selling to tourists) and in specialised shops in larger towns and cities. Already in 2004, the foodstuff producers on the Danish Small Islands had started to work together within the 'Food network of the Danish Small Islands'. The association received support from the Danish Small Islands LAG in the following areas:

- ▶ to set up the home page (www.oespecialiteter.dk);
- ▶ for the Internet shop (www.oespecialiteter.dk/shop);
- ▶ a leaflet on island specialties;
- ▶ seminars on food production and marketing;
- ▶ participation in national food markets;
- ▶ common marketing in the press and contact with purchasers.

A small island network...

The region covered by the Danish Small Islands LAG includes 27 islands with a population ranging from 10 to 1 200 people. Unlike in an archipelago, these islands are scattered around the Danish coast and fiords. Nevertheless, a tradition exists regarding cooperation on political matters, infrastructure, education and economic development.

The Danish Small Islands therefore have a good basis for establishing cooperation and a network between the different enterprises on the small islands. One of the LAG's intermediate aims has been 'to strengthen agriculture and food production'. In the LAG's development plan, amongst other things, there is a focus on the production of local quality foodstuffs: 'The demand for certain quality products is increasing in line with the increase in the number of consumers with strong purchasing power and quality awareness... At the same time, the diversity of the products available is reduced due to structural rationalisation within agriculture in general... This may result in more possibilities for





The producers operating within the network have recently started to discuss the definition of 'island specialties'. The objective is to raise awareness about what is produced with a view to product certification, which takes into account: the origin of the raw materials used; careful processing (adding none or few additives); sensory product quality; the environment; the product identity, and its story.

The producers have also adopted the French concept of *terroir* with its idea of the link between the product and its place of cultivation, which also shows the relationship between climate and soil in the raw materials.

Results of cooperation between food producers

In late 2005 the two LAGs, Bornholm and the Danish Small Islands, along with the Centre for Regional and Tourism Research (Bornholm), supported cooperation between the different food producers in their respective regions. Their aim was 'to support a group of small food producers by way of an exchange of experience and assistance of a consultant focusing on increasing sales, product development and marketing'. This was to be done by acting upon existing best practices and, from these, to develop new ideas and contacts.

The project, 'Full speed of local food products', involved the participation of four producers from the Danish Small Islands and three from Bornholm. These participants were able to take part, amongst other things, in two workshops that included visits to businesses, presentations by consultants, and an exchange of experience. The first workshop was held in December 2005 on Bornholm with visits to a small ice-cream factory and a vineyard. In February 2006 the producers met on the small islands of Fejø and Strynø, where they paid a visit to a jam-making enterprise and an apple cider producer. At these two workshops the producers heard presentations on the following subjects: 'Consultancy and product development in Swedish networks' by Bodil Cornel from a Swedish centre specialising in small-scale craftsmanship within food-stuffs; and 'Taste experiences and product development' by Kille Enna, a Danish cook and product developer.

Producers from the two LAG regions now cooperate within a nationwide network focusing on the development of an advisory service, and common marketing and policymaking concerning the legal framework for small food producers. This cooperation includes producers from seven Danish regions, and in this respect the producers from Bornholm and the small islands make use of their experiences and contacts from their small cooperation project.

The Danish Small Islands food network

Member State: Denmark

Region, district: Småøer

Name of the LAG:

Danske Småøer (Danish Small Islands)

Population: 5 284

Surface area: 196 km²

Project total cost: EUR 26 666

EU: EUR 13 333

Other public funds: EUR 13 333

Project eligibility: October 2005–May 2007

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Photos provided by the Danish national network unit.

Food development centre of Bornholm

Member State: Denmark
Region, district: Bornholm
Name of the LAG: Bornholm
Population: 43 245
Surface area: 587 km²

Project total cost: EUR 280 000
EU: EUR 140 000
Other public funds: EUR 140 000
Project eligibility: January 2004–December 2006

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Joint development of local food products

Member State: Denmark
Region, district: Bornholm and Danske Småøer (Danish Small Islands)
Name of the LAG: Bornholm and Danske Småøer (Danish Small Islands)

Project total cost: EUR 18 667
EU: EUR 8 000
Other public funds: EUR 10 667
Project eligibility: January 2004–December 2006

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► BELGIUM



Meetjesland: Developing and supporting regional products

Creating brand awareness and supporting local products is not only a way to add value but also a means to encourage businesses that can contribute to the local economy.

Introduction

The region covered by the Meetjesland LAG is an agricultural area within the province of East Flanders, and is home to a significant number of farm shops and home production, as well as food companies that process the locally grown produce. Consequently the Meetjesland LAG has taken the future development of agriculture and food as a main goal for its region's development plan. In particular this meant providing support for the sale of locally grown products from such outlets as farm shops, as well as helping to maintain the added value on the farms. On this basis the agricultural centre 'Plattelandscentrum Meetjesland vzw' set up a supporting structure for product development and joint sales in collaboration with the farmers.

An initiative aimed at development

'Plattelandscentrum Meetjesland vzw' is an initiative aimed directly at developing the Meetjesland area and has the full support of the LAG. On the one hand, the centre wants to

acquaint the population with the local agriculture and horticulture, while on the other it supports the development of regional products. The project is coordinated by Luc Feuels, co-initiator of the cooperative, and consists of three





in various price ranges; gift sets for special occasions; and personalised gift-wrappings.

A promotion strategy

'Mmm...eetjesland' stands for fresh products made with a lot of care, transported over short distances, and the close proximity between producer and consumer helps make it really sustainable. The starting-point of the promotion is letting the consumer discover the label of origin 'Mmm...eetjesland'. This label gives form to the identity, the authenticity and the origin of the product. In this way, the Meetjesland's farms and local products will become a true ambassador for the Meetjesland as a rural area. A logo was developed to give form to the cooperation and the producers opted to create a quality business and a strong brand. Producers have the right to put a label of origin on their product, which draws attention to its identity and origin, so the consumer knows they are buying a product of renowned quality from the Meetjesland region.

Thanks to the joint advertising campaign, there are more resources and a wider audience is reached. It is also possible to have different kinds of advertising: there are general brochures as well as specific ones for special occasions which target as many groups as possible. For example, there are brochures in various languages for tourists, as well as specific brochures aimed at public authorities, libraries, restaurants, catering companies and delicatessens, etc. The organisation can also organise events, such as: specific demonstration cookery courses; markets for farm and regional products; and special actions which promote the farm and products of the Meetjesland region.

According to Luc Feusels, 'Promoting products from the own region encourages other businesses (tradesmen, companies,

parts, which are inextricably interrelated. There is: firstly, all the organisation of a structure involving farm and regional products of the Meetjesland; secondly, the development of an advertising strategy and promotion centre for selling farm and regional products on the market; and finally the setting-up of various distribution channels for Meetjesland's farm and regional products. Leader+ funding has been instrumental in providing: the necessary promotional materials (advertising panels, website, registering the trademark, etc.); publicity events (cookery evenings); mobile refrigeration; and overheads (staff and office).

The structure: selling the products together

After many meetings and consultation it was decided to choose a 'cooperative' structure in order to guarantee a better promotion of the Meetjesland's producers and their products. In the beginning the cooperative will be supported by the Plattelandscentrum vzw, who will act as a consultant, and eventually the cooperative will become totally independent.

From the variety of members' farm and regional products, a selection is made in order to be able to offer a complete range of standard products, coming from as many producers as possible. To attract consumers, specific combinations of farm and regional products are offered: standard sets





farmers, market gardeners) to develop new regional and/or farm products. So this project also creates an economic surplus for these companies. New for the Meetjesland region is to have the farm and regional products processed by long-term unemployed people. In that way they become acquainted with the agricultural and food sector and maybe in the long run they can also find work in these industries.'

Developing a distribution network

In the future the cooperative will try to optimise other forms of cooperation and joint commercialisation. Different activities are possible, such as gift packs, actions for St Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, etc., plus catering at receptions and events, as well as highlighting a specific producer for a certain period of time.

In a second phase, a more intensive form of cooperation can be developed – for example, producers selling on behalf of each other or the construction of a dedicated distribution centre.

'Thanks to the creation of an "own regional label" with own products and advertising campaign, we give the food industry in the Meetjesland region its own identity and structure. Producers often lack the know-how and the time for

developing such a communication strategy. Furthermore, the return is mainly for the farm itself', says Mr Feusels.

Some concrete results

The project has successfully brought together 17 producers, working within a new cooperative structure 'mmm... eetjesland cvba'. This has already led to the development of a range of regional and/or farm products, including gift boxes, of which 5 000 have already been promoted through a variety of different activities. In addition there have been a number of receptions organised, as well as 'meals on demand'. Linked to these activities, the project has developed and produced a range of promotional materials such as banners, boxes and napkins, and organised its first 'Meetjeslandse market' for regional and/or farm products, which attracted around 1 500 visitors. This is in addition to participation in several regional markets and other promotional activities, such as cooking lessons (800 participants over 50 lessons), and the development of mobile refrigeration. The project now has its own website, and organises information evenings for producers.

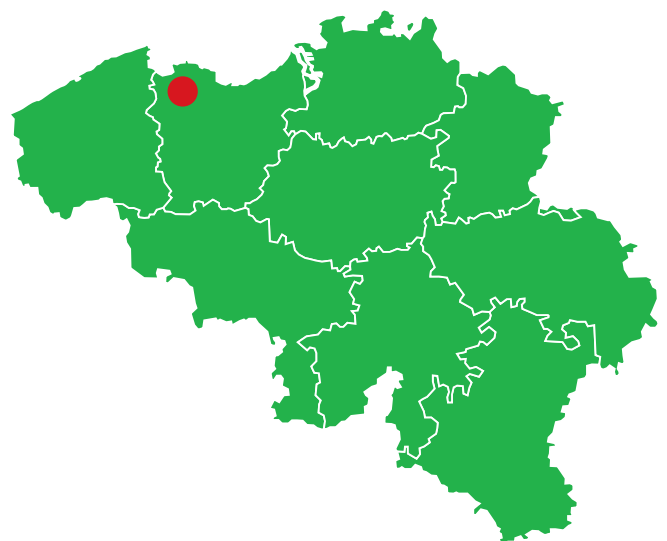


Meetjesland's regional products

Member State: Belgium
Region, district: East Flanders
Name of the LAG: Meetjesland
Population: 94 505
Surface area: 500 km²

Project total cost: EUR 248 195
EU: EUR 86 868
Other public funds: EUR 86 868
Private funds: EUR 74 459
Project eligibility: March 2004–June 2007

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Photos provided by the Belgium national network unit.



Making the best use of natural and cultural resources



► The UNITED KINGDOM

Spring Fling: Crafts in the community

► IRELAND

The Fuchsia brand initiative:
developing the regional economy



► The UNITED KINGDOM



Spring Fling: Crafts in the community

A cultural event establishes itself as an annual focus for the artistic community and becomes an important tool in the region's economy.

Introduction

The region of Dumfries and Galloway is located in the south-west of Scotland. It has a land mass of 6 396 km² and, with only 145 000 inhabitants, it represents around 3 % of Scotland's population. It is an area far from major urban centres, with a strong farming and forestry community, a rich cultural history and a diverse landscape with 27 designated Natura 2000 sites. Unfortunately, there is a continued downturn in agriculture and other traditional industries, and the population continues to decline, especially among the young and economically active who continue to leave the region. This results in even more fragmented communities and even greater feelings of isolation.

The region, however, is a Mecca for numerous small and medium-sized enterprises in the arts and crafts sector. In recognition of this, the arts and crafts open studio event called Spring Fling was designed to highlight Dumfries and Galloway as a place to visit for quality arts and crafts. The project aimed to allow arts and crafts enterprises to develop their business practice through direct sales, building of new markets, and secure exhibitions and opportunities, that would otherwise have never been possible. All this to an audience the size and breadth of which would be difficult to achieve over a whole year.

Creating an annual opportunity

Spring Fling (www.spring-fling.co.uk) is an annual open studio weekend event for artists and craft makers. It is designed to act as an umbrella under which those living and working in this sector in the Dumfries and Galloway region can open their studios to the public in order to exhibit their work, answer questions, give demonstrations, and even

take commissions. Spring Fling evolved from, and encompassed the aims and objectives of, the Dumfries and Galloway Council and European Regional Development Funded (ERDF) 'Arts and craft sector trade development' project (2002–05), the broad remit of which is to:

- develop business networks;
- initiate and develop marketing and trade initiatives;
- expand business to consumer markets;
- raise the sector's profile to both the trade and cultural tourism markets.

The project is now in its second phase (2006–08) and continues to support the development of visual artists' and craft-makers' businesses in the region. Importantly for Spring Fling, it is working in partnership with the Spring Fling Open Studios Association to continue the provision of this successful event. The project's activities include a number of initiatives, including marketing and creative development awards, a bi-monthly newsletter, one-to-one advice sessions, art retail, and craft trade fair attendance.

Reaching out to a wider audience...

Following an open application process, artists and craft-makers are selected to participate in the event. A glossy brochure, which is widely distributed, is produced which gives some background about: the artists' and craft-makers' work; their individual contact details; price ranges and directions to their studios. The 70 plus venues are grouped by location over six colour-coded routes to maximise the visiting potential by the public. Research has shown that visitors who return tend to follow a different route on their next visit.

...gets results from a wider audience

This event has also attracted arts and craft enterprises to relocate to the Dumfries and Galloway area. The accommodation sector has also benefited from the event as have other businesses in the catering and tourism sectors, both directly through recommendation in the Spring Fling brochure, and indirectly through additional visitors to the region. Indeed, in the UK, Spring Fling is unique in the way in which it combines arts and craft businesses with other related businesses, cultural attractions and the topography of the region itself. It is also unique in the high percentage of visitors it attracts into the region, unlike many open studio events which rely on their home-grown markets.

A success based on sound management

Spring Fling is organised, managed and delivered by the Council's Arts Team, specifically the Crafts Development



Officer and the Visual Arts Development Officer. Since the event's inception and until recently the team has worked closely with the Spring Fling Steering Group. Since February 2008 the team have worked with the Spring Fling Management Committee elected by the Spring Fling Open Studios Association, a membership body of past and present Spring Fling participants. Following an open consultation with members, a three-year business plan for the purposes of the association's successful delivery of the event in 2010 has been written and sees the Council's Arts Team working closely with the association to realise this.

The year 2008 is the sixth consecutive year the event has been held. Plans for this year's event are to build on 2007, the most successful and busiest year yet. Spring Fling has now established a reputation and position as Scotland's most successful and original annual open studio event, and is a firm fixture on the Scottish arts calendar.

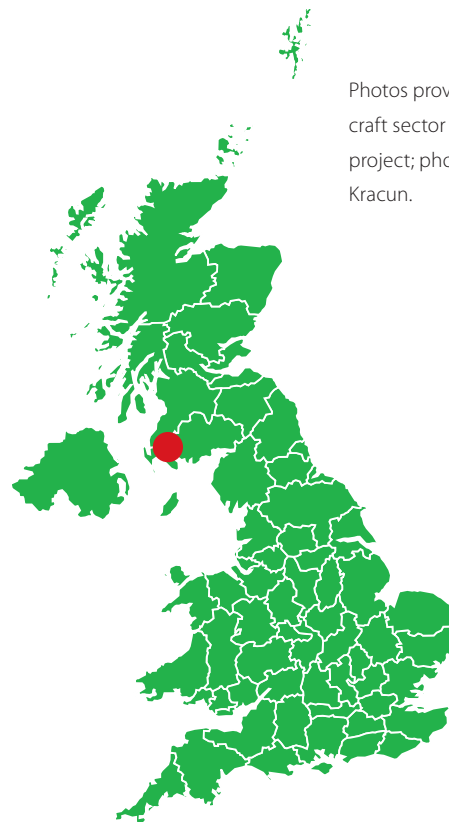
Over the two years of Leader+ support (2003–05), the project was very successful, realising a total spend in the region of around EUR 375 000 (GBP 268 869) in 2005, and this success has since continued. In 2005, Spring Fling won a Leader+ award for excellence in rural development. In 2006, it was shortlisted in the 'Event Scotland' sponsored 'Events and festivals' category of the prestigious Scottish Thistle Awards. In 2007, Spring Fling received a Bronze Medal in the COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) Excellence Awards, having been nominated for the 'Advancing Community Well Being' category and was also advanced to Beacon Festival status 2007–09 by the Dumfries and Galloway Events Partnership. In total, 87 artists and craft-makers from across the region will participate in 73 studios in 2008's event – the greatest number of studios to date. The third year of the 'New faces' scheme welcomes four participants to the event who have graduated in a fine or applied art discipline. These artists, who originally hail from south-west Scotland, returned to the region to exhibit alongside a local artist in their studio. Since its inception in 2003, Spring Fling has realised a total spend of over EUR 2 289 000 (GBP 1 750 000) in the region.

'Spring Fling'

Member State: United Kingdom
Region, district: Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway
Name of the LAG: Dumfries and Galloway
Population: 144 856
Surface area: 6 396 km²

Project total cost: EUR 58 986
EU: EUR 27 671
Other public funds: EUR 27 669
Private funds: EUR 3 646
Project eligibility: March 2003–October 2005

Contact persons: Helen Voce/Elinor Gallant
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E-mail: HelenV@dumgal.gov.uk/elinor.gallant@dumgal.gov.uk
Website: www.spring-fling.co.uk



Photos provided by the 'Arts and craft sector trade development' project; photographer: Zvonko Kracun.

► IRELAND



The Fuchsia brand initiative: Developing the regional economy

By using a strong regional brand, many projects and diverse elements combine to enhance a region's natural and cultural heritage, and become key elements within a coherent regional development strategy.

Introduction

The preservation and enhancement of the local environment is a significant aid to local development. In this respect, the West Cork Leader Cooperative Society Ltd (WCLCS) supports enterprise development as well as amenity enhancement, local cultural preservation, heritage, village renewal and work related to the environment. The area of west Cork enjoys a strong image, profile and regional identity, and the area also embraces strong community and voluntary participation.

The region's appeal stems from its rugged landscape, coastline, environment, built heritage, archaeological treasures, walking routes, towns, villages and people. This compelling mix all adds to the region's distinctiveness and uniqueness.

A brand in context

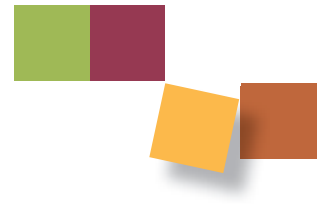
The principal tool available to the WCLCS in achieving competitive advantage has been the development of the west Cork regional branding initiative. The fuchsia, long associated with west Cork, has been chosen as the symbol of origin and quality for the food, tourism and craft products of the region. It also reflects such positive local characteristics as environmental quality, and the richness and diversity of the region's heritage, culture and landscape. The Fuchsia brand reflects the essence of the region in a simple way. At the

same time, it also communicates the feelings that people have for the region, along with the values associated with its heritage and tradition, and it does this in a distinctive and coherent manner.

Moreover, it provides a clear synergy between enterprise development on the one hand, and active community participation and voluntary development on the other, thus aiming to: harness the region's distinctive image as an aid to local competitive advantage; promote the region with an emphasis on its unique environmental, cultural and heritage resources; and develop a branded identity for local goods and services emphasising distinctive regional origins and product quality.

A brand with clear objectives

The Fuchsia brand initiative has resulted in the creation of a prime infrastructure and support system. This is already delivering exceptional benefits to brand participants and to the region in general. A recent economic evaluation of the Fuchsia brand undertaken by University College Cork estimated its total direct value to have been EUR 107 million in 2005. EUR 70 million of this remained in the region, and through multiplier effects an overall contribution of EUR 89 million to the west



Cork economy has been generated, and 1 131 full-time equivalent jobs supported. The brand has also been instrumental in the WCLCS's endeavours to stimulate the technology sector investment through the development of the West Cork Business and Technology Park in Clonakilty, which now accounts for 820 new jobs in information technology and in the services sector. The success of this project and the strategic approach of the WCLCS clearly demonstrates the view that the region's distinctive character and strong regional profile, as well as its prime natural and cultural resources, can be used to significant effect in broadening the economic base and in achieving competitive advantage for the region. This has been done according to the brand's clear objectives, namely to:

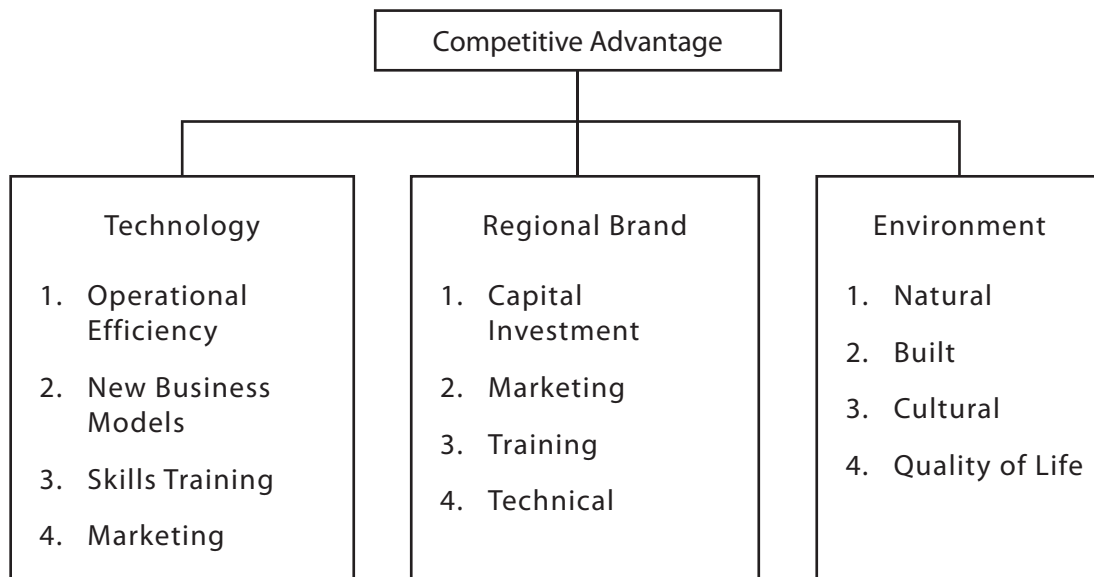
- ▶ develop high-quality goods and services, using local natural resources, to satisfy specific market needs;
- ▶ integrate the development and marketing of complementary economic sectors;
- ▶ achieve greater degrees of collective action by the public and private sectors in local development;
- ▶ utilise the regional profile, imagery and identity in attracting new enterprise development to the region.

Adopting a thematic approach

A thematic approach has been adopted by the WCLCS so as to utilise the strong regional identity, and the cultural and environmental values of the west Cork area, in order to achieve territorial competitiveness and local competitive advantage. This approach encompasses a continuum of three complementary and mutually supportive elements, namely the:

- ▶ further development and marketing of the west Cork regional brand;
- ▶ enhancement of the natural, built and cultural environment of west Cork;
- ▶ development and application of new technologies in west Cork.

The interrelationships of these three elements are denoted in the following diagram.



Underpinning the successful enterprise development by the Fuchsia brand initiative is the clear expression of its explicit brand values, as represented by its local cultural, heritage and environmental resources. This can be best understood by looking at some project examples which have been helped by Leader+ funding, and which all reflect key assets related to environment and heritage which themselves are fundamental to the west Cork brand.

Branding with success

1. Expression, impression and profession

In recognition of Cork's designation as European Capital of Culture 2005, the WCLCS commissioned the renowned local photographer John Minihan to capture portraits of acclaimed local food producers. Entitled 'Expression' and reflecting



the considerable cultural and heritage wealth of artisan food production within west Cork, these portraits formed a unique photo-essay and journey through west Cork. Each image captures the diversity, character and unique personalities that are the cornerstone of west Cork's food industry. These portraits were on permanent display throughout 2005 in Cork's principal artisan food market where they remain. A public exhibition of this work was a centrepiece of the 'A taste of west Cork' food festival. These portraits have subsequently been fully integrated within the regional marketing strategy, having been reproduced in marketing promotions and brochures, as well as in a promotional calendar in 2006.

Further to the success of this initiative, additional commissions were placed to capture the unique personalities in both local tourism and craft sectors. Entitled 'Impression' and 'Profession' respectively, these portraits continue to explore the unique mix of people, product and place, and at the same time represent the core values and essence of the region.

2. Heritage training: a flagship project

The aim of this course was to develop an appreciation of the full value of local heritage and the need to raise more widespread awareness of this, by:

- ▶ providing practical information and training relating to the care and maintenance of local heritage;
- ▶ encouraging an integrated approach to the care of local heritage;
- ▶ promoting best practice in the care of local heritage;
- ▶ enhancing the capacity of local communities to work effectively as a team and to undertake appropriate care of the local heritage.

On completion of the course, participants should be equipped to give a full account of heritage within a given

area, and to apply criteria in order to attribute relative values to the different heritage elements identified. They should also be able to identify appropriate and feasible heritage-related projects, and to draw up plans for the successful realisation of proposed projects.

The course culminates in an integrated heritage management, where each participant practically applies the material taught in the previous classes. Participants then design their projects, which involves demonstrating the recording and valuing of various aspects of local heritage audits, generating viable proposals for heritage-related actions, and developing a heritage action plan to deliver on these actions. This training programme has been a successful catalyst in stimulating a number of community-initiated heritage and conservation projects funded under the Leader programme.

3. Carriganass Castle

Carriganass Castle, 'The rock of the waterfall', is the impressive remains of a 16th century tower and walled courtyard, which has a very strong presence in the folk-memory of the local community. The restoration of this castle was undertaken by a vibrant local committee and was officially opened by the Oscar-winning actor Jeremy Irons who lives locally. The castle was donated to the local community, and this was invaluable as a source of part-matching finance in the restoration of the castle. Aside from the core conservation of the castle structure, the project serves as a focal point in the community. It has acted as a catalyst for the development of a variety of projects including the development of local circuit walks, and enhanced access to local archaeological and heritage sites.

4. Good practice in village planning: A guide for local communities

Using the concept of a training initiative, the WCLCS compiled a 'Good practice in village planning: A guide for local communities'. The aim of this design guide and the training programme (which formed part of it) was to assist local communities in identifying areas where the design and layout of their village could be improved and where existing assets can be exploited to the overall benefit of the community. The design guide focused on a number of areas including formulating an overall development strategy by looking at: key sites; local features; important spaces and places; and key environmental improvements.

This initiative, which promotes sensitive development village design, has been particularly successful in stimulating community responsibility for village renewal. In many cases



the participating villages have developed vibrant community structures and secured development funding for a wide variety of projects including heritage conservation, amenity enhancement, community facilities and small-scale infra-structural development.

5. Lace-making trail

In 2002, the WCLCS facilitated a beginner's course in lace-making. Held in a number of locations in west Cork with over 70 women participating, the course concentrated on specific lace and was aimed at experienced needle workers. It was then decided to look into the idea of a lace trail and, as part of the lace-making workshops, the participants completed research on the history of lace in the west Cork region. This concluded with the publication of a lace trail brochure and trail following lace making from the towns of:

Kinsale; Macroom; Bantry; Cape Clear; Rathbarry; and Clonakilty. The 'Traditional lace-makers of Ireland' showcased samples of Irish lace at the 2006 lace festival in Salsapolco, Italy, whereupon they were awarded with an international gold medal for their research on the west Cork lace trail.

Conclusions

The west Cork region's heritage and culture has provided an excellent basis for the Fuchsia brand initiative. Leader+ support over a range of different projects has helped to secure not only the region's identity but has also created directly or indirectly a significant number of new jobs which contribute to the region's prosperity. In considering the natural and cultural heritage, these projects align themselves naturally to the region's key assets meaning that their sustainability is more readily secured.

The Fuchsia Brand initiative

Member State: Ireland

Region, district: West Cork

Name of the LAG: West Cork Leader Cooperative Society

Population: 108 000

Surface area: 3 150 km²

EXPRESSION, IMPRESSION AND PROFESSION

Project total cost: EUR 21 290

EU: 10 645

Private funds: EUR 10 645

Project eligibility: April 2005–November 2006

HERITAGE MANAGEMENT TRAINING

Project total cost: EUR 50 000

EU: EUR 50 000

Project eligibility: December 2005–June 2007

GOOD PRACTICE IN VILLAGE PLANNING: A GUIDE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Project total cost: EUR 108 527

EU: EUR 108 527

Project eligibility: March 2003–August 2005

CARRIGANASS CASTLE

Project total cost: EUR 375 243

EU: EUR 171 308

Private funds: EUR 171 308

Project eligibility: June 2002–December 2006

LACE-MAKING TRAIL

Project total cost: EUR 6 550

EU: EUR 6 550

Project eligibility: June 2002–April 2006

Contact person: Ian Dempsey

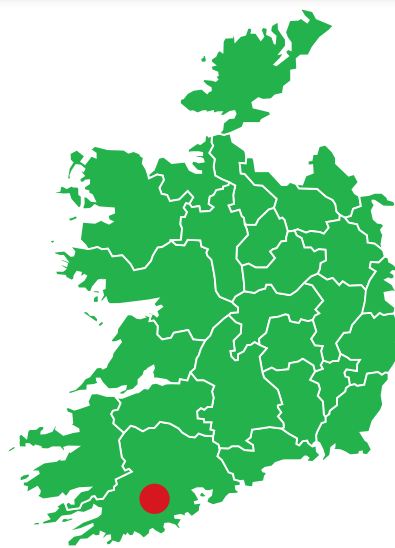
Address: West Cork Leader Cooperative Society Ltd, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, Ireland

Tel. (353-23) 34 035

Fax (353-23) 34 066

E-mail: ian@westcorkleader.ie

Website: www.westcorkleader.ie



Photos provided by the Irish national network unit.



The use of new know-how and new technologies



▶ ITALY

Teleworking:
strengthening social and economic cohesion

▶ SPAIN

You have a message: the Infomobile Service





Teleworking: strengthening social and economic cohesion

New technologies provide new employment opportunities and help to reduce the isolation felt by people living in remote areas.

Based on an article written by the Alto Oltrepo LAG, and Laura Ganglia of the Italian Leader network

Introduction

The project developed by the Alto Oltrepo LAG uses new technologies to facilitate 'teleworking' as part of its social and economic policy for the region. The creation of telecentres, in areas normally lacking the necessary technological infrastructure (connections and services), provides an important opportunity for rural development. Telecentres not only enable the area to meet both the demand for employment by the local population, but also provides local companies with basic services for the so-called 'net economy' (1).

Characterised by inland mountains and hills, the Alto Oltrepo region suffers from widespread depopulation and an ageing population, which consequently has a negative socioeconomic impact on its rural towns. Another critical factor is the lack of an innovative business culture. This is due to several factors: the limited awareness of the region's potential; poor opportunities for local development; difficulty in adapting to market changes; poor information and training of the workforce; and a poor sense of cooperation that exacerbates the fragmentation in the labour market

(the production facilities in the area are small or minuscule in size and operate mostly in the agricultural sector).

Creating rural strength

To deal with these problems, the LAG has adopted (in part based on the Leader II experience which has strengthened the awareness of local identity) a strategy where an area's rural nature becomes its strength. In order to do this there is a need for sustainable development which takes into account the needs of the environment. The LAG has therefore implemented measures which are designed to meet four specific objectives: to work with the 'net economy'; to put an end to isolation by shrinking the physical distance between worker and the place of work; to support family life with a network of services; and to ensure the management of the territory and its traditions.

Thus, the idea is to revive the essential functions that are associated with living in the area: work; personal mobility; communication – all coexisting in a civilised way in order to form a stable and coherent local community.

(1) The net economy: The virtual arena in which business actually is conducted, value is created and exchanged, transactions occur, and one-to-one relationships mature. These processes may be related to, but are nevertheless independent of, similar activities occurring in the conventional marketplace.



Telecentres as an instrument for social cohesion

This project was designed to produce a significant improvement in the quality of life for local families. Through the use of new technologies, the need to commute would be reduced, and there would be a better match between job offers and job seekers. This in turn would hopefully lead to the creation of new companies, greater innovation and a better understanding of new work methods.

The project focuses on teleworking, which allows the worker to reduce the amount of time needed to travel between home and place of work. It also allows for work to be combined with a range of other services provided to families and, in a more general sense, to the local population. Moreover, in terms of the economic and social development within an area, the creation of telecentres brings with it a number of other activities, such as: creating a group of users; promoting cooperation between the companies involved; helping to start businesses that are typically part of the 'net economy'; and making available a package of advanced services for professionals in the area. The telecentre is also intended to be a point of social cohesion, a centre for providing horizontal services, and a means to combine economic and technological opportunities.

The added value of Leader+

The approach taken by the LAG in creating telework centres first involved carrying out a feasibility study to identify those areas where commuting was most widespread. When this was done; it was then possible to determine which pro-

fessional categories would be interested in teleworking and to make an appropriate plan.

From a methodological point of view, Leader+ provided the right framework, being consistent with the spirit and the needs of this project. The Alto Oltrepo LAG decided to proceed on the basis of the results of the feasibility study, and identified the services that would meet the needs of the local area. In order to be able to share common goals, an important effort was made to work with and listen to the local population by holding round-table discussions, collecting expressions of interest, and interviewing individuals. The effort was directed toward local authorities, economic, social and cultural associations, as well as those bodies and institutions that provide essential strategic services and functions at different levels.

The above procedure proved to be useful for identifying the best locations for the telework centres and for finding a group of individuals willing to participate in the project. An organisation to manage the network of telework centres was also created. This was in the form of a cooperative which, together with the three municipalities who were the project beneficiaries, signed a programming agreement for developing and managing the network.

At the same time, a series of interviews involving over 100 persons was conducted in order to select a group of (more or less) qualified individuals who would enrol in training programmes specially developed and set up by LAG. In turn these would 'select' those individuals who would form part of the final team at the telework centres.

Flexibility in training and job creation

The project eventually led to the creation of three telework centres with all the telematic equipment and connections needed to support teleworking and various services. These centres were selected for the municipalities of Brallo di Pregola in upper Valle Staffora, Val di Nizza, and Golferenzo.





However, instead of following the initial plan, which specified the setting-up of two facilities, a decision was taken to create three centres: i.e. one main facility and two smaller centres, so as to cover the chosen area more effectively. Also, 46 persons participated in two training courses of 200 hours each. With regard to the impact on employment, 18 new jobs were created, and 10 persons have been regularly employed at the first telework centre that entered into service. Once the first telework centre was in place, the LAG also developed a monitoring and support programme with specialised technicians to ensure that the facilities are operated correctly. Operators with the proper know-how for using the equipment and software have also been provided.

In departing from the original plan, the focus of the project's development shifted from facilitating the mobility of local workers to the creation of real jobs for people in local areas. These people risked being excluded from work because of the difficulties they faced in taking advantage of professional opportunities. The jobs resulting from the development of new activities, known as 'teleactivities', covered support and assist in a range of different activities and services, including: toll-free numbers for contacting companies and services; online documents; Internet points; baby-sitting; a unified point of access to government services; a 'Registry Office' service, and a tourist office.

Teleworking for social and economic cohesion

Member State: Italy

Region, district: Lombardy

Name of the LAG: Alto Oltrepo

Population: 17 970

Surface area: 487 km²

Project total cost: EUR 240 000

EU: EUR 36 000

Other public funds: EUR 60 000

Private funds: EUR 144 000

Project eligibility: July 2005–July 2007

Contact person: Raffaella Piazzardi

Address: Via Mazzini, 16, I-27057 Varzi (PV)

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E-mail: galoltrepo@tiscali.it

Website: www.gal-oltrepo.it



Photos provided by the Italian national network unit.

You have a message: the Infomobile Service

This pilot action was designed to meet the information needs of several municipalities, and quickly proved to be a hit amongst its young users.

Based on an article by Luis Fernandez Muñoz and Covadonga Fernandez Garcia, youth information officers for the association of the eastern Asturias region

Introduction

The association of city councils of eastern Asturias consists of 13 municipalities: Amieva, Cabrales, Cangas de Onís, Caravia, Llanes, Onís, Parres, Peñamellera Alta, Peñamellera Baja, Piloña, Ponga, Ribadedeva and Ribadesella. This is the same territory covered by the eastern Asturias Leader+ group, which is managed by the Consorcio para el desarrollo rural del oriente de Asturias LAG (consortium for rural development of eastern Asturias).

The total population of these 13 mountainous and very rural municipalities is around 50 000 inhabitants, who are spread over 1 819 km², and the number of young people aged from 15 to 35 is less than 12 000. The population of this eastern district is very dispersed, with, for example, only 78 settlements in the municipality of Llanes. Concerning employment, the service sector (tourism, trade) is the major employer, followed by agriculture and fisheries, construction and industry.

Managing a youth information service

The youth information offices of the association of municipalities for this eastern region are a public service dedicated to informing and assisting youth. They are located in two offices: one in the municipality of Llanes, and another in the municipality of Parres. These offices are responsible for serving the 13 municipalities that make up the territory served by the association, and their operation fits within the framework of the Asturias youth information network, which consists of almost 40 offices covering the entire region.

A youth information office gathers quite diverse information that can help young people make decisions about their future. They gather, classify, develop and disseminate information which is of interest to young people, and it is in respect of the latter that the Infomobile Service is concerned.



During 2004, the region's offices dealt with a total of 5 191 requests and in doing so accessed many different channels: mail, telephone, fax and e-mail. This was in addition to those requests taking place in person either at the youth information points or at the offices themselves.

In fact, the Infomobile project had already taken place, as an experiment, in the association of municipalities, during the first three months of 2002. It was subsequently chosen as an example of good practice in the field of youth information, and presented in a national competition.

About the service

The Infomobile Service is a free service that sends text messages (SMS), in which, according to preference, young people aged 15 to 35 are registered as users requesting a specific type of information of special importance to them (employment, housing, subsidies, training, etc.). The simplicity of the service provided, however, is in sharp contrast to the complexity of its planning and execution by the two youth information officers in charge of its operation.

The origins of the idea

In statistical surveys targeted at young people, it was shown that mobile telephones are available to 92 % of them. It also showed that 94 % of users between the ages of 15 and 29 use mobile phones to: send text and multimedia messages; download songs and ring tones; and participate in contests, etc. Faced with this social reality, the youth information officers thought that it would be very interesting to send information directly to the user. This would achieve a certain level of personalised information services by sending information along the lines of interest previously indicated.

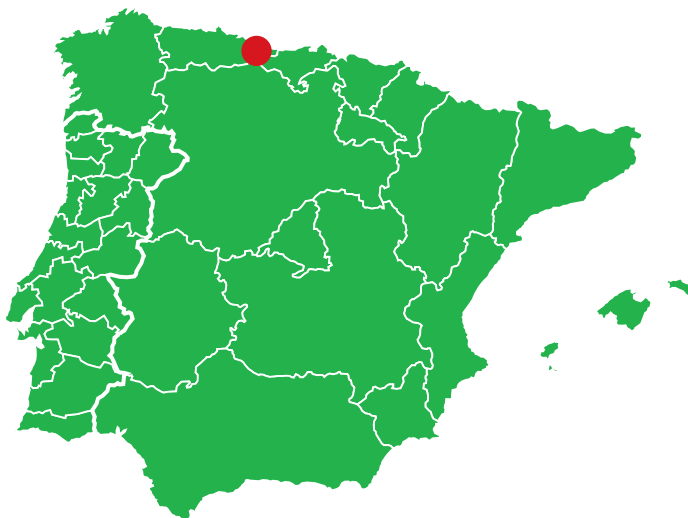


In May 2005, the Infomobile project was approved by Leader+, and the association of municipalities was presented with a budget of EUR 7 092. The money awarded was used to start up the service and configure the tool, as well to produce publicity material, including leaflets, designed to support the various dissemination campaigns.

The idea in action...

The Infomobile project is based on a strategy of sending clear and concise information that users themselves request when first registering with the service. This takes place by means of a registration form that records the data of the user and the preferred subject/s on which he or she wishes to be informed, such as: employment; housing; examinations; courses; scholarships and financial assistance for studies; competitions and contests; leisure time; culture; sports; clubs; and any other subjects that may be of interest.

This record is accompanied by the user's authorisation to receive information in this way, and the guarantee by the service provider that the data given by the user will be respected in accordance with current legislation. The computer application 'SMSnet' registers all the users logged in the system's contact book and creates groups with common interests according to the type of information requested (job offers, courses, help with housing, etc.) to whom the pre-selected information is to be sent.



Photos provided by the Spanish national network unit.

...generated a positive response

In the first few months of the project, from June 2005 to November 2005, there were 291 users registered with the youth information offices located in the municipalities of Llanes and Parres: 65 % of them were women and 35 % men. Young people aged 25 to 30 predominated, with 30 %, followed by those aged 18 to 24, with 27 %. Those aged 31 to 35 accounted for around 12 %, which was more or less the same for those over 35; and young people, aged 16 to 17, represented 6 %. Over this same period, a total of 2 673 SMS messages were sent, with the most requested subjects being employment, training, housing and free time.

An evaluation system included a subjective appraisal which produced very positive results, including that it was a: 'good and very easy form of help'; and 'the fastest way to receive information'.

On the basis of these results the Infomobile pilot project is expected to continue, with new marketing campaigns and technical improvements, which will attract a growing number of users.

The infomobile service

Member State: Spain

Region, district: Asturias

Name of the LAG: Consorcio para el desarrollo rural del oriente de Asturias

Population: 49 136

Surface area: 1 829 km²

Project total cost: EUR 7 093

EU: EUR 4 681

Other public funds: EUR 2 412

Project eligibility: May 2005–July 2005

Contact person: Luis Fernandez Muñoz

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E-mail: info@leaderoriente.com

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Cooperation in rural development



► FRANCE and TUNISIA

Hands across the sea:
France and Tunisia working together

► IRELAND, FRANCE, ITALY, the NETHERLANDS,
FINLAND and the UNITED KINGDOM

Transnet:
A European partnership for developing rural business



► FRANCE and TUNISIA



Hands across the sea: France and Tunisia working together

Two countries help each other to find solutions to common problems by developing their cultural and agricultural heritage.

Introduction

In the heart of the Rhône-Alpes region in south-eastern France, the Chamberan LAG launched in 2005 the idea of a transnational cooperation scheme with the local development association of El Jem, a town in the centre of Tunisia.

The cities of Romans-sur-Isère (in the Drôme 'hill country') and El Jem have in fact been working together since 1993 in the framework of a cultural exchange programme. Although divided by the Mediterranean, the two regions have found that they have much in common: not least knowing how to attract tourists.

Although El Jem and the Drôme hill country have a rich local cultural heritage, both find it hard to attract tourists. This part of the Drôme has both landscape and folk tradition: scenery, churches, villages, and arts and crafts, which combine to form a rural heritage that has never been properly developed. Meanwhile at El Jem, tour operators deliver busloads of tourists who come to admire the third largest amphitheatre in the Roman Empire (conveniently situated just an hour's drive from the beachfront clubs) but then whisk them away again without giving

them even a glimpse of the town itself. The ruins of El Jem are a world-famous attraction that brings nothing to the region, since even the admission receipts go entirely to the Institute for National Heritage. However, the two territories also share another underexploited resource: their trees (chestnuts in France, olives in Tunisia), as well as their respective oils.





Making use of their timber

Encouraged by the success of the earlier exchange programme, the town of Romans-sur-Isère asked the Chamberan LAG to think of ways to extend the existing cooperation between the two towns to include their rural hinterlands. Now, thanks to support from Leader+, and with the assistance of both the LAG and CNASEA (the French national centre for farm planning), a suitable 'sustainable rural development' plan is coming to fruition.

Over the past year representatives of its three principal partners – the horticultural school of Romans-sur-Isère; CIVAM (local agriculture and rural development initiative centre) of the Drôme; and the local development association of El Jem (ADM) – have been meeting regularly to set up a joint system for tackling the different problems that have been

identified. Of the four axes of cooperation that have been outlined, the horticultural school has taken the lead in the 'exploitation of local products which focus on wood'. In the Drôme, the wood of the chestnut had previously only been used for making stakes, while, at El Jem, the olive trees that have been replaced by young plants are simply thrown away. The school in Romans-sur-Isère has organised training sessions on both sides of the Mediterranean, concerned with the creation of 'street' furniture based on original design concepts. Exhibition areas have been set up to display the various benches, signs and tables and, in El Jem, also craft articles. In this way, future entrepreneurs may be inspired to create business activities based on local natural resources. In the same spirit, CIVAM, with its experience in exploiting farm products, is considering setting up a process for selling olive oil packaged in small bottles to the many tourists who pass through the region each year.





Axes of cooperation

'Women's work in rural areas' constitutes the second main axis of cooperation. Another problem common to both of these rural districts is that of the isolation and lack of recognition of their womenfolk, many who work not only on the farm, but also on various crafts. The idea here is to create initiatives for meeting up and for economic activities. CIVAM and the local development association are also interested in creating a local accommodation network. Since bed and breakfast establishments are prohibited in Tunisia, there is little possibility for a tourist to find accommodation in or around El Jem. The hope is that by

opening a debate on the subject doors will also gradually open. In the Drôme, any bed and breakfast activity is the result of personal initiative since there is no related organisation or network. The project calls for the creation of a transnational network based on sponsorship, charter and communication. The fourth and final axis of cooperation focuses on a 'youth project', where young people from the MJC (*maisons de jeunesse culturelles*) of El Jem and Romans-sur-Isère would work together to create 'citizen's videos' and documentaries on the lives of young women in rural settings. Cultural and environmental differences notwithstanding, the problems are very similar on both sides of the sea.

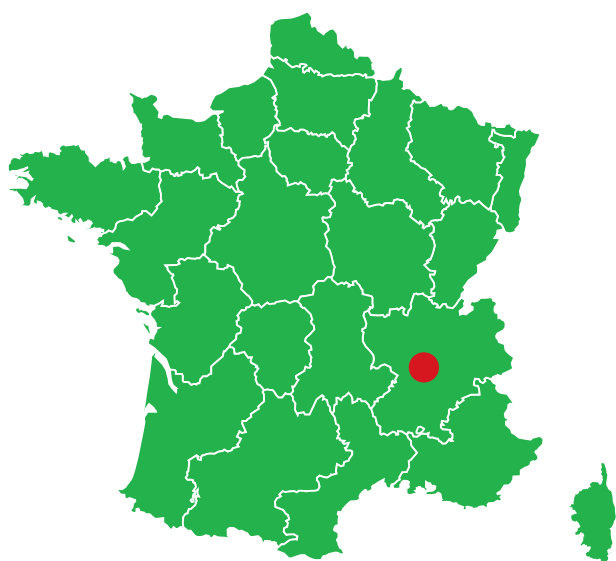




An experiment in connecting people

This transnational cooperation scheme is still in its infancy. For the moment, the task is to validate these axes for the local population and verify that these goals stem from a real need and are shaped by including the participation of the local population. To this end, two events have been set up: last year El Jem held an Olive Festival on 28–29 December, while the 'Festive crossings' project, with a week-long programme of professional workshops, public lectures, musical evenings and photo exhibitions, took place on 3–10 February. Support from European funds made it possible to mount the 'Festive crossings' operation, and cover the travel costs of the participants from one country to the other. More importantly, this backing allowed the organising teams to take the time they needed to organise and run the project properly.

In addition, the network and the Leader+ label facilitated contacts and partnerships with the Rhône-Alpes region. 'Without the funding for the first exploratory trip, nothing could have been done', was the unanimous verdict of all the participants. They also regret that European funds cannot be shared with a non-member country. El Jem has virtually no budget, and the operation was handicapped by the resulting financial imbalance. On the other hand, El Jem's Labour Bureau has done a remarkable amount of groundwork. What they have accomplished suggests that they will be creating activities based on a micro-credit system. This sort of project, bringing together people from rural areas in France and a country from the Maghreb, is still at an experimental stage. However already the Monts du Lyonnais district is looking into a joint project with a region in Morocco!



Hands across the sea

Member State: France

Region, district: Drôme

Name of the LAG: Chamberan

Population: 77 899

Surface area: 1 303 km²

Project total cost: EUR 64 538

EU: EUR 32 369

Other public funds: EUR 14 578

Private funds: EUR 17 591

Project eligibility: June 2006-December 2007

Contact person: Sandie Schlingler

Address: FDCIVAM 'En avant drôme des collines'

Maison de la 3 côte chapeliers, F-26100 Romans-sur-Isère

Tel. (33-4) 75 45 13 15

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E-mail: sdsvamdrôme@free.fr

Website: www.fdcivamdrôme.org

Photos provided by the French national network unit.

► IRELAND, FRANCE, ITALY, the NETHERLANDS, FINLAND and the UNITED KINGDOM



Transnet: A European partnership for developing rural business

Showing the value of Leader+ ‘pilot’ actions helps to determine the focus of possible future projects, and ensures sustainability for the right partners.

Introduction

Transnet is a partnership for rural business development which involved seven European rural regions working together under a Leader+ project. The participating rural areas included regions from the following EU Member States: Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland and the United Kingdom.

As a pilot project, it aimed to develop the capabilities of rural entrepreneurs through networking and training. Rural businesses in each area were also helped to consider the export and marketing of their products and/or services in the various participating EU regions. Transnet also provided a process of information exchange which could help to sustain micro-enterprises in Europe’s rural areas, by improving their existing business networks and developing new quality business circles.

The project’s priority was to establish practical examples of international trade adapted to the needs of small rural businesses.

Why Transnet for the Oost Drenthe LAG?

Although there are many tools available to Europe’s businesses helping them to work internationally, they often do not meet the needs of micro-businesses that have limited resources. Transnet brought together the expertise of

seven different European regions to address the needs of micro-businesses, by providing them with a network to aid rural national and international development.

The region of the Oost Drenthe LAG needed to both stimulate and strengthen the functioning of its existing business networks. Since the proposed Transnet activities were recognised as being suitable, it was decided to participate, since cooperation is regarded as a way of mutual learning and strengthening of the local business network. In this way, developing the region’s business network would also reinforce the region’s economic structure.

The Oost Drenthe LAG first got involved in 2002 when the Leader coordinator and a member of the LAG (also part of the local business network) attended a conference on international cooperation in Cork, Ireland (to which they were invited by the Waterford Leader partnership). During this conference, the Dutch LAG members met the other cooperating LAGs and started to exchange ideas and knowledge. It was agreed that Transnet should link up with the Dutch local project called Stipo (*Stimulerend Plattelandsondernemingen* – stimulating rural enterprises). In fact, in Drenthe, Transnet was seen as a project that could provide a strong and structural incentive for the Stipo project, involving two Leader LAGs: Oost Drenthe and Drents-Friese Leader-gebied.

The idea behind Transnet

Transnet works by developing a European network of rural business quality circles. It consists of a training programme for market expansion and business event organisation. In this way the scheme would help micro-businesses to innovate and be effective entrepreneurs by helping to increase their profitability through business trade opportunities and partnerships. One way to do this is by exchanging business know-how, market information, and good practice in product and service.





The project also focused on helping existing local business networks improve their activities and the way they work. In addition, priority was given to the needs of young people, thereby encouraging this target group to return to work in their home region, as well as supporting women to set up small enterprises. A business network is a group of three or more enterprises that have decided to cooperate as a group in order to undertake a project or activity that individual members of the group would be unable to do as well if they were on their own.

Some early results and recommendations

The pilot project, which concluded in December 2006, had one overall project coordination partner. Other Leader+ partners were responsible for managing each of the project's three themes, namely:

- ▶ European network of rural business networks;
- ▶ joint training module in market expansion;
- ▶ business events.

Each theme had several outputs. For theme one this included a website, a good practice guide and reports. Theme two generated training initiatives, an evaluation survey and the training of 80 entrepreneurs. Theme three resulted in

new business contacts and a programme of customised events.

A steering group (made up of Transnet partners) then discussed the results of the pilot project and made some recommendations. With regard to the project's organisational structure, it was felt that members were too different in terms of their: local culture; practices; type of business; support structures; and facilities, etc. to fully benefit from the project or indeed the partnership.

It was also recommended that, for future transnational partner selection, the region of the proposed member should have suitable businesses that would match the needs of the other partner regions, and a willingness to participate. In addition the communication and marketing of the project was, in the very early stages, very important in order to involve the businesses, and to ensure that the partners' needs would be met.

Learning by doing

Reflecting on their experience of the pilot project, the participants felt that the project lacked sufficient 'transnationalism'. The project also highlighted the need for partners to come together at the initial design and structuring of the programme. In this case the project was already designed and structured before all partners came on board, which allowed very little opportunity for further input and change. The real learning of the project should focus on the sharing of knowledge amongst the businesses from the different partner regions, since it was felt that this was where the real networking took place. It was recommended that, in future transnational activity, some or all partners would come together to agree the initial project framework, so that the detail could be subsequently agreed, and to include yearly reviews/evaluations which would allow a redefinition and/or design of the programme.

However, certain events did prove successful where real trade opportunities were taken advantage of, such as: the networking event in Finland in June 2004; the workshop in Abruzzo, Italy, September 2004; and the World Ploughing Championships in Carlow, September 2006. These cases proved the point that preparation and taking part in such events is paramount to success and in creating real added value for the participants.

Results for the Oost Drenthe LAG

At the start of the project, the Dutch partner's expectations of the benefits of the Transnet project were very positive. By



taking part, the various Dutch entrepreneurs had hoped to improve their own network and networking skills. However, these expectations were not met. As already indicated in the overall results and recommendations mentioned above, the Dutch partners felt that the participating partner regions lacked similarities, and that these differences were too great to be readily overcome.

The Oost Drenthe region's focus is on tourism, recreation and agriculture and is aimed at the surrounding urban areas. Compared with many other Transnet partner regions, the Oost Drenthe region is not a traditional agricultural region, with a low number of inhabitants and little interaction with the surrounding urban areas. Consequently the Dutch entrepreneurs found it difficult to match with other businesses in the project. Moreover, Dutch entrepreneurs are already more export oriented, as underlined by government support for this. This meant that the Transnet project was, from the Dutch perspective, not of such importance as an export aid. Finally, the project themes were not entirely relevant for the Oost Drenthe partners. Therefore the Dutch LAG would in future need to ensure a selection of transnational project partners with a similar focus to its own.

Shared experiences and conclusions

Despite the experience of the Dutch partner, the Transnet project nevertheless demonstrates the many positive aspects of transnational cooperation, whereby regions are given the chance to share experience and gain knowledge about new areas of activity. During the course of a steering group meeting which took place in February 2007, and explained above, lessons were indeed learned from the project. Transnet also highlighted the importance of evaluation as a way to analyse the effectiveness of the project with respect to its: programming; management; performance, etc.; the added value brought; and the potential impact on local, national and European policies and programmes. Training was considered to have been an important issue for all partners: the project showed that training should be introduced at a fairly early stage, and be fairly broad-based to allow for a later focus if required.

While there was a positive agreement to carry out a smaller and better defined project, it was made very clear that, in the future selection of transnational partners, the region of the proposed member would need to have suitable businesses which match the needs of the other partner regions. In this way, the failure on this occasion of the Dutch partner to match with other businesses in the project would be avoided.



Transnet

Member States: Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Finland

Regions: Waterford and Louth (Ireland), Bretagne (France), Abruzzo (Italy), Drenthe (the Netherlands), Kauhava (Finland)

Name of the Leading LAG: Waterford Leader Partnership (Ireland)

Population: 60 000

Surface area: 1 290 km²

Other LAGs: Louth Leader (Ireland), Pays de Morlaix (France), Gal Vastese Inn (Italy), Oost Drenthe (the Netherlands), Aisapari (Finland)

Non-Leader + LAG: Joutsenten Reitti (Finland) (not included in costs)

Project total cost: EUR 534 272

EU: EUR 320 930

Other public funds: EUR 175 062

Private funds: EUR 103 612

Project eligibility: January 10–October 2006

Waterford (Ireland) project cost: EUR 104 994

EU: EUR 97 154

Other public funds: EUR 0

Private funds: EUR 7 840

Louth (Ireland) project cost: EUR 84 735

EU: EUR 71 735.39

Other public funds: EUR 0

Private funds: EUR 13 000

France project cost: EUR 85 164

EU: EUR 42 582

Other public funds: EUR 18 325

Private funds: EUR 24 257

Italy project cost: EUR 84 107

EU: EUR 26 073

Other public funds: EUR 26 073

Private funds: EUR 31 961

The Netherlands project cost: EUR 90 272

EU: EUR 45 136

Other public funds: EUR 27 082

Private funds: EUR 18 054

Finland project cost: EUR 85 000

EU: EUR 38 250

Other public funds: EUR 38 250

Private funds: EUR 8 500

Contact person: Claire Connors (Waterford Leader Partnership)

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Photos provided by the Dutch national network unit.



Women and youth in Leader+



► SWEDEN

An interview with Jenny Nylund, youth leader, Nedre Dalälven LAG

► AUSTRIA

Professional youth supervision





► SWEDEN



An interview with Jenny Nylund, youth leader, LAG Nedre Dalälven, Sweden

Introduction

Jenny Nylund works in Leader+ in Nedre Dalälven. She lives in a village with her partner and three children and runs her own business in the tourist industry. During the last five years she has worked as a project manager in rural development on youth issues. Today her job consists of supporting young people that wish to launch their own projects and to encourage those who are running projects in her area. One of these is the 'youth-cheques' scheme in Nedre Dalälven that awards around EUR 1 500 in order to help villages improve their offering for youths. This is a scheme where young people between the ages of 15 and 25 can apply for funding of up to EUR 1 500. The schemes must be their own ideas and, although some help is available from the Leader+ office, they have to do most of the work including the application and reports, etc. This scheme has been a very successful tool in working with Nedre Dalälven's young people.

She also works as part of the LAG and the executive committee for Leader+ in Nedre Dalälven, and is also an active member of the board for an interregional project for young people in Sweden called 'U-LAND'. This is a cooperation project between five Leader areas that aims to address youth in villages.

The common denominator in Nedre Dalälven is the Dalälven River. The area is characterised by the river and its history, and its industrial areas readily blend in with the natural surroundings, which include a natural park. The area is located about 150 km to the north of Stockholm and is one of Sweden's 12 Leader+ areas. It has 65 000 inhabitants. The area

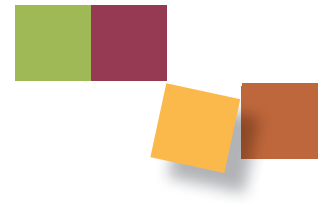
has a growing tourist industry and is a very popular place thanks to its world-class fishing possibilities. More information about the LAG can be found at the following link: www.leader-nedredalalven.org

The interview

Leader+ Contact Point: At the local level what does rural development mean to you? What aspects of your daily work do you find the most interesting? Do you think being a young woman makes any difference?

Jenny Nylund: For me, rural development is a complex entity. Basically, it's about creating the preconditions for a good life in the countryside – jobs, communication, accessibility to nature, a rich cultural life, good public services and interesting activities for young people, etc. It is equally important to change attitudes towards the village and about creating a spirit of entrepreneurship, cohesion and innovation in the villages.

The most interesting part of my job as a 'youth coach' is to meet young people that really want to contribute and refuse to let anyone stand in their way! To support these youths and help them carry out their projects is the smartest thing we can do, regardless if they choose to live in villages or to move to the cities in the future. They are our future! The role as an active young woman in a rural area is ... complicated. Not everyone supports changes and innovation. Everybody does not wish to see changes. Yes, 'complicated' is even an



understatement. But it's all about focusing on the positive voices (that are growing in number and intensity) and remembering that age and gender does not reveal everything about a person and their competences, though it's probably true that people of different ages can do better different things.

In my job working with young people, it's a big advantage to be (relatively) young myself. I can talk with young people on their own terms and it's probably less intimidating to meet the person in charge of EU support when that person is not very unlike oneself!

CP: How important do you consider your region's natural and cultural heritage as a resource to be exploited within the Leader initiative? What kind of things have been done to develop and make this heritage more visible?

JN: The characteristic feature of our area is the river. We have a number of natural reserves and a natural park. We work on several projects that open such areas to tourists. In such projects it's important to keep the balance between accessibility and protecting nature. As in many other areas in Sweden, we have something unique to offer the visitors from abroad: peace, quiet and purity. Many endangered animal species can be found in Nedre Dalälven, including a rich bird life. The challenge lies in being able to respectfully exploit the natural and cultural heritage without damaging it.

CP: Is there a particular project which has been successful in giving your region an economic boost? What is it, and why do you think it has been successful?

JN: Yes, we have a project that has developed business in a village called Östervåla. This project won a prize as the best project in Sweden in 2005. The project has created several new jobs, kept a large employer who was getting ready to relocate, and attracted new companies. I believe the reason for this success is a mix of good project management and the attitude in the village. The businesses in Östervåla *want* to cooperate in order to develop their village. When the local inn was under threat of closing, a group of local businesspeople took it over. We choose to take responsibility for our village and take matters into our own hands instead of sitting back with our arms folded and complain when it's too late. It is priceless for the village to have so many dedicated citizens working together on a common goal!

CP: At the moment there is an emphasis on sustainable economic development and job creation across a range of EU policies. For the Dalälven LAG, how have you addressed these issues within your development strategy?

JN: This is obviously one of the most important goals for Nedre Dalälven – not least for those co-financing. We have set up objectives on how many jobs we hope to create and those objectives have been met. The LAG has a clear sense of which projects are likely to be successful or not. It is then important that the projects get the adequate support from the LAG office ⁽¹⁾. We are working with a local support unit that works with the project manager on an informal level. We are doing our utmost to make the administration as light as possible for our projects in order to spend as much time and energy as possible on their actual implementation. I am willing to claim that the efforts of the support unit have made our projects more successful!

CP: For your region's young people, what are the main problems they face in getting a job? Do you think that policies like Leader+ are best suited to creating permanent jobs? How innovative have you had to be in your thinking?

JN: In our region, we define 'youth' as persons aged 15–25. There are no important towns and therefore the possibilities of getting a higher education are very limited for those who choose to stay in the area. Young people who choose to stay do not have a higher education and therefore find themselves in low-income jobs or in the industry. This is not necessarily negative – many young people wish to work instead of continuing to study. Unfortunately there are only a few available jobs in the village, and this pushes the young people to move to the larger cities to find jobs or to study.

We perceive young migration in two ways. On the one hand, we want the youths to get new experiences, study and travel, and then come back and raise a family in the same place as they grew up. It is our job to make sure the home village is as attractive as possible for children and young people – a place that they want to return to.

There are even youths that wish to stay because they want to, maybe they found a job, started their own business or study per correspondence. For this we need to work on a change of attitude in the entire society. It is often perceived as a failure if one hasn't been travelling in Australia, studied in the USA or worked abroad before settling down. Why should it be considered as a negative thing to know what you want and pursue it?

In Nedre Dalälven we have shown that the Leader method works. The LAG is co-financing and managing projects, it pays taxes and everybody can see the results it has achieved.

(1) The LAG office is the support unit of the LAG: those who work for the administration of the LAG. In Sweden they call it 'kansli', both at LAG and National Network Unit level.



Personally the method is highly appropriate to create positive development on the long term, something many have failed to do. I believe that this is thanks to the partnerships and the bottom-up approach.

CP: What advice would you give to other LAG groups in dealing with youth employment? Have you any plans to make contact with other LAGs outside your area on this issue?

JN: Our main focus has not been on job creation. We work to create a good environment for young people, where they can launch and run projects by themselves. In order for the projects to be considered as youth projects, we demand that they run them by themselves. We believe that this is the way to teach young people to be independent and to give them the means to start their own businesses later in life. We also acknowledge the importance of having a person in charge of the youth activities who is paid to provide support for the youths and encourage them in the project work. It is equally important to have a strong association with devoted adults behind their activities to make sure that the experiences are capitalised on and transferred to the next generation as the young people grow up and move on.

Through the youth network in the Swedish NNU, U-LAND, we are working with four other areas to develop the work we do with young people. We are equally eager to cooperate with other European LAGs on these matters.

CP: How do you think rural development is going to change for you personally in the next programming period? What new things would you like to be involved in and why?

JN: Leader will undergo major changes in Sweden. It used to cover only a small part of Sweden, but will progressively apply to all rural areas! This is of course very exciting and positive for those of us who are already convinced by the Leader method. I believe that Leader will be less experimental and the method will become obvious to many people. Cooperation with neighbouring regions will become more important. There will also be more opportunities to find cooperation partners in regions similar to our own as more areas will be concerned. I believe and hope that the Swedish Leader youth network will grow and become more important. I hope to remain active and contribute in creating new possibilities and cooperation projects in Sweden and abroad. I even hope I will be able to help launch the youth work in new areas.

I have high expectations regarding what we can achieve in our work with young people in Nedre Dalälven. We now know what it takes to be successful. I look forward to a new period working with young people and new ideas.

CP: The EU-27 provides an enormous opportunity for rural actors to exchange experience and culture through networking and cooperation. What do you think are the best ways of achieving this exchange, and how can we best engage women and youth, particularly in the new Member States?

JN: During the current period I think that many LAGs discovered that it is complicated to have common cooperation projects with other countries! It is of the utmost importance that the rules are clear and ready at an early stage so that the LAGs get a chance to understand them. It takes longer than one thinks to find a partner, write applications, build a project and implement it, especially when you consider language and cultural barriers. I think it's very important to decide on focusing on a topic and establish contacts with other LAGs as early as possible. Once the project is launched it's easier to be efficient! We have cooperated with partners in Finland on a youth project on theatre camps.

When it comes to cooperation between young people I believe it's important to be as concrete as possible. If your area is famous for windsurfing then it's probably possible to find a group of willing young people from another European region that is also known for windsurfing. Then you can compare, find common ideas for business, discuss the developments and have fun together. For many young people, the actual cooperation with other youths, with a different background and environment, is the gain. If one chooses to cooperate with new Member States it can be even more enriching because the knowledge of these countries is often sketchy. I hope that Nedre Dalälven will have the opportunity to engage in such cooperation projects during the next programming period!



Photos provided by the Swedish National Network Unit

► AUSTRIA



Professional youth supervision

Leader+ supports a professional youth supervision service which helps the region's youth to take responsibility for their own actions, and engages with the local community.

Introduction

'The youth is our future' is often quoted in political speeches. Nevertheless the only way to build a relationship with young people at the regional level means taking their concerns seriously! This in turn promotes their interest in regional matters and helps to prevent their future migration. The establishment of professional youth supervision in the Austrian Leader+ region of Südburgenland is a good example of this.

The project is the result of years of effort to establish 'youth supervision' in the Jennersdorf district. The initial idea to include street workers from Jennersdorf in the project was suggested in 2001 to the Leader group and to regional funding authorities. A year later a youth survey was conducted which was also supported by the youth department of the *Land Burgenland*. In 2003 so-called 'youth idea circles' were held. These comprised various workshops and discussions between adolescents, parents and municipal representatives, where the situation of young people in the district was discussed. The driving force behind these initiatives was Willi Brunner, pastoral associate of the Jennersdorf parish. The youth idea circles were already financed by Leader+. The results of these surveys and discussions showed that young people wanted

their own free spaces and a chance to express themselves, which until this time was not possible in their existing social environments (family, school, workplace, clubs, etc.).

Understanding what young people want

In a 2002 survey of Jennersdorf's youth, the results showed that the greatest need was for: party rooms with free admission and without pressure to spend money (61 %); special meeting places for young people as well as shuttle buses (55 %) for concerts, discos, leisure time events; and dedicated youth rooms (49 %).

Other information also provided an important basis for future measures which could benefit young people, especially in terms of leisure activities, where young people look for a balance between the tensions and problems they face at home, school or work. If they don't have the means to come to terms with such issues, then this could lead to aggressive behaviour, psychological illnesses or even drug abuse. The people responsible in the region therefore came to the following conclusion: that preventative measures must gear any proposals concerning leisure and supervision towards the needs of young people.



Youth centre and youth rooms

As a prerequisite and basis for regional youth supervision, a central youth centre was created in Jennersdorf, the district capital. This youth centre co-supervises the youth rooms in the municipalities (which already partly existed).

All the district organisations concerned with young people took part in establishing the youth facilities and their supervision, for example: the district government's youth welfare office; municipalities; clubs (voluntary fire brigade, sports clubs, music societies, etc.); religious communities; and the police.

In creating the central and decentralised structures, the poor mobility of young people as well as the district's particular geographic, social and cultural conditions were taken into account.

Based on the survey results, the project's priority goal and guiding principle was to provide young people with a place where they could meet and with no pressure to consume. These meeting places were not just furnished for young people but mainly by the young people themselves according to their own vision.

Both the youth centre and the youth rooms are self-run both in terms of their organisation and administration. The grass-roots democratic approach to self-administration makes young people learn to take responsibility and to develop a willingness to compromise and work together as a team. When conflicting/problematic situations arise, a professional youth leader (supervisor) is at hand.

Activities of the youth leaders

With the support of Leader, two professional youth leaders (a man and a woman) were employed in the region. They supported the municipalities and young people even during the setting-up of the youth centres. Their main job, however, is to regularly serve as a contact point in the youth rooms at fixed times several times a week, and to develop leisure activities together with the young people. As experts in youth work, the two youth leaders are naturally also available to the region's municipal representatives for matters concerning young people.

The range of tasks for these two supervisors can be summarised as follows:

- ▶ act as a contact person for young people and municipalities in developing projects, and in the event of conflicts and problems;
- ▶ perceive and act upon the requirements and individual interests of young people;
- ▶ support and instruct young people in the self-administration of the youth rooms;
- ▶ take over the administration of youth rooms when there is no person of the right age available in the municipality;
- ▶ motivate and develop relationships with the young people;
- ▶ develop services related to leisure activities/events;
- ▶ organise and carry out events suitable for young people;
- ▶ networking of all people and facilities within the district concerned with young people;
- ▶ gender-specific work with boys and girls;
- ▶ organise and carry out outdoor activities and take part in pedagogical projects;
- ▶ stimulate a feeling of well-being and substance abuse prevention;
- ▶ refer adolescents with psychosocial or psychiatric problems to experts for treatment and supervision;
- ▶ preventative work with young people prone to violence so as to prevent criminalisation.

Activities of the youth centres

The activities carried out and organised by the young people themselves, or with the help of the youth leaders, range from joint leisure activities (visiting a spa, cooking, sport, etc.) to information events on topics like 'fair trade' or 'protection of children and young persons'. Furthermore, there are events organised jointly by the youth centres of all seven municipalities: summer camps, football tournaments, snowboarding and skiing weekends.



Youth supervision in Jennersdorf

Member State: Austria

Region, district: Burgenland, southern Burgenland

Name of the LAG: Südburgenland plus

Population: 103 736

Surface area: 1 456 km²

Project total cost: EUR 283 182

EU: EUR 141 591

Other public funds: EUR 2 825

Private funds: EUR 138 766

Project eligibility: May 2004–December 2006

Contact person: Thomas Novoszel

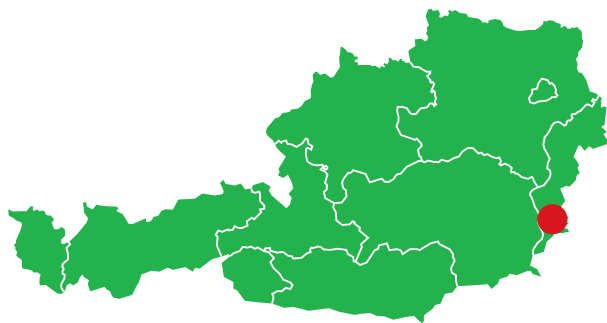
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Photos provided by the Austrian National Network Unit

Important goals to be achieved by the self-administered youth centres and the professionalisation of the youth work were, for example:

- ▶ that young people develop group spirit and a sense of solidarity;
- ▶ that the feeling among young people of belonging to their municipality should be strengthened;
- ▶ that young people's own initiatives should be promoted;
- ▶ to develop a democratic awareness;
- ▶ to awaken young people's voluntary commitment within the community;
- ▶ to learn to take responsibility and become active in a self-determined way;
- ▶ to be able to bring one's own ideas and interests in the design of one's own lifeworld (1).

Leader+ funding: Innovation and sustainability

Leader+ funds sponsored the employment of both youth leaders (personnel costs), the holding of youth workshops (youth circles) in the municipalities of the region, further education measures and public relations, as well as minor investments in information technology.

Setting up professional (mobile) youth supervision including decentralised youth centres in the municipalities has been a pilot project for the whole *Land of Burgenland*. With the support of Leader+ something new has been created which has never existed in this form in the Burgenland before. The comprehensive offer of help and support services for young people is a special innovation, the extent of which is also unusual in rural regions. The organisation model of the youth rooms is innovative, too: self-administration by the young people themselves. The sustainability of the project is reflected by the fact that the youth centres and the professional youth supervision are being carried on even after Leader funding has expired.

(1) Lifeworld is a concept used in philosophy and in some social sciences, meaning the world "as lived" prior to reflective representation.

Perspectives on rural development in Bulgaria and Romania

By Roland Hamel, Resident Twinning Adviser, Twinning for Rural Development and Fisheries Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development Office, Bucharest, Romania



Introduction

Bulgaria and Romania, as with the other Member States of the European Union, are preparing talks with the European Commission, in order to launch their ambitious rural development programmes for the period 2007–13 as soon as possible.

As prescribed by Council regulations⁽¹⁾, these negotiations are based on an analysis of national strategic plans and rural development programmes which specify the conditions governing the intervention of policies derived from clearly defined European policy goals. These programmes will replace Sapard, which in the pre-accession stage helped normalise farming and agri-food structures and train personnel

to take charge of Community programme management, monitoring and payment services.

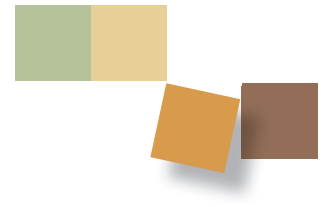
The strategies developed by these two countries are closely linked to those issues which confront their particular rural regions. They will allow rural policies to be implemented whose impact will encourage the socioeconomic transformations necessary to achieve convergence of these economies in transition.

One of the chief characteristics of these economies is in fact the socioeconomic weight of their rural areas, which is much greater than for the EU-25 and even in the case of the 10 New Member States that joined in 2004, as summarised in the table below.

Rural areas ⁽²⁾	Bulgaria	Romania	NMS-10	EU-25
% of territory	76.5%	61.6%	50.8%	56.2%
% of population	58.4%	47.1%	34.5%	18.6%
% of employment	56.9%	58%	31.1%	16%
% GDP generated by the primary sector	12.1%	12.5%	4.1%	2.1%
% of GDP	48.4%	36.5%	26%	13.1%

(1) Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

(2) OECD criterion: Area with a population density of less than 150 /km².



In these two countries, rural areas are not only where much of the population lives and works, but also where a significant share of these nations' wealth is created. The gap between these economies and those of the countries of the EU-25 is striking, particularly with regard to rural employment, which in Bulgaria and Romania accounts for nearly 57 % of total jobs compared with 16 % in the rest of Europe. With regard to the rural contribution to GDP, 48.4 % of added value in Bulgaria is being generated in rural areas, compared with 13.1 % in the EU-25. There is also a notable gap in comparison with the countries that joined the EU in 2004, where the restructuring of the primary sector is generally well under way: on average, the primary sector accounts for only 4.1 % of GDP in those 10 countries, compared with 12 % in the two newest Member States.

The restructuring of the primary sector in these two economies is the chief concern of rural development policy for the period 2007–13. It is, therefore, the second pillar of the common agricultural policy (CAP) that constitutes the principal tool for the restructuring of their rural regions. In both Bulgaria and Romania it is this second pillar which represents the primary support tool of the CAP, and outweighing the first pillar, with its focus on the competitiveness of farm prices. Liberally supplied with European credits (nearly EUR 3 billion in Bulgaria and a little over EUR 8 billion in Romania, which is the fourth largest EAFRD allocation in the EU-27, before France, with EUR 6.4 billion), the national rural development programmes of these two countries will have a significant impact at the macro-economic level.

A farm and agri-food sector ripe for restructuring...

Bulgaria and Romania account for nearly 35 % of all farms in the European Union. In these countries the sector is characterised by a duality, in which a minority of large farms account for the greater part of the useful agricultural land (UAL), and exist side by side with a majority of tiny holdings (less than 5 hectares) and working a relatively small fraction of the UAL. In Romania, 45 % of the UAL is owned by a minority of large farms (5 % of the total), while the remaining 55 % supports the 4.5 million smallholdings that constitute the vast majority of farm properties (95 %). The phenomenon is even more pronounced in Bulgaria, where 0.8 % of farms occupy 70 % of UAL, leaving just 30 % for the remaining 99.2 % (675 000 farms). The result of a privatisation process that led to a broad redistribution of farmland after the collapse of the previous regimes, these small semi-subsistence farms are the underlying cause of the lack of competitiveness of a

primary sector marked by the fragmentation of agricultural land and minimal mechanisation.

These two countries want to use their strategies to encourage the creation of a network of economically viable medium-sized farms, similar to those that predominate in most European countries, chiefly through a restructuring of their semi-subsistence farms.

...with an ageing and relatively uneducated population...

In Romania, farmers constitute a large proportion of the active population in rural areas, representing nearly 69 % of the rural population. Virtually the whole of this agricultural population currently lives in semi-subsistence conditions: nearly 93 % in Bulgaria and 98 % in Romania. This situation masks a high level of underemployment that is not reflected in the unemployment rates, which are comparable to those in other European Union countries (8 % in Romania, 12 % in Bulgaria). This population is, typically: ageing (nearly 65 % of Romanian and Bulgarian farmers are more than 55 years old); and little educated (4.4 % of Bulgarian farmers and only 1.8 % of the rural population of Romania have a university education). With a view to creating a network of family farms, older farmers will be encouraged to retire in order to facilitate the consolidation of fragmented landholdings and the setting-up of younger farmers, while the implementation of training and advisory actions will also be promoted.

... and an uncompetitive agri-food sector acting as a brake on restructuring the primary sector

Although in both Bulgaria and Romania the agri-food sector accounts for nearly 14 % of all industrial production, it is structurally uncompetitive. The degree of concentration of these industries is very low in both countries: in Romania, small farms with fewer than 10 employees account for 60 % of the sector, while a similar situation prevails in Bulgaria, where, out of a total of 6 500 units counted by the 2003 census, 20 % were small businesses and 73 % were micro-businesses. Processing units are a natural outlet for agricultural products, which can thus gain added value, but the existence of semi-subsistence farms is unfavourable to a regular supply of quality produce. It is, therefore, necessary on the one hand to finalise the normalisation of processing units and on the other to stimulate their vertical integration with growers/producers by improving the supply chains.



A varied countryside, endowed with natural riches that can be tapped for tourism development

Both Bulgaria and Romania have areas of outstanding natural beauty, which have been preserved from the process of agricultural collectivisation by their relative inaccessibility. These include the mountain areas that constitute more than 30 % of their territory, and certain well-watered regions along the course of the Lower Danube, which runs between the two countries. These zones, some of which are recognised by Unesco (17 in Bulgaria and 4 in Romania), are heavily forested. Another typical feature of these rural areas is their truly remarkable biodiversity. For example, Romania alone has nearly 40 % of Europe's wolf and lynx populations, and more than 60 % of its brown bears.

This environment is therefore favourable to the development of 'green' tourism, a fact which is further encouraged by the quality of the historic heritage, which is largely cultural. The strategies thus aim at maintaining the environmental quality of its sites, primarily through the agency of Natura 2000 and the development of farm practices that respect the environment. In the tourism sector, there needs to be greater professionalism and increased diversification of services, improved promotion of remarkable sites, and a more energetic territorial marketing policy.

Rural areas remain unattractive

In rural areas, where infrastructure is often lacking, roads are essential for transportation. In Romania, 80 % of the road network is made up of 'B class' roads and/or local roads, of which only 10 % have been modernised. While the situation appears to be somewhat better in Bulgaria, there too the road networks suffer from a lack of maintenance. In both these countries the essential problem lies in the lack of adequate drainage systems (30 % of Bulgarian villages and only 10 % of Romanian), with highly negative consequences for the environment.

Health and education infrastructure suffers from the same problems. School buildings are falling into disuse for want of maintenance, and teaching materials need to be modernised. The consequence of all this is that the best teachers tend to leave, which further widens the gap in relation

to the urban areas. In the health sector, professionals are few and far between (Romania has 1 doctor for every 1 600 inhabitants in the rural regions compared with 1 to 292 in the cities), which is hard on a population that is relatively elderly and has little mobility.

Bringing this infrastructure up to standard is therefore a major prerequisite for the development of these zones.

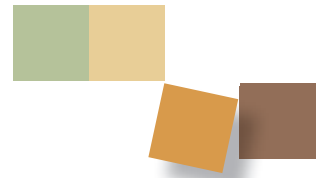
Economic activities

The commonest economic activities are centred around the local neighbourhood shop and the various activities associated with the primary sector. Businesses are scarce in rural areas: Romania has 9 SMEs per 1 000 inhabitants compared with 20 for 1 000 in urban regions, and 52 per 1 000 in the EU-15. In Bulgaria the situation generates a long-term unemployment that is endemic in rural regions, affecting 11 % of the population compared with 3 % in urban areas. This situation is explained by the lack of infrastructure, the absence of a solvent local market and the low educational level of the population. Improving education and creating economic activities in other than the agricultural sector are key issues for rural regions.

A strategy structured around three priorities

The (similar) strategic orientations proposed by these two countries for addressing these issues, unlike those adopted by other European countries, are as follows:

- ▶ give priority to the restructuring and modernisation of the tools of production in their farming and forestry sectors, which constitutes the first axis of the rural development regulation (RDR – cf note 1); thus, 41.7 % and 45 % of EAFRD credits are allocated to this axis in Bulgaria and Romania respectively;
- ▶ mobilise the credits available under the second axis of the RDR, for the preservation and utilisation of the natural environment, to the bare minimum required by EC regulations; this axis absorbs 27.1 % of EAFRD credits in Bulgaria and 25 % in Romania;
- ▶ attach considerable importance to the opening-up of their rural regions by the development of infrastructure and diversification activities in order to make these areas more attractive, in line with axis 3 of the RDR; in Bulgaria and Romania this axis accounts for 31.2 % and 30 % of EAFRD credits respectively.



A Leader programme that should accelerate the restructuring of rural areas

Both Bulgaria and Romania have plunged enthusiastically into their preparation work for the Leader axis. Nearly 2.5 % of EAFRD credits are earmarked for financing local development strategies implemented by LAGs, the first of which will be selected before 2010, the RDR's proposed deadline for selection.

Bulgaria is one step ahead of Romania in this preparatory phase. A project financed by the United Nations over the period 2003–06 made possible the creation of LAGs through which a number of private-public partnerships were created. Local development strategies were developed and projects set up in 11 areas. The experience thus accumulated has enabled Bulgaria to work out an ambitious Leader strategy, opening all aspects of its rural development programme throughout its territory.

Romania has also thrown itself into this preparatory phase with considerable energy. The Minister for Agriculture has pre-selected 120 areas with some experience in carrying out local projects, in order to foster the development of partnerships that will be created in order to work out local development strategies. These entities will remain in place after 2007 in order to choose the first LAGs as quickly as possible. In addition, each decentralised service (at the NUTS 3 level⁽³⁾) has an official in charge of the follow-up to this preparatory phase, whose presence will strengthen exchanges between

the local and national levels. The various Romanian regions will be able to develop their local strategies based on all axis 3 measures and on three measures from axis 1, focusing particularly on training, advice and product processing.

For the period 2007–09, these two countries will be giving priority to the creation of partnerships and the maturing of their development strategy through the funding of actions attributed to the Leader axis and authorised by derogation under a provision of the Accession Treaty.

Leader is an invaluable asset for these two countries, which are both faced with the need to restructure their rural areas. Its innovative methods of implementation will accelerate the social and economic restructuring of rural regions for, when directed towards specific issues, the Leader initiative will:

- ▶ by promoting the development of local know-how through the recruitment of group leaders and technicians, foster the dissemination of information and the provision of advice, both of which are very important in the context of rural populations with little education;
- ▶ as an intersectoral initiative, facilitate the consolidation or restructuring of farm jobs by creating links with activities that will reinforce the image of the region;
- ▶ by drawing the players into a network and within the framework of that rural network creating platforms for exchanges with the national level, improve the charting of national policy.

(3) The NUTS classification is hierarchical in that it subdivides each Member State into three levels: NUTS levels 1, 2 and 3. The second and third levels are subdivisions of the first and second levels respectively.

The Leader+ Observatory: organising and networking of Leader+ at the European level

Introduction

The Leader+ Observatory is the structure within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development which has the responsibility for organising the Leader+ network at Community level.

Since 2004, the Leader+ Observatory, also known as the 'Observatory of rural territories', has carried out a whole range of tasks and activities with the help of the Leader+ Contact Point.

In reaching out to Europe's rural territories, the Observatory has developed a variety of tools, some of which, such as this publication, follow more traditional routes of dissemination, while others, such as the 'interactive' tools found on the Leader+ website, are very much testimony to the Leader spirit, not least for their spirit of innovation and 'bottom-up' approach.

Although Leader+ is an initiative of the European Commission, which initially focused on the EU-15, and then more recently on the EU-25 and EU-27, the Observatory has also reached out to all rural actors, wherever they might be and at whatever level. This philosophy has been very much reflected in the work that has been carried out over recent years. As with most networks, there is a great value to be gained by providing a framework for the collection and dissemination of information, either in paper format, electronically, and not least by facilitating 'face to face' contact. The Leader+ Observatory is in fact a very small team, and one that counts very much on the support of the Contact Point, who in turn looks to LAGs and other rural actors for information and insight into rural development in all its diverse forms and spheres.

Thus the very essence of networking is to know: 'who people are'; 'what they are doing', and very importantly 'how they

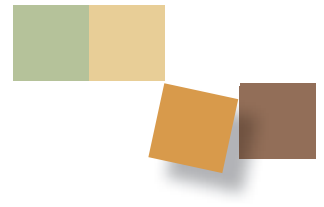
are doing it'. With these elements in place, the task of the Observatory to provide information for rural actors on major trends about the situation in rural areas becomes much easier. It is to this task that we now turn our attention.

The Leader+ website – a tool developed for you!

All community initiatives have a website dedicated to them, and have become indispensable communication tools: the **Leader+ website** is no exception! When we talk about website content, then we really need to understand from where and how this content is derived, and by doing so, we see that the bottom-up approach is very much enshrined in the way that this information and data has been collected and made available. Although national Leader+ websites were already in place, the Leader+ Observatory was very much aware of the need to offer a platform which could complement this existing nationally based information and present it via a European portal.

Also, being aware of the importance to reach as wide an audience as possible, the issue of language, particularly for those living in rural areas, is crucial. For this reason much thought was given to providing main website **menus in all**





official languages of the EU-27. As much content as possible is provided in the language of origin and/or English. However, in the case of the submenus for the website tools, these are only available in 11 languages.

Content is not only presented in the classical way, such as in archives, but can also be accessed by a range of interactive tools which in turn are linked to databases and operated by search engines. These tools have been specifically developed with the needs of the rural actors, and in particular LAGs, in mind. This is not only because they have been the ones contributing much of the information, but indeed they are the ones who can gain most benefit from such consolidated information. The website has developed over a period of three years and is constantly evolving in terms of its functionality and available content. We present below some of the many components of the website, which presents the totality of the tools available to Europe's rural actors and beyond, and are themselves a clear legacy of the Observatory's work.

Who's who in Leader

Knowing who people are and how to contact them is one of the most basic information requirements for those working in Leader+. All those working at European, national and local levels are covered, in order that any questions concerning the implementation and any ongoing procedural issues can be dealt with by the appropriate person. In the LAG database there is also a listing of 1 153 LAGs by Member State. This is made up of all the 896 LAGs from the EU-15, plus a further 257 from the new Member States. These LAG data sheets give details about the LAG's rural development strategy and help to facilitate transnational cooperation.

In this respect, there are other related tools: the partner search tool, and the cooperation database which have been developed with the needs of the LAG in mind. These are discussed below.

Events

The Observatory has organised eight events since October 2004. Two of these were held in Brussels, and six have been decentralised ones, meaning they were held in different Member States and hosted by a local LAG. All Leader+ Observatory seminars seek to address a specific Leader+ theme. This has meant involving as many LAGs as possible whose main interests are represented by the chosen theme, in order to provide relevant information and contact, and to help them in the implementation of their local strate-

gies. When held on LAG territory, the seminar programme ensures that attendees can visit relevant LAG projects. These visits provide a very tangible proof of Leader+ working at grassroots level, and demonstrate the contribution that Leader can make to local development. As such these events serve as a meeting point for the beneficiaries of the initiative. Seminars are also facilitated by a careful selection of speakers and moderators who, due to their experience and knowledge about the subject, are able to address specific questions.

To be successful these events are dependent on the contribution of managing authorities (MAs), national network units (NNUs) and LAGs and other rural actors. All may be requested to help design and take part in the event, by: making presentations about specific case studies; talking about their experiences at territorial level in respect of a particular methodology or decision-making process; moderating workshops; reporting on points discussed; and in general contributing to the debate. This means that all those involved in territorial initiatives have an opportunity to make a positive contribution, including those who are not LAGs, by sharing their experience and know-how. Events are also an excellent source of good practice ideas, and, since they are 'face to face', an excellent stimulus for exchanging information.

Indeed, networking and cooperation has been a feature of all Observatory seminars, and none more so than during the European Cooperation Fair, which took place in Brussels in June 2005. The goal of this event was to trigger transnational cooperation, and to assist national administrations in their coordinating role. This was achieved by: a careful selection of speakers, projects and topics; an exhibition of national stands; and a dedicated 'partner search area'. The presence of Commissioner Fischer Boel also strengthened the importance of this event.

You can also read about the latest Observatory seminar in the Leader+ news section of this magazine. As with all seminars, relevant documentation including photos can be found under the events section of the website. Linked closely to this is an **events calendar**. This provides details of events related to rural development. The content for this calendar is derived not only from Flash News, but also from contributions provided by the public at large.

Member State files

At Member State level, it is possible to have a complete picture of the current status of the Leader programme nationally in the form of a country data sheet. These **Member**



State files also contain a map, produced by the national network units, which shows the location of each LAG. For each Member State (EU-25), this map has an interactive link to the LAG database, from where it is possible to bring up further details about the LAG, its territory and its strategy. The national maps of the EU-15 have also been brought together by the Observatory as a map of European LAGs (see publications) and those of the new Member States have been included when they have become available. This European map, which identifies each LAG according to its EU code and selected theme, is available in hard copy and can also be downloaded from the website.

Publications

The **Leader+ Magazine** is published in all EU official languages, with the aim of giving its readers an ongoing overview of Leader+ projects that have been or are being carried out in the different Member States. Each edition has a special focus which aims to highlight a specific area of Leader interest, whether it is one of the Leader themes, or an aspect of policy, and contributions are requested at national level according to an agreed content structure. A search engine means that articles can be searched for on a given theme, edition, target group, or even keyword. This tool is also linked to the image gallery. The **Leader+ Magazine**, which builds on the success of its predecessor, **Leader II Magazine**, is designed to complement the many magazines that are produced nationally. It has a very wide readership, not only amongst the EU's Leader community but also amongst rural actors in third countries. Subscribers can request copies in the language of their choice, change their contact details or unsubscribe via the Leader+ subscriptions management tool. On this

page is also a link to the articles' search engine, via which specific articles can be searched according to criteria such as country, theme, issue, target group, and keyword, as well as a 'free text' option. Articles are also available in a print version and can be downloaded in PDF format separately. The articles are available in English. Navigation is available in 11 languages.

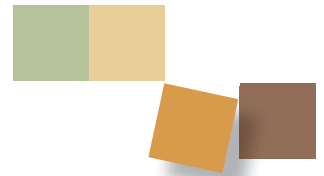
The **Leader+ best practices** are made up of examples gathered by the Leader+ Observatory throughout the EU-15 with the help of the national network units and managing authorities. All the examples were selected on the basis of the European Leader+ good practice database, which is

also available on the website. They will be available in 22 EU languages.

Flash News was conceived to provide a regular update about important news about Leader+, such as events and interesting publications. Like the magazine, it compliments what is already done at national level, by providing a European view of Leader+, and can be received directly via a link in a choice of five languages. There is also the possibility for news to be contributed, and readers are actively encouraged to send news about cooperation projects, as well as link to the 'Leader Competence Pool' which is discussed below.

Library

The Leader+ library has been developed around three main categories: Leader capitalisation, EU documents, and NNU documents. Here information has been grouped together which has either a specific use or value. For example, Leader capitalisation contains relevant documents and publications produced by the NNUs, and these provide methodological support including information from Leader II, as well as for the future programming period. Both these sections are further divided amongst the familiar Leader subject areas, notably: monitoring; evaluation; methodology; cooperation; and good practice. The EU documents relate to those official documents produced by the European institutions which are linked to Leader, while documentation from the NNUs provide the 'bottom-up' link to the national libraries of the different Member States. The library is constantly updated and is an important source of information about the Leader initiative for all rural actors, especially when used in conjunction with the Leader archives section.



registered include professionals involved in: LAG management; the regional, inter-regional or national networks; and institutional bodies such as the managing authorities.

The **partner search tool** is the tool that has been in use for the longest length of time, being already available under Leader II. It was developed in order to enhance cooperation, particularly transnational cooperation, and is also available on the national websites of Leader+. It uses simple keywords, and enables a LAG to look for other LAGs and interesting projects in specified Member States. Users can search along given themes and combine different options such as regional characteristics. It

is also possible to advertise a particular project or to find suitable partners looking for projects.

Image gallery

In order that readers can access photos used in the Leader+ Magazine articles, an image gallery has been developed, which is available for each article, and which in turn links directly with the text. This tool enriches the featured stories and personalities behind the projects and their contribution to rural development. This facility is only available in English, although the text menus are in 11 languages.

The above are all features which may be considered as 'static' components of the website. However, perhaps the most useful and certainly most sophisticated tools that the Observatory has developed are those which form '**Leader+ interactive**'. These tools are very much designed (but not exclusively) with LAGs in mind, and are linked directly to databases developed for specific purposes.

The most recent tool that has been developed is the **Leader Competence Pool (LCP)**, which has been done so in response to the results of the Leader+ mid-term evaluation. The Observatory also considers it vital that the skills and experience learned between Leader II and Leader+ is not lost. This idea was further discussed and developed with representatives of LAGs, national network units and managing authorities during the course of the Leader+ Observatory seminar in Tihany, Hungary, in November 2006. The LCP tool was launched by the Contact Point in cooperation with Leader+ managing authorities and national network units who suggested suitable candidates to register and publish their profiles. It brings to those people working in rural development around Europe (and indeed the world) a tool where they can find peers or expertise in certain fields, which can help them in whatever situation. Those already

The Observatory's emphasis on the importance of transnational cooperation has been complemented by the **cooperation database**. This database helps LAGs exchange information about the implementation of transnational cooperation, and concerns projects approved under the Leader+ initiative. Information is available concerning: the contact details of the participating partners; common cooperation objectives; the joint action plan; legal aspects; the expected outputs and results; and financial information. Consequently it is a very useful tool for demonstrating the benefits of cooperation, and thereby helping to stimulate new cooperation activities. For this, the MAs and NNUs were asked to send a list of their approved cooperation projects. The individual project was then linked to a project template or data sheet, providing several fields describing the project, and was completed by the MAs and NNUs with the help of the LAGs. This information is available in the language of the lead partner and translated into English by the European Commission once the data sheet has been correctly filled in.

One of the Observatory's major tasks has in fact been to gather prior information about every LAG for the **LAG database**. This work began in the first quarter of 2005, and while it initially focused on the EU-15, it now includes data on LAGs in the new Member States (ongoing). It is also possible to access the LAG database via the individual Member State files. All the essential data was initially recorded by the Contact Point according to information provided in the annual reports. The sheets were sent to the relevant managing authorities to have the missing data fields completed. Once



completed, the sheet was validated by the MA, after which a request for translation was made to the European Commission. The reference 'not yet validated by the national authorities' displayed in the data sheet shows those sheets which have never been validated by the MAs, and consequently these have not been translated.

The information displayed in a LAG data sheet can be accessed either by a search engine using specific selection criteria, or via the Member State files' page (see above), or alternatively from the 'Who's who' LAGs' address list. LAG data sheets can also be downloaded in PDF format.

Apart from information contained in publications, the library and the various databases, the Observatory has received many requests for information about 'good practice' projects. While it can already be assumed that articles in the magazine are 'good practice', and as such are a rich source of inspiration and ideas, it was nevertheless decided to take this a step further, and develop the **good practice** database. 'Good practice' relates to individual projects which have a special strategic focus, or a series of projects which can be considered as a whole.

The collection of good practice examples at the European level has been an important task for the Leader+ Observatory, since it clearly shows the achievements of Leader+ in rural areas, not only to the public at large, but to all rural development actors who wish to understand how Leader+ is being implemented. In doing so, the Observatory selected a team of experts to collect good practice examples on a national basis by both the Leader+ national network units and the managing authorities. The criteria for identifying good practice were based on the seven Leader+ characteristics which are valid for all Leader+ programmes in Europe, and in addition transferability and sustainability. Once the examples were selected, the experts reformatted them into a common European template. The idea has been to select for each Member State between two and five examples. These include a few cooperation actions/projects distributed between the four Leader+ themes, and also to respect the type of project, geographical balance and the content-related criteria linked to the Leader approach.

The development of this database is ongoing as new examples of good practice, which also contributes to the diversity of Leader+, are added. Information is available in English and displayed in a data sheet format. All data sheets can also be displayed and downloaded as a PDF. These data sheets are accessible from the search engine by using the selection

criteria provided. New examples of good practice will be added as and when they become available. It is also planned to link this tool to the LAG database.

The **monitoring indicators database** provides statistical information at programme, national and EU level for the years 2003 and 2004, and for 2005 where already available.

Working via a web portal, a **search engine** linked to all databases has been established using a common interface. The **Leader+ InfoBank** allows the user to search for information from a single gateway via countries, themes, keywords, target groups and 'free text'. This applies to some databases showing the legacy of Leader+, such as the good practice database, the publications database (magazine) and the cooperation database. The LAG database and LCP is also part of the InfoBank though without the keywords' and target groups' functionalities which are not applicable here.

Conclusions

The importance of having validated and consistent information about Leader at EU level should not be underestimated. In carrying out the various tasks described, there has very much been a true sense of the bottom-up approach in terms of the collection of the information and the development of the various databases. The value of what has so far been achieved is already quite evident, since for the first time, LAGs and other rural actors have a much clearer picture of what is happening in Leader+, and more importantly have a range of excellent tools for their future rural development initiatives. However, building on success is very much part of the Leader legacy and is something that the Observatory will certainly continue to do in the future.