CHAPTER VIII   Networking and cooperation between areas

references

European Commission Notices to the Member States

LEADER II
ref. 94/C180/12
Notice to the Member States laying down guidelines for global grants
or integrated operational programmes for which the Member States
are invited to submit applications for assistance in the framework of
a Community Initiative for rural development – LEADER II
(Links between actions for the development of the rural economy).

LEADER+
ref. 2000/C139/05
Commission Notice to the Member States of 14 April 2000 laying down
guidelines for the Community Initiative for rural development (LEADER+)

LEADER II dossiers

Innovation notebooks
No. 1: Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach (1999)
No. 6: Creating a territorial development strategy in the light of the
LEADER experience – Part 5: Global competitiveness of rural areas (2000)
No. 11: Transnational cooperation under LEADER II: lesson from the past,
tools for the future (2001)

references

Observatory dossiers

No. 3: Mainstreaming LEADER in future rural policies (1999)

No. 4: Information technologies and rural development (2000)

Guides

Transnational cooperation between rural areas (1997)

LEADER Magazine

No. 16: Special LEADER Symposium "Towards a new Community Initiative for rural development: 800 leaders give their views" (Winter 1997-1998)

No. 21: Transnational cooperation between rural areas (Autumn 1999)

No. 23: The added value of LEADER (Summer 2000)

No. 24: Unifying theme(s), integrated territorial development (Autumn 2000)

Examples

"Innovative actions" factsheets

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Networking and cooperation between areas

Networking and
cooperation between areas

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I/5
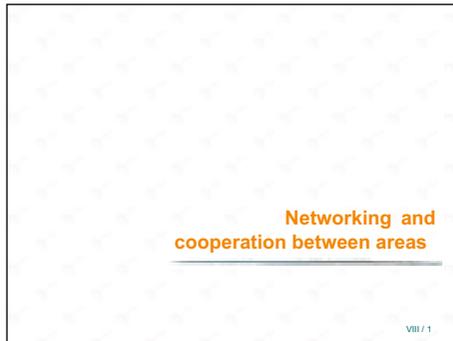
LEADER I emphasised the networking of players as a tool for local development, thereby breaking the isolation of numerous rural areas. A **"LEADER Coordinating Unit"** had been set up to facilitate exchanges between the LAGs, optimise the circulation of information and ensure wide dissemination of the actions most representative of the priority rural issues. Such networking aroused a shared commitment to a joint approach. A few transnational cooperation ventures were established by local action groups (LAG) but they did not benefit from organised technical support.

Under LEADER II, the networking of rural areas was provided with a better support system: the **"LEADER European Observatory"**, backed up in most Member States by **"National Coordination Units"**. The Observatory's two new missions were, one, to develop a methodology for identifying, analysing and transferring innovation in rural areas and, two, to provide technical assistance to transnational cooperation ventures between rural areas from at least two European Union Member States.

Networking and cooperation: additional tools

Networking and cooperation : additional tools

Networking	⟷	Cooperation

☛ **All services and tools**

✓ intended for local development players

✓ to encourage exchanges and cooperation

☛ **Formalised mechanism to complement informal relations**

☛ **Instrument for**

✓ reinforcing the activities of local actions groups

✓ resolving problems

✓ adding value to local resources

✓ injecting dynamism into the economy

☛ **Formal commitment**

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By facilitating the transfer of experience and know-how, networking and cooperation between rural areas are key elements in the added value of the LEADER approach:

Networking (**slides 3 to 6**) is a system based on providing a set of tools and services to local practitioners and public administrations in order to foster exchanges and cooperation at all levels (local, regional, national and European). It relies on a formalised mechanism, an **"animation" structure,** whose tasks are established in formal contracts with the European Commission. This mechanism includes the Brussels-based LEADER European Observatory, which is 100% funded by the Commission, and the National Coordination Units, cofinanced by the Commission and based in the Member States. Such networking complements the informal contacts established between groups.

Cooperation **(slide 7 to 12)** is an instrument available to the groups to boost their local activities. It can allow them to resolve certain problems or add value to local resources. Indeed, when exchanges of knowledge and know-how, pooling resources and seeking critical mass provide access to a new market, this can be very useful in injecting dynamism into the rural economy. Cooperation is generally the subject of a **formal commitment** between the partners.

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Objectives of networking

Objectives of networking

▶ Forging links

▶ Exchanges and transfers

▶ Stimulation of cooperation between areas

▶ Capitalising on lessons learned

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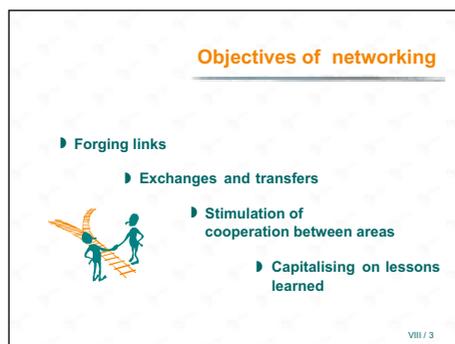
Networking is aimed at all rural areas, public administrations and organisations, whether or not they are beneficiaries of the Initiative.

In order to pool their various experiences, LEADER beneficiaries are asked to contribute to the network dynamic by supplying information about the innovative actions they conduct, and are invited to participate in the seminars organised by the Observatory.

The objectives of networking are to:
> **forge links** between people, projects and rural areas;
> **exchange and transfer** experiences, skills and know-how (reduce isolation, forge links, create channels to facilitate the circulation of information, etc.);
> **stimulate cooperation between areas** by making available to local action groups the information they need to search for partners and technical support for preparing a cooperation action (see slide 9);
> **capitalise on the lessons learned from local rural development** (analysing innovative approaches, actions and practices, modelling the LEADER approach and disseminating its principal lessons). Such "capitalisation" of experience relies on organised exchanges of information between the LEADER European Observatory, National Coordination Units, local action groups and administrations responsible for the Initiative.

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Networks: different types...

Networks : different types ...

Geographical level	Type
- Local	- Institutional
- Regional	- Associations
- National	- General
- European	- Thematic

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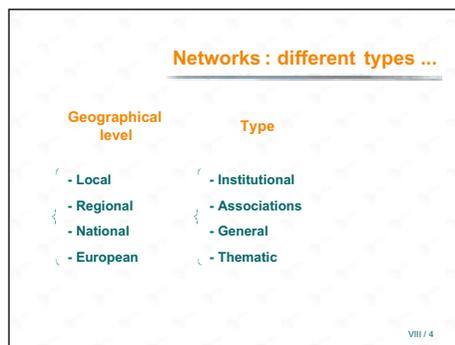
As the Initiative has progressed, the LEADER network has been enhanced. Different types of network exist side by side:

> An **institutional** network funded by the European Commission, which defines its role. The support system for this network is the LEADER European Observatory and the **National Units**.

> Networks of **associations**, set up by LEADER **local or regional** groups (e.g.: Auvergne in France; Aragon and Andalusia in Spain; and Scotland in Great Britain) or national groups (e.g.: the network of Irish and Greek groups) and even European groups ("European LEADER Association for Rural Development" / ELARD). Although these networks receive no funding from the European Commission, little by little some have formalised their organisation by adopting a legal structure. Gradually some **associations have received support from the region or the Member State**.

Networks may be either **general or thematic**. There have been some efforts to set up thematic networks on a transnational cooperation basis.

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... and different roles

... and different roles

Geographical level	Type	Role
- Local	- Institutional	- "Animator"
- Regional	- Associations	- Operator
- National	- General	- Mediator
- European	- Thematic	- Political

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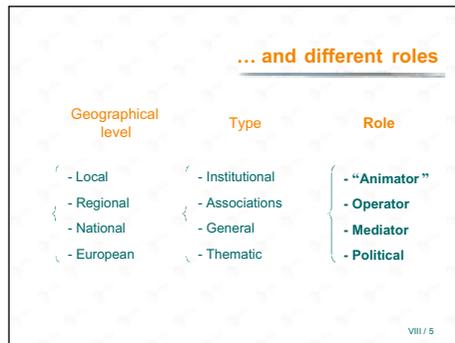
Depending on its structure, objectives and resources, each level assumes one or more roles:

> **Role of "animator"** – To put into contact beneficiaries of the Initiative at all geographical levels (local, regional, national and European); to support and bring to fruition ideas and projects; to facilitate collective and inter-cultural learning processes (seminars); to encourage the acquisition of thematic and methodological know-how.

> **Role of operator** – To help implement the Initiative, for example by acting as an interface between the LEADER groups and public administrations, by circulating information and by fostering dialogue between players at the different echelons (LAGs, regional and national administrations and the European Commission).

> **Role of mediator** – To conceptualise the LEADER approach and to "model" and convey the image of Europe's rural areas. The solidarity between rural areas that gives rise to networks makes collective representation possible.

> **Political role** – To incorporate the lessons learned from LEADER into national and regional policies ("mainstreaming" LEADER).

Mission of the LEADER European Observatory

Under LEADER II the mission of the "LEADER European Observatory" was chiefly to:

> **identify and analyse information** and good rural development practices; provide information on **the development of rural areas** both inside and outside the European Union;

> organise **exchanges of experience** within the network;

> **meet beneficiaries** of the Initiative;

> arrange **exchanges between administrations**;

> **stimulate cooperation** and support for its implementation;

> **analyse the lessons learned** from LEADER.

To achieve its mission, the Observatory has produced tools and services for local action groups, public administrations and other rural players:

> Regular publications in seven languages (monthly "INFO-LEADER" newsletter to keep programme beneficiaries in touch with one another) or in 11 languages (quarterly LEADER Magazine).

> Technical dossiers and directories in seven languages.

> "Rural Europe" Internet site (www.rural-europe.aeidl.be) in six languages.

> Thematic or methodological conferences and seminars.

> A multilingual team to answer requests for information.

> Technical assistance for transnational cooperation ventures.

The impact of networking
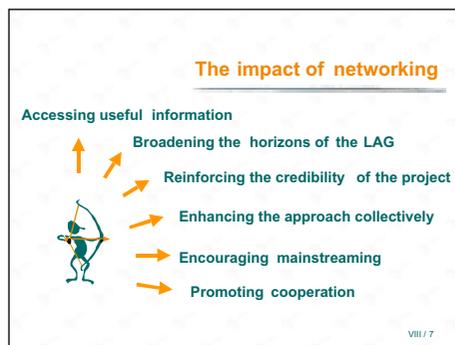
According to feedback from LEADER groups, networking has an impact on a number of different levels. It has made it possible to:

> **Access useful information** for seeking partners, identifying other European sources of funding, identifying "good practices" and using them as inspiration for resolving local problems.

> **Broaden the horizons of the local groups** so as to boost the local credibility of projects, create or reinforce links outside the area, transcend parochialism and break the isolation of rural areas and development agents.

> **Collectively develop and enhance the LEADER approach** through joint research and by capitalising on the lessons learned from LEADER, as well by disseminating the method beyond beneficiaries of the Initiative.

> Encourage this rural development concept to be integrated into other national or regional development policies (**"mainstreaming**" LEADER).

> **Promote cooperation** (see slide 8).

Networking should ultimately save the LAGs both time and energy. With respect to training, for instance, mutual visits have enabled LAGs to acquire experience that has led to numerous innovations.

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Transnational cooperation in LEADER II

Transnational cooperation in LEADER II

46% of groups involved in

255 projects known to the Observatory

Often limited number of partners (3 on average)

Sectors   Agri-food production
Rural tourism
Information technology
Environment and heritage
Rural services

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During autumn 2000, the LEADER European Observatory carried out a study on transnational cooperation conducted under LEADER II.

Technical assistance for LEADER II transnational cooperation ventures was given to more than half the local action groups.

46% of LAGs were involved in one or more of the **255 transnational cooperation actions** known to the Observatory.

In general the transnational actions involved few partners (an average of three, but only two in 46% of projects); 15% involved more than four partners and 18% of such ventures, more than six partners.

LEADER II cooperation actions were mainly in **five sectors**: agrifood production, rural tourism, information technology, the environment and heritage, and rural services.

Irrespective of the sector, the partner LAGs started by focusing on specialised training. Quality control systems were a major concern in the agrifood production and tourism sectors. Networking of producers and service providers was another field explored by many cooperation actions.

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Transnational cooperation in LEADER II

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Sectors
Agri-food production
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Information technology
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Rural services

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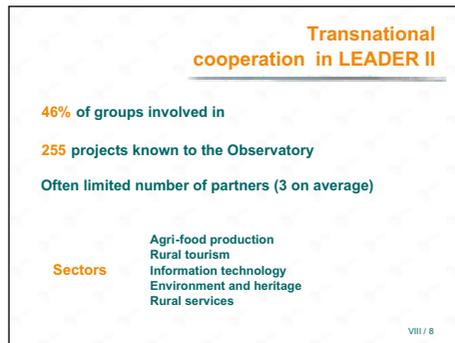
In terms of joint production, cooperation actions were less advanced due to logistical and economic obstacles that were difficult to surmount. However, many cooperation ventures had already boosted the production side of local production chains with new methods, know-how and procedures.

There were numerous promotion-related cooperation actions in all sectors, especially tourism. In most cases this took the form of group promotional activities by creating joint Web sites, brochures, logos and labels and joint participation in fairs and exhibitions.

Cooperation is a long-term approach that often takes several years to come to fruition. In 2000, the joint marketing stage had been reached by only a few cooperation ventures in the tourism and information technology sectors, with actions in the agrifood sector still facing major commercial challenges (e.g. harmonising tax legislation and health standards) before they can successfully engage in cooperation.

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Objectives of cooperation
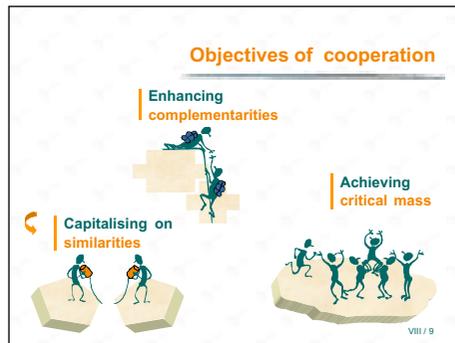
The objectives pursued by the partners are evidently as varied as the themes of the cooperation projects themselves. However, three complementary objectives emerge:

> **Capitalising on similarities –** Some cooperation projects are between LAGs that share a similar resource, based upon which they can develop common actions. Such resources, which cooperation can help to exploit more fully, may be a geographical characteristic (seaside areas with a similar ecosystem, etc.), a cultural heritage (Celtic, Roman, etc.), a specific product (olive oil, chestnuts, wool, etc.), a technological innovation (e.g. the "cyclorail" invention which three LAGs from Spain, France and Germany are seeking to develop, etc.)

> **Enhancing complementarities** – In this case the aim of transnational cooperation is more to associate areas with resources which, though different can be capitalised on by making them complementary. They may be geographical complementarities (e.g. introducing a European adventure race circuit in Scotland, Swedish Lapland and Greece), natural complementarities (North/South migration corridor for cranes through a number of countries, etc.), mastery of complementary know-how (e.g. cooperation to develop a product, such as the case of a Sardinian area producing coarse wool which has allied itself with another Italian area specialising in wool processing and a Spanish area with access to specific wool markets), distribution of work between partners according to their specialisation, etc.

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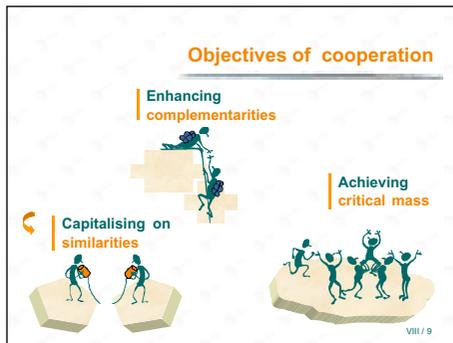
> **Achieving critical mass** – This is undoubtedly what most LEADER groups are seeking to accomplish through transnational cooperation. Rural areas often have a limited amount of resources at their disposal, which does not allow them to resolve certain problems alone or to exploit certain potential to the full. By joining forces, such areas can overcome their limitations and achieve otherwise unachievable results. For instance, it allows them to achieve economies of scale, to jointly offer products, to afford new technology or a new process, or to "take a stand" in order to secure more favourable regulations for the product they wish to develop (case of the LAGs involved in the "Chestnut Route).
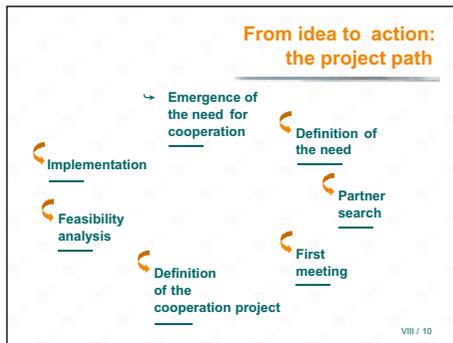
Emergence of the need for cooperation

A need for cooperation can emerge:
> as a result of the area-based analysis;
> as a result of "animation" work;
> during a meeting within an organised context (seminar, meeting, conference, etc.);
> at the request of a group of local players, enterprise or association.

Definition of the need

The need for cooperation will be defined by:
> formulating specific clearly-defined objectives, to be negotiated with the partners;
> putting forward a project that is not yet too elaborate (to be negotiated with the partners) but specifying the type of actions to be conducted in partnership;
> ensuring the active involvement of local players (communication, "animation", etc.).

From idea to action: the project path

From idea to action:
the project path

Emergence of
the need for
cooperation

Definition of
the need

Implementation

Partner
search

Feasibility
analysis

First
meeting

Definition
of the
cooperation project

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Partner search

The search for partners must not begin until the group's own expectations have been specified, in answer to the three following key questions:

> What characteristics are sought in potential partners? Similarity, complementarity, critical mass? Type of rural area, type of structure?

> What does the group expect from these partners?

> What can the group itself contribute?

First meeting between partners

The organisation of a first meeting will, in great measure, determine what happens next with the project. Apart from the objective of getting acquainted and visiting partner areas, the aim is to gauge "what we should do together", and decide whether or not to progress from idea to joint project.

> Is there agreement on the objectives and main thrust of the project?

> Do we have the capacity to work together? In what timeframe?

> What are the respective constraints?

From idea to action:
the project path

Emergence of
the need for
cooperation

Definition of
the need

Implementation

Partner
search

Feasibility
analysis

First
meeting

Definition
of the
cooperation project

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## Definition of the cooperation project

This starts by defining common objectives. These objectives will serve as a reference throughout the process of project development (defining a strategy, producing an action plan, seeking funding, etc.) and implementation. They will be referred to if disputes should arise between the partners and will serve as a "compass" for conducting and evaluating the project.

The next step is to define a joint strategy and establish an action plan for the project. For a transnational project, this phase resembles that for a local project, except that it presents special difficulties due to the fact that it is transnational:

> language barriers can lead to misunderstandings;
> the diversity of backgrounds is not conducive to establishing a common working framework;
> distance naturally tends to weaken the links between partners.

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Feasibility analysis

A feasibility study can make it possible to specify a number of aspects:
> the ability of each organisation to harness financial, human, logistical, time and other resources;
> the impact of the action on the sectors of activity and communities concerned;
> the project's viability (including financial aspects).

Implementation

Conducting a transnational cooperation project is no different from conducting any other type of project. However, a transnational project is conducted at both the transnational and local levels. At transnational level, this entails verifying that operations are running smoothly, managing the funding and evaluating the results of cooperation. At local level, it is more a question of making these results available for local development. The following few pointers may facilitate implementation:
> clearly define a transnational coordinator;
> draw up a management chart so that the progress of the various project components can be verified;
> associate financial managers far upstream of decision-making;
> set up a transnational steering committee.

Qualitative aspects of cooperation

Qualitative aspects of cooperation

Opening up
and cultural melting pot

Emergence of a culture of
cooperation

Spin-off outside the
local group

Learning through
experience

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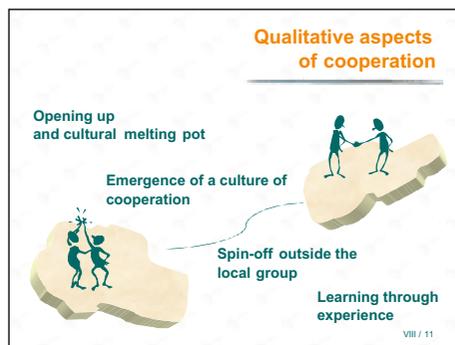
The qualitative and intangible effects most often mentioned are innovation and opening up to the outside world.

As Chapter 6 of the teaching guide deals at length with innovation, here we confine ourselves to identifying the other effects observed in many cooperation actions:

> **Opening-up and cultural melting pot** – A real antidote to parochialism, cooperation enables LAGs to discover the benefits of their diversity, whilst creating common references and a common language, which in turn create new solidarity links. It makes rural areas really open up to the outside world and enriches the local culture through meeting players and people from different cultures.

> **Emergence of a culture of cooperation** – Some areas adopt an explicit strategy of cooperation and partnership at all levels: local, regional, national and transnational. This leads to the spread of a genuine "cooperation culture".

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Qualitative aspects of cooperation

Qualitative aspects of cooperation

Opening up and cultural melting pot

Emergence of a culture of cooperation

Spin-off outside the local group

Learning through experience

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> **Spin-off outside the local action group** – Some LAGs seek to "disseminate" the advantages of cooperation among the different players in their area. This turns the LEADER group into a sort of local agency for facilitating the access of local players (enterprises, associations, etc.) to the transnational level and providing technical assistance (search for partners, access to funding procedures, etc.), without for all that getting involved in project implementation itself. This opens up the entire rural area to cooperation, making it part of a global world where the local level is an asset rather than an obstacle. Differences become a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be resolved by "standardising" products and rural areas.

> **Learning through experience** – For rural players that have chosen to embark on this demanding adventure, LEADER transnational cooperation is also a training tool, a "school for cooperation", providing them with experience that will enable them to avoid numerous pitfalls in their future projects. It also brings with it a "risk culture". For LAGs, it can enhance the locally-formulated development strategy by: confirming the definition of the area, putting into practice new methods of "animation", reviewing the partnership framework, improving access to innovation, identifying new links between sectors, further decentralising decision-making, encouraging the local community to gear up to networking, etc.

Transnational cooperation in LEADER+

**Transnational
cooperation in LEADER+**

☞ **Inter-territorial cooperation**

☞ **Transnational within the Union**

☞ **Areas outside the Union ,
set up according to the LEADER
approach**

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Under LEADER+ there are three levels of cooperation:

> Inter-territorial cooperation – This level of cooperation is open to all rural areas in a single Member State: areas selected under LEADER+, or other rural areas, organised according to the LEADER approach and recognised by the Member State.

> Transnational cooperation **within the European Union**: This applies to LAGs from at least two Member States and possibly to other rural areas, organised according to the LEADER approach.

> Transnational cooperation **with an area situated outside the European Union**, provided that it is organised according to the LEADER approach.

In all three cases, only the costs submitted by the LEADER+ beneficiary area are eligible for Community funding.

Transnational cooperation in LEADER+

Transnational cooperation in LEADER+

☛ **Inter-territorial cooperation**

☛ **Transnational within the Union**

☛ **Areas outside the Union , set up according to the LEADER approach**

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Cooperation ventures must bring real added value to the areas concerned.

They should allow the pooling of know-how and/or human and financial resources scattered throughout each of the areas.

They should form part of the thematic guidelines ("unifying themes") defined by the LAGs in their development plan.

Such cooperation ventures must not remain at the stage of a simple exchange of experiences but must lead to developing a joint action, if possible promoted by a joint structure.

Local cooperation and transnational cooperation are implemented under the responsibility of the LAG heading the project.

Cooperation: a demanding process

Transnational cooperation is intended as a "plus factor" to support the development strategy of the LAGs. However, no matter how appealing cooperation may appear, it is a demanding process that requires a number of factors to be taken into account:

> Transnational cooperation should focus on **important themes** affecting the future of the areas concerned (linked with the unifying theme) which can bring added value to the sectors of activity, practitioners and communities concerned.

> Precisely identifying **the relevance of a cooperation project** demands considerable rigour from the LAG.

> Cooperation requires the **respective interests** to be perceived and articulated in order to successfully define common objectives.

> A transnational cooperation project will develop **"in its own good time"**, usually when the local approach is already well under way (people and local players have been engaged, the overall vision of the area has gained widespread acceptance, the local partnership is operational, the unifying theme and development strategy have been defined and local actions are being implemented).

> Transnational exchanges are never easy to organise. Apart from inter-cultural skills and sufficient funding, they require **time and energy** for a sometimes unpredictable result.

Difficulties and tips to overcome them (1/2)

Difficulties / **Tips**

unclear or over-ambitious objectives → objectives responding to real local needs / well-defined plan of action

coordinating the action → effective coordination structure

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Difficulties and tips to overcome them (2/2)

Difficulties / **Tips**

administrative, financial and legal problems → effective coordination structure / external assistance / realistic budget / combination of public and private funds / suitable legal models

local recognition → good communication

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The **principal difficulties** reported by LEADER II groups concern:
> the transnational partnership (which can be ineffective and unproductive);
> project objectives (unclear or over-ambitious);
> conducting and coordinating the transnational action (due to lack of experience or follow-up);
> administrative, financial and legal problems;
> an inability to gain local recognition for the relevance of the cooperation project.
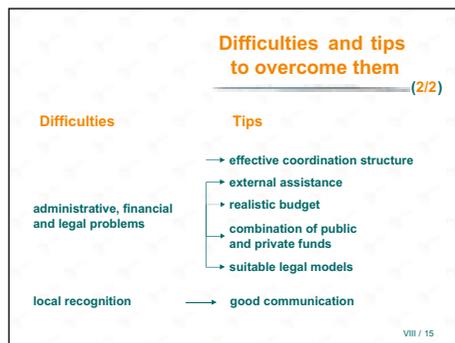
In spite of the wide diversity between LEADER groups in terms of transnational experience and the degree of relevance of chosen cooperation themes, there are a number of **tips for improving the effectiveness** of rural transnational cooperation:
> find good partners and bring them together in a sound and active partnership;
> define a theme and objectives that respond to real local needs;
> properly define the action plan;
> set up a clearly identified and accountable coordination structure responsible for ongoing monitoring and assessment;

Difficulties and tips to overcome them
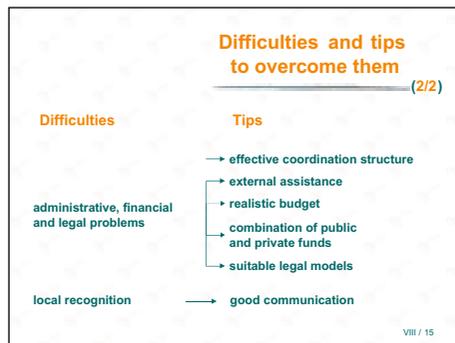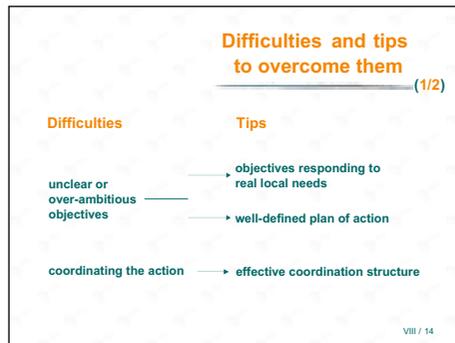
> do not hesitate to call upon external assistance (especially the LEADER Observatory);

> improve project management and endow the cooperation project with a realistic budget;

> do not underestimate language problems (ensure professional translation/ interpretation);

> adopt a broader financial base by combining public and private funding;

> develop and promote legal models designed for transnational associations, organisations and networks;

> Disseminate commonly agreed quality standards more effectively;

> anchor the cooperation project at local level by sticking closely to local needs, by involving the community as much as possible in order to gain its support and by keeping it informed of the progress and results of cooperation.

Looking ahead

A) Participation in networks:

- Why?
- What is the added value?
- What are the obstacles?

B) Transnational cooperation:

- Why?
- What can it bring?
- What are the impediments?

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Why participate in one or more network(s)?

1. To resolve ad hoc problems?
2. To exchange information?
3. To exchange practices?
4. To transfer experience?
5. To search for partners?
6. Other?

What added value does it bring?

1. Reduces the area's isolation?
2. Reduces the "animators'" isolation?
3. Improves local skills?
4. Develops exchanges with players from other areas?
5. Supports innovation?
6. Other advantages?

What are the obstacles to taking part in networks?

Looking ahead

A) Participation in networks:

- Why?
- What is the added value?
- What are the obstacles?

B) Transnational cooperation:

- Why?
- What can it bring?
- What are the impediments?

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What specific contribution can cooperation make to the area?

1. Implementation of local projects that would not have been possible otherwise?
2. Stimulation of innovative actions?
3. Capitalising on similarities or complementarities?
4. Achievement of critical mass that was formerly insufficient at local level?
5. Thematic networking?
6. Other?

What are the specific impediments or difficulties?

1. Setting up the right partnership?
2. Properly defining the project content?
3. Managing the project effectively?
4. The transnational project's lack of relevance to the local level?
5. Legal, administrative or financial aspects?
6. Lack of technical support?
7. Other obstacles?