

Plokkersheem with the class: technology offerings in a rural setting

Rural science, technology, engineering, arts, and maths school modules from LEADER.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Watou, Flanders, Belgium

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER CLLD

Funding:	Total budget	42 919 (EUR)
	EAFRD	10 730 (EUR)
	National/Regional	10 730 (EUR)
	Private/own	21 459 (EUR)

Timeframe: 01/07/2015 - 31/03/2017

Project promoter: CNPV vzw

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Summary

LEADER support helped a youth accommodation centre and local businesses cooperate in Belgium to develop a novel commercial venture attracting school pupils (ages 6-14) to attend rural classes in the West Flanders village of Watou. Pupils received rural education, got to know the local countryside, and experimented with a variety of workshops that were organised by the 'Plokkersheem' youth accommodation facility.

The project focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) topics. For example, pupils visited a carpenter, a company working with stainless steel, a farmer with a milking robot, and a leather worker. LEADER-funded sensory experience focused on tasting farm products, seeing through the eyes of an artist, 'listening to the silence', and feeling different textures on a barefoot path.

Project results

- > 1.5 full-time jobs.
- > 0.5 temporary jobs.
- > 12 different rural STEAM education modules.

- > 11 groups (of about 15 students per group) participated in the project.
- > Establishing a network among five rural entrepreneurs, three knowledge institutions, and numerous schools from various regions across Flanders.

This project successfully immersed students in rural life, blending education with hands-on activities and sensory experiences, thus fostering a deeper connection with the local culture and their learning. Results also help bridge urban-rural divides by fostering a new generation that better understands rural development issues.

Key lessons and recommendations

- > Building a strong network was crucial for the successful construction and maintenance of the educational modules.
- > LEADER's flexibility allows LAGs to support education projects that can increase youth appreciation of rural development issues.



Context

Urban youth can be increasingly disconnected from rural life. Many young people growing up in cities have a limited understanding of rural life. This disconnect can reduce appreciation of rural society.

To help address this gap, the Youth Accommodation Centre “Het Plokkersheem” in Watou (Poperinge, West Flanders, Belgium) developed a comprehensive educational programme. It provides a place for groups of young people to stay overnight and offers a wide range of educational options for schools to choose from. By doing so, they aim to reconnect urban students with the countryside through direct, hands-on experiences.

Their education programme includes site visits where students engage with local experts and artisans. These visits allow pupils to learn about rural traditions. Workshops and activities are designed to be practical and immersive, providing students with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rural environment.

Objectives

LEADER funds were awarded to this initiative with aims to:

- Provide children and young people with high-quality exposure to technology and dynamic technical enterprises in a rural setting.
- Link STEAM education curriculums in schools with farms and rural SMEs.
- Establish a network of local entrepreneurs who collectively promote the innovative narrative of Westhoek in West-Flanders.
- Enable children and young people to explore the societal, economic, and ecological decisions associated with technological advancements by connecting them with inspiring residents and craft workers from Westhoek.

Activities

Activities included initially visiting schools and organising special feedback days to plan the education programme, which was developed to involve mainly visits to rural craft locations. Farms were also included.

Inspiration workshops with local entrepreneurs helped create different educational modules spanning the following themes and concepts:

- **Farm Full of Technology:** Integrating technology into agricultural processes. Building a prototype of a milk pre-cooler.

- **The Wooden Neighbour:** Exploring woodworking and craftsmanship.
- **The Tale of Metal:** Delving into metalworking and its applications.
- **Learn More About Leather:** Unveiling the art and science behind leather crafting.
- **On the Farm:** Discovering agricultural practices and innovations e.g. a dairy farm milking robot.
- **Building with Cardboard:** Exploring structural design using cardboard, e.g. building a chair.
- **Knot Tying: Tangled Up:** Mastering the art of knots and their practical applications.
- **Printing printing printing:** Understanding the world of printing and its techniques.
- **The Kitchen of Ginny:** Exploring different flavours and visiting a lemonade brewery.
- **Plokkelij's Glasses Factory:** Discovering optics and illusions.
- **The Scent Library:** Exploring the science and art of fragrances.

Communication activities about the LEADER project included participation in educational fairs as well as producing videos and news featuring the programme.

Main results

- 1.5 full-time jobs.
- 0.5 temporary jobs.
- 12 different rural STEAM education modules.
- 11 groups (of about 15 students per group) participated in the project.
- Establishing a network among rural entrepreneurs, knowledge institutions, and schools from various regions across Flanders.

Results from the workshops and visits provided hands-on learning experiences for youth, fostering their skills and understanding of rural crafts, including some agriculture.

LEADER funds facilitated cooperation between the youth accommodation centre artisans, SMEs, and farms. This partnership enriched educational opportunities, supported local businesses, and promoted community integration.



Key lessons and recommendations

- > Building a strong network was crucial for the successful construction and maintenance of the educational modules. The presence of experts from knowledge institutions (e.g. Inagro or Vives) helped to guide the process.
- > LEADER's flexibility allows LAGs to support education projects that can increase youth appreciation of rural development issues.

Additional information:

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/plokkersheem

Project webpage:

www.vlaamsruraalnetwerk.be/projecten/plokkersheem-met-de-klas-technologisch-aanbod-een-landelijke-omgeving

Website:

www.plokkersheem.be



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