EU Rural Review

A Publication from the European Network for Rural Development

LEADER and Cooperation

European Commission

European Network for Rural Development

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Welcome to Issue 11 of the *EU Rural Review*. This is the first of a 'new generation' of *EU Rural Reviews* that will take a deeper look at specific issues of interest to the rural development community. For example, this edition has been written and published as a supporting document for the ENRD LEADER event on 27 and 28 April 2012 and focuses upon the inter-relationship between two key elements of the LEADER[1] approach – Local Development Strategies and cooperation.

Local Development Strategies, based largely upon the 20+ years of LEADER experience, are increasingly recognised as effective vehicles for implementing a range of EU policies. In late 2011 the European Commission put forward proposals that introduce common rules for the multi-funding and integrated delivery of local development projects. This is an exciting development that paves the way for local public-private partnerships to seek simultaneous support from EU rural, regional, social and fisheries funds.

Further details are outlined in the article on 'Proposals for the LEADER approach in 2014-2020' (page 28).

Local Development Strategies are an essential component of the LEADER approach and, in combination with available funds, provide Local Action Groups (LAGs) across the EU with the opportunity to map out and pursue a development path that reflects their own unique combination of local assets, resources and aspirations. This edition of the *EU Rural Review* reflects upon the importance of the Local Development Strategy and draws attention (page 34) to the work of a specialist focus group launched by the ENRD in May 2011 that has been looking at how LAGs can improve the quality of their strategies both in terms of design and implementation.

In this issue we take an in-depth look at the role of cooperation in the LEADER approach. During the 20 years that LAGs have been implementing Local Development Strategies, the role of cooperation and the benefits of working with inter-territorial and transnational partners have evolved dramatically (page 6).

Cooperation between local partnerships is now recognised as playing a key role in strengthening Local Development Strategies (page 10) – whether this includes cooperation with other rural areas (inter-territorial and transnational cooperation), or within the same region across the rural-urban divide or between rural and fishery areas. Numerous examples of the multiple dimensions of 'LEADER and Cooperation' have been collected for this issue of the *EU Rural Review* and you will find various practical examples and experiences (pages 14). This includes a more detailed examination of the emerging relationships between LAGs and their equivalent entities funded under axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) – the Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs).

We hope you find the contents of this edition of the *EU Rural Review* both inspiring and informative.

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(1)   You can find a list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this issue of the EU Rural Review on page 42.

Twenty years of LEADER and cooperation

During the 20 years that Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been implementing Local Development Strategies using the LEADER approach, the role of cooperation and the benefits of working with inter-territorial and transnational partners have evolved dramatically.

The LEADER approach was first introduced by the European Commission in 1991 as the LEADER I Community Initiative for rural development, out of a desire to experiment with moving Structural Policy away from single project based funding to a strategic area based approach. Delivery of the pilot LEADER I methodology began with 217 LAGs across various Member States[2]. Despite focusing on the use of networking as a development tool, the approach did not allow for the setting-up of cooperation projects. However, this did not dampen LAGs' enthusiasm to work together and informal partnerships were established through thematic networks, innovation transfer and the exchange of best practice. A survey conducted in 1994 identified that even though formal cooperative working was not then

a part of the LEADER approach, 25% of LAG's were involved in some form of collaboration.

After the successes of LEADER I, and in recognition of the enthusiasm for co-operating more formally, the LEADER II Community Initiative was launched in 1994 with funding available to develop and deliver cooperation projects. The aim was to assist LAGs with the "joint design, production and marketing of goods or services in any area of rural development"[3] and although not compulsory, LAGs were encouraged to cooperate where it would add value to an activity being delivered at a local level. Of the 906 LAGs involved in LEADER II[4], 50% were involved in the 252 transnational projects reported[5] to the LEADER European Observatory.

The decision to open the LEADER method to all rural areas was taken in 2000 with the LEADER+ Community Initiative 2000-2006. Under LEADER+ cooperation was extended to partnership with areas from the same country or from outside the EU. The countries joining the EU in 2004 could also benefit from a LEADER+ type measure[6], and in total 1 153 LAGs were approved in the old and new Member States.

A survey of the LEADER+ European Observatory indicated that in the EU 15 83% of LAGs were involved in inter-territorial cooperation and 68.5% in transnational cooperation.

The *ex post* evaluation of LEADER+ suggested that cooperation projects worked best where there were common interests and concerns, and that the added value

of cooperation and networking mainly lay in being a source of inspiration and best practice for improving the LEADER approach at a local level. Participating in cooperative activity enabled LAGs to reinforce their own local identity and brought local actors together to help create lasting rural networks that would enable future collaboration and cooperation.

In the current programming period (2007-2013) the LEADER approach has been integrated as an Axis of the Rural Development Programmes (the so-called mainstreaming of LEADER) and has involved a near doubling of selected LAGs to 2 308[7] across all EU 27 Member States (although the process of establishing LAGs is not quite completed in Romania and Bulgaria). By January 2012 a total of 209 approved transnational cooperation projects have been notified to the European Commission.

The types of cooperation projects LAGs have entered into can be categorised into five main themes:
• adding value to food and agriculture,
• rural tourism,
• information technology,
• heritage and the environment,
• delivering services in rural areas.

These projects are also providing LAGs with the opportunity to share best practice in the development, management and administration of their Local Development Strategies.

Cooperation and Local Development Strategies

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is the document which brings the LAG together by providing members with a shared vision for the goals and aspirations they want to achieve in their area. If the LAG is properly involved in the preparation of the strategy, and continues to engage in reviewing and developing the elements within it, then a true sense of ownership can be built. This ownership helps to foster local governance and to develop social capital through the LAG, ensuring also that the strategy remains relevant throughout its lifetime. That the

relationship between the LDS and social capital is mutually beneficial has been emphasised during the ex post evaluation of LEADER+, recommending that "Local Development Strategies should clearly focus on the local social capital"[8]. This encourages LAGs to see their LDS

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Programme	Programme Period	Financial Instruments	EU Budget (EUR)	Number of LAGs
LEADER I	1991– 1993	EAGGF-Guidance, ESF, ERDF	450 million	217 in EU-12
LEADER II	1994-1999	EAGGF-Guidance, ESF, ERDF	1.7 billion	906 in EU-15
LEADER+	2000-2006	EAGGF-Guidance	2.1 billion	893 in EU-15 (+ 250 LAGs from the 6 new MS who joined the EU in 2004 implemented a Leader+ type measure)
LEADER axis	2007-2013	EAFRD	5.5 billion → 6% of the EAFRD funding	2 308 (not yet completely selected in BG and RO)

(2)   The EU of 12 Member States prior to the enlargement in 1995, 2004 and 2007.
(3)   Notice to the Member States, OJEC no. C 180 of 1/7/94.
(4)   The EU of 15 Member States since Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995.
(5)   Transnational cooperation under LEADER II. Lessons from the past tools for the future. Rural innovation Dossier No. 11. LEADER European Observatory. March 2001.
(6)   Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the EU in 2004.
(7)   Data as of January 2012.
(8)   Metis GmbH with AEIDL (European Association for Information on Local Development) and CEU (Középeurópai Egyetem / Central European University). Ex post evaluation of LEADER+.

not just as a requirement to obtain project funding, but as a strategy through which the capacity of an area and of the people within it improves, enabling them to engage with local development and to have a greater say in the future of their communities.

According to the *ex post* evaluation of Leader + there is evidence suggesting that 'social' capital in the form of the willingness and capacity of local people to cooperate has been successfully created.

The LDS is also an effective tool for encouraging innovation. Creating clarity within the LDS over what innovation means to the area, how the LAG is seeking to innovate, and how innovation will be encouraged is key to achieving it. The innovation principle of the LEADER approach is not about a narrow, technological definition of innovation, nor is it just about innovative projects, it is first and foremost about innovative approaches and governance styles. Connecting people triggers new ways of doing things; innovation should be included in all aspects of the LAGs' work. The ex post evaluation of LEADER+ suggested that LAGs saw elements beyond their control as the principle obstacles for implementing innovative LEADER strategies, whereas the success factors and solutions were mostly internal and based on good social capital, the capacity to cooperate and their collective ability to translate a shared vision into real projects.

Opening minds through cooperation

LEADER brings together locals with people from other areas. Meetings with other LAGs encourage the emergence of new projects. Rural areas have a limited "stock" of resources which does not enable them to solve certain problems alone, or to take advantage of some of their potential in an optimal way. In contrast, by pooling their strengths, these areas can overcome these limits and achieve otherwise inaccessible results.

Engaging in cooperation gives local actors another perspective on their day-to-day activity. They can contrast their problems with those of other areas and be inspired by ideas implemented elsewhere. As Thomas Müller, manager of the LAG 'Sauwald' in Austria says, "Local people do not need to always invent new concepts because there are so many good projects and ideas across Europe".

The starting point for cooperation is often a reflection on the challenges identified by the local strategy. For example, are there adequate human resources and ideas available in the area to tackle these issues? Cooperation is then seen as a way of solving some local problems or enabling something to be done that a LAG could not do on its own. A more elaborate and systematic search for ideas and partners is then undertaken by the LAG.

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*Number of **Local Action Groups (LAGs) selected per Member States** as of March 2012*
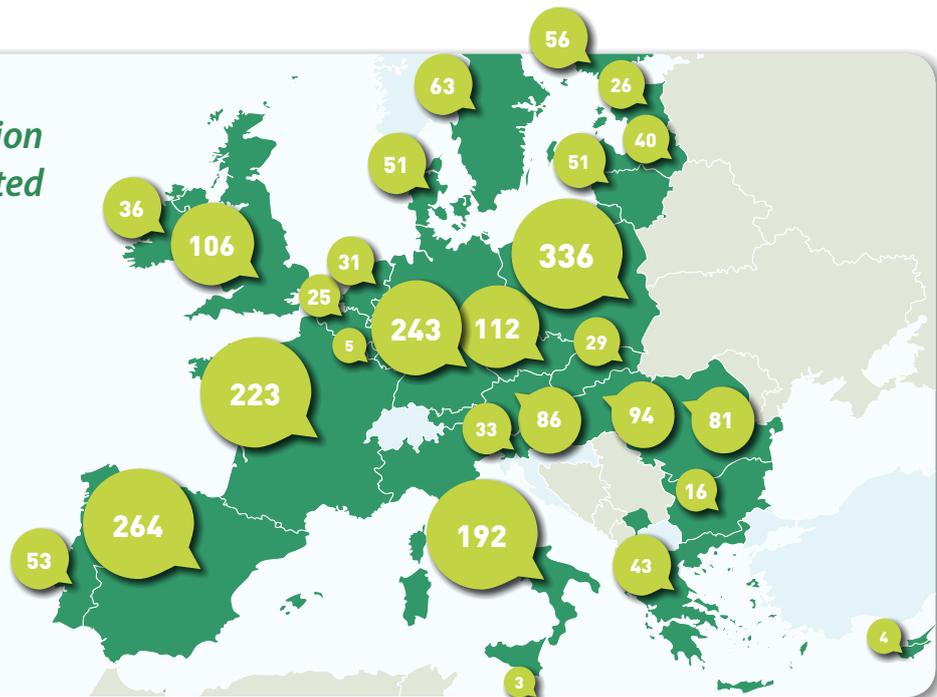
Source: ENRD Contact Point

Ideally, cooperation needs should be identified at an early stage when the LDS is being elaborated, but it often emerges as an issue when implementation of the local strategy is already well underway. Utilisation of the funds earmarked for cooperation is therefore often more delayed than the rest of the programme.

Key lessons regarding cooperation

Developing a robust LDS requires a strong understanding of the LAG area, the challenges it faces and the opportunities that exist to overcome those challenges. One such opportunity is co-operative working. Developing and delivering transnational and inter-territorial projects provides LAGs with an impetus for new ideas and a source of innovation. This process enables LAGs to share experiences and learn together, while the delivery of shared activity allows for funds to be utilised more efficiently and effectively. Through this creative and shared learning process, cooperation projects are able to add real value to a LDS.

An activity, product or service which is common place in one LAG area may be a source of new inspiration in another. Often, working with cooperation partners provides an opportunity to be truly pro-active, entailing intensive engagement with the LDS beyond what single project promoters usually seek to achieve. Sharing experience with partners throughout the collaboration encourages learning, not only for those activities associated with the project itself, but also, more generally, of methods for managing and delivering the LDS and developing the LAG. Most cooperation projects focus on the development of shared activities, products or services and this sharing of development costs enables LAGs to utilise their budgets more effectively. In some cases LAGs are even able to undertake activities that otherwise would have been too costly to achieve on their own.

Finding the right partners, developing a project that suits the needs of all, and delivering that project successfully across country or LAG boundaries can seem somewhat daunting. But as Sarah

Watson, former manager of the 'Chalk and Cheese' LAG in south-west England says, "Cooperation is a lot like dating – you have just got to get yourself out there!".

According to Sarah Watson and other experienced LAG managers, LAGs do recognise that effective cooperative working is more about the long term relationships that are developed between individuals, organisations and businesses working across LAG areas than about the short term projects that the partnership chooses to deliver. Hence, they can start focusing on the quality of the partnership as being the key to success. This on-going partnership development throughout the lifetime of the LEADER approach has resulted in projects that are "…more complete, sometimes more complex, too, but also much more concrete and with better visible tangible results than in the previous generations of the programme"[9].

Nonetheless, it must always be remembered that, to obtain a positive impact, cooperation projects cannot stand alone – they must be strongly rooted in the LDS and the work already taking place locally.

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(9) *Dorothee Duguet (2007). Cooperation in LEADER+: The actual benefits for the local areas. The LEADER+ Observatory Contact Point.*

The role of cooperation in strengthening Local Development Strategies

More than two hundred transnational cooperation (TNC) projects have been or are currently being implemented throughout Europe[10]. While this figure may be impressive at first sight, its significance is limited considering that more than 2 300 Local Action Groups (LAGs) are operational across the European Union during the 2007-2013 EAFRD programme period.

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Despite the enthusiasm with which cooperation is embraced by many LAGs, it is still generally the exception to the rule rather than the norm. LAGs are not obliged to engage in cooperation. The European Commission recommends that LAGs consider the application of their Rural Development Programme's (RDP) cooperation measure[11] at the earliest possible stage, i.e. when formulating their Local Development Strategy (LDS). In the old Member States (EU15) those groups that included cooperation as an approach to address their LDS objectives were given priority during the LAG selection process[12].

A survey on the implementation of the cooperation measure carried out in 2010 by the ENRD Contact Point, on behalf of the LEADER Focus Group, established that the Managing Authorities (MAs) of 45 RDPs obliged or strongly encouraged their LAG applicants to clearly state in their LDS whether they intend to cooperate with other LAGs. However, 38 MAs confirmed they would still support a LAG's TNC funding application, even if

cooperation was not foreseen in its LDS - provided the project is consistent with LDS objectives[13].

In another recent study the ENRD Contact Point established that the National Rural Networks (NRNs) of 18 EU Member States provide dedicated TNC support services to LAGs. Most of them have developed and disseminated cooperation guides and documentation. In addition, some NRNs organise cooperation fairs or workshops, exhibitions and market-place-type events to help with the identification of suitable project partners. The study concluded that more information was needed to encourage LAGs to engage in cooperation with partners from within or outside their Member State.

Understanding the benefits of cooperation

So, why is it that within such a framework of rather favourable and supportive conditions cooperation appears to be the exception? Thomas Müller, manager of the Austrian LAG 'Sauwald' claims to know the

answer. "If you have not experienced it, you won't feel it", he told the participants of last year's ENRD event for new LAGs. "You must be realistic about the objectives, time and effort needed", added José Ángel Garcia Lucas, Cooperation manager of the Spanish LAG 'Adri Jiloca Gallocanta'. They both refer to the same fact: it requires first-hand experience – which often takes as long as a whole programme period to gain – before efforts and benefits of cooperation are understood by local stakeholders. It is usually only then that cooperation finds its way into the LDS.

Some of the examples of cooperation types and benefits that Mr Garcia Lucas provided in his presentation to the participants of the ENRD's Cooperation workshop read like the menu of a typical LAG's strategic objectives:
• "enhanced qualifications of the local population through skills improvement;
• transfer of innovation through the application of new expertise, technology and/or working methods;
• access to new markets through joint business management".

(10) Source: Managing Authorities' LEADER TNC project notifications, submitted via SFC2007 by 02/11/2011. An updated list of notified TNC projects is regularly published on the LEADER Gateway of the ENRD website at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/en/transnational-cooperation_en.cfm
(11) Measure 421 on implementing transnational and inter-territorial cooperation projects of axis 4 funded under the EAFRD.
(12) EC DG AGRI Guide for the application of the LEADER axis of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 funded by the EAFRD (revised version as presented to the Rural Development Committee on 08.03.2011; finalised on 25.03.2011).
(13) These figures do not include the Spanish RDPs, where TNC obtains national funding support only.

According to Mr Garcia Lucas, what these all have in common is the strong need for information – information that can be made available by connecting with the 'outside world'. Whilst continuing to describe[14] how cooperation has become a solution to the challenge of effectively addressing the objectives of his LAG's LDS, he further explains: "With participation in thematic networking you collectively manage an exchange of experiences. This raises awareness about a particular theme and establishes new perspectives. It opens the mind-set of the local people and gives them the confidence that finally enables them to jointly define new norms and methodologies".

Amongst the 200 TNC projects implemented to-date, many provide good examples on how cooperation has become a workable method and effective tool for LAGs to develop future solutions for their local needs.

Information and education for preserving cultural heritage

Cooperation is one of the four main implementation approaches the LDS of the Czech LAG 'Sdružení SPLAV' explicitly refers to. The LAG, which was established in 2004, first gained experience with cooperation projects before the completion of its current strategy, both with partners from the Czech Republic and from abroad – notably with Hungary and Italy in the Local Product Development Network and with Poland in Interreg cross-border cooperation[15].

'Cooperation in Cultural Heritage Exploitation'[16] was the first project that the LAG implemented in accordance with provisions made for TNC in its LDS. The 2007-2013 strategy focuses on topics such as village and rural landscape restoration, preservation of cultural and historical heritage, education, information and tourism. LAG members chose to address these objectives via cooperation,

as TNC was expected to yield access to relevant foreign expertise. Moreover, TNC was seen as a unique opportunity to share knowledge and skills to better use cultural and natural heritage in a sustainable manner.

The transnational cooperation connected municipalities from the Czech regions of Rychnovsky, Kostelecky and from Järva County in Estonia. For many LAG members and individual members of these rural communities, the project offered a first time opportunity to cooperate and work at an international level towards a common goal, sharing useful information about traditions, conservation practices and related legal provisions.

"The beneficiaries of the TNC project now appreciate more the history of their own region. Through cooperation they have developed a stronger sense of identity", emphasizes Kristina Holmova, the Czech LAG's Cooperation manager. Her Estonian counterpart Silva Anspal points out, "A priority of our strategy is to support cooperation and development activities of the community. We encourage people living in our area to engage in social activity and to become acquainted with

the advantages cooperation offers for this purpose." The Estonian LAG Järva Development Partners has chosen this approach to develop and maintain the area's cultural heritage in a sustainable manner, one of the LDS objectives they associate with the improvement of the region's quality of life. "The project has also instigated new local activities in handicraft and photography", she adds. Project beneficiaries say that, through international teamwork, they got to know a different culture, have developed greater tolerance and have also lost their fear of communicating in a foreign language.

The Czech LAG is already set to launch its next TNC projects in 2012. Agreement with two Finnish LAGs has been reached to launch 'Villages without fences' this February. In addition, during this summer international youth camps will be organised with partners from Slovak, Finnish and Belgian LAGs.

Re-establishing historical links to enhance tourism potential

The 'Colmcille Challenge', which started as a rowing race between two rowing

© CONNY WERNITZNIG

Participation in **transnational cooperation projects per country** *as of March 2012*

(based on the number of projects notified to the European Commission)

Source: ENRD Contact Point

clubs from Ireland and Scotland, ended up being supported by LAGs from their respective areas. In a joint effort, the initiative was developed further by integrating it with the idea of a 'Festival of the Sea' which seeks to increase volunteer participation and to promote skills training.

"The project addressed specific objectives of our strategy", confirms Gillian McColgan of the Inishowen Development Partnership (County Donegal, Ireland), "Bringing communities together in a common cultural endeavour, new linkages have been made and old ones rekindled." In its current LDS, the LAG aims to address geographical and cultural links with Scotland trough transnational relationships, thus accessing Scottish expertise in coastal and maritime heritage and creating a baseline for further joint economic development.

The actual project included exchange visits before and after the main event, which served to coordinate festival activities and to discuss further links and opportunities for cooperation between the partner communities. Transnational meetings focused on the preparation of awareness raising events and workshops to highlight the shared heritage of both areas. Members of both local communities provided their knowledge to prepare exhibitions of heritage, modern coastal

rowing boats and rafts, traditional music and dance, historical walks, arts, crafts and photo exhibits, folklore storytelling, cooking demos celebrating local seafood, and talks and lectures about environment, coastal wildlife and safety at sea.

The cooperation project was successful in actualizing the strategic purpose of the learning partnership with Scotland – theme and product development for tourism. "The potential for tourism development between both communities has received a tremendous boost and the quality of life for both communities is greatly enhanced by a sense of community purpose" says Lorna Elliott from the Argyll and the Island's LAG (Islay, Scotland).

Accessing artistic skills to stimulate village renewal

"We planned our cooperation project for quite a long time," says Eila Heikkilä of the Finnish ITU arts association. "When we applied for funding to Louna Plussa LAG for the first time in 2008, the guidelines for TNC projects were not ready in Finland." Their project 'Woven Together' brought together the creativity, skills and knowledge of artists from two rural areas in Finland and Austria, drawing on different cultural origins and backgrounds.

Both Ms Heikkilä and Conny Wernitznig, manager of the Austrian partner LAG 'Mühlviertler Kernland', are in agreement that it was worth waiting and making their first ever attempt to apply for TNC funding support under the new RDPs. The Finns highlight their experience of the Austrian-led workshops in Finland in which they found out about ancient clay modelling methods. "We learned that the local clay near our art storehouse is suitable for ceramics and that it is possible to create pottery with very simple methods and tools". Access to the Finnish expertise in methods such as glass blowing, glass bead production, water colour painting and yarn spinning also provided the participating Austrian artists with valuable inspiration.

The local artist association 'Schaufenster (='Shop window') Freistadt' uses old village facilities such as abandoned grocery shops to present and disseminate art among the wider rural public. Ms Wernitznig is therefore convinced that the knowledge acquired in the joint workshops will enable them to further contribute to the region's strategic objective of stimulating village renewal. She is also convinced the Finnish partners will pursue similar objectives. Both groups will remain in touch and have agreed to continue their cooperation for another ten years.

The multiple dimensions of LEADER and cooperation

Over the 20 years of implementing the LEADER approach, Local Action Groups (LAGs) have sought to learn from one another in both formal and informal ways. As the experience of working cooperatively has grown, so has the complexity of projects and also the complexity of the funding packages used to deliver them.

The cooperation measure under axis 4 of the Rural Development Policy for 2007-2013, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in accordance with article 65 of Council (EC) Regulation 1698/2005, enables LAGs to undertake joint actions with another LEADER group or with a group taking an approach similar to LEADER in another region, EU Member State, or even a third country. Joint actions are carried out on the basis of a partnership agreement, with its implementation being coordinated by a lead partner LAG.

All cooperation projects must lead to clearly identifiable deliverables, which produce benefits for all the rural territories involved. Based on mutual learning, cooperation is expected to result in real added value for the participating areas. Access to new information and ideas enables cooperating partners to jointly address a specific local development issue. Almost 5% (€265 million) of the total EAFRD funding has been budgeted for implementing both inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects.

As a tool for delivering Local Development Strategies (LDS), cooperative activity provides LAGs with the confidence to innovate. Working together, sharing the risk and utilising each other's experience increases the chances of success. With the majority of cooperation projects being developed and delivered by LAGs themselves (rather than by project promoters applying for funding), they provide the opportunity to follow through effectively with the LDS in a way that individual project promoters may not achieve.

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Despite the growing experience with co-operation, such projects remain time consuming and challenging to develop. The support provided has made it far easier to identify suitable partners; however, agreeing on the details of the project, responsibilities and funding can still prove challenging when working across language, cultural and administrative boundaries[17]. Despite these challenges there are already a number of project examples that provide evidence of how cooperation efforts by rural communities in the current programme period produce tangible results.

The cooperation measure makes provision for groups to carry out joint preparatory activities, during which potential partners can meet, discuss and develop a potential cooperation project. Although such partnership development activities are not always successful, they help determine the viability of a shared cooperation idea and of the potential partnership itself. The Finnish led 'Innovative Village' project (**Example 1**) has undergone a nine month development period with partners from Spain, Estonia and Ireland, using a Goal Orientated Project Planning approach. This has enabled the partnership to create a framework for their project by first focusing on what they wanted to achieve and then agreeing on the actions and activities that would support them to do this. The resulting framework will meet the needs of all the LAGs involved, thus creating the foundation for a strong partnership.

After a successful project development phase the majority of cooperation projects are implemented under EAFRD measure 421. Such projects bring LAGs together to work on a range of activities which help them overcome shared challenges or make the best use of their existing resources. The German and Austrian 'Lebensqualität durch Nähe' project (**Example 2**) demonstrates how working together to creatively address the shared issue of diminishing services in rural areas has enabled both LAGs to develop their own locally appropriate responses.

Recognising that cooperation benefits the development of shared resources,

adjoining LAGs who share a resource such as a landscape area or cultural tradition are also encouraged to collaborate. The Cheviot Futures initiative initially devised a project aimed at supporting landowners and farmers to develop techniques which mitigate climate change in the Cheviot Hills of northern England (**Example 3**). They then realised that developing a cooperative project with their neighbouring LAG would allow them to work throughout the whole river catchment area and so support all those working the land across this landscape feature, disseminating the benefits of the project more widely.

Measure 421 has also been used to transfer the LEADER approach to non-EU countries. In addition to the general benefits from cooperation, involving a so-called third country also provides the opportunity for non-EU stakeholders to learn how to implement the LEADER approach from their partner LAGs. In the case of the Alps Mura Fishing Region cooperation is also used in a cross-border context involving adjacent rural areas (**Example 4**). The partners managed to develop tourism throughout a landscape feature that stretches beyond national borders and beyond the boundaries of the EU.

LAGs have also used other EAFRD measures to initiate relationships between partners before a formal cooperation project takes place. The Estonian tourism network 'Genuine Experiences in Lahemaa' (**Example 5**) received funding from their LAG through measure 341, enabling them to develop their network and strategy and to start development work with 2 Finnish LAGs in Kymenlaakso. The opportunity to deliver this initial successful project has given the Estonian group the confidence to work cooperatively and they are now embarking on a transnational project with their Finnish partners to add value to the project they have already delivered at a local level.

In the same way cooperation through the LEADER approach has evolved, so have some cooperation partnerships and the projects they have chosen to implement. The Spanish and French Ornithological

Tourism cooperation (**Example 6**) began as a concept in LEADER I, and has adapted and grown with each phase of LEADER into the project we see today. The long-term engagement with a project and its partners allows LAGs to take a more strategic approach which incorporates cooperation in a way that ensures the effective implementation of their LDS.

Many cooperation projects have acquired new partners over time, building cooperative momentum around shared interests. A popular theme for cooperation continues to be local food. The 'Transnational Cooperation in Local Food' project (**Example 7**), involving fourteen different LAGs, is a good example of how LAGs can work together on a common theme and establish networks and trading systems which operate at a European level.

Joint action with other local public-private partnerships within the same region is also facilitated by the existence of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs), which are supported by the EFF (European Fisheries Fund) in the programming period 2007-2013. FLAGs and LAGs working together, often with shared administrative resources, have set up a range of projects which draw on two funding sources. Individuals and organisations in the Noteć Valley in Poland (**Example 8**) have been delivering a range of activity in the area for several years. The introduction of a FLAG that complements the existing LAG has opened up new funding avenues for projects that make a real difference to the fishing industry and the rural communities of the valley.

As more LAGs experience cooperative working awareness of the benefits of these projects increases. Flexibility in funding allows LAGs to take cooperative ideas towards a more strategic direction, bolstering their confidence to embark upon transnational working. Flexible funding also enables all elements of axis 4 to work together, generating multi-faceted benefits to rural areas and maximizing the developmental potential of the EAFRD.

EXAMPLE 1: Innovative Village - Bringing partners together

Since April 2011 the JAMK University of Applied Sciences School of Business and Services Management, and five LAGs including Viisari and Jyväs Riihi in Central Finland, have been developing a transnational cooperation project called 'Innovative Village'. This project aims to enhance service delivery in rural areas and hopes to pilot and evaluate methods for stimulating locally deliverable models of rural service provision. Furthermore, it seeks to empower local communities with the skills and knowledge required to deliver the services their villages need.

Access to basic services in rural areas is a common issue across all Member States. When the project was initially promoted through the Cooperation Offers section of the ENRD website and a short description was circulated through European contacts, 28 LAGs responded by enquiring about how to become involved. Online discussions took place prior to the first development meeting with the 10 LAGs which ultimately chose to participate.

To overcome the challenges of working with a range of different partners, JAMK University delivered the workshop using Goal Orientated Project Planning (GOPP), anticipating that this approach would help break down cultural and language barriers while helping participants' to develop shared goals. The GOPP approach provides a systematic structure for identifying, planning and managing projects, developing a planning matrix or logical project framework, which summarises and structures the main elements of a project and highlights logical linkages between intended inputs, planned activities and expected results.

Outi Raatikainen from JAMK University says: "GOPP worked well for us. There were 12 people in the group which is an ideal size, and the method needs a trained facilitator which we had from JAMK. Everybody was equally engaged in the work, all opinions were taken into account and democratically discussed and voted on. All in all, communication through GOPP was surprisingly easy despite the fact that the level of English of the participants varied - the ideas were both spoken aloud, written down, and often also explained and discussed through".

By the end of 2011 the JAMK and the five LAGs of Viisari and Jyväs Riihi, the North East Region Rural Development Group in Northern Ireland, the Asociaciónpara el Desarrollo Rural Comarcal de la Hoya de Huesca ADESHO in Spain and Tartumaa Arendusselt in Estonia had completed their application for funding, and hope that the Innovative Village project will begin in 2012.

Kristiina Liimand from Tartu Rural Development Association has been active in developing the project idea: "I think it's very important to pay attention to the process of project development and the team of partners. Involving all partners from the beginning to create a common understanding about the project ideas and outcomes ensures that the project will be successful. Through this process it has been a pleasure to get to know each other and to develop a project which meets all partners' needs and expectations."

© OUTI RAATIKAINEN / INNOVATIVE VILLAGE

EXAMPLE 2: Working together to improve quality of life

The 'Quality of Life through Proximity' project ('Lebensqualität durch Nähe – LQN') is working to ensure that basic services and local supplies are available in rural areas, addressing the principal challenges of rural demographic change and the current economic climate. More and more grocery stores, banks and post offices are withdrawing from rural areas, too burdened by the economic pressures of high maintenance costs and low purchasing power. The participating LAGs from Germany and Austria hope to find solutions to maintain or even improve the quality of life in their areas.

The LQN cooperation project aims to support local communities with the development of innovative and integrated activities which deliver all inclusive services and provide a supply of local food. The project will become sustainable as it directly targets the needs of communities, encourages the participation of committed local people and draws support from the transnational cooperation dimension. The sharing of new ideas, the fresh impetus that comes with working with new partners and the consideration of examples of innovative practice are expected to help develop new approaches to service delivery.

"The partner regions discovered they have very similar problems and therefore they wanted to cooperate to support each other with the development and implementation of solutions", says Ingrid Engelhart, the LQN project coordinator of the German lead partner LAG Nordschwarzwald.

Visits of partner regions focused on flagship projects aimed at safe-guarding quality of life in rural areas. Transnational training courses, held in both the Austrian and German partner regions, comprised six modules and a final symposium. Thereafter, participants developed solutions adapted to their own specific local needs. For example, elderly people will now have a dedicated point of contact if they need help, innovative forms of housing and care which include regular meetings, recreational dates and day care for people with dementia are being established, and centres providing local food and other essential goods, coupled with public and private services, social and medical care, communicative and cultural services are being trialled.

The development strategies of the partnering LAGs all share a focus on securing the quality of life by maintaining the supply of basic services and needs. "Through cooperation we have identified an innovative concept and hopefully a long-term solution for how to economically operate a shop in one of our villages, despite the low purchasing power of its population", explains Andreas Schilcher, manager of the LEADER Region Nationalpark Kalkalpen, one of the Austrian partner LAGs.

Given such positive experiences the participating LAGs want to cooperate in other projects. Among them is the plan to jointly initiate and implement innovative, 'barrier-free' forms of living for elderly people, including a care option, thus stimulating village revival and renewal.

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EXAMPLE 3: Cheviot Futures – cooperating over climate change

The Cheviot Hills is a range of rolling hills in the north of England, straddling the English Scottish border. The project was developed by a cooperative of representatives from agencies and organisations involved in working with rural communities in and around this area.

The 'Cheviot Futures Initiative' began with an initial project focusing on the Tweed river catchment area which helped farmers and land managers to take steps to adapt to a changing climate through a series of demonstration projects that looked at developing farming techniques and sharing best practice. A series of short projects addressed the various impacts of climate change faced by rural communities, such as increased flooding and run off of carrying soils and pollutants, drought, wildfire, wind erosion and the effects on grouse, sheep and salmon.

Uplands LAG manager Tom Burston says "The benefits of working collaboratively on this issue are numerous, not least because land management practices and changing climate conditions do not obviously fit with LEADER boundaries. For example, some of the work undertaken by the project is based on river catchment areas, which cross LAG boundaries. Also, similar land conditions are found on both sides of the border so lessons and good practice can be shared between Northumberland and the Scottish Borders".

The second phase of Cheviot Futures is about raising awareness of the predicted threats and opportunities of climate change in the area and aims to take simple practical approaches to land management that focus on adapting to the effects of climate change. This is being achieved through the sharing of best practice to support and, where appropriate, diversify rural businesses. The key is the continuous engagement with farmers and land managers to develop and adopt new sustainable solutions to address the impact of climate change. These solutions deliver wider community and economic resilience and also support local businesses by helping them to become more resilient to climate change phenomena.

The project provides an adviser, who works directly with farmers and land managers to enable them to incorporate climate adaptation measures into their business practices, including the roll-out of the recently developed and successfully piloted farm flood plans. The project officer will also create an exhaustive catalogue of projects and best practice guidance so as to have a lasting impact on the way farmers and land managers within the catchment area reduce the risk of flooding and improve their overall resilience to climate change. The approach reflects the needs of land managers and ensures that the emphasis continues to be on practical solutions to real problems, hence encouraging other land managers to also invest in adaptation measures.

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The success of this first project encouraged Cheviot Futures to work over a larger catchment area and so an inter-territorial LAG project, working with both the Northumberland Uplands LAG and the Scottish Borders LAG, was developed. Northumberland

EXAMPLE 4: Alps Mura Fishing Region – A preparatory action for cross-border cooperation

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A number of independent fishing clubs and associations exist in the Alpine lowlands and along the Mura River that flows through Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary. In 2006, three of these fishing associations met for the first time to discuss freshwater fishing issues and possible solutions.

Meetings between the Kerka Fishing Association of Kerkaszentkirályi (HU), the Lendava Fishing Club (SI) and the 'Karas' Sports Fishing Association of Peklenica (HR) continued on a regular basis, and led to the production of a joint paper, 'Mura binds us together', in which the fishing associations summarised cooperation ideas and linked activities. One of these ideas was to coordinate fishing tourism throughout the partner regions in order to enhance the tourism offer, encourage the development of new businesses and the creation of new jobs – the latter being a strategic ambition shared by all partners. A TNC preparatory project involving the participation of LEADER and LEADER-like groups from Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia (due to join the EU in 2013), was developed to support the partners' collaborative working. The opening seminar of the project was held in February 2012 and will culminate in the joint organisation of the first ever 'Alps Mura Fishing Day' in late summer 2012.

The Hungarian lead partner LAG 'Zala Zöld Szíve Vidékfejlesztési Egyesület' highlights that the members of the fishing associations are also local residents and have participated in formulating and delivering the project. The LAG expects that this will strengthen the associations' involvement in their local community. At the same time, the transnational partners emphasise their commitment to the key environmental objectives promoted by the EU's Water Framework Directive for surface water, groundwater and water management of protected areas.

The Kerka Fishing Association of Kerkaszentkirályi is convinced that having an integrated plan for fishing tourism extending beyond the limits of its own LAG area will lead to increased numbers of overnight stays and the development of new services, benefiting the local economies of all participating areas. Others also share this vision, with the Burgenland Fishing Association from Austria (further upstream on the Mura River) having already declared its interest in joining the partnership in the near future.

EXAMPLE 5: Genuine Experiences in Lahemaa – starting cooperation through axis 3

The Lahemaa National Park is situated in Northern Estonia, 70 km east of Tallinn, and at 725 km2 it is the largest National Park in Estonia. In 2005, the Lahemaa National Park Visitors Centre formed a network for entrepreneurs together with 17 rural tourism enterprises in the region (16 farm stay businesses and a private museum). The network is called 'Genuine Experiences in Lahemaa'.

The network developed its tourism offer focusing on the farm tourism businesses' unique position in the natural and cultural environment of the area. Offering a tranquil setting where visitors can experience nature, local foods and handicrafts, they also propose a range of outdoor activities and history-themed trips. All the businesses in the network also agree to use natural resources sustainably, to conserve and use historical heritage and promote the cultural assets of the area.

Established as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the network received funding through measure 341 from their LAG to enable them to develop their network and its strategy, and to start working with 2 Finnish LAGs in Kymenlaakso. This enabled the network to develop a shared logo and web-page for the joint promotion of their businesses and to exhibit at the national tourism fair in Tallinn. Members of the network also received training on using the internet as a marketing tool to ensure that they were able to make the best use of the resources provided. To prepare the transnational project the funding also enabled the network to provide a two day introductory tour of all the member businesses for partners, representatives of the press and members of the Finnish LAGs.

Working together through this initial LAG funded project has enabled network members to develop an open and honest relationship with each other. Taking responsibility for the success of the network, working together to develop common products and services and to deliver joint marketing has made the small farm businesses more visible. This has decreased their individual marketing costs, given them a stronger position in the market place and helped them secure funding for development and cooperation projects.

The initial project has provided the network with the confidence to develop a two year transnational cooperation project supported by measure 421, called 'Loving Local Values', with the two Finnish groups. Through this project the groups will share experiences and work together to build a sustainable tourism network across the Baltic Sea region. They will link with each other's tourism associations, develop more shared services and products and support young people so that they can become involved with their local entrepreneurs and NGOs. This will include a three day study tour for 14 to 26 year olds to each rural region. Support will also be provided for cooperation between handicraft and local food producers; this will include seminars, study tours, working closely with local organisations, participating in promotional food competitions and creating an Estonian-Finnish recipe book. The partners also hope that this project will enable them to find new partners that will strengthen the network further.

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EXAMPLE 6: European Network for Ornithological Tourism (RETO) – Building long-term relationships through cooperation

Thanks to the commitment of the Spanish LAG 'Adri Jiloca Gallocanta' to develop socio-economic opportunities around the Gallocanta Lake, the Spanish and French Ornithological Tourism cooperation has been going strong since LEADER I and therefore developed through all the stages of the LEADER approach. The migration of one particular bird, the crane, was used as the link between LAG areas to begin discussions around a cooperation project.

During LEADER II, LAGs from Spain, Sweden, Germany and France came together to cooperate with artisans across the areas to build a European network of sustainable municipalities along the migratory route of cranes. The main actions included sharing experiences, the production of a film explaining the route and the conceptualisation of a variety of material for tourists.

LEADER+ saw the network expanding its remit from working only with cranes to all bird species, with 17 partners from Spain and France and a budget of €933 549. The cooperation created a tourist network around zones such as Natural Parks which provided special protection to birds.

During the current period of the LEADER approach the tourism network of nature observation areas for the Natura 2000 network was established. Several LAGs had seen natural and cultural resources such as birds utilised to develop rural areas and were interested in joining the project. Initially the Jiloca Gallocanta LAG had talked with their partners from LEADER II and had searched for new partners with important natural areas for birds, visiting groups in France, Germany and Spain. Finally, 15 LAGs started the project, with two more groups joining later. The Spanish partners received support from national funds while the two French partners (Pays Combraille en Marche, Regional Natural Park La Brenne) were supported by the EAFRD.

Working together, the LAGs developed a joint communication plan and an official project presentation. They provided environmental information to their local area, developed nature classrooms, and delivered a conference for environmental volunteers. Focusing on tourism, a strategy was developed and tourist packages created, as well as research and implementation of tourist management systems, formation of the tourist sector and a best practice manual. An internet site has also been developed, which is available at **www.retoeurope.com**.

The LAGs have equally undertaken individual activities appropriate to their area, including delivering training courses for tour guides and developing art and music linked to the birds of most importance to them. There are now 30 Spanish LAGs cooperating to capture the socio-economic benefits from the conservation of nature for local communities, entrepreneurs and tourists, and to support local and global development plans in Natura 2000 areas. The budget for this initiative amounts to €378 000 between 2009 and 2011.

A socio-economic evaluation has been undertaken in relation to the work carried out by the various LAGs, concluding that the project had a very positive impact on conservation and the redevelopment of species and their habitats. It was also evident, however, that further assessment was required concerning the ability of the project to add value to the local tourism products offered and to thereby create sustainable economic benefits. With support from the Spanish Ministry of Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, the partners will estimate the economic potential of nature watching tourism developed in each LAG area. This will encourage the tourism sector's participation in developing sustainable tourism strategies that generate wealth in rural areas.

From his experience of working on the network, José Ángel Garcia Lucas says, "Cooperation can be the over-arching tool for management of LAG areas because it is not reliant on a specific project applicant; instead it moves a whole area forward under the strategy that it has decided upon itself".

© RETO NATURA 2000 (ADRI JILOCA GALLOCANTA)

© RETO NATURA 2000

EXAMPLE 7: Transnational collaboration in short food supply chains

Fourteen LAGs from Finland, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and Poland came together to develop short supply chains for local food across the EU. The partners are cooperating to find out more about best practice examples of production, marketing and distribution in each other's areas, and to identify and disseminate regulations associated with the transportation of food between partner countries. They also seek to pilot trading relationships between partners to market and sell local products across regions and to explore the links between agriculture and tourism.

To achieve this, partners are facilitating exchanges between producers wanting to learn production and marketing techniques. Over 55 producers have already participated in these exchanges which have resulted in products from a French producer being sold on a Dutch website, and Dutch products being sold in Finland.

Four international food markets are to be developed in France, French Guyana, Hungary and Poland. The first one of these is taking place in Le Puy en Velay from 10-12 May 2012 where an existing historic market will be used to sell products from partner LAGs producers, promote the different regional areas and raise awareness of the project itself.

Béatrice Sauvignet is coordinating the event and she says "We are very pleased to host the first European market in Le Puy en Velay. This event is the catalyst for us to bring together European countries and their producers to exchange both food and ideas! The organisation of this event is really motivating and rewarding because I have a lot of contact with the different countries. My job is very varied and interesting, I make links between the different projects which will be presented at our event, answer different queries from the partners, and ensure the quality of documents so everybody is able to understand each other. It is a big challenge, but I am still interested in finding new European partners and countries so if you want to taste Le Puy en Velay and to join us, don't hesitate to call me!"

Béatrice's motivation for working on a transnational project is clear, she says, "Europe is all about the quality of life of the people who live here. People need to meet each other, to share and to move forward together."

EXAMPLE 8: The Noteć River joins us – partnership building with Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) in Poland

Over the last ten years the communities of Nakło and the surrounding area have developed various projects, funded by a range of sources, to engage with the Noteć river as part of the environmental, social and economic heritage of their area.

In June 1996 the Maritime and River League applied for support to return the management of rivers to local communities and to organise communities to respond to this opportunity. In May 2000, after seeing the success this brought elsewhere, five towns and three communes signed the founding act of the Association of Towns and Communes upon the Noteć River and the shared strategy for 2000-2020 was agreed. Its main goals include improving the condition of the natural environment, restoring and developing tourist and leisure opportunities in the Noteć Valley, the development of wharfs and the construction of marinas, organisation of events, development of aquatic sports, and controlling water degradation. This strategy has been financed through a range of different sources.

The first activities were funded through national sources and included the creation of specific brands for the Noteć Valley and its communities. These were developed through the Tourist Product Development Program via the Polish Tourism Development Agency in Warsaw. In the Nakło Notecią area, activities to develop tourism in the Noteć Valley in line with the "Green Valley Notec" concept were financed by the Polish Ministry of Economy.

By 2006 the area had been granted funding under Interreg IIIB for a project called 'In Water' to utilise inland watercourses for regional development in cooperation with areas along the E70 waterway. This project provided the foundation for subsequent activities to promote the region in Poland and Europe, including the development of a shared tourism website to encourage visitors to the area. The project was run by the Association of Towns and Communes upon the Noteć River, with the main partner being the Inland Navigation School in Nakło and Notecią, which is the only secondary school of its kind in Poland.

From 2006 to 2008 the 'Noteć River Joins us' project became the cornerstone for a LEADER+ Pilot Programme, which was launched by the Foundation Partnership for Krajna and Pałuki. From the beginning the LAG cooperated closely with the association and planned complementary activities and projects which combined water and inland activity for the benefit of local communities. The success of the LEADER+ pilot project led to the launch of the LAG's new Local Development Strategy for the Association Partnership for Krajna and Pałuki in 2009.

The area was awarded Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) status through the 'Our Krajna and Paluki' FLAG, whose local fisheries strategy for 2010-2015 is funded by the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). The main activities of the FLAG are associated with the hundreds of hectares of traditional karp fish ponds in the Noteć Valley.

One of the major projects in the area is the building of a marina. This has been led by Nakło County Self Government (Powiat Nakło) which also manages the Inland Navigation School, a key partner in this project. Funding for the construction of the Marina and an associated educational project was given by the ERDF Regional Programme for Kujawsko-Pomorskie.

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Ryszard Kamiński, Chairman of the LAG and a committee member of the FLAG, says "The role of the LAG and, from 2011 also our new FLAG, is to build a platform of cooperation to make all these separate projects and actions more comprehensive and ensure they complement each other. The LAG and FLAG will be working together in partnership, supporting projects, but most of all building a platform of real cooperation between local stakeholders from different sectors."

Networking to promote Transnational Cooperation

Networking is central to supporting transnational cooperation (TNC) between rural stakeholders. The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) offers several tools to promote such exchanges at EU level. Through their thematic and geographic cluster structure the National Rural Networks (NRNs) complement this effectively and actively. Other relevant EU initiatives have now also launched specific actions that contribute to increase this overall networking effort for TNC.

So, how do the ENRD and NRNs contribute to promote TNC via their cooperation events and web-based tools?

Firstly, it is important to understand that the current approach of the ENRD and NRNs is built upon past networking experiences within LEADER. This approach encourages exchanges and cooperation between all actors implicated in rural development policy, with a particular focus on key networking stakeholders, i.e. NRNs and Local Action Groups (LAGs). The ENRD promotes networking and supports transnational cooperation initiatives and projects in a variety of ways, including through its participation and organisation of cooperation events across Europe and through web-based interactive tools, which include:

• A guide for LEADER transnational cooperation providing both practical and administrative information for LAGs and project holders;

• A database of registered LAGs within Europe, as well as a summary of their strategy themes and contact details;

• A database of Cooperation Offers, which consists of a list of project ideas where project promoters are seeking to identify additional partners from other countries;

• A thematic intranet discussion forum accessible to LAGs.

The ENRD LAG events - namely the "LEADER as a driver for Rural Europe: workshop for new Local Action Groups" held on 19-20 January 2011 and the "Local Development Strategies and Cooperation: Key Approaches to Local Development" event planned for 27-28 April 2012 - give LAGs the opportunity to find potential partners with similar interests and project ideas for TNC. Thanks to dynamic and participative networking tools and methods, e.g. a cooperation market, thematic cooperation corners (on economic development, environment, social dimension, tourism, agriculture and food, etc.), and a video corner, LAG participants can experiment with cooperation on-site. They also benefit from mentoring and assistance regarding the management of different project phases and partnership management, with the support of NRNs and TNC experts.

Those means of networking at EU and national or regional levels have built upon experiences from previous LEADER programmes. The *ex post* evaluation of LEADER+ showed that networking could be enhanced if benefits are clearly articulated and geared to solving common problems. Also the evaluation confirmed the strong role of the NRNs in both identifying such needs and working with partners in other countries to create appropriate fora to engage with interested LAGs. In that context, "there were clear strong calls for more face to

face meetings that enable more recurring cooperation activities". The *ex post* evaluation finally recommended that "targeted opportunities for peer learning for LAGs must be further developed, both within and between countries", and concluded that "the networking units at regional, national and European level are of great value to stabilize the flows of exchanging and creating knowledge at larger scales".

NRNs are providing a variety of technical support to LAGs, strengthening their capacity to act through exchanges of ideas, providing training for new LAGs and facilitating the emergence of transnational cooperation projects.

NRN joint actions as leverage to support transnational cooperation at EU level

Increasingly the NRNs participate in thematic and geographic clusters to promote technical exchange between networks and greater cooperation between rural development stakeholders.

NRN thematic joint initiatives bring together NRNs which express a common interest in specific areas of Rural Development Policy and programme implementation. NRNs which deliver

thematic technical assistance to LAGs are obtaining relevant additional expertise from these exchanges.

However as the past experience of LEADER has shown cooperation building can be a long process and the initial effects of NRNs' support in this context are usually only noticeable indirectly. An example is given by the LAG 'Pays Adour Landes Océanes' (notably through the work of Christophe Arrondeau), who participated in the NRN Forestry Initiative. According to the LAG participating in this initiative has served to "demystify" the issues of transnational cooperation. Indeed, they are now engaged in the planning of the "European Trainee Forest Initiative" in 2012.

Some NRNs are also engaged in geographic clusters that share a common history, common issues of territorial development and a good neighbourliness. The Nordic-Baltic cluster consisting of NRNs from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden is particularly vibrant, meeting regularly, sharing common objectives and activities, and now playing an increasingly active role in relation to the rural development components of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The cluster initially began as a simple

'bottom-up' initiative for sharing experiences on rural networking in 2007-2008 but it is now obvious that the common identity and familiarity shared by all the participating NRNs is greatly enhancing the level, intensity and strategic significance of networking activities in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Cooperation under LEADER is already a key component of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, as evidenced by examples such as the 'Sailing Training and Maritime Heritage' project that involves four LAGs from Denmark, Estonia, and Finland. The NRNs, as active stakeholders in the Nordic-Baltic cluster, are obviously key players in encouraging TNC. This is revealed by several actions such as support for the partnership search, the organisation of study tours and the running of cooperation meetings between the LAGs.

Based on the experience of the Nordic-Baltic Rural Networks cluster, the possibility of forming network clusters in other regions is under discussion within the ENRD. The existence of structured networks of rural actors such as NRNs and networks of LAGs and a shared macroterritorial strategy of rural development could be seen as key ingredients to building relevant geographical clusters.

It is also worth mentioning the experience of the regional Rural network Languedoc Roussillon and its role within the Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée. From 6-7 October 2011, the network held – in partnership with the regions Midi-Pyrénées, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands – the first meeting of rural actors of the Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée. Part of this meeting was dedicated to a presentation of the different modalities of cooperation via LEADER, but also through other programmes such Interreg and sectorial programmes of the European Commission. Thematic workshops on topics such as the environment, short supply chains and heritage were organised and led the LAGs and other promoters to exchange ideas and plan some concrete actions. A directory of the LEADER LAGs of the Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditerranée was constructed and offers of cooperation were put online. To give

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greater scope to this cooperation the members of the Euroregion decided to establish a new legal instrument through the creation of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) which allows, for example, the management of calls for projects.

Other initiatives encouraging LEADER co-operation projects (2007-2013)

Following up on one of the recommendations of the *ex post* evaluation of LEADER+ to foster peer learning, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development – ELARD[18] - launched an initiative that offers European LAGs a possibility for reciprocal, international staff exchange. This promotes their formation

and training, as well as enabling the exchange of experience, know-how and new ideas. By going on an exchange to a LAG in another EU country LAG staff can get valuable perspectives on their own local work, improve their language and intercultural skills and establish networks.

The initiative aims to offer LAGs a low-threshold opportunity to cooperate and network on an international level, without having to necessarily create their own cooperation projects yet. Naturally the exchange can work as the first contact with another European LAG and new cooperation projects or more permanent "twin LAG" relationships can later be developed on this basis.

Suitable areas or actors with similar characteristics or interests are then identified

in order to find potential topics of mutual interest and joint learning opportunities. The staff exchange takes the form of educational three week visits, arranged between two participating LAGs. The exchange is reciprocal, meaning that the same LAG both sends and receives a visitor. The objective of the exchange is defined in advance in an agreement and a programme for the exchange is provided by the host LAG before the exchange takes place. The objective of the exchange is not only to offer the staff members a possibility to meet their colleagues in another EU country, but also to create more tangible results, for example to carry out analysis of common challenges that the territories of both LAG partners face and to share the solutions both LAGs have identified in delivering successful and innovative projects.

(18) ELARD is an international non-profit making association established in 1999 by the National LEADER Networks of different EU Member States.

Proposals for the LEADER approach in 2014-2020

LEADER's bottom-up approach for local development has, over a number of years, proven its utility in promoting the development of rural areas by fully taking into account the multi-sectoral needs for endogenous rural development. LEADER will therefore be continued in the future under the EAFRD, but the aim is for it to be supported by other EU funds - including the possibility for "multi-funded" Local Development Strategies.

This article focuses only on the new features introduced by the Commission's legislative proposals published in autumn of 2011. Three distinct legal proposals from the European Commission are relevant for LEADER in the future: the Regulation on Common provisions for the Funds operating under the Common Strategic Framework (CSF)[19], the Regulation on support for rural development from the EAFRD[20], and the CAP Horizontal Regulation[21]. The proposed provisions described below are currently being discussed by the European Council and Parliament, and consequently may be subject to amendments during the negotiation.

It is proposed that a) LEADER should remain compulsory with a minimum spending rate of 5% of the EAFRD envelope in each Rural Development Programme (RDP), and b) that the LEADER approach should be available for all rural development priorities which contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The reinforcement of the LEADER approach

Increased local capacity

In the current period most RDPs demonstrate a lack of strategy for ensuring that sufficient capacity is created and maintained in the Local Action Groups (LAGs) for the performance of their tasks in the implementation of LEADER. Capacity at LAG level though is crucial for successful governance.

The architecture of LEADER in the future legislative framework should be more adapted to design capacity-building schemes that support and respect the different degrees of experiences of rural areas with the LEADER approach. To use LEADER effectively expertise is needed, but it is clear that some potential LAGs are significantly less experienced than others. Therefore, after 2013 there will be a stronger and more explicit emphasis on building the necessary capacity to maximise LEADER's positive impact. In particular it is proposed that the EAFRD will cover the cost of a preparatory phase, during which time LAGs can build up their base of knowledge and skills for the subsequent implementation of a Local Development Strategy (LDS).

An entry step for LEADER (*preparatory support*) will be introduced, starting with a phase of capacity-building adapted to the needs of each LAG, covering all areas who are interested in implementing a LDS.

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(19) The Funds covered by the Commission's Common Strategic Framework are: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The Commissions' proposal for common provisions: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf

(20) Commission's proposal on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com627/627_en.pdf

(21) Commissions' proposal for a Regulation on on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy, http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/com628/628_en.pdf

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All actors involved in LEADER (LAGs and the involved authorities) should also benefit from capacity-building actions and the exchange of experience carried out by National Rural Networks (NRNs) and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). It is proposed that NRNs provide training to LAGs throughout the whole LEADER process and support them for the monitoring and evaluation of their LDS.

LEADER start-up kit

As a special provision for potential LAGs which were not previously involved in LEADER a new 'LEADER start-up kit' will be introduced, which can be adapted to the particular needs of a given territory. It will aid the setting-up of LEADER groups and strategies, and local partnerships will have to decide beforehand if they submit a Local Development Strategy or otherwise go for a less demanding start-up kit.

Potential LAGs that make use of the kit will receive support for building capacity and will also be able to experiment with smaller LEADER-type pilot projects.

Higher co-financing rate

The term 'co-financing rate' refers to the contribution EU funding makes to the public spending of a programme. Co-financing is usually subject to a maximum threshold, which is defined as a percentage of the total public spending of the programme. A higher EU co-financing rate is proposed for LEADER: 90% in less developed regions and 80% in other regions, in comparison to rates of 75% and 50% for standard rural development measures. This increase will facilitate the support of innovative local strategies since there is often a scarcity of national public funds to support local initiatives with novel approaches.

More flexibility and an improved framework to actualize the potential added value of LEADER

Ensuring sufficient quality in Local Development Strategies

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) in its Special Report n°5/2010[22] on the implementation of the LEADER approach for rural development found that, despite some examples of good practice, the approach was often implemented in ways that limited the potential for added value. The Court considered that the Commission and Member States were also not sufficiently demanding to ensure the potential added value of LEADER was delivered through the Local Development Strategies that were selected and supported.

The introduction of minimum elements regarding the content of a Local Development Strategy in the post-2013 regulatory framework aims to address this Court conclusion. The minimum elements introduced to ensure sufficient quality are: definition of the area covered; a SWOT analysis[23] (applied to the territory); strategic objectives and hierarchy of priorities; the contribution of innovation and (possibly) cooperation to the strategic objectives; and an action plan (including the LAG structure, organisation and internal rules and procedures, monitoring and evaluation system and tools).

An important improvement is that for the first time LAGs are explicitly obliged to monitor and evaluate the LDS. This is necessary to be able to demonstrate the added value achieved.

Flexibility in implementation

Many Member States in the current programming period limited the content of the LDS and projects to the pre-defined measures under the RDPs. This has led to limitations in the design of the Local Development Strategies and especially in the design of projects, in particular those of an innovative and integrated character which are closely linked to the local circumstances.

In order to bring back flexibility, under Article 64 of Council (EC) Regulation 1698/2005, Member States are now being asked to design specific eligibility

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(22) http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/7912812.PDF
(23) SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

criteria for LEADER in their RDPs. In cases where LAGs and Member States feel that they have good experiences using the standard measures, they are of course free to adopt the same approach.

The possibility to grant advances is extended to 50% of the total public support related to the running and animation costs in order to ensure the cash flow of LAGs. In the current period this is only specifically foreseen for up to 20% of the running costs.

Increased administrative autonomy for LAGs

Due to "mainstreaming" several Member States integrated LEADER into the implementing structures of the rural development policy without actually taking the specificities of LEADER into account. Although the bottom-up approach is based on the right of the LAG to decide on the projects itself on the basis of its strategy, Member States established procedures which led to a strong involvement of the programme authorities/paying agencies into this process. This was in part due to the fact that, in case of irregularities, sanctions were applied to the whole RDP as opposed to only the specific LAG project. In combination with the "pre-defined measure approach" this contributed to the refusal of innovative and valid local projects mentioned above, and imposed to some extent on the LAGs the implementation of standardised projects. Inevitably, the 'local value' of the Local Development Strategies suffered from such limitations.

A description of the minimum tasks of the LAGs in the legislation is also proposed to help guarantee the respect of the bottom-up principle (LAG responsibility to implement the LDS) and to ensure a clear division of tasks between the authorities and LAGs.

Multi-fund Local Development Strategy: a multi-fund mainstreaming

In the future the LEADER approach will be referred to as "Community-led local development" in a multi-fund context, but will continue to be designated as LEADER local development in relation to the EAFRD.

The application of community-led local development (CLLD), based on the LEADER method, to all Common Strategic Framework Funds is the major novelty introduced by the Commission's proposals of October 2011. CLLD is becoming the main development instrument supported by EU funds at sub-regional level.

It gives LAGs the opportunity to design multi-fund strategies and to come back to one of the initial assets of the LEADER approach[24], but this time in a mainstreaming context and not as a Community Initiative.

It seems desirable that a given territory could make use of the different policies and funds to be again able to play an important role in the endogenous development of rural territories. The implementation of broader Local Development Strategies is then complemented by the priorities of several EU funds.

For the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), CLLD will be included under the thematic objective of promoting social inclusion and combating poverty under the investment priority on the economic and physical regeneration of deprived communities, but it can include activities related to all thematic objectives. For the European Social Fund (ESF), it is foreseen as an investment priority under the same thematic objective (promoting social inclusion and combating poverty) but can also include activities related to all thematic objectives listed in the scope of the ESF. CLLD can either comprise the whole of one priority axis, or be otherwise implemented as part of a priority axis that includes several investment priorities related to social inclusion, and receives the co-financing rate of the priority axis concerned.

Under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) CLLD will be included under a specific EU priority.

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(24) LEADER I and II were funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in addition to the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund's (EAGGF) Guidance section.

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As regards the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), community-led local development (LEADER) is obligatory with a minimum spending rate of 5% of the EAFRD envelope in each rural development programme, and it has to address at least one of the following EU priorities for rural development:

(1) fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas;

(2) enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability;

(3) promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture;

(4) restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry;

(5) promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors;

(6) promoting social inclusion poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

The 6th EU priority for rural development has a specific focus area related to fostering local development in rural areas[25].

The local SWOT analysis, on which LDSs are based, needs to incorporate social elements alongside economic, environmental and territorial elements. All these elements are equally essential in pursuing a sustainable development approach.

Preparation of multi-fund Local Development Strategies

The support of different funds in the implementation of a Local Development Strategy will have to be reflected upon by the LAG when drawing up the strategy. It will also depend on the availability and allocation of funding from each individual Fund to contribute to the implementation of the strategy in the respective Member State or region.

It will be up to the LAG to determine the scope and objectives of the Local Development Strategy and the operations financed under it. Even though such strategies may be co-financed by several Funds, Operational Programmes (OPs) and priorities, there may be CLLD strategies which are supported from one Fund or one priority axis only.

Possibilities to implement holistic Local Development Strategies

The objectives and priority actions foreseen in the LDS must balance out social, economic and environmental needs and concerns. It is interesting to note that the recommendations of the LEADER+ *ex post* evaluation report included taking additional account of the needs of minority or marginalised groups. At project level it will be possible to use several funds (to achieve competing objectives in integrated/complex projects), but in this case the LAG must be able to identify in its accounts the expenditures supported by each different Fund.

A lead Fund as a simplification measure

In the case of multi-funded LDS LAGs and Member States might opt for one of the Funds to fully cover the management costs of the LDS (this will either be the ESF, ERDF, EMFF, or EAFRD[26]) as a so-called "lead Fund". This model is just an option aimed at facilitating the implementation of a multi-funded LDS. The lead Fund in a given area would be designated by the Member State, namely the Managing Authorities concerned, in consultation with the LAG[27]. The choice of the lead Fund will depend on the activities foreseen in the strategy by the LAG and the type of area in question.

Harmonised eligibility rules but Fund specific financial conditions

Implementation of multi-fund Local Development Strategies is facilitated by the harmonisation of rules between the EU funds (e.g. VAT, contribution in kind, etc.).

Co-financing rates will remain fund or priority specific. Maximum co-financing rates are established for the different funds in the fund-specific rules. Where CLLD is supported under a single priority axis of the ERDF or ESF it can benefit from a top-up of 10% on the co-financing rate for this priority axis. As already mentioned above, the maximum EAFRD contribution for LEADER support shall be 80% of

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(25) *Art. 5.6 (b) of the proposal mentioned in footnote 19.*
(26) *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) or European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).*
(27) *Commission's proposal on Common Provisions, Art. 28.3:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf

total public support and 90% for the programmes of less developed and outermost regions and the smaller Aegean islands[28].

Local area

The local area should have sufficient critical mass to implement a viable Local Development Strategy and, at the same time, be sufficiently small to allow for local interaction. A delegated act will set out criteria for the definition of the area and the population covered by the strategy[29].

Potentially increased budget for Local Action Groups

The financial base will be potentially be broadened if the Member State decides to support CLLD throughout several or all CSF Funds.

It is up to the LAGs to set out the planned allocation for each of the Funds, which will be contained in the indicative financial plan of the strategy. The proposed allocation will depend on the needs identified and the prioritisation of the Local Development Strategy objectives.

When approving the strategy the selection committee will also set out the allocations of each CSF Fund and programme for each CLLD strategy.

Enhancing the implementation of cooperation projects

Cooperation will not be made mandatory in order to still allow LAGs to opt for only locally relevant issues (which is especially important for new LAGs). Still, the LDS should point out in the SWOT analysis of the territory why cooperation actions are not envisaged.

Cooperation projects are hampered by the fact that there are different administrative rules in different Member States. The new legal basis should include some provisions to harmonise these diversities with a view to facilitating cooperation.

Preparatory support

The new rules clarify that preparatory support for cooperation can be issued independently of the implementation of a concrete project. Preparatory support is considered as being necessary, even if a

common project does not see the day. In order to avoid that this support could be reduced to the funding of "tourist activities", LAGs have to demonstrate that they are envisaging the implementation of a concrete project (i.e. to provide the description of a cooperation project idea). This clarification is supposed to encourage other Member States to programme this support, too.

Regular access to cooperation support

In order to substantially improve the implementation of transnational cooperation projects Member States should be asked to foresee a system of on-going calls for application for cooperation projects (contrary to the practice of timely calls for applications). Often LAGs have to wait a very long time for the approval of the authorities of those LAGs from Member States which work with periodical calls (which are sometimes only held on an annual basis).

It is proposed that the period from submission of the project application until approval should not be longer than four months in any Member State.

More transparency on cooperation rules

The national or regional administrative procedures regarding the eligibility for transnational cooperation projects should be made public by the Member State (for example, on the website). This should happen at the latest two years after the approval of the RDP and should include a full list of eligible costs.

Strengthening of rural-urban links through cooperation

New possibilities of cooperation have been introduced in the post 2013 rural development proposals (with an emphasis on cooperation with non-rural territories). Any other territory (rural, coastal or urban) in the EU, selected under the common methodological approach for local development, might be put forward as a cooperation partner.

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(28) *Within the meaning of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2019/93 of 19 July 1993 introducing specific measures for the smaller Aegean islands concerning certain agricultural products.*
(29) *Commission's Proposal for Common provisions, Art. 29 (6):* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf

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Improving Local Development Strategies

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is an essential component of the LEADER approach, plotting a development path that reflects the unique combination of local assets, resources and aspirations. Since May 2011, a specialist focus group established within the ENRD LEADER sub-committee has been looking at how Local Action Groups (LAGs) can improve the quality of their strategies, to better take account of local specificities and devote more attention to monitoring and measuring performance.

Given the experiences accumulated under LEADER, community-led local development is increasingly recognised as an effective vehicle for implementing a range of EU policies. Indeed, the European Commission recently put forward proposals that could clear the way for local partnerships to seek simultaneous support from EU Rural, Regional, Social and Fisheries Funds[30], with a set of common rules to ensure integrated delivery on the ground.

A key determinant of the success of the LEADER approach, however, is the quality of Local Development Strategies (LDSs). A 2010 report from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the implementation of LEADER highlighted a number of weaknesses in relation to Local Development Strategies, and emphasised the need for improvements in their quality and delivery.

In particular the report found that "LAGs did not show a strong focus on achieving the objectives of their strategies," frequently diverting resources to activities that were not identified as strategic priorities.

ENRD focus group

These findings prompted the establishment, in May 2011, of a special focus group on "Better Local Development Strategies".

Supported by the Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD CP), the objectives of the focus group are "to identify the critical requirements in the design of the Local Development Strategy and to collect tools and good practices used at Local Action Group level, thus ensuring an efficient implementation of the Local Development Strategy."

"One main driver is the ECA report and its findings with regard to LAGs and their ability to report on progress against their strategies," explains John Grieve, the ENRD expert supporting the focus group. "There are real weaknesses, which are further supported by evaluation evidence".[31]

The other driver is, of course, the new programming period and the changes which this will bring, demanding a higher quality approach. The seventy-five member focus group includes representatives from all 27 EU Member States including LAGs, Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies (PA), National Rural Networks (NRNs), the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), as well as other organisations nominated by the LEADER Sub-Committee.

The work of the focus group is divided into two phases: The first phase, focusing on how local strategies are elaborated,

(30) The Funds covered by the Commission's proposed Common Strategic Framework are: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).
(31) For example, one of the conclusions of the Leader+ ex post evaluation is that LAG self-evaluation, although having the potential to complement the programme formal evaluation, has been limited by a lack of focus and coherence of approach. This problem still persists.

designed and assessed by MAs which ran from July to December 2011, was based around separate surveys of MAs and LAGs, as well as more focused discussions held in Lisbon and Brussels. The second phase, which runs from January to June 2012, is looking at the implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation of strategies.

There is much that is demonstrably good about LEADER and LDSs, but the approach of the focus group has, quite rightly, been a critical one as its objective is to identify where improvements can be made.

Making an early start

The results of phase one highlight various issues impacting on the quality of LDSs. Firstly, they reveal considerable variation in terms of when the LDS process started, with many LAGs starting later than intended. There was also considerable variation in the time allocated to the LDS elaboration process, with over 50% of the 200 LAGs that responded experiencing some difficulties in relation to the time allowed.

To ensure that in the future LAGs start early and have adequate time for the preparation of their LDS, the focus group underlines the need for better communication between the different levels (EU, MAs, LAGs) and for each one to take responsibility and initiative within the process, not waiting to be 'spoon fed'.

Building and retaining capacity

The results also point to the existence of skills gaps in both new and existing LAGs, with clear capacity development needs regarding LDS development. The focus group concludes that training has not sufficiently addressed this. It highlights the fact that a training action plan was not considered essential by any MA as being "a critical omission."

"This finding is particularly surprising and gives considerable cause for concern," says Ana Pires da Silva, one of the focus group's three co-chairs and a representative of the Portuguese NRN. "It is also a concern that there is little differentiation between new LAGs and older,

more experienced ones. Lessons learnt, many times, are clearly not being taken into account."

According to Ana Pires da Silva, "There is also a clear recognition that the different generations of programmes need to be better connected in order to ensure continuity, which is recognised to be of high importance."

In terms of methodologies, the focus group suggests that LAGs would benefit from guidance on methods and their use. It also warns that the Commission's proposals for "integrated delivery" will add to the need for guidance and support, and recommends that specific EU guidelines on multi-fund approaches should be prepared.

Autonomy and accountability

While the phase one study found that LAGs were largely free to select their territories and themes, there was still some concern amongst LAGs that aspects of theme selection were outside their control. The focus group therefore reiterates the need for clearer guidance and for LAGs to be involved in the process of deciding on themes and priorities.

Overall it seems that the greater the degree of autonomy, the better the LDS can

be tailored to address the local needs. However, as John Grieve emphasises, autonomy also has a price: "If LAGs want to be autonomous then they have to be mature enough about it, as with increased autonomy comes increased responsibility and with that greater accountability. These are the areas of evident weakness that have to be addressed."

"In particular, there are major weaknesses around the logic for and justification of interventions," insists Mr Grieve. "Budgets should be evidence based. To make that possible we simply need better evidence."

Concerns in this area are compounded by weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation. "The LAG survey results show that only 72% of LAGs actively monitored performance. This is a real concern," says Sanna Sihvola, focus group co-chair and representative of the Finnish MA.

Where LAGs do monitor their performance the survey suggests that there is no common or consistent approach, which the focus group attributes to the absence of monitoring and evaluation plans in many LDSs.

Feedback and review

Finally both LAGs and MAs recognise the importance of feedback during the

"The LEADER tendering process should not be a competition between different rural regions but rather an internal challenge to reach the LEADER criteria. If the MAs have the good will and the capacity they can help the territories to achieve this and produce high quality strategies."

A learning process

In mid-2012 the focus group will present its final conclusions, which will provide a basis for all stakeholders to learn from and improve on LDS activities to date. "This is a learning process," says Judit Török from the ENRD CP. "The participation of LAGs and MAs is essential and so far there has been a very enthusiastic response. The challenge now is that we work together to put this learning into practice and really raise the standard of LDSs in the next programming period."

LDS assessment and selection process. However, the survey shows considerable variation in the approaches between MAs.

"Some MAs merely approve the local strategies and give LAGs their LEADER status, while others put more effort into the process and actually help the groups to enhance their strategies along a multi-step approval process," explains Petri Rinne, focus group co-chair and ELARD president.

Success factors: LAG experiences

Learning from others – Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu LAG (Bavaria, Germany)

Founded in 2003, the LAG Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu is a relative newcomer to the LEADER approach and the LDS process. "Knowing the wealth of experience that already existed within other LAGs, a priority for us was to learn from others, so we organised a number of field trips to other regions," explains Sabine Weizenegger, LAG manager and a focus group member.

"This process really helped to get our members motivated and inspired. In the beginning, we put a lot of emphasis on involving local actors in the preparation of our LDS. I am convinced that a development process can only be successful if you involve the right people and keep them motivated."

LAG website: **www.regionalentwicklung-oberallgaeu.de**

Ensuring continuity: Redange-Wiltz LAG (Luxembourg)

In Luxembourg, the MA allowed LAGs considerable autonomy in deciding priority themes to be addressed in their LDSs.

"This approach meant that 'older' LAGs like ours were able to continue developing and deepening themes we had already begin to address in previous periods," says Jacques Fons, manager of the LAG Redange-Wiltz.

"To prepare our Local Development Strategy, questionnaires were sent to the municipalities and to a number of potential local and regional actors. The feedback was analysed during a working session involving all those who responded to our questionnaire, and from the various project proposals that emerged we were able to prepare a new strategy. This way of working really made it a shared process."

LAG website: **www.rw.leader.lu**

Feedback and communication: South & East Cork Area Development LAG (Ireland)

The 'South & East Cork Area Development' (SECAD) LAG had its strategy approved and commenced activities in February 2009. Just two months later, in April 2009, it was invited by the MA to a meeting to review the strategy and the outcomes of the assessment process.

"The approach and the timing were excellent," insists Ryan Howard, SECAD's CEO and a focus group member. "By this time we had a couple of months experience of implementing the strategy, which provided for a much more productive meeting."

"I think the ideal situation is to have a first review early in the implementation process, with another about two years later. This second review could also be used to identify issues with regard to the programme or implementing rules."

LAG website: **www.secad.ie**

The example of cooperation between LAGs and FLAGs

In the legislative proposals published in October 2011, the European Commission has proposed that four major funds should work together in the next period to support "community-led local development" following the lines of the LEADER model. Right now, over a hundred Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) are already working hand in hand with LEADER local action groups (LAGs) to promote more sustainable paths of development in their areas. Their experience offers many lessons for the future.

Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) was launched in 2007 for "the sustainable development of fisheries areas" and follows very similar principles to that of LEADER. Axis 4 of the EFF is a younger initiative and more sectorally focused than LEADER, but it is growing and maturing fast. At the time of writing there were 231 approved FLAGs with a further 50 in the final stages of being set up.

With broadly similar approaches, both EFF axis 4 and LEADER fit with the new definition of "community-led local development" - they do, however, also have some important differences. Both have integrated area based local strategies with projects selected by local partnerships made up of a balanced mix of local stakeholders, but the nature of the areas and composition of the partnerships differs, as we will see. The average budget (public expenditure) of both FLAGs and LAGs is fairly similar (€3.2 million for FLAGs compared to €3.9 million for LAGs). The variation in budget between FLAGs is greater than for LAGs and can vary enormously by country (ranging from under €0.1 million to €17 million per group).

Fisheries areas and rural areas often co-incide – especially in the more remote rural coastal zones and around inland lakes and waterways. There one finds great potential for synergies between the two community-led local development programmes. In other areas the scope for cooperation is more limited. As most rural areas are inland, with a very low presence of fishing, the norm is to have a LAG but no FLAG. Other countries explicitly exclude coastal areas from rural development programmes as they often have a higher population density or are economically stronger than the inland areas. In such cases it is more likely to have a FLAG without a corresponding LAG.

Where the potential exists, active co-operation between FLAGs and LAGs is common. A recent survey of 221 FLAGs by FARNET (the European Fisheries Areas Network) found that almost two thirds of FLAGs (139 partnerships or 63%) have developed some sort of formal system of cooperation with their sister LAG. The other 82 are "free standing" FLAGs. In other words there is no formal organizational link (or there is no LAG in the area), but nevertheless many still do or plan to cooperate with LAGs.

How do FLAGs and LAGs cooperate, how can we make the most of the common ground whilst taking into account the important distinctions? FARNET have distinguished three main "formal" organisational models of cooperation between FLAGs and LAGs:

- In 40% of cases (89 FLAGs), the LAG and the FLAG are in fact the same organisation. A common organisational structure is used with a single overarching strategy. The design of the fisheries part of the strategy and project selection is done by a separate sub-partnership (or selection committee) that is more representative of the fishing community. This formula allows the FLAG to benefit from the LAG's experience as well as sharing the LAG's administrative and other resources. This model is especially important in Finland, Denmark, Germany and Latvia, but there are also examples in 6 other Member States.
- Another model is for both LAGs and FLAGs to be managed as "sub partnerships" of a third "accountable body", usually a local public organisation such as a development partnership responsible for the area. Around 10% of all FLAGs (23) use this model. Examples here include the FLAGs and LAGs managed by the local development agencies in Greece, the "Pays" or other inter-municipal bodies in France and similar models in Portugal, Sweden and the Netherlands. The advantage here is that both FLAG and LAG strategies can form coherent parts of a larger umbrella strategy and that the resources of the accountable body are being shared. For these partnerships it is important to avoid the risk of being dominated by the public sector.

• Finally, another 12% of FLAGs (27) have some sort of formal organisational relationship with the LAG, even though they are separate freestanding organisations. This can range from simple cross representation on each other's boards to the more complex situation where a group of LAGs participate on the board of a FLAG whose area crosses over several LAG areas, e.g. following the line of the coast, a river or lake.

Several other points stand out when thinking about how to improve coordination in the future. Although EFF axis 4 and LEADER share many features, the need to respect the different strategic goals and focus of each programme is important. As the LEADER acronym suggests (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale), its focus is on linkages within and between rural areas. As LEADER does not address urban areas or (as yet) rural-urban linkages, LAG areas can often be smaller than functional labour market areas. EFF axis 4 also focuses on stimulating linkages, but in this case the focus is outward-oriented in order to improve linkages between fishing communities and other actors, both in and outside the fishing industry and in and outside the area. The actors driving both programmes need to be sure that their coordination will provide additional benefits to their respective programmes, rather than diluting their central focus.

Secondly, one has to consider how each organisational model of coordination interacts with the various arrangements of boundaries for the area. FLAG and LAG areas may coincide exactly, one may be contained in the other, they may partially overlap or they may be strictly separate parts of a larger area. LAGs often cover a larger area than FLAGs as fishing activity is often concentrated and distributed along a coast, river or lake. What matters in each case is that the area is coherent from the point of view of the strategic aim of each programme and their Local Development Strategies. Dividing up areas to fit one model could be counterproductive, whilst aggregating areas could dilute the local dimension. A form of strategic and organisational cooperation which allows for differences in areas is more likely to result in synergies and avoid unproductive standardisation.

Finally, when it comes to the partnership, while both programmes aim to involve a balanced representation of the stakeholders in their areas, this balance also varies according to the strategic aims of each programme. Given the sectorial focus of EFF axis 4 there are likely to be more fishers on the decision making bodies of FLAGs than there are farmers on the more heterogeneous rural LAGs. This makes sense – the aim is not to create a kind of parallel democracy but to mobilise the key stakeholders required to achieve the aims of the local strategy. Where FLAGs and LAGs are linked, e.g. within a larger umbrella organisation or by some form of cooperation, such differences can be and are dealt with by having different, possibly linked, project selection committees.

In conclusion, it can be seen that there are many models and forms of cooperation between FLAGs and LAGs and some important practical lessons which can be learned, both at the local level and between MAs and national networks. Looking ahead, the ways in which the different initiatives interact and complement each other will become more important. Given that Community Led Local Development under the 2014 – 2020 programmes will be voluntary for Member States under the EMFF, the ERDF and the ESF[32], the stakeholders of each programme will need to go back to their strategic goals and consider how enhanced cooperation can really add value to their intervention.

(32) It is an obligation under EAFRD funding rules, where 5% of the funds are 'ring-fenced' for LEADER.

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Abbreviations and acronyms used in this issue of the *EU Rural Review*

CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	IADS	Integrated Area Development Strategies
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development	LAG	Local Action Group
CP	Contact Point	LDS	Local Development Strategy
CSF	Common Strategic Framework	LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale, meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development		
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development		
EAGGF	European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund	LsC	LEADER subcommittee
ECA	European Court of Auditors	MA	Managing Authority
ELARD	European Leader Association for Rural Development	MS	Member States
EFF	European Fisheries Fund	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund	NRN	National Rural Network
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development	NUTS	Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics
ESF	European Social Fund	PA	Paying Agency
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	RD	Rural Development
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions	RDP	Rural Development Programme
FG	Focus Group (of the LEADER subcommittee)	RDR	Rural Development Regulation (2000 - 2006)
FLAG	Fisheries Local Action Group	SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

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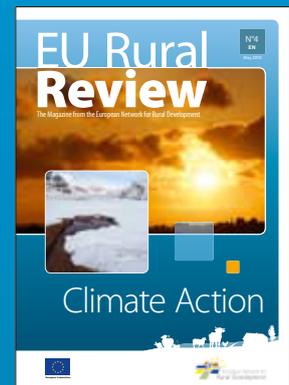
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