



European Network for
Rural Development



LEADER Event 2012

Local Development Strategies and Cooperation
27-28 April 2012

A journey best travelled together

We once again find ourselves in a time of change with the current rural development funding period of 2007-2013 drawing to a close. Against this evolving backdrop the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) brought together around 400 participants – including representatives of over 250 LAGs - on 27-28 April 2012 to share their experiences, explore further co-operation and take a first look at the possible future of LEADER.

And for two days in April, the LEADER event in Brussels was the place to be! A huge amount of effort was put into organising the event, but the time and place were perfect for:

- being informed about the likely evolution of the LEADER approach, including the importance of strengthening the quality of Local Development Strategies (LDS);
- sharing experiences amongst participants about how to design and implement stronger Local Development Strategies (LDS);
- launching a new wave of transnational cooperation (TNC) projects for the remainder of the current programming period (2007 – 2013).

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Funded by the



What were we doing?

A path had been created for us to journey along. All of the activities in the programme were carefully created to facilitate meaningful and practical discussions about the need to strengthen Local Development Strategies and the opportunities to develop a new wave of transnational cooperation projects.

Where were we?

The EGG in Brussels provided the perfect location for this innovative event. It gave an imaginative semi-industrial backdrop to the workshops and transnational cooperation project meetings - and even allowed the sharing of meals together across a river running down the centre of the room to encourage the flow of ideas.



How did we work together?

Sharing, debating and harvesting ideas - everyone immersed themselves in the 'participatory approaches' that the ENRD used to help everyone contribute and learn. The philosophy behind these simple, yet powerful methods is simply the idea that the best results are generated where a 'space' is created in which people can discuss the topics that are meaningful to them in an open, yet structured, way.



Key Outcomes

Two days of intense discussion and activity with around 400 people led to many different outcomes. Here are a few:

- There were participants from LAGs, national rural networks and public authorities from all 27 EU Member States - a great opportunity for building better understanding, exchange of experience and closer co-operation at all levels!
- All participants were actively involved in discussions - maintaining the LEADER spirit, even in the middle of Brussels!
- Over 70 new transnational projects were promoted and discussed - a new wave of TNC projects was successfully launched!
- Over 120 LAGs participating in the event were actively looking for involvement in a new TNC project - lots of opportunity for co-operation ready to be followed up!

- A great mixture of 'old' and 'new' LAGS - everyone sharing their experiences openly and freely!
- Two important, in-depth workshops on the strengthening of Local Development Strategies, with lots of key messages to policy-makers from the LAGs - putting the bottom-up approach into action!
- And finally loads of great feedback on the event - people really enjoyed it! We all look forward to next time.

For more information on the outcomes of the event visit the event pages on the ENRD website (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/leader-event-2012-local-development-strategies/en/leader-event-2012-local-development-strategies_en.cfm).





The journey begins.....

The first session was met with the awkward enthusiasm which accompanies a room of people meeting for the first time. This soon changed when working in groups we discussed what had brought us together - a mutual desire to share and learn!

What we came for...

SHARING

- exploring the opportunities for working together transnationally
- offering project ideas to potential partners
- exchanging experience to innovate and become inspired
- sharing ways of building local capacity
- developing relationships with other LAGs that last many years into the future
- identifying new ways of helping LAGs to get to know each other to develop the added value of meeting together

What we came for...

LEARNING

- hearing about the future of the LEADER approach
- discovering how to utilise the potential of all axes through LEADER
- realising the potential of the LEADER approach from more experienced LAGs
- building a better Local Development Strategy

The opening video message from Dacian Cioloş, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, encouraged us all to celebrate the diversity of the LEADER approach. He called for the LAGs to continue driving rural development and creating a wealth of knowledge that would support DG AGRI in its role. He highlighted the growing potential of the LEADER approach in the future, suggesting it would create better rural urban links and was an essential ingredient for community-led local development. Finally he identified the importance of transnational cooperation (TNC) encouraging everyone to continue to work together bringing the European added value to local projects.

Panel Discussion

To guide us through the next steps of our journey a range of experts were invited to join a panel discussion in the style of an informal 'chat show'. The 'chat show' guests included Pedro Brosei from the European Commission (DG AGRI), Petri Rinne from ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development), Marina Brakalova and Ryan Howard representing LAGs from Bulgaria and Ireland, Hans-Olof Stålgren from the Swedish National Rural Network and Ursula Budzich-Szukala from FARNET (the European Fisheries Areas Network).

Taking questions from the audience, the big themes of discussion were the evolution of the LEADER approach, the need for stronger Local Development Strategies and the exciting (if daunting) opportunities provided by trans-national co-operation. Some of the insights shared were:

- LEADER is a **different kind of governance** – it feels like we can actually change things. It is a tool for investing in local democracy and governance.
- There is a **big diversity** in the implementation of the LEADER approach and LAGs should always challenge what they are doing to make sure it is effective, whilst recognising that it is hard to measure the real added value of the LEADER approach.
- LAGs should take a **more proactive lead** to ensure that the principles of LEADER remain intact and to demonstrate the 'added value' of the approach.
- Implementing the LEADER approach and a Local Development Strategy **takes time**.

Progress is being made by most Member States, but at different speeds.

- A plan is nothing, but **planning is everything**. The importance of careful planning is too often under-appreciated!
- **Never underestimate the importance of networking** to bring people together
- The new programme period (2014-2020) is an **opportunity to influence the policy framework** and to improve the coordination between all layers of the process (the LAGs, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies etc.).
- The **multi-fund approach is a big challenge**, but in this programming period there are already examples from which to learn. The Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) and LAGs which have piloted the multi-fund approach through the use of EAFRD and EFF resources have found it takes a long time for everyone to understand how to apply it. Ireland have been delivering the a multi-fund approach across rural and urban areas for many years.
- Transnational cooperation is the **European element of LEADER**. Many LAGs avoid these projects at the beginning, but as soon as they are involved in one they wish they had started earlier. Stepping out of your area helps to see it through others eyes which builds your own capacity.
- Strong transnational projects are built upon **friendship and inspiration**, learning about each other's areas, developing projects and then delivering real business benefits.



Travelling together through transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation is an exciting, but also somewhat daunting undertaking. Nothing helps to overcome the initial barriers of getting to know new partners like meeting in person – hence, this LEADER event provided a variety of facilities, both formal and informal, for LAG representatives to meet.

At the heart of the match-making process – and the next stage of our journey – was the Networking and Cooperation Fair. Here we found

market stalls from every corner of the European Union with people proudly offering their region's local products, discussing local crafts and beginning conversations about opportunities to work together. Alongside the colours, tastes and smells of a diverse yet unified rural Europe was an array of project ideas complemented by dedicated match-making support and break-out sessions where LAGs could discuss their particular cooperation offers.

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TNC meeting snapshots

During the many meetings which took place, some organised through the appointments board others happening more informally, LAGs had a chance to identify their similarities – similar

environments, similar culture, similar challenges, similar assets. From there they were able to build the foundations for a new wave of transnational projects.

Mobility in Rural Areas:

France – Austria

“ We're building relationships for the future and taking time to do it well”

Elsa Loupandine, LAG manager of GAL Terres de Vie en Lozère, France

ICT and Organisational Structures in Tourism:

Ireland – France

“ Tourism is an area we're really committed to in our LAG. I've spoken to lots of people and it has been great just to meet them and start to make those connections”

Ross Curley, South and East Cork Area Development Partnership Ltd., Ireland

Local Products and Local Services:

Lithuania – Latvia

“ Sometimes people can be scared of developing new projects on their own, but our communities grow in confidence when they see what other people like them have achieved. I am 100% sure that this discussion will develop into a project”

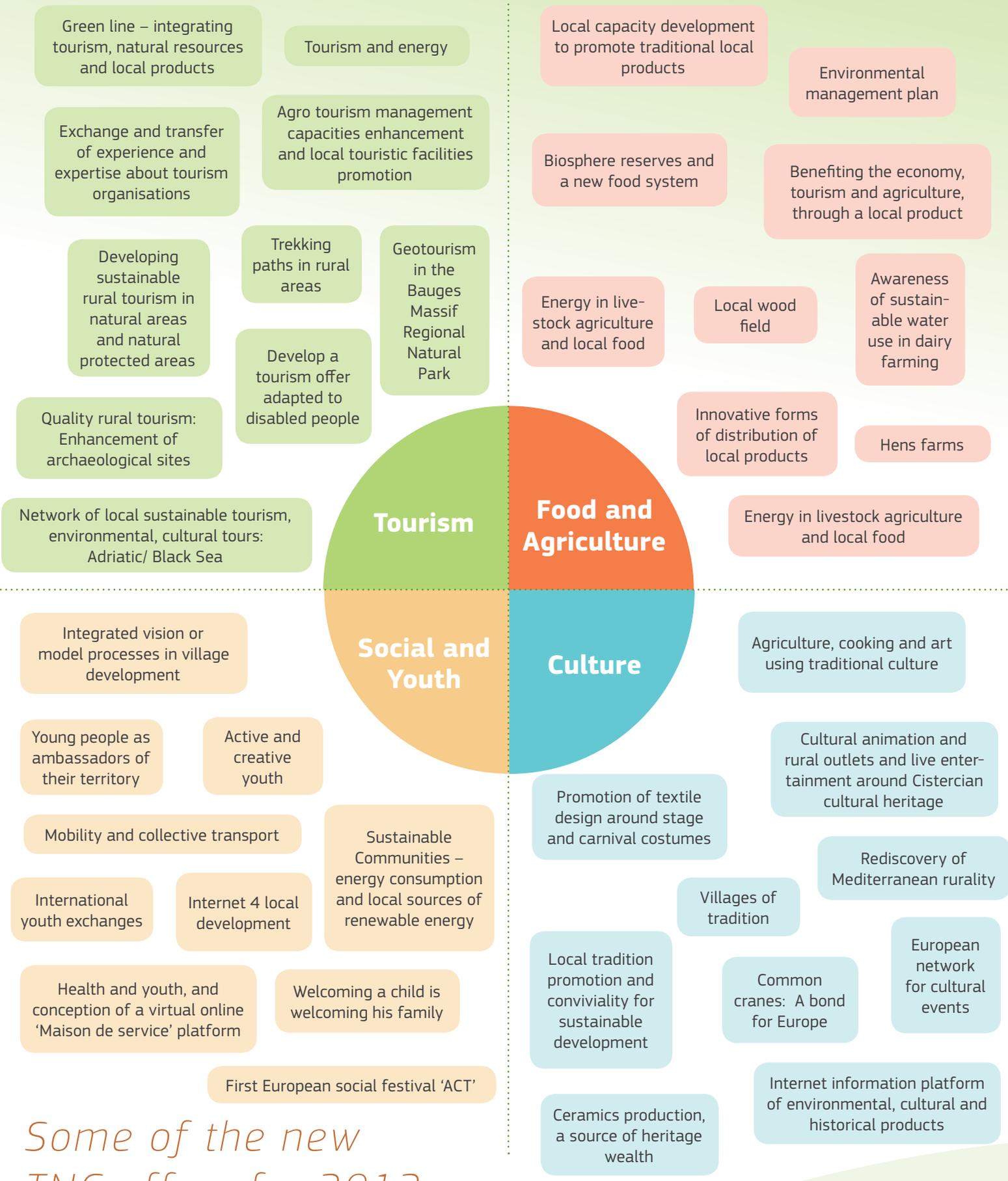
Mindaugas Kuodis, LAG of Utena Region, Lithuania

Youth projects: *Czech Republic – Estonia – France – Romania – Poland*

“ Transnational cooperation is important to us because meeting other LAGs, exchanging ideas and sharing challenges means we can work together to solve problems. Or even find someone with a solution already! Seeing our area through other people's eyes builds confidence in what we can achieve”

Malgorzata Sliczna, Stowarzyzenie Lokalna Grupa Dzialna Dolina Stobrawy, Poland





*Some of the new
TNC offers for 2012 -
2013*



Innovation in Local Food Distribution:

France – Italy – Slovakia – UK England – Malta

‘Cooperation is a driving force to innovate’ - Anne Brunet, Pays du Chalonnais, France

A project offer appeared on the appointment board requesting potential partners to work on a project together to explore and trial different innovative methods of distributing local food. LAGs who had seen the offer earlier in the day arrived in the allocated cooperation spaces to share experience and identify ways they may work together in the future.

“We all shared information about ourselves and discovered that we were all new LAGs in this Programme period and had no or little experience of working in cooperation projects. This ‘shared inexperience’ drew us together!

All our areas already had some activity focused on the local food sector but these are very diverse – from slaughter units for poultry to local food brands, from local food in schools to developing producer networks.

Aware of the short timeframe before the end of this programme period and wanting to take the time to get to know and understand each other everyone agreed that the focus now should be on a transnational project that carried out research beneficial to each area.

This research could then help us to develop the local food supply chain networks we need to deliver further activity. A nice simple project for us new groups! Most excitingly we all agreed that this would be the first project in a series of joint projects that would stretch into the next Programme period and beyond, and that may even culminate in transnational trading of local products from our LAGs through new short supply chains we had developed together.”

Anne Brunet, Pays du Chalonnais, France



Sharing experiences on the journey



After a chance to relax at the end of the first day, we continued our journey again on the morning of the second day. Day 2 was due to be even more participatory and involving working together to find solutions to challenges that we might not be able to overcome on our own. We separated into two workshop groups – one to explore the best way to design a Local Development Strategy and the other to identify the most successful way to implement that Strategy.

Designing a Local Development Strategy

This workshop focused on identifying best practice examples for designing a Local Development Strategy (LDS):

- Differing views were expressed on the design process, but everyone agreed that the LDS should be a **true strategy for the area** not simply a tool to secure funding or a combination of measures tied together. But in order to achieve a true strategy **sufficient time** needs to be given to develop proper, bottom-up engagement with local people, businesses and organisations in the area. It would help if the strategy could be simplified and made more flexible so that it could really reflect the needs and the shared vision of the local area.
- Writing a strategy which **encourages innovation** was identified as a real difficulty since not all the goals of innovation are measurable. It was suggested that if the aims of an LDS are kept broad then it will allow the promotion of innovation to be “enabling” and not “restrictive”.

- Face-to-face meetings were identified as one of the key elements to designing a successful LDS, although LAG Managers felt that as part of their role they were continually talking with people and discussing the needs and issues of the area so this process was on-going and not specifically linked to strategy development. It was agreed that this **bottom-up approach** which included local opinion was also instrumental in designing a robust strategy with a shared vision for the future.
- Designing the Local Development Strategy represents an opportunity to gather the research and statistics to support the local knowledge collected as well as rethinking and relinking to **engage people** with the communities through this process.
- The multi-fund approach engenders concerns regarding the **interpretation of any new regulations** at a Member State level and the potential complexities of administration between Programmes and countries. This might result in too much administration and not enough animation. Actively engaging with the Managing Authorities and paying agencies is the most effective way to harmonise and synthesise Programmes and approaches, e.g. when contemplating the design of a single application form for all EU funds.
- The **Member States** needed to think ambitiously and **work in a participatory way** with all stakeholders being happy with a trialling approach, recognising that it may not work perfectly from the beginning.

Key Message:

Simplifying complexity and reinforcing vertical as well as horizontal relationships.





Implementing a Local Development Strategy

This workshop focused on how Local Development Strategies are being implemented and the monitoring and evaluation of this implementation:

- It is vital that **LAGs demonstrate the value added of the LEADER approach** at a local level, however, this is not happening with a structured approach in a co-ordinated way. Measureable indicators that reflect this and simple tools to deliver on these indicators need to be established and used by all LAGs. These could then work alongside the locally specific self-evaluation activities that are taking place.
- Once a good quality Strategy with a clear focus has been developed it is important to treat it as a **living document** which is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it stays relevant to the LAG area it covers. The Strategy should also be communicated effectively to the community to develop a sense of ownership. This may also involve training of key stakeholders to build their capacity to engage with the Strategy and therefore the local Programme itself.
- Implementation could be improved by **simplifying the procedures** for the final beneficiaries as many community groups can struggle with the level of administration involved.

Key message:

Importance of animation and capacity building for successful implementation and need for collaboration in monitoring and evaluation to capture the added value of LEADER.

- More support is required for LAGs to deliver **robust monitoring and evaluation** that could be shared with the Commission and broader LEADER community. The process needs to be better defined and there should be more consistency between what the LAGs and the Managing Authorities wish to monitor and how this is done.
- Better **communication** between LAGs across the European Union and enhanced dialogue with individual Managing Authorities would improve the monitoring and evaluation that is taking place.
- We need to appreciate that LAGs have widely **different levels of autonomy** in relation to their Managing Authorities, which conditions their room for manoeuvre.
- These insights need to feed future regulation: In the next programme period a **common regulation** for all EU funds will apply to all LAGs, for the main implementation tasks.

For further information on strengthening Local Development Strategies visit the ENRD website at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/leader/focus-groups/en/focus-group-4_en.cfm

Connecting the dots... and the way forward



As diverse as LAGs are, many of our challenges are the same. If we share these challenges, we can also share the solutions. This event opened up new perspectives and solutions – as well as sparking **around 70 new transnational projects** involving nearly all the LAGs who were there. This is a new wave of cooperation projects that we can all feel very proud of, further expanding the European dimension of the LEADER approach.

But it takes work to turn a spark into a fire! In his closing speech we were reminded by José Manuel Sousa-Uva, the Director of DG AGRI, of the importance of:

- a **strong, appropriate and robust Local Development Strategy** to effectively deliver the LEADER approach in our LAGs;

- **fully utilising the National Rural Networks and ENRD** to support our cooperative working and help us share best practice, and;
- that **we all have a role to play** – LAGs, Managing Authorities and the Commission – in making the next programme period of 2014-2020 a success.

Equipped with the experiences of over 20 years of the LEADER approach, the enthusiasm that all those involved in LEADER share and the vision that we can make a difference to rural development across Europe – it is in our hands now to make it happen!



Final thoughts at the end of the journey

'Well organised, informational, happening, THANK YOU!'

'I learned and saw a lot and met lots of enthusiastic LEADER people.'

'Two days for such a big thing is too little...'

'It was good to be here. We can forget about the everyday problems and instability...We went back to the roots, and we saw there are lots of things we don't know about the LEADER approach'

'I really enjoyed the event. The contacts were very easy and natural. Thank you for organisation.'

'It was enormous! Thank you for the great job!'

'It was very well organised. I am satisfied with being part of it. Thank you for invitation. Hoping for future cooperation.'

'It's really a great event. Hope to be able to attend it in the future (it would be great if it could be organised every year). Thanks a lot.'

'I think it would be very important to have such an event every year!'

'Thank you very much for organising that. It was a quality event with many useful information and good occasion for networking.'

'Stands – good idea. For us it was effective especially for promotion TNC projects and making new contacts'

