

Leader+

Q U A R T E R L Y

N o 2 / 2 0 0 7



Dear Readers,

With the arrival of the spring, it is high time a new issue of the Leader+ Quarterly was published. This time it is Małopolska and Pomorze Środkowe which represent Polish regions. We have pleasure in presenting to you the activities of the Local Action Group from Małopolska with an intriguing name “Gościniec Czterech Żywiołów” [High Road of the Four Forces of Nature]. Despite the difficulties encountered, the Association has been successfully implementing its projects based on the natural and cultural resources as well as the local tourist product. Alternatively, Pomorze Środkowe can take pride in presenting to the readers a model example of creating the local brand name “Naszyjnik Północy” [the Necklace of the North]. The brand was devised based on the cultural heritage and unique nature and tourism values of the region.

In addition, this edition of the Quarterly will be an opportunity for you to get acquainted with an interesting foreign example of the Leader Programme and initiatives based on this method. We would like to invite you to the region of contrasts, which undoubtedly is Spanish Andalusia.

Furthermore, we present the networking issues in the EU member states, including the activity of the Leader Network in France and one of the Bretagne LAGs called Espace Femmes i.e. “Women’s Space”.

In this edition of the Quarterly you will find current information on the Pilot Programme Leader+ implementation.

Please visit our information corner.

We wish you interesting and pleasant reading.

The Editorial Team

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Local Action Group — Association “Gościniec”

Local Action Group “Gościniec Czterech Żywiołów” [High Road of Four Forces of Nature] is an effect of the work of people and institutions involved in the implementation of the Pilot Project Leader+. Representatives of three sectors set up Association “Gościniec” according to Leader requirements. They devised an integrated strategy for the development of their area, i.e. four communes: Sułkowice, Lanckorona, Stryszów, Mucharz.



Lanckorona – Pracownia Muz Artystycznych



Sułkowice – Stolica Polskich Kowali

Local Action Group “Gościniec” has selected three leading themes from the Leader+ priorities:

- no 2 – Improving the quality of life in rural areas.
- no 3 – Adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective action.
- no 4 – making the use of natural and cultural heritage, including the potential of “Natura 2000” areas.

The greatest natural and cultural potential of the four communes was defined and expressed as names of the forces of nature assigned to the communes:

- Sułkowice – Fire,
- Lanckorona – Air,
- Stryszów – Earth,
- Mucharz – Water.

Resulting from such visualisation of the region, four integrated tourism products were developed and introduced:

Lanckorona – Atelier of Artistic Muses

Artistic events have a favourable atmosphere in Lanckorona as the place has been known for its respect for tradition, handicraft promotion and care for wooden architecture of historical value. Fairs and a shop with local products have been organized. Tourism as well as social economy are developing thanks to a social company Horyzonty ITD. Inspiracja. Turystyka [Horizons etc. Inspiration. Tourism], set up by the Association “Na Bursztynowym Szlaku” [the Amber Route].

Mucharz - the Sea of Mucharz

Mucharz has a large tourism potential due to the water reservoir, which gives hope for the region development. Local product development and a wise use of cultural heritage resources is envisaged.

Stryszów – Green Gate to the Beskid Mountains

Stryszów commune – known for its nature values, organic crops, agri-tourism farms and historical monuments – wants to develop rural tourism based, inter alia, on organic farms and promotion of local products.

Sułkowice – the capital city of Polish smiths

Sułkowice preserves old smithery tradition. At present metal processing companies dominate in his area. In addition, there is a tourist attraction there on the national scale: Raciborski’s Yew Trees, the oldest in Poland, whose age is estimated at 1200 - 2000 years

Due to the Leader+ density criterion, LAG “Gościniec” did not submit an application for Scheme II. However, it would be difficult to exclude from a coherent and well-thought out concept any of the communes. There is a need and will on the part of the local community to develop the association despite the lack of funds and aid that other LAGs have at present.

The Association continues to create its organisational capacity, it has prepared several applications and is currently involved in implementing two projects:

Tradition Plus – an international project with partners from Aragonia (Spain) and Macedonia (Greece) whose effect is to be a brand name “4 Forces of Nature”, identification of local products from the “4 Forces of Nature” area, promotion packages with products and the Centre for Local Product Handling. The project is being delivered under the SMART Programme.

Polish gardens – let’s protect domestic flowers and herbs – an inventory of valuable natural resources from the “4 Forces of Nature” communes.



Mucharz – Mucharzkie Morze

LAG “Gościniec” has played an active part in initiating the establishment LAG Network in the region of Małopolska, by arranging meetings with representatives of the Marshal Office in Małopolska and lodging an application: “Federalisation of LAGs, i.e. non-governmental organisations operating in rural areas”.

A long-term objective of LAG Go[ciniec is effective functioning of the Group and rapid development of the region.

Renata Bukowska

President , LAG “Gościniec”, Lanckorona, ul. Krakowska 473

Role of local brand “Naszyjnik Północy” (The Necklace of the North) in promoting socio-economic development of Pomorze Środkowe region

“Naszyjnik Północy” is an open agreement concluded between local governments, non-governmental organisations, public services and entrepreneurs from Pomorze Środkowe, Bory Tucholskie and Ziemia Krajeńska areas. It is composed of 50 partners. They share a conviction that in order to respond to the problems related to the regional development, it is indispensable to integrate activities aimed at environmental protection and support the processes of the region’s social and economic development.

The Social Agreement “Naszyjnik Północy” was set up on the initiative of the Ecological Foundation of Chojnice and Zaborów Area, Association for the Development of the Commune and Town of Debrzno and the Partnership for the Environment Foundation. The idea was conceived in autumn 1999. The Agreement integrates partners and initiatives dispersed so far to draw up a coherent programme of sustainable development.

In 2002 the Social Agreement “Naszyjnik Północy” established the programme, the organisational structure and its rules and regulations. All the partners of “Naszyjnik Północy” are responsible for preparing and implementing projects as well as for fund raising for these projects.

In 2001 and 2002 the area of the “Naszyjnik Północy” activities was covered by the Programme of Rural Initiatives, “Active Village”, of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, coordinated by the Partnership for the Environment Foundation, under which 7 projects were implemented in Pomorze Środkowe:

- Birch twigs – a brand product of the village of Skowarnki,
- The final stage of tourism development in the Debrzynka River Valley,
- Stare Gronowo – yesterday, today and tomorrow (management of the palace and park complex),
- Known and Unknown Lipka (management of the park in Buczek Mały situated on the Gogolin lake and areas in Suche Dół and opening them to tourists),
- Let’s restore the beauty of this place (rehabilitation of the park on the former mansion area in Leśno),
- Comprehensive tourism development of the commune of Barwice,
- Our common bread (renovation of bread ovens and bread baking according to traditional recipes by agri-tourism farms).

Other projects implemented by the Association for the Development of the Commune and Town of Debrzno through the Partnership for the Environment Foundation:

- Launching a technological line of organic cereals milling using traditional stone quern,
- Stimulating entrepreneurship and improving environmental protection standards in small and medium enterprises operating in villages located in the “Naszyjnik Północy” area – Clean Business Club.

Detailed information on these issues can be found in the publication of the Partnership for the Environment Foundation, “Pokonać bierność na wsi” [“To overcome passivity in villages”] edited by Andrzej Biderman and Barbara Kazior, in the

Programme of Activating Rural Communities, Partnership Groups for Sustainable Development.

Another large programme delivered in this area was “Schools for sustainable development”. Forty one schools from Pomorze region took part in the first edition of the programme and thirty three in the second. Under the programme small, however, practical activities are undertaken targeted at waste management, water management, energy, environment surrounding the schools.

The most interesting part of the Naszyjnik Północy activities is an attempt at creating a comprehensive tourist offer of the Pomorze Środkowe region based on the main cycle route of a length of 870 km and thematic cycle routes of around 1000 km passing through 32 communes of pomorskie, zachodniopomorskie, wielkopolskie and kujawsko-pomorskie voivodships (provinces). An application “Greenways of the Naszyjnik Północy” for delineation and management of the greenway was lodged to the Tourism Department of the Ministry of the Economy, Labour and Social Policy. Funding equal to 61 500 zlotys was granted, which enabled initiation of works. The activities are being continued and every year new tourist infrastructure elements are added to the greenway.

Pomorze Środkowe is a very interesting and ecologically clean region. However, nature and culture only is not sufficient to attract a tourist. Therefore, a decision was made to make an inventory of cultural and natural resources as well as boarding facilities so that to develop a comprehensive tourist offer on that basis.



Wyroby z witek brzoźowych

Promotion of local products could be one of the methods of fostering sustainable development and a means of counteracting unemployment. While developing a local product, a local brand, the following was adopted:

- heritage of the past for the future (each place shows its history),
- local raw material base,
- local human capital (skills, assets owned, ambitions, aspirations, patriotism),
- partnership of three sectors,
- local individuality, uniqueness and originality,
- compliance with all ecological and environmental rules.

In 2001, jointly with the Partnership for the Environment Foundation, activities were initiated to deliver the project “Local Brand of Naszyjnik Północy”. The Project included a series of specialist training sessions in the marketing of the local product and formulating and monitoring the plan of implementing particular actions. The programme of the local brand and products, devised under the project, was included into the “Naszyjnik Północy” activities aimed at stimulating local initiatives and combating unemployment.

In the framework of the project 25 people were trained in the local product marketing and plans of implementing particular actions were formulated, a promotional programme and the criteria for granting “Naszyjnik Północy” awards were developed, promotional and marketing materials were published, a logo of the “Naszyjnik Północy” Local Brand was designed.

The best example of a single implementation of the plan is a project “Birch twigs – a brand product of the Skowarnki village” under which:

- a representative of manufacturers of birch twig products, Ms Maria Wójcik, received training in running a business,
- a business plan of the undertaking was drawn up, materials related to a commercial and promotional offer were prepared (business cards, leaflets, a catalogue, a folder),
- specimens of particular birch twig products were made,
- birch twig products were shown at international, national and local fairs,
- permanent buyers of products were found.

On 29 and 30 October 2003 the Partnership for the Environment Foundation arranged a workshop in Debrzno: “The role of local products in the development of Central European regions”. The participants familiarised themselves with the examples of developing, promoting and selling local products in Poland and Central Europe. Among others, the following were presented: the methods of promoting and selling folk toys in the Babia Góra region; the ways of combining organic product sales with running agri-tourism farms in the Bochnia region; the fair as the place where local products are promoted and distributed based on the example from the Opatów area; “Honey from Przemkowo” as a local product and inspiration of local events of the Middle Oder River Valley, or the experiences of granting the promotional logo of the Green Lungs of Poland.

Under the leadership of Ms Olga Gałek, a local product consultant at the Partnership for the Environment Foundation, a definition of a local product, its criteria and a questionnaire useful for the inventory of regional products and services were developed.

A local product is a product or service with which inhabitants of a particular region identify themselves, manufactured not on a massive scale and in an environmentally friendly way, from locally available raw materials. The local product becomes a symbol of the region by making use of its specific and unique character and by involving local people into the development of local entrepreneurship.

The final version of the Naszyjnik Północy promotional logo was adopted, registered in the Patent Office and granted the relevant certificate in December 2006.

In addition, the Rules and Regulations for Granting and Using the “Naszyjnik Północy” Promotional Logo were adopted.

Management of the “Naszyjnik Północy” brand was entrusted to the “Naszyjnik Północy” Foundation. Until it was formally registered, the function was performed by the Association for the Development of the Town and Commune of Debrzno. The activities of the thematic team for the Local Brand were coordinated by Ms Anna Mauer, a representative of the Czaplinek commune.



Due to protracted procedures, in 2003 the following products were awarded a brand name on a pilot basis:

- Flour from Debrzno produced in Mr Eugeniusz Suchowiecki’s mill,
- Bread from Barwice from agri-tourism farms in Barwice,
- Bread from Debrzno from the Janusz & Gierłowski bakery.

On 4 March 2003, at the seminar entitled “Green Jobs” held in Debrzno, the aforementioned manufacturers were given licences authorising them to use the “Naszyjnik Północy” Promotional Logo throughout 2003.



Mąka debrznieńska

The hitherto achievements of brand products were presented at an international conference: Marketing of Local Products convened in Barzkowice on 27 and 28 March 2003.

In December 2003 as a result of a competition, the Promotional Logo – Local Brand “Naszyjnik Północy” was awarded, during a special ceremony, to the best artistic and functional products as well as socially important initiatives.

The competition was held under the honorary patronage of the Weekend Radio and the Senator of the Republic of Poland, Mr Gerard Czaja. Twenty applications and products were registered for the competition. Based on the decision of the Competition Jury, the following people and their products were the winners:

- birch twig products – Mr Antoni Wójcik from Skowarnki,

- woollen mascots, a couple from the krajeński area – Ms Jolanta Dolat from Samborsk,
- embroidery from the krajeński area – Ms Jadwiga Angutek from Więcbork,
- wooden sculptures showing scenes from village life – Mr Aleksander Ołów from Człuchów,
- the bookbinding workshop PRIMAX – Mr Przemysław Cisoń from Debrzno,
- folk band “Krajniacy” From Wielki Buczek – for preserving the region’s traditions,
- regional ornaments – Ms Teresa Szapiel from Złotów,
- embroidery from the Kaszuby area – Mr Tadeusz Narloch; registered for the competition by the Company, Promotion of Chojnice Region, Ltd.,
- “Naszyjnik Północy” riding school – Mr Tomasz Szydeł from Chojnice educational and recreational activities,
- oil paintings showing regional scenes – Mr Andrzej Marcińczak from Łęknica,
- pictures painted on glass showing (regional scenes) – Ms Krystyna Laskowska-Kiepiela from Człuchów,
- floral decorations for various occasions – Ms Dorota Reimus from Więcbork.

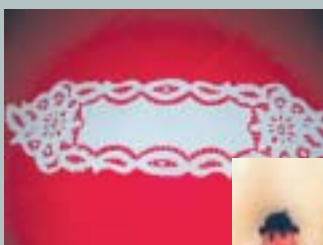
The third competition for the best foodstuffs took place on 20 June 2004. It coincided with the celebrations of 650 years of Debrzno and a ceremony of the opening of the Gallery of Naszyjnik Północy Local Products in the Entrepreneurship Centre in Debrzno.

The right to use the Promotional Logo was granted to:

- Łakocie słodkiego Józia [Sweet Joe’s Sweets] – from Mr Józef Berendt’s bakery,
- farmhouse bread – from the agri-tourism farm run by Stanisława and Tadeusz Lewicki from Barwice,
- wheat flour from Debrzno – from the Eugeniusz Suchowiecki’s Cereals Purchase and Flour Production Plant,
- Aunt Marta’s pierogi [dumplings] in green sauce, meatloaf of your dreams, hunters bigos [stewed dish from sauerkraut and fresh cabbage], golden lard – Restaurant and Café “CAFFE KOSMOS” run by Mr Teofil Szub from the Łobez village;
- boss croissants, tipsy bacon, gizzards in chicken soup, pork neck in garlic sauce – ODEJEWSKI – ODAN COMPANY Ltd.

In February and June 2004 the Association for the Development of the Town and Commune of Debrzno provided training, under Phare Programme 2001 – Development of Civil Society, composed of the following parts:

- psychological support,



Leader Initiative in Polish Regions



Rzeźba drewniana Aleksandra Ołowa z Człuchowa

- demonstrations of making birch twig products, ceramics, wooden products, articles made from large pieces of salt, of painting on the glass, arranging bouquets from flowers, herbs and cones,
- workshops on making birch twig products, painting on the glass, arranging bouquets from flowers, herbs and cones,
- instruction on legal and financial aspects of running a business,
- workshops on improving the skill of marketing and selling the products made.

Under the programme the Gallery (shop) of Local Products made by local craftsmen and trainees was set up. Sixty people were involved in the programme in the framework of which forty eight craftsmen were trained.

In the fourth competition for artistic and functional products as well as socially important initiatives held in 2005 the licence of the “Naszyjnik Północy” Promotional Logo was granted to:

- ^a embroidery from the krajeński area – Ms Teresa Kuczera from Więcbork,
- “frywolitki” – Ms Alaksandra Banach from Więcbork,
- embroidery from the krajeński area and knitted lace – Ms Irena Chichończyk from Więcbork,
- folk band “Słowinki” from Debrzno,
- folk band “Gronowianki” from Stare Gronowo,
- skaut mandolin band “Frygi”.

In 2006 the fifth competition coincided with the implementation of the project “Local and Traditional Product” an Opportunity for the Naszyjnik Północy Region Development” co-funded by the Cooperation Fund under the Programme “Agro-Smak2”. The Jury

handed out awards to:

- wreath from Debrzno, boss trout – from “Angelika” bakery run by Józef Berendt from Debrzno,
- meat filled dumplings – from ODEJEWSKI – ODAN COMPANY Ltd,
- farmhouse bread, wholemeal farmhouse bread Koprzywieński – baked by Ms Kazimiera Kula from Nowe Koprzywno,
- farmhouse bread – baked by Ms Małgorzata Lewicka from Nowe Koprzywno,
- intarsia – Mr Michał Iwańczyk from Okonko,
- postcards with dried flowers from the Debrzynka river valley – Ms Katarzyna Kucharska-Józefowicz from Debrzno,
- wood engraving representing hunting scenes – Mr Mieczysław Cymbatek from Kłodzino,
- oil paintings on canvass showing regional scenes – Mr Jan Pawlicki from Debrzno,
- trout tartare – Circle of Village Housewives from Łęg,
- Ms Halina Kiedrowicz from Brusy for upholding the Kaszuby area cuisine,
- 4H Club from Myśligoszcz for activities aimed at protecting cultural and natural heritage,
- Folk band “Stupianki” from Słupia.



Garncarstwo, Człuchów

Thanks to the implementation of the Programme “Local Brand – Naszyjnik Północy”, the following results were obtained:

- activating local communities, stimulating activities aimed at improving the quality of the products made and verifying them in a competition,
- integrating people revealing artistic talents,
- boosting confidence of the long-term unemployed,
- coordinating all the activities connected with the Programme “Local Brand – Naszyjnik Północy” with local manufacturers and craftsmen,
- discovering new folk artists,
- making an inventory and creating a data base of local craftsmen (approximately 70 people),
- promoting the project in the media,
- promotion – preparing various forms of product presentation

(among others, permanent exhibition on the Association premises, showing products on the website, attending fairs, local and regional events),

- finding new outlets, intermediation services – cooperation with foreign countries: Germany, the commune of Weinbach, Sweden, the commune of Huddingen – Christmas exhibitions showing local products and France, Paris – product exhibition,
- developing formal and legal procedure of awarding the Promotional Logo “Local Brand – Naszyjnik Północy”,
- preparing and organising the sixth promotion competition of the “Naszyjnik Północy”
- preparing and printing a catalogue,
- opening the Gallery of the “Naszyjnik Północy” Local Products,
- arousing interest of local people in certification of traditional products.

Activities undertaken by the members of the “Naszyjnik Północy” with regard to the local products are in line with the vision of the Integrated Strategy for the Development of the Naszyjnik Północy Rural Areas conveyed by the Foundation – Local Action Group “Naszyjnik Północy “ under the Pilot Programme Leader+ Scheme II:

- Area attractive for tourists with the clean environment and the quality of life of the inhabitants much better than today thanks to collective action undertaken by socially and professionally active inhabitants making the best use of the micro-region’s cultural and natural resources as well as tourism, small production units, crafts and organic farming - for the purposes of its development.

Members of the “Naszyjnik Północy” want the Pomorze Środkowe region to be willingly visited by tourists, to have a broad offer including the cycle route “Greenway of Naszyjnik Północy”, environmentally friendly recreation and leisure facilities, the whole range of recognised local products.

We are very pleased that the project of the LAG Foundation – Naszyjnik Północy entitled Each bead of the necklace makes it valuable – implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Strategy was accepted under LEADER+. This means additional funds for awards. Activities under the second edition of the project Local and traditional products – an opportunity for the Naszyjnik Północy region development, submitted by the Association for the Development of the Town and Commune of Debrzno to be included in the Agro-Smak Programme, will be continued.

Drawn up by: **Zdzisława Hołubowska**
LGD Naszyjnik Północy

Information on implementation Measure 2.7

Pilot Programme Leader + Scheme II

At the beginning of March 2007 the Foundation of Assistance Programmes for Agriculture finalised the signing of contracts with beneficiaries who occupied the first 80 places on the ranking list. In mid-March FAPA started preparing and signing contracts with subsequent beneficiaries in connection with the decision of the Monitoring Committee of the Sectoral Operational Programme "Restructuring and modernisation of the food sector and rural development 2004-2006" to shift additional financial resources to Measure 2.7 Pilot Programme Leader+. Given the funds available, by 13 April 2007 seventy contracts were signed, which means that in total 150 projects are under implementation all across the country. The number of projects implemented broken down by voivodships is as follows:

Voivodship	No of contracts signed	Value
Dolnośląskie	11	7 081 744
Kujawsko-pomorskie	13	8 803 040
Lubuskie	8	4 111 380
Lubelskie	4	2 953 270
Łódzkie	9	5 880 284
Małopolskie	16	10 478 149
Mazowieckie	9	5 798 534
Opolskie	4	2 728 425
Podkarpackie	15	9 438 844
Podlaskie	8	5 064 373
Pomorskie	7	4 289 063
Śląskie	9	5 576 844
Świętokrzyskie	9	6 456 125
Warmińsko-mazurskie	8	5 592 300
Wielkopolskie	14	9 886 457
Zachodniopomorskie	6	4 391 436
TOTAL	150	98 530 268

Claims for the first payment (advance money) were submitted by 140 Local Actions Groups, most of them for the maximum amount of 20% of total project value. FAPA made a positive verification of all claims appropriately filled in, and transferred 112 payment orders to the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture. The remaining claims are being successively supplemented and corrected by the beneficiaries. By the end of April the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture started paying out the financial resources.

On 27 March 2007 FAPA provided training to the first group of beneficiaries who lodged claims for indirect payments. The training focussed on rights and obligations arising out of the contract signed, the rules of implementing the Integrated Rural Development Strategies and the settlement method under Scheme II. Further training courses are planned in June.

Leader Programme Implementation in Andalusia¹

With a population of 7.6 million people and a land surface of 89 000 km², Andalusia is one of the largest and the most populated regions of Spain². Agriculture is still extremely important in the regional economy and represents about 4,9% of regional income – approximately double the national average³.

Although the entire region falls under the Convergence Objective⁴ and has one of the lowest average per capita incomes in Spain (around 77,6% of the EU average) it is a region of contrasts. The coastal areas (like the Costa del Sol) have experienced almost 50 years of uninterrupted tourist boom with massive pressure on land prices, natural resources and traditional activities. Cultural jewels like Seville, Granada and Cordoba also continue to draw millions of tourists per year. There are also important clusters of high tech development around some of the major cities.

Agriculture itself varies enormously – from extremely intense and competitive irrigated fruit and vegetable production (like the strawberry production in Huelva) – to immense areas dependent on one single extensive crop like olives. Interspersed, there are 24 natural parks with some of the most diverse fauna and flora in Europe (for example the National Park of Doñana).



One of the peculiarities of Andalusian agriculture has been the predominance of large absent landlords (latifundia) who employ casual day labourers (jornaleros). Around 70% of the people active in agriculture are still in this situation – although their numbers have fallen dramatically from around half a million fifteen years ago to around 300 000 people today. The extreme insecurity and poverty faced by these workers in the past led the Spanish government to establish a special system of social security (the PER) which provides agricultural workers with a basic monthly income in return for paying contributions during at least three months of farm work. The system is still a lifeline for many families but it is also recognised that it discourages many young people from entering the formal labour market.

The labour market situation has improved dramatically in Andalusia over the last 10 years – as in the rest of Spain. Unemployment had been reduced threefold – from a massive 31% in 1997 to 10% in 2005 – and the distance from the rest of Spain had been halved. However, this hides huge disparities. Women, in particular, still carry

the brunt of the burden. One in five women in the labour market was unemployed in 2005 – three times the EU average. Even worse, the employment rate among women was just 33% – under half the Lisbon target. Young people and ethnic minorities are also particularly hard hit by lack of alternative sources of paid employment in the countryside and the most deprived urban neighbourhoods.

In this context, large parts of interior of the region face the risk of depopulation. On the other hand, there are growing concentrations of immigrants in the poor “barrios” of the larger cities, in the coastal areas and in the areas of intensive agriculture.

Existing policies in the rural sector

The Andalusian Regional Government is fully responsible for agricultural and rural development policy in the region. Due to the importance of both agriculture and rural areas in the regional economy, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Consejería de Agricultura y Pesca) is one of the most powerful departments with one of the largest budgets in the government.

Given the uneven nature of regional development, the Department has not only supported strong sectoral policies for agriculture but it has also been one of the first in Spain to support more bottom-up and integrated territorial approaches to rural development. As far back as 1992, the regional government created a regional negotiating “table” between the administration, employers organisations and the trade unions to establish the ground rules for a Regional Development Plan which went far beyond the limits of the EU Rural Development Regulation.

The Plan considered that first nine LEADER groups approved during the LEADER 1 period were a great success and recommended that the Leader model of local development partnerships be extended to all rural areas in the region. It must be recognised that at that time both local authorities and civil society were extremely weak in many rural areas so that the LEADER partnerships were seen as a very interesting mechanism for strengthening governance, building local capacity and mobilising endogenous local development in rural areas.

During LEADER II the number of LEADER groups was increased to twenty two and the Regional Government managed to cover a very high proportion of rural areas by approving a further twenty seven groups under the national PRODER⁵ programme (together with one partnership funded by yet another programme this made 50 groups in total). They covered 89% of the regional territory, 660 municipalities and a population of 3 million inhabitants with an investment of 211,2 million euros or 4.2 meuro per group)

Creative approach of the Andalusian Regional Government to the Leader Programme and LAGs

By the end of LEADER II the regional government was convinced of the value of the LEADER approach. They were able to point to a battery of quantitative results but in fact they placed more emphasis on certain qualitative changes such as a new sense of optimism and

¹ Source: an analysis “The extension of the Leader model in Andalusia. Spain” by Paul Soto, made on the basis of Francisco Alba Riesgo’s material collected for the purposes of a collective report of the National Centre for Management of Agricultural Holding Structures CNASEA “The CNASEA Comparative Report on Rural Development Strategies and Programmes in 11 European Countries 2007-13” (editorial team’s note).

² Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities with considerable legislative and executive powers. Each community has its own parliament and regional government (editorial team’s note).

³ Editorial team’s note.

⁴ The region, where an average GDP per capita is less than 75% of the average European GDP. (editorial team’s note).

⁵ PRODER is a Leader type initiative, launched on the basis of similar rules, using the same methodology and networking instruments (editorial team’s note).

identity in rural areas and a considerable strengthening of local organisational and technical capacity. However, they pointed out that LEADER and PRODER still only accounted for a very small percentage of expenditure on rural development. In order to extend the LEADER approach they introduced two important innovations.

1) The first was to develop a tripartite “Commitment to Rural Development” signed officially by the Regional Government, the Employers Federation and the main trade unions which officially recognised the Local Action Groups as entities able to carry out public policies on behalf of the Regional Government. In return for this recognition the LAGS had to meet certain conditions in terms of the representativeness of their boards, the quality of their procedures and the technical capacity of their staff. The region followed this up by helping the voluntary network of local action groups (ARA) and regional universities to organise training and support for LAG staff (this included a Master in Rural Development, specialised training in certain key management areas, a series of technical guides and so on).

It is important to note that the Regional Government sees the strengthening of the local partnerships and the creation of experienced technical teams in nearly all rural areas as one of the main achievements of LEADER. They definitively do not see the partnerships and technical teams as one-off projects. So they are concerned to build up the quality both the partnerships and their staff in the long term rather than subjecting them to constant changes in project funding.

2) The second innovation was to ask all local action groups to carry out a local strategic plan⁶ which went beyond the confines of the LEADER and PRODER programmes. Each group was given a small budget with which they either developed the plan in-house or brought in an external consultant. The plans varied in their scope but they helped to put the LAGs in the centre of a far broader territorial development process.

The public budget for LEADER + and the second round of PRODER was 357 million euros to cover the 50 groups for seven years (around 7.2 euros per group) making it one of the largest measures in the programme for 2000-6 (after Agroenvironmental Measures -18,5%, Irrigation Measures 14,27% and support for agrofood firms with 14.26%).

Another series of innovative solutions was presented by the Regional Government at the last stage of implementation.

3) The PRODER programme ensured the continuity of the 50 local partnerships and technical teams which had taken so long to build over the last two programmes. The region used PRODER for covering a variable part of the running costs and the basic governance and local development function of all groups. They then they used the LEADER programme to fund the 22 of the LAGS that promote more innovating projects related to the priority themes in the programme

4) Another idea was to take a far more structured approach to cooperation, including international cooperation. The regional government argued that one of the main problems of the previous phases of LEADER was that there was an excessive gap between the transnational cooperation activities which often took place with very distant countries without taking into account similar, much closer projects in the region itself. As a result they decided to set up a system for encouraging cooperation around the priority themes chosen for Action 1.

They set aside a relatively large budget of 25 meuros for cooperation but of this nearly 20 meuro of this amount went to finance seven thematic cooperation groups. Each cooperation group (or network) was made up of a minimum of 4 Andalusian LAGs and could include partners from other regions, other countries and non LEADER partners (PRODER, etc). After discussion with the LAGs it was decided to base the groups around the 7 priority themes chose in Andalusia.

Each group had a budget of just under 3 meuro for a three year period. The lead partner was given a budget of up to 200 000 euro while each participant LAG has up to 60 000 euros for involvement in the activities. Each Group had to develop a Strategy for encouraging cooperation with other actors which is at least at regional level. It could organise joint activities and fund third parties. It developed actions around a series of specific issues like traceability and organic food in the local products group.

5) In addition, the Regional Government has taken a series of steps that make the financial and administrative processes better than in other Spanish Regions. The Region receives the EU funds directly (rather than through the central government) and incorporates these sums into its annual budget. This allows it to establish a system of advances to the LAGs which is much more favourable than in other regions. The regional government makes an advance of the total amount of the first year of the programme to the groups. As soon as the first year is certified by the LAG it can receive 50% of the second year and so on.

Unlike other Spanish regions the groups do not have to pay the final beneficiary before receiving the funds. They simply certify the completion of the investments and pass this on to the regional government. So it is the Regional Government and not the LAG which absorbs any problems caused by a lack of liquidity resulting from gaps between the 7% advanced by FEOGA and the payments that have to made to justify the next instalments. This means that unlike other Spanish LAGs, Andalusian groups are not in debt.

The choice of projects to fund lies entirely with the Local Action Group but they have to follow a set of common procedures (with regards to communication, transparency, etc) and a use a base line set of criteria approved by the Regional Government. They are also able to add in their own specific local criteria. The decisions are subject



⁶ In Poland: Integrated Rural Development Strategies (editorial team's note).

to an eligibility check by the Regional Government. This can now be carried out far faster using the IT management system called SEGGES. Apart from the financial control it specifies all the steps that each dossier should cover and allows questions about eligibility to be posed and answered in real time. The eligibility reports protect the LAGs and their need is not questioned although some LAGs think that the procedure can still be simplified.

Nevertheless LAG managers consider that LEADER has become increasingly bureaucratic and that they spend at least 50% of their time on administrative matters rather than being out working with the local community. The Regional Government contributes 100.000 euros to the running of the groups which considerably improves the situation.

Some of the methods to overcome deficiencies and difficulties connected with a new programming period

Strategic Planning and vertical partnerships

Even though the LEADER and PRODER partnerships are the only local organisations who have been asked to carry out a broad strategic plan of their area (at the beginning of Leader +), these plans varied in both scope and quality. This has reduced the extent to which these plans have really been accepted by other actors as strategic instruments of coordination.

The legitimacy and representativeness of the Local Action Groups

In general, all the evaluations carried out of LEADER in Andalusia have concluded that the Local Action Groups have achieved a high degree of representativeness and legitimacy among other local actors. On average non-public actors represent around 59% of the votes on the LAG boards while the public sector has around 41%.

In addition to strengthening the strategic function of the local action groups, Andalusia is embarking on an interesting process of improving their local representativeness while at the same time ensuring that they fulfill all the conditions for being recognised as official "collaboratory agents of the administration" (entidades colaboradoras de la administración). This involves applying a delicate balance of top down and bottom up conditions which should be monitored closely because they could tip the LAGs in either direction.

In the first place all LAGs now have to be registered as not for profit associations open to all local members of society. This is because in the past some LAGs were registered as private companies and even though they did not distribute profits this reduced their ability to receive and manage certain kinds of public funds.

In addition, the association must have carried out the local strategic planning process described above (not only the plan and submission for LEADER).

On top of the general conditions in the RDR, the Regional Government insists that the LAG boards must have a good balance of agricultural organisations, women and young people. It remains to be seen what criteria will be applied here.

But one of the innovations in the new Rural Development Programme is the creation of Local Committees of Rural Development (Consejos Comarcales de Desarrollo Rural) in each with a similar representative structure which will be specified by the regional government. The LAG team will act as the staff of the Local Committee and submit all projects to it for final decision. The Regional Government aims to

ensure that independently of the make up of the LAG board all local actors are represented on the Committee and that it is free from political interference. The presidency of the Local Committee will be shared between the LAG president and a representative of the Regional Government.

So the final decision on the selection of projects rests with the local committee. However, the LAGs have to follow a common procedure specified in the Rural Development Programme. For example, the LAGs have to employ a common set of basic criteria for selecting the projects (for example, the impact on employment for the target groups defined in the local strategy, the impact on equal opportunities and on the environment, etc). These criteria must be worth at least 70% of the points given in taking the decision. The LAGs are free to add in other criteria and decide on the weight given to the common criteria but the final system must be approved by the Regional Government.

As in the past, all projects will be checked for eligibility by the provincial delegation of the Agricultural Department. In Andalusia this process is faster and more transparent than in many other Spanish regions as a result of the IT management system called SEGGES and the efficient system of advances and payments.

It will be important to monitor the composition of the local committees of rural development and the effect that this has on the LAG boards themselves. As has been mentioned, the aim is to guarantee a certain base level of local representativeness while at the same time providing certain guarantees to the administration.

Adjusting territorial boundaries and funding mechanisms to take account of rural diversity

The intention is to apply LEADER to all rural territories in Andalusia. Because of the pattern of urban settlements in the region these areas can fall within municipalities with a large town or city and a population of over 100,000 people. However, the investments will be directed at the rural hinterlands of these areas and no investments will be permitted in settlements of more than 50 000 people.

As has been mentioned some LEADER territories are considered to be too large and diverse to develop a coherent strategy so the region expects to increase the number of areas and as a consequence, the number of LAGs might increase.

More ambitiously, the Regional Government also wants to be able to modulate the levels and intensity of public investment to take account of the degree of rurality of each area. In order to do this it is testing a battery of indicators for developing a finer typology of rural areas which can be used to provide an objective basis for adjusting funding levels and rates.

Developing procedures for using the local action groups to manage measures in all three axes

In order to do this, the Rural Development Programme of Andalusia specifies that the LEADER method should be applied to all three axes and detailed negotiations have been held with those responsible for the main measures to define where LEADER could be most useful. This will obviously not be the same in all areas. For example in predominantly agricultural areas LEADER may be able to play an important role in axis 1 by developing local, high quality food chains, whereas this may not be the case in areas which depend mainly on tourism.

In order to deal with this situation, the Regional Government has decided to ask the Local Action Groups to submit up to four

⁷ Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.



programmes – one basic programme and 3 specific programmes – linked to the different axes in the Rural Development Regulation. All these fall under the general umbrella of the local strategic plan mentioned earlier. They are as follows:

A basic plan. This will be similar in all rural areas of Andalusia and basically covers the running costs of the LAGS, the preparation of the strategic plan and the specific programmes submitted to LEADER and animation and training. It is supplemented by 3 specific plans or programmes which cover a list of measures in each axis of the RDR which those responsible in the Regional Government have agreed are susceptible to the LEADER method. They are as follows

Axis 1. The Specific Plan for the Competitiveness of Agriculture.

Leader can intervene in the following measures:

- Information and training to farmers
- The modernisation of farms
- Increasing the value added of agricultural and forestry products
- Cooperation to develop new products and technologies
- The improvement of infrastructure for agriculture and forestry

Axis 2. The Specific Plan for the Environment/Sustainable Land Use.

LEADER can intervene in the following measures

- Support (grants) for non productive investments in agricultural land
- Support (grants) for non productive investments in forest land

Axis 3. The Specific Plan for the Quality of Life and Diversification of Rural Areas.

LEADER can intervene in the following measures:

- Support for the diversification of farm activities into other sectors
- Support for the creation, growth, modernisation and transfer of microenterprises
- Support and promotion of tourist activities
- Support for basic services for the rural population
- Support for the renovation and development of rural settlements
- Support for the protection and conservation of rural heritage
- Support for the training and information of economic actors
- Support for capacity building around the local development strategy.

The LAGs will be able to tender to different plans and they will be awarded different amounts according to the characteristics of the area and the quality of the proposals.

According to the initial version of the Rural Development Programme for 2007 – 2013, consulted at present with the European Commission, LAGs in Andalusia will be in charge of direct administration of 406 million euros (15% of the total budget allocated for the Programme for Andalusia).

Finally, it should be emphasised that the Regional Government of Andalusia regards the development of coherent, representative partnerships with experienced teams and employees with practical skills in local development, as the basis for creating the identity and potential of rural areas as well as using the LEADER type approach effectively in the region. It is worthwhile to underline that Andalusian LAGs have devised a series of methods and procedures that might be useful to partnerships from other EU member states.

Source: an analysis “The extension of the Leader model in Andalusia. Spain” by Paul Soto, made on the basis of Francisco Alba Riesgo’s material collected for the purposes of a collective report of the National Centre for Management of Agricultural Holding Structures CNASEA “The CNASEA Comparative Report on Rural Development Strategies and Programmes in 11 European Countries 2007-13” (editorial team’s note).

Leader + Network in France

The Leader+ network in France has a complex character as formally it comprises one national and five inter-regional structures. At the beginning, the National Network Unit (UNA – Unité National d'Animation¹) carried out an analysis in order to define the most appropriate level for the implementation of network's tasks. Resulting from the research (one of the first UNA's tasks), five geographical areas were distinguished, which formed the basis for setting up the same number of inter-regional networks (RIA – Réseau Interrégional d'Animation) to complement the national level. One of them is an inter-regional network embracing 7 out of 20 French eastern regions (RIA Grand Est). In this area 22 Local Action Groups (LAGs) (out of 140 operating across the country) pursue their activities.

Part of the inter-regional network activities is financed at the national level and, wherever possible, certain tasks are co-funded by the network itself. To separate different levels in the form of national and regional network units requires good coordination between their actions and clear definition of the tasks of each of them to avoid the risk of duplicating their work. Simultaneously, their decisive advantage, in particular in big countries, is easier contact thanks to the retained sense of closeness to the Local Action Groups.

Local Action Groups under Leader+ were selected in France based on a two-stage procedure: first, an initial regional selection on the basis of a technical evaluation, and then the final decision made by the Committee composed of the representatives of the institutions as well as socio-economic partners and national organisations. Projects of cooperation between LAGs are approved by the Selection Committee which convenes four times annually. The Managing Authority for Leader+ in France is DIACT (Agency for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, an entity separate from the Ministry of Agriculture and reporting to the Prime Minister). The discussions between partners are being carried out within the Steering Committee which brings together LAGs' representatives. The activities of the National Network Unit take various forms, inter alia publications prepared and disseminated by the unit. Thus, the bulletin "Galaxie" published systematically, containing announcements and information on events, proposals of cooperation and examples of projects run and the magazine "Pilote" are very important sources of information for LAGs. They are assessed as helpful and responsive to the needs of local partners.

Example of regional activities

In the area covered by the activities of the Bretagne Local Action Group "Pays de Dinan", a centre "Espace Femmes" has been operating for two years; it is a venue where meetings and joint undertakings are arranged. In the area covered by LAG "Pays de Dinan" the number of women unemployed or in



a difficult financial situation is the biggest in the whole department of CÔte d'Armor. The initiative of establishing a centre was taken by women themselves. Finally, after consultations with numerous social partners and meetings aimed at setting out the guidelines for the project, "Espace Femmes" was open in the former barracks with an area of 400 m². Thus, a kind of club was created to which people from the whole LAG area belong (out of 345 people, 40% come from 58 communes scattered in four different LAGs' corners). The centre is open to all women regardless of their age and personal wealth. In "Espace Femmes" women can take part in various activities starting from taking courses in yoga and cooking through participation in discussions, exhibitions to taking legal counsel.

One third of the budget needed for "Espace Femmes" was allocated from Leader+. The Centre does not only provide help to its so far members, but also aims at expanding its activities to involve the women living in rural areas who often have problems in getting to the town (an inadequate transport network).

Drawn up by **Marta Leoniak**

UNA website: www.una-leader.org

¹ Source: French Leader's website: www.una-leader.org

The Leader Network in the European Union

The network is a type of mutual relations and contacts in order to exchange information or share resources with the special emphasis on maintaining communication between particular links of the chain.

The notion was also adopted by the EU Leader Programme, to become an indispensable element and a tool to achieve its objectives. The Leader network enables primarily contacts and exchange of experiences that may lead to the development of local resources in rural areas. This is an extremely important and most frequently mentioned task of the UE network.

However, if an attempt is made at fuller specification of the network's role, a broad and multi-dimensional picture of the meaning of networking emerges. Starting from its practical dimension as a forum of cooperation and exchange of information between the persons interested in the same issues, and ending with the creation of essential, though less measurable, sense of belonging to the community, thereby eliminating the impression of isolation of particular groups and motivating them to an active search for solutions to the problems.

In the context of the Leader implementation, the network should be perceived as a structure existing on different levels: the EU, national and, in some cases, inter-regional. The latter exist both within a member state. In addition to formal structures receiving EU funds to perform their functions, there are in some countries informal networks providing support to the Local Action Groups (LAGs). Most often they are associations of LAGs, playing an active part, particularly in the first two editions of the Leader Programme. According to the survey carried out in the European Union¹, the network is often identified with national units it comprises, which in fact are organisations providing technical support for the national Leader networks.

However, the concept of connecting all the persons concerned is definitely much broader. It is a system of existing contacts and those being developed between the persons concerned, where network units constitute a platform for mutual meetings and cooperation using the tools available. The persons that took part in the survey very often emphasised that the network was not one more administrative structure only. In their view it was a structure established for Local Action Groups, which with the help of the network unit play an active role in its development.

The characteristic features of the Leader network take account of the specificity of the EU programme. However, beside common features, network units in particular member states differ between themselves with regard to the selection of means and tools, types of activity, the status of the organisations that run them (consortia, public structures, non-governmental organisations) and the methods used. Furthermore, the differences are related to more extensive experience of the old "Fifteen" member states (sometimes network units operated in subsequent editions of the Programme) and to the structures existing for a shorter period in the new member states. All the

network units are, however, structures which help Local Action Groups that are looking for information and support in order to resolve problems.

The catalogue of tools used by these organisations includes, inter alia, publication of magazines, organisation of joint events and conferences, management of databases of Local Action Groups and an active forum. All the organised networks should ensure easy access to the information for all the parties interested. Similar tools with a broader range are also used during network creation on the European level.

Based on the hitherto Leader's experience, it is underlined that it is people involved in the Leader network who have a decisive impact on its effectiveness and efficiency. In other words, the network's functioning takes the form of specific actions undertaken by its partners. Many other factors are also involved, including the creation of conditions favourable to contacts, exchange of experiences and initiatives of cooperation to encourage engagement as many LAGs as possible². At the same time it must be borne in mind that building up the network of connections and contacts involving local partnerships is a rather long-term process and needs time, but it brings numerous benefits such as ideas of new projects and persistence of the cooperation habit.

Following the period of building up the network around the Leader Programme, member states and the EU will face the challenge of setting up a comprehensive rural development network³. This means that in the future the network will be shaped by other parties and structures (not only Local Action Groups)⁴ connected with a broadly understood notion of rural development. The task of the network in rural areas will be to activate and connect all the entities engaged in implementing rural development policy instruments in the Community. Undoubtedly, former experience from the network operation in member states will be useful for performing this task in member states and at the EU level. The entities involved in creating the network based on the Leader Programme make various suggestions as to the organisation of the rural network, including the establishment of its sub-network for, inter alia Leader, that might receive special support.

Drawn up by **Marta Leoniak**

Source: Report "Networking: Leader's Experience", Contact Point

¹ Report "Networking: Leader's Experience" was published in September 2006.

² In most member states network membership is on a voluntary basis (it is compulsory in Sweden).

³ Council Regulation 1698/2005, article 67, provides for the establishment of the European Rural Development Network.

⁴ So far other organisations or structures outside the Leader Programme have hardly ever been involved in the network activity in member states.

Local tourist product in rural areas

For many regions, small towns, villages and hamlets situated in very attractive areas and their small communities the only opportunity for development, for improvement of the quality of life, for creation of new jobs and, as a result, for unemployment reduction is tourism development. Tourism in a broader context ñ tourism industry. The notion of tourism industry includes everything and seemingly is not directly connected with tourism as such.

Tourism stimulates the construction of roads, petrol stations, garages, i.e. the whole transport infrastructure. It stimulates telecommunications development. It forces the improvement of the quality of medical services and work of the uniformed services. It encourages the development of trade and food production. It has a great impact on the whole services sector and cultural institutions alike. Practically, there is no area of social life that would not develop in consequence of tourism development. The growth of tourism in a given place or region brings about economic revival which, if steered skilfully, fosters steady development in the region. Therefore, in almost all the strategies of the Polish local governments tourism development is one of the major objectives of the measures adopted therein.



This gives rise to some questions: which practical measures should be undertaken so that such development actually takes place? How to limit negative aspects that accompany the process described above so that tourism promotion does not become a curse instead of the good? What to do in order that tourism is sustainable and environmentally friendly? There are

in Poland numerous areas of great potential with many nature attractions, also those made by man characterised by rich cultural heritage. Despite that, nothing is going on there.

To explore the potential lying dormant in the region, it is necessary to create a local tourist product, full of attractions, professionally devised and skilfully promoted. A condition for its creation is practical training of people in services for tourists. Moreover, well-coordinated and planned action, divided into stages, should be carried by local governments, central administration bodies and the society to gain a common, well-understood benefit. However, of greatest importance is the very concept formulated after an in-depth inventory of all attractions, resources, material and non-material components of cultural heritage, the existing tourist, transport infrastructure etc.

Each product is composed of the following:

Nature attractiveness – understood as not only nature reserves, national parks, caves, waterfalls, nature monuments, nature marvels, but also as the landscape bewitching by a range of colours changing with each season of the year. It is the whole kingdom of plants and animals occurring in a particular region that should be looked at through the eyes of potential tourists.

Cultural heritage should be broadly understood as any traces of human activity. Not only as buildings or works of art exhibited in museums, technology marvels, wonderful bridges, salt mines or the remains of our history.

Of equal interest is rich culinary heritage. To get to know each other, the nicest and at the same time the most delicious way is to hold feasts together. Tourists very often remember regional dishes, food and drinks made, processed and offered according to the tradition. Cultural heritage includes also crafts, handicrafts, dresses, music, dance, local customs and habits, i.e. folklore.

The idea of the place, the notion of the region in the minds of tourists to whom the offer is addressed. Such idea is often formed laboriously for a long time by using various promotion methods. Highly effective is promotion that draws on historical elements, such as reconstruction of battles or other historical events, creation of open-air ethnographic museums, organisation of festivals, sports or cultural events. Very often it is a carefully directed and planned event publicised by media. Everything which serves the purpose of creating an attractive, positive image involves the building of the brand name, a recognisable ñsignñ associated with the place. The brand name is one of the keys to success.

Tourist infrastructure of the region, i.e. the quality of accommodation facilities, eating places as well as the quality and type of additional services, leisure activities for tourists. Of equal importance is the quality of banking, mail, local transport services and, for elderly tourists, the standard of medical care. In addition, the work of rescue services and those responsible for public order is of significance to ensure security and protection against various threats, including epidemiological risk and petty offences.

Access by transport, i.e. whether the place is located close to

the main transport routes, airports, sea ports, road and rail hubs. Price – each potential client perceives the tourist product through the price.

Those who create the offer, i.e. those who want to sell their tourist product should perceive the tourist product differently. For them the most important thing should be to find the core of the product, i.e. to determine with perfect accuracy whether the product will be purchased by potential tourists. Those who develop a tourist product should answer a question: why may a tourist want to come here? Why will he or she choose this particular place, not another one? If we refer to the things defined as product components, essential for the offer buyer, the conclusions will be drawn immediately.

All tourist product components will have impact on a positive decision of the potential tourist. Some to a greater and some to a lesser degree depending on the segment of the market which is always very competitive. From the viewpoint of the offer creator, the product components are obvious, such as specific boarding conditions, quality of the menu proposed, transport and all additional services offered to the tourist. From the viewpoint of the offer creator, all that is a way to reach the goal. The first stage of the local product development is an inventory of all product components, a full, thorough analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the future tourist offer. First, a catalogue of tourist and nature attractions should be prepared with the view to making use of them in tourism development in the region. The next stage is to compile an exact and detailed list of everything which is part of cultural heritage including all the aspects. It is only a detailed analysis of the material collected which enables the formulation of the strategy for that. The strategy is needed primarily to coordinate activities and to draw up a programme of the tourist product development, agreed on with all social partners. The success of the implementation of the strategy for the local tourist product development will be conditional clustering around it, i.e. reaching an agreement on the matter, which in the short and long term will impose tasks imposed on its creators to be carried out.

Such well-thought activity, based on a solid framework, must take into account in its implementing part the rule that is the basis of a free market, i.e. freedom of running a business. Here both leaders of local communities and local governments play an important role. The latter, though very often are not holders of funds targeted at investment in tourist infrastructure, have in their hands invaluable tools – decisions. It is a local government which may, by way of its decisions, prepare land for the investment project, grant the required permits, often on a preferential basis, on condition that investor's activities fit into the development plan adopted. Therefore, clustering without full participation of the local government and central government bodies will not be successful.

As illustrated above, tourism development, especially in rural areas is a process which must take place in many areas of social life, however, at the same time it has to be managed and



coordinated in such a way so that a synergy effect is achieved. Management of such development requires the setting up of coordination centres composed of local community leaders. In such case the European Union opts for social-public-economic partnership. Coordinated activities with regard to assistance funds should be the basis for implementation of the adopted strategy by taking specific measures and implementing investment projects.

It is LAGs and social-private partnerships which should have funds for the promotion, training and planning of particular elements of this complicated puzzle. It is essential to raise local awareness by getting acquainted with positive examples from Poland and other countries. Study tours broaden the horizons and remove any mental barriers rapidly and effectively, and give good models to copy. On-the-job training in tourist services, particularly those to be provided in countries and regions, is the fastest way to achieve the level that will guarantee the competitiveness of the offer. This should be the most important element of cooperation with other European regions. Learning from others and transferring experience to the local area is nothing shameful, on the contrary, it is a wise action, which is always profitable.

dr Grzegorz Russak

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The Leader+ National Network Unit in Poland

In the framework of the National Network Leader+ (NNL+) project from 16 April to 15 May 2007 workshops were organised for representatives of all Local Action Groups whose purpose was to expand the know-how and to improve the skill of settlement of the projects implemented under Scheme II, Measure 2.7, of the Pilot Programme Leader+ and the rules for implementing axis 3 "Improvement of the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy" (RDP 2007-2013). The trainees gave a favourable assessment of the training and underlined the need to arrange similar meetings devoted to such substantial issues in the future.

On 25 and 26 May the conference entitled "Building up support for rural development" was convened. It was the first of the three NNL+ conferences planned. The agenda was carefully drawn up and included various aspects. The conference was divided into lectures, workshops and study tours. The conference focussed on very interesting examples of projects implemented by LAGs and partnerships preparing themselves for participation in the Leader axis in the new programming period. They included presentations made by LAGs: Zielone Bieszczady [Green Bieszczady Mountains], Partnerstwo Doliny Środkowej Odry [Partnership of the Middle Oder River Valley], Trzy Doliny [Three Valleys], Unia Nadwarciańska [The Warta River Union] and Partnerstwo Puszczy Kozienickiej "Lokomotywa" [Partnership for the Kozienice Forest "Locomotive"].

At the conference awards of the National Network of Partnership Groups for Sustainable Development were handed out. The Partnership Group Wrzosowa Kraina [Moorland] won the title of the Partnership Group of the Year, Ekomuzeum Trzy Kultury [Ecomuseum Three Cultures] - the title of the Project of the Year and Mr Rafał Plezia from the Partnerstwo Doliny Środkowej Odry - the title of the Animator of the Partnership of the Year.

In addition, measures implemented for the Leader+ Network in Poland and the ideas of networking in the EU were presented

to the conference participants. Interesting presentations were given on the Leader Programme delivery based on the Hungarian example and cooperation projects initiated in Galicia in Spain. The conference also looked at the analysis of the Leader+ implementation status in Poland. During workshops trainees acquired a practical knowledge of the problems LAGs are currently facing upon partnership creation, strategy development as well as implementation and settlement of projects under the Pilot Programme Leader+.

Should you be interested in additional information on these issues, please contact us via the website www.leaderplus.org.pl, siec_leader@fapa.org.pl.

Coming soon

Right now we would like to invite you to read the subsequent edition of the Quarterly, to be published in August, in which we will print, among other things, an article devoted to Polish-Hungarian cooperation under the Leader Programme and provide you with information on the region where the traditions of Lach, Lemka and Black Highlanders are still vivid. The Association "Perty Beskidu Sądeckiego" [Pearls of the Beskid Sądecki Mountain Range] will present to us its picturesque Small Fatherland, with hamlets in the mountains located in the communes of Aabowa, Nawojowa, Piwniczna-Zdrój and Rytro, where talented artists create their works of art and representatives of perishing professions make their handicrafts, among them lace makers, embroiderers, axle grease makers, coopers, glove makers and Gobelin tapestry makers.



Establishing cooperation between LAGs from Germany, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Between 8 and 10 May 2007 a conference was held in Bavaria, organised by the German Leader+ Network, devoted to cooperation between LAGs from the four countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Hungary. The groups discussed jointly what to do, in order to bring substantial benefits to local communities through common action.

Cooperation between LAGs will not develop on its own, someone must start an initiative, someone else must undertake it. It seemed that LAGs would be willing to explore possibilities of cooperation ensured by the Leader structure. However, the situation is not so good, even in Germany.

From the beginning of their existence, Polish Local Action Groups have been forging bilateral and multilateral contacts. For instance they established relations at the conferences organised by the Contact Point Leader+, at the meeting in Tihany in Hungary held in November last year or at the meeting in Corsica in April this year.

The conference in Bad Staffelstein looked at, among other things, ways of removing barriers that have impact on cooperation. One of the constraints discussed was the lack of funds. It was at the same time emphasised that this barrier was most likely lifted at least with regard to 150 LAGs which implemented their strategies thanks to support from the EU and the national budget under the Pilot Project Leader+ Scheme II.

A major barrier to establishing direct cooperation between LAGs from different countries is no knowledge of foreign languages. It is worthwhile to take it into account and to look for ways of removing such barriers. Participation in the conference of so many Polish people was to a large extent possible thanks to ensuring professional interpreting services into Polish. However, in addition to using translation services, it is helpful to improve the knowledge of foreign languages, to invite teachers of foreign languages for cooperation, young people, e.g. students who could provide support not only with regard to translation.

Joint meetings with LAG representatives in other countries are, on the one hand, an excellent opportunity to observe the arrangements that gave desired results and to introduce them directly into another country or after their adaptation to local conditions. On the other hand, participation in study tours, establishment and maintenance of contacts with people from other countries and regions of a different culture is a good way to expand cooperation under Leader and to involve other partners in it.

The meeting in Bad Staffelstein was, to a considerable degree, targeted at better familiarisation with each other and establishment of first contacts. German LAGs are looking for partners in the neighbouring countries, including Poland, to implement jointly specific projects such as international cycle

route R1 from Petersburg to Amsterdam or Polish-German horse trail.

A project of international cooperation should be well prepared, organised and delivered consistently, which requires some knowledge, skills and determination. Such knowledge should be constantly expanded, skills upgraded whereas consistence and responsibility should be acquired.

Ten persons submitted their registrations for the Bad Staffelstein conference, but as many as three of them did not turn up without notifying organisers thereof. That meant a great waste as someone else might have taken part in the conference instead and the organisers, unfortunately, had to pay for that anyway. However, the most significant loss was incurred by those who, despite earlier registration for the conference, did not seize the opportunity to learn something new and lost a chance to establish contacts. Moreover, we are sorry to admit it, they tarnished their reputation and also that of others.

The conference was an excellent opportunity to learn, improve and develop the rules of cooperation. Those who took part in it, certainly reaped great benefits thereof. As for the Polish group, it was Mr Piotr Kosowiec from the Foundation Leader Watecki who stood out. Numerous representatives of foreign LAGs established contacts with him and proposed cooperation. Several of these LAGs already had specific proposals of cooperation projects and I have committed myself to posting these proposals, after we receive them, on the website, in the Quarterly and to sending them by e-mail to all or selected LAGs in our country.

It is advisable to visit the website of the Leader network www.leaderplus.pl. You can find there, among others, interesting proposals of cooperation published in the FlashNews bulletin, edited by Leader+ Contact Point in Brussels and translated for you into Polish.

We would like to remind you that international cooperation is an eligible expenditure under Scheme II and it will be supported to greater extent than so far in the new programming period 2007-2013.

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