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Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle
Ländliche Räume

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Guide to interterritorial and
transnational cooperation

Future Country Living.

 **netzwerk**
LÄNDLICHE RÄUME



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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.



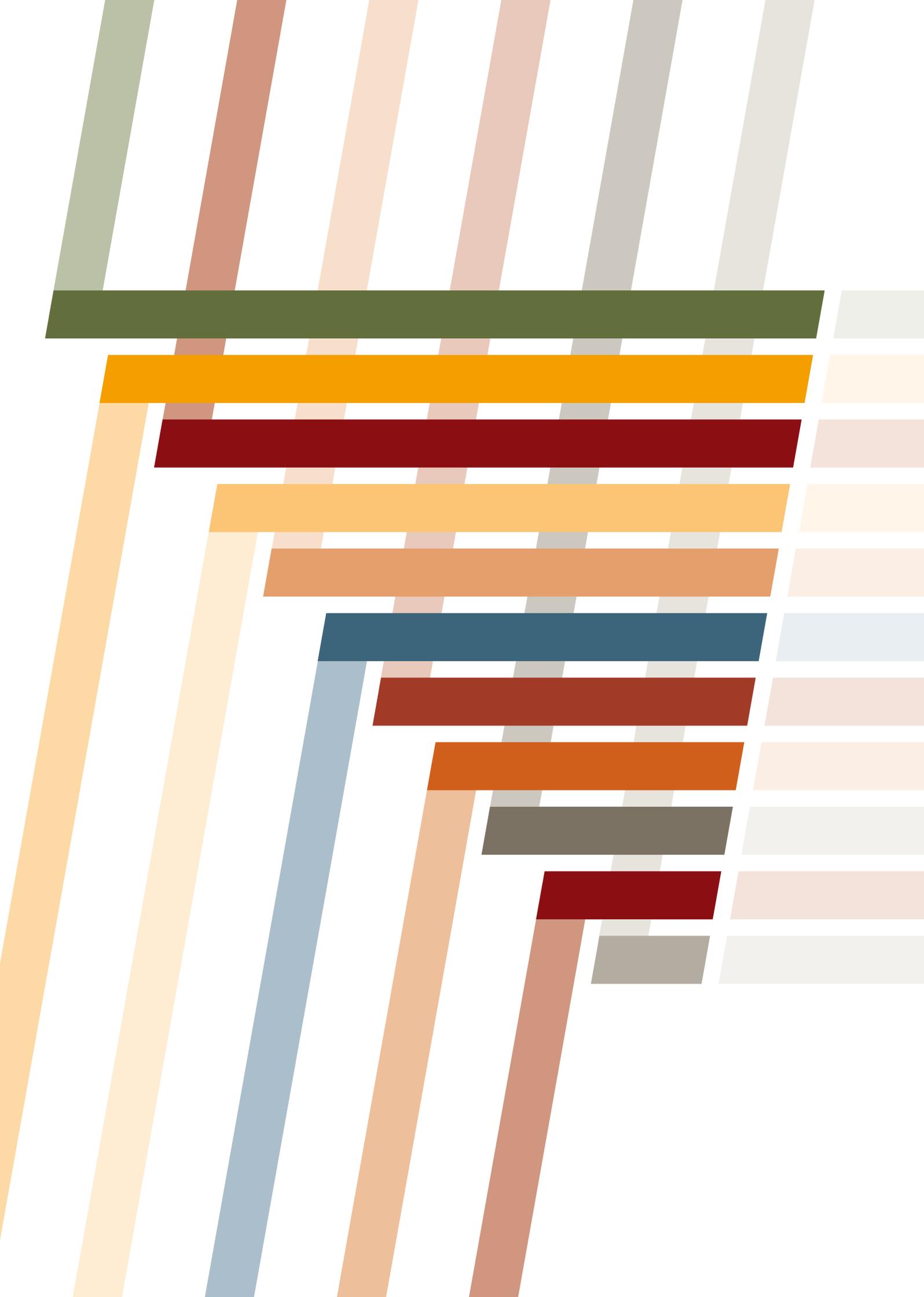
Federal Ministry
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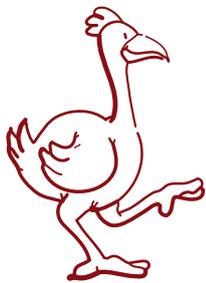
***Guide to interterritorial and
transnational cooperation***

August 2009



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Introduction

Cooperation between stakeholders in rural areas is a fundamental component of Leader (4th axis of the EAFRD). It starts with people in a given rural area who are willing to play an active part in local development. Their action evolves into cooperation projects with neighbouring areas and culminates in transnational activities at European level.

In recent years, the European Union has become much more closely knit and has grown considerably with the accession of new Member States. This growth is not limited to the area of land the European Union now covers. The number of possible partner countries has risen significantly and with it the potential to exploit the added value promised by cooperation activities.

Interterritorial and transnational cooperation projects now play a greater role than ever when it comes to provide funding for Local Action Groups (LAGs). While only a few such projects came to fruition under the LEADER II initiative, many have since been implemented with the LEADER+ programme: so far, Germany's 148 LAGs have engaged in around 60 transnational and 150 interterritorial cooperation projects. The German states (Länder) have created a separate budget from which to allocate funding for Local Action Group activities.

When devising their local development strategies for 2007-2013, some Local Action Groups went as far as to name future cooperation partners and project themes. Addressing the subject of cooperation at an early stage speeds up the process of getting such projects off the ground – by their very nature, cooperation projects conducted at interterritorial and transnational level are far more time-intensive than 'normal' local-level ones.

Such projects are well worth the effort, though, because they bring a range of added benefits. It is not so much the projects themselves, but the people and organisations involved that make them worthwhile and profitable. They boost a region's image beyond its own borders, generate numerous new contacts and give people an insight into alternative ways of thinking and working. In short, they serve areas all round.

With this in mind, this publication is designed to support Local Action Groups in their cooperation project efforts. It looks at why such projects are important and shows how they come about, thus providing an important source of reference for less experienced local-level actors.

Born of the conviction and dedication of local stakeholders, cooperation projects begin at home and then evolve in the search for suitable project partners. Once those partners have been found, the two sides must work together to develop a meaningful and beneficial project model before submitting their project proposal. They have to work out which issues they need to consider and identify the conflicts they are likely to face.

In doing so, they can draw upon the resources of locally organised events, project reports and publications, and works issued by other EU networks involved in the LEADER II and LEADER+ initiatives.

The idea is to underpin theory with best-practice models. Practical guidance is drawn from a series of interviews specially conducted for the publication. Special thanks thus go to all those involved for dedicating their invaluable time to the cause.

This publication is also downloadable on the website of the German Network for Rural Areas.
>> www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/kooperation



Benefits of Cooperation

The ways in which rural areas can significantly benefit from cooperation at interterritorial and transnational level are not always readily evident. But when a project is otherwise likely to fail, perhaps due to lack of funding or other resources, it certainly makes sense to look for a suitable partner in the immediate area or even further afield.

Cooperation means added value

Neighbouring areas can benefit from things like joint marketing initiatives – it is rarely a good idea to focus marketing activities on one small geographic area. Taking the tourism sector as an example, the borders that apply to a specific Local Action Group (LAG) will not necessarily match those of a particular tourism region. This is especially the case as regards cycling, walking and riding routes.

The Local Action Groups representing Wirtschaftsraum Schraden (Brandenburg) and Westlausitzer Heidebogen (Saxony) cooperate on a project (SchRADELN) involving tourism service providers from both regions. Together, they have developed and marketed a bookable fixed-price service which allows cyclists to tour the region without having to worry about their luggage. The package ranges from hotels and restaurants, specially devised tourist guides and other services of interest to cyclists.

When it comes to marketing local and innovative products, it can often take a joint venture to reach critical mass and position the goods or services in new markets. The savings to be had from splitting production phases between project partners naturally play a key role, as does learning from the experience of others. By adopting a joint approach, areas are far better positioned to embrace risk and explore new avenues.





The LAG Strittmatter Land area is currently planning a cooperation project with LAGs from Poland, Lithuania, Austria and Hungary in which they will jointly develop an optimised biomass production chain. Where one region might have particular production-related weaknesses, another could demonstrate strengths in that same area. Their differing levels of expertise can be optimally combined at relevant points along the production chain.

Cooperating beyond national borders provides an ideal opportunity to test the export potential of local products. It also helps businesses find new markets, something of great importance in border regions. Plus, it attracts new project partners and makes people willing to participate in activities they would normally shy away from.

Cooperation can also be advantageous to museums that cover similar subjects, allowing them to reap the benefits of jointly organised exhibitions.

The cooperation project Umwelt- und Wirtschaftsarchäologie – neue Bausteine einer modernen Erlebnispädagogik involving LAGs in Oberschwaben (Baden Württemberg, Germany) and Vinschgau (Italy) focuses on employee-sharing, with museum educationalists being hired to work for both museums. The museums also mutually benefit by taking each other's tried and tested models and implementing them in their own region.

There is strong local consensus that the project should focus on locational factors like tourism and value added chains.





Cooperation is added value plus

Experience gathered under the LEADER II and LEADER+ initiatives has shown that co-operation on a specific issue can produce sustainable international networks and provide the groundwork for future activities.

Transinterpret is a transnational cooperation project designed to promote landscape interpretation. It was developed as a LEADER II project and continued under LEADER+ although with new project partners. It was only during the second phase of the project that many local stakeholders (mayors, tourism service providers, etc.) were won over to the qualitative benefits of landscape interpretation. International exchange has sparked many new ideas in the areas represented by the various cooperation partners.

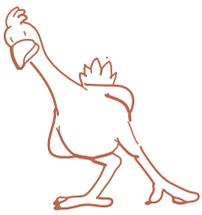
>> www.transinterpret.net

Cooperation on a specific issue broadens knowledge, fosters an innovative approach to project implementation and incentivises people to test the unknown.

Mobikult is a cooperation project between six LEADER+ areas in the German state of Brandenburg. In conjunction with the Technical University of Berlin (Centre for Technology and Society), they use new forms of cooperation between tourism organisations and public and private mobility providers to develop innovative mobility models for rural areas. The project inspired the LAGs to develop new mobility models for their respective regions. It also provides a basis for further cooperation projects under the current LEADER+ initiative and other, similar programmes launched in the future.

>> www.mobikult.de





Broader horizons

Because no two areas are alike, cooperation projects allow close insight into how others work. This broadens people's horizons, sparking new ideas among local actors and breathing new life into the everyday workings of local management and administration. Exchange at administrative level can be particularly beneficial.

The state of Baden Württemberg has hosted several successful inter-territorial cooperation projects. Much has been done to encourage a shift away from parochial thinking and many local mayors have had only positive things to say about the lasting benefits derived from such activities. More importance is now being placed on the growing trend towards cooperation.

At transnational level, the areas are confronted with the attitudes and opinions of other cultures and are suddenly able to view their own in a different light. Local identity is perceived more intensely and in turn this reflects people's increased readiness to work towards improving conditions in their own area. The idea of boosting an area's image beyond its borders provides a great incentive for people to get involved.

Broadening horizons can also have a positive effect in other ways. For example, it gives project participants a growing insight into the ways of other cultures.



The LAG Steinburg has joined forces with an area in Finland to work on two related cooperation projects: an international women's network and a trades and crafts cooperative. Working with their Finnish colleagues gave the LAG the idea for yet another project which centres on the district museum. It was sparked by the insight gained into Finnish people's attitude to culture – culture in Finland is placed in higher esteem than in Germany and each small community boasts a wealth of cultural institutions such as libraries and small museums. The LAG Steinburg was influenced by the results of the PISA study and hopes to enhance German education by promoting culture in the area. Much can be learned from Finland, both conceptually and practically.



Lasting benefits for local actors and local populations

Cooperation at interterritorial and transnational level often focuses on preserving common cultural, historical or natural heritage. In many cases, cooperating on a project provides the opportunity to lend new importance to heritage issues. It can also foster solidarity at local, regional and European level.

In a LEADER II cooperation project between a LAG in the German state of Hesse and one in France, the two groups tackled the historical heritage of the Huguenots. On the German side, the project took in several villages that had formerly experienced problems in inter-village communication. The cooperation activities and the focus on shared roots were instrumental in fostering more intensive liaison between the villages in question.



The diverse positive effects and sustainability derived from transnational cooperation is evident in a project involving LAG Oberschwaben and a Spanish partner area. While the project aim was to establish a thermal baths network, it also gave rise to the following subsidiary products:

- * School exchanges
- * Language courses and extra-curricular Spanish groups in the local German school
- * Ongoing visits on both sides
- * Work placement/apprenticeship exchanges at the respective thermal baths
- * Parents of the school children involved have since visited the Spanish region
- * On the German side, attempts are being made to adopt a Spanish attitude to hospitality
- * The city marketing authorities also benefited because the tourist information office is responsible for coordinating the project and thus attends meetings with all those involved in the project. People participating in the meetings automatically talked about other projects they were involved in or knew about, and the two sides now work far better together than before.



Another example of the sustainability effects arising from cooperation projects in the area involves the Habitat Domus project run by the German LAG Märkische Schweiz and Switzerland's Thunersee (Lake Thun) region, in which a joint property exchange was developed:

„...Contact between pupils, teachers and nature park administrators continues on both private and professional level. The Swiss project partners have already spent holidays in the Märkische Schweiz region. They can take part in four-day tours of the nature park and these coincide with the arrival of the Eurasian Coot. Mutual visits are planned by artists from both regions. Pupils from the local schools have stayed in contact and hope to visit one another in the future...“



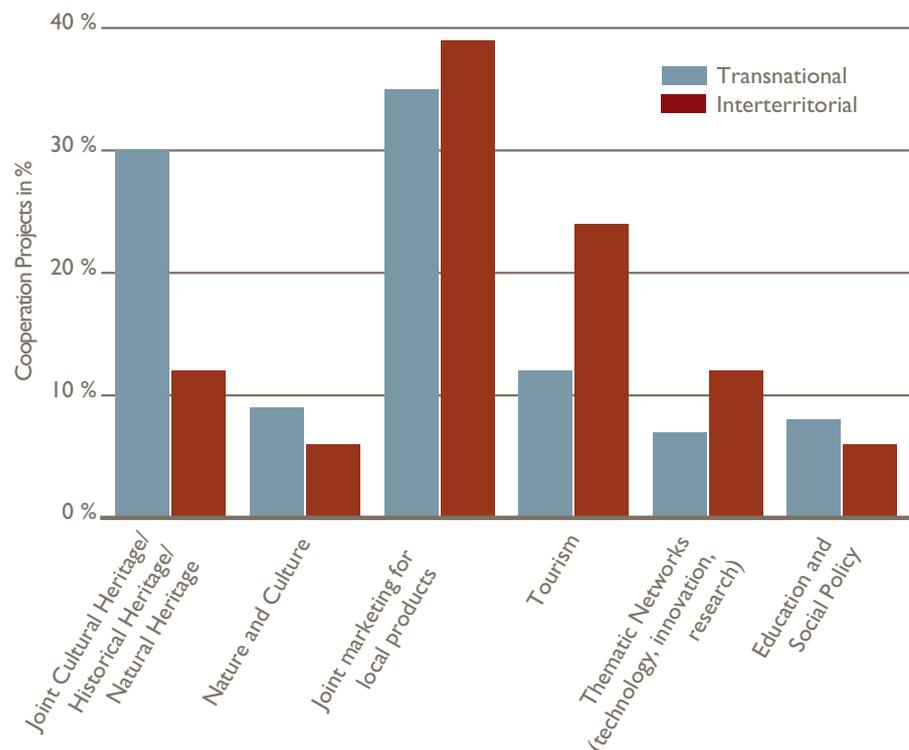
LEADER+ Cooperation Activities

Under the LEADER+ programme, some 60 transnational and 150 interterritorial cooperation projects have been implemented in Germany. Their thematic focus was joint marketing of local products and other marketing activities.

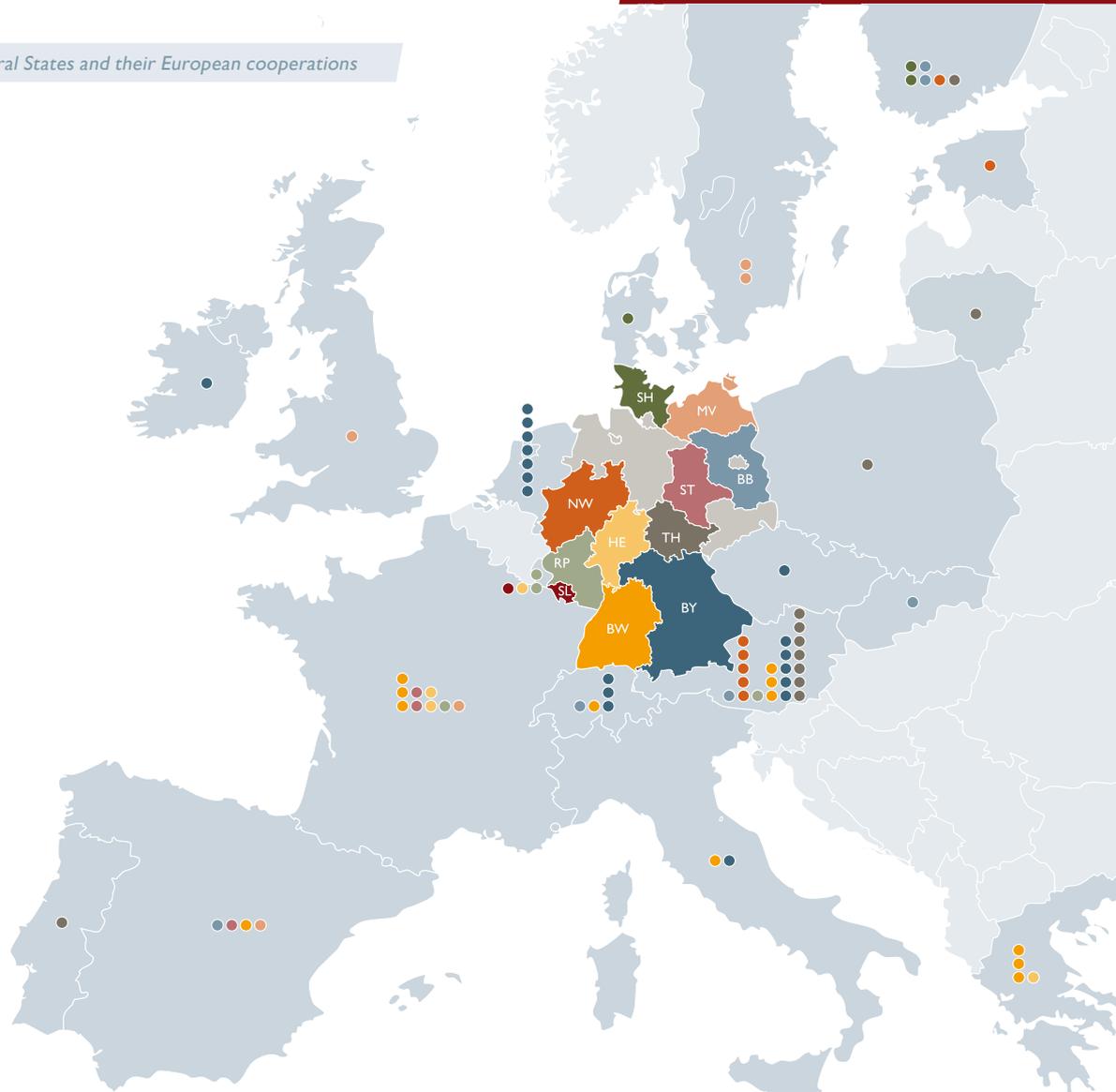


Natur- und Kulturerbe Vorarlberg (Austria), Nordschwarzwald (Baden-Württemberg) and Impuls Westallgäu 10+ (Bavaria) are three LAGs with a common problem: they all have difficulty in marketing high-quality silver fir timber. The high costs involved in managing and processing silver fir compared with other types of timber have led to significant reductions in the quantities of silver fir that are cultivated. Yet, the silver fir possesses specific traits whose huge marketing potential the three LAGs are now able to exploit by means of interterritorial cooperation and jointly-developed marketing activities. This has boosted value creation for forest owners and secured long-term conservation of the silver fir so important to the cultural landscape. A joint advertising brochure has been produced along with a dedicated website.

>> www.weisstanne.net



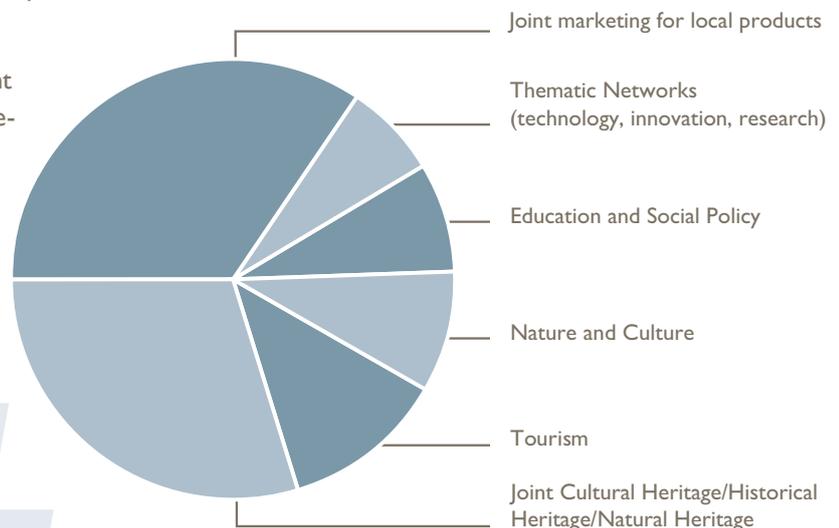
This image shows the Federal States and their European cooperations



Transnational Cooperation Projects

Under LEADER+, German LAGs have largely cooperated with project partners from other German-speaking countries (Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland). Two thirds of the projects were carried out in conjunction with neighbouring EU member states. This highlights the fact that when selecting candidates for cooperation, preference is given to project partners who speak the same language.

The second major theme of cooperation after joint marketing is joint cultural, historical and natural heritage. Divided by national borders, these common issues were taken up under the LEADER+ programme and have been given a new lease of life in the respective regions.



On the left: All german LAG's thematic cooperations in LEADER+

On the right: German LAG's transnational cooperations in LEADER+

Several LAGs from areas in Germany's Rhineland Palatinate and from Luxembourg want to revive their common Roman heritage. To promote Roman remains in the areas covered by the LAGs, the project uses flyers, a dedicated website and standardised signage along the Straße der Römer (Roman Heritage Route). The project partners believe their transnational project offers a unique opportunity to join forces with the tourism sector and boost interest in the valuable relics of Roman times. The plan is to attract new project partners from other EU countries during the next funding period.

>> www.strasse-der-roemer.de



More examples of transnational cooperation projects that were not used as model projects for the purposes of this publication are available on the website of the German Network for Rural Areas (www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/kooperation) and the European Contact Point LEADER+.

>> <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus>

Interterritorial cooperation projects

Over half the interterritorial cooperation projects were implemented in conjunction with immediate neighbouring LAGs. The main focus was placed on joint marketing activities and tourism. In many cases, it was the cooperation between the areas that actually made the projects worthwhile.

In the Allgäu area, three LAGs got together to launch the LandZunge im Allgäu project, the idea being to showcase local products. Participating restaurants in the area offer specially created LandZunge menus and use only products grown and reared in the Allgäu-Schwäbische area, thus providing an additional source of value creation for local farmers. A further criterion is that all beef and veal used for the menus must come from local brand schemes or have a direct link with local agriculture. The menus must contain two or three meals that use locally produced cheese and the available beverages must include local beer and apple juice.

>> www.landzunge.info



Wir sind dabei!

Many other projects have come to fruition thanks to cooperation between project partners in a single German state (Land). For the LAGs involved, the topics chosen were only really worthwhile once they joined forces and consolidated their resources – it was the only way to arrive at a sustainable strategy and achieve truly lasting benefit.

Mobikult: New Approaches to Mobile Services in Rural Areas

Six LAGs in the German state of Brandenburg jointly developed a sustainable, fundable, demand-driven service to improve mobility in the area.

Schleswig-Holstein Cycling Portal

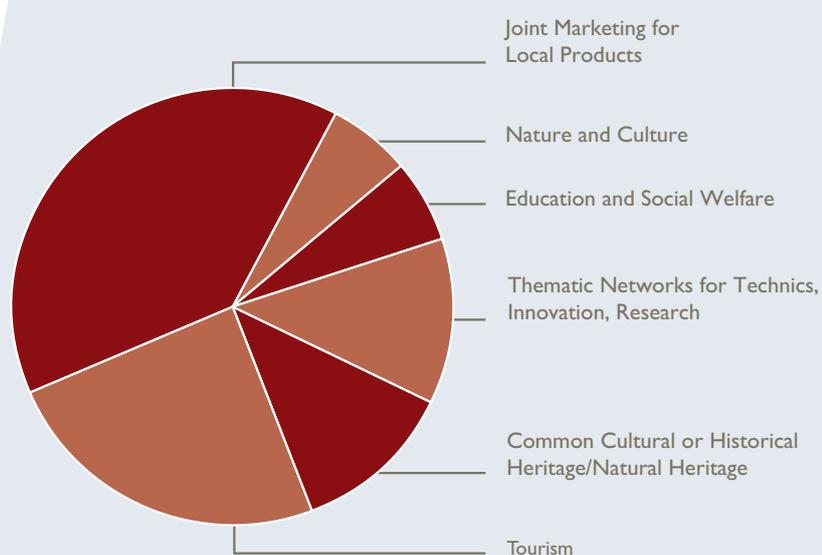
Five LAGs worked together to produce an online cycling portal for the Land Schleswig-Holstein.

Hesse Regional Forums

LAGs in the Land of Hesse organised joint events to build awareness of the opportunities and challenges involved in integrated local development. The issues covered include civil engagement and cooperation at municipal level, job opportunities and job creation, tourism and recreation, land use and energy, and provision of basic services and infrastructure.

School Trips and Youth Excursions

Five LAGs in Germany's Mittelfranken region published a joint brochure containing two suggestions each for trips and excursions in their respective areas. These were distributed to all schools in Mittelfranken and neighbouring regions. A targeted PR campaign was launched at the same time. Having proved a success, the project was then expanded to take in suggestions on trips and excursions for clubs and walking/rambling groups. Suggestions were also made for new LEADER projects.



International cooperations in LEADER+



Cooperation begins at home

When attempting to get a cooperation project off the ground, the first step is to scan the area for potential projects and themes. Are any projects already up and running that might benefit from cooperation? Who is involved? Ideally, they will have some experience in working in partnership. Language barriers, cultural differences and spatial distance should not hinder transnational cooperation. It makes sense to bring in people from further afield right from the beginning.

Timely assessment as to whether a project promises added value, both for the project partners and for the region, is of vital importance before going any further. The same applies to obtaining co-financing: trying to convince municipal, district and other institutions of a project's merits can often be more difficult than with normal projects. If the added value offered by a project is readily visible from the outset, funding is less of a problem.

Cooperation projects take up more time than single-source local projects. Everyone involved must be aware of this. A critical look at whether they have the necessary amount of time available is thus of utmost importance.

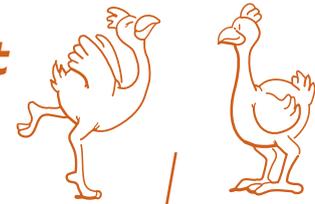


Working groups

It can make sense for individual LAGs to form dedicated working groups to focus specifically on cooperation projects. The working groups would then be responsible for finding suitable project partners and clarifying administrative and technical issues. This eases the burden at local management level.



Partner Search and Recruitment



Project partners and themes

Personal contact is one of the most important factors in organising a cooperation project and it is vital that project planning allows enough time to conduct an in-depth search.

Regardless of who initiates a project, they should give considerable thought to the type of project partner they are looking for. It makes the search more structured and targeted:

- What kind of partners are needed (public, private, public-private)? Should there be similarities between them and the initiator?
- Should cooperation partners possess specific characteristics, knowledge and experience? Or should their interests go beyond those of the project itself?
- Should they have gained experience in a particular area and be willing to share it with others?
- What benefits can potential partners bring to the area?

When deciding on a project theme, the following questions should be considered:

- Is the aim to promote a common heritage?
- Is the aim to consolidate resources?
- Is the aim to develop a joint product or service?

Cooperation can involve other Local Action Groups within Germany and the EU, and other rural areas within and beyond Europe who work on similar lines to the Leader approach .

There are many different ways of finding suitable cooperation partners. LAGs can take the initiative and start looking for potential partners themselves, or they can respond to advertisements from other areas. Talks held with stakeholders at organised events can also give rise to meaningful projects.

Existing contacts

In rural areas with little experience with cooperation projects, existing partnerships with other areas can provide ideal conditions on which to base a new project partnership. This has the advantage that the people involved are often already acquainted with one another and so know what to expect.

The easiest option is to cooperate with a neighbouring area; the potential project themes at this level are as many as they are varied.



The Rhön area stretches across three German Länder and forms an identifiable landscape and tourism area. The neighbouring LAGs in Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia have long maintained contact and have used their connections to engage in a cooperation project designed to boost the area's image. The project largely focuses on tourism: on walking and rambling, cycling, canoeing and kayaking, creating a digital Rhön encyclopaedia and developing a quality assurance scheme for the area's hospitality sector.

Municipal, town and district partnerships provide a solid base for cooperation. This does away with the need for an initial 'ice-breaking' meeting, both in terms of the people involved and the areas themselves.

Interterritorial cooperation

The German Network for Rural Areas (DVS) organises conferences, workshops and seminars to assist the search for co-operation partners within Germany.

Meetings arranged by other dedicated networks are also an ideal venue at which to meet people who are active in LEADER or similar local partnerships and whose areas are interested in cooperating with others.



In an otter conservation project devised by the Schleswig-Holstein LAGs Eider-Treene-Sorge and Schwentine-Holsteinische Schweiz, the project partners – Natur- und Umweltzentrum Hohner See and Verein Wasser Otter Mensch – already knew each other from attending the annual meetings of a working group on water mammals. The idea for the otter project came up during one of the working group’s meetings and both LAGs immediately recognised its potential.



Rural areas publish their need for project partners on the DVS website (www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/kooperation). DVS also runs similar advertisements in its regular publications.

The website contains a database in which potential cooperation partners can be sought for specific project themes.

Transnational cooperation

At transnational level, DVS publishes cooperation advertisements on its website and in its various publications. Advertisements targeting LAGs in other EU countries are immediately forwarded to the network offices of the country in question and the European Contact Point. They then pass on the information to the LAGs. Online searches via the website of the European Contact Point are also planned.

Cooperation events

DVS, National Rural Networks in other EU countries and the European Contact Point organise ongoing events to bring potential cooperation partners together. These events have produced in the past many partnerships, most of which have led to successful projects.

Events that focus on issues other than cooperation also provide an ideal opportunity to meet potential cooperation partners. Experience has shown that a partnership’s chances of success are enhanced through personal contact.



In January 2004, a member of the LAG Mittlere Altmark (Saxony-Anhalt) took the initiative to drive to Lyon to attend a national event hosted by the French LEADER+ Network Unit. She spoke perfect French and thus had no difficulty in participating in a workshop and speaking about her own LAG. Her brief presentation hit exactly the right note. After the workshop, several French LAGs (one being the LAG Beauce Dunois) approached her and said words to the effect of "I know just the thing our groups could cooperate on". The two LAGs complemented one another in their landscape, cultural and economic situations and faced the same problems, thus providing optimal conditions for a cooperation project.

Together, the LAGs developed Euro Land Art, a landscape art festival to be held in their respective regions.

The project was approved in April 2005 and has since been implemented with great success. A cooperation partner from the Netherlands joined the project in 2006 after hearing about it from the LEADER+ Contact Point.

The project goes on with other subsidies in the current funding period.
 >> www.eurolandart-altmark.de

CHOOSE THE RIGHT GAME TO WIN!



Individual partner search

The German Network for Rural Areas can assist in the search for a cooperation partner, either at interterritorial or at transnational level. It uses its contacts with networks throughout the EU to launch a search according to preferred cooperation areas and/or partners.

Enquiries regarding the current situation with Leader in other EU Member States are welcome at any time.

The LAG Oberschwaben decided to look for local cooperation partners with similar areas of focus. Having lighted on the common denominator of archaeology, a number of museums have since successfully implemented projects in the area. The LAG organised a workshop and invited all potential cooperation partners and actors. The invitation clearly stated that the LAG Oberschwaben had considerable experience with cooperation projects and would be approaching the event in a serious and professional manner. That only three registrations were received was sobering to say the least.

DVS thus suggested that the LAG visit all potential cooperation partners along the Danube river. This would allow them to meet personally, form an opinion and get an insight into ongoing projects.

The LAG organised a week-long trip with no less than 12 destinations, some as far afield as Budapest. Everyone with a key role to play in the project went on the trip. Taking the Danube as a reference point, the German Network Unit focused its search on LAGs and LEADER-type areas along the entire stretch of the river. During the trip, it announced that an associated workshop would be held at a later date.

The workshop took place after the trip. It was attended by about 50 people and gave rise to a number of museum-related cooperation projects.

Accompanying the LAG on its trip along the Danube gave the various local actors a chance to get to know each other and form closer links. Museum directors who until then had seen each other as competitors now work together and maintain ongoing exchange.



The Challenge in Cooperation

The experience gathered in previous LEADER periods has shown that cooperation projects are not always plain sailing. Problems can arise at various stages along the way. If they are to avoid disappointment and conflict, project partners need to be aware of potential problems in advance

Language barriers

When working at transnational level, misunderstandings can arise simply due to the fact that project partners speak different languages. Language barriers increase the time needed to get the job done because everything has to be translated. This heightens the risk of information not being passed on. When embarking on a cooperation project, the partners thus need to agree on a working language. This is especially important if several partner countries are involved and fundamental issues have to be agreed on before work can begin. If the parties are unable to communicate sufficiently in the other language, it can be helpful to bring in someone (to attend the initial meeting) who speaks all the languages involved.

The LAGs in Steinburg (Schleswig-Holstein) and Aisapari (Finland) agreed on English as the working language for their Landfrauennetzwerk project. But as it turned out, at their very first meeting one of the Finnish group announced that she had grown up in Germany and spoke fluent German as well as Finnish. When it came to agreeing on a common goal and defining the project's aims, she acted as an interpreter and ensured that nothing was lost in translation. After that, the parties were able to communicate in English without any further problems.

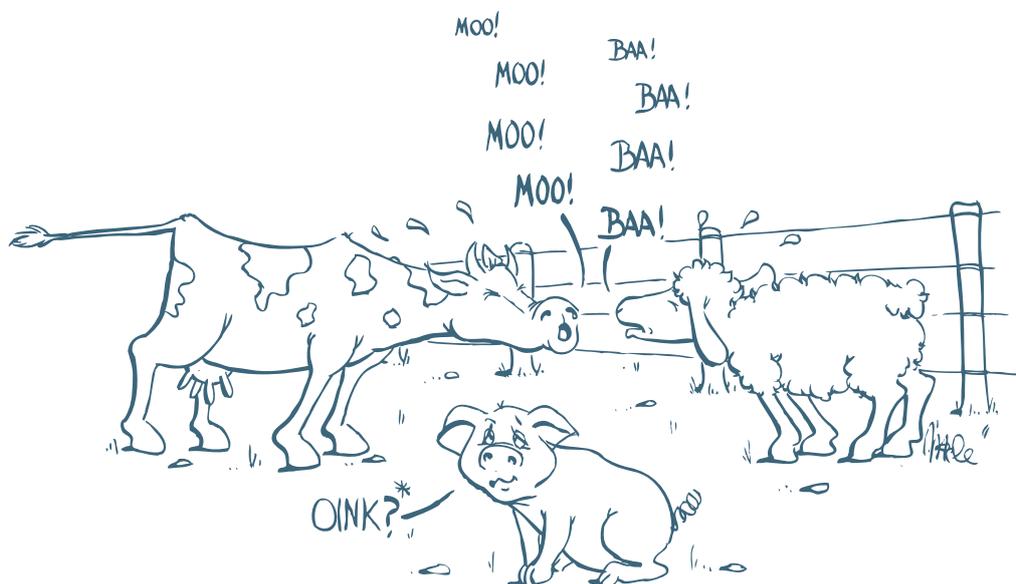
If there is no-one available who speaks the languages of the cooperation partners, especially if more than two partners and languages are involved, it is wise to hire an interpreter who has been briefed about the project and its aims. Interpreters can be expensive and talks with the competent project approval authorities will clarify whether the costs of interpreter services can be billed against the project budget. At meetings attended by four to six people, it is recommended not only to have an interpreter on hand but to use a conference interpreting system so everyone can benefit from the services of simultaneous interpreting.

In the case of the Transinterpret landscape interpretation project (a transnational cooperation activity involving partners from Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Greece), the problem of language arose at a meeting in Italy. Apart from those working on the project, the meeting was attended by interested parties from Italy and a ministry representative from Greece. They were less than proficient in English, the agreed working language for the project, and would thus have been unable to follow the discussion. The project budget made no provision for simultaneous interpreting services. So at the meeting, they had to rely on consecutive interpreting (oral translation of a speaker's words after they have finished speaking) which meant it was impossible to keep to the set timetable.

>> www.transinterpret.net

If project partners attending a cooperation meeting volunteer to act as unofficial interpreters, they have to concentrate so hard that it can deter their ability to play an active role in the proceedings and the discussion can suffer as a result.

That having been said, it is extremely important that project partners be able to communicate with one another. If communication suffers, when they get to the project proposal phase the partners will find that they simply cannot work with one another.

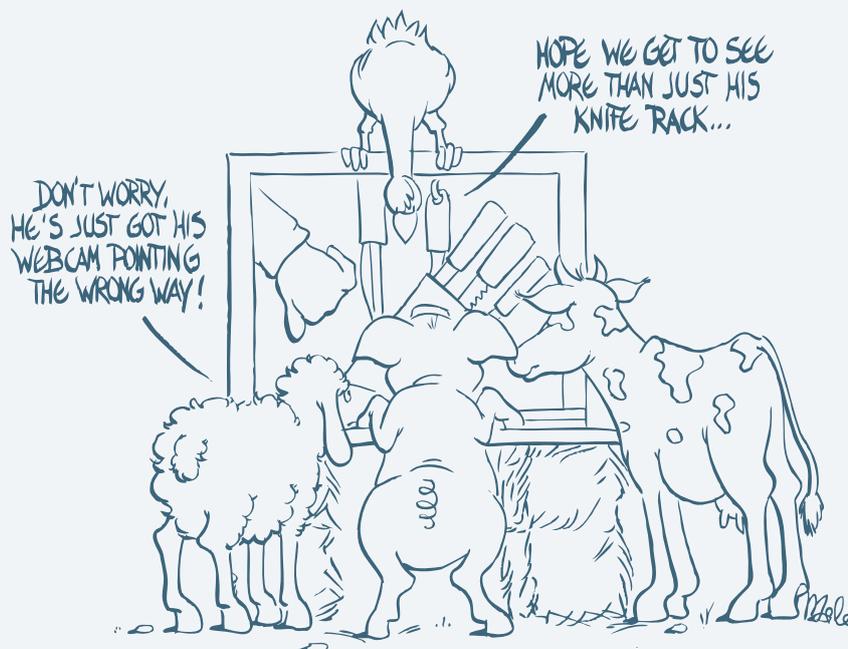


* COULD SOMEONE GET AN INTERPRETER, PLEASE?

Cultural differences

It is a well-known fact that every country has its own cultural identity. Even in a relatively small country like Germany, cultural differences are evident across individual Länder. The cooperation partners naturally display these traits in project activities, calling for a high degree of tolerance from all concerned. This applies to people's attitudes and behaviour, the speed at which they work and the care applied in each individual phase of work.

The German coordinator of the Thermalbadvernetzung 2006 project once remarked that: "...When going into a cooperation project, you have to be aware that your Spanish counterparts might have completely different working hours to your own. If you want same-day information, you have to send your e-mails by lunch time at the latest to be sure of getting a reply."



Spatial distance

Direct contact is vital to cooperation projects, even in the digital age. The closer the partners are in proximity, the easier they will be able to work together. This is especially the case for those engaging in a cooperation project for the first time.

The greater the distance between the parties, the more time and effort the work will involve. This must be taken into account when planning the project schedule. Paying attention to these issues can add to a project's success.

Conflicting expectations

Before a project can be thrashed out in a face-to-face meeting, a number of points need to be clarified.

If the expectations of the various partners and of individual LAG members differ, conflict is bound to arise.

It is advisable, therefore, to discuss in advance things like the project's aims, the amount of time available and the funding arrangements. Partnerships are rarely successful if one partner allows the other to have their own way simply because they have more experience or greater expertise. It pays to reflect on one's own options and expectations.

The Habitat Domus cooperation project run by the LAG Märkische Schweiz (German state of Brandenburg) and Thunersee (Lake Thun, Switzerland) faced problems in the early stages of implementation. The Swiss LAG more or less tried to go it alone: they failed to communicate adequately with their German counterparts during the project proposal phase and wanted to see all their ideas implemented without exception. The Märkische Schweiz group agreed to some but not all of the demands and had planned to conduct a target group analysis from the outset – a move that proved highly beneficial to the project. By way of contrast, the Swiss partners had not considered the need for a target group analysis and encountered problems during project implementation as a result. The German group stuck to their chosen course and their efforts were well rewarded.

>> www.landsucht.com

Looked at from another angle, differing levels of experience can be beneficial if the project partners are aware of their differences from the start and can recognise the added value to be had from their project.

While cooperation projects are not always sparked by bottom-up initiatives, they can evolve into a local-level activity. Whether or not they do depend on the local actors involved and how they communicate the project idea.



Differing structures

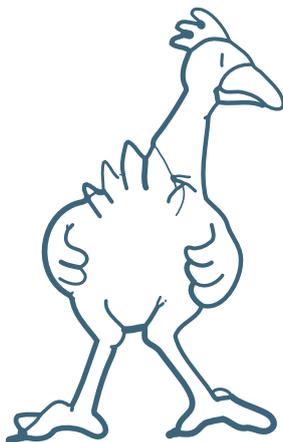
Every EU Member State and each of Germany's individual Länder has its own administrative structures. At EU level, there are also differing legal systems to contend with.

National project approval processes can sometimes differ tremendously. The amount of influence from regional and local policy level varies greatly and can be instrumental in facilitating mutual understanding.

It thus pays to inform project partners about prevailing structures prior to developing a project model. This helps avoid misunderstanding and stops things getting bogged down.

With the transnational Transinterpret project (see above), approval from the Greek side was severely delayed and the subcontracted German project manager was forced to invest so much private capital that he almost went bankrupt. The original project team left their jobs because the funding that paid their salaries was no longer secure. The Greek approval office had the problem that they had not understood that in Germany, project management can be outsourced to a university and that the same university can perform the project evaluation and research. The Greek system does not allow sub-contractor-funded, third-party projects to be conducted by universities. Time had almost run out when the Greek side finally approved the project and it was seen through to its successful conclusion.
 >> www.transinterpret.net

Also, when engaging in a cooperation project, other important factors to consider are whether the work done by the LAG involved is performed by private individuals, recognised associations or public administrations, and who intends to assume the role of project sponsor.



Coming together
is a beginning.

Staying together
is progress.

Working together
is success.

HENRY FORD



Meeting for the First Time



BE SURE TO CREATE THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE
TO MAKE THE MEETING A SUCCESS.

The first meeting can shape the rest of the project and must be carefully thought through.

Preparing for the meeting

Planning is everything and one of the most important things to think about is what the meeting should achieve. To start with, a well-planned and structured programme is needed. It should include a workshop and a sufficient number of breaks as experience has shown that people use the breaks to thrash out ideas. Planning should then turn to arranging site visits and other excursions within the area. These provide an excellent opportunity for people to get to know each other and form their own impressions of the partner area. The situation is similar when it comes to organising the evening programme. Ideally, it should take in a cultural or social activity that everyone can attend. Nearly everyone involved in LEADER+ cooperation projects has reported that their most memorable project-related experiences occurred not at working but at social level: the evening programme allows the inclusion of elements that can be instrumental in fostering relationships between the project partners.

Tip

Begin the meeting with a round of introductions and follow these up with presentations on the areas involved. This gives people something to talk about during breaks and highlights the similarities between the participating areas.

Document the results of the workshop in writing to safeguard vital information and findings. This ensures they are available for future reference.

Participants

Invitations should go out to relevant experts and to everyone involved in the project. Depending on the range of disciplines represented, it might be wise to hold a local-level informational event in advance. This will attract more people to attend the first official meeting. An event of this kind can also be used to sensitise local people to the ideas behind the cooperation project.

Important invitees include local policymakers who could potentially put up co-financing funds and who can be better convinced of the merits of a project in a face-to-face meeting. If the partner area announces who it intends to send to the meeting and what their positions and functions are, the information should be passed to members of the 'home' delegation so they can prepare themselves accordingly.

Thought should also be given to who plays which role in preparing and implementing the project. Once this has been decided, the partner area should be informed as to who the decision-makers are, the coordinators, the points of contact and so on.

To speed up the subsequent approval process and allow the project approval authorities to play an active role, they should be invited to the meeting and asked to sit in on negotiations.

In Bavaria, along with the usual LAG managers, nine LEADER managers were appointed to act as middle-men in communication with local administration, the LAGs and the project approval authorities. They assist LAGs in their coordination and moderation efforts, are readily available to attend cooperation project meetings and say whether a project idea is feasible.

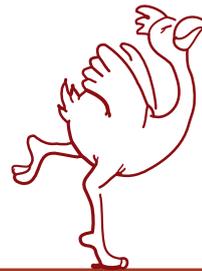
Funding the meeting

In Germany, no special funds are provided to aid LAGs in their search for a cooperation partner. Other Member States allocate a budget to each LAG (for more information please visit the website of the European Contact Point). In most cases the funding is available for the entire funding phase and can be used to pay for trips to meet cooperation partners and attend other LEADER-related meetings. The LAGs found this significantly reduced their burden on their resources.

Some German Länder provide their LAGs with a budget for local project management and allow them to use the funds to meet the costs of searching for and recruiting a cooperation partner. Other states make no such provision. This means that some LAG managers have to find a way to cover the costs in advance and then charge them against the project budget at a later date. In some cases, LAGs go so far as to submit a separate project proposal to obtain funding for the partner search and recruitment phase.

Whatever the situation, it is wise to seek information about the funding rules at the earliest possible juncture and to pass it on to the partner area. There have been many cases where host LAGs in Germany have appeared mean or stingy in the eyes of those in other countries because their poor financial resources have forced them to arrange only the bare necessities when organising and hosting a cooperation meeting.

Finally, before trying to define the project focus and aims, the partners must agree on who will head the project overall. The position is more time-intensive, carries greater responsibility and should ideally be filled by people with experience in working on cooperation projects.



The Cooperation Project

Project focus and aims

(Essential to the cooperation agreement)

While it is not absolutely necessary for every phase of the project to be worked out in minute detail at the initial meeting, the parties should agree on the project focus and aims. Hence, it makes sense to have someone chair the meeting. In most LEADER+ cooperation projects, this was done by the LAG manager or another LAG member. There is, however, a downside to this approach: these individuals are often too caught up with their own area, they are unable to view the process objectively and others attending the meeting perceive them as being biased. For this reason, it is best to use an external chairperson or moderator. Ideally, this would be someone who already has experience with rural development projects, is well acquainted with the related subject and, where a transnational project is involved, has the language skills needed to communicate with all concerned.

As with other LEADER projects, when embarking on a cooperation project it is necessary to draw a line between short-term and long-term project aims. Concentrating on core activities is vital. All secondary activities that could evolve from a previous partnership must be kept separate and be pushed into the background for the time being. They can be taken up later down the line and perhaps serve as the basis for additional cooperation projects in the future.

With some projects, a distinction is made between project aims that enjoy higher and lower priority.

The most successful projects concentrate on specific needs: they pursue a clear objective with which all project partners can identify.

But well-defined goals are not enough by themselves. What is really needed is a clearly formulated plan that provides visible and measurable results. This plays an important role in winning acceptance in the area.

And in every project, consideration should be given to whether the partners already have experience with cooperation projects or are treading new ground. More experienced partners are usually able to define their goals quickly and easily.

In their transnational cooperation project to promote the silver fir, the LAGs from the Vorarlberg (Austria) and Westallgäu (Bavaria) had already worked on LEADER II cooperation projects and had gathered considerable experience with them. But the third LAG, from the Nordschwarzwald (Baden-Württemberg) region, was embarking on its first ever cooperation project. The Austrian LEADER manager assumed the role of chairperson at project meetings and also put together the project proposal. This speeded up the process considerably and the Nordschwarzwald group benefited greatly from the experience.

>> www.weisstanne.net



Feasibility studies?

Feasibility studies are project-related studies that serve to determine whether a project idea can realistically be implemented. They are especially helpful in cases where potential risks cannot be readily assessed or the project aims appear questionable.

The feasibility study identifies the scope, resources and time-line needed to implement a specific project. It also highlights any conflicts between the project aims and available knowledge and expertise.

The Danewerk/Hjemstedt-Oldtidspark cultural history cooperation project run by the LAGs Schlei-Region (Schleswig-Holstein) and Sønderjylland (Denmark) was preceded by a feasibility study which the German side had commissioned. The study was necessary in order to convince the Danish LAG of the merits of entering into the project. At the time, the Danes attached little cultural importance to a national monument (the Dannevirke (Dane's Work) fortification) that stands on what is now German soil in Schleswig-Holstein. Once the study had highlighted the site's potential the Danes readily agreed to cooperate on a project aimed at promoting the Dannevirke and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

>> www.danewerk.info



Action plan

The action plan must answer five key questions „what“, „when“, „where“, „how“ and „who“ ?.

It must contain the full range of intended measures, both for implementation in each of the project areas and jointly by the cooperation partners. Many LAGs differentiate between primary and secondary implementation phases.

A chart setting out the measures in abbreviated form, the names of those involved and the agreed timelines provides a good basis on which to answer the when, where and who. The timelines should show which project phase is to be implemented when as this is vital to ensuring the project's success.

In projects carried out under the LEADER+ programme, it has been shown that a jointly agreed schedule is of key importance because it gives the project partners a point of reference when things get bogged down or delayed.

Sample Action Plan for a Transnational Cycle Path Network

Transnational Cooperation Projects	2004	2005	2006	2007
Route planning, Cycling route map		Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland		
Set up cyclist information centres			Germany, Switzerland*	
Produce joint content		Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland		
International events, Organise meetings		Germany*, Italy*, France*, Switzerland*		
Joint cycling pass, Design symbols	Germany*, Italy, France, Switzerland			
Develop transnational cycle tourism services			Germany, Italy, France	
			Switzerland*	
Train cycling tour guides (international)		Germany*, Italy, France, Switzerland		
Exchange of information and experience between the participating countries		Germany*, Italy*, France*, Switzerland*		
Cross-border marketing of cycle routes			Germany*, Italy*, France*, Switzerland*	

* Partner countries responsible for this particular project phase

Time and staffing

Experience has shown that cooperation projects, and especially those at transnational level, take up more time than 'normal' projects conducted by a single area. Even interterritorial projects take more time when it comes to coordinating activities and reaching an agreement. The extra time needed must be planned for from the outset.

When calculating costs, the scope of the project is the deciding factor. If, for example, full-blown project management is needed, the necessary funding must be budgeted for right from the beginning.

Most LAGs cover the costs of searching for and recruiting a project partner from their office budgets. The greater the distance between the partner regions, the higher the costs incurred for things like travel and accommodation.

Project management

Inexperienced LAGs often underestimate the extra time and effort needed when entering into a cooperation project. To ensure the project runs smoothly, it is vital that the partners draw up a clearly structured project management plan based on realistic use of available resources.

Joint steering group?

A joint steering group can make sense if a project involves more than two partners and/or their activities are of varying quality. The responsibilities assigned to the steering group are determined according to the needs of each individual project. The main task is to coordinate the interests of the groups involved and to monitor proper implementation of project measures to achieve the agreed aims.





A cooperation project (Europäische Jakobswege) to promote the Santiago pilgrimage involves five Bavarian LAGs (Regionalentwicklung Stauden, Unterallgäu Aktiv, Westallgäu Impuls 10+, Wittelsbacher Land and Monheimer Alb), a number of Austrian LAGs (Vorarlberg and several from the Tirol and Salzburg) and a Swiss LAG (Regio Plus-Region Berner Oberland). The LAGs in each country were merged to form regional project groups which are organised at national level. They coordinate national-level activities and are represented in the transnational project management or steering group by one or two members each. The regional steering groups are responsible for implementing the transnational project within the allocated budget and schedule. They have estimated their annual workload for the transnational meetings at 32 working days.

>> www.jakobswege.net

Advantages and Disadvantages of Differing Management and Coordination Models

Methods	Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal coordination One project partner is trusted with project coordination	+ Clarity regarding responsibilities + Greater organisational capacity	– Unequal participation by the partners – Higher workload for the coordinator – Imbalance as regards interests and involvement
Joint Coordination The partners each assume responsibility for specific activities	+ Equal distribution of work and responsibility + Individual responsibility for central activities	– Each area of activity is dependent on a single project partner – Potential competition between the individual areas of activity
Joint transnational steering group	+ Shared participation and responsibility + Joint responsibility for managing central activities	– Could potentially be overburdened with work – More time needed for decisionmaking processes
External, professional project management	+ Clear division of responsibilities + Buying in professional, effective, better quality management	– Weakens idea of joint responsibility and involvement – Risk that partners lose control of the project process

Project leadership

Regardless of whether a project is conducted at interterritorial or transnational level, one or other of the project partners must assume the leadpartner role. This is an extremely time-intensive responsibility. It also brings prestige to the respective region. There have, however, been cases where a cooperation project has failed because the partners were unable to agree on which roles should be assigned to whom. The responsibilities assumed by the leading LAG are addressed in the following section.



The Project Proposal

Letter of Intent

Cooperation agreements are rarely signed at the very first meeting. To make sure everyone is aware of what the project entails, it makes sense for the partners to draw up and sign a Letter of Intent in which they outline their intentions and aims. While the letter is non-binding, it pays to document intended cooperation project activities as early as possible as this demonstrates to the project approval authority that the partners mean business.

The Letter of Intent should contain the names of the cooperation partners, a working title for the project, the planned areas of activity and a brief description of the project aims. A copy should be supplied to each of the project partners.

Cooperation agreement

In most Rural Development Programmes, the cooperation agreement is an integral part of the project proposal. It makes for more transparent administration of cooperation projects and defines the mutual obligations involved. Documenting what has been agreed helps prevent misunderstandings. A signed agreement makes the cooperation project official and legally binding.

Project leadership

Every cooperation project must be implemented under the leadership of the Local Action Group entrusted with overall responsibility for project coordination and monitoring. This role is assigned by mutual consent and documented in the cooperation agreement.

The European Commission recommends that the lead partner assume the following set of responsibilities:

- Management and coordination in the project development phase and when drafting the cooperation agreement (project description and defining partners' obligations)
- Coordination of project funding: collation of information on funding requests submitted by the individual LAGs using the programme title agreed for cooperation expense claims
- Management and coordination of project implementation and of the activities to which the LAGs are committed under the terms of the cooperation agreement

- Supporting and monitoring the cooperation project (public relations work, documentation of expenses incurred and goals achieved, organising meetings to assist exchange between the project partners and drafting implementation/status reports).
- Monitoring to ensure those involved in the project fulfil their obligations

Some of these responsibilities match those of generic project management. In most cooperation projects, the responsibilities of the lead partner are drawn up in accordance with project needs and tailored to the specific situation.

Each of the partners bears administrative and financial responsibility for the measures and activities entrusted to them. They invoice their project-related expenses to the competent project approval authority.

Content

Cooperation agreements must contain the following:

- Details of the lead project partner, including how to contact them
- Details of the cooperation partners, including how to contact them
- Representatives of the various LAGs involved (describing their roles within the LAG, as appropriate)
- Measures to be implemented at regional, interterritorial and transnational level
- Project partners' roles and obligations
- Funding framework (itemised cost sheet based on EAFRD provisions, national funding, private funding)

As long as they contain the above, cooperation agreements can be structured individually to focus on the needs and expectations of the project partners. Examples include:

- Purpose of the cooperation activity
- Working language
- Rights to project-derived products and results
- Partners' contribution to jointly incurred costs and expenses
- Dispute resolution
- Place of jurisdiction

Sample cooperation agreements from the European Commission are provided in the Annex to this publication.

I'LL SHOW THEM WHO HAS THE PLUCK TO LEAD!



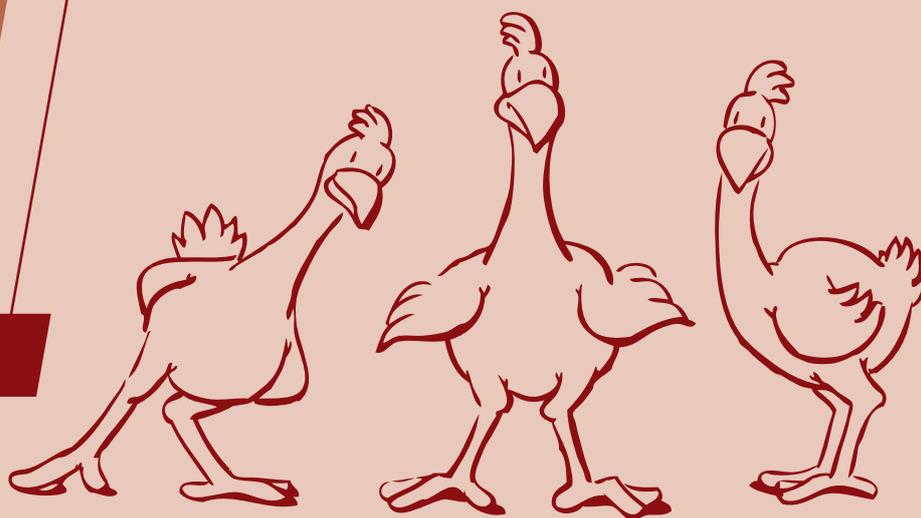
Administrative Framework

Each of the German Länder and all EU Member States have their own Rural Development Programme (RDP) and thus their own requirements regarding project proposals and implementation.

The better the project partners inform themselves about conditions in the countries concerned, the less likely misunderstandings that arise in specific project phases can be blamed on the administrative framework.

The German Network for Rural Areas (DVS) website and the website of the EU Contact Point provides an overview of the prevailing administrative framework for the German Länder and the various EU Member States.

www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de





Annex

Annex 1 – Model Cooperation Agreement

Title of cooperation project

Declaration

The undersigned, representing the local action group partners, hereby undertake to implement the co-operation project defined in the Annex and also certify the veracity of the information contained therein.

Applicable law and competent court

The agreement is governed by ... law.

1. Any dispute between the parties resulting from the interpretation or application of the agreement which cannot be settled amicably shall be brought before the courts of ...
2. Clause permitting the inclusion of new partners („Leader or other Local Action Groups may be included by an amendment to this agreement should they express the wish“)
3. Clause permitting other amendments

4. Signatures

Name of the coordinator Leader local action group	Name of Leader local action group/other local action group 1
Name of representative	Name of representative
Position	Position
Date	Date
Place (address, including country)	Place (address, including country)
Signature	Signature

Name of Leader local action group/other local action group n	Name of representative
Position	Date
Place (address, including country)	Signature

Annex to cooperation agreement, Discription of project

Title of cooperation project

Partners in cooperation project

Contacts
Name of coordinator Local Action Group under Leader Axis
Name of chairperson
Name of contact person for this form
Organisation responsible for local programme
Address of contact person, Telephone, Fax, E-mail, Languages spoken/understood

Contacts
Name of Leader LAG/other local action group I
Name of chairperson
Name of contact person for this form
Organisation responsible for local programme
Address of contact person, Telephone, Fax, E-mail, Languages spoken/understood

Contacts
Name of Leader LAG/other local action group n

Name of contact person for this form
Name of contact person for this form
Organisation responsible for local programme
Address of contact person, Telephone, Fax, E-mail, Languages spoken/understood

Description of the cooperation project

Description of project goals, main project activities (including relevant places and dates); beneficiaries of the operation and its state of progress
Description of anticipated results for beneficiaries of the operation and for the areas concerned
Approach, methods and procedure for implementing the project for which financing is requested
Period of implementation of the project
Role of each partner in relation to main activities

Planned budget for project

Rural Development programme	Coordinator LAG or LAG/ other groups	Anticipated activities	Cost (EUR)	Financing (EUR)		
				Community EAFRD	Public	Private
	Organisational coordination expenditure (shared)					
	Other expenditure (shared) (main activities ...)					
	Other expenditure (not shared)					
	Total					

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.
Europe investing in rural area.



Leader