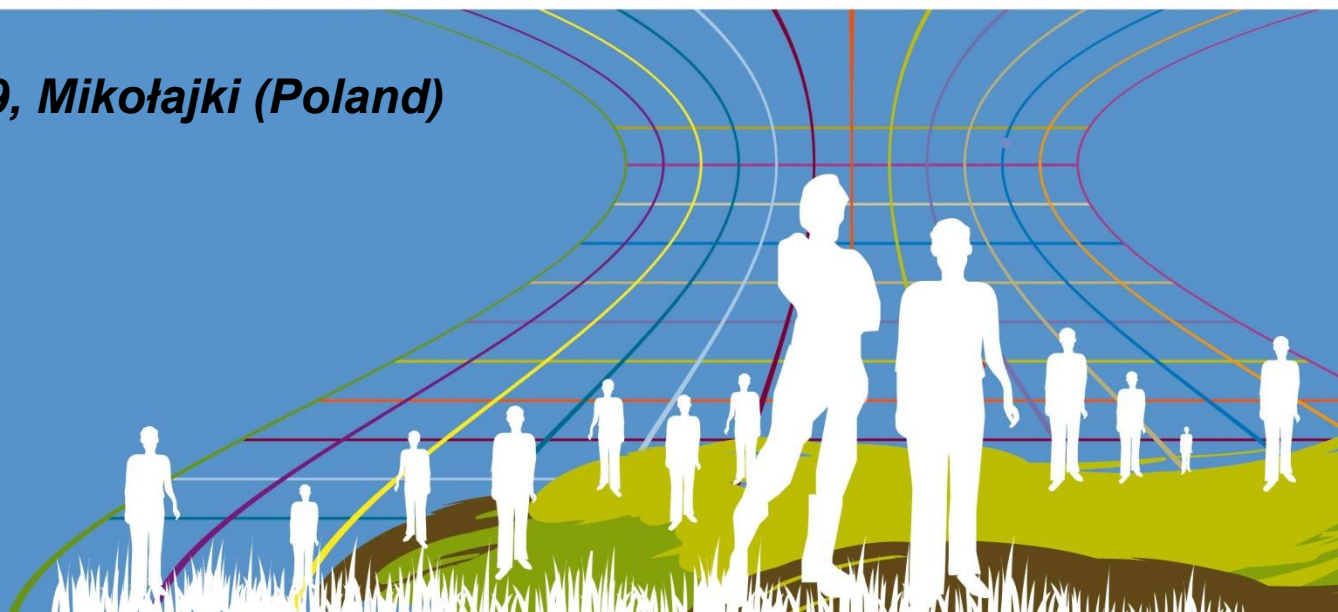


# **“Cooperation Projects – interregional and international dimension”**

***Networking - building of a  
cooperation network, importance of  
exchange of information***

***14 October 2009, Mikołajki (Poland)***

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- During the period 2007-2013, the EAFRD will support transnational and inter-territorial projects between LAGs under the Rural Development programmes (*articles 63 b and 65 of Regulation (EC) N°1698/2005*).
- The cooperation measure is one of the three LEADER Axis measure.
- Cooperation encourages and supports a LAG to undertake a joint action with another LEADER group or with group taking a similar approach, in another region, member State or even third country.
- Although cooperation is not always easy, it can often be most effective way of achieving results on innovation and capacity building.

## The Inter-territorial cooperation

- within a Member State, it concerns at least one area selected under Leader Axis.
- the partnership may also be open to local public private partnerships according to Article 62 1.(b of the Regulation (EC) n°1698/2005 or other rural groups organised along the lines of Leader and recognised by the Member State.

**Art. 62 1. (b): “...a group already qualified for the Leader II or Leader+ initiatives, or according to the Leader approach, or be a new group representing partners from the various locally based socioeconomic sectors in the territory concerned...”**

Besides, in addition to the definition of “*another rural area organised along the lines of LEADER*”:

- a local group active in rural development having the capacity to draw up a development strategy for a certain geographical territory;
- the organization of the group is based on an open and wide partnership in which the participation of local actors is encouraged. The group should consist of representatives from several socio-economic sectors, including associations. The group should develop its own development policy;
- the group should strive to work on a network basis with other groups.

## The trans-national cooperation

1. **within the Union:** it covers at least two LAGs located in two Member States among which at least one is selected under the Leader Axis.

Like inter-territorial cooperation it will be possible to extend this cooperation to groups selected according to Article 62 1.(b of the Regulation (EC) n°1698/2005 or other rural groups organised along the lines of Leader and recognised by the Member State. Other costs related to other groups areas or any other rural areas organised according to Leader should be financed outside the Leader axis.

## The trans-national cooperation

- 2. with areas in third countries:** it concerns at least one area selected under Leader axis.

The expenditure involved relating to the Leader area becomes eligible (e.g. participation by the Leader local action group in partnership meetings, local application in its area of the joint project). In other words, expenditure "relating to" the Leader area does not mean necessarily "in the area". Expenditure in the area in the non-member country and not related to the Leader area is not eligible..

## The contribution of “Networking”

On the practical level, cooperation gives rise to a lot of questions:

- ***how to find a partner;***
- ***how to share the work and responsibilities among partners.***

*Member States must be prepared to allocate appropriate technical assistance resources for this purpose.*

- In the case of Inter-territorial cooperation, preparatory technical support will be backed up by the work of the *National Rural network* by promoting and facilitating cooperation between all the local action groups
- In the case of Transnational cooperation, preparatory technical support will be backed up by the work of the *European Rural Network* which promotes this type of cooperation.
- The work of the *National networks* in stimulating transnational cooperation will be also crucial.



Within their own responsibilities Managing authorities in the Member States should:

- clearly inform local action groups of the possibilities for cooperation funding on the basis of clear guidelines;
- ensure that application process is as simple and flexible as possible and, if applicable, shall select beneficiaries for preparatory technical support and cooperation projects.

## National networks should:

- organize cooperation seminars for local action groups;
- establish systems to gather examples of good practices;
- provide a partner search tool and publish at regular basis announcements for transnational partners;
- provide technical assistance to local action groups (individual advice);
- be in regular contact with other National networks.

## At European level the Commission will:

- provide a tool to support transnational cooperation partner search;
- organise European Leader seminars promoting cooperation for local action groups;
- organise an information exchange on transnational cooperation projects under approval process;
- provide guide(s) on transnational cooperation;
- establish a framework for the collection and dissemination of good practices (in close collaboration with national networks).

## Networking and cooperation

Networking is a system based on providing ***a set of tools and services*** to local practitioners and public administrations in order to foster exchanges and cooperation at all levels (local, regional, national and European).

It relies on a formalised mechanism, an “**animation**” **structure**, whose tasks are established in formal contracts with the European Commission. This mechanism includes the Brussels-based LEADER European Observatory, which is 100% funded by the Commission, and the National Coordination Units, cofinanced by the Commission and based in the Member States.

## Networking and cooperation between areas

- LEADER I emphasised the networking of players as a tool for local development, thereby breaking the isolation of numerous rural areas. A “**LEADER Coordinating Unit**” had been set up to facilitate exchanges between the LAGs, optimise the circulation of information and ensure wide dissemination of the actions most representative of the priority rural issues.
- Under LEADER II, the networking of rural areas was provided with a better support system: the “**LEADER European Observatory**”, backed up in most Member States by “**National Coordination Units**”.

Under LEADER II and LEADER +, the mission of the “LEADER European Observatory” was chiefly to:

- ✓ **identify and analyze information** and good rural development practices;
- ✓ provide information on **the development of rural areas** both inside and outside the European Union;
- ✓ organise **exchanges of experience** within the network;
- ✓ **meet beneficiaries** of the Initiative;
- ✓ arrange **exchanges between administrations**;
- ✓ **stimulate cooperation** and support for its implementation;
- ✓ **analyse the lessons learned** from LEADER.

To achieve its mission, the Observatory has produced tools and services for local action groups, public administrations and other rural players:

- regular publications (monthly newsletter to keep programme beneficiaries in touch with one another, quarterly LEADER Magazines);
- technical dossiers;
- websites;
- thematic or methodological conferences and seminars;
- a multilingual team to answer requests for information;
- technical assistance for transnational cooperation ventures.

## Different roles (1)

Depending on its structure, objectives and resources, each level assumes one or more roles:

➤ role of “***animator***”:

- ✓ to put into contact beneficiaries of the Initiative at all geographical levels (local, regional, national and European);
- ✓ to support and bring to fruition ideas and projects;
- ✓ to facilitate collective and intercultural learning processes (seminars);
- ✓ to encourage the acquisition of thematic and methodological know-how



## ...and different roles (2)

### ➤ role of “**operator**”:

- ✓ to help implement the Initiative, for example by acting as an interface between the LEADER groups and public administrations, by circulating information and by fostering dialogue between players at the different levels (LAGs, regional and national administrations and the European Commission).

### ➤ role of “**mediator**”:

- ✓ to conceptualise the LEADER approach and to “model” and convey the image of Europe’s rural areas.

### ➤ “**political**” role:

- ✓ to incorporate the lessons learned from LEADER into national and regional policies.

## Objectives of networking

- **forge links** between people, projects and rural areas;
- **exchange and transfer** experiences, skills and know-how (reduce isolation, create channels to facilitate the circulation of information, etc.);
- **stimulate cooperation between areas** by making available to local action groups the information they need to search for partners and technical support for preparing a cooperation action;
- **capitalise on the lessons learned from local rural development** (analysing innovative approaches, actions and practices, modelling the LEADER approach and disseminating its principal lessons).

## The impact of networking

- **Access useful information** for seeking partners, identifying other European sources of funding, identifying “good practices” and using them as inspiration for resolving local problems.
- **Broaden the horizons of the local groups** so as to boost the local credibility of projects, create or reinforce links outside the area, transcend parochialism and break the isolation of rural areas and development agents.
- **Collectively develop and enhance the LEADER approach** through joint research and by capitalising on the lessons learned from LEADER, as well by disseminating the method beyond beneficiaries of the Initiative.
- Encourage this rural development concept to be integrated into other national or regional development policies (“**mainstreaming**” LEADER).
- **Promote cooperation.**

## Objectives of cooperation

- **Capitalising on similarities** – Some cooperation projects are between LAGs that share a similar resource (geographic advantages, complementary know-hows, subdivision of the work partners based on the respective specializations), based upon which they can develop common actions.
- **Enhancing complementarities** – In this case the aim of transnational cooperation is more to associate areas with resources which, though different can be capitalised on by making them complementary.
- **Achieving critical mass** – Rural areas often have a limited amount of resources at their disposal, which does not allow them to resolve certain problems alone or to exploit certain potential to the full. By joining forces, such areas can overcome their limitations and achieve otherwise unachievable results.

## Qualitative aspects of cooperation

- **opening-up and mutual cultural enrichment** – It makes rural areas really open up to the outside world and enriches the local culture through meeting players and people from different cultures of various cultures.
- **Birth of a culture of cooperation** – Some areas adopt an explicit strategy of cooperation and partnership at all levels: local, regional, national and transnational.
- **dissemination outside the local action group** – Some LAGs seek to “disseminate” the advantages of cooperation among the different players (enterprises, associations) in their area supplying them technical assistance.
- **learning through experience** – For rural players that have chosen to embark on this demanding adventure, LEADER transnational cooperation is also a training tool, a “school for cooperation”, providing them with experience that will enable them to avoid numerous difficulties in their future projects.

## Besides....

- Cooperation ventures must bring real added value to the areas concerned.
- They should allow the pooling of know-how and/or human and financial resources scattered throughout each of the areas.
- They should form part of the thematic guidelines (“unifying themes”) defined by the LAGs in their development plan.
- Such cooperation ventures must not remain at the stage of a simple exchange of experiences but must lead to developing a joint action, if possible promoted by a joint structure.
- Local cooperation and transnational cooperation are implemented under the responsibility of the LAG heading the project.

## The cooperation project path

- Emergence of the need for cooperation
- Definition of the need
- Partner search
- First meeting between partners
- Definition of the cooperation project
- Feasibility analysis
- Implementation

## Difficulties and tips (1)

The **principal difficulties** reported by LEADER groups concern:

- the transnational partnership (which can be ineffective and unproductive);
- project objectives (unclear or over-ambitious);
- conducting and coordinating the transnational action (due to lack of experience or follow-up);
- administrative, financial and legal problems;
- an inability to gain local recognition for the relevance of the cooperation project.



## Difficulties and tips (2)

There are a number of **tips for improving the effectiveness** of rural transnational cooperation:

- find good partners and bring them together in a sound and active partnership;
- define a theme and objectives that respond to real local needs;
- properly define the action plan;
- set up a clearly identified and accountable coordination structure responsible for ongoing monitoring and assessment;
- do not hesitate to call upon external assistance (especially the LEADER Observatory);
- improve project management and endow the cooperation project with a realistic budget;

- do not underestimate language problems (ensure professional translation/ interpretation);
- adopt a broader financial base by combining public and private funding;
- develop and promote legal models designed for transnational associations, organisations and networks;
- disseminate commonly agreed quality standards more effectively;
- anchor the cooperation project at local level by sticking closely to local needs, by involving the community as much as possible in order to gain its support and by keeping it informed of the progress and results of cooperation.

## Why participate in one or more network(s)?

1. To resolve ad hoc problems?
2. To exchange information?
3. To exchange practices?
4. To transfer experience?
5. To search for partners?
6. Other?

## What added value does it bring?

1. Reduces the area's isolation?
2. Reduces the “animators” isolation?
3. Improves local skills?
4. Develops exchanges with players from other areas?
5. Supports innovation?
6. Other advantages?

## What specific contribution can cooperation make to the area?

1. Implementation of local projects that would not have been possible otherwise?
2. Stimulation of innovative actions?
3. Capitalising on similarities or complementarities?
4. Achievement of critical mass that was formerly insufficient at local level?
5. Thematic networking?
6. Other?

## What are the specific impediments or difficulties?

1. Setting up the right partnership?
2. Properly defining the project content?
3. Managing the project effectively?
4. The transnational project's lack of relevance to the local level?
5. Legal, administrative or financial aspects?
6. Lack of technical support?
7. Other obstacles?

## Overview on Rural Networks in Europe

- The European Rural Network and every National Rural Network (27 in total; one for each Member State) can play a significant role.
- They are concrete “instruments” that allow to “bring together” Rural Development Programmes implemented in the Union.
- Their main role is to highlight results, know-how, good practises or innovations, enabling to set synergies for facing common challenges and for improving RDP effectiveness.

## The Italian context

- The twenty-one Regions are in charge of RDP planning and implementation, while the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies provides for a guiding and coordinating role, also assuring the achievement of National Strategic Plan (NSP) objectives.
- Therefore, the National Rural Network plays a major role both in emphasizing the strengths of the Italian rural model and in highlighting any criticality of the rural policy so as to guarantee a timely intervention and proper solutions.



## The Italian rural model

- Italy is first EU Country for PDO (*Protected Designation of Origin*) and PGI (*Protected Geographical Indication*) products, with a total of n. 169 quality products recognized by EU (January 2008 data; source DG AGRI).
- Italy is the first Member State for hectares cultivated with organic method (1.067.102 ha; data 2005; source FiBL).
- Concerning diversification of the agricultural activities, Italy is leader in EU for number of Agro-tourism farms (n. 16.765 , data 2005; source ISTAT).

## The Italian Rural Network strategy (1)

- *“NRN: a Network of networks for Rural Development”*: it promotes the creation of a new model of development, increasingly integrated, participatory and innovating.
- It has been designed in order to allow as much participation as possible for the civil society (associations involved in rural issues, NGOs, universities, Think-Tanks) in the evaluation of the public policy effectiveness; enabling these subjects (defined as “Members of the Rural Network”) to directly participate in the definition of the Network activities and even implementing some of them.

## The Italian Rural Network strategy (2)

- It provides for a coordination on key issues concerning Programmes' management such as: procedures, monitoring and evaluation, legal aspects, LEADER approach, integration among RDP measures, integration between EAFRD and Structural Funds.
- One of the most important characteristic of the Italian Rural Network is its international dimension. Some of the actors involved in the IRN are European or International (e.g. other Member States NRNs and the European Rural Network).

***This allows to bring new ideas into the Italian rural areas for actually making possible success stories***

## The three global objectives of the Italian Rural Network

1. *Improvement of governance;*
2. *Strengthening of the managerial and planning capacities;*
3. *Diffusion of good practices and knowledge.*

***These objectives correspond to the three NRN sets of measures, combined with a fourth one that concerns the management of the Network.***

## *Improvement of governance (1)*

1. To support all Administrations engaged in RDPs in terms of performances and efficiency:
  - a) *“Horizontal support to the Administrations engaged in the Rural Development Programme implementation;*
  - b) *Support to the establishment of the national monitoring and evaluation system”.* The main objective of the action is to ensure the coordination of methodologies, elaboration of appropriate indicators, monitoring and evaluation procedures among 21 RDPs. This action also provides support for the evaluation of RDPs’ impacts on landscape, environment, food chains and rural areas (socioeconomic changes).

## *Improvement of governance (2)*

2. To encourage the involvement and the partnership among Rural Network members (national, regional and local institutions with horizontal and vertical partnership):
  - a) *Forum, involving all NRN members, gathers at least once every year for overseeing the implementation of the 21 RDPs and their compliance with national strategy;*
  - b) *Interregional Workshops for development not manageable at a local level and affecting large areas of the Country on “water resources and irrigation”, “environment safeguard” (landscape changes, nitrates and pesticides residuals, preservation of the NATURA 2000 sites) and “socio-economic changes in specific rural areas”*

## **Strengthening of the managerial and planning capacities**

1. To provide for the acquisition and update of managerial capacities of the individuals involved in RDPs implementation (Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and LAGs):
  - a) *“Preparation of training programmes for the Local Actions Groups”*,
  - b) *“Organization of experiences and know-how exchange”*
  - c) *“Workshops on pilot ideas and integrated projects”*.

***It aims also to supporting cooperation ability between territories and actors involved in rural development, both at the LAG level and at the institutional level***

## *Diffusion of good practices and knowledge (1)*

1. To mobilize the people that experienced those good practises or innovations, in order to practically transfer those projects into different contexts:
  - a) identification and analysis of transferable good practices/innovations and relevant information
  - b) transfer of good practices/innovations and relevant placement into different contexts



## *Diffusion of good practices and knowledge (2)*

1. To promote and encourage the diffusion of possibilities and results of rural development policies:
  - a) Supporting the promotion of services in favour of rural actors (e.g. those directly involved in the agricultural and forestry activities);
  - b) Information on contents and results achieved by CAP and rural development policies.

## *How to make NRN work*

1. Involvement of other (official and unofficial) local, national and international networks that are already active in sectors other than the rural;
2. Fifteen “other networks”, most of them established by the European Union (i.e. *Europe Direct Network, Euroguichets Networks, Innovation Relay Centres, EU Cultural Contact Points*, etc.).
3. Establishment of Thematic Task Forces (TTF) including Network Members having an interest in a specific issue

## *Thematic Task forces*

1. *“LEADER approach”*
2. *“Cooperation”*
3. *“Monitoring and Evaluation”*
4. *“Farm competitiveness”*
5. *“Environment and Cross compliance” (soil, water resources, climatic changes, agro-energies, biodiversity)*
6. *Forests*
7. *“Landscape safeguard”*
8. *“Integrated programming”*
9. *“Food chains”*
10. *“Young Farmers and equal opportunities”*
11. *“Integration among RD and other policies”*

## *The organization of the IRN*

- *“National Unit for Animation and Coordination” (UNAC)*, supported by *“Regional Antennas”* active in each Region;
- *“UNAC”* implements NRN actions and provides for Network management, animation and coordination, including the participation to the European Rural Network activities.
- *“Regional Antennas”* have two main purposes: collecting every requirement emerging from local stakeholders, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies; implementing NRN activities at a regional level, ensuring a better circulation of know-how and experiences.
- A *“Steering committee”* completes this structure, addressing, monitoring, and if necessary reprogramming the Action Plan activities.

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# THANK YOU!!!!

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