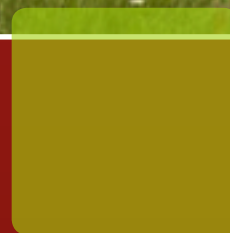


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Foreword

EUROPEAN UNION, 1995-2010



Encouraging rural employment, tackling rural poverty and improving the quality of life are all important direct and indirect goals for EU rural development policy. These objectives reflect the EU's 2020 new strategy, which sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century, and the aims of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010. The latter EU-wide campaign is a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

Research has shown that income poverty is, on average, higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Lower levels or rates of education, economic activity, population density and infrastructure contribute to this gap and hinder the potential of rural areas in terms of growth and jobs.

European rural development policy has an important role to play in this respect. Its main objectives include the diversification of the rural economy and improvement in the quality of rural life.

This sixth edition of the *EU Rural Review* takes a closer look at how EU rural development policy is contributing to fighting unemployment and social exclusion in practice. We investigate the progress being made in this area and how the issue of job creation and associated social inclusion complements other rural development priorities.



We also examine how different Member States utilise different types of Rural Development Programme (RDP) interventions and complementary actions to address the issue of poverty and unemployment in their rural territories, by encouraging entrepreneurship and innovative solutions, as well as promoting new opportunities for all.

The magazine focuses on three major aspects of the linkage between rural development policy and combating unemployment and social exclusion, namely:

- Understanding the key employment and poverty challenges facing rural areas and rural stakeholders;
- Exploring what rural areas and rural stakeholders can do to enhance employment, reduce rural poverty and strengthen social inclusion; and
- Identifying what role EU rural development policy and programmes can play in combating poverty and social exclusion.

This edition also includes several case studies examining successful projects and practical experiences from the ground showing how entrepreneurship and local bottom-up initiatives can help tackle rural unemployment and social exclusion, thanks to the financial support of the measures included in the RDPs. The Leader approach in particular shows how networking and promoting dialogue at the local level can contribute to improving participation of civil society and inclusion of disadvantaged groups.



Rural Focus



Rural development opportunities for supporting employment and associated social inclusion



Rural development policy plays an important role in maintaining employment and preventing social exclusion through both targeted and indirect effects of the four priority axes.

Reflecting one of the main priorities of the European Union, as outlined in the Lisbon Strategy, 2010 has been declared the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Over 79 million EU citizens live below the poverty line, the majority of them in rural regions, which account for 91% of EU territory (predominantly rural and intermediate) and 57% of the EU population (Factsheet on 2010, the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion).

Research indicates that poverty is, on average, higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. Rural areas face a number of very specific economic and structural challenges, such as low income levels, lack of employment opportunities, low levels of education and a low quality of infrastructure. Two commonly used concepts capture the nature of the problems: the poverty of rural areas and

poverty in rural areas. Poverty of rural areas refers to the existence of certain disadvantages of rural regions, which result in a higher risk of poverty in those areas, when compared to urban areas (for example remoteness of rural areas, level and quality of education, and labour market opportunities). **Poverty in rural areas** is a human extension of those disadvantages - it concerns the poverty of people living in rural areas.

Due to the great diversity of rural areas across the EU27, establishing and measuring consistent indicators on both concepts has proven difficult, and hence these challenges are often not addressed as well as they should be. The last two EU waves of enlargement have also highlighted the stark differences in the economic development levels and the standard of living, in particular in rural areas, of the old and newer Member

States. This year's EU-wide campaign is therefore designed to contribute to greater awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and social exclusion.

Analysis of the data on the Lisbon index, used to measure how close EU regions are to achieving the Lisbon 2010 Strategy targets on education, employment, research and development, reveals disparities between urban and rural areas, with the level of achievement of the targets in rural areas of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and the newer Member States being the lowest in the EU.

Poverty in rural areas

The Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas (DG Employment, 2008) - identifies some specific problems which characterise rural areas and determine

“ EU citizens living under the poverty threshold are unequally distributed in urban and rural areas. As social, economic, cultural, political, environmental similarities and differences exist between rural and urban communities, fighting against exclusion can be regarded as a very local issue. ”

Arnoldas Abramavicius, Committee of the Regions' Commission for Economic and Social Policy

the risk of poverty and social exclusion for the rural population. This set of problems includes several difficulties linked to demography, remoteness and education, as well as some special features of the labour market.

Rural areas, compared to urban areas, are characterised by lower education levels, lower rates of economic activity, lower population density and weaker infrastructure. Rural poverty affects everyone; however children, young people, older workers, lower skilled workers and the unemployed are amongst the most vulnerable groups.

Labour market in rural areas

Economic activity rates (the proportion of the working age population which is employed or seeking work) are on average slightly higher in urban regions than in rural regions (source: Study on Employment in Rural Areas - DG Agriculture and Rural Development, 2006CIS: they are generally higher in northern and western Europe, and lower in southern and eastern Europe. They are also higher (on average) in central regions, than those regions situated on the European periphery.

The agricultural sector

In most rural regions the primary sector accounts for less than 10% of total employment and in one third of rural

regions the share represented is less than 5%. However, in some rural regions – particularly in the central and eastern European Countries (CEEC) (Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia) as well as in the southern part of the EU15 (Greece, Spain, Portugal) – employment in the primary sector is above 25%.

Since 1990 agricultural employment has been experiencing an almost universally downward trend within in the EU15, with a reduction of 2–3% per year, on average. This equates to an absolute reduction in the EU15 agricultural workforce of some 340 000 persons or 190 000 annual work units (AWU) per year. The only exceptions where losses have been smaller, concern a few regions characterised by aging farm holders, or a higher proportion of female and part-time workers, as well as some which showed a strong rise in “other gainful activities”.

The state of play in terms of the development of agricultural employment in the newer Member States has been different. In some countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia), restructuring during transition has led to a strong decrease in agricultural labour, whilst in others (such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia) there has been an increase due to the rise of semi-subsistence farming acting as a social buffer in response to increased levels of unemployment.

These patterns of change suggest complex evolutionary processes, influenced by labour-saving technical progress, the macro-economic environment, farm structures, the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and workers, and ways in which various policies intervene in this sector. The predominance of family labour (over 90% of the EU25 farm workforce) points to the importance of ‘household decision making’, with intergenerational change representing an opportunity for larger adjustments in the otherwise rather “incremental” process of downsizing through part-time working.

Low incomes and the seasonality of work in the agricultural sector could represent an important risk of poverty and social exclusion. In particular, seasonal workers may suffer from exclusion due to the low pensions they are due to receive upon retiring (Greece, France, Italy, Spain). In some eastern countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Romania) problems relating to the fragmentation of farms and the small dimensions of economic activities represent important determinants of poverty and exclusion for farmers and their families.

There is also often high employment of immigrant workers linked to agricultural activity and this is particularly true in western countries. Seasonal workers have a higher risk of encountering illegal immigration, often associated with very poor living conditions, low

“ We will only manage to reduce poverty and exclusion on a long-term basis if we make structural changes in both organisations and people’s behaviour. ”

Vladimír Špidla, former European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

80% of agricultural labour force is now working part-time

An important path of adjustment involves combining part-time farming with other on-farm enterprises or off-farm employment. Across the EU, it is estimated that around 80% of the agricultural labour force is now working part-time, and this trend is still on the rise in most Member States. Part-time farming is particularly common within the family worker group, among younger workers, and women.

salaries, and the absence of any kind of insurance. Those problems are more severe in southern countries, where the production of fruit and vegetables has a strong seasonal cycle, requiring many seasonal workers (Italy, Spain, Greece).

The main elements of rural poverty

The conference organised in 2009 in Budapest by the European Commission on 'Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas', drew attention to the main determinants of rural poverty, as defined in its report: demography, education, labour markets and remoteness. The interaction of these determinants can produce a vicious cycle in which rural poverty becomes entrenched.

The demography aspect is linked to migration, low population density and ageing populations, combined with low birth-rates (due to urbanisation and emigration, which is particularly relevant in the newer Member States, although it is worth noting that some countries, e.g. the United Kingdom and France in particular, are now experiencing a new trend of counter-urbanisation), all of which have a significant impact on the economic performance of a region.

Education and training are core factors which have a positive impact on the quality of life of citizens and research suggests that rural areas generally lag behind in terms of the availability of an educated workforce. In addition, some eastern European countries still

struggle with rural illiteracy. This results in a limited labour supply and low employment levels, poor employment opportunities and low investment rates. Some rural areas in western Europe and all rural areas in eastern Europe still demonstrate a high dependency on agriculture for employment. As a result, low incomes and the seasonality of the work pose a potential risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Poor infrastructure and access to public services are the result of lower investment levels and lack of entrepreneurship. This is most apparent when one considers the transport infrastructure in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, which has not been maintained or experienced significant investment in the past,





discouraging major potential investors from building production plants and so relocating to other countries instead. Limited access to the internet in rural areas is another key issue in terms of infrastructure. Broadband usage is at a high level in rural Scandinavia, the UK, France, Germany and Slovenia, but remains very low in most newer Member States and Greece.

The Budapest conference concluded that a more focused approach is required to tackle these problems in European and national policies, so as to ensure a more effective concentration of effort. Existing funding mechanisms (including the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) could benefit from better integration and vertical coordination. In addition a bottom-up partnership approach, such as the Leader methodology, was identified by the Conference as a useful tool for boosting employment in rural areas. Indeed, experience from previous Leader programming periods confirms the ability

of Local Action Groups (LAGs) to target and engage with the most vulnerable groups in the poorest rural regions.

Employment, in particular, plays a key role in addressing the issue of social exclusion. Rural employment has a major impact on the economic output and the poverty rate. A low employment rate results in a 'skills drain', migration or emigration and poor quality of public services (i.e. the lack of a qualified labour force) which subsequently deters investment.

It is important, however, to note that in a number of circumstances the relationship between rural poverty and unemployment is often more complex than a simple cause-and-effect type relationship. Other variables can play a critical role such as:

- Low rural incomes and seasonality of work, which can increase the risk of poverty;
- Low pensions for much of the rural population;
- The inter-generational transmission of poverty, in particular amongst farmers;

- The transformation of agriculture from state to private farms, which has impacted upon other socio-economic relationships in rural areas.

The structure and role of rural regions are constantly changing and the RDPs can represent an important mechanism to support farmers and rural citizens to respond to these changes, and the emerging market opportunities and related expectations.

Rural development policy facilitates income generation and employment opportunities through training provision and supply chain development for traditional rural businesses (to help with rural farm efficiency) and investments in modern, more efficient farms and rural infrastructure (to support competitiveness of rural businesses). Moreover, RDPs support economic activity diversification to address changing rural market needs (ecological farming, alternative energy sources for farms, climate change adaptations, rural tourism development and village

“Poverty is not just scarcity of material income. It is also about the lack of a future and lack of opportunities. Access to the labour market is a key factor in fighting poverty and breaking the vicious cycle of exclusion.”

László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

EUROPEAN UNION, 1995-2010



improvements). Higher levels of employment and income generation have a knock-on effect on rural social inclusion, creating a wealthier society with a better quality of rural infrastructure and a better quality of life for its citizens.

Although a crucial element, employment is not the only solution to rural poverty. The above mentioned study on 'Employment in Rural Areas' (DG AGRI, 2006) observes that while the two dimensions of the rural labour market - performance and participation - are instrumental to the stimulation of entrepreneurship, diversification and labour market inclusion, there is a need for a parallel improvement in infrastructure and access to services, which can be equally important determinants of the 'quality of life' in rural areas.

The role of CAP and other EU policies

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy are the two main European policies that have an impact

on the poverty of and in rural areas. Rural development policy is an increasingly significant element of the CAP. It focuses on supporting the development of rural areas through targeting economic, environmental, and social components of the rural economy.

The main objectives of the rural development policy refer to increasing the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, to encouraging and promoting environmental improvements, and to supporting initiatives to diversify the rural economy and to improve the quality of life in rural areas. The Leader bottom-up approach to rural development plays a pivotal role in providing sustainable solutions to local problems.

All four axes of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) contribute to a varying degree towards achieving a more inclusive and job-creating society:

- Axis 1 of the RDPs is aimed at supporting and enhancing the competitiveness of farms and forest businesses, through investments in human and physical

capital. It contributes, in the medium and long-term, to the maintenance of existing jobs and the creation of new rural jobs, higher incomes from farming activities and further investment opportunities for local areas. Support for semi-subsistence farming, particularly in the newer Member States, aims to help small farms to restructure and improve the viability of their holdings.

- Axis 2 provides support to ensure sustainable agricultural land use, and the provision of environmental public goods and services, thus making an important contribution to maintaining the countryside and rural society. It also contributes indirectly to increasing rural economic activity and income generation.
- Axis 3 offers opportunities for the development and improvement of rural infrastructure and village renewal, including cultural, rural heritage and sport facilities. It also provides support for business creation (including micro-businesses), and diversification into non-agricultural activities (e.g. tourism). Axis 3 contributes to improving the

overall quality of life in these areas, potentially playing a key role in promoting social inclusion.

- Axis 4 provides opportunities for developing and empowering local organisations, through a bottom-up approach to local development strategies, in addition to involving local actors and society in the development process. This has the potential to contribute to the creation of new rural jobs as well as improving the effectiveness of implemented initiatives.

Cohesion Policy can provide important and complementary support, aimed at strengthening poorer regions and implementing the Lisbon agenda through sectoral and regional operational programmes. This support provides a vital contribution to building up the three key deterrents of rural poverty: providing opportunities for education including vocational education and training, creating new jobs and developing new infrastructure.

Impact of the economic crisis

The recent economic crisis has had a significant impact on many European and non-European economies. World agricultural trade, where the EU is a major player, was affected too. Its volume dropped 3%, less than trade in manufactured products due to the lower income elasticity of demand for food. Unemployment and out-migration levels in rural areas have also risen, although not as sharply as in urban areas. The crisis highlighted the importance of a coordinated regional and local response to economic challenges, and the need for sustainable, robust and diversified rural economies.

In this situation, RDPs continue to provide new income and employment opportunities, in particular through measures supporting business creation and development, and diversification to non-agricultural activities, predominantly tourism. In addition, axis 2 support provided for agri-environment measures to promote environmental management

and stewardship and for farming and forestry can have a significant multiplier effect on the economic situation of the rural areas. The research and analysis of case studies conducted by an EN RD Thematic Working Group on "Targeting territorial specificities and needs" suggests that the majority of revenue generated stays within a region and brings additional income to rural communities.

The 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is therefore a good opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of poverty and social inclusion in rural areas, to contribute to the debate on new challenges and the future shaping of European policies, specifically Cohesion Policy and CAP, and to emphasise their contribution to building a strong rural economy and thus alleviating rural poverty and social exclusion.

Facing new challenges

Rural areas are also increasingly facing new challenges, such as climate change, globalisation pressures and demographic changes, and the RDPs include a number of measures to help tackle those challenges. Climate change mitigation measures include rewarding farmers and other land managers for environmental services and products, and support for investments, aiming at greenhouse gas reductions.

Globalisation pressures are tackled through investments in modernisation of farms, diversification of economic activity and investments in human capital. Demographic changes, in particular the ageing of society and the migration of young educated people, are targeted through activities aimed at improvement of infrastructure and the quality of life in rural areas (e.g broadband, sports and cultural infrastructure), which are designed to attract inward investment, to broaden education and labour market opportunities, and consequently to support social inclusion.

The role of employment in alleviating rural poverty is central, but the provision

of education and vocational training should also not be under-estimated, as raised education levels are closely linked to better employment rates. It is expected that the role of activities aiming at providing targeted education support to rural areas will increase, as will employment initiatives and climate change adaptation schemes to ensure competitiveness of the EU rural economy.

The EU 2020 Strategy highlights the importance of supporting schemes which help eliminate labour market and social inclusion barriers, in particular for the most vulnerable groups of women, young people, older workers and the disabled. These schemes include education and lifelong learning opportunities, modern transport and ICT infrastructure, and improved access to public services.

The post-2013 CAP needs to take on-board the main objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy for intelligent, inclusive and sustainable growth. The current CAP debate on the nature of the response to economic, agricultural and environmental challenges will determine the future extent of support and its priorities. It is evident that Europe seeks a bottom-up approach, as seen through

wide public debate. The future rural development policy will undoubtedly be fundamental to improving the economic and social performance of rural regions.

EU rural development policy can address issues such as globalisation, climate change and demographic challenges in rural areas and it does so through a number of targeted measures. The current debate on the future of rural development policy is shaped by its achievements so far, and more effort channeled through both the rural development policy and Cohesion Policy is expected to focus on tackling these challenges.

Useful links

Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas (DG Employment, 2008)
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2085&langId=en>

Study on Employment in rural areas - DG Agriculture and rural development, 2006
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/reports/ruralemployment/sec1772_en.pdf

Conference on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas, Budapest 2009
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=158>

Conference report - Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3964&langId=en>





RDP approaches to
enhancing employment
and improving social
inclusion in rural Poland

Eliminating poverty and social exclusion is one of the main priorities of the EU. Due to a number of specific structural and socio-economic conditions, rural areas are at a particular risk of poverty. Rural development policy plays an active role in improving employment opportunities and in fighting against social exclusion in rural Poland.

Rural areas play a vital role in the Polish economic and social environment – they account for 93% of the country's territory and 39% of the population (Polish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013). A number of structural and socio-economic factors including lower income generation and investment rates in rural areas, a higher risk of unemployment, lower education attainment, a high level of migration and an ageing society, and poor physical infrastructure make Polish rural areas more exposed to the risk of poverty than the urban areas.

Analysis of key national economic and social statistics, as described in the Rural Poland 2010 Report by the Foundation for Development of Polish Agriculture, suggests that:

- 14% of all employed work in the agricultural sector
- the agricultural sector is characterised by low productivity, as compared to the EU27 average
- rural families without farms and farming income and those dependent on social

support are at the highest risk of relative (26%) and absolute (9%) poverty¹

- rural unemployment (8%) mainly affects young people (18-24 years old), women, and those with basic education
- poverty which is passed on from generation to generation results in generational deprivation, which is particularly difficult to break due to psychological and behavioural conditions.

¹ Relative poverty is defined as an income value below half of the median income of a given country, while absolute poverty represents a value below the minimum income required to afford an adequate standard of living.

Challenges for rural Poland

Being unemployed diminishes the ability of individuals to adapt to changing economic and social conditions and leads to social exclusion, which is often a hereditary problem. The main challenges for rural Poland include:

- diversification of economic activity, through provision of information and support to develop alternative income-generating activities
- ensuring the competitiveness of rural businesses through investment in their infrastructure needs and in the general rural infrastructure
- sustainable rural development processes and investments are required which do not compromise existing natural assets and resources
- provision of education and vocational training opportunities to improve the competitiveness of rural human capital
- investment in rural infrastructure and in villages to improve the quality of rural life and to prevent young people from migrating
- building on existing assets and advantages (e.g. rural tourism, food products), promoting a stronger Polish rural brand enhancing the rural cultural identity
- more coordination of the policies and funding sources to ensure sustainable development of rural areas.

EU activities in support of rural development in Poland

Over the last decade Poland has benefited from a range of EU policies and initiatives to support economic and social rural development processes. The main objective of the pre-accession programme SAPARD (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) was to support agriculture and rural areas. The programme had a particularly positive impact in terms of developing and modernising rural infrastructure. In addition to direct payments under Pillar 1, which had a major effect on farming income, Post-accession programmes had a positive economic effect. The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2004-2006, and the Sectoral Operational Programme Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector were instrumental in facilitating the agricultural and food production development in rural areas.

In the current programming period 2007-2013, rural poverty is addressed through a range of Cohesion Policy instruments and the Rural Development Programme. The National Strategic Reference Framework, which outlines the main Cohesion policy objectives for Poland, focuses on rural areas through its sixth horizontal objective – Rural Development. The objective assigns exclusive responsibility for issues such as rural health, education, information society and local roads to the

Sectoral (Human Capital, Infrastructure and Environment, Innovative Economy), Regional and Eastern Poland Operational Programmes.

The Operational Programmes have the highest responsibility for supporting entrepreneurship, water, waste and wastewater investments in both rural and urban areas. This is separate from the support provided through the RDP, and potentially such a division can result in certain rural areas becoming marginalised unless the support under these two policies is coordinated.

The 2007-2013 RDP offers funding to a wide range of measures which can offer vital contributions to combating rural poverty and social exclusion.

The most relevant support to alleviating poverty and social exclusion in Poland is provided through axis 3, aimed at improving the quality of rural life. This emphasises sport, cultural heritage and infrastructure and projects for rural community centers. Other activities, such as diversification to non-agricultural activities and support to micro-businesses are particularly important to providing employment and income opportunities outside farming.



KASTEL Clear windows and doors

KASTEL Windows and Doors Factory Ltd was established in 2001 in the small village of Katy Nowe, Buski County, Swietokrzyskie region. The county is typically rural, with agriculture and tourism as the main economic activities.

KASTEL is a small manufacturing enterprise – it has two production lines for PVC and for aluminum. The owner of the company has over 20 years of experience in the sector. The company manufactures and sells windows, doors, window sills and blinds. The enterprise is continuously developing and searching for new innovative and ecological products and methods of production – they use nontoxic calcium and zinc stabilizers which have replaced lead and tin.

The company has applied for RDP support under axis 3, Establishing and development of microenterprises, to upgrade their production facilities, and to buy new equipment and a delivery truck. A grant of PLN 299 997 (EUR 73 554.17) will result in a higher production output, lower production costs and an increase in income. KASTEL will create five new jobs for the local labour force.

For more information visit <http://www.kastel.kkf.pl/>

SWIETOKRZYSKA FABRYKA OKIEN I DRZWI "KASTEL" SP. Z O.O.





“ Rural Poland is changing for the better. We have financial support – the Young Farmer programme - for young farmers who are setting up new rural enterprises. ”

Marek Sawicki, Polish Minister for Rural Development

Axis 1 actions include vocational education and training opportunities for farmers and woodland owners (e.g. for new farming and horticultural practices), as well as

investment in farm modernisation such as new machinery or solar panels as renewable energy solutions, as well as support to young farmers.



Farm development and support to increased income generation

Bielawy is a small village in the municipality of Kazimierz Biskupi, in the Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) region, located 90 km east of Poznan. The population of the municipality is approximately 10 500. The main economic activity is agriculture, though mining and other industry has historically played a significant role. The unemployment rate in the municipality is below 10%.

Adam Sroka has taken over 19.2 ha of farming land, which consists mainly of middling and low quality soil. Under the previous owner the land was mainly used as a meadow but there was also a cherry orchard, a strawberry field and other arable land. Mr Sroka has prepared a development plan for his farm, and applied for support under the RDP 2007-2013 axis 1 activity 112 - ‘Support to young farmers’ to develop his farmland and accelerate production through growing vegetables under foil tunnels.

The RDP grant of PLN 50 000 (EUR 12 259.25) enabled Mr Sroka to build two foil tunnels, 210 m² each, which replaced the strawberry field. One of the tunnels is used for tomatoes and the other for cucumbers, lettuce and bell pepper. He has decided to maintain the cherry orchard, and uses the arable land to grow corn.

The RDP grant has helped Mr Sroka improve the earning potential of his farmland and has given him the crucial support to kick-off a productive rural enterprise. It has also contributed to the local community as the farm now offers seasonal employment opportunities to local vegetable and fruit pickers.

For more information visit www.arimr.gov.pl



HUBERT TOMASZ KAROLCZAK



Organic farming in Śmiłowo

Hubert Karolczak, 36, is a graduate of the University of Technology and Life Sciences in Bydgoszcz. He lives in Śmiłowo, a small village situated on the national route Szczecin-Warsaw, west of Bydgoszcz. The village lives off agricultural production and due to its beautiful surrounding lakes and nature, on tourism.

Mr Karolczak owns over 30 ha of farmland which he took over from his father in 1999. His farm is located on a NATURA 2000 site – which protects vulnerable natural and semi-natural habitats – in a lowland area, which is defined as less favoured. The farm also includes two fish breeding ponds (carp and tench), which take up 4 ha of the area, and a small, 6.5 ha lake, as well as over 1 700 hens.

Mr Karolczak has previously applied for funding from the 2004-2006 RDP to support his organic farming practices. Since 2009, he has benefited from the agri-environment programme through activities under two funding packages: organic farming and extensive permanent grassland. Under the organic farming scheme there is a general obligation to maintain the elements of the landscape which are not used for agricultural purposes (e.g. ponds). So far Mr. Karolcsak has received over PLN 59 000 (EUR 14426.91).

Mr Karolczak is determined to continue developing his ecological and sustainable farming practices and all fish, eggs, poultry and other produce from his farm are certified organic. His farm is popular among tourists, and the local residents happily promote and support his work, because as organic farming is more time and effort consuming than conventional methods, Mr Karolczak employs, on both a permanent and seasonal basis, a number of local residents.

For more information visit
<http://zlotylin.itbvega.pl/index.html>

Gates to the Mazurian Land

The 'Gates to the Mazurian Land' LAG was established in April 2006 in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region of Poland. The LAG currently consists of 46 members, and is active in 16 rural municipalities of the three counties of Nidzicki, Działdowski and Szczęciński. The total population included in the activity of the LAG is approximately 100 000 inhabitants. Selected areas of the LAG activity are located on NATURA 2000, national park and nature reserve sites. The lakes and rivers as well as historical and cultural sites in the area attract high numbers of tourists, and therefore the main economic activities are tourism including fishing, hunting and agriculture.

Until recently, however, the region did not have one common 'brand' to identify it to visitors, and associated promotional activities were fragmented. Consequently, the full economic potential of the area was not being sufficiently exploited, and the region suffered from a very high (21%) unemployment, high migration levels of mostly young people, an ageing society and a negative cultural identity.

The LAG has successfully organized a range of activities to promote entrepreneurship and support micro- and small enterprises, as well as diversification into non-agricultural activity and improvement of the quality of rural life. Particular initiatives included the Jobs Fair, which attracted over 20 local organisations (including enterprises, NGOs, training and business support centres), and 200 local unemployed; and 'the Mazurian wedding' which is promoted as a local tourism product.

Entrepreneurship training has been provided to over 60 people to help them take advantage of the cultural and historical heritage of the area. Publications and promotional materials has also been developed to help promote the new products. Another noteworthy project has been the establishment of a Rural Education Centre, which promotes skills development and entrepreneurship, delivers vocational education and training opportunities and helps with establishing non-agricultural businesses.

For more information visit www.lgdbmk.pl



LOKALNA GRUPA DZIAŁANIA "BRAMA MAZURSKIEJ KRAINY"

Useful links

Ministry of Rural Development www.minrol.gov.pl

Agency for Modernisation and Restructuring of Agriculture www.arimr.gov.pl

Foundation for Development of Polish Agriculture www.fdpa.org.pl

Foundation of Assistance Programmes for Agriculture www.fapa.org.pl

National Rural Network www.ksow.pl

Rural Development Foundation www.fww.org.pl

Polish Rural Forum www.faow.org.pl

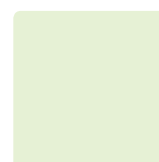
Farmer www.farmer.pl

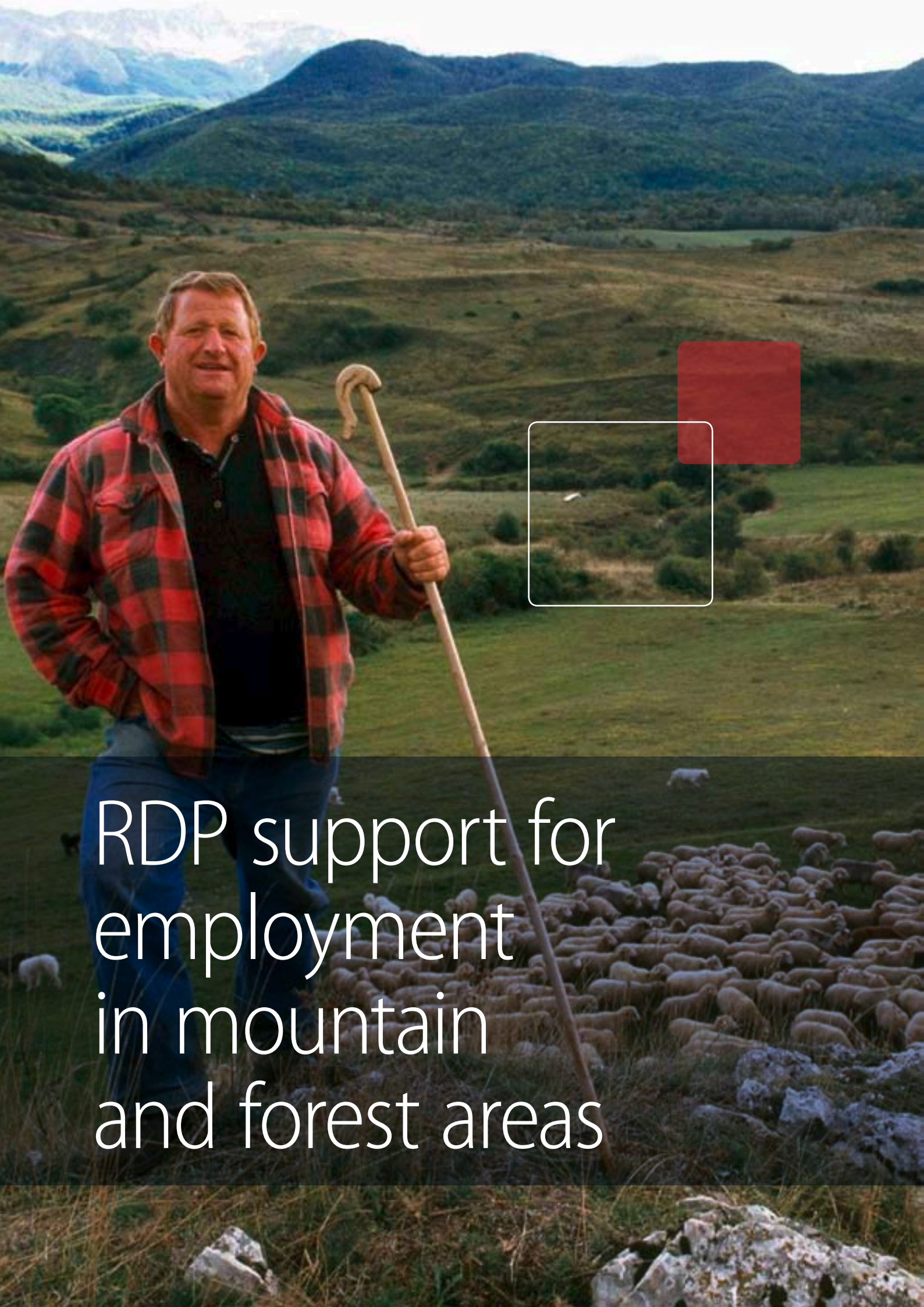
Axis 2 helps maintain the viability of rural areas by providing support to those who want to continue farming in less favoured areas (LFA). The agri-environment component of the programme promotes sustainable land management and farming practices (e.g. organic farming). The measures contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of rural enterprises on European and global markets.

Axis 4, through the Leader approach, identifies local problems and offers local solutions. Local Action Groups (LAGs) coordinate the development and implementation of local development strategies through a bottom-up, participative approach to identifying problems, needs and solutions. The aim is to include and empower rural community organisations and public and private institutions as active partners, who are willing to contribute with innovative ideas to maximise the true economic, social and cultural potential of rural areas.

There are 338 LAGs in Poland and the Leader approach is increasingly becoming a standard approach to tackling rural challenges. The wider objective of axis 4 is also to maximise the impact of the axis 3 activities discussed above – diversification to non-agricultural activity, improvement of the quality of life and support to microenterprises.

Rural Poland faces many challenges in the coming years and rural development policy has a vital role to play in adapting to and addressing these challenges. The Rural Poland 2010 Report suggests that improvement of the quality of life and contribution of agricultural activity to the local economy is proportionate to the level of rural development aid received. The current CAP debate will, undoubtedly, have a major impact on the future shape of the rural development policy; however, increased coordination with EU Cohesion Policy must be sought so as to better address the needs of rural Poland.





RDP support for
employment
in mountain
and forest areas

Mountain and Forest Areas across Europe are benefitting from Rural Development Programme (RDP) support for maintaining existing and creating new employment opportunities in the face of additional challenges posed by global markets and climate change.

Mountain and Forest areas (see Table 1) account for approximately 29% and 42% of Europe's landmass respectively, although much of this overlaps with forest being the dominant land cover in most of the EU's mountain areas (exceptions being in Sicily, southern Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom).

There exists however significant variances in both extent and type of mountain areas and forest areas across Member States. While Scandinavia and the Baltic States are predominantly lowland in nature and heavily forested with coniferous tree cover, central Europe has significant but defined mountain massifs with mixed forest cover over large tracts of both mountain and lowland areas. In the Mediterranean States mountain area and forest cover, usually hardwood, is high.

Those areas not covered in forest tend to be moorland, scrubland, barren land or permanent snow. Grassland is a feature in the Massif Central, Crete, the Carpathians and the Apennines with arable land (including permanent crops such as vineyards, olive groves and orchards) also being significant in central and southern Europe. This reflects both

natural settings and centuries of land use and in turn affects the type of economic activity that can take place on the land and opportunities for employment.

Challenges and opportunities for mountain and forest areas

The key challenges for mountain areas are their relative remoteness, lack of infrastructure, the necessity to use machinery depending on steepness of slopes, as well as the fact that they are sometimes sparsely populated; however, again there are variations across Member States. This is then reflected in typical household incomes with an average annual farm income of EUR 13 800 in EU mountain areas, as compared to EUR 18 900 in non-disadvantaged areas.

Mountain areas also face more variable and extreme climatic conditions and are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Table 1: Definitions of forest and mountain areas in Europe

Mountain Areas

Mountain areas shall be those characterised by a considerable limitation of the possibilities for using the land and an appreciable increase in working it due:

- to the existence, because of altitude, of very difficult climatic conditions, the effect of which is substantially to shorten the growing season,
- at a lower altitude, to the presence over the greater part of the area in question of slopes too steep for the use of machinery or requiring the use of very expensive special equipment, or
- to a combination of these two factors, where the handicap resulting from each taken separately is less acute but the combination of the two gives rise to an equivalent handicap.

Source: European Commission

Forest Areas

Forest: Land with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10% and area of more than 0.5 km². The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5m at maturity in situ.

Other Wooded Land (OWL): Land either with a tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of 5-10 percent of trees able to reach a height of 5 m at maturity in situ; or a crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10% of trees not able to reach a height of 5m at maturity in situ and shrub and bush cover.

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and Food and Agriculture Organization



Sustaining Market Position in a Challenging Economic Climate

Although based in a small village in the Lake District National Park in the far North West of England, 'Second Nature UK' is the national brand leader in natural and sustainable insulation solutions supplying building projects that include Edinburgh Castle and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Started just 10 years ago, the company specialised in transforming coarse sheep wool that was previously disposed of through burning, into a high value and sustainable building material.

'Second Nature UK' has used funding available through the Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader Programme Micro-Enterprise support to buy in specialist marketing expertise. This has enabled them to produce a marketing strategy which will help them to extend their "Thermafleece" brand into both a broader range of products and new markets.

Christine Armstrong, Second Nature UK's Chief Executive, said "Wool is a natural, safe and healthy product, the uses of which have extended far beyond traditional applications. Leader has recognised the importance of our project – their support has been invaluable."

The Lake District National Park is a heavily forested upland area containing some of England's highest mountain peaks. The area is also a tourism 'honeypot' and the National Park Authority has a challenge in its role to balance social, economic and environmental rural development demands.

For more information visit: www.secondnatureuk.com



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Forest areas in lowlands do not necessarily have these problems, however mountain forests are less economically attractive due to poor forest infrastructure, harvesting and transport to markets. Employment opportunities can be limited, notwithstanding a vital agriculture and forestry sector. Unemployment is particularly high in peripheral areas at the Northern and Southern edges of Europe both of which are dominated by either mountains or forests.

On the positive side, structural change in agriculture has moved faster in mountain areas than in other similar areas. Communities in these areas also appear to recognise the benefits from co-operative working and are good at taking innovative approaches.

Forest management and land management in mountain areas also provide a range of public goods in relation to habitat and biodiversity preservation (43% of Natura 2000 areas located in mountain massifs and 13% within forest areas), climate change (through carbon management), water management as well as landscapes which are a resource for tourism and recreation.

The policy context

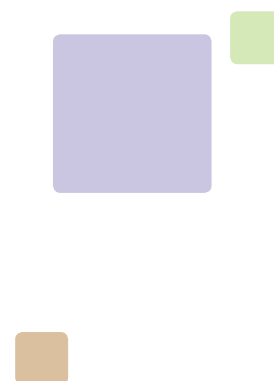
There is a divergence in the approach to support for mountain and forest areas. Forests and the timber industry are well defined and have a number of specific support measures. At a European level a more holistic approach is being developed through the 'EU Forest Strategy and Action Plan' and the Commission's Green Paper on 'Forest Protection and Information in the EU: Preparing forests for climate change' will provide a greater focus on the key role that forests will have in the future. A recent review of RDP support for forestry activity ('Initial screening of forestry measures in 2007-2013 RDPs') produced

by the National Rural Networks (NRN) Forestry Thematic Initiative identified that of the 88 national and regional RDPs "all, except those of Malta and Ireland, include at least some forestry measures or forestry related actions."

Although mountain areas do not have specific support mechanisms addressed to them other than compensation payments for natural handicaps, most RDPs provide plenty of opportunities for supporting mountain areas, including increased levels of grants which are priority-specific to them. The Commission Document 'Peak performance: new insights into mountain farming in the European Union' presented at the Conference on Mountain Farming in Austria in December 2009 drew attention to the needs of mountain areas. The Commission repeated its recommendation to Member States to make sure that the RDPs address the needs of mountain areas, initially through the mid-term evaluations and then on to the next programming period. In 2010, the European Environment Agency published also a report: 'Europe's ecological backbone: recognizing the true value of our mountains' (EEA Report n°6/2010) providing the environmental information needed for the development and implementation of relevant policies.

Employment and inclusion opportunities

Feedback from stakeholders in mountain and forest areas indicate that RDP support has acted as a catalyst for the development of activities leading to employment through adding value to raw materials at source, development of supply chains, improved branding and marketing and development of new products and ways of doing things. All of these activities create new employment.





Mountain biking leading the way in tourism employment in South Scotland's forests

The popularity of mountain biking continues to climb as a growth activity in many EU rural areas. This is the case in Scotland where significant amounts of EU funding has been invested in developing infrastructure to facilitate this type of sport in a sustainable manner that also protects sensitive environments in upland forest areas.

An example is the '7-Stanes Mountain Bike Facility' in southern Scotland's Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders region. This network of mountain bike trails and support services in upland forest areas attracts some 400 000 visitors annually who between them generated around EUR 11.5 million each year for the local rural economy.

EU support during the previous programming period was used to establish the '7-Stanes' project and RDP funds are now being used to build on these economic development benefits through a series of Leader projects that are co-financed by the regions' Local Action Groups.

These Scottish axis 4 funds are enabling a wide range of private sector businesses to work together to maximise economic benefits for the longer term and include development projects such as undertaking joint marketing and media activity. Additional product development and packaging of mountain bike holiday activities is also being supported with LAG assistance to encourage mountain bikers to stay and utilise the services of local businesses. Innovative products include a Mountain Bikers Hospitality scheme that has been designed to help local businesses meet the needs of mountain bike tourists.

For further information about these RDP projects supporting sustainable employment in mountain areas contact the LAGs:

www.dgcommunity.net/leader

and

www.scottishbordersleader.co.uk

More information on the '7-Stanes' project can be obtained from www.7stanes.gov.uk



MOUNTAIN BIKE BUSINESS NETWORK



Growth through organic beef production in the Italian Tyrol

The 'Slow Food' movement has seen a rapid expansion in quality beef production in the Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano. Laugenrind (Laugen Beef) has been built from the area's traditional alpine agriculture system comprising of small farms based on milk and meat production.

Support through axis 1 measure 124 which supports co-operation for the development of new products, processes and technologies has enabled 30 farmers with 100 cattle to follow the quality criteria of organic meat production, adding up to an extra 30% value, by producing a variety of quality organic meat products including sausages, goulash and Bolognese ragout.

The organic and slow food labels, linking products to the local area and the Alpine Grey cattle have all helped to add value. These products are now sold and promoted to tourist restaurants and direct to consumers.



FUNDĂȚIA ADEPT TRANSILVANIA



Awareness-raising activities with respect to mountain areas have been carried out by the Euromontana organisation, which is a multi-sectoral association promoting co-operation and development of mountain territories in the EU. Its mission is to promote “living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas”. A core part of the Euromontana mandate involves identifying economic development opportunities for mountain areas, and useful findings have emerged recently following the conclusion of their EuroMARC initiative.

This documented that consumers identify mountain images with goods of a certain added value and confirmed the potential for RDP assistance to help mountain stakeholders in adding value, improving supply chains and promoting a mountain image and brand. There is also continuing discussion with the Commission regarding a label relating to products of mountain farming to possibly cover raw materials and products processed in mountain areas.

Green growth

A recurring theme through the RDPs is the scope for supporting Green Growth both in terms of developing environmental

“ Europeans have long understood that our forests provide society with a multitude of ecological, social and economic functions and benefits. ”

Professor Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director,
European Environment Agency

products and services and also in relation to tackling climate change. Support is provided for the development of activity and nature-based tourism with mountain and forest areas supplying a high quality resource.

There is also a range of support available to help communities reduce the potential impacts of climate change. This includes measures to reduce the impact of extreme weather such as fire, flood or drought, which can threaten both natural resources and industries such as tourism. In addition forests in particular can contribute to the provision of green energy with demand for timber as a bio-fuel, in log, chip and pellet forms.

In conclusion the RDP provides a toolbox to enable communities in mountain and forest areas to innovate and create new types of rural employment.

“ The comparative advantage of ‘mountains’ in quality must be exploited through different strategies: the existing quality schemes are part of the possible strategies, as well as the organic label, but they should be improved and complemented by other specific to mountains, in order to protect the use of the mountain image. ”

Euromontana



Increasing local energy produced from biomass in Germany



The NRN forestry thematic initiative identified that the RDP in Hessen, Germany includes within measure 321 (basic services for the economy and rural population) a sub-measure "Facilities for the energetic use and material recycling of biomass" which supports a range of projects to increase local energy produced from biomass including:

- Bio-gas plants, combined heat and power plants.
- Wood fired heating systems for central supply, at least 50KW.
- Local heat supply systems.
- Research and development projects, pilot schemes and feasibility studies.

Support is given exclusively on the basis of area-related local development strategies and their aim is to support about 152 units and 35 pilot projects.

Useful links

Euromontana: www.euromontana.org

EuroMARC: www.mountainproducts-europe.org

EU Forest Strategy and Action Plan: <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/>

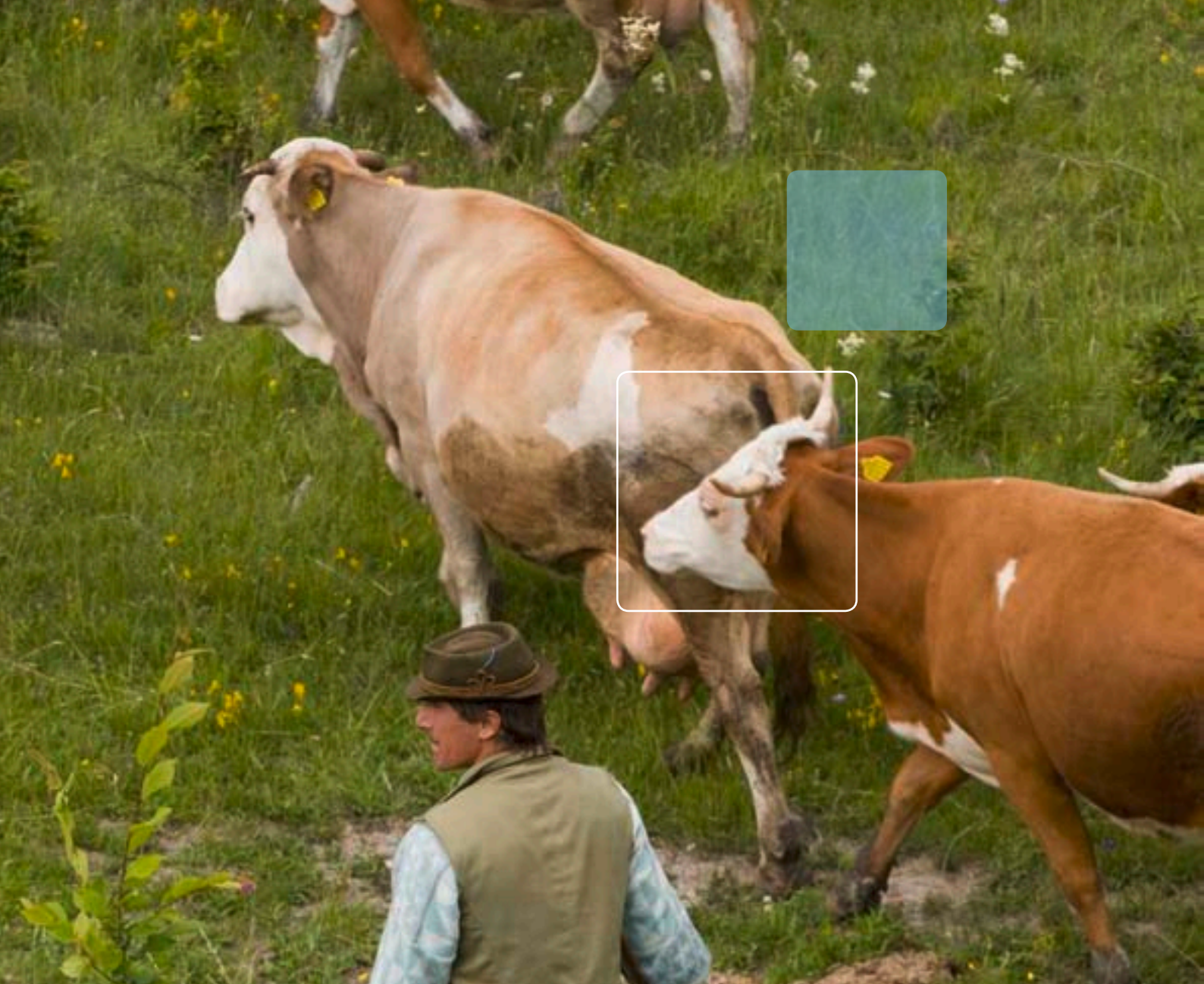
Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF): www.cepf-eu.org

European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP): www.efncp.org

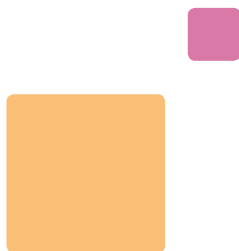
Commission's Green Paper 'Forest Protection and Information in the EU: Preparing forests for climate change': <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/207>

EN RD NRN Forestry Thematic Initiative: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/national-rural-networks/joint-nrn-activities/nrn-forestry-thematic-initiative_en/en/nrn-forestry-thematic-initiative_home_en.cfm

European Environment Agency: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-ecological-backbone>



Making it work:
exploiting the
specificities and assets
of rural territories to
create employment



EVA CARLSSON



Drawn to the rural way of life, a new generation of entrepreneurs are finding new value in rural assets and resources, creating opportunities for employment and income and breathing new life back into the rural economy.

In the spring of 2003, when Tanya Hultman took the road from Kristianstad in the south of Sweden and headed north to her new home in the province of Norrbotten, she was struck by the fact that most of the traffic seemed to be going in the opposite direction. Undeterred, she continued her journey, seizing the opportunity provided by a general exodus from rural areas to acquire a small farm and realise a long-held dream of starting a new life in the country.

“We were initially attracted by the land prices, which were considerably lower than in the south of Sweden,” Ms Hultman explains. “But we also really liked the quiet rural setting, which was the perfect place to bring up our two young children.”

Ms Hultman and her husband had purchased a 6.0 ha farm near the town of Piteå, where they set about establishing Alter Valley Carrots (Alterdalens Morötter), focusing on the growing and distribution of carrots to the local market. Over the next seven years, and despite Norrbotten’s remoteness and low population density (7,3 hab/km²), the business went from strength to strength.

“We were surprised,” says Ms Hultman. “From the moment we started we have not been able to keep up with demand. Our carrots are slightly more expensive than the competition, but people are prepared to pay that bit extra for quality local products. Between 2003 and 2008 we increased our growing area eight-fold, from 1.0 ha to 8.0 ha, but with demand continuing to grow, we eventually had to look at other ways of increasing production.”

In 2008, with support from the Grön Framtidsgård (Green Future Farm) project (see box), Alter Valley Carrots launched a search for local contract growers. This resulted in agreements being signed with three local farmers, allowing Alter Valley Carrots to double its production and allowing Tanya to devote herself full-time to the business. It also boosted the viability of the participating farms and created an additional full-time job on one of them.

Boosting employment in peripheral rural areas

Alter Valley Carrots provides a good example of the potential for employment creation in peripheral rural areas,

where employment rates are among the lowest in the EU. Through product innovation (testing and selecting carrot varieties adapted to the local climate), an emphasis on quality, and a focus on direct distribution to local markets, the business has succeeded in creating local jobs and income. This, as Ms Hultman points out, is not the road to riches but it does make it possible for people to continue to make a living in the country.

The Hultman’s story further highlights the potential for exploiting local assets and incentives, such as lower land prices and an environment that can be attractive to young families, to counter trends such as ageing and “masculinisation”, which affect many remote rural areas in Europe.

As to what the future holds for employment in rural areas, Ms Hultman is quite clear. “Think food!” she advises, without hesitation. “People will always have to eat and with the increasing emphasis on climate change and health I really believe that the market for quality local produce will continue to grow. Since I set up the business seven years ago, demand has exploded.”



Grön Framtidsgård (Green Future Farm) in Sweden

Grön Framtidsgård, a project funded under the Swedish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, has helped over 150 people to develop new rural businesses. "There was a positive spirit among farmers in Norrbotten and Västerbotten," says Håkan Stenmark, project manager at the Farmers Union, LRF Västerbotten, the project beneficiary. "We wanted to try to exploit this as a positive driving force in rural areas."

Mr Stenmark and his colleagues visit farmers who have ideas for development or diversification and develop tailored support to meet their specific requirements. Mr Stenmark believes Norrbotten and Västerbotten have resources which are, and will continue to be, in demand. However, in his view, better knowledge of markets and a closer relationship with municipalities are vital for success.

"Traditionally, farmers have been invisible as a business category, but with more and more farmers investing in complementary activities it is important that the relationship with the municipality is redefined," he insists.

Combining farming with other activities

Tanya Hultman's success in identifying and responding to market demands has allowed her to develop a profitable farm enterprise and to create and sustain employment in the agricultural sector. However, with employment in farming continuing to fall in Europe and with growing numbers of part-time farmers, other sources of on and off-farm employment and income are also increasingly important.



T. HUDSON



Biogas-run heat and power plant in an Alpine region of Italy

In South Tyrol (Italy), a local farmer's cooperative was established in the municipality of Sand in Taufers in order to exploit the potential of renewable energy to supplement farm income and employment. Having originally established a plant to convert excess liquid manure to biogas, the cooperative is currently receiving support from the region's Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) for the development of a combined heat and power plant that will run on this biogas, and for the connection of the plant to the distribution networks.

"This will transform what is currently a loss making venture into a business that is profitable and makes an important contribution to the viability of local farms," explains Helmut Pinggera, Coordinator of the Valli di Tures ed Aurina LAG, which is co-funding the project. He adds; "the nature of farming in this mountainous area means that farms produce more liquid manure than they can spread on the land. The new plant will give them a viable outlet for this, as well as the potential for an additional income stream from the sale of heat and electricity."

The local municipality has agreed to purchase 70% of the heat and 95% of the electricity produced, which will secure the viability of the plant and provide a good basis for future growth.

In fact, the original idea for the project came from the local mayor, Helmuth Innerbichlir, who saw it as an opportunity to provide a more sustainable source of energy for the municipality's public buildings.

Mr Pinggera is proud of the fact that money that once flowed out of the local economy will in future help to sustain local employment. However, he stresses that keeping people in rural areas is more than about job creation. "The source of development are the families and therefore we need kindergartens and schools in the countryside: as long as the schools are there, the families will remain there; as long as the families remain there, the houses remain there, as long as the houses remain, the villages remain and so on".

Preparing for work in the country

Schools and education have an even greater importance in rural areas, however. An analysis of education statistics in the EU suggests a significant "deficit" within the rural workforce, which acts as a barrier to entrepreneurship and

to the uptake of available employment opportunities. Appropriate education and training options for both young people (as a disincentive to out-migration) and older inhabitants (as a means of combating underemployment) are central, therefore, to any effort to increase rural employment rates.



NÜNA MÄNTYNIEMI

Training for young farmers in Wallonia, Belgium

In Belgium, the Federation of Young Farmers (Fédération des Jeunes Agriculteurs - FJA) in the region of Wallonia is receiving support under the region's Rural Development Programme to provide training for farmers, farm workers and other rural job seekers. The centre offers two kinds of training. The first includes preparatory courses for those getting into farming for the first time. From September 2010, this will also include a specific course on organic farming. "This sector is growing rapidly," explains Gregory Etienne, chairman of the FJA. "The new course is a real innovation for us. It is the first time we will have an entire course devoted entirely to this type of production."

The second type of training focuses on diversification and includes training in such areas as cheese making, ice-cream production, branding and marketing of farm products, and renewable energy production. There are currently over 700 students participating in this programme, as compared to 200 in the farm installation courses. "The new diversification courses have been an unquestionable success," states Mr Etienne. "There is a big demand for this training, which gives farmers the skills to diversify into other sectors."

Samuel Van Eesbeek is one of the current participants in the course. With his father, Samuel manages a dairy farm in the municipality of Villers-la-Ville, but he hopes the training will allow him to also diversify into cheese and ice-cream production. "We are at a crossroads," Mr Van Eesbeek acknowledges. "To continue to make a living from the farm we have to choose between diversification or increasing production, or both. For me, diversification is a must. I really believe that selling direct will be a critical addition to farming in the future."

The next generation

Like most of his fellow students, Samuel Van Eesbeek is convinced that he can continue to make a living in the rural area he grew up in. Ensuring this continuity between generations is an essential part of any strategy to sustain and increase employment in rural areas.

In Finland, the 'Maaseutu opettaa' ('Learning from the countryside') project in the region of North Savo (Pohjois-Savo) is taking this a step further, by promoting awareness among secondary school students and their teachers about different rural occupations, businesses and education and training options.

According to the project coordinator, Niina Mantyniemi, the aim is to encourage young people to find employment in the countryside, choose entrepreneurship and to benefit from training opportunities in the natural resources sector. "In North Savo there is a real concern that there

will not be enough skilled workers and entrepreneurs in the countryside in the future," Ms Mantyniemi explains. "The region already faces a shortage of labour in such occupations as harvester operators, forest workers, agricultural substitute workers and agricultural construction professionals."

Now in its third and final year, the project, which is being co-financed through the Finnish Rural Development Programme (2007-2013), has already organised 98 different events, involving over 5 300 participants (pupils and teachers). These included practical work-days on farms and in rural tourism enterprises for students, as well as visits by farmers and rural entrepreneurs to local schools.

"One of the main achievements of the project has been the establishment of a cooperation network between rural businesses and schools in the region," adds Ms Mantyniemi.

Turning the traffic

Across Europe there are many examples of farmers and other rural entrepreneurs who have successfully exploited local assets and specificities to create or sustain employment. This new generation of pioneers is discovering opportunities in even the most remote areas, capitalising on new trends and technologies and building new networks and partnerships that allow them to create successful businesses.

Training and education are important enablers of this process, ensuring that current and future generations have the skills and know-how to exploit new opportunities as well as to sustain more traditional activities. However, a key driver of rural enterprise and employment is people's desire to live and to raise families in rural areas. Access to schools, healthcare and other essential services has, therefore, an important influence on the spatial distribution of employment and, ultimately, on the success of efforts to divert the traffic back into rural areas!



T. HUDSON



T. HUDSON





Supporting
disadvantaged people
in rural areas

Unemployment and social exclusion are serious problems in many rural areas, and hit disadvantaged groups the most. These include older people, people detached from the labour market, low-paid people, women and groups of minority ethnic origin. RDPs can play an important role in promoting a more inclusive society and making rural areas a better place to live.

Rural areas in Europe are facing a number of problems, including the unfavourable demographic situation, low educational levels, poor labour market opportunities, remoteness and lack of transport facilities. These problems are commonly described as 'vicious circles', as one weakness may lead to another, gradually worsening the situation of the rural community. For instance, low educational levels may result in low employment rates, and consequently increased poverty rates, which in turn negatively affect the chances of improving the quality of education.

"It is beautiful, but we tend to feel that we are forgotten about out here. We have a feeling that we exist as a picture postcard, and nothing else" – says a woman in the film entitled 'Rural Disadvantage: Hidden Voices' aimed at supporting the study of the same subject by the Commission for Rural Communities in England.

Certain groups that are highly represented in rural areas are hit more severely by these problems than others. These include older people, people detached from the labour market, low-paid people, women and groups of minority ethnic origin. Rural development policies can play an important role in reducing such

disparities and making rural areas a better place to live. The diversity of problems that rural areas are facing in Europe has triggered varied responses.

The Communication of the European Commission on 'non-discrimination and equal opportunities (2005)²' stresses that the EAFRD operates in respect of the non-discrimination principle. Member States have to ensure that there is no discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in the implementation of their Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

Addressing unemployment in rural areas

Unemployment is a serious problem in many rural areas, and hits disadvantaged groups (such as youth and elderly) the most. A study on 'Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas'³ carried out in 2008 by the European Commission – DG Employment reports that the main

² http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/human_rights/fundamental_rights_within_european_union/c10313_en.htm

³ ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2085&langId=en

concern for young people in rural areas is the exclusion from labour market participation. "The bottom line is, in places like this, that there is no work, or what work there is you won't earn sufficient to do any good with" – says a rural youngster in the UK. The effects of unemployment are magnified by factors, such as peripherality, weaknesses in access to education and training facilities and problems related to seasonality. The project promoted by the West Cork Partnership in Ireland aims to overcome such difficulties.

Multiple exclusions: disabled people in rural areas

People experiencing a combination of disadvantages are those most in need of support. This is the situation for disabled people in rural areas. "There is evidence of multiple exclusion for particular groups of disabled people in European labour markets [...] This underlines the necessity in the years to come for a stronger focus on how decisions are implemented, including whether the necessary resources are available, both in relation to financial investment and in relation to qualified staff," argues a 2009 report of the Academic Network



Support for unemployed people in Macroom, Ireland

Unemployment figures in the West Cork town of Macroom have risen dramatically between 2008 and 2010. This fact spurred West Cork Development Partnership into holding a series of motivational workshops for job seekers and would-be entrepreneurs. They invited a renowned motivational speaker to advise participants on how best to secure employment during a recession. At the end of the workshop the participants were asked to write down their goals. Some had been recently made redundant, others were hoping to re-enter the workforce as their children were starting school and some were recent graduates.

Catherine Dineen is a nurse who was made redundant. As the carer of her son with autism she is no stranger

to the importance of being able to access the correct services. "Sometimes it's difficult to know where to turn for help", she said. "In Dublin there are voluntary organisations whose job it is to link you up with the correct services and support. However in rural Ireland it's more difficult to find support. There's still an attitude that you should be able to cope yourself."

"In the area I live in there have been a lot of tragedies and people don't know where to turn for support", Ms Dineen said. "I would like to set up a rurality-based organisation which can identify needs and provide the appropriate help when people face a sudden and major shift in their life. I don't see being made redundant as the end. It's simply a new beginning. This workshop has shown me that."

“ The majority of the world’s 650 million disabled people live in developing countries, 80 percent of them in rural areas, often in a state of dire poverty. ”

Libor Stloukal, FAO expert

of European Disability Experts⁴. The project supported in the framework of the Slovenian RDP aims to address this issue.

Moreover, a recent study in France, entitled 'Poverty, insecurity, solidarity in rural areas'⁵ shows that the economy and the occupational composition of rural areas expose them to precarious situations, where almost all indicators show that in the areas concerned, their inhabitants are below national averages in terms of participation in the national economy, income, qualifications or employment.

⁴ <http://www.disability-europe.net/content/pdf/ANED%202009%20Activity%20Report%20Final%2003-06-2010.pdf>

⁵ <http://lesrapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/094000616/0000.pdf>

Minority groups in rural development

Ethnic minorities are often among the most excluded groups in rural areas. This is a particular problem of the Roma population in rural regions of Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere. In April 2010, the European Commission issued a Communication on Roma integration for the first time. The document defines the main challenges ahead and develops an ambitious programme to help make policies for Roma inclusion more effective. As the Communication highlights, the situation of Roma (about 10-12 million people in Europe) is far more difficult than that of other ethnic minorities. They are highly vulnerable to far-reaching social exclusion and widespread discrimination. A survey by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency

in April 2009 showed that half of Roma respondents had faced discrimination at least once in the previous 12 months.

Efforts are being made in several EU countries to promote the participation of the Roma population in the RDPs as a means of reducing the risk of social exclusion and promoting their integration. Recent initiatives in this direction include seminars and workshops in Member States, organized in coordination with national authorities and Roma representatives, to raise awareness on possibilities offered by the programmes and to create the necessary link between those managing the programmes at national level and potential Roma community stakeholders. In this context a series of High Level events (HLE) were held in Hungary (September 2010) and Romania



Supporting people facing multiple exclusions in Slovenia

Disabled people face great challenges in finding employment. In the current economic crisis, when even people with no disabilities are losing their jobs, the situation is even worse. Diminished capacity to work presents an additional factor for refusal by employers. As a response, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Action Programme for Disabled Persons 2007-2013, which is aimed at promoting, protecting and providing full and equal implementation of human rights for disabled persons, and at encouraging respect for their dignity.

The project supported in the framework of the Slovenian RDP by Obsotelje and Kozjansko Local Action Group (LAG) is also to improve the employment opportunities for the disabled. As part of the project, an analysis of the unemployment situation in municipalities within the LAG was conducted. Useful information on the unemployment situation of disabled people was gathered, concerning their age, education, degree of invalidity, employment limitations. The target group was asked to complete a questionnaire, which covered issues with regard to their needs, capacities, motivations for work, work experience and skills.

As a result of the project a study was prepared on the employment opportunities of disabled people, and a promotional leaflet was issued. Data gathered was analysed and will serve as a basis for further activities to integrate disabled people into the labour market.



Supporting Roma people in the BÜKK-MAK Leader area in Hungary

One of the major objectives of BÜKK-MAK Leader in Hungary is to better integrate Roma people, who form some 15 percent of the local population. The local development strategy aims to combine the objective of enhanced bioenergy use with employment support for the most disadvantaged groups. The objective of the ROMAVIRKA initiative is to provide the most disadvantaged Roma communities with alternative income sources through promoting their involvement in bioenergy production. Part of the initiative is to collect and re-use local waste.

During the discussion process with Roma leaders, members of BÜKK-MAK Leader realised that they did not know enough about the local Roma communities. Therefore, training was organised with the involvement of Roma leaders for members of the LAG in order to provide a better insight into Roma culture, lifestyle, behaviour and typical problems. During the training, Roma leaders explained that "it is typical of gypsies that they are unable to think about the far future. One has to search for the origins of this behaviour in the history of the Roma: poverty, regular deprivation, and survival from one day to the next make Roma people care only about today and make the most of it."

In August 2009, the LAG membership unanimously approved the 'BÜKK-MAK Leader Community Solid Waste Collection and Utilisation System' and the 'Roma Community Energycourt' concepts. The LAG submitted a request to the Managing Authority for the preparation of a comprehensive research on the situation of the Roma population in the LAG area. In the future the LAG is planning to launch calls for proposals specifically designed for Roma people, based on the lessons learnt from the study.



EUROPEAN UNION, 1995-2010

(October 2010) entitled “Contribution of the EU funds to the integration of Roma”. A national HLE was held in Bucharest, followed by two regional level events in Cluj and Iași. Their aim was to maximize the use of various EU funds, including the structural and cohesion funds.

The Bulgarian RDP for example emphasises the need for targeted information campaigns about support possibilities under the RDP in order to try to reach socially isolated groups such as Roma communities. A similar emphasis can also be found in Hungary’s RDP which is also reflected in the strategy of the BÜKK-MAKK Local Action Group.

Diversifying rural communities

A study entitled ‘Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas’⁶ carried out in the United

Kingdom argues that “many rural areas are becoming increasingly exclusive, in the sense that only better-off people can afford to live there. Richer people are moving in and poorer people are moving out”. This phenomenon of ‘gentrification’ has been evident in many areas of rural Britain, as better-off people have migrated into the countryside and displaced the less affluent, primarily through competition for scarce housing.

As the intro-song in the Hidden Voices film expressively tells: “And the red brick cottage where I was born is the empty shell of a holiday home/ Most of year there’s no-one there, the village is dead and they don’t care/ Now we live on the edge of town/ Haven’t been back since the pub closed down/ One man’s family pays the price for another man’s vision of country life.”

The Swedish RDP offers a unique approach towards the diversification of rural communities and inclusion of disadvantaged groups. According to the Rural Development Programme,

the problem here is that “young people, women, and particularly people of foreign origin are under-represented in the Swedish agricultural and forestry sectors, and in Sweden’s sparsely populated and rural areas. These groups of citizens are also under-represented in regional and local development work on rural development issues”.

Therefore the Swedish RDP sets the goal to improve the integration of new groups and improve gender equality. The Ministry of Agriculture’s Report on Diversity states that “migration leads to an influx of important human resources and increases opportunities for development of the business sector. Diversity creates potential. A key issue is therefore to identify the obstacles and to take measures to remove or reduce them so as to view the demographic realities Sweden is facing.”

⁶ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/exclusive-countryside-social-inclusion-and-regeneration-rural-areas>





Integrating immigrants into the rural countryside of Sweden

Today's Sweden is characterised by ethnic diversity. Its population has roots in some 200 countries, and there are neighbourhoods where people speak many languages. Most foreigners live in urban areas. People of foreign origin are under-represented in the Swedish countryside.

Many of the foreigners have a generally negative image of rural areas and fear living there. As one of the immigrants said, "Nature for me is a place which is dangerous and you spend as little time there as possible to avoid wild animals, attacks of rebel soldiers and other hazards." The Thematic Working Group on Integration within the Swedish Rural Network was set up with the aim to change such images of immigrants about the rural countryside and help their integration.

The 'Green Integration in Rural Areas' project was initiated in Västra Götaland County by Marianne Barrljung, project manager and leader of the Thematic Working Group on Integration. She has long realised the need to better integrate immigrants in rural areas, and the opportunity to start this initiative was provided by the Swedish Rural Development Programme. "My main task in this project is to form arenas for cooperation between the private, voluntary and public sectors in the society, thereby creating opportunities for the immigrants to discover the countryside and the green business sector" – says Ms Barrljung.

A network has been set up in Västra Götaland County with some hundred people working on raising awareness about the integration of immigrants. Furthermore, some thirty-six 'immigrant guides' were trained, and cooperation with entrepreneurs was established in order to engage them in the provision of practical training. "The project was a kind of wake-up call," – says Ms Barrljung – "It has inspired others to start similar initiatives in the region."



CHRISTINA MILE 'N JACOBSSON

Useful links

Commission for Rural Communities (England):

<http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk/disadvantage-study/>

Communication on Roma in Europe (European Commission):

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/121>

Report on 'Labour market situation of disabled people in European countries and implementation of employment policies' (2009):

<http://www.disability-europe.net/en/themes/Employment/Employment%20reports%20overviewEN.jsp>

Thematic Working Group on Integration (Sweden):

<http://www.landsbygdsnatverket.se/huvudomraden/omnatverket/tematiskaarbetsgrupper/integration.4.424d259d1214272440980003198.html>

Report on 'Exclusive countryside: Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas':

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/exclusive-countryside-social-inclusion-and-regeneration-rural-areas>



Developing inclusion
and employment
opportunities through
Leader



Rural development policy serves more than 56% of the population across 27 EU Member States living in rural areas. Funding is allocated for the “Leader approach” to rural development, supporting individual projects by local partnerships to address specific common problems.

Leader programmes provide effective support to the unemployed and disadvantaged groups by fostering partnerships, learning from, and working with, other regions. By stimulating an integrated skills development approach in rural and disadvantaged areas, project work and short term work placements can be facilitated, improving access to full-time employment. The challenges lie in extending these innovative approaches and mainstreaming principles to benefit all axes across the EU, and increasing cooperation between a new and larger network of Local Action Groups (LAGs).

The global economic crisis has increased pressure on RDPs and subsequently on Leader to find innovative approaches to ensure that unemployment levels do not become unbalanced to the point of un-sustainability. However, an economic downturn also creates opportunities for growth, where direct investment by Leader and other social inclusion programmes, channeled through existing local partnerships, can renew and diversify the economic base of rural and disadvantaged areas.

Role of networking and exchange of good practice

A German employment model observed on a Leader trans-national project with a Local Action Group in the Wesermarsch Region of Northern Germany in 2004 inspired a recent innovative employment initiative by a leading partnership company in the south of Ireland, to be coordinated through existing LAG partnerships. South & East Cork Area Development Ltd (SECAD) are looking at a Supported Training & Employment Partnership or STEP approach, based on the German ‘Zeit and Service’ or Z&S model of an independent, not-for-profit company, established primarily to hire people who recently lost their jobs.

The Z&S company was set up to place participants within a local business for 12-36 months with the expected outcome being full-time employment after that time. This model was developed in Germany to avoid or escape a long-term dependence on social welfare. Local employers favoured Z&S employees as their contracts ceased within 24/36 months, and Z&S successfully placed over 85% of their employees into private sector contracts and away from social

welfare dependence. Most of these employees were later retained and offered long term contracts by the local businesses.

After four years, the cost of investment into Z&S was only slightly higher than the cost of social welfare payments that would have been paid to those that became employees. The indirect costs ‘saved’ in terms of mental health etc, though incalculable, would have been substantial to the state.

Based on this, the STEP model proposed by SECAD is intended to harness the unique positioning and network of LAGs across Europe as a platform for this employment-focused strategy. This can facilitate real employment opportunities where the LAG has developed a positive relationship and strong linkages with the private sector, social economy or through delivery of service contracts for local services.

The German Wesermarsch initiative also showed that the sooner a person is brought into an active and fulfilling setting, even if the salary level is not much more than they might receive on social welfare, and the majority of the work that they undertake is manual or

requires only basic skills, it can result in maintaining the self belief and the confidence to get back into the workforce when the opportunity arises. This proved that early labour market intervention is critical.

CEO of SECAD Ryan Howard; "I believe the Leader LAG structure provides an ideal platform for the delivery of creative and innovative actions or reactions as a response to the challenges that exist around us... the LAG fills a unique space between the services and opportunities of the state and the marketplace, as well as community and business sectors who are attempting to realise these opportunities. In developing the concept of the 'STEP' Model we were taking elements of other 'employment' methodologies or models which were driven by NGO's that we had observed or heard about in Northern Germany and Holland, with the help of a Leader Transnational Linkage Project."

Developing social capital

The villagers of Collyweston, population 450, in the northern Northamptonshire region of the UK formed a fund raising and management committee in 2008, to take over the lease of a former butchers shop. The group applied to their local Leader programme for grant support to open a community shop. Leader Programme Manager Mike Oakley; "We agreed grant support to help the village of Collyweston and the community shop is due to open its doors in July 2010" (www.collywestonshop.co.uk/).

The community shop will create social interaction within the village community by providing a social meeting place for locals, especially the elderly, those without transport, those who live on their own, young mothers with children.

Other applications for Leader funding to support retail possibilities in northern Northamptonshire include a general store manager wishing to acquire an

underused church hall premises so that he can create a 'village hub' with a post-office, general store, tea shop, internet cafe, bistro and garden centre, while the members of another rural village are looking for funding to set up a coffee shop to be run by a local charity. By funding rural start-ups, Leader plays a key role in nourishing social capital, thus maximising the endogenous potential of disadvantaged areas.

Mr Oakley describes the northern Northamptonshire rural action partnership and development strategy, formed under Leader, entitled 'Meeting the Sustainable Development Challenge'. This was set up to secure the benefits of growth for the local land-based sector and rural communities under a framework of green infrastructure. The strategy aims to:

- Increase opportunities for "green" tourism and leisure activities in rural northern Northamptonshire
- Help local land based businesses (e.g. farmers and foresters) to diversify into new activities and markets, particularly those aware of energy efficiency and the carbon footprint
- Grow the market for locally sourced food and drink products
- Support local small business growth and community enterprise solutions to service provision.

"We will use this strategy to seek to influence government policy and programmes, and to secure the necessary public and private sector investment," Mr Oakley says. "Our aim is to improve the economic well-being of rural northern Northamptonshire by encouraging tourism, micro enterprises and the diversification of land-based businesses."

SANDRA JOHNSON





Community development and social inclusion

Project Leader Christelle Théâte of the Wallonia LAG coordinated a number of social initiatives targeting disadvantaged areas of Belgium under axis 4 (Leader). Ms Théâte outlines the main objectives of her work; “I conceive my role within the Leader project as a job of impulse, or as an engine. Various projects and services were born thanks to the participation of numerous volunteers....their availability and their commitment should be highlighted. Together, we bring help to the people who need it, often weakened people, whether it is in the social, family, relational or economic context.”

To address problems of mobility (access) in disadvantaged areas, a ‘service voiturage’ or ‘transport service’ recruits volunteer drivers to help adults and children who do not have the means of transport or who live in areas that are not served by public transport. This is facilitated by a phone number where bookings can be made for transport three days in advance. This service often

involves transporting elderly citizens to the bus stop, train station, supermarket or the hairdresser. Another service is a website (www.covoiturage.caiaac.be) set up to facilitate contact with others who are willing to share the cost of educational, professional or leisure journeys, or car pooling.

To improve access to cultural activities for those at the poorest levels, a ‘cultural ambassador’ service lowered the price for entrance tickets to museums, cinema, theatre and concerts to EUR 1.25 for those accompanied by a volunteer driver. Also a ‘public writing’ service was set up to imitate a school where volunteers offered help with writing skills.

Based on results of a 2007 survey into the needs of those aged 65 years and up, a community centre for elderly people was set up, while volunteers were recruited to visit old people once a week to prepare and eat food together, and to participate in various activities.

LAG President Luc Bouveroux praises Ms Théâte for improving the quality of life of

the inhabitants of the Assesse, Gesves and Ohey regions; “...this is now an excellent and efficient service... placing a priority on the aged, mobility, access to culture for those who are economically fragile, the continuing evolution of our youth and the quality of inter-generational relations.”

A testimonial from an elderly woman, Maxime Fanoupké Comlan of Maillen, who lives alone, highlights how this initiative works directly to combat social isolation in rural areas; “Personally, these organised outings have helped me out of solitude. Meeting other people, and seeing friends in a different context, laughing together and discovering other cultures, exchanging our thoughts, this is all good. For me, it’s an outing and I meet others who teach me new things.”

Dagmar Wilisch, Manager of Mecklenburgische Seenplatte – Muritz LAG in Germany, outlines a project implemented by Leader to address major challenges in nursing homes. This followed a survey showing more than half of 700 000 in-patients in German nursing

homes suffered from dementia, adding to difficulties and devaluing homes as a whole.

The residential community project by Leader provides apartments for elderly people with dementia where they receive full-time (shared) out-patient care. One example is in Muritz where an unused building was converted into apartments for 12 people. This benefits local development strategies as old buildings are re-used. Rent is agreed and necessary care and support services are chosen and contracted.

“As a care network is established, the importance of the project reaches beyond the Leader region,” Ms Wilisch says. “It enables carers to continue to have responsibility but without the burden of around-the-clock maintenance. It makes a real addition to the existing structure of nursing supply. Hence, this allows reconciling care and work.”

Tackling the rural/urban skills drain

The abandonment of rural areas by young people is a stark phenomenon in many regions of the EU. This is often

the case when, after qualifying with a degree from a faraway university, the graduate doesn't return home to their rural area, causing a “skills drain” from the countryside to the city. An increasing number and variety of LAG project ideas are proposed and listed to address this issue, amongst many others, and each project seeks transnational cooperation with partners from a new and larger network of EU LAGs.

For example, Ternano LAG in the Umbria region of Italy is driving a project called ‘Innovative Entrepreneurship’ as part of their local development plan 2007-2013.



At the time of writing, Project leader Paolo Pennazzi was seeking LAG partners across the EU. Its two main objectives are to encourage young people to stay in their rural area and provide better perspectives for a good quality of life, and secondly, to raise awareness of opportunities in traditional occupations, as well as more innovative professions.

To encourage young people to participate in local development policies and governance, Ternano LAG plans to organize meetings and visits to local businesses for young people to foster entrepreneurship and develop contacts with schools in other countries. Moreover it aims at exchanging experiences through seminars, conferences and trainings camps and disseminating the results through promotional material.

Isabelle Pacilly of the Pays de la Baie du Mont Saint-Michel LAG in France is coordinating a similar proposal, seeking LAG partners to work on an 'Attractiveness of rural areas for youth' project to encourage an exchange of areas about youth policy in rural areas. This is in response to the draining of young people from Lower Normandy.

The project seeks to identify the reasons why young people are leaving and raise



CHRISTELLE THEATE

awareness amongst young people of the strengths and weaknesses of their rural areas. Moreover, it will point to career possibilities in rural areas where there is potential.

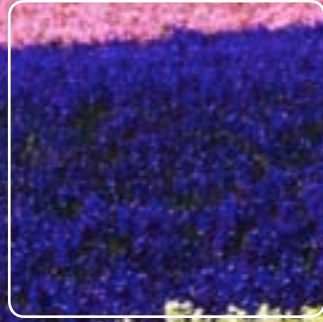
Ms Pacilly is focusing on the potential of future jobs for youth in the field of sustainable development and information technology. Her research will involve interviews with ten young people aged 15-18 years as well as policy makers in rural areas of Lower-Normandy. Working towards a comprehensive review of youth policy in those areas, she will look at rural and community activities, teaching, environment and transportation etc. Ms Pacilly will create

a video to stimulate debate and organise meetings with LAG partners across the EU to facilitate an exchange of youth policy research and experience.

By publishing a list of all these LAG project proposals and contact details on the website, the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD) hopes to encourage the participation of partners and/or attract expressions of interest to strengthen transnational cooperation across the EU, and even beyond. Cooperation must involve the implementation of a joint project, and if possible, this project will be supported by a shared structure.



WEGWEISER E. V.



Supporting female
entrepreneurial spirit

Women can give a significant contribution to rural economies. Berit Nordlander helped launch a Swedish initiative, project Grogrund, which demonstrated the level of interest among women in setting up and expanding their businesses in rural areas and showed how this entrepreneurial spirit could be best supported.

Through the provision of expertise and advice, project Grogrund (which translates as 'hotbed/seedbed') has helped women in rural areas to make a greater contribution to the local economy. The project, which ran from the end of 2007 to the end of 2009, helped around 70 female entrepreneurs to get their businesses up and running.

The project was established in response to the lack of employment opportunities that women face in rural areas in Sweden. According to the project leader, Berit Nordlander of the County Administration Board (Länsstyrelsen) of Västra Götaland: "Women are 'fleeing' the countryside and moving to the cities, while many others are unemployed."

But Ms Nordlander, who has worked for many years in entrepreneurial training for women, says that she sees many opportunities for job creation and growth in rural areas. "It is important to support and promote entrepreneurship for women. The proportion of women who run companies is still small compared to men."

The objective of the project was to create a good business climate and focus on making it viable for women to

continue living in the countryside. To launch the project, the organisers held a "big inspirational day" consisting of seminars and workshops. Such events were repeated at regular intervals throughout the project period. "We were responsive to women's needs and built up the project activities according to those needs. We teach them how to get their businesses started, how to go to a bank etc. They learn together," says Ms Nordlander.

The demand for such training and assistance far exceeded expectations. "We knew there was some interest among female entrepreneurs to participate, but the demand was much bigger than we thought. It is difficult to set up businesses in rural areas due to the logistical issues of working over long distances, often unsupervised and with poor customer support."

The project brought together entrepreneurs from many different sectors, ranging from hotel managers to cake makers. "The meetings have generated business contacts and created some sort of a fellowship among the participants, which many have drawn upon in the creation and development of their own businesses," she says. A

LÄNSSTYRELSEN VÄSTRA GÖTALANDS LÄN





significant outcome of the project was the publication of a practical guide of small business owners in the local community.

Mentoring programme

Mentoring formed a major component of the project. Ms Nordlander explains: "The entrepreneurs meet with their mentors, both individually and in groups, according to what kind of business sector they are working in (typically groups of 5-8 members meet once a month). It has enabled participants to get to know other entrepreneurs and it has given them contacts in their own sector. That is perhaps just what a lonely rural entrepreneur needs above all else."

Mentors have extensive experience of running businesses in different

industries and offer their services for free. They help the entrepreneur to draw up a business plan for the future development of the company. Mentoring groups have been organised around the following sectors: health and wellness, horse activities, tourism and accommodation, beekeeping, small-scale food processing, fruit and drinks, dairy, café and restaurant management, and design. Over the two-year period of the project, 70% of participants in the mentoring and training groups have started a business or continued to operate in the countryside.

Long-term impact

Grogrund also co-financed several actions and investments of female entrepreneurs. Many of these initiatives were only possible thanks to the project

Grogrund. About 70 entrepreneurs have, through the project, started, developed and invested in their businesses, and 15 entrepreneurs have increased investment in their business and applied for various forms of support from the County Administration Board.

According to Ms Nordlander, more initiatives are expected. "As a woman and an entrepreneur you do not kick-start a business with large investments. We know that many more will apply for different kinds of subsidies and support for their entrepreneurship."

The project has had a long-term impact on women, who have "generally evolved and become more secure in their role as entrepreneurs and are better prepared for employment". However, Ms Nordlander believes that the regulatory framework



Grogrund Project

Grogrund is aimed at women of all ages who live in rural areas of Västra Götaland and who wish to:

- develop business ideas in the countryside
- know more about how to start or expand businesses
- exchange experiences with other companies
- strengthen the effectiveness of the company

Participants can receive financial support for new construction work, machines and equipment, as well as for services and expenses related to the above investments. However, support is not provided for a company's own

work or for its own materials, replacement investment or used equipment. Moreover, aid is not granted for the purchase of buildings or machines, such as tractors and construction machinery.

The aid is designed to benefit one or more industries and to develop activities in the local community or geographical area to increase its attractiveness to business. The project supports activities or new solutions to problems that increase quality of life and are useful for many people. Examples of such initiatives include various kinds of partnerships, networking opportunities and professional development.

still needs reforming to make it easier to start small businesses and, in particular, "stimulate more entrepreneurship in small-scale food production in the countryside".

In her position at the County Administration Board, Ms Nordlander is also informing local business people about the opportunities, such as eco-tourism and sustainable development,

offered by the Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013. "How much fun can it be for women to stay at home on the farm?" she asks.



Local action promotes social integration in Luxembourg

Jacques Fons is manager of the Local Action Group (LAG) Redange-Wiltz in Luxembourg, responsible for implementing Leader in two of the 12 municipalities of Luxembourg (Redange and Wiltz in the west of the country). The Redange-Wiltz LAG has led innovative and successful approaches to integrating the Portuguese community into Luxembourgish society.

Farming is the main source of employment in this lightly populated rural area, which contains Luxembourg's first national park (Naturpark Öwersauer). As elsewhere in Luxembourg, the area is notable for a higher-than-EU-average presence of non-indigenous residents (some 6% of the 22 500 population are of Portuguese origin).

"As you know there are a lot of foreigners working and living here in Luxembourg – more than 40% of the population," explains Mr Fons. "In our region a large

percentage of the population came from Portugal in the 1970s. The problem is that a lot of the first generation Portuguese immigrants don't speak Luxembourgish," he notes.

Two-thirds of Luxembourgers speak the country's native language, and demand for Luxembourgish courses is increasing, particularly as they are compulsory for those who want Luxembourg citizenship. However, says Mr Fons, "It's very difficult for an outsider to speak Luxembourgish in our country because, as Luxembourgers,

when we address people from outside we always try to talk in their language, whether it's French or German or English, and so on."

As a result of these unusual circumstances, the Redange-Wiltz LAG has chosen to focus on people, training and communication initiatives: increasing human resources through training and education; promoting leisure, culture and tourism; and providing better communication between different target groups in the villages.

Leader shows the way

In order to improve social interaction and integration between the original inhabitants of Luxembourg and incomers of Portuguese origin, an innovative transnational Leader project ("De Basto à Redange-Wiltz: Regional Development through Cultural Exchange") was undertaken jointly from 2005-2007 by the Redange-Wiltz LAG and the ProBasto LAG in northern Portugal. The collaboration encompassed three action strands: promotion of regional/local products; promotion of tourism; and, most significantly, a highly successful pilot language/integration course in Redange-Wiltz.

The course, the first of its kind in the country, involved simultaneous teaching of both Portuguese and Luxembourgish to a group of 20 students (10 speakers of each language). "The teaching concept behind it was to learn the foreign language through knowledge about the country's culture, history, traditions, cuisine and dance," explains Mr Fons.

An important part of the course was a series of workshops in which participants were organised in pairs (one Portuguese speaker, one Luxembourgish speaker) and sent to do activities together, such as shopping, cooking, dancing and playing games. "The workshops allowed the participants to not only discover each other's country and language in a practical way, but also to get to know each other," he says.

The first pilot course started in February 2006 in Wiltz and lasted for 17 weeks. Attracting participants from

the Portuguese-speaking community was a challenge, admits Mr Fons, and traditional advertising methods such as posters and newspaper adverts got little response. However, the LAG chose to contact potential participants directly through partner organisations, such as the friendship association Portugal-Luxembourg. "Without local multipliers it would not have worked," believes the Leader-manager. The "excellent" response to the first course led to a second pilot course beginning in autumn 2006 and involving a further 20 participants.

"We were very happy with the project, or at least with the local part of it," says Mr Fons. "However, the contact between the LAGs could have been better." Co-ordination issues arose at the transnational level due to the different interests of the two LAGs. Social and cultural integration of Portuguese inhabitants in Luxembourg was the main goal of the Redange-Wiltz LAG, while the ProBasto LAG was more interested in the promotion of its regional products abroad.

Nonetheless, Mr Fons is very pleased to note that the project has contributed to an improved understanding between the Luxembourgish and Portuguese communities and to better integration of minority groups. "The creative style of the language workshops has led to an exchange not only of language skills but also to a considerable cultural exchange," he says proudly.

Multiplying the effects

The language courses have proved so popular that the Luxembourg Ministry for Families and Integration is planning

to mainstream them at national level to encourage wider cultural integration and ensure the sustainability of the project.

Mr Fons explains that "in this period of Leader we have again put a very big emphasis on the integration of people coming from outside living in our region". The Redange-Wiltz LAG is planning to launch some new language courses in autumn 2010 that build on the lessons learned during the "Regional Development through Cultural Exchange" project.

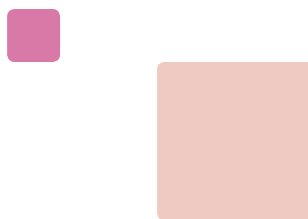
"We are collaborating now with a social association in Luxembourg on what we call an 'integration pack' with all the municipalities in our partnership. As part of this we hope to launch some new courses where people learning the Luxembourgish languages are guided on a practical level by a coach who will be by their side during different activities. So the Luxembourgish 'coach' will have lunch or a coffee with them, go shopping with them or have a walk with them while practicing the Luxembourgish language with the students in real-life situations (1-2 hours per week). We call these 'coaching courses' and we are advertising now for interested parties to take part."

Mr Fons shared some general principles that he also tries to apply in his work with the LAG: "Always have respect for other cultures and look at things from their point-of-view too. Don't just look at things with your own eyes, stay on the mirror side and see things through the eyes of the foreigner coming to another country."



New approach to nature conservation: generating an income while preserving biodiversity





Edit Pop is World Wildlife Fund (WWF) project coordinator located in Maramures in Northern Romania. The activities she leads are part of a broader WWF initiative called “One Europe More Nature”. Adopting a new approach, the aim is to provide practical examples of economic mechanisms for nature conservation and restoration and rural development.

This new approach is especially important in Maramures in the northern Carpathians, as the county boasts Romania’s largest protected landscape area after the Danube Delta. It includes eight specially protected sites within the EU’s Natura 2000 network, a UNESCO biosphere reserve, 17 nature monuments and the Rodnei Mountains’ national park.

The region also has many protected species, including rare or endangered raptors (birds of prey) such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and large carnivores such as bears and wolves. Maramures also boasts a remarkable cultural and natural heritage that needs to be preserved.

It is already a well-known rural tourist destination with visitors attracted by the traditional villages with their typical wooden architecture and the pristine landscape (mountains, sub-alpine grasslands and forests of mainly oak and beech). The challenge for Ms Pop and her small team of three, all locals, is to find a way of conserving this remarkable heritage, whilst generating income.

She has been working in the region since 2004 - developing mechanisms that can work for nature, by preserving biodiversity; and for people, by generating an income. She describes this work as “satisfying, but challenging”. Promoting this concept was not easy, she explains, especially in the beginning: “This was a very new idea and we were discovering things ourselves. It’s all very well planning and preparing ideas on paper – but then you have to put them into practice and make them work.”

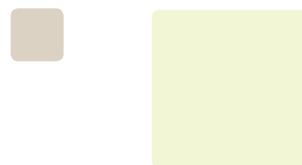
Her practical experience has shown that success on the ground depends on many factors that vary according to different communities, local areas and local opinion: “People have to learn about the need for conservation first, and then - through a process of participation and consultation - they can do things in the right way,” she notes.

Key challenge

Therefore the first main task was to persuade the local people (mainly living in remote, mountain communities) that there are good options available for generating income, while maintaining

the landscape. Here, local knowledge was invaluable. Originally from the city of Baia Mare, Ms Pop has worked in this rugged, mountainous area for over 10 years. She says her knowledge of the area, together with good grass-root level local contacts have helped to build trust and to win farmers around to this new approach.

Improving the potential for grazing is one of the most important areas of the rural development work – looking for ways to make cattle grazing more profitable to farmers, while maintaining the open grassland landscape in the highlands. Due to its geographical characteristics – i.e. its remoteness (there is no railway and the mountain roads are difficult to access during the harsh winter months) collectivization failed in communist times. As a result, no large farms were established in the region and traditional low-intensity farming practices have survived. Such extensive farming practices, mostly dominated by grazed, semi-natural habitats, tend to be richest in biodiversity.



Pilot scheme

An example is a pilot scheme, supported by EU agri-environment measures, to introduce year-round cattle grazing to the Tataru plateau, an area that had largely become abandoned. Based on a concept, developed in Denmark, a small-scale dairy farmer has been persuaded to switch to using a local breed of hardy beef cattle (supplied by the project) for year-round grazing. Instead of taking the animals down in winter-time, they remain on the uplands in a traditional shelter, built from locally-sourced material, by the farmer.

The idea is that the farmer will give away the same number of cattle originally received to another farmer after five years – and that the rolling scheme will continue to recruit other farmers. While still at pilot stage, the results are encouraging and organic certification

is under way for the beef, which should bring extra income to the farmer.

Ms Pop reports that the model has already persuaded some other neighbouring farms to switch from dairy to beef and (a small number) of their cattle are also grazing the once abandoned uplands. From a biodiversity aspect, she says there are also signs of improvements in plant composition, although this is a long-term conservation strategy that will require monitoring.

Elsewhere, organic farming is still in development stage in Romania. In 2009, 240 000 ha were farmed organically. The trend is for growth in this sector and, according to Ms Pop, it is relatively straightforward to get certified in Maramures, as the region's traditional farming practices fit perfectly with organic farming requirements.

Ecotourism

Other rural development initiatives have focused on ecotourism, a sector that also fits perfectly with the county's cultural and natural heritage. A notable example is the "Maramureş Greenways" – a system of eco-trails connecting communities and natural and cultural heritage sites; and promoting a healthy environment and lifestyle. The first of these greenways is the "Maramures Heritage Trail", which opened (in 2006) connecting seven protected areas and several villages with traditional architecture (UNESCO heritage wooden churches, monumental carved wooden gates, etc).

Payments for ecosystem services also present an innovative approach, whereby land owners and managers will be paid to adopt sustainable practices. Work in this area – supported under the EU Leader measure – covers the sale of

“...It's all very well planning and preparing ideas on paper – but then you have to put them into practice and make them work.”

Edit Pop, WWF project coordinator



green products including organic food (beef, medicinal plants, forest fruits, mushrooms) and certified wood products from the high conservation value forests. It also encompasses green services such as ecotourism. Local producers receive support for their products and services and this motivates them to continue their practices which are necessary

for maintaining the area's valuable landscapes.

Summarizing her rural development work in Maramures, Ms Pop says her greatest satisfaction is seeing that things are working: "When you see things are changing or improving, this makes you motivated to continue."

Looking ahead, she says care needs to be taken to achieve a "good balance" between nature conservation and economic development: "We have this traditional community that we really want to conserve and we have to pay attention that future economic development is well-planned."

Useful links

WWF Romania website (in Romanian):
<http://romania.panda.org/>

Maramures Greenways:
www.maramuresgreenways.ro/

EU research helps improve employment prospects in rural areas: the SCARLED project



The SCARLED - Structural Change in Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods - project, which was funded by 6th Framework Programme of the European Union, and coordinated by the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Central and Eastern Europe (IAMO), aims to strengthen the current research of rural structural and employment challenges in new Member States.

One of the key findings of the project was the significant role that subsistence farming (SF) and semi-subsistence farming (SSF) play in supporting as well as impeding changes to rural livelihoods. Consequently, the SCARLED project enables policy-makers to see beyond “typical labour market assessments” and to better understand the “hearts and minds of rural people who choose to pursue small-scale farming which generates limited income”.

SSF has been of political importance to the EU and newer Member States since the fall of the Berlin Wall due to the creation of millions of small farms resulting from post-Communist land reforms. Although there is no agreed definition of SSF, for the most part they are considered as family-run agricultural holdings, associated with production for own-food needs, using minimal land and purchased production inputs, and a low degree of market participation.

In many newer Member States, SSFs are the main agricultural structure. In terms of the extent of market participation, Eurostat 2007 data¹ shows that: in Slovakia, SSFs made-up 93% of the

total number of farms; Hungary (83%); Romania (81%); Latvia (72%); Bulgaria (70%) and Slovenia (61%). Eurostat data has identified similar evidence, through looking at the economic size of farm enterprises (farms smaller than 1 European Size Unit are classified as SFs whilst those smaller than 8 ESU are SSFs). In 2007, across the EU-27 there were 6.4 million SFs and 4.7 million SSFs, which together amounted to 81.1% of the total number of farms. However, their overall share of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA), although significant, is a much lower proportion than that of larger farm enterprises.

Sophia Davidova, from the University of Kent, has identified through her research that many SSFs across the EU are often faced with barriers to market entry and as a result? significant proportion of their farm output is not sold. The main reasons for this are due to business costs and the inability to meet agricultural and/or food hygiene standards. In addition, as mentioned, SSFs also produce food for their own food-consumption needs, given that they are cash-poor, have limited access to sources of fresh produce in isolated rural communities and because they enjoy the lifestyle benefits of producing their own food.

The SCARLED project: aims and activities

Given the economic and social disparity between the new Member States and the EU 15, the main objectives of the SCARLED project are:

- to analyse the agricultural sector restructuring process and rural socio-economic transformation in the new Member States, with a particular focus on five countries as case studies (namely Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia);
- to analyse the patterns behind rural “success stories” in selected EU15 countries during previous enlargements (e.g. in Austria, Ireland, the new German Bundesländer, Spain, and Sweden) to identify best practices and to draw recommendations for the New Member States.

Yet despite their low earning potential, SSFs are regarded as a buffer against absolute poverty, particularly in the new Member States which have weak social safety-nets, under-performing rural economies and limited options for off-farm employment. As a result, Gertrud Buchenrieder and Judith Moellers (IAMO) make the point that although SSF is not a solution to combating poverty it can help to alleviate more extreme forms of deprivation.

At the same time, whilst SSF can act as a buffer against extreme rural poverty, it is also perceived as a barrier for broader structural changes and inhibiting

¹ <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/agriculture/data/database>

agricultural development. One of the key problems for several newer Member States is that rural areas are dominated by SSFs which are managed by low-skilled and ageing farmers, and this often prevents the development of larger farms.

Given that SSF fails to deliver economic dynamism to rural areas, why have public policies so far under-performed in providing support? There have been obstacles to specifically targeting SSFs, as they often don't meet eligibility criteria for support. In addition, other administrative and tax issues continue to hinder progress, e.g. in Romania, in

2008, 3 million subsistence and semi-subsistence farm households did not qualify for funding. Of course a more competitive and remunerative farm sector would be a desirable outcome, however, Ms Buchenrieder and Ms Moellers emphasise that the solution also hinges upon "accessible local rural non-farm employment". Encouragingly, the research has identified that self-employment outside of the agriculture sector is viewed as a potential option, with many farmers aiming for sectors with low entry barriers such as shop keeping, food processing and transport. However, the main driver for self-employment is

based on 'distress-push motivation' rather than 'demand-pull non-farm jobs' which reflects the lack of economic dynamism within many of these areas.

Given the challenges which the new Member States face, the SCARLED project assessed EU-15 "rural success stories" which might provide some insight for shaping rural development policy. A range of effective policies, as well as positive internal and external factors, were determined as some of the key ingredients for generating rural change and although the combination of elements were different in each case



study, they illustrated some important trends and lessons, which could help foster constructive development in the new Member States. For example, the Broader Midland and Western region in Ireland and the German Altmark (northern region of the Bundesland Saxony Anhalt) were supported by strong institutions, which could attract and disseminate EU funds; Tyrol in Austria, Navarra in Spain and Altmark in Germany successfully adopted territorial and integrated approaches to rural development to support the broader needs of rural regions; and collectively they all have been spurred on by enhancements in

social capital, utilisation of 'bottom-up' approaches and participation from local communities.

The SCARLED project consequently emphasises a range of policy solutions to better adapt rural development policy to the economic and social contexts in which it operates. Although not exhaustive, this includes the recognition that there is no unique model for managing rural development and as such policies need to be adapted to local needs in order to build capacity, enhance participation and mobilise resources. In addition, CAP reform is required to respond to

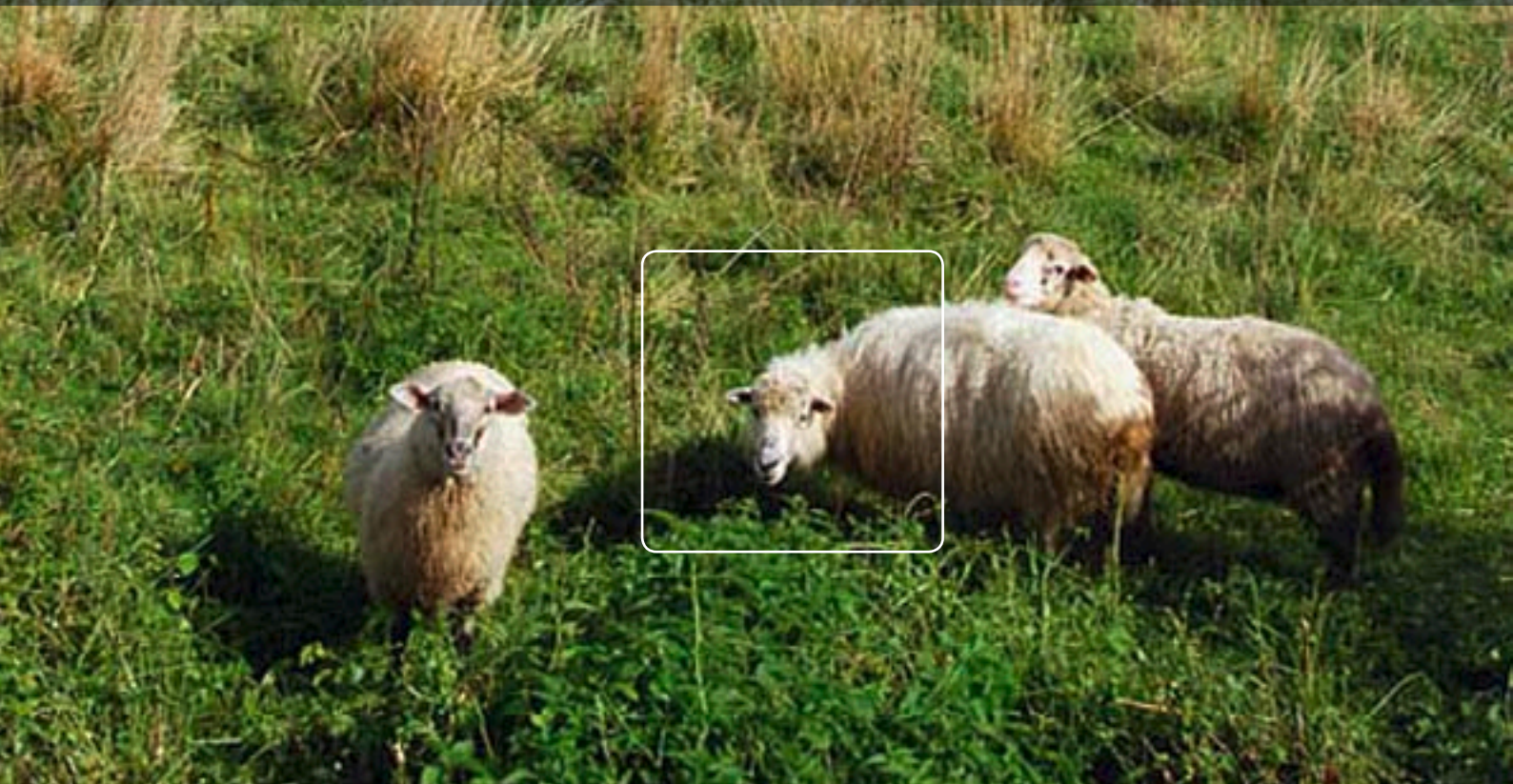
the dynamics within new Member States which includes supporting the provision of public goods, whilst recognising competitiveness enhancement and the fact that SF and SSFs should be specifically targeted. Ms Davidova believes therefore that "creative policy decisions are necessary" that could provide a clear role for SSF in a much more integrated vision of rural development, so as to enhance tourism activities, sustainable farming methods and local food production.

Visit the SCARLED website for further information: <http://www.scarled.eu/>





Social services in multifunctional farms: the SOFAR project





Social farming continues to attract attention from rural development stakeholders across Europe and a recent research project has produced some useful outcomes in this field which aim to promote both social inclusion and business benefits from multi-functional farms.

The SOFAR - Social services in multifunctional farms - project ran between May 2006 and May 2009 and it was an exploratory project funded under the Sixth EU Programme for research and Technological Development. Its aim was to define policy proposals in supporting the implementation of multi-functional agriculture in the field of social inclusion. Social farming is an example of an innovative response to changing economic structures and a linkage between essential issues in all societies. Such changes affect agriculture and sectors such as health, care, education and employment.

In practical terms, social farming is typically referred to as those practices aimed at promoting educational activities for the rehabilitation and care of disadvantaged people, e.g. the intellectually and physically disabled, convicts, drug addicts, minors, migrants etc. However, services also include practices in rural areas for children and the elderly.

“The added value of social farming is the possibility for disadvantaged people to integrate into a living context, where their personal capabilities are valued and enhanced” says Francesco Di Iacovo, SOFAR Project Coordinator.

The main goal of the project was to support the building of a new institutional environment for social or care farming, and providing research to practitioners and rural players and bringing different European experiences closer to compare, exchange and coordinate experiences and efforts. Finally, the project also aimed at creating a platform around social farming by bringing together key stakeholders and rural development researchers to envisage and support the designing of future policies at regional and European level.

The project was promoted by several European organisations, involving about 20 researchers from Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Slovenia and Ireland, and it was divided into four phases, namely: a fact-finding and analysis phase, followed by the development of country or regional platforms. The third phase was the establishment of European platforms and the final phase was dedicated to communication and dissemination activities.

Throughout Europe there is a history of a common relationship between farming practices and practices for social inclusion. Such social inclusion initiatives are usually carried out in isolation promoted by a collective interest, mostly invisibly. In fact, this invisibility represents the lack

of a defined juridical or institutional framework for social farming.

Social farming is however, evolving and becoming more dynamic by gaining more attention from different stakeholders, and in some countries such interest and developments have made social farming into a legally recognized and formalized activity, such as in the Netherlands for example.

In recent times there has been a new widespread perception of agriculture and natural resources, contributing to a growing interest in the beneficial effects of natural spaces and agricultural areas on the social, physical and psychological well-being of people. Interestingly, health institutions contribute to this development by seeking alternative practices, embedded in the social context, for their treatments.

From the farmers’ point-of-view, social farming provides a window of opportunity for them to diversify their activities and define their role in their communities within a social context. The interaction between agricultural practices and social services may also allow for new sources of income for farmers, including a more defined image of agriculture, and favouring the development of new relations between rural and urban citizens.

Still today however, social farming in most countries and at European level is a patchwork, developed on a voluntary basis by bottom-up actions and not supported by specific policies and/or an institutional framework. There is an evident need for improvement in offering social services by multifunctional farms, and enhancing their quality. The creation of a more defined and stable social farming 'system' appears to be a long-term, evolutionary, multi-actor process that should be based on the experience of those rural actors who have already embarked on this journey.

At the same time, the vision of a process of extension and 'normalisation' of social farming should avoid the loss of the original spirit and values, like solidarity and responsibility, which most of the pioneer experiences were based on. Thus, it is apparent that the building of a new institutional environment for social farming requires most attention, which means involving diverse actors

in a dialogue, especially assuring active participation of the historical and current protagonists.

In terms of outcomes, the SOFAR project produced a variety of reports, newsletters and press material describing and analysing the characteristics of social farming. Furthermore, the project provided an inventory of rural players, i.e. social farms, and third stakeholders, and national/regional and European innovation strategies. Finally, a website, book and video documentary were also produced, of which the latter two provided examples of case studies.

In the second phase of the SOFAR project a participatory platform process was developed. The platform was based on national/regional platforms in each participating country and a joint network in Brussels with representatives from each country. This mechanism allowed for more information sharing and policy development to take place.

Yet there are a number of obstacles that hinder social farming from becoming more widespread, namely that it is a topic that does not fit well in only one specific policy area but rather touches upon several policy issues, e.g. planning, agriculture, social/health affairs. Thus, key stakeholders are reluctant to assume full responsibility for the development of social farming as part of their policy agenda. Furthermore, there is also a lack of visibility around social farming and a great need to build awareness and disseminate information.

"Awareness raising and a joined-up approach on policy formation at both national and EU level is needed in order for social farming to become more established" says Deirdre O'Connor, former member of the SOFAR project team (Ireland) and social farming expert in support of the EN RD Contact Point.

The general definition of social farming is not yet agreed upon in Europe and still



today there are different ways to indicate the phenomena (farming for health, green care, social farming, gardening therapy and green programmes for social/health care) and the use of agriculture or gardening for social/health purposes. In order to develop a clear-cut, consistent and strong sector at European level, a joint European view is needed, based upon the experience, interest and insights gained from rural stakeholders in different Member States.

The European Network for Rural Development (EN RD) has been gathering such evidence, aiming to showcase how rural development can support social farming through networks at both national and international level by comparing and disseminating relevant experience examples.

Results from such initiatives and those generated through research from projects like SOFAR can provide

critical insights, guidance and support that promote changes in rural areas. Access to practical information and knowledge that can promote improved connections between agriculture and societal challenges, introducing innovation, linking farm production, social, educational and inclusive services in a sustainable way.

Useful links

SOFAR project website: <http://sofar.unipi.it/>

Farming for health - an international group of researchers and practitioners in the field of green care, health farms and other initiatives concerning special care in green environments: <http://www.farmingforhealth.org/>

Book on farming for health edited by researchers at the Wageningen University and Research Centre: http://library.wur.nl/frontis/farming_for_health/

COST - Green care in Agriculture: <http://www.umb.no/greencare/>



Rural Development Perspectives



ICT's role in supporting
employment and
reducing social
exclusion



Many rural parts of Europe still lag behind in ICT infrastructure terms, but plans and strategies are in place to change this.

Hiiumaa is Estonia's second largest island. Situated off the west coast of the mainland, it covers nearly 1 000 square kilometres, but has only 11 000 people, giving a very low population density of 10.9 per km². It is low-lying, with extensive forests, misty marshes and long sandy beaches. It is considered a beautiful and healthy place to live.

But Hiiumaa also faces the problems of isolated areas. In terms of employment, islanders traditionally worked as sailors and farmers, but as Hiiumaa has adapted to the modern economy there has been diversification into small-scale manufacturing and tourism. This means overcoming logistical and marketing problems. Goods must be transported off the island, while visitors must be able to travel to it. In both cases, exchange

of information about what Hiiumaa can offer is essential.

There is also the challenge of inclusion. Rural areas across the European Union risk missing out on the opportunities provided by modern society because it is harder to deliver services to them than to urban areas, including crucial educational services. As the European Commission noted in a March 2009 working document dealing with information and communication technologies in rural areas, "the bulk of the rural population receives poorer services at higher costs".

There is therefore a demand for ICT infrastructure in rural areas such as Hiiumaa. The European Commission has recognised this in its 2007-2013 rural development strategy, which has

providing better access to ICT as a central objective. The March 2009 working document was published alongside a Commission communication on "Better access for rural areas to modern ICT". This notes that better ICT can connect rural areas to the mainstream economy, and overcome problems caused by isolation.

ICT can improve the competitiveness of traditional rural sectors such as agriculture and forestry, for example by giving farmers instant access to latest agricultural commodity prices, while giving greater scope for entrepreneurs to start up new businesses, such as Internet service companies. ICT can also foster inclusion by making it easier to deliver educational and other services to rural areas.

Broadband challenge

The ICT challenge in rural areas is illustrated by the statistic that in 2007, 98% of people in urban areas were able to subscribe to a broadband connection, but in rural areas the average figure was 70%. This ICT gap is evident in Estonia. Kristine Hindriks of the Rural Development Department of the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture says that in 2009, 63% of all Estonian households were connected to the Internet, but in rural areas, the figure falls to 56%.

Moreover, Ms Hindriks says, “the difference is bigger when we compare the speed and quality of the Internet”. Estonia put in place in 2006 and 2007 a network covering most of its territory, but this “lacks the capability to remain in step with the development of services and needs,” Ms Hindriks adds. The focus is now on high-speed broadband networks, but providing these in rural areas is

not commercially viable. The Estonian government is thus embarking on a programme to last until 2015 to install approximately 6 000 km of fibre optic networks, giving broadband access to 98% of Estonians.

On the other side of Europe, in the much more densely populated UK, rural areas experience similar problems. Chris Wynne-Davies, Communications Manager for England’s Commission for Rural Communities, says ICT is “a big, big issue for all sorts of reasons. Where there is good access to ICT, business can be located anywhere”.

Creeping depopulation is a problem for the economy of many rural areas. In the past, it has been caused by factors such as a lack of jobs or housing. But lack of ICT is now an incentive for people to leave rural areas because, “ICT is that important to people now,” according to Mr Wynne-Davies.



EUROPEAN UNION, 1995-2010



In mid-2009, the Commission for Rural Communities published a study that found that “people in rural England are at risk of constantly playing digital ‘catch up’”. The study identified “not-spots” across England where broadband access was poor. The people “most likely to see next generation broadband investments are almost exclusively in deeply urban areas,” the report notes.

Rollout fund

Through the EU Economic Recovery Plan, the EC offered additional funding to Member States attempting to overcome these ICT shortcomings. The plan gave Member States access to EUR 1,02 billion of extra money to support broadband rollout and, at the choice of the MS, to address new challenges such as climate change, water management, biodiversity, and the production of green energy in rural areas. The additional

budget was injected into existing Rural Development Programmes which were modified accordingly in the period July 2009-January 2010. During this reprogramming, a total of EUR 360 million was used for broadband supply, with the highest amounts going to Italy, Poland and Greece. Other countries had other priorities.

Back on Hiiumaa island, the benefits of modern ICT are already highly appreciated. Broadband access allows environmental consultant and photographer Toomas Kokovkin to run a variety of activities from the island. He heads an organisation, Arhipelaag, which works to foster sustainable lifestyles on Estonia’s coasts and islands. Arhipelaag is involved in a range of projects dealing with conservation and planning.

Mr Kokovkin says that Hiiumaa realised early that it could benefit from ICT,

and began to establish public Internet centres, even in the 1990s. Internet communications enabled Arhipelaag to “produce digital maps of Africa and South America for a Swedish company in the late 1990s, without ever meeting the employers”.

The ICT infrastructure is less of a problem for Hiiumaa than for other EU rural areas. Nevertheless, Mr Kokovkin says young people leave the island to further their education. Availability of broadband is therefore a way of tempting them back, or of encouraging others to move to the island. However, in some cases, people’s attitudes also need to change, he says. Although the ICT infrastructure is increasingly in place, some employers “want their workers to sit next door, not on a remote island”. But as rural ICT improves, with EU support, and the benefits of broadband become clear for all to see, perhaps those attitudes will change.

Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes: Assessing the impacts of employment and social aspects



The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, whose remit is to support Member States in the evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the programming period 2007-2013, published recently two working papers on how to evaluate impacts. These working papers are titled (i) "Approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors" and (ii) "Capturing impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas". They complement the guidance given by the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) and its Handbook¹, which forms the basis for evaluating the RDPs. The application of the methods described in these working papers is voluntary and meant to support evaluators in the Member States. The following text summarizes succinctly the main issues around evaluating employment effects.

In the EU 27, the majority of the population lives in rural areas, generating 45% of gross value added and employing 53% of its workforce. In most cases, however, job generation and levels of income are lagging behind urban areas with the associated higher risk of living in poverty. Thus, multiple national and European policies were created that influence employment and other social aspects of rural life either directly or indirectly.

In contrast to other policies such as the Structural Funds, the Rural Development

Regulation with its RDPs targets employment issues from two angles: first, by starting from the agricultural base and trying to mushroom out towards adjacent entrepreneurial activities in rural areas and second, by supporting the setting up of non-agricultural micro-enterprises including tourism. Social aspects, mainly targeted by axis 3 and 4 measures, include the maintenance of quality of life in rural areas as well as training and information activities. Supported activities are small scale projects that are largely scattered over the entire rural area.

Employment effects of RD policies are to be measured by using the impact indicator 'employment creation' which counts net additional full-time equivalent jobs created. Thus, RDPs tackle employment by increasing entrepreneurship of people working in agriculture and the potential for setting up micro-enterprises that can flourish in rural settings. Other aspects of employment that are on the social inclusion agenda (such as non-discrimination and gender equality) are considered within the RDPs, but are not the major focal point when evaluating the implementation of these policies. Hence, the CMEF measures the socio-economic impact in terms of economic growth, employment creation and labour productivity.²

Methodological challenges for assessing RD impacts

As only a handful out of the available RD measures focus specifically on employment creation (e.g. 'diversification into non-agricultural activities', 'support for business creation and development', 'encouragement of tourism activities', and 'basic services for the economy and rural population'), the observation of employment effects is challenging. RD measures can have positive, none, or negative employment effects and should be considered appropriately to arrive at a net impact.

Fundamentally, the evaluation of policy measures poses a challenge due to the fact the effects of interventions cannot be directly observed. We do not know how those supported by a policy might have developed without it. Measurement techniques try to come as close as possible to measuring real effects by mimicking the beneficiaries of a policy with similar non-beneficiaries and comparing their development over time. The definition of such a 'counterfactual' situation is considered to be a key element of a quantitative impact evaluation design, to ensure that biased assessments are minimised. It also requires the appropriate definition of a baseline at the beginning of the policy intervention. Here, econometric (quasi-experimental) methods are available to evaluate singular measures. Challenges for the quantitative evaluation of some RD measures can, for example, be that samples of beneficiaries are either too

1 http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm

2 See the Evaluation Expert Network's working paper 'Approaches for assessing the impacts of the RDPs in the context of multiple intervening factors' for the definition of the terms (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=EB43A527-C292-F36C-FC51-9EA5B47CEDAE).

small for quantitative analysis, or the take-up of a measure is so broad that no meaningful sample of matching non-beneficiaries can be found.

Incorporating all external effects to arrive at the net effects that can be assigned to a particular intervention is challenging. These external effects can be positive or negative, direct or indirect, on the micro or the macro level, with the latter requiring complementary assessment methods to arrive at a net impact. External effects particularly relevant for RD programmes can, for example, stem from other programmes like the Structural Funds or external economic shocks, which might have varying impacts on the development of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. For measuring net effects, one subtracts or adds the changes which would have occurred in the absence of the public intervention from the gross effects.

The above can be implemented for established interventions where sufficient data is available, or if lacking, the data will sometimes be separately collected through specific surveys. Here we arrive at the question of when and where to apply quantitative and qualitative methods. To answer this, it might be helpful to consider the following two basic evaluation questions:

a. 'To what extent does the policy work?' asks primarily for a quantitative approach because summative effects³ are of interest here and it is easier to arrive at less biased assessments. Thus, if data is available we should use it. It would also be beneficial to invest in more elaborate data monitoring for RD measures

with high participation rates (e.g. farm investment aid, diversification, especially to define counterfactuals). Sometimes it would simply suffice to review data protection regulations to release datasets to evaluators and increase the quality of data already collected. But quantitative methods also have their weaknesses - because they only measure the final impact, they do not tell us, per se, how interventions work and how they need to be implemented to show the desired effects. In the case of lacking data, evaluators have in the past, often tried to answer this question with qualitative or semi-quantitative methods, but with quite varying degrees of success. Given present data constraints, evaluators should be able to apply these to the evaluation of some measures under axes 1 and 2.

b. 'How does the policy work?' asks for a qualitative approach because its strength is to highlight detailed and "fuzzy" information to ensure process learning and capture effects that would be overlooked by a purely quantitative approach. Qualitative information is needed if one wants to understand the mechanisms of how RD support hampers or facilitates the creation or retention of employment. For axes 3 and 4 measures, the European Evaluation Network's methodological working paper "Capturing impacts of LEADER and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas" suggests a common approach that is very much qualitative in nature in order to capture the disperse effects expected from interventions that are based on complex concepts like quality of life.

³ Summative effects are outcomes and overall impacts of measures.

L & BÖHM





Data availability on RD support and implications for the selection of methods

Quantitative assessments of impacts are often not realized because it is questioned whether they are good value for money. The reasons for this are that RD support is very diverse, data monitoring systems are sometimes not set up to meet the needs, and also because of the relatively small scale of some RD measures. This is the case for some measures of axes 1 and 2, but especially for axes 3 and 4. The conclusion is that quantitative methods should be used as long as secondary data is available to implement such an analysis (e.g. Farm Accountancy Data Network - FADN, which is sometimes enriched by other national databases) and one can reasonably assume that effects are large enough to show up quantitatively, because cost arguments should then carry less weight than the potential gains from less biased assessments. FADN provides data concerning beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of RDPs. This data allows for an assessment of the effects of farm

investment support (measure 121), Less Favoured Areas schemes (measures 211, 212) and agri-environmental programmes (measures 214, 215).

Outside the agricultural sector, the availability of secondary data is scarce. Various national statistics on households (labour force surveys) and enterprises exist, but availability varies considerably between Member States. In some cases, collecting primary data through evaluator's own surveys will be the only source of information for the evaluation of non-agricultural RD activities. The aforementioned methodological working paper presents some exemplary monitoring systems that are worthwhile studying.

Data for macro-level analyses are to be collected from official statistics. NUTS 3 (in some Member States even the LAU 1 level)⁴ will be the lowest possible macro level where employment effects

⁴ LAU level 1 (Local Administrative Unit) represents the former NUTS level 4, which is one of the hierarchical levels in the statistical system of Eurostat.

of the RD support can be estimated. If data is available on LAU 1 level, one can discuss whether it could make sense to implement also a quantitative approach for measures of axis 3.

Conclusions

In summary, there is no magic bullet for impact evaluation, only a careful balancing of qualitative and quantitative information can give us a sufficiently elaborated picture. A generic way of formulating the interplay of various methods/techniques during the evaluation process can be described as follows:

- The intervention logic of the CMEF sets the frame for the evaluation of singular measures on the micro level by conceptualising the causal chain from inputs to impacts.
- Qualitative methods are necessary to put the theoretical construct on a firm footing by covering background knowledge to formulate correct quantitative models and also potential alternative conceptualisations/modifications to the intervention logic.

- Quantitative methods are then advantageous for estimating and comparing the magnitude of net impacts.
- Qualitative methods should again be used to confirm the direction of the quantitative results, to gain a deeper understanding of why the quantitative effects played out the way they did, and to investigate the role heterogeneity plays in the terms of implementation and context, in determining the success of policy measures.

For a quantitative assessment of impacts, the availability of data on non-beneficiaries is crucial. This is why the applicability of quantitative methods will be restricted to particular measures for various reasons. These are spelled out in detail in one of the European Evaluation Network's working papers. The FADN database in particular should be able to provide this information, which it does to a certain extent, but it still needs to be improved.

And finally, the three common socio-economic impact indicators of the CMEF - economic growth, employment creation and labour productivity - need to be interpreted in tandem. For instance, rising total factor productivity (labour, capital, land) may explain why jobs have been lost in the agricultural sector.

The two working papers and other information about assessing the impacts of RDPs are available on the "Evaluation Methodologies" section of the website of the Evaluation Expert Network (enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation).

Interview with Peter Kaufmann from the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Rural Review: Why are the methodological guides so important and what is the ultimate aim?

Peter Kaufmann: The quality of past evaluations varies a lot, mainly because of the widely varying use of qualitative and quantitative methods. This is why the EC is now rightly pushing for the establishment of proper baselines and methodological support for both monitoring and evaluation. The ultimate aim is that by standardising approaches across the EU, it will be possible to aggregate impacts to a much higher extent than is currently possible.

Rural Review: Your article refers to gaps in the availability of quantitative data for measuring the employment impacts of axis 3 and axis 4. What needs to be done in future to close these gaps?

Peter Kaufmann: Quantitative data could and should be made available for measures such as diversification into non-agricultural activities. However, different quantitative methods can also show somewhat varying results even though the same data is used. If we want to be able to aggregate assessments above the national level it would be preferable to use the same methods, which is currently not possible because of differing data availability in Member States. This is why the methodological guide for assessing the impacts of Rural Development Programmes recommends a set of methods for each impact indicator, but there are preferred options that should be used when data allows for it.

Peter Kaufmann is an independent expert involved in the development of the Working Paper on the Assessment of Impacts of RDPs – socio-economic aspects



European Evaluation Network
for Rural Development

EN RD conference on semi-subsistence farming: key issues and outcomes



The two most recent enlargements of the EU resulted in the addition of millions of small semi-subsistence farms which dominate the farming sector in some EU Member States. The significance of this was underlined at the recent EN RD conference in Sibiu, Romania on October 13-15 on 'Semi-subsistence farming in the EU: Current situation and future prospects'. The objective of the seminar was to assess the current situation regarding policies directed towards semi-subsistence farms in the EU-27 and identify the challenges, needs and prospects they face. Often the main agricultural presence in the most fragile and valuable environmental areas, these farmers are custodians of the scenic traditional landscapes, particularly in hilly and mountainous regions. Given that the focus of the CAP is evolving towards increasing support for a more environmental role, based on the principle of 'public money for public goods', increasing the awareness of policy needs of semi-subsistence farms is an important issue.

The EU-27 faces some unique challenges in managing the structural transformation of these semi-subsistence farms, e.g. enhancing their role in the provision of biodiversity, maintaining the landscape, and keeping village traditions alive. Almost 140 participants - all major stakeholders in rural development - attended the event to discuss these issues. They included farmers, NGOs, representatives of Local

Action Groups (LAGs), representatives of the EC, as well as local and national administration representatives involved in rural development policy. This event provided an opportunity for the exchange of views, observations, problems and best practice among participants from different Member States and regions, and a basis for appreciating the multiple roles semi-subsistence farmers perform with respect to the agri-environment and the wider rural society.

During the opening session, Sophia Davidova from the University of Kent presented a background paper underlining some of these key issues and definitions of semi-subsistence farming. Antonis Constantinou, Director in the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, presented EU rural development policy with respect to semi-subsistence farming. This session was followed by four parallel workshops devoted to some central topics for debate: semi-subsistence farming concepts and key issues; the wider implications of semi-subsistence farming for society and the environment; pathways for semi-subsistence farming; integration into food chain diversification; and reaching and supporting semi-subsistence farms. The EU Commissioner Dacian Cioloş closed the conference with assurances that the issue is being taken very seriously at EU level.

Semi-subsistence farming – a diverse and complex issue

The future of small farms has always been of political importance in the EU, in part because of their social role in preserving rural communities. Subsistence and semi-subsistence farming has played a more prominent role in Europe since the fall of the Berlin wall, owing to the creation of millions of small farms resulting from post-communist land reforms in central and eastern Europe. A lack of off-farm jobs, the high age of farmers, and their low level of transferable skills often hinder structural change and provide grounds for the persistence of small-scale semi-subsistence farming.

Other major factors for this persistence are the pockets of poverty in rural areas or the farmers' strong preferences to maintain family farming traditions and produce their own food. Thus, farmers may be pushed into semi-subsistence farming as a result of low cash incomes or, equally, semi-subsistence farming could be a life-style choice. However, semi-subsistence farmers are not homogenous and there are multiple paths of development. Some may exit agriculture while others try to diversify their livelihoods into non-farm activities, becoming less reliant on farming. Others may contemplate further engagement in agriculture with an increased reliance on markets and sales.

“ Within the European Union there are entire regions where small farms play a vital role, not only in economic terms, but also from a social and environmental point of view. There are regions, such as the one that is the location for today’s event, where the small-scale producer represents the cornerstone of rural life and the guardian of traditions and rural consciousness. ”

Dacian Cioloş, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

“ We do not need a museum. We need a thriving rural community that will provide public goods – beautiful landscapes and biodiversity. We need to keep some traditional features, including traditional farming practices, traditional varieties, low intensity farming, village homes with gardens, but not at the price of poverty, allowing at the same time the development of the modernisation of agriculture. ”

Discussants in Workshop 2 ‘Wider Implications of Semi-subsistence Farming for Society and the Environment’

Conference Findings

All stakeholders participating in the conference agreed on the central points – the multiple roles provided by semi-subsistence farmers, as regards the environment and vitality of rural communities on the one hand, and the need to better integrate these farms into rural development policies on the other. Of particular importance is their role for the environment and maintenance of rural traditions. Several participants emphasised that semi-subsistence farmers provide important public goods which are very much in demand. However, they are not rewarded for these social benefits and many of them live below the poverty line.

It was also noted at the seminar, that semi-subsistence farms are also perceived to be a cultural asset that can provide the basis for diversification into speciality foods and rural tourism. In this regard, they are integral to locally distinctive rural development.

There was a general consensus that the future of semi-subsistence farms is a policy issue, not only for individual Member States and regional authorities

but for the EU as a whole. At the same time, various challenges were underlined. The barriers these farmers experience in accessing funding under rural development policies relate not just to the formal requirements but also to particular characteristics of semi-subsistence farming. Such problems include: the difficulty of individually targeting smaller producers (since a large fraction are not registered); the high cost of reaching millions of semi-subsistence farmers; difficulties in reaching them with policies requiring formal co-operation due to a reluctance to engage in formal cooperation on the part of the farmers themselves; and the high age and low level of education of many semi-subsistence farmers. Commissioner Dacian Cioloş gave hope that strong political will exists but at the same time emphasised that one of the main questions is - how do we support these farmers without ‘blocking their natural evolution’?

Conference participants formulated several policy-relevant conclusions and recommendations. Rural development policies for semi-subsistence farms should be treated as a package; there is no single measure that could answer

their policy needs. The approaches should be mainly local and territorial to acknowledge the huge diversity of situations and policy needs of semi-subsistence farmers. Better targeting and consistency is needed in terms of policy goals, i.e. commercialisation and restructuring versus purely environmental objectives. The Leader approach was lauded as presenting a great opportunity for semi-subsistence farmers, as it allows local targeting and delivery, particularly if farmers organise themselves in associations. The advisory service was also identified as one of the most effective policy measures to help farmers integrate into local markets.

In summary, the seminar highlighted the fact that the policy focus should be on improving the economic and institutional environment in which semi-subsistence farms operate, in order to give them opportunities to develop, contribute to the rural economy and increase the living standards of farming households.

The conference proved to be a timely and useful event. However, policy dialogue should now continue, given that the future of around 11 million farms in the EU-27 is at stake.

“ Local communities from rural areas, associated producers, peri-urban communities, urban authorities could join forces, organise traditional products market where local farmers can be present in high numbers to ensure diversity. Market entry is a psychological barrier for producers as risks are incurred, so producers could be helped to cross this barrier. ”

Teodor Frolu Association Group of Initiative ‘Radu Anton Roman’



“ The case study on Romania shows that ‘improvements in consultancy services will deliver much improved results on the ground, in terms of uptake by farmers. The study also shows that if the range of NRDP support measures is combined in an innovative way, it can be very effective in supporting small-scale farming communities. ”

Nathaniel Page, Director ADEPT Foundation

Useful links

Conference “Semi-subsistence farming in the EU: current situation and future prospects”: Commissioner Cioloş’ speech
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/ciolos/headlines/speeches/2010/10/20101014_en.htm

Conference page on the EN RD website
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/enrd-seminars/semi-subsistence-seminar/en/semi-subsistence-seminar_home_en.cfm

SCARLED project
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