



## Transnational Cooperation: The case of 'Culinarium Europa'

*The 'Culinarium Europa' initiative is a clear example of transnational cooperation. It is achievable and thereby beneficial for a large number of Local action groups (LAGs) throughout Europe. It is also appealing: who wouldn't like savoury a region's identity? The initiative shows the benefits of a 'push and pull approach' in effectively strengthening both the regional and the European cultural awareness.*

Cooperation is an integral and fundamental element of the LEADER+ Programme. Nevertheless, in many member states of the Community, cooperation, and transnational cooperation in particular, appears to be a difficult process to set in motion. Many LEADER-groups not only experience the difficulties creating transnational cooperation, but also begin to doubt its usefulness. Moreover, they all increasingly feel that time is running out. We have two basic explanations for this disappointing situation. Firstly an appropriate cooperation linkage between LAGs evidently cannot be achieved without help in a partner search or in the set-up of cooperation themes that prove to be of mutual benefit. Secondly, it really takes time to achieve effective cooperation. With the exception

of really clear-cut themes, or cooperation between very similar regions like wetlands, it takes more than just one meeting before LAGs are willing to spend their valuable time in an uncertain process with people they do not really know.

### Pushing and pulling

The current policy in LEADER+ assumes that 'push' factors at the local level (the LAGs) alone should be motivating enough for transnational cooperation. There have not been that many potential 'pull'-factors from the European level towards LAGs so far, though the European Cooperation Fair held in Brussels in June 2005 could be a goodstep in a new direction. The combination of pushing at LAGlevel and pulling at EU-level can reinforce both incentives. The 'Culinarium Europa' initiative, aiming to set up the utilisation and marketing of regional identity, shows how well this can work out.

### A region and its flavors

Travelling through our neighborhoods, our country or across Europe, we experience the most basic things in life: eating and drinking. Unlike for example the relative uniformity in the USA, culinary habits in Europe vary from locality to locality, from region to region and from country to country. Interestingly, these differences can be traced back to the specific characteristics of the region, such as landscape features, land use or use of the sea, historical culture and so forth. In other words, the culinary habits reflect the identity of the region quite well. Getting to know these habits gives us an opportunity to get to know the region better. This basic idea is the starting point for the 'Culinarium Europa' initiative. How can we put culinary habits to economic use? And can we raise regional marketing to the European level and build a common quality concept?

### Regional 'bottom up' approach

On the one hand, the starting point of the initiative should always be at the local and regional level. That is, linking people and organisations to form a network that focuses on the culinary identity of the region and highlighting the specific qualities and opportunities within the region. Aspects in the fields of land use and agriculture, tourism, landscape features, history and culture should be recognised and integrated into a marketing concept. Once the concept is worked out within the region, the marketing itself can begin.

### The European level

On the other hand, the initiative implies the recognition and scaling up to the European level to allow the marketing concept to be successful and to achieve maximum result. The colorful palette of European culinary regions reflects the richness of the different cultures and cultural identities. When regional marketing that builds on this richness is brought to the European level, a common quality concept could emerge.

### A growing concept?

The 'Culinarium Europa' initiative was presented by Peter Laan (The Netherlands) and Reinhard Lechner (Austria) in a LEADER+ Conference in Bergen (The Netherlands) in December 2004. This conference was the inception of the initiative as a transnational cooperation project within the LEADER framework and is now starting up in two regions in the Netherlands, while there is interest in Spain, Italy, Finland and Ireland. The LEADER- methodology plus the LEADER+ organisation structure offers a brilliant chance to meet these aspects. Interested groups who feel their area is tasty enough are welcome to join the initiative.

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# Money,

# Money,

# Money!

# Must be funny?

A column by Marc Buijter

On a sunny Friday afternoon Jan and Bram meet each other in an outdoor café with a splendid view on the IJsselmeer, the old sea in the heart of the Netherlands. Jan is an enthusiastic LEADER+ coordinator in a Dutch LEADER area. His friend Bram is a psychologist with a slight professional deformation; he tends to analyse a lot. Usually Jan doesn't allow Bram to give free rein to his analytical passion. A somewhat annoyed look over the top of his glasses is mostly enough to shut Bram up and to continue their ritual lively conversations about sailing, hard rock, opera and beautiful women. Today things are different. Jan has worries and Bram smells an opportunity. While gazing at the sunset with a white beer in his hand Jan is willing to lie back on the virtual couch of Bram.

Bram: You look a bit tormented, if I may say so. What's the problem?

Jan: We've got too much money.

Bram: Well you know me, I'm always ready to help you solving your problems.

Jan: You don't understand. I meant, we've got too much money left in the LEADER+ budget for transnational cooperation.

Bram: That shouldn't be too hard a purpose to spend money on.

Jan: It is actually. There is more than enough budget, but we do not receive many serious project proposals.

Bram: So, what do you do to generate cooperation projects?

Jan: Nothing.

Bram: Nothing?

Jan: Well, we have a brochure and some websites with useful information and contacts. It's all there.

Bram: And you expect that that is enough to organize international cooperation?

Jan: Of course, we're all adults after all. It's not that difficult to generate project ideas or to contact foreign partners, via the internet, or otherwise.

Bram: Do you cooperate yourself beyond the border of your region?

Jan: Yes, I regularly meet other LEADER+ coordinators from the surrounding provinces to coordinate running projects within our areas and to explore opportunities for new common projects and initiatives.

Bram: And how did that come into existence?

Jan: Somewhere at the beginning of this phase of the LEADER programme, we had a magnificent dinner party with live music and good food. After that party we started to call each other for consultation

on hot issues in our LEADER areas. We soon noticed that we were confronted with similar problems and that we learned a lot from our various ways to deal with these problems. Then we decided to organize monthly meetings to facilitate our cooperation and coordination on a more regular basis.

Bram: It seems to me that you just mentioned at least three preconditions for cross-border cooperation that you are withholding from your clients in your own area.

Jan: Did I?

Bram: Yes you did.

Jan: Enlighten me.

Bram: First, the dinner party gave you a nice, informal opportunity to get to know each other directly, face to face. Second, afterwards there was time and room to work together on an ad hoc basis without the pressure of a suffocating project plan with a tight time frame, measurable goals and lots of administrative paperwork.

Third, in due course of time you gradually came to believe in the added value of cross border cooperation. On the basis of this conviction and the working relations that you slowly built up, you decided to organize the cooperation in a more formal way, by having these monthly meetings.

Jan: But these are the kind of preconditions that Brussels should create, not us. Transnational cooperation is their baby, not ours.

Bram: A few moments ago you said you had a money problem.

Jan: Yes, and...?

At this moment Bram bends over to Jan, knocks on his head and shouts: 'HELLO, IS THERE ANYBODY HOME?'

Jan: Hey! Go take a hike.

Bram: Use your imagination a little and give your clients a break. You just told me that it took a little while to get to know your partners in the surrounding provinces, to learn about the added value of cooperation and to build up a fruitful working relation. And you were only talking about cooperation in the Netherlands, of all places. Not the biggest country in the EU I would say. So, if it takes so much effort to organize cooperation and you have a bag full of money, why don't you hire someone to go look around in Europe and not just on the internet, but also in the real world by travelling around and making videos for at home. This person should be sensitive in social relations, which in

most cases means that you'll have to hire a woman. When she finds some potentially interesting partners somewhere, you can organize a big party for the stakeholders in the LEADER areas involved. But please, make it a bit spicy. Not another folkloristic market with old crafts and local produce for heaven's sake. Organize a rural rock show with local pop musicians for example, or a rural love parade with 'farm house music' where visitors can buy the famous high quality Dutch grass and invite some modern artists to organize some interactive art happenings.

Jan: And that should lead to transnational cooperation?

Bram: What did you do after the dinner party?

Jan: We started calling each other about our work.

Bram: Exactly. LEADER is the common ground for such a party. It won't take long before people start talking about the things they do for the development of their area. And you can stimulate this of course by offering time and room in the exchange programme for informal meetings and networking. But don't make it too heavy too early. There's plenty of time for that afterwards. People usually want to sniff around a bit first, if you know what I mean.

Jan: Mmm, I begin to see your point.

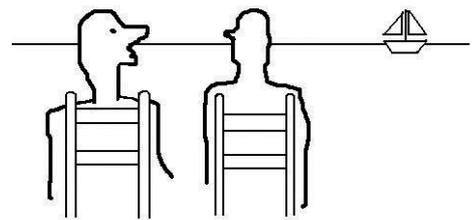
Bram: I always admire your sharpness on Friday afternoons.

(...)

Bram: Are there any LEADER areas in Italy?

Jan: Yes, why do you ask?

Bram: In Italy they make great operas and they have beautiful women.



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## The Way of St. James

*Since many, many centuries pilgrims make their way to Santiago de Compostella, a town in the North of Spain. Pilgrims came from all parts of Europe, along many different paths, to visit the tomb of St. James the Great, discovered in the the beginning of ninth century. Especially during between 1100 and 1300 BC, streams of pilgrims walked miles and miles all over Europe. The number of walkers, not always pilgrims nowadays, along the routes is picking up again in the twentieth century. But not all paths lead to Santiago de Compostella anymore, and some old routes seem long forgotten.*

Several organisations that engage themselves with these old routes have emerged throughout Europe. In The Netherlands the Dutch Society of St. James, founded in 1986, seeks to enlarge and deepen the interest for pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostella, today as well as in the past. Still, it is not completely clear where the old routes have been. The pieces that are known do not always fit together; there are still some blank parts. Wouldn't it be a good idea to develop a pilgrim route together with the LEADER+ areas it runs through and promote it together? In LEADER area Hoogeland they thought it a brilliant idea. The routes from northern Netherlands connect to the route in France that passes through Vézelay. What is needed is to find

all the old routes, and have a complete description, in Dutch as well as in other languages, of the all stretches of the path. Not all is terra incognita. There are already five publications that describe pilgrim routes for walkers, and two for bikers. Nevertheless, especially the parts between Groningen and Millingen, via Hasselt, are not clearly identified.

### More than a path

LEADER area Hoogeland is setting up a cooperation project to find these paths. But the project aims to do more. The walkers and hikers and pilgrims that will follow these routes are not just walking the path. They walk through a region, with all its (historical) cultural and natural values and beauty. It should not be too difficult to draw their attention to their surroundings. There are so many magnificent churches, organs, churchyards that deserve the attention of those passing by. Through targeted promotion and good publications the project hopes to draw more walkers and pilgrims to these routes, and to interest them for the cultural heritage of the areas.

The envisaged *Way of St. James* can make a match with many other activities. Walkers need food and lodging during their trip. During peak times concerts and



lectures on associated subjects could be held, museums could dedicate part of their exhibition space. With 2006 being the 'year of religion' some interesting connections can certainly be made. There are similar initiatives in other countries as well. Contacts with Spain and Austria are made: it has a lot of potential for a Transnational Cooperation project.

More information can soon be found on [www.jacobspad.nl](http://www.jacobspad.nl)  
Please contact Aalf Aalfs ([a.aalfs@regioraad.nl](mailto:a.aalfs@regioraad.nl)) or Bart Bagerman ([leader@hoogeland.nl](mailto:leader@hoogeland.nl)) for more information.

## Village landscape mapping: comparing and supporting local communities

*Villagers have a most integral vision of the landscape that surrounds them. Moreover, when asked to define this landscape themselves, they come up with remarkably similar borders: a territorium that can be defined as a village landscape. It is, so to say, the natural habitat where they feel they have a say about, and have the knowledge about to do so.*

This village landscape is not only composed of natural resources, but also of social, cultural and economic events. By mapping these village landscapes, a whole body of knowledge and enthusiasm is unleashed, that can lead to revitalisation and revalorization of natural and cultural resources, socio-economic activities, and can easily feed into regional development plans.

### Positive experiences

In The Netherlands, quite a few experiences are available with mapping village landscapes. Different methods and approaches have been used, different results were achieved. In one such case, an investment of 2.7 million Euros was

triggered by mapping village landscapes and linking it to municipal and provincial mainstream policies. The Dutch experience suggests that working with village landscapes lead to greater social cohesion, more socio-economic activities, greater care for village history, life and landscape, higher qualities of spatial plans and a better integration with top-down policies and plans.

However, there is still a lot to be discovered in working with village landscapes. Methodologies can and should be improved, the integration with higher level development plans should be strengthened, rural people should be able to replace the role outside facilitators have fulfilled so far but need training, and so forth.

We think that comparing similar village landscape activities elsewhere in Europe will give us sufficient body to be able to bring the tool to a higher level, and to capacitate rural people better.

### Proposal

We aim to bring together five or six communities / regions / LAGs throughout Europe that use village landscapes or a



variant thereof to revitalise these communities. We would be happy to share views with you on the nature of the transnational exchange we could bring about. We aim to arrive at best practices, and, above all, a lot of inspiration. Apart from several recent village landscape mapping experiences, we can also bring in experiences gained in the COMPAS-programme, a worldwide project assisting communities to define their own view on development.

Please contact Marga de Jong ([m.dejong@etcnl.nl](mailto:m.dejong@etcnl.nl)) or Gaston Remmers ([gremmers@xs4all.nl](mailto:gremmers@xs4all.nl)) if you are interested. More info on Compas: [www.compasnet.org](http://www.compasnet.org)

# First Rural Parliament in the Netherlands

In May 2004 a delegation from the Dutch Leader Network, the National Association of Small Towns and Villages and a delegation from the Ministry of Agriculture visited the Rural Parliament in Sweden. In Sweden, the Popular Movements Council for Rural Development, organises every two years a national "referendum". Inspired by the Swedish Rural Parliament, which is characterised by direct communication between rural actors, politicians and government, it was decided to assess the interest for a Rural Parliament in the Netherlands. Upon return from Sweden the assessment was done, supported by the Ministry and a great level of interest for such a process in the Netherlands was found.

The first Rural Parliament will be held on the 8th of October 2005. After the overwhelming 'NO' from the Dutch to the New European Constitution it became clear to the politicians that much more dialogue with the people is absolutely necessary. The First Rural Parliament offers an opportunity for such a dialogue!

The organisation has approached the 1200 villages of the National Association and the 28 Leader Local Action Groups to assess their participation in the rural parliament. The interest from the politicians is encouraging. It will be a gathering in presence of a large representation from the Dutch Parliament. Of course the time for preparation is short and therefore the programme will not be decided upon thoroughly democratic, but mostly through contribution from the LAG's and the Village Councils. Nevertheless the meeting in October is regarded as good start and a beginning of a series of Rural Parliaments.

The response from local actors, NGO's, politicians and representatives of the governments is encouraging. Even the youth will play a role in the Rural Parliament and are actively preparing for it.

The Rural Parliament in October is seen as the place for rural actors and members of the Parliament to meet. By making their voice heard local actors can definitely influence the political agenda.

# Dutch LAGs, per theme

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## Highlights of the Dutch Leader+ Network / Network for Rural Renewal

### 2005 Central theme: "Strengthening Pioneers in Local Governance"

January	The National Network Unit (NNU) started a scheme to support the Self evaluation of Local Action Groups (with a view on the new programming period 2007 - 2013). Throughout 2005 most of the LAG's will take part in this initiative.
April	To strengthen efforts in (trans) national cooperation the Network organised a North - South Exchange: an exchange programme for Leader Coordinators and Project Implementers from the Northern and Southern part of the Netherlands to exchange experience and to strengthen cooperation. At the same time the Network started the Transnational Cooperation Support Programme with Ireland and the UK. This series of workshops will take place in the period April - September 2005.
May	In May the NNU started the special programme (based on the concept of Communities of Practice) on empowering pioneers in Local Governance. In this programme 5 areas take place, among which 3 Leader areas. The programme will continue till the end of 2006.
June	The NNU supports the discussions on mainstreaming LEADER in the rural development strategy by co-organizing a Conference / Consultation Round with the Social Partners on the Rural Development Strategy 2007 - 2013. The Finish Leader experience is inspiring for the Netherlands. The LAG of Hoogeland started exchanging experiences with Finland. More LAGs will follow by visiting Finland.
September	The Leader Areas in the Northern part of the Netherlands are preparing for a special Conference on Regional Products and Marketing
October	The feasibility study on the possibilities of a Rural Parliament in the Netherlands concluded positively and the first Rural Parliament will be held on the 8th of October 2005. The organisation is in the hands of the NNU and the National Association of Small Towns and Villages. It will be a gathering in presence of a large representation from the Dutch Parliament.
December	The yearly National Conference will be held in December and focuses on "Best practices of rural renewal and the future of the area-based approach".

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