



Netwerk Plattelandsontwikkeling
LEADER netwerk *Nederland*

SPECIAL BULLETIN
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The Dutch network team supporting LEADER and other rural development programmes: Peter van Zutphen, Henk Kieft, Wim Hiemstra, Frode Numan, Marga de Jong (from left to right). Mandy Wille was not present when the picture was made.

Building rural development programmes on the experiences of LEADER

Many LEADER experiences have proven to be highly productive laboratories in which promising and innovative solutions have been designed. Better than any other European programme, LEADER succeeds to address the heterogeneity of the countryside, based on local initiatives. No wonder that the call for mainstreaming increasingly is being heard.

Beyond current limitations

A scaling up of the LEADER approach to all rural actors has to go hand in hand with establishing Local Action Groups (LAGs), encouraging experiments and accepting risks. We have to go beyond the current situation in which local actors are treated, within the framework of rural development, as 'passive receivers'. The LEADER approach is fit for mainstream rural development programmes. Some further improvement of the LEADER methodology is needed. LAGs should perform as part of a triangular power arrangement that includes effective local governance and strong local civil society

organisations as the other two nodes. Meaningful participation can only take place when all parties have access to relevant information and equal decision making power, on the program and budget. This is a translation of the words of EU Commissioner Franz Fischler, when he stated in Salzburg in 2003: "we need rural development policy by the rural people, not for them". Hence, a new measure within the Rural Development Regulation is to be formulated that requires each regional and/or national rural development programme to provide for the creation and subsequent facilitation of Local Action Groups.

Farmers and city people: a largely untapped reservoir

Recent research increasingly makes clear that agriculture is not anymore a specialised sector, nor the dominant one in rural areas. It is, instead, becoming an integral part of a mixed rural economy. This also means that 'the territory' (the regional identity) is will be the guiding principle for integrated development. And yet another trend can be seen: new

inhabitants in the rural area (often city people) are interested to contribute to the development of the area. Often higher educated, well-earning couples as well as elders in the Netherlands are increasingly buying a house in the rural area. They value the natural and cultural resources and its social context.

The original inhabitants are often pleasantly surprised with the appreciative comments made by the new-comers, who have indeed found their area attractive because of its natural, cultural and social identity! And the newcomers are willing to spend their time to ensure that the identity will be maintained. This is the potential of the urban citizen as a new partner in rural development.

Promising initiatives

We are aware of at least one such initiative - the cooperative arrangement Stadteland (city in the rural area) near Amersfoort, in which such a relationship has been elaborated both institutionally and financially. Let's explore these potentials when we formulate the new Dutch rural development policy for 2007-2013.

Rural Development Programmes **BY** the people, not for them

Within the Netherlands, a discussion is taking place among those concerned with the new rural development policy for 2007-2013. Representatives of LEADER and other rural development programmes met in March 2004 and forwarded two statements to policy makers formulating the new framework:

The LEADER approach should become a logical part of the new rural development policy framework which leads to a broad rural development programme. The framework should support initiatives, in which local actors share the responsibility for the future of their area and for the finances, with public administrators.

The new policy framework should be implemented according to the current Orientation Fund. The financial control and monitoring should allow the integrated area-based LEADER approach and bottom-up methodologies. The Leader approach only fits the EOGFL-Funding regime.



Uniting the best of both programmes

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Let's Keep It Smart & Simple

A practical guide on interregional and transnational cooperation

Establishing efficient and effective cooperation between (Leader) areas is not an easy job. New cooperation projects get off the ground only after considerable searching and negotiation. Many LAGs wonder: what is the added value of a transnational project? Therefore, the Dutch Network for Rural Development documented and published some learning experiences.

'Let's Kiss' refers to the desire to get new acquaintances and to the motto 'Let's Keep it Smart & Simple'. The booklet describes real-life experiences of coordinators engaged in six cases of cooperation.

Villages of Tradition (Leader+) - a cooperation between authentic villages in Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Ireland focusing on eco-tourism. Contact person in NL: frits.schuitemaker@hetnet.nl

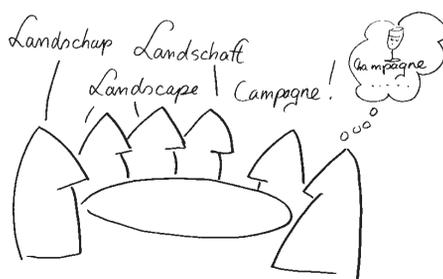
Transnet (Leader+) - a network of rural entrepreneurs from Ireland, Finland, France, Spain, Italy, Austria and the Netherlands, developing training modules and business events. Contact person in NL: c.posthumus@drenthe.nl

Sustainable Open Space (Interreg) - developing sustainable open spaces in an urban surrounding through shared innovation, marketing & promotion and knowledge exchange. Contact person in NL: marianne@sos-project.org

Partnership Spreewald-Weerribben (Leader+ linked) - two wetland areas in (former East) Germany and the Netherlands exchange knowledge and experience related to management and tourism development and possibly local products. Contact person in NL: l.jacobs@sbb.agro.nl

Sustainable Waddensea Tourism (Interreg) - public authorities in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands cooperated for six years for shared marketing, gastronomic cooperation and internet facilities for entrepreneurs. Contact person in NL: h.eekhof@fryslan.nl

Hands on Hedges (Leader+ linked) - nature organisations in Ireland, France, three regions in England and the Netherlands seek cooperation to secure the traditional hedges in the countryside. The hedges have both aesthetic and ecological value, but the skills to maintain them are getting lost. The cooperation project seeks to make the public aware on hedges and coordinate trainings. Contact person in NL: [Lex.Roeleveld, info@heggen.nu](mailto:Lex.Roeleveld@heggen.nu)



Added value

A major question among initial parties to search for cooperation is: what is the added value of our 'joint adventure'?

Sharing knowledge and experiences

How the different parties address problems and challenges in their own context proves to be a major added value for the interviewees. This can be either content or process related. Moreover, the challenge to cooperate with 'external partner' also strengthens the internal cooperation within the area. For example, the nine Dutch Villages of Tradition do meet regularly and exchange on practical and strategic matters such as: how to make a fair with local products and cultural expressions? How to make itineraries between the villages?

Shared marketing

Transnational cooperation is regularly established in order to market a certain area, either its products or for tourism. Sharing the costs of marketing and promotion and broadening the reach of those PR products is an another added value listed.

Sharing ecological expertise

The parties focussing on a wetland in the Netherlands and Germany indicate that the exchange of expertise is important: The Dutch can witness in Spreewald certain ecological developments, like natural forestation, which have not yet taken place in the Netherlands.

Getting new ideas and visions

With foreign experts and experience, 'innovative' ideas for the Netherlands can gain more momentum. This was seen in the Sustainable Open Space cooperation and in Hands on Hedges.



Dialogue, negotiation and good personal relationships: representatives from the Netherlands, Italy and Portugal of Villages of Tradition.

The human dimension

Good personal relationships cannot be overemphasised when people from different backgrounds cooperate. A good 'chemistry' between the major actors is indispensable for its success. As one interviewee put it: "Transnational cooperation offers the possibility for meeting dynamic people".

Overcoming bottlenecks

How people dialogue and negotiate is different in each country. Language can be a major obstacle for communication, as certain jargon is used and interpreted in its own cultural context. Here the experience is to invest not only good translation but also in establishing good personal relationships.

Rightfully or not, the Dutch have an image that in southern European countries bureaucracy is more prevailing and more hierarchical. Who can take decisions? The British seem to have a more participatory administrative culture, in which non-governmental organisations have a big say in local and regional governments. In the experience of the Dutch, these differences have led to some delays in implementation.

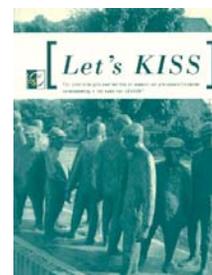
All project partners met a huge and tough bureaucracy when developing the proposal. Sometimes this refers to rules from the EU, sometimes to local rules and regulations. For example, securing co-financing often takes considerable time.

Hints and suggestions

A specific chapter highlights methodological suggestions in cooperation:

- Identifying the theme,
- How to find suitable partners,
- Organising a (first) meeting,
- Designing the cooperation project: formulating a cooperation agreement; feasibility study; aims, strategy and plan of operations;
- Securing the finances
- Implementation
- Monitoring and Evaluation.

The Dutch booklet concludes with an English Annex in which all 28 Dutch Leader areas are shortly described. Downloadable as PDF-file from



www.netwerkplatteland.nl
www.leaderplus.nl

Empowering Pioneers in regional governance



The Network for Rural Development / Netherlands LEADER+ network intends to mainstream the LEADER principles in the emerging national policy on Rural Development (2007-2013), which is currently taking shape. Emphasis is placed on strengthening the co-responsibility of local actors and public administrators to jointly govern the future of their area.

Is there a problem?

Yes, said the Dutch Advisory Council for the Countryside in 2003. There are problems in shaping new rural development policies, as we lack inspiring examples of **policies steered** by new combinations of interests; as we lack thorough **understanding** of how to re-organize public administration to allow for more responsibility of the citizens in the area; as we lack good examples of **processes** leading towards new public-private mutuality.

What and why?

In the Netherlands, LEADER is the only Rural Development programme in which local people through the Local Action Groups (LAGs) formally share the responsibility with public administrators, including (dis)approving project proposals. A consensus seems to emerge in several areas and in governmental circles that the balance of influence is biased towards governmental responsibility at the expense of influence of citizens. The slow, and democratically tied, process-dynamics of public administration does not fit well with the quicksilver dynamics of groups developing new initiatives, working with volunteers and entrepreneurs, desiring instant result. A new balance is needed between 'handing over' responsibility - by administrators and policy makers - and 'taking responsibility' by - local people. It is part of a new style of governance, intimately related to empowerment of local people.

We certainly need this experience to shape future Rural Policy by the people, instead of policy for the people, as EU-Commissioner mr. Franz Fischler indicated in November 2003 in Salzburg. Focussing on local and regional governance also addresses the challenge of the Dutch government in its Rural Policy 'Agenda Vital Countryside' which states: 'to shape policy in which the responsibility of citizens and society are strengthened...'

How to empower the pioneers?

The Dutch Network on Rural Development / LEADER+ will not

establish new pilots. Rather, spotlights will lighten-up already existing efforts of pioneers, showing energy and leadership. We perceive this diversity in new experience as an extremely rich laboratory for learning on how to steer area-based rural development policy. In cooperation with others, we will make an inventory of these experiences and we will support deepening of this experience with 5-10 pioneers. We will analyze the experiences and share the lessons with the broader network. Also knowledge-related networks are requested to participate. If necessary, both the local actors and the network will lobby for policy room to enable risk-taking experiments.

Actors in various areas already show interest in this focus. Pioneers can be found among governmental staff or policy makers, local institutions and local people. From various perspectives, people look for the optimal sharing of responsibilities and forms of cooperation.

Which pioneers can join?

Most interesting are those areas where actors themselves have felt the urgency and importance to find new steering modes with balanced mandates from public and private sectors, who want to invest in trying out new ways, who can phrase their objectives, obstacles and/or constraints well. The starting point is the dynamics in the area. We do not want to find a blue-print model.

This leads to the following criteria:

- Several areas with rather **different approaches** will offer the biggest chance for learning.
- **Unconventional coalitions** (e.g. urban-rural) and 'unusual' partners like local banks, consumer-producer relations, citizen-farmer cooperatives are preferred.
- **Not only LEADER groups** but also other rural development programs or watershed institutions will be included.
- **Taking risks and responsibilities:** Pioneers who are willing to experiment, also at the administrative level, and who are open to honestly share their experiences and concerns.
- **What is the potential for up-scaling** of the experience? This is important for mainstreaming into 2007-2013.

The basic **role of the Dutch network team** is to inventorize pioneer initiatives, to challenge administrative authorities towards renewed governance, to jointly monitor and learn, to analyze factors of success or failure, and to mainstream the relevant findings through workshops and publications. We implement this in close cooperation with the Dutch network for sustainable development - Habiforum.

We expect great interest, even internationally. The theme also seems relevant in many other countries. That is why on 21-23 May 2004, we will also visit Sweden during their national Rural Parliament week. **International exchange challenges our 'institutional nationalism' and creates new reflections on our own reality. So, if you know of comparable initiatives elsewhere in Europe, we are most interested to contact them and share ideas and experiences.**

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Milestones 2003-2004 of the Dutch Network

Theme 2003: Agriculture from a regional perspective

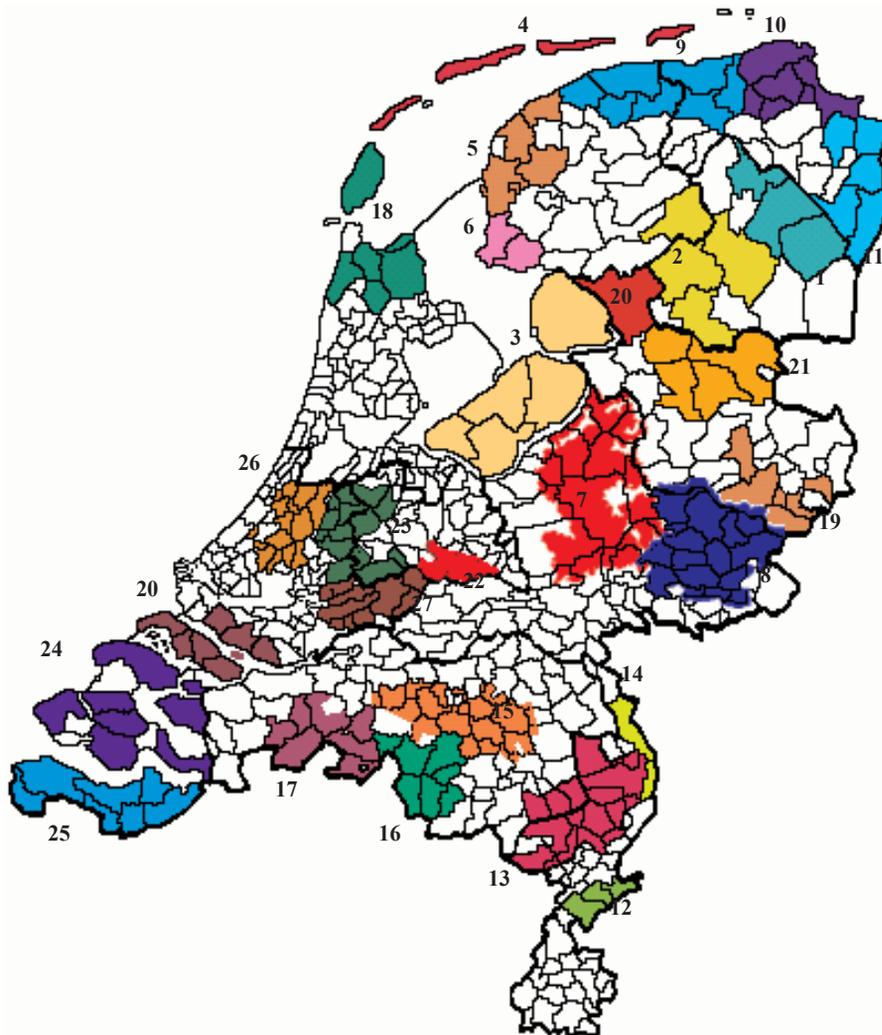
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| Jan. | Preparing a national conference on 'LEADER and agriculture' |
| Febr. | Upgrading the website with Forum and English pages |
| March | Conference in the South on 'Regional innovation'
Participating in Marstrand 'Transfair', Sweden
Participating the Belgium conference on 'Vital Countryside'
Workshop 'Entrepreneurship 'New Style' |
| April | Conference in the North on 'Regional innovation'
Thinktank 1: Who is the LEADER in Dutch Agriculture? |
| May | Workshop (trans)national cooperation |
| June | Workshop interpreting Regulations & European Funding |
| Sept. | Pilot 'Countryside Exchange' in the South
Preparation new vision and mission LEADER network/Network for Rural Development |

Oct. Thinktank 2: 'Pioneers in regional governance'
Publication of 'Let's KISS'

Nov. National conference 'The future of agriculture in rural development'

Theme 2004: Pioneers in regional governance

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Jan. | From LEADER network to Netherlands Network for rural development |
| Febr. | Preparing 'Pioneers in regional governance' |
| March | Meeting on the rural development policy 2007-2013 to include the LEADER principles |
| April | Workshop in the South on '(trans)national cooperation
Preparing a power-point presentation (in Dutch) to share the results of the Leader 2 evaluation |
| May | Two-day conference on 'Regional identity':
Using natural and cultural resources and adding value to local products. |



Implementing LEADER+ in the Netherlands:

The specific rural situation deals with the challenge to keep the rural areas vital in an urbanised surrounding. The map shows that despite the high population density, many rural areas fit LEADER+ criteria. Rural development in the Netherlands is a struggle for space and its often conflicting claims, such as agriculture, nature, housing, recreation. 28 areas, € 82.9 million EOGFL contribution next to national, provincial and municipal co-financing and the countless hours of volunteers.

The mid-term evaluation (autumn 2003) observed that the added value of LEADER in the Netherlands is that it supports current approaches of area-oriented project and bottom-up methodologies and even goes a step further: local actors in LAGs have decision making capacities. Cooperation is mainly taking place within the area; the current impression is that the basis for transnational cooperation is as yet too small. The Netherlands LEADER+ Network should redefine its role, now that the LAGs are established and a specific role is foreseen to lobby at policy levels for solving bottlenecks at field level.

What's in a name?

From Netherlands LEADER+ Network to Network for Rural Development

In 2004, the Netherlands LEADER Network decided to change its name and logo and to make the switch from LEADER sec to a broad Rural Development Network. LEADER will remain one of the most important inspirators for the network. But to prepare for the start of the European Rural Development Programme (POP) in 2007, mainstreaming of the LEADER principles is urgent and as such the start of a broader network inevitable.

What did the network do so far to broaden the scope?

- We prepared a special bulletin on the lessons of LEADER for the future of Rural Development;
- We organized a conference on LEADER and the New European Programme POP;
- We decided to focus the coming 3 years on 'Pioneers of regional governance' in order to strengthen the co-responsibility of local actors and public administrations;
- We changed the website to www.netwerkplatteland.nl in order to reach a larger public than LEADER only.

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Adding value to local products

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Using new know-how and technology

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