

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Examples of Leader projects



European Network for
Rural Development



European Commission
Agriculture and
Rural Development





European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) contributes to the efficient implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) throughout the European Union (EU).

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN) which brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development.

At EU level, the ENRD ensures the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

Find out more on the [ENRD website](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu) (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>)

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Information exchange is an important aspect of the NRN and ENRD operations. This brochure forms part of a series of ENRD publications that has been introduced to help encourage such information exchange.

Each edition of the brochure features different types of projects that have received RDP co-finance from The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

This edition of the brochure focuses on the work of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and highlights different EAFRD projects that use Leader methodologies to produce rural development benefits.

Other editions of the brochure can be downloaded from the [ENRD website's library section](#)¹ and a [RDP Projects database](#)² contains many examples of EAFRD assistance to rural development initiatives.

Managing editor: Rob Peters, Head of Unit, EC Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Manuscript text finalised during June 2011. Original version is the English text

Acknowledgements

ENRD Contact Point editorial input: Tim Hudson, Pascale Van Doren, Judit Török

Cover photograph: © Tim Hudson

The contents of this publication do not necessarily express the opinions of the institutions of the European Union.

1 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-library/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en/en/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en_home.cfm

2 <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/>

Table of contents

Examples of EAFRD Leader projects

Introduction: Leader, Local Action Groups and EU rural development3

Leader’s top results from bottom-up rural development: LITHUANIA.....4

Innovation drives LAG action : WALES, UNITED KINGDOM.....6

Transnational project supports territorial development :
LUXEMBOURG, FRANCE & GERMANY8

Neighbouring LAGs develop niche tourism cluster : AUSTRIA10

Leader valorises local food products : PORTUGAL12

Mainstreaming Leader’s added value : NETHERLANDS14

LAGs promote environmentally sustainable governance : WALLONIA, BELGIUM....16

New LAGs take up transnational opportunities :
CZECH REPUBLIC, ESTONIA & SLOVAKIA18

Exporting the Leader methodology : FINLAND20

Leader, Local Action Groups and EU rural development

'Leader' is the term used to describe a special local development approach for rural areas. The name Leader originates from the French abbreviation for 'Liaison Entre Actions pour le Développement de l'Economie Rurale' (which roughly translates to 'links between actions for developing the rural economy'). It was originally introduced by the European Commission in the early 1990s as an experimental approach to rural development.

Since then the 'Leader methodology' has proved to be so successful that the European Commission no longer uses the abbreviation and Leader has now become a mainstream proper noun in the EU rural development dictionary.

Leader's special approach is based around a methodology that focuses on 'bottom-up' rural development actions. These involve local businesses, representatives from civil society and local authorities joining together in a public-private partnership. A Leader partnership is known as a Local Action Group (LAG).

LAGs receive a budget from the EAFRD and the LAG decides how their EAFRD budget will be used for developing projects in its rural territory. The decision-making process is based around a LAG's Local Development Strategy (LDS) and all of the EAFRD projects supported by LAGs need to fit with their LDS.

Each LDS contains a set of rural development actions and objectives that have been suggested by local communities in the LAG territory. This approach ensures that all Leader actions are driven from the 'bottom-up', which provides added-value because rural communities are often more likely to get involved with helping support projects that are considered relevant to themselves.



A number of other added-value features also make the Leader approach unique. Innovation is one of these. The aim of this criterion is to encourage LAGs to test new ways of developing their territory, and Leader has been extremely effective at stimulating all sorts of different socio-economic and environmental innovations throughout rural Europe.

The European aspect of Leader is another important characteristic of the methodology. Specific parts of the LAGs' EAFRD budgets are provided for transnational cooperation (TNC). TNC helps rural people learn from their peers in other countries about new ideas for rural development projects. Such LAG cooperation has created a great many mutual benefits for many different rural areas across the EU countryside and a LAG's LDS contains a strong emphasis on cooperation and networking.

Nearly 2200 LAGs are already implementing Leader approaches across the EU and more LAGs are still being set up. Some €5.5 billion of EAFRD is allocated to these LAGs' projects and the

funds are being invested in bottom-up rural development priorities like business competitiveness, environmental sustainability, economic diversification and quality of life.

This brochure has been prepared to illustrate a small sample of such Leader projects. The nine articles each highlight what can be possible from Leader. They also underscore the added-value of this popular and productive rural development methodology.

The brochure builds on the existing library of material that is available from the [ENRD website's dedicated section](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/rural-development-policy/leader/en/leader_home_en.cfm)³ about Leader and LAGs' roles in EU rural development activity⁴.

Other recent additions to this Leader library include reports from three Leader Focus Groups established within the Leader subcommittee of the ENRD.

Launched by the European Commission in 2009, the Focus Groups examined Leader activity across the EU with a view to identifying issues, underline examples of good practice and develop recommendations to improve the implementation of Leader. The Focus Groups were dealing with Leader's delivery mechanisms, its innovation characteristics and cooperation measures.



3 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/rural-development-policy/leader/en/leader_home_en.cfm

4 At EU level, delivery of the Leader methodology is overseen by a special Leader subcommittee of the main ENRD steering group

Leader's top results from bottom-up rural development: LAG supports community's priority projects in Lithuania

Rural development projects that are taken forward by members of a local community and address a defined local need are referred to as 'bottom-up' projects. All Leader projects are bottom-up and their actions tend to bring together people from different backgrounds who share common goals.



4

One of the factors that reinforce the bottom-up characteristics of Leader projects is the way the LAG partnerships operate. All LAGs are made up from a cross section of local communities and LAG members include representatives from, among others, local authorities, business groups, social organisations and environmental bodies. These multi-sector LAGs bring together a large centralised knowledge base of skills and ensure an equitable coverage of interests.

Multi-sector LAG structures are found in all Member States and, by way of illustrating a typical LAG structure, Lithuania's Kaunas District Region LAG ('Kauno R. LAG') for example includes municipalities, community centres, youth groups, a farmers' association, environmental specialists, businesses and sports clubs. Here in central Lithuania, the LAG Members have organised themselves into a main LAG Board which is supported by a number of subcommittees. These are designed to make best use of the LAG's skill base in specific thematic areas. Such an approach is also common across the EU and in the Kaunas District Region the LAG's subcommittee topics cover rural business development, village renewal, and social community matters.

Each of the Kaunas District Region LAG's subject areas has been identified as a priority for Leader project support. This prioritisation process occurred during the production of the LAG's Local Development Strategy (LDS). An LDS is another special feature of Leader's bottom-up methodology.

Local Development Strategy

All LAGs are required to prepare a LDS before they start assigning EAFRD to rural development projects. The LDS involves an in-depth analysis of a LAG territory to identify what local people believe is most important for the development of their area. The LDS also clarifies what issues the rural population considers to be the main challenges that Leader funds should be used to tackle. A considerable amount of community consultation is required to produce an LDS and the procedure helps to provide the LAG with a built-in bottom-up direction for their work.

Whilst the general format of a LDS remains mainly constant for all LAGs, different LAGs tend to adopt different approaches to the community consultation process. In the example of the Kaunas District Region LDS, ideas and opinions from local residents, businesses and organisations were collected and then grouped under the headings of 'Achievement', 'Stagnation', 'Crisis' and 'Hope' to help assess opportunities and problems. A LAG's flexibility to apply techniques that are most appropriate for its own areas makes sure that the resulting LDS is 'territorial specific', and this is a further crucial ingredient of Leader's bottom-up recipe.

Territorial specific priorities identified by the rural population of Kaunas District Region included a strong desire to find ways of maintaining cultural traditions. As in most parts of Europe's countryside, cultural identity remains highly important for rural

Lithuania and this message came through clearly in the LDS. Improvements in rural development infrastructure also came across as a top priority for people from Kaunas District Region, who were aware that opportunities from tourism and education could be created if the right facilities were put in place.

In response to these bottom-up demands the LDS established a dedicated funding category to help rural groups develop traditional crafts centres. Chairman of the Kauno R. LAG, Mr Vytautas Zubas explains this LDS measure can be used for, “setting up of traditional crafts’ technology lines, providing traditional crafts’ market places and supporting premises for training in traditional crafts”. He goes on to say “Professional craft skills in our territory are vanishing and we believe that building up both supply and demand for our craft sector will provide opportunities for a new generation of craft workers. At the same time this will also help us sustain and strengthen our traditional cultural heritage. We see it as a win-win approach and we are already using the Leader funds to develop new rural development infrastructure in the craft sector”.

EAFRD in action

A high profile project example in this sector from the Kauno R. LAG is a rural crafts centre being implemented by a local museum organisation at the village of Biliūnų. Costing nearly €390 000 in total, the new facility received €67 911 of EAFRD and €45 133 of national co-finance from the LAG for a new building and ancillary investments. Traditional timber construction methods are being used in the 80m² craft centre which features various trades such as ironmongery, wood working, and textile production.

A large multi-purpose space has been designed into the centre, which can be used as an exhibition hall and educational training resource. Mr Juozapas Liekis from the project is enthusiastic about the future prospects for the centre and says “We will be providing lots of different and interesting services for local community members and tourists. Our programme includes introductions to traditional crafts and ethnic cultural traditions. Artisans and folk artists will be sharing experiences through live demonstrations of craft skills supported by stories about the working methods. The project aims to encourage young people to become more interested in traditional folk crafts as a career option and so help partly solve the problem of youth employment”.

“ We see it as a win-win approach and we are already using the Leader funds to develop new rural development infrastructure in the craft sector. ”

Vytautas Zubas, Chairman of the Kauno R. LAG Board



© Kaunas District Region LAG

A host of rural development benefits are therefore possible from this EAFRD project which is able to provide visitor services for tourists as well as learning opportunities for local craft entrepreneurs. New facilities and new services offered by this type of locally-led development initiative often also help to stimulate community confidence which creates a momentum for other project ideas to emerge. This is true for the Kauno R. LAG and top quality results from such bottom-up actions continue to help the LAG attract a stream of fresh applications for other Leader project ideas that fit with its LDS.

See the [LAG's website \(http://kaunorvvg.lt/en/about-us\)](http://kaunorvvg.lt/en/about-us) for further details about their LDS and its support to bottom-up projects in the rural parts of Kaunas District.

LAG approaches contain the essential raw ingredients for successful bottom-up rural development

Innovation drives LAG action: Welsh Leader projects adapt new technologies and adopt novel approaches

Innovation sits at the centre of the Leader methodology and this core criterion has been highly effective at encouraging rural areas to explore new development ideas. Impressive results over the years clearly show that LAGs have a tremendous capacity for identifying creative new opportunities and finding innovative solutions to local development challenges.



6

Leader is able to accommodate a broad range of different types of rural innovation. These stretch from policy programming to project implementation, and this flexibility has been one of the methodology's success factors. Different ways that innovation is expressed by Leader include:

Working in new ways: this might involve rural development approaches that apply new ideas, using new techniques, focusing on alternative markets, bringing diverse sectors and stakeholders together via new networking methods, supporting new priority groups, or finding new solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.

Developing new products and services: these often result from testing innovative ways of working and can be created through the application of new or novel techniques, partnerships, technology, processes, research and thinking.

Adapting proven approaches to new circumstances: is also recognised as an effective means of creating locally significant innovative rural developments. These types of innovative actions are often facilitated by knowledge transfer between regions or Member States.

Leader has collated a large portfolio of practical rural development experience in these types of innovation and a useful reference of [Leader information](#)⁵ is available on the ENRD website.

UK rural innovation

All Member States are actively building on this Leader library through new innovative LAG projects. Some interesting examples can be seen from the UK in Wales where alternative ways of working are creating new products and services by adapting proven approaches to new circumstances.

Novel uses of information technology in rural tourism attractions are among the list of Welsh LAG projects that have been supported with help from the EAFRD. These tourism innovations include among others, the use of satellite technology for treasure hunts, mp3 ecotourism applications for raising awareness about environmental management in nature reserves, and webcams for virtual farm visits.

The satellite powered treasure hunts have proved to be a popular new visitor attraction with tourists of all ages. They are based on the principles of 'geocaching' games but apply less intrusive '[earthcaching](#)' techniques (<http://rock.geosociety.org/earthcache/intro.htm>) and take tourists on geological tours of woodland sites in the [Clwydian uplands](#) (www.clwydian-rangeaonb.org.uk). Tourists here can pay a refundable deposit to hire hand-held GPS devices which are programmed to take people around the forested areas.

Countryside officer for the Clwydian area, David Shiel, said: "The forest has a fascinating story to tell including ancient burial sites

over 4 000 years old, historic lead mines from the 18th and 19th century and an abandoned farmstead hidden within the trees that cloaked the open mountain when they were planted in the early 1960s. It is an ideal location for an earthcaching trail because the story it has to tell lies under the trees.” Clwydian’s satellite walks received £30 000 (equivalent to around €35 000) from the Cadwyn Clwyd LAG and forms part of a three-year plan in rural Flintshire and Denbighshire to revitalise rural communities and their economies.

Elsewhere in Wales, the the Glaslyn e-trail project funded by Powys LAG is using digital technology to provide new audio tours of the Glaslyn Nature Reserve. This ecotourism Leader project secured an EAFRD grant of £7430 (equivalent to around €8250) for its aims to attract, entertain and inform visitors. The audio tours and smartphone applications contain a mix of guided directions and stories told by local people from the project area. Digital recordings of the tour content can be [downloaded free of charge](http://www.montwt.co.uk/audiotrail.html) (www.montwt.co.uk/audiotrail.html) and then played in situ using standard MP3 devices, like those on mobile phones or portable music players.

Cliff Webb from the project explains that, “This Leader project promotes the nature reserve and the local region’s cultural history. It also raises visitor awareness about how well-managed upland areas and appropriate farming methods can help create lesser known benefits for society like reducing flood risks, stor-



© ourwelshfarm.co.uk

“ *This is a fantastic project which brings day-to-day life on a working farm directly into homes and classrooms.* ”

Ieuan Sherwood, Bridgend County Borough Council

ing carbon and, of course, protecting wildlife. Our innovative use of modern technologies means we have done this in an entertaining way that helps reach a wider audience of visitors.”

Similar educational gains are possible from the Bridgend virtual farm tour. This Leader project was launched to inform the general public about farming related issues and was awarded an EAFRD grant of £38 075 (equivalent to around €43 500). Five webcams were set up using EAFRD assistance from the Bridgend LAG at a farm in Blackmill to allow internet audiences to follow daily life on a farm. The LAG project’s interactive [website](http://www.ourwelshfarm.co.uk) (www.ourwelshfarm.co.uk) enables people to learn about everything from food production to sustainability and its success was recognised last year in the Welsh ‘Farming and Countryside Education’ awards, which highlight the important role that farmers can play in educating young people.

Besides acting as an educational tool, Bridgend Virtual Farm Tours also intends to inspire people to visit the countryside. Ieuan Sherwood, Rural Development Manager at Bridgend County Borough Council is very enthusiastic about the project and notes how, “This is a fantastic project which brings day-to-day life on a working farm directly into homes and classrooms. It really is a top class educational resource.” He concludes, “As a trial project under the Leader initiative, it has been a great success.”

The Wales Rural Network⁶ is able to provide additional information about Leader projects from their part of the UK.

Leader’s strength is its ability to support a broad range of different rural innovations

Transnational project supports territorial development: mutual interests between Moselle wine businesses spurs cross border cooperation

Cooperation between rural areas can generate positive added-value outcomes and a specific part of the Leader funding toolkit is available for helping LAGs to implement EAFRD projects that involve cooperation on a transnational scale.



8

Leader LAGs are involved in encouraging exchanges of know-how between groups, businesses and organisations from around rural Europe. Some of the common questions asked by LAGs about such cooperation projects are, “How do we start and what should we do?” An *ENRD guidance manual on cooperation*⁷ has been prepared to help answer such questions.

This step-by-step guide notes that many TNC projects start life when people from different regions realise that they have things in common. These people (and their organisations) can then join together around their common interest(s) to undertake mutually beneficial activities. Rural businesses from LAG territories located on the Luxembourg, German and French banks of the River Moselle started cooperating in this way. Their mutual interest was based on strengthening competitiveness in their local wine sectors and they set up a TNC project to work on the topic.

Cooperating to compete

Moselle wines from the three countries have a history dating back to Roman times. The region is well established as a producer of different varieties ranging from the French Gris de Toul Grey, to German Rieslings and the Luxembourg Crémants. All these wines reflect a cultural richness that incorporates time-honoured wine processes and local Moselle traditions.

Recent globalisation trends however have exerted increasing commercial pressures on the Moselle vineyards and an influx of ‘new world’ wines continues to force traditional brands to find new ways of competing. In addition to the common problem of market pressures, wineries in each country experience similar productivity issues concerning unpredictable conditions, difficult terrain, high standards and increasing production costs.

Rural development actions had previously been helping to address such issues on a country by country level. That was until business representatives from the three Moselle regions realised that an opportunity existed to gain synergies from collective activity. Philippe Eschenauer from Luxembourg’s Miselerland LAG explains that “It has taken over two years to bring together the 20 or so partners in this Leader project which we call ‘Terroir Moselle’. Our cooperation slogan is ‘stronger together’ and this sums up the project’s aims well”.

Core objectives for the TNC project centre on a cross-border strategy to strengthen the international reputation of the LAG territories’ wines. Thomas Wallrich from the Moselfranken LAG in Germany says, “Between us the Terroir Moselle’ project partners cover nearly 4 000 wineries from three countries and we take in around 10 500 hectares of vineyards. Over 220 villages in the region depend on the wine growing trade and wine tourism so our project has the potential for bringing considerable benefits.”

⁷ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/2007-2013/tnc-guide/en/tnc-guide_home_en.cfm

The most European of wines

Marketing costs account for the majority of the TNC project's €250 000 budget. EAFRD contributed 55% of this from the LAGs' funds targeting improvements in business competitiveness. A part-time coordinator has also been employed to steer the TNC project and facilitate networking of wine businesses in the different LAG areas.

Early business development outcomes from the Leader initiative identified opportunities for making use of the Moselle wines' distinctive international identity. Results are helping the Terroir Moselle partners to promote their products as "the most European of all wines" – so called because of their tri-country characteristics. This unique selling point is now being used as an advertising tool and special attention is given to tackle markets outside of the Moselle region.

Building on this European dimension, winery cooperation continues to grow and a common communication plan has started to raise the profile of Moselle products. Wine tourism is included in the Leader project's mandate and dedicated campaigns are underway that aim to attract new and repeat visitors to the region. These tourism strategies do not rely only on stories of fine wines but also bring into play the Moselle's other key assets, namely its natural environment, its distinguishing landscapes and its multi-cultural traditions.

“ Our cooperation slogan is ‘stronger together’ and this sums up the project's aims well. ”

Philippe Eschenauer,
Luxembourg's Miselerland LAG

Viticulture and enology are also benefitting from the TNC between Terroir Moselle growers. An example of this is a new trans-frontier quality award for vintage wines named the 'Schengen Prestige'. Members of the Schengen Prestige Charter have agreed to respect strict performance criteria and undergo special tests before their wines can be marked using the Schengen Luxury Charter label. No LAG funds were needed to set up the Charter which is an example of the type of added-value spin-offs that can be created when rural businesses start cooperating following the initial stimulus of a Leader project.

Another innovation emerging from Terroir Moselle TNC is a proposal for new 'wine ship' that would be developed as a floating promotional service for the region's wines. The ship could act as a mobile information centre for Moselle wine enthusiasts and also carry out tours designed to ensure that all parts of the river basin benefit from wine tourism.

More information about the Leader project's wine ship plan and other aspects of the Terroir Moselle TNC project is available on www.terroirmoselle.eu and from the LAG staff involved:

France – LAG Pays Terres de Lorraine -

Peggy Dangelser (leader.terresdelorraine@yahoo.fr)

Germany - LAG Mosel -

Helmut Ulmen (Helmut.Ulmen@Bernkastel-Wittlich.de)

Germany - LAG Moselfranken -

Thomas Wallrich (info@lag-moselfranken.de)

Luxembourg – LAG Miselerland -

Philippe Eschenauer (philippe.eschenauer@miselerland.lu)

Advice about planning and implementing Leader cooperation projects is available from National Rural Networks and the ENRD website



Neighbouring LAGs develop niche tourism cluster: cooperation promotes Austria's Tyrol as 'Climbers' Paradise'

A group of LAGs from western Austria are working together to establish the Tyrol region as a centre of excellence for rock climbing and this Leader cooperation is being achieved in a manner that shares economic benefits as well as protects environmental assets.



© Mike Gabl

Other articles in this series have highlighted how the multi-country characteristics of a river basin can form the basis for cooperation on a transnational level under Leader. Similarly so, geographic features within a country's borders can also act as the stimulus for effective LAG cooperation on a national basis. Leader work in Austria's Tyrol mountain range offers an insight into how this can happen in practice.

Common geographic features, like mountains, rivers, forests and coastlines, can often act as a source of ideas for cooperation projects between LAGs that share similar environments. This was the case in Tyrol where the mountains provided local communities with similar opportunities, as well as comparable challenges.

LAG cooperation on the Tyrol climbing project first started in 2006 and was driven by eight LAGs in cooperation with a group of local tourism associations. This partnership came together to maximise their potential by combining their efforts. They aimed to find new ways for attracting visitors to Tyrol on an all-year basis, and initial work involved carrying out preparatory actions to assess and agree how they might achieve their mutual objectives. This process included following steps like those shown in the *ENRD cooperation guide's toolkit*⁸ sections regarding setting up a cooperation project between LAGs and selecting common project objectives.

Outcomes from the Tyrol project's early meetings led to joint proposals for developing the region as a world class destination for all-weather and all-season rock climbing. LAG cooperation inputs then helped to coordinate the implementation of a campaign promoting Tyrol as an internationally recognised 'Climbers Paradise'.

Climbers Paradise project

All cooperation projects benefit from having a strong lead partner. Lead partners can be resourced from the EAFRD to provide strategic roles in overseeing the implementation of project activity, and coordinating exchanges of knowledge between the project partners. Tyrol's Imst LAG was nominated to take on these lead partner tasks for the Climber's Paradise project in 2006 and they are still providing the same functions today.

Peter Thaler, the Imst LAG Manager explains how "We predicted that the work involved in supervising a project that spans eight different LAGs would be time-consuming and so we agreed to pool our cooperation funds and employ a professional coordinator for the Climbers Paradise project."

He continues "We also knew it was important for this person to be not only good with people skills, since they would need to find ways of balancing a lot of different peoples' interests,

but that they also needed to be a technical expert as well who could provide their own input into the project's overall vision."

Thanks in part to the suitability of the project coordinator that was employed, the lead partner's commitment and the other partners' enthusiasm, Tyrol's Climbers Paradise project has achieved much of what it set out to. The region is now well known as a centre of excellence for climbing, and tourism businesses continue to work together to build on this cluster opportunity.

LAG investments over the years have seen new climbing facilities and infrastructure being introduced in a coordinated manner that manages tourist numbers and shares economic benefits around the region. LAG areas are developing different commercial niches and learning from each other in the process. For example, LAGs concentrating on providing rock climbing services for children and beginners can share their know-how with LAGs providing similar functions at ice-climbing venues. Environmental bodies form part of the project steering group and these help to ensure that the developments are taken forward in a fully sustainable way.

Partner cooperation

Funding totalling €670 000 (including 48% from Leader) was invested in the Tyrol project between 2007 and 2010 by the different LAG partners. One of the major outcomes from the LAG cooperation has been the *Climber Paradise website* (www.climbers-paradise.com).

This website has been developed to benefit all LAGs in the project partnership and Mr Thaler notes how "The portal serves as an information hub and is crucial because we find that the Internet is the main communication medium used by climbers for selecting their destinations."

A wealth of knowledge has now been accumulated by this multi-LAG project on multiple topics ranging from partner cooperation to management of tourism clusters. Further information about these and other aspects of the Climbers Paradise cooperation actions is available from the *Imst LAG* (www.regio-imst.at).

“ *The larger a project is the more important is exchange of information between stakeholders.* ”

Peter Thaler, Imst LAG Manager



© Mike Gabl

Environmental partners can make useful contributions to socio-economic cooperation projects

Leader valorises local food products: Pioneering Portuguese project proves the development potential of social media

Leader projects have a strong track record of supporting the valorisation of rural products and services. This is especially true for local food products because many LAGs are able to offer funding assistance to help farmers and processors grow their businesses through innovative projects that improve overall competitiveness.



Sustaining viable agricultural activities can be a major challenge for many rural areas. Structural complications like natural handicaps, small farm sizes or distances to sales points can combine with market issues (such as strong competition and price pressures on farm products) to create difficult conditions for farmers.

One solution is the valorisation of agricultural raw materials by converting them into quality food products. The potential rewards from this rural development approach have been verified by an array of different Leader projects that have added value to farm products through processing and marketing initiatives. Innovation has been a powerful force behind these developments, and actions by a pioneering Portuguese Leader project typify the benefits that can be generated for rural areas by creative approaches to product valorisation.

Proven success

Portugal's 'PROVE' project (PROmover e VEnde – which translates to 'Promote and Sell') stems from a bottom-up initiative involving eight of the country's mainland LAGs. PROVE has been busy connecting local producers in these LAG territories within a joint marketing scheme for fresh locally-sourced fruit and vegetables. The project is helping producers sell and promote their produce directly to customers for a fair price, whilst guaranteeing a high quality product for consumers.

Support for the scheme continues to gain impetus and the PROVE project is fast becoming a major success story. It represents an excellent demonstration of how Leader can be used to assist successful inter-territorial cooperation in local product valorisation. Funding to help first establish PROVE activities came from the 2000-2006 EQUAL Community initiative and this foundation work was further developed with the EAFRD. Some €235 325 of EAFRD has been allocated to PROVE from the eight cooperating LAGs, and the total project costs summed to €500 693 which funded work focused on publicising the project through different channels.

Mediators were trained to promote the PROVE methodology among farmers and consumers through seminars and training workshops. Other aspects of the project have seen PROVE staff providing direct support to help farm businesses draw up development plans. A good practice handbook in this subject has been produced. Results from the multi-LAG scheme are credited with expanding and strengthening the local food sector in Portugal, through the creation of 20 new PROVE areas, which link producers with consumers through the PROVE website and its G-PROVE on-line ordering system.

The [PROVE's website's](http://www.prove.com.pt) (www.prove.com.pt) e-shopping system acts as a hub for the project's operations and it's easy to use functions encourage new consumers to support the local food sector. Consumers order 'boxes' of 7-8 kg of fresh seasonal

fruit and vegetables via the on-line facility. Boxes are delivered weekly and priced between €9-11 depending upon their content. The website provides lists of all possible products as well as detailed information on participating producers, collection points and delivery times. Information is also available about the products' nutritional value and recipes are posted on the website to encourage customers to use more PROVE food products in new ways.

Sophisticated management software allows the on-line ordering system to operate automatically by receiving orders and client data, calculating the total quantities of produce required from each producer, planning the contents of each delivery box and printing reports.

Business growth from this high-tech PROVE marketing is impressive. Over 20 distribution centres have been established which between them provide sales outlets for 60 participating producers. Customers numbers reached 900 by early 2011 and these were bringing in €8 200 of revenue each week from around 6.5 tonnes of horticultural produce. As Maria Simões, (a PROVE producer) says "We all know how to grow the produce. What is more difficult is to sell what we produce....and now we have a solution!"



© PROVE project

Social media marketing

PROVE is now also actively marketing its service by using social media. For example, the project established a [PROVE Facebook page](http://www.facebook.com/projectoprove) (www.facebook.com/projectoprove) and the initial feedback from this innovation is extremely promising. By June 2011, PROVE had already collected over 635 followers on Facebook, each of whom the project can now communicate with directly and easily through the social media site.

Information from the PROVE project website is disseminated through the Facebook page and so in this way news about special offers, services or promotions can be instantly issued to a large number of customers. These customers might not

“Our Facebook page has been a very useful marketing tool because it is very efficient for spreading news and receiving comments from clients about their expectations of our products.”

José Diogo, PROVE project

regularly log-in to follow the marketing updates hosted on the PROVE website but a growing number of people do tend to check their Facebook pages on a relatively frequent basis. Hence, by sending out instant posts through the social media facility, PROVE's managers can reach a potentially wider audience than a standard web promotional campaign.

Such new and novel approaches to direct marketing are rapidly becoming mainstream across the world. More and

more people are now extending their use of social media and, what was once a useful tool for keeping in touch with friends and family, is now also a highly efficient means for people to stay up to date with developments in whatever topics, products or services that interest them.

Harnessing the power of a social media 'following' is one of the new challenges for rural businesses. Key tricks of this new trade include posting regular short snippets of information that continuously remind followers of why they should use your business again, and why they should recommend it to others. Experts believe that the most effective social media 'posts' for maintaining customer loyalty are those that create a conversation between the business and its followers. Relentless sales pitches fair less well in this highly dynamic marketing arena and Leader's innovation funds can help rural businesses apply these types of lessons to boost their own on-line development potential.

In the age of social media we no longer need to find information because information will find us

Mainstreaming Leader's added value: Dutch LAG supports dairy diversification partnership

LAG assistance to agricultural projects is encouraged by the EU as part of the push to integrate Leader methodologies across different RDP measures, and a dairy project from the Netherlands demonstrates how local farmers can make good use of Leader.



© Rita van Blesbergen / Mugmedia

Leader approaches have become increasingly influential and the original experimental methodology has now matured into one of the mainstream components of EU rural development policy. Leader approaches are expected to continue to grow in relevance and Mr Dacian Cioloș, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural development stated recently that “Local Leader-type initiatives will remain at the heart of rural development policy. Our objective is not only to reinforce such initiatives, but also to expand upon them, as much as possible, in the organisation and structuring of local agriculture and the development of local products.”

A key issue facing future Leader actions is how to further embed the methodology within mainstream rural development activity. RDPs are tasked to encourage this ‘Leader mainstreaming’ and the majority of LAGs have managed to broaden the scope of Leader to cover much more of the overall EU rural development toolkit. This is expanding the added-value opportunities available from Leader and the ENRD set up special Focus Groups to explore other ways in which to help strengthen the long-term capacity of Leader, and make recommendations for further improvements to the methodology.

A full set of reports from the Focus Groups’ work on ways for improving Leader’s implementation is available on the ENRD website. Recommendations in the reports cover Leader’s delivery mechanisms, its innovation characteristics and cooperation measures.

The power of partnership approaches is identified in all the

ENRD Leader Focus Groups reports as a common source of innovation, cooperation and bottom-up development.

Partnership power

One of the Focus Groups for example was examining ways to preserve Leader’s innovative qualities and this concluded that Leader’s ability to “forge new links inside an area helps to foster a greater drive for success than one actor alone would have been able to achieve”. This Focus Group’s findings highlighted how the Leader methodology was helping support innovation in new types of partnerships. LAG partnerships’ decision making systems (involving joint committees of local public, private, and voluntary sector representatives) were noted as very innovative for many rural areas.

The Focus Group on preserving the innovative character of Leader also drew attention to the role that Leader can play in facilitating wider partnerships. In particular those involving local actors and stakeholders who gain from participation in the LDS definition process, or implementing projects that help develop their local area. A collection of EAFRD project examples are presented by the Focus Group to illustrate such findings. One of these features an innovative partnership from the Netherlands’ Zuid Oost Drenthe LAG where new links are being forged between dairy farmers, agri-food enterprises and rural residents. This project demonstrates how Leader mainstreaming can contribute to high level objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy, like assisting transition in the EU dairy sector.

Dutch Dairy cooperation

Led by two local dairy farmers (the Wilms brothers) from the Schoonebeek area this Dutch LAG projects centres around a partnership that the brothers has formed. Their partnership includes livestock breeders and other farm businesses in the local agri-food industry, as well as rural citizens, public sector bodies, wildlife interests and rural tourism partners.

“Cooperation is the key for the new type of dairy farm that we want to develop”, say Berend Jan and Bouke Durk Wilms.

By working together, the different rural development stakeholders involved in the project are now providing new and mutually beneficial support for each other through an innovative master plan. A great deal of effort, and €134 000 of EAFRD support from the Netherland's RDP Leader budget, was invested in producing a blue print for helping dairy farmers like the Wilms increase their business competitiveness and become better integrated within the local rural economy.

The blue print is the main outcome from the LAG project. It provides the farmers and their partnership with a structured plan and informed vision about how to develop their organisations in a collaborative way that will create synergies and offer improved opportunities for all stakeholders.

Leader methodologies can be applied to implement many different types of RDP measures

“ Like all farmers, we are confronted with a changing European agricultural policy. That requires changes in the company. ”

Berend Jan and Bouke Durk Wilms

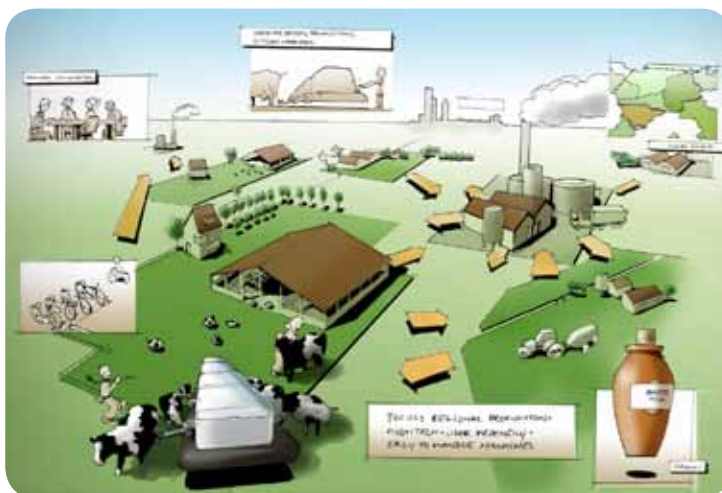
People, Profit & Planet

Three inter-related principles drive the Leader project's blueprint (People, Profit & Planet). People are the mainstay of the initiative which sees the benefits of improving farmers' skills to become more specialised

and better networked. Creating mutually beneficial relationships in a community involves the farmers speaking and listening to their neighbours. Simple communication is helping overcome conflicts caused by a lack of understanding about each other, and reducing the farmers' sense of isolation from the community they live in.

As the farmers become more integrated into their rural community they are discovering more opportunities for business cooperation and profit. These include joint initiatives promoting rural tourism and cost sharing activities that also reduce energy impacts on the planet. Introducing soil-friendly agricultural practices, such as crop rotations, is another part of the master plan to reduce dependencies on intensive farm approaches, improve relationships with environmentally-minded locals and attract green-tourism.

Contact the Zuid Oost Drenthe LAG⁹ or the project's Agrocenter¹⁰ partner organisation for more information about the Wilms brothers' master plan, as well as its interesting sister initiatives in dairy diversification like the 'Cowmunity' collaboration between three dairy farmers looking to achieve a large-scale specialised dairy enterprise, and the 'Cowfortable' livestock welfare project.



© JAM visual thinking

9 www.provincie.drenthe.nl/landelijkgebied/gebieden/zuidoost-drenthe-0/leader/

10 www.agrocenter.wur.nl/NL/AgroLanderij/

LAGs promote environmentally sustainable governance: multiple Leader benefits flow from river management project in Belgium

Natural resources underpin EU rural areas and LAGs are able to help communities to carry out an assortment of locally-led environmental management projects. These include short-term small-scale actions as well as longer-term schemes funded by Leader.

Environmental sustainability is an important goal for Leader projects. Such objectives reflect the 'Green Growth' approaches that the EAFRD promotes in rural areas as part of RDP contributions to the *EU's 2020 growth strategy*¹¹. Communities in Europe's countryside understand the relevance of looking after their natural resources and Leader has a long history of funding bottom-up environmental projects. These include undertakings like protecting wildlife species or conserving landscape features, and improving the quality of water or soils.

Leader's involvement with environmental projects has shown that these types of projects may sometimes require concerted actions over a long period before they achieve their ultimate objective. LAGs responsible for the implementation of multi-annual local strategies are in a position to provide such continuity of support for innovative and bottom-up projects. In addition LAGs that were working in the previous programming period between 2000 and 2006 have been able to continue their support for longer-term environmental initiatives in the current funding period.

Innovation has not been compromised in this process as bottom-up projects introduce new activities that build on their earlier work. LAGs are hence able to provide a valuable source of stable support for environmental (and other) rural development projects.

RIVEO

Benefits associated with Leader's ability to blend consistency and innovation can be demonstrated in Belgium on the RIVEO project. This eco tourism scheme from Wallonia's Pays de l'Ourthe LAG adopts sustainable development principles. It forms a new phase in a programme of locally-led green tourism services that have received Leader assistance since 1998.

Cécile Schalenbourg from the Walloon Rural Network confirms that, "RIVEO is part of an ongoing bottom-up project and it shows how LAGs can provide a continuity of support that encourages local groups to keep innovating and growing their ideas." The original eco-tourism project started with Leader's help to renovate an old manor house for use as a visitor centre. Information about the local area's flora and fauna was presented at the centre which acted as a tourist hub for the surrounding countryside.

After the success of their initial efforts, the community then expanded their wildlife tourism horizons and used further LAG funding to upgrade their environmental interpretation facilities. More ambitious plans followed and led to the current RIVEO project focus on maximising economic opportunities from developing a range of different river-based tourism and community services.



© Tim Hudson

11 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/priorities/sustainable-growth/index_en.htm

Much of the RIVEO project revolves around angling and particular emphasis is placed on promoting the LAG area as a destination for fun family fishing. Just over €82 000 of EAFRD has been used for this purpose and results from Leader's investments include a network of new 'fishing stations' as well as a marketing campaign and series of awareness raising products about 'Nature and Fisheries'. The latter have caught the public's attention and are helping to safeguard environmentally sustainable approaches to angling tourism.

François Adant from the project considers that, "RIVEO is a good example of environmentally-friendly rural development". He continues "The project is creating quality of life benefits for our communities here in Ourthe and economic development from new part-time jobs and tourist income, at the same time it is also very much involved with looking after our river environment and our aquatic species".

RIVEO's eco tourism package is now well established and the [project Centre's website](http://www.riveo.be/en) (www.riveo.be/en) provides a useful overview of what can be possible from a continued course of community-led rural development actions.

Future RIVEO phases are also in the pipeline and include testing the scope of new niche markets. Technology is expected to become more popular as an angling tool and so the project is looking into how satellite guided geographical positioning systems (GPS) could offer innovative opportunities, both for fishing and a new set of hiking trails.

More information about the project is available on [Walloon Rural Network's website](http://www.reseau-pwdr.be/reseaupwdr/bonnes-pratiques/fr/index_fr.cfm) (www.reseau-pwdr.be/reseaupwdr/bonnes-pratiques/fr/index_fr.cfm)

Leader's inherent environmental features help foster sustainable governance approaches by LAGs

“LAGs can provide a continuity of support that encourages local groups to keep innovating and growing their ideas.”

Cécile Schalenbourg, Walloon Rural Network



New LAGs take up transnational opportunities: Czech, Estonian and Slovakian groups share experiences in managing heritage assets

Leader's TNC support is designed to create synergies for LAGs and bring about benefits that could not be achieved by one LAG working on its own. This is another of the core features that are built into the Leader methodology to produce added-value.



Added-value benefits from Leader like those showcased throughout this brochure are now being rolled out by LAGs across the EU. By March 2011, a total of 2195 LAGs were operational in the Member States and new LAGs are still being set up.

A large proportion of the 2195 LAGs are relatively new and so have not yet had much time to gain a lot of practice in Leader approaches. Nevertheless, the LAGs are quick learners and they are drawing on the experiences of a critical mass of Leader experience held by veteran LAGs. Furthermore, special capacity building tools are being developed by the ENRD Contact Point to help new LAGs get up to speed with Leader's potential. The ENRD also organised a Leader event for new LAGs in January 2011 attracting 300 participants who obtained training on topics such as implementing a LDS and best practice regarding TNC. Full details about this and other Leader events are available from the [ENRD website](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/en-rd-events/en/leader-as-a-driver-for-rural-europe_en.cfm)¹². Conclusions from the ENRD's Leader Focus Group assessing cooperation measures were also presented at the event.

This Focus Group investigated options for increasing collaboration between LAGs and its findings are leading to, among other things, more information being made available about the different TNC rules in different Member States. Understanding what is possible in another country can greatly help new LAGs find the right type of partners. This then 'opens the door' for the added-value benefits that TNC offers.

New LAG cooperation

A TNC project between new LAG areas from the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia illustrates the types of added-value outcomes that are possible from TNC synergies. The project partners' experiences on this TNC venture (titled 'Cooperation in Cultural Heritage Exploitation') underscore the importance of preparatory work as noted by Silva Anspal from the Lead Estonia LAG. She stresses that, "The preliminary work is very important if you want to establish good synergy in the project. We took a year to get ready for the project before we started. It took us this time to get all the approvals in place from the RDP managers, but it was worth the wait because our cooperation has been so fruitful".

All cooperation projects must be able to demonstrate that the exchanges in project experience create new socio economic or environmental benefits for each participating LAG area. The cooperation must therefore be essential to achieve the project's rural development aims. In the case of the Czech, Estonian and Slovak exchanges, the added-value benefits were evident in the new skills that were learnt in heritage management. Kristina Garrido Holmova from the Czech Republic's Sdružení SPLAV LAG was involved in the project and she feels that, "The international cooperation has been extremely valuable for our LAG area because we were able to learn about new ways that we could preserve our cultural heritage by conserving our architectural assets and protecting our local landscapes."

12 See http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/en-rd-events/en/leader-as-a-driver-for-rural-europe_en.cfm

Specialists in traditional crafts took part in the TNC project, which managed a total EAFRD budget of just over €90 000. Funds were used to organise demonstrations of heritage conservation techniques from Estonia's Järva region for entrepreneurs involved in Czech architectural restoration work, and vice versa. In addition, Slovakian heritage representatives from Kysak provided inputs to the project as an informal partner.

Learning outcomes from the different TNC activities not only helped to improve the heritage conservation capacities of each territory but they have also highlighted the role of heritage as an economic development tool. Europe's countryside contains a diversity of culture which presents many opportunities for heritage tourism and traditional skills are needed to maintain rural area's cultural assets. Participants in the TNC project were aware of this and the LAG areas have learnt useful lessons from each other in how to make wise use of their heritage resources.

Future generations

Young people from the LAG territories played a big part in documenting their areas' heritage resources. Training in photography skills was provided to help the young citizens record the condition of cultural sites and produce inventories that can be used for restoration or tourism purposes. Exhibitions of the photographs have helped raise awareness about the possibilities of heritage as a rural development driver, and the young people have gained useful insights into the issues involved with implementing a bottom-up project.

Involving local young people in TNC projects can help foster their interests in the future of their local areas. Travel opportunities from cooperation work can provide a strong incentive for youth participation and lead to important new know-how about preparing, implementing and funding Leader type projects. This technical knowledge is often complemented by more qualitative and personal development outcomes. Examples of which are noted by Kristina Garrido Holmova who, in referring to all the TNC project participants, observes that in addition to the heritage exploitation skills, "We learned teamwork and more tolerance, we got to know differences of other culture, we found out common history, we learned to communicate in a foreign language, and we strengthened the feeling of joint Europe."

“ Each partner country has it's own and different rules for cooperation projects – it is a reality that you have to accept. ”

Silva Anspal, LAG Manager, Järva Development Partners

TNC actions through this project have now stimulated a new generation of follow-up rural development projects among the main participants. More details about these knock-on benefits can be provided by the [Czech](http://www.sdruzenisplav.cz) (www.sdruzenisplav.cz) and [Estonian](http://www.jap.org.ee) (www.jap.org.ee) lead LAGs.



© Andrus Kopliste

LAGs need to show that TNC project results could not come about by the LAGs working independently alone

Exporting the Leader methodology: LAGs and FLAGs coordinate rural diversification efforts for Finland's fishing communities

As Leader's core characteristics of bottom-up development through innovation and cooperation continue to be mainstreamed into EU rural development programming, other policy areas inside and outside the EU are also adopting Leader techniques.



© Erno Salonen

The European Commission's Leader methodology is now well established as an effective model for funding community-based rural development activity. Countries from outside the EU have acknowledged the benefits that LAG controlled bottom-up approaches can bring, and Leader practices are now being applied in different rural locations around the world. Leader methodologies have also been recognised as a useful implementation mechanism by other sources of EU financial assistance, such as the European Fisheries Fund (EFF).

Targeting its funds at Member States' fishing communities, the EFF has adopted its own type of Leader model which includes a special budget and a network of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs).

EFF FLAGs and EAFRD LAGs have complimentary objectives because a large part of a FLAG's mandate involves strengthening ties between local fishery sectors and their regions. EFF is provided through the FLAGs to help modernise and broaden fishery product ranges and related market opportunities. Hence, FLAGs are helping sustain rural economies in fishing communities and many LAGs work closely with their FLAG colleagues.

Following the Leader

LAG and FLAG cooperation is shown well in Finland where FLAGs have been formed under the umbrella of Leader LAGs. Finnish FLAGs are all non-profit organisations and they share

their administrative support structures with LAGs. However, the FLAGs have separate partnerships to their Leader counterparts, a separate project selection process, and clearly differentiated strategies and accounting.

Ms Hanna-Leena Talvensaari from Finland's Northernmost Lapland LAG describes how the two EU funding streams harmonise and help create mutual benefits. She says, "In our experience the FLAG and LAG have exactly the same target: to keep these rural areas viable and to develop those livelihoods that best suit the people and the conditions here."

LAGs and FLAGs therefore often work in parallel and by following a Leader approach FLAGs are able to provide EFF directly to fishing communities. FLAG project coordinator for the Northern Lapland region, Mr Markku Ahonen, notes how some development operations in Finland's fisheries had previously been, "Top down-projects initiated by educational or research institutes or other big operators. The basis of Leader work is the bottom-up approach so by working closely as an integral part of the LAG, the FLAG is operating proper bottom-up approaches for the fishing sector and this is a big improvement."

Benefits are also generated for LAGs from working in parallel with FLAGs. "This gives the LAG valuable experience about how to work with various development funds" says Ms Talvensaari who continues, "Even though it is difficult to arrange joint projects that are funded by both FLAG and LAG, separate projects can help to achieve the same basic goal." Examples of such

joined-up actions continue to be carried out by the FLAG and LAG in diversifying Northern Lapland's traditional rural economy through the development of new tourist services.

Tourism cooperation

Tourism is a growing industry in Lapland and this is helping to create new opportunities for local entrepreneurs. The FLAG's strategic objectives include supporting fishing crews' diversification into secondary occupations like fishing tourism. Parallel priorities identified in the LAG's LDS include providing Leader funding for small scale nature-based tourism like trekking, hunting and fishing in the 'land of the midnight sun'.

FLAG and LAG staff have been coordinating their actions in this tourism field to help strengthen the scope and range of visitor facilities and products that are available in Northern Lapland. Mr Ahonen observes that FLAG support was particularly useful for addressing the specific diversification needs of the local fishing sector, "Fishermen here did not have much, if any, experience in tourism. The main objective of the project was that these fishermen would gain the basic skills that are required when you are working with paying visitors. That means both those skills demanded by legislation and those necessary to keep the tourists satisfied".

The EFF provided 90% of the €78 000 costs for designing and delivering a dedicated tourism training course for fishermen in the FLAG/LAG territory, and results led to the launch of seven new wildlife tourism products. Similarly beneficial outcomes for Northern Lapland's rural tourist trade have been created by the LAG's Leader funds.

“ *The FLAG and LAG have exactly the same target: to keep these rural areas viable and to develop those livelihoods that best suit the people and the conditions here.* ”

**Hanna-Leena Talvensaari,
Finland's Northernmost Lapland LAG**

Over 25 different tourism projects have been supported by the LAG using EAFRD. One case of this is a new wilderness hiking network called the 'Panorama route'. It used just over €42 000 of EAFRD to set up the walking trail which follows the path of the River Tana along the Norwegian border. Salmon fishing had previously provided a limited amount of tourist income for the area, but the season was short and Leader's Panorama route expects to attract a new visitor market. The LAG and FLAG anticipate that the long-term impacts will help extend their territory's tourist season for rural businesses offering accommodation and Lapland culture.

Further information about FLAGs' complementarity with LAGs can be found on the [website of the FARNET organisation](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet/) (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet/>).

Leader's success had led to its core characteristics being adopted by a variety of different development programmes around the world



The European Network for Rural Development ONLINE

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>



Publications Office

ISSN: 1831-9378