



Territorial and local approaches encouraging the uptake of environmental and climate action under the CAP Strategic Plans

Thematic Group on the European Green Deal and Rural Areas

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1. INTRODUCTION

Creating local ownership and tailoring schemes and actions to local needs and opportunities are central to ensuring rural actors' uptake of sustainable practices, whether for land management or in rural economies more generally. Local development strategies and territorial, collective initiatives have the potential to generate such ownership, especially when they succeed in combining the environmental benefits of the green transition with social and economic ones.

The European Green Deal (EGD) and the targets and ambitions set out in the Biodiversity 2030 and Farm to Fork strategies signal a significant change in direction for land managers and rural businesses. Coupled with the new flexibilities in the design of their CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), this offers Member States and regions a unique opportunity to support rural economies in this green transition by offering locally tailored support and co-operative initiatives.

2. THE VALUE OF TAKING A TERRITORIAL / LOCAL APPROACH

The diversity of rural areas in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental characteristics is what makes the EU special. Tailoring policy interventions to recognise and harness these local factors in cooperation with local communities can deliver better outcomes in the long-term.

The CAP does not work in a vacuum but interacts with other policies both at EU and national level (in education and infrastructure for example) as well as with local drivers of other

changes (e.g. young people moving away from rural areas to find employment). Local or territorial approaches can take into account the interdependence of such factors. These types of initiative allow projects to be tailored to achieve locally relevant co-benefits so that environmental outcomes are met whilst also addressing social and economic needs. This way there are benefits, not just for local people but also for government, in delivering different policy strands for rural areas in a joined-up manner.



3. THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

It is important to empower local stakeholders, rural communities, land managers and businesses to take ownership of the green agenda and get involved in delivering solutions that take account of the distinct local characteristics of the area.

This requires the active engagement of authorities and local actors in the development of projects to build trust, reciprocity and respect. It is important to engage facilitators who are respected by the local community and familiar with people's issues, concerns and attitudes. Equally important is for those in charge of the funding to listen carefully to both the concerns and the locally identified solutions, be open to new ideas and flexible in responding. Local actors need access to the appropriate support, expertise, information and advice via a range of sources, such as rural innovators, advisers, Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and other forms of networking – local and regional. They should also be able to share experiences between regions and countries.

The benefits of effective engagement in developing projects in partnership with local people include: a greater involvement in the project's objectives and outcomes and therefore a commitment to make it work in the long term; the ability to harness local expertise; the development of new skills; the sharing of resources; reduced isolation; confidence building; and opening up new business opportunities (e.g. economies of scale in shared marketing, processing and local procurement, such as food for tourist enterprises or schools).



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4. DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL TERRITORIAL APPROACHES

Successful design and implementation within the CAP requires two things to be in place:

1. At national level an enabling 'territorial toolbox' of measures and funding made available for these in the Member State's CSP; and
2. At local or territorial level, the resources, skills and commitment to use these tools.

When both these elements are in place and work in synergy, rural communities and land managers are able to seize opportunities, support innovation and overcome the challenges of implementation on the ground.

From experience, factors enabling the successful design and implementation of territorial approaches include:

- For Managing Authorities designing and implementing the CSP
- Provide details, in the CSP intervention strategy, of interventions and funding specifically focused on increasing the use of territorial and local approaches, including LEADER.
 - Design and publicise flexible menus and 'toolboxes' of CAP support to develop a successful territorial or co-operative approach that territorial/sub-regional authorities and stakeholders can easily deploy in their local context.
 - Ensure these toolboxes always support co-operation, facilitation, knowledge exchange and information, as well as locally relevant interventions for environmental land management, investment and business start-ups. LEADER already encompasses these

elements in its approach, but territorial initiatives do not have to be carried out via LEADER.

- Make sure the CAP interventions in these toolboxes are designed to be both relevant and attractive to potential beneficiaries (e.g. in terms of their eligibility criteria, payment terms, the inclusion of interactive/responsive opportunities for building skills and capacity, research etc) in order to encourage uptake on a sufficient scale.
- Build-in flexibility in the associated financial support to take account of different needs and business timescales including, for example, those that may involve land-use changes and require longer-term support such as agroforestry.
- Use the Technical Assistance budget to provide a dedicated advisory hub/help-desk, and facilitate the exchange of information between people developing territorial initiatives.
- Make sure successful territorial initiatives are showcased by the NRN (and in the future, the CAP Networks) and in CAP communication channels such as Farm Advisory Service newsletters.

For those setting up territorial approaches

- The choice of scale and location should be appropriate for the desired goal. It should not be too big and broadly similar in terms of land use, environmental and socio-economic challenges to optimise uptake and inclusivity.
- Actively engage with local stakeholders, communities, and potential beneficiaries early in the project design process to encourage them to take ownership of the green agenda.

Involve them in co-creating projects that meet local needs and priorities and offer flexible packages of interventions that respond to local needs. Involve not only the intended beneficiaries but also other relevant local actors in specific and meaningful tasks and think about how to engage young people to future-proof ideas.

- Encourage innovation and listen to all ideas – great proposals may come from unexpected places!
- Shift the focus away from one-way information and advice to more a active advisory dialogue between recipient and advisor as well as peer-to-peer learning and mutual support to achieve the desired outcomes. The best advisors and facilitators are people trusted by the local community – building trust takes time.

- Marketing and communicating the opportunities to potential beneficiaries is key. Be innovative in the way you communicate – videos, podcasts, interviews and sharing positive examples can be very powerful.
- Reflect on how to secure the longevity of successful projects and whether they can be scaled- up or replicated elsewhere.
- Involve beneficiaries in measuring their own progress to create a process of continuous learning throughout the project's implementation. As part of this, provide participants with constructive feedback, involve them in assessing the achievements and adjust the schemes accordingly.
- Celebrate achievements! Disseminate them through networks! Make end-users media ambassadors for your successful approach.

EXAMPLES

BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration In a Dairying Environment) Ireland

BRIDE is an innovative biodiversity project in the catchment area of the river Bride, an area of intense dairy cattle farming in south-east Ireland with historically low participation rates in agri-environment schemes.

An innovative feature of the BRIDE project is the landscape-scale approach to biodiversity, where groups of farmers are encouraged to implement a range of habitat improvement measures. This combined, community-based effort is an entirely new approach to environmental management compared to the randomised selection process in previous agri-environment schemes.

The project is designed to send a signal to farmers as to how best they can manage and improve their farmland habitats and reward them for environmental improvement through higher payments for higher quality habitats.

Farmers are provided with an attractive, illustrated 80-page biodiversity management handbook which describes all the farmland habitats they can look after and/or create. There are scorecards to rate 31 different farmland habitats based on their ecological quality, for example woodland and hedgerows, bird and bat boxes in the farmyard, different types of grassland, marshes, ponds, stone walls and winter stubble. These cards are the basis for an annual biodiversity quality assessment on each farm and the aggregate score is converted into a financial payment that is directly linked to the habitat quality and provides an incentive to farmers to improve and maintain their biodiversity management skills. There are regular meetings and a newsletter to keep everyone informed of progress.

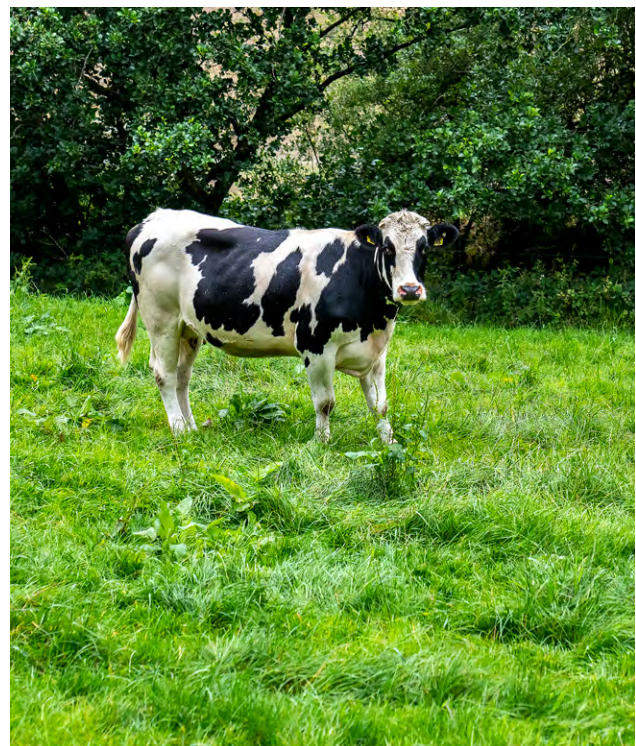
The project is managed by a well-known Bride valley farmer who has integrated biodiversity into his own dairy enterprise, where he milks 70 cows in an intensive spring-calving operation. The project team includes an ecologist and is supported by Teagasc, the government research and advisory services and a wider Operational Group that includes the Irish Food Board, Birdwatch Ireland, leading dairy and meat-processing companies, the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the local authority.

By early 2020, there were 44 BRIDE Project farmers who all have environmental improvement plans to be implemented on their farms by the end of 2021.

Funding: one of more than 20 European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, at a total cost of € 59 million.

Sources:

- <https://www.thebrideproject.ie>
- <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/bride-biodiversity-regeneration-dairying>
- <https://www.farmingfornature.ie/current-ambassadors/>





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Ramskapelle Demonstration Site (Belgium) under the PARTRIDGE Interreg project

The demonstration area is 499 hectares with a total of 28 farmers and mostly arable farms growing cereals (winter wheat), sugar beet, potatoes and flax, but some are mixed and there is one poultry farm. This is just one of ten farmland demonstration sites across seven countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, England and Scotland) under the INTERREG PARTRIDGE project. All are working towards having at least 7% of each site improved by high-quality habitat measures, tailored to grey partridges, whose numbers have declined by over 90% since the 1970s. As a resident species, they require diverse habitats all year round throughout their life cycle, which means that habitat measures tailored to the grey partridge (for nesting, food resources, overwinter cover) will also benefit a wide range of other farmland wildlife, from insects to mammals and other birds whose conservation is matter of concern.

To do this, the Ramskapelle project works in partnership with the Flemish Land Agency (VLM) and supports a cluster group of farmers and farmer-hunters who are

actively involved in discussing and implementing new habitat and wildlife management solutions. Currently the project is monitoring partridges, hares, songbirds and insects, using standardised protocols.

By 2020, nearly 15% of the arable land in this demonstration site had high-quality wildlife friendly habitats, managed by 12 of the 28 active farmers. These habitats are a mix of existing agri-environment measures and innovative PARTRIDGE measures, for example, arable areas sown with tailored seed mixes providing winter summer food sources as well as nesting habitat, grass margins, late-mown pasture, beetle banks and winter stubble. The six hunting groups are responsible for providing extra winter food and for predator management in accordance with Flemish legislation. They also play a role in providing some extra quality habitat for farmland birds and other wildlife.

Since the start of the project, the team has organised 12 guided on-site farm walks explaining and showcasing the approach and 200 people have visited the site.

Source: <https://northsearegion.eu/partridge/demonstration-sites/ramskapelle-belgium/>

Pilot result-based agri-environment payments (RBAPS) for HNV grasslands in Tarnava Mare and Pogány Havas (Romania)

This 4 year project (2015-2019) tested the application of results-based agri-environment payment schemes at HNV grassland sites in Southeast Transylvania in two distinct bio-geographical areas, Continental and Alpine. The project targeted High Nature Value (HNV) semi-natural grasslands on a landscape-scale that rarely exists in the EU today. This extensively farmed land supports a wide range of habitat and species that rely on a 'patchwork' of small-scale mowing and grazing practices. The main threats to these long-established farming systems are the agricultural intensification of easily accessible meadows and pastures and the abandonment of less accessible grasslands. Results-based agri-environment payments (RBAPS), centered on the diversity of wild flowers in each parcel of grassland, were tested as a potential alternative to existing prescriptive agri-environment schemes (whose fixed management dates at landscape scale can perversely threaten the species and habitats that are the object of the schemes).

The RBAPS pilot had three phases – the first year was spent researching, selecting and testing a list of indicator flowering species that could be used by farmers to score individual parcels of grassland (using a standard protocol), and setting payment rates. Payments were compatible with CAP rules, took account of the farmers' transaction costs and progressively rewarded the floristic quality achieved and maintained – the more indicator species from the list that are present, the higher the payment rate per ha. The implementation phase, over three summer seasons, recruited more than 200 parcels of HNV grassland covering

a total of 164 ha, across both sites. Farmers (and paying agency inspectors) were trained to monitor the indicator species, and advice was provided to farmers on the most appropriate grazing and cutting management for their specific grassland types. The grassland parcels were self-assessed by farmers using a pictorial field guide produced by the project team and, because it was an experimental scheme, independently assessed by the project specialists. The third phase independently evaluated the effectiveness of the whole scheme.

Farmers unanimously appreciated the flexibility of the scheme, which allowed them to alter management dates according to annual variations in weather, and they generally enjoyed learning about the flowering species. The project offered key messages to policy makers and farmers on future use of RBAPS payments for HNV grasslands in Romania, within the context of CAP biodiversity support.

Funding: DG ENV and the European Parliament and Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU), with co-funding provided by Fundatia Orange.

Source:

Page, Nathaniel; Constantinescu, Mihai; Demeter, Laszlo; Keenleyside, Clunie; Oppermann, Rainer; Popa, Razvan; Sutcliffe, Laura (2019). Non- technical Summary: Results-based agri-environment schemes for support of broad biodiversity at landscape scale in Transylvanian High Nature Value farmland, Romania. Report prepared for the European Commission, Agreement No. 07.027722/2014/697044/SUB/B2. <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/conference/docs/pilot-project-in-romania-final-report.zip>



The Avesnois Regional Natural Park pilot and the “Territoires Bio” approach to the development of “organic territories” in France

The “Territoires bio pilotes” is a network of French pilot projects in different localities, with the common objectives of preserving tap water quality and ecosystems as well as promoting the local economy. With those aims, they are encouraging the development of the organic sector and, more recently, of local value chains, as the central element of their territorial development strategy. There are about 30 network members, from a wide range of administrations and organisations, representing the French agricultural sector. The National Federation of Organic Farming (FNAB) acts as the network’s facilitator.

Originally started in 2008, what was then the “Eau&Bio” (Water&Organics) mechanism focused on improving tap water quality and water quality in particular water catchments. It was transformed in 2011 into a network of pilot sites with the same objective. In 2020, the network was renamed “Territoires bio” (Organic territories) to illustrate a change in focus around a more “territorial” approach to organic food systems.

In practical terms, the network functions as a bottom-up source of innovative ideas and experiments, channelled from the local to the regional and national level via meetings and field visits. It also functions as a reflection circle for testing local management practices, enabling, for example, improved dialogue with producers and the rest of the value-chain.

The Avesnois Regional Natural Park is one of the pilot territories and member of the network. It provides a

concrete example of a local development strategy focused on organic farming that has led to a significant uptake of organic practices (10% of UAA in 2020), including organic dairy production, in one of the French regions where organic production was less developed (2% compared to 7.5% of UAA nationally). Originally, locally elected officials pushed for organic farming as a solution to preserve tap water quality. This is how this pilot network came to be, involving all relevant local actors from municipalities to farmers. A multistakeholder action plan guides the implementation around several axes: an objective of 30% of organic UAA locally backed by a land property policy that is favourable to newcomers and the conversion of land to organic production, a territorial approach to value chains and participatory governance. The Avesnois Regional Natural Park has proved a success thanks to the alignment of priorities between local municipalities and farmers’ interest groups, but also through the marketing and development of local value chains, leading for example to organic public catering schemes being implemented locally.

Similar examples of territorial value chains will feed into the work of the Territoires Bio network in 2021, as well as into the production of a methodology to help local territories to set up their “territorial” organic system strategies.

Funding: The national “Territoires Bio” network is funded by the Ministry for the Environment. The Avesnois Regional Natural Park pilot receives around € 300 000 a year from both the Water Agency of the Ministry for the Environment (70%) and local municipalities (30%).

Source: <https://territoiresbio.fr/un-reseau-national-pour-progresser-ensemble/>



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The Slovenian organic farmers group and social company “Eco Prlekija”

Eko Prlekija is a group of farmers and a private company established in Prlekija, north-eastern Slovenia, in September 2017 to sell their organic farming products and increase their market competitiveness. They are the first Slovenian organic producers’ group. Originally made up of eight farmers totalling 200 ha of land, the group now sells the organic products of 47 farmers (members) spanning 800 ha.

The company sells the members’ products directly on its website, according to availability. 80% of the turnover comes from meat products although dairy, fruit, vegetables, or processed products is also sold. Products are distributed directly to customers every two weeks by the staff working for the company assisted in a voluntary capacity by the farmers themselves. They currently have more than 500 private individuals from all Slovenia as customers as well as 16 public institutions, totalling approximately € 190 000 in sales per year. As a side activity, the group additionally offers consulting services to support farmers in transitioning to organic farming.

A major success factor was the marketing of the initiative, facilitated by RDP funding. The group benefited from Measure 9.1 (Support to the establishment of producer groups and organisations in the agricultural sector) and Measure 16.4 (Establishment and development of short supply chains and local markets) of the Slovenian Rural Development Programme. The financing allowed the farmers to finance the first operational costs such as their office, coordinator, etc. It also enabled the deployment of promotional activities such as tourist rides on organic farms, product taste tests by consumers and public lectures on the virtues of organic products. They now also appear on local radio and television shows. This has helped raise consumer awareness and ultimately increased sales.

Funding : the group benefitted from RDP funding consisting of € 55 400 over 2021-2023 under Measure 16.4, and € 120 000 over four years under Measure 9.1.

Source: <https://ekoprlekija.si/O-podjetju>

MUNTER: Adding value for agriculture and nature (Germany)

This project in Germany’s Rhineland Palatinate, ran from 2016 to 2021 and developed a management template for farmers and local communities. The template was used to identify how to manage land in an environmentally and climate sound way to minimise flooding incidents and protect local communities downstream. Funded under the EAFRD as an EIP-AGRI Operational Group (M16), it brought together communities, municipalities, a research institute, farmers, water managers and nature conservation bodies to find sustainable solutions to local flood risk issues.

An analysis was carried out on the local conditions affecting flood risk, including information on water bodies, soil, precipitation and topography, to calculate and simulate water runoff. The economic potential of the different options for reducing flood risk was also assessed. Participative processes and joint workshops early in the process used this information to help identify the issues and opportunities and these were subsequently put into practice in four different areas of the region.

Four farmers carried out various actions, together with their local communities, to reduce erosion and flooding as well as to provide income diversification opportunities by creating new value chains using less fossil fuels. This has involved:

- tree planting on two farms: one farmer planted strips of trees on his grassland for short-term rotational wood to reduce water erosion. The other combined increased biodiversity in the local stream with a water retention area of low marshy land to retain water along with agricultural wood production. The intention is also to use the timber at a later stage for local heating systems;
- the introduction of agro-forestry on another farm to help protect biodiverse marginal land and increase its economic viability through the additional production of nuts and fruit and;
- on the fourth farm, the farmer changed his crop from maize to silphia .Growing silphia reduces the risk of erosion and requires less water and plant protection products, but can still be used in the farmers’ biogas digester.

As a result of the cooperation between these partners, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture of Rhineland-Palatinate are encouraging similar flood risk reduction projects across the region. The results of the MUNTER project are already being developed further in other projects in Germany.

Funding: Total budget € 358 264.04

(EAFRD: € 258 747.72 and National/Regional € 99 516.32)

Source:

- <https://munter.stoffstrom.org>
- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice/green-future-munter-germany_en



Promoting biodiversity projects across the Åland Islands (Finland)

In the 2007-2013 period there had not been a good uptake of environmental measures under the non-productive investments measure by the farming community of Finland's Åland Islands. To rectify this situation, it was decided to use LEADER in the 2014-2020 period, rather than the more conventional rural development measures to promote a range of projects for biodiversity and reduce nutrient leakage into water bodies. Nature care was then locally mainstreamed through the Local Development Strategy that provides the framework for local development projects.

It took a while to get the farmers on board, but over time a range of projects has been put forward, as mindsets shifted and the local community became more aware of the range of activities that can improve the environment, combat climate change and support a green and circular economy. Examples have included: opening up overgrown areas to create wood pastures and new hiking trails with information boards in these areas; creating sedimentation ponds at the end of ditches to reduce pollution run-off into the sea; wetland creation; courses on beekeeping and educational activities on a range of topics.

Networking, collaboration and communication have been at the heart of this approach, working in partnership with other local organisations to raise environmental awareness and talking face-to-face with the local community. One of the key ways of stimulating interest was through demonstrating the multiple benefits of potential projects. For example, a pond is useful for agriculture but can also, increase biodiversity and attract recreation and sporting activities.

As part of this approach, farmers and consumers have come together locally to develop a sustainable food production strategy. Farmers receive funding to create wetland areas, natural pastures and other biodiversity actions. They have also found innovative ways of marketing their products by making consumers more aware of the local produce available, such as through podcasts to introduce individual farmers and through networking activities. As a result consumers are now buying more locally.

Source: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice/leader-case-study-promoting-transition-green-economy_en

Reducing pesticides in fruit production in the Aso Valley, Italy

Valdaso is located in the Marche region of central Italy on the banks of the Aso river. Local agriculture is highly specialised in fruit production (peaches, plums, apples and pears) and agriculture is the most important economic activity of the area. The orchards in the valley have been traditionally cultivated with high levels of chemical inputs leading to water and air pollution, loss of soil fertility and other negative environmental impacts. About 80% of farms in the area are smaller than 5 ha in size.

To reduce the negative impacts of the local farming systems on soil and water, a small group of farmers, part of a local farmers' association called Nuova Agricoltura, started, in 2007, a grass roots initiative to adopt integrated management techniques at territorial scale. This initiative was supported by the regional and provincial authorities, and a specific agri-environmental agreement with a package of supportive measures was set up, financed by the Regional Rural Development Programme (RDP).

This initiative has continued into the 2014-2020 period with the focus of the agri-environmental agreement on supporting local action to reduce pollution and improve water quality. The project aims to:

- Promote low-input farming across the area for at least five years.
- Introduce integrated and organic farming on selected farms, limiting the use of plant protection products and fertilisers.

104 farmers in 19 municipalities have been involved in the drawing up and implementation of the agreement covering a total of 9 000 ha. This has led to 1 063 ha now being cultivated using organic (25 farmers)/ advanced integrated farming techniques (79 farmers). The main crops being cultivated are fruit, grapes, vegetables, olives and cereals.

The scheme has been promoted through word of mouth, with the original group of farmers and the local farm extension adviser playing a key role. The proactive participation of the beneficiaries in the definition of the management practices has been one of the key reasons for the successful uptake of the measures by farmers. This has enabled the AE measure to be tailored and targeted to the local situation. The combination of using RDP measures to support advice and capacity building alongside those incentivising environmental land management (organic measure and the AECM) and working collaboratively has contributed to the success of this initiative.

Information on the 2016-2021 AEA:

- Total project budget € 3 480 000
- EU contribution (EAFRD) € 1 500 576
- National /regional contribution € 1 979 424
- RDP Measure(s): Knowledge transfer & information, M1; Agri-environment-climate, M10; Organic farming, M11; Cooperation, M16

Source:

- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/s8_water-soil_poster_aso-valley_it.pdf
- <http://pegasus.ieep.eu/case-studies/list-of-case-studies#italy>