



Added Value of Networking

Success Story

Success Story title	<i>NRN Structure Austria</i>		
Theme	<i>Network communications; Knowledge exchange; Training; Cooperation</i>		
NRN	<i>Austria</i>	Coordinator	<i>Christian Jochum</i>
Period	<i>2008 onwards</i>	Resources	<i>Network budget for the current period: 3.5 MEur</i>
Geo-location	<i>Rural Austria</i>		
Beneficiaries	<i>Various actors of all axes</i>		

Background

The design of the current EAFRD program with its three axis plus the Leader axis made it necessary to think of an innovative solution for an NRN structure in the pre-programme phase. It was clear that successful networking horizontally and vertically within and across the axis could only be achieved by having an NSU that was rooted in all four topics that are the focus of the axis.

Main activities

The very first activity was the formation of the NSU partnership through three different organisations each representing a different axis within the rural development program:

- Agrar Projekt Verein - covers agriculture and forestry (axis 1), coordinates all activities, as well as hosting the secretariat;
- Umweltdachverband (UWD), an umbrella association for over 40 environmental NGOs focusing on issues of axis 2;
- ÖAR Regionalberatung GmbH, already operating the LEADER networks in the LEADER II and LEADER+ periods, deals with the themes of 'quality of life' and 'diversification of the rural economy' as well as 'Leader'(axes 3 and 4)

When the consortium was established thematic support groups - "Begleitgruppen" were set up, one for each axis and one for forestry. These groupings can be seen as the areas of vertical networking while the NSU organises cross axis horizontal networking such as workshops for "LEADER and forestry", or "LEADER and environment" as well as a shared annual rural development conference.

Main results/benefits

Every partner is rooted within user groups that represent actors and target groups in each of the four axis. So from the very beginning the networking activities were built upon a level of trust between the actors and the NSU. That was and still is a very important prerequisite for successful and effective exchange and collaboration within the network. This structure also supports cross axis networking as, at the level of the network support unit, communication between the organisations ensures there is a high level of awareness of what's going on in every axis enabling relevant topics from one axis to be integrated into the activities of the others. The thematic support groups provide feedback on network activities and give direction to the annual activity programmes. Besides the axis specific participants they also consist of representatives from other axis – for example a Leader representative of the NSU is part of the thematic support group on agriculture which enables communication between the different themes. These network activities foster exchange, mutual understanding and in some cases cooperation projects.





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Success factors

One success factor is the trust which exists among the NSU partners as well as between them and their specific network members. This has to be maintained continuously through specific activities. Another success factor is the resources that an NSU can provide and mobilise for its network members. These resources are not only networking activities such as workshops or study visits but more the social capital that can be provided by linking network members with other groups or systems. A third success factor derives from the first two, the ability to offer the right services to the different network members. Austrian Leader LAGs for example demand a balanced mixture of information, best practice examples but also opportunities for off-topic exchange during the workshops. The necessary know how to deliver the right services stems from a long term relationship and trust between NSU members and the network members.

Additional information

www.netzwerk-land.at

www.agrarprojektverein.at www.umweltdachverband.at www.oear.at

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