



*Independent network on European Agricultural and Rural Policies*

## **Territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods in the context of the CAP Reform**

### **Towards a European platform for territorial cooperation**

#### **Why a European platform?**

In December 2013 and April 2014 two conferences were organised by the Groupe de Bruges in collaboration with the French Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Forests and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs on territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods. These conferences have made clear that there is an increasing number of bottom-up initiatives of various types of territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods and/or the application of agro-ecological practices in a variety of European countries and regions. These initiatives also represent a wide variety of farming sectors (arable, fruit, vegetable, dairy, beef, sheep) as well as types of farming: organic and non-organic, intensive and extensive, relatively large-scale family farms and small farms.

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At the same time the new CAP, both in the First and Second Pillar, provides more room for these types of initiatives to be supported or even to act as final beneficiaries, but it is in the end up to the national and regional authorities if and how they will make use of these opportunities.

Lastly, these initiatives attract attention from green NGOs and civil society as they aim for better delivery of public goods and/or agro-ecological performance through territorial cooperation that go beyond legal and statutory requirements. In this sense these initiatives can be seen as front-runners of a new movement to make European agriculture, in all its diversity, more sustainable and a more effective manager of public goods.

What they lack however is:

- Access to experiences and knowledge from other European regions or other sources (e.g. research) to further improve their own practices;
- Direct access to policy makers, implementers and controllers at the European level to discuss practical proposals to improve policy and policy implementation and control. Most farmers involved in these territorial initiatives are also member of traditional farmers' unions, but many of these unions have so far not responded adequately to the needs and wishes of these initiatives. They therefore need a more direct access to policy institutions;
- Access to connect to relevant actors and stakeholders at European level to engage them in this movement<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See for more information the Agenda for action "Territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods"

## Points of departure

The ambition is therefore to create a European platform of these territorial initiatives that can remedy these obstacles.

To establish a successful platform at the European level, however, a number of crucial items have to be addressed and agreed upon before any activity can start.

These items concern:

- Identification of shared values;
- Determining of shared mission, objectives and goals;
- Demarcation of the envisaged participants;
- Identifying of other relevant stakeholders and opportunities to cooperate with these stakeholders;
- Identification of the core activities of the network.

## Shared values and principles

Crucial for successful cooperation is a set of common values and principles. These will create a basis for respect, trust and reciprocity between the participants of the platform and between the platform and the outside world. They include:

- Ecological, economic and social sustainability: to foster positive externalities and to reduce negative externalities of land use management and in doing so to contribute to a decent income for the farmers;
- Corporate social responsibility: fostering of sustainability is not merely driven by legal requirements and subsidies, but is seen and felt as an integral part of responsible management that will attribute to the license to produce by society and a higher self-esteem and pride of farmers;
- Self-governance as a way to take private responsibility to achieve public goals;
- Respect and understanding for the diversity of farming systems and strategies and for the opinions of other stakeholders;
- Open attitude towards the dialogue with society and other stakeholders;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Sharing and cooperative attitude;
- Sharing or developing a long-term perspective.

## Goals and ambitions of the European platform

Based on the discussions held during the two conferences, the following goals and ambitions of the European platform were defined:

1. To collect and exchange knowledge and best practices and to set an agenda for (further) debate, exchange and (practical) research;
2. To formulate recommendations to improve national and European policies concerning the creation, operation and support for these forms of territorial cooperation and to discuss these recommendations with relevant policy makers and policy implementers at European level;
3. To promote and disseminate the values of the platform and in particular to contribute to the development of 'sense of place' and of the value placed on the particular features of their local environment and farming system by local communities, by setting them in context and by providing an opportunity to demonstrate them to and share them with a wider audience
4. To propagate forms of integrated, multifunctional agricultural production that are more sustainable in the agro-ecological sense, delivers more and better ecosystem services and is in an open dialogue with society;
5. To showcase initiatives to come to a European multi-actor, multi-stakeholder movement for territorial cooperation and other self-governance models.

### **Which types of territorial cooperation will be included?**

In practice a wide range of forms and types of territorial cooperation and coordination can be witnessed. Cooperation can be formal (association, cooperative) or informal (farmers' network, study groups, participants of territorial scheme or project). They furthermore differ in stage of development, scale (area, number of land owners involved), objectives, type of activities, types of funding (public, private or mixed), etc.

In general two types of territorial cooperation initiatives will form the basis of the European network:

- Groups of farmers and other land users that address public goods/eco-system services such as landscape management, biodiversity management, water management.
- Groups of farmers and other land users that aim to put into practice agro-ecological methods to reduce the negative externalities of agricultural production towards nature, environment (air, soil, water) and climate.

What connects them is the realisation that the effectiveness of both types can be improved through cooperation at the territorial level. What they also have in common is the fact that they represent new forms of private (self-)governance to address and achieve public goals.

*In other words: all territorial groups that work together to address either public goods and/or agro-ecological practices that go beyond legal requirements can in principle be included in the network.*

We want to stress, again, that these groups do not necessarily represent only extensive or intensive farmers, large scale or small farms, organic or conventional farmers. Cooperation approaches are also not limited to so-called marginal areas (Natura 2000, ANCs), but are applicable to all types of farming (dairy, beef, sheep, arable, fruit, vegetable), land management and areas.

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Special attention will be given towards former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe: although almost 25 years (one generation) have passed since the breakdown of the socialist systems, there is still a lot of scepticism towards any form of cooperation among farmers in these countries. The aim of the network is to specifically include territorial cooperation initiatives in these countries or to assist in creating these initiatives.

### **Role and position of other actors/stakeholders**

The core of the network will consist of groups of farmers and other land managers and land users that have developed as a result of a bottom-up process and that work together in a certain area (territory) towards achieving one or more common objectives concerning ecosystem services/public goods or agro-ecological practices. This description already shows that the network will not be limited to (active) farmers only – although they will remain the primary group – but will include all land users and other interest groups (including citizens) that are part of the territorial cooperation initiatives.

Other stakeholders, both local, national and European, can be invited to join as members or supporters as long as they agree with and are committed to the core values and principles of the network.

In other cases collaboration with other actors, stakeholders and networks, often on a temporary basis and for specific activities and projects (e.g. research projects) will be involved. Their role and position will vary accordingly. This more informal network could therefore include a wide variety of actors and stakeholders.

## Towards a common programme

We envisage four main domains of action for the platform:

### 1. Information sharing

During the first conference in France in December 2013 participants agreed that this was the most important theme for the short term and something that could offer immediate benefits for all involved. We propose at least three ways to collect and disseminate information and offer platforms for further exchange and discussion:

- a. *A virtual information platform.* This could be a kind of Wikipedia platform to which all participants of the (informal) network can have access (through a log in system). On the platform there will be:
  - A database of examples and of good, bad and failed practices (documents, presentations, video's, photo's)
  - Research material
  - Policy material
  - Reports of meetings
  - Manuals, practical guides, communication materials
  - Funding opportunities
  - Forums where specific topics can be discussed (see also point 4. General management)

All participants in the network can upload material to the platform. Important matters to be addressed here are peer-review of information and the language barrier.

Obviously, it has to be made sure that this platform is also well connected to platforms for exchange of knowledge and best practices, such as European Network for Rural Development and the EIP Service Point;

- b. *Exchange visits.* 'Seeing is believing'. Nothing works better to get an understanding of an initiative and its context than an on the spot visit. Especially for groups of farmers that are in principle willing to start a form of territorial cooperation (in particular in new Member States), but also for policy makers and public managers as well as researchers and representatives of NGOs the opportunity to witness an initiative with their own eyes is the quickest way to improve understanding and will give energy and inspiration. It is therefore proposed that at least once a year in alternating regions the territorial cooperation initiative(s) active in that region will organise an exchange visit;
- c. *Twinning:* to achieve a more in-depth knowledge and understanding, initiatives are invited to connect with each other in the form of cross-border twinning. The aim is to establish a long term collaboration and exchange relationship. Twinning can also form a stepping stone to engage in field experiments and practical research. The results of the various twinings will be fed into the virtual information platform;
- d. *Workshops and seminars.* The exchange visits will offer also the opportunity to integrate one or more workshops or seminars to discuss specific topics and/or to invite specialists to give lectures.

### 2. Training and capacity building

Capacity building is the second domain of activities that was frequently stressed during the first conference. Quite a few initiatives have integrated this – and other forms of learning – into their projects. Based on this and on the specific needs to build and maintain a European network, we can make an assessment which kind of training programme can be developed and executed.

Topics that seem relevant at this stage:

- Development of leadership capacities to be able to act effectively at local, national and European level;
- Training of facilitators and animators;
- Training of public administrators concerning their role in forms of self-governance;

- Courses on policy and regulations;
- Development of local produce businesses, technical aspects, economics, branding and marketing based on the TEEB approach (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) to valorise public goods in the market place through local products;
- Technical trainings on specific topics such as flora and fauna recognition, animal behaviour and appropriate management techniques;
- Farm management courses on improved efficiency in the use of fertilizers, pesticides, water and energy; improvement of soil management, reduction of waste, etc.;
- Development of territorial and farm management plans;
- Development of territorial and individual contracts, indicators, monitoring and sanctioning systems;

These trainings and courses can be developed based on existing material and made available online.

### 3. Research

Although there is already some empirical research on the topic of territorial cooperation (or coordination), still a lot of questions need further research in particular in the context of the implementation of the new CAP. One of the aims of the European network is to come up with recommendations for policy improvement for which the mid-term review (2017) will be the first milestone. Eventually the aim is to integrate the territorial approach more in the CAP and also to extend it to the First Pillar in the CAP post 2020. Empirical research can help to substantiate our claims.

In this context we propose the following actions to be elaborated in the coming period:

- The creation of local operational groups under the EIP (in those MS where the EIP has been integrated in the Rural Development Programmes) and creation of a network of operational groups under Horizon2020;
- To lobby for a EIP Focus Group on territorial cooperation for public goods and agro-ecological practices;
- To develop a research proposal for the Horizon2020 2016-217 Call concerning further identification of public goods, eco-system services and agro-ecological practices and of appropriate scale and management; a comparative analysis of ecological delivery (sustainability) and economic benefits (competitiveness) of eco-system services and agro-ecological practices of individual versus collective approaches. The research would also include an assessment of critical success and failure factors in the creation, development and management of cooperative approaches, the design and testing of policy measures that can effectively support territorial cooperation and address the question how collective approaches can influence individual behaviour through the construction of new social norms.
- To develop a bench marking systems and a set of practical performance indicators;
- To develop a project to use performance indicators to come to certification and labelling systems (equivalence);
- Identification and development of appropriate machinery and other field management tools
- Development and use of simple monitoring techniques (e.g. GPS trackers);
- Opportunities and conditions for management of HVN and Natura 2000 areas by territorial cooperation;
- Analysis and comparison of management of EFA's through individual farmer or territorial approach;
- Business cases for private funding of public goods, either directly, through local, quality products or through the creation of new economic activities (e.g. methane production, biomass use);
- Research and pilot projects on results based payment schemes for ecosystems services.

**What resources are necessary to set up and maintain the network?**

The Groupe de Bruges so far has facilitated the creation of the network and will continue in this role until the third meeting. A first step for the network to stand on its own feet is the creation of a preparatory group or Steering Group.

This SG is composed of a maximum of five people, representing different grass roots initiatives of territorial cooperation from different European regions and perhaps one or two representatives of other stakeholders (NGO's, research). The Groupe de Bruges can, if necessary and within its own possibilities, provide some back-up support in the initial stages

The Steering Group will be responsible for:

- developing a more formal model and structure for the network: federation, association, democratic control, day-to-day management;
- elaborating the working programme: set priorities, invite other stakeholders to collaborate, develop proposals for funding, appoint responsible persons per project/activity;
- acting as spokes persons towards the relevant European institutions and organisations
- taking charge of the communication towards its (potential) members;
- developing a strategy to enlarge the network.