farnet
MAGAZINE

Putting learning
into practice

European
Commission

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Contents

Editorial

"We need to take stock of what has worked in the past in order to do things even better in the future."

This tenth edition of the *FARNET Magazine* comes out during a critical transition period. Many Managing Authorities (MAs) and FLAGs, including several from the countries I deal with, are still under intense pressure to complete the selection and implementation of as many good projects as possible, before the end of the current programming period. At the same time, the clock is ticking away for the presentation of the new operational programmes for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

There are two very compelling reasons for engaging with stakeholders to prepare the future of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in sheries areas as soon as possible. The rst is that the adoption of the legislative framework of the EMFF has been delayed compared to other Funds. This has led to a high degree of uncertainty amongst stakeholders and MAs. MAs and FLAGs have to act now to ensure that the voice of shing communities is heard.

The second reason is that, as several articles in this magazine highlight, a huge amount has been learned from this period through the Axis 4 experience. The 300 partnerships, more than 6 000 projects and very encouraging jobs gures identi ed by a soon to be published study of Axis 4 by Capgemini (described later in this magazine) are a testimony to this.

But at the same time, there is also room for improvement and a new period represents a major opportunity for doing things better next time round. This is why we recommend that all stakeholders should take a step back, before launching into the new programmes, and take stock of what has really worked and not worked in each context.

The huge diversity in the starting point for local strategies is re ected in the reportages on three FLAG areas – the Danube Delta and South Dobrogea in Romania and Marennes Oléron in France – as well as the interview with Rita Pamplona from the Portuguese Managing Authority. For example, the Danube Delta is an area with huge potential that is starting almost from zero and has had to build con dence amongst local authorities, actors and stakeholders in community and collective activities.

They have the largest budget of any FLAG in Europe (22 million euros) and given the basic needs of the territory it is not surprising that much is spent on basic services and infrastructure as well as investments by private initiatives.

At the other extreme, the Island of Oléron is one of the most popular tourist destinations in France as well as being one of the most important locations for oyster production and shing. Here, there is a long experience of local development. The budget is very much smaller – just one million euros – and is targeted at "collective" actions designed to forge a common maritime identity among local stakeholders.

Despite the big di erences, both examples point to the prime importance of the people involved in Axis 4 – both FLAG teams and board members. This is why one of the rst priorities must clearly be to ensure that all the experience and human capital so painfully built up at local, regional and national level should not be lost in the transition to the next period. Member States should be aware that the measures for preparatory support and also for the implementation of the strategies are eligible from the 1st January 2014 – as long as certain conditions are met. Thus, it is important that MAs and Axis 4 stakeholders take special care to avoid any potential funding gaps as a result of the transition period between the EFF and the new EMFF.

In the opening article of this Magazine, the FARNET Support Unit suggests ve ways of putting learning into practice to strengthen the future work of the FLAGs. These are: more focussed strategies, using monitoring and evaluation to improve exibility, stronger animation and capacity building, more support devoted to developing higher quality projects, and clearer communication plans. FLAGs are already working in this direction. In the coming months, the FARNET Support Unit will be producing resource material for the website and assisting with events to help roll out these principles. As Rita Pamplona says: "don't keep complaining about the wind, don't keep waiting for it to pass; adjust the sails and move ahead."

Frangiscos Nikolian,
Head of Unit (D3) – Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, Directorate-General for Maritime A airs and Fisheries

FIVE KEY WAYS FOR FLAGS
TO STRENGTHEN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AXIS 4

Putting learning into practice

In 2006, just eight years ago, the European Commission held a first transnational meeting in Oporto, Portugal, to launch a new "territorial approach" to addressing the challenges faced by Europe's fisheries. Axis 4, as it became known, was born in relatively healthy economic times – even though the fishing sector was already in crisis. At that time, the emphasis that Axis 4 placed on "sustainable" and "balanced" local development was a mystery to many onlookers in the fisheries world. But if we thought the newness of the approach was a challenge, it was as nothing compared to the crisis lurking just around the corner!

▲ *Promotion of the Flanders sh auction (Belgian FLAG).*

Since then, an expanding network of people and organisations has got involved in implementing this new territorial approach in sheries communities. EU o cials, representatives of the ministries and regional governments of 21 Member States, the sta of over three hundred Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) and many thousands of local stakeholders have thrown themselves into making the approach a success. There was a lot to learn and it has been a challenging time and process. Of course, some mistakes have been made but a huge amount of good practice and experience has also been developed and there are many lessons to be learned.

The rst lesson is that Axis 4 works. It takes time to put all the pieces in place, but across the EU the signs are clear and the results of these e orts are now emerging: over three hundred partnerships, more than 6000 projects, and a considerable number of new jobs created (see the report on the "*Successful implementation*

of Axis 4 in 15 Member States" in this issue of the Magazine).

Impressive though this is, Axis 4 is not just about delivering projects. It is about helping people to help themselves – development done *by* sheries people rather than *for* them. In the context of the economic crisis, Axis 4 puts tools and resources in the hands of local people, helping to empower them at a time of uncertainty due to factors outside their control. As a consequence, less tangible but no less important results can be found in many personal stories and testimonies describing how Axis 4 has built the self-con - dence and capacity of shing communities, helped to overcome their isolation, and improved local organisation. In turn, the shing sector itself has increasingly come to see Axis 4 as a helpful complement to other sectoral support policies.

▲ *Visit of the Portuguese managing authority and a Croatian delegation to the Minho River Aquamuseum (Litoral Norte FLAG area, Portugal).*

A recent European Commission study of Axis 4 underlines the important role played by FLAG sta in mobilising local stakeholders and supporting them to develop projects that improve their own wellbeing and that of their community. Indeed, the successes of Axis 4 are intrinsically linked to the people that have been driving the programme – the FLAG Managers, *animateurs*, project development o cers and board members. Once the delivery systems are in place (and these are also iden-

ti ed as being fundamental to the success of the programme), the skills and experience of FLAG sta and members stand out as a key determinant of the results of each FLAG. Drawing on the experience of the last ve years, and also from lessons from similar programmes such as LEADER, FARNET has identi ed ve key areas that FLAGs can look to in order to improve the quality of their work and maximise results in the future.

For the vitally important transition to the next programming period, FARNET intends to work with Managing Authorities and National Networks to support FLAGs in capitalising on the skills and experience developed in the current period. As a taster to start this process and show what can be done, here are some important tips and examples for each of these priority elds.

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Five priorities for learning and improvement

1. Finding ways of mobilising shing communities, helping to build their capacity and empower them to take initiative;

2. Applying successful approaches for generating, selecting and supporting the development of high quality projects;

3. Using local development strategies as e ective and exible tools for change;

4. Monitoring progress and performance, a cycle of continuous learning and improvement;

5. Communicating local development e ectively, building two-way communication with di erent audiences.

▲ *Fishermen from the Daujavpils & Illukste FLAG area, Latvia.*

The ability of FLAGs to animate, build capacity and empower shing communities needs to be strengthened

One widespread misconception about local action groups is that they are simply decentralised local delivery o ces; part of a top-down system delivering policies conceived elsewhere. According to this view, all local partnerships would have to do is publish standard calls for tender, wait for the projects to come in and then tick boxes scoring them against predetermined criteria.

But developing and using local action groups just to hand out public subsidies would be a waste of time and resources; if that was all that was needed then this could be done much more simply. The key added value of local action groups is their capacity to use these funds, and their management, as a tool to strengthen communities' own capacity to take further initiatives. The money is a means – not an end. FLAGs, therefore, need to provide a range of support such as animation, capacity building and project development, which accompanies their grant-giving function.

These added value functions are normally carried out by FLAG sta , which is usually paid from the FLAG's running costs allocation (limited under the EFF to 10% of their total public budget). In the current period, many FLAG budgets were below €1 million, which meant they could only employ one sta member, often loaned from another organisation and sometimes working on a part-time basis. Depending on the functions of the FLAG, and the complexity of its administrative procedures, between 20% and 100% of the time of a full time employee can be taken up on administration. This leaves many FLAGs with no human resources for animation or project development support.

In the present period many FLAGs have found smart ways of working around this to free up these vital animation resources. For example, in countries like Finland, FLAGs have overcome this problem by covering the o ce running costs and administration with existing sta of one of the public partners (usually the accountable body). They have then nanced a full-time manager/animator through separate animation projects.

The European Commission has recognised the need to strengthen the animation function of local action groups nanced in the 2014-2020 period by CLLD, by clarifying that the resources used for animation and running costs can, together, reach up to 25% of the budget. Animation can include activities such as:

> Information campaigns and outreach work in the community;
> Support for bringing people together in common activities, creating trust and building community organisation;
> One to one or collective advice, mentoring, exchange and peer learning;
> Training.

However, these activities require more than just monetary resources. FLAGs need committed people with speci c skills. Selecting the right person for the job is essential, and priority should be given to candidates who are eager to make a difference, have strong people skills, who are dynamic and can adapt to di erent situations.

Be clear, the task of FLAG sta is not simply to animate for its own sake. FLAGs need to map out the assets and needs of the local community and design an animation plan that really contributes to the local development strategy. Prior experience in local development is, therefore, a strong asset for FLAG sta – as is knowledge of the sheries sector, especially if the FLAG is to have credibility with its main stakeholder base.

The trade winds section of this magazine (page 31) o ers an interesting example of a range of activities undertaken by a Polish FLAG to mobilise and animate its community.

▲ *Sustainable shing project in the Österbotten FLAG area, Finland.*

The quality of projects selected needs to improve in order to make a clearer contribution to the strategic goals of local development

In this period, FLAGs initially faced an extremely daunting situation. They were tasked with supporting projects that helped shing communities, made the sector more sustainable and, if possible, also created jobs. Good quality projects were often hard to come by, even with animation.

In the early days, FLAG links within the shing communities were often weak. Communities themselves were often fragmented, dispersed and wary. Many lacked the nancial resources, knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop innovative projects, while the crisis bred risk aversion rather than entrepreneurship. Moreover, in some countries the application process was unnecessarily complicated. Faced with pressure to commit and spend their budgets, some FLAGs faced the temptation to accept whatever projects came forward.

Encouraging higher quality projects means that FLAGs have to take a much more proactive role at all stages of the project development process: project identi cation, assembly and "engineering". FLAGs also have to ensure that this ts closely and transparently with their strategy objectives and project selection procedures.

At the stage of *identifying promising project ideas*, FLAGs can develop systems for stimulating, detecting, screening and prioritising projects that are worth putting more time into. Strong involvement of the FLAG board can be crucial for reaching out to shing communities. At the same time, clear criteria or guidelines e.g. regarding the contribution to the local development strategy are also important, in order to avoid any perceived favouritism or cronyism.

Assembling or bringing together the different stakeholders and components that make up a good quality project can require strong leadership skills, diplomacy and a lot of perseverance. In supporting this process, FLAG sta and boards must balance the time and e ort invested with the potential gains to the local development strategy, as well as the inevitable risks of failure. Getting this 'cost/bene t' balance right is a priority.

The stage of project *"engineering"*, to build a nal proposal, often requires skills in market and nancial analysis, as well as knowledge of any speci c technology. Not all project promoters will have these skills, nor does FLAG sta . Some FLAG managers have a degree in economics or business studies but they do not always have hands-on experience of running a business. FLAG members on the other hand sometimes do. The advice here for FLAG sta is to be modest, to recognise their limitations and to ensure project promoters have access to the professional advice they need.

The Trade Winds section of this Magazine (page 31) o ers an example of the type of capacity building that national or regional administrations can organise to ensure that FLAG sta have the basic skills to assess project viability.

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▲ *Education project during "Semaine de la Mer" (Sea Week), France.*

▲ *Fish smoking in North Kurzeme, Latvia.*

Local development strategies need to be more focused but also more flexible

In 2007, at the very beginning of this funding period, the territorial approach was completely new to fishing communities and there were no FLAGs. Although some strategies were prepared by experienced LEADER LAGs, others were written by public agencies and consultancies with insufficient real local involvement. As a result, some were written in rather general terms. These strategies lack sufficient focus and relevance, and their value as an operational tool to stimulate, guide and select projects that benefit fisheries communities is limited. In the worst cases almost any project can be made to fit into these strategies. Today, with over 300 FLAGs with experience of what has worked and what hasn't, things have moved on.

What pitfalls will FLAGs have to avoid this time round? We see two main issues: firstly the temptation to interpret meeting local needs as simply keeping everyone happy. If you start by saying, "here is what can be funded, now tell us what you want", you will get what you ask for – undifferentiated wish-lists and unrealistic projects. If FLAGs are really going to help communities tackle the challenges and opportunities they are faced with they need smart, realistic and needs-based strategies. This means undertaking a far more complex and delicate process of negotiation within the community to agree on real priorities that can have the greatest local development impact.

The second difficulty involves walking the tight-rope between agreeing clear and measurable "smart" objectives with the community, as required by the Common Provisions Regulation[1], while preserving the flexibility to respond to change. For this, FLAGs will need to carry out a solid analysis of needs and propose specific measurable targets for the objectives of their future strategies. Local strategies should be considered as dynamic tools to steer FLAGs' work, which can be adapted as implementation progresses and new contexts arise. Managing Authorities should therefore take steps to enable FLAGs to review their strategic plans on a regular basis so as to maintain their relevance to the evolving needs of the territory and, where necessary, adapt them accordingly.

The Trade Winds section of this Magazine (page 31) offers an example of the way the Arcachon FLAG works closely to its strategic objectives and carries out periodic reviews.

Local partnerships need to continuously learn from past successes and failures and adapt accordingly

Axis 4 is all about changing things for the better, doing things differently. It's about finding new ways to meet needs and take advantage of opportunities. Most importantly, it is about continuous improvement. But how can we improve if we don't know what works and what doesn't?

If you keep doing the same thing, don't be surprised if you keep getting the same result. Even the most successful approaches can be improved. To be really effective and keep things fresh and motivating we all need to be dynamic, adaptable, reflexive and analytical. That means that FLAGs need to think about what they do and how they do it. Learn the lessons from their work and apply them. The trouble here is that too often people see monitoring and evaluation as a burden, a necessary evil, a diversion from the real work. In fact, this should be the fun bit – finding out what works, seeing the evidence that your effort has been worthwhile, learning how you can do better in future.

The trick here is for FLAGs and Managing Authorities to make it easy on themselves. Planning evaluation at the start of the process is essential. Getting this right means that you have the systems, resources and information you need when you need them. When properly planned, the mechanics of this are so much easier to manage and you can then really concentrate on learning the lessons, making the necessary changes, and improving what you do, how you do it and what you can achieve. Invest, it's worth the effort!

The following article shares some useful techniques that LAGs/FLAGs in Sweden are using to monitor, evaluate and improve their work.

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1 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

▲ *Chris Ranford, the coordinator of the Cornwall FLAG (centre), with shermen at the inauguration of a new pontoon (England, UK).*

Everyone should know about your FLAG

So, we have introduced Axis 4 and made some really great progress; we have built capacity; the FLAGs are working well with communities; we are getting some great projects; strategies are more exible and e ective; and we are learning the lessons from what we have achieved. Job done, right? Wrong. The nal part of the jig-saw is communication, and unless we get this right we could put the entire process at risk.

To communicate literally means 'to share', an active process which lies at the heart of the Axis 4 approach and the way in which it works. Good Axis 4 communication is not just a transfer of information amongst the informed. Of course, all those involved in the programme and its delivery chain need to share information, knowledge, experience, and resources. However, if Axis 4 is to deliver on its potential, now and in the future, then there are also many people, communities and organisations with whom we all need to 'share' in di er-ent ways and in di erent activities.

If we do not communicate e ectively to the sheries communities and indeed to sheries administrations, how can we count on their support in the future, to extend involvement, strengthen partici-pation, generate better projects and learn the lessons on what works? Communicat-ing well with the wider community is also essential if Axis 4 is to be known and val-ued, the approach extended, resources provided and public and political support committed.

What are the priorities for improvement here?

The most essential thing to recognise is the need for improvement and planning. In developing communication plans, the important things to consider are:

> What are our communication objec-tives, internal and external?

> What is it that we need to commu-nicate? There are a huge range of messages: guidance, the strategy, contacts, calls for projects, selection criteria and processes, outcomes etc. And certain information is more inter-esting for some people than others.

> Who should it be communicated to? What are your target groups? For Axis 4, these include the European Commission, Managing Authorities, Payment Agencies, National Networks, other FLAGs/LAGs, FLAG members, other sheries stakeholder organisa-tions, sheries communities and the general public. All have their own dis-tinct communication needs and may need to be contacted for di erent purposes, at di erent times, using dif-ferent communication channels.

> When should it be communicated? If communication is to be e ective, tim-ing is fundamental. The right message for to the right person at the right time can be very powerful, so do not rush things and do not risk communication overload by frantically communicat-ing on everything you are doing all the time. Choose your moment, com-bining communication e orts with

key steps taken by the FLAG or major milestones in a project's lifecycle, for example. Finally, make sure you allow enough time for communications to succeed.

> Through what means or channels should messages be communicated? Di erent channels can be used to reach di erent audiences. Use the most appropriate method, the right tools for the job and the appropriate language for those you are targeting.

> How will we know if our communi-cation has been e ective? E ective communication should generate the desired e ect. If this is not achieved we need to understand why. It is essen-tial to check that messages, including feedback, have been received and understood, as communication is by de nition a two way process.

These are just some of the lessons we have identi ed and which we hope will help FLAGs to continue learning and improv-ing their daily work in sheries communi-ties. These lessons will inform the upcom-ing tools that FARNET is preparing, which will be shared with Managing Authorities, FLAGs and others working to make local development a success in shing commu-nities. By working and learning together we can take essential steps along the road to a stronger future for our sheries areas and communities. ■

Zoom

Peer-to-peer learning and mentoring: team play will take you further

Local partnerships need to continuously learn from past successes and failures and adapt accordingly. Three examples from Sweden.

Running a FLAG requires a degree of athleticism – it takes a certain mix of *sense, sweat* and *skill.* A FLAG manager can have all the good "sense" in the world, and be prepared to "sweat" for the cause, but without the necessary "skills" they will struggle to deliver on their FLAG's objectives. But running a FLAG is a team e ort – there are colleagues from the FLAG partnership as well as members of other FLAGs and potential partners in other networks that can help by sharing ideas, discussing problems, and nding solutions. Learning and applying lessons through mentoring, twinning and peer-to-peer reviewing are also winning strategies that can help FLAGs achieve their goals.

But to be e ective in improving the work of partnerships, twinning and peer-to-peer learning must begin with an acceptance that self-awareness and self-evaluation are constants in the life of a partnership. It is only by being aware of your strengths and weaknesses that you will be able to bene t from the help of others.

Self-assessment, including reaping the bene ts of peer-to-peer learning and mentoring, can be organised around three main activities:

1. Collecting information systematically and in a purposeful way;

2. Analysing that information objectively;

3. Sharing the results of the analysis with the partnership and drawing conclusions for possible adaptations.

▲ *Training for young shermen, Sweden.*

Examples from Sweden

Twinning and peer-to-peer learning provide opportunities to bene t from the ideas and experience of fellow partnerships. Two examples from Leader+ and Leader 2007-2013 illustrate techniques that FLAGs can also use to learn from each other.

1. The South East Baltic LAG network – cooperating to design an external assessment

In 2008, eleven Leader areas in Sweden established the South-East Sweden network. After meeting regularly for a year, the general feeling was that a lot of exchanges focused on the "soft values" of their actions and the di culty in formally de ning them. This prompted seven of the LAGs to commission an external evaluator to perform a qualitative and learning evaluation of their work in order to assess their e ciency in achieving their objectives. The study assessed 49 projects, seven projects per area, engaged in interviews with the LAG chairmen and LAG Managers, and also surveyed the municipal assemblies.

The study provided guidelines and advice for LAGs, for instance, on how to better "market" the opportunities o ered by Leader to local stakeholders, how to encourage and support projects to nd new ways to communicate their results, including through storytelling, interviews, and producing impact and data visualizations. It also suggested that projects should allocate more resources to assessing and disseminating both quantitative and qualitative results.

Another key recommendation from this study was that project promoters should be o ered more support and coaching throughout the entire project development process, from idea to the nal evaluation of the results.

▲ *Tommy Svensson , Blekinge FLAG manager, Sweden.*

2. Mentorship and project coaching

Another way of bene ting from twinning and peer-to-peer learning is to introduce a mentoring scheme, where more experienced LAGs or FLAGs mentor less experienced peers. But mentoring as a principle can also be e ective between partnerships and their bene ciaries. Having a contact-person per project in the partnership can facilitate the ow of information between the FLAG and operations on the ground, which are led by bene ciaries.

This has been taken on board by a FLAG in Sweden in the current period: in Blekinge, a "support team" has been built around each project, to assist the promoter in implementing the project as smoothly as possible, and providing regular insights into the life and evolution of the project. Every project selected by the FLAG has been followed by a "project support team", but this was not an obligation for project promoters. The expert or team hired for project support were paid from the project budget. When designing the project, a certain amount had to be planned in the budget to cover the work of the expert mandated to follow up the project.

Tommy Svensson, Blekinge FLAG manager explains: "*In our area, we only have small-scale shermen who work near the coast, and most do not have time to manage a project in addition to their daily operations. We initiated this "project support team" idea to facilitate their work as project promoters.*

Our experience has been that it is extremely di cult to nd a single person with all the competences needed to follow a project, i.e. combining shing knowledge, management and administrative skills. So we built a "support team" around every project: the sta in the FLAG o ce take care of the administration, coordination and strategic management of the project, but we also hire one or several persons with the right skills to assist the bene ciary with his or her project. These "Coaches" are paid from the budget of the project, proportionally with their involvement."

Zoom

3. Collegial learning circles: a Leader+ initiative (2000-2006)

In Sweden, the"Kollegiala lärandecirklar" (or collegial learning circles) was developed in order to enable cross-evaluation amongst Leader LAGs. This system was inspired by a network of hospitals, where nurses of di erent hospitals met regularly to learn from each other. These 'circles' could involve from 3-7 persons and last for 3 to 6 months. Participants of a circle shared similar positions in di erent LAGs and engaged in a series of "incremental" bilateral meetings:
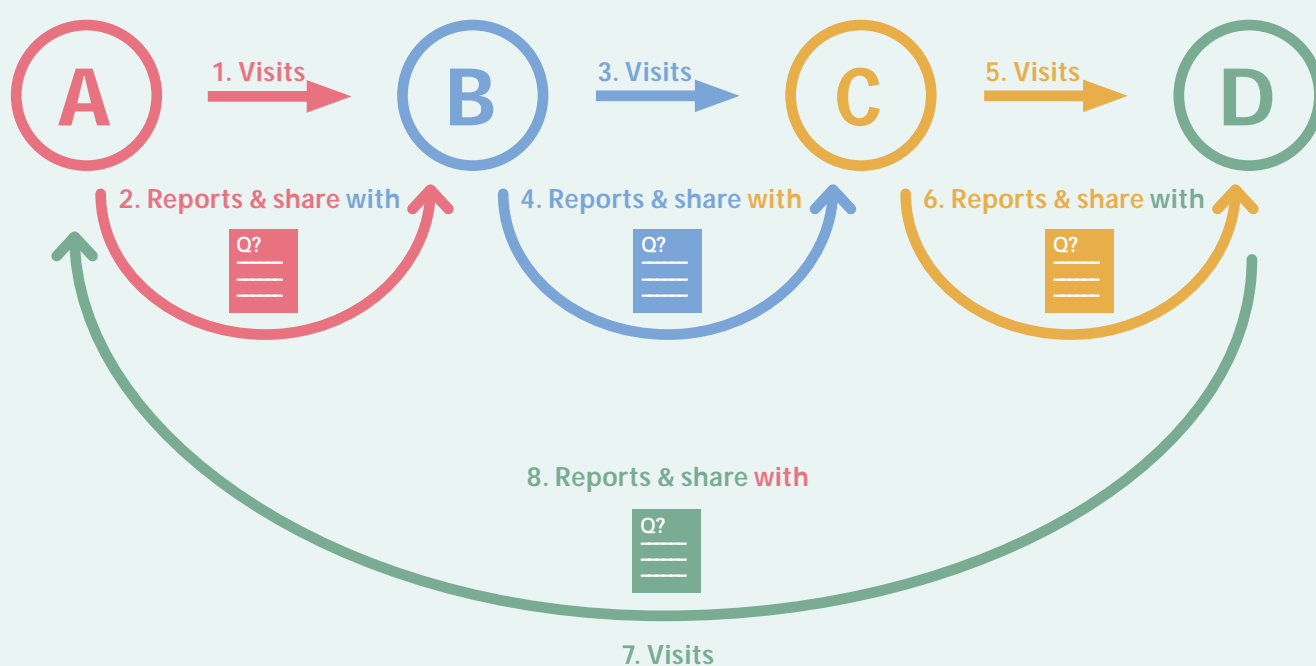
Each group meets up initially to describe their jobs and to explain what di culties and challenges they face. They then agree on a set of questions they want to discuss further in programmed bilateral meetings.

The member of (F)LAG "A" visits "B" at his/her workplace with a view to addressing a series of questions that could help their work, "A" reports on the meeting and sends it back to "B" to re ect on, for double loop learning. "B" then visits "C" (with the same questions as a base, but they can also add other questions), "C" then visits "D", who visits "A" in order to close the loop. When the loop is closed, a second group meeting is held to discuss ndings and close the circle.

The process can then be repeated but changing who visits who.

The collected reports can be used as a collective document for all groups to re ect on jointly.

"Any good project manager will (…) observe project progress and performance closely and keenly, will discuss achievements and problems with other members of the project team, and will seek to adapt the running of the project, as well as plans for future projects, in the light of their insights.[2]"

Insight from the ground: Thomas Norrby – University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala

As a Leader LAG member, Thomas Norrby has been involved in collegial circles with other LAGs and this led to the introduction of peer-to-peer learning techniques in the LAGs: *"As chairman of the intermediary board at the beginning of the current period (2007-2013), I teamed up with a group of people formulating the strategy of the Upplandsbygd Leader group. As a member of the LAG, I initiated a discussion on how to employ a relevant level of self-evaluation in our work (continuous evaluation/monitoring). Among many other parallel initiatives, we agreed to introduce peer-to-peer evaluation. The sta   of the LAG later decided to join with two other adjacent LAGs to have recurrent exchanges of experience between sta ."*

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Key lessons

> **Your partnership should have a "built-in" approach to self-awareness**: plan regular intervals in your work programme to assess achievements, the state of play, and blockages.

> **Cooperate with other partnerships and have your work assessed externally**: agree on objectives and methods jointly with other groups to ensure mutual and relevant bene ts.

> **Gather regular information on the progress of projects supported**: by ensuring regular support, the option of project mentoring can bene t both the project promoter and the partnership.

> **Always be on the lookout for innovative and alternative strategies**: you can nd inspiring ways to analyse your work and assess your needs from many different sources and horizons.

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2 Guide to self-evaluation for employment pro-
   jects, ADAPT Community Initiative, European
   Commission, March 1997.

Report

FORGING A COMMON MARITIME IDENTITY THROUGH ANIMATION AND COLLECTIVE PROJECT SUPPORT IN MARENNES OLÉRON
[POITOU-CHARENTES, FRANCE]

Partners of the sea

Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) has enabled local stakeholders – fishermen, shellfish farmers, elected representatives, local authorities, associations, technical support and training bodies – to develop a shared vision and jointly implement projects for the benefit of a region that is both maritime and rural in nature.

"This brand new net didn't even last a day! It tore on the rocks on the seabed. What rotten luck!" says Philippe Morandeau, alias Pipo, as he watches the unloading of a huge net outside the *Atelier des Gens de Mer (*The Seafarers Workshop) at the port of La Cotinière on the Ile d'Oléron. With co-funding from Axis 4 of the EFF, the *Atelier* seeks to facilitate the return to work of for-mer shermen like Pipo, left unemployed following illness or handicap caused by an accident. *"A structure like this is great,"* he says, *"because it enables us to nd another job in sheries, to keep the contact with the sea."* Employing a sta of six, the *Atelier* o ers a range of services to the sheries sector, such as net cleaning and repair, boat servicing and various other kinds of maintenance. *"We are an open port, not divided up into sectors,"* explains Nicolas Dubois, director of the port of La Cotinière and one of the founders of the local Fisher-ies Local Action Group (FLAG). *"You sense a genuine spirit of solidarity in and around the port, as you do within the project. And with Axis 4 we have been able to extend this soli-darity to the region as a whole."*

Between land and sea

Marennes Oléron, in Charente-Maritime (southwest France), is both a rural area – the closest towns of any size, Saintes and Royan, are 45 minutes by road – and resolutely maritime. On the mainland, the Marennes Basin ("Terra Maritimemsis" for the Romans) consists of marshes and for-mer bays dotted with islands. The island of Oléron, 30 km long and 8 km wide, is the largest island in metropolitan France after Corsica. Since 1966, a three-kilo-metre bridge has linked the island to the mainland, connecting the two municipal communities.

The area is a major tourist destination, with Marennes Oléron recording around eight million overnight stays a year, which is nearly a quarter of the total for Charente-Maritime, France's second most popular *département* for tourism. The île d'Oléron alone accounts for three million over-night stays a year. *"Oléron is seen as a tour-ist attraction but in fact the island is much more than that: shing and oyster farming remain essential economic sectors,"* insists Nicolas Dubois. Fed by the freshwater of the River Seudre, the marine environment o the coast of Marennes Oléron boasts

▲ La Cayenne in Marennes is an important area for oyster production.

an impressive variety of sh. No fewer than 90 species are shed o the island's coasts, including such agship species as sole, wedge sole and langoustine.

La Cotinière, the sixth largest French shing port in terms of the value landed (€26 million a year), provides employment for 700 people, including 200 shermen and 120 buyers. About 100 shing boats operate from the port. Its auction is one of the few to be held twice daily and is attended by around 120 buyers, including not only shmongers from the surrounding area, but also wholesalers from France, Spain (70% of the sole and cuttle sh leave for Spain) and Italy.

Marennes Oléron is also the most important centre for oyster re ning and marketing in France, and indeed in Europe. The region is home to more than 900 oyster-farms, 400 of which bene t from the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), '*Huî-tres de Marennes Oléron*'. With a further 80 mussel-farms, the shell sh sector provides over 4,000 full-time and 4,500 seasonal jobs. "*Our economy is based on tourism and the primary sector, essentially shing and shell sh farming,*" explains Mickaël Vallet, mayor of Marennes, member of the Regional Council and FLAG president. "*There is no industry, never mind major companies, just public works and building. We therefore have to strengthen our three*

▲ The sh auction in La Cotinière.

speci cities – shing, shell sh farming and tourism – while respecting the environment. European programmes such as Leader and Axis 4 of the EFF are all working in this direction and, apart from the money, a big advantage is that they get people working together."

▶ ▶ ▶

Maritime identity

The area's FLAG is managed by the Joint Syndicate of the *Pays de Marennes Oléron,* which has four areas of responsibility: town and country planning, the promotion of tourism, technical assistance to the member municipalities, and the administration of regional and European programmes such as Axis 4 of the EAFRD ("Leader"), Axis 4 of the EFF, and various ESF and ERDF projects.

"Axis 4 of the EFF is perfectly in keeping with the area's vision," stresses Jean-Claude Mercier, Director of the *Pays de Marennes Oléron. "It is a real godsend, as with Leader we did not reach coastal activities. We had 'land' actors but no sherman or shell sh farmers. Today we have a genuine 'task-force', to use the European jargon: Leader and Axis 4 provide a genuine one-stop shop for project promoters."*

▲ *The port of La Cotinière.*

A committed approach to evaluation

As the EFF Axis 4 programme comes to an end, the Marennes Oléron FLAG is embarking on a self-assessment process, the main principles of which have been presented and circulated to the other 10 French FLAGs.

An internal self-assessment will be based on a methodological model developed by the FLAG in 2012, and will complement a national assessment to be undertaken by an external evaluator at the request of the French managing authority.

The assessment questions adopted by the Marennes Oléron FLAG are designed in particular to analyse the implementation of the local strategy:
> To what extent does the take-up of the allocated nance re ect the objectives of the group's strategy?
> Do the members of the FLAG board feel part of the process of strategy implementation?
> Does the support provided by the programme enable the project promoters to invest in the implementation of the local strategy?

Initially (January-August 2014), the assessment will focus on gathering, compiling, organising and cross-referencing:
> quantitative data and key programme data;
> qualitative data, gathered by means of a questionnaire, to be completed by members of the Programming Committee, associated partners and project promoters, and also in part by conducting individual interviews.

During the second stage (September-December 2014), there will be a collective analysis of this data, in particular by an "Evaluation working group". A seminar to present the results is also envisaged at the end of the year, to complete the analysis.

Certain elements may be developed in cooperation with the Pays Marennes Oléron Leader group, as well as with the Bassin d'Arcachon-Val de l'Eyre FLAG, especially on the subject of cooperation.

This self-evaluation approach developed by the Marennes Oléron FLAG was presented and circulated to the other 10 French FLAGS in the framework of their national network (the PACTE network), which is coordinated by the French Fisheries and Maritime A airs Directorate and the Services and Payment Agency. Exchanges between the groups on the approach have already taken place.

A total of 21 organisations sit on the FLAG's "programming committee". This includes local authorities, professional bodies, environment and tourist organisations, the *Lycée de la Mer* (maritime training centre), and the Centre for Aquaculture, Experimentation and Exploitation. *"Axis 4 is rooted in the approach initiated by the programme for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) between 2005 and 2008,"* explains Amélie Perraudeau of the FLAG. *This made it easier to mobilise the various actors but because we did not bene t from Leader before 2009, the local, territorial approach was still new. The various trades and professions traditionally work on a national and sectorial basis. The territorial approach is not yet fully assimilated in practice but it has already impacted on the way people think."*

To support the EFF Axis 4 application, four public forums were held, re ecting the sectors of activity: shing, shell sh farming, tourism and the environment. Eighty people participated in this process. *"Unlike Leader, which imposed strict eligibility criteria, Axis 4 allowed much more choice. The programme's experimental nature was ideal. In a way, we really had a clean slate,"* adds Amélie.

This approach resulted in the drawing up of a strategy, the main aim of which is to strengthen the area's maritime identity through local products (adding value), the environment, the maritime heritage, and *"people"* – as Amélie Perraudeau puts it – by supporting vocational pathways.

"It was through working together that we decided on the need to promote the maritime identity," explains Lionel Pacaud, Director of the Tourist O ce, FLAG member and the promoter of a collective Axis 4 project. *"Everybody had his or her vision of things but pooling individual strengths is to everybody's advantage. Thanks to working in partnership, the area will have databases, photos, videos, etc… , all of which will help us to rea rm the maritime identity and our image of 'the countryside by the sea'. It is very important to rea rm our identity, as sometimes new arrivals, often retired people from large towns, tend to forget that there are people here for whom the sea is their livelihood and their sustenance."*

▲ *Mending nets at Atelier des Gens de Mer, a social enterprise sta ed by injured shermen.*

Organisation and support

The FLAG and its strategy were selected in June 2009, with an allocated budget of €1 million. The organisation became operational in February 2010. After appointing an *animateur*, the programming committee set up several working groups on, for instance, hospitality, waste management, maritime heritage and communication, with a focus on evaluation already in people's minds *(see box)*. *"This set-up made it possible to meet and get to know one another, and to organise the di erent people into networks, on the subject of the environment, for example,"* explains Amélie. *"We launched the process, mobilised stakeholders and instilled in them a sense of responsibility. In short, we made sure everybody was on board. Of course we are also lucky as we are a small area and proximity makes many things a lot easier."*

The organisational aspects were time-consuming and having a full-time animateur was certainly not a luxury. *"The animateur is like a mediator,"* says Lionel Pacaud. *"It gives the project a collective credibility and keeps all the wheels well-oiled, calming the waters, as everybody has his or her own interest and point of view, with the resulting constant risk of alienation."*

The reason the organisational aspects took a lot of time was also because the FLAG was not content with simply drawing up and selecting projects, it also wanted to support them throughout the process. *"All the project promoters played the game and allowed us to be involved in getting their projects o the ground,"* stresses Amélie. *"I am invited to all the important meetings in the life of the project. We are not regarded as a simple registration o ce. Our support role is warmly welcomed and takes many forms. It takes a lot of time and energy but, in the programme's closing stages, we are seeing that we have become very e cient, in terms of nancial management, for example, which makes life easier for the project promoters. We know what can and cannot be funded. Because it is not enough to simply select a project. You also have to be able to fund it and avoid the danger of having to reimburse the aid received. The project promoter knows he must show scrupulous respect for the rules."*

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Learning

The Programming Committee (PC) meets three times a year, and counts amongst its key tasks that of examining the projects, including those already programmed and those re-programmed due to deadlines, modi cations or comments that need to be taken into account. It also assesses the nancial take-up of the programme and selects projects. *"The Axis 4 Programming Committee allows us to bring together around the same table people from very di erent backgrounds,"* stresses Lionel Pacaud. *"We knew one another before but we were not used to working together. This networking of stakeholders is extremely important. It is by working together – tourism, shermen and oyster farmers, the three pillars of the territory – that we have come to understand one another. Previously, there was no formal body to facilitate this as each sector worked separately. Producers and restaurant owners had little understanding of their respective realities, for example. Today, everybody is more aware of the logistical constraints or price dynamics of the other. We all learn from each other."*

Amélie Perraudeau presses home the point: *"The PC is a genuine place of exchange and discussion between elected representatives, professional bodies and environmental associations."* This is con rmed by Jean-Baptiste Bonnin of the IODDE association, set up in 2004 and which, in 2011, became one of the Permanent Centres for Environmental Initiatives (*Centres permanents d'initiatives pour l'environnement*) in France. *"The IODDE itself has not presented any Axis 4 projects for funding but we are members of the Programming Committee, to which we try to bring a sustainable development slant. These meetings are an opportunity to engage in useful discussions with the stakeholders, for instance on the bene ts for shermen and oyster-farmers of processing waste at source, as in projects such as the port waste collection site at La Cotinière, the only one of its kind in France, or the Terre-Mer Chantiers structure, for example."*

▲ Recycling used oyster bags at Terre-Mer Chantiers.

Transversal environmental actions

Terre-Mer Chantiers is a social enterprise, *"one of the only ones of its kind in France,"* say its two managers, Thierry Leques and Gilles Bouillaguet. It was set up in April 2012, following a study co- nanced by Axis 4. The mission is to combine environmental protection with the return to work of the long-term unemployed. The company prepares used oyster bags for recycling, as well as other plastic maritime waste, such as you nd on beaches. A team of 17 sort, clean and prepare this waste prior to dispatch, usually to Barcelona, the headquarters of the principal oyster bag producer in Europe. In addition to the study, Axis 4 will also co- nance a mechanised sorting line, as well as other equipment to improve work e ciency and comfort.

As the environment is by nature a transversal eld, Axis 4 has also been used to support other environmental projects. Ana-Maria Le Go is responsible for nature conservation with the Oléron community of municipalities. She set up this service in April 2011 and her team of four technical experts monitor the health of the island's environment because, although Oléron is relatively urbanised, 70% of its surface area is classi ed for conservation and 40% as a Natura 2000 site. Their mission is to maintain and improve these areas, provide advice and technical assistance to the municipalities and monitor particularly sensitive sites such as the marshes and mud ats. *"We have a monitoring mission, but we also need to inform and increase awareness,"* explains Ana-Maria. *"There is a great diversity of natural environments here, but also a great diversity of stakeholders: residents, tourists, leisure-boat operators, professional shermen and also amateur shermen. You have to bring all these priorities together, make a connection, send the same message to them all and promote a certain coherence, such as by encouraging property owners to put up the same kind of fences."* The team will soon be moving to the north of the island, to Douhet beach, where a former holiday centre has been converted to provide a home for environmental associations. Ultimately, Axis 4 will co- nance the start-up costs, including the necessary equipment, uniforms for the technicians and computer equipment.

Partnership and collective actions

The partnership dynamic triggered by Axis 4, the rich network and the relatively limited FLAG budget meant that almost all of the 30 projects supported by Marennes Oléron are collective actions involving several groups of stakeholders and often dealing with "intangible" issues, such as improving capacities, data collection, studies… As Nicolas Dubois, Director of the port of La Cotinière, stresses: *"Axis 4 has led to a joined-up approach to maritime issues."*

A good example is the *"Fourchette & Saveurs de la mer"* (Fork & Sea Flavours) project (€23 100), which ran for 18 months and brought together fishermen, shellfish farmers, the tourist office and about 20 restaurants and fishmongers. *"It was a question of training 'ambassadors for local products', in the same way as the 'ambassadors for selective waste recycling in the environmental field,"* explains Laurent Champeau, Director of the Poitou-Charentes Regional Committee for Shellfish Farming (CRCPC), and also a FLAG founding member. *"During the 18 months of the project, these 'ambassadors' proposed dishes based on the seasonal produce available. Without Axis 4, this would not have been possible."*

"Fourchette et Saveurs de la mer" benefitted from technical assistance from the Regional Centre for Aquaculture Experimentation and Exploitation (CREEA), which was also involved in three other Axis 4 projects: a study on mussel predation (by seagulls, sea bream and dog whelks), an advanced study on whether to install artificial reefs off the coast of Oléron (*"another project that brought together many stakeholders,"* stresses CREEA Director, Philippe Blachier), and *in situ* experimentation on the purifying role of maturing oysters in '*claires*', a kind of very small lake originally used as salt marshes. A peculiarity of Marennes Oléron oysters is that many of them are matured for 28 days in these *claires*. The study, and its follow-up, was designed to show that the water in the *claires* has a decontaminating effect, rather like lagoon systems for waste water. *"We obtained excellent results,"* concluded Philippe Blachier. *"We saw how a delib-*

▲ The *"Fourchette & Saveurs de la mer"* project brought together fishermen, shellfish farmers, the tourist office and about 20 restaurants and fishmongers.

erately contaminated oyster, thus unfit for consumption, became perfect again after 48 hours in the claire. It even tasted better!"

In the shellfish sector, other Axis 4 projects combine studies, data gathering and partnerships between actors. With 'Conchylifutur', the CRCPC wishes to promote innovation in shellfish farming, such as new methods for rearing oysters in deep waters, which also means overcoming conflicts of use. This complements the creation of a socio-economic observatory and a study on eco-systemic services provided by the sector to the environment (and making data and literature accessible to professionals and the public alike as planning tools).

Another project example has involved cooperation between fishermen, fishmongers, the *Lycée de la Mer* and the port of La Cotinière in providing training and support for auction staff. The aim was to teach them to be better able to assess the quality of fish and batches offered for sale, thereby enhancing their credibility in the eyes of fishermen and fish buyers.

Finally, several cultural events have been supported by the FLAG, including an

annual festival of sea ballads, the "Sailor Stories" event (tales, writing workshops, exhibition, etc.) and a book and gastronomy of the sea festival.

Have all these activities delivered the desired results? All those involved spoke of one disappointment: the mixed results of pesca-tourism. Laurent Champeau explains: *"There was the example of Arcachon, where there are pesca-tourism activities[3], and there was also an association here, 'Terre marine', which organised sea excursions. But the regulations have become much too strict. About 20 shellfish farmers were interested in pesca-tourism but they became discouraged. Before taking passengers on board, the boats have to be fitted with a guardrail and that is a major obstacle to handling the bags that are essential for this work. Moreover, in terms of training, the regulations here are not the same as in Arcachon because it is another type of navigation there. Even so, three shellfish farmers did carry out pesca-tourism in 2011 but just one in 2012. The results are therefore mixed and that's a pity, considering the demand, the development potential and the strong interest of the tourist offices."*

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And for the future?

In Marennes Oléron, the future of Axis 4 is of course on everyone's mind. *"For the future, we want to continue to develop tools with which to promote not only products but also our heritage, as seen from the human angle. For example, by showing not just our beautiful picturesque sea huts, but above all the people who work in them, and the different trades,"* says the Tourism Office manager, Lionel Pacaud. *"New communication technologies, such as video streaming for smart phones, enable us to present local characters, show the authenticity of our territory and communicate the message: Marennes Oléron is a 'real' holiday destination, with 'real' activities and the opportunity to meet 'real' people."*

For the shellfish farmers, Laurent Champeau would like to *"build on what has already been done and use the experience acquired to launch other projects with a high environmental content, again with a view to more integrated management."* As for the fishermen, a particular aim is to successfully conclude the work begun under the initial programming period to obtain a designation of origin for a particular local fish soup and also to pursue possible uses for fish waste, in pharmacology, for example.

"Integrated local development must be the common thread running through our future work. It is now time to build on the initial experiment," insists Jean-Claude Mercier, Director of the Pays Marennes Oléron. FLAG President Mickaël Vallet continues: *"Our strengths can also be constraints. The challenge is to maintain a positive balance. For the future, I see three major priorities for our area: maintaining existing businesses and attracting new ones – I am thinking here of shipyards; increasing our attractiveness, in particular through increasing the professionalism of tourism activities; and finally, building on the impetus generated by Axis 4 of the EFF by intensifying the dialogue between stakeholders."* ■

▲ *Raising awareness of cockle pickers*

MARENNES OLÉRON (France)

Île d'Oléron
Marennes

Area:
356 km²

Population:
36 859 inhabitants (2011)

Density:
103 inhabitants/km² (2011)

Axis 4 Budget	EUR			
	EU	National	Private	Total
Total	500 000	500 000	41 000	1 041 000

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People

Rita Pamplona:

"Successful modern societies tend to favour the bottom-up approach, involving people in decision making processes and making them accountable for their actions."

Interview with Rita Pamplona, Director of the Technical Assistance Unit for the EFF Managing Authority in Portugal.

FARNET Magazine: What is your personal and professional background, any marking childhood memories of sheries?

I started working on the sheries operational programmes in 2000. Since then, I've undertaken a bachelors degree in social communication, completed a post-graduation course in public policy management and a maritime a airs course. After the 1974 revolution, my mother found work in the public sector, supporting the sheries industry. I was born in 1977 and one of the rst things I learnt was that there are three kinds of men: the ones who are dead, the ones who are alive and the men that work in the sea. Now I am glad to witness rst hand this reality. The sector is full of special people. Although hardened by the conditions they are exposed to on a daily basis, shermen are kind and grateful people. I can now say that I am very proud to follow in the footsteps of my mother, and I believe she is happy too.

Rita Pamplona
Director of the Technical Assistance Unit for the EFF Managing Authority in Portugal.

What was your rst opinion of the Axis 4 approach? Has it changed along the way?

I believe that successful modern societies tend to favour the bottom-up approach, involving people in decision-making processes and making them accountable for their actions. The more people involved the better. Axis 4 took this philosophy to another level: involving people not only in evaluating the options but also in deciding upon actions and how to implement the measures, in managing the rules and in the use of public funds.

In the beginning I was sceptical: on the one hand, there was the inexperience of some of the FLAGs' collaborators with regard to addressing the public interest; on the other hand, problems related to con ict of interests once choices were made on the ground, and the potential clash with individual interests was also a concern. Looking back, we can see that this challenge was overcome. There were several hurdles and it is still an on-going process, there is always room for improvement and we are actively pursuing the improvement of the processes and the adequacy of the responses.

As an Axis 4 coordinator in Lisbon, what has been your best experience of working with FLAGs? What would you have liked to have done di erently or given more time to?

The opportunity to work in a policy sustained through a bottom-up approach is in itself a ful lling experience. The Portuguese FLAGs are in some cases led by public sector bodies and in other cases by the private sector. Two completely di erent visions, which result in di erent responses and behaviours. The opportunity to engage with these two realities was very useful and enriching. We should have organised a campaign to show the best projects and tried to replicate examples of good ideas from one FLAG area to the others. For examples, the Sea Villages project promoted by Litoral Norte FLAG.

▶ ▶ ▶

The Portuguese FLAGs: a good balance between the public and private sectors

FLAG Litoral Norte

FLAG Região de Aveiro

FLAG Mondego Mar

FLAG Oeste

SPAIN

PORTUGAL

FLAG Além Tejo

FLAG Barlavento do Algarve

FLAG Sotavento do Algarve

With a total public budget of approximately €3 million each, the seven Portuguese FLAGs have been set up around different types of existing organisations, such as associations, municipalities or platforms of municipalities. Several groups have also included Leader LAGs in their partnerships.

Public and semi-public sector actors must make up 50% of FLAG partnerships in Portugal. Local authorities are well represented, as well as a diversity of public bodies such as institutes for professional education in the maritime sector, entities such as Docapesca (a partly state funded distribution company supplying the Portuguese fish market, running auctions and handling data on fresh fish sales) and academic partners such as polytechnic institutes (Leiria) and universities (Aveiro). The private sector must account for the remaining 50% of each partnership and 60% of these private actors must come from the fisheries sector.

Aware of the many opportunities offered by its maritime economy, diversification towards other economic activities is a top priority for Portuguese FLAGs, followed by improving the competitiveness of the fisheries sector and environmental management. The analysis of Portuguese FLAG strategies shows that the activities they promote include: diversification and restructuring of local economic and social activities; bringing together different actors representing the local community and fisheries sector; training and research; as well as developing the potential of fisheries products and the coastal environment.

A selection of Portuguese Axis 4 news, facts and projects is available here: http://bit.ly/1j2t vNZ

▲ Portuguese fishermen.

What has been tough and what has been rewarding?

Involving fishermen and trying not to lose sight of the ultimate goal has been the most difficult issue. Creating jobs in the fisheries sector has also been challenging. The most rewarding experience has been to participate in an initiative that can change people's lives and create a new entrepreneurial mentality in Portugal.

Five years on, what benefits do you think the Portuguese FLAGs have brought to their areas?

Depending of the areas, we can see more innovation (Litoral Norte FLAG), better promotion of local products (Região de Aveiro and Além Tejo FLAG), more jobs created (Sotavento do Algarve FLAG), and more diversification and local services (all FLAGs). In short: more local capacity and a greater critical mass.

Portugal has been severely hit by the crisis, what has this meant for fishing communities?

More unemployment, more financial difficulties…

Have the FLAGs suffered? How did they cope and what solutions did they bring?

The biggest challenge was building confidence. The kind of aid Axis 4 provides can help to create additional or alternative income sources, but in relation to incentives for adjusting the size of the fleet, fishermen tend to see Axis 4 as some kind of threat, something which has the purpose of terminating their activity. For the Sotavento do Algarve FLAG, the solution was to help fishermen fill in the forms to respond to calls under the other EFF axes; for the Oeste FLAG, the solution was to build a network of fishermen's associations. In response to the risk of projects not being executed, or only partly so, due to the financial crisis, the Litoral Norte FLAG published a call for a "reserve list of projects" which would be financed if money allocated to previously approved projects was not spent.

▲ *Research on sh preservation at GIRM, Peniche, in the Oeste FLAG area.*

▲ *Visiting the Litoral Norte FLAG.*

Can you describe a particular Axis 4 project, in Portugal or in another country, that you think stands out and could inspire other sheries communities in Portugal.

The development of new uses for seaweed could be an example. In Portugal, the Litoral Norte FLAG supported a project on its use as a fertilizer. In Denmark, they used it for making ice cream, extolling its health bene ts. There is also a famous project that was promoted by João Sabino, a shell sh farmer with big blue eyes, who used Axis 4 aid to buy a touristic vessel. The ladies at the European Commission at least, got very inspired by this project (laughs).

What will FLAGs look like in Portugal in the future? Will there be more? What will the "new Axis 4" mean for FLAGs and local sheries communities?

Well, we are also waiting for that answer to come from the discussions with the stakeholders. The proposed regulation that is being discussed allows FLAGs and rural Local Action Groups (LAGs) to merge their structures, while answering the calls with di erent strategies. That might be good in some cases, especially in terms of reducing the entities' running costs, but in other cases there might be downsides and a potential loss of focus. We would like to have the opportunity to extend the FLAG approach to more locations not covered by the current Fund. But, in the context of the bottom-up approach, it will be up to the areas themselves to decide what they need. As regards the role of the Managing Authority, we act as a regulator in this decision.

To exit the crisis, Portugal is also looking to its maritime economy as a source of opportunities (blue growth etc…), as outlined in the National Maritime Strategy of Portugal. How do FLAGs t into this vision?

They will have to be in the right place at the right time. The National Maritime Strategy, and the proposed regulation for the next period, provides a lot of material for the conception of FLAG strategies. FLAGs are seen as one of the conduits for the implementation of this strategy. The 2014-2020 programming period considers new support areas, such as Integrated Maritime Policy, and the National Maritime Strategy (NMS) proposes setting up something called "sea clusters", or "poles" in areas where FLAGs are active.

Is there any particular sector of the blue growth economy where FLAGs could have a lead or facilitating role?

According to our discussions with the FLAGs at national level, it is their intention to lead the development of a new national regulation for pesca-tourism, in line with what is already practiced in France, and in some Spanish areas and the Azores. Another area which would appear to o er opportunities for innovation is the use of sheries waste. But the main point is that the growth and development of the sector is driven by people. FLAGs are the bodies that are closest to the citizens, many of them have close links to local colleges and support projects that could lead to innovative approaches and products. In the next period, we want to see more of these kinds of projects.

You're taking on new professional responsibilities, so are we going to see you again? What advice would you give to your successor or to someone taking o ce as Axis 4 coordinator in another Managing Authority?

You sure will! I am not that easy to get rid of! I am already involved in the preparations for the next programming period. Axis 4 is a cross-cutting policy, thus related to all EFF axes. We all should be there! (laughs). The new Axis 4 national coordinator is Alexandra Toscano. She will be a good captain of this ship. As for advice, I'll use something I heard this morning on the radio: *don't keep complaining about the wind, don´t keep waiting for it to pass; adjust the sails and move ahead.* ■

*Interview conducted (in English)
in April 2014.*

Report

AXIS 4 OF THE EFF, AT THE FOREFRONT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE DANUBE DELTA [ROMANIA]

Learning by doing

An ecological gem on the European Union's eastern limits, the Danube Delta is home to many communities of fishermen seeking a path to diversification, jobs and a better quality of life. To help them on their way, the Delta FLAG has received no fewer than 112 project proposals. A remarkable result in a country where the participative approach to development remains relatively new. Training and capacity building have played an important role.

"The Danube Delta is a common asset. We need to look after it and make sure that everybody can enjoy it. That is what I want to encourage. I myself owe everything to the delta and I feel an obligation to contribute to its development." The words of a true star in Romania: Ivan Patzaichin, four-time Olympic gold medallist and nine-time world champion in sprint canoeing. The association he heads, "Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23", aims primarily to support local development operations in the delta, starting with the village where he was born, Mila 23. A predestined name for a village that between 1950 and 2000 produced no fewer than 23 sprint-canoeing champions! More than a sport, canoeing is an integral part of the culture in this area: all the local champions built their muscles by rowing a *lotca*, the traditional boat of the Danube Delta, which is specially designed to cut a path through the reed beds. It can also be tted with a mast and sails.

Rowmania

"With all the video games, young people here were abandoning rowing, with the risk of losing that whole culture. Something had to be done," explains Ivan. In 2012, together with his association, he created a *lotca* race for adults, young people and children. Thanks to Ivan's fame, the event was broadcast on national television and young people were soon rediscovering an interest in the sport. *"Seeing the race on television restored the image of the* lotca, *and the local culture along with it. The young people no longer see rowing as something for fuddy-duddies! We have now also created a brand: 'Rowmania'. We have got the backing of Romania's Ecotourism Association and together we want to make the Danube Delta Europe's leading destination for rowing sports."*

▲ *Ivan Patzaichin (in blue) guiding tourists in the delta.*

The Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) that is implementing Axis 4 of the EFF in the Delta sees ecotourism as a largely untapped source of activities and jobs, especially as the more traditional day trips on a riverboat has been declining since 2006. *"Tourism needs an injection of energy,"* explains Daniel Buhai, the FLAG president. *"Visitors must be encouraged to stay longer. At present, tourists stay an average of 1.8 days and because of access issues, 60% of what they spend goes on transport to get here. Our aim is for visitors to stay four days, hence the need to create new activities. Nautical sports are an excellent idea, a great way of attracting an active, urban clientele."*

▲ The delta is home to more than 1 200 varieties of plant and 300 bird species (including 4000 pelicans).

▲ Many local shermen are Lipovans.

Following the same strategy, the Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 association wants to create a museum of the *lotca* and has built a prototype of a light *lotca* adapted for tourists. It also envisages launching a system of boat sharing for the delta, modelled on bike sharing, which is already fashionable in many cities. *"Tradition + innovation = added value for the future,"* is how Teodor Frolu, an architect and association member, sums it up.

World heritage

The Danube Delta (3 446 km²) includes around 15 branches. The three main ones – Chilia, Sulina and Sf. Gheorghe – are accessible to large ocean-going vessels, which can navigate upstream. The delta is home to more than 1 200 varieties of plants, 300 bird species (including a pelican population of 4 000) and 45 freshwater sh species in its many lakes and marshes. In 1992, thanks to the e orts of Romanian and Ukrainian biologists, and to encouragement in the media by the French explorer and oceanographer, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, small local Romanian and Ukrainian reserves have received the status of biosphere reserves and are listed as UNESCO world heritage sites. As such, 2 733 km² of the delta is classed as a protected area.

About 15 000 people live in the villages of the delta, many of them earning their livelihood from shing (1 600 registered professional shermen), and a growing number from tourism. The population is made up of many minority groups, including around 10 000 Lipovans or 'Old Believers', descendants of Russians who ed the religious persecution of the 18th century.

The area covered by Axis 4 includes 22 municipalities. The Delta FLAG, consists of the *Judet* (County) Council of Tulcea, the Biosphere Reserve and three shermen's associations, including the RO-Pescador association, the initiator of the FLAG. The FLAG has the biggest of any EU Axis 4 budget: more than €22 million.

"Our strategy seeks to respond to three types of needs," explains Daniel Buhai. *"Firstly, to improve the quality of life in the villages. This includes better access and better public services. Secondly, to boost territorial competitiveness, in order to create jobs and increase earnings. And nally, to protect and highlight the importance of our natural and cultural heritage. One of the key words for us is diversi cation."*

Learning process

The strategy was submitted in December 2011. This was followed by a clari cation and nancial negotiation stage with the managing authority, which led to the signing of a contract in April 2012. *"This stage was an initial learning process, in terms of method and strategy,"* stresses Nicusor Alexandru, the FLAG Director.

There was a year between the signing of the contract and the rst call for projects. At local level, this period was used to organise information meetings in the different municipalities. *"The local approach was totally new,"* continues Nicusor.

▶ ▶ ▶

"We had to explain it and that was not easy. For many people 'community' evoked notions of communism! Then, everybody wanted to submit projects. We had to explain and explain again the concept and create some order among the project ideas so as not to nd ourselves doing everything and anything."

To be able to make a selection and have a good working knowledge of the Axis 4 parameters, the Delta FLAG bene tted from assistance organised at national level. To render the FLAGs operational and help them implement their strategy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which is responsible for sher-ies and is the Axis 4 managing authority, introduced a training programme, with the support of the FARNET team and DG MARE. A series of monthly meetings were held between December 2012 and January 2014 for Romania's 14 FLAGS, members of the Managing Authority and FARNET experts. In addition to clarifying certain procedures, these gave rise to all kinds of practical exercises, such as project selection simulations, for example, and they made it possible to disseminate examples of European good practices in administration, organisation and project support. *"The approach also made it possible to boost con dence and prepare everybody for this lengthy process. All the meetings helped to resolve, or prevent the appearance of, certain problems,"* explains Simona Pascariu, the FARNET representative in Romania.

At the same time, in the eld, the mobilisation continued. By January 2014, the Delta FLAG had received no fewer than 112 project proposals. Two months later, all of these projects have been scrutinised and 64 have entered a technical– nancial assessment phase. The managing authority's task is then to check that the administrative criteria are respected, as at this stage FLAG approval is taken as given. Two projects are, nevertheless, being subject to closer scrutiny as their amount exceeds €300 000, the threshold for which, in Romania, the managing authority is legally required to re-examine the application as a whole before deciding whether or not to approve the project.

▲ *A boat is often the primary means of transportation.*

Sulina

"Axis 4 is a godsend," exclaims Silviu Gheorghe, president of the Sulina shermen's association, which has 70 members. Lying to the extreme east of the EU, where the great river nally ows into the Black Sea, Sulina (pop. 3 663) embodies everything that constitutes the "raison d'être" of Axis 4. With both freshwater and sea shing, and agship species such as the sturgeon and turbot, shing here is facing enormous di culties, as indeed is the town as a whole, despite its many assets and glorious past.

"The rst European Commission had its home here," jokes Aurel Dimitriu, mayor of Sulina. Indeed, between 1865 and 1939, Sulina was home to the European Commission of the Danube. In 1878, the town became Romanian and saw its population grow to 15 000. During the Second World War, it was here that the paddleboats of the Danube drew alongside the ocean-going vessels to transfer their human cargo: the thousands of refugees eeing the Nazis. Classed as a military zone after the war, then demilitarised in 1990, Sulina is now in the grips of severe economic crisis. The town has conserved many buildings of the 'Belle Époque' although many of them are now sadly dilapidated.

Fishing and sh farming collapsed with the fall of communism and the know-how left the delta. *"There are no longer sh farm engineers, no more grey matter,"* says the mayor, regretfully. He would like Bucharest to encourage specialists to move to the area. *"That kind of approach is a thing of the past,"* counters Valentin Toma, Deputy General Director for Fishing at the Minis-

▲ *Sulina, the link between the Danube and the Black Sea.*

try of Agriculture and Rural Development. *"Needs of this kind must be included as part of a local strategy. That is why we have the FLAG, to do exactly that."*

Indeed, the FLAG is responding to this call. In relation to shing, it has approved ve projects, including four sponsored by shermen. These concern the conversion of two boats for carrying tourists and the creation of guest houses for shing tourism. The fth project involves equipping a sh processing plant (for shad, carp, anchovies, mackerel, cat sh, bream and sprat) and marketing a range of smoked, salted, marinated and frozen products. About ten jobs will be created. *"There is a lot of synergy between Axis 4 and the downstream shing sector and we really feel we have got some solid support behind us,"* believes Sorin Popa, the company manager.

Other project proposals are in the eld of culture and improving the quality of life in Sulina. Thanks to Axis 4, two magni cent buildings are to be renovated and converted, one into a municipal library, the other into a multicultural centre to highlight, through the theme of shing, the lives of the di erent minorities who live in the town, many of whom are shermen or linked to the sheries sector.

That leaves one major challenge – accessibility. The only way to reach Sulina is by boat, a journey of one hour from the end of the road to Cri an or of two hours from Tulcea. To improve communication within the delta, an Axis 4 project plans to upgrade the former cattle tracks to create a network of roads for villagers and tourists.

On the return journey to Tulcea, by boat of course, Mihaela Iliuteanu, a development o cer with the FLAG, showed us other projects designed to improve access and quality of life. The municipality of Maliuc, lying midway along the river between Tulcea and Sulina, covers ve villages. Nine projects have been submitted and six of them are presently in the technical- nancial assessment phase, for a total amount of €500 000.

They are for the building of pontoons and landing points, the upgrading of roads and public lighting, and the tting out of a boat to serve as a local taxi, ferrying people between the villages lying on the two banks of the river. But the biggest project planned at present is to create a shing interpretation centre in a former canning factory. Located in Sf. Gheorghe, at the mouth of another branch of the Danube, the planned investment is €400 000.

"Before Axis 4, it was very di cult for local stakeholders to nd nancing. It is much easier today and, as you will see, when these projects are up and running they will have a knock-on e ect and others will follow. People have to see to believe." This is the view of Andrian Ampleev, a member of the municipal council and president of the Lipovan community of Tulcea.

In the meantime, ve organisers and a coordinator are supporting the project promoters, as well as other FLAG partner organisations such as the Biosphere Reserve. *"Our territory is big and di cult to travel around but the shing sector and other parties form a solid community. Everybody knows each other and that makes things easier,"* says Cristian Dogaru, who is in charge of communication and animation for the FLAG. *"The dissemination of our strategy has relaunched the associative dynamic and we are seeing many individuals getting involved. In fact, 60% of the project proposals we received come from individuals."*

Catching up

With the new 2014-2020 programming period about to start, what is the verdict of the Axis 4 o cials on the period now ending? *"With our team rmly in place, the arrival of 109 project proposals and the implementation of the rst initiatives, we nally feel that we are fully operational,"* concludes the FLAG Director. *"For the next programming period it is very important to have the available resources from the start because the lack of own funds to start the engine largely explains the delay in launching the projects."*

Monica Ecobici, EFF Axis 4 administrator at the ministry, sums up the problems the Delta FLAG and other Romanian FLAGS had to face:*"During this programming period, we had a very long preparatory phase and a very short implementation phase. This should be a lot easier in the future."* Deputy Director Valentin Toma evokes the bigger picture: *"In Romania, a country that is very much at the catching-*up stage after a long period of bureaucratic planning, the major contribution of Axis 4 of the EFF and the EAFRD (Leader) during this period was the introduction of the bottom-up approach to development. That is already a big step forward. With the gradual arrival of the younger generations, who have never experienced a centralised economy, things will be easier."* ◼

▲ *Thanks to Axis 4, this derelict building will be renovated and become a multicultural centre.*

GRUP LOCAL PENTRU PESCARIE DURABILA IN DELTA DUNARII (Romania)

Area:
5 227 km²

Population:
59 220 inhabitants

Density:
11 inhabitants/km²

Axis 4 Budget	EUR			
	EU	National	Private	Total
Total	15 066 801	5 022 267	2 262 600	22 351 668

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Report

FISHING COMMUNITIES TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS IN SOUTH DOBROGEA [ROMANIA]

And then there was light

Less than thirty years ago, fishing in Romania collapsed and the communities that once depended on it have experienced stagnation and difficult times. In this context, Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) presents a real opportunity, and could be the prelude to an economic, social and cultural renaissance.

The Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) of South Dobrogea is located on the Black Sea, between Constanţa and the Bulgarian border. It is a typical coastal area, very different from the Danube delta we looked at previously *(see previous article)*. You enter this area when you cross the suspension bridge that separates Constanţa from its suburbs to the south. The two municipalities that created the FLAG – Agigea and Tuzla – belong to what is considered to be the second largest metropolitan area in Romania (450 000 inhabitants), with its largest port and the leading seaside resort.

Fishing and ecotourism

"Here, we want to restore fishing to its former glory and develop ecotourism, which could be an alternative or complement to seaside tourism in Constanţa," says Cristian Cirjaliu, Mayor of Agigea and President of the FLAG.

"Fishing, and especially the processing sector, literally collapsed along with the Communist regime in 1989," says Gabriel Dimoftache, a fish farming engineer since 1959, a technical advisor for the Federation of Black Sea Fishing Organisations, and one of those responsible for the creation of the FLAG. *"Previously, we had a large fish market and canning facility. Fish farming underwent significant development. Now, there are only 400 professional fishermen, 350 small boats and only six vessels over 11 meters, compared with 12 before 1989."*

With his experience and vast knowledge of the sector, and of those involved in fishing in Romania, Gabriel spent 2010 getting people involved and telling them about Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund. Various meetings resulted in the creation to two FLAGs, either side of Constanţa: North Dobrogea and South Dobrogea.

The latter includes two municipalities (Agigea and Tuzla), the Association of Communes of Romania, the Constanţa County subsidiary, two fishing associations, the Association of Tourism Operators for the Danube Delta and Black Sea Coast, and an individual fisherman, Gabriel Dimoftache.

Projects

The FLAG's strategy was approved in December 2012 and aims to promote the entire fishing sector and link it to ecotourism, cultural heritage and environmental protection. *"In 2013, we made the transition from organising ourselves and becoming familiar with the procedures to transforming ideas into projects,"* explains Berghin Osman, Director of the FLAG. *"This development phase was a bit thankless and worrying. Now, we have a fully operational team and with the first projects already presented, we really feel in control. It's like giving birth!"* Six project proposals have been accepted so far (February 2014). One was rejected as it was deemed not to be sufficiently developed. Three proposals have been sent to the Managing Authorities. These included the launch of an information campaign – 'My Dobrogea' – in ten primary and ten secondary schools near the coast, and the creation of a computer platform – 'e-Fish' – providing lots of information about where different fish are found and how they are landed. The two other projects approved

▲ *Taner Resit, Berghin Osman and Laurentiu Mirea showing the plans for the project.*

by the FLAG relate to the organisation of a Fish Festival in Eforie, and the creation of a small eco-tourism pension in Olimp.

Seven more project proposals are expected by the middle of March 2014, including: the tting out of a sh-processing unit, the organisation of shipbuilding and shing equipment repair workshops, the tting out of a boat for diving, the building of two wharfs, and the creation of an ambitious complex combining shing and tourism in Tuzla.

"We believe in the importance of agship projects, which could act as examples, leading to the emergence of other initiatives. The Tuzla project is one of these agship projects," says Taner Resit, Vice Mayor of Tuzla.

Axis 4 in a nutshell

The Tuzla commune has made an undeveloped coastal site of 46 000 m^2 available to the local association of shermen and shell sh farmers (12 professionals and 7 boats) for the creation of a 'Fishing Village'. If it succeeds, it would be a real microcosm of Axis 4, promoting local shing, ecotourism, shing heritage and job creation in a single location.

Along a small bay, where steps lead down the cli s to a beach, the association plans to create: a small, fully equipped port for the immediate processing of catches; a sh restaurant with a large terrace; around twenty bungalows, each large enough for a family; several small stalls where visitors can sample freshly caught sh and other seafood; and a small, independent shipyard for the repair and maintenance of boats.

"Tourists and the local population, who are increasingly cut o from the world of shing, will be able to watch the shermen work, eat and learn how to cook local sea produce and have fun, just as in any holiday village," say Laurentiu Mirea, President of the association leading the project, and of the Federation of Black Sea Fishing Organisations. *"The project is also part of our local strategy for extending the tourist season, so it runs from April to October."*

▲ *Tuzla beach, where the "Fishing Village" will be built.*

► ► ►

▲ *Gabriel Dimoftache, one of the FLAG's initiators, in front of a   sh restaurant looking on to the Black Sea.*

Around 60 jobs are expected to be created, mainly among vulnerable groups such as   shermen, women and young people. *"In addition to meeting a social aim, this new infrastructure should have the whole community's backing: the inhabitants think that it fully justi es the other investments we have made, such as building the road, supplying water and sewage services, etc."*

"It really is a pleasure to see projects like this," says Gabriel Dimoftache. *"We have come a long way! We have gone from a system where everything was dictated from above to crossing a vast desert where we still have a way to go… but with Axis 4, we can   nally see the light at the end of the tunnel."* ■

ASOCIA IA GRUP LOCAL DOBROGEA SUD (Romania)

ROMANIA

Constan a

BULGARIA

Area:
2 814 km²

Population:
146 979 inhabitants

Density:
52 inhabitants/km²

Axis 4 Budget	EUR			
	EU	National	Private	Total
Total	2 625 000	875 000	–	3 500 000

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Trade winds

Animation in Obra-Warta

Total cost (2013): EUR 37 000 – **EU contribution (EFF Axis 4):** EUR 17 700

"Our FLAG, an inland FLAG located in North-Western Poland, pays particular attention to animating the local community and promoting local sheries. We have organised 49 training sessions for 970 people and provided individual consultations to approximately 1000 potential project promoters. This has resulted in 855 applications and 397 projects selected. We have also developed special software to facilitate on-line applications, which is now also available to other FLAGs. We have also organised 'Fish Days' in schools, where 20 000 people tasted locally produced sh. For NGOs applying for sheries-related projects, we have a special credit line with the local cooperative bank, with up to 50% of the interest costs covered by the FLAG. We provide small grants for community projects such as restoring local heritage sites. We have also helped to re-activate a training programme for future shermen and created a scholarship fund for the students. Our most recent initiative is the creation of 'Fish Radio', which provides entertainment and information of interest to the sheries community, as well as promoting the FLAG's activities."

Bernard Doro ała, *FLAG President*
biuro@lgrow.pl
www.lgrow.pl/projekty/realizowane/1135-startuje-rybadio

Project development support in Galicia

Total cost: approx. EUR 3 000 – **EU contribution (EFF Axis 5 – Regional technical assistance):** approx. EUR 3 000

"In order to improve the quality of projects being supported by Galician FLAGs, the regional government organised a training day for FLAG managers on evaluating project viability. The training took place in 2011, following the rst round of calls for projects. It covered some of the fundamentals for assessing project viability. Business plan templates had already been provided to the FLAGs by the regional government and this training provided further guidance on developing a business plan and analysing nancial viability. The training helped strengthen the capacity of the FLAGs to select and support the development of e ective and viable projects at local level. It also helped to reduce delays in project approvals. Moreover, it provided FLAGs with the opportunity to exchange information on their project selection criteria, which allowed them to streamline, to some extent, the criteria used in the di erent FLAG areas."

Esperanza Martinez Bouzas, *Head of Unit, Department of Fisheries Development, Galicia*
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http://accioncosteira.es

A living strategy in Arcachon-Val de l'Eyre

Total cost: n.a. **EU contribution (Axis 4 EFF):** n.a.

"Our local development strategy (LDS) is at the heart of our group's work. Each of the priorities established at the beginning of the programme is declined into speci c objectives, such as involving sheries professionals in the management of the environment, or improving the commercialisation and processing of local products. Every action has a designated budget line. The strategic objectives also guide our FLAG's animation work. Moreover, a regular review of our achievements against planned actions means that we can take stock of where progress is being made and what areas need additional support. Re ection on the implementation of the LDS and relevant changes to the territory are important to the FLAG, as it allows us to change course if necessary. In such cases, the FLAG may propose amendments to the action plan, e.g. in terms of the eligible bene ciaries or types of actions. The result is a living strategy, which ts with the needs of our territory, is reviewed regularly against clear objectives, but is exible enough to adapt to changing circumstances."

Aurélie Lecanu, *EFF Axis 4 coordinator*
fepbassindarcachon@valdeleyre.fr
www.fepaxe4-paysbarval.fr

Communication in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

Total cost: approx. EUR 6 000 per year (largely sta time) –
EU contribution (EFF Axis 4): approx. EUR 6 000

"Our FLAG has made 'communication' an integral part of its working method. It employs a broad range of tools to ensure that its community knows who the FLAG is and what it is doing – but also to ensure its results are disseminated beyond the FLAG territory. Techniques include: ensuring a presence in the written press and on the radio; direct newsletter mailings to identi ed stakeholders; a designated web page; and telephone and face to face contact with community members, managing authority representatives and other FLAGs from the UK and beyond. To ensure visibility for the FLAG in the media, our team has a designated PR person, who produces press releases and stays in regular contact with the local media. Moreover, the FLAG has the tools in-house to make short videos to present successful projects in a concise and dynamic way."

Chris Ranford, *FLAG coordinator*
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www.seafoodcornwalltraining.co.uk/news/169- ag.html

Spotlight

Towards a successful implementation of Axis 4

A soon to be published study on Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) in 15 Member States estimates that considerable employment benefits and some important results have already been achieved by FLAGs and beneficiaries.

In September 2013, DG MARE launched a study on the implementation of Axis 4 of the EFF in 15 Member States. A study team of Capgemini Consulting (lead), Ramboll Management, Wageningen UR, Framian and various local institutes throughout Europe was contracted to:

> Generate an early set of quantitative results, both aggregate and Member State-specic, on Axis 4 implementation;
> Identify the main factors for success and the diculties that were met in implementing Axis 4;
> Generate country-specic recommendations on improving the implementation of the proposed CLLD in the 2014-2020 programming period.

Research data was gathered via dierent channels, relying heavily on the contribution of actors in the eld. This included:

> Online surveys of 255 FLAGs that had been active for more than one year, and the corresponding Managing Authorities, to gather both quantitative and qualitative data[4];
> On-the-spot case studies of 20 FLAGs to gain insights into the delivery systems at national and local level, and to obtain information on the factors leading to the success or failure of FLAGs;
> Interviews with Managing Authorities to get a clear understanding of the division of tasks and responsibilities concerning the delivery systems in place;

> Focus groups involving Managing Authorities and FLAGs, in order to validate the analysis of the delivery systems and to discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, FLAGs and beneciaries in 15 Member States[5] contributed actively to make this study a success and generate valuable ndings for Community Led-Local Development (CLLD) in sheries areas under the new generation of EMFF programmes 2014-2020.
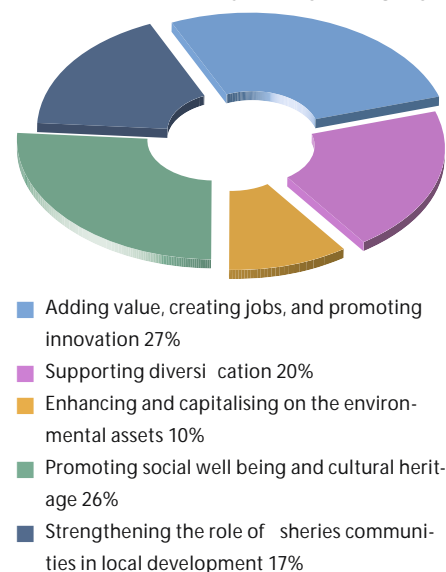
FLAG areas and budgets

The areas in which FLAGs operate vary considerably in terms of geography, but also in terms of size, the number of inhabitants and the population density. The majority of FLAGs in the survey started their operations in the years 2009-2010. The budget (EFF only) per FLAG that responded to the survey ranged from €443 094 in Germany to €4.5 million in Poland. The study found no relationship between the size of the FLAG population or area and the EFF budget.

Overall, 67% of the budget for Axis 4 had been committed by September 1, 2013 with high levels of implementation particularly evident in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia and Sweden.

Projects implemented

What the study shows is that Axis 4 tends to be made up of individual projects (72%)[6], as opposed to collective projects (28%). Projects fall under a number of different categories, with most split between "adding value, creating jobs, and promoting innovation at all stages of the sheries and aquaculture supply chain" (27%) and those "promoting social well-being and cultural heritage in sheries areas, including maritime cultural heritage" (26%)[7].

Distribution of projects by category

■ Adding value, creating jobs, and promoting innovation 27%

■ Supporting diversication 20%

■ Enhancing and capitalising on the environmental assets 10%

■ Promoting social well being and cultural heritage 26%

■ Strengthening the role of sheries communities in local development 17%

▲ *Kite-sur ng in the Ebro delta, Spain.*

Overall, however, the study shows that support for the sheries sector is a priority in the implementation of Axis 4, even if it is embedded in a variety of approaches to enhancing the sustainable development of sheries areas.

The study shows that there is no speci c pattern of type of project per Member State. For example, projects primarily promoting social well-being and cultural heritage are a particular focus in Germany, Denmark, Poland, Estonia and Portugal, while diversi cation plays a signi cant role in Axis 4 in Greece. The UK and Belgium are the countries that focus most on the development of sheries communities. Environmental policy issues play the strongest role in Sweden but are of lower importance in a number of Member States.

Employment and income e ects

The FLAG survey showed that the implementation of Axis 4 has resulted in a **leverage factor of 1.06**, meaning that one EFF euro has attracted another €1.06 for implementing projects in sheries communities. Private contributions are the main non-EFF source of nance for Axis 4 projects. The study also underlines the optimistic expectations of FLAGs about the economic sustainability of projects: it is expected that 61% of projects will continue once EFF support stops.

Expectations on the continuation of projects after EFF support expires

■ Continued 61%
■ Not continued 12%
■ Do not know 27%
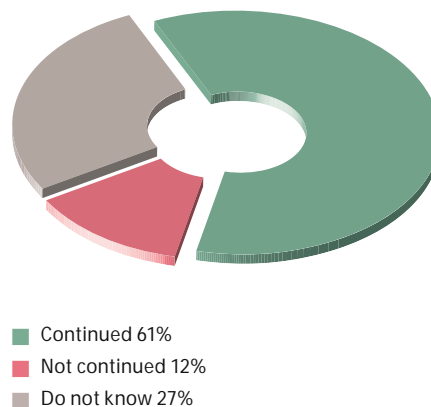
The survey of the FLAGs points to considerable employment e ects. The survey showed that, on a project basis estimate, 498 projects have helped create 687 jobs, while a further 488 projects have helped to maintain 1016 FTEs. Extrapolating these gures at aggregate level, would point to over 8 000 jobs created and nearly 12 500 jobs maintained for the total number of FARNET projects at the time of the survey (5,991; October 2013)[8]. However, it is already clear that Axis 4 has a signi cant potential for creating jobs in sheries areas.

Moreover, Axis 4 is also contributing to the creation of businesses in sheries areas: FLAGs reported that 220 enterprises (pro t and non-pro t) were created with EFF support. However, support related to the activities of existing businesses also plays a key role.

▶ ▶ ▶

4 The overall response rate of the FLAG survey was 46% (117 FLAGs), although not everyone answered all questions. While the total sample is valid for drawing some preliminary conclusions on the overall implementation of Axis 4 across the 15 Member States studied, the data has its limitations when making comparisons between individual Member States. Many of the results cannot, therefore, be extrapolated to the rest of the FLAGs.

5 The study only covered the 15 Member States where Axis 4 had been implemented on the ground for over one year, these were: BE, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, EL, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, ES, SE, UK

6 Meaning that only one actor is involved in the project – although in some cases, FLAGs may have considered projects presented by a single collective body such as a shermen's association as a single project.

7 The attribution of projects to these categories is based on the subjective judgements of FLAG managers.

8 The number of responses received means that such an extrapolation should be treated with caution and further research is needed in this respect (for example, in the framework of the ex-post evaluation of the EFF).

Factors for success

In order to collect information on the operation of FLAGs and their success factors, 20 case studies were carried out in 15 different Member States[9].

It is difficult to assess whether a FLAG can be considered successful, particularly if project targets and objectives cannot be measured in quantitative terms.

However, from a broader perspective, the following success factors were identified:

Involvement of the (fisheries) community

The involvement of the fisheries sector and other local actors in the community is key for the success of FLAGs. The bottom-up approach of Axis 4 requires an active community that is willing to develop projects that fit the needs of local people. The more project proposals are submitted, the more options the FLAGs have to choose from, which normally increases the quality of projects. The case study reports showed that there were no shortfalls in project proposals in any of the cases analysed. This suggests that there is considerable potential for more quality projects if the skills and knowledge of the local community to successfully apply for Axis 4 funds are improved by further capacity building.

Previous local development experience

Previous local development experience has proven to be a valuable asset in different stages of the lifecycle of FLAGs. This is especially true in the formation of the partnership and the preparation of the local strategy, but also in the implementation, selection and monitoring of projects. This finding is supported by the

FLAG survey, which shows that 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that previous experience with approaches such as LEADER facilitated the process of building the local partnership. Three key elements make previous local development experience a factor for success: (1) knowledge of the bottom-up approach; (2) an already established network in the community; and (3) a clear view on local needs and wishes.

Capacity of the FLAG staff

The ability of the FLAG staff to engage the (fisheries) community in local development activities in order to generate project ideas and high quality project proposals is critical for the functioning of the FLAGs. The capacity of the FLAG staff in terms of staff numbers and personal skills and expertise plays a crucial role in animating the area, community networking and providing support and guidance to project promoters. In most case studies, the FLAG staff was praised for its ability to unite divergent interests and to build trust among local stakeholders. The time spent on administrative duties averages 31%. This leaves less time for other – at least equally important – activities, such as animation and project guidance and support. It must be noted that smaller FLAGs reported that most of their staff time is spent on administrative tasks, resulting in limited time for animation and support and guidance for applicants.

Commitment of the FLAG board and members

As representatives of the community, the FLAG board and members can have a significant impact on the attitude of the community towards Axis 4 and, thus, on the results of the FLAG. The actual involvement of the FLAG board and members differs per FLAG and largely depends on the willingness of individuals. However, the case study reports show that the commitment of the board and members has

contributed to a large extent to community capacity building. These people bring their formal and informal networks to the FLAG and have detailed information on local needs, which they can use to create awareness among local actors of how to apply for Axis 4 funds.

Effective and legitimised FLAG operations

Efficient and transparent selection procedures are critical for the success of FLAGs. Clearly defined selection criteria will increase the confidence of the local community that the FLAGs are functioning well. Almost all FLAGs have drawn up formal statutes in which the selection procedures and roles and responsibilities of the different bodies of a FLAG are clearly described. These statutes, and sometimes additional procedures, are used to avoid conflicts of interest in the evaluation of projects. Consequently, the community will be more willing to submit project proposals, which in the end will give the FLAGs more options to choose from and help to ensure they only select those projects which best respond to the needs of the local community.

In addition to the success factors above, the speedy 'availability of financial resources' is a precondition for the good functioning of FLAGs. In particular, the following factors are all vital to ensure the effectiveness of FLAG operations:
> the payment process;
> the availability of pre-financing and co-financing;
> the capacity to attract private match funding.

The absence of these conditions can have a major impact on the performance of the FLAGs and underlying projects.

Final steps

The study concludes with a number of country specific recommendations for Community-Led Local Development in the 2014-2020 programming period. These recommendations will be helpful in the preparations for the new EMFF programmes, in particular how Member States plan to take on board some of the lessons learned from the Axis 4 experience under the EFF. ■
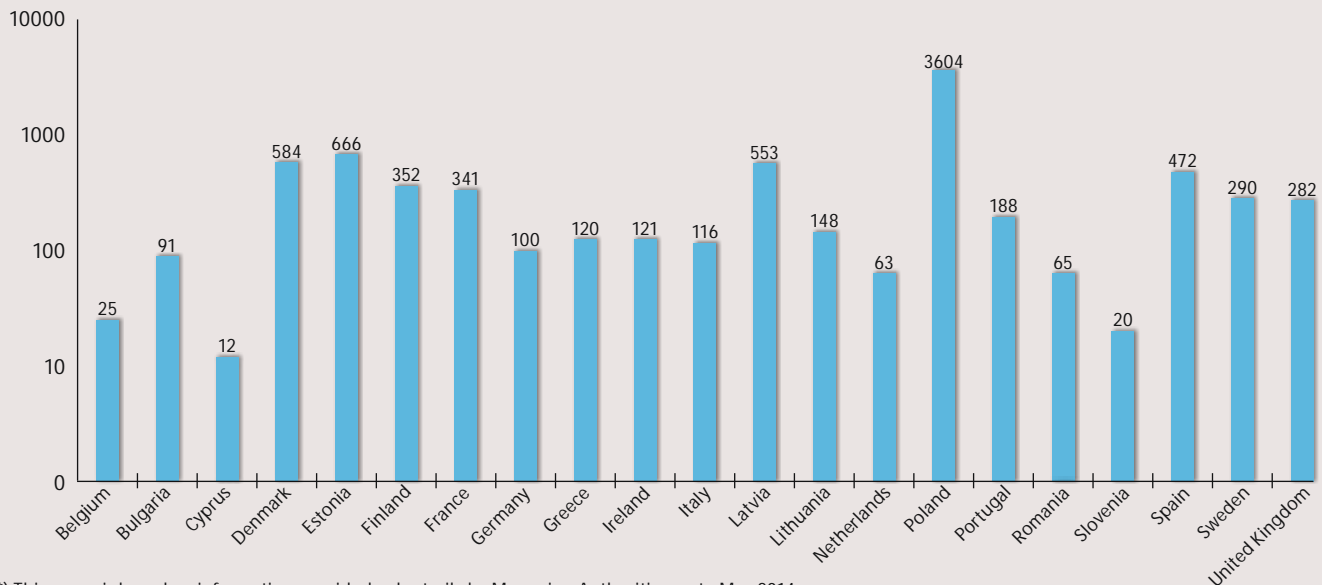

FARNETwork

> State of play: 6 498 projects and counting!

By March 2014, the 307 FLAGs now active across 21 Member States had supported an estimated 6 498 projects*.

(*) This   gure is based on information provided voluntarily by Managing Authorities up to May 2014.

> Tools to prepare CLLD in 2014-2020

To assist FLAGs and other stakeholders in preparing for the next programming period, a new section has been developed on the FARNET website, called "Local development 2014-2020". This new section contains sample strategies, tools, guides, presentations and other material, which was published during the 2007-2013 funding period, but is still useful for preparing Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in   sheries areas in the 2014-2020 period. The contents are sub-divided into what is relevant to Managing Authorities (MAs) and what applies to FLAGs. New tools and resources will also be added as and when they become available, including common guidance on CLLD (2014-2020) for local actors, which is being jointly prepared by DGs REGIO, AGRI, EMPL and MARE.

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fp s/cms/farnet/
tools-preparing-community-led-local-development-2014-2020

> Action plan to support the development of blue energy

The European Commission unveiled a new action plan to facilitate the further development of the renewable ocean energy sector in Europe. A central element in this action plan will be to establish an Ocean Energy Forum, bringing together stakeholders to build capacity and foster cooperation. The action plan should help drive forward this nascent 'blue energy' sector towards full industrialisation. Ocean energy covers all technologies to harvest the renewable energy of our seas and oceans other than o shore wind.

http://ec.europa.eu/news/energy/140122_en.htm.

FARNET Agenda

WHEN	WHAT	WHERE
06-08 May 2014	European Seafood Exposition	Brussels (B)
19-20 May 2014	European Maritime Day 2014	Bremen (D)
08 June 2014	World Oceans Day	worldwide
06-09 October 2014	OPEN DAYS – 12th European Week of Regions and Cities	Brussels (B)

Pro le

NAME: Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF)

OBJECTIVE: The EFF may co- nance local projects for sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life in sheries areas, complementary to other EU nancial instruments.

IMPLEMENTATION: Twenty-one Member States implement Axis 4. An important innovation in the implementation of this axis is the emphasis on the territorial approach.

TARGET AREAS: "**Fisheries areas**" are areas with a sea or lake shore or including ponds or a river estuary and with a signi cant level of employment in the sheries sector. The Member States select the eligible areas according to the following criteria: they should be small local territories (less than NUTS 3) that are coherent from a geographical, economic and social point of view. Support should be targeted either to sparsely populated areas or those where the sector is in decline or those with small sheries communities. Member States can add further criteria for the selection of the areas.

RECIPIENTS: "**Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)**", i.e. a combination of public, private and civil society partners jointly devising a strategy and innovative measures for the sustainable development of a sheries area. FLAGs are selected by the Member States on the basis of criteria de ned in their operational programmes. More than 300 FLAGs have been created across the EU.

ELIGIBLE MEASURES: Strengthening the competitiveness of the sheries areas; restructuring, redirecting and diversifying economic activities; adding value to sheries products; small sheries and tourism infrastructure and services; protecting the environment; restoring production damaged by disasters; inter-regional and trans-national cooperation of actors; capacity building to prepare local development strategies; and the running costs of FLAGs.

NETWORK: All the stakeholders concerned with Axis 4 are organised around a "**European Fisheries Areas Network (FARNET)**", permitting wide dissemination (through seminars, meetings and publications) of innovative projects implemented for the bene t of sheries areas and fostering transnational cooperation. The network is coordinated by the "**FARNET Support Unit**".

DURATION OF THE PROGRAMME: seven years (2007-2013), but projects can be implemented until the end of 2015.

EUROPEAN UNION ASSISTANCE: Priority Axis 4 has a budget of EUR 570 million of EFF funding for the period 2007-2013, to which must be added national public co-funding and private investment. It represents approximately 13% of the overall EFF budget (2010).

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