Connecting Scotland: How Scottish organisations engage internationally

Outer Hebrides LEADER Local Action Group

QUESTIONS

1. What international activities are happening now in your sector and/or organisation? Please describe how and why these activities take place. Are other sectors or organisations involved? What do these activities contribute or achieve?

This response is on behalf of the Outer Hebrides LEADER Local Action Group (LAG). The LAG is a public-private partnership which manages and administers the local LEADER programme on behalf of the Outer Hebridean community. The LEADER approach is about proactive ‘animation’ (‘animating a territory’) and developing links between actions for the development of the rural economy. In this way the LEADER approach builds social and economic capital and is also about the added value that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach with better identification of local needs and local solutions, more engagement on the part of local stakeholders and greater scope for innovation. A key feature of this is the co-operation element of the programme.

Transnational and inter-territorial cooperation have become increasingly important aspects of LEADER and assists with expanding the knowledge of rural stakeholders by working in partnerships to find innovative solutions to common issues that the group might not have considered previously.

As the ENRD (European Network for Rural Development) website states ‘Transnational cooperation (TNC) is more than just networking. It encourages and supports a Local Action Group to undertake a joint action with another LEADER group, or with a group taking a similar approach, in another region, Member State, or even a third country. The general objective of TNC is to help rural actors to improve the potential of their local areas.’ In Scotland, especially in the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme, there is going to be a greater emphasis on Co-operation as each Local Action Group are required to commit at least 10% of their local LEADER funding allocations on this action.

Projects take place when two groups with similar aspirations and not hailing from the same county or country wish to develop a project innovatively. The groups visit each other’s bases, take part in activities and meetings to identify what skills can be transferred, how groups can learn from each other’s practices and traditions and how to work together in the future. Knowledge transfer, developing new systems and processes, becoming more efficient, environmentally sustainable and economical are some of the benefits that arise from groups and businesses being involved in Co-operation projects.

LEADER would support projects wishing to undertake international co-operation in any sector however by way of illustration in the 2007-2013 Programme the Outer Hebrides LEADER LAG supported one project with Ceolas (a local cultural, heritage and arts organisation) who have strong links with the islands diaspora and they were
investigating similar Oral Song Traditions in Finland and Brittany against the Gaelic traditions in Uist and therefore heritage and language were the main components of this co-operation. Another example was the support that ‘Outer Hebrides Tourism’ received to develop a Nature Tourism project with tourism groups in Finland, Hungary, France, Portugal, England and Cape Verde. In this project each area held an international conference inviting the partners to transfer their knowledge, view how similar actions are undertaken in other countries and provide opportunities to all learn from each other. This was also a highly successful co-operation project.

2. Do you think your sector and/ or organisation is effective in participating in international activities? If not, what would help you to make improvements? What prevents you from making improvements now?

The 2007-2013 Scottish LEADER Programme was not as effective in undertaking co-operation projects as previous programmes however as previously mentioned this is changing for the 2014-2020 Programme. Where 10% of each area’s grant allocation requires to be committed and spent on Co-operation Projects.

The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Rural Network, are also committing more resources to supporting LAGs through the process by employing dedicated personnel to assist with developing Co-operation projects. They will also cover up to 100% of any preparatory costs when designing and developing the projects before its roll-out. Both these resources will be invaluable to LAGs to ensure that the Co-operation is successful and beneficial.

LEADER LAGs also receive support through ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development) and ENRD (European Network for Rural Development) who provide useful information and opportunities to view potential links and co-operation partners on a dedicated transnational co-operation portal.

3. What should organisations in Scotland do to be effective internationally? Are you aware of any good examples of this from Scotland or another country?

LEADER is an excellent mechanism to enable co-operation to take place between groups who would otherwise not have known about each other, their similarities and common interests and can therefore learn from each other.

To be able to effectively co-operate internationally groups and organisations require to be more confident in their products, services and idea’s to enable them to share their knowledge and experiences with others and be open to learning from other groups from other countries and not to be afraid of change. This not only fosters opportunities to develop innovative solutions but to also allow them to integrate new practices learned from other countries into their structures.

Examples were provided in Question 1.

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