



European Leader Association  
for Rural Development  
Brussels, [www.elard.eu](http://www.elard.eu)

FRENCH  
PRESIDENCY  
2023-2024



2024

# EUROPEAN LEADER CONGRESS

*Let's talk about cooperation !*



Event on the 02 & 03 of October 2024

Futuroscope,  
Poitiers France



European LEADER Association 2014





# EDITO

## THIBAUT GUIGNARD

Dear Members and Partners,

The 2024 European LEADER Congress at the Futuroscope, Poitiers, gathered over 440 participants from across Europe to advance cooperation within the LEADER programme. With inspiring sessions on project management, cross-border collaboration, and best practices, as well as the dynamic Cooperation Fair, the event showcased the innovative spirit of rural development. We also celebrated outstanding cooperation projects, highlighting the human connections that make LEADER unique.

For a detailed look at the congress and its key outcomes, we invite you to explore this booklet.

Happy reading!

[leadercongress.eu](https://leadercongress.eu)

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## Thank you 35

# DAY 1

## Why organising a LEADER Congress

While LEADER-CLLD are rooted in ultra-local approaches, cooperation remains one of their fundamental pillars. At the start of a new programming period, it is crucial to provide Local Action Groups from across Europe with opportunities to meet, exchange ideas, and build connections—bringing this pillar of cooperation to life.

With Europe spanning 10.18 million square kilometers, the diversity of contexts, cultures, and challenges is immense. Yet, many issues are surprisingly shared, from one corner of the continent to another. This Congress was an invaluable opportunity to uncover these commonalities and collaborate on innovative ways to address them.

The 130+ cooperation offers that came out of it are a compelling witness of this.



# INTRODUCTION PLENARY

The plenary session started with a warm welcome from the organisers and the Vice-President of the Grand Poitiers agglomeration, Frédy Poirier.

ELARD President, Thibaut Guignard, reflected on the importance of cooperation as a cornerstone of LEADER, encouraging Local Action Groups to embrace collaboration at every scale - starting locally and expanding beyond borders. He emphasised the hands-on and practical nature of the congress, designed to ensure that no participant left without having found a potential cooperation partner.

Speakers from the French Ministry of Agriculture, Hanane Allali, and the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region, Isabelle Boudineau, provided perspectives on regional and national expectations for LEADER cooperation, while Roberto Berutti, representing the office of Agri Commissioner Wojciechowski highlighted the EU's goals for the 2021-2027 period. The session also allowed for an engaging audience exchange, where participants shared challenges of the 21-27 programming period.





# 2024 ELARD Cooperation Awards

The Cooperation Awards celebrated exemplary LEADER projects, showcasing the power of collaboration across Europe. 33 submissions from 20 countries were sent in, gathering in total more than 180 partners, including non-EU participants like Canada and Cape Verde.

The projects were evaluated based on five key criteria: the quality of their partnerships, the impact and added value of LEADER, alignment with LEADER principles, sustainability, and transnational impact.

A jury, composed of Marta Marczis (AEIDL President), Tom Jones (ERCA President), Anita Selicka (ELARD Board Member), and Urszula Zelazny (LAG Dorzecze Bobrzy), had the delicate task of assessing applications and selecting winners.

The audience, with more than 4 100 online votes, chose its own project to be rewarded.



## ELARD Cooperation award



European LEADER Committee

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Discover the projects on  
[leadercongress.eu](https://leadercongress.eu)





Winner Public choice Award - 474 votes / 4 179



## Tierra Minera

*Asociación Oficina de Fomento y Desarrollo de las Cuencas Mineras, Grupo de Desarrollo Rural Valle del Alto Gudiato, Asociación Montesur, Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral del Bajo Martín y Andorra Sierra de Arcos, Asociación para el Desarrollo Rural Integral de las Tierras del Jiloca y Gallocanta, Asociación para el Desarrollo de la Ribera Alta del Ebro*

“Tierra Minera” is an innovative and transformative project that revitalizes historic mining areas into vibrant tourism destinations across Spain. The consortium’s mission is to preserve and celebrate the rich industrial heritage while fostering sustainable economic growth and community empowerment.

By integrating cutting-edge technology with authentic historical experiences, “Tierra Minera” offers a unique, immersive journey into Spain’s mining legacy with a touristic product. Users can explore underground galleries, interactive exhibits, and augmented reality applications, bringing the past to life in a dynamic and engaging way.



1st Jury's choice



## 5StarNature

*LAG Aktiivinen Pohjois-Satakunta ry (Finland), LAG Western-Harju (Estonia), LAG Järva Arengu Partnerid (Estonia), LAG Valli del Canavese (Italy), LAG Montagne Biellesi (Italy), LAG Valle del Ambroz (Spain)*

The 5StarNature project is a collaborative initiative uniting four European countries to develop international rural tourism events that highlight nature tourism in their respective regions. By networking local tourism entrepreneurs across borders, the project aims to share best practices and enhance the appeal of rural areas as tourist destinations.

Launched in 2018, with activities continuing through 2024, 5StarNature focuses on the rapidly growing sector of nature and rural cultural tourism. The project involves six LAGs working together to explore and improve opportunities for international tourism. Key activities include organising international project logo competitions, publishing best practice guides in multiple languages, conducting benchmarking visits to test tourism products, and utilising social media channels for event marketing and outreach.



2nd Jury's choice



## Flourishing Destinations

***Belgium, Meetjesland: LAG LEADER Meetjesland, Tourism Meetjesland, Plattelandscentrum Meetjesland, Tourism Flanders, Municipality of Assenede, Municipality Sint-Laureins***

***Scotland, Angus: LAG LEADER Angus, Angus Tourism Cooperative, Angus Council, Murton Trust***

***Romania, Basinul Dornelor: LAG LEADER Basinul Dornelor, Community Safety and Mediation Center, Ecotourism Association Tara Dornelor, International: Conscious Travel - Anna Pollock***

“How can the local community thrive through tourism?” This was the central question of this transnational project. The project was based on a theoretical framework underpinning the new vision of tourism in Flanders that had the goal of envisioning a future that goes beyond simply attracting more visitors to a region or destination. Shifting from quantity to quality, focusing on the added value that tourism can bring. Through a co-creative approach, partners explored how tourism can contribute to the vitality and flourishing of the local community.



3rd Jury's choice



## Boergondische Buren

***EGTS Linieland van Waas en Hulst, municipality of Stekene, Hulst, Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, Provincie Zeeland, Evides, Het Zeeuwse Landschap, Toerisme Oost-Vlaanderen, Toerisme Waasland, Bosgroep Oost-Vlaanderen Noord, EROV, Plattelandscentrum Meetjesland, ZLTO***

This project celebrates the shared Burgundian heritage and agricultural roots of cross-border farmers, fostering collaboration and creating new sales opportunities. Responding to farmers' and entrepreneurs' needs, it produced a comprehensive database of farm and regional products, connecting consumers and the hospitality sector to local goods.

Key outputs include a practical manual for cross-border trade, a strong entrepreneurial network facilitating knowledge exchange, and innovative agritourism partnerships linking producers with hospitality businesses. The project's highlight is the "Niemandland" watchtower, a public-designed symbol of shared history featuring sculptures and QR codes directing visitors to local producers, leaving a lasting legacy for tourism and community identity.

# Roundtable: hearing back from successful projects

Representatives of winning projects were invited onto the scene to discuss the main challenges they had encountered in their projects, how collaborating made them overcome them, and what project brought to their territories.



# DAY 2



The second day of the Congress brought participants together in an inspiring atmosphere of collaboration and knowledge-sharing. The day featured:

**Our cooperation fair:** A vibrant hub with a helpdesk, coaching, a cooperation wall, thematic tables, and networking spaces like speed-dating, fostering connections and project partnerships.

**Parallel sessions:** A series of expert-led discussions explored critical topics such as cross-border cooperation, aligning LEADER with the EU's rural vision, empowering youth, and addressing practical challenges in cooperation projects.

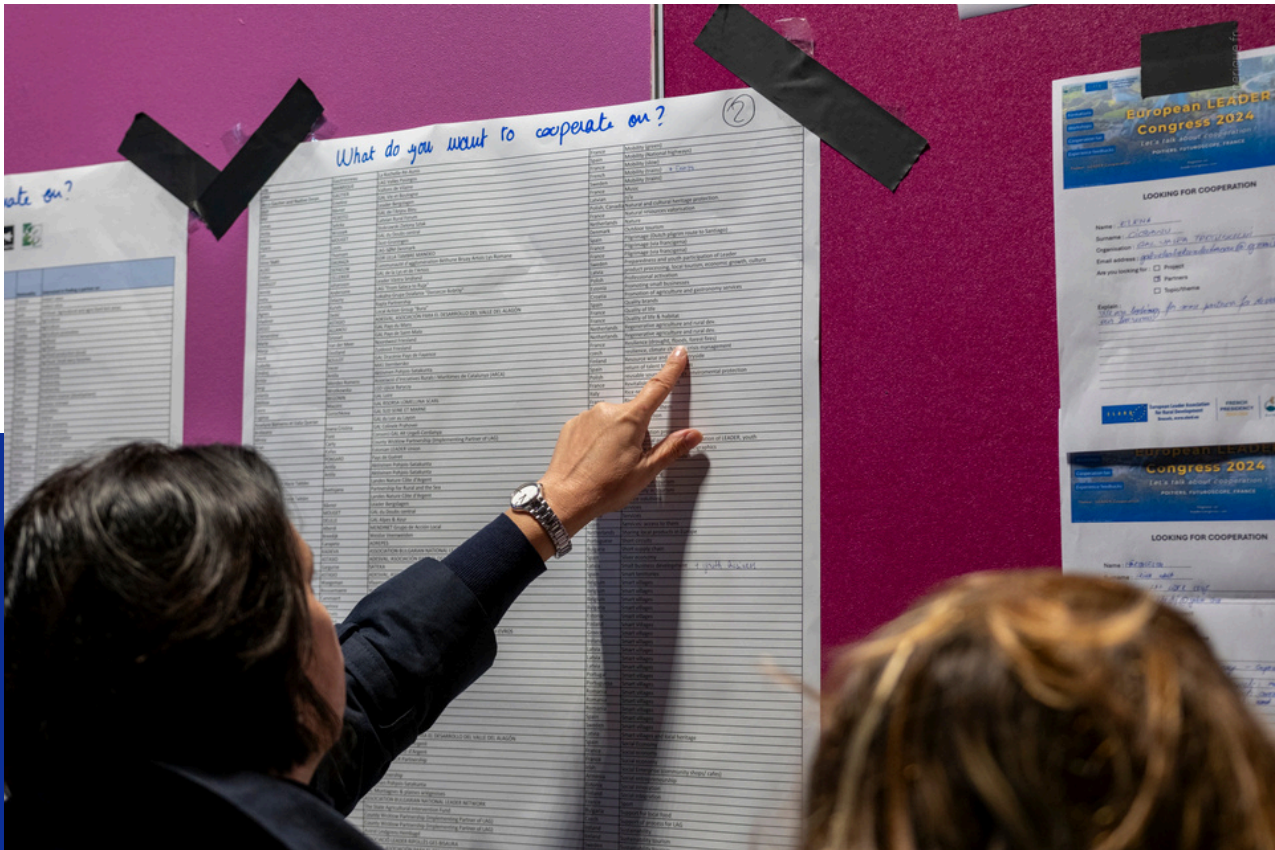
## **Closing Plenary & evening show:**

The day wrapped up with reflections on the event's achievements, followed by an entertaining evening show at the heart of the Futuroscope.

Each session is detailed in the following pages, providing insights into the discussions and outcomes.

**All congress materials, including presentations, are available online on our [website](#).**



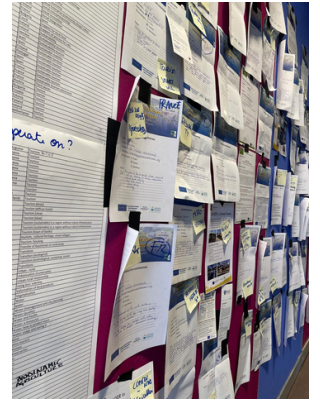


## LOOKING FOR COOPERATION

With more than 400 participants attending, the event was a huge opportunity to harness cooperation wishes, even those not fully formulated yet. It is not often that representatives from all EU countries and beyond are present in the same room.

From broad topics participants wanted to cooperate on, that we gathered before the Congress, we built 30 conversation tables, taking place one after the other during the day. A “cooperation helpdesk” was set-up, ran by experts from Managing Authorities, experimented LAG managers, and the EU CAP network, to help and guide those who aren’t sure where to start. Participants were also able to stick on the wall their offers. There were more than 130!

# COOPERATION FAIR





# WORKSHOPS

Summary of each workshop session on  
03rd Octobre 2024

## THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF COOPERATION FOR 21-27

### SPEAKERS

- Peter Toth, EU CAP Network
- Elena Di Federico, EU CAP Network

This workshop focused on equipping participants with practical knowledge and tools for planning and implementing transnational cooperation projects under the 2021-2027 framework. With an interactive format, the session aimed to encourage experience-sharing and collaboration.

The session began with updates from the EU CAP Network, highlighting support mechanisms available for TNC. Participants, divided into diverse groups, worked collaboratively to:

- Sequence 17 key steps involved in TNC projects, ranging from assessing local needs to evaluating project outcomes.
- Share advice and experiences, enriching the discussion with practical insights.
- Explore detailed guidance through "Joker" cards and document their work on flipcharts.

The groups then presented their findings, sharing key advice and experiences. The session concluded with overarching recommendations from the EU CAP Network, emphasizing the importance of structured planning, local engagement, and lessons learned for future projects.





## COOPERATION WITHOUT (EU) BORDERS

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### SPEAKERS

- Petar Gjorgievski, Balkan Rural Development Network and Rural Development Network of North Macedonia
- Ana Damovska, Rural Development Network of North Macedonia
- Marta Marczis, European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)
- Olha Oliinyk, ALDA Est – Region of Vinnytsia
- Pierre Le Men, GAL Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée
- Hanane Allali-Puz, Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire

This session explored the opportunities and challenges of engaging in TNC projects beyond the European Union. Participants heard from experts and practitioners with firsthand experience in fostering international partnerships.

### Regional Perspectives:

- Mediterranean and Middle East: Insights on methodologies to facilitate cooperation for Local Action Groups in regions like Southern France and Corsica. Plans were shared for developing a comprehensive guide and training French LAGs to engage in these often-complex projects.
- North Macedonia and Albania: Speakers highlighted the advantages and barriers in these regions, including a reliance on donor funding and the slow adoption of the LEADER system. Despite these challenges, there is strong interest in expanding international partnerships.
- Armenia: Limited access to EU funds complicates the establishment of additional LAGs. Efforts focus on skill-building through international workshops and implementing sustainable, smart actions in rural communities.



## 64 MA AND 64 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: HOW TO HOMOGENIZE COOPERATION RULES?

### SPEAKERS

- Juha-Matti Markkola, Rural Network Unit / Food Authority of Finland
- Laura Jänis, Managing authority / Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland
- Anke Weymeher, BAGLAG (Germany)
- Dr. Konstantinos C. Zapounidis, Pieriki Local Development Agency & LAG Leader Programme Management (Greece)
- Melanie Steinbacher, Regionalmanagement Kufstein und Umgebung (Austria)

This session enabled participants to hear back from the four of the five European champions in cooperation (Austria, Greece, Finland, Germany) and understand how their managing authorities support them in cooperating at transnational level.

The workshop showed that despite the fact that each managing authority sets their own eligibility criteria and rules, it is possible to navigate those and undertake a high number of cooperation projects with various partners



## THE UNUSUAL TOPICS AND SUSPECTS: LEADER COOPERATION CONTRIBUTING TO THE EU RURAL VISION

### SPEAKERS

- Enrique Nieto, Rural Pact Support Office
- Wolfgang Berger, LEADER-forum Austria
- Barbara Stumpf, LEADER-forum Austria
- Eduard Trepas, ARCA
- Haude Blanc, DG AGRI - European Commission

*'How to support innovative topics that contribute to stronger, prosperous, connected and resilient rural areas?'*



Moderated by Enrique Nieto from the Rural Pact Support Office, this session aimed to explore how cooperation can contribute to achieving the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

Ms. Haude Blanc from DG AGRI delivered a presentation on LEADER cooperation within the context of the LTVRA. The following presentations highlighted LEADER as a method for realising the goals of long-term visions. Additionally, Eduard Trepas from ARCA shared a national example, illustrating how to elevate the voices of rural communities in Catalonia's rural policy agendas.



## SMALL PROJECT AS A STARTING POINT FOR COOPERATION

### SPEAKERS

- Inga Krekele, LAG Kaimiņi
- Fabrice Geoffroy, LAG Pays du Ruffécois

With LEADER, quality takes precedence over quantity. This session demonstrated how smaller projects can achieve effective collaboration and impact. Many fear that cooperation projects are synonymous with large-scale initiatives, but this is neither true nor necessary.

Speakers addressed the question, 'How big does my cooperation project need to be?'

Inga Krekele, managing Latvian LAG, LAG Kaimini, shared the impactful project on identity creation, which success in implementation lied in the strength of the teams and their management. Mr. Geoffroy, from French LAG Pays du Ruffécois, shared how their local civic project focused on youth mobilisation expanded over time. Originally launched with 4 LAGs, the project has grown to be international, thanks to the diversification of its goals, including the development of educational tools and the creation of an escape game.



*“ Connecting people are the essential, but also work on their identity, especially for small villages : knowing people, their culture “*



## THE FLOOR IS YOURS: COOPERATION PITCHES

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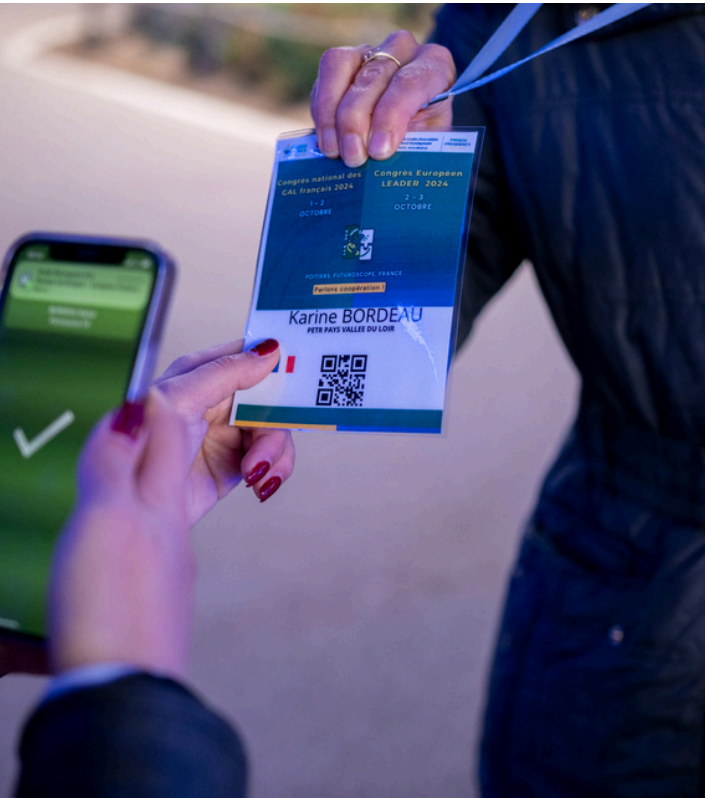
### SPEAKERS

- Maria Jose Murciano, REDR - Spanish Network for Rural Development
- 15 participants pitched their project ideas.

Moderated by Maria Jose Murciano, this session aimed to promote projects and facilitate partner search.

Fifteen participants pitched their project ideas, each having two minutes to present.

Highly interactive, the session enabled several participants to connect with potential future partners for their projects.







# COOPERATION PLATFORMS: TOOLS UNDER DEVELOPMENT TO FACILITATE THE CREATION OF COOPERATION PARTNERSHIPS

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## SPEAKERS

- Hanane Allali-Puz, Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire (French Ministry of Agriculture)
- Thibaut Guignard, Leader France & Mayor of Plœuc-L'Hermitage
- Elyse Lebreuilly, Leader France

This workshop focused on discussions and exchanges regarding existing cooperation platforms dedicated to facilitating the creation of exchange networks for cooperation projects.

## Building Europe with Local Councilors (BELC)

Mr. Thibaut Guignard, Mayor of Ploëuc-L'Hermitage, discussed the European network launched by the European Commission, 'Building Europe with Local Councilors' (BELC), which brings together 1,136 members. This network aims to encourage local elected officials to collaborate and raise citizens' awareness. To support this, local officials have access to tools that promote European initiatives and can seek out cooperation projects. It is the local elected officials who keep this network active by contributing to the exchange platform, particularly by sharing their best practices. For example, Mr. Guignard shared the experience of Plœuc-L'Hermitage's townhall, which disseminate its cooperation project involving firefighters from Poland, Romania, and France through the BELC network.

## Cluster MED

Cluster MED is a project supported by the French Ministry of Agriculture, aimed at developing an exchange platform to facilitate cooperation with third countries within the framework of the LEADER programme. This project is being developed in partnership with French LAGs involved in cooperation with countries in the Mediterranean basin, drawing on their experiences. A benchmarking study is currently underway in six countries with ongoing cooperation projects with third countries: Spain, Italy, Portugal, Finland, Cyprus, and Malta.

## Erasmus + DROM project & RUP platform project

Leader France, in collaboration with the REDR and Minha Terra, is currently running an Erasmus+ project for LAGs in the European overseas territories, which face specific challenges in implementing the LEADER programme.

This project serves as an initial step in a broader reflection on the unique needs of the outermost regions, offering them an opportunity to share their best practices as overseas LAGs.

The first mobilities of the project have provided insights into the specificities of each overseas region and will contribute to the creation of a guide and the drafting of an advocacy document to support the inclusion of outermost regions in European policies.





## INTEGRATING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN LOCAL PROJECTS

### SPEAKERS

- Ana Margarida Esteves, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ISCTE IUL
- Marion Eckardt, ELARD Knowledge Hub
- Laurence Modrego, ECOLISE

Focusing on cooperation at local level, this session aimed at exchanging on the following question:

“How to empower communities to actively participate in shaping a regenerative future?”



In the format of a fishboal session, this workshop explored:

- 1 Methods for incorporating democratic processes and citizen involvement in community-led initiatives;
- 2 Environmental advocacy within LAGs: designing and implementing community-led environmental projects

## COOPERATION PROJECT CHALLENGES: DO'S AND DON'TS

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### SPEAKERS

- Séverine Bressaud, Eurêka21
- Anke Wehmeyer, BagLag

Moderated by two cooperation experts, the goal of this session was to uncover and discuss the keys to successful cooperation projects, while learning from common pitfalls. In a dynamic dual performance, Séverine and Anke tackled every question from the audience about the various aspects of setting up cooperation projects. Together, they debunked all the excuses that might hold LAG managers back from diving into a cooperation project. By the end of the workshop, 'I don't speak the language!' and 'I don't have the funds!' were no longer valid excuses!

# COOPERATION AS A LEADER PRINCIPLE: HOW DO YOU ENGAGE LOCALS TO PARTICIPATE IN YOUR LAG AND PROJECTS?

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## SPEAKERS

- Loïc Sorin, SLR2A
- Claudie Vetro, LAG CACEM
- Matthias Wagner, LAG Leipziger Muldenland
- Katharine Koss, LAG Leipziger Muldenland

This workshop went beyond the contractual side of cooperation (transnational or transregional) to explore the fundamental principle: how do you bring people together around a common goal, and how do you recruit participants and partners to work towards it?

The session aimed to provide the audience with insights from speakers on their strategies for successfully involving different types of stakeholders in their projects or LAG strategies.

While some stakeholders can be more challenging to reach than others, speakers shared valuable experiences.

For example, Mr. Loic Sorin and Mrs. Claudie Vetro discussed their experience in creating a comprehensive food strategy in Martinique. The LAG consulted an expert to develop a project focused on food, resulting in an island-wide food strategy involving municipalities, schools, children, and more.

Matthias Wagner presented CoLabora, a European cooperation project focused on coworking in rural areas, bringing together seven LAGs from different EU Member States. From 2018 to 2022, the partners conducted study trips and collaborative work to create a methodological toolkit, raising awareness of the benefits of coworking in rural areas and helping others set up and operate coworking spaces. An Erasmus+ project is planned for 2025 to facilitate the exchange of best practices between employees and owners of coworking spaces.



## FROM LEADER PROJECT TO REGIONAL POLICY

### SPEAKERS

- Dr. Konstantinos C. Zapounidis, Pieriki Local Development Agency & LAG Leader Programme Management
- Claudia Bruno, LAG Tirreno Eolie

*'How can a LEADER project influence regional policy?'*

A LEADER project can influence regional policy by demonstrating successful local solutions that can be scaled and replicated.

The Emblematic Mediterranean Mountains Network is the perfect example to illustrate this. We heard from the Emblematic

Mediterranean Mountains project from first hand sources: Konstantinos Zapounodis, there since the start of the project, and Claudia Bruno, one of the latest joiners in the project. The network started as a small initiative, and has grown into a large network and influenced regional policy on sustainable development by highlighting the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation. Through shared best practices and evidence-based outcomes, such projects can prompt policy adjustments that integrate local knowledge into broader regional strategies. And their influence is still expanding with more mountains joining the network each year!



## ENGAGING YOUTH

### SPEAKERS

- Annie Linsemark, ELARD Knowledge Hub
- Lorine Payet, LAG Haute Provence Luberon
- María Gafo Gómez-Zamolla, DG AGRI - European Commission
- Aude Bourgeois, ELARD

This session was divided into two parts: the first focused on the Youth in LEADER Community, launched by ELARD, presenting the results of the steering committee votes and an overview of community management.

The second part addressed the critical need to involve more young people in LEADER initiatives to secure the future of rural development. With only 9% of LAG council members being youth, greater efforts are needed to amplify their voices and contributions.

Maria Gafo Gomez, representing DG AGRI, shared the importance of youth engagement, along with current statistics and European Commission initiatives. Following this, interactive panel discussions allowed participants to engage directly, exchanging ideas and insights.

The session concluded with a call to action: improving communication is essential to raise awareness of rural support programs and opportunities. Innovative, youth-focused solutions can encourage active participation and long-term engagement in rural communities.



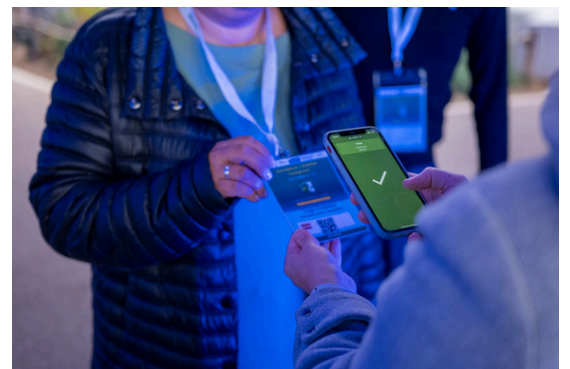
## Session highlights:

- Young people face barriers such as limited representation in decision-making processes, insufficient support for innovation, and restricted access to education, public transport, culture, employment, and housing. **The lack of affordable housing was identified as a significant driver of rural depopulation.**
- Youth bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and an essential voice to the bottom-up approach of LEADER. **Intergenerational dialogue was emphasized as key to fostering better understanding and collaborative solutions.**









# THANK YOU!

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Thank you for making this possible.

Thank you for coming to Poitiers for the 2024 European LEADER Congress.

Thank you to Grand Poitiers agglomeration, Nouvelle-Aquitaine region and the French Ministry of Agriculture for supporting the event.

Thank you to the speakers.

Thank you to the Futuroscope, and to its technical team and volunteers to help us on-site.

Thanks to the all the volunteers for their help, and specifically to the team of Leader France.

Thank you LEADER.

Thank you Europe.





**ELARD**

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