

BELGIUM
PRAXIS: Making Rural Entrepreneurship Work
www.praxisnetwork.net

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Details of activity

Background to the case study	<p>Aims and objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of institutional capacity to develop rural partnerships and rural development strategies at regional and local level. • Exchanging experience on policies and initiatives to tackle unemployment in rural areas and promote entrepreneurship. • Exchanging experience and strengthening rural development through sharing best practice. <p>Brief rationale</p> <p>PRAXIS is an Individual Project with 15 partners from 9 different countries, who have a shared interest in the sustainable development of their rural areas.</p> <p>They have been working together for more than 2 years to exchange information and experiences on working with local and regional partnerships to tackle rural development issues in their areas. Rural unemployment, low income, social exclusion, skills deficits and the departure of younger generations from rural areas</p>
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are all problems they are trying to solve.

PRAXIS aims to take this cooperation a step further by exploring best practice in creating effective partnerships to promote entrepreneurship in rural areas and by implementing 4 pilot projects that will demonstrate innovative approaches how these partnerships can provide practical support to existing and potential businesses to be more competitive.

The technical content of the project has been divided into two Components which are interrelated:

- **Component 2 will focus on improving institutional capacity** to create and sustain cross-cutting rural partnerships so that business support services can be delivered to existing and potential businesses in rural areas in a co-ordinated and effective way. This will be achieved by means of an on-line Rural Partnerships and Strategies questionnaire survey which will be analysed at a seminar to which all PRAXIS partners and others will be invited. A Toolbox for the Development of Regional Strategies will be launched at a final conference in Opole in September 2006 and key policy recommendations will be fed into national and EU consultations on integrating rural and regional development programmes.
- **Component 3 will test the findings of Component 2**, specifically, how these partnerships work together on the ground using Structural Funds to implement rural development strategies in 4 pilot projects that will focus on different aspects of supporting entrepreneurial activity in rural areas:
 1. Pilot project 1 will involve the delivery of **innovation training programmes to businesses** in 2 countries and the development of the Local Sustainable Rural Business Framework.
 2. **Pilot project 2 will facilitate the start-up of micro-enterprises in rural areas** through production of a Local Partnership Guide and training modules.
 3. Pilot project 3 will develop a **Virtual Community of Entrepreneurs** based on Information Society Technology to be used by all partners.
 4. Pilot project 4 will produce **diversification plans**,



	<p>provide business advice to companies and evaluate the effectiveness of these diversification and innovation activities in improving the liveability of rural areas.</p> <p>The experiences gained through these pilots will be disseminated at 4 seminars and a final conference and recommendations will be made on their transferability to PRAXIS partners and others.</p> <p>Implementing organisation Essex County Council (UK) East of England Regional Assembly (UK) East of England Development Agency (UK) Business Link for Essex (UK) Writtle College (UK) Province of East Flanders (BE) Province of West Flanders (BE) Technological Institute of Aragon (ES) Picardy Regional Council (FR) Heraklion Development Agency (GR) Province of Mantua (IT) Province of South Holland (NL) Opolskie Voivodeship (PL) Pomeranian Association of Rural Municipalities (PL) Arad County Council (RO)</p> <p>Funders European Regional Development Fund; InterregIIC (Community initiative on interregional co-operation across the entire EU territory and neighbouring countries) Partners co-financing.</p> <p>When activity started / end date? Network started in 2001 InterregIIC-project : Start oktober 2004 – end September 2007</p>
Description of activity	<p>Outline of programme / activities and approaches used The overall objective of PRAXIS is to expose all partners to new ideas and approaches on entrepreneurship in rural areas, which will help them to create effective rural entrepreneurship partnerships and produce integrated rural entrepreneurship</p>



strategies that will help make rural areas more prosperous and sustainable and attractive to live in.

The sub-objectives are:

- To carry out, analyse and communicate the results of a survey of the experience of PRAXIS partners in the creation of rural partnerships and their role in formulating and implementing integrated strategies that support rural businesses to embrace innovation and be more competitive;
- to carry out, and then compare the results of, a series of pilot projects to test the effectiveness of different partnership approaches to implement rural development policies, which encourage entrepreneurship and innovation;
- to look at the role of existing and future Structural Funds in supporting regional and development objectives;
- to compare how innovation programmes in different countries facilitate, encourage and enthuse rural SMEs
- to encourage and facilitate the start-up of micro-enterprises in rural areas;
- to improve access to communication between rural entrepreneurs across Europe and their capacity to exchange knowledge and experience;
- to explore and widen the range of alternative sources of income in rural areas and provide training to rural workers so they can benefit from these new opportunities;
- to complement experiences gained under the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy by adding value to pillar II activities and exploring areas for activity currently left untouched by pillar II.

Origins – how it came about – bottom up / top down, grew from previous initiative (if so what)

The PRAXIS partnership has developed over the last three years in response to a desire by local and regional authorities in the existing EU member states and the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe to be able to exchange experience and knowledge across a range of practical regional development issues. The idea for such a network was initiated in 2001 involving a group of regions in North-West Europe that had a history of mutual cooperation through INTERREG and other EU programmes. They each had some type of co-operation agreement with a range of local and regional authorities from Central and Eastern Europe. In September 2003 the partnership

	<p>submitted a project proposal under the INTERREG IIC programme based on the work of the PRAXIS network and the outcomes of 2 conferences, one in Budapest in 2001 and one in Arad, Romania in 2002. Unfortunately the proposal was not approved because it was not focused enough. All partners were keen that we should try to focus the proposal more and resubmit it in the next round. During the international partner meetings in preparation for the first proposal it had already turned out that most of the partners had a lot of experience with rural development issues and therefore we decided to build further on this topic.</p> <p>Who was involved in the design, management and delivery of the programme All the praxis members, see above Lead Partner : Essex Development & Regeneration Agency</p> <p>Recognition – has the programme been recognised as good practice? If so, by whom?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval as Interreg III C project. • Publication in the project summary of the InterregIIC West-Zone secretariat • There have been a couple of articles in Essex Newspapers as well as Greek newsletters. • To be confirmed : Presentation of Praxis in the European week of cities and regions.
<p>Policy context within which the programme operates</p>	<p>Is there an explicit relationship between policy priorities / local activities? The project will focus on experiences gained through Objective 1 and 2 funding, INTERREG, LEADER, the European Social Fund, Phare and SAPARD.</p> <p>PRAXIS will complement the objectives and activities of the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy by exploring new areas of activity that are currently not covered by the CAP and by a transnational exchange of experience across the whole of Europe. This will be achieved by creating an overview of different models of rural partnership across Europe and their success factors and developing a Toolbox for the Development of Regional Strategies in Component 2. The outcomes of Component 2 will be implemented and tested through 4 Pilot</p>



	<p>Projects in Component 3. This will be achieved through the transfer of good practice on the role that regional and local authorities can play in bringing different public and private sector players together to produce and implement integrated rural development strategies with support of the Structural Funds.</p> <p>Is the policy context supportive / prohibitive? Supportive</p> <p>Has the policy context changed during the life of the activity? No</p> <p>Which came first – local activities or policy priorities (i.e. is activity leading or following policy priorities)? Policy priorities</p>
Geographical focus of the case study	European level
Impact	<p>Outputs – scale and scope of people reached through the programme Successful Innovative Rural Entrepreneurship Initiatives in Europe.</p> <p>Indicators: number of meetings, Progress Reports, leaflets, newsletters, returned questionnaires, number of seminars, training modules, number of businesses participating/reached etc.</p> <p>The project aims to produce the following results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitating long-term transfer of experience and expertise between rural areas • more employment opportunities in rural areas • more entrepreneurial mindset among workers in rural areas • a higher rate of people in rural areas setting up their own business • more and better partnership working in rural areas. <p>The project intends to produce the following long-term impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the sustainable economic development of rural areas • the inclusion of objectives with regard to rural entrepreneurship in the Single Fund for Rural Development and the transnational strand of the future



	<p>Structural Funds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• more attractive image of rural areas as places to live and work. <p>Outcomes: at local level – what difference at local level and at regional and / or national level – what difference made?</p> <p>The outputs of the project will be owned by all project partners.</p> <p>The PRAXIS website will continue after the end of the project.</p> <p>The findings and results of the project will be integrated into future local, regional, and hopefully national and European policies.</p> <p>The Toolbox for the Development of Regional Strategies that will be developed as part of Component 2 will be used by the PRAXIS partners to improve their own procedures for partnership working in the future.</p> <p>The findings of the questionnaire and seminars in Component 2 will be used to issue Policy Recommendations to influence national and regional policies and the programme of the European Single Fund for Rural Development, which will come into force from 2007 onwards.</p> <p>One of the outputs of Pilot Project 1 will be a Sustainable Rural Business Framework, which will empower rural businesses to maximise local markets and sharpen entrepreneurial skills. This will continue after the end of the project.</p> <p>Pilot Project 1 will also help to capture a local market for rural products. This market will continue to exist after the end of the project.</p> <p>Pilot Project 2 will establish a Local Partnership that will continue its activity after the project. The LP and the Guide for People who wish to start up micro-enterprises in rural areas will continue to support the business start-up process.</p> <p>Pilot Project 3 will see the development of an on-line European Rural Network of Decentralised Services, which will continue after the project.</p>
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	<p>Pilot Project 4 will see an improved liveability of rural areas.</p> <p>Any impact at European level? See above. Benefit from the activities of the Pilot Projects through transnational seminars, the development of transferable models, educational materials, study visits and shared tools and databases. www.praxisnetwork.net</p>
Partners' details	<p><u>Component 1</u> involves <u>management and coordination</u>. (Essex County Council)</p> <p><u>Component 2</u> will focus on improving <u>institutional capacity</u> to create and sustain cross-cutting rural partnerships so that business support services can be delivered to existing and potential businesses in rural areas in a co-ordinated and effective way. This will be achieved by means of an on-line Rural Partnerships and Strategies questionnaire survey which will be analysed at a seminar to which all PRAXIS partners and others will be invited. A Toolbox for the Development of Regional Strategies will be launched at a final conference in Opole in September 2007 and key policy recommendations will be fed into national and EU consultations on integrating rural and regional development programmes. (East of England Regional Assembly)</p> <p><u>Component 3</u> will test the findings of Component 2, specifically, how these partnerships work together on the ground using Structural Funds to implement rural development strategies in <u>4 pilot projects that will focus on different aspects of supporting entrepreneurial activity in rural areas</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot project 1 "Developing Innovation Amongst Rural Entrepreneurs", will involve the delivery of innovation training programmes to businesses in 2 countries and the development of the Local Sustainable Rural Business Framework. (Essex Rural Partnership (ERP) through Essex County Council, Writtle College and Business Link for Essex) • Pilot project 2 "Micro-Enterprise Start-Up in Rural Areas" (MESURA) will facilitate the start-up of micro-enterprises in



	<p>rural areas through production of a Local Partnership Guide and training modules. (Development Agency of Heraklion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot project 3 "Virtual Community of Entrepreneurs in the Rural World" (Vicor) will develop a Virtual Community of Entrepreneurs based on Information Society Technology to be used by all partners. (Aragon Technological Institute) • Pilot project 4 "Innovation through Diversification of Economic Activities in Rural Areas" will produce diversification plans, provide business advice to companies and evaluate the effectiveness of these diversification and innovation activities in improving the liveability of rural areas. (Province of West Flanders)
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Theme-Specific Questions

Who was targeted by the programme?	Rural entrepreneurs – Micro enterprises in rural areas. Different public and private sector players
Which levels of government were involved, informed or consulted?	<p>Added value of the transnational and inter-regional partnership will be the encouragement of partners “to think outside the box” about entrepreneurship. The recognition that rural businesses located close to urban areas require particular enterprise support is an innovative aspect of the operation.</p> <p>Local, regional, national and EU level of government involved</p>
What actions resulted in mainstreaming?	<p>MESURA : Their pilot involves Leader and Leader + programmes. A curriculum for the training seminars has been developed with 30 hours and four parts to the training to begin in April/May. They will have results in May. Their target groups are young people and people in the early stages of business start up. Opolskie Voivodeship : They are looking to work with Mesura and are developing extra activities and an event to create a bigger impact on the region. They are promoting the project to young people and there is potential to link to Vicor later on.</p> <p>Essex: 25 businesses are participating in I Dare. 3 business mentors are providing intensive 1 to1 mentoring support. A brochure has been produced and a workshop was planned for 23 March 2006 to address the businesses general skills needs with</p>



	<p>sessions on leadership and marketing and promotion. The next phase is for sustained mentoring, a further workshop and the conference in September to share good practice.</p> <p>Vicor: The tools are in place for Vicor and they have worked with programmers and designers to develop the website. The next stage will be the dissemination of the tools and working with them. There is a forum on the website with topics as well as registration details. http://www.ita.es/praxis/web/splash.html</p> <p>West Flanders: The project started in October 2005 with 2 people providing support to rural entrepreneurs with the current focus on farmers wanting to diversify. 2 networks were set up to encourage collaboration to sell products through regional branding and farms arranging visits by schools and families.</p>
Sustainability	<p>Total Budget : 1 894 100 ERDF : 1 070 550 Partners : 823 550</p>
Successes / lessons learned	<p>What contributed to the programme's success? A good lead partner, good organisation of project, interested partners, good communication (f.e. communication manager) Important to meet the partners personally to create activities (recommendable each time the same person) Split the steering group meetings and the seminars. What lessons have been learned Project is not finished yet.</p>