

Connecting People with Peatlands

Following LEADER to the Peatlands

Encouraging and supporting new approaches to rural development was central to different phases of 'LEADER' initiatives within the European Union (EU). The initials of LEADER stand for: 'Liaison Entre Actions de Developement d'Economie Rurale.' You can find out more on the LEADER+ website.

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

But here is a summary:

LEADER I started the process. Then LEADER II put the approach of territorially based, integrated, participative rural development into more widespread use. LEADER+ continued the programme in the period 2000-2006. It was designed as an EU 'laboratory' to promote the creation and testing of innovative methods for sustainable rural development.

LEADER+ was built on support for three actions

- * strategies for integrated territorial development based on a 'bottom-up' approach
- * co-operation between rural areas
- * networking

Partnerships called Local Action Groups (LAGs) were crucial to delivery of pilot schemes under LEADER+. This was the case with the trans-national 'Connecting people with our Peatland Heritage' project. It was run by a partnership of LAGs, national agencies and local groups from the four EU member states which participated.

Lead LAGs

The lead LAG for the projects was Lomond and Rural Stirling Leader+ in Scotland.

<http://www.irsleaderplus.org.uk/>

In Finland, Perapohjolan Kehitys ry Leader+ and partners steered the peatland work.

<http://www.perapohjola.fi/>

In France, Centre Ouest Bretagne and local partners took the lead.

<http://www.centre-ouest-bretagne.org/>

In Ireland, it was Offaly Leader+ and local partners.

<http://www.offalyleader.ie/>

Cost

The total cost of the project was 494,214 Euros. The EU provided EUR 203,378, other public funds EUR 197,531 and private funds EUR 93,305.

Priorities

Priority themes laid down by the European Commission for LEADER+ were:

- * making the best use of natural and cultural resources; (this was the most popular theme with LAGs and the one through which the peatland work was done)
- * improving the quality of life in rural areas
- * adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions
- * the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive

Added value

The environmental and cultural focus of the peatland project's theme had considerable overlap with other LEADER+ themes. By creating new access to a local peatland and promoting innovative ways of interpreting it, for example, peatland work could certainly 'improve the quality of life' in a rural area and potentially 'add value to local products'.

A further important aspect of work done through the 'Connecting People With Our Peatland Heritage' project was its inclusion of several sites in the 'Natura 2000' network.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/index_en.htm

There were some 18,000 of these sites in the EU in 2000-2006, each designated as European importance for nature conservation.

Interpreting Peatlands for People

Interpretation is a particular form of communication. For sites which have heritage value, interpretation is often used to share stories, information or images which can convey some aspects of that value to visitor, viewer, listener or reader.

Discussions through the LEADER+ project workshop in Co. Offaly, Ireland in September 2005 showed that where you interpret peatlands will depend on the nature of the site, the story of the site and the people you want to reach.

The way you connect people with peatlands should reflect their cultural associations and perceptions of peatlands. Within the project, partner countries differed in these aspects.

Take it or leave it?

Basic decisions about location of interpretation can be made by considering how sensitive a peatland and its wildlife might be to human disturbance. If the site is very sensitive - for example because of its small size - it might be best to interpret the peatland off-site. In other words, aim to **Take the Peatlands to the People**.

Where a site is more robust - perhaps because it is large and can cope with visitors in one part while leaving other areas undisturbed - there can be opportunities for on-site interpretation and access. You can **Take the People to the Peatlands** to give them first-hand experience of the resource.

Whether your focus is on-site or off-site, good planning of interpretation should be a key part of your work

Planning Interpretation

Design, delivery and review of any project can be assisted greatly by good planning. This can apply as much to interpretation as to work which involves provision of infrastructure, such as the installation of peatland boardwalks.

Before you decide where and how you are going to interpret your site, you need to assess what you wish to interpret. How might this affect your site and for whom do you wish to interpret it?

Here is a basic checklist of things to consider:

- Understand the site's cultural, historical and natural significance; what aspects of these make this peatland important?
- identify any areas that are fragile or sensitive. If these amount to much of the site, then you might wish to **Take the Peatlands to the People**.
- Identify areas that are robust enough to support visitors on sites where you can **Take the People to the Peatlands**
- Identify your visitors. What range of ages do you wish to reach? Where do you think they will come from, at local, national and international scales?
- Understand the needs of visitors. This will mean thinking about their safety, their enjoyment and the quality of the experience you may offer.
- Identify a vision for your site (an ideal view of what the site could become).

Management for People

There are many resources available to help you plan your interpretation.
Management for People (SNH 2004, Module 2)

Scottish Natural Heritage - Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
Natural Heritage Management Publications
Management for People

<http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/online/heritagemanagement/managementforpeople.asp>

provides a toolkit for planning for people. It follows a sequence of 'Plan, Do, Review' through different stages of project creation, delivery and assessment. Where possible, this sequence has been used within this Connecting People with our Peatland Heritage website to describe key aspects of work within different partner countries.

Once you have clearly identified the needs of the site and the visitors, you can begin to match the type of interpretation you can provide to meet these needs. The arts can provide a creative way to engage communities with their peatland heritage. Go to our Hints and Tips page to find out more about working with artists, photographers, designers and craftspeople to develop your site.
Demonstration Day

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FRANCE

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