



Journal | 31_26



Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present the 31st issue of the IfLS Journal. At 44 pages, it is the most comprehensive issue we have ever published. This is due to the large number of projects we are working on in 2025 and currently, which we report on in this issue. As the number of projects has grown, our team has also expanded by seven people. The new staff members introduce themselves on pages 35–37.

Regarding our project work, this issue highlights the topic of agricultural policy and rural development. Here, we are currently engaged in several research projects and policy evaluations in the context of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These include projects at the EU level for the Federal Republic of Germany as well as for individual Federal States. The project results are primarily intended to draw lessons from the past and current funding periods regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the CAP for the design of funding starting in 2028 (pp. 2–10).

However, it is not yet clear what form the CAP will take after 2028. The European Commission’s proposals - which place greater emphasis on competitiveness and food security, neglect rural development, and represent a step backward in terms of Environmental

Sustainability - are currently being met with strong criticism from various quarters.

The IfLS will seek to contribute to further development at various levels (EU, Federal and State) using the results of its projects. These include, for example, findings on the added value of the LEADER approach for rural development (pp. 23–24) or how innovation in agriculture can be stimulated and new knowledge can reach agricultural businesses (pp. 25–27). Further examples include concepts for the further development of climate protection and climate adaptation (pp. 19–21).

We hope you enjoy reading this issue!

Jörg Schramek, Simone Sterly und Ulrich Gehrlein

Inhalt	
Projects	S. 02-33
Miscellaneous	S. 34-37
Publications and Services	S. 38-41

Projects

Agricultural policy and rural development

Evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan – 3 lots, 3 major projects

As part of the evaluation of the Federal Republic of Germany's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, the IfLS is responsible for lots 1, 3 and 5. These are projects commissioned separately by the *Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH)*. The approach in these projects is coordinated by the BMLEH and the external service provider MEDL. The three lots focus on:

- Income support and stabilisation, promoting competitiveness, maintaining market orientation and strengthening agricultural businesses in the value chain;
- Contributions of the CAP to economic development, social participation and quality of life in rural areas
- Promoting knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas.

A key focus in 2025 was the development of the detailed concept for all three lots, which forms the methodological and analytical basis for the coming years and serves as an evaluation plan. The first survey and analysis phases are scheduled for 2026. The aim is to target CAP support more effectively and make integrated rural development more effective in the future.

Project title: Evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan, LOT 1, LOT 3, LOT 5

Duration: 2025-2028

Client: Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH)

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V. and IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In cooperation with: USV Agrar, Österreichisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (WIFO) – LOS 1; Thünen-Institut für Lebensverhältnisse in ländlichen Räumen, Forschungsgruppe Agrar- und Regionalentwicklung Triesdorf (ART), Gerald Wagner Regionalforschung & Beratung – LOS 3; Universität Hohenheim, b&s GmbH, ATB gGmbH – LOS 5

Contact persons at IfLS: Jörg Schramek, Bettina Spengler (LOT 1), Jörg Schramek, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein (LOT 3), Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Svea Thietje (LOT 5)

Evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan for individual farm investment support, sector programmes, support for young farmers and direct payments (Lot 1)

Together with three other partners, the IfLS evaluates to which extent the CAP Strategic Plan has contributed to supporting and stabilising farm incomes and improving competitiveness. Significant financial support in this context includes direct payments to farms as well as individual farm investment subsidies.

Furthermore, the study examines the extent to which subsidies within the CAP Strategic Plan facilitated the takeover of farms by young farmers. They can, for one, receive top-ups to area-based direct payments. Additionally, they can apply for a higher subsidy rate for eligible farm investments. A third component is a lump-sum financial grant that six federal states offer young farmers as installation aid.

The IfLS has recently launched an online survey of approximately 200 farms that have taken advantage of the installation aid. Among other things, the survey aims to provide insight into how the subsidized farms are using the funds and what relief they have provided in the farm takeover process. Initial results will be presented to the Monitoring Committee for the CAP Strategic Plan in July.

Rural Development and LEADER (Lot 3)

The aim of the evaluation in Lot 3 is to obtain reliable findings on the effectiveness and further development of support for rural areas.

The focus is on the CAP's contributions to economic development, social participation, and quality of life in rural areas (SO 8), the specific LEADER added value, and the cross-cutting objective of gender equality. The evaluation follows European guidelines and assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, coherence, and EU added value of the measures.

The evaluation thus provides practical foundations for targeting CAP funding more effectively and making

integrated rural development more effective in the future. Following the development of the detailed concept, the evaluation team will conduct data collection and analysis throughout 2026.

Promoting knowledge, innovation, and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas (Lot 5)

The focus of Lot 5 is on how knowledge and innovations emerge, how they are disseminated, and how they are implemented in practice. It also examines the contribution made by the interventions of the CAP Strategic Plan to strengthening the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). The detailed design specifies how the key AKIS-relevant interventions—in particular networks and collaborations, EIP-Agri, advisory services and training, demonstration activities, and knowledge exchange—will be examined and evaluated. During the development of the concept, the intervention logic of the CAP Strategic Plan was reviewed, refined, and critically assessed. The detailed concept specifies the largely predefined evaluation questions, integrates them into a consistent evaluation framework, and defines the methodological mix of data analysis and supplementary surveys.

The IfLS is responsible not only for assessing the cross-cutting objective but also for evaluating the networking activities of *Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle Ländliche Räume (DVS)*. In 2025, a detailed plan was developed for this purpose, setting out the objectives, research questions, data sources, and reporting framework for the coming years. Annual brief evaluations are planned, as well as in-depth assessments at the midpoint and at the end of the observation period.

These two approaches laid the groundwork in 2025 for a transparent, scientifically sound, and practical

evaluation. It combines the AKIS baseline assessment as a starting point with the impact assessment of AKIS-relevant interventions and the findings on DVS networking. This provides an integrated picture of how knowledge transfer, innovation, and networking interact within the CAP, where interfaces function well, and where there is a need for further development.



Ad hoc studies on support measures in Baden-Württemberg

On behalf of *Ministerium für Ernährung, Ländlichen Raum und Verbraucherschutz Baden-Württemberg*, the IfLS is currently conducting region-specific monitoring and evaluation of selected funding measures in Baden-Württemberg, in addition to the national evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan. The aim of these studies is to make any necessary adjustments during the current funding period and to draw conclusions for a needs-based design of EU-funded regional support programmes and measures in the next funding period. The funding measures being evaluated include diversification (study 1), investments in small agricultural businesses (study 2), animal welfare measures, LEADER (study 4), and support for beekeeping (study 5). The results of the studies will be available by fall 2026.

Investment subsidies for Diversification (study 1)

The aim of investment subsidies for diversification is to support agricultural businesses to access additional sources of income from self-employment, to enable alternative business developments, and to maintain economic vitality in rural areas. While earlier evaluations primarily focused on the implementation and uptake of the support measures, there is currently little evidence regarding their long-term effects. This study therefore examines the development of grant-funded projects (completed between 2014 and 2020) and their significance for the farms' economic and social situation. Diversification projects into processing, direct sales, tourism (vacation apartments, guest rooms) and gastronomy were examined. The research is based on guided interviews with funded farms.

Preliminary findings suggest that diversification investments play a significant role in stabilising farms. At the same time, it is evident that the impact on income depends on factors such as farm organisation and personal commitment. New lines of business usually entail additional work demands while also creating new opportunities for flexibility, such as involving additional family members in the workforce.



Support for Investments in Small Agricultural Businesses (study 2)

The goal of investment support for small agricultural businesses is to help farms – particularly those in disadvantaged locations – improve labor efficiency, animal welfare, and farm income. This is intended to ensure long-term farm management and thereby promote the preservation of the cultural landscape through open land management and maintenance. This study examines the extent to which investments contribute to the achievement of the support objectives and the role of technical advice and ongoing support in their implementation. The study focuses on supported farms with ruminants, particularly cattle farms that previously practiced tethered housing, as well as poultry farms. The objective is to assess the extent to which improvements in labor efficiency, animal welfare, and farm income have been achieved, thereby supporting long-term management and the preservation of the cultural landscape. Data collection is conducted via online surveys of the farms followed by guide-based expert interviews.



Support for Beekeeping (study 3)

This study examines funding for training and investments in training materials and for equipment for individual beekeepers. The overarching questions are: how should EU-funded support programmes be designed for the funding period beginning in 2028 to improve beekeeping knowledge and the economic viability of commercial beekeepers in Baden-Württemberg? Additionally, how can procedures related to funding be simplified? The core of the study consists of online surveys of beekeeping associations and commercial beekeepers. In addition, funding data will be analysed and interviews conducted with selected experts.

Support measures for particularly animal-friendly farming practices (study 4)

Baden-Württemberg offers various support measures to promote particularly animal-friendly farming practices for different types of livestock. The study analyses the extent to which the 13 funding options currently in place lead to improved animal welfare and how this goal could potentially be achieved more effectively. A central component of the study is an online survey of funded farms, designed to gather

experiences with the funding measures and assessments of the effects of various funding conditions. In addition, through discussions with experts from administrative and advisory bodies, the survey results are contextualised and validated, and information on the technical implementation of the funding is obtained. Both the online surveys and the expert discussions solicit suggestions for improving the funding programme.

LEADER (study 5)

Another study analyses the extent to which LEADER in Baden-Württemberg shapes regional structures and decision-making processes beyond project funding, and whether the bottom-up approach and LEADER networks can be transferred to other areas of action. The study examines differences between “old” and “new” LEADER regions, between LAG organisational forms (association vs. administrative integration) and the role of regional management as a key actor for networking and regional participation. Methodologically, online surveys are combined with case studies and interviews at the regional and higher levels to identify success factors, limitations, and starting points for the further development of the LEADER process.

Project title: Conducting ad hoc studies to monitor and evaluate selected interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan for Baden-Württemberg on a regional Basis

Duration: 2025-2028

Client: Ministerium für Ernährung, Ländlichen Raum und Verbraucherschutz Baden-Württemberg

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH und Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

Subcontractor: unique land use GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Study 1 and study 2: Hanna Deittrick, Bettina Spengler; study 3 and study 4: Heike Nitsch; study 5: Lukas Welk

Lessons from the previous funding period for the CAP starting in 2028

The CAP funding periods are organised into seven-year phases. However, the transitions between them are fluid. Since January 1st, 2023, the federal government and the states have been implementing a joint CAP strategic plan for Germany for the first time (see “Evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan – 3 Lots, 3 Major Projects” on pp. 2–3). In parallel, the rural development programmes of the federal states, which have been in place since 2014, were continued until the end of 2025. The IfLS has been commissioned to conduct the final evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the old rural development programmes in Baden-Württemberg (MEPL III) and innovatiland-Palatinate (EULLE). The so-called ex-post evaluations will be available in 2026 and are intended to provide key insights for the design of funding starting in 2028.



To make these findings available at an early stage, the State of Baden-Württemberg commissioned the IfLS and its project partners to organise and conduct a workshop on November 5th, 2025. The goal was to present and jointly discuss the initial preliminary results and recommendations of the MEPL III ex-post evaluation. We will provide further information on our website as soon as it is published. A working group focused on investment support measures in agriculture, as well as measures for the diversification, processing, and marketing of agricultural products and

for promoting innovation. A key point of discussion regarding individual farm investment support was, among other things, the sharp rise in average investment costs. Despite funding, major developmental steps are increasingly feasible only for farms that are already economically successful. Against this backdrop, the discussion centered on the extent to which individual farm investment support should primarily further strengthen farms that are already competitive. Alternatively, it examined whether different funding approaches are necessary. A second working group addressed agri-environmental and climate measures in Baden-Württemberg. Here, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of clearly defined and transparently communicated objectives: What priorities should be set – for example, with regard to goals but also to the farms to be supported? How, for instance, can a fair balance be achieved between biodiversity goals and agricultural production? The event was documented in a report containing the presented slides and the key findings. We will post information on our website as soon as it is published.

Project title: Evaluation of the Rural Development Plan in Baden-Württemberg (MEPL III)

Duration: 2016 - 2026

Client: Ministerium für Ländlichen Raum und Verbraucherschutz Baden-Württemberg (MLR)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In cooperation with: Forschungsgruppe Agrar und Regionalentwicklung Triesdorf (ART), Unique Forestry Freiburg

Contact person at IfLS: Jörg Schramek

Project title: Evaluation of the Rural Development Plan in Rheinland-Pfalz (EULLE)

Duration: 2016 - 2026

Client: Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Verkehr, Landwirtschaft und Weinbau Rheinland-Pfalz (MWVLW)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In cooperation with: Planung & Forschung (PRAC), regioTrend – Büro für Regionalentwicklung

Contact person at IfLS: Jörg Schramek

RUSTIK: Consolidation of results in the final year

RUSTIK concluded the year 2025 with a review of its experiences with the Living Labs approach in the 14 RUSTIK pilot regions in ten European countries. The approach has proven particularly successful in areas where it is possible to connect to strong local networks, and where local RUSTIK partners enjoy trust as multipliers and mediators. Another important factor is that the topic addressed – in relation to the specific challenges in the regional transition context – is compatible with existing political objectives. In RUSTIK, the Living Labs proved to be an effective framework for bringing different actors together, developing a common understanding of problems, and translating the findings into practical approaches that meet local needs. A report on lessons from the Living Labs approach and all other project results are available on the RUSTIK website (<https://rustik-he.eu/deliverables/>).

In the final phase in 2026, project partners will intensify the consolidation of the rich project results from the various strands of work. On the one hand, the different thematic foci of the transition processes in the pilot regions will be examined from a comparative perspective. On the other hand, the synthesis will focus on the methodological approaches that were tested in the context of 'data experiments' aimed at addressing region-specific challenges. The conclusions will feed into recommendations for policy and practice at different levels.

The project meetings in Joensuu (Finland) in June 2025 and in Cheltenham (UK) in November 2025 were important milestones towards achieving these results. The June meeting focused on sharing the experiences with the Living Lab approach in the different contexts of the 14 pilot regions, highlighting challenges and solutions.

The November meeting centred on workshops targeting key topics, in which the more mature findings from the pilot regions were reflected and advanced. In-depth exchange between partners from practice and research supported the joint development of approaches to strengthen resilience, sustainability, and social inclusion in rural regions. Both project meetings also provided a framework for sharing and discussing Living Labs results with an extended audience of stakeholders in the host countries.



Project title: RUSTIK – Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes

Duration: 2022-2026

Funded by: European Commission, Horizon Europe

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

In cooperation with: 30 partner organisations from 10 European countries, coordinated by IfLS e.V.

Contact persons at IfLS: Simone Sterly, Sarah Peter

RUSTIK: Using Data to Improve Labour market matching? - RUSTIK Living Lab “Vocational training in the Rhein-Hunsrück District”

What does it take for young people and regional training companies in the Rhein-Hunsrück district to connect with one another successfully? The RUSTIK Living Lab Rhein-Hunsrück, coordinated by the IfLS in collaboration with *Regionalrat Wirtschaft Rhein Hunsrück e. V. (ReWi)*, explored this question. In 2025, the main focus was on application and critical reflection. Data and results collected in recent years were not only analysed but also specifically fed back into the region and further developed in collaboration with stakeholders. The empirical basis is extensive: a youth survey with 290 participants, interviews with key labor market stakeholders, and a survey of 70 regional training companies. Overall, the findings show that interest and opportunities are present, yet in practice, connections often fail at specific points. Misunderstandings and communication gaps play a role, as do differing expectations and structural barriers such as mobility and accessibility. It is also striking that companies and young people sometimes assess requirements differently. While companies primarily emphasise motivation, reliability, and a willingness to learn, young people often perceive academic performance and formal criteria as the main barriers when looking for an apprenticeship. These differing perceptions can lead both sides to overlook one another, even when they might in fact be a good match.

In 2025, the focus was therefore on working with the region to translate these findings into potential solutions. During the “Youth and Training Here” Dialogue Forum in February 2025, initial findings were discussed with approximately 150 participants from politics, businesses, education, and other regional institutions. In November 2025, key topics were revisited in Simmern and explored in greater depth with approximately 50 regional stakeholders. In

several facilitated workshops, starting points for a future-oriented training landscape were specified. Topics ranged from cooperation between schools and businesses to mobility issues and how different groups of young people can be reached more effectively and engaged more deeply in the future.



The results thus served as a common point of reference for clearing up misunderstandings, refining priorities, and initiating next steps. The RUSTIK Living Lab Rhein-Hunsrück thereby provides insights into how vocational training and career guidance in the Rhein-Hunsrück district can be made more tailored and sustainable in the long term.

Project title: RUSTIK – Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes

Duration: 2022-2026

Funded by: European Commission, Horizon Europe

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

Contact person at IfLS: Svea Thietje

Innovating Together? The Multi-Actor Approach to Fostering Innovation in Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Areas

Promoting innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas is a key priority of European agricultural policy and research.

In the face of complex transformation processes, such as those driven by climate change or digitalisation, interactive models of innovation are becoming increasingly important. These models strengthen the joint development of innovation, whereby new or improved products, practices, or organisational solutions are created through the collaboration of diverse actors. The aim is to increase the uptake of these innovations among end users.

Against this backdrop, the European Union, through the Horizon programme, specifically supports tools that implement the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA): standard multi-actor projects, thematic networks, advisory networks, living labs, and lighthouses. The Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung (IfLS) has been commissioned to evaluate these five tools. A key objective of the evaluation study is to assess the extent to which they have contributed to the introduction and uptake of innovations in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas. Furthermore, the evaluation examines the added value of the MAA: to what extent were actors, particularly end users, involved across the project lifecycle? To what extent were the projects aligned with the needs of (end-) users? And to what degree were projects able to generate and disseminate new knowledge? The evaluation covers Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas that applied the MAA during the period 2014 to 2024. To address these questions, ten case studies will be conducted across EU member states, covering a range of different contexts and innovation systems. The evaluation will provide tailored recommendations that will inform the programmatic and strategic development of the five tools in Horizon MAA projects.



Project title: Study on the impact of specific Horizon tools that support innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

Duration: 2025-2026

Client: Generaldirektion Landwirtschaft und ländliche Entwicklung (DG AGRI) der Europäischen Kommission

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: Aide à la Décision Economique (ADE, Belgien), Consiglio per la Ricerca in Agricol-tura e l'Analisi dell'Economia Agraria (CREA, Italien)

Contact persons at IfLS: Simone Sterly, Nico Herforth (PhD)

Testing Tools for CAP-Strategies in Case Studies

Last year, the EU project Tools4CAP moved into a testing phase. The IfLS, together with partners from the Hessian administration, tested the I/O/I matrix as an instrument designed to make the logic of CAP Strategic Plans visible and manageable.

The Hessian case study aims to render the effects of eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate measures of the CAP in Hesse visible and comparable. The I/O/I matrix serves as a tool to clearly link interventions to specific output and impact objectives, systematically connect existing indicators and data sources, and thus contribute to a coherent intervention logic.

The Hessian case study is part of the “Replication Lab”, in which Tools4CAP tests and refines innovative tools in real-life settings. In addition to Hesse, further case studies on models, monitoring solutions and participatory approaches have been implemented in other Member States to support the preparation of the next generation of CAP Strategic Plans.

Tools4CAP is a European research and innovation project that supports Member States in developing

and practically applying tools for planning, implementation and monitoring of CAP Strategic Plans. Funded under Horizon Europe, 21 partners are working together in the project from 2023 to 2026. The IfLS leads a work package on participatory tools for decision-making.



**Funded by
the European Union**

Project title: Tools4CAP

Duration: 2023-2026

Funded by: Horizon Europe

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

In cooperation with: Ecorys (Koordinator)

Contact persons at IfLS: Simone Sterly, Carla Wember





Sustainable land use

How can organic and regional public catering be successful?

The past year of the RegioWertGeBen project focused on identifying successful approaches to organic and regional public catering. To this end, six good practices were examined: three international examples from Copenhagen (Denmark), Mouans-Sartoux (France) and the Province of Bergamo (Italy), as well as three initiatives from the DACH countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), i.e. *Allianz Trade*, the *Bäuerliches Versorgungsnetzwerk Steiermark* and *Frisches Bio-gemüse Brandenburg GmbH*.

At the end of 2025, the key success factors of these six good practices were systematically examined for the project's two pilot regions – the district Ludwigsburg–Stuttgart and the region Northern Hesse – in SWOT workshops. Building on this, the project partners are now developing concrete solution pathways to increase organic and regional public catering in both regions. These approaches are being discussed in practice-oriented dialogues with stakeholders from farming, processing, logistics, municipal administration and kitchens; a synthesis workshop and a national transfer workshop will consolidate the results and make them accessible for other regions.



RegioWertGeBen is a practice-oriented project that develops innovative and feasible approaches to strengthen regional, organic public catering in the vegetable sector. From 2024 to 2027, the IfLS, two institutes of *Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen* and practice partners from Northern Hesse and Ludwigsburg–Stuttgart are working in the two pilot regions to strengthen organic farming on the ground and improve the supply of the population with organic food. RegioWertGeBen is funded within the *Bundesprogramm ökologischer Landbau (BÖL)* by the *Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH)*.

Project title: RegioWertGeBen — Developing regional value chain networks for communal catering

Duration: 2024-2027

Funded by: Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH)

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

In cooperation with: Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Zentrum für Ökologische Landwirtschaft e.V., Biomuster-region Ludwigsburg-Stuttgart

Contact person at IfLS: Carla Wember

Environmental Organic Action Plan of Baden-Württemberg: Participatory processes and updating

With its action plan “Organic from Baden-Württemberg” the federal state of Baden-Württemberg aims to improve the framework conditions for domestic organic farming. The action plan focuses on the production, processing and marketing of organic products from Baden-Württemberg, as well as providing relevant consumer information.

Based on an interim evaluation of the action plan in 2023, also carried out by the IfLS, the IfLS organised a participation process in close consultation with the MLR with stakeholders along the organic value chain in Baden-Württemberg, in which representatives from production, processing and marketing, professional associations, science, politics and administration were able to contribute their ideas and suggestions.

Following a well-attended kick-off workshop in Stuttgart at the end of March, three further workshops were held in May 2025 to discuss what concrete measures and steps the federal state and other stakeholders could take to further promote “organic” in Baden-Württemberg. This was explored in greater

depth with a focus on production, processing and marketing as well as vocational training in food-related professions. Based on the results of the previous evaluation and the workshops, the IfLS developed proposals for measures and action steps.

In July 2025, another group of experts got together to discuss and prioritise these suggested measures.

This provided a foundation for the MLR to use as a starting point for updating the action plan. The updated Baden-Württemberg Organic Action Plan will be published by the MLR.

Project title: Organisation, moderation and documentation of the meetings for the further development of the Baden-Württemberg Environmental Organic Action Plan and its updating

Duration: 2025

Client: Ministerium für Ländlichen Raum und Verbraucherschutz Baden-Württemberg (MLR)

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

Contact persons at IfLS: Heike Nitsch, Jörg Schramek





Socio-economics of farm use

(Partially) mobile slaughter from the perspective of slaughterhouses

Since an amendment to the EU Hygiene Regulation in 2021, the legal framework for on-farm slaughter methods – such as slaughter at the farm of origin using a mobile unit – has been significantly simplified in some respects, and the topic is increasingly being covered by the media. In on-farm slaughter using a mobile unit – better known as semi-mobile slaughter – the animal is stunned and killed directly on the farm or in the pasture and then transported to a slaughterhouse for further processing. This means the animals do not have to be transported alive and remain in their familiar environment until the end.

However, the process involves additional effort and is more costly than slaughtering in a conventional, larger slaughterhouse. Against this backdrop, the question arises as to whether economic benefits can be achieved or whether the advantages lie primarily in a potential improvement in animal welfare. Since the perspective of slaughterhouses in this context has so far been examined only to a limited extent, this project investigates the extent to which semi-mobile slaughter can be integrated into the workflows of a slaughterhouse and what conditions must be met for the process to be both economically viable and practically feasible.

To address this question, interviews were conducted last year with relevant associations as well as with slaughterhouses. Preliminary results indicate that semi-mobile slaughter is feasible but depends on the nature of the operation as well as on local conditions and framework requirements. The service was offered primarily by facilities that either specialise in it or by those that exclusively handle the receipt of animal carcasses. Less commonly, there are operations that

offer partial mobile slaughter as a supplementary service alongside their regular slaughtering. Partial mobile slaughter was primarily carried out in the form of contract slaughtering. Butchers with their own slaughter facilities who market the meat themselves were the exception. This assessment aligns with observations at the industry association level, according to which the method has so far been viewed primarily as a niche option, and its economically viable implementation depends largely on whether there are enough livestock producers with good marketing channels (e.g., direct marketing) who are able to bear the additional costs. Another point raised was that slaughterhouses do not necessarily see a need to make additional investments in such a process. Often, existing slaughter capacities are already operating at near full capacity, meaning that semi-mobile slaughter would require an additional team, which is usually not economically viable. Added to this is the existing shortage of skilled workers in the butchery trade. At the same time, however, the process was largely perceived as an opportunity for the butchery trade, which could potentially help attract more skilled workers to the butchery trade.

Project title: Study of the Potential of Mobile Slaughtering for Small and Medium-Sized Slaughterhouses

Duration: 2025

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

Contact persons at IfLS: Franziska Straubinger, Bettina Spengler

Evaluation of the subsidy programme for the restructuring of animal husbandry – investment projects

Together with DLG e.V. and INFO GmbH, IfLS is evaluating the funding of investment projects for the conversion of pig farming in Germany. The project is commissioned by *BMLEH* and *BLE*. The funding guideline came into force in March 2024. It provides federal funding for animal-friendly and environmentally friendly husbandry facilities on pig farms in Germany. Funding applications were originally expected to be possible until the end of 2030, but the federal programme will be terminated prematurely on 31 August 2026 (end of the application period). The final assessment by the evaluation team will therefore take place as early as 2028.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the direct and indirect effects on pig farms, relevant economic sectors and the economy as a whole. It will also assess how the funding has changed society's acceptance of agricultural animal husbandry. For this purpose, the evaluation team conducted an initial representative survey of beneficiary and non-beneficiary livestock farms as well as a population survey in 2025/2026. The survey will be repeated in 2027/2028 in order to identify any changes.

In 2025, at the beginning of the process, the assessment focused on implementation in order to make recommendations for improvement at an early stage if necessary. To this end, the IfLS conducted a total of 16 expert interviews with representatives of various institutions: relevant authorities, professional and organic associations, and advisory bodies. The resulting recommendations were given to the client for consideration in further implementation.

The first results of the study are available in the published interim report: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18670068>

Project title: Evaluation of "Support for the Restructuring of Animal Husbandry 2024–2030 – Capital Projects"

Duration: 2025-2028

Client: Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH), Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In cooperation with: DLG e.V., INFO GmbH Markt- und Meinungsforschung

Contact persons at IfLS: Jörg Schramek, Bettina Spengler





Protected areas and cultural landscapes

Five-year Management Plan for the *Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald*: An Interim Report

In 2020, the *Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald* adopted a Geo-Nature Park Plan in the form of a management plan. This plan established a regionally coordinated mission statement as well as medium- and long-term goals. An interim evaluation was scheduled in the management plan for the year 2025.

The IfLS reviewed the status of implementation and the achievement of the management plan's objectives to date based on a systematic analysis of documents and data with a focus on examining and evaluating the developments and activities of the Geo-Nature Park to date.

The evaluation shows that the vast majority of the planned targets for the operational goals have been achieved:

- the flagship projects were successfully developed within the timeframe and consistently implemented
- numerous work progress and key milestones were achieved
- A wide range of measures demonstrate the Geo-Nature Park's comprehensive commitment to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the regional, national, and international levels.

The management plan has thus proven to be a sound foundation for the daily work of the Geo-Nature Park and can therefore be used as a basis for continuing the work carried out to date.

Project title: Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the management plan for the *Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald*

Duration: 2025

Client: Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald e.V.

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Sophia Heini

Development of a biodiversity concept for the *Biosphärenreservat Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen*

Positive Biodiversity development is not a sure-fire success. Climate change, pressure from land use and slow changes are putting ecosystems under pressure – with consequences for us humans too. This is precisely where the development of recommendations for the office of the biosphere reserve Palatinate Forest comes in.

The aim was to systematically review existing nature conservation activities in the region and use them to derive a clear, implementation-oriented framework for the office's strategic action: What needs special attention? Where can leverage be applied effectively? Where are there still only a few other actors active and what fits in with the biosphere reserves mandate?

In 2026, the focus was on jointly developing and refining the recommendations for action. To this end, a specialist participation process, a project-accompanying working group and numerous discussions were carried out. The feedback was directly incorporated into the specification of measures and priorities. The recommendations for action focused in particular on areas such as castles and castle ruins, springs and small bodies of water, and forests.

With the completion of the project, the biosphere reserve now has a 'roadmap' that outlines approaches for the targeted use of existing resources.

Project title: Development of a Biodiversity Plan for the biosphere reserve *Pfälzerwald Nordvogesen*

Duration: 2024-2025

Client: Biosphärenreservat *Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen*

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In cooperation with: IUS Team Ness

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

NaBioKom – Project completion and guidelines “Nature parks and biosphere reserves: spaces for dialogue on the future of forests”

After three years, the NaBioKom research project has come to an end. The aim of this transdisciplinary project was to analyse and further develop the role of nature parks and biosphere reserves in Germany as platforms for forest dialogue.

Together with the project and practice partners – team ewen, Naturpark Kellerwald-Edersee, Geo-Naturpark Bergstraße-Odenwald, and the Biosphärenreservat Rhön (Bavarian Administrative Office) – the practical guide developed in the project and examples of good practice for forest dialogue processes were presented on December 11, 2025, as part of an online closing event.

The guide “Nature Parks and Biosphere Reserves: Dialogue Spaces for the Future of the Forest” is aimed at large protected areas and encourages them to actively use their scope for action for forest dialogue, taking into account the available human and financial resources. It shows how regional forces can be pooled, relevant future issues addressed at an early stage, and, in particular, how the exchange of perspectives between regional actors can be coordinated. In terms of content, the guide deals with the practical design of forest dialogue processes by nature parks and biosphere reserves. Topics covered include the selection of suitable dialogue topics, the tasks and roles of large protected areas, the objectives of dialogue processes, cooperation with regional actors, and proven event formats. It is based in particular on the practical experience gained in the NaBioKom project, with many concrete suggestions, recommendations, and implementation tips.

The project results show that regions and regional stakeholders benefit significantly when nature parks and biosphere reserves take an active role in coordinating or moderating forest dialogue processes. Through their established networks and communication channels, they reach target groups from different

specialist areas, create spaces for inter-municipal and interregional exchange, and facilitate constructive dialogue. In addition, they contribute to the objectification of discourse through knowledge transfer formats, have experience in moderating complex dialogue processes, and can proactively address future issues so that communication does not only take place in the event of conflict. As coordinating actors in multi-stakeholder dialogues, nature parks and biosphere reserves thus make an important contribution to the implementation of Agenda 2030 by working with regional actors to develop viable solutions for the preservation of ecosystems.

All publications can be found on the project website: <https://www.ifls.de/nabiokom/ergebnisse>



Gefördert durch:



aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

Project title: NaBioKom – Nature parks and biosphere reserves as regional communication platforms for sustainable forest Management

Duration: 2022-2025

Funded by: Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e.V. (FNR) with funding from Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH) pursuant to a resolution of the German Bundestag under the Renewable Raw Materials funding program

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: team ewen, Naturpark Kellerwald-Edersee, Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald, Biosphärenreservat Rhön (Bayerische Verwaltung)

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Marie Sophie Schmidt, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

Forest.Water.Biodiversity - Development of a project proposal for the *Naturpark RheinTaunus*

Under the working title “Forest.Water.Biodiversity”, a project outline has been developed for the *Naturpark RheinTaunus* that brings together key nature park themes in the area of nature conservation under a unified approach. The focus is on the protection and enhancement of forest springs, responsible management of water resources, and the promotion of biological diversity—with the goal of developing a feasible project with a clear regional impact. This addresses and expands upon a theme from the nature park plan in the area of nature conservation. The reason is this: Many springs are inconspicuous and often endangered. However, they serve as an early warning system for changes in the water balance, provide a habitat for special species, and are often not included in existing funding programs.

During the planning phase, the project concept was refined, the content and potential components were structured, and these were coordinated through discussions with potential partners and regional experts. The project is designed to enable integrated management of the springs within the nature park and their protection, as well as to deepen knowledge about them in the local context.

The next step will focus on identifying suitable funding opportunities.

Project title: Project outline for the establishment of a model region in the combination of biodiversity and climate protection in conjunction with climate adaptation measures and ESD (education for sustainable development)

Duration: 2024-2025

Client: Kommunalen Zweckverband Naturpark RheinTaunus

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

Development of forest wilderness through the *Wispertaunus* large-scale nature conservation project

Under the coordination of the *Zoologische Gesellschaft Frankfurt*, 2,800 hectares of natural forest are to be preserved and connected in collaboration with forest owners, including approximately 1,000 hectares of additional land. This strengthens habitats for species such as the wildcat, Bechstein’s bat, and the hazel dormouse, while also increasing the resilience of the forests. The project is being funded by the *Bundesamt für Naturschutz* as a major nature conservation initiative. During the 2023–2026 planning phase, suitable areas will be identified and measures developed, thereby laying the groundwork for potential implementation starting in 2027 through a Maintenance and Development Plan. The IfLS plays a supporting role in the development of this plan: its tasks include facilitating meetings and events, as well as conducting a conflict and acceptance analysis to identify sentiments, interests, and potential points of friction at an early stage and to support dialogue within the project area.

Gefördert durch:

 Bundesministerium
für Umwelt, Naturschutz, nukleare Sicherheit
und Verbraucherschutz

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

 Bundesamt für
Naturschutz

 ZOÖLOGISCHE
GESELLSCHAFT
FRANKFURT

 HESSEN
Hessisches Ministerium für Landwirtschaft
und Umwelt, Forsten, Energie und
Klimaschutz

 WISPER
TAUNUS
Wertvolle Wälder
bewahren und erleben

Project title: External facilitation for the large-scale nature conservation project “Wispertaunus”, in accordance with the guidelines „chance.natur – Bundesförderung Naturschutz“

Duration: 2025- 2026

Client: Land Hessen; Regierungspräsidium Darmstadt

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Hanna Kramer

Education for Sustainable Development - a concept at *Steinhuder Meer*

The *Naturpark Steinhuder Meer* offers a wide range of environmental education programmes and serves as a high-quality natural and learning environment. In light of global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, these programmes are to be systematically developed into Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiatives. The goal of the project is to align their own environmental education more closely with ESD principles, consolidate existing programs and, together with regional organisations, build a robust network that identifies needs and strengthens cooperation.

The foundation is an analysis of the current situation. This involves identifying existing strengths (e.g., subject-matter expertise, attractive learning locations, committed stakeholders) and areas for development (e.g., lack of common standards, limited networking). Building on this, a mission statement is developed in consultation with cooperation partners. Key objectives include quality improvement, a stronger focus on target groups, and sustainable collaboration.

The future ESD program is to include common ESD standards, a range of offerings tailored to specific target groups, and a concrete implementation plan. In addition, three exemplary ESD flagship projects will be developed as project outlines.

The results will ultimately be compiled into a written ESD plan for the *Naturpark Steinhuder Meer*.

Project title: ESD Concept for the Naturpark Steinhuder Meer

Duration: 2025- 2026

Client: Region Hannover, Fachbereich Umwelt - Team Naturpark Steinhuder MeerRegion

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact person at IfLS: Hanna Kramer

Where the cultural landscape contributes to green infrastructure

In the district of Lippe, the “green infrastructure in rural areas” project demonstrates how established cultural landscapes, biodiversity, and recreational opportunities can be integrated to safeguard ecosystem services, preserve history and strengthen recreational opportunities. The project aims to establish green infrastructure as an integral part of regional development.

The focus here is not only on ecological connectivity, but above all on viewing cultural landscapes as a “textbook” of regional history and land use: orchard meadows, historic tree-lined avenues, traditionally managed forest types, or remnants of past resource extraction shape the landscape. When such elements are consciously maintained, further developed, and integrated into trail or experiential concepts, a network emerges that combines conservation and use.

In 2025, the IfLS focused in particular on research and analysis of characteristic elements of the cultural landscape. These included pasture forests as evidence of historical forest use, as well as old quarries as unique habitats and sites of cultural and historical significance. In addition, moderated sessions, events, and exchange formats were organised to bring stakeholders together, pool knowledge, and jointly discuss perspectives for the further development of the cultural landscape and green infrastructure.

Project title: Green infrastructure in rural areas

Duration: 2024-2027

Client: Kreis Lippe

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In partnership with: insitu worldheritage consulting

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

Climate protection and adaptation

Agroforestry between strategy and practice – water as a connecting element?

Agroforestry has long been considered a promising approach to more sustainable land use. It is becoming an increasingly prominent feature of political strategies, support programmes and expert debates. However, in many places, its practical implementation falls short of expectations. Agroforestry systems offer many advantages: they diversify agricultural businesses, enhance the aesthetic value of cultural landscapes, promote biodiversity, and contribute significantly to water management. And that's where the AFaktive project steps in. The project focuses on the potential of agroforestry systems for sustainable water management and why this potential has not been exploited more widely to date.

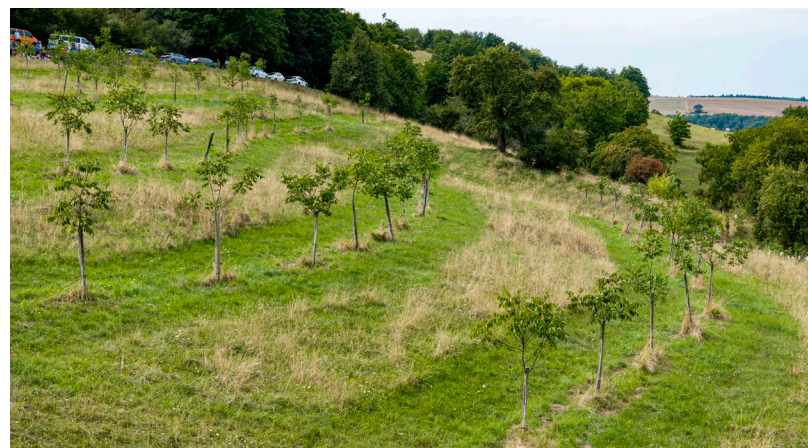
Last year, as part of the project, the IfLS analysed the political framework conditions for agroforestry at the EU level, as well as in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. The results clearly show that, although agroforestry is mentioned in various policy areas, there is a lack of coherent political support. Currently, agroforestry and water management are predominantly regulated separately, resulting in a lack of coordination and numerous practical obstacles.

While the IfLS conducted the political analysis, the project partners focused primarily on practical implementation. In collaboration with farmers in the three countries, they developed and implemented hydrologically optimised planting concepts. Additionally, a monitoring system for existing agroforestry systems was established, incorporating initial measurement series for soil and water parameters. This work was time-consuming, but it provides a foundation for reliable conclusions regarding the impact of agroforestry systems.

A significant milestone was the annual project meeting held in September at Royal Eijkelkamp in Arnhem (Netherlands). Here, all project partners reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining the practical nature of AFaktive.

The findings from monitoring and research should provide land managers with a concrete basis for decision-making and facilitate the adoption of agroforestry systems.

The upcoming project phases will focus particularly on regionally anchoring agroforestry. Capacity building and networking, involving local and water authorities, are central to this. Politically, the project takes a bottom-up approach that empowers local stakeholders and focuses on practical solutions. It is only when strategy and practice come together that agroforestry can reach its full potential.



Project title: AFaktive – Agroforestry as a key to improve water management & adaptation to extreme weather events

Duration: 2023-2028

Funded by: European Commission – LIFE SAP Climate Action

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: Institut für angewandtes Stoffstrommanagement (IfaS, Coordination) and 11 Partners from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Holger Pabst, Simone Sterly

More water in the forest: RegioBlau brings stakeholders together

Water-related ecosystem services are crucial for the stability and resilience of our forests. Against the backdrop of increasing droughts and extreme weather events, the ability of forests to retain water is becoming an increasingly important focus. The RegioBlau project is investigating how forestry, local authorities, water management, nature conservation and other stakeholder groups can collaborate more effectively in this area. The project's goal is to encourage decision-makers to implement water retention measures in corporate and private forests. To this end, regional governance structures are being developed further, targeted awareness-raising approaches are being trialled, and practical framework conditions are being improved.

Close cooperation with the aforementioned stakeholder groups is central to this. The two living labs, including the Northern Rhineland-Palatinate, are therefore at the heart of the project. Initially, the current situation will be analysed by evaluating the strategic planning instruments available in the living lab, conducting guided interviews with key stakeholders and performing a stakeholder analysis. The perspectives of forest owners will also be considered through the analysis of motivations and barriers to implementing water retention measures.

Eight dialogue events or working group meetings are planned for each living lab. These aim to engage relevant target groups and address various objectives, such as selecting key measures, developing cross-sector cooperation approaches, and facilitating knowledge transfer. The results could include regional roadmaps that define goals and strategies and clarify future roles and responsibilities. If approved by regional decision-making bodies, these roadmaps will serve as a basis for concrete decisions, for example at the municipal level.

The experience gained in the living labs will be compiled into practical working materials for regional stakeholders and policy recommendations. These should also be usable in other regions once the project has been completed.

The first step was to establish the regional project group for the Northern Rhineland-Palatinate living lab in January. This group will coordinate the future process on site, taking on various roles as decision-makers, multipliers or technical experts. Participants particularly associate the RegioBlau project with the expectation of stronger networking and would like to see examples of good practice for small-scale measures with low-threshold financing options that can be applied in small private forests, among other things. Another living lab is currently being defined.

Information on the RegioBlau project:

<https://www.ifls.de/regioblau>



Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung
und Heimat

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

Project title: RegioBlau - Water retention in corporate and private forests: Regional governance and awareness raising

Duration: 10/2025 - 09/2028

Funded by: Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e.V. (FNR) with funds from the Bundesministeriums für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH) aufgrund eines Beschlusses des Deutschen Bundestages im Förderprogramm Nachhaltige Erneuerbare Ressourcen

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: team ewen, Forstamt Hachenburg & Forstamt Altenkirchen der Landesforsten Rheinland-Pfalz

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Marie Sophie Schmidt, Simone Sterly



GRACE: Transformative Climate Resilience through Participatory Solutions and Innovative Governance for Rural Communities in Europe

Since October 2025, the Horizon Europe project GRACE (Growing Climate Resilience in Remote Rural Areas through Community Empowerment) has been developing new ways for Europe's rural and remote regions not only to cope with climate change but to actively shape it. The focus lies on building local capacities, driving transformation processes, and creating solutions that combine ecological stability with social and economic added value.

A consortium of 26 organisations from 16 countries, coordinated by the CMCC Foundation, is leading the project. In five demonstration regions—in Portugal, Italy, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden—nature-based adaptation solutions are being tested, while regions in Greece, Slovakia, Ireland, Latvia, and Ukraine are preparing for their adoption.

The IfLS leads the work package on participatory governance and economic evaluation. GRACE deliberately follows a transformative approach: local communities become active agents of change rather than mere stakeholders. On the ground, solutions are being created that reduce climate risks, strengthen the circular economy, and open new perspectives for structurally weak regions. Participatory planning, training, and regional exchanges connect top-down policy frameworks with bottom-up innovations.

GRACE sees itself as a catalyst for a climate-resilient future that goes beyond mere damage control. By making transformation pathways visible, rural areas can become more resilient, attractive, and livable—and help close the urban–rural divide.

The project's official launch took place in November 2025 in Venice, followed by an excursion to the demonstration region Cavallino-Treporti. There, it became clear how natural dune systems for coastal protection, sustainable agriculture, and local strategies for energy efficiency, green space conservation, and decentralised solutions interconnect—and how GRACE is thus tangibly strengthening climate resilience.

For more information, please visit the project website at: <https://grace-project.eu/>



**Funded by
the European Union**

Project title: GRACE – Growing Climate Resilience in Remote Rural Areas through Community Empowerment

Duration: 2025-2029

Funded by: European Union - Horizon Europe

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: 26 European partners from 16 countries, coordinated by the CMCC Foundation (Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change)

Contact persons at IfLS: Simone Sterly, Carla Wember



Regional development

Cultural Practice, Knowledge Production, and Regional Development: Findings from a Transdisciplinary Research Project

Art, culture, and creative work make an important contribution to social participation, the development of local identity, and the sustainable development of rural areas. At the same time, cultural initiatives face limited resources, uncertain funding conditions, and complex negotiation processes.

The AMuRaKK project examined these tensions from a transdisciplinary perspective and combined qualitative field research with ongoing exchange between academia and practice.

Key findings were discussed during the reporting period in academic publications, at the *DGEKW Congress (Deutsche Gesellschaft für empirische Kulturwissenschaft)*, and at the third practical workshop in October 2025. The focus was on four cultural modes identified by the project, which describe different organisational and operational approaches to cultural work in rural areas. Feedback from the practice partners also showed that success factors such as funding, networks, reputation, and physical infrastructure are weighted differently depending on the project context. Funding uncertainties and a lack of resources were specifically cited as key challenges.

A key outcome of the project is the “Guide for Cultural Entrepreneurs,” which systematically compiles success factors, pitfalls, and best practices. It will be published online and distributed through intermediary institutions. Overall, the project demonstrates that cultural work in rural areas has not only cultural but also social and institutional impacts and should be understood as an important component of integrated regional development.



Project title: Actor networks and multifunctional spaces for art, culture and creative work in rural regions (AMuRaKK)

Duration: 2023-2026

Funded by: Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH) im Rahmen des Bundesprogramms Ländliche Entwicklung (BULE)

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: Abteilung für Empirische Kulturwissenschaften und Kulturanthropologie an der Universität Bonn

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Lukas Welk

Smart Development in LEADER Regions with INTERREG Europe

Rural areas are under pressure due to outmigration, demographic change, the withdrawal of public services, and the digital divide. This is precisely where the Smart Villages approach comes in: digitalisation is not seen as an end in itself, but as a tool to improve everyday life in these communities – for example, in terms of supply, education, healthcare, or the integration of regional economic cycles.

The Interreg Europe-project INSPIRE supports rural regions in developing “smart” approaches and integrating them into policy instruments. In Germany, the project is working with the LEADER region of Lahn-Dill-Wetzlar to identify areas where such smart approaches can be further developed.

In 2025, a key focus was on tailoring policy instruments more precisely: Work was carried out on further developing the management structure and the Local Development Strategy so that Smart Village approaches could be better integrated into LEADER. In addition, international exchanges took place, including a visit to the Hungarian LEADER region of Tokaj, where the focus was on smart forms of support for small and medium-sized enterprises.



Interreg
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INSPIRE

Project title: INSPIRE - Innovative and Smarter Policy Instruments for Rural Europe

Duration: 2024-2028

Funded by: interreg europe

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: LEADER-Region Lahn-Dill-Wetzlar

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein



Mid-term evaluations in Hesse's LEADER regions: Assessing progress, enhancing impact

LEADER thrives on regions taking charge of their own development through projects that are precisely tailored to local needs. To ensure that this work remains effective throughout the entire funding period, interim evaluations are a crucial component: they provide a structured process for pausing, assessing and making adjustments.

Especially halfway through a funding period, it's worth taking a look at some key questions: Are we still on the right track with our focus areas? Are we reaching our target audiences? How are project implementation and fund disbursement going? And above all: What adjustments can we make to ensure that the second half of the funding period reaches its full potential?

In several LEADER regions in Hesse, such interim evaluations were supported by the IfLS using a range

of methods, from facilitating workshops to conducting in-depth analyses. The focus in each case was on collaborative dialogue with regional stakeholders: highlighting successes, openly identifying challenges, and deriving concrete starting points for further development from these discussions.

Project title: Interim Evaluation in 4 Hessian regions

Duration: 2025

Client: LEADER-Regionen Hersfeld-Rotenburg, Marburger Land, Wetterau/Oberhessen sowie Lahn-Dill-Wetzlar

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Lukas Welk, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein





Knowledge and Innovation

EIP Agri - Innovation Support Service for Rhineland-Palatinate

In 2025, the IfLS in Rhineland-Palatinate will continue to support the development and implementation of EIP-Agri projects as an Innovation Support Service (ISS) within the framework of the CAP Strategic Plan. The focus was on supporting applicants in funding calls, from initial orientation and consultation to refine project ideas, through to structured support during the application and selection process. In doing so, the IfLS serves as a key interface between project groups, funding agencies, and the administration.

A second focus in 2025 was on networking. For example, participating groups were accompanied to a nationwide networking meeting in Hamburg. One key theme in this year's funding call was a clear trend: many of the selected or further developed projects are increasingly combining innovation with a digital approach, for example through data-driven applications,

automated processes, or digital tools for planning, management, and communication. It remains to be seen where this innovation dynamic will lead in Rhineland-Palatinate. However, this was likely the first and last call for proposals in the current funding period. Networking the groups and serving as an ISS remains a key task for the IfLS.

Project title: Management and evaluation of three EIP-Agri funding calls in Rhineland-Palatinate

Duration: 2023-2029

Client: Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Verkehr, Landwirtschaft und Weinbau Rheinland-Pfalz (MWVLW)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein



EIP-Agri & cooperation and networks in Hesse

Innovation arises where different perspectives come together! This is precisely where the work of the IfLS, as the Hessian Innovation Support Service (ISS), comes into play. On behalf of the *HMLU*, the IfLS supports stakeholders from the fields of practice, consulting, academia, and administration in developing viable EIP-Agri projects and collaborative initiatives from ideas, structuring grant applications, and supporting implementation. This also includes networking, knowledge transfer, and project communication that quickly translates results into practice.

2025 was a year marked by significant milestones. In the summer, six new Hessian projects were approved. The official handover of the funding approval notice did not take place in the meeting room, but “on farm.” In terms of content, the approved projects reflected the breadth of current issues. For example, the “Micro-algae Biomass as Fertiliser” is working on recovering nutrients from municipal wastewater; “aimGrassland” combines sensors, drones, and AI for more precise grassland management; and the cooperation project “*Extrawurst 2.0*” focuses on cooperation and knowledge transfer in farm-based artisanal processing.

A second clear signal came in the fall. In the 4th EIP-Agri call for proposals, a total of 19 project applications were submitted to the ISS. This high level of response further intensified the advisory and networking efforts – from refining project logic and partner constellations to “translating” practical ideas into eligible action plans.



At the same time, in 2025, efforts were deliberately directed beyond the state’s own funding framework. At the Horizon Europe information session (Cluster 6) held in Wiesbaden in April 2025, European funding opportunities were presented in a practical manner, and points of connection between different funding frameworks were discussed with the aim of further strengthening multi-stakeholder approaches in Hesse.

Outlook for 2026: Anyone pursuing a new EIP-Agri idea should keep November 3, 2026, in mind, as action plans can be submitted to the Hessian ISS again by that date.

Project title: EIP-Agri Support Services and Cooperation Projects in Hesse (Hessian Innovation Support Service)

Duration: 2023-2029

Client: Hessisches Ministerium für Landwirtschaft und Umwelt, Weinbau, Forsten, Jagd und Heimat (HMLU)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Svea Thietje, Sophia Heint



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The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System in Brandenburg – An AKIS Assessment

How does new knowledge find its way into agricultural operations, and what is needed for this knowledge to lead to innovations? These questions are at the heart of the current assessment and evaluation of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) in Brandenburg being conducted by the IfLS.

AKIS describes a system of actors, institutions and processes through which knowledge is generated and disseminated in agriculture to drive innovation. It therefore plays a central role in helping the agricultural sector adapt to current and future challenges and is also an essential component of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The goal of the AKIS inventory in Brandenburg is therefore to systematically map and analyse existing knowledge and network structures in the agricultural sector and to formulate recommendations for their further development. The aim is to develop a comprehensive overview of Brandenburg's AKIS that can serve as a basis for decision-making by policymakers, government agencies and funding institutions.

A prerequisite for this is always a functioning and well-connected AKIS, which ensures that innovations – for example, from research – can be translated into practice and implemented by agricultural operations. Due to Germany's federal structure, with differing responsibilities at the federal and state levels, AKIS networks vary across the federal states. It is therefore important to gain an overview of the various stakeholders in the federal states in order to better understand the individual knowledge flows and, if necessary, make adjustments to make the system even more effective, interconnected and future-oriented.

One distinctive feature of Brandenburg, for example, is that its agricultural sector is heavily dominated by large-scale operations, which means that knowledge and innovation processes often take place within a relatively small number of very large farms and agricultural cooperatives. Another factor is that, unlike many western German states, Brandenburg does not have a chamber of agriculture, which significantly shapes the structure and functioning of the AKIS in Brandenburg.

The AKIS study aims to shed more light on the system in Brandenburg and identify effective structures, as well as its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. To this end, in addition to secondary analyses, the study will include interviews, online surveys, and workshops with relevant stakeholders, which are intended to provide detailed insight into the system and how it operates. The results are intended to help derive practical recommendations for the further development of the knowledge and innovation landscape in the state of Brandenburg.

Project title: Ad hoc Study on the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) of the State of Brandenburg

Duration: 2026

Client: Ministerium für Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft, Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz des Landes Brandenburg

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

Contact persons at IfLS: Franziska Straubinger, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

Thinking Ahead About Regional Value Chains in Agriculture

In the Erasmus+ project ReVaCy (Regional Value Cycles in Agriculture) the IfLS is working with partners from five countries to integrate knowledge about the potential of circular value cycles in agriculture into education and training programmes through practical learning opportunities. The project is based on the fundamental idea of integrating concepts of the circular economy into agricultural continuing education and training and developing practical strategies for local farms.

Circular value chains are considered a key approach to making agriculture more ecologically sustainable, economically robust, and resilient in the long term. At their core, they aim to use resources more efficiently, close material loops, and reduce dependence on external inputs. The circular approach relies on reuse, further processing, and cascading use, as well as on the sharing of resources. In agriculture, for example, this means viewing byproducts not as waste but as a starting point for new value creation: organic residues can be turned into fertiliser, energy or new products; production processes can be coordinated and regionally networked.

The learning materials draw on real-world examples and highlight the organisational, economic, and social conditions necessary for successful implementation. In the future, a learning platform will be used to make knowledge accessible, identify opportunities for action, and provide long-term support for the practical implementation of circular agriculture.



ReVaCy
farm



Co-funded by
the European Union

Projekttitel: Regional Value Cycles in Agriculture (ReVaCy Project)

Duration: 2023-2026

Funded by: Erasmus+

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung e.V.

In Partnerschaft mit: Hof und Leben GmbH (DE), CeSAR (IT), COAG Jaén (ES), Biotehniški center Naklo (SI)

Contact persons at IfLS: Christoph Mathias



RURALED: From Competency Frameworks to Smart Village Practices

In Germany, the term “smart village” is often understood primarily as an approach to digitalization. The European concept of a smart village, however, focuses instead on participatory, bottom-up village development that mobilizes local resources, connects stakeholders, and creates synergies. Digital solutions can also be employed where they offer concrete added value. New collaborations or the development of third places, for example, also represent equally suitable solutions to some of the challenges facing rural areas. Against this backdrop, the RURALED project demonstrated that in practice it is often more helpful to speak of “intelligent village development.” Ultimately, however, it is not the label that matters, but the question of how village communities can actively shape their development through the conscious integration of digital technologies where they make sense.

Another key finding of the project concerns the availability of targeted skills development—both for those who are expected to lead a Smart Village initiative and for those who will later use such Smart Village services. While support structures such as digital guides already exist for digital services in some regions, comparable offerings are lacking for citizen-led initiatives that wish to further develop their communities through an open, bottom-up process. The RURALED Toolbox closes this gap (<https://ruraled.eu/?lang=de>). For civil society-led initiatives, it brings together knowledge, methods and tools that support both the development of a shared vision and the formulation and implementation of a strategy. The methods and tools presented have already been tested in the LEADER context and have proven effective there.

Beyond citizen-led initiatives, the EU’s LEADER regional development approach provides a particularly suitable platform for supporting smart village processes in Germany. LEADER regions have established networks, extensive experience in participatory regional development, and – given the lack of

nationwide funding programmes for smart villages – access to financing options. For LEADER stakeholders, the toolbox’s practical examples, status quo check and competency check are particularly useful for supporting communities in designing smart village development processes. In this way, the RURALED Toolbox offers dual added value: it supports both inexperienced civil society initiatives and experienced facilitators from village and regional development in designing structured participatory processes and pursuing joint development paths.

However, when it comes to implementation, the concept of “smart villages” often needs to be explained or deliberately redefined to avoid narrowing the focus to digitalisation alone. Ultimately, it is not the concept that matters, but the process itself. The experiences from the RURALED project show that people in villages always have ideas for the further development of their living environment. The key is to create spaces for exchange and to engage in dialogue with one another. Whether “smart” or “intelligent” – solutions developed collaboratively strengthen every village community.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Project title: Building a bright future for rural communities through smart village education and development

Duration: 2023-2025

Client: Erasmus+

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforshung e.V.

In cooperation with: Agritour (Bulgaria), Ardmore (Ireland), CESAR (Italy), SMC HPHE (Ukraine)

Contact person at IfLS: Christoph Mathias

Building Skills for a Circular Society

The transition to a circular society requires not only technical solutions, but also, first and foremost, knowledge and practical skills among stakeholders in local governments, civil society, the business sector and the education sector. However, there is often a lack of accessible information and educational resources that make circular principles understandable and encourage and empower people to put them into practice.

This is where the Erasmus+ project ACE (Actions for a Circular Society through Education) comes in. The goal is to support adults, local initiatives, and organisations in understanding circular approaches and applying them in their own environments. To this end, the project is developing multilingual Open Educational Resources (OER) that link key concepts of a circular society with practical examples. In addition, practical examples are systematically compiled and described in such a way that their applicability to different target groups – from education professionals to local decision makers – becomes clear.

All content will be consolidated on a digital learning platform with a toolbox and made freely available. In addition to learning modules, the platform will also offer methods and materials for workshops. In the partner countries, the content will be tested and further developed through regional educational initiatives.

ACE deliberately adopts a broad interpretation of the circular economy: in addition to waste prevention, it also addresses circular design, services, shared-use models and bio-based value creation. The aim is to strengthen circular thinking as a learning and development process, thereby serving as the foundation for long-term local and regional transformation.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Project title: Actions for a Circular Society through Education (ACE)

Duration: 2025-2027

Funded by: Erasmus+

Carried out by: Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: Asociación de Profesionais de Desenvolvemento Local de Galicia (ES), SWIDEAS AB (SE), Fundacja Wspierania Węzi Lokalnych „Linking Foundation” (PL)

Contact person at IfLS: Christoph Mathias

Bioeconomy and circular economy

Exchange of experiences on the circular economy in rural areas



The transition to a circular economy is considered a key component of sustainable rural development because it combines resource conservation, regional value creation and resilience. The Interreg Europe project iCEAR addresses this issue by bringing together partners from nine European regions who aim to further develop their various policy instruments to promote the circular economy in a targeted manner.

The focus is on a structured European exchange and learning process: policies and funding approaches from regional programmes – ranging from macro-regions down to municipal climate strategies – are systematically examined. The aim is not only to learn from one another but also to improve the alignment with upstream and downstream instruments as these policy tools are further developed. As the lead partner, the IfLS coordinates the overall project and thus the Europe-wide exchange of experiences. In addition, the IfLS is collaborating with the District of Giessen as an Associated Policy Authority to integrate the circular economy into the District of Giessen 100% Climate Protection Master Plan. The first two international exchange meetings took place in the District of Giessen and in Ireland.

In addition to workshops on circular beer production, the study visits highlighted examples of the circular bioeconomy in particular. In 2026, a participatory and strategic process will begin in the district of Giessen to further develop the master plan and launch joint projects in the field of the circular economy.



Project title: Integrated Circular Economy Action Plans for Rural Areas

Duration: 2025 - 2029

Funded by: Interreg Europe

Carried out by: Institut f. Ländliche Strukturforchung e.V.

In cooperation with: Opolski Center for Economic Development (PL), Ballyhoura Development CLG (IE), Centre - Val de Loire Region (FR), Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (GR), Intermunicipal Community of Baixo Alentejo - CIMBAL (PT), Development Agency Synergija (SI), Regional Council of Durres (AL), Jacobstad Region Development Company Concordia Ltd (FI)

Contact persons at IfLS: Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Christoph Mathias, Hanna Kramer

Circular Economy as a Development Approach in Biosphere Reserves and Peripheral Rural Regions

As part of the project a Circular Economy (CE) profile for the three Biosphere Reserves (BR) Bliesgau, Schaalsee, and Spreewald was developed. This was followed by a CE action plan, in order to systematically identify the respective regional starting conditions, potential, and areas of action for a circular economy and to further develop them in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

It has become clear that a circular economy in rural areas is usually established not through radical innovations, but rather through a series of smaller steps in a continuous development process. To find sustainable solutions, there must also be room to develop, offer, and practically test promising products and services. BRs, with their institutional structures and networks, are just as suitable for this as sustainability-oriented development initiatives such as the LEADER programme.



Key findings from the project will be incorporated into a guide. This guide provides guidance and real-world examples. First, the fundamentals and core principles of the circular economy are explained and placed within the regional context. Building on this, the guide highlights opportunities found particularly in rural areas, such as in agriculture and forestry, habitat and landscape conservation, the construction sector and the tourism sector.

The guide makes it clear that circular transformation does not necessarily require large-scale flagship projects or extensive research capabilities, but often arises through practical, incremental innovations. In addition, strategies and starting points are presented on how regional coordination centers – such as those found in biosphere reserves, other large protected areas, or LEADER regions – can harness such potential: from awareness-raising measures to networking and coordination and on to the development of regionally coordinated strategies.



gefördert durch



Deutsche
Bundesstiftung Umwelt

www.dbu.de

Project title: Biosphere Reserves as Model Regions for Circular Economy in Rural Areas

Duration: 2024 - 2026

Funded by: Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

Contact persons at IfLS: Ulrich Gehrlein, Christoph Mathias

Sustainability and resilience

Global Sustainable Municipality Hesse. Strategy development with 8 municipalities in Hesse

Local governments have significant discretion in implementing the SDGs and play a key role in achieving these global goals. Furthermore, local sustainability is enshrined in the Hessian Constitution as a responsibility of local governments.

Against this backdrop, the demands are high and the operating conditions in many places are challenging: scarce resources, growing responsibilities and complex conflicting priorities. This makes it even more important to firmly embed sustainability in local government budgets, administration and policy.

These goals can be defined as part of municipal sustainability strategies. Existing initiatives are consolidated and priorities set, so that individual measures come together to form a coherent overall plan.

In 2025 and 2026, eight local governments in Hesse receive support in developing their strategies. The focus is on a structured process: goals and priorities are defined, specific measures are identified, responsibilities are clarified and implementation is assigned to existing management tools.

Overall coordination of the project is handled by IfLS, which supports the Lahn-Dill district, the state capital of Wiesbaden, the city of Lohfelden, and the city of Pfungstadt. The municipalities of Oestrich-Winkel, Breuberg, Wettenberg, and Nidderau are supported by the project partner team ewen.

Together, we are creating a broad-based Hessian learning and exchange platform with the goal of establishing municipal sustainability strategies as effective local governance tools for the 2030 Agenda.

The project is being carried out on behalf of *Service-stelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt (SKEW)* of Engagement Global, with funding from the *Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)*.



Projekt title: Global Sustainable Municipality Hesse 2025-2026

Duration: 2025 - 2026

Client: Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt (SKEW)

Carried out by: IfLS Beratung und Projekte GmbH

In Cooperation with: team ewen

Contact persons at IfLS: Hanna Kramer, Christoph Mathias

Miscellaneous

Company Trip

Amorbach, an idyllic small town in Lower Franconia on the border with Hesse, was the destination of our 2025 company outing.

In sweltering temperatures exceeding 30 degrees, we gathered at the princely Palais Amorbach to focus on improving the impact orientation of our project work. In this seminar, we learned to clearly define the target groups of our projects, formulate realistic goals, develop indicators and impact methods such as the impact ladder, and consistently reflect on each step. In relation to our project work, we realized that while it was easy to define input (all necessary resources) and output (direct results from the use of the input), it was difficult to capture outcomes (changes achieved through the outputs) and impacts (the long-term and sustainable changes in society achieved by a project). We were glad to have received some guidance from our Phineo seminar leaders, which we will use in the future to specifically focus on enhancing impact in our project work.

We then cooled off in Stang's Kitchen, in the beer garden under the shade of the trees: there we enjoyed a nice glass of white wine and a diverse menu featuring plenty of herbs.

Those who needed a bit more refreshment then headed for the cool waters of the Billbach stream or had a cold shower at our lodging in Emich's Hotel.



Hoping that the overnight coolness would carry over into the coming day, we set out after a hearty breakfast into the fields around Amorbach to find herbs and other plants along the way, identify them, and then turn them into a snack in Stang's kitchen. We also took a cultural break at the Amorsbrunn Chapel, which was built over a spring that has been said to have healing powers for many centuries. The coolness of the cold spring water was enough for us in those tropical temperatures!



New to the Team

Johanna Greiner, M.Sc.

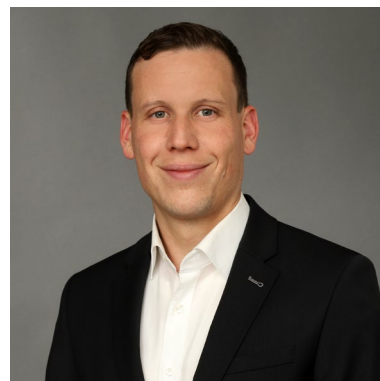
Johanna Greiner has been supporting the Regio-WertGeBen project at IfLS since June 2024, which examines the value chain of organic vegetables from the field to institutional food service.

Prior to this, she earned a Master of Science in Agricultural Management from Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences. In addition to her work at the IfLS, she serves as regional manager for the Ludwigsburg-Stuttgart Organic Model Region.



Lukas Welk, M.Sc.

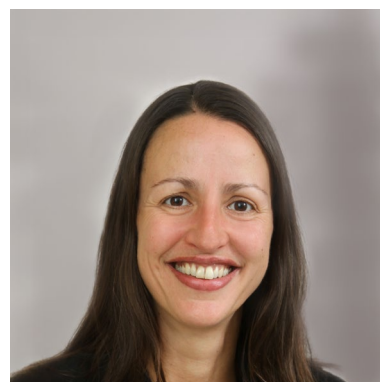
Since April 1, 2025, Lukas Welk has been contributing to the Regional Development, Innovation Consulting, and Large-Scale Protected Areas division. His responsibilities primarily involve evaluating the German CAP Strategic Plan in the areas of sustainable economy and rural development, as well as the cross-cutting objective / AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System). In addition, Mr. Welk is supporting the evaluation of MEPL-III, EULLE, and PLENUM in the Tübingen district, as well as an ad hoc study on LEADER in Baden-Württemberg. Lukas Welk holds a Master of Science in Bio- and Agricultural Economics from the University of Hohenheim and previously worked in evaluation in the field of development cooperation.



Michaela Koller, MBA

Michaela Koller has been heading the Finance and Administration department since October 2025. As a trained banking and finance specialist, she has many years of professional experience in finance. She also holds an MBA in Environmental and Quality Management and has spent the last 15 years working at various research institutions, including Goethe University Frankfurt.

At the IfLS, Michaela Koller focuses on project financing for commissioned and research projects, as well as the associated personnel matters.



Nico Herforth, PhD

Nico Herforth has been part of the IfLS team since November 2025. His work at IfLS focuses on evaluating the Horizon program for the agricultural sector (commissioned by Generaldirektion Landwirtschaft und ländliche Entwicklung, DG AGRI).

Nico Herforth earned his Ph.D. in international agricultural economics from the University of Göttingen in 2015 and has since worked as an independent evaluator in international development cooperation as well as at the German Evaluation Institute for Development Cooperation (DEval).



Hanna Deittrick, M.Sc.

Hanna Deittrick joined the IfLS in October 2025. Her work primarily focuses on ad hoc studies (IKLB and diversification) aimed at providing region-specific support and evaluating selected funding measures in Baden-Württemberg.

Hanna Deittrick earned her master's degree in agribusiness from the University of Hohenheim in 2025 and gained her first professional experience in regional management at the Heidenheim plus organic model region and in the "*BioBotschafter:innen*" project.



Franziska Straubinger, M. Sc.

Franziska Straubinger joined the IfLS in September 2025 in the Rural Development, Agriculture, and Environment Division, where she worked on a study examining the potential of semi-mobile slaughtering. On January 1, 2026, she switched departments and is now working on the evaluation of the EIP-Agri and advisory support, as well as an assessment of the AKIS system in Brandenburg.

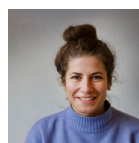
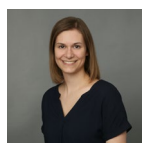
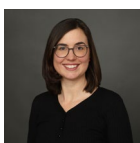
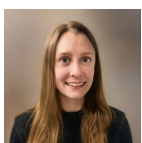
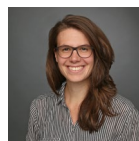
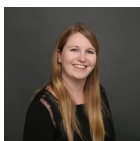
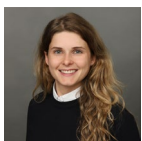
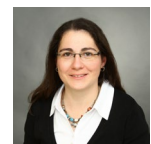
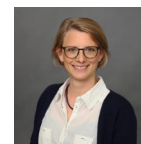
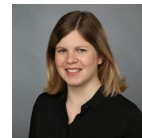
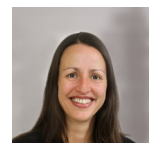
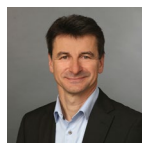
Franziska Straubinger holds a master's degree in Economic Development & Growth from Carlos III University in Madrid and subsequently spent several years as a research assistant and doctoral candidate at the Technical University of Munich, where she is currently completing her dissertation in agricultural and resource economics.



Viola Krieger, M. Sc.

Viola Krieger joined our team in February 2026. In the areas of regional development, innovation consulting, and large-scale protected areas, she examines the impact of funding programs on regional development, currently with a regional focus on Baden-Württemberg: as part of the final evaluation of the PLE-NUM program and the ad hoc study on the implementation of LEADER.

After earning her M.Sc. in Environmental and Resource Management from Justus-Liebig-Universität in Giessen, she spent ten years working at a planning firm, where she was responsible for developing regional development strategies and served as a project manager in LEADER regional management.



Publications and Services

Navigating Europe's agricultural transition: Systemic policy approaches to mixed farming and agroforestry – Peer-reviewed article

This article summarizes the findings of the EU project MIXED, which was completed in 2025. The focus is on mixed land-use systems and agroforestry, which combine crop production, livestock farming, and tree cultivation. These systems promote soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience, but their adoption is hindered by financial, knowledge-related, and legal barriers. More sustainable CAP funding, simpler rules, as well as advisory services, cooperation, and compensation for public goods are crucial for their wider implementation.

<https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.20398.2>



Nature Parks and Biosphere Reserves: Forums for Dialogue on the Future of Forests – A Guide

The project “Nature Parks and Biosphere Reserves as Regional Communication Platforms for Sustainable Forest Management (NaBioKom)” was funded under the Renewable Raw Materials Program by the *Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e.V. (FNR)* with funds from the *Bundesministeriums für Landwirtschaft, Ernährung und Heimat (BMLEH)* pursuant to a resolution of the German Bundestag (Duration: 09/2022 – 08/2025; FKZ: 2220NR223X).

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18696874>



Agroforestry and Water Management: An overview of current frameworks, strategies and key actors – Project Report

Although agroforestry is increasingly being incorporated into strategies, guidelines, and funding programs, in practice it remains the exception rather than the rule. A recent report by the IfLS from the “AFaktive” project identifies a key reason for this. The policy frameworks for agroforestry and water management have not yet been sufficiently coordinated. The report analyzes existing regulations, stakeholders, and climate challenges with a focus on the EU as well as Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and demonstrates how better policy coordination can effectively advance the implementation of agroforestry systems.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18323893>



Forest Dialogue for Balancing Interests - Status Quo Analysis of the Role of Nature Parks and Biosphere Reserves – Working Paper

This working paper from the NaBioKom project presents the results of a status quo analysis of stakeholder interests and the role of nature parks and biosphere reserves in managed forests. Position papers from forestry and nature conservation interest groups at the federal and state levels were examined to identify areas of interest where stakeholders have differing and/or shared interests. A Germany-wide online survey of nature parks and biosphere reserves enables an assessment of the relevance of specific topics at the regional level as well as their roles in the forest dialogue.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17338885>

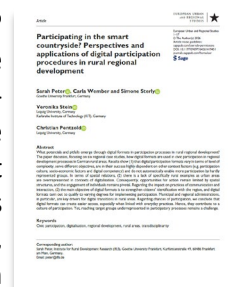


Participating in the smart countryside? Perspectives and applications of digital participation procedures in rural regional development – Peer-Reviewed Article

How are digital formats used to engage citizens in rural regional development processes? What are the potential benefits and limitations of such participatory formats? The article “Participating in the smart countryside? Perspectives and applications of digital participation procedures in rural regional development” explores these questions through six case studies in rural regions of Germany. The results show that digital formats do not “automatically” lead to greater participation by underrepresented groups. Success depends much more on contextual factors, such as the existing culture of participation, socioeconomic factors, and digital literacy. The authors conclude that digital formats can facilitate participation, particularly when they are low-threshold and linked to everyday practices. Nevertheless, reaching target groups that are underrepresented in participatory processes remains a challenge.

The article is based on findings from the project “Perspectives and possible applications of digital participation procedures in rural regional development – DigiBeL”, funded by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) through the Federal Rural Development Scheme (BULEplus).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/09697764261419451>



Regional Approaches to the Circular Economy in German Biosphere Reserves – Project Report

The report assesses the state of research on the circular economy (CE) in rural areas and relates it to German UNESCO biosphere reserves. Based on a literature and online review as well as a survey of all 16 biosphere reserve administrations, the report demonstrates that numerous approaches to sustainable economic management exist in biosphere reserves, although CE is rarely explicitly addressed. Biosphere reserves can serve as platforms to facilitate participatory transformation processes through networks, education, and coordination.

[https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Abbildungen/Publikationen/2025/BRe-sourceful AP1-Bericht.pdf](https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Abbildungen/Publikationen/2025/BRe-sourceful_AP1-Bericht.pdf)



Lunch Talk and Newsletter

The Lunch Talk takes place every 6–8 weeks at lunchtime (12:30–1:30 p.m.). During these sessions, we briefly present ongoing projects and then look forward to your input and discussions. Our topics for 2026 are once again diverse:

Date	Topic
13.05.2026	Evaluation of Funding for Capital Projects in the Restructuring of Livestock Farming: Assessment of the Implementation of the Funding and Survey Results from the General Public and Livestock Farmers
18.06.2026	(Partial) mobile slaughter from the perspective of slaughterhouses

The dates for the upcoming lunch talk discussions (RUSTIK, Horizon Tools Study, and Tools4CAP) will be announced in advance. You are welcome to register on our website at <https://www.ifls.de/aktuelles/tisch-gespraeche>. You will then receive an invitation for each roundtable discussion and can participate without obligation. We look forward to more lively discussions and exchanges.

You can also subscribe to our quarterly newsletter: <https://www.ifls.de/ifls-newsletteranmeldung>

IfLS-Homepage

You can always find the latest news on our website, www.ifls.de. We also provide information about our areas of focus, services, projects, and publications.

LinkedIn

On LinkedIn, you can follow us, our projects, and our various initiatives under [Institut für Ländliche Strukturforschung \(IfLS\)](#)

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Projects

Agricultural policy and rural development	▪ Evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan, LOT 1, LOT 3, LOT 5 – p.2-3 ▪ Conducting ad hoc studies to monitor and evaluate selected interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan for Baden-Württemberg on a regional basis – p. 4-5 ▪ Evaluation of the Rural Development Plan in Baden-Württemberg (MEPL III) – p.6 ▪ Evaluation of the Rural Development Plan in Rheinland-Pfalz (EULLE) – p.6 ▪ RUSTIK – Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes – p.7-8 ▪ Study on the impact of specific Horizon tools that support innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas – p.9 ▪ Tools4CAP – p.10
Sustainable land use	▪ RegioWertGeBen — Developing regional value chain networks for communal catering – p.11 ▪ Organisation, moderation and documentation of the meetings for the further development of the Baden-Württemberg Environmental Organic Action Plan and its updating – p.12
Socio-economics of farm business	▪ Study of the Potential of Mobile Slaughtering for Small and Medium-Sized Slaughterhouses – p.13 ▪ Evaluation of “Support for the Restructuring of Animal Husbandry 2024–2030 – Capital Projects” – p.14
Protected areas and cultural landscapes	▪ Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the management plan for the Bergstrasse-Odenwald Geo-Nature Park – p.15 ▪ Development of a Biodiversity Plan for the biosphere reserve Pfälzerwald Nordvogesen – p.15 ▪ NaBioKom – Nature parks and biosphere reserves as regional communication platforms for sustainable forest Management – p.16 ▪ Project outline for the establishment of a model region in the combination of biodiversity and climate protection in conjunction with climate adaptation measures and BNE (education for sustainable development) – p.17 ▪ External facilitation for the large-scale nature conservation project “Wispertaunus”, in accordance with the guidelines „chance.natur – Bundesförderung Naturschutz“ – p.17 ▪ ESD Concept for the Naturpark Steinhuder Meer – p.18 ▪ Green infrastructure in rural areas – p.18
Climate protection and adaptation	▪ AFaktive - Agroforestry as a Key to improve Water Management & Adaptation to Extreme Weather Events – p.19 ▪ RegioBlau - Water retention in corporate and private forests: Regional governance and awareness raising – p.20 ▪ GRACE - Growing Climate Resilience in Remote rural Areas through Community Empowerment – p.21
Regional development	▪ Actor networks and multifunctional spaces for art, culture and creative work in rural regions (AMuRaKK) – p.22 ▪ INSPIRE - Innovative and Smarter Policy Instruments for Rural Europe – p.23 ▪ Interim Evaluation in 4 Hessian regions – p.24
Knowledge and innovation	▪ Management and evaluation of three EIP-Agri funding calls in Rhineland-Palatinate – p.25 ▪ IP-Agri Support Services and Cooperation Projects in Hesse (Hessian Innovation Support Service) – p.26 ▪ Ad hoc Study on the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) of the State of Brandenburg – p.27 ▪ Regional Value Cycles in Agriculture (ReVaCy Project) – p.28 ▪ RURALEd – Building a bright future for rural communities through smart village education and development – p.29 ▪ Actions for a Circular Society through Education (ACE) – p.30
Bioeconomy and circular economy	▪ Integrated Circular Economy Action Plans for Rural Areas – p. 31 ▪ Biosphere Reserves as Model Regions for Circular Economy in Rural Areas – p.32
Sustainability and resilience	▪ Global Sustainable Municipality Hesse (GNK Hessen) 2025-2026 – p.33