

# Journal | 28\_23



## Editorial

Dear Readers,

In the last edition of the IfLS Journal, we reported that two organisations - the IfLS e.V. as well as the IfLS GmbH - have been operating under the IfLS umbrella since 2022. The construct has become well established in the meantime. Sustainable development continues to be the claim and the constant goal of the IfLS. We strive to always consider the ecological, economic and social dimensions as a triad and to initiate processes that can be continued in the long term - this applies to our research and consulting activities as well as to our daily work in the office.

It is always important to find the right balance between the different dimensions. This is also reflected in our project work, in various topics. For this reason the balance between use and protection of nature is the focus of some IfLS projects. The GOBIOM project, for example, deals with the question of how milk production systems can be made more biodiversity-friendly and at the same time economically viable (p. 6). In the NaBioKom project we promote dialogue between the interests of nature conservation and forestry (p. 19). In the development of nature conservation plans, we also demonstrate in various projects how adapted uses can be made economically viable (p. 5, "Common hamster land"; p.26, "Streams, moors

and mountain meadows in the Thuringian Forest " and p. 27, " non-marketable eggs").

In the course of the development of municipal sustainability strategies in the project "Globally Sustainable Municipality Palatinate" (p.22), the aim is to find the best balance of conflicting goals between the Sustainable Development Goals at the municipal level. The LEADER approach (pp. 14-17) also pursues economically, ecologically and socially balanced development. It relies on innovations that make this possible for rural areas. UNESCO biosphere reserves and nature parks as well as UNESCO Global Geoparks (pp. 20 and 23) claim to be model regions for sustainable development, which we support to the best of our ability.

Enjoy reading the IfLS Journal 2023!

Jörg Schramek, Simone Sterly and Ulrich Gehrlein

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# Projects

## Rural Areas

### How does a Village become „smart“? Handbook published in Smart Rural 21 project has answers

"Smart" villages can meet their challenges with innovations that may (but do not have to) be of a technical and in some cases digital nature, but above all are based on participation and cooperation. Titled "Preparatory Action on Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century" or, in short, "Smart Rural 21", the project funded by the European Commission supported municipalities in developing and implementing the respective strategies. Conclusions for future measures on "smart" rural areas can be derived from the results.

For the project, 21 municipalities across the EU were selected to receive expert support on their way to becoming Smart Villages. The IfLS advised a municipality in Germany, Sollstedt in the southern Harz region, on the development of its strategy. In addition, the Institute contributed to the analysis of the EU and German policy and funding framework as well as the materials and resources developed in the project for villages on their way to smart development. Five case studies on funding opportunities for smart villages in different EU countries were led by the IfLS.

During a two-day final conference in Gdansk (Poland) in mid-October 2022, the project results were presented and discussed in panels, workshops, lectures and various network formats and finalised afterwards.

Lessons learned from the project are collected in the "Guidebook on How to Become a Smart Village" which has been published on the website in 22 languages. It provides an overview of the path to a smart village and at the same time introduces the reader to concrete project results that can be used in practice. Among the topics covered are: What is a Smart Village, how to develop a Smart Village strategy, which funding opportunities help and how can local people be involved? Reference is often made to the more detailed materials developed – partly by the IfLS – In the project for each step, e.g. so called [Smart Solutions](#) and [Roadmap Tools](#). These are socially and/or technically innovative

approaches in the areas of social, economic, housing/culture/leisure, environment, mobility, digitalisation and governance.

The guidebook is available for download on the project website at [www.smartrural21.eu/guidebook](http://www.smartrural21.eu/guidebook).



**Project title:** Smart Rural 21 – Preparatory Action on Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century

**Duration:** 2019 – 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission - GD Landwirtschaft und ländliche Entwicklung

**In cooperation with:** E40 Group (HU, coordination) empirica (DE), eTownz (IE), Innovationsförderungszenrum für die Landwirtschaft und den ländlichen Raum (NL), Landwirtschaftliche Universität Athen (GR)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Simone Sterly, Christoph Mathias, Sarah Peter

## Creating knowledge for sustainable rural areas: New project RUSTIK launched

How can rural areas be supported in dealing with growing social and ecological challenges? What is the impact of European policies in rural areas? What should European strategies and funding look like that promote diversity and sustainability in rural areas? The Horizon Europe project "RUSTIK" (Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes), launched on September 1, aims to create indicators and databases that provide answers to these questions and allow for a better rural proofing of European policies.

For the kick-off, project partners met in Frankfurt a.M. from 4th-5th October 2022. The programme included getting to know the partners, organisational matters around the project start and discussions on coordinating next steps. In addition, initial decisions were made with all partners in the first consortium meeting, which was held in a hybrid format.

RUSTIK focuses on capturing transitions in rural areas, especially socio-economic change, climate change and environmental challenges, as well as digitalisation. Based on this, the project partners will create a methodological framework for understanding functional rural areas, which will be used to build data sources and infrastructures at regional and European level. Against this background, the project will develop improved strategies and governance approaches for rural actors and decision makers as well as improved approaches for rural proofing of European policies.

The transdisciplinary project focuses on Living Labs in 14 pilot regions in 10 European countries. They are the key element of an action-oriented multi-actor approach to explore rural diversity and transitions in rural areas. The Living Labs bring together regional actors whose experiences feed into designing and testing data sources and infrastructures. A first meeting of the Living Labs was held in Barcelona in February of this year.

The RUSTIK project is coordinated by IfLS e.V. and includes a consortium of 30 European partner organisations. Among them is the [Regionalrat Wirtschaft Rhein-Hunsrück e.V.](#) [link in German], which organises the Living Lab in the pilot region Rhein-Hunsrück together with the IfLS.



A brief description of the project can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3LzUJgH>.

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

**Duration:** 2022 – 2026

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission, Horizon Europe

**In cooperation with:** 30 partner organisations from 10 countries

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Simone Sterly, Carla Wember



## How can citizen participation in rural regional development be achieved by digital means?

Until the DigiBeL research project will ended in spring 2023, we are working on conclusions and recommendations for practice. In early February 2023, we were able to present and discuss a preliminary status of the project results in a third workshop with experts from the fields of rural development, digitalisation and democratic participation in the digital realm. We were pleased to receive a lot of confirmation, as well as exciting thoughts and questions, which we will take into account in the final work of the project and which inspire us for the final stretch.

At the end of March, the final results were presented at a closing event with representatives from research, politics and regional development practice. A keynote speech by Prof. Dr. Diane Ahrens from the Technical University of Deggendorf on "Citizen participation as a guarantee of success for digital transformation in rural areas" and a presentation of the results of the BULE+ project "Potentials and Strategies of Digital Regional Development in Rural Areas (HeiDi)" of the Friedrich-Alexander University (FAU) Erlangen-Nuremberg also contributed to the success of the event.

In cooperation with the Institute of Media and Communication Studies (IfKMW) at Leipzig University, we have been investigating "Perspectives and Possible Ap-

plications of Digital Participation Processes in Rural Regional Development" (DigiBeL) since April 2020. Based on a literature review and a nationwide online survey of key actors in rural regional development, we have investigated regional development processes with citizen participation in six rural case study regions throughout Germany. In the final months of the project, the project team completed the synthesis of the findings from the literature review, online survey, and the six case studies.

The recommendations for practice, which our research will culminate in, will be compiled and published in target group-specific formats: a policy brief and a guide for action for those responsible in politics, municipalities, civil society, business and education.

Information about the progress and results of the project can be found on the [DigiBeL project website](#) (in German). [The DigitalLand podcast](#) (in German), which accompanies the project and offers insights into the research work, is also available on the website and through popular podcast provider.

Gefördert durch:



aufgrund eines Beschlusses  
des Deutschen Bundestages

**Project title:** Perspectives and Possible Applications of Digital Participation Processes in Rural Regional Development (DigiBeL)

**Duration:** 2020 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesprogramm Ländliche Entwicklung und regionale Wertschöpfung (BULE+)

**In cooperation with:** Prof. Dr. Christian Pentzold, Institute of Media and Communication Studies (Institut für Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft, IfKMW), Universität Leipzig (formerly TU Chemnitz)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Simone Sterly, Sarah Peter

## Sustainable land use

### Evaluation of the project *Common hamster land*

The first time we reported about the *Common hamster land project* was in 2020. Now we are finalising the project dedicated to protection of common hamster in Germany.

Currently the last questionnaires of volunteers and farmers are collected for evaluation. At the same time the IfLS is conducting telephone in-depth-interviews with experts working on protection of common hamster at governmental agencies. The results of these interviews will be integrated in the evaluation as well.

The interim results expose that the main reason for farmers to take part in the protection measures is the protection of endangered species and especially of the common hamster. The sample mainly consists of professional farms working traditionally and taking part in agri-environmental measures and protection measures of common hamster. For evaluation of advantages and disadvantages as well as consequences for the farms, the farmers were interviewed twice, once in advance and once after taking part in the protection measures of common hamster. Contents of the interview were implementation of agri-environmental measures and protection measures of common hamster by the farms, as well as positive aspects, difficulties and modifications coming along with that.

The sample of volunteers mainly consisted of participants being familiar with the subject of common hamster protection. The age distribution of the sample is mixed, including a few young people (under age of 20). Overall more female than male volunteers join the events. The results imply that many volunteers are professionally involved in protection of common hamster.

In terms of content the events increase the volunteers' knowledge of ecology, mapping and situation of common hamsters. Additionally, the events have positive impacts on the volunteers' motivation, exchange, network and community.

We will inform you about the final results and any follow up activities of the project in the next issue.

Further information (in German):

<https://www.feldhamster.de>



**Project title:** „Common hamster land“ - Evaluation of a project with focus on the protection of the common hamster in the in the Federal Programme for Biological Diversity

**Duration:** 2019 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Deutsche Wildtier Stiftung

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## Pasture for the cows

Cows stand on pasture! Even if this is not always true, it depicts the connection between milk production and grassland management. Yet it is well known that there is often a discrepancy between flowering, species-rich meadows and economically profitable milk production. This is the starting point of the GOBIOM project, which aims to develop options for dairy production systems that contribute to the conservation and improvement of biodiversity and at the same time secure an economic income for the farms.

Already during the initial outreach to farms in spring 2022, the tense situation of many dairy farms came up. Several times, reference was made to a planned withdrawal from dairy farming or the poor economic conditions. Since then, enterprises along the value chain have also recorded generally rising costs and prices, the effects of which cannot be estimated as of now. Nevertheless, we were able to win some farms for cooperation and to participate in a first biodiversity consultation.

Farm visits continued into the winter of 2022/2023. These served to determine the ecological conditions

and the current situation, as well as to explore possibilities for improving biodiversity. In the future and as part of the consultations, farmers will be guided in their on-farm biodiversity monitoring. In addition, plans include the use of accounting records in conjunction with other available data to develop a farm typology, which shall illustrate business impacts and display biodiversity-relevant aspects in eco-balances. In close cooperation with stakeholders of the dairy value chain, recommendations for action and policy as well as possible future scenarios for sustainable dairy production will be developed in 2023/2024.

**Project title:** Design options for economically viable biodiversity-enhancing dairy production systems in regions of Freiburg and Ravensburg (GOBIOM)

**Duration:** 2021 – 2024 (Phase 2)

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF).

**In cooperation with:** Öko-Institut (project management), grünweg

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Jörg Schramek, Dr. Holger Pabst





## Modernised agricultural technique as a "game changer" for species protection?

Current trends in modern agricultural technique are on the one hand heavier and larger machines. On the other hand smaller, lighter equipment (or swarms of machines) are increasingly being developed. In both trends, automation and environment recognition (e.g. with sensors or drones) play a decisive role.

An R&D project, coordinated by the DLR project management organisation and in which the IfLS is involved with other project partners, was to determine in how far wild species could be adversely affected by such developments.

After first creating a catalogue of current and future developments in agricultural techniques, the IfLS was involved in researching the effects on individual species or groups of species by means of a literature analysis.

In principle, modernised techniques offer certain opportunities to reduce pressures on the species studied. However, there may also be risks for wild animal species living in arable land. In a last step, the project team develops possible avoidance measures for such risks and formulates further research needs.

The results of the project will be published in a final report.

**Project title:** Species conservation in the light of modernised agricultural techniques

**Duration:** Dec. 2021 – Apr. 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH

**Client:** Bundesamt für Naturschutz (BfN)

**In cooperation with:** DLR Projektträger, Leibniz-Institut für Agrartechnik und Bioökonomie (ATB), Ulrich Sander (freiberuflicher Biologe)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Heike Nitsch, Jörg Schramek

## Evaluation of the second training course of the flower ambassadors

The Main-Kinzig district is implementing the "Main.Kinzig.Blüht.Netz" project as part of the federal biodiversity programme. Areas in public ownership are to be optimised from a nature conservation perspective. This includes, for example, roadsides and field margins. In parallel to activities on areas, "Flowering Ambassadors for Insect Diversity" are trained in annual courses. They are to act as advisors, multipliers, contact persons and caretakers on site.

In 2021, the IfLS was commissioned by the Main-Kinzig district with the socio-economic evaluation of the project, which includes several evaluation modules until 2025.

The second annual course for flower ambassadors took place in 2022. As in the previous year, the IfLS conducted surveys at the beginning and end of the course to find out what knowledge the participants had gained. Knowledge improved in all subject areas. However, the respondents considered their knowledge of grassland communities and the overview of influences on insects and the relationships between insects and plants to be particularly important. In addition, the course has led to networking among the flower ambassadors and has provided ideas for activities as well as skills for improving the approach to and technical information of target groups.

**Project title:** Socio-economic evaluation of the "Main.Kinzig.Blüht.Netz" project

**Duration:** 2021 – 2025

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Main-Kinzig-Kreis

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Jörg Schramek, Heike Nitsch

## Does more sustainability entail more complexity?

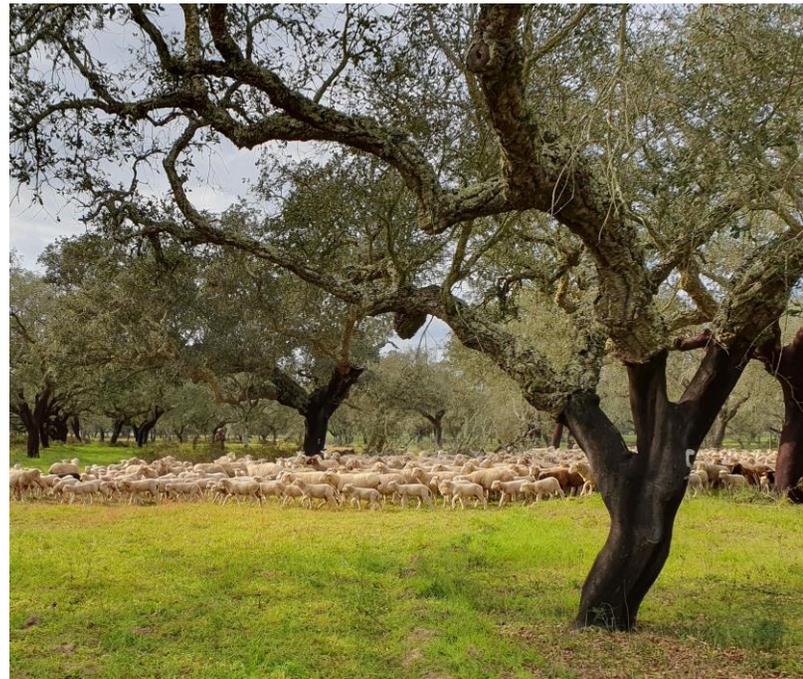
Mixed land use systems are diverse and sometimes complex. In addition, they often use synergies of different forms of management to optimise the use of available resources, which increases their resilience. At least in theory!

A theory, the MIXED project deals with extensively. However, initially the complexity lay more in the design of the data collection and facing the challenge to capture aspects and interrelationships of mixed land use systems in the best possible way. Nevertheless, it was possible to collect most of the data from the German networks by the end of the year. This data will now feed into modelling in order to gain new insights into mixed land use systems.

In addition to the rewetting of peatlands (ArGe Schwäbisches Donaumoos), in Germany our work also includes farms with agroforestry. As agroforestry is still rather uncommon in Germany, we are pleased about the active support and good cooperation with the Agroforestry Monitoring Team of the University of Münster.

The main task of the IfLS within the project concerns the elaboration of policy recommendations. In February 2023 the compilation of various relevant, and in particular beneficial, policy instruments from networks and partner countries started. Used in stakeholder workshops, these feed discussions in order to derive possible scenarios, with the eventual aim of strengthening policy implementation and creating improved framework conditions for mixed land use systems.

Looking forward, EU-wide projects continue to be important but also challenging or complex, thus requiring regular communication between project stakeholders. Late January 2023 in Lisbon, the second physical project meeting served to review the completed data collection, to exchange and discuss in an open setting, but also to coordinate the upcoming tasks.



**Project title:** Multi-actor and transdisciplinary development of efficient and resilient MIXED farming and agroforestry systems (MIXED)

**Duration:** 2020 – 2024

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission, Horizon 2020

**In cooperation with:** International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS) at the University Aarhus (Coordinator) and 17 further institutions in 10 countries in total

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

## Climate Change and renewable energy

### Planning a CoAct site: Challenges and adjusted value chains

The project "CoAct - Integrated Urban-Rural Concept for the Production of Activated Carbon and Energy Sources from Residual Biomass", which is part of the FONA research programme "Stadt-Land-Plus", started its implementation phase in 2022. IfLS has been contributing to the detailed planning of a CoAct plant and optimising the economic viability of activated carbon production from residual biomass at a wastewater treatment plant.

The original concept envisaged that, when using herbaceous biomasses, the solid and liquid fractions would be separated in order to pelletise and pyrolyse the solid fraction and then activate it hydrothermally - i.e. by means of steam. The liquid fraction is to be used as a carbon-based nutrient in the sewage process. Last year, it became clear that hydrothermal activation at the wastewater treatment plant remains a technical challenge.

The solution in the CoAct project is now to outsource this step. For the value chain of regionally produced activated carbon, this means that part of the value creation takes place outside the wastewater treatment plant or the "CoAct company". At the same time, this solution means that established technology and economies of scale can thus be used for activation, which can potentially benefit the economic viability of this ecologically valuable approach.



**Project title:** Integrated urban-rural concept for the production of activated carbon and energy sources from residual biomass – CoAct

**Duration:** 2018 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)

**In cooperation with:** Universität Kassel (Koordination), ifeu, Bodensee-Stiftung, Krieg & Fischer Ingenieure, Bodenseekreis

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Christoph Mathias

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## Negative emissions and the use of biochar in agriculture

Biochar is produced by the conversion of biomass via pyrolysis. Most of the carbon in biochar remains stable over a very long period of time. Biochar is thus an option for removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and storing it longterm. In addition, there is the possibility of using surplus heat, pyrolysis gas and pyrolysis oil to generate energy, and there are many possible uses for biochar. In agriculture, biochar can be applied in animal husbandry and for soil improvement.

The dynamics of developments in the subjects of climate protection and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in general, and biochar in particular, are high. However, biochar is still little known to the general public.

The Landwirtschaftliche Rentenbank therefore funded a project that provides an overview of the state of knowledge on the subject of biochar and its application in agriculture in particular.

The results of the research were published in a report by IfLS. Starting point is the need to create negative emissions in order to achieve climate goals. After an introduction to the definition, production and properties of biochar, an overview of the possible application and effects of its use in agriculture follows. Legal framework conditions, certification and aspects of biomass use against the background of climate protection and limited biomass resources are also addressed.

In agriculture, it seems promising to achieve yield increases or to reduce the use of fertilisers with a comparatively small amount of biochar "loaded" with nutrients. Biochar cannot and should not replace "traditional" humus management (crop rotation, catch crops, organic fertilisers, etc.), but can complement it.

Strict quality requirements (including contents of contaminants) must be imposed on biochar introduced into soils and used in animal feed, and these must be effectively monitored. The exclusive use of certified biochar is highly recommended.

The production of biochar creates additional demand for biomass. If carbon sequestration via biochar is to take place on a larger scale in the future, other priorities must not only be set in the use of biomass (e.g. pyrolysis instead of biomass combustion), but it must also be produced additionally, e.g. through increased planting of woody biomass in the agricultural landscape. System comparisons of different biomass utilisation pathways should include pyrolysis and the production of biochar for different utilisation options. The production of biochar should be taken into account in the development of the National Biomass Strategy.

It is necessary that policy-makers and the public increasingly address the issue and recognise the opportunities of biochar as a low-risk sink technology for the next decades and use it as a contribution to reach the climate targets.

The study is available at (in German):

[https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Pflanzenkohle\\_Bericht\\_IfLS\\_Rentenbank.pdf](https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Pflanzenkohle_Bericht_IfLS_Rentenbank.pdf)

**Project title:** Use of biochar in agriculture: Opportunities and limits

**Duration:** 2021 – 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Landwirtschaftliche Rentenbank

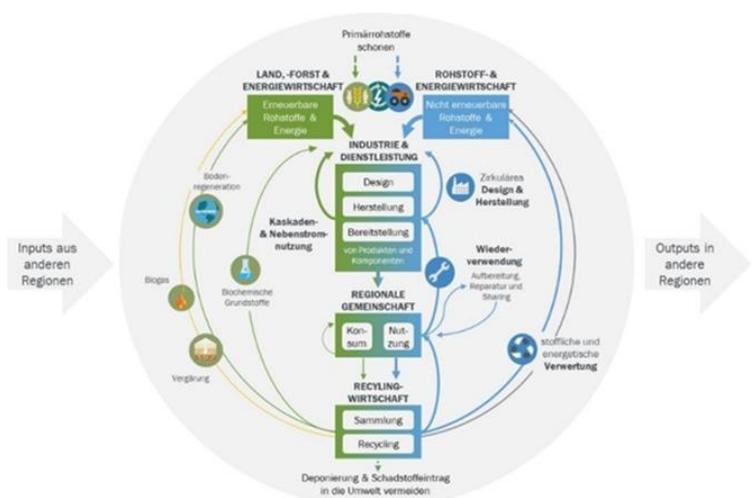
**Contact person at the IfLS:** Heike Nitsch

## Which factors inhibit or promote the implementation of circular economy in rural areas?

Circular economy (see figure 1) promises sustainable resource use and development opportunities also for rural areas. As part of the project "Potentials of the circular economy for rural development in Germany and Europe", an impact diagram for establishing circular economy in rural areas was developed on the basis of a comprehensive literature review. It is currently being tested in twelve regions in Germany and Europe. The study examines the extent to which constellations of actors from business, science, politics and society influence regional production systems that make circular use of existing primary and secondary resources.

The roles played by regional planning and governance processes, knowledge, skills and values, and the legal framework will also be examined. The aim is to identify promoting and limiting factors of a circular economy in rural areas and, based on this, to derive policy recommendations and recommendations for regional stakeholders.

The project is funded by the programme „[Region gestalten](#)“.



*Circular economy in rural areas (Own representation, Prognos AG, IfLS 2021, On the basis of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation)*

**Project title:** Potentials of the circular economy for rural development in Germany and Europe

**Duration:** 2021 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung im Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBSR)

**In cooperation with:** Prognos AG (coordination)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Christoph Mathias, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

## Regional development

### Networks and spaces of cultural and creative work: A development factor in rural areas?

Together with the Department of Empirical Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bonn, the IfLS is conducting the joint project "AMuRaKK - Actor Networks and Multifunctional Spaces of Art, Culture and Creative Work in Rural Regions" from 2023-2025. The project will be implemented as a trans-disciplinary research project together with the practice partners in the case regions Homberg (Efze), Blomberg, Itzehoe and Erlau-Crossen.

The overall objective of the project is to increase the impact of arts, culture and creative work in rural regions by integrating these actors into social networks and supporting them through local administrations. The project also aims to identify the competencies and skills required for network management and to provide them to coordinating key actors. Finally, it aims to identify conditions for success and success factors for network formation through the collaborative use of multifunctional spaces for creative activities and engagement with local communities. The project investigates how arts, culture and creative practitioners are integrated into actor networks and how they collaborate with local civil society actors and local governments to create, use and shape multifunctional spaces to enable broad cultural participation. Following the project understanding, art, culture and creative work includes professional as well as broad culture activities (e.g. musicians, choirs), volunteer cultural organisations, professional cultural management, home and cultural associations, creative leisure hackers or professional UX designers.

Multifunctional spaces, such as community studios or multifunctional houses, bring together different actors as well as cultural, social and economic offerings in one place.

They counteract functional spatial separation and social segregation and promote structural public services. They also contribute to social participation and

exchange between population groups by bundling essential services. As "social anchor points," they strengthen social cohesion and create publicity. Cultural, artistic and creative professionals and their complementary offerings play an important role in activating and revitalising multifunctional spaces in rural regions. Cultural offerings appeal to different target groups and have a multiplier effect in terms of the diversity of possible uses and the associated networks of actors. By creating or providing spatial and social resources in multifunctional spaces, the cultural engagement of amateur and professional cultural, artistic and creative workers in rural areas is to be strengthened. On the other hand, the expansion of cultural offerings, often in the form of free and low-threshold offerings (e.g. street theater, traveling cinema, open workshops) contributes to strengthening the cultural participation of local people.

The project started in March 2023, and the first empirical survey phase in the case study regions will take place later in the year.

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

**Duration:** 2023 – 2025

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE)

**In cooperation with:** University Bonn, Department of Empirical Cultural Studies and Cultural Anthropology

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Oliver Müller, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein



## Active last year in the "CityZen" project

Strengthening urban and peri-urban agriculture: This was the goal of the activities in the "CityZen" project again last year. Together with the RhineMain Regional Park, the IfLS presented the action plan "Developing the cultural landscape. Strengthening agriculture. Experiencing the Regional Park" in January. In May, an exchange meeting of project partners with expertise in urban agriculture took place in Frankfurt a.M..

The aim of the INTERREG-EUROPE project, which started in 2019 and will be completed this year, is to communicate the economic and social potential of urban and peri-urban agriculture to political decision-makers and citizens. Partners from five project regions (Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Germany) are raising awareness for green innovation and resource efficiency among local policy makers. Through regional action plans, they integrate food security, waste management, community development and climate change adaptation into urban and peri-urban agriculture models and practices.

The action plan in the Rhine-Main region presented in January is one of five plans in the partner regions. It aims to provide impulses for a better perception of the environmental and social benefits of urban agriculture and to promote innovative approaches. First measures are to be implemented by the Regional park Rhine Main and partners in the area this year: (1) Raising consciousness to strengthen and value meadow orchards. A special goal is to prevent the increasing theft along the cultivation areas. (2) Along the Regional Park route there are numerous and very different agricultural operations and initiatives. The Regional Park is working on a better integration of these into the guided route. (3) Agriculture is changing - This applies to urban and rural areas. Permacultures on green spaces or aquaponics systems are to encourage people to think about the advantages and disadvantages of agricultural developments.

Beyond the regional action plans, "CityZen" aims at bringing different actors together to learn from each

other. For such an exchange meeting 35 participants from the project regions came to Frankfurt a.M from May 17 to 19, 2022. They discussed the action plans of their regions in order to bring innovative ideas and implementation strategies to their respective regions. In the practical part of the meeting, the participants visited regional good practices such as the Main Äppel Haus on the Lorberg, the Stadtgarten project in Eschborn, and Regional Park farm stations. A bicycle tour along the Regional Park route led to further exemplary farms and the agricultural-cultural axis.



Before the project comes to an end in May with a joint final conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, the action plans will be put into action. Initial findings on

policies and practices collected during the project can be found in the e-handbook "Urban Farming: Policies and Practices." It describes the broad benefits that urban farming brings to „CityZen“regions: greener and more resilient cities, promotion of health, community engagement and inclusion, innovation, and knowledge gains. The handbook also provides an overview of the action plans in which "CityZen"-partners define next steps to improve the policy context for promoting urban agriculture.

**Project Title:** Promoting scalable innovations and new business models based on the values of the urban agro-ecosystem (CityZen)

**Duration:** 2019 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Interreg Europe

**In cooperation with:** Applied Research and Communications Fund (Coordination, BG), Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (EL), Municipality of Beja (PT), Universität Valladolid (ES), CIMBAL (PT), Natural Heritage Foundation of Castilla y León (ES)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Simone Sterly, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

## LEADER provides strong impetus for Tsalka in Georgia

With the year 2022 the support of the LEADER implementation by the IfLS in the region of Tsalka in Georgia came to an end. The organisation CENN (Caucasian Environment NGO Network) was accompanied in the implementation of the project "Embrace Tsalka" for a total of 4 years.

The LEADER region included the territory of Tsalka municipality, which is located in the south-west of Georgia on a high plateau at about 1400m above sea level. Tsalka is characterised by a strong population decline since the mid-1990s and the multi-ethnic composition of the population.

Needs and potentials for the implementation within LEADER were seen mainly in the areas of job creation, promotion of culture and agricultural production, as well as the development of tourism.

The role of the IfLS in the project was to support the Georgian project executing agency CENN as well as the Local Action Group (LAG) especially in issues such as strategy development, project selection, self-evaluation, communication and stabilization of activities.

At the beginning of May 2022, the IfLS was able to realise a visit of a 20-member delegation of the LAG as well as municipal and parliamentary representatives with on-site visits in Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg. In return, in July 2022, IfLS staff members conducted a consulting trip to the region and worked together with the LAG to develop an action plan for the period after the end of the LEADER term. The positive developments in the community were obvious; many of the projects were partly financed by LEADER. The project also made a significant contribution to building the capacity of the LAG members, who previously had no experience with bottom-up approaches or project funding.

Due to the programme structure, with the expiration of the funding period for the European Neighborhood

Programme for Rural Development (ENPARD), a renewed application of Tsalka as a LEADER region is currently not possible. This is a major problem for the sustainability of the LAG, because after four years of the project it is not yet institutionally strong enough to pursue the developed strategic goals alone.

"Embrace Tsalka" has given important impulses in the region, which hopefully have a "continuing" effect „Embrace Tsalka“.



**Project title:** Support for the implementation of LEADER in Georgia – EMBRACE Tsalka

**Duration:** 2018 – 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** EU (EuropeAid) ENPARD-program

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Simone Sterly



## LEADER/CLLD selection in Saxony-Anhalt - an area-wide development approach

With the start of the new funding period 2023-2027, the selection of new LEADER/CLLD areas was also on the agenda in the federal states. The state of Saxony-Anhalt had decided in advance to expand the area coverage and thus also approved the urban areas of Magdeburg, Halle and Dessau-Roßlau for CLLD funding. The state is thus exploiting the potential of the integrated community-led local development (CLLD) approach by allowing the areas to draw on funds from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) as well as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF+). In total, the state provides around 290 million euros for the implementation of LEADER/CLLD from the participating funds.

IfLS Consulting and Projects supported the selection process with the creation of a criteria catalogue for the submitted local development strategies, the on-site consultation of regional key players for the strategy creation as well as the final assessment and evaluation of the submitted strategies. On the basis of the expert opinions, a selection committee was able to select 24 of 25 submitted strategies for funding. Finally, the project team developed a proposal for the distribution of the budget from the participating funds into 24 individual Financial Orientation Frameworks (FOR), which are made available to the regions for the implementation of their strategies.

With the financial and territorial expansion of the development approach, the spectrum of topics and fields of action addressed by the respective CLLD strategies of the areas also expands. It became apparent, for example, that in addition to the "classic" topics, "new" areas such as the remediation of contaminated sites can also be of great importance for the development of rural areas. Since the regional needs for this specific funding area could not yet be described in sufficiently concrete terms at the time the strategy was drawn up, the state decided to set up a special

budget of 20 million euros. This gives the regions the opportunity to work out their specific needs together with specialist authorities in the course of implementation.

In addition to the integrated consideration of new topics and issues, the demarcation of urban and rural areas surrounding the agglomeration areas was a particular challenge. This was necessary due to the proportional financing of the areas from the three funds involved, according to which the EAFRD is to be applied only in the rural and rurally characterised areas. How the strengthening of urban-rural relations via LEADER/CLLD can succeed, however, is shown in the submitted strategies: Be it the integrated bicycle traffic concept, the development of regional recreational areas in the surrounding areas or the strengthening of regional sales markets in close cooperation with rural action groups - the strategies contain a multitude of good starting points.



SACHSEN-ANHALT



**Project title:** LEADER/CLLD Selection Process in Saxony-Anhalt

**Duration:** 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH

**Client:** EU-Verwaltungsbehörde für die ESI-Fonds, Ministerium der Finanzen des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt (MF)

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Oliver Müller

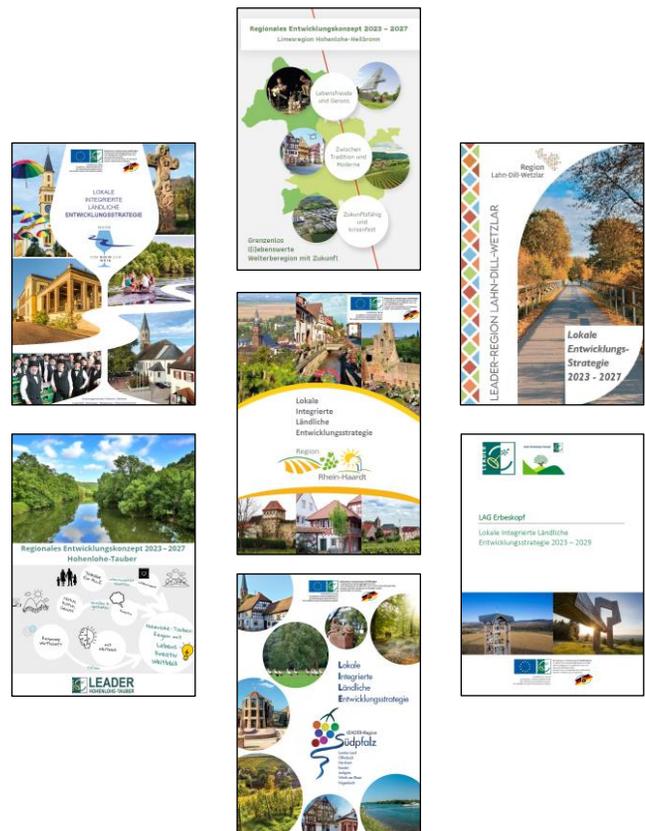
## LEADER concepts in Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg recognised for funding period 2023 - 2027

In November 2022, the three federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse announced the LEADER action groups selected for the coming funding period and thus also officially recognised the seven LEADER regions accompanied by the IfLS.

On 07.11.2022 Baden-Württemberg gave the starting signal when Minister Hauk announced in Stuttgart that all 20 LEADER applicant regions will be included in the funding. Among them are the two regions Hohenlohe-Tauber and Limesregion Hohenlohe-Heilbronn, which are managed by the IfLS. Three days later, the announcement of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate followed when State Secretary Becht presented the certificates to the 21 LEADER regions at Hambach Castle.

In Rhineland-Palatinate, the IfLS accompanied the regions Südpfalz, Vom Rhein zum Wein, Erbeskopf and Rhein-Haardt in the preparation of the strategies. In Hesse, Environment Minister Priska Hinz handed over the certificates of recognition to the 24 Hessian LEADER regions on 10.11.2022 in Eltville. Among them also for the LEADER region Lahn-Dill-Wetzlar, which was created by the IfLS.

As part of the development process, the IfLS held information and participation events in a wide variety of formats. The concepts were developed in digital, analog and hybrid forms for the participation of different groups of the population and stakeholders. With a view to the respective characteristics of the regions, individual mission statements and target strategies as well as lead projects were developed for the new funding period. These can be located, for example, in the areas of tourism, bioeconomy, climate protection, digitisation, services of general interest and enhancement of the quality of life.



**Project title:** Development of LEADER-concepts

**Duration:** 2021 – 2022

**Client:**

- LAG Erbeskopf
- LAG Südpfalz
- LAG Rhein-Haardt
- LAG Vom Rhein zum Wein
- LAG Limesregion Hohenlohe-Heilbronn
- LAG Hohenlohe-Tauber
- LAG LahnDillWetzlar

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V. and IfLS GmbH

**In cooperation with:** Kobra Beratungszentrum (LAG Vom Rhein zum Wein, Rhein-Haardt and Südpfalz)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Svea Thietje, Christoph Mathias, Oliver Müller, Hanna Kramer



## LEADER-evaluation of the regional management “Oben an der Volme”

At the end of the 2014-2022 funding period, all LEADER regions in North Rhine-Westphalia have to evaluate their strategy implementation.

In this context, IfLS Consulting and Projects supports the association responsible for the development of the region “Oben an der Volme”. IfLS is carrying out surveys of project promoters, interviews with key persons and the final analysis of all collected data. Not only members, project promoters and regional key persons are interviewed, but also for the first time beneficiaries of the regional budget financed by the GAK. The regional budget allows for the unbureaucratic funding of small projects (up to 20,000 €) which contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Regional Development Strategy. In particular, voluntary and local initiatives should be strengthened in their commitment.

Following the survey, the various interest groups discuss the results in a workshop and draw conclusions for improving cooperation, process flows and opportunities for participation.

In addition, the IfLS is working on a project brochure that summarises the results of all 60 implemented LEADER projects.

**Project title:** Final evaluation Oben an der Volme  
**Duration:** 2022 – 2023  
**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH  
**Client:** Regionalentwicklung “Oben an der Volme”  
**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Oliver Müller, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

## Faszination Mosel – Evaluation of the regional initiative after two years of work

The regional initiative “Faszination Mosel” has the declared goal of marketing the entire wine-growing region of the Mosel as a region of pleasure both internally and externally. For the first time, the initiative brings together the different local pillars of wine, vacation, enjoyment, culture, nature & landscape and world cultural heritage in a common structure.

IfLS Consulting and Projects analysed the success of the initiative's work after about two years of operation. The basis of the evaluation was an online survey with the target group of local residents. The survey reached more than 500 people and thus well-founded conclusions about past developments could be drawn. In addition to the survey, which focused primarily on completed activities, regional actors looked at the results during a workshop day and established a regional context. Based on the results, the participants discussed future developments to strengthen the regional initiative and its goals.

Overall, it became clear that the regional initiative was already well established despite the Corona pandemic and the associated restrictions. In the future, it will be a matter of anchoring the aforementioned pillars in their breadth in the awareness of the region's residents and guests.

The results of the evaluation were published in a final report and presented locally.

**Project title:** Short evaluation of the regional initiative „Faszination Mosel“  
**Duration:** 2022  
**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH  
**Client:** Regional initiative “Faszination Mosel”  
c/o Kreisverwaltung Bernkastel-Wittlich  
**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Hanna Kramer

## Elevate and promote organic farming performance regionally: regiosöl project results

What contribution does organic agriculture make to livable regions? The promotion of biodiversity and soil fertility, contributions at the social level (e.g. educational work, local recreation, disaster prevention) or to the regional economy (e.g. direct marketing) are just some of the social benefits of organic agriculture. These socio-ecological services (söL) are to be given a higher value against the background of sustainable development goals. To this end, regions were designated as the primary level of action in the "regiosöl" project.

The recording of performance was divided into an operational and a regional level. As a result of the analysis of seven sustainability calculators, the regional value performance calculator was selected as a suitable recording tool. It makes it possible to represent the on-farm social performance of organic farmers and to include regional effects. The following approach was used to test the validity of this assessment for the recording of societal performance at the regional level: First of all, the data collection questions of the tool were extended within the framework of the project with the participation of experts to include indicators related to the company as well as to the region. A total of 161 indicators from 17 thematic areas were included. The resulting questionnaire distinguishes between individual farm decisions (e.g. number of crops grown), region-related quantitative data (e.g. organic farming area) and qualitative data (e.g. local marketing structures).

Real laboratories in the administrative district of Cologne and in the Werra-Meißner and Kassel districts of northern Hesse offered scope for concrete application. The computer was used on a total of 61 farms with various farm profiles.

It was not possible to determine data in all the areas queried, so that in some cases averaged operational sustainability indicators were used for orientation.

However, selected criteria provide an initial overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the regions considered. Overall, there is a lack of a uniform data basis for evaluating potentials at the regional level, such as documentation of currently available training places or local self-sufficiency levels.

Key players in the pilot regions shaped the research process: The "Regionalwert-AG Rheinland" and the "Zentrum für Ökologische Landwirtschaft e.V.". contributed to a broad networking. In addition, they ensured the creation of regional profiles and formulated recommendations for the improved provision of söL. Central are the promotion of organic agriculture as well as local value creation and demand, regional networks and a focus on söL in education and training. The addressees of the specific recommendations include LEADER regions, municipalities, cultural authorities, chambers and associations. In addition to the supra-regional levers, strategic consideration can be given to eco-friendly products and services in intervention compensation schemes, municipal procurement, local processing and sustainable logistics models, among others. <https://www.ifls.de/referenzen/regiosoe/>



Gefördert durch



aufgrund eines Beschlusses  
des Deutschen Bundestages

**Project title:** regiosöl: Regional social and ecological benefits of organic farming: assess - value - act

**Duration:** 2020 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** BÖL – Bundesprogramm Ökolandbau der Bundesanstalt für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft

**In cooperation with:** Regionalwert Impuls, Regionalwert-AG Rheinland Zentrum für Ökologische Landwirtschaft (ZÖL) e.V.

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Ribana Bergmann, Simone Sterly



## Protected areas and cultural landscape

### NaBioKom - How can nature parks and biosphere reserves support the dialogue of forest interests?

Diverse demands on the forest are associated with different interests. This requires a balance between the dimensions of ecology, economy and social issues within the framework of a fact-based dialogue. Particularly in the area of tension between climate change, loss of biodiversity and other challenges, we, as a society and as experts, are called upon to find joint solutions for the reconciliation of interests.

The NaBioKom project deals with the question: How can nature parks and biosphere reserves as communication platforms support and promote the dialogue process between regional actors of nature conservation and forestry? Together with team ewen, project partner for communication and mediation, and practice partners, the IfLS implements dialogue processes in four living labs. The Kellerwald-Edersee Nature Park, the Bergstrasse-Odenwald Geo-Nature Park and the Rhön and Thuringian Forest Biosphere Reserves are participating as living labs. The project is supported by the Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe with funds from the BMEL.

Within the status quo analysis, differences and commonalities of the interests of actors in the forest will be investigated based on a literature analysis and a nationwide online survey of nature parks and biosphere reserves. The online survey will also provide information on the current role of nature parks and biosphere reserves in the dialogue, as well as an assessment of development perspectives. On this basis, the regional results of the living labs can later be put into a Germany-wide context.

In the four living labs, regional attitudes and interests in the forest will be investigated, important topics of dialogue and/or differences in interests will be recorded, and the actors involved will be identified. Possible overarching themes could be forest and recreation, forest and game, or adaptation to climate change.

For this purpose, region-specific and topic-related dialogue processes are implemented in the living labs. The goal is a trusting and constructive cooperation. As results consensual solutions for balancing interests are planned, which are regionally adapted. The experiences and findings from the dialogue processes are to be prepared in a guideline for other nature parks and biosphere reserves and serve as regional examples for administrations, politics, associations and other institutions.

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des Deutschen Bundestages

The previous exchange in the NaBioKom team, also with the project-accompanying working group, which met for the first time in January 2023, made it clear that the practice partners can build on a good cooperation with various actors in the forest on specific topics

and occasions. In the future, voluntary actors and private forest owners should be better involved and integrated in the dialogue for a near-natural and multi-functional forest use.

Project website (in German): [nabiokom.ifls.de](https://nabiokom.ifls.de)

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

**Duration:** 2022 – 2025

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Fachagentur für Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e.V. with funds of the BMEL

**In cooperation with:** team ewen, Naturpark Kellerwald-Edersee, Geo-Naturpark Bergstraße-Odenwald, Biosphärenreservat Rhön, Biosphärenreservat Thüringer Wald

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

## Potentials of insect protection in protected areas

In 2019 the Federal Cabinet of Germany has launched an action programme on insect conservation. One focus of the programme is on strengthening protected areas, another on restoring and connecting habitats. Because they cover more than 30% of the federal territory, measures in protected areas can achieve measurable effects.

IfLS Consulting and Projects organised two conferences on behalf of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, which took place in May 2022 and February 2023. These three-day conferences are primarily aimed at representatives of biosphere reserves and nature parks, as they have only limited land sovereignty and financial resources for nature conservation and are therefore often dependent on good, cooperative actions with regional actors and funding.

In addition to expert presentations, the conference focused on approaches to insect protection in the areas of agricultural landscape, forestry, water bodies, settlements, education and light pollution. The technical papers and results will be published in a BfN script. The IfLS also coordinates the preparation.

**Project title:** R+D project „Insect protection measures and potentials for those in large protected areas“

**Duration:** 2021 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesamt für Naturschutz

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

## A platform for education for sustainable development

The UNESCO Geo-Nature Park wants to strengthen the role of education for sustainable development in its region. Therefore, after the creation of the strategic-didactic ESD-concept, the Geo- and Nature Park commissioned the IfLS Consulting and Projects to support the creation of a digital ESD platform.

In the area of the Geo-Nature Park Bergstrasse-Odenwald, various actors are already dedicated to education for sustainable development (ESD) and thus strengthen the awareness of individuals for their work and role in this area and on our earth.

In order to support the visibility of these actors and to spread the idea of ESD further, the digital ESD platform was set up. The platform presents the individual partners with their respective focal points and offers in a short profile and locates them on a map. IfLS Consulting and Projects coordinated the creation of the profiles with the regional actors and wrote background information about the field of education for sustainable development.

In the long term, the platform is to grow - first digitally, then analogously - into an ESD academy.

**Project title:** ESD-platform of the UNESCO Geo-Nature Park Bergstrasse-Odenwald

**Duration:** 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH

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

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



## Shaping the future with strategies ready for implementation: Management plans for the Nature Parks Kellerwald-Edersee and Reinhardswald

The management plans for two Hessian nature parks - the Kellerwald-Edersee Nature Park and the Reinhardswald Nature Park – will soon be completed. In 2022/2023, the IfLS GmbH intensively engaged in the strategic design of possible future objectives, projects and the underlying exchange with the nature park administrations, regional partners and the public.

For a coordinated regional development, the IfLS considered both nature parks with their respective regional characteristics:

**Nature Park Reinhardswald:** After its foundation in 2017, the nature park plan for the Reinhardswald is their first strategic instrument. This is because with its relatively young age, the nature park is still at the beginning of its activity and establishment in the region. Another special feature is that the nature parks' office also has the role of a tourism-working group according to the Hessian three-level model for tourism development. Correspondingly, the field recreation and tourism has a great importance in their current and future work. In addition, objectives in the field of marketing are integrated into the classically rather "inwardly" aligned field of communication and public relations. The exchange with professional partners or the established steering group is most important in the planning process in order to strengthen regional synergies.

**Kellerwald-Edersee Nature Park:** In contrast to the Reinhardswald Nature Park, the Kellerwald-Edersee Nature Park is one of the oldest Hessian nature parks. In 2022, it celebrated its 20+1 birthday with a nature park festival, which also included a public participation opportunity in the context of nature park planning. However, a unique feature of the nature park is that the only Hessian national park is to be found in its midst. Furthermore, the LEADER regional management belongs to their office and the nature park is the leaseholder of the lake 'Edersee'. As a result, the field

of action "sustainable fishery management" is part of the planning. IfLS Consulting and Projects developed the target strategy in a close exchange with the steering group, but also with the public. Another special feature was the organisational workshop in which the entire office dealt with the future personnel, financial and structural development and its own self-perception.

Together with the nature park plans in the Taunus, Rhine-Taunus and in the Odenwald, five of 13 Hessian nature park plans were prepared by IfLS Consulting and Projects and the Institute for Rural Development research.

**Project title:** Nature Park Plan for the Nature Park Reinhardswald

**Duration:** 2022 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH

**Client:** Zweckverband Naturpark Reinhardswald

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Svea Thietje, Hanna Kramer

**Project title:** Nature Park Plan for the Nature Park Kellerwald-Edersee

**Duration:** 2022 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH

**Client:** Zweckverband Naturpark Kellerwald-Edersee

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Svea Thietje, Hanna Kramer

## Globally sustainable communities in the Palatine

Municipalities are key players in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development, as they impact their implementation at the local level. Transformation processes at the local level take place primarily in the interplay between politics, administration, business and civil society.

The project "Globally Sustainable Communities (in German: Global nachhaltige Kommunen - GNK) Palatinate" supports the city of Speyer and the municipalities of Deidesheim and Spendingen-Gensingen in the implementation of municipal sustainability strategies.

Within the framework of this project and its predecessor project "SDG Model Region Palatinate Forest or a Sustainable Rhineland-Palatinate" (2019-2021), the IfLS GmbH and the IfLS e.V. advise a total of 11 model municipalities in Rhineland-Palatinate in the different phases of creating and implementing their sustainability strategies.

The GNK project is based on two pillars: In the first pillar, the eight municipalities from the previous project are supported in the implementation of their sustainability strategies. Workshops held focused on the implementation of the self-selected fields of action. Topics include sustainability communication, volunteerism, partnerships in the global south, and monitoring and steps to implement the existing plans.

In the second pillar, the three above-mentioned municipalities will, as a first step, prepare municipal sustainability reports in accordance with the specifications of the German Council for Sustainable Development (Reporting Framework for Sustainable Development) and sustainability strategies (SDG action plans) based on these reports.

In addition to providing advice on content, IfLS Consulting and Projects implements a participatory pro-

cess with networking events and workshops in and between the municipalities to develop the locally coordinated action plans.



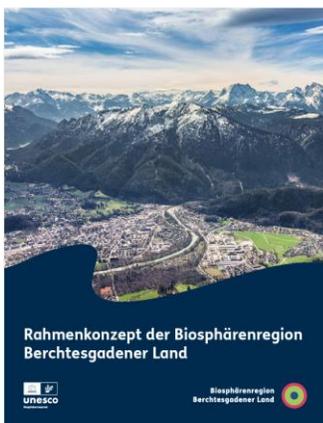
The Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen Biosphere Reserve supports the project in cooperation with the "Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt" of Engagement Global and the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. It is financed by funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate.

**Project title:** Global sustainable Communities in the Palatinate  
**Duration:** 2022 – 2023  
**Client:** Biosphärenreservat Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen  
**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH  
**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Hanna Kramer, Christoph Mathias



## Framework concept as a future guide for the work in the Biosphere Region Berchtesgadener Land

Sustainability encompasses all areas of life and work and, as a task for society as a whole, can only be achieved through dialog in society and cooperation between all relevant actors. A consensus-based and future-oriented strategy is therefore indispensable for regional implementation. With the framework concept developed in 2022, the biosphere region Berchtesgadener Land wants to set the course for the sustainable development of the region in the next 10 years. The framework concept therefore contains goals and



measures in its three fields of action "Nature and landscape", "Sustainable Life and Economy" and "Knowledge", which serve the conservation and development of nature and landscape, but at the same time also take into account social and regional economic aspects.

Close coordination and cooperation with various regional actors is crucial in order to further establish the biosphere region Berchtesgadener Land as a model region for sustainable development.

Find the concept at <https://brbgl.de/> (in German).

**Project title:** Framework concept for the Biosphere Region Berchtesgadener Land  
**Duration:** 2021 – 2022  
**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH  
**Client:** Biosphärenregion Berchtesgadener Land  
**In cooperation with:** Spreadwings GmbH & Co. KG  
**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Svea Thietje, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

## Reflection on sustainable development in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve

Every ten years, in accordance with the international guidelines for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO reviews whether the biosphere reserves it has recognised may continue to bear this award. The Rhön biosphere reserve was recognised by UNESCO in 1991 as a transnational biosphere reserve in Bavaria, Hesse and Thuringia and is now undergoing its third evaluation process in 2023/2024.

The IfLS supports the three biosphere administrations in the preparation of the "Berichts zur periodischen Überprüfung" (report on periodic review). Various regional stakeholders are involved in the development process (through discussions, an online survey and three evaluation workshops) in order to also discuss future perspectives. The report is to present the developments of the past 10 years and specifically address the activities of the administrative bodies and other regional actors in order to provide a holistic picture of sustainable development in the region. The final report will be submitted to the German MAB National Committee in spring 2024. Overall, the periodic review provides an opportunity to comprehensively reflect on the activities in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve. It is not only a proof of the work of the administrations of the Biosphere Reserve Rhön towards UNESCO, but should help to strengthen the quality as a model region for developing and testing new approaches for sustainable development.

**Project title:** Periodic review of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Rhön  
**Duration:** 2023 – 2024  
**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH  
**Client:** Thüringer Verwaltungsstelle UNESCO Biosphärenreservat Rhön  
**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Svea Thietje

## Agricultural policy

### Smooth transition from federal-state programmes to a national CAP strategic plan

On November 21, 2022, the [CAP Strategic Plan for the Federal Republic of Germany](#) was officially approved by the European Commission. It forms the basis for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in Germany.

Since January 1, 2023, the federal and state governments are implementing the CAP strategic plan. The IfLS was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) to conduct the [ex-ante evaluation](#) (in German) of the plan. Together with the Thünen Institut, entera and BonnEval, it accompanied the process of programme development in an advisory capacity during 2020-2021. Before the draft CAP strategic plan was sent to the EU Commission, the team evaluated it in its entirety. This included the evaluation of the initial situation description, the SWOT analysis based on it and the derived needs. Finally, it evaluated how interventions potentially and logically contribute to the [objectives of the CAP](#).

The rural development programmes of the federal states, which have been in place since 2014, will continue until 2025, in parallel with the CAP strategic plan. The IfLS will therefore conduct its commissioned final evaluations of the implementation and effectiveness of the rural development programmes in Baden-Württemberg (MEPL III) and Rhineland-Palatinate (EULLE) only until 2026. This is in line with the requirements of the EU, which wants to have accountability for all funds used.

However, in order for the federal states to be able to draw lessons from the old funding period in time for the new one that has just started, early interim results are necessary. Therefore, the IfLS, together with its respective evaluation partners in both federal states (see box), will, as far as possible, bring forward in-depth studies to 2023 and 2024. This also makes sense because otherwise there is a risk of mixing up with new measures in surveys of beneficiaries.

The first interim results are already available. For example, in-depth data evaluations were carried out on contractual nature conservation grazing in Baden-Württemberg.

To evaluate LEADER funding, as another example, case studies are due in 2023. These aim to investigate the LEADER added value, e.g. the process benefits of LEADER and the impact on voluntary engagement. At the same time, the hypothesis will be tested to what extent the involvement of voluntary commitment improves the quality of results of the LEADER process.

**Project title:** Ex-ante evaluation of the national 'CAP Strategic Plan' for the Federal Republic of Germany, including the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

**Duration:** 2020 – 2022

**Client:** Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL)

**In cooperation with:** Thünen-Institut für Ländliche Räume, entera, BonnEval

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Jörg Schramek

**Project title:** Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme of Baden-Württemberg 2014-2022 (MEPL III)

**Duration:** 2016 – 2026

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

**In cooperation with:** Forschungsgruppe Agrar- und Regionalentwicklung Triesdorf, Unique Forestry Freiburg

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Jörg Schramek

**Project title:** Ongoing Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme of Rhineland-Palatinate 2014-2022 – EULLE

**Duration:** 2016 – 2026

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

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V./IfLS Consulting and Projects

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

**Contact person at the IfLS:** Jörg Schramek

## Evaluation of the support for fruit and vegetable producer organisations in Europe

Producer organisations (PO) in the fruit and vegetable sector can receive financial support from the European Union through so-called operational programmes (OP). How the support is structured is determined by the individual member states in national strategies. Together with Ecorys, the IfLS was involved in the synthesis of the evaluation reports of the National Strategies for Sustainable OPs in the fruit and vegetable sector 2013-2018 of all member states, which was commissioned by the EU Commission.

The synthesis of the evaluation reports underline that OPs contribute efficiently to the achievement of the set objectives. The reports show that OPs make membership in POs more attractive and contribute positively to concentrating of supply, marketing, increasing the commercial value of products from POs and their adaptation to demand. They also contribute to improving competitiveness, protecting and preserving the environment, and preventing and managing crises. Due to a lack of quantitative evidence, the evaluation was more difficult with respect to other objectives.

The synthesis report also asked whether the supported measures of the OPs were coherent with each other and with measures of other rural development programmes with similar objectives. In particular, coherence can be identified in relation to environmental measures, research and experimental production, and measures to improve marketing.

The results are used by the EU Commission for the evaluation of the funding period under review, on the basis of which it designs and adapts future funding programmes.

**Project title:** Synthesis of evaluation reports from Member States regarding their national strategies for sustainable operational programmes in the fruit and vegetables sector 2013-2018

**Duration:** 2021 – 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission – GD Agriculture and Rural Development

**In cooperation with:** Ecorys

**Contact person at IfLS:** Simone Sterly



## Socioeconomics



### Streams, moors and mountain meadows in the Thuringian Forest

A change in land use, either in the form of intensification or through land abandonment, endangers the existing structural and species diversity in parts of the Thuringian Forest. The aim of the major conservation project "Streams, moors and mountain meadows in the Thuringian Forest" is to restore streams, moors and mountain meadows to their natural state and to preserve intact biotopes. They are valuable habitats for many animal and plant species, some of which are at risk of extinction.

Within the framework of the major conservation project, a maintenance and development plan is being prepared. Part of this is the socio-economic analysis, conducted by the IfLS. For this purpose, about 15 experts from the fields of agriculture, forestry and water management, from municipal institutions, regional development, tourism and environmental protection will be interviewed until February 2023. A further survey among farms will follow later in the year.

Together with project partners, the IfLS will compile the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project region. It will formulate recommendations for action based on the project results that take into account the various interests of the stakeholders in the region. The socio-economic study is also intended to identify possible conflict situations and to point out realistic solutions for these.



**Project title:** Major conservation project „Streams, moors and mountain meadows in the Thuringian Forest“ (Socio-economic analysis as part of the maintenance and development plan)

**Duration:** 2022 – 2024

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V. & IfLS GmbH

**Client:** Naturstiftung David

**Contact persons at IfLS:** Bettina Spengler, Hanna Kramer

## Utilization strategies for non-marketable eggs from small laying flocks

Between January 2020 and September 2022, the project examined possible utilization strategies for dirty, cracked and small sized eggs from small flocks of laying hens ( $\leq 3,000$  hens). This also involved surveys on processing, marketing and logistics as well as on husbandry management and slaughter of old hens.

In the first step, alternative utilization strategies for non-marketable eggs and eggs difficult to market were investigated on farms and examined for their sustainability. In a further step, some of these strategies, such as on-farm processing, were examined in more detail. This resulted in a fact sheet on the requirements and opportunities of important processing strategies, which deals with legal requirements, work processes and economic aspects of each strategy, among other things.

Furthermore, the role of producer organizations in the bundling, processing and marketing of non-marketable or difficult-to-market eggs from small layer flocks was investigated. Logistical challenges in the bundling and transport of the goods were elaborated.

An additional subject of research was the occurrence of larger quantities of non-marketable organic eggs as such due to new waiting time regulations following the treatment of animals with chemically synthesised, allopathic medicines. The new waiting times are in accordance with the new EU organic regulation. For this purpose, a further German-language fact sheet has been prepared to show alternatives for the treatment of animals or for the utilization of these eggs from organic farms.

Furthermore, a management guide (in German) for the reduction and avoidance of non-marketable eggs from small flocks of laying hens deals with the factors influencing the occurrence of non-marketable eggs and with possible options for farmers.

The subject of the utilization of old hens was also addressed in the project, since old hens are another

product that is generally difficult to market. In particular, the slaughter conditions of small animal batches were addressed.

All project results (detailed final report, fact sheets, management guide) are available here: [https://or-gprints.org/id/saved\\_search/1853](https://or-gprints.org/id/saved_search/1853) (in German).

Further, at the end of the project, the results are summarized in a [leaflet published by BÖLN](#) (in German).



**Project title:** Organic eggs from small production units – current and alternative utilization of non-marketable eggs

**Duration:** 2020 – 2022

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE) im Rahmen des Bundesprogramms “Ökologischer Landbau und andere Formen nachhaltiger Landwirtschaft” (BÖLN)

**In cooperation with:** Bioland e.V., Demeter e.V.

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Bettina Spengler, Jörg Schramek

## Knowledge and Innovation

### Learning materials on short chains for sustainable practices and viable farms

Small and medium-sized farms face the challenge of generating sufficient income to survive in the market. At the same time, society's demands on food production are growing. A high degree of animal welfare, regional production and features such as old varieties or artisanal food processing create products that are comparatively rare in the mass market. Although the market for such products is smaller, such niches offer the potential for small and medium-sized farms to generate an economic livelihood and to reward their environmental services.

The IfLS is developing learning materials as part of the Erasmus+ projects Niche Market Farming and OnFarm to highlight the opportunities of niche markets. The Niche Market Farming project considers three niches, which can be occupied individually or combined. With the aim to increase biodiversity in agriculture, the possibilities and challenges of cultivating old varieties are considered. The procurement of seeds is a central challenge, which can be solved with the help of seed-saving initiatives or seed banks. In cultivation, old varieties are characterised by a high adaptation to the region of origin, which may become increasingly interesting for farms against the background of climate change. Organic-certified production makes it possible to further increase the price-premium on the market, especially since the lower productivity of old varieties in this segment is not as significant as it is compared to conventional production. Protected designations of origin certify the product's specificity. Old varieties, regional specialties and artisanal production can thus be used to increase biodiversity in agriculture.

The OnFarm project focuses on added-value creation after the primary production. This can be achieved on the one hand through the further processing of agricultural products or direct marketing. Both can be combined as well. Through further processing, a higher-quality product is created and the farm can skim off this added value. The same is possible through various direct marketing channels such as farm stores, market stalls or delivery services.

The learning materials provide overarching information on the preservation of old varieties as well as consulting and support services for direct marketing. Farm profiles and a podcast provide insights into farming and marketing practices. Learning materials address, for example, the challenges of certification or the establishment and cooperation of short chains.

**Project title:** Niche Market Farming – Niche Markets in Agriculture

**Duration:** 2022 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V. (coordination)

**Client:** European Commission, Erasmus+

**In cooperation with:** ARID (PL), CIA Umbria (IT), MAD (IT), OnProjects (ES), Hof und Leben (DE)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Christoph Mathias, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

**Project title:** Farming, Food Production and Food Processing with Added Value for Local Small and Medium-sized Farmers – OnFarm

**Duration:** 2022 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission, Erasmus+

**In cooperation with:** ASZ (CZ, Coordination), CEJA (BE), CIA Toscana (IT), OnProjects (ES), SFYN (NL)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Christoph Mathias, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein

## Diverse agricultural innovations in Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony-Anhalt

The EU funding period 2014-2022 and thus also the period in which the new EU programme “European Innovation Partnerships” (EIP-Agri) for the promotion of agricultural innovations was implemented for the first time, led to interesting changes. The funding offer has enabled a wide range of innovative solutions to be developed for a future-oriented agriculture, forestry and food industry. In Germany alone, a total of 347 Operational Groups (OGs) have been and are being funded as an association of farmers, researchers and consultants to jointly answer the most pressing questions and problems in agriculture and forestry and to rapidly transfer the knowledge gained into practice. The thematic spectrum is broad and ranges from food security and new foods to innovations for promoting animal welfare and technical solutions in horticulture.

But how do OGs get together in the first place? How do initial innovative ideas become applications that can be approved? And how exactly can implementation, networking and dissemination of results work even better? This is where the work of the Innovation Support Services (ISS) (short: innovation broker) have a significant role to play. They support OGs in developing their ideas into projects, accompany the application process and can also provide support in the implementation phase, for example in public relations work, transfer impulses from other OGs in Germany and the EU and, last but not least, improve networking with other actors.

The IfLS has been commissioned as innovation broker in Hesse for more than eight years and in Saxony-Anhalt and Rhineland-Palatinate for about four years to support both the ministries and the operational groups.

In the last funding period, a total of 34 OGs in Hesse (as well as five cooperatives as part of the cooperation measures), 33 OGs in Rhineland-Palatinate and 9 OGs

in Saxony-Anhalt received funding. Their projects creatively address important future issues such as climate and resource protection, animal welfare and health, and the promotion of organic farming. Questions and problems of practical agriculture are addressed together with partners from science, consulting, companies and associations in an equal process.

In the coming funding period 2023-2027, the IfLS as IDL would like to support innovative project sponsors again. For this purpose, the first assignment as IDL in Rhineland-Palatinate will start in spring 2023.

**Project title:** Support for agricultural Innovation (EIP-Agri) and Cooperation projects in Hesse

**Duration:** 2014 – 2023

**Client:** Hessisches Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (HMUKLV), Wiesbaden

**Project title:** Supervision and evaluation of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th funding call „European Innovation Partnership“ in Rhineland-Palatinate & supervision and evaluation of three funding calls EIP-Agri for the EU funding period 2023-2029

**Duration:** 2018 – 2022 & 2023 – 2027

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

**Project title:** Innovation Service Provider Saxony-Anhalt

**Duration:** 2019 – 2023

**Carried out by:** IfLS GmbH (all 3 projects)

**Client:** Ministerium Umwelt, Energie und Landwirtschaft des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt (MULE)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Svea Thietje, Oliver Müller, Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein (all 3 projects)

## Learning materials for climate-smart agriculture

With regard to climate change, agriculture is both a polluter and a victim. On the one hand, the sector contributes to climate change through soil cultivation, changes in land use or the consumption of fossil fuels. On the other hand, it is directly affected by climate change. Crops are not adapted to rising temperatures, lower or higher precipitation, and yields suffer accordingly.

Against this background, adapted agricultural practices are required. As part of the Innovations for Climate-Smart Agriculture project, information and learning materials are created that will be published on a virtual learning platform and cover three topics:

- Farming methods adapted to climate change
- Management methods that release fewer greenhouse gases
- Innovation management methods to develop new, climate-friendly approaches and products and introduce them on the farm.

The learning materials are supplemented with practical examples.

**Project title:** Innovations for a climate-smart agriculture

**Duration:** 2023 – 2024

**Carried out by:** IfLS e.V.

**Client:** European Commission, Erasmus+

**In collaboration with:** ASZ (CZ), CIA Umbria (IT), OnProjects (ES), Hof und Leben (DE)

**Contact persons at the IfLS:** Dr. Ulrich Gehrlein, Christoph Mathias



Asociace  
soukromého  
zemědělství ČR



HOF UND  
LEBEN



# Miscellenaous

## Cycling for stress relief

As in previous years our company starts our yearly excursion. This time in the sense of movement, nature, learning and application.

The High Road in Frankfurt is known as the starting point of an important old trade route from west to east. We started fit in Frankfurt, cycled through valley and field, were rewarded with spectacular views and ended shortly before the official end of the High Road at Kapellenhof in Hammersbach.

A monastic ambience and delicious lentil stew awaited us there as well as a delicious lentil stew to fortify us. Satisfied, we settled into the workshop on recognizing, preventing and avoiding stress in everyday (work) life. With the help of an experienced coach, we identified our stress types, discussed various models of stress management and were grateful for the breathing exercises that followed. What will be used in everyday life is yet to be seen. We ended the evening in a friendly atmosphere in the wine tavern in Hammersbach.

The next morning we were given an introduction to sheep farming at the Demeter farm Hofgut Kapellenhof. The sheep species Lacaune is kept for lambing throughout the year and thus guarantees a constant plannable quantity of milk and delivery of lambs. In order to fully exploit the value chain, the milk is processed in the farm's own cheese dairy and offered for sale both at markets and in supermarkets. It was interesting to note that the interest of restaurants in the Rhine-Main area in the meat of the old sheep has also increased and they are now finding an appropriate utilization. At the end of the day, we were allowed to taste the products from the farm's own cheese dairy: Yogurt, Camembert, fresh cheese, smoked cheese and ice cream - the quality of the laborious handiwork was definitely reflected in the taste. Strengthened, we saddled up our bikes, enjoyed the sun and found ourselves in a beer garden at the gates of Frankfurt to conclude an interesting, instructive and also very sporty company outing together.



# Publications and Services

## Use of biochar in agriculture: Opportunities and challenges

In January 2023, the IfLS published a report with research results on the topic of biochar. The starting point is the need to create additional carbon sinks in order to achieve climate targets – in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible. An introduction to the definition, production and properties of biochar is followed by an overview of possible uses. The use in agriculture is discussed in more detail. Legal framework conditions, certification and aspects of biomass use against the background of climate protection and limited resources are also addressed. The project was funded by the Landwirtschaftliche Rentenbank.

The study is available at (in German):

[https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Pflanzekohle\\_Bericht>IfLS\\_Rentenbank.pdf](https://www.ifls.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Pflanzekohle_Bericht>IfLS_Rentenbank.pdf)



## Working together for the agriculture of the future: Implementing EIP-Agri in Germany

Since the launch of EIP-Agri in 2014, more than 320 EIP projects have been implemented across Germany. This special issue of EIP-Agri aims to take into account the many insights gained. Therefore, participants from EIP projects as well as innovation broker were interviewed. Other articles explain what innovations within the framework of EIP-Agri actually are and shed light on how knowledge transfer works and how results can be made permanent. Also the benefits of the AKIS-Concept (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System) are explained.

Together with the other innovation service providers and the German Networking Center for Rural Areas, the IfLS was also involved in the creation of various articles. The IfLS has been active as an innovation broker in Hesse since 2014 and as in Saxony-Anhalt and Rhineland-Palatinate since 2019.

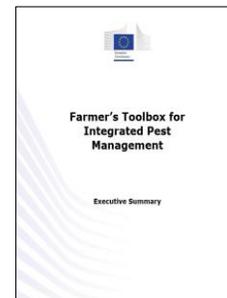
The brochure is available at (in German): <https://doi.org/10.12767/buel.vi234.442>



## Farmer's Toolbox for Integrated Pest Management

The Farmer's Toolbox for Integrated Pest Management was commissioned by DG AGRI 2020. The objectives of the pilot project are to provide useful information for future action at EU and member state level on integrated pest management (IPM), including the implementation of CAP post-2020 through the following four specific objectives: Provide a comprehensive description of currently available implementation approaches, assess the potential of approaches to reduce dependence on pesticide use, propose specific strategies for the dissemination of best practices, establish an EU-wide database with the relevant information and advice opportunities for farmers.

The study is available at: <https://op.europa.eu/s/ypzC>

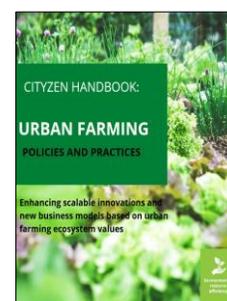


## CityZen e-handbook: Urban farming – policies and practices

CityZen is an Interreg Europe project that aims to promote urban agriculture policies and their key role in improving resource efficiency in cities. Agriculture in urban environments is already a global and fast-growing trend that offers great potential for green, social and technological innovation. CityZen partners have identified such local solutions as vertical gardens, rooftop gardens, greening of brownfields, multifunctional use of land.

The handbook is available at:

<https://projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/cityzen/news/news-article/14974/cityzen-e-handbook-urban-farming-policies-practices/>



## Guiding the path to the Smart Village

The experience and knowledge gained in the transdisciplinary work of the Smart Rural 21 project have been compiled in a guide and prepared for use by actors, especially at the municipal level. The "Guide: How to create a 'smart' village?" is available on the project website. It provides an overview of the path to a smart village and, at the same time, concrete project results that can be used in practice. Among other things, it clarifies what is meant by a smart village, how a smart village strategy can be developed, which funding opportunities help and how local people can be involved. Reference is always made to the more detailed materials for each step developed in the project by the IfLS and the collaborative partners, e.g. so-called Smart Solutions and Roadmap Tools. This refers to socially and/or technologically innovative approaches in the fields of social, economic, housing/culture/leisure, environmental, mobility, digitalization and governance.

The guide is available at: <https://www.smartrural21.eu/guidebook/>



On our website <https://www.ifls.de/en/> you will find the latest news. We also provide information about topics, services, projects and publications. You can also follow us at [Twitter](#) (@ifls\_rural) and [LinkedIn](#).

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