



ACCESS'R SEMINAR

ACCeSSibility to population ServiceS in Rural environments (ACCESS'R)

**Public interest services in rural environments:
What pooled resources and new types of
participation are there?**

La Rochelle, France, 6-7 November 2018



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TUESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER

OPENING ADDRESS

THIBAUT GUIGNARD, CHAIRMAN OF THE SAINT-BRIEUC REGION'S LOCAL ACTION GROUP AND PRESIDENT OF 'LEADER FRANCE'

The president of LEADER France, Thibaut Guignard, opened the ACCESS'R project launch seminar by raising the question of accessibility to public interest services, since these have witnessed a gradual drawdown in all rural areas. In dealing with this situation, the question had now become one of providing "services for the public" and thus extended the scope for resource pooling and the implementation of new types of participation within rural environments.

As a member of several European networks and fully committed to defending the status of the countryside under European public policies, Leader France was looking for solutions to this complex problem area by bringing together the best practices in the field of public interest services in rural environments at both national and European levels whilst also ensuring their rollout on a large scale. The individual members of the federation (organisations, local authorities) all faced very different realities locally and provided differing types of services for the public. It made sense, therefore, to augment national efforts with data from other EU member States in order to take into account the great diversity of European rural areas as well as those regions geographically outside the European Union (e.g., overseas territories) that had their own definitions of public interest services.

Thibaut Guignard saw these services as now being in a state of flux as their beneficiaries' habits were changing, especially with information technology (IT). It was, therefore, necessary to grant greater freedom to local stakeholders to be innovative and to adapt solutions suited to their own local areas.

PATRICE JOLY, SENATOR FOR LA NIEVRE, FRANCE, AND PRESIDENT OF THE ANNR ASSOCIATION

Patrice Joly, President of the ANNR countryside association (*Association Nationale Nouvelles Ruralités*) said that as much information as possible needed to be gathered at local level, the better to rethink public policies. This was one of the functions of the ANNR, an association that sought to take part in constructive and positive initiatives offering proof that rural local authorities had a great deal to offer and didn't exist solely to ask for aid. To do this, there was a need to break away from the urban-centred thinking of cities versus countryside with its social dominance rationale where Paris meant France and 'cities' meant 'provincial' (see the contents of the ANCT text), since real local development was based on bottom-up reasoning and networking.

Public policies must not be modelled on accounting categories. Public works were an investment. Within government, a steady reduction of operating expenses had become apparent in favour of investment expenses but the operational side still consisted of both public works and organisational tasks. Patrice Joly suggested that the operating method of sub-Prefectures was not suited to rural environments. The training of sub-Prefects should include experience gained at local authority level and their local authority postings during the course of their careers should be extended to a period of several years (currently, sub-Prefects stay in local authority posts for just one to two years).

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

HANANE ALLALI-PUZ, LEADER FRANCE'S POLICY OFFICER AT THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

As the representative of the French national countryside network, the *RRN (Réseau Rural National)*, steered jointly by the Food and Agriculture Ministry (as the managing authority), the Regional Councils' organisation, *Régions de France*, and the French *CGET* local authorities' equality Commission (*Commissariat général à l'égalité des territoires*), Hanane Allali-Puz described ACCESS'R as a collective rural fund-raising project, or *MCDR (Mobilisation Collective pour le Développement Rural)*, for which ACCESS'R had won the call for proposals.

ACCESS'R had been one of the themes favouring the expansion of services for rural populations and, in particular, those services offering access to healthcare, mobility and cultural activities, and one that favoured inter-generational relationships, help for ageing populations, social integration and support for family life. The approach taken by ACCESS'R had been of particular interest to the *RRN* because its measures were those regularly found within LEADER's LAG initiatives, themselves precursors to the search for solutions reinstating public interest services in rural areas.

The *MCDR 2018* call for project proposals had provided ways of diversifying earlier approaches to enlarging the network and strengthening partnerships, particularly in the field of rural development. In addition, the 21 projects under consideration had more than doubled the planned budget. Of the 19.5 M€ in payments, 8 M€ would come from the European EAFRD and 7.2 M€ from national credits.

The *RRN* was a coordinating authority for all rural development activity stakeholders through its sponsorship of EAFRD fundraising in France. Public works finally arising from the *MCDR* projects would be centrally managed within the *RRN's* resource centre to provide an improved visibility of their effectiveness.

MONICA RONECKER, ACCESS'R PROJECT COORDINATOR FOR THE LEADER FRANCE ASSOCIATION

Monica Ronecker presented the ACCESS'R project as a centralised programme for the diffusion of best practices and a means of support for those sponsoring projects for public interest services within rural environments, as described within the management priorities of the European Union's rural development policy. These priorities were aimed at improving social integration, reducing poverty and, above all, expanding rural economies. Thanks to a partnership bringing together 12 non-profit associations, French local authorities and 5 European networks, ACCESS'R would, initially, study a range of original ideas and available funding plans and arrangements. The aim of this would be to identify areas for improvement, or conditions for the development, of new public interest services in rural environments. Subsequently, this data would be made available to elected officials and project sponsors who would then be able to use and extend it within their local areas using a dual approach, local and European.

Several deliverables were expected, in particular a form of 'tool box' for potential project sponsors consisting of government forms and guides that might be of use to them in submitting proposals, as well as standardised documents, lists of contacts and interactive software.

Monica Ronecker encouraged the Local Action Groups and local authorities sponsoring original projects in this field to send such information to the ACCESS'R Secretariat for centralised management and distribution.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PUBLIC INTEREST SERVICES

VANIK BERBERIAN, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH RURAL MAYORS' ASSOCIATION (*LES MAIRES RURAUX DE FRANCE*).

Vanik Berbérian regarded the issue of the countryside like one of shortening 'modernisation' to 'modernity'. According to popular thinking, the term "countryside" generally had a positive value but still evoked a clichéd, nostalgic image of a bygone era. Culturally, people tended to associate the modernity of cities with their modernisation, whereas the countryside was not immediately seen as modern because it had not received as much modernisation. We therefore needed to give some meaning back to the word 'countryside'. Governments needed to tackle this issue and choose whether to aggravate the inequalities or reverse the trend. Public interest services could change the situation but, for that to happen, rural areas still needed such services.

Time and geography were the two essential criteria for government action that had not, however, been taken into account in spite of government changeovers, e.g., the *NOTRe* Act had been proposed under Nicolas Sarkozy, voted in under François Hollande and finalised under Emmanuel Macron. The problem stemmed mainly from a lack of recognition for the rural authorities of France. Jacqueline Gourault's Ministry did not incorporate the word 'countryside' although 'town' was used, which was suggestive. What's more, the proposal to draw up a national Countryside Act had not been adopted, even though the adoption of a national rural agenda had been proposed.

As for European institutions, they instantly and exclusively associated the countryside with agriculture. One study showed that, during the 2017 Presidential campaign, candidates spent just two minutes talking about the countryside before moving on to agriculture. Vanik Berbérian thought that the recognition of rural diversity was the key to improving living standards in rural areas, and that included the field of public interest services.

SYLVIE CABASSOT, PUBLIC POLICY COORDINATOR FOR SDASP'S AT THE CGET

As the Public Policy Coordinator within the French *CGET* Commission, Sylvie Cabassot explained the *SDASP* *Départemental*-level services accessibility plans (*Schémas départementaux d'accessibilité aux services publics*). These plans had their origins in Article 98 of the French *NOTRe* Act and had the merit of networking various stakeholders (*EPCI* community co-ordination structures, central Government, Regional counsellors) together in order to improve access to public interest services, both physical and digital. The *SDASP* concept was a modern instrument, capable of evolution and adapted to reality.

The purpose of the *SDASP* plans was therefore to express a shared vision of the future for a given area. Nevertheless, many local authorities had entrusted the preparation of their plans to consultancy firms even though it was the local elected officials who had the authority needed to implement these visions. The use of consultancy firms would have been better reserved for the plan's organisation.

Central government had provided local authorities with a statistical vision based on existing levels of staffing and service (apart from Paris and its inner suburbs). Sylvie Cabassot thought that the essence of public interest services lay in their local availability (their 'accessibility') and their clear visibility to users (it was important effectively to communicate both the nature of the service and the beneficiaries' rights to it).

CHANTAL GUIMBERTEAU, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CHARENTE-MARITIME DÉPARTEMENTAL COUNCIL

Chantal Guimberteau was the Mayor of a municipality with 350 inhabitants who had come to the seminar to share her experiences of public interest services within her area.

In peak season, the Community of Communes' (*Communauté de communes*) social programme allowed individual municipalities to develop their own visions. Although the Charente-Maritime Département as a whole was wealthy, its rural municipalities might lack public and business services (local shops). Chantal Guimberteau had seen a worsening in access to public interest services rather than an improvement. This was in part due to a failure to follow-up on certain matters: a sub-Prefect's appointment lasted two years although the run-out of a Départemental programme took three years.

Where was this going? Firstly, central Government had to stop cutting back public interest services. As for the Départemental plan, the President of Charent-Maritime, Dominique Bussereau, had asked that it be kept alive. To achieve this, a questionnaire needed to be sent to municipalities every year for them to provide regular progress reports or the plan risked running out of steam.

GENEVIEVE BARAT, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE NOUVELLE AQUITAINE REGION

Geneviève Barat spoke of the importance with which the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region regarded all its local authorities having the same level of access to those services for which the Region was responsible (the economy, professional training, education, etc.).

In order to prevent rural areas feeling left out when they came across difficulties with a project's public works (a sentiment felt more keenly there than in urban areas), the Region sought to meet them halfway and offer special support. To that end, given its great disparity, a 'countryside' division had been created at the same time as the new extended Region.

Geneviève Barat thought that public interest services found it hard to survive in areas with low populations. There was therefore a need for 'customisation' adapted to each local authority. Localised solutions needed to be found, in particular by regrouping public interest services. Voluntary and cultural organisations, where people bonded socially, could form a defence against public interest service cutbacks in rural areas.

Geneviève Barat explained that mediation with local authorities was essential, as was close collaboration between the stakeholders and all and those involved (elected officials, researchers, farmers, businesses, etc) in order to prevent the countryside's disappearance due to falling population levels. The countryside remained an essential factor in the future of certain areas (energy transition, environmental protection, etc). Given today's lifestyle changes and the digital revolution, rural areas would become more accessible and attractive in the future.

PUBLIC INTEREST SERVICES IN RURAL ENVIRONMENTS: NEW EXPECTATIONS, NEW SOLUTIONS

JEAN-BAPTISTE BAUD, INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS MANAGER WITH THE RURAL FAMILIES ASSOCIATION (*ASSOCIATION FAMILLES RURALES*)

Jean-Baptiste Baud talked of a countryside survey report that was available on the *Association Familles Rurales* website. This survey spoke of the differing perceptions between the general public and the residents of rural areas, mainly based on the socio-economic difficulties experienced by the latter. Nevertheless, 95% of the rural population wanted to stay living in the countryside, even if they felt themselves to be abandoned, a feeling explained by their dissociation from public interest services, especially healthcare and local shops.

The same survey also revealed that 80% of French people would be ready to live in a rural environment, since it offered a better quality of life than urban centres, but they refrained from moving due to the lack of local services. The report also proposed ideas for developing rural districts in order to improve their attractiveness.

The Rural Families Association was already committed to digital mediation, community transport services and the creation of an endowment fund to permit experimentation and innovation in rural environments.

JACKY DENIEUL, 'CREATIVITY AND RURAL AREAS' ADVISOR WITH THE *CCSTI* RESEARCH CENTRE, NOUVELLE AQUITAINE REGION

Jacky Denieul put forward another solution to improve the attractiveness of rural areas, since he considered it necessary to break down barriers between stakeholders and associate them with the building of a local authority's vision through a cross-disciplinary approach to its various aspects (economy, business, culture, sport, etc).

This innovation came from the *Espace Mendès France* research centre that, since its creation, had focussed on the rural areas by infusing the ideas of creativity and dialogue between those stakeholders who might not otherwise meet one another. This meeting of minds was aimed at enriching shared visions and finding solutions that might not otherwise have been foreseen.

Jacky Denieul thought that central Government should organise the collection of data and then diffuse it on a larger scale.

CORINNE LACOMBE, POST OFFICE DELEGATE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY RELATIONS WITHIN THE CHARENTE-MARITIME DÉPARTEMENT

Corinne Lacombe said that, as a rural area business partner, the Post Office (*Groupe La Poste*) was an indispensable guide and companion in the countryside. This was especially true in the face of the challenges posed by digital transition, due to the infrastructure and public interest IT facilities provided by the Post Office for its customers. In this way, the Post Office had sought to create new services in the face of today's new challenges (digital transition, the ecology, demography, etc).

In the future, *MSAP* public services centres (*Maisons de Services aux Publics*) would be provided in the so-called 'intermediate zones' (semi-urban areas) offering a range of pooled services and networking together those stakeholders best able to answer the various demands of the public. Postmen and women, furthermore, would still be the first to identify and communicate the difficulties met by rural residents.

DISCUSSIONS IN THE HALL

There were numerous richly informative discussions with those present in the hall. Several questions concerned day-to-day problems met by local elected officials or rural residents, whilst others concerned access to EAFRD funding or the LEADER programme in general.

The observations were all the same: the failure of central Government together with dramatic local authority inequalities affecting the Republic. One Mayor, from Martinique, described the difficulties currently afflicting his municipality: the Gendarmerie had closed down, as had the hospital, and there were problems with public transport and a lack of fibre-optic communications. The Mayor was trying to develop a bay area project but it lacked sponsors (a problem with business start-ups).

Public transport and healthcare were crucial issues in rural environments. Transport types suited to urban use were no longer viable in areas with shrinking population densities. As for healthcare, the trend was also linked to mobility.

For many of those taking part, local public interest services needed to be re-thought in the light of information technology (IT). The Internet allowed sharing and customer migration. Even today, however, 13 million French people did not have Internet access. The solution would be to set up an IT platform dedicated to public interest services. To achieve this, it would be necessary to evaluate both the financial cost and the political resolve because the installation work itself was straightforward. A number of Départements would have to experiment with this type of platform.

AN OVERVIEW OF NEW TYPES OF PUBLIC INTEREST SERVICES

By way of illustrating the round table discussions, an overview of the new types of public interest services in France and in Europe was suggested. Accordingly, several projects were then presented as having seen real success on a day-to-day basis concerning matters related to healthcare, public transport, the environment, culture, information media, safety and social matters.

ISALINE ROME, PAYS D'AUGE LOCAL ACTION GROUP, CALVADOS, FRANCE

The Calvados Département had introduced a 'mobile doctors' medical bus service as an extension of the existing network. This was intended for children under the age of six in order to increase accessibility and local services for families. The project prioritised access to medical consultations for everyone whilst reducing public transport problems and raising the level of service already provided in the various mother and child care centres in the Calvados Département.

In another age category, a '*Calvados Sensibus - bus de Bien Vieillir*' service had been provided for the over-60's in order to show them arrangements currently in place to make their home lives easier.

TRIIN KALLAS, LEADER NATIONAL NETWORK, ESTONIA

In Estonia, private companies and LEADER had jointly funded two projects to offer mobile veterinary services. The Raivo Raja clinic had an operating theatre, dental equipment, X-ray machines and ultrasound facilities. Treatment was provided for a wide variety of animals, in particular domestic pets. A second project, the 'mobile equine clinic' specialised in veterinary care for horses and provided a rapid call-out service with X-ray and surgery facilities.

ÉRIC COURNOT, LIVRADOIS-FOREZ REGIONAL PARK

The 'home puppet show' (*Marionnettes à domicile*) was a 3-year project for which the home-based experimental phase had started in 2017. Since then, it had moved on to larger audiences in assisted living facilities and other places. The project consisted of preparing and performing short puppet shows (15 minutes or so) to volunteer seniors in their homes in order to increase their independence whilst combating isolation and withdrawal in a culturally enlightening manner.

ANCA PINTILIE, FNGAL ROMANIA

In Romania, a social integration centre offering social services to a population of 44,381 inhabitants had been inaugurated on the initiative of the Napoca Porolissum Local Action Group, supported by LEADER. The project has tried to facilitate the integration of vulnerable social groups within the employment market and reduce social marginalisation for people in difficulty whilst developing a healthier lifestyle amongst socially disadvantaged groups within the Local Action Group's area.

VALERIE JOUNO, DÉPARTEMENTAL COUNCIL, COTES D'ARMOR, FRANCE

The *Dispositif ICI* scheme set up by the Département of Côtes-d'Armor and the Saint-Brieuc Armor urban authority was aimed at simplifying administrative procedures by facilitating access to the information needed by the public. By means of networked information sheets on a digital platform, reception desk staff in Town Halls, at Départemental level and within the Saint-Brieuc urban area have been enabled to supply information quickly to users and direct them to the appropriate official, regardless of which government office is involved. Using thematic headings (public records, accommodation, age-related issues, transport, waste disposal, leisure activities), these information sheets provide an easy-access information source.

PAULINE FOUCHER, BEAUCE VAL DE LOIRE COMMUNITY OF COMMUNES

The Beauce Val de Loire 'mobile *MSAP*' public services vehicle managed by the Community of Communes (*Communauté de Communes*) serves 30 municipalities with some 20,000 inhabitants. On a monthly circuit, it was tasked with bringing public interest services to users in rural environments so that the latter could access them more easily. The services using the *MSAP* were those concerned with family benefits (*CAF*), health insurance (*CPAM*), retirement pensions (*CARSAT*), agricultural health insurance (*MSA*), employment (*Pole Emploi*), youth development (*Mission Locale*), Inland Revenue (*DDFIP*) and the online vehicle licensing service (*ANTS*). The project has been subsidised by central Government (*DSIL* and *FNADT*), the Départemental Council and the LEADER programme.

CELINE MORIN, FAMILLES RURALES (IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE POST OFFICE)

In the Côtes-d'Armor, the *Familles Rurales* association has partnered with the Post Office in an experiment designed to bring together those public interest services involved with daily administrative procedures. Public services centres, *MSAPs* (*Maisons de Services au Public*), have been set up within Post Offices in various municipalities with between 959 and 2939 inhabitants in order to promote access to services in rural environments. These are the fruit of a joint effort involving central Government, the Départemental Council and local authorities. The aim was not to replace the existing reception services for the *MSA*, *CAF* or *CPAM* but rather to offer greater convenience to the users of these organisations.

FRANÇOIS GALABRUN, EASTERN AUDE LOCAL ACTION GROUP

At Villerouge-Termenès, in the Aude Département, a municipal car-sharing project had proved very successful in making the village accessible. An electric car, paid for by the Town Hall, had been made available for reservation on-line, simply by using either a computer or a telephone. The car was originally provided for residents as a non-polluting transport system at a socially affordable cost but was also available for visitors or, occasionally, for use by the Council's own staff. The experiment had proved satisfactory and would be the subject of a follow-up to assess its long-term effectiveness and viability.

MARIA CSORDAS, NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK, HUNGARY

In Hungary, projects offering services for the public in rural environments have taken diverse and original forms.

One project provided a bus and vehicles for local administrative associations, national minority administrations and non-profit organisations. It cost 15 billion HUF (4.5 M€) between 2013 and 2017 and had been financed by the Regional Development Programme. The service was provided for low-population urban districts (with less than 5000 inhabitants).

The *A Szovetseg* (the Alliance), was a 'police auxiliary' organisation (uniformed but unarmed officers) set up to help the police safeguard urban areas by means of regular patrols in marked cars, preventing juvenile crime and detaining offenders caught in the act until the arrival of the police.

Some villages have also provided 'caretaker' services in order to improve the lives of residents and make up for local authority deficiencies. These have taken several forms such as the sale of fresh produce and emergency groceries, service centres and introductions to service providers (by appointment), etc.

CONCLUSION OF THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

THIBAUT GUIGNARD, PRESIDENT OF THE PAYS DE SAINT-BRIEUC LOCAL ACTION GROUP AND PRESIDENT OF LEADER FRANCE

Closing this initial ACCESS'R seminar, Thibaut Guignard, as President of LEADER France, hoped that the two round table discussions at which the participants had been able, in particular, to discuss the needs and expectations of rural populations might already have led to thoughts on adapting public interest services in rural areas. The participants had also discussed everyday solutions flowing from the stream of innovations coming from local authorities. Likewise, the overview of projects had showed that although problems might be resolved in different, albeit practical, ways they were still able to meet the urgent needs and expectations of the population.

WEDNESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER

FIELD TRIP – MARENNES

At the end of the seminar, the municipality of Marennes offered the participants a field trip to see several projects in order to widen their knowledge of public interest service provision. The aim was to discuss local initiatives by means of visits to several sites symbolising the re-growth of the town.

Those present:

- Mickaël Vallet, Mayor of Marennes, President of the *Bassin de Marennes* Community of Communes and of the local social equality centre (*PETR du Pays Marennes Oléron*), Départemental Councillor and President of the *Pays Marennes Oléron* Local Action Group;
- Claude Balloteau, Deputy mayor for Culture and Heritage, Marennes;
- Sylvie Lechevallier, Director of the Marennes Oléron employment zone committee;
- Stéphane Rocton, manager of three bookshops within the Pays Marennes-Oléron area, President of the Saint-Pierre d'Oléron business and tradesmen's Union, President of the Oléron village preservation association and President of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine independent bookshops' association.

The municipality of Marennes has 5,672 inhabitants whilst the Pays Marennes Oléron area has around 37,000 in two Communities of Communes. According to Mickaël Vallet, from the point of view of public interest services and cultural activities, the LEADER programme has acted like a lever in the area, especially in the central part (regenerating the town centre).

L'ESTRAN, MARENNES' CINEMA

The L'Estran is a cinema with 190 seats and a significant amount of high-quality equipment. The building belongs to the municipality and has been made available by the Town Hall, which also supports certain presentations financially. It is run by the 'LOCAL' Association (*Lien Oléronais pour la Culture, l'Animation et les Loisirs*) founded in 1982 as a 1901 Association's Act organisation. Its aim is to promote and organise all forms of cultural activity within the Pays Marennes-Oléron area. The Association runs two active cinemas: the Eldorado cinema in Saint-Pierre d'Oléron that opened in 1983 and the l'Estran cinema in Marennes that opened at the end of 2007. 15 volunteers, 2 employees, 1000 members and some 20 to 22,000 cinemagoers per year bring this cinema to life. 60% of its productions are artistic and experimental films. The L'Estran hosts, takes part in, organises or assists with 4 festivals, including 'Vision d'Afrique' (African films with a frequently literary component) and the French-speaking Festival of Culture. The cinema's auditorium can also be used as a theatre where the municipality offers performances at the l'Estran once a week. In rural areas, cinemas form fixed sites for broadcasting and performances. In Poitou-Charentes, the network of cinemas in the rural environment is dense and well organised. For 15-20 years, all those local authorities that still have cinemas have made efforts to retain them. Regional policy is focussed on the upkeep of the network of cinemas in rural environments.

THE INFORMATION AND SERVICES CENTRE

The MIS Information and Services Centre (*Maison des Initiatives et des Services*) at the Pays Marennes Oléron rural area social equality centre (*Pôle d'Equilibre Territorial Rural*) was opened to the public in February 2013. Its role is to welcome, inform and guide any member of the public with a personal or professional project or anyone looking for help with training, business creation, citizens' legal advice, finding work or other public services. The MIS centre is run by the Marennes Oléron employment zone committee, COBEMO (*Le Comité de Bassin d'Emploi Marennes Oléron*). This is a non-profit organisation with four elements: elected officials, business owners, Trades Unions and representatives of associations and the volunteer economy. Its primary purpose is to design and sponsor multi-partner ventures aimed at promoting the upkeep and development of employment, training, internships as well as access to services and justice.

MARENNES COVERED MARKET

The covered market (*Les Halles*) in Marennes was renovated in 2014 to make it more attractive. Under the French SCoT planning scheme (*Schéma de cohérence territoriale*), the creation of new shopping centres is prohibited, but it is possible to reconfigure existing ones, especially in town centres. Likewise, planning permission to change existing shop-windows is prohibited under town planning and environmental controls. A municipality, however, can act as private entity and also has the option of first refusal. In the case of the Marennes covered market, the municipality is the landlord of the premises that it then leases out. The reconstruction work was financed using funds obtained from LEADER.

THE 'LE COUREAU' INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOP

The Le Coureau bookshop is a 'third sister' to the *Librairie des pertuis* bookshop at Saint-Pierre-d'Oléron and the *Pêche aux livres* at Saint-Denis and it has more than 6,000 titles on sale. Designed as friendly space in the style of a bric-a-brac market, it has been a flagship project in the revitalisation of Marennes, and that in spite of a very competitive market. Stéphan Rocton, the manager, thinks of it as an independent bookshop that uses the sale of books to enliven the area socially and culturally whilst also promoting its reputation with booksellers elsewhere. These bookshops don't just sell books, they also organise exhibitions, meetings, etc. For Mr Rocton, Marennes is a shining example of the struggle against the desertification of town centres. The Region, central Government, the CNL literature support organisation and the municipality have all provided the bookshop with financial support. Of the 60,000€ received, 40,000€ has come from literary support funds. The banks, however, have provided no support. The Regional economic, social and environmental council (CESER) could be lobbied in order to obtain investment aid and recognition, rather than a drip feed.

THE CULTURAL CENTRE – LIBRARY, MEDIA CENTRE AND GAMES CENTRE

The Marennes cultural centre is located in the town centre, near to the nursery and primary schools and the music school. It consists of a library, media centre and games centre providing inhabitants with a real community centre where all forms of media may be found.

Converted from a former Sisters of Charity convent chapel in 2013, the media centre has undergone significant expansion work and a complete rearrangement of the premises. Comfortable furniture has been provided so that users can have a sense of connection and ownership. Books, CDs, magazines and IT access are all available.

The Aluette games centre is a place that encourages experimental play, communication, social awareness, integration and learning through games. Claude Balloteau, Deputy Mayor for Culture, explained that, "When the media centre was enlarged in 2013, the municipality wanted to offer people a games centre that could round out the cultural activities facility" With 230 members and 1500 games available, the games centre is a successful working example of a public interest service.

LA BIGAILLE – CULTURAL ACTIVITY BAR AND CLUBHOUSE

The La Bigaille was formerly a fire station that was then converted into a cultural activity bar and clubhouse. The auditorium has a stage with sound and lighting equipment and can hold an audience of around 160 people standing. The costs of refurbishing and fitting out the La Bigaille came to 160,000€ (financed by the municipality of Marennes, the Poitou-Charentes Region and LEADER). The premises are modular and can be adapted to host small events (50-60 people) in a cosy atmosphere, or larger ones of up to 150 people. The hall itself was largely built by the association's members at the outset of the project, using cob on wood sustainable building materials.

The LEADER France Association would like to thank warmly all the participants and contributors to the ACCESS'R Seminar on Public Interest Services in rural environments.