

26th – 28th
September
2018



LEADER RELOADED

The ELARD conference on the heartbeat
of the LEADER community

Keynote paper
Robert Lukesch

Updated on 09/10/2018

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1 A brief history of LEADER

1.1 Precursors

Local development in Europe has gone through various stages. Let us go back to the eighties of last century. Local development experts and activists, usually bound to their respective national or regional context, found opportunities to exchange their experiences in European gatherings organised by the OECD, by the Council of Europe and last but not least by the European Community which eventually morphed into the European Union by 1993¹. Concepts and approaches, regardless of the type of area, urban or rural, began to cross-fertilize each other across language barriers. In the 1980s economic crisis in lagging regions and old industrial areas threw up new responses such as 'local employment initiatives' (LEIs). This phenomenon was identified and analysed by the OECD's LEED Programme² and was nurtured over a number of years by the

¹ By virtue of the Maastricht Treaty.

² Local Economy and Employment, an ongoing priority focus of the OECD since 1982.

<http://www.oecd.org/employment/leed/>

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action-research and networking activities of the European Commission's LEDA³ Programme. LEDA distilled the key characteristics of bottom-up local development approaches, with the triptych of 'local partnership', 'local area', and 'local development strategy' already emerging, offering a generic model of area-based development pursuing a broad range of social and economic development objectives.

All this evolved against the backdrop of accelerated industrialisation and structural change in rural areas, specifically in France, Italy and in the newly entered southern EU member states (Greece: 1981, Spain and Portugal: 1986). Rural development as currently perceived was not part of early European Agricultural Policy and it was not until the late 1960's as part of the so called *Mansholt* plan that it started to emerge as policy issue⁴. The perceived emaciation of rural areas gave rise to a new policy approach which put the particular role of rural areas in its focus. This policy shift is marked by the Communication of the European Commission 'The Future of Rural Society'⁵ in 1988, and the targeted rural development support from Structural Funds⁶ starting from 1989 on, under the Presidency of Jaques Delors⁷ and the Agricultural Commissioner Ray McSharry, both having a strong stance in local development. Subsequently the first edition of LEADER was launched in 1991, in large parts drawn up by a very committed EC official named Michel Laine. Michel had previously worked in General Directorate Employment of the EU-COM to support local employment initiatives (LEI's), and after in (as it was called at this moment) DG XXII (coordination of structural funds) to manage "Integrated Mediterranean Programs", specific programs for Italy, Greece, and south in France in response to the enormous challenges posed by the accession of Portugal and Spain^{8,9}.

1.2 LEADER I Community Initiative (1991-1993)

Once rural policy has become a legitimate EU policy area in its own right from 1989 on, all EU Agriculture Commissioners have officially been endowed with the responsibility for both 'agriculture' and 'rural development'. The European Union's agricultural structures policy began a shift away from enhancing productivity to improving the quality of agricultural output and to take care of the environment, as well as finding new markets for agricultural products.

³ Local Employment Development Action, implemented in 45 local areas between 1986 and 1996.

⁴ The Mansholt Plan sought to reduce the number of small farms in Europe and there was recognition that rural development measures were needed to address the issues of reducing farm numbers and at the same time trying to maintain a vibrant rural economy.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/cap-history/crisis-years-1980s/com88-501_en.pdf

⁶ Lagging rural areas having been tagged as „Objective 5b” areas benefitted from an early version of a multifund approach

⁷ Address given by Jaques Delors in Bruges, 17 Oct. 1989: https://ldnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/CLLD_Challenges-and-Opportunities_RSA_blog_08.03.2017_22.pdf

⁸ At that time, a proper General Directorate (DG XXIII – Structural Policies Coordination) was set up integrating the ERDF, ESF and (a precursor of what is today the) EAFRD to get things going.

⁹ Thanks to Michel Laine and Yves Champetier for this information (conveyed in Evora on Sept.27th, 2018)

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The Community Initiative LEADER I (1991-1993) of the European Commission (EC) can be seen as the outcome of a merger between this new rural policy perspective and the wealth of experiences gained in local development initiatives. It rested on three elementary principles:

- preparing and implementing a 'local action plan' in rural areas between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. This plan was to define a limited number of strategic development axes and corresponding measures, which had to be put in action within a period of three years (1991-1993);
- the local action plan was to be designed and implemented by a local partnership as the final beneficiary of the initiative;
- multi-sectorality and systematic interlinking of development actions were to be embedded in an overall vision and strategy¹⁰.

Thus LEADER I started as a pilot community initiative calling on local partnerships¹¹ (aka Local Action Groups/LAGs) from disadvantaged rural areas in the EU12 to submit local action plans for funding via integrated global grants. Among the local partnerships having responded to the call, 217 LAGs were selected as beneficiaries. National and regional authorities were completely bypassed during that period, a fact which did not disturb anybody of political influence, as this Community Initiative was widely considered as a low-end measure with no budgetary or political importance.

However we know that disruptive innovations use to start at the low-end¹². And from hindsight LEADER can be regarded as a disruptive institutional innovation. It embodies the paradox of 'controlled loss of control' which plagues authorities and auditors until nowadays. We will come back on that later on.

The decision of the EU-COM to create a networking hub (the so-called 'Coordinating Unit' entrusted to the AEIDL¹³) for accompanying the emerging local action groups, fostering learning across member states and the colourful bouquet of approaches and cultures of problem solving, turned out to be a veritable booster for collective learning on a European scale. Experts and activists from different member states passed from sporadic meetings in conference and research project settings to join their views, capabilities and networking ties and to collaborate on a regular basis.

¹⁰ Hence the acronym: LEADER = Liaison Entre Actions du Développement de l'Économie Rural

¹¹ Their composition was not specified at that time.

¹² <https://www.cirlot.com/3-indicators-of-disruptive-innovation>

¹³ <https://www.aeidl.eu/en/projects/territorial-development/leader.html>. AEIDL also acquired the contract to run the LEADER II Observatory until 2001.

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In this climate of mutual amazement and inspiration the team of the European ex post evaluation of LEADER I, in collaboration with the LEADER II Observatory¹⁴, laid the conceptual foundations of what is today called the 'LEADER/CLLD approach' or 'method', defined as the combined application of 'seven operational principles' or 'key features'.¹⁵

1.3 LEADER II Community Initiative (1994-1999)

Quite swiftly and surprisingly LEADER I gained widespread reputation as an innovative instrument to mobilize endogenous potential of marginalized rural areas. Therefore in 1994, the Commission decided to continue it as a decentralised approach in partnership with the Member States which henceforth wanted to have a say in the game. Subsequently LEADER II was implemented through 102 national/regional Operational Programmes (OPs) in the EU15.

The second stage of LEADER introduced four more elements:

- the initiative was inserted into the programming logic of Structural Funds;
- programme responsibility was entrusted to national or regional authorities – according to the Member States' decision;
- the LEADER II Observatory was set up as the anchor point of European-wide networking and capacity building;
- transnational co-operation was incorporated as a regular programme component.

The accession of three new Member States (Austria, Finland, Sweden) in 1995 further enriched the mix of concepts and experiential backgrounds. First and foremost, the Swedish partners brought in the concept and institutional form of Rural Parliaments¹⁶ which were, unsurprisingly, first taken up by Central-East States (eventually becoming EU Member States by 2004/2007) in their quest for thoroughly reorganising their public

¹⁴ Through all the periods, there has been an agency/observatory/contact point/ endowed at European level providing support to the local action groups and to the national and regional networks in implementing the LEADER programme.

¹⁵ Area-based approach; bottom-up; local partnership; multisectoral approach; innovation; networking; cooperation. See the EC factsheet: <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/fms/pdf/2B953E0A-9045-2198-8B09ED2F3D2CCED3.pdf>. It has to be said that originally, throughout LEADER I and II, the seven principles included "Decentralised management and financing", whereas "Networking" and "Cooperation" had been considered as one. Thus they kept being seven all the time, only that the most essential aspect of "Decentralised management and financing" got out of sight and literally went to the dogs during the first mainstreaming period (2007-2013). Although it has regained attention during the period 2014-2020, I propose to put things right by re-enacting it as the eighth LEADER principle, as was emphasized by Michael Dower in his final remarks during the workshop "LEADER Reloaded" in Évora on Sept. 28th, 2018.

¹⁶ Woolvin, M.; Atterton, J.; Skerrat, S. (2012): Rural Policy Centre: Rural Parliaments in Europe: A report for the Scottish Government. Rural Policy Centre, SAC.

https://www.helagsverige.se/fileadmin/user_upload/HSSL_Kansli/in_english/ruralparliamentseuro2012.pdf

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policy systems, but soon spreading out to Western European countries until spawning the European Rural Parliament in 2013¹⁷.

1.4 LEADER+ (2000-2006) and LEADER-type measures in new Member States (MS) (2004-2006)

In its third edition, the community initiative LEADER+ was designed to encourage the implementation of integrated, high quality and original strategies for sustainable development. It had a strong focus on partnership and networks promoting the exchange of experience. As its name implies, LEADER+ incorporated further improvements, namely the following characteristics:

- all rural areas within the EU became, in principle, eligible;
- the operational principle of 'innovation' was amalgamated with the regulative principle of 'sustainability' aiming at encouraging more ambitious 'pilot strategies for integrated rural development';
- priority themes of particular interest at European level were defined around which Local Action Groups should focus their development strategies;
- the participation of public actors in the decision making bodies was limited to 50%;
- an increased emphasis was laid on co-operation between rural areas with LAGs or LAG-like structures within and between Member States, even outside the EU.

LEADER+ continued to play its role as a laboratory aimed at encouraging the emergence and testing of new approaches to integrated and sustainable development and at complementing other rural development programmes by encouraging those involved in rural communities to devise and implement integrated and innovative development strategies.

The organisation of LEADER+ type measures in the Member States having joined the EU during this period followed the same approach as in the EU15, although there was more emphasis on initial capacity building and on tentatively implementing pilot strategies.

Some LAGs have committed themselves to go global. Partnerships with similar structures in Mozambique, Cabo Verde and Latin American countries emerged. LEADER started to gain world-wide reputation, basically by the initiative of local actors and local development experts.

¹⁷ <http://europeanruralparliament.com/phocadownload/ERP2013%20-%20printed%20report.pdf>

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1.5 LEADER as the fourth (horizontal) axis of the RDPs (2007-2013)

The end of LEADER+ marks a hiatus in the 27 year-long history of LEADER. As the team leader of the European evaluation of LEADER II¹⁸ and of the subsequent study on 'Mainstreaming the LEADER Approach into Rural Development Programmes'¹⁹ I gained the strong impression that the termination of the European instrument of Community Initiatives would eventually be the swan song for the LEADER approach as a whole, as there were a considerable number of officials in the EU-COM and in some Member States who did not cherish the approach at all, for various reasons.

The mainstream rural development programmes turned out to become Noah's ark for LEADER in the given policy context. Rural development policy for 2007 to 2013 (EU 25+2) focused on three themes (aka 'thematic axes'):

- Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector;
- Improving the environment and the countryside;
- Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy.

LEADER was established as the fourth axis, cross-cutting the other three axes and obligatorily endowed with at least 5% of the overall RDP budget. For the Member States having joined the EU in 2004 (EU10), a threshold of 2,5% was fixed mainly for preparatory and capacity building measures.

During the beginning of this period²⁰, the LEADER+ Observatory Conference on 'LEADER achievements: a diversity of territorial experience' was organized in the beautiful town of Évora. Bernd Schuh from the ÖIR and me were invited to give a presentation under the heading '*We get to share it! The legacy of LEADER*'. We laid emphasis on the lessons learnt after 15 years of LEADER and its uncertain prospects as an integral part of the second pillar of the CAP. The merger with the mainstream programmes was a way to make the LEADER approach survive, but already at that time many experts and activists uttered their anxieties about Noah's ark possibly turning out as Babylonian captivity.

1.6 LEADER/CLLD (2014-2020)

In the current period, the LEADER method is applicable to all European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) under the name of Community Led Local Development (CLLD). CLLD still runs under the name 'LEADER' in the EAFRD (Measure 19 under the Focus Area 6b), being mandatory in all 118 rural development programmes (EU28) with a minimum endowment of 5% of the RDP budget (2,5% for Bulgaria and Romania having joined the Union in 2007, and specific arrangements for Croatia having joined in 2014).

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/evaluation/rural-development-reports/2003/leader2/full1.pdf>

¹⁹ This study (2004) has, presumably by error, disappeared from the DG Agri website.

²⁰ 22-23 Nov. 2007.

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From my personal point of view, the Articles determining CLLD in the Articles 32-35 of the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 are the most developed and best-thought edition of LEADER rules ever. The framework has obviously integrated the recommendations from the Report of the European Court of Auditors on the *'Implementation of the LEADER Approach for Rural Development'*²¹ with its strong emphasis on the local development strategy to be devised and accountably implemented by an autonomous local partnership. It has also benefited from the visionary power of the Commissioners and high-ranking officials of the EU-COM involved who were in turn supported by political representatives in the EU Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, consistently spurred by civil society movements collaborating in the platform ARC2020 and the vibrant community of rural and local development experts.

Despite all achievements, the elaborate legal frame could not clear out many of the hindrances which are decryd by local action groups from one period to another, and which mostly refer to administrative burden and bureaucratic intricacies which amount to excessive paperwork, time delays and even financial losses, when received funding has been declared ineligible in a subsequent audit and had to be paid back.

The following table provides an overview of the eventful journey of the LEADER approach in five stages.

Table 1: LEADER evolution through time

Name	Period	Programme type	Nr. of LAGs	Total public budget (EU+ national)	Nr. of Member States
LEADER 1	1991-1993	Community Initiative	217 LAGs in lagging rural areas	1,2 bio. EUR	EU12
LEADER 2	1994-1999	Community Initiative implemented through 102 national/regional Operational Programmes	906 LAGs in lagging rural areas	5,4 bio. EUR	EU15
LEADER+	2000-2006	Community Initiative, implemented through 73 national/regional Operational Programmes	1153 LAGs in all rural areas	5,1 bio. EUR	EU15+10
LEADER Axis	2007-2013	Obligatory RDP/Axis 4 measure (5% resp. 2,5% for new member states)	2402 LAGs in all rural areas	8,9 bio. EUR	EU 25+2
LEADER/CLLD	2014-2020	Obligatory RDP Measure 19 (5%)	~ 2600 LAGs ²² in all rural areas	9,8 bio. EUR	EU27+1

²¹ https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR10_05/SR10_05_EN.PDF

²² This number is not definitive. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en

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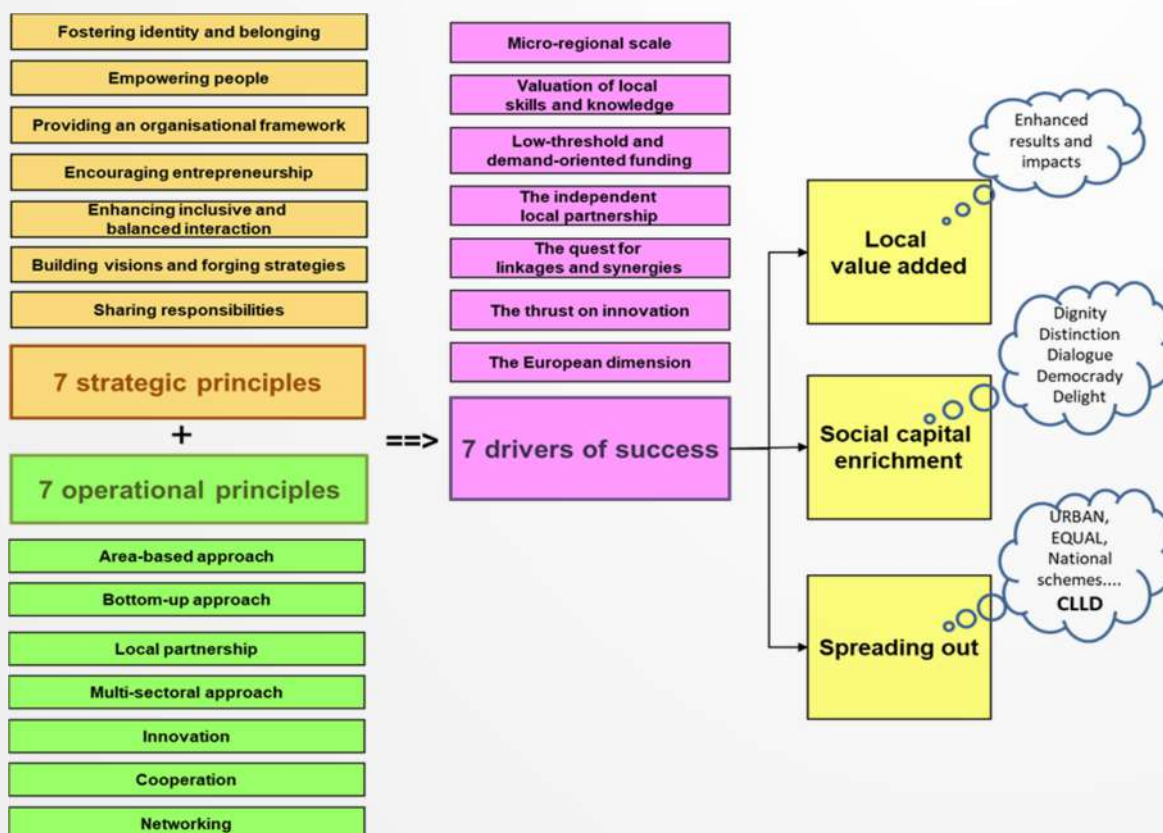
2 Evora 2007: Looking back on what we foresaw

2.1 Strategic and operational principles and drivers of success

Bernd Schuh's and my presentation in Evora (2007) was centred around an assessment of the first 15 years which we summed up in the diagram shown below (figure 1). The lessons learnt mainly drew not only from the abovementioned evaluation studies, but particularly from the European Synthesis of Mid-Term Evaluations of LEADER+ which we had accomplished together²³ in 2006 and from the testimonials of 16 LAGs which have been selected by the LEADER Observatory Contact Point and whose exemplary practices and achievements have been shown and discussed during the event.

We presumed that the momentum gained by applying certain strategic and operational principles would translate into seven drivers of success which ultimately would produce additional local value added, enrich the social capital and spread out to other policy realms.

Fig.1: The 'lessons from 15 years of LEADER' (2007) from hindsight



²³ Carried out by a consortium of ÖIR/ÖAR/AEIDL.

https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/evaluation/rural-development-reports/2006/leaderplus/full_text.pdf

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Let us go through the different items of the diagram:

- The seven **operational principles** are well-known and do not need to be further commented here.
- The seven **strategic principles** are supposed to spawn these operational principles. They derive from insights and values grounded in social and political science, but altogether in common sense. For instance, the ‚area-based approach‘ (operational principle) derives from the insight that a ‚sense of belonging‘ (strategic principle) – to a community, to a surrounding which is tied to emotional and sensual feelings and memories, filled with worries and hopes – is a powerful source of personal commitment and common endeavour²⁴. Or, take the ‚bottom-up approach‘ (operational principle). It derives from the principle of ‚empowering people‘ paired with the one of ‚sharing responsibilities‘ (strategic principles). To quote the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, ‚freedom is the will to be responsible to ourselves‘, complemented by Platon: ‚The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.‘
- The seven **drivers of success** result from actions inspired and guided by the abovementioned principles.

The seven drivers of success are worth looking upon a little closer:

- **Micro-regional scale:** Over the last two periods, there has been a tendency to increase or amalgamate smaller LAG territories into larger territorial units. This was seen as a measure to increase the efficiency of the LAG management which in many areas had gradually morphed into a multi-purpose development agency operating on a number of funds, not only of the EAFRD, but also on Structural Funds and additional schemes. However, to my mind, there is a trade-off between the required efficiency of local/regional development agencies which use to operate somewhere between the NUTS 3 and NUTS 2 level, and the required redundancy of operations triggered by local/micro-regional local action groups which operate somewhere between the LAU 1 and NUTS 3 level²⁵. Their task is to strengthen and finally to harness the capabilities of local actors and cooperation systems to collaborate for local development and for the common good. To speak in terms of a gardener, it's less about nourishing the plants, but rather about the earthworms. I believe that the enlargement of LAGs has in some cases diminished their ability to act as a local development catalyst.
- **Valuation of local skills and knowledge:** This is undoubtedly a trump card of LEADER because it goes along with a secular trend – that of emphasizing inimitable capabilities in a globalising world, that of somewheres as opposed to anywheres, of glocals who marry their attachment to place and community with a cosmopolitan horizon.

²⁴ From today's point of view, I would replace the singular ‚identity‘ (see the upper left box in the figure) with the plural ‚identities‘ because the forging of a homogenous one-and-only identity leads us astray. Unique is not our identity, but our blend of identities.

²⁵ LAU (Local Administrative Unit) and NUTS (Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques) are reference units used in the EU to categorize the size of territories.

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- **Low-threshold and demand-oriented funding:** This driver of success has in cases, where it turned out to be nothing but a broken promise, may become a driver of despair, and it makes me sick when I hear that in some areas the LAGs have, at this point in time (in year four out of seven), not even started with strategy implementation, because the flow of funds be allegedly clogged due to administrative inconsistencies. It is true, and I said this at several occasions, that LEADER is supposed to build on a pre-established practice of good public governance to unfold its full potential. If this is not guaranteed, the failure will directly impact on the quality of LEADER implementation. And this has still nothing to do with the complexities of the LEADER approach as such. Moreover, LEADER is more demanding than other schemes because of the requirement to delegate decision making power to the public-private LAGs which usually are conveyed only to public entities. We should have a much closer look on the interaction between managing authorities and the LAGs, and the positive examples which leave both sides, and the final project promoters, satisfied. Among those I would highlight regions with a high proportion of RDP money entrusted to the LAGs (led by Saxony with 41% !) or countries and regions trying to manage multi-fund CLLD according to the needs of local action groups (e.g. Sweden which has drawn together the administrative responsibilities for CLLD from all cohesion policy funds into one switch point, the Swedish Board of Agriculture), or local action groups who apparently do well in drawing together and customising various schemes and funding sources into one instrument such as reducing complexity for the end user, the project promoters (like the SECAD Partnership in South and West Cork, Ireland²⁶, or by the way the multifund-LAGs operate in the State of Tyrol, Austria²⁷). The use of simplified cost options and other mechanisms put in place to reduce the administrative burden and slack may have brought some relief here and there, but the bigger problems linger on.
- **The independent local partnership:** Compared to the first period of mainstreaming (2007-2013) and in response to the trenchant European Report of Auditors (2010) the Member States have found, in general, more appropriate ways to leave the decision-making power to the LAGs. On the other hand, they have lashed up a tight corset of monitoring and control which constrains the LAGs' room to manoeuvre from the backdoor. It has to be said that the managing and paying authorities are trapped in a similar dynamic. The accumulation and interaction of rules between different Structural Funds and between administrative levels produce uncertainties and thereby risks which do not seem to match the benefits expectable from a relatively small share of public expenses. This is one of the reasons why CLLD and multi-funding has not been wholeheartedly taken up by regional and national authorities such as many EU officials or local development experts would have wished.

²⁶ <https://www.secad.ie/>

²⁷ <https://www.tirol.gv.at/tirol-europa/eu-regionalforderung-tirol/regionalmanagement-tirol/>

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- **The quest for linkages and synergies:** The first letter of LEADER – standing for ‚Liaison‘ – is still the most obvious driver of success. It means forging linkages at a personal level and at that of collective actors, through intensive networking and cooperation inside and outside the area. It is a prerequisite for learning and knowledge sharing, for constantly putting the own potential and limits under scrutiny and pushing the envelope gradually further. I still cannot understand that this quest is sometimes limited by petty prescriptions. How can it be, for example, that the Austrian budget for transnational cooperation is already depleted at this early point in time, a budget which has never been entrusted to LAGs – not even to regional authorities – but has been stored in the vaults of the Managing Authority?
- **The thrust on innovation:** Regarding LEADER, innovation was always in the centre of local actors, policy makers and experts. The LEADER II Observatory’s Dossier No. 2 from 1997 on ‚Innovation and Rural Development‘²⁸ is still ground-breaking in the way that it describes, without naming it explicitly²⁹, the circumstances, triggers and pathways of *social innovation*³⁰ from a territorial perspective. Innovation means change, and this may imply the break of ties; however knowing that ongoing change happens in any event, it is the gain in command upon these changes which is in the focus of innovation: The little spin we can give the ongoing changes in our environment and ultimately in ourselves which leaves us with more options to act, with more leeway to make mistakes, with more resilience in the face of all the known and unknown occurrences: To quote Mahatma Gandhi, ‚freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes‘.
- **The European dimension:** From the very beginning, LEADER was a means to connect people from different backgrounds not only with each other, but also to make them familiar with the rules, mechanisms and methods of the European governance architecture. It has forged friendships and even love stories and marriages. It has translated noble motives and declarations into living practice and tangible benefits. Regarding the recent estrangement of many rural people from established democratic institutions in many developed countries (not only in the EU), and the increasing rural-urban divide in many issues of societal concern, the European dimension takes centre stage. Without any further comment, I just present the map of Brexit votes to underpin this assumption.

²⁸ http://www.rederural.gov.pt/images/innovation_and_rural_development.pdf

²⁹ The term ‚social innovation‘ was not yet widely used in those times. However, the heading on page 27 of the dossier reads: „Innovation, a process of fundamentally social nature.“

³⁰ We understand social innovation in the sense of the Horizon2020 Project SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) which defines social innovation as ‚*the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors*‘. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/social-innovation-marginalised-rural-areas-simra-0>

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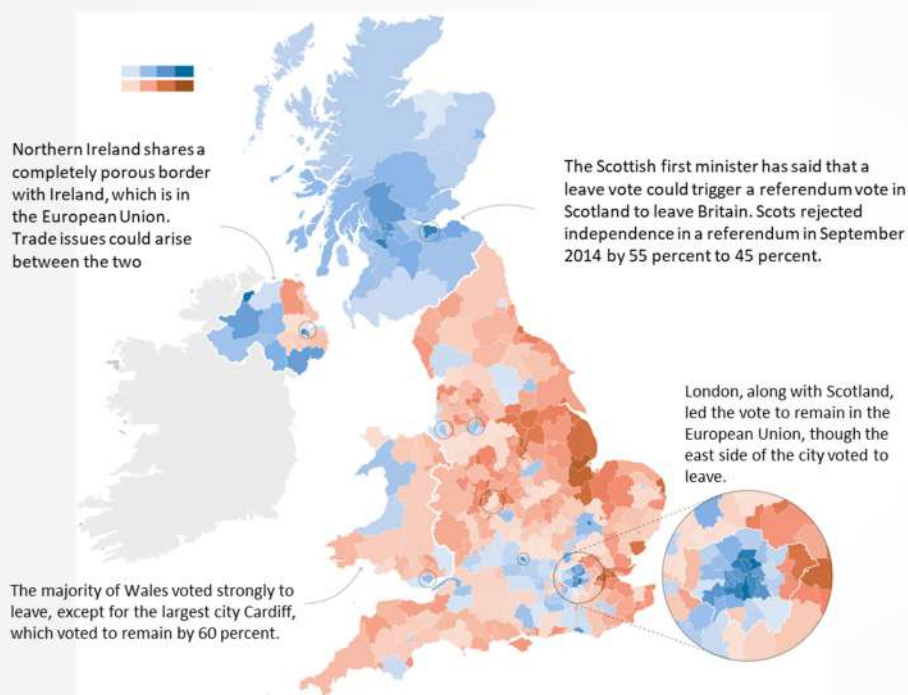


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Fig. 2: Votes on Brexit (2016)³¹



2.2 Talking about the effects and the added value of LEADER

In our presentation from 2007, Fig. 1 shows it, we stipulated three main effects of the LEADER approach, if properly applied: Local value added, enriched social capital and spreading out. Let us examine these three in the light of the experiences we have gained ever since:

- **Local value added:** The LEADER evaluation guidelines of the Rural Evaluation Helpdesk³² (see Fig.4) define the so-called 'Added Value of LEADER' as the combined benefits deriving from (i) improved social capital, (ii) improved local governance and (iii) enhanced results of strategy implementation. What has been addressed as 'local value added' in Evora in the year 2007, is equivalent to what is labelled 'enhanced results' in the 2017 guidelines. The evaluator builds his or her analysis on the premise that the outcomes of the projects funded under the local development strategy under LEADER are different compared to those achieved by conventional project promotion measures:

³¹ British Office of National Statistics and BBC.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/24/world/europe/how-britain-voted-brexite-referendum.html>

³² Published in August 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/24/world/europe/how-britain-voted-brexite-referendum.html>

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- Some of these projects would not have occurred at all, because they may have been considered as too small, too untested or too trippy, or simply would have slipped under the radar of conventional promotion measures.
- Other projects however, think about bed and breakfast, cultural fairs, a thematic route, an IT education initiative, etc. may have received funding from other measures as well. In these cases, it should be possible to make evident at large that they have resulted in more leverage (personal or crowd funding), that they have included more and different actors than in non-LEADER contexts, that they have been designed and are managed in more innovative ways and that they are more demand-responsive and sustainable in the sense that they are well received and used by the final beneficiaries. By which indicators and by which methods this ‚difference in difference‘ should be measured is up to the evaluators‘ skills.
- **Social capital enrichment:** Since the evaluation of LEADER II, social capital appears as a central concept regarding the value added of the LEADER approach. The assumption goes that the operations of the LAG, be they oriented towards project generation and optimisation or be they oriented towards developing the capacities of local actors and cooperation systems (through sensitisation, animation, capacity building and networking activities), generate the strongest effects via the enrichment of the social capital, which can be measured in various ways. In the Evora presentation from 2007, we epitomised our insights as the ‚5 D‘:
 - **Dignity:** The emergence of new, previously overlooked or underrated actors and the reassessment of their skills, ideas, actions and contributions to the society.
 - **Distinction:** The recognition of the particularity or even uniqueness of one’s identities and contributions, and the search for the ‚right course of action‘ in a given context (Aristotle’s ‚phronesis‘), regardless of how narrow the options might appear to be.
 - **Dialogue:** The willingness and capability to enter a conversation and act cooperatively on the basis of the insight that there are such things like universal concerns (human and social well-being, environmental integrity etc.) and of the basis of respect for other people³³ regardless of their world views, habits or lifestyles. A prerequisite to foster respectful attitudes is to learn to know more about the ‚significant other‘. It may be in that perspective that the *Grupo CARMEN*³⁴ has proposed an ERASMUS programme for local actors in their succinct manifesto on ‚Reinventing Europe‘³⁵; I deem it an excellent idea.

³³ In reference to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s groundbreaking work on ‚Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers.‘ Penguin (2007).

³⁴ CARMEN = Centro de Animação Rural para a Mobilização dos Neurónios. The CARMEN centre is located in Alentejo/Portugal and hosted the meeting of this reflection group.

³⁵ https://ldnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/Proposition_Groupe_CARMEN_-_2_pages_171015_24.pdf

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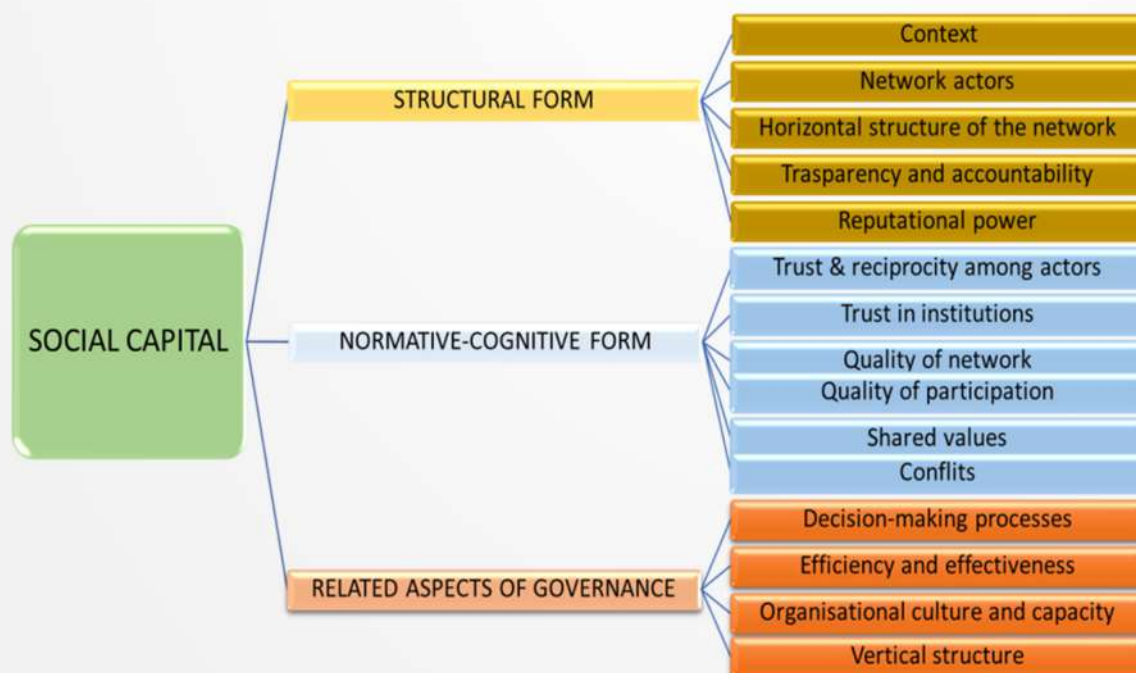
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- **Democracy:** Participation and stakeholder dialogue are capacities which are dearly needed in democratic governance, and increasingly so in a world in which the denial of reason has re-entered the stage of political communication. The local action group de facto plays an educative role for democratic governance – and should be utterly conscient of that role –, for it seeks to combine the virtues of representative, deliberative and participative governance to achieve common well-being.
- **Delight:** After all, people involved in LEADER confirm it time and again: LEADER is fun. From a Danish LAG we got the quote: *„Even if it has been blood, sweat and tears....we would do it again.“* I think there is nothing to add.

So far what we had to say back then. Today the central question for evaluators and managing authorities is how to measure changes in social capital. Measurements will certainly include human capital, such as individual actors' skills and capabilities, but also the level of community and stakeholder involvement in deliberations and decision making, the dynamic of links and relationships and possible shifts in mental models, beliefs and trust.

In our presentation in 2007 and contrary to the concept set out in the LEADER guidelines, we understood the effects on **local governance** as a part of the social capital. The excellent research team in the TESAF³⁶ Institute at the University of Padova has made the same choice, namely to consider governance capacity as one of three forms of social capital (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Forms and Dimensions of Social Capital as conceived by Pisani E. e.a.³⁷



³⁶ TESAF: Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry.

³⁷ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/gpw-07_4_social_capital_pisani_aguanno_0.pdf

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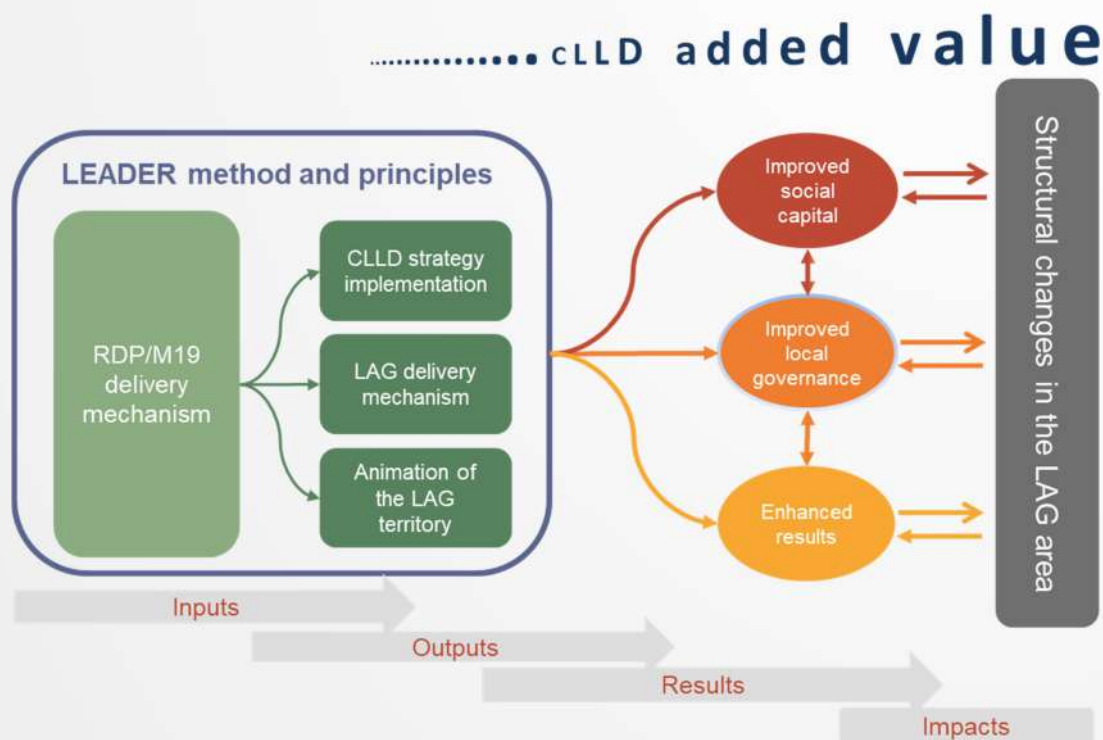
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- Improved local governance:** Following the logic of the LEADER guidelines, I consider useful to distinguish the two categories 'social capital' and 'local governance', because this allows for a better distinction between 'social innovation' on one side and 'institutional innovation' on the other. The latter provides the context for the former. They are complementary, like the pasture provides the context for the cow. In this view, LEADER is the (admittedly seasoned) institutional innovation which is supposed to tangibly increase the probability of the emergence of (social, but also economic-technological) innovation in its operation space. If we say that local governance is improved through the implementation of LEADER, we stipulate that it has also an effect on institutional innovation, and this effect may even be recursive in a way that it affects the delivery mechanisms at the level of the programme authorities, in some cases the structures of the managing authorities themselves: Just think about the changes which had to be thought and carried through to manage LEADER in the way that is done in Saxony! This is to remind that the LEADER approach cannot be conceptualised without taking into account the whole delivery chain and the multiple tiers of decision making.

Figure 4 depicts the present state of the art of how the added value of LEADER can be perceived and measured.

Fig. 4: Concept of LEADER Added Value at local level according to the Rural Evaluation Helpdesk (2017)³⁸



³⁸ [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/twg-03-leader_clld-aug2017%20\(8\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/twg-03-leader_clld-aug2017%20(8).pdf)

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- **Spreading out:** Already since its second edition, the LEADER approach has inspired the emergence of a host of national schemes, such as in Finland, Germany, Ireland and Spain. The ultimate step was the formulation of the CLLD Articles in the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 which allowed for the expansion of the CLLD/LEADER approach to the four cohesion policy instruments ERDF, ESF, EMFF and EAFRD. This move seemed to lay out a new horizon, a wide field of opportunities to reshape territorial policies in urban, rural and coastal areas even-handedly.

2.3 Forebodings

It should be remembered that in our presentation, Bernd and me mentioned five possible pitfalls which might come along with the mainstreaming of LEADER in the RDPs:

- **Submission:** that the LEADER approach shrivels to an appendix to conventional programme implementation, deprived of its operational features, at very most becoming a ‚guichet‘ for a few designated measures;
- **Backstreaming:** that the LAGs develop into tools to implement the goals of rural development programmes mainly dictated by sectoral (agricultural) interests or becoming a proxy for intermunicipal cooperation (a grouping of mayors);
- **Degeneration:** that the LEADER approach be fragmented and only implemented in parts, according to convenience, disregarding the basic assumption that the LEADER method only unfolds its virtues if the seven operational principles are applied as a package.
- **Overload:** that the LAGs be left with duties and responsibilities for which the local actors have not been accordingly prepared;
- **Tickover:** that the LAGs be charged with administrative requirements which sucks up their human resource capacities, to the detriment of their core task as a catalyst for local development. In other words, the LAG management would run out of gear.

Honestly, it did not need rocket science to anticipate these shortcomings. In one way or another, the described phenomena have already occurred before the mainstreaming; they certainly got worse during the first period of mainstreaming in most LEADER areas, and they still persist in the present period, despite the efforts made to improve and simplify the regulative environment for LEADER in the runup of the actual period – not least because there is the wider environment of ESI Funds rules and the ever tightening grip on public spending in times of budget cuts.

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The interim assessment of the state of implementation of LEADER 2014-2020 made by ELARD earlier this year is – I cannot say it otherwise – quite devastating. And there is scarcely a difference between monofund and multifund contexts³⁹.

3 CLLD/LEADER at the crossroads

There is unanimity among experts and policy makers that LEADER is, by and large, a success story. It is remarkable that the approach is as strongly rooted in local areas as it is at European scale, regarding networks, institutions and what can be considered as a culture of policy making. However, it should be also said that after almost 30 years of local development ideas and practice in Europe, local development has lost some of its vibrancy, having either become 'part of the furniture', e.g. in rural development and LEADER, or having been more or less forgotten in other fields⁴⁰.

There is a risk that local action groups may end up replicating the bureaucratic approaches of state authorities, preoccupied with administering calls for projects prepared by consultants and the paperwork of payments and controls, with only a thin veneer of 'local strategy' pretending to hold the selected projects together into an integrated approach. In this climate, broader governance aspects such as partnership working and links with community development may be neglected.

Having said this, it is appropriate to pause and to reflect on the mission of LEADER and the LAG as a change maker for rural renaissance, sitting on the fence between continuity and transformation, preservation and creative destruction, innovation and institutionalisation.

3.1 The innovation paradox

There is a fundamental paradox in every innovation. It may either disappear after a short life span, sucked up by the heavyweight of the dominant systems in place, like a solar protuberance; or it may live on, evolve and follow a trajectory of

- **local integration:** in this case the change is so particular to the local context that it remains where it has sprung up, with no or little effects anywhere else;
- **growth:** New structures and processes establish themselves, reaching out to and involving a growing number of stakeholders and beneficiaries;

³⁹ See the report to the General Assembly of ELARD, held in Bruxelles on the 7th of March 2018 where the implementation progress is set out country by country. http://www.leadersuomi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ELARD_j%C3%A4senten_tilannekatsaus_7.3.2018.pdf

⁴⁰ See H. Martinos (2017): Community-led local development: challenges and opportunities. https://ldnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/CLLD_Challenges-and-Opportunities_RSA_blog_08.03.2017_22.pdf

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- **spreading out:** the innovation goes viral, gets copied and varied in manifold ways and reproduces itself autonomously in other places, gradually displacing previous practices;
- **scaling up:** The reconfigured practices lead to a regime shift⁴¹ in a certain sector or policy field (economy, environment, health, education....), leading to an adjustment or a reform of the regulatory context from top-down;
- **scaling deep**⁴²: the reconfigured practices do not just lead to regime change but to a transformation of beliefs, informal rules and cultural settings.

These trajectories have one thing in common: The reconfigured practices bring forth new structures and processes, new rules of the game – at any scale – and this is synonymous with institutionalisation. Innovation consummates itself in institutionalisation.

The paradox of ‚institutionalised innovation‘ is twofold:

- First of all, LEADER as a programme/measure/method, and the LAG as a local partnership/organisation, can both be regarded as institutions whose mission is to encourage, enable and ultimately to generate (social and economic-technological) innovation in their spheres of activity. LEADER and the LAG are poised at the edge of complying to the prevailing structures and processes on the one hand and of instigating change – and not of the kind which would occur anyway! – on the other hand. It is obvious that the LAG should, for the sake of consistency and credibility, apply this perspective of continuous renewal on itself: only a learning LAG will be able to strengthen the learning capacities of the local cooperation systems⁴³. However, this is not only true for the LAG, but for the whole system of LEADER policy delivery, right up to the Managing Authorities and the European frameworks. This basic insight is well perceived by the policy makers and, until the drafting of the CLLD Articles in the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 it has been, grosso modo, heeded.
- Secondly, there are strong signs that, after 25 years, the institutional innovation named LEADER has accomplished its cycle with the first mainstreaming period (2007-2013). This does not constitute a problem per se. As important mechanisms of local development funding, local development agencies run by local partnerships can still create considerable added value at local level, provided they be actually institutionalised which means stabilised – and not put in question whenever an EU budget period comes to

⁴¹ The term ‚regime‘ is used here as a synonym for the ‚governance in a certain sector or policy field‘. Regime shift is a concept frequently used in socio-ecological research. See:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-5871.12267>

⁴² Riddell, D. und Moore, M.-L. (2015): Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it. J.W.McConnell Foundation and Tamarack Institute, CN. https://mccconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut_Nov27A_AV_BrandedBleed.pdf

⁴³ I use the term ‚cooperation system‘ for ensembles of collective actors who have to coordinate their activities in order to achieve common goals, e.g. all the actors involved to make the health system work, or an economic cluster, or local mobility systems, environmental preservation, etc.

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an end. LAGs would morph into micro-regional development agencies, entrusted with the task of project funding according to the respective needs of the regions in which they operate. Such entities used to be funded degressively in the past by the ERDF, and they continue to thrive on EU funds to the extent that they are landing contracts for specific development projects they are going to manage or supervise. However, the original role of LEADER as a driver of innovation in rural areas, as the owner of a local development strategy which is supposed to make a difference at a territorial, i.e. systemic level, would gradually expire, just like an airplane taxiing to a standstill after landing. This turn of events is not in the minds of most local actors, policy makers or development experts I know. They rather want to keep it rockin' and rollin', and furthermore to expand the LEADER method on a wider scale just in the way CLLD was intended.

3.2 Shortcomings in CLLD/LEADER implementation 2014-2020

Even though the political environment has not been the most favorable one (Brexit, nationalist tendencies, public budget cuts, the consumptive debate on migration) I believe that the CLLD framework for 2014-2020 still has the makings of triggering a new policy cycle of local development in all types of areas. It got somewhat bogged down by the complexity and intricacy of rules of Structural Funds involved, and by the avoidance strategy of national and regional authorities which already have experienced, or were anxious not to experience bureaucratic entanglements and budget reclaims based on negative audit results. Still there is a host of countries and regions which have embarked on multi-fund CLLD. 20 of 28 Member States allow for multi-funded strategies, and there are eleven countries which allow for involving all four ESI Funds into CLLD implementation⁴⁴. Member States have made efforts to tackle the requirements with according adjustments. For instance, as was already mentioned, Sweden has centralised the administrative handling in a single managing authority. However, complaints about hurdles and delays have never fallen silent, but rather get louder and louder with every year of implementation, whatever delivery mechanism may be at work.

Yet another factor has hampered the unfolding of CLLD in the Structural Funds: Whereas CLLD/LEADER in the EAFRD and in the EMFF is accompanied by networking support (ENRD and FARNET), CLLD in the ERDF and in the ESF does not enjoy such support. Surely, there is the URBACT programme⁴⁵ and secretariat which networks a host of cities involved in CLLD and CLLD-like operations. But if you click on the URBACT website, there is no button for CLLD, and if you browse the search engine, the last note relating to CLLD was a seminar held in Sweden in the end of 2016 dealing with the question how to put the CLLD method to work⁴⁶. Considering how important the European networking has been for the evolution of the

⁴⁴ <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/clld-eu.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://urbact.eu/#>

⁴⁶ <http://urbact.eu/achieving-results-clld-way-putting-method-work>



LEADER method: actually, there is a gaping void concerning learning, exchange and conceptualising CLLD in urban areas – which would be dearly needed, as there are quite different circumstances and challenges in urban as compared to rural areas. It goes by itself that this void also negatively affects the rural-urban interactions at local level, and the learning processes which should be going on in this respect. The voluntary LDnet network and website⁴⁷ run by a group of experts is virtually the only place providing good practice examples, policy concepts and methodological contributions on all aspects of local development in urban, rural and coastal areas, including an emphasis on social inclusion.

3.3 Calls for a radical renewal of CLLD/LEADER

The perceived gap between the potential of CLLD and its actual expressions gave rise to a number of manifestos and declarations of the civil society in the past two years:

- During a conference held in December 2016, ELARD issued the Tartu Declaration ,Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+‘ in which it recalls the importance of empowering local communities and local action groups, the stifling effects of the threat of sanctions at local level, calling for a thorough process of de-regulation with the participation of all stakeholders and the concentration of programme delivery in one single authority at European, national and, if applicable, regional level. A CLLD sub-group should be established under the EGESIF (Expert Group on European Structural and Investment Funds) in order to observe and guide CLLD implementation in all Member States.
- In April 2017, the *Grupo CARMEN* issued a paper called ,Reinventing Europe – with and for its people‘ stating that an appropriate response to change and diversity would require collaborative governance, for which it stipulated six principles and its translation into practice. An essential instrument would be a ,separate fund for citizen-led local development with separate programme in Member States and/or regions...with no distinction or demarcation between funds...Finance must be decentralised to provide the flexibility for local strategies to respond to local needs and challenges with a shift from compliance to achieving goals and respecting the agreed principles and methods‘.
- In October 2017, the European Rural Parliament, in its third gathering, issued the Venhorst Declaration⁴⁸ which describes in more detail how such separate fund for CLLD should be structured. ,The Fund should receive a significant proportion of all European Structural Investment Funds (10%)...(and)....should be deployed on a decentralised basis, through local partnerships, so that local strategies can respond to local needs and challenges, as the diagram below explains‘.

Fig. 5: The CLLD Fund as proposed by the European Rural Parliament in the Venhorst Declaration (21 Oct. 2017)

⁴⁷ <http://ldnet.eu/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.kleinekernenkrant.nl/data/documents/De-declaratie-van-Venhorst.pdf>

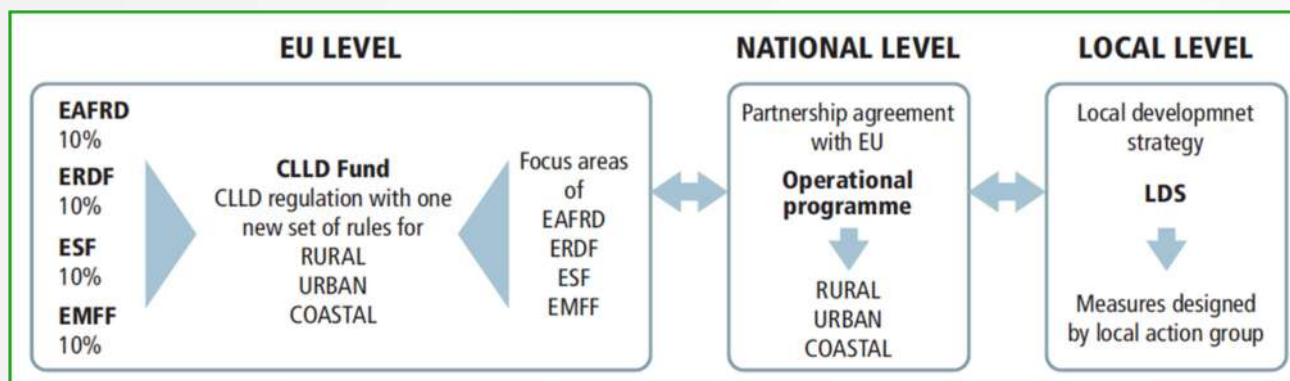
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Thus the debate on the shaping of CLLD beyond 2020 is also a debate on how to rejuvenate the approach and make it a powerful tool for local development facing the challenges of the 21st century. In this rejuvenation process, there are also countries which are just about to launch the LEADER approach for the first time and in their particular ways: the Southeastern European countries⁴⁹. Consider that they will most probably not be just at the receiving end, but also at the giving one, as innovation is often inspired and induced by newcomers.

In short, the debate within civil society organisations and local development experts converged towards a quite precise proposal which would represent the radical institutional innovation required to launch a new innovation cycle for the next 20 years.

Thus goes the pressing question: what has actually been taken up in the EU-COM proposals for the next programming period 2021-2027?

4 Looking forward to the period 2021 – 2027: What is on the table?

4.1 The Draft Common Provisions Regulation

- The Draft Common Provisions Regulation⁵⁰ (29 May 2018) proposes a common framework for the ERDF, the ESF and the EMFF, but no longer for the EAFRD. In the formal architecture, EAFRD will be no longer considered as an instrument of the European cohesion policy.
- The provisions for CLLD in the funds for cohesion policy are laid down in the Articles 25 to 28 of the Draft CPR. They are more or less rolling forward what has been stipulated in the Art. 32 to 35 of the current CPR 1303/2013⁵¹. There is no obligation in neither of the funds to put any money into CLLD.

⁴⁹ See the report published by the Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD) in the SEE Countries (2017): 'Application of the LEADER Approach in the Western Balkan Countries – from a local initiative to a mainstream concept in the rural areas'. <http://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/LEADER-Report-WEB.pdf>

⁵⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-common-provisions_en.pdf

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- There is a threshold of 6% of the funds which shall be devoted to partnerships for local development via various tools, one of which might be CLLD.
- A simplified approach to CLLD' is promised.

4.2 The Draft CAP Strategic Plans Regulation

- The Draft Regulation for CAP Strategic Plans (1 June 2018)⁵² is designed as a common framework for the first and the second pillar of the CAP. The two pillars and their financial instruments EAGF and EAFRD are supposed to be more coherent and integrated in their objectives than hitherto. LEADER is subsumed, like the EIP Operational Groups, social farming, producer groups, networks and clusters etc. under the heading 'Cooperation' in Art. 71. LEADER is 'referred to as community-led local development in Article 25 of the Common Provisions Regulations' which is kind of weird because the CPR does no longer include the EAFRD.
- A mandatory minimum of 5% is earmarked for LEADER in each RDP, just like in the current period. In the same vein, higher co-financing rates are foreseen in LEADER than for conventional development measures.

4.3 Time to act

That's all? - Yes, that's all.

The proposals just wave through what is already going on but do not respond to any of the shortcomings which actually stymies the LEADER implementation. The future separation of Cohesion Policy and CAP Funds makes us doubt whether the CLLD/LEADER approach will actually survive as a relevant method for local development outside rural and possibly fishery areas.

The proposals are certainly not a recipe for a relaunch of the CLLD/LEADER approach into a new cycle of institutional innovation.

This obvious neglect is barely understandable, because it has been devised in times in which it was not yet possible to evaluate and learn from CLLD/LEADER implementation in its current form. With good will one could guess that policy makers may have wished to get more information – and more responses from Member States, civil society networks and local development experts in order to give the CLLD framework its definite shape later on.

⁵¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303&from=EN>

⁵² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-cap-strategic-plans_en.pdf

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There is a saying: hope blurs the view. I don't believe that there was a second thought behind the current proposal. It is what it is: A swan song to community-led local development as a change maker.

Today, on September 27th, the proposals have still not crystallized into definite Regulations. There is time to raise our voice, to intervene, to argue, to come up with better proposals. Why should we just sit there and spectate at the fizzling out of a piece of policy which has brought so much value to our rural areas?

Let's get clear on what we want to achieve – together. And then let's take leave and do our homework.

Imagine these efforts would not succeed. That should not bother us too much. We should not act like the drunkard in the dark who is shaking at a garden fence crying 'Let me out of here!' We should not focus on conditions which turn out to be unchangeable for the while being. Thousands of local actors and stakeholders, together with committed public officials and network support units, do an excellent job and work for the common good in rural areas, producing demonstrable results. If the best option is not feasible, take the second best. It may turn out as the best one later on. We never know. History teaches people, said M. Gandhi, that history teaches people nothing. Chance favors the prepared mind, Louis Pasteur used to say. And let me finish with Shakespeare: All things are ready, if our mind be so.