

***Ex-post Evaluation of
the Community
Initiative LEADER II***

***Final Report
Volume 4: Geographical Reports***

by ÖIR – Managementdienste GmbH

Commissioned by:
European Commission
DG Agriculture, Unit A.4

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This is **Volume 4 of the Final Report** of the European evaluation of the LEADER II Community Initiative dealing with 12 Geographical Reports on all Member States of the EU.

Volume 1 of the Final Report contains the main report and the executive summary.

Volume 2 of the Final Report contains the bibliographical sources, interview partners and methodological tools used for quantitative data collection and qualitative investigations.

Volume 3 of the Final Report is a compilation of case studies on 13 trans-national cooperation projects and 10 comparative case studies on cost-effectiveness of the LEADER II initiative.

CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	7
II.	Geographical Reports	11
II.1	Austria	13
II.2	Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands	33
II.3	Germany	83
II.4a	Denmark	129
II.4b	Sweden OP LEADER II Objective 5b	145
II.4c	Sweden OP LEADER II Objective 6	165
II.5	Spain	195
II.6	Finland	257
II.7	France, Wallonie/Belgique, Luxembourg	271
II.8	Greece	305
II.9	Ireland	327
II.10	Italy	351
II.11	Portugal	425
II.12	United Kingdom	445

I. INTRODUCTION

Volume 4 includes 12 geographical reports which have been drafted by the following national evaluators:

Overview of Geographical Reports

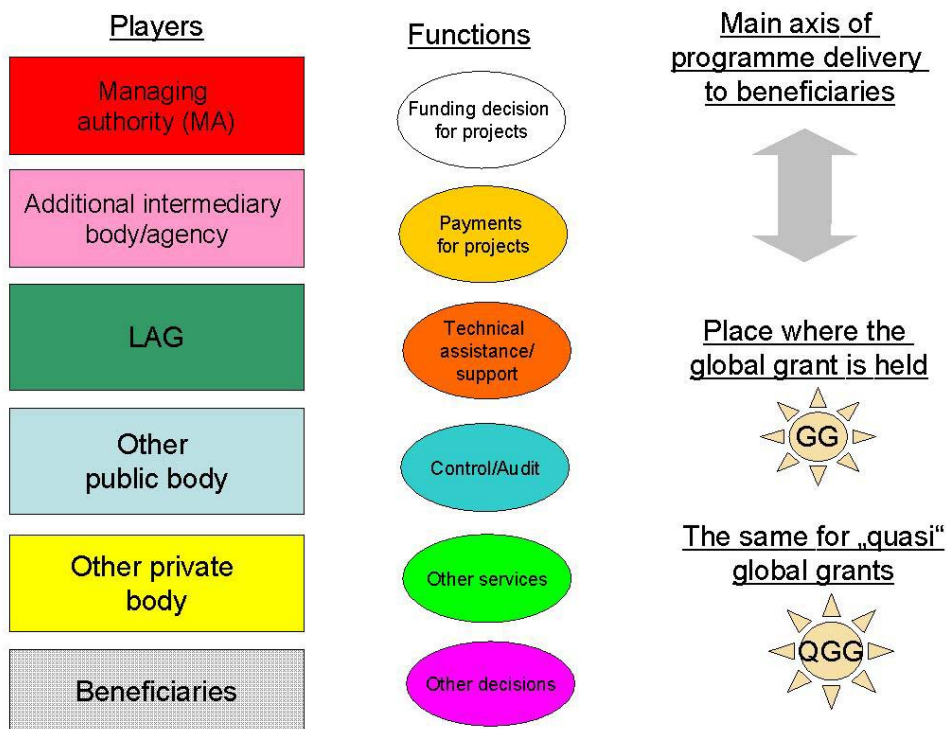
Nr.	Country or region covered	Responsible evaluator
1	Austria	Richard Hummelbrunner
2	Belgium-Flemish part and Netherlands	Margot van Soetendael
3	Germany	Otmar Seibert
4	Denmark, Sweden	Ulla Herlitz
5	Spain	Javier Esparcia
6	Finland	Torsti Hyryläinen
7	France, Belgium-Wallonian part and Luxembourg	Jean-Claude Bontron
8	Greece	Sophia Efstratoglou
9	Ireland	Brendan Kearney
10	Italy	Carlo Ricci
11	Portugal	António Oliveira das Neves
12	United Kingdom	Robin McDowell

Each Geographical Report includes

- The reports from 30 focus groups carried out in 13 member states (all except DK, LU). See the list next page.
- Overviews on national and regional evaluations.
- One or more organigraphs visualising the administrative set up of LEADER in the different member states and regions. The legend is shown further below.
- Description of the evaluation process in the respective geographical area.

Each geographical report contains an organigraph, that should be read in the following way:

Key how to read the organigraphs



One essential element of the evaluation process were the Focus Groups held for a total of 30 LEADER groups. The following list gives an overview of these Focus Groups.

List of Focus Groups

MS	Nr.	Region	LEADER group
AT	1	Niederösterreich	Retzer Land
	2	Tirol	Ötztal
BE	3	Vlaanderen	Westhoek
DE	4	Bayern	Freyung-Grafenau
	5	Hessen	Vogelsbergkreis
	6	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Ludwigslust

	7	Sachsen	Lommatzscher Pflege
ES	8	Andalucía	Condado de Jaén
	9	Aragón	Somontano de Huesca
	10	Canarias	Lanzarote
	11	Galícia	Terra Chá
FI	12	Obj. 6 area	Koillis-Savon
FR	13	Aquitaine	Haut Périgord
	14	Bretagne	Centre Ouest Bretagne
	15	Centre	Saint-Amandois
	16	Rhône-Alpes	Avant-Pays Savoyard
GR	17	Thessalia	Kalambaka-Pyli
	18	Dytiki Ellada	Achaia
IE	19		Louth
	20		Roscommon
IT	21	Calabria	Valle del Crati
	22	Emilia-Romagna	Delta 2000
	23	Piemonte	Valle Elvo
	24	Sardegna	Anglona-Monte Acuto
	25	Toscana	Garfagnana
NL	26	Flevoland	Flevoland
PT	27	Alentejo	Vale do Sôr
SE	28	Obj. 6 area	Inlandslaget
UK	29	England	Cumbria Fells and Yorkshire Dales
	30	Highlands and Islands/Scotland	Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh

II. GEOGRAPHICAL REPORTS

II.1 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT AUSTRIA

Contents

1.	General introduction	15
2.	Report on Focus Groups	16
2.1	Introduction	16
2.2	Description of partnership and activities	16
3.	Report on national and regional programme evaluations	24
3.1	Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out	24
3.2	Overall assessment	25
3.3	Relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the evaluation reports	26
4.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	29
4.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II initiative	29
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	30

1. General introduction

The Team for the evaluation of the Austrian LEADER II Programme consisted of :

- Richard Hummelbrunner (geographical expert): responsible for overall delivery, collection of information of LAGs (Q 202), interviews at programme level in Tirol (Q 34), focus groups (F30), transnational co-operation (TNC)
- Bernhard Schausberger (geographical expert) supported by Theodor Quendler (ÖIR staff member): responsible for the compilation of information for OP 102 and L1002, interviews at programme level in Niederösterreich and Burgenland (Q34) and at national level
- Perditta Simschitz (assistant of R. Hummelbrunner): assisted in the finalisation of questionnaires (Q34 and Q 202) as well as codification of responses.

Brief overview of the **work process**:

- At the start information for all OPs and LAGs were collected (OP 102 and L1002), first problems in compiling information from the INTERREG authorities at Länder level already emerged at this stage, because only part of the information required for the ex-post evaluation was available from the Final Reports. Thus this work took much longer than originally anticipated (report in mid-April).
- Next interviews at programme level were carried out for Niederösterreich and Burgenland, plus initial contacts at national level (LEADER coordinators in Ministries, evaluation team, national network). The interviews for Tirol were only held early June.
- A first screening of the proposed sample of 9 LAGs (via telephone) revealed that some changes had to be made due to non-availability of interlocuteurs. 2 changes took place at LAG level (Ötztal instead of Virgental, Kamptal instead of Schneeberg) and 1 for the CB (Wieseninitiative instead of).
- Subsequently Q202 questionnaires were distributed and filled out by the LAGs, but some questions were dealt with over the telephone. Considerable support and encouragement by the geographical expert was required as the questionnaires were much too long and extensive for LAGs to handle by themselves. Another problem was to identify suitable persons who had an overview of the entire implementing period (in some cases 3 people had to collaborate to be able to obtain a complete picture for a given LAG). Again, this process took much longer than anticipated and some questionnaires were only handed in at the last reporting deadline, but in the end all LAGs in the sample have completed Q202.
- The decision on Focus Groups and the trans-national co-operation project was taken in April, but some time elapsed before the meetings could actually be held (see below).
- The reports on Q202 were delivered on June 10th and for Q34 on June 13th.

2. Report on Focus Groups

2.1 Introduction

Although the LAGs for the focus group meetings have already been identified early in April, some time was required before they were actually held and substantial changes took place as to the composition of the groups.

The meeting in Retz was originally scheduled for end of May, but due to some unanticipated events had to be advanced and was organised in an ad-hoc manner. It took place **on May 16th** at the premises of the LAG, but because of the change in date three persons could not attend. In the end only the LAG Manager (H. Weitschacher) and the president of the association (Mr. C. Blei) were present.

The meeting in Ötztal had to be postponed twice, due to problems in finding suitable dates and participants. Contrary to earlier declarations and expectations by the LAG Manager, members of the group showed very little interest in participating in such a meeting. It was finally held on **June 3** at the office of Tele Ötztal (Umhausen), and because last-minute attempts to gather additional people failed, only the LAG Manager (W. Kräutler) took part.

The results of the meetings were feed-back and verified by the interlocuteurs at Retzer Land (German summary produced) and Ötztal (English summary), and the findings were verified and considered to be valid.

2.2 Description of partnership and activities

Retzer Land

The LAG has been established by 6 municipalities and key representatives of the local economy. The LAG association has concluded a contract with the “Retzer Land Vermarktungs GmbH” to implement the LEADER activities. This company has appointed a LEADER manager and operates a small secretariat. The projects are prepared and implemented with the active participation of thematic working groups, and a Steering Group of LAG members meets several times a year to discuss and select the projects.

The strategy is focused on the promotion of wine, cycling tourism, national park and local SMEs/farms. These various domains should be linked through a regional trademark “Retzer Land” and used for new positioning on markets. Particular attention is also paid to the promotion of new local products (e.g. pumpkin) and increased local processing of products.

Key activities of the LAG include:

- Regional promotion leaflet and catalogues: to jointly promote the local offer and activities in the various domains (wine, cycling, events, nature)
- Cross-border cycling trails: To continue the already dense network of cycling trails across the Czech border, complete with map and information booklet.
- Retzer Land newspaper: bimonthly periodical to inform the local population about major developments, in order to strengthen local identity and commitment.
- TeleOffice Retzer Land: to offer teleworking opportunities and make use of ICT especially for local tourism marketing

Ötztal

The LAG has 20 regular and approx. 150 associated members. The regular members are primarily individuals, acknowledged key figures of the valley. A LEADER manager has been appointed and a small secretariat installed. The projects are prepared by the manager and discussed in board meetings of the LAG. Proposals for projects come either from members or – which turned out to be more frequent – from the LAG's manager.

The original strategy has been to reinforce the links between tourism and agriculture, notably via organised marketing of farming products to local hotels and restaurants. Another important pillar was to increase the value-added of local farming through intensified local processing of raw materials (wool, milk, meat). Later on, the strategy was modified to tap the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and to diversify local tourism products.

Key activities of the LAG include:

- TeleCentre Ötztal: to prepare the valley's population and businesses for the opportunities of ICT. Includes training programmes for adults (notably women from farms), promotion of teleworking and use of ICT for direct marketing.
- Direct marketing hub: to install a virtual marketplace for local farming products, where requests from local businesses and tourists and the offer from farmers can be matched.
- Wool washing plant: Located in the municipality of Umhausen, this large wool washing plant (capacity for 300 tons per year) is equipped with lead-edge technology and will permit to treat the wool of many decentralised wool producers without „hard“ detergents.
- Thematic hiking trails: Based on the attraction of „Ötzi“, a series of ancient trails between the Inn valley and Val Venosta in Italy will be investigated and newly installed.

Hypotheses and conclusions on main issues concerning implementation of LEADER II

Due to reduced participation (see above), it was not feasible to follow the methodology outline in the F30 Manual. The meeting was only facilitated by one evaluator (geographical expert). However, all the issues of the Manual were covered, but instead of a group session the meetings had the character of Focus Dialogues. Thus explanations given and hypotheses formulated were closely interwoven in an in-depth interview style.

Retzer Land

The context conditions at the start of the implementing period can be summarised as follows:

- Existing development initiative: in the early nineties a group (Initiative Retzer Region) was established and successfully implemented two major impulse projects
- Existing project ideas: encouraged by the success of these first projects, several other ideas have already been developed in various areas
- Opening of borders: Retz is located right at the former “Iron Curtain”, and the gradual opening of the borders from 1989 onwards coincided with the local development process
- Regional trademark: “Retzer Land” has already been established as a common brand for a range of projects and for the co-ordinated use of various funding opportunities
- Lack of sectoral structures: In the areas of agriculture and local businesses development structures were missing or too weak, there was also a lack of critical mass of businesses

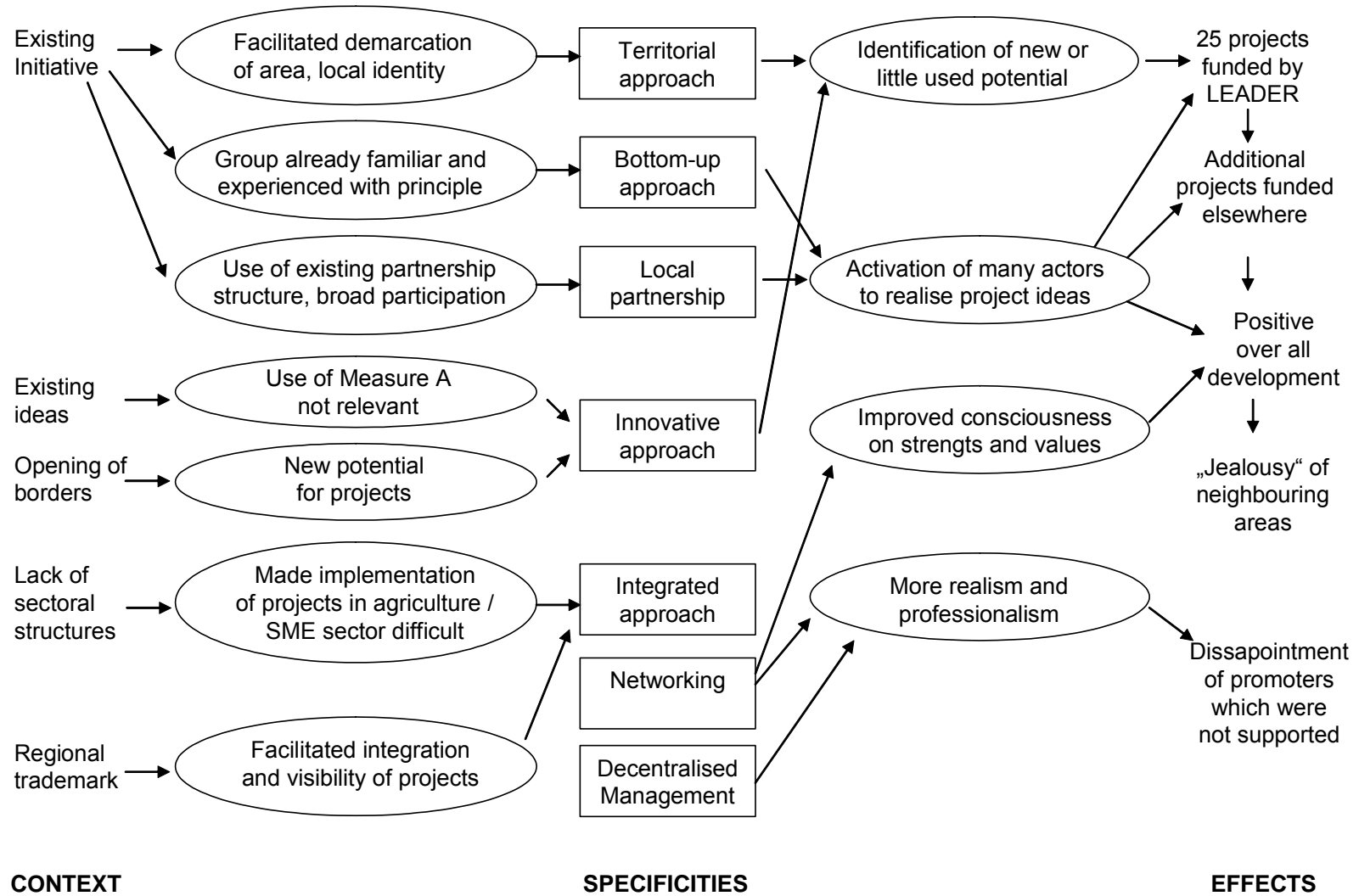
The hypotheses which were jointly developed are outlined in the map on the following page (mainly behavioural changes linking LEADER specificities with context conditions on one side and effects on the other side). The main material effects obtained were the number of projects obtained (both with and without LEADER funding) and a remarkable overall development of the area (e.g. drastic increase in overnight stays during the 90s, effective reversal of former outmigration). This success story has also led to considerable jealousy among neighbouring areas which were not included in the LAG. At their request, the territory for LEADER + was substantially increased (from 6 to 45 municipalities).

Conclusions and recommendations for future rural development programmes include:

- desirable changes at local level:
 - more detailed investigations are needed before the start of a programme, notably to test the feasibility and plausibility of project ideas
 - topics should be more focused, restriction to some core issues is advantageous
 - intended raising of own funds/local co-finance could be considered as criterion for the seriousness of a project
 - the size of the territory should be treated in a flexible manner, as it is to be viewed in close connection with the specific topic.

- desirable changes at the level of administration and networks:
 - administrative procedures should possibly be simplified, not made for complicated and bureaucratic
 - the liberty which existed under LEADER II to develop new ideas and try new approaches should be preserved (“laboratory” for rural development)
 - LEADER funding should essentially be regarded as risk funding for innovations in rural areas, and thus must also allow for failures and be sufficiently open for non-foreseeable developments
 - the existing national LEADER network is considered satisfactory (demand-oriented approach), additional networks at regional level for joint reflection and learning are considered advantageous.

Key hypotheses LAG „Retzer Land“



Ötztal

The context conditions at the start of the implementing period can be summarised as follows:

- Relative prosperity: The Ötztal region is marked by intense (winter) tourism and thus comparatively rich and prosperous, even in the non-tourism sectors
- Traditional culture: The social structure is dominated by men and conservative values, people tend to close themselves off towards external influence and outsiders
- Political monopolism: political structures in the entire valley are dominated by one (conservative) party, there is hardly any opposition (allowed)
- Agrarian structure: There are very few large farmers, and the small farmers produce comparatively little and have good access to non-farming income from tourism
- Other funding possibilities: similar projects could also be funded through Obj. 5b programme or national/regional sources, often without ambitions at integrating actions

Once again , the hypotheses which were jointly developed are outlined in the map on the following page. It must be stressed that the initial idea for the LAG was soon considered non-implementable, as it was developed by a single individual and would have agreed a high degree of collaboration among the sectors of agriculture and tourism, which was unrealistic given the context conditions. Thus a major shift in focus towards Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was initiated by the LAG manager, who also identified and implemented most of the projects himself (only few people were active alongside him).

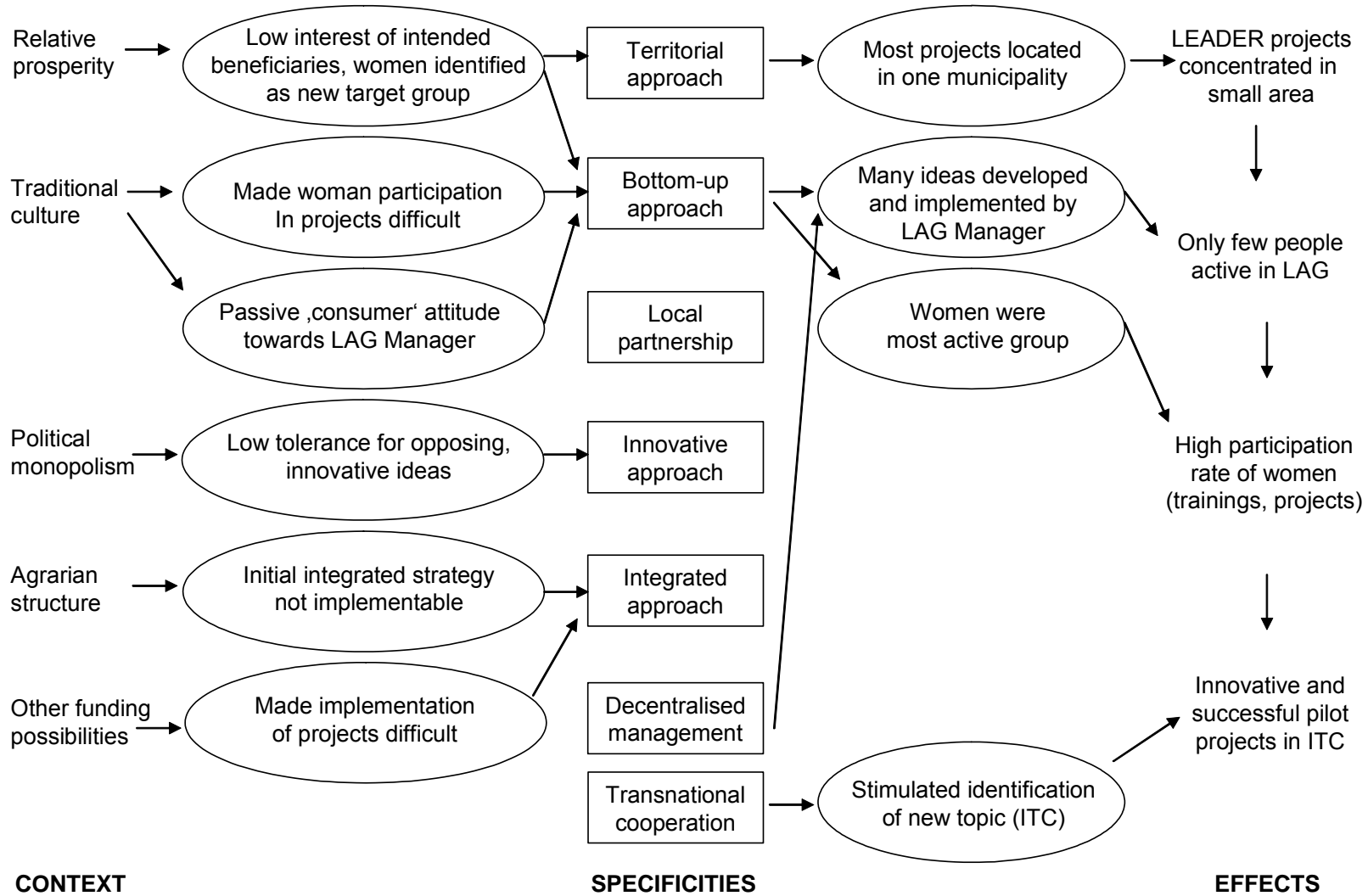
The main material effects obtained were the projects carried out with LEADER funding which were concentrated in a small area (essentially the municipality of Umhausen). The low participation rate was somehow compensated by the high participation rate of women in the newly identified ICT projects, which marked the major behavioural change triggered by LEADERII in the area. Highly innovative and successful pilot projects were established in this field which continue to date and have also lead to increasing transnational co-operation (see separate TNC study).

Conclusions and recommendations for future rural development programmes include:

- desirable changes at local level:
 - opposing opinions should be well represented in programmes like LEADER in order to assume a role as innovator
 - a territory should first of all become aware of its historical heritage and own resources before identifying suitable development projects

- an appropriate division of labour among LEADER and regional development structures needs to be established (under LEADER II these two structures were functioning in parallel and independently of each other)
- desirable changes at the level of administration and networks:
 - Need to co-operate should be introduced as funding criteria in most of the regional programmes and collaboration at larger scale encouraged (especially in tourism)
 - Willingness and capacity to raise/invest own funds should be regarded as an indicator for the maturity of a project proposals and be used as a selection criterion.

Key hypotheses LAG „Ötztal“



3. Report on national and regional programme evaluations

3.1 Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out

National level

The interim and ex-post evaluation was carried out in conjunction with the Objective 5b Programmes. One evaluation team was contracted for the entire work, the LEADER evaluation part (7 programmes) was essentially carried out by Regional Consulting, Vienna.

The evaluation of the Burgenland region (Objective 1 area) was carried out separately. The mid-term evaluation was done in conjunction with the mid-term evaluation of the Objective 1 Programme, and by the same team that carried out this evaluation. The ex-post evaluation was carried out in the beginning of 2003 and by the team which was in charge of the national LEADER evaluation.

The national LEADER evaluation was published by the ÖROK (Schriftenreihe Nr. 161/II) and thus made available for a wider public.

Although the national evaluation of LEADER was carried together with the Objective 5b programmes, care was taken to assess the specific characteristics of the Community Initiative. In particular, the suggestions of the European Seminar on Nov. 23/24 2000 in Brussels were taken into account and led to an increased bottom-up approach in the evaluation. Also the questionnaires which have been elaborated by the European observatory after this seminar were sent out to all Austrian LEADER groups and the assessment of the LAG's perception on the LEADER specificities were contained in a separate chapter in the Final Report.

A major problem faced in the evaluation was the inadequacy of the monitoring system. The indicators contained therein were not sufficient for an in-depth assessment of the implementation of the LEADER II Programme. In addition the evaluators considered that the LEADER specificities can only be adequately be dealt with at the level of the individual LAGs and require a large amount of qualitative information, which is not contained in the monitoring system.

Thus the evaluators carried out their work predominantly at the level of LAGs and individual projects via interviews and questionnaires and got a good bottom-up perception of the programme's implementation. However, the return rate of the Observatory questionnaire was only around 50% and this voluminous questionnaire (27 pages) was apparently too difficult to handle for many LAGs. Last but not least, some LAGs had no information on the financial situation, as this was dealt with at the level of the programme's administration.

Regional level

The only regional level evaluation (besides the one for Burgenland mentioned above) was carried out within the LEADER II programme in Lower Austria. This was carried out as joint self-evaluation among the six LEADER groups, supported by an external consultant (A. Kofler, OSB). This evaluation was conceived as an accompanying consultation process which was designed by the participants to the greatest extent possible. The entire evaluation process spanned a period of three years (from 1997 to 1999).

The process has been extensively documented and summarised in a separate publication “Die Kunst der Balance in komplexen Projekten”, EcoPlus, March 2000, incl. English summary.

The main findings and recommendations of the self-evaluation in Lower Austria are:

- Everything which is not completed at the start phase of complex projects will be all the more difficult to implement later
- Those LAGs which developed minimum strategy elements early on were more successful
- A Regional Association is normally not in a position to implement a LEADER strategy, but requires a larger partnership
- LEADER managers are subject to diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations
- Project orientation and project management must be learned
- Efficient LEADER projects require efficient contact and funding structures

3.2 Overall assessment

Both the mid-term and ex-post evaluations were considered rather useful by the programme administrators (as confirmed in the interviews). Although some have mentioned that institutional learning from these evaluations could have been better and that the potential for learning has not been fully captured. But it must be taken into account that this was the first time that a programme evaluation of this size and complexity was carried out for a rural policy programme in Austria, thus this was an important learning process by itself.

The self-evaluation process in the region of Lower Austria and was very much appreciated by the participating LAGs (a similar concept is also pursued under LEADER+). It was also considered very useful by programme management and has lead to a noticeable increase in the quality of the programme’s implementation.

The national LEADER evaluation can be considered very relevant. The final report contains an excellent description of the implementing process, both at regional and LAG level. And despite a standardised treatment, the evaluators have acquired a good understanding of the different implementing contexts.

The specific aspects of LEADER II were treated with care and well differentiated. Because the results of this national evaluation can be considered much more representative than the rather fragmented assessment possible in the framework of the European ex-post evaluation, the grid in the following chapter has been completed by summarising its findings.

The key recommendations on future evaluations can be summarised as follows:

- Install an on-going self-assessment process for each programme
- Take due account of the integrated and cross-sectoral aspects of the programme
- Make more use of qualitative methods to capture the specific aspects of LEADER
- Use precise and standardised nomenclature in the monitoring system, to allow for swift data processing and cross-reference analysis
- Adapt questionnaires to the handling capacity of the LAGs (shorter, more focused)

3.3 Relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the evaluation reports

The grid on the following page has been filled out with information contained in the final report of the national LEADER ex-post evaluation.

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORT AUSTRIA

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects
Area-based approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Usually the entire territory benefited from the implemented measures ▪ The proportion of LEADER funding which was spent outside the LAG territory varies between 0 and 30% ▪ Crucial aspects were identification of the population with the territory and strong collaboration among actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ turned out to be the most important factor for the success of a local programme ▪ critical mass with respect to population and economic activity was regarded less important ▪ pre-existence of development structure not very relevant
Bottom-up approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farmers, politicians, employees and youth were involved most intensively in LAG activities ▪ Environmental groups, women organisations and non-employed were less involved ▪ Project structures and procedures were essential for active participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The major achievement of the bottom-up approach was improved organisation of actors and the model role for other programmes ▪ Bureaucratic procedures, to little incentives from support programmes and short implementing period were considered to be the major obstacles
The local group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LAGs were mainly organised as associations, and half of them were founded at the start of the programme ▪ Almost all LAGs had a manager and were staffed by 1- 3 people ▪ Women participation in LAGs was around 50% ▪ More than 60% of LAGs were responsible both for management and use of financial resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivated employees were not a bottleneck ▪ For the composition of the LAG much attention was paid to include members of the younger generation ▪ Annual administrative budgets of LAGs were rather modest (on average 0,08 Mio. Euro/LAG/year)
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For most LAGs innovation has been an important aspect in their business plans ▪ 75% of all innovative projects could not have been carried out with other support programmes ▪ the major difficulties for innovation were problems in obtaining co-finance and delays in funding, convincing actors to become more innovative has rarely been a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovative actions have mainly contributed to improve the LAG's profile and competitiveness, they have also helped to stimulate transfer of experience to other areas ▪ Innovations have stimulated other local initiatives and have contributed to raise awareness and local identity
Multisectoral integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nearly all LAGs have chosen an integrative theme for their activities ▪ Cross-sectoral actions were mainly collaboration among businesses or links between tourism, agriculture and/ or SMEs ▪ Delays in implementation and individualism of actors were the major factors working against multisectoral integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved synergies and new marketing or income opportunities were the major effects ▪ Tourism and agriculture were the sectors which benefited most from multisectoral integration

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50% of LAGs have used services of the European Observatory, nearly all have provided information for the Observatory ▪ 50% of LAGs were members in other networks (national, regional, European or thematic) ▪ Nearly all LAGs have carried out cross-border projects ▪ On average each LAG has been visited by 14 groups and has visited 9 others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relative isolation of areas has been reduced by networking ▪ Additional effects of networking were improved local knowledge, increasing exchange with actors outside the area and stimulation of local innovation
Trans-national cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nearly all LAGs have participated in transnational projects ▪ LAG managers were the driving force behind these projects, similar interests were the most important criterion for choosing partners ▪ Difficult application procedures, lack of time and communication problems were considered to be the major obstacles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The main effects were the stimulation of innovative actions and projects, which would have otherwise not have been carried out ▪ Transnational co-operation was most beneficial for agriculture, tourism, use of ICT and training activities
Decentralised management and financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LAG's largest degree of autonomy was in selecting projects and in transnational co-operation ▪ LAGs were rather restricted in the delimitation of the area and financial reallocations ▪ Programme administration was considered most helpful for the establishment of the LAG and providing assistance for applications ▪ EAGFL was considered to be the Fund which posed the least problems, followed by ERDF and ESF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in financial transactions were the major negative effect of decentralised management ▪ These delays have often resulted in financial difficulties for the promoters and have increasingly discouraged them from submitting projects ▪ In 30% of all cases other co-funders have advanced funds of other sources (mainly EU)
Other important issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 80% of LAGs have produced a brochure, 50% a videofilm and 40% a CD-Rom ▪ All LAGs have their own website, nearly 50% have installed an information system or a databank ▪ All LAGs have carried out activities to involve the population more actively (events, fairs, shows etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall, local partnership was considered to be the most important specificity of LEADER, followed by area-based approach and decentralised management. ▪ Transnational co-operation was considered to be the least important of the seven specificities

4. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

4.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II initiative

The national evaluation of the LEADER II Programme concluded that its implementation can be considered a success. 1260 individual projects were supported through a total of 50,2 Mio. in public Funds (of which 48% came from EU Structural Funds).

34% of the public funds were dedicated to tourism, followed by marketing of regional agricultural products with 15% and training or consulting projects with 14%. Public funds for infrastructure projects amounted to 29%.

In relation to the four sub-programs (defined at national level), several aspects were highlighted:

- Subprograms 1 & 2: Skills acquisition and innovation in rural areas:
Targeted training of regional key actors proved to be highly important: success or failure of programmes depended on individual persons. The LEADER II Programme was a particular success in regions with already existing and functional regional co-operation structures. Particularly important was the co-operation between public institutions (municipalities), private initiatives and project promoters. The majority of LEADER II projects met the standards set by the LEADER II Programme.
- Subprogram 3: Transnational co-operation:
Only a few LEADER regions were prepared for transnational co-operation in the programming period 1005 – 99. Most groups were primarily occupied with themselves. In international regions with similar problems and existing prior contacts (e.g. national parks), co-operation could be intensified.
- Subprogram 4: Monitoring and Evaluation:
The implementation of LEADER II had in some regions considerably diverged from the initially planned priorities and goals. Assumptions and expectations in the OPs were partly unrealistic, the targets of sub-goals were set too high most of the times. However, concerned LAGs together with responsible administrators changed course and were able to develop many successful projects. Both mid-term and ex-post evaluation showed that the indicators in the monitoring system were inadequate, the specific features of LEADER require for (qualitative) data to be collected at LAG level.

A series of recommendations has been produced for the implementation of LEADER+, but both the evaluators and the interviewed LAGs have expressed their concern that these learnings from LEADER II have not been fully captured.

Concerning the present implementing period of **LEADER+**, LAGs were particularly worried about increasing bureaucratic procedures and cumbersome project preparation. On one hand LAG staff is taken up excessively by administrative work and fulfilling bureaucratic requirements and has much less time for development work. On the other hand, the dominance of a spirit of ex-ante control results in a remarkable degradation of the innovative aspects of the LEADER Programme. Innovations do carry a certain extent of risk, and by trying to eliminate riskier actions beforehand the character of LEADER as laboratory for the future of rural areas is very much endangered.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

The design of the ex-post evaluation as described in the Offer and the various manuals was highly innovative and suited to the task. Background material and formats for compiling and reporting information were very useful and of good quality. Also the support and guidance provided by the core team was excellent.

However, the ambitious concept was difficult to implement, because some of the original assumptions turned out to be wrong (at least for Austria):

- Data was not readily available for the “black questions” in the questionnaires: The requirements of the questionnaires did not correspond with the monitoring and reporting procedures installed at regional and local level in Austria. The Länder authorities have essentially structured and aggregated their data according to measures (and not LAGs), and their data banks were organised along individual projects. And for the LAGs there were hardly any Business-Plans established beforehand (at least in the chosen sample) and their operation and thinking were focused on the projects which they have implemented. This mismatch was not sufficiently checked at the beginning and there were hardly any corrections possible once the evaluation had started.
- Little interest for learning at LAG level: For these desired learning effects the evaluation simply came much too late, and in some instances the actors of LEADER II were not available any more as interlocutors (or very difficult to find). Most actors approached had great difficulties to relate to the previous period, which for most of them was already 3-4 years back and they could hardly be convinced to also benefits for them in the ex-post evaluation exercise.

As a consequence, the evaluation was a quite cumbersome compilation of (financial) data from programme administrators and LAGs with little or no added value for them. And even though most interlocutors had a positive attitude when first addressed, they rapidly considered the ex-post evaluation as a basically useless bureaucratic exercise.

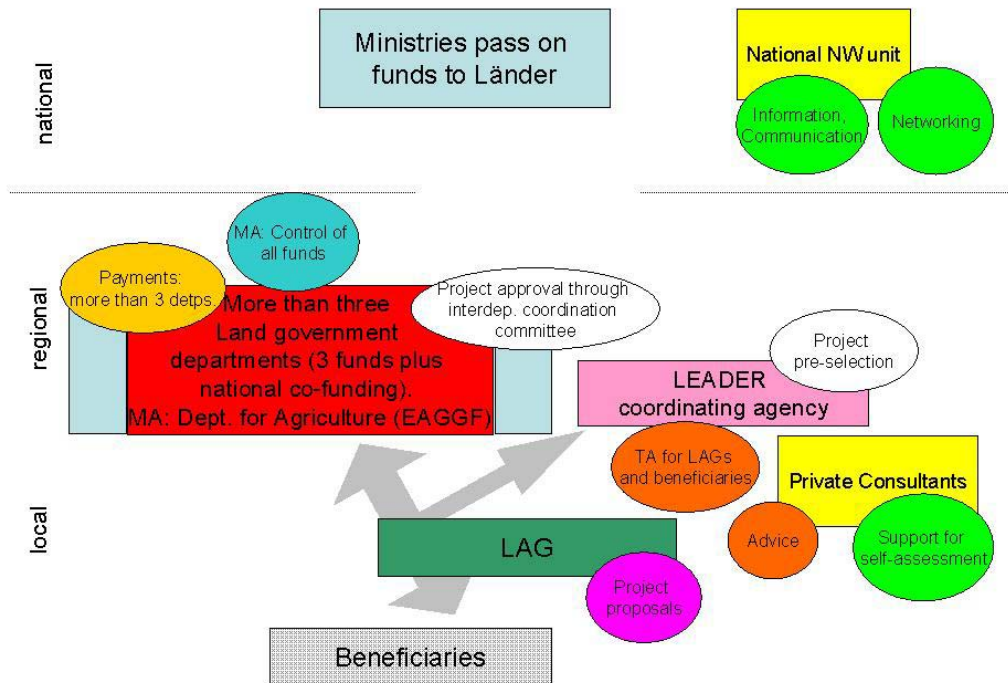
It was a particular pity, that due to the (necessarily standardised) procedure for data collection the findings of the national ex-post evaluation concerning LEADER specificities could hardly be captured (they were only incorporated in the present country report). Thus the EU ex-post evaluation did not at all capture the potential to build on a national evaluation, which has made exemplary use of previous recommendations and material produced by the EU Commission and the EU Observatory.

Proposal for future ex-post evaluations:

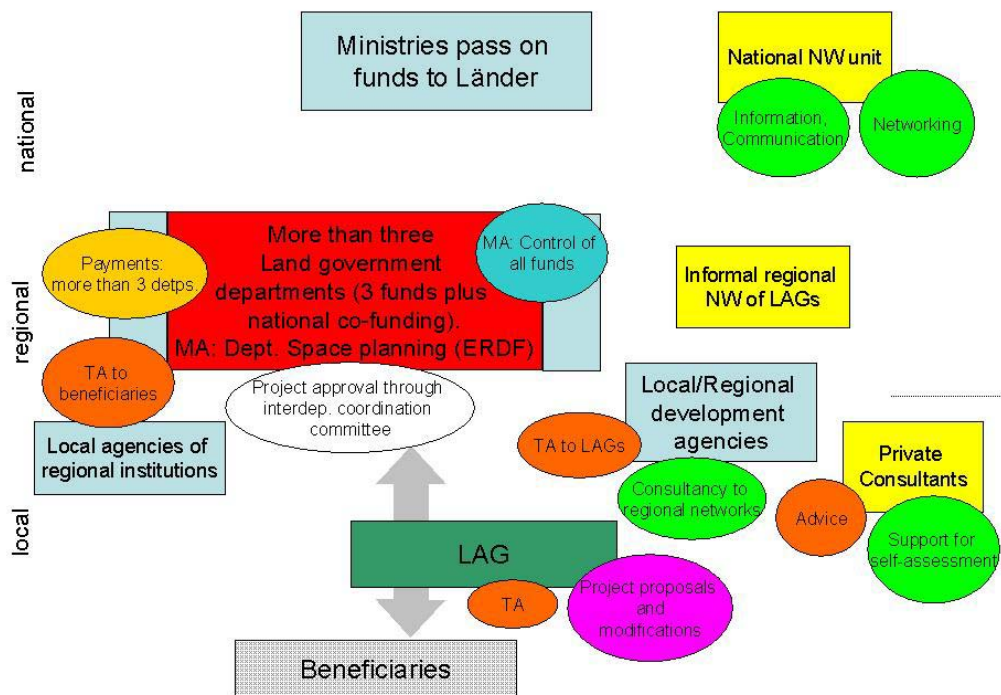
- It is recommended to dissociate learning and impact analysis as much as possible. Learning should be aimed at close to the end of the implementing period. Thus actors can better relate to their experience and still have a vivid memory. Perhaps this is better to be integrated in ex-post evaluations at programme/national level (as in the case of Austria), with few additional questions posed by the EU-Commission on crucial policy issues.
- Impact analysis should be done 2-3 years after the end of the implementing period. This could be the focus of the ex-post evaluation at EU-level, based on existing reports and evaluations at programme level. The local level should only be approached to collect information for some selected projects or impact chains.

Models of implementation

Austria – Burgenland



Austria – Niederösterreich



II.2 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT FOR FLANDERS (BELGIUM) AND THE NETHERLANDS

Contents

1.	General introduction	35
2.	Report on focus groups	37
2.1	Flevoland (NL)	37
2.1.1	Introduction	37
2.1.2	Formulations, justifications and reactions	38
2.1.3	Causal Loop Diagrams	44
2.1.4	Conclusions and recommendations	47
2.1.5	Personal impression	48
2.2	Westhoek (BE)	49
2.2.1	Introduction	49
2.2.2	Formulations, justifications and reactions	50
2.2.3	Causal Loop Diagrams	55
2.2.4	Conclusions and recommendations	57
2.2.5	Personal impression	58
2.3	Report on national and description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level	59
2.3.1	Ex-ante	59
2.3.2	Mid-term	59
2.3.3	Ex-post	60
2.4	Overall assessment	62
2.4.1	The Netherlands	62
2.4.2	Flanders (Belgium)	62
2.4.3	Key recommendations on future evaluations (LEADER+, rural development programmes, structural funds)	63
2.5	Capitalisation on relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the national and regional evaluation reports of the 34 selected programmes (use the corresponding grid)	64
3.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	68
3.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II initiative	68
3.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	69
	ANNEX I: Summaries for Flevoland, Lauwersland (Groningen), Drenthe and Friesland carried out by ETC Ecoculture (June 2001, regional ex-post evaluations)	71

1. General introduction

The total number of OP for this evaluation report is 6 (4 Dutch and 2 Flemish OP) and for every OP there was only 1 LAG, so the data collection was handled by one person (GE, contractor of OIR). The following data were collected and the following studies were carried out:

- OP102&L1000; OP34; Q34 and Q202 questionnaires
- 2 focus groups (Westhoek (BE) and Flevoland(NL))
- 1 cost-effectiveness study (Flevoland, Bed&Breakfast of Leader-II and Objective1))

To collect the data for the OP102&L1000 questionnaire the following information was used:

- OP of the 6 Leader-areas
- Regional ex-post evaluation of the 6 Leader-areas
- National Dutch ex-post evaluation and the Dutch network evaluation
- AEIDL questionnaires of 4 Dutch Leader-areas
- Final reports of the 6 Leader-areas
- Flemish Final reports per Fund and Leader-areas
- Internet research on the European Observatory site and the respective Leader2 sites.

The partly completed questionnaires were send to the 6 Leader2-coordinators, asking them kindly to fill up the lacking data. In general financial data was missing, especially the co-financing caused big trouble. In most cases it was solved by some telephone calls, explaining what was missing and stressing the importance of it in this evaluation. In Flanders, the management of financial data divided by Structural Fund and not by Programme at the relevant Ministry, was creating absurd situations, especially for Meetjesland, but finally the problem was solved.

After this first contact with the L-II coordinators and this first data collection, I informed everybody on the following steps of this evaluation, asked the selected LAGs Westhoek (BE) and Lauwersland (Groningen, NL) if they were willing to get on board of this evaluation-train. The respondent of Lauwersland explained me that the original L-II area was split up in different L-+ areas which had the consequence that L-II LAG members also split up in the new L-+ LAGs and that after a first check, only one person, beside the respondent self, was willing to cooperate. At the same time, the actors of Flevoland (OP and LAG, inside the objective 1 area) were available and willing to cooperate. The change from Lauwersland to Flevoland was accepted by the Core Team and the Commission. Westhoek, although it is not included in the L-+ Programme, accepted to go on.

The partly completed OP34 questionnaires were sent to the respective respondents and the appointments were made for the first 2-days personal visit.

As every OP was corresponding with one LAG, and there was no separate LAP designed, lots of the black factual questions of the Q202 and Q34 questionnaires were overlapping. But these questionnaires still seemed very discouraging the actors of both areas, and helping them personally was changing the boring task in something more interesting, although the final numbers of actors which completed the red and green questions was disappointing. The personal visit did have a positive effect, for the GE it gave the opportunity to know the respondents and the area, for the local respondents, the idea that "evaluation = control" disappeared and finally both showed a high interest to participate in a Focus Group. Flevoland also proposed the comparative study between two bed & breakfasts, funded by L-II and Obj)1 respectively. Both focus groups and the comparative study were accepted by the Core Team.

Both respondents invited the necessary actors for the Focus Group, a date was fixed and a second personal visit was organised. In Flevoland, it was combined with a visit of both beneficiaries of the B&B, and a national workshop on rural development and networking, where I participated in the B&B group.

In the Netherlands (Flevoland) the role of animator in the focus group was played by an employee of ETC ecoculture, the consulting bureau which realised the regional and national ex-post evaluations of the Dutch Programmes and network. In Belgium (Westhoek) the role of animator was played by a provincial employee.

2. Report on focus groups

2.1 Flevoland (NL)

2.1.1 Introduction

2.1.1.1 Name of LAG and interlocutors, participants; dates

LAG: Stuurgroep (Flevoland)

Interlocutor: Geert Gielen (Project co-ordinator Leader-II Flevoland)

Participants

Date: 15th May 03

Total number: 9

Place: Tarpania's Hoeve (L-II project), Tarpanweg 3, Swifterbant

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Ab and Karin de Lange	Beneficiaries (Tarpania's Hoeve: rural accommodation for long-term ill children)
Cees and Margriet v. Woerden	Beneficiaries (organic vegetables enterprise)
Geert Gielen	Co-ordinator Leader-II
Jan Hermsen	Chairman LAG Leader+ Flevoland
Marga de Jong	Role 1 evaluator (employee of the consulting bureau ETC Ecoculture, which carried out the regional and national ex-post evaluations)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

Date: 16th May 03

Total number: 7

Place: Museum Schokland (L-II project), Schokland

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Marinus van Dam	Beneficiary ("de Boerderij", Care Farm
Gerard Ruiters	Beneficiary (Kuinderbos en RONOP)
Mireille Korterik	Co-ordinator Leader+
Geert Gielen	Co-ordinator Leader-II
Jan Hermsen	Chairman LAG Leader+ Flevoland
Marga de Jong	Role 1 evaluator (employee of the consulting bureau ETC Ecoculture, which carried out the regional and national ex-post evaluations)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

2.1.1.2 Description of the process from the first contact until taking leave

On 10-11 April I was in Flevoland for a personal visit, organised by the Leader-II Co-ordinator (Geert Gielen). The aim of the visit was the following:

- solving the black factual questions of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires;
- meeting with the LAG members of Leader-II (and Leader+)
- knowing better the Flevoland Leader area.

Together with the LAG members we passed through the red questions of Q202 translating them, most of them just filled them in. Together we discussed the possibility for being a Focus Group, and the modalities to do it. They choose to participate and to organise it as a two days session, located in two different L-II projects. Miss Anouk Van Gils, from the directorate of Agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Fishery) was invited at the meeting and afterwards we visited Flevoland together. During the visit, we participated at a presentation of the annual Leader+ award, given to a children's farm where also mental disabled people work.

2.1.2 Formulations, justifications and reactions

What hypotheses did the evaluators formulate, how did they justify them and how did the local actors react when they were confronted to them?

The Q202 questionnaire was studied and highlights of every Leader characteristic were used to lead the discussion of the first session. In this way it was possible to discover some more details of "curious" results of the Q202, and to fill up gaps where the questionnaire was not giving a clear response or if opinions between the different LAG members were varying a lot.

2.1.2.1 Area-based approach

The Provincial Administration of Flevoland decided how to define the L-II area, mainly based on the population density. The homogeneity of Flevoland is exceptional, so only urban areas with a high population density were left out.

- Lelystad and Almeren were not included, but rural areas of Lelystad were;
- Urk, a small village living of fishery was not included, but was included in the PESCA Programme;
- Zeewolde, not included in L-II, is now included in L-+: this was the only village where meanings were differing.

A sheriff of the town council, was representing the rural area of Lelystad in the LAG. His low “rural-feeling” often was the source for intense discussions in the LAG, but put in evidence that the rural areas need their towns to survive and to develop.

The local actors did not have a specific point of view about it.

2.1.2.2 Bottom-up

The writing of the OP was immediately decentralised from the relevant Ministry towards the Provincial administrations.

The beneficiaries did not have the intention, but finally they did. Often, they just realised it after realising their project. The idea of the project was born by the beneficiaries, when needed, they got support to convert it from idea to concept. The main difficulties were:

- discover the existence of L-II
- respect the guidelines and procedures of L-II
- understanding the role of the LAG

Sometimes the way was long and expensive before getting in contact with the LAG and L-II:

Knocking first at the Ministry’ door (Agriculture, Environment and Fishery) they got in contact with the “top-down” approach: they had to pay a consulting bureau for writing their project demand, it was not approved for some totally unrealistic reasons, mostly the innovative idea behind it was considered to risky. It was their “entrepreneur-spirit”, typical for these *pioneers of the seabed*, which pushed them not to give up. Surprisingly is the fact that most of them, would have realised their project also without funding. Interaction with the LAG, improved the quality of their project, helped them to express their ideas.

The LAG did not seek potential beneficiaries, they just tried to spread out the L-II concept and waited for reactions by the local population. This made that at the beginning of the implementation period, very few projects were proposed, and the number of projects increased exponentially towards the end.

The role of the LAG was initially not known by the population, some of them even did not know of the existence of it. The lack of experience of the LAG members was expressed in a very cautious approach, which resulted in lower funding of the projects at the beginning and higher funding at the end (what could be subsidised and what not, how many projects will be realised during the entire period, what if we finish our funding resources and other projects (maybe better ones) are proposed?).

Beneficiaries sometimes had difficulties to write their project proposal and demand, most of them, having farmer-roots, were afraid of administrative procedures. The open spirit of the project-coordinator of the LAG, helped them to overcome this modesty towards bureaucracy. Lots of times the coordinator visited the local actors, drinking a cup of tea with them in their kitchen (and not in the Province Office) was experienced as a non political, man to man approach.

2.1.2.3 Partnership

LAG:

Initially; lots of local actors did not know the role of the LAG. They did not have direct contact with them (beside the project coordinator) and just waited if their proposal was accepted or not. They were considered as a jury, which applied some rules and decided what to fund and what not...When the L-II concept was better known, newspapers publicised about L-II projects etc... the role of the LAG became more clear for local actors *and* LAG members. Beneficiaries expressed the idea to give the opportunity to know the LAG as a group, organising an open meeting or something similar.

To find out whether a project could be funded or not, 2 LAG members had to study the project demand. They were not chosen by typology of the project, so several times they had to study, widen their horizons in other sectors. There were no LAG experts for tourism projects, farmers projects etc...The idea behind it was stimulating the multi-sectoral approach, without obliging it.

New partnerships:

While cooperation between different sectors often is a requirement in the top-down approach, in the bottom-up approach it was most of the time a logical consequence. It was enough to have the firms of the partners in the project demand, without having official cooperation contracts. These low-level criteria of L-II, resulted black-on-white, in the possibility to fund a certain number of projects which would not have been (or were not) approved by the Ministry handling the top-down approach. It is almost impossible to stipulate an official contract between different partners, when high responsibilities are expected (ex: medical centres, hospitals...).

In the Netherlands, and particularly in Flevoland, the foundation creating mentality of the population is a fact, when people discover the goodness, the positive effect on the society of a certain project, it starts "raining" donations, mouth-to-mouth publicity spreads out the idea of the project, volunteers offer their devotion. The result of this mentality is the explosion of new partnerships AFTER the project's implementation. These effects, sometimes can be forecasted, but never can be contracted BEFORE the project's implementation.

2.1.2.4 Innovation

The LAG members were not evaluating the project demands only on their innovative character: sometimes innovation was totally absent, sometimes it was only partly included in the project. Funding the infrastructure of a stock-house for organic crops may be not innovative, but the cooperation of 5 organic farmers in the distribution centre was. The surplus value of the project was innovative, while the funding sources were used for “classical” infrastructure. The innovative part of the project could be realised having only firms of the other farmers on the project’s demand.

For the local actors the way of financing of L-II was experienced as innovative: it was possible to receive a funding advance. Furthermore, for the local actors the rules for expenses-evidences were considered clear and logical so the fear to loose funds caused by errors, comparing with former funding programmes, was much less.

2.1.2.5 Multi-sectoral approach

The LAG members were not evaluating the project demands only on their multi-sectoral character: it was the first time for Flevoland to get in contact with Leader, and the region was not ready for the multi-sectoral approach because of its small experience in rural development programmes. It was a conscious choice of the LAG to neglect the multi-sectoriality at the beginning, neither they had the experience to create it.

During the mid-term evaluation, it was stressed that in Flevoland there were realised a lot of small scaled disjointed projects. “They created the pearls, now they had to create the necklace”. During the second half of the Programme Implementation, thanks to the experience of the first half and the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation, the LAG members tried to introduce the multi-sectoriality in some projects by informing the local actors of the possibility of it.

Now in Leader+, multi-sectoriality became more important than innovation.

2.1.2.6 TNC & Networking

At the beginning of the Programme, TNC was not so important in Flevoland. The region was working on its first rural development experiences and time was lacking for international exchange. This was mainly due to the difficult communication between countries. It seemed that the effort was bigger then the results that could be obtained. In the second half of the Programme’s implementation, some TNC cooperations were developed. Low requirements were expected, to give any kind of TNC an opportunity. This had a positive effect: without forcing it, a grow in TNC interest was obtained. As it was all very small scaled, Leader2 funding

(Technical assistance) was used to avoid the more complicated administrative procedures of AEIDL. (funds promoting the design of the co-operation projects).

At the beginning of the Programme, it was difficult to circulate the existence of LEADER and its concept. Newspapers were hardly interested to publish about Leader projects, and when they did, often they forgot to mention the name LEADER, but talked about “European Funding Programme”, “European Money” etc... The Leader-signboards, hanged up in every project, did not have a meaning for the local people. Inviting public persons, like Urbanus (belgian entertainer) and the Queen’s sister at project openings or other public meetings, was a way to attract local and national press. Later, when the name and the concept of Leader was better known, people recognised the Leader-symbol on the signboards and realised that a lot of initiatives were born thanks to Leader, and they started to think about new project ideas. Once Leader was known in the area, the way to find the LAG was very short. This had also negative effects: while at the beginning the sequence of developing a project was making a concept, then see if there was the possibility to get financing, sometimes getting financing was becoming the first aim, and creating a project around it to get it Leader-compatible the second step. Fortunately, the experience of the LAG members had grown enough to filter out the project demands based on “there is the Leader money-box, what shall we propose to get some money of it?”

Networking between the 4 Dutch LAGs was initially difficult, but improved when the informal network was formalised. During L-II, international networking was more stimulated, while now during L+, networking between the L+-areas has become more important.

2.1.2.7 Financing

The way of financing was seen as very positive: once the LAG approved a project, the Province agreed for European funding. Co-financing caused some troubles as Municipalities were asked to foresee the co-financing for the projects on their territory but they did not foresee a Leader budget in their yearly estimate or did not agree with the innovative character of the project.

2.1.2.8 Conclusion of the First Session

How are these significant issues related to the operational principles of LEADER?

The Bottom-up approach and the local partnership were considered the most important issues in Flevoland. In the area they were not brought as a requirement “a priori”, but they were developed parallel with the diffusion of the Leader concept. The area and its population had the time to let these issues grow, bottom-up and partnership “bubbled up” slowly at the beginning of Leader II and knew an exponential growth towards the end of the Programme

What behavioural change can be observed? How do we assess this change?

The LAG, being a mix of private & public, functioned without any political influence and without prejudices. It was the first time that local actors got involved in the process from idea to concept, in which they took also their responsibility. Consulting bureau's, specialised in public administration support, were left out while the local population, it did not matter which education or background they had, were stimulated to express their ideas, making up the project demand etc... It was possible to motivate the local actors to do so, because the LAG and the Provincial Administration handled with an open mind, invested time in visiting the beneficiaries at home etc... The distance between Local actors and LAG (Provincial Administration) disappeared, and the consciousness that working together gives amazing results (1 plus 1 is more than 2) for the area and its population, caused a change in mentality for both sides.

What behavioural change did not take place (although it was expected)? How do we assess this non-change?

The mentality of mutual dependency (local population needs public administration and vice versa) did not take place at municipality level and in other public administrations (administration for building licences, regional planning, district water board, etc...). Only the public administrations involved in the LAG (so Provincial), were able to open their mind in the bottom-up approach, the new partnerships and area based approach. The other administrations, not prepared for the Leader approach, did not have confidence in the small-scaled and innovative projects. At municipality level, often it was difficult to get co-financing. Although they were informed about Leader-II at the beginning of the implementation period, they did not foresee a budget in their yearly estimate. It proves that there must be invested in education and support for a "fan" of public administrations and not only the ones which are directly involved with LEADER.

In which way can the behavioural change related with material effects in the area?

Leader 2 has become a concept for the local actors, and the Leader sign boards hanging up by the projects are noticed by the local population. Leader has caused a dynamism which continues to work on the image of the rural area. (like the Project coordinator said: if the next European Programme, after L+, will get another name then Leader, we'll have to start all over again...)

2.1.2.9 Hypothesis

Thanks to the Leader approach, there is also invested in people, and not only in the projects. The extreme homogeneity of the area and the clear identity of the local actors, created space for small scaled and innovative projects, which wouldn't have been realised with the "classic" top-down approach.

The LAG did not push the Leader approaches, but let bubble up initiatives from the inside of the area and its population. This had a very positive effect: Leader was growing slowly but it matured together with the local actors and administrations. The bottom-up approach was seen as the most important, although beneficiaries expressed also the danger of it: public administrations should always be involved in the procedures to stress the importance in the local context and to avoid personal profit. Projects should not only improve family quality or income, should add a surplus value in the local context. Local actors did not know if their project was making part of a certain local area strategy.

The particular administrative context, namely 1 person which is Provincial employee and in the same time also L-II project coordinator, had a very positive effect. In paragraph 2.1.3.2, where this issue was discussed by means of a causal loop diagram, the possible negative effects were searched, although in the case of Flevoland they did not verify.

Leader-II can be seen as a complementary Programme for Objective 1, without overlapping it.

The lack of means and services in the area, together with the enthusiastic population, seems a good cocktail to stimulate Leader-like projects.

Its success in Flevoland is partly due to the “entrepreneurs-spirit” of the population and its demographic growth.

2.1.3 Causal Loop Diagrams

2.1.3.1 The horizontal partnership influenced the Programme implementation

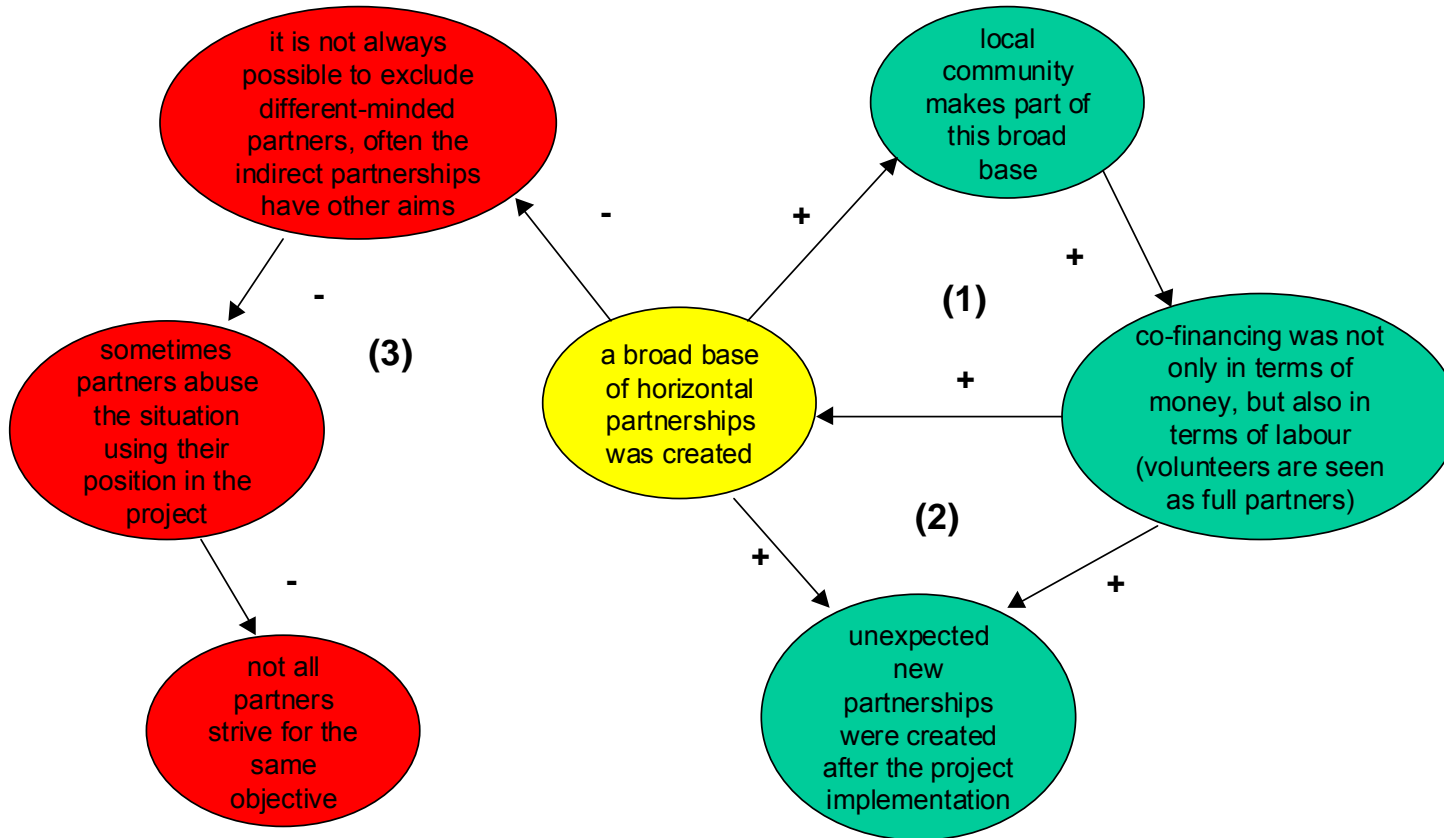
See Figure 1

2.1.3.2 The management authority and the LAG coordinator are one and the same person of the managing authority (Provincial Administration)

During this causal loop diagram this issue was chosen because of its highly positive effect in Flevoland. The members of this session were asked to brainstorm about the possible negative effects this kind of situation could bring, although they did not verify. See Figure 2

Figure 1

Flevoland 1st Causal Loop Diagram: How the horizontal partnership influenced the Programme implementation



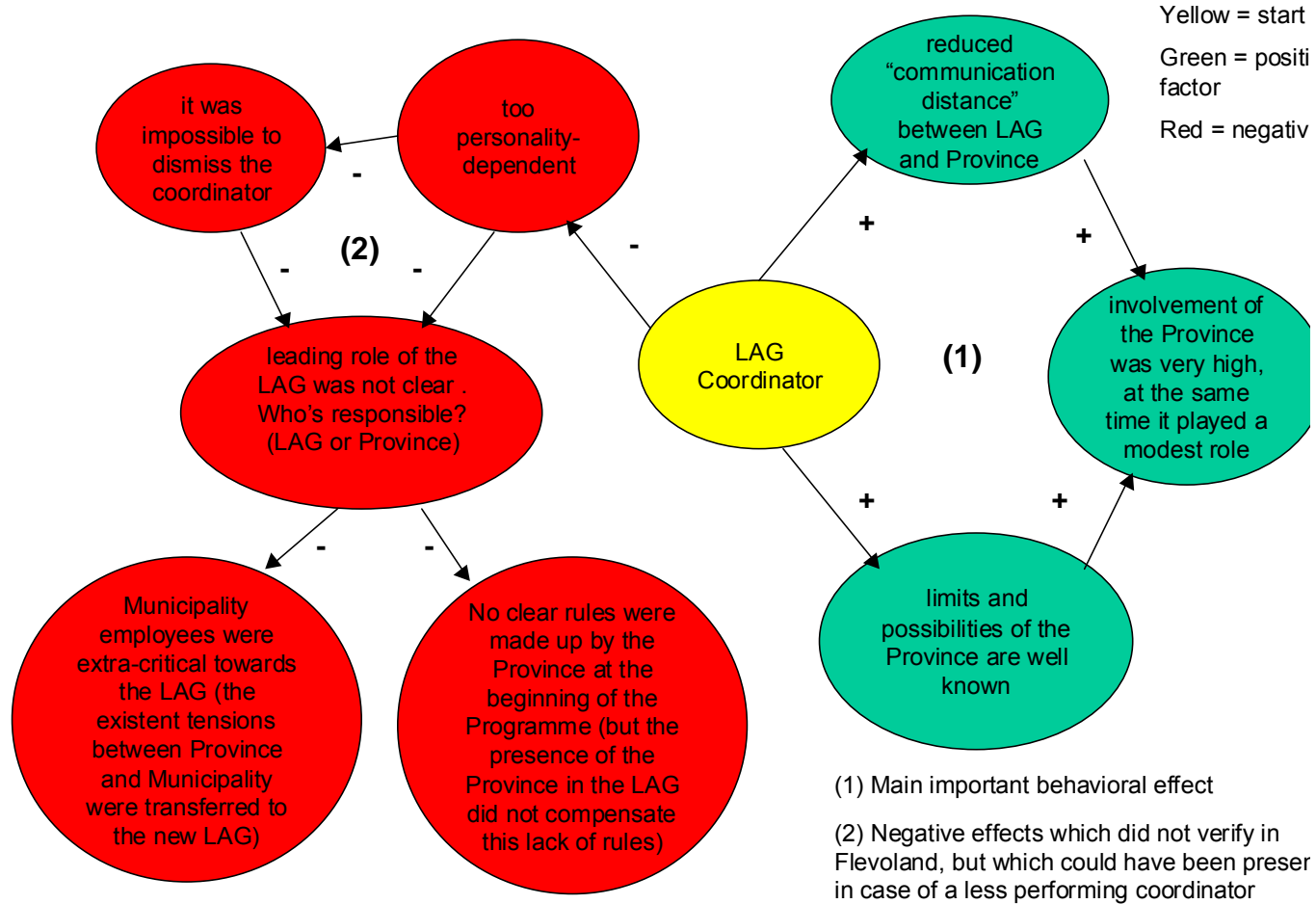
(3) Negative effect without concrete negative feedback

Yellow = start point
Green = positive factor
Red = negative factor

(1) 1st basic positive feedback
(2) Main important behavioral effect

Figure 2

Flevoland 2nd Causal Loop Diagram: The management authority and the LAG coordinator are one and the same person of the Managing Authority



2.1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations according to the four questions/answers produced during the second session.

What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operational principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?

See paragraph *Formulations, justifications and reactions*

What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

- the LAG and its function were not well known at the beginning of the Programme: clear rules should be defined (for LAG members, local administrations and local actors)
- co-financing sometimes works contra-productive: local authorities and LAG sometimes do not agree on the importance of a project. Months of project preparation, study, actor's motivation etc.... risk to be lost by negative advice from the Municipality
- The double role of the Provincial Administrations should be well defined: refusal for co-financing is not always motivated
- A framework or local area strategy in which projects should make part can avoid the effect of disjointed projects

What should be changed at the level of programme administrations and official networks (regional, national) in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

- ALL public administrations should be involved in the Programme (contractual), firms and formal agreements could prevent opposition and delays
- Co-financing should be foreseen in the budget of all involved Administrations
- Mentality change should be stimulated in other relevant public administrations
- Maybe other relevant public administrations should participate in the LAG, problem is that the total number of LAG members could become too high (private partners should be well represented as well).

What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?

- open mind of ALL public administrations towards rural development
- clear “identity” of rural development in the local context
- somebody of the town council should be present in the LAG, to support the interaction between rural and urban areas
- programme’s implementation period should be long enough, no “hap-snap”, possibility for mainstreaming
- Objectives of Administrations and Leader objectives should be tuned
- Project evolutions in the future should be evaluated: will small-scaled projects survive in the future, will they satisfy the local actor in the future? What about regulations, won't they oblige the beneficiary to new investments which could bring the cost-benefit balance in danger? Will enlarging the scale of a project still fit within the rural context?

2.1.5 Personal impression

Personal impression of the whole process, feedback for the core team (on the method, on the instructions).

The two sessions were organised in two days and in different places (2 Leader projects). During these sessions the beneficiaries were not the same. The rules of the guidelines were *personalised* because it was not possible to start the second session with the hypothesis of the first session.

During the first session, two families with farmer roots participated. They realised small scaled projects involving partners from private sectors and setting up formal cooperations with medical institutions. During the second session, other beneficiaries with manager backgrounds participated. They were able to handle with the more “technical” build-up of the session. During both sessions different types of positive and negative experiences came up to the surface. Once the train got in movement, it was hardly to stop it. Lots of impressions, results and experiences should never been obtained by means of a questionnaire. More sessions would have resulted in even more results, we had the maximum result with maximum effort, but did not reach the bottom yet.

All participants of the focus group were quite well informed about the Leader characteristics (except the beneficiaries), probably due to the AEIDL questionnaires and the Q202 questionnaire. Although it was sometimes very difficult to guide the discussion for every Leader characteristic separately as their boundaries are not so clear (see paragraphs from 2.2.2.1 to

2.2.2.7). It was preferred to try to not disturb the discussion, to let emerge the different opinions without forcing them in every feature. But I do confirm that these Leader characteristics are an extremely useful instrument for analysing the local situation, and that this methodological approach is underlining the added value of LEADER respect to the more « traditional » programmes.

2.2 Westhoek (BE)

2.2.1 Introduction

2.2.1.1 Name of LAG and interlocutors, participants; dates

LAG: Leader-II team (LAG Westhoek)

Interlocutor: Sabine Derck

Participants

Date: 23th May 03

Total number: 10

Place: Provincial Administration, Esenkasteel, Diksmuide (B)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Stefaan Gheysen (*)	Co-ordinator Tourist projects in LAG (head Tourist Product Development)
Lieven Louwagie	Co-ordinator Agricultural projects in LAG (employee Province)
Sabine Derck	secretary of LAG (employee Province)
Els Soenen	financial coordinator for projects funded by EAGGF (employee Flemish Administrations, agri- and horticulture)
Brigitte de Wulf	Beneficiary (Store and art gallery managed by mentally disabled persons)
Geert Vandewalle	Beneficiary (sale of organic products by mentally disabled persons)
Christine Delefortrie (**)	Beneficiary (horse tours and herb garden)
Patrick Braem (**)	Beneficiary (care farm receiving disabled persons)
Filip Boury	Role 1 evaluator (employee Province, area and environment coordinator Westhoek)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

(*) only present during first session

(**) only present during second session

2.2.1.2 Description of the process from the first contact until taking leave

On 2,3 and 4 April I was in Westhoek (Provincial Administrations) for a personal visit, organized by the Leader-II secretary (Sabine Derck). The aim of the visit was the following:

- solving the black factual questions of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires;
- talking about the possibility of being a Focus Group

We solved the black factual questions of Q34 and Q202, and together with Filip Boury, we discussed the possibility for being a Focus Group, and the modalities to do it. They choose to participate and to organize it as a one day session, located in the Provincial Administration itself. Unfortunately, our agenda was rather plenty in these days, and no time was left to go for a ride in the area to visit some L-II projects.

2.2.2 Formulations, justifications and reactions

What hypotheses did the evaluators formulate, how did they justify them and how did the local actors react when they were confronted to them?

The Q202 questionnaire was studied and highlights of every Leader characteristic were used to lead the discussion of the first session. In this way it was possible to discover some more details of “curious” results of the Q202, and to fill up gaps where the questionnaire was not giving a clear response or if opinions between the different LAG members were varying a lot.

2.2.2.1 Area-based approach

The indispensable connection with the 5b area-delimitation was too restrictive. Westhoek is already a good delineated area with its own identity, the very capricious (too small) delimitation of the L-II area by the relevant Flemish Ministry, caused a lot of trouble “in situ”:

- a lot of leader-like ideas were born in non 5b municipalities and they felt injured because they also did not have had 5b possibilities (although they have a low population density, but were left out of the 5b-area).
- The delimitation was made using administrative boundaries of *fractions* of municipalities, sometimes the left and right side of the street just defined who was in Leader and non-Leader zones.

To overcome the problem, sometimes project ideas were funded by INTERREG, one local actor moved into the Leader-area to get L-II funding!

The 10% clause was applied in a way to obtain as much as possible funding possibilities: less L-II funding and more co-financing was given, and finally almost 27% of the total budget was invested outside the Leader-II area.

2.2.2.2 Bottom-up

The experience of Leader I did not cause a “break through” of the bottom-up approach: the OP was kept on Flemish level, because they considered the Provincial Administrations not ready to do it. Also the co-financing was playing a role in it (see Financing).

To get the local actors in contact with L-II, a large information campaign was set up, 10 of the 12 municipalities were visited, the press publicized about L-II, the 5b-magazine, already known by a big number of farmers in the area, preserved space for L-II.

Although the local actors got in contact with L-II and started to develop ideas, the Provincial Administration and the LAG preferred to apply some “top-down” in the “bottom-up”: all projects had to fit in the “local-area-strategy”, developed by different local administrations. This combination of top-down and bottom-up was seen as very positive by the local actors as the administrations, the first had the idea to contribute to the image of the area, to realize a project which had some benefit also for the community, the second had a clear idea of the aim of the Programme and could guide the local actors in it. Another reason of this approach was the short implementation period of L-II in the area, there was no time to let “bubble up” the ideas as in 2 years all projects had to be approved.

2.2.2.3 Partnership

A particular partnership was developed: while the LAG was advising and supporting the local actors in the process from project idea to proposal, a Management Committee (MaC) was the deciding organ to approve the project proposals and to credit the European funding. The LAG members presented the projects in the MaC, who decided by consensus. Sometimes this was experienced as frustrating by the local actors, especially by negative advice (they could not present their proposal personally). On the other hand, the LAG members were appreciating a lot this way of working, do not having the “moral responsibility” of the decision, they did not have difficulties to go on working with the same actors by negative advice.

In the LAG the members were divided in tourism, agricultural, etc... responsables. This was seen as very positive by the local actors (high professional support) and accelerated a lot the decision to propose the project in the MaC (no extra study) as the implementation period was very short. A negative effect was the low multi-sectoral approach, it was difficult to break off the “walls” around every single sector.

This sectoral separation, starting already at the Flemish level where the structural funds are managed by different persons (one for EAGGF, one for ERDF, etc....and not one person for one Programme), led to a different financial management of tourism and agricultural projects: after approval by the MaC, two ways existed to foresee in co-financing. The tourism projects passed directly to the Provincial Administrations for co-financing, while the agricultural projects passed by the “Agricultural Advising Group” before arriving at the Provincial Administrations.

2.2.2.4 Innovation

Having the possibility to give support to the local actors (main task of LAG) was experienced as very innovative: the first time there was communication between public and private, there was time foreseen to spend with the local actors in order to help them.

Innovation was seen as very important, projects could be absolute innovative, innovative for Flanders or innovative for Westhoek: sometimes by means of multi-sectorality (disabled persons sell organic products), by means of networking (different institutions and associations exchange information on how to organize jobs for disabled persons), by means of the originality of the project (adventure holidays, new farm techniques, etc....).

Some projects did not make it, the innovation is sometimes a risk (ex. Taxi-bicycles). Sometimes the projects were realized, although the “innovation touch” did not make it (ex. Bed & breakfast realized, surplus value not). Sometimes innovation techniques in agriculture were technically seen as highly innovative, but had a negative influence on the landscape (particular plastic greenhouses).

Sometimes the innovation condition put the LAG in difficulties: a children’s farm, not approved although it could be considered innovative in the area, was realized without funding and became very successful, another very innovative project did not make it because of a incompetence of the local actor.

2.2.2.5 Multi-sectoral approach

The way of working of the Flemish Administrations, the Provincial Administrations and the LAG was not stimulating the multi-sectoral approach as responsibilities were inserted for every SF/sector. The LAG tried to introduce the multi-sectorality in some projects, but did not have the time to introduce it integrally in all project proposals. Although the local actors had multi-sectoral ideas, as project proposals sometimes covered two or three different sectors.

2.2.2.6 TNC & Networking

The implementation period was too short to invest in TNC. Some small initiatives were taken, but they ended together with the end of the Programme.

Thanks to L-II, networking in Westhoek knew an important local development (local farm products, visit farms, etc) Sometimes it was enough to give occasion to networking while now the network is surviving on its own, in some cases the Provincial Administration continue to finance them, as they understood the importance of networking and the continue support in professional advice.

Local actors asked advice to other L-II beneficiaries, before proposing new projects.

At regional and national level, networking was a real disaster, very few experiences were exchanged although the importance of it was considered very high (the short implementation period was considered the main cause)

2.2.2.7 Financing

The Flemish Ministry thought: "if we have to foresee the co-financing, we'll decide about the OP". The result was that the OP was developed without any link towards the Leader-area. It was kept very large for interpretations, in this way the Provincial Authorities could fill it up in a "personal" way, but this had the consequence that juridically it was very weak. No co-financing from municipality-level was foreseen.

The heavy administrative procedures were seen as the most important hindrance for the local actors. Some realized their project without L-II funding, although they knew about it. The Flemish Administration replied that these procedures are required from the EC, and therefore couldn't be simplified locally.

2.2.2.8 Conclusion of the First Session

How are these significant issues related to the operational principles of LEADER?

Innovation was considered the most important issue in Westhoek. Small scaled projects were evaluated on their innovation to fill up the white spots left by Objective 5b) in the local area strategy.

What behavioural change can be observed? How do we assess this change?

The cooperation between LAG and the beneficiaries opened the consciousness of the last of their capacities to open their spirit and realize their initiatives. Beneficiaries became active

actors, and the feeling that they personally contributed to the image and the liveability of the area was new for them.

Thanks to L-II, some the Flemish Regulations for agriculture have been revised and became more Leader-minded, which opens the door for mainstreaming.

What behavioural change did not take place (although it was expected)? How do we assess this non-change?

Leader has become a concept for the beneficiaries, but not for all local actors. It did not cause a big mentality change, the mainstreaming from L-I to L-II to L-+ did not take place as Leader is still seen as a means to obtain certain objectives, but not as a concept.

While the Flemish Agricultural Regulations were revised, the regulations for Tourism did not at all. There is still no decree for trial projects as they are seen as personal private initiatives, and therefore wouldn't need any public aid...

Important L-II projects which had survival problems (most of the time "growing projects" in the care sector) could not count on further financing by the Flemish Ministry and just died after Leader-II. The Provincial Administration tried to furnish some co-financing but could not satisfy the demand.

In which way can the behavioural change related with material effects in the area?

Local actors are working in a active way on the image of the area. New networks were created, sometimes supported administratively by the Province.

2.2.2.9 Hypothesis

Thanks to a clear local-area-strategy, made up by the local public administrations, and the initiatives of the local actors, it was possible to create a lot of small-scaled projects. The combination of bottom-up in a fixed frame (top-down) was seen as highly productive in the very short implementation period of the Programme.

The Leader-area was very homogeneous but too small, this was caused by the already unsatisfactory 5b-delimitation. Leader-II can be seen more than a complementary Programme for Objective 5, by means of the area-choice (4 municipalities excluded from 5b were included in L-II) and by means of the content (L-II concept and scale).

Although Westhoek is relatively "rich" and developed (obj5 and not obj1), the main objective is not yet reached: L-II was an impulse to create a certain dynamism, but still has to be stimulated in the future.

L-II improved the image of the area, weaknesses became strengths, “rural’ does not mean ‘under developed” anymore.

L-II did not achieve to promote the revision of certain Flemish regulations for environment, landscape and recreation: the message was not “strong” enough to be taken into account in higher administrative levels.

Local actors were very satisfied by the high professional support of the LAG. LAG members were divided by typology of projects (responsible for tourism, agriculture, art and handicraft), although it was limiting the multi-sectorial approach. The LAG did not have the decisional responsibility of the projects, an intermediate organ (Management Committee) was installed to decide which projects could be approved.

2.2.3 Causal Loop Diagrams

2.2.3.1 The interaction between the Management Committee, the LAG and the local actors

See Figure 3

2.2.3.2 The relation between the area strategy and innovation, and their effects on the image of Westhoek

This issue probably was too complicated, as “the image of Westhoek” was not an easy subject and caused some trouble by the participants to reflect on. Some positive and negative effects were pronounced, although the information is not enough to design a causal loop diagram.

Positive effects:

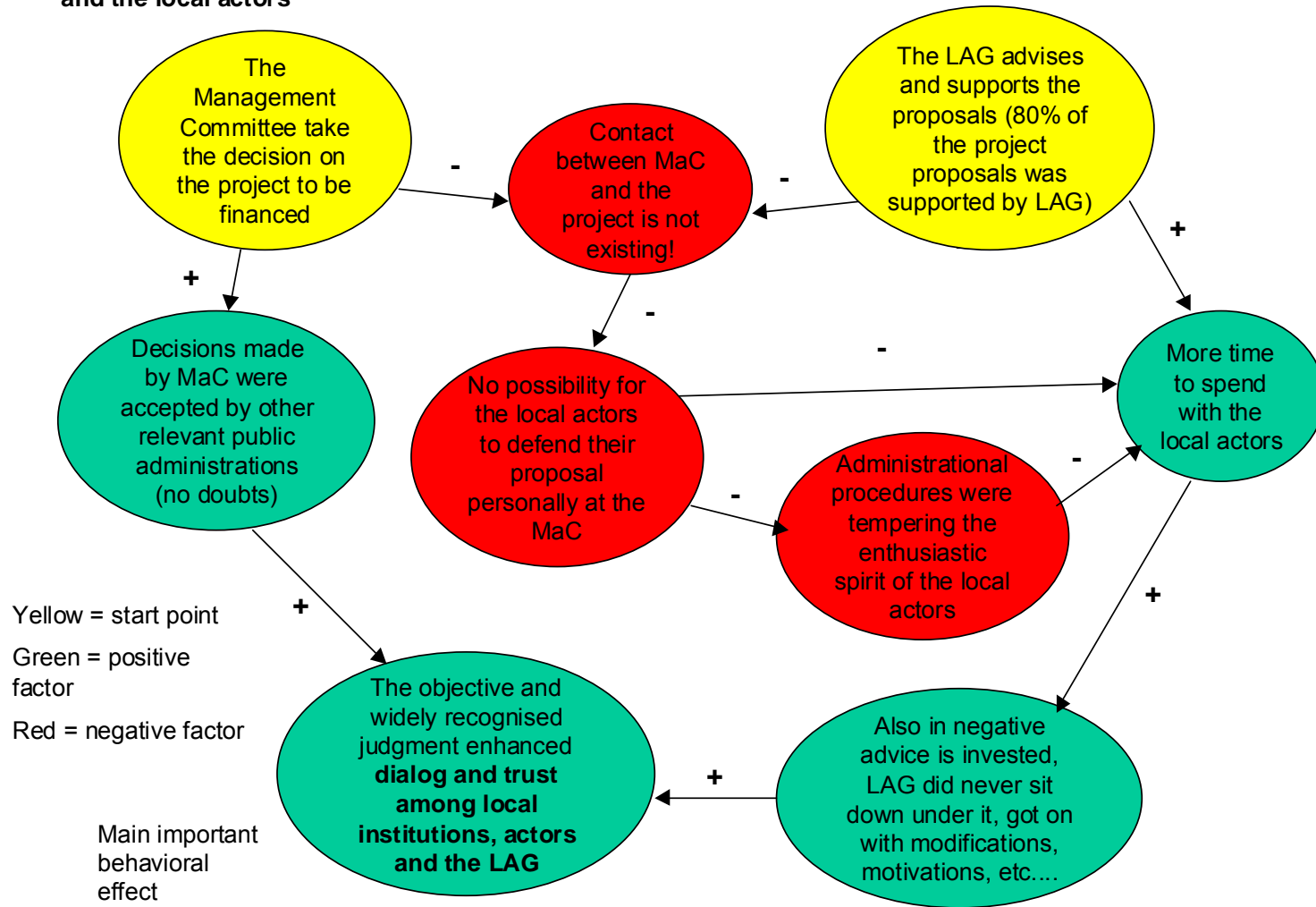
- Vast knowledge of the area is used to make up a specific strategy where innovation can be accentuated
- Continuity: the strategy is building on the existing image, and tries to reinforce it, improve it.
- Name “Westhoek” is overall present (and not Leader)
- All interested parties know each other

Negative effects:

- Also the Provincial Administration is one of the parties, with its own limitations as public administration
- The local area strategy can also hamper innovation

Figure 3

Westhoek 1st Causal Loop Diagram: The interaction between the Management Committee, the LAG and the local actors



2.2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations according to the four questions/answers produced during the second session.

What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operational principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?

See paragraph *Formulations, justifications and reactions*

What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

- The composition of the LAG should be larger, to avoid a too “public administration” approach
- The implementation period should be longer
- The experiences of Leader II should be transmitted to other local public administrations

What should be changed at the level of programme administrations and official networks (regional, national) in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

- The Flemish Ministry should be replaced by the Province as Managing Authority for the OP
- Some Flemish regulations are negatively affecting the implementation of the Leader Programme
- If the administrative procedures are obligatory, explain WHY, communicate and try to make disappear the prejudices towards the public administrations.
- Administrative procedures should be proportioned with the scale of the project (request from EC to foresee the same documents for small-scaled projects is not realizable)
- The positive effects of the L-II approach should be stimulated in other relevant public administrations
- “growing projects” should have the opportunity to change during the implementation period, what could not be used in the first year, should be easily transferred into the second year, also AFTER the implementation period (prediction is very difficult). A more flexible regulation from the EC should be recommendable. (During the discussion

emerged this rigidity of the EC regulations, but it was not clear if in fact these regulations were rigid or if the local authorities interpreted them in this way)

- Coordination from the EC towards the Ministries should be more transparent to prevent the “snowball effect” of unclear rules transmitted to all other levels of administrations. (also here it was not clear if there was a communication problem between EC and the Flemish Ministry, or between Ministry and local administrative levels)

What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?

- At least 4 years of effective implementation period, after the running-in period
- a local area strategy is indispensable, and should be flexible enough to promote innovation
- guarantee the continuity of “growing projects” (foresee in further financing and support)
- ex-ante evaluation is completely senseless, while mid-term and ex-post are highly recommendable
- transparent communication is important (between public institutes, private-public etc...if the higher administrative levels can send clear messages to the lower levels, the LAG does not need to have the financial responsibility of the Programme, which is the case now in L+, the negative effect of it is that now LAG members should specialize in European, National and Regional regulations, while before it was enough to know the local regulations)
- certainty of co-financing: the EU and National (State, Province) financing should be decided in one step (like now in L+)

2.2.5 Personal impression

The L-II Programme has been implemented with a rather “public” minded approach, which I do not consider as negative: the very short implementation period did not give the opportunity to experiment. I did notice that on Flemish level, the need to keep a check on the lower administrative levels was felt as very important (afraid to lose control), while I noticed that the Provincial Administration would be able to deal with the new tasks.

While the first session was going very well, the second was troubling a little: maybe working on the hypothesis and the causal loop diagrams was experienced as too “technical” while during the first session everybody felt free to speak. (maybe 2 sessions in 1 day is also asking too much energy)

The roles of the ex-ante and ex-post evaluations were not fully understood. The ex-ante evaluation remains a difficult exercise, may be it is not yet effective enough. In general the decision taken by the Commission to call “ex-post evaluation” which was indeed a “Final evaluation” (see COM guidelines) was criticized. Furthermore, a final evaluation is indispensable to avoid losing the available information at local level (LAG members who leave the LAG, or other relevant stakeholders) but is, in fact different from an ex-post evaluation. For Westhoek, the ex-post evaluation was carried out by the University of Gent but does not take into consideration the features and the implementing processes (see paragraph 2.3.2).

2.3 Report on national and description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level

Complete overview per member state and per OP

What evaluation was done at programme level (statutory evaluation reports, specific studies, data collection, taking account of specific features etc.)? What problems and constraints, if any, were encountered?

How were evaluations processed at national level (Summaries, transmissions to the Commission etc.)?

The roles of the ex-ante and ex-post evaluations were not fully understood. The ex-ante evaluation remains a difficult exercise, may be it is not yet effective enough. The Commission made a mistake calling “ex-post evaluation” which was indeed a “Final evaluation” (see COM guidelines). A final evaluation is indispensable to avoid losing the available information at local level (LAG members who leave the LAG, or other relevant stakeholders).

2.3.1 Ex-ante

Only for Lauwersland (Groningen, NL) an ex-ante evaluation was carried out.

2.3.2 Mid-term

The 4 Dutch Leader-areas carried out a mid-term evaluation mid 1997. It was effectuated by MHP (Valkenburg) and the reports had the aim to describe the following for every area:

- *actualising the setting of the programme*
- *analysing the progress of the programme, and*
- *effects of the programme*

In Flevoland the importance of the monitoring of the Leader-initiative was stressed, “to measure = to know”, and the application of project-related indicators was suggested for both quality control and the final programme results. The working of the LAG was considered adequate, but the importance of networking and TNC was underlined to update continuously the programme marketing. Moreover, the need to have more eye for cohesion was mentioned (multi-sectoriality). Periodical and critical self-evaluations were suggested to further personalise the realisation of the programme.

In Drenthe the monitoring resulted worked out reasonably well, and therefore it was able to get a clear picture of the progress of the programme and the projects involved. Although external expertise (on call) and an upgrade of the current monitoring system are suggested to improve still the effectiveness.

2.3.3 Ex-post

In Both nations (Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands) the physical information (output and result indicators) were not collected during the Programme implementation. The relevant institutions blame the absence of a clear reference for the monitoring and evaluation at the beginning of the Leader Programme. Therefore, the systematic collection of output and result indicators was not effectuated, furthermore the reference to Leader in the relevant STAR document for the period 1994-1999, seemed too much based on objective 5b).

In the Dutch ex-post evaluations, this lack of indicators is mentioned and therefore the report is a qualitative evaluation and no quantitative evaluation. For each area, every Leader characteristic is described by its implementation and its effect and eventually some recommendations are formulated. In the national ex-post evaluation, the four Leader areas were compared, differences were focussed and different results were discussed.

The Dutch ex-post evaluations (national and regional, and networking) were carried out by the same consulting bureau (ETC Ecoculture). The homogeneous and clear structure of each regional report simplified the interpretation of it, in the national report, the same contents were presented in another way, which gave the opportunity to confront the different areas between them, to formulate new conclusions.

For the summary of the 4 Dutch ex-post evaluations, see ANNEX I

In the Flemish ex-post evaluations, it is not so clear if they considered their report qualitative or quantitative, as they selected a certain number of projects (20% of total number) for which a certain number of indicators (which?) and information were collected in situ and at the LAG by the evaluators. A summary for each project is reported, and conclusions and recommendations were formulated. None of the Leader characteristics was described, so it was not possible to

understand how the LAG and local administrations applied the Leader characteristics, and what their effects were in every Leader area.

All evaluations reported in tables I and II were transmitted to the Commission.

Table I

List of evaluation reports for the Netherlands

OP	Title	Author	Date
National	National Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
National	Evaluation Leader Network Netherlands	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Lauwersland	Regional Leader ex-ante evaluation		
Lauwersland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Lauwersland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Lauwersland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
Friesland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Friesland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Friesland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
South-West Drenthe	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
South-West Drenthe	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
South-West Drenthe	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
Flevoland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Flevoland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Flevoland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	

Table II

List of evaluations reports for Flandres (Belgium)

OP	Title	Author	Date
Westhoek	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	University Gent	June 2001
Meetjesland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	University Gent	June 2001

2.4 Overall assessment

Usefulness and relevance of the evaluations for learning at local and institutional levels according to the opinion of the geographical evaluators

2.4.1 The Netherlands

The Leader characteristics were considered, their implementation, their effects and eventual recommendations were formulated. The questionnaires of AEIDL contributed to create a general view of the programme implementation

Conclusions and recommendations were specified for every Leader characteristic.

Every evaluation has a summary in English (see ANNEX I for the summaries of the Dutch ex-post evaluations).

In general it can be said that the Dutch reports have a high quality, as conclusions and recommendations were useful for both the local administrations, LAG and the GE. Also during the focus group, Flevoland expressed a positive advice on the learning of the mid-term and ex-post evaluations.

The evaluation activities can be seen as a continuous and positive exercise, Continuous because beside the interim evaluation also informal self-evaluations took place, positive because it was based on the Leader approach and its implementation. The AEIDL questionnaires probably helped to involve the LAG in the evaluation process.

The only fact which remains a demand is the lack of the physical indicator collection: in the mid-term evaluations their importance was underlined and also in the AEIDL questionnaires it is clear that the European Observatory considers these indicators as very important (these parts of the questionnaires were left open). If it is true that a clear reference from the Commission was lacking, the local authorities should have understood and should have taken initiative for a better monitoring of the programme.

2.4.2 Flanders (Belgium)

The ex-post evaluation carried out by the University of Gent mentions the EC guidelines for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II but in fact does not take them into consideration. The LEADER global and specific objectives and features are not assessed and the report does not provide any assessment on the immediate and final impacts.

Also having a look to the applied methodology it seems that it was focussed on the traditional methodology foreseen for the Objective 5b) programs. Indeed it was

Indeed the LEADER approach was completely missing in these evaluations.

The evaluators expressed a general positive judgement but the provided conclusions and remarks seem weak and they are not basically justified.

The late approval of the OP (dec 1997) is just mentioned, but is not considered as a problem and the related evaluator conclusion is “the procedures should be simplified focussing on the financial absorption capacity.

The final actors are considered the most important factor for the Programme success (their innovative spirit and personality) while nothing is said about the working of the LAG (excluding that it supported them). It seems that the evaluators did not involve the LAG and the Provincial Administrations in the evaluation process. The description of the data collection describes the study of the relevant documentation (with support from the Province when necessary) and the data collection of the selected projects in situ. Although the task of the LAG was described and its importance was underlined, nothing was said about its programme strategy and working process.

Indeed the evaluator did not analyse the process and the impact, he just limited his attention on the projects but also without assessing their singular impacts.

For the GE the evaluation report was of low value, and also the LAG and Province were unsatisfied about it. The LAG could not learn anything from it, for the GE it was impossible to get a general overview of the Programme implementation.

In Flanders, evaluation activities during the implementation period were completely missing, so there was no continuity at all. Probably the main cause is once more the very late Programme approval (Dec 1997).

2.4.3 Key recommendations on future evaluations (LEADER+, rural development programmes, structural funds)

The presence from the beginning of a clear reference for monitoring and evaluation activities is the “sinae qua non” condition for obtaining a complete data collection from local to central level. The vertical partnership in this case is of extreme importance: a clear constant dialogue between levels of what has to be measured and followed up can lead to a satisfactory monitoring. A good monitoring is the source for a good evaluation.

In the evaluation process ALL stakeholders should be involved, and especially who is involved with the programme implementation. Evaluation processes should be continuous, and should develop both the evaluation-culture and the actors who are evaluated.

The mid-term evaluation should be considered as essential. It is very difficult to carry out a high quality ex-post evaluation (read: Final evaluation at the programme level) based on a “evaluation desert”. The ex-post evaluation should complete the evaluation process of the programme period, and should not be a “snap-shot’ action realised because of legal obligation.

The recipe of the focus group could function not only in the ex-post period but also and especially during the implementation period. It could be an extremely useful instrument of self-assessment for the LAG and the local administration.

The role and importance of the ex-ante evaluation is not fully understood. It would be recommendable to improve the information towards the relevant administrations about it, as ex-ante evaluations could become the framework of the entire evaluation process (if we have a good start, the successive evaluations probably will be of good quality too).

The evaluation instruments for Leader+ have improved a lot respect to Leader2 and besides they were also made available ever since the beginning of the programme. This should be an advantage, but we should not forget that these instruments have to be distributed, explained and discussed by the different stakeholders to obtain a satisfactory use of it. The networks could play an indispensable role in it.

In the case of regional Leader programmes, it should be obligatory to carry out also a national evaluation (or at least a comparative study between the different regional evaluations).

2.5 Capitalisation on relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the national and regional evaluation reports of the 34 selected programmes (use the corresponding grid)

Brief summary on:

- *Implementation, effects and recommendations on the specific features*
- *Other important issues, general conclusions and recommendations*

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: Flevoland (NL)

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ complete rural area of Flevoland without urban zones with high population density 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ development of local identity ▪ better use of human resources ▪ better use of local economical/financial resources ▪ better use of cultural-historic sites 	
Bottom-up approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LAG considered innovation and transferability as important in projects, but the active participation of the local actors was the most important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local authorities accept local initiatives ▪ regional actors learned to organise themselves ▪ better identification of local problems and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ coordination between local initiatives and local public administration deserves more attention ▪ knowledge of financial rules at local level should improve
The local group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ project leader of LAG was Provincial employee ▪ LAG proposals were always endorsed by “Gedeputeerde Staten”) ▪ All sectoral interests were represented in the LAG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local actors consider themselves able to take more responsibility ▪ decentralisation of decision responsibility improved cooperation within the LAG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ new LAG members should be prepared by the experiences of experienced LAG members
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ emphasized in the agricultural sector ▪ at the beginning accent on innovative techniques, later accent on combining agriculture with other sectors (care, tourism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flevoland has highest percentage of organic farming in the Netherlands (4%) ▪ Better solutions for social problems ▪ Diversification of the local economy ▪ Improved position on the market ▪ Local regulations hamper innovation 	

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Multisectoral integration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ better feasibility of the projects ▪ the still dominating sectoral organisation of interests still remains a limiting factor ▪ co-financing caused problems 	
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local networking is still in development ▪ participation by coordinator at European Observatory ▪ participation by coordinator at national Leader-II network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ exchange of know-how and best practices between rural areas, organisations and actors ▪ improvement of the access to information ▪ new contacts between actors of different regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ better structuring is required to improve effectiveness ▪ monitoring and evaluation of exchange activities (what was the effect for the visiting group, what was the effect for the receiving group?) ▪ thematic files are useful, but should include also failure stories and not only success
Trans-national cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 transnational visits ▪ 10 visits from other countries to Flevoland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ high cost of TNC limits participation ▪ communication problems (language) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ engage an expert for TNC, specialised to search foreign projects
Decentralised management and financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ short administrative lines, and fast payments ▪ LAG ha large degree of autonomy ▪ Volunteers were allowed to consider voluntary working hours as a local part of co-financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LAG did not follow-up the projects, so no evaluation, and little monitoring ▪ Generally procedures for funding are mentioned to be more effective than other area-programs: with shorter administrative lines and with faster payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop clear rules for the beneficiaries for administration and monitoring ▪ Invest attention in the creation of co-financing at municipality level
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good monitoring and continuous self-evaluation was not emphasised in LEADER-II until this evaluation, when the many questions for learning became clear 	

Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Other important issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ exchange of experiences / technical support ▪ dissemination of information ▪ impact on rural policy making ▪ the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of 5 from other public funds and private sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ overlaps should be reduced. Joint product development and more active collaboration with knowledge centres and other programmes is required ▪ the mandate of the national LEADER network should be extended to all rural areas in the Netherlands ▪ information regarding area specific rural development deserves wider dissemination. Learning points from rural renewal are relevant to policy makers. A national platform with the Ministry of Agriculture would serve this purpose ▪ mainstreaming at national level with the Ministry of Agriculture would require additional budget ▪ more technical assistance should be provided, especially in new areas ▪ more emphasis on reaching critical mass for activities to take off

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: Westhoek (BE)

Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Other important issues	<p>The ex-post evaluation carried out by the University of Gent mentions the EC guidelines for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II but in fact it does not take in into consideration. The LEADER global and specific objectives and features are not assessed.</p>	<p>The report does not provide any assessment on the immediate and final impacts.</p>

3. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

3.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II initiative

Synthesis of the main outcomes and learnings from the LEADER II initiative in the area covered by the geographical evaluator

Although this evaluation is not meant to compare nations, the differences between the Netherlands and Belgium were extremely clear, while differences between OPs of the same country were not so relevant, although their respective typology of areas were. Probably it is due to the management of the public administration who got directly in touch with the Commission. Therefore it can be said that the effect on the LEADER implementation is highly depending on a few initial steps *on the top of the pyramid*.

- **degree of decentralisation of the OP management, and the structure of this managing authority;**
- **administrational level of the source for public co-financing.**

When the OP management remains at regional level, the LAG composition is mainly public, and the approach is similar to a “classic” Programme. When the OP is decentralised to the provincial level, non-public associations were represented in the LAG, and the approach becomes more “bottom-up”. At the same time if the structure of the managing authority is divided in offices per sector, the multi-sectoral approach get in trouble (who will be the responsible office?), if the managing authority of the Programme is installed in one office (one group of employees), the multi-sectoral approach is more stimulated, or at least is not inhibited.

When co-financing is foreseen at higher administrational level, automatically the approach will remain some more “top-down”. The need to keep control over what will be done with “their” money will oblige the lower administrational levels to respect certain rules imposed by the co-financing partner. Co-financing from lower level (municipality, Province) stimulates better the bottom-up approach, but has to be organised before the start of the implementation period. As often not all municipalities of the Leader-area are not (or cannot) be involved in the LAG, these administrations should be informed from the very beginning of the Programme (OP), and should have the opportunity to express their doubts and opinion.

In general can be said that the local population is very positive about the Programme. It was the first time they were involved as active actors in a cooperation with the public authorities. Farmers experienced the different approach from former classic funding programmes, for them it was the first time they could think about agriculture in a larger way, combining it with other

sectors, obtaining a new way of creating income. For the non-farmers, most of the time it was the first time they got in touch with a funding programme. For them, the public administration is not more synonym of the institute which asks you to pay taxes, which plants flowers and trees in your street and thinks about collecting your house refuse. Now the public administration has got a face, is close to the area and its actors, and is working together with these actors on the liveability of the territory.

3.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

Recapitulation of problems and difficulties encountered, of solutions found; comments on methods; proposals for improvement

The recommendation letter was not giving the right message, the respondents considered this evaluation in the first place as another control of the Commission, not as an evaluation seen in the European context which could provide the Commission some indispensable information for the future. I think it would have been more encouraging for the local respondents, receiving the demand to cooperate at the evaluation a few months before our start in January 2003, directly from the Commission. In this way, they would have had some more time to refresh minds and collect data of L-II. The deadline of the first questionnaire was felt as unreasonable, as data was stored in back-ups, former L-II employees had changed office, etc...

Also the start of the GE with “empty hands” was seen as very unprofessional. Why didn’t we receive all the documents from the Commission, which obligatory had to be send to the EC during the implementation period of L-II?

Besides, in January, several respondents were struggling with some additional demands of the Commission on L-II, which they felt as very unreasonable. They said that the rules of the game could not be changed after playing it. I think it was a clear message of communication problems between EC and the different administration levels, it was certainly not clear which physical indicators were required in the Leader2 Programme.

The length of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires was discouraging a lot. The black factual questions, which served as context description for the red and green questions, were blowing up the volume of the questionnaire, and especially for the LAG members (Q202), this task was seen as very boring. I think that the lack of feedback for the respondents was the main cause of the low interest to co-operate.

The focus group has been a very positive experience for all participants. The success of the more “technical” second session (working on the hypothesis, causal loop diagrams) was depending too much on the personal capacities of the participants, but in general, everybody was very satisfied. The clear feedback for every single member of the group, was motivating the

energy of this exercise. Especially the beneficiaries felt honoured to be involved in the process, for them it was the first time they could express their experience towards the Commission. My personal impression is that a two-days workshop is highly recommendable, the one-day workshop in Belgium was rather heavy.

Important was the fact that initially, none of the two respondents was interested to participate as a focus group when I informed them by mail about the working method and the aim. It was the personal visit which made them change idea. It confirms that still nowadays, with all the modern types of communication, some face-to-face communication is required.

The surplus value of information for this evaluation obtained by a focus group, compensate abundantly the effort of it. The energy spend by the GE to try to motivate actors to respond on the green questions in Q202 and Q34, and the frustration because successively they did not, is telling me that it was better doing some more focus groups. Besides, the preparation of the focus group initially seems difficult, but yet the second time you can count on the former experience etc...

My proposal for the future is:

- use one and the same professional data-base system for the data collection AND questionnaires (MS ACCES, or something similar) to avoid errors and useless work.
- Prepare detailed questionnaires only with black and red type questions AND make them so that they can be easily changed in two versions (one for experts, one for normal)
- Try to organise more focus groups in general, and especially try to discover the influence of the higher administrative levels on the effects of the implementation of the programme locally as the vertical partnership remains a key issue.

ANNEX I: Summaries for Flevoland, Lauwersland (Groningen), Drenthe and Friesland carried out by ETC Ecoculture (June 2001, regional ex-post evaluations)

Flevoland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Flevoland. The EC had made available Euro 2.9 million for Flevoland.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in the region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

In Flevoland an active Local Action Group was functioning, with members from public administration at provincial and community level and from various groups of the society. This Group aimed at a good liaison and a good understanding with the communities. Procedures of decision-making were well organised. The co-financing of the projects was well thought through. Although the formal authority for financial and administrative matters was at the level of the provincial management board, the LAG was given a high degree of delegated responsibility.

The original outline of the LEADER program in Flevoland evolved in dialogue with various organisations for development such as: provincial departments, municipal councils, a centre for organic farming, the forum for agriculture and environment, farmers organisations, the Flevoland centre for innovation, and local community organisations. The main characteristics of the program are: strengthening the rural areas, promotion of recreation & tourism and raising the quality of life with low priority for funding of infra-structural works and productive activities.

Innovative and exemplary projects, the replicability and – last but not least – the involvement of local people in planning and implementation, determined the outline of the programme and resulted in the selection of projects. These broad guidelines allowed an equally broad range of initiatives and resulted in a total number of 80 projects. Quantity and diversity was emphasised in early years. At a later stage the integration between individual projects received more attention. During the last years of LEADER – II, the LAG favoured projects with a wider institutional objective: innovative forms of partnership were supported, such as the support platform for agro-environmental management group and the Organic Producers European Network.

LAG Flevoland spent little funds on intermediary organisations or advisors: there is always a direct link between the LAG and the project initiators. The initiators are solely responsible for implementation without intermediaries or project offices being involved.

The **area-approach** has strengthened the feeling of local identity. It has resulted in Flevoland in a better use of human resources. Especially the rather high educational background of the agricultural community and the high rate of social organisation in the area, added to the success of LEADER – II.

The **bottom-up approach** has gained recognition in Flevoland. It increased the development of new and exemplary ideas, it assisted regional actors to organise themselves and it also made project decisions better accepted by local authorities. In some areas a specific regional fund for local initiative clearly has strengthened the commitment of the population. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves quite some attention. Increasing the insight knowledge at the local level in the financial rules may help improve the effectiveness of bottom up.

The effects of the **local public-private partnership** are positive in Flevoland. Although public administration was strongly supporting the functioning of the LAG, a reasonable degree of (delegated) autonomous decision-making was possible (LAG proposals were always endorsed by "Gedeputeerde Staten"). The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. Local partners consider themselves able to take more responsibility, including for co-financing.

Innovative activities were emphasised in the agricultural sector. In the first year, agricultural projects of LEADER had a technically innovative character. Initially, small-scale, transferable initiatives regarding sustainable and ecological farming were granted. Later on the experiences from the field like combining Agriculture and Care and/or Tourism for example, were recognised. More innovative projects based on farmers' ideas with delegated responsibility for implementation, were funded. Supra-regional initiatives and institutional implications got more attention in projects.

In Flevoland, being a newly reclaimed polder, the **multi-sectoral and integrated approach** has been favoured. It suited the character of the region. The approach led to a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves. As constraints people mention basically the increased number of administrative sectoral procedures to be followed. Furthermore the still dominating sectoral organisation of interests and their tendency not to include other sectoral interests in their weighing. In such situations, better funding regulations and better professional guidance in processes of beginning co-operation could be helpful.

Networking and trans-national cooperation is in Flevoland still in development. It is expected that (international) networks will be developed further in LEADER+. Organising networks and exchanges more effectively in future will require better structuring.

Local funding mechanisms and program management. Generally procedures for funding are mentioned to be more effective than other area-programs: with shorter administrative lines and with faster payments. The LAG had a reasonably large degree of autonomy for their own management, mainly in selecting projects and in initiating cooperation. This autonomy counts less for decisions about re-allocation of funds.

The LAG Flevoland has promoted regional funds, in which municipalities ("gemeenten") do participate from the very beginning. In Flevoland volunteers were allowed to consider voluntary working hours as a local part of co-financing.

Good monitoring and continuous self-evaluation was not emphasised in LEADER-II until this evaluation, when the many questions for learning became clear.

The availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of 5 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of Private and Public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER program. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

Lauwersland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Lauwersland. The EC had made available Euro 3.2 million for Lauwersland.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in the region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

Four municipalities in Friesland and three in the province of Groningen together form the region Lauwersland. In the sparsely populated region, farming is important, unemployment rates are rather high, and – consequently – people are moving out. Tourism has a lot of potential, but is underdeveloped. In short: the rural area requires some push. A whole range of projects that

`improve the quality of rural life`, which has become the slogan of all involved, was funded under LEADER – II.

LAG Lauwersland aimed at the integration of the efforts of different actors in rural renewal. The LAG is composed of representatives of both provinces and the seven municipalities. In addition, the various sectors in society are represented: rural tourism, agriculture, entrepreneurs, and local community organisations. Although the formal responsibility is with the Province, the LAG – which is chaired by the provincial representative – is actually responsible. The Lauwersland project office serves as a resource centre. The programme manager oversees the project office in the day-to-day operations.

The main idea of the LEADER-II programme has been formulated as 1) improving the quality of life for the present population, and 2) attract people and business. The LAG worked this out in a strategy with projects in the following sectors: economic development, small and medium sized enterprises, agriculture, cultural heritage, rural tourism and improving local skills & capacity. Over time, projects were added or existing ones omitted. To qualify for LEADER subsidy, initiatives have to be small scale, innovative and need to have the consent of the local population.

Unique for LEADER-II in Lauwersland is the project office. Project LEADERs and coordinators of LEADER-II and other development programmes use the office. Ideally, initiators of projects can consult the project office regarding subsidies. The office is well accessible to local initiative groups and individuals.

The LAG also designed a communication plan with the local population regarding rural development, including a plan to improve communication with the authorities (link to box: improving local skills and capacity). New forms of partnerships of entrepreneurs in tourism, agriculture and small and medium sized enterprises have emerged over time. These partnerships evolved without any statal interference; they are well rooted in society and manage their own organisation.

The organisation in LEADER in Lauwersland differs from the one in other regions as each project has its own implementing agency and project LEADER.

From the early days of LEADER – II the area approach was of utmost important in Lauwersland. It helped strengthening the feeling of regional identity. The binding factor is the Lauwerslake and the characteristic landscape and cultural history. These factors are used in a more integrated development of the region. The provincial authorities indeed have recognised through experiences with LEADER the value of a more integrated area approach in Lauwersland and the need to continue this approach in the future.

The main outline of the programme in Lauwersland as well as the co-funding, was decided upon in the early stages of LEADER – II. There was little room left for own initiative. Commitment of the population has to be gained later on. This was felt as top down rather than **bottom up** development. It was only later in the programme that the LAG started to recognise the importance of community participation and participatory methodologies. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves a lot of attention.

The LAG-Lauwersland aimed at integrating various actors in one local group. As a result, the LAG became a unique blend of provinces, co-funding and various private and public actors. Such a broad, target oriented collaboration or **partnership** between various programmes had a positive impact. The LAG Lauwersland is the most innovative partnership in LEADER – II. The merger of different development organisations, even beyond rigid provincial boundaries, is unique for this part of the country.

Another LEADER **innovation** is related to funding. A representative example is the cultural heritage lodging “Borch”. As several institutions got together to implement this project, they succeeded in tapping new sources of funding.

Good examples of **integrated approaches** are found in the activities to develop tourism in Lauwersland: Tourism was integrated in nature in the ‘Natuurgericht Maatregelenplan Lauwersmeer’, and combined with culture in the projects ‘Cultuurhistorisch Erfgoed en Cultuurtoerisme’. In other examples, farming is combined with tourism and selling regional products. This favourite combination is found in the earlier mentioned project ‘Pronkkamers’ and in the ‘Stichting Waddenproducten’.

Networking and transnational cooperation is in development. Also local collaboration has grown between village councils, entrepreneurial groups and other social organisations. Between areas regional networks have emerged, specifically between Northwest Fryslan and Lauwersland. Added value of international cooperation was born from joining forces in the Netherlands with Portugal and Italy in the network “Villages of Tradition”. First steps were made towards international broadening of the regional “Waddenproducts” towards Germany and Denmark. It is expected that both international networks will be developed further in LEADER+ and will generate higher economic value. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

The LAG Lauwersland played a crucial role in managing the programme, but not so much in allocating or relocating funds. Much emphasis was paid to enlighten municipalities in how to obtain co-funding. Public authorities supported the implementation and organisation of the programme wherever possible. **Management procedures** could improve by more bottom-up

involvement and delegation of responsibilities. Initiating special co-financing funds at municipal level was recognised as important, it deserves attention in future programmes as well.

In Lauwersland, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 10 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private en public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

Drenthe's regional ex-post evaluation Summary

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Drenthe. The EC had made available Euro 2.6 million for Drenthe.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

An active Local Action Group was running the LEADER program in Drenthe. The LAG was composed of representatives of various organisations in order to maximise the involvement of the various actors in the LEADER programme. Business, tourism, farmer's organisations, the agricultural council, the network of small villages, environmental organisations, municipal and provincial authorities, are all represented. Because of its broad composition, the LAG functions as a think tank. The provincial management board member ("Gedeputeerde") chairs the LAG and the province also provides financial and administrative support, but the LAG decides independently on the allocation of funds.

The first activity of the LAG was drafting a strategy for the area, based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Most prominent strengths were the clear image of the area, an attractive living environment and the importance of environment and tourism. In particular the integration of tourism, environment and farming were recognised as opportunities. Hence, the LAG preferred integrated projects contributing to the natural image of Drenthe and to improving the environment. A summary of the strategy is as follows:

- To develop innovative projects in the rural area focusing on sustainability, agricultural technology and conservation of nature.

- To optimise tourism
- To strengthen small-scale business.

In total 50 projects have been supported by LEADER funds, with a total investment of 7.6 million Euro. LEADER funds were preferably spent directly on projects and not on overhead costs.

The **area approach** was successful in Southwest Drenthe. Several factors contributed to success. Binding factors like landscape characteristics and cultural history do feed the willingness to cooperate towards a more integrated development. The cohesion of the actors and the strong identification of the people with the area added to the success as well. This cohesion is based indeed on a collective cultural history and tradition. Furthermore the attitude of the public authorities played an important role in the success of the programme: an informal and open attitude goes hand in hand with the LEADER approach.

After the **bottom-up approach** gained recognition in Drenthe, it became an important reason for selection. It increased the development of new and exemplary ideas, it assisted regional actors to organise themselves and it also made project decisions better accepted by local authorities. Active involvement of entrepreneurs and/or villagers through brainstorming sessions was encouraged in developing projects. An example of such a bottom-up approach is the project "Improving local skills & capacity" in which STAMM consultants played an important role.

The effects of the **local public-private partnership** are positive in Drenthe. Although public administration was strongly supporting the functioning of the LAG, a reasonable degree of (delegated) autonomous decision-making was possible (LAG proposals were always endorsed by the provincial management board "Gedeputeerde Staten"). The participation of 'locals' offered a fresh view on new local possibilities and a flexible attitude towards renewal. The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. Local partners consider themselves able to take more responsibility, including for co-financing.

Innovation was an important selection criteria for project proposals. The LAG granted many innovative initiatives. Positive examples are the new cooperation in the Village of Lubbinge and the Land Exchange Bank in the village of Wapserveen. Others failed, which was accepted as an inherent risk to supporting innovative initiatives. Documenting successes and failures and spreading the learning experience was not sufficiently done, but is considered very important.

Good examples of **integrated approaches** are found in the activities to develop agriculture in relation with recreation and tourism and in agriculture and care. Another example of a **multi-**

sectoral project is Drenths Goed, where farming is combined with tourism and selling regional products.

Actors often state a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves. As constraints people mention basically the increased number of administrative sectoral procedures to be followed. Furthermore the still dominant sectoral organisation of interests and their tendency not to include other sectoral interests in their weighing. In such situations, better funding regulations and better professional guidance in processes of beginning co-operation could be helpful.

Networking and trans-national cooperation is in Drenthe still in development. The most promising examples of networking in Drenthe is found with the Network of producers of regional products "Drents Goed" and the Network of Villages of Tradition. It is expected that (international) networks will be developed further in LEADER+. Organising networks and exchanges more effectively in future will require better structuring. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

In Drenthe, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 6 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private en public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

The LAG Drenthe played a crucial role in managing the programme, but not so much in allocating or relocating funds. Much emphasis was paid to enlighten municipalities in how to obtain co-funding. Public authorities supported the implementation and organisation of the programme wherever possible. **Management procedures** could improve by more bottom-up involvement and delegation of responsibilities. Initiating special co-financing funds at municipal level was recognised as important, it deserves attention in future programmes as well.

In Drenthe very little attention was given to setting quantitative indicators for success, nor to serious documenting of processes and results. Hence, this is a weak basis for analysis and exchange of experience. Nevertheless, interesting results have been achieved. This evaluation cannot specifically track these exclusively to one or two LEADER-characteristics, most results can be contributed to the set of 7 LEADER-characteristics.

Friesland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Northwest Fryslân. The EC had made available Euro 3.8 million for NW Fryslân.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

NW Friesland was the only LEADER – I region in the Netherlands from 1991 – 1994. Many lessons have been learned during this period: small-scale projects can have tremendous impact, an integrated approach pays off, and the necessity to involve the local population in implementation. The LAG NW Friesland has used these experiences in orchestrating the LEADER – II programme.

The overall objective of the LEADER – II programme in NW Friesland is to break the downward trend in rural areas and to improve the quality of life by rural renewal and development.

The LAG consists of representatives of local en regional authorities, village interest groups, agriculture, small and medium sized enterprises, recreation & tourism. The formal responsibility of the LEADER programme is with the Province, whereas the LAG is responsible for preparing, detailing and implementing the programme, for financial administration and project management and for maintaining contacts with the authorities.

NW Fryslân has a special project office, just like in Lauwersland. Special teams and task forces work out particular project clusters and facilitate and advise on participatory implementation. Smaller local projects are implemented by societies or municipal councils. Project implementers meet to exchange experiences twice a year.

The `pronkkamer` project (see: <http://www.pronkkamer.nl/uk/index.html>) is illustrative for the organisational approach of LEADER NW Friesland: the project LEADER identifies entrepreneurs, who form a foundation to independently manage the projects. An interesting initiative is the touristic network TUON.W: a special platform in the tourism sector to exchange information, and to coordinate project planning and implementation.

The funds are mainly used for stimulation of economic industry including agricultural diversification, promotion of tourism and recreation, and some other measures, such as the fund for liveability in the villages.

The **area-approach** has strengthened the feeling of regional identity in Northwest Fryslân. Binding factors like landscape characteristics and cultural history do feed the willingness to cooperate towards a more integrated development of the region. The provincial authorities in Fryslân have recognised -amongst others through experiences with LEADER- the value of a more integrated area approach as compared to sectoral programs.

Bottom up: The main outline of the programme in Northwest Fryslân was decided upon in the early stages of LEADER – II. There was little room left for own initiative. Only after the success of a specific regional fund for local initiatives which clearly strengthened the commitment of the population, the LAG started to recognise the importance of community participation. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves quite some attention.

Local public-private partnership in the LAG has had some positive effects. The participation of 'locals' offered a fresh view on new local possibilities and a flexible attitude towards renewal. The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. The LAG in Northwest Fryslân was still too much dominated by public administration. It is certainly an area for improvement in the future.

The LEADER-II programme in NW Friesland and Lauwersland opted for the purpose: nurture entrepreneurship, including diversification and sustaining agriculture. This had also been the purpose of the LEADER-I programme. Strengthening the economic function of rural areas was explored by developing a second or even third occupation, and by the introduction of new crops. Furthermore, it has been considered to integrate environmental management, recreation and tourism in agriculture.

Innovative activities were emphasised in the agricultural sector. Within the cluster of 'pure' agriculture projects, innovation was aimed at by encouraging the cultivation of flower bulbs under an incentive scheme, and the processing of wastewater on dairy farms by using special filters. Initiatives like trickle irrigation in seed potato production, composting manure and vegetable waste, and planning energy management in dairy farms, were supported as well.

However, LEADER projects integrating agriculture, recreation, tourism and regional rejuvenation, i.e. 'Pronkkamer' and the 'Waddengroep' were most innovative and successful in both NW Friesland and Lauwersland. The 'Pronkkamer' foundation offers boarding and lodging facilities in (traditionally the best rooms of) farmhouses with an interesting cultural history. The 'Waddengroup' foundation is involved in producing, promoting and marketing local products. The success of both projects determined the image of LEADER in the region

In various innovative projects it was found that intensive professional guidance was not sufficiently available, and that a rigid attitude of public bureaucracies was hampering innovation.

In reflective interviews with regional actors it was suggested that co-operation and co-financing could contribute both to decrease the risk of failure itself and to spread the financial risks inherent in innovation.

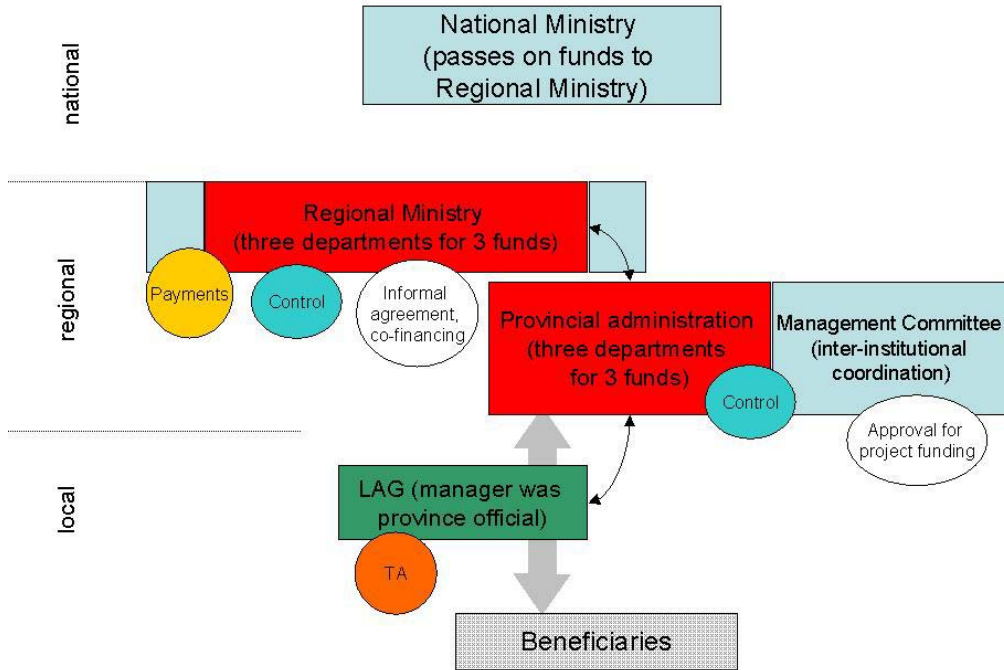
Northwest Fryslân has various examples of projects with a **multi-sectoral and integrated approach**. Sometimes liveability was the binding theme, sometimes inter-sectoral collaboration was actively encouraged between actors in agriculture, in nature and in recreation. Actors often state a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves.

Networking and transnational cooperation is in development. Also local collaboration has grown between village councils, entrepreneurial groups and other social organisations. Between areas regional networks have emerged, specifically between Northwest Fryslân and Lauwersland. Added value of international cooperation was born from joining forces in the Netherlands with Portugal and Italy in the network "Villages of Tradition". First steps were made towards international broadening of the regional "Waddenproducts" towards Germany and Denmark. It is expected that both international networks will be developed further in LEADER+ and will generate higher economic value. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

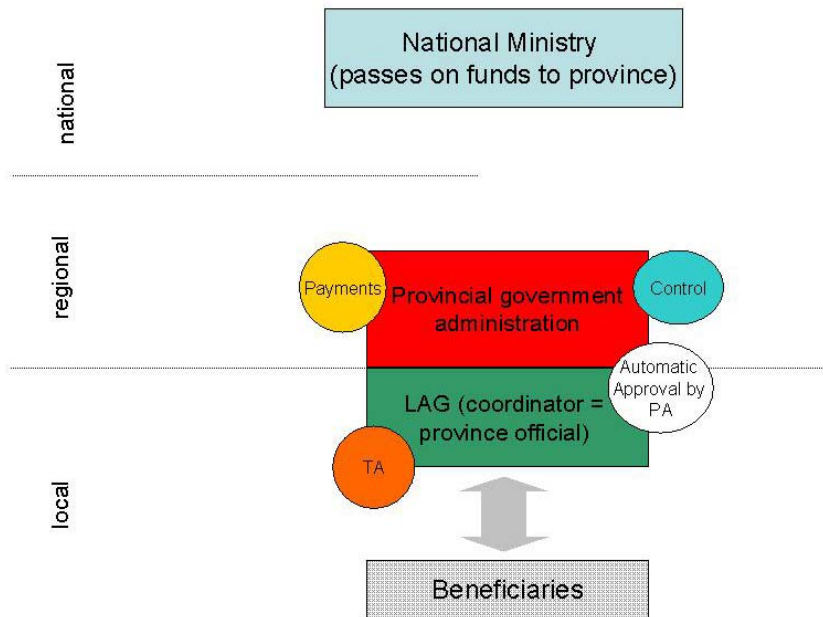
In Northwest Fryslân, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 10 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private and public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

Model of implementation

Belgium – Vlaanderen



Netherlands



II.3 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT GERMANY

Contents

1.	General introduction	85
1.1	Motive and intention of the examination	85
1.2	Approach and methodology – work organization and process	85
2.	The implementation of LEADER II in the German federal states	87
3.	Selected Results of the State Programs (sample)	90
3.1	Implementation of the LEADER program	90
3.2	Effectiveness regarding the horizontal objectives– general assessment of the effectiveness of the LEADER-Initiative	94
3.3	Assessment of the effectiveness of the LEADER-method	98
3.4	Management- and funding procedures	102
4.	Report on focus groups	104
4.1	Introduction	104
4.2	Description of partnership and activities	105
4.3	Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the LEADER II implementation in the area, Conclusions and recommendations	106
5.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	113
5.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II-Initiative	113
5.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	116
5.2	Report on national and regional programme evaluations	118
ANNEX:		
	Brief notes on selected German ex post-evaluations of LEADER II	120

1. General introduction

1.1 Motive and intention of the examination

According to the European Commission, the Europe-wide evaluation of LEADER II follows two goals:

- Assessment of the effects of LEADER which was intended since the beginning of the Community Initiative: “LEADER II is subject of an interim and final evaluation with respect to the impacts on national and EU-level ... Thereby specific and program-dependent criteria build the evaluation basis.”¹
- Furthermore a particular interest exists regarding the learning-effects that were expected by applying the LEADER method. In order to quantify and compare the value-added of LEADER II to other rural development measures, the special contribution of the seven action principles of LEADER will undergo an evaluation.

In the terms of reference the following objective was determined:

“With the general aim of drawing lessons to improve the implementation and impact of measures financed by the EAGGF, and more particularly the new phase of the LEADER+ Initiative, this evaluation should provide a detailed view of the added value of LEADER II compared to other rural development operations. In particular, it will have to verify the extent to which implementing the specific features of the LEADER II approach has contributed to attaining its objectives, namely encouraging innovation and the involvement of local communities with a view to launching sustainable local development in rural areas.”

In this regard the evaluation may be understood as an instrument of learning for the future program development and in order to accumulate the knowledge of the local actors and administrations. It does not have the character of an „impact-control“.

1.2 Approach and methodology – work organization and process

The “Forschungsgruppe Agrar- und Regionalentwicklung Triesdorf“ at the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf² accepted as a cooperation-partner (geographical team) of an European evaluation-consortium the assessment of the German LEADER II programs. The evaluation methodology was mostly predetermined by the core team.

¹ KOM: Mitteilung der Kommission an die Mitgliedsstaaten, Punkt 19 der Leitlinien für integrierte Globalzuschüsse für die Gemeinschaftsinitiative LEADER II, Brüssel 1994.

² Scientists in charge of the assessment: Manfred Geißendörfer, Michael Thomas, Otmar Seibert.

Data collection and surveys commenced in January 2003. Corresponding to the methodological concept, information was summarized and analysed on three levels. For Germany this meant:

- **Evaluation of national/regional programs:** Analysis of reports and ex-post evaluations of 14 federal states; interlocutions with officers responsible for LEADER in 4 selected states (Q 34-questionnaire);
 - General scanning of all LEADER Operational Programs (OP) for the German Laenders (grid OP-102 and grid L-1000); collection of financial and other standardized data;
 - Detailed analysis of 4 German OP (sample; EU total: 34) according to a standardized analysis grid for data;
 - Interviews with LEADER actors at national level and with program managers at regional level (Laenders);
 - Verification, regional analysis and synthesis.
- **Evaluation of local action groups (LAG):** Written questioning of 32 selected LAGs and collective bodies (CB) in the federal states of Bavaria, Saxony, Hesse and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Q 202-questionnaire)³;
 - Analysis of documents and organisation of interviews (distribution, animation, collection);
 - Verification, regional analysis and synthesis, transfer of information and results to the core team.
- **Participatory evaluation of LAGs:** Intensive interviews in 4 LAGs (focus-groups) with one workshop in each selected federal state.

Numerous interviews and supplementary case studies were accomplished in order to answer particular questions of LEADER (project level):

- **Cost-effectiveness-analysis:** Comparative analysis of a non-LEADER II and a LEADER II project (LAG Ludwigslust, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania); Issue: local employment and qualification measures.
- **Trans-national Cooperation:** Analysis of the region and boarder spreading cooperation between the district Oberallgäu (Bavaria) and the region Kleinwalsertal (Austria); Issue: tourism, new technologies (introduction of the touch-less Allgäu-Walser-Card).

³ Of 32 addressed LEADER groups 27 answered. Three CBs and one LAG did not reply to the detailed questionnaire regarding the LEADER method. In one other LAG a contact person could not be reached due to the disorganization of the responsible body.

2. The implementation of LEADER II in the German federal states

In Germany 14 federal states participated with own operational programs or applications for global grants in the Community Initiative LEADER II. The Federal Ministry for Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (national level) mainly coordinated the state-interests in order to take over a bundling function with respect to the European institutions (general directorates of the Commission, STAR-committee, services for financial control). Via an analysis of the ex-post evaluations and final reports of 13 federal states, the assessors achieved an overview of the institutional implementation, project process, financial realization, physical results and the first apparent effects of the Community Initiative in Germany.⁴

In order to obtain uniform data for all OPs and the LEADER groups established in the individual states, an additional survey of the responsible state-resorts was carried out. On account of the now broader information basis it became obvious that every state had defined specific details concerning the implementation on program and LAG level. This diversity was e.g. expressed by the fact that the number of Ministries involved varied between 1 (Baden-Wuerttemberg, Saxony) and 5 (Bavaria) which was inter alia caused by the state-specific regulations regarding the management of the three EU funds. The regulations influenced the integration of the funds into the implementation-strategies on local level because the number of contact persons for the LAG and the coordination effort increased. The establishment of steering groups (Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) by the program authorities and/or the employment of LEADER managers within the administrations (Bavaria, Saxony) was supposed to master this hurdle. Particularly the integration of the ESF within the regional OPs caused some problems, as the LAG's demand on support was more frequently not congruent with the funding possibilities (deviation between demand and supply).⁵

Moreover, the degree of rigour of the organizational and conceptional preparations, demanded by the LAG, was regulated differently. While in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania solely the local authorities were assigned with the accomplishment of LEADER II, in Bavaria, Saxony-Anhalt and Lower Saxony various organizational structures developed. In general, the German federal states applied more or less different strategies to prepare and realized their OP (see Annex 1). In particular the preparations for the establishment of LEADER groups and the development of primary project strategies proved to be causative for the late start of the Community Initiative in mostly all federal states (start on local level normally not until 1996/1997).

⁴ It was agreed on not accomplishing an ex-post evaluation for the state of Berlin.

⁵ Another reason for the comparably low exhaustion of the ESF means might be seen in the fact that several federal states (especially the new German Laender) used primarily the Objective 1-program for the funding of „typical“ ESF-projekts.

In dependency of the state-specific implementation and the endowment with funds, the overall 124 national LAGs concentrate in Bavaria, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt. In the federal states participating in the 5b-programme, this corresponds not at least to the geographic proportions of the 5b-programme area (exceptions: Schleswig-Holstein without any LAG and Saarland with only one LAG). LEADER was applied for the first time in the 5 new federal states (including Berlin as entire objective 1-area) where – prevalently with active support of the program authorities – 43 LAGs developed.

Besides the LAGs founded primarily for local implementation strategies, already existing CBs which aspired a closer thematic focus were often selected by the involved ministries. In this respect Schleswig-Holstein where solely CBs acted, Bavaria and to some extent North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony stand out. According to the analysis of the evaluation documents, more than 80 CBs should have profited from the LEADER program on national level.

The total costs of LEADER II exceeded the original projection (420 Mio ECU) about 30 percent. In contrast to the prognosis, the states on average had to expend about 50% extra national funds for the co-financing of the total costs. Compared to the original planning of the EU funds, the EFRE fund (113%) and the EAGFL fund (106%) were used above average and the ESF fund (77%) below average (aggregated over all federal states). A differentiated analysis that focuses on the financial degree of realization of the EU funds shows insightful cognitions (see table 1):

- 6 of 14 federal states did not bail out the designated EU budget completely (e.g. Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein).
- Between the states and as well between the funds significant differences are obvious. Baden-Wuerttemberg for instance did not completely bail out EAGFL funds while having relatively low own funding, but used EFRE funds to a double extend. Furthermore, Lower Saxony and the Saarland as well deployed EFRE funds above average. On the other side, however, Bavaria and Brandenburg for instance bailed out EAGFL funds intensively.
- High private investments – in relation to the absolute expenditures – were initiated in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Thuringia, Hesse and Bavaria.

Table 1

Implementation of LEADER II in the German federal states – financial and program related data

	Baden-Württemberg	Bayern	Berlin	Brandenburg	Hessen	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Niedersachsen	Nordrhein-Westfalen	Rheinland-Pfalz	Sachsen	Sachsen-Anhalt	Saarland	Schleswig-Holstein	Thüringen
number of LAG	3	45	0	6	6	12	17	0	9	6	12	1	0	7
number of CB	0	19	1	2	0	0	1 + projects in Ziff. 8-areas	2	0	1	1	3	26 EAGFL, 6 ESF, 25 EFRE	0
objective-area	5b	5b	1	1	5b	1	5b	5b	5b	1	1	5b	5b	1
share of eligible area (% of area of federal state)	10	57	-	100	29,8	100	49,7	10	42,8	100	100	37	48	100
responsible ministry	Ministry for food and the rural area	State Ministry for agriculture and forestry	Senate administration for economy, labour and women	Ministry for agriculture, environmental protection and spatial planning	Ministry for economy, traffic and regional development	Ministry for food, agriculture, forestry and fishery	Ministry for the rural area, food, agriculture and consumer protection	Ministry for environment, nature protection, agriculture and consumer protection	Ministry for economy, traffic, agriculture and viniculture	State Ministry for environment and agriculture	Ministry for agriculture and environment	Ministry for environment	Ministry for the rural areas, spatial planning, agriculture and tourism	Ministry for agriculture, nature protection and environment
number of participating ministries	1	5	1	2	1	3	3	1	3	1	2	2	3	2
Financial plan * in ECU														
total	14.255.888	113.453.449	466.667	33.193.050	25.224.240	29.307.000	40.090.354	10.004.882	25.484.672	35.453.000	30.330.554	4.197.752	21.995.000	35.131.002
EAGFL	3.966.664	22.580.392	280.000	11.122.000	5.550.354	9.960.000	8.407.188	1.031.119	2.979.288	11.707.000	10.708.668	607.208	3.537.000	9.216.342
EFRE	1.709.104	12.942.040	-	5.589.000	2.073.122	5.245.000	9.802.488	3.427.506	5.571.344	6.304.000	3.049.000	606.192	3.854.000	6.264.654
ESF	-	7.523.760	-	1.863.000	178.209	350.000	626.078	-	-	-	4.157.297	606.192	909.000	546.426
national	4.221.480	43.783.160	186.667	6.209.000	7.801.685	5.185.000	18.608.968	5.514.049	10.451.360	5.997.000	4.346.143	1.854.072	12.923.000	5.342.474
private	4.358.640	26.624.097	-	8.410.050	9.620.871	8.567.000	2.645.632	32.208	6.482.680	11.445.000	8.069.446	524.088	772.000	13.761.106
measure A	-	11.406.323	-	331.930	462.067	1.036.000	-	-	2.703.564	312.000	216.000	-	-	453.255
measure B	13.648.839	89.376.919	466.667	31.009.080	24.055.618	18.669.000	39.684.869	-	21.945.811	34.781.000	27.734.554	4.123.796	21.995.000	34.359.444
measure C	490.342	12.467.474	-	1.659.650	567.677	539.000	-	-	652.829	120.000	2.318.000	-	-	60.742
measure D	116.707	202.733	-	192.390	138.878	497.000	405.485	-	182.468	240.000	62.000	73.956	-	257.561
Payments * (31.12.2001) in ECU (exchange rate 1,95583)														
total	72.651.586	128.782.453	443.711	35.246.426	23.216.619	51.401.297	54.687.838	12.249.493	29.960.852	36.950.176	28.779.006	6.206.229	21.139.779	36.595.667
EAGFL	3.537.700	24.941.855	266.226	13.449.447	4.060.883	11.637.934	9.335.242	908.454	3.696.327	12.633.829	10.454.641	776.589	3.388.061	9.002.289
EFRE	3.598.926	14.818.150	-	5.453.719	1.905.371	5.936.774	13.588.535	3.393.283	6.420.589	7.023.221	2.965.972	732.823	3.093.470	6.216.812
ESF	-	4.671.884	-	1.804.025	126.924	-	729.046	-	-	-	3.662.446	704.048	799.273	482.126
national	27.566.912	71.654.064	177.484	8.000.189	6.287.653	5.858.236	23.875.635	7.947.756	17.536.602	6.552.350	4.806.292	3.077.975	13.858.975	5.233.742
private	37.948.048	12.696.500	-	6.539.046	10.835.787	27.968.353	7.159.379	not available	2.307.334	10.740.776	6.889.655	914.794	not available	15.660.699
measure A	-	1.409.688	-	198.445	20.853	2.373.606	-	-	468.233	512.888	291.569	-	-	424.229
measure B	72.119.495	121.050.065	443.711	34.210.522	23.142.387	20.742.857	54.521.670	11.330.797	29.070.273	36.403.176	26.261.510	6.137.826	21.139.779	35.829.949
measure C	465.701	6.446.702	-	567.849	-	69.525	-	944.258	1.219.471	16.462	2.152.272	-	-	63.721
measures D	66.390	174.869	-	269.098	25.769	246.956	166.168	-	35.790	17.650	73.654	68.404	-	277.769

*) source: data of federal state ministries (final reports or OP-102 interviews)

3. Selected Results of the State Programs (sample)

3.1 Implementation of the LEADER program

Implementation of the LEADER-specific features on local level (questions 11 and 13 in Q-202): While in Hesse a state program for rural regional development with similar goals existed in parallel to LEADER, a comparable program was inexistent in Bavaria, Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. For LEADER suitable „promotion principles“ first of all needed to be developed and notified or – obviously more convenient – an appropriate and already notified state promotion guideline for LEADER projects had to be found. The fact that numerous CBs participated in LEADER II in Germany may on the one hand be an evidence for the simpler implementation of funding mechanisms with respect to these beneficiaries. On the other hand the CBs assured as established and popular organizations specific competence regarding project accomplishment and management. Since mostly LAGs but barely CBs replied to the survey, and due to the fact that the questions predominantly emphasized the specialities of the LEADER method, the following valuations reflect above all the view of the local action groups.

Explicit **selection criteria** were firstly inexistent for the LAGs. Every federal state had its own “implicit” criteria which were only partly determined in the OP. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania chose all rural districts as LEADER areas in order to have the possibility to start rapidly and uncomplicated. Most federal states included references regarding the LEADER criteria into the OPs. These references most of all proved to be valid for the selection of promotion areas and only to a lesser extend for the demarcation of the LAG. In Saxony the LAGs obviously had to deal most thoroughly with the LEADER criteria in the scope of the area concept.

The **demarcation** and selection of the LAG occurred mainly by consultations between representatives of the LEADER area and the program administration. The majority of the surveyed LAGs stated that a cooperative approach (networking, bottom-up) was demanded concerning the development of innovative and area-referred projects. With regard to the CBs, the aspect of innovation was emphasized to a larger extend whereas a bottom-up approach and the integration with other fields of action was not demanded. Overall, the program administration tried to align the LEADER criteria with respect to feasibility.

For the demarcation two possibilities existed:

- For simplification reasons and in order to increase the power of impact the demarcation followed administrative borders (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, some districts in Bavaria, Lower Saxony);

- The demarcation followed geographic aspects like natural preserve, low mountain range, historic or cultural characteristics (Hesse, Saxonia) or even distinct communal particularities (re-vitalization of individual villages).

The **bottom-up approach** was in particular promoted when politics and administration were prepared to admit an open participation process. In many cases associations or other organizational forms developed in which committed actors came together. However, obstructions existed as well: Interferences and delays of the administration, concern of high organizational and financial expenditures and not at least the inactivity of the population.

According to questionnaire statements (Q-202), the driving forces behind the build-up of **LAG partnerships** have equally been public administrations as well as key actors from politics (mayors, district administrators) and associations, particularly from the environmental sector. The initiative rarely came from already existing networks of regional actors or entrepreneurs (e.g. DE/BA 20 and 21 or DE/HE 01 and 04). In dependency of the LAGs activity and the broadness of their activities, new partners joined while LEADER being accomplished.

Every LAG respective approval body tried to fulfil the pretence of **innovation** more or less completely with respect to the project selection process. While in Bavaria and Hesse the integrated approach between different sectors and to a lesser extend the aspect of technological innovation (IC-technologies) stood in the foreground, the area-referred project solutions for local problems characterized the degree of innovation in the new federal states. It was always examined if and to what extend the projects deviated from mainstream programs.

In about half of the evaluated LEADER areas the activities referred to an **area-based topic** in which the projects had to be integrated. Nonetheless the topics were rather determined loosely and additional ideas with impulse-character were welcomed in all LAGs: the majority of topics focussed on cultural, environmental or touristic regional development, the strengthening of regional economic circles, valorisation of endogenous potentials and the improvement of life quality. Hence, only a few concentrated on small and medium enterprises (SME) or the testing of new technologies.

Multi-sectoral strategies were in particular supported by the composition and engagement of regional interest groups and individual actors. If by the bundling of activities new perspectives for the region arose (e.g. strengthening of identity and image, income alternatives), initial obstructions like sectoral-administrative structures or competitiveness between actors was reduced.

Area-spreading and trans-national cooperation, designated as „European“ element within the LEADER program, was namely considered in the German OPs but rarely practiced. Altogether only a minority of LAGs tried to achieve an exchange of experience with other

European LAGs. However, from LAG-viewpoint it was hard to realize sound project cooperation as language and administrative barriers had to be mastered (approval procedures). Only 8 LAG of the entire Q-202 sample in Germany (25 % out of 32 LAGs) participated in this measure which benefited in particular from already existing area contacts.

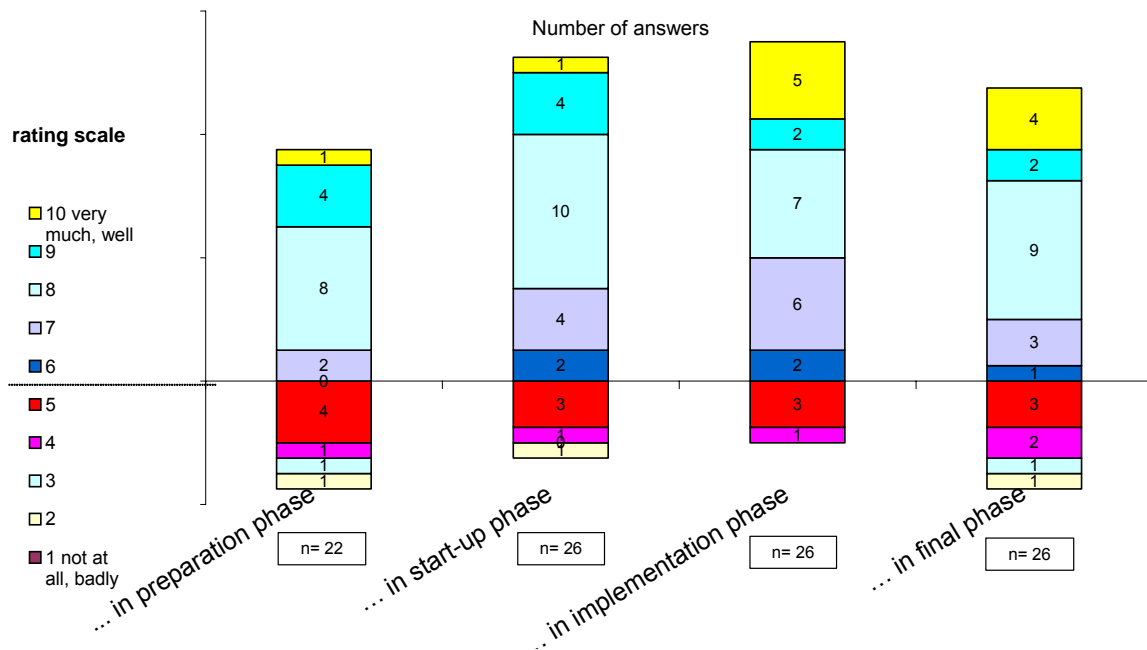
Implementation of local measures: In this respect it is to distinguish between LAGs having a detailed area concept and those without. While in Bavaria⁶ a strategy with related project-bundles frequently arose not until or even during implementation, other regions (Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony) had the advantage of already existing project concepts. That opened the possibility to start more rapidly. In both cases harmonized decision making processes within the LAG-bodies and the authorities have been an essential element of implementation. However, this required compromises, persuasiveness and as well the will for objective decisions. In order to simplify the decision making process (project selection, financial focus) and dampen dominant self-interests, formal selection mechanisms (e.g. criteria) were applied in about 25% of all LAG's.

As most important priorities were chosen: Creation of jobs and income, development of tourism, build-up of regional marketing, strengthening of regional identity and cooperation. Following these priorities, the LAGs in general needed to react flexible to the regional situation. According to statements of individual LAG offices, already planned projects sometimes were not accomplished because project executing organizations failed or other developments arose (e.g. within the IC-sector). However, this was mostly compensated by new project ideas.

Organizational arrangements between LAG's and program authorities: In general the LAGs were supported actively on all administrative levels. The administrative coordinators, e.g. in Bavaria and Saxony, proved to have positive effects for the LAGs. On the other hand, the different handling of the program by too many departments resulted in problems regarding the approval of funding applications. Thus the reporting and verification duties also increased what influenced the attitude of the local/regional administrations with respect to LEADER: On the one side the program owned a „flexible part“ concerning the selection of funding projects; on the other, the program seems inflexible and bureaucratic because of an insufficient definition of promotion objects. The degree of cooperative intenseness and constructiveness between LAGs and program authorities was inter alia determined by the administration's willingness to accept innovation and to learn new lessons. The involved authorities were supposed to think “LEADER conform”. Mostly the administrative support resulted from the impartment of know how (technical help, qualification) and regular consulting with the LAGs during the start-up and implementation phase (see figure).

Administrative support for LEADER-groups (LAG/CB) ...

How has the local group been supported by the managing authority (be it by own staff or assigned experts)?



Respecting the implementation of the LEADER program the vertical partnership did however not play a role. The state authorities remained in charge for the program implementation. Moreover the LAGs had barely a voice within the monitoring committee.

Networking structures: The national networking office established in 1997, promoted the exchange of experience and the derivation of topic or project specific information particularly between those LEADER areas that showed outstanding interest in area-spreading cooperation or workshops organised by the national networking body. On national level these connections were complemented e.g. by regional meetings of the LAGs in Hesse or an own regional network in Saxony. Even though the majority of states abandoned institutionalised regional LEADER networks, many (informal) networks developed through mostly topic-oriented links. The services of the European LEADER Observatory (AEIDL) were demanded by only about 10 % of the surveyed LAGs, as firstly the German LAGs were occupied with their own local challenges and secondly, the program authorities often acted reserved regarding the demand for European networking and trans-national cooperation (question of cost-value-ratio). Altogether the potential of inter-regional and trans-national networking under LEADER II was not bailed out entirely.

⁶ Due to the high interest of regions and not completely bailed out funds, the authorities in Bavaria admitted new action groups until program-end.

Questions of funding and delays regarding the implementation process: The LEADER funds were requested at and as well paid out by the program authorities (district governments, NUTS II-level). The LAGs usually had no own budget. In fact, the project executing organizations/actors had to apply for funds at the funding institution. The LAG's degree of decision-making authority concerning the project approval varied significantly between the individual federal states: Hesse und Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania left the selection of LEADER projects to the LAGs, Lower Saxony in contrast demanded e.g. positive LAG statements. In Bavaria the LAGs had a relatively low formal decision-making ability. As a consequence the authorities had the possibility to also promote projects outside the LAG-areas. Respecting the funding procedures, only some of the surveyed LAGs mentioned the starting difficulties and the following high realization pressure between 1997 and 1999/2001. Consequential redeployment of capital and delays solely affected the program level. Only if the LAGs had entered liabilities in advance they had to bear the corresponding costs of pre-financing.

3.2 Effectiveness regarding the horizontal objectives– general assessment of the effectiveness of the LEADER-Initiative

LEADER was designed in order to test new methods and complement existing mainstream programs. The estimation of effects respecting the horizontal objectives should therefore refer to the following question: Did LEADER achieve superior effects compared to mainstream programs and/or did the application of new methods result in effects which open a long-term perspective for the politics of rural areas.

On local level LEADER II aimed at the generation of income alternatives for farmers within the processing and services sector. "Due to the realization of pilot projects and innovative marketing concepts, the readiness for diversification increased significantly. Absolutely new enterprise branches developed. While the normal diversification was covered by the 5b program, LEADER solely focussed on pilot projects" (statement of the representative of a LAG in Western Germany). Based on the evaluation reports, the agricultural diversification projects had a higher significance in West Germany than in East Germany where large-scale agricultural structures exist and other development approaches were applied. The impact of diversification on the development of agricultural structures was estimated qualitatively to be average;⁷ the effects on motivation and the creation of pilot solutions were in particular emphasized.

The cross-sectional goal „employment“ affects different fields. Direct employment effects could be detected primarily regarding the promotion of start-ups, the establishment of new businesses in agro-tourism and the promotion of SMEs (management of innovation, co-operation, new

⁷ Score 5.4 on a scale from 1 (extremely low) until 10 (extremely high);

technologies). Indirect or hardly any employment effects could, on the other hand, be found in a large number of smaller LEADER-areas, frequently aiming at the improvement of living conditions (e.g. maintenance of jobs in the building industry or in tourism).

In the new federal states the LEADER projects in general were combined with tools of national labour market policy. ABM and SAM⁸ promotions temporarily ensured considerable employment possibilities and additional qualifications created perspectives for the primary labour market. (see CEA-report). In this respect it is however difficult to demonstrate net-effects and to verify the sustainability of achieved employment impacts. In some states (e.g. Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony) it was according to the ex post evaluations possible to integrate several hundred persons living in rural areas into the regular labour market again (e.g. due to specific qualification and employment measures). Those projects were partly accomplished by CBs on behalf of the institutions responsible for the ESF fund.

Pursuant to statements of the LEADER groups in the Q 202 sample, about 1.870 jobs were directly created and sustained through LEADER measures. Thereof 40 % account for women. The indirect employment effects that were initiated by marketing and investment measures resulted in the creation of about 2.600 jobs (gross-effect). If temporary employment effects are considered (ABM and temporary employment, e.g. in the building industry), about 1.565 jobs remain as net-effect. To a great extent (about 722 jobs) this is due to indirect impacts what as well reflects the synergetic character of LEADER actions: Regional marketing concepts and umbrella brand names, combined measures between landscape conservation, extensive animal husbandry and gastronomy, connection of target group specific offers in tourism (thematic biking and hiking concepts), regional fairs for craft and trade as well as the accomplishment of location specific enterprise and qualification concepts. In general the LEADER actions contributed by this way to the stabilisation of employment due to the increase of turnover.

⁸ ABM: Arbeits-Beschaffungs-Maßnahme (labour creation measures); SAM: Struktur-Anpassungs-Maßnahmen (structural adjustment measures).

Table 2

Employment effects of LEADER II (sample)

		Number of jobs	
		total	women
1	Directly created jobs through LEADER II (in FTE ¹)	1.004	394
2	Existing jobs secured through LEADER II (in FTE ¹)	867	337
3	Total number of jobs directly created and secured	1.871	731
4	Thereof temporary jobs (ABM, temporarily during promotion)	1.028	403
5	Jobs indirectly secured (estimation)	723	302
6	Gross-sum of jobs (3)+(5)	2.593	1.033
7	Net-sum of permanent jobs (3)-(4)	843	328
8	Net-sum of permanent and indirectly secured jobs (5)+(7)	1.565	630

1) FTE = Full-Time-Equivalent; Source: Q 202-sample, n= 27 LAGs of 4 federal states

About half of the surveyed LAG stated that with the support of LEADER actions positive environmental effects were initiated. The combination of nature conservation measures and agricultural-gastronomic marketing concepts or the promotion of sound tourism and sparing production techniques need to be mentioned as well as the introduction of techniques for the use of renewable energies. Furthermore projects in natural parks as wells as environmental education plans played a role regarding the profiling of areas as nature and tourism region.

Employment effects in particular developed from the creation of new jobs and the opening of new markets. In Bavaria additional income potentials were harnessed through e.g. distinct priority measures like the installation of information and communication facilities and marketing initiatives. That often required investments of local actors. Public investments frequently aimed on the improvement of tourism related infrastructure and the renewal of touristically important buildings (e.g. castles in Lommatzsch and Demmin) as wells as on the up-valuation of cultural-historic potentials (e.g. open-air museum in Freyung-Grafenau) and the enhancement of the regional degree of attractiveness (image investments). However, employment effects may only be expected in the long-run.

Using regional wage rates, an additional income of about 47.6 Mio € per year arose solely from the directly created and secured jobs of the Q-202 samples (n=27; see row no. 3 in Table 2). This as well includes jobs of national employment programs (ABM-measures). So, the amount of permanent employment by the end of the funding phase should reflect a more realistic picture of the income effects. A total income of about 21.4 Mio € per year may therefore be expected (based on row no. 7 in Table 2). Nevertheless it remains unclear to what extent indirect employment effects affected the total income.

According to LAG and program authority statements, LEADER was open to all person groups. Thus specific projects for women or juveniles were only promoted in individual cases.

The coherence of the promotion programs was ensured by the cooperation of the responsible funding authorities and their transparent information policy. The possibility to combine LEADER with tools of labour market policy was an advantage in East Germany (ABM financing as substitute for equity capital). Coordination problems sometimes arose due to the high number of individual programs. Where LAGs operated without the cooperation of funding authorities or specific LEADER coordinators, the harmonization deficits needed to be balanced on LAG or regional management level. Unmanaged LAGs had disadvantages in this respect.

Total qualitative effects (2113)

Regarding the long-term effects of the LEADER method, the strengthening of the cooperation for a common regional development conception stood clearly in the foreground. Based on potential and result oriented planning and development methods, better aligned development strategies which prevalently focussed on sustainability emerged from LEADER. With the help of identification-strengthening projects it was possible to generate an initial effect beyond the LEADER II phase. This as well affected LEADER+ activities or other regional development projects in more than half of the surveyed areas.

Even though the public representatives dominated within the LAGs in some federal states, elementary pre-conditions developed for closer public-private-partnerships. This was expressed by a closer connection and the increasing involvement of partners into the regional decision-making processes. So, the participative approach became part of the tool box of communal policy. At a later stage this was e.g. expressed by the collaboration of tourism-municipalities or the cooperation of district administrations and LEADER group representatives. However, „regional governance“ by LEADER II could not prevail within Germany’s federal system. It was slowed down in some states (Schleswig-Holstein, Bavaria) also due to the close link of promotion competences to sectoral authorities.

The ability of local actors to acquire new competence and self-assertion was forced predominantly in those LEADER areas where a regional management worked well and the LAGs work found broad support of all relevant regional interest groups. Advantageous effects arose e.g. from initial activities of marketing associations, innovation and co-ordination circles or regular consultations with public and private institutions.

3.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of the LEADER-method

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	<p>Area-demarkation was adequate and mostly accomplished by the local level;</p> <p>only partly too inflexible and areas of too small size (individual villages);</p> <p>19 of 27 surveyed LAGs acknowledged that the original strategy was followed consistently; only few expanded the area by taking in new partners;</p>	<p>Broad support for the up-valuation of local resources by LEADER; thus rise in popularity: Local products (agriculture and forestry and as well the textile sector), cultural resources and cultural landscape, natural sights, local infrastructures (recreation facilities, touristic biking- and hiking-pathways), traditional knowledge and skills (handicraft skills); to a lesser extend as well utilization of human resources through qualification of target groups (new media, enterprises of young people, business founders).</p>	<p>Territorial approach should be retained based on a minimum size of the area. The optimal size depends on the goals of the LAG. Touristic-cultural activities are easier to realize on communal level, economy-promoting, labour market and marketing referred activities are easier to realize on district or district-spanning level. A functional linking of the corresponding action levels and a powerful management with support of the existing administration is important.</p>
Bottom-up approach	<p>Local needs were analysed thoroughly and considered by more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the surveyed LAGs;</p> <p>Methods: committees with important key persons, representatives of the municipalities and/or active project executing organizations, working parties, strategy workshops, surveys;</p>	<p>Via open meetings a broad participation was possible in about $\frac{2}{3}$ of all LAGs. Sometimes up to 200 meetings were carried out in order to sensitize target groups and develop projects. On the one hand the diversity of ideas and participation possibilities were strongly extended, on the other, however, apathy and a lack of time burdened a more intense participation. Regarding innovative projects it was partly necessary to involve impulse transmitters in order make projects ready for conversion.</p> <p>While the new federal German states greatly emphasized the involvement of problem groups (long-term unemployed), this was rather an exception in the western part of Germany.</p>	<p>In almost all LAGs the actors, interest representatives and project executing organizations were intensively sensitised; however, the development strategies only seldom were anchored in the broad population. This closely relates to the LAG working method and the organizational structure of partnership („fundament of the LAG“); the phase of mobilization is supposed to become more important in the future in order to generate a higher degree of own initiative/dynamic. So, the LEADER requisitions need to be implemented understandable for the „average citizen“. Synergies with Agenda 21 activities are valuable for the bottom up approach.</p>

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
The local group	<p>Three different initial situations:</p> <p>a) LEADER I groups or similar areas had a quick start;</p> <p>b) LAGs with intensive support of institutions (districts, LEADER administration); search for partners was embossed by institutions;</p> <p>c) Late-starting LAG or LAG based on informal cooperation: „tough“ implementation, lack of time, dominance of individual persons.</p> <p>Cooperation projects increased the acceptance of LAGs strongly.</p>	<p>The LAGs all in all developed good methods in order to find solution strategies for existing problems. New partnerships occurred through project developments and the technical cooperation regarding a specific regional topic. Some saw the creation of viable partnerships and of a good cooperative climate as a main goal of LEADER. Project-successes weld the partners together. Only in a few LEADER areas the organizational structures of the local development partnership were not or only weakly viable, as a consequence of an insufficient size of the area; thus insecure long-term financing, too close connection to the district administration etc.</p>	<p>The support from political decision committees and authorities is an important element for a powerful LAG partnership; furthermore, a results-oriented but however flexible development process has to be maintained and attended through a regionally harmonized target agreement (LAG-monitoring). Finally the project successes express the regional competence of the LAG and secure the support of the target groups. The transition from L II to L+ was not trouble-free for many LAGs (e.g. abrupt end of project funding).</p>
Innovation	<p>The demand of „innovation“ was mostly fulfilled pragmatically and locally-adjusted. Some regional administrations that demanded severe process and product referred innovations („classical term of innovation“) were an exception. Thereby the hazard of overextending the actors increased.</p> <p>Really innovative models of funding were inexistent in Germany. In the new federal states the readiness of the labour administration to acknowledge non-cash services as an element of financing and to take over the co-financing of labour market relevant LEADER projects was helpful.</p>	<p>26 of 27 questioned LAGs expressed that the projects initiated innovations. Most important impact: Up-valuation of natural and cultural resources on a local level (23), combined with the valorisation of specific knowledge (22); innovations with respect to traditional activities (17) and the implementation of new technologies (15) were applied to a lesser extend.</p> <p>For example, the responses to deficits in the structure of the areas (projects focussing on unemployment) and the up-valuation of cultural-historic potentials through utilization concepts in the new federal states were innovative. The development of new markets and the enhancement of market access (regional marketing, target groups for tourism) as well as the more intense use of new technologies in rural areas stood in the foreground in West Germany.</p> <p>The prevailing number of LAGs transferred specific solutions for regional problems within their areas (16) or into other regions (18). Transfer of information resulted from public relations, attendance of visitors, contacts to advisors and as well from regional and national networking bodies.</p>	<p>New utilization options for economic and cultural resources proved to be good approaches in order to increase regional competitiveness. Not the innovative individual project was important to the LAGs but the process of project development and of exchange of experience; For the acquisition of specific knowledge a close contact to universities and qualification centres is beneficial; this should be used more intense. Emigration tendencies of young qualified people and the lacking financial power are the most negative factors for the ability of regions to implement innovative projects. This is in particular valid for East Germany.</p> <p>The readiness of the economy to cooperate in innovative projects or in regional management was low. A more transparent display of the expected value added could have advantageous effects. All in all the readiness of the economy is determined by the expected return of the projects.</p>

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Multisectoral integration	<p>LAGs often related this aspect to the participation of target groups (bottom up). Although only some LAGs determined area spreading topics, cross-sectional partnerships arose due to the practical development work.</p> <p>Harmonization deficits between (too many) involved resorts and authorities partly slowed down the realization of sector spreading measures.</p>	<p>More than 2/3 of the questioned LAGs mentioned that the multi-sectoral approach resulted in new co-operations between public and private interest groups. The spectrum covers common planning (rural development concepts) via the coordination of LEADER projects and even the search for new partners concerning the accomplishment of larger projects. More intensive connections between sectors existed in regional marketing and within the handcrafting sector. However, in about one third of the LAGs the co-operations remained on an exchange of experience level. Long-term models of cooperation developed if added value for individual partners was created.</p> <p>The high number of CBs in Germany is an indicator for the fact that the integration of activities into rural development concepts was not supported in all areas of promotion.</p>	<p>On local level it seems beneficial to mobilize a sector spreading potential for ideas and action via the creation of participation possibilities. An effective structuring and a focussed supervision of the project groups is important. Even the LAG decision making committees should be composed representatively. Thereby an equal allocation of public and private partners is recommended but however not always of advantage. In addition, the establishment of cooperation networks that develop further activities with a medium or long-term perspective is fundamental.</p> <p>In the focus group-workshops the multi-sectoral approach was always considered rather unimportant for the effectiveness of LEADER.</p>
Networking	<p>Local networking was highly valued by the LAGs since the beginning; trans-regional and national networking accrued not until the implementation of projects.</p>	<p>Information systems, websites, newsletters, excursions or regularly public relations work supported the communication of local actors and...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ other local actors/initiatives (88 %), ▪ other rural areas (78 %), ▪ research institutes, universities (63%), ▪ other specialized service providers (41 %) ▪ municipal initiatives (33 %). <p>Effects: fast flow of information, experience of possible cooperation potentials and exchange of know how (in particular current, not yet encoded knowledge resulting from LEADER project work) between regions.</p> <p>Only a few LAGs capitalized the networking so that trans-regional popular „competence-clusters“ with specific know how regarding rural development issues accrued (e.g. DE/BA 21 and 22).</p>	<p>The network management of the LAGs turned out to be a typical extra „service“ that is not offered on regular markets (=region specific added value). Through utilization and transfer of information/know how between LEADER actors, linked interest-clusters developed. This requires the provision of personnel and financial resources. It is recommended to promote an even more systematic connection between informal partnerships and durable cooperation networks.</p>

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Trans-national cooperation	Trans-national cooperation (TNC) was not applied intensively on program and local level. Too many factors of uncertainty burdened the TNC measure, e.g. TNC approval processes were assessed as too time-consuming.	According to the LAGs, the trans-national cooperation did barely contribute to the development of the areas. 8 of 27 LAGs built up contacts in partnership. However, only 3 thereof finally resulted in cooperation projects. Altogether 5 LAGs stated that they had established more intense economic relationships.	The regions involved benefited from an intensive exchange of experience. However, the effectiveness of the TNC strongly depends on the actual ability to capitalize cooperation gains. That was obviously simpler in neighbouring regions (see TNC-analysis Bavaria)

3.4 Management- and funding procedures

Budget-administration was in general a public function (de jure) and tied up with state budgets. No global grants existed for the German LEADER areas.⁹ The LAGs had relatively low influence regarding the allocation of promotion funds. Some influence was exerted in those areas that had established own management head offices and thus gained power. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania the most decentralized approval procedures could be found (see annex 1). Even though the rural districts (which were congruent with the LEADER-areas) administrated the funds, promotion agreements always required reconciliation with the permanent steering committee on state level. Depending on the implementation of the LAG such consulting-processes were as well applied in other areas. So, a close decision partnership between LAG and administration de facto developed, which was favourable in some federal states by the individual program set-up (see annex 1, e.g. coordination circles in Saxony). Interlocutions between LAG and program authority that focussed on program coordination (state level) have in general been beneficial as they eased harmonization processes. They moreover supported the exchange of experience and the interregional cooperation.

In most of the examined federal states the approval and payment competences were linked to the middle level of the resorts. The LAGs experienced the financing and conversion modalities mostly as little decentralized. This applies in particular if a cooperative decision regarding the allocation of funds fell through and LEADER was handled like every other program. Especially the significant question of „interpretation-freedom“ regarding the funding guidelines was applied restrictively by the administrations in some cases.

On LAG as well as on program level the administration effort was estimated over-proportionally high compared to other project promotion programs. This fact burdened the application of LEADER criteria in about half of the cases („frustration about the administrative regulations“); the other half considered these procedures as quality-increasing for the development processes. A dependency thus seems to exist between the application and the understanding of the LEADER method **within** the administration and its effectiveness on the level of LAG-beneficiaries. Consequently the assigned administrators of the approval authorities are to demand a high degree of „LEADER qualification“ and as well the readiness for the involvement into local working levels.

Additional impacts of the decentralized decision making and the management on the application of the LEADER method and the added-value of LEADER II can therefore be isolated only very

⁹ This means both, advantages and disadvantages: In Hesse LEADER funds were blocked for almost a year by budgeted closures. So, on a local level a promotion of projects was barely possible. In Bavaria a pre-financing out of the state budget bridged a longer delay of EU-payments.

restrictively.¹⁰ According to the questioned LAGs, particularly LEADER aspects like bottom-up, territorial and innovative approach, which were supported by independent management structures and local partnership, led to a progress regarding local development work. You might say, this represents the added-value of the LEADER method in almost all federal states. In contrast it was hard to realize integrated program strategies on account of numerous different funding responsibilities. In the scope of program implementation, however, learning processes were as well initiated in the authorities and ministries.

¹⁰ Only 10 answers to question 2331.

4. Report on focus groups

4.1 Introduction

Name of LAGs, interlocutors, participants (contact persons in bold):

	LAG Freyung-Grafenau	LAG Lommatzscher Pflege	LAG Ludwigslust	LAG Vogelsbergkreis
	DE BA 20 (Bayern)	DE SN 02 (Sachsen)	DE MV 05 (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)	DE HE 05 (Hessen)
Date of the workshop	2003-05-09	2003-05-21	2003-05-22	2003-06-02.
Interlocutors	<p>Mr. Urban, former district administrator ;</p> <p>Mr. Baeumel, officer of the National Park Bayerischer Wald;</p> <p>Dr. Ortmaier, director of the open-air museum Finsterau;</p> <p>Mr. Denk, farmer and chairman of the LAG;</p> <p>Mrs. Vornehm, regional manager for the LEADER+ – program in the district Freyung-Grafenau;</p> <p>Mr. Schreiner, officer of the district administration;</p> <p>Mr. Sammer, former LEADER-manager in the administration for agriculture;</p>	<p>Mr. Enscher, mayor of the town Lommatzsch;</p> <p>Mr. Doleschal, mayor of the village Schleinitz-Leuben;</p> <p>Mr. Berth, mayor of the village Stauchitz;</p> <p>Mrs. Walter, officer of the village administration of Stauchitz;</p> <p>Mr. Jentzsch, entrepreneur;</p> <p>Mr. Steiner, rural district officer;</p> <p>Mrs. Pfützner, officer of the regional administration for land reform/land re-organization (“LEADER-manager”);</p>	<p>Mr. Dörre, officer of the rural district administration Ludwigslust and head of the LAG;</p> <p>Mrs. Herrmann, rural district administration with the function of a „LEADER-manager“;</p> <p>Mr. Berenz, mayor of the village Glaisin;</p> <p>2 representatives of municipal administrations (Ludwigslust, Glaisin);</p> <p>1 representative of the farmers women association;</p> <p>2 representatives of regional employment agencies;</p> <p>1 LEADER-beneficiary and head of a regional association;</p>	<p>Mr. Schaumberg, head of LEADER Ltd. (actually: Vogelsberg Consulting Ltd.) and responsible for regional economic development of the rural district Vogelsbergkreis;</p> <p>Mrs. Reichenbacher, LEADER-beneficiary and start-up entrepreneur;</p> <p>Mr. Kock, officer of the administration for regional development (approval authority for funding applications);</p> <p>Mrs. Pollack, manager of a regional qualification agency and member of board of the LEADER Ltd.;</p>

Process of dialog organization

First contacts were made with the LAG-managers and/or LAG chairmen. They organized the meetings which needed about 5 hours time on average.

Each workshop started with a personal conception of the participants and information about the purpose of the ex post-evaluation of LEADER II. The methodical concept of the evaluation was described briefly and the special role of workshops with selected focus-groups was placed out.

The contentwise structure of the workshops followed 3 central questions:

- (1) Which quantifiable and qualitative effects were obtained by LEADER – projects and process?
- (2) In which way did the specific LEADER criteria affect the impacts and the entire development process?
- (3) Which learning results can be derived for the future regional development policy? Did a consciousness change begin with the regional participants and institutions?

From the results of the discussion hypotheses were formulated and coordinated together.

4.2 Description of partnership and activities

DE BA 20 Freyung-Grafenau (Bavaria): broad informal partnership of various public and private interest representatives on district level under the direction of a committed farmer; Core team of about 10 key persons; strong support by the LEADER manager (officer of the agricultural administration), the rural district administrator, the economic development department of the district as well as by the administration of the nature park “Bavarian forest” and the executives of the open-air museum Finsterau. No full time LAG-management installed until a regional management was established in the scope of LEADER+.

Multi-sectoral focal points: Nature tourism, cultural tourism and experimental tourism, regional marketing, new technologies, qualification.

DE SN 02 Lommatzscher Pflege (Saxonia): At first communal partnership of 13 municipalities that belong to 3 districts (demarcation of the area follows natural and cultural aspects); a coordination circle functioned as steering committee of the LAG. An officer of the regional administration for land re-organisation (responsible for the approval of funds) acted as head of the committee and project coordinator and was in charge of the LAG-management. The LAG expanded with the engagement of additional partners (regional economy, social institutions) up to at least approx. 40 engaged key persons. After closing LEADER II a regional management for the further support of the development processes was established on district level.

Focal points: Improvement of quality of life, revitalization of buildings for tourism and culture related purposes, promotion of inter-communal cooperation, creation of new jobs and income.

DE/MV 05 Ludwigslust (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania): LAG partnership was initiated by the district administration (8 members entitled to vote and additional consulting members). The LAG was a combination of interested groups which did however not include all potential

target groups. The district council secured the co-financing of funding projects. The district administration was in charge of the management of the LAG. During LEADER+ two smaller LAGs that are still backed by the rural district emerged on communal level.

Focal points: Revitalization of buildings for tourism and culture related purposes, promotion of qualification and employment, nature and water tourism.

DE HE 05 Vogelsbergkreis (Hesse): The LAG consisted of 18 members representing different economic, social, cultural and environmental interests. They formed the advisory board of the LEADER Ltd. and initiated a multitude of informal connections (decision committee in public-private-partnership). The rural district secured basic funding but was barely involved within actual work. In 1999, the LEADER Ltd. and the association for economic development merged into the Vogelsberg Consulting. The advisory board exists furtheron as LAG in LEADER+.

Focal points: Promotion of business start-ups as well as SMEs, qualification of target groups (women, craftsmen), nature tourism and landscape maintenance, cultural cooperation.

4.3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the LEADER II implementation in the area, Conclusions and recommendations

Following the discussion about projects, processes and the specific features of the LEADER method, the evaluators and the workshop participators formulated hypotheses directed to the following predetermined questions.¹¹ The discussion was accompanied by a visualization in form of mind-maps.

¹¹ The questions followed EU-wide agreed guidelines (F-30 manual).

- (1) What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operational principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?**

Freyung-Grafenau (DE BA 20, Bayern)

Thesis 1: The LEADER-criteria were not well-known at first. Broader information on all levels could have caused a larger participation. The long delays with the approval of funding applications worked negatively and discouraging for participation processes and thus for the impulse effect of LEADER. In order to avoid this, a drawing budget should be made available to the LAGs after they obtained starting permission with which first projects or meetings could be financed independently.

Thesis 2: A regional management that is independent of temporally limited funding-programs would arrange the development-process more continuously. The regional management would provide contact persons before the beginning of the program and after program end. Thus, a region could react with greater flexibility to new funding offers or market opportunities. The structural organization of LAGs only with honorary active persons makes the work too strongly dependent on individuals.

Thesis 3: The demarcation of the LEADER-area congruently with the administrative boundary (rural district) offers advantages as the LEADER-process thereby automatically becomes an affair of the district. This facilitates the possible receive of supplementing support. Region-adapted strategies and projects as well as a party-independent work make it easier to join forces and to work all together.

Lommatzscher Pflege (DE SN 02, Sachsen)

Thesis 1: The effective and efficient usage of programs such as LEADER presupposes broad information and experiences with the implementation of EU-funding programs. In the "Lommatzscher Pflege" the LEADER II-program started slowly because the administration was not familiar with the program-accomplishment. In this case a "promotion-guide" would have been helpful.

Thesis 2: The participation in LEADER can conceptually demand the population and participants too much if no regional structures exist for the preparation and implementation. The participation of the population would have been higher if the preparation of development objectives and of a strategy had not been so time intensive.

Thesis 3: The coordination circle of a LAG must not be too large in order to be able to act efficiently. The regional and the project management has to be integrated therein.

Ludwigslust, (DE/MV 05, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

Thesis 1: The area based approach and the strategy determined by the local actors proved to be successful in Ludwigslust: The region itself has to face a topic and needs to be involved into the problem identification and solution processes; thus the identification with the area and its potentials (respectively the possibilities to value those potentials) will rise the most.

Thesis 2: A region needs to know the way it wants to go. Otherwise it does not make sense to discuss innovation and select projects after innovation criteria. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania the „conservation of regionally important cultural assets with new utilization concepts“ was a criterion. Another connoting tool were the regionally adapted innovations regarding employment policy; they sometimes already existed in other parts of the state and were now adapted to the specific conditions of the region. The approval of projects with a close relation to the area should in particular occur near to the local level.

Vogelsbergkreis (DE/HE 05, Hesse)

Thesis 1: The local partnership was represented well by the broad allocation of the LAG with 18 partners from important social fields. Altogether the work of the LEADER group was very conducive for the relations between the regional institutions. As the LEADER II area did not correspond to the district borders, the acquisition of partners was relatively easy.

Thesis 2: A more intensive attendance of actors respectively the improvement of communication (e.g. between business founders) or other flanking measures (e.g. coaching) could have made the linking of projects/actors and the multi-sectoral cooperation even more effective.

(2) What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

Freyung-Grafenau (DE BA 20, Bayern)

Thesis 4: A core-group that communicates the local concept and the LEADER-program is to be formed of members from politics, specialized authorities and of groups of interest. The group should be as stable as possible and at least consist of 10 members who ensure the support of the local policy and of specialized authorities.

Thesis 5: The function of bundling and coordination must be concentrated centrally. Above all a close coordination with legitimized representatives is important in order to avoid unintentional fear of competition. Local and regional parliaments and many political representatives require broader information so as to recognize the chances from local development programs and, furthermore, to be able to support the financing more actively.

Lommatzscher Pflege (DE SN 02, Sachsen)

Thesis 4: A continuous regional management, acting independently from funding periods, allows a faster take up of funding possibilities and the participation in promotion competitions.

Thesis 5: With small total population and size, an integrated regional marketing is necessary in order to better bundle individual offers and to develop a supra-sectoral co-operation.

Thesis 6: The occupation effect of LEADER is increased by the integration of the local labour offices in LEADER-activities. This requires

- a coordination of the rural development funding with the regional labour policy,
- a flexible handling of the job market funding.

Ludwigslust, (DE/MV 05, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

Thesis 3: Different action groups that do not comply with the administrative district boarder, exist within the area. Simultaneously regional managements and initiatives developed on several levels (EQUAL, LEADER+, German programs like "Regionen Aktiv", regions for state planning purposes etc.). For the bundling of the powers, however, a single coordination office would be more sensible (e.g. an independent regional management together with business promotion, tourism association and authority representatives).

Vogelsbergkreis (DE/HE 05, Hesse)

Thesis 3: The LEADER process could still be respected stronger by the LAG (advisory board of the Vogelsberg Consulting Ltd.). Some officials/mayors/representatives view the „LEADER philosophy“ extremely pragmatic: „Nothing is more important than action“. The new regional development concept for LEADER+ needs to find a stronger consideration.

Thesis 4: The LAG has the advantage of not being registered within but acting on district administration level. On the one side the inhibitions regarding the usage of advisory are lower, on the other side it would be better to concentrate the various competences even more into **one** responsible function (consulting, project development, LAG project harmonization, application for promotion, approval, payments).

(3) What should be changed at the level of program administrations and official networks in order to improve the effectiveness of programs such as LEADER II?

Freyung-Grafenau (DE BA 20, Bavaria)

Thesis 6: Programs such as LEADER allow the realization of projects which cannot be funded by mainstream programs. However, a better co-ordination of the departments concerned is to be ensured, so that the LAG will be able to accomplish multi-sectoral projects faster.

Thesis 7: The decision on numerous L II-projects was not easy for the responsible agriculture administration because non-agricultural relations were to be judged frequently. Faster and more substantiate decisions require a better coordination of the sectoral administrations, e.g. in the context of a common funding and steering committee.

Lommatzcher Pflege (DE SN 02, Saxony)

Thesis 7: The variety of programs for rural development is confusing in practice. In order to achieve higher transparency, a concentration of the promotion possibilities would in general be important. Due to good "funding management" of the offices involved numerous LEADER II projects which were funded by several financial sources were made possible. An at present more rigid application of funding criteria and scarcer public budgets harm the financing and a rapid conversion of L+ projects.

Thesis 8: The exclusion of cities (often having only a small total population in rural areas) from participation in rural development programs does not correspond to the close cross-links between city and country. Smaller cities should be integrated into programs such as LEADER.

Thesis 9: A too strong stress of concepts and strategies delays the rapid start of a program and harms an active participation of the population. In L II numerous persons gave up their cooperation as the formal conditions for the realisation of the first projects were too extensive.

Ludwigslust, (DE/MV 05, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

Thesis 4: The financing tools should be combinable in various ways (the previously practiced co-financing with national labour market funds currently is hardly possible). Finally the programs were considered inflexible by the local actors as too many involved administrations existed within the rural area.

Thesis 5: No abrupt promotion end but steady program continuation is important! The process from program conception to implementation between EU and beneficiaries is too slow.

Vogelsbergkreis (DE/HE 05, Hesse)

Thesis 5: The implementation of the program on a local level could be more effective if continuous provision of funds would be secured, a premature start of measures introduced during accomplishment and if the resort-spreading cooperation would be improved.

Thesis 6: The shorter the total provided public funds are and the older a program is (3rd LEADER phase), the more intense is the involvement of the authorities regarding smaller programs like LEADER. Bureaucratic approval procedures burden more complex and innovative projects; only the „simple“ measures will master the bureaucratic hurdles as their conversion is standardized. This endangers the value-added of programs like LEADER.

(4) What are the key criteria for a rural development program to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?

Freyung-Grafenau (DE BA 20, Bavaria)

Thesis 8: The existence of a regional networking institution that would offer trans-sectoral information, advisory activities and qualifications, could on regional level clearly support the development process.

Thesis 9: A gradual (not abrupt) reduction of the promotion would facilitate the continuation of regional development processes.

Lommatzcher Pflege (DE SN 02, Saxony)

Thesis 10: A continuous promotion without abrupt ending is a central condition for the development of sustainable projects.

Thesis 11: A positive development in the long-term presupposes the continuous cooperation of the population and of the regional economy. Thus, working groups are to be formed on a regular basis in order to establish common institutions (e.g. association for economic promotion, regional management).

Ludwigslust, (DE/MV 05, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

Thesis 6: In order to clear up the promotion jungle, the responsibilities should be bundled in only a few authorities. Responsibility should be delegated top-down so that decisions could preferably be made on local level (the bottom-up approach regarding project development currently faces a top-down method regarding approval – LEADER+). At the moment the complexity of promotion regulation is too high and too strongly split on higher level. The effort for achieving promotion (cross-references, regulations, requirements and conditions) most of the time exceeds the value for the applicant.

Solution proposals of the participants:

- The decision making is to be delegated to LAG or district level;
- Control mechanisms are to be reduced, e.g. bagatelle limits concerning cross-references etc.; the audit needs to be concentrated on larger projects.

Vogelsbergkreis (DE/HE 05, Hesse)

Thesis 7: The programs need to be implemented flexibly simply and rapidly.

Thesis 8: Physical targets are not always helpful (number of projects to be accomplished, number of projects with gender-mainstreaming); process and result-oriented targets would be better.

5. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

5.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II-Initiative

Objectives and strategies in the German federal states

Following the goals of the EU commission, the LEADER specific features in the OPs of the states were considered and applied. On program level this resulted in a very broad and free determination of objectives and opened a flexible scope of action to the LEADER groups and authorities. Only in Lower Saxony a thematic focal point for the program that affected the activities of the LAGs was pre-determined. In all other states this was left to the LAGs or the local approval authorities. Goals concerning the local level were exclusively formulated qualitatively and oftentimes aligned pragmatically to the feasibility and the rapid practicability of strategies during accomplishment („goal-continuum“). The majority of LAG's therefore had to develop a more or less elaborated concept which secured sufficient flexibility (even financially) during the conversion phase.

Implementation of the program

Every federal state revealed particularities regarding program implementation. While the new states (Eastern Germany) made good experiences with the administration of the 3 funds in one single resort, the old states (Western Germany) bewailed the involvement of several authorities (e.g. fund management). This was a disadvantage if the financing of projects was burdened or fell through due to insufficient coordination.

The area-demarcation and the selection of LAGs was predominantly characterized by consultations between LEADER area and program administration. The questioned LAGs by the majority mentioned that a procedure of partnership (networking, bottom-up) was initiated between public and private groups and that thus fundamental advantages for the generation of ideas arose. Smaller areas (up to the size of a district) were able to maintain this „population-close“ processes during the entire LEADER period. Larger areas oftentimes restricted the implementation to interest groups that were able to realize the projects more or less independently. The demand for the preparation of innovative and area-based projects by the programs in general showed quality improving effects for the project development process. The broader the goals and strategies of the LAG were, the more responsibilities were involved in different administrations. In this respect the LEADER coordinators within the administration are helpful. However, they are subject to the legitimacy and acceptance of the involved resorts.

On the one side the LEADER programs in fact had a flexible part regarding the selection of eligible projects. On the other side an inflexible part with strong bureaucratic management also

existed. This inflexibility was in particular generated by the open-defined funding facts and even amplified by extensive report and verification duties on all levels. In the dialog rounds with local actors (focus workshops) it was demanded that the programs need to be organized simpler, more flexible and as well more decentralised regarding the administration of funds in particular.

Lastly the interaction between the application and the understanding of the LEADER method within the administration and its effectiveness on the level of LAG-beneficiaries was determining. Thus a high degree of "LEADER qualification" and the readiness to participate in local operation levels in order to come to process-supporting decisions is to be demanded from the assigned administrators.

Results and impacts

After mastering start-up difficulties it was possible to initiate various qualitative and quantitative effects in particular during the second half of the program. All in all LEADER II was a success in Germany. The achievements could to an unexpected high degree be quantified by employment effects. Different strategies were required:

- Promotion of diversification regarding the employment basics for the rural population;
- Development of niche-markets (e.g. service networks) and introduction of information and communication technologies (e.g. telematic);
- Strengthening of tourism destinations through the profiling for target groups as well as linking and up-valuation of regional attractiveness potentials („regional amenities“);
- Build-up of regional marketing concepts (market halls, regional counters, concepts in combination with gastronomy);
- Promotion of innovative enterprise concepts (SMEs, business founders and co-operations).

Moreover, significant qualitative improvements concerning location factors as well as working and living conditions were achieved. Corresponding to the program objectives, the LEADER activities amplified

- the regional cooperation between municipalities, authorities, commercial as well as social partners and in particular between active interest groups and project executing organizations;
- the identity of the regions, especially through projects referring to the culture and life of the involved;
- the improvements of the general conditions regarding infrastructure and the profiling of the region as attractive business location;

- the enhancement of the range of services and provisions offered for the benefit of the rural population;
- the distribution and qualification with respect to new information and communication technologies;
- the improvement of environmental quality and linked utilization of resources (landscape conservation and landscape marketing, development of resource-sparing concepts).

Contribution of the LEADER specific features to the impacts (value added)

In the examined LEADER areas the establishment of managements on LAG or communal level has eased the inter-communal cooperation as well as the integration of private and public actors and accelerated the accomplishment of projects. LEADER areas without managements in contrast strongly depended on honorary engagement and the support of the regional authorities and their motivation.

As a result it is necessary to not only to win important key persons (mayors, district administrators, authority executives) but to also to convince the regional economy of a cross-section-oriented stronger cooperation (e.g. via umbrella-marketing and accentuation of regional competences). The innovation-approach and the expectation of benefiting from LEADER projects positively influenced the readiness of enterprises to cooperatively participate in regional development processes.

The organizational and communication structures of the LAGs mostly facilitated the participation of interest groups. The resulting partnerships sometimes solely based on project-oriented interests and ended after project accomplishment. If it has been possible to bundle those interests to long-run oriented thematic partnerships, in some areas productive networks arose which exist even after closing the funding phase. They mostly act as motor of innovative and independent regional development and contribute to the strengthening of regional competence.

The network-management of those partnerships turned out to be a typical extra service of the LAG that was not offered on the regular market (region specific value-added). By circulating information between LEADER actors the first interest clusters developed. For this the provision of personnel and financial resources is required. It is recommended to promote an even more systematic connection of informal partnerships regarding the development of long-term cooperation networks or trans-regional technical networks („clustering“) as these would positively influence the region's competitiveness.

The activities of the German networking body found increasing acceptance. These structures should be maintained and eventually complemented on regional level. In order to promote area-spreading and trans-national co-operations early-stage assistance is required (fundamental

information regarding the TNC and administrative processes, creation of cooperation exchanges etc.).

Achievement of objectives and recommendations

The formulated objectives of the operational programs followed the qualitative specifications of the Commission guideline. A subsequent quantification did however not occur so that the possibility of measuring effectiveness and efficiency on basis of hard data barely existed (variance comparison). The gross-effects and the derived net-effects show surprisingly high economic impacts. In order to value ecologic and socio-cultural effects further, more thorough case studies and actor-surveys would be essential.

Due to the programs multi-sectoral character the program authorities had difficulties regarding the implementation of adequate monitoring systems. According to the program authorities, the acquisition of sufficient information for the control of smaller LEADER programs was nevertheless relatively unproblematic. In order to evaluate the general and specific objectives of LEADER while considering the allegations of the EU Commission, evaluation studies needed to be carried out in the federal states which demanded extensive questioning and data collection efforts. In order to optimize the control and orientation function of monitoring and evaluation, other methods of evaluation that allow a better judgement of implementation results and effectiveness should be developed in the future. Besides a basis of quantifiable target and result indicators, the process-oriented aspects of LEADER should in particular be integrated.

The sustainability of LEADER activities was in particular secured where subsequent funding for management and projects was acquired at an early stage. The local level was due to the slow progress from program conception in the EU over the preparation of operational programs and the build-up of local implementation structures frequently forced to develop projects within a maximum of 3 years. For many LAGs the end of the approval period came too early and abrupt. Thus an enormous realization pressure arose for the LAGs, the potential project executing organizations and the promotion beneficiaries.

5.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

The general scanning of the German OPs and the basic evaluation of 124 LAGs and about 45 CBs¹² caused an intense time effort but could not supply considerable information gains. Although the analysis of individual cases provided interesting insights into the development processes and results of the LEADER groups, several physical and financial data which played

¹² About 45 of the overall 80 CBs were analysed briefly; the federal state Schleswig-Holstein did not provide data on CB-level; in Lower Saxony for the external beneficiaries (local groups outside the LEADER area) only aggregated data were available.

a major role within the EU-wide ex post-evaluation could hardly be procured, for different reasons: the local groups were generally not equipped with a global grant and individual data on LAG/CB level were originally not requested from the federal states. In addition, the shifting of means between the structural funds as well as between LEADER and other regional funding programs impeded a consistent monitoring of the financial implementation of LEADER II on state level. In general, the cost-benefit-ratio of the “basic analysis” must be assessed as rather unfavourable.

The 32 German groups which were interviewed in the scope of the Q-202 analysis predominantly valued the interviews as too voluminous and a larger number of questions also as too complex. That is why in individual cases answers remained blank. Nevertheless, the red coloured questions (ratings) were answered rather universally and surprisingly also the “green” questions stimulated for broad and often substantial answers.

The quality of the answers showed a wide variety, depending on the individual involvement of the interviewees into the LEADER process and their readiness (and ability) to support the evaluation. Generally the evaluators got the impression of rather positive answers. A reason for this may be the fact that the LAG managers respectively the responsible LEADER coordinators had to assess their own performance.

The intensive workshops with 4 focus-groups provided the evaluators with the most substantial insights into the implementation of LEADER, the participation structures of the local groups, the individual reasons for the chosen legal status as well as about the interactions between the LAGs and the administrations involved. Based on own experiences with the evaluation of LEADER programs¹³ it is suggested to further use those workshops more broadly also for the analysis of factors influencing the success or failure of local development activities.

The brief analysis of already existing ex post evaluations was insightful as predominantly good evaluations corresponding to the evaluation guidelines were carried out. If the evaluations also were based extensively on data from local level valuable information gains resulted. However, the variety in the format and particular in the focus of the evaluation reports impeded a state-spanning comprehension of the results and recommendations.

Both case studies – one on trans-national cooperation (TNC), the other one regarding the cost effectiveness analysis of comparable measures (CEA) – presented distinctively individual results. Given the case that other projects would have been selected, different results would have been achieved.

¹³ Mid-term and ex post-valuation of the LEADER programs in Bavaria and Luxembourg.

Particularly the TNC-project proved to be extremely complex and too demanding for a single LAG. In so far less the concrete development, introduction and use of an innovative technique in a tourism region forms the main result of the study; the perception that also small areas with different interest groups and without broad experiences in new technologies are in the position to make use of those innovations seems to be the most valuable result. This is also true for the experience that much more potentials for region-spanning co-operations exist than recently are used.

5.2 Report on national and regional programme evaluations

All German federal states, except Berlin, accomplished mid-term and ex post-evaluations of LEADER II. In the majority of the mid-term reports the improvement of the monitoring systems was recommended. The ex post-evaluations provided high quality results particularly if monitoring data were closely linked with primarily and representatively gathered data from interviews, case studies and actor-related intensive analyses. A national ex post-evaluation was not conducted.

6 out of 14 existing regional evaluation reports have been analysed more intensively for the EU-wide ex post-evaluation of LEADER II (meta-evaluation), the remaining reports only roughly. Table 3 informs about the realization of these evaluations as well as about the applied methods and the execution of participatory assessment techniques on local level. Independently from the EU-wide evaluation, 6 of the 32 analysed LAGs (Q-202) applied (different) methods of self-evaluation. The analysis of the LEADER specific features was conducted more or less intensively in all 14 reports.

Brief notes on the applied methods, results and recommendations extracted from 4 regional ex post-reports are attached in Annex 2 (in German language).

Table 3

Ex post-evaluations in the German federal states

Federal state	Ex-post evaluation of LEADER II			
	Realized and transmitted to the national authorities and the EU-Commission	Execution of participatory evaluation methods (incl. self-evaluation)	Intensity of the analysis of existing ex post-reports for the purpose of the EU-wide ex post-evaluation	
			Intensively	Roughly
Baden-Württemberg	X			X
Bayern	X	X	X	
Berlin				
Brandenburg	X			X
Hessen	X		X	
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	X		X	
Niedersachsen	X		X	
Nordrhein-Westfalen	X			X
Rheinland-Pfalz	X			X
Sachsen	X		X	
Sachsen-Anhalt	X			X
Saarland	X			X
Schleswig-Holstein	X		X	
Thüringen	X	X		X

The administrations involved in the EU-wide evaluation without exception stated the beneficial value of the ex post-evaluation on regional level. Nevertheless, they expressed, that the results and recommendations were hardly used for the further development of the LEADER program. Adjustments with regard to the ex post-reports mainly concern e.g. the improvement of the monitoring system and the intensification of PR-activities.

Due to the rather small programs of the federal states, fairly well contacts existed between the program authorities and the local groups/actors. Compared to the larger mainstream programs the LAGs estimated the quality of those contacts as better. In single cases the transfer of successful strategic elements of the LEADER method to other funding programs as well as general lessons learned in the course of LEADER were mentioned from the authorities as an outcome of the close interaction between administration and local level (institutional learning processes).

ANNEX: Brief notes on selected German ex post-evaluations of LEADER II

(1) Niedersachsen

Angewandte Methoden und spezifische Analysen

Zwischenbewertung Mai 1998;

Ex post Bewertung Februar 2002:

- Beantwortung der von der EU vorgegebenen Evaluationsfragen;
- Anwendung von physischen Indikatoren zur Beschreibung des Outputs der Fördermaßnahmen (Projekt-Datenblätter);
- Analyse der Zielerreichung (gemäß OP-Zielen);
- Analyse der spezifischen Zielsetzungen von LEADER (Anwendung und Mehrwert der LEADER-Besonderheiten) durch Befragung aller LAG und Ziffer 8-Gebiete.

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse, Umsetzungsprobleme und Empfehlungen

- Detaillierte Analyse der regionalen und maßnahmenbezogenen Finanzmittelverteilung; z.B. 8,6 % der Mittel außerhalb des Fördergebiets eingesetzt; Schwerpunkt Umwelt/ Lebensqualität ca. 51,6 % und Schwerpunkt Ländlicher Fremdenverkehr ca. 48 % der Auszahlungen, Bildungsmaßnahmen nur 0,4 % (Datengrundlage 593 bewilligte Projekte);
- Maßnahmenbezogene Analyse der Wirkungen mit weitgehend quantitativer Bewertung der Folgewirkungen, z.B. von Beschäftigungseffekten in Höhe von 387 geschaffenen Arbeitsplätzen (dav. 246 Saisonarbeitsplätze); dennoch ist eine Differenzierung nach Brutto- und Nettoeffekten kaum möglich. Die Vielfältigkeit und der Ergänzungscharakter der LEADER-Projekte verhindert eine eindeutige Zurechnung ökonomisch oder ökologisch quantifizierbarer Wirkungen.

Zusammenfassende qualitative Einschätzung der Evaluierungsfragen:

- „Die im Programm formulierten Ziele und Erwartungen wurden eindeutig erreicht. Dabei wurden die Umweltqualität ebenso wie das Tourismusangebot verbessert. Die Zielsetzungen stehen nicht zueinander im Konflikt. Sowohl die Angebote im Tourismus sind besser vernetzt, wie auch die LAG. Auch wenn sich Spin-off-Effekte nicht eindeutig belegen lassen, kann von einem ökonomischen Nutzen nicht nur für die Tourismusbranche ausgegangen werden, sondern auch für Handel, Dienstleistungen und Land-

wirtschaft.“ Auch im Handwerk wurden durch Investitionen temporär Arbeitsplätze gesichert.

- Der gebietsbezogene Ansatz weicht in Niedersachsen von denen anderer Regionen ab. In Verbindung mit einem landesweiten thematischen Ansatz „Wasser schützen – Wasser nutzen“ (Verbindung von Tourismus und Umweltschutz) bildeten sich großräumigere Kooperationen. Die LEADER-Gebiete waren zwar an die Landkreisgrenzen in den 5b-Gebieten gekoppelt, wurden jedoch durch die Bildung von Vernetzungen mit den benachbarten Regionen (auch außerhalb des Fördergebiets, sog. Ziffer 8-Gebiete) ausgeweitet. Demgegenüber beteiligte sich Niedersachsen kaum an der transnationalen Vernetzung (keine C-Mittel eingeplant).

Empfehlungen:

- Fortführung des thematischen Ansatzes, weil dies der „Verzettelung“ entgegenwirkt und abgestimmte Handlungsprioritäten fördert;
- Noch intensivere Einbindung der Nicht-Regierungs-Organisationen in die LAG-Strukturen (bislang dominierten öffentliche Partner und Verwaltungen);
- Stärkere und rechtzeitige Unterstützung der transnationalen Kooperation (Maßnahme C); auch die Vernetzungsaktivitäten über die DVS wurden zuletzt intensiver genutzt. Der etablierte Lenkungsausschuss in Niedersachsen hat sich auf die Kooperation der LAG und KAT positiv ausgewirkt. Eine „regionale Vernetzungsstelle“ würde diese Zielrichtung des Programms noch verstärken.
- Der Aufwand für die Beschaffung zuverlässiger Evaluations-Daten ist erheblich: insbesondere um quantifizierbare Brutto- und Nettoeffekte, aber auch ausreichend qualitative Informationen zu erhalten, sollen neue Monitoring- und Evaluierungsformen mit angemessenem Nutzen-/Aufwandsverhältnis geschaffen werden.

(2) Schleswig-Holstein

Angewandte Methoden und spezifische Analysen

Zwischenbewertung 1998;

Ex post Bewertung September 2001:

- Anwendung von Indikatoren zur Wirkungsanalyse der Fördermaßnahmen;
- Analyse der spezifischen Zielsetzungen von LEADER (Anwendung und Mehrwert der LEADER-Besonderheiten) durch themenbezogene Fallstudien (7) und Befragung aller Projektträger;

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse, Umsetzungsprobleme und Empfehlungen

- Zunächst schleppende, dann aber beschleunigte Umsetzung des Programms aufgrund intensiverer Publizitätsanstrengungen ab 1998. Ein angestrebter Qualitätswettbewerb zur Auswahl von Projektanträgen fand nicht statt, weil nur wenig mehr Projekte eingereicht wurden als Mittel zur Verfügung standen. Ein dafür erstellter Kriterienkatalog hat jedoch wesentlich zur (später erfolgten) LEADER-konformen Projektauswahl beigetragen.
- Im Schleswig-Holsteinischen LEADER-Programm waren keine LAG vorgesehen. Als Aktionsträger wurden insges. 41 verschiedene KATs aufgrund der Projektanträge ausgewählt. Die Ex post-Evaluation stellt fest, dass sich dies **nicht** nachteilig auf die Programmumsetzung ausgewirkt hat. Ein großer Teil der Projekte war trotzdem in regionale Entwicklungsstrategien (z.B. Eider-Treen-Sorge-Region) oder durch Ländliche Strukturentwicklungsanalysen (LSE) in agrarstrukturelle Konzepte eingebunden. Auch entwickelten sich während der gemeinsamen Umsetzung von Projekten Kooperationsstrukturen, die anschließend als Basis für „Lokale Partnerschaften“ weiterentwickelt wurden.
- Die im Lenkungsgremium „Programm-Nord-Rat“ zusammengeschlossenen Ministerien entschieden zentral über die vorgeschlagenen Projekte. Da an der Umsetzung relativ viele Fachreferate beteiligt waren, wurden die Projektträger mit mehreren Zuwendungsgebern konfrontiert, die jeweils unterschiedliche Anforderungen stellten (z.B. Antragstellung, Berichterstattung). Insgesamt erforderte die Programmabwicklung einen sehr hohen Abstimmungs- und Koordinierungsaufwand. Zudem kam in etwa 50 % der Förderfälle der Impuls zur Inanspruchnahme von L II-Mitteln eher von der zuständigen Behörde und nicht von der lokalen Ebene. Der Kenntnisstand über die Besonderheiten von LEADER war bei den Projektträgern deshalb eher gering. (Anmerkung: weil auf lokaler Ebene die Sensibilisierungs- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit einer LAG fehlte!)
- Negativ hat sich das Fehlen der LAG jedoch auf die Vernetzung der LEADER-Projekte untereinander und die Beteiligung an der gebietsübergreifenden Vernetzung ausgewirkt.
- Wesentlichstes innovatives Element der Projekte war die Entwicklung „neuer Formen der Zusammenarbeit“, z.B. zwischen den 5b-Landkreisen oder verschiedenen Gemeinden und privaten Partnern. Eine Beteiligung der lokalen Ebene in der Projektentwicklung hat nach Angaben der Evaluation stattgefunden. Hier wirkte sich vorteilhaft aus, dass die LSE-Gutachten sehr stark nach dem bottom up-Prinzip erstellt wurden. Dennoch dominierten in der Umsetzung öffentliche Träger.

Empfehlungen (z.T. für LEADER + schon berücksichtigt):

- Geeignete Indikatoren für LEADER+ werden mit lokaler/regionaler Ebene zusammen erarbeitet;
- Unterstützungsstrukturen für LEADER+ und die künftigen LAG sollen aufgebaut werden; insbesondere Forderung nach einer einfacheren administrativen Abwicklung der Strukturfondsmittel für die lokale/regionale Ebene. Ein Arbeitshandbuch für LEADER+ ist bereits im Januar 2002 neu aufgelegt worden.
- Kommunikation, Austausch und Vernetzung sollten im Rahmen von L+ intensiviert werden, um die gebietsübergreifende Zusammenarbeit zu erleichtern. Die gänzlich fehlenden Erfahrungen im Bereich der transnationalen Zusammenarbeit im Rahmen von L II machen für L+ eine besondere Hilfestellung erforderlich.
- Zielerreichungskontrollen sind allein auf LEADER-Projekte bezogen kaum möglich, auch weil häufig nur Teile von Projekten über LEADER gefördert werden, das Zielspektrum sehr weit gefasst war und keine Konkretisierung durch Indikatoren vorgenommen wurde. Räumlich Wirkungen lassen sich zudem erst im Zusammenwirken mit anderen Programmförderungen ermitteln. Programmübergreifende und stärker auf Regionen bezogene Evaluationen wären in diesem Fall den rein programmbezogenen Evaluationen vorzuziehen.

(3) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

Angewandte Methoden und spezifische Analysen

Zwischenbewertung 1998;

Ex post Bewertung 2001:

- Wirkungsanalyse mithilfe der im Rahmen der Zwischenbewertung vorgeschlagenen Indikatoren für die Programmbegleitung und projektbezogenen Fallstudien;
- Analyse der spezifischen Zielsetzungen von LEADER (Anwendung und Mehrwert der LEADER-Besonderheiten) mittels Befragung der LAG;

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse, Umsetzungsprobleme und Empfehlungen

- Die Anlehnung der LAG-Gebietskulisse an die Verwaltungsterritorien der Landkreise hat maßgeblich zu einer schnellen, effektiven und effizienten Durchführung beigetragen.
- Ca. $\frac{3}{4}$ der EU-Fördermittel flossen in Projekte, die der Verbesserung der Lebensqualität, der Inwertsetzung ländlicher Bausubstanz oder dem Land-Tourismus dienten. Wichtig war in MV das produktive Zusammenspiel mit der nationalen

Arbeitsverwaltung, die häufig bei Bau-Projekten die Kofinanzierung des Personals über ABM-Mittel stellte. Hier konnten vielfach Synergieeffekte erschlossen werden. Vereinzelt gab es dabei im Bereich der formalen Abwicklung (Kostentrennung). In L+ ist diese Kombination nur noch in Ausnahmefällen möglich. Einige Förderprojekte (mit Personalförderung) zeigten jedoch nach Ende der Förderphase nicht die gewünschte Marktakzeptanz bzw. wirtschaftliche Tragfähigkeit.

- Aufgrund von Schätzungen und Hochrechnungen wurden dadurch insges. ca. 1.850 Arbeitskräfte über LEADER-Projekte beschäftigt. Auch wenn die Auswertung der Arbeitsplatzeffekte im Monitoring-System nicht immer auf sicherer Daten-Basis erfolgte und deshalb wahrscheinlich zu positiv ausfallen, wurden mithilfe von LEADER höhere Beschäftigungseffekte erzielt als mit den Mainstream-Programmen der sonstigen Agrarstrukturförderung.
- Die Stärke der GI LEADER II lag eindeutig in der praktischen Erprobung und konzeptionellen Vorbereitung motivierender und innovativer Aktionen. Gerade der Aspekt der Motivation und Eröffnung von neuen Lebensperspektiven im ländlichen Raum hat oftmals eine wichtige Signalwirkung. Die Gründung von 33 neuen Unternehmen mit Unterstützung von L II ist dafür ein wichtiger Beleg.
- Eine „ständige Arbeitsgruppe“ (StAG) auf Landesebene mit Beteiligung der Ministerien und der LAG hat zum Aufbau einer guten vertikalen Partnerschaft beigetragen, die einen ausgewogenen Interessenausgleich ermöglichte. Die Bewilligung erfolgte dezentral in der Landkreisverwaltung.

Zusammenfassende qualitative Einschätzung:

- Der territoriale Ansatz wurde durch die Wahl aller Landkreise als LEADER II-Aktionsräume umgesetzt und hat sich grundsätzlich bewährt (i.d.R. produktive LAG-Führung durch die Kreisverwaltung). In LEADER+ wurde davon abgewichen, da weder alle Teilräume eines Landkreises noch alle Landkreise untereinander die gleiche Förderbedürftigkeit aufweisen.
- Die Umsetzung des bottom-up-Ansatzes erfolgte über die Einbeziehung der lokalen Akteure in die LAG. Hier gab es Verbesserungsmöglichkeiten im Bereich der Zusammensetzung der LAG, ihrer regionalen Akzeptanz und des Engagements ihrer Mitglieder.
- Der Innovationswert vieler Projekte war hoch, jedoch eher auf die Einzelinitiative von Akteure zurückzuführen, als auf strategische Innovationsarbeit in den LAG. Diese kümmerte sich eher um die Verbindung der Projekte in den Themenbereichen Direktvermarktung, Tourismus oder Kultur. Eine Integration in eine regionale Gesamtstrategie gelang jedoch nicht immer.

- Ebenso wurde die grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit vernachlässigt.

Empfehlungen:

- Ein noch systematischeres Zielsystem wäre wünschenswert, z.B. mit quantifizierten Zielindikatoren. Ebenso wäre zur Programmsteuerung die Schaffung eines den Akteuren zumutbaren und verlässlichen Begleitsystems vorteilhaft.
- Eine regional differenziertere Vergabe der Fördermittel (nicht in gleicher Höhe an alle Landkreise) wäre zudem für eine ausgleichende Strukturpolitik angemessener. Es besteht genereller Bedarf für den Aufbau einer umfassenden Fördermittelberatung für die ländlichen Räume in M-V (zu viele Zuständigkeiten).
- Die Einzelprojekte sollten stärker auf ihre wirtschaftliche Tragfähigkeit nach Auslaufen der Förderung überprüft werden, z.B. durch besseren Verzahnung von touristischen Projekten unter LEADER mit den außerhalb der Gemeinschaftsinitiative angesiedelten Tourismusaktivitäten. Die Rolle der LAG als strategisch-konzeptioneller Akteur muss noch gestärkt werden.

(4) Hessen

Angewandte Methoden und spezifische Analysen

Zwischenbewertung 1998;

Ex post Bewertung April 2002:

- Anwendung von Indikatoren zur Wirkungsanalyse der Fördermaßnahmen; schriftliche Befragung der Projektträger;
- Analyse der spezifischen Zielsetzungen von LEADER durch Befragung aller LAG und ausgewählter Programm-Administratoren sowie Experten;

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse, Umsetzungsprobleme und Empfehlungen

- Die Mittel aus den drei beteiligten Strukturfonds wurden über **eine** spezielle für die ländliche Entwicklung und die Durchführung von LEADER konzipierte Förderrichtlinie verausgabt. Dies erleichterte grundsätzlich eine kohärente Verknüpfung der Fördertöpfe, wenngleich die kontinuierliche Bereitstellung von Finanzmitteln für die lokale Ebene nicht immer gelang (Haushaltssperren, usw.). Insgesamt wurden die geplanten Mittel nicht ausgeschöpft.
- Die LAG erhielten ein hohes Maß an Eigenverantwortung für Konzepterstellung und den Einsatz der Fördermittel (Lenkungsfunktion, Beschluss über LEADER-konforme

Projekte). Die Bewilligung oblag den regionalen Ämtern für Regionalentwicklung und Landwirtschaft.

- Die Stärkung der Identifikation der Bevölkerung mit ihrer Region ist einer der wichtigsten Erfolge von LEADER, die durch aktives Regionalmanagement (der LAG) und Motivation zur Entwicklung von regionalen Vorhaben befördert wurden.
- Beschäftigungseffekte waren höher als erwartet: Obwohl dies nicht die Hauptzielrichtung von LEADER war, konnten 278 Arbeitsplätze geschaffen und 75 Unternehmen gegründet werden. Schwerpunkte waren Investitionen in KMU, die Förderung der Diversifizierung von landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben und die Errichtung touristischer Attraktionen.
- Unterdurchschnittliche Bedeutung hatten Qualifizierungsmaßnahmen (ESF), weil diese nur in Verbindung mit Projekten durchgeführt wurden. Allerdings profitierten insbesondere Frauen von den LEADER II-Qualifizierungen.

Zusammenfassende qualitative Einschätzung:

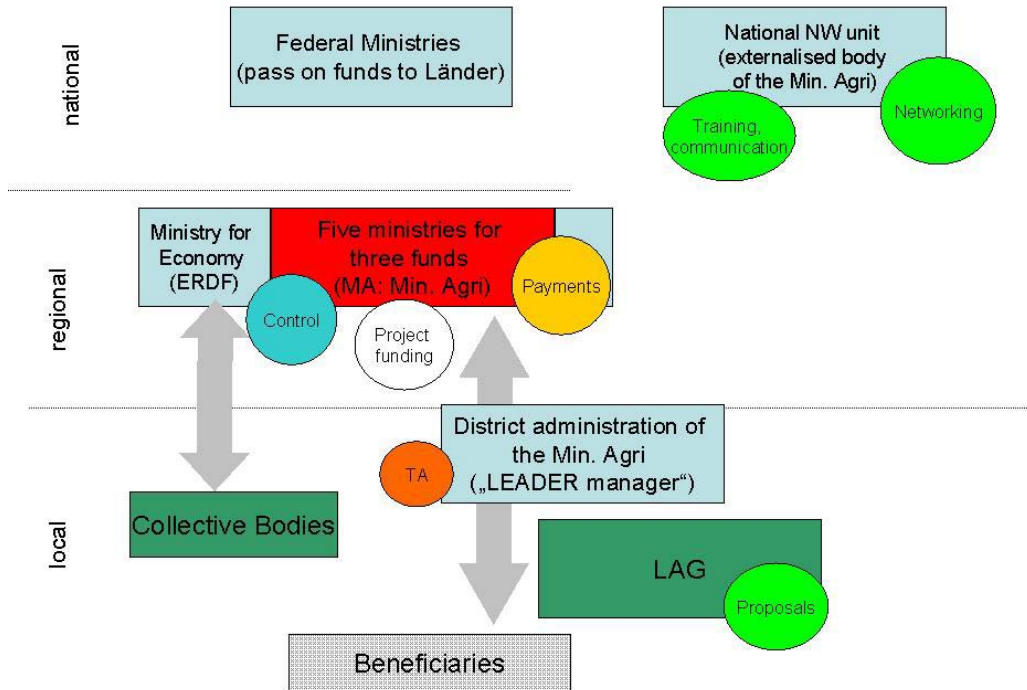
- Der bottom-up-Ansatz erfolgte über die Einbeziehung verschiedener Interessenvertreter in die LAG, generell intensive Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und vereinzelt auch durch basisorientierte Beteiligungsarbeit (Zukunftswerkstatt). Der Innovationswert wurde in Hessen nicht einheitlich definiert, sondern den jeweiligen LAG und Ämtern für Regionalentwicklung überlassen, was zu einer sehr unterschiedlichen Projektauswahl führte.
- Durch Zusammenarbeit der hessischen LAG und anderer Regionalmanagements in einer Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft ergaben sich positive Vernetzungseffekte (Informations- und Wissenstransfer. Auch der grenzüberschreitende Erfahrungsaustausch (Maßnahme C) wurde in mehreren LAG gepflegt, wenngleich es nur zu wenigen Kooperationsprojekten kam.

Empfehlungen:

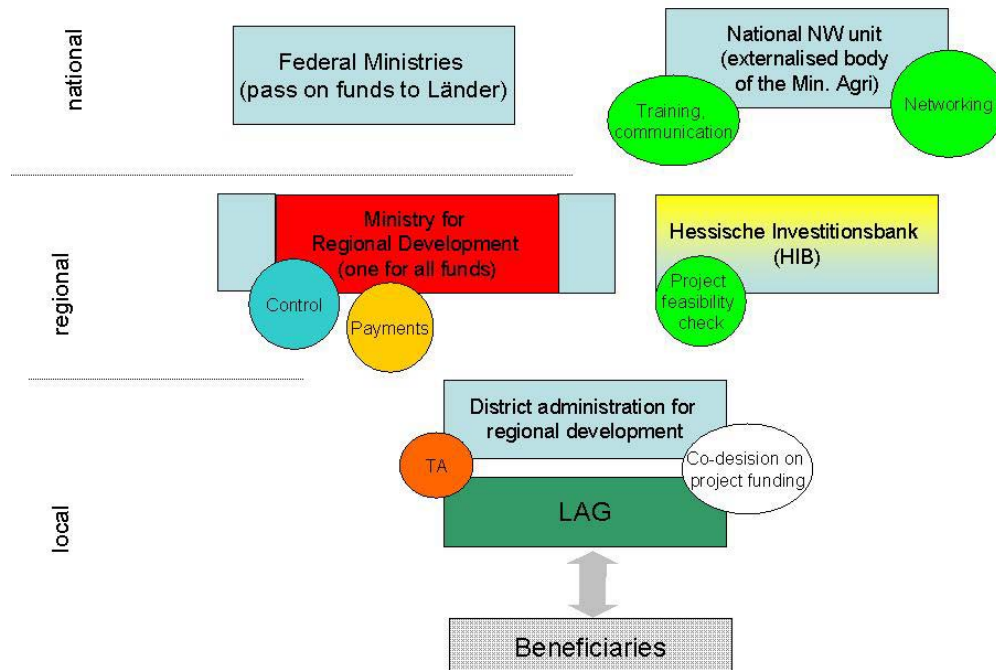
- Aufbau eines systematischeren Monitoring;
- Vereinfachung des Antragsverfahrens (nur **eine** regional zuständige Bewilligungsbehörde bei Verwaltungsgrenzen überschreitenden LEADER-Gebieten, schnellere Genehmigungen, z.B. zum vorzeitigen Maßnahmenbeginn);
- Aktuell: Die Rückverlagerung der Entscheidungs- und Bewilligungskompetenzen an die Hessische Investitionsbank in LEADER+ wird von den LAGs mit spürbaren Nachteilen für die LEADER-Projektumsetzung in Verbindung gebracht, weil das regionale „Verständnis“ für die Projekte fehlt. Durch bürokratische Bewilligungsprozeduren werden (komplexere und innovativere) Projekte erschwert; nur „einfache“ Maßnahmen schaffen die Hürden, weil sie „standardisiert“ abzuwickeln sind. Dadurch wird der Mehrwert von kleinen Innovations-Programmen wie LEADER gefährdet.

Models of implementation

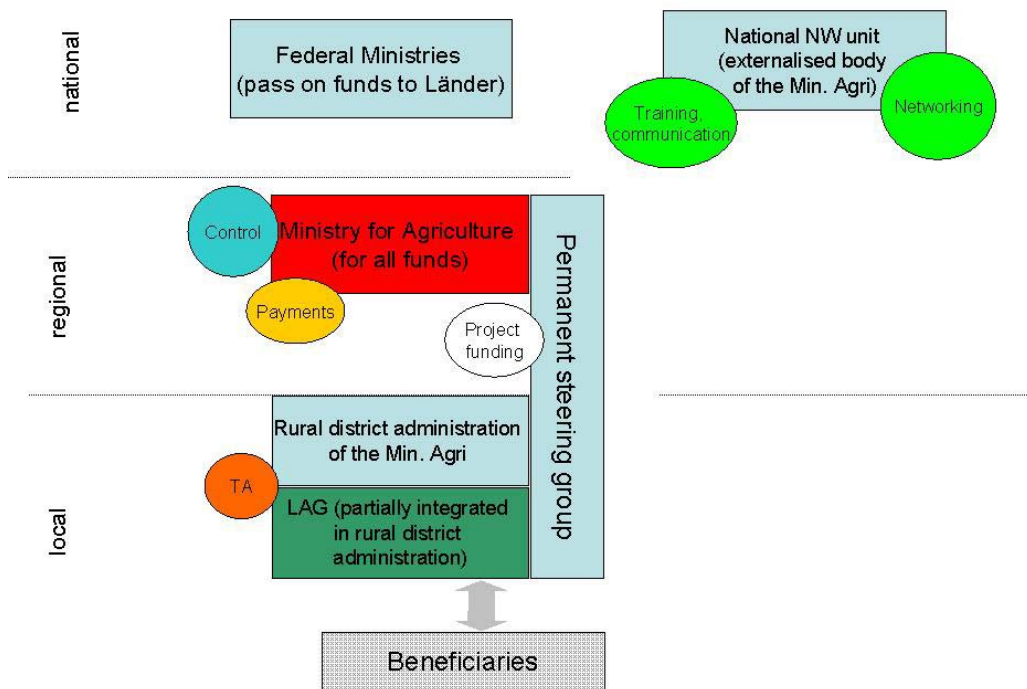
Germany – Bayern



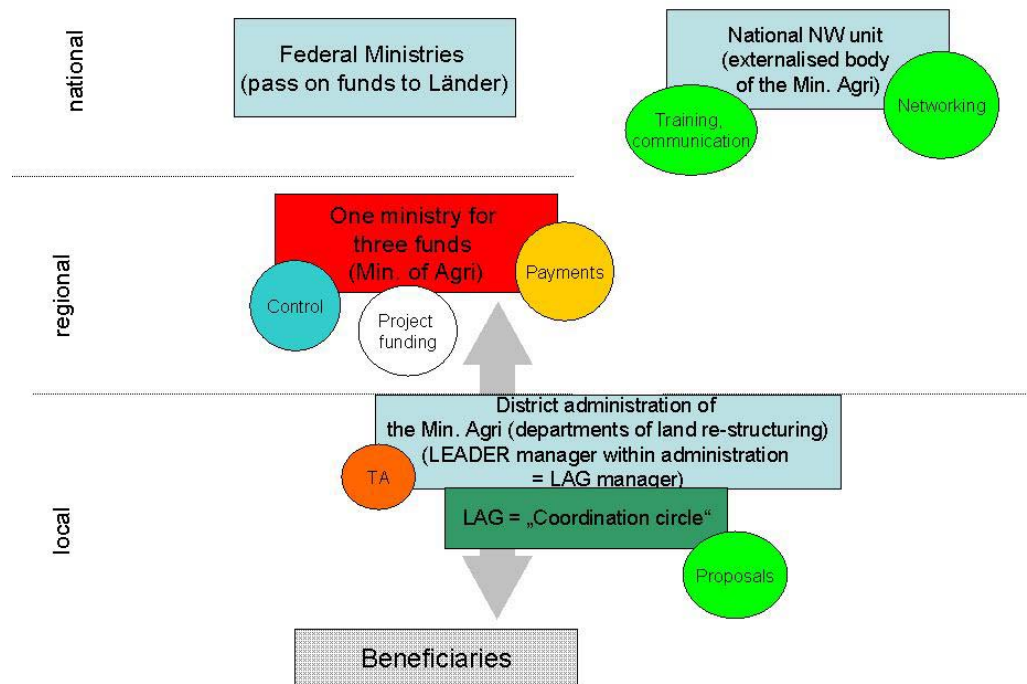
Germany – Hessen



Germany – Mecklenburg-Vorpommern



Germany – Sachsen



II.4A GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT DENMARK

Contents

1.	General introduction	131
2.	Report on focus group	132
3.	Report on national and regional programme evaluations	133
3.1	Evaluations	133
	3.1.1 Interim evaluation 16.07.98	133
	3.1.2 Ex post evaluation August 2001	134
3.2	Overall assessment	136
	3.2.1 Learning at local and institutional levels	136
	3.2.2 Future evaluations	138
3.3	Capitalisation	138
4.	General appreciation	139
4.1	General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative	139
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	140

1. General introduction

The EU ex-post evaluation of Denmark started in November/December 2002. The LEADER II programme in Denmark was a small programme, with a total budget of 29 million EUR, encompassing one national programme and 11 Local Action Groups in objective 5b area.

The focus in LEADER II Denmark was on projects which aimed to improve the environment and the living conditions in rural areas. Examples include the enhancements of small town centres and village meeting halls. Rural tourism and conservation of the local architectural heritage were other main features of LEADER II. Examples are the restoration of traditional windmills on the island of Bornholm.

The evaluation-work was carried out by geographical expert Ulla Herlitz, Sweden. Although LEADER II Denmark was a small programme, it was a challenge in each case to find the right person involved in a programme that was closed many years earlier. Another challenge was to collect the financial data from the three different funding authorities, and to have them summed up for LAGs and for the whole OP in a way that had not been done before.

In order to get a quick start of the overview of LEADER II in Denmark a visit was made, December 4th 2002, to the national authority in charge; the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. Mr Anders Årup, who was responsible for co-ordination of LEADER II in Denmark, offered very good help through the whole evaluation process. Now he was working with LEADER +. In this first meeting in Köpenhamn he gave an introduction to the Danish LEADER II system; including the programme, organisation, funding, LAGs, evaluations etc. The programme, the interim evaluation, the ex post evaluation, LAG-addresses etc were handed over to me. Additional information was collected later from the other funding authorities, LAGs etc. Some information was also extracted from the website of the LEADER Observatory.

After the meeting with the evaluation team in Brussels January 14th 2003, and when the grids were ready for use an intensive period with many contacts through telephone and mail with persons involved in the LEADER II implementation started. Also fax and regular post was used in collecting and processing the information needed for the report. Sometimes the work was like a detective's work, searching for missing people and information. The national ex-post evaluator had become a pensioner in France, and the manager for one of the selected LAGs "had nothing to do with LEADER". As time went on the problems were solved. And in the end, all of the persons were found and to different degree also willing to co-operate in the evaluation. But some of the factual questions could not be answered, although we tried hard to manage.

Another visit to the co-ordination unit at Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries was made the April 28th when also the interview (Q 34) with mr Årup was carried out. All other interviews were made by telephone and mail due to practical reasons.

The following materials have been delivered to the evaluation core team:

- OP 102; one national programme
- LAG 1000; 11 LAGs
- Q 34 key persons interviewed:
Anders Årup, national co-ordinator/ Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
Ulrick Moos, ex post evaluator
Henrik Brask Pedersen, LAG member/Regional Authority
- Q 202 Aktionsgruppen for Nordjylland Amt
Carsten Mogensen
- Q 202 Aktionsgruppen for Sammanslutningen av Danske Småøer
Tom Asmussen
Agnethe Nørgaard

2. Report on focus group

No focus group was selected in Denmark.

3. Report on national and regional programme evaluations

3.1 Evaluations

3.1.1 Interim evaluation 16.07.98

Anne-Mette Hjalager from consultant enterprise Advance/1 undertook the interim evaluation of the LEADER II programme. The evaluation highlighted some special conditions in relation to the implementation and the principles of the programme.

The programme design

The LEADER II programme, according to its objectives and contents, and the objective 5b programme were overlapping. From the beginning the LEADER area was too extent in relation to the economic resources the programme could offer, and a concentration of the LEADER area was a demand from the Commission for making a better balance between area and budget. To take measures to implement this demand on concentration was a difficult process. The concentration led to that only the rural areas could be eligible for EU funding, which in some cases could bring LEADER II in contradiction to the national laws regarding planning and environment.

The administrative set-up

The organisation of administration at local level was experienced as complicated, and in addition to that the speed of processing of the project-applications was slow.

Programme implementation

The programme started very late, as the approval from the Commission was not ready until 13.06.96. At the time of the interim evaluation it was obvious that not so many projects had started. Also due to the late start the payments were extremely slow at the time of interim evaluation, only 1,3 % of the overall EU-funding had been paid. Still, at that time, many projects were in process.

Programme effects

Due to the late start of the programme no results or effects could be measured.

3.1.2 Ex post evaluation August 2001

In August 2001 the Teknologisk Institut/Kompetence og IT/ Analyser completed the ex post evaluation. The start of the evaluation was in January 2000. The evaluation was sent to the EU Commission September 25th 2001.

Results and recommendations:

- LEADER II 1994-1999 with EU funding of 62,6 million Dkr had during the implementation period funded 483 projects, of which 158 had been in priority Tourism.
- The LEADER II programme had a special profile according to the bottom-up approach, with a more innovative approach and broader qualitative development strategy than objective 5b. The programme was technically well designed, but a greater distinction between different kind of indicators would be desirable.
- The European approach – background in international research, professional programme administration, contacts to the European LEADER Observatory etc – has made the LEADER programme an important contribution to the national rural development programmes. However the central funding authorities have only to a very small extent forwarded European experiences to the Danish LAGs and LEADER actors. The experiences collected at the LEADER Observatory have been only sporadically used as the LEADER actors on regional and local levels did not have knowledge about the Observatory.
- The national Managing Authority had not organised a national co-operation or change of experiences between the LAGs. In the later part of the LEADER II period an important co-operation was organised on initiative by regional LEADER actors.
- There has been no inadequate overlapping to other programmes. Funding from LEADER II had been a crucial prerequisite of the implementation of 87 % of the projects.
- The co-operation of the three funding authorities – with different cultural backgrounds – was not a success. The programme only supported 10-20 multi-funding projects, even though the three boards made a common marketing. Especially during the first year the integration-effort created administrative and mental barriers and processing the applications took a long time.
- The programme period started in 1994 but due to late approval of the Danish LEADER II programme, the projects did not start until 1997. This caused problems with the flow of projects during the rest of the period.
- During a long period of time, rural actors had the wrong understanding of LEADER II, they believed it was an appendix to Objective 5b. This also contributed to a slow use of

LEADER funding. However by the end of the period the budget-frame was almost used. When the evaluation was undertaken mid 2001, approximately about 100 LEADER II projects were not ready with their final report. This was regarded as an expression of uncertainty of the use of the total budget-frame.

- A questionnaire to all projects indicate that nearly 80 % of the projects had reached or nearly reached their planned objectives. This was highlighted as the key-result of the national ex-post-evaluation and showing a positive expression of an overall satisfactory result of the implementation of LEADER II programme.
- The projects have, however to a varying degree, developed the region and the local area in a broader sense. One result is the creation of readiness for development in the form of new networks and partnerships, new local services, a better environment as well as new knowledge and competence, new ideas and methods for solving problems, new optimism and willingness to take action.
- In comparison to programmes like Objective 5b with a more clear focus on job-creation, LEADER II was not mainly aimed at job-creation, but the programme also contributed to 250-300 jobs.
- The total regional effects of LEADER II are difficult to measure in statistics, as it is hard to isolate the effects of LEADER II from other influences, e.g. development of the state of market. However, a study of the socio-economic indicators for LEADER II areas shows the following key-trends over the programme-period:
 - decrease of population, but not so fast
 - unemployment rate is falling
 - income is increasing
 - decrease in agriculture and fishery, services status quo
 - the work force are more qualified
- Regarding the nature of the LEADER II programme, with bottom-up and network approach, nearly 75 % of the projects were developed in co-operation between several local actors. In this sense the results from the LEADER evaluation are quite different from the Objective 5b evaluation, which was carried out during the same time. The decentralised organisation of the LEADER II programme and creation of LAG has been successful.
- 75 % of the answers of the questionnaires indicate that the projects were innovative for the area.
- 72 % of the projects were planning for a continuation after LEADER II. This is a positive expression of sustainability.

- Most of the answers indicate that the rules for funding were too complicated, but at the same time they were satisfied with how the programme administration was functioning. On the other hand the regional field-officers criticised the programme authority's mediation of LEADER principles and the absence or lack of initiatives for trans-national and national/regional change of experiences.
- In a total valuation of the effects of the projects – related to both project level and programme level – 21 % of the projects had “great effect”, 61 % “middle effect” and 18 % had “less effect”. As a whole the effects of the programme was characterised as satisfactory.
- Describing such a fulfilment of total effects – not only the objective of a single project but also combined with the overall objective of the LEADER II programme – shows that more extensive projects have a higher rate of success than smaller projects. It turned out to be difficult for the small projects to produce effects that could be visible in the local area. In the LEADER programme – in opposite to the Objective 5b programme – this cohesion could be noticed in projects up to “middle-size”.

3.2 Overall assessment

3.2.1 Learning at local and institutional levels

In consideration of the national evaluations, the Managing Authority – the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fishery / Directorate for Food, Fishery and Agri Business – undertook measures to bring the proposals into the planning and start up process of the new LEADER+ initiative.

- *Start up of LEADER*
In LEADER II the start was delayed three years. The Managing Authority had an ambition to start up LEADER+ as early as possible after approval from the Commission; before the end of year 2001.
- *The LEADER idea and administration*
In the evaluation it was found that LEADER specificities were not adequate mediated by the funding authorities. Steps should be taken in LEADER+ to reduce this problem. The funding authorities have gained a much better understanding of the LEADER idea through their participation in LEADER II and in the planning of LEADER+ initiative. Now the administration of LEADER+ will be decentralised to 12 local action groups. This will presumably constitute a better conditions for organising the support to and implementation of projects, in relation to LEADER's idea of bottom-up and area-based approach.
- *Development in the local area*
The evaluation pointed out that many projects were aimed at developing tourism in the

local area. In LEADER+ there is now a more overall view of development, and development of the local area should be about a lot of aspects, not only tourism.

■ *Co-operation and networking*

The evaluation claimed that the LEADER II central administration had introduced too few initiatives regarding national and trans-national co-operation, that there was lack of information about the European LEADER Observatory and that the dissemination of experiences from other countries was not sufficient. In the future, these activities should be put in focus. The new LEADER+ programme is designed to reduce the problems highlighted. E.g. the programme has a measure funding co-operation both on national and European level. Furthermore there is a measure “participation in the LEADER+ network” and it is obligatory for all LAGs to participate in the national LEADER+ network, which will have a close contact to the new European Observatory. Networking will be an important part of the new LEADER initiative.

■ *Complementarity*

The Managing Authority will follow the LEADER + initiative in relation to other EU funded or national rural programmes.

■ *Increased information*

August 17th 2001 a conference about rural development was carried out. The LEADER+ programme was a part of that conference. The representatives from the media participated in the conference and LEADER+ was also highlighted in the media. In addition LAGs are presumed to give information to the local people about funding of projects within the LEADER+ programme. The LAGs have that responsibility and the Managing Authority will follow the LAG’s activities in order to ensure a good flow of information.

■ *Simplifying the funding process*

The national evaluation found the rules for funding too complicated. The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fishery will simplify the process of funding, also making the process more transparent. One example is the law for integrated rural funding, which show that it is possible to administer a tool with a better overview than was before. The monitoring committee will also follow the funding process, making the process as flexible as possible.

■ *Monitoring the effects of the programme*

A better monitoring of the macro-economic effects in the local area is planned during this new programme-period. The statistics that LAGs delivered to the central administration about the situation in LAG areas will be followed in order to explore if some effects have been gained and how the process is developing according to the objectives. The monitoring indicators that the Commission prepared will be used to produce the annually based reports. The expectation is that these indicators will give

the central administration a better assumption to evaluate the objectives of the programme. The effects on environment protection and improvement and also equal opportunities will be followed.

According to the above mentioned assessments the evaluations have been successful. The experiences and recommendations have been transferred to the new LEADER + programme. Actors in all levels involved have recognised and learned about the LEADER idea.

3.2.2 Future evaluations

- Ex-post evaluations at national and EU level should include a set of questions in common to make it easier to provide EU ex-post evaluations with basic facts and valuable information of implementation, funding etc. If these questions were known in the beginning of the programme it could also help the projects, LAGs and funding authorities etc. in presenting annual reports. Makes it easier also to follow/compare the development of the programme at LAG level and national level.
- It should be of great value with a deeper penetration of each of the LEADER specificities.
- In the national ex-post evaluation a study was made of all the 483 projects (44 % answered the questionnaire), also interesting could be analysis based on a geographical approach with focus on the LAG areas.

3.3 Capitalisation

Experiences from implementation of LEADER II programme show weaknesses on two points:

- The broad variety of measures/priorities possible for funding created a sprawling mix of projects.
- The strategy of implementing had difficulties to live up to LEADER ideology and to some extent reduced the programme to a “mini – 5b”.

(See corresponding grid)

4. General appreciation

4.1 General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative

The LEADER II programme was several years delayed, as it did not start until 1997. The Commission wanted the programme to cover a LEADER II area which should cover 50 % of the population of 5b-area, not the whole 5b area as proposed by Denmark. The negotiation ended up with the 5b-area excluding all towns/villages down to 600 inhabitants, which posed difficulties for the daily administration of LEADER.

In spite of a late and slow start, confusion between LEADER II (mini-5b) and Objective 5b, limited information from the Managing Authority, no highlighting of the LEADER specificities, no national LEADER network, sparsely trans-national contacts and a complicated funding process with three different funding authorities, LEADER II managed quite well. The national ex-post evaluation found that the effects of the projects (483 projects) funded within the programme had been “satisfactory”. At local level many projects were developed through co-operation between local actors, they were innovative in the area and also sustainable.

LEADER II was brought out in a quite easy way and the administration used the ministries, municipalities, counties etc. already existing groups for the implementation, e.g. there were no selection process of LAGs as the regional 5b groups were appointed as LAGs. A close contact between LEADER II and 5b was then also easily established.

The national ex-post evaluation criticised the non existing networking, TNC and also decentralised management and funding (opinions from persons interviewed; in comparison to Objective 5b there was a quite notable decentralised system in LEADER II with the LAGs, the local co-operation in projects etc.) The critical points have been taken into consideration by the responsible ministries and integrated in LEADER+ . The LEADER spirit has increased over the years and it is not until now in LEADER+ that actors from all levels have “discovered” / are “discovering” the LEADER spirit.

I argue that actors at project level, some “fire-spirits” at all levels and the evaluations – especially the national ex-post evaluation – have been very important in putting emphasis on the LEADER specificities and development of the LEADER spirit. That process took about ten years. This development process – including change of behaviour – took a long time. Perhaps the Danish example – when things don’t change too fast – with new impulses in combination with some resisting elements of mainstreaming (use of the already functioning structures) will be a success in the long run.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

- It is not easy to ask questions about a programme that took place several years earlier.
- Far too many questions to the LAGs.
- The factual questions took too long time in relation to the time planned; three different funding authorities and the data was not delivered or earlier published for the categories asked for in our evaluation; e.g. LAG level.
- To collect factual comparable data is not an issue for evaluators at EU level, the data should be provide by the Observatory or by the Commission via national Managing Authority.
- More time should be planned for the geographical evaluator to comment on national evaluations etc.

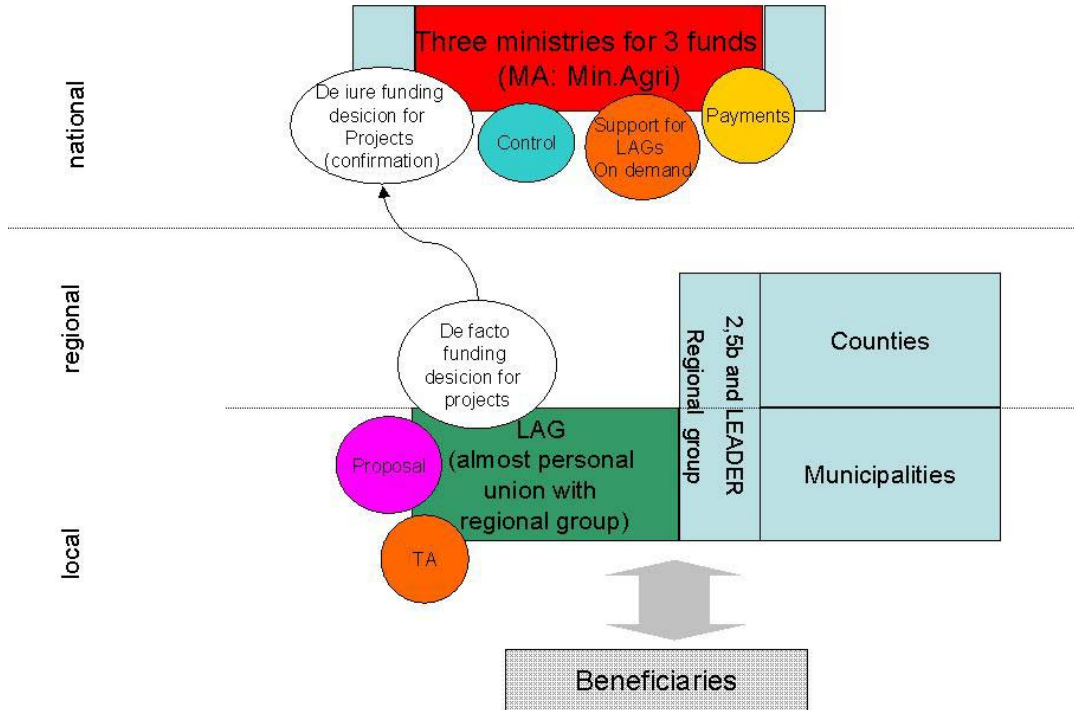
SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: DANMARK

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	The LAG areas were selected from above with some consultation between central and regional administrations and local actors.	At the beginning some rural actors were not aware of the specific LEADER idea, the programme was for a long time regarded as "mini-5b". However at the end they had learned that LEADER II programme was more of a method than a traditional funding source.	Bottom-up approach when appointing the members of LAGs.
Bottom-up approach	75 % of the projects had been developed in co-operation between local actors.	Readiness for future development; the local actors have learned a method how to work for local development. The issue of rural development had been put on the Agenda, it had been visualised not only among authorities but also among rural people.	
The local group	In many cases the 5b regional group (Indstillningsudvalget for Mål 5b) was identical to LAG. Some LAGs were more professional than others.	Some rural actors were not aware of the specific LEADER idea, the programme was for a long time regarded as "mini-5b". Professional guidance to projects and networking seemed to be the most important conditions for success.	To make a real bottom up approach the LAG could be elected by the people in the area; in a general election.
Innovation	75 % of the projects were innovative for the area.		Keep some funding for a national competition of innovative projects at the national level.
Multisectoral integration	–		
Networking	No national LEADER network was set up by the managing authority. Later some LAGs organised ad-hoc co-operation. A study circle "From idea to practise" put focus on the process.	Networking and professional guidance to projects seemed to be the most important conditions for success.	Experiences transferred and considered in LEADER+.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Trans-national cooperation	The managing (funding) authorities had to a very limited extent informed the LEADER actors of trans-national co-operation and LEADER Observatory.	Only one trans-national project was carried out. The LAGs did not participate in the exchange of experiences as frequent as the LEADER idea assumed.	Experiences transferred and considered in LEADER+.
Decentralised management and financing	It was not easy to implement a programme that intended to decentralise and at the same time kept the decision making at a superior level.		Experiences transferred and considered in LEADER+.
Other important issues	The LAGs used area-based, bottom up and innovative approach as most important issues in the selection process of projects.		

Model of implementation



II.4B GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT SWEDEN OP LEADER II OBJECTIVE 5B

Contents

1.	General introduction	147
2.	Report on focus group	148
3.	Report on national programme evaluations	149
3.1	Overview and synthetic description	149
3.1.1	Interim report	149
3.1.2	Final report – implementation	150
3.1.3	Final report – results and objectives	151
3.1.4	Final report – white book	153
3.1.5	LEADER II Network	153
3.1.6	Processing at national level	154
3.2	Overall assessment	155
3.3	Capitalisation and recommendations	156
4.	General appreciation	160
4.1	General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative	160
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	161

1. General introduction

The evaluation-work was carried out by geographical expert Ulla Herlitz, Sweden. Although LEADER II Objective 5b Sweden was a small programme it was a challenge find the right persons involved in a programme that was closed many years earlier. Another challenge was to collect the financial data from the three different funding authorities, and to have them summed up for LAGs and for the whole OP in a way that had not been done before.

LEADER II was carried through in the Swedish Objective 5 b area between 1996-1999. The programme comprised measures B – Rural Innovation Programme, measure C – Transnational Co-operation and measure D – Technical Assistance. Compared to other EU funded programmes, LEADER II was a small programme. The LEADER II programme with nine LAGs in Objective 5b area was budgeted (paid) 65 million ECU compared to 793 million ECU for Objective 5b.

In order to get a quick start of the overview of LEADER II in Sweden the ex-post evaluation work started in November 2002. First of all the key-persons were informed about the coming ex-post evaluation. They were asked to participate with factual information and some of them to be interviewed. I wanted them to be prepared for further contacts later on in 2003.

After the meeting with the evaluation team in Brussels January 14th 2003, and when the grids were ready for use an intensive period started with many contacts through telephone and mail with persons involved in the LEADER II implementation. Also fax and regular post were used in collecting and processing the information needed. Sometimes the work was like a detective's work, searching for missing people and information.

Glesbygdsverket (The National Rural Development Agency) was the managing authority for both LEADER II 5b and 6, and handed over the programmes, interim and ex-post evaluations, annually reports, information on the LEADER Network etc. The financial information had to be collected from each of the three different funding authorities. This process to gather the financial data as well as some other factual information took too long. The officials were busy with new tasks and it was complicated and time-consuming for them to look for data from the LEADER II period, but anyhow they were rather polite and tried to do their best during the present situation.

The delay of data for the LAG 1000 was due to the fact that the three funding authorities also worked and prioritised the final LEADER II report to the Commission, and data at LAG level was not included in that report. Another problem was that the LAGs had sent all their documentation to a national archive and overall the financial data was not easy accessible to fit in the grids for this ex-post evaluation. All LAGs were contacted and they helped giving and/or checking the information in the LAG 1000 grid.

The former Objective 5b area was eligible for LEADER +. The LAG “LEADER Värmland” was selected for the Q202. That LAG did apply for LEADER + but was not selected. They still existed as an organisation as they were not ready yet with the financial issues. As all the other LAGs they had sent the documentation to the national archive, which was to some degree a problem when looking for answers to the factual questions. Nevertheless, the manager for the was very helpful and willing to co-operate. The manager also assisted to select the two projects for the CEA study; Dirty Dancing from Objective 5b and Total Musikal from LEADER II.

The following materials have been delivered to the evaluation core team:

- OP 102; one national programme
- LAG 1000; 9 LAGs
- Q 34 key persons interviewed:
Agneta Spetz, Ministry of Industry
Nils Lagerroth, LEADER Network
Tim Brooks, National Rural Development Agency
Lars Larsson, Uppsala University, Dep. Of Social and Economic Geography
Staffan Bond, Popular Movements Council for Rural Development
- Q 202 LEADER Värmland/Kjell Toreld, County of Värmland
- CEA; comparative study on Dirty Dancing and Total Musikal

2. Report on focus group

No focus group was selected within this programme.

3. Report on national programme evaluations

3.1 Overview and synthetic description

3.1.1 Interim report

The interim report was made by Euro Futures AB and dated October 1997. LEADER II in Sweden had hardly begun at that time and the programme was very delayed. In September 1997 only 10% of the total budget was reserved. One important conclusion of the interim evaluation was that the speed must increase considerably in order to ensure the implementation of the programme within the given time.

The LAG plans focused on the improvement of a good environment for activities and development. The evaluator pointed out the importance to focus the project towards more commercial activities in the priorities small enterprises, rural tourism and valorisation of agricultural products. To have success with these projects, the evaluator suggests in addition to the LAGs to include an active supporting function (mobilising, planning and coaching projects) as a natural part of the project.

Another suggestion was to supplement the existing indicators in the LAG plans with qualitative indicators that could show the soft development issues such as:

- willingness for change
- ambition of autonomy
- knowledge about enterprising
- willingness to start an enterprise.

The implementation of LEADER II during the evaluation period was characterised by start-up problems. Many of the problems in the beginning were due to the complex decision making structure. Gradually these problems were solved within the existing structure, and no recommendation was given to change the structure at present. In the future – with a possible LEADER III – there could be reason to change the structure to some extent.

Ordering from EU-funds had not been functioning. Only one project had so far (12.9.1997) been paid. Glesbygdsverket, the Managing Authority, should be given a commission to co-ordinate and streamline the three funding authorities management of orders and payments to the LAGs. In addition the LAGs must themselves more actively take part in the financing process.

The national co-financing had so far not been a problem for the majority of LAGs in objective 5b area, but some LAGs had great problems to find co-financing actors and announced doubts if it was possible to implement the plans.

An important part of development work is that the information to and from the LAGs is functioning. A problem implementing LEADER was that no one had an overall responsibility for handling the information. The Monitoring Committee was recommended to arrange the possibilities for such a function.

3.1.2 Final report – implementation

In December 1999 Ledningskonsulterna i Stockholm AB was given the commission to carry out the national ex-post evaluation of LEADER II in Sweden. Glesbygdsverket, the Managing Authority, ordered the evaluation on commission of the Monitoring Committee. The work was divided in to two separate parts. This first part handles evaluation of the implementation and was finished in May 2000.

This first ex-post evaluation report concentrated on needs of changes during the time left for the LEADER programme and also to contribute with recommendations for LEADER+.

The evaluation made following conclusions:

- The establishment of LAGs took a long time, it was a process that continued also during the first years after the formal establishment was done. Many problems occurred; uncertainty with partnerships, local LEADER offices, funding of technical assistant, understanding of innovation, prohibition against activities within single firms etc.
- The activities carried out were as a whole according to the programme and LAG plans, with the exception of the problem to have single enterprises as beneficiaries in the priorities adopted to them. Important prerequisites were the possibilities to fund ideas and projects not streamlined for traditional measures or EU programme and also that LEADER opened up for beneficiaries to use voluntary work and for entrepreneurs to use own working time as private co-financing. This kind of contribution injected the national local development work with considerable resources.
- The resources needed to establish and implement a programme parallel to the existing regional and national structures and also introducing new methods were underestimated.
- The establishment of local partnerships, involvement of local actors/ beneficiaries, accessibility etc, developed according to the programmes and LAG-plans. However, the LAGs had problems with the public co-financing at county level. "The LAG autonomy in relation to the traditional public actors is an explanation why it has been difficult to establish a close co-operation at county level.
- A problem in implementing the programme was the complex and slow administration of the funding procedure. It was very resource-consuming at all levels.

- Analysis made by the evaluators show shortages in managing and monitoring of the programme. After approval of the LAGs no management by objectives was done. No qualitative indicators were introduced as was recommended in the interim report. The LEADER Network had been given the task also to identify, analyse and estimate qualitative results for dissemination, but no systematic information was brought back to the policymaking bodies. An important conclusion was that the Managing Authority, if they choose to delegate the dissemination, should not give up the managing and monitoring of the LEADER activities and should keep the responsibility to bring back information to policymaking levels.
- The flow of project-ideas and results between LEADER II and other structural funds were limited due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the LEADER mission and also lack of co-operation between the LAGs and the decision groups for Objective 5b.
- Analysis show great difficulties to handle the horizontal objective in terms of equal opportunities. Managing this issue at programme, LAG and project level have been more of a formal character. The lack of success often related back to weak management.

3.1.3 Final report – results and objectives

In December 1999 Ledningskonsulterna i Stockholm AB was given the commission to carry out the national ex-post evaluation of LEADER II in Sweden. Glesbygdsverket, the managing authority, ordered the evaluation on commission of the Monitoring Committee. The work was divided in to two separate parts. This second part of the evaluation dealt with results and objectives and was published in October 2001.

The following conclusions were made by the evaluation team:

- The overall assessment of the qualitative analysis show that the background, chosen strategies, organisational set up etc influenced in a quantitative perspective, while the qualitative objectives found in the LEADER plans have had less influence on the results. The start of LEADER was slow and the first part of LEADER period had constantly recurring disturbances. In fact the time for project implementation was too short which strongly contributed to the possibilities to carry out the activities focusing innovation, dissemination and influencing methods for rural development.
- The partnership-model has been established and is today an accepted method to organise rural development work. The voluntary actors have been accepted as legitimate actors within rural development work. The co-operation within the municipalities has developed. Especially the co-operation between the voluntary sector and the municipal sector had advanced and deepened. The business' sector

participation in the local partnership had been limited, which show the difficulties of establishing genuine 3-partnerships.

- The innovative objective according development and establishment of the LEADER method at LAG level has not fully been implemented. The concentration has been more on problem solving activities instead of development of different methods for rural development. Bottom up perspective, local mobilisation and to start and run projects have been the main focus. Due to this readiness, consciousness and resources in the local responsibility and future development work have reinforced.
- The projects have had a relatively weak market orientation as well as meeting the needs which influenced the possibilities to meet important objectives as innovation and market orientation. The activities have not in an obvious way resulted in new solutions that could be used in a rural development strategy more concentrated on structural change of rural areas. Nevertheless, many innovative projects have been carried out because of LEADERs accessibility for new and not so streamlined actors, projects whose results are important to take care of.
- The projects have developed from a bottom up perspective and were based on earlier mobilisation processes and further developed processes during the start up of LEADER. One weakness observed was that not many farmers had been participating in LEADER.
- The interest and knowledge about the LEADER method have increased. The voluntary and municipal sectors have contributed to the dissemination of knowledge and experiences from LEADER. A more planned dissemination and influence have been limited due to shortages in the monitoring and management system. The distribution of roles and responsibilities were blurred, which hindered the possibilities for an effective system for dissemination and influence. The division of responsibility between the Managing Authority and the LEADER Network also influenced the dissemination in a negative way. The Network was the one that in a more systematic way had disseminated important experiences about examples of good projects.
- The LEADER programme has engaged many thousands of people. Together they constitute a unique knowledge about development work in rural areas. This knowledge must be taken care of as soon as possible, as it also can disappear rapidly when people are going further to other jobs and tasks.
- The women in Swedish rural areas have been strongly engaged in implementing LEADER II. LEADER has given them a base and resources to develop their competence and engagement. However this has not led to much influence of female aspects of the implementation of the horizontal objective for equal opportunities.
- The horizontal objective on environmental protection and improvement was clear and it was rather common with environmental projects in a broad sense.

- The youth as a prioritised target group in the programme had a clear impact. Many projects were completely or partly concentrated on this group. However it was hard to identify results and therefore hard to judge if the objective was achieved or not.
- The trans national co-operation was extensive, but only a few projects were implemented at C-level. The co-operation resulted in many contacts and the projects were mostly concentrated on different common activities. Less in focus were activities about increased business relations and trade. For the LAG members and staff the contacts at LAG level have been important sources for stimulation and knowledge, and their view of how a successful LEADER work can be implemented have also been influenced.

3.1.4 Final report – white book

In connection to the ex-post evaluations of LEADER 5b and 6 a white book was published. The sub- title was “Experiences to learn from – Innovative project-results from the implementation of LEADER II” (August 2001). This publication is not an evaluation of projects, but an interesting example of how to disseminate the experiences from LEADER projects and to reflect upon the use of and relevance of some the experiences made in about 20 different projects.

3.1.5 LEADER II Network

An evaluation on the Swedish LEADER II Network (August 2000) was carried out according to the recommendations from the Commission. The evaluator stated the Swedish LEADER Network had organised activities according to the planned objectives. In general, the network succeeded very well with the actions. Good relations were established between LAGs and the Network which facilitated an effective dissemination of information.

The very short evaluation report consist mostly of presentations of the activities, in fact very few analytic viewpoints were made. The presentation comprised:

- gathering of information
- dissemination of information
- conferences, seminars and workshops
- networking
- measures to promote rural development.

Some results:

- More seminars were organised than initially planned and all seminars had many participants from the LAGs.
- A web-site was developed, including a database of LEADER projects.
- Analysis of innovative projects was going on in close connection to the Swedish Agriculture University. The reports were published at the web-site.

Regarding the networking, the evaluator had found that the LEADER II Network had played an important role for the co-operation and contacts between LAGs. Change of experiences between the groups had facilitated the implementation of the programme and also inspired finding different solutions of rural area problems. The board of the network were representing a wide range of the most important and widespread popular movements in the rural areas as well as the public national rural development agency (Glesbygdsverket). Together they had access to very short and fast channels to disseminate experiences from the LEADER activities to the rest of the country.

The evaluator also made a special comment that all activities made by the Swedish LEADER II network aimed at promoting rural development. In addition to the networking activities they also tried to influence the rural policy; e.g. the Network was asked to give its view on the new national rural programme and other new official measures for rural development.

The board also took initiative to a programme to develop methods for development in rural areas, inspired by the LEADER method. The programme was named "Method LEADER" and was carried out in the Objective 6 area. The board was the same for the new programme as for the network which enabled an interplay in change of experiences and networking. A special evaluation of the programme took place.

3.1.6 Processing at national level

The evaluations were commissioned by the Managing Authority and also processed within their normal routines. They were presented at the web-page and could be ordered from the MA. Press-releases were also made. The evaluations were sent to the Commission and distributed to MC, different important actors etc.

The evaluation as a development method was new in Sweden. Earlier it was common to report programme/project results in a more descriptive way and they were often also made by the persons involved. Evaluations made in a professional and systematic way was something new for Swedish local development activities. In fact these evaluations were "dutifully" made because they were a part of the LEADER concept, they had to be done within the programme.

The persons in charge of LEADER were informed through newsletters, web-page etc. about the evaluations and hopefully ordered and read them. At least the responsible ministry and national authorities had to take care of the recommendations etc. The MC had ongoing discussions with the evaluators, which were presented in the interim report, followed by the ex-post evaluation. As the MC did not exist when the ex-post evaluation was ready there was no organised follow up and discussions about the findings.

There is a time-problem related to processing of the evaluations and the usefulness in a short perspective. Even the interim evaluation was in practice too late to influence the ongoing LEADER II, and the ex-post evaluation was too late to give feed-back for those involved in LEADER II. E.g. the recommendation in the interim evaluation of developing qualitative indicators was not implemented in LEADER II. But in fact another recommendation on limited information co-ordination did influence the establishment of the LEADER network.

The experiences and recommendations from the interim evaluation and the experiences from the ex-post evaluation in progress did however influence and were taken into consideration when processing the LEADER + programme.

Two officials, "firespirits", within the Managing Authority and the Ministry had in mind to mainstream the LEADER method into the Government bill on regional policy. They were involved in that work and could also bring some methods about 3-partnership, bottom-up etc in the draft, but as the Swedish Government did not have their own majority and was dependent of two smaller parties of which one insisted not to bring these methods in the bill, they were withdrawn.

3.2 Overall assessment

The usefulness and relevance of the the national evaluations for learning at local level seems to have had an indirect learning effect. Experiences and recommendations from the national evaluations have had a clear influence on some features in the LEADER + programme and implementation that effects the learning processes at local level. E.g. the claim that all LAGs should prepare an annual report in which the strategy and achievement of the LAG plan should be described and commented. These annual reports are aimed at highlighting and learning about how development plans based on LEADER principals can be implemented. Also in LEADER + the aim is to broaden the project data-base to have a learning process perspective by both describing the project and the experiences made.

NUTEK, the national authority in charge of making the final national report on LEADER II to the Commission made a special comment on this relevance-issue. They argued like this: The evaluations were not ready when LEADER + programme was processed and from that point of view results of evaluations seemed to be of no value, but they explained Glesbygdsverket

during the time the evaluations were carried out had discussed with the evaluators and used their findings and views. NUTEK also mentioned that many of the problems which the evaluations stressed in the written reports were already known by Glesbygdsverket. The managing authority was well aware of the problems. Through the LAGs they were informed about the difficulties and also the possibilities.

This reflection show the difficulties to judge who really “owned” the origin of the problem, conclusion and solution. Perhaps many technical/administrative problems could have been solved without the evaluations, but when it comes to the analysis of development strategies, methods etc that can impact rural policy evaluations are of great value.

All evaluations, except for the LEADER II Network evaluation which was more of a short description, were professionally conducted and interesting; giving relevant recommendations and highlighting important problems, both technical problems and also difficulties in a wider sense in relation to national policy and global development.

I have studied the six evaluations mentioned earlier and what is striking when discussing with officials at the Managing Authority as well as the responsible Ministry is that none of them has analysed the whole bunch of evaluations in order to make conclusions and proposals to bring back to the national rural policy. The attempt to mainstream some LEADER elements in the Government bill on regional policy was ad hoc. The NUTEK report of LEADER II in Sweden is a well prepared summary, but as it is a report on a programme it was not designed to suggest changes in the national rural policy and it was also not their taks. My recommendation for future evaluations has nothing to do with the evaluations as such, it is the processing of the results at national level that has to improve. The experiences of LEADER II have influenced LEADER + , but the evaluations could be used for further discussions of the possibilities of mainstreaming the LEADER specificities in the development policy in general and how this can be done.

3.3 Capitalisation and recommendations

In the ex-post evaluations, the recommendations are based on the evaluations carried out but also the general knowledge of experimental programmes that the evaluation team possessed. The recommendations are divided in five categories; recommendations on the implementation, recommendations to LEADER +, overall recommendations, necessary conditions of experimental programmes and finally recommendations on the managing authorities (managing authority, MC and LAGs) and its structure and commission.

Implementation

- Managing the programme the Managing Authority and the LAGs ought to focus on follow-up and evaluation of closed and ongoing projects.
- A more systematic analysis of the implementation should be carried out, based on the information from evaluations of LAGs and programmes already available.
- The responsible Ministry and Glesbygdsverket ought to initiate methods how to use and bring back results and experiences to the policy making level, from the implementation process as well as the innovative projects.
- A functioning database for documentation of the implementation etc. must be set up.

LEADER +

- LEADER II LAGs not continuing in LEADER + ought to be given two years to close their programme.
- This could be arranged with resources from Objective 1 and 2.
- In the Objective 1 area, where LEADER + is excluded, a global grant-programme could be a solution,
- Managing LEADER +, besides administrative and economic management, ought to focus implementation of strategies and objectives in the LAG plans.
- A possible improvement of management could be "calls for proposals" which makes it easier for a LAG to manage the flow, administration and decision making of applications according to LEADER strategy, objectives and indicators.
- Developing of a more programme oriented view of development (instead of projects) by the involved public actors.
- The new programme have to be better established among public authorities at county level.
- For a better relation (co-operation and flow) between LEADER and other EU funded programmes the programme should give clear instructions and objectives.
- A need for developing methods for mainstreaming of equal opportunities, which also could be used in other structural fund programmes.
- A claim on the LAG officials to have good administration and economy-competence.
- A functioning database for documentation of the implementation etc. must be developed.

Overall recommendations

- Introduce qualitative indicators at all levels.
- The quantitative objectives should not be superior to qualitative objectives.
- The qualitative objectives should be set up at all levels with connected indicators.
- MC and Managing Authority should make the programme with its objectives, strategies and measures deeply rooted in authorities, organisations etc involved at regional and national level.

Necessary conditions

- Management takes time – the Managing Authority and the LAGs must be given enough resources to fulfil their tasks.
- The officials must concentrate on implementing plans, projects etc. The administration and funding systems have to be easily functioning.
- Only the two last years in LEADER II were effective time for implementing the programme, plans and projects. This was not enough time for a sustainable establishment of the LEADER method in the areas concerned. The LAGs should be given opportunities to continue their activities in LEADER + or in other programmes.
- The LEADER method and programme ought to be well known and accepted at all levels to ensure the projects to focus on the innovative objectives. Until now, the projects have been focusing more of traditional rural development areas. The bottom up approach has been very clear through the whole implementation, but has not fully supported the innovative objectives as these were not understood to be the main objectives at local level.

Managing

- Visualise the traditional rural actors' view of development-needs.
- The rural actors have to analyse their own activities in relation to the objectives of the programme; to identify own needs and find out how they could fit in the programme.
- MC and MA have to be organised to focus on the results both on programme level and LAG level, making clear distinction between how objectives, strategies and measures are achieved.
- The LAGs have to constantly follow the achievement of the plans/strategies and the projects. The MA have to insure that this is done.

- MA should make corrections in one way or another when limits occur according to the planned results and objectives.
- The main responsibility of dissemination and influence should rest on the MA, even if some information tasks are delegated to e.g. the LEADER Network. The MA should also be responsible for analysing of what kind of change in rural policy should be proposed based on experiences of the implementation of LEADER programme. The LAGs should have the responsibility to disseminate and bring back the results to actors at local level. All levels/actors involved in LEADER should take an active interest in the results. That is an important part in disseminating and influencing the activities.

(See also corresponding grid)

4. General appreciation

4.1 General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative

The main outcome according to my opinion was the empowerment and increased competence among the local people involved in managing and participating in LAGs and projects, and the opportunities for them to meet in different networks, seminars and conferences was a very important tool. Another important circumstance was the established contacts between people from different levels. LEADER enabled “fire-spirits” from all levels (from EU level to village level) and from different sectors (voluntary, private and public) to work together. It was obvious that those contacts played a role in creating the very positive feeling of belonging to the “LEADER family” or the “LEADER spirit” as some of the people interviewed named it. Perhaps the national LEADER programme, the MA, the MC, the LAGs, evaluations etc. should more than what was done have stressed these unique elements and the other LEADER specificities.

Even though the evaluations very much focused on serious problems and recommendations how to avoid or overcome these obstacles, the interviews showed people with a great enthusiasm for the LEADER method. The problems faced did not destroy their trust in the LEADER method, in their opinion it was not the LEADER method but the traditional structure that should be changed.

A problem with evaluations is that they naturally evaluate the outcomes in relation to the programme. But in these evaluations where the methods were in focus, it would have been interesting with assessments comparing the LEADER method with methods used e.g. in Objective 5b and 6, with traditional national methods for rural development and also with methods used in the voluntary village action movement.

A question discussed in Sweden when introducing LEADER was whether it was fair to support 12 LAGs and leave the rest of the Swedish rural areas behind or with the same total amount of money support as many village partnerships as possible. Now, when the Government has excluded former Objective 6 from LEADER + this question can be on the agenda again, but put in a different way. The challenge is how to implement the LEADER method without a LEADER programme; how to mainstream the principles to the rural development activities at national, regional, municipal and village level.

Strong recommendations

The focus group meeting was one of the highlights in this evaluation work. I strongly recommend a focus group meeting should be offered to all LAGs as a part of the evaluation process and learning process, planned from the beginning and funded in the LAG budget. As both the evaluations carried out and the focus group stressed the lack of “LEADER understanding” I also strongly agree with the focus group recommendation to educate actors at

all levels involved in LEADER in the LEADER method so that they also can act according to the principles in the programme they are a part of.

Most astonishing

The most astonishing experience was reading the evaluations, there was so much of knowledge and so many experiences. The evaluations constitute a great potential for those who would like to analyse rural development and make proposals to improve the traditional development policy. Until now it seems like the evaluation results have settled “between the chairs”.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

- It is not easy to ask questions about a programme that closed several years ago.
- There were far too many questions to the LAGs.
- The factual questions took too long time in relation to the time planned; three different funding authorities and the data was not delivered or earlier published for the categories asked for in our evaluation; e.g. LAG level.
- To collect factual comparable data should not be the task of the evaluators at EU level, the data should be provided by the Observatory or by the Commission via national Managing Authority.
- More time should be planned for the geographical evaluator to comment on national evaluations etc. This part should be in the very beginning of the evaluation.
- The focus-group, TNC and CEA studies were like a learning process for those interviewed, and it was very appreciated, as well as it was interesting for me as an evaluator. The guidance for the focus group and the two studies were very instructive, easy to understand and worked out very good in practice.
- Many thanks to the core-team for a stimulating and interesting co-operation.

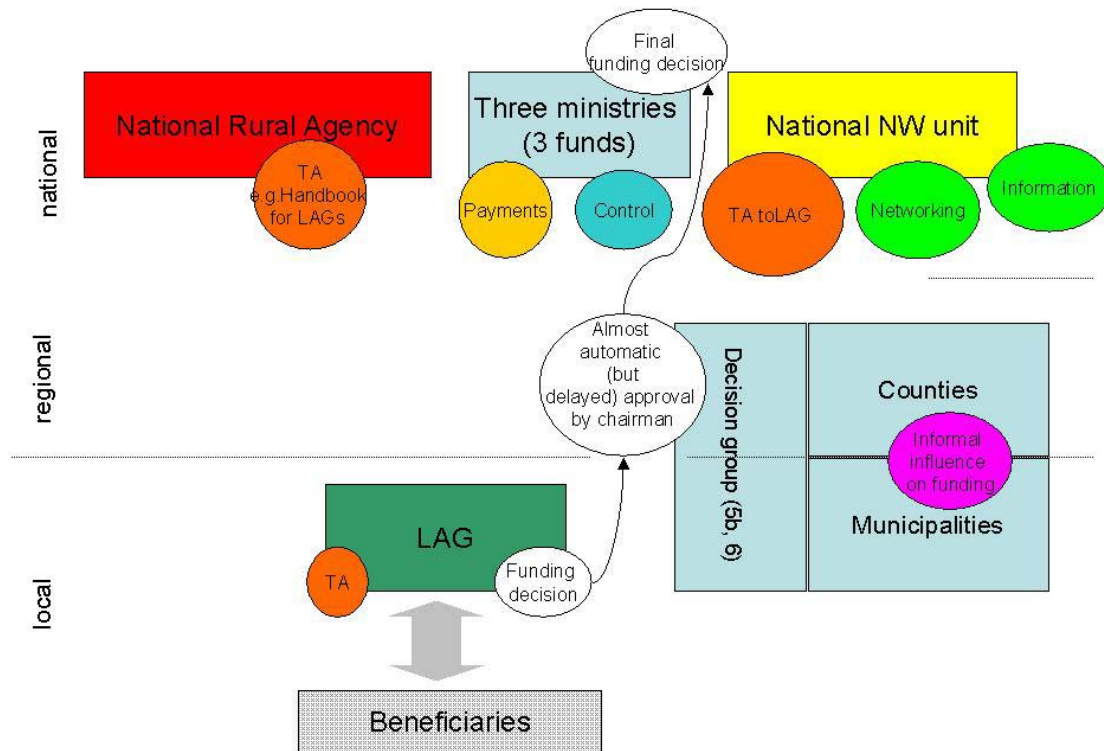
SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: LEADER II Objective 5b

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	It has been very clear in the implementation	The projects have been more like traditional development projects to meet the local needs	–
Bottom-up approach	<p>It has been very clear in the implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ voluntary work and private work were accepted as private co-financing ▪ based on earlier mobilisation which also developed during the start up of LEADER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The projects have been more like traditional development projects to meet the local needs ▪ The voluntary work and entrepreneurs using their own working time as private co-financing have injected rural development with considerable resources. ▪ Many thousands of people engaged ▪ Empowerment and increased knowledge ▪ Women strongly engaged ▪ Readiness and consciousness reinforced to take on local responsibility and future development work 	–
The local group	LAG autonomy in relation to traditional public actors was a new element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The autonomy made it difficult to establish a close co-operation at county level ▪ The autonomy – but not traditionally based in a democratic sense – also caused problems with co-financing ▪ The private sector participation in the partnerships were limited. 	–
Innovation	Positive possibilities to fund ideas and projects not streamlined for traditional measures could be funded.	Has not been fully implemented (see area-based and bottom-up) bottom-up, local mobilisation and to start and run projects were in focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Call for proposals can ensure a more close relation to the strategy, objectives and indicators ▪ develop a more programme orientated view of development, instead of projects oriented, by the involved actors

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Multisectoral integration	The partnership model has been established.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farmers and businesses have not participated as much as planned. ▪ Co-operation between local actors and municipalities have developed 	–
Networking	LEADER II Network was established and good relations developed between the LAGs and the network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More seminars were organised than planned ▪ Facilitated the implementation of the programme and inspired finding solutions of rural area problems. ▪ A fast channel to the whole rural Sweden ▪ Initiated and run the programme Method LEADER. ▪ unclear roles/responsibilities according analysis and bringing back (influence) experiences to the policy making level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More clear roles; MA keeps the role to analyse and influence, the network handles the information
Trans-national cooperation	Extensive co-operation but only a few projects at C-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less focus on business projects than expected ▪ important source for stimulation, knowledge and experiences how to implement LEADER 	–
Decentralised management and financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LAG autonomy – not based on democratic principles – sometimes caused problems in relation to traditional elected local and regional actors and the voluntary sector as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ complex and slow funding administration with three different funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA and LAG must be given enough resources ▪ funding adm. problems solved in LEADER+
Other important issues	–	–	–

Model of implementation



II.4C GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT SWEDEN OP LEADER II OBJECTIVE 6

Contents

1.	General introduction	167
2.	Report on focus group	169
3.	Report on national programme evaluations	176
3.1	Overview and synthetic description	176
3.1.1	Interim report	176
3.1.2	Final report – implementation	177
3.1.3	Final report – results and objectives	178
3.1.4	Final report – white book	180
3.1.5	LEADER II Network	180
3.1.6	“Method LEADER”	181
3.1.7	Processing at national level	185
3.2	Overall assessment	186
3.3	Capitalisation and recommendations	187
4.	General appreciation	190
4.1	General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative	190
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	191

1. General introduction

The evaluation-work was carried out by geographical expert Ulla Herlitz, Sweden. Although LEADER II Objective 6 Sweden was a small programme it was a challenge to find the right persons involved in a programme that was closed many years ago. Another challenge was to collect the financial data from the three different funding authorities, and to have them summed up for LAGs and for the whole OP in a way that had not been done before.

LEADER II was carried out in the Swedish Objective 6 area between 1996-1999. The programme comprised measures B – Rural Innovation Programme, measure C – Transnational Co-operation and measure D – Technical Assistance. Compared to other EU funded programmes, LEADER II was a small programme. The LEADER II programme with three LAGs in Objective 6 area had a total budget of (paid) 13 million ECU compared to 776 million ECU for Objective 6.

In order to get a quick start of the overview of LEADER II in Sweden the ex-post evaluation work started already in November 2002. First of all the key-persons were informed about the coming ex-post evaluation. They were asked to participate with factual information and some of them to participate in interviews. I wanted them to be prepared for further contacts later on in 2003.

After the meeting with the evaluation team in Brussels January 14th 2003, and when the grids were ready for use, an intensive period started with many contacts through telephone and mail with persons involved in the LEADER II implementation. Also fax and regular post were used in collecting and processing the information needed. Sometimes the work was like a detective's work, searching for missing people and information.

Glesbygdsverket (The National Rural Development Agency) was the managing authority for both LEADER II 5b and 6, and handed over programmes, interim and ex-post evaluations, annually reports, information on the LEADER Network etc. The financial information had to be collected from each of the three different funding authorities. This process, to gather the financial data as well as some other factual information, took too long. The officials were busy with new tasks and it was complicated and time-consuming for them to search for data from the LEADER II period, but anyhow they were rather polite and tried to do the best during the present circumstances.

The delay of data for the LAG 1000 was due to the fact that the three funding authorities also worked and prioritised the final LEADER II report to the Commission, and data at LAG level was not included in the report. Another problem was that the LAGs had sent all their documentation to a national archive, in general the financial data was not easy accessible for the questions in

this ex-post evaluation. All LAGs were contacted and they helped giving and/or checking the information in the LAG 1000 grid.

The former Objective 6 area was excluded from LEADER + and therefore none of the LAGs were able to continue. Nevertheless, the manager for the selected LAG for Q202, Inlandslaget, was very helpful and willing to co-operate. Inlandslaget participated in a focus group meeting in Arvidsjaur 2003-05-26. It was also selected to the TNC-study and the personal TNC-interview was made 2003-05-27.

The following materials have been delivered to the evaluation core team:

- OP 102; one national programme
- LAG 1000; three LAGs
- Q 34; key persons interviewed:
Agneta Spetz, Ministry of Industry
Nils Lagerroth, LEADER Network
Tim Brooks, National Rural Development Agency
Lars Larsson, Uppsala University, Dep. of Social and Economic Geography
Lennart Larsson, Lycksele Municipality
- Q 202 Inlandslaget/Leopold Sjöström, Sorsele Municipality
- Focus-group Inlandslaget
- TNC study on Rural Tourism Network

2. Report on focus group

Inlandslaget SE – 02

Arvidsjaur 26.05.03, one –day-workshop

I. Introduction

Evaluator/senior expert: Ulla Herlitz

Evaluator/assistant: H el ene Marlot

Participants:

Kenneth Eklund, Arvidsjaur, LAG-chairman

 ke Cederberg, Arjeplog, LAG-member

Lotta Svensson, Arvidsjaur, LAG-member, project

Johnny H ogberg, Arvidsjaur, LAG-member

Bo Lundmark, Glommerstr sk, project

Leopold Sj str m, LAG-manager

Inlandslaget was one out of two Q202 LAGs in Sweden. At an early stage in the evaluation process they agreed on being a focus group. Former Objective 6 area, where Inlandslaget is situated, was excluded from LEADER + by the Swedish government (against EU's wish according to Inlandslaget) and therefore it was not obvious to get a positive answer on the request. Inlandslaget still exist as an association. They have tried, without any big success, to get funding for a LEADER-like continuation of LEADER II.

However, I got a lot of positive support from the LAG-manager Leopold Sj str m in arranging the focus group and they selected May 26th. Mr Sj str m, in close contact with me, sent the information/invitations, introduced an evaluator/assistant from the area and arranged all other practical things. Mr Sj str m was the man to give me all necessary information/reports etc. (he had made the Q202 Inlandslaget) and he was also the Swedish co-ordinator of Q-TNC project RTN.

The focus group was held between 9.30 – 15.30 with lunch 12-13.30. First we made presentations around the table. I followed the manual, but added in the beginning – after LAG chairman and my introductions – a small questionnaire regarding the LEADER principles. The reason was that I wanted from each of them their genuine view, before the discussions took place. In addition to this I also had some minutes for the group to discuss the TNC- learned lessons (Carlos question).

II. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 – **The capacity and competence of local actors increased**

The most important behavioural change that occurred.

A) The way that took form/happened

The evaluator proposes some features and the participants agree or complete with other points:

- Three persons were the driving forces thanks to their competence in the field of projects. They were not isolated but supporting the others of the network
- meetings
- learning by doing
- role of the advisers/instructors in each municipality to prepare applications
- existing networks before LEADER and the experience in SOS (network of municipalities in the region) which was an important background
- training

The participants agree that this was the way competence mainly developed in all the area.

B) Context variables facilitating/impeding this change

Facilitating:

- commitment
- driving forces

Impeding:

- “Jantelagen”: the “ten commandments” inspired by envy and parochialism that can be summed up by a “don’t think you are somebody” attitude. The participants agree that this attitude was in the cultural background of the Local Action Plan, but that they did not meet it in the work during the programme.
- traditional attitudes and thinking
- rules and regulations

The participants reacted strongly on the rules and regulations. They described it as the biggest restrictive issue and commented that local actors have to learn to know and understand them

better, to adapt themselves to them and to evade them, but also to influence them and propose improvements and changes.

The actual rules and regulations correspond to the organisation of 1866 when the municipal structure was created. Then Sweden had 2500 municipalities which gradually developed a high degree of autonomy. In modern time, concluding 1974, a merge of the municipalities was forced by a government decision decrease the number to approximate 300 municipalities. Hence decision-making was centralised. The participants proposal was to transfer(to give back) decision and financial power to the local level.

Another aspect pointed out is that the share of money dedicated to administration for the management and control of LEADER II is too large.

C) Results

The increased local capacity and competence led to many other projects and networks, thanks too raised self-confidence.

The participants quote a few examples where the experience acquired in LEADER and the connection with other networks was important: an education network "Akademi Norr", a project to support local farm production and transformation along the Vindel River, a project on bio energies, the establishment of a transport company, etc.

D) Operational principles of the LEADER method concerned

- Bottom-up approach
- Area-based
- Local Action Group
- Network

The participants agree that these principles were the pillars for this change and that the results obtained would not have occurred without them. Since the participants were already very critical against regional policies, they welcomed these principles and used them as criterion to select projects.

Hypothesis 2 – The power and influence of local actors did not increase

The most important behavioural change that did not take place.

A) Description

With LEADER II, the local level expected to be able to decide more about its development but that did not happen.

The LAG made decisions, but was not entrusted with the task of making formal decision.

The decision process and the payments for the projects were too complicated and took too much time making.

The LAG actors were like “hostages”. The projects apprehended the decision of the LAG as a decision but that was not the case. It took long time to get the formal decision, which caused problems for local projects/actors.

The intentions of the European Commission were warmly welcomed as they corresponded well to the local needs and hopes, but the blockage came from the regional and national level.

Together with the evaluator, the participants present these levels as a sluggish big grey cloud between the European and local level that understand each other. In this slow-moving cloud, a few driving forces (“fire-spirits”) are making the link with the upper and lower levels with the risk that they get disillusioned. (figure 1)

B) Context variables that impeded the power and influence of local actors to increase

- the separation between fields of actions
- the fact to have three different European funds and ministries
- the fact that the LAG did not have direct financial resources
- the rules regarding taxes
- the fact that the two different County Administrations involved had some times different views on applications
- the bureaucracy of the County Administration to make formal decision
- the differing perspective between actors

The participants agree that the Finnish system is more effective regarding LEADER and rural development in general. One reason proposed is the absence of County Administrations in Finland.

C) Operational principles of the LEADER method concerned

- Bottom-up approach

III. The four questions

A. What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operation principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?

Area-based approach, bottom-up approach and LAG/Partnership were the most important principles according to the participants. In the project-selection process the LAG used some of the LEADER principles, which were a strong driving forces. One or several of the following criterion should be fulfilled:

- bottom-up
- innovation in a local context
- local partnership/co-operation/networking
- trans-national co-operation

The most inhibiting force was the “old” structure of power.

For more answers look at Q202 Inlandslaget question 2332 and hypothesis 1 and 2.

B. What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

More power on financing should be given to the LAG group and politicians must participate more in the process (particularly at the municipal level). They should follow the projects with at least one account given every year to the municipal board. The trade and industry offices of the municipalities should also become more involved.

The diversity of fields of action must be maintained, even if that means many small projects, because LEADER must be seen as a forum for projects to start up in a first stage. On the other hand, focusing must be a concern in other programmes for the development of these projects started in LEADER. Each municipality must also select pillars for its economy. They have to concentrate on fields as in which they have an advantage in.

Centres could be set up for specific competence fields represented in the LAG area and make them interact to have a stronger impact on the programme activities.

C. What should be changed at the level of programme administration (nationally/regionally) and LEADER network in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

Regionally, the guidance of the County Administration must be improved.

Nationally, it is important to have local representatives in diverse networks to multiply contacts and opportunities for local projects. These networks have to be always maintained and developed.

The difficulty remains in making use of the possibilities offered. Those offered in the European LEADER network were perceived as more attractive than those of the national network because the European one was more “exotic” and it was a bigger arena for the marketing of the area.

D. What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?

The State has an important role to play in adapting the central regulations for rural areas. Trips must not be limited due to high taxes on fuel; flights subsidies must be available also in the north of Sweden; the rationalisation of the social insurance offices and their concentration on the coast and in the south of Sweden must stop; tax relief must be granted to companies and individuals to settle in rural areas; the State must guarantee the banks so that it is easier for them to offer loans to companies. Why should rules be the same all over the country if that generates inequality?

The problem of the grants given to be able to live in cities will also have to be reconsidered.

Moreover, efforts have to be done to educate and support entrepreneurship.

But first of all, the question “do we need rural areas?” has to be asked and answered nationally, as the survival of rural areas, since the demographic trend changed, is a political issue. It is also necessary to agree upon the definition of and distinction between rural and sparsely populated areas (“landsbygden/glesbygden”).

The sector-based policies have to be changed into a “honey-comb” system and a real long-term strategy for rural areas has to be adopted. There are already examples showing that towns need to be surrounded by healthy rural areas to be healthy themselves. The role of nature resources must be more stressed.

The actual government “inland delegation” aiming at supporting rural areas will be an illusion if no new policy is applied.

The National Rural Development Agency is of minor importance if it remains hand in hand with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Rural areas have to be more represented in the Parliament. How can their needs be taken into account if no more than 8 or 9 parliamentarians live farther than 20 km outside the Parliament in Stockholm?

IV. Personal impression

First I got the impression that this could be a very challenging task, would they at all be positive and agree to take part in the evaluation as a focus group. These busy people, arguing about taking a lot of time, can you fund this event etc. I meet very committed people and they stayed the whole day, they did “never” want to end the meeting, having a lot of experiences and opinions to express. Very positive response to the meeting itself. “I did not believe the evaluation should be of any interest to me, but I was mistaken. I recognised in a new way what we really had been doing, and learned a lot.”

My suggestion is that all LAGs should be able to make a sum-up evaluation/analyses like this, with an expert from the outside. It is good to read the written evaluations but they are more addressed to external people, but a focus-group is a learning process for the local actors themselves.

Very early – almost immediately – in the focus-group process the hot issues were discussed and highlighted. These were not the issues that I had expected. All participants expressed their opinions and none of them had a diverse opinion. They were like a river – going in one direction – all participants gave small or big contributions on the different issues.

The manual was very instructive and made it more easy to organise the session. My assistant criticised the many examples in the introduction – about the behavioural change – but I think they were necessary to give the participants a strong indication what was the focus – and they did also concentrate the discussions on that.

To sum up:

The participants have confidence in the LEADER method, but they very strongly recommend the authorities at all levels involved in LEADER also to use the method.

3. Report on national programme evaluations

3.1 Overview and synthetic description

3.1.1 Interim report

The interim report was made by Euro Futures AB and dated October 1997. LEADER II in Sweden had hardly begun at that time and the programme was very delayed. In September 1997 only 10% of the total budget was reserved. One important conclusion of the interim evaluation was that the speed must increase considerably in order to ensure the implementation of the programme within the given time.

The LAG plans focused on the improvement of a good environment for activities and development. The evaluator pointed out the importance to focus the project towards more commercial activities in the priorities small enterprises, rural tourism and valorisation of agricultural products. To have success with these projects, the evaluator suggests in addition to the LAGs to include an active supportive function (mobilising, planning and coaching projects) as a natural part of the project.

Another suggestion was to supplement the existing indicators in the LAG plans with qualitative indicators that could show the soft development issues such as:

- willingness for change
- ambition of autonomy
- knowledge about enterprising
- willingness to start an enterprise.

The implementation of LEADER II during the evaluation period was characterised by start-up problems. Many of the problems in the beginning were due to the complex decision making structure. Gradually these problems were solved within the existing structure, and no recommendation was given to change the structure at present. In the future – with a possible LEADER III – there could be reason to change the structure to some extent.

Ordering from EU-funds had not been functioning. Only one project had so far (12.9.1997) been paid. Glesbygdsverket, the Managing Authority, should be given a commission to co-ordinate and streamline the three funding authorities management of orders and payments to the LAGs. In addition the LAGs must themselves more actively take part in the financing process.

The national co-financing had so far not been a problem in objective 6 area, but some LAGs announced probable future problems.

An important part of development work is that the information to and from the LAGs is functioning. A problem implementing LEADER was that no one had an overall responsibility for handling the information. The Monitoring Committee was recommended to arrange the possibilities for such a function.

3.1.2 Final report – implementation

In December 1999 Ledningskonsulterna i Stockholm AB was given the commission to carry out the national ex-post evaluation of LEADER II in Sweden. Glesbygdsverket, the Managing Authority, ordered the evaluation on commission of the Monitoring Committee. The work was divided in to two separate parts. This first part handles evaluation of the implementation and was finished in May 2000.

This first ex-post evaluation report concentrated on needs of changes during the time left for the LEADER programme and also to contribute with recommendations for LEADER+.

The evaluation made following conclusions:

- The establishment of LAGs took a long time, it was a process that continued also during the first years after the formal establishment was done. Many problems occurred; uncertainty with partnerships, local LEADER offices, funding of technical assistant, understanding of innovation, prohibition against activities within single firms etc.
- The activities carried out were as a whole according to the programme and LAG plans, with the exception of the problem to have single enterprises as beneficiaries in the priorities adopted to them. Important prerequisites were the possibilities to fund ideas and projects not streamlined for traditional measures or EU programme and also that LEADER opened up for beneficiaries to use voluntary work and for entrepreneurs to use own working time as private co-financing. This kind of contribution injected the national local development work with considerable resources.
- The resources needed to establish and implement a programme parallel to the existing regional and national structures and also introducing new methods were underestimated.
- The establishment of local partnerships, involvement of local actors/ beneficiaries, accessibility etc, developed according to the programmes and LAG-plans. However, the LAGs had problems with the public co-financing at county level. "The LAG autonomy in relation to the traditional public actors is an explanation why it has been difficult to establish a close co-operation at county level.
- A problem in implementing the programme was the complex and slow administration of the funding procedure. It was very resource-consuming at all levels.

- Analysis made by the evaluators show shortages in managing and monitoring of the programme. After approval of the LAGs no management by objectives was done. No qualitative indicators were introduced as was recommended in the interim report. The LEADER Network had been given the task also to identify, analyse and estimate qualitative results for dissemination, but no systematic information was brought back to the policymaking bodies. An important conclusion was that the Managing Authority, if they choose to delegate the dissemination, should not give up the managing and monitoring of the LEADER activities and should keep the responsibility to bring back information to policymaking levels.
- The flow of project-ideas and results between LEADER II and other structural funds were limited due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the LEADER mission and also lack of co-operation between the LAGs and the decision group for Objective 6.
- Analysis show great difficulties to handle the horizontal objective in terms of equal opportunities. Managing this issue at programme, LAG and project level have been more of a formal character. The lack of success often related back to weak management.

3.1.3 Final report – results and objectives

In December 1999 Ledningskonsulterna i Stockholm AB was given the commission to carry out the national ex-post evaluation of LEADER II in Sweden. Glesbygdsverket, the Managing Authority, ordered the evaluation on commission of the Monitoring Committee. The work was divided in to two separate parts. This second part of the evaluation dealt with results and objectives and was published in October 2001.

The following conclusions were made by the evaluation team:

- The overall assessment of the qualitative analysis show that the background, chosen strategies, organisational set up etc influenced in a quantitative perspective, while the qualitative objectives found in the LEADER plans have had less influence on the results. The start of LEADER was slow and the first part of LEADER period had constantly recurring disturbances. In fact the time for project implementation was too short which strongly contributed to the possibilities to carry out the activities focusing innovation, dissemination and influencing methods for rural development.
- The partnership-model has been established and is today an accepted method to organise rural development work. The voluntary actors have been accepted as legitimate actors within rural development work. The co-operation within the municipalities has developed. Especially the co-operation between the voluntary sector and the municipal sector had advanced and deepened. The business' sector

participation in the local partnership had been limited, which show the difficulties of establishing genuine 3-partnerships.

- The innovative objective according development and establishment of the LEADER method at LAG level has not fully been implemented. The concentration has been more on problem solving activities instead of development of different methods for rural development. Bottom up perspective, local mobilisation and to start and run projects have been the main focus. Due to this readiness, consciousness and resources in the local responsibility and future development work have reinforced.
- The projects have had a relatively weak market orientation as well as meeting the needs which influenced the possibilities to meet important objectives as innovation and market orientation. The activities have not in an obvious way resulted in new solutions that could be used in a rural development strategy more concentrated on structural change of rural areas. Nevertheless many innovative projects have been carried out because of LEADERs accessibility for new and not so streamlined actors, projects whose results are important to take care of.
- The projects have developed from a bottom up perspective and were based on earlier mobilisation processes and further developed processes during the start up of LEADER. One weakness observed was that not many farmers had been participating in LEADER.
- The interest and knowledge about the LEADER method have increased. The voluntary and municipal sectors have contributed to the dissemination of knowledge and experiences from LEADER. A more planned dissemination and influence have been limited due to shortages in the monitoring and management system. The distribution of roles and responsibilities were blurred, which hindered the possibilities for an effective system for dissemination and influence. The division of responsibility between the Managing Authority and the LEADER Network also influenced the dissemination in a negative way. The Network was the one that in a more systematic way had disseminated important experiences about examples of good projects.
- The LEADER programme has engaged many thousands of people. Together they constitute a unique knowledge about development work in rural areas. This knowledge must be taken care of as soon as possible, as it also can disappear rapidly when people are going further to other jobs and tasks.
- The women in Swedish rural areas have been strongly engaged in implementing LEADER II. LEADER has given them a base and resources to develop their competence and engagement. However this has not led to much influence of female aspects of the implementation of the horizontal objective for equal opportunities.
- The horizontal objective on environmental protection and improvement was clear and it was rather common with environmental projects in a broad sense.

- The youth as a prioritised target group in the programme had a clear impact. Many projects were completely or partly concentrated on this group. However it was hard to identify results and therefore hard to judge if the objective was achieved or not.
- The trans national co-operation was extensive, but only a few projects were implemented at C-level. The co-operation resulted in many contacts and the projects were mostly concentrated on different common activities. Less in focus were activities about increased business relations and trade. For the LAG members and staff the contacts at LAG level have been important sources for stimulation and knowledge, and their view of how a successful LEADER work can be implemented have also been influenced.

3.1.4 Final report – white book

In connection to the ex-post evaluations of LEADER 5b and 6 a white book was published. The sub- title was “Experiences to learn from – Innovative project-results from the implementation of LEADER II” (August 2001). This publication is not an evaluation of projects, but an interesting example of how to disseminate the experiences from LEADER projects and to reflect upon the use of and relevance of some the experiences made in about 20 different projects.

3.1.5 LEADER II Network

An evaluation on the Swedish LEADER II Network (August 2000) was carried out according to the recommendations from the Commission. The evaluator stated the Swedish LEADER Network had organised activities according to the planned objectives. In general, the network succeeded very well with the actions. Good relations were established between LAGs and the network which facilitated an effective dissemination of information.

The very short evaluation report consist mostly of presentations of the activities, in fact very few analytic viewpoints were made. The presentation comprised:

- gathering of information
- dissemination of information
- conferences, seminars and workshops
- networking
- measures to promote rural development.

Some results:

- More seminars were organised than initially planned and all seminars had many participants from the LAGs.
- A web-site was developed, including a database of LEADER projects.
- Analysis of innovative projects was going on in close connection to the Swedish Agriculture University. The reports were published at the web-site.

Regarding the networking, the evaluator had found that the LEADER II Network had played an important role for the co-operation and contacts between LAGs. Change of experiences between the groups had facilitated the implementation of the programme and also inspired finding different solutions of rural area problems. The board of the network were representing a wide range of the most important and widespread popular movements in the rural areas as well as the public national rural development agency (Glesbygdsverket). Together they had access to very short and fast channels to disseminate experiences from the LEADER activities to the rest of the country.

The evaluator also made a special comment that all activities made by the Swedish LEADER II network aimed at promoting rural development. In addition to the networking activities they also tried to influence the rural policy; e.g. the Network was asked to give its view on the new national rural programme and other new official measures for rural development.

The board also took initiative to a programme to develop methods for development in rural areas, inspired by the LEADER method. The programme was named "Method LEADER" and was carried out in the Objective 6 area. The board was the same for the new programme as for the network which enabled an interplay in change of experiences and networking. A special evaluation of the programme took place.

3.1.6 "Method LEADER"

Method LEADER was not funded within LEADER II programme, but as it was initiated and managed within the LEADERII Network committed people, based on LEADER principals, could fund pilot-projects, was a compensation for areas not elected for LEADER II etc. I found the Method LEADER evaluation (May 2001) relevant for our ex-post evaluation. It gave an extra dimension on the rural development issues. Especially the recommendations based on project case studies and analysis of the political and global context for rural development in Sweden.

Method LEADER was a programme concentrating on developing methods and was planned and implemented during April 1998 to December 2000. It encompass the Objective 6 area and the county of Dalarna, and was enabled through reallocation of funds from Objective 5a to

Objective 6 and others. In total, the budget was 2,05 million ECU, including the co-financing. Funded by Method LEADER, 26 projects were carried out to develop and pilot new ideas and methods of local development work. The initiative to the programme was taken by the board of the LEADER Network, which also became the board of the new programme. They also managed the programme within the administration of the network. The focus in this programme was HOW to do development, not WHAT to do.

The four aims of the programme were:

- extension of local partnerships
- empowerment; capacity and competence
- facilitate enterprising
- less bureaucracy/more flexibility at local level implementing e.g. labour market measures etc

The evaluation was led by the Swedish Agricultural University and had the striking title “Methods for rural development – is that enough?” The overall assessment made by the team of evaluation was that the project had delivered many positive results, but also negative results. The project got a “cautious positive assessment” regarding the first two aims and about the other two aims it was too early to see any results. The team found that the circumstances for implementing the programme was not too good. Anyhow, the positive results were starting off positive processes in many of the pilot-villages and to some extent also on regional and national level. The methods were implemented in a way that the board had not really expected; the process started making more specific what to do, which was a help for the question of how to do it.

The team of evaluation found the programme board had made some misjudgements according to the prerequisites for the project, and they also had difficulties to manage the project in the final stage. The team praised the LEADER II Network board in taking initiative to the programme, their important work etc. They also stressed the positive support to some projects which were exiting and creative, but in spite of the good intentions, the board was to rush with its planning and analyses. The process itself was regarded as the most positive and valuable results of the programme, because it could probably contribute to a positive development in the long run. Nevertheless, the team could not assess if the started processes or the results of the different projects could contribute to sustainable development in the rural areas or not. This was to a great extent a question of local conditions, especially structural and political conditions.

In the analysis of the political and global context for rural development in Sweden the team noticed the following tendencies:

- Focus on competitiveness on an economic perspective in agricultural, environment and rural development sector lead to prioritising of large scale production and effectiveness. Marginal areas (e.g. objective 6 area) are not interesting.
- Development of a more liberal global agricultural trade can have great effects on development in rural areas in Sweden. Measures to meet this development tends to have low priority among Swedish authorities, e.g. important EU programme as LEADER + was excluded from objective 6 area and the “Swedish Programme for rural development 2000-2006” priorities areas outside Objective 1.
- A positive development can be possible in the field of rural/wildlife tourism. This focus on the owner structure of the nature (forest) resources, whereas a change of owner structure gives a greater influence for the local society and the region, which can generate interesting ideas to joint co-operation between local societies, regional and national level.
- “The region, according to our assessment, ought to have a more fair reimbursement for the natural resources.....” The history of the area reminds of the exploitation in the colonial time in Africa and the post colonial African states exploitation of the rural areas (Prof. Kjell Havnevik, head of the evaluation team, is an expert on rural Africa development).

Developing methods for the Swedish rural areas must be based on a realistic assessment of structural and global restricting forces and also possibilities. The work to develop and make accessible existing or new methods for long term and sustainable development seems only to be possible in connection to such a deeper analyses.

In a future global context the evaluation team could view a tendency that the people in the area evaluated to a greater extent have to take their own responsibility for development and establishment of sustainable ways of living. This new responsibility opens up for new processes and movements where people and organisations in the rural areas to identify and implement new ways of living. According to the evaluation team such a mobilisation have to be based on democratic principles.

Recommendations from the evaluation team – local level:

1. The methods must develop in a local context. The HOW question must go with the WHAT and also the WHY questions.
2. The local actors themselves have to identify, chose, develop and adopt the methods to their own activities and the chosen way of living. The existing methods must be

available for the local actors, the commercial elements must be reduced. The study-organisations must take a greater responsibility for development and dissemination of the methods and the experiences of using them.

3. The nature of mobilisation have to be deeply analysed as it influence the choice of methods and how they develop.
4. The consequences of the growing institutionalisation of Swedish rural development work, including development of methods, have to be discussed. Today a small, but very competent group, have too much influence over the initiatives and funding possibilities promoting rural development. It is very important to widen the farmer's activities and responsibilities to comprise also a greater interest in the local village and rural area development. It is worrying that nearly all funding in the national rural development programme is reserved for improving the farm-enterprises.

Recommendations from the evaluation team – regional, national and global level:

1. Analysis of how local influence regarding management of local nature resources can increase.
2. Analysis and identification of mechanisms to give marginal areas a more fair reimbursement for local/regional resources that the whole of Sweden can take advantage of.
3. Analysis of the consequences of not including Objective 6 area in LEADER + and concentration of the national rural programme 2000-2006 to the middle and south Sweden.
4. Analysis of the development of WTO negotiations.
5. The Saamis right to land must be highlighted.
6. Analysis of decreased public and private service sector.
7. Some studies and knowledge already exist in fields suggested, but missing is the overview and synthetics. Studies of development possibilities in the marginal areas in northern Sweden needs to be deeper. It is also important to analyse is the possibilities for development and introduction of different methods into rural development.
8. National and local training activities are very important to create meeting-places for different actors, e.g. where village action groups and officials can meet.

The evaluation team stressed the importance to link analysis from different levels to create a view of what is realistic to bring about under the existing circumstances of structure and power. Their assessment is that the area studied is in great need of change related to national, regional and global levels. This change is needed to make the positive results of the programme

sustainable, and too increase space for local participation and development, including methods, aiming to change the negative trend the area show. The team also recommend the National Authority to establish a permanent analysing-team.

3.1.7 Processing at national level

The evaluations were commissioned by the Managing Authority and also processed within their normal routines. They were presented at the web-page and could be ordered from the MA. Press-releases were also made. The evaluations were sent to the Commission and distributed to MC, different important actors etc.

The evaluation as a development method was new in Sweden. Earlier it was common to report programme/project results in a more descriptive way and they were often also made by the persons involved. Evaluations made in a professional and systematic way was something new for Swedish local development activities. In fact these evaluations were “dutifully” made because they were a part of the LEADER concept, they had to be done within the programme.

The persons in charge of LEADER were informed through newsletters, web-page etc. about the evaluations and hopefully ordered and read them. At least the responsible ministry and national authorities had to take care of the recommendations etc. The MC had ongoing discussions with the evaluators, which were presented in the interim report, followed by the ex-post evaluation. As the MC did not exist when the ex-post evaluation was ready there was no organised follow up and discussions about the findings.

There is a time-problem related to processing of the evaluations and the usefulness in a short perspective. Even the interim evaluation was in practice too late to influence the ongoing LEADER II, and the ex-post evaluation was too late to give feed-back for those involved in LEADER II. E.g. the recommendation in the interim evaluation of developing qualitative indicators was not implemented in LEADER II. But in fact another recommendation on limited information co-ordination did influence the establishment of the LEADER network.

The experiences and recommendations from the interim evaluation and the experiences from the ex-post evaluation in progress did however influence and were taken into consideration when processing the LEADER + programme.

Two officials, “firespirits”, within the Managing Authority and the Ministry had in mind to mainstream the LEADER method into the Government bill on regional policy. They were involved in that work and could also bring some methods about 3-partnership, bottom-up etc in the draft, but as the Swedish Government did not have their own majority and was dependent of two smaller parties of which one insisted not to bring these methods in the bill, they were withdrawn.

3.2 Overall assessment

The usefulness and relevance of the the national evaluations for learning at local level seems to have had an indirect learning effect. Experiences and recommendations from the national evaluations have had a clear influence on some features in the LEADER + programme and implementation that effects the learning processes at local level. E.g. the claim that all LAGs should prepare an annual report in which the strategy and achievement of the LAG plan should be described and commented. These annual reports are aimed at highlighting and learning about how development plans based on LEADER principals can be implemented. Also in LEADER + the aim is to broaden the project data-base to have a learning process perspective by both describing the project and the experiences made.

NUTEK, the national authority in charge of making the final national report on LEADER II to the Commission made a special comment on this relevance-issue. They argued like this: The evaluations were not ready when LEADER + programme was processed and from that point of view results of evaluations seemed to be of no value, but they explained Glesbygdsverket during the time the evaluations were carried out had discussed with the evaluators and used their findings and views. NUTEK also mentioned that many of the problems which the evaluations stressed in the written reports were already known by Glesbygdsverket. The Managing Authority was well aware of the problems. Through the LAGs they were informed about the difficulties and also the possibilities.

This reflection show the difficulties to judge who really “owned” the origin of the problem, conclusion and solution. Perhaps many technical/administrative problems could have been solved without the evaluations, but when it comes to the analysis of development strategies, methods etc that can impact rural policy evaluations are of great value.

All evaluations, except for the LEADER II Network evaluation that was more of a short description, were professionally conducted and interesting; giving relevant recommendations and highlighting important problems, both technical problems and also difficulties in a wider sense in relation to national policy and global development.

I have studied the six evaluations mentioned earlier and what is striking when discussing with officials at the Managing Authority as well as the responsible Ministry is that none of them has analysed the whole bunch of evaluations in order to make conclusions and proposals to bring back to the national rural policy. The attempt to mainstream some LEADER elements in the Government bill on regional policy was ad hoc. The NUTEK report of LEADER II in Sweden is a well prepared summary, but as it is a report on a programme it was not designed to suggest changes in the national rural policy and that was also not their task. My recommendation for future evaluations has nothing to do with the evaluations as such, it is the processing of the results at national level that has to improve. The experiences of LEADER II have influenced

LEADER + , but the evaluations could be used for further discussions of the possibilities of mainstreaming the LEADER specificities in the development policy in general and how this can be done.

3.3 Capitalisation and recommendations

In the ex-post evaluations, the recommendations are based on the evaluations carried out but also the general knowledge of experimental programmes that the evaluation team possessed. The recommendations are divided in five categories; recommendations on the implementation, recommendations to LEADER +, overall recommendations, necessary conditions of experimental programmes and finally recommendations on the managing authorities (managing authority, MC and LAGs) and its structure and commission.

Implementation

- Managing the programme the Managing Authority and the LAGs ought to focus on follow-up and evaluation of closed and ongoing projects.
- A more systematic analysis of the implementation should be carried out, based on the information from evaluations of LAGs and programmes already available.
- The responsible Ministry and Glesbygdsverket ought to initiate methods how to use and bring back results and experiences to the policy making level, from the implementation process as well as the innovative projects.
- A functioning database for documentation of the implementation etc. must be set up.

LEADER +

- LEADER II LAGs not continuing in LEADER + ought to be given two years to close their programme.
- This could be arranged with resources from Objective 1 and 2.
- In the Objective 1 area where LEADER + is excluded a global grant-programme could be a solution,
- Managing LEADER +, besides administrative and economic management, ought to focus implementation of strategies and objectives in the LAG plans.
- A possible improvement of management could be “calls for proposals” which makes it easier for a LAG to manage the flow, administration and decision making of applications according to LEADER strategy, objectives and indicators.
- Developing of a more programme oriented view of development (instead of projects) by the involved public actors.

- The new programme have to be better established among public authorities at county level.
- For a better relation (co-operation and flow) between LEADER and other EU funded programmes the programme should give clear instructions and objectives.
- A need for developing methods for mainstreaming of equal opportunities, which also could be used in other structural fund programmes.
- A claim on the LAG officials to have good administration and economy-competence.
- A functioning database for documentation of the implementation etc. must be developed.

Overall recommendations

- Introduce qualitative indicators at all levels.
- The quantitative objectives should not be superior to qualitative objectives.
- The qualitative objectives should be set up at all levels with connected indicators.
- MC and Managing Authority should make the programme with its objectives, strategies and measures deeply rooted in authorities, organisations etc involved at regional and national level.

Necessary conditions

- Management takes time – Managing Authority and the LAGs must be given enough resources to fulfil their tasks.
- The officials must concentrate on implementing plans, projects etc. The administration and funding systems have to be easily functioning.
- Only the two last years in LEADER II were effective time for implementing the programme, plans and projects. This was not enough time for a sustainable establishment of LEADER method in the areas concerned. The LAGs should be given opportunities to continue their activities in LEADER + or in other programmes.
- The LEADER method and programme ought to be well known and accepted at all levels to ensure the projects to focus on the innovative objectives. Until now, the projects have been focusing more on traditional rural development areas. The bottom up approach has been very clear through the whole implementation, but has not fully supported the innovative objectives as these were not understood to be the main objectives at local level.

Managing

- Visualise the traditional rural actors' view of development-needs.
- The rural actors have to analyse their own activities in relation to the objectives of the programme; to identify own needs and find out how they could fit in the programme.
- MC and MA have to be organised to focus on the results both on programme level and LAG level, making clear distinction between how objectives, strategies and measures are achieved.
- The LAGs have to constantly follow the achievement of the plans/strategies and the projects. The MA have to insure that this is done.
- MA should make corrections in one way or another when limits occur according to the planned results and objectives.
- The main responsibility of dissemination and influence should rest on the MA, even if some information tasks are delegated to e.g. the LEADER Network. The MA should also be responsible for analysing of what kind of change in rural policy should be proposed based on experiences of the implementation of LEADER programme. The LAGs should have the responsibility to disseminate and bring back the results to actors at local level. All levels/actors involved in LEADER should take an active interest in the results. That is an important part in disseminating and influencing the activities.

(See also corresponding grid)

4. General appreciation

4.1 General appreciation of the LEADER II initiative

The main outcome according to my opinion was the empowerment and increased competence among the local people involved in managing and participating in LAGs and projects, and the opportunities for them to meet in different networks, seminars and conferences was a very important tool. Another important circumstance was the established contacts between people from different levels. LEADER enabled “fire-spirits” from all levels (from EU level to village level) and from different sectors (voluntary, private and public) to work together. It was obvious that those contacts played a role in creating the very positive feeling of belonging to the “LEADER family” or the “LEADER spirit” as some of the people interviewed named it. Perhaps the national LEADER programme, the MA, the MC, the LAGs, and the evaluations etc. should more than what was done have stressed these unique elements and the other LEADER specificities.

Even though the evaluations very much focused on serious problems and recommendations how to avoid or overcome these obstacles, the interviews showed people with a great enthusiasm for the LEADER method. The problems faced did not destroy their trust in the LEADER method, in their opinion it was not the LEADER method but the traditional structure that should be changed.

A problem with evaluations is that they naturally evaluate the outcomes in relation to the programme. But in these evaluations where the methods were in focus it would have been interesting with assessments comparing the LEADER method with methods used e.g. in Objective 5b and 6, with traditional national methods for rural development and also with methods used in the voluntary village action movement.

A question discussed in Sweden when introducing LEADER was whether it was fair to support 12 LAGs and leave the rest of the Swedish rural areas behind or with the same total amount of money support as many village partnerships as possible. Now, when the Government has excluded former Objective 6 from LEADER + this question can be on the agenda again, but put in a different way. The challenge then is how to implement the LEADER method without a LEADER programme; how to mainstream the principles to the rural development activities at national, regional, municipal and village level.

Strong recommendations

The focus group meeting was one of the highlights in this evaluation work. I strongly recommend a focus group meeting should be offered to all LAGs as a part of the evaluation process and learning process, planned from the beginning and funded in the LAG budget. As both the evaluations carried out and the focus group stressed the lack of “LEADER understanding” I also strongly agree with the focus group recommendation to educate actors at

all levels involved in LEADER in the LEADER method so that they also can act according to the principles in the programme they are a part of.

Most astonishing

The most astonishing experience was reading the evaluations, there was so much knowledge and so many experiences. The evaluations constitute a great potential for those who would like to analyse rural development and make proposals to improve the traditional development policy. Until now it seems like the evaluation results have settled “between the chairs”.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

- It is not easy to ask questions about a programme that closed several years ago.
- There were far too many questions to the LAGs.
- The factual questions took too long time in relation to the time planned; three different funding authorities and the data was not delivered or earlier published for the categories asked for in our evaluation; e.g. LAG level.
- To collect factual comparable data should not be the task of the evaluators at EU level, the data should be provide by the Observatory or by the Commission via national Managing Authority.
- More time should be planned for the geographical evaluator to comment on national evaluations etc. This part should be in the very beginning of the evaluation.
- The focus-group, TNC and CEA studies were like a learning process for those interviewed, and it was very much appreciated as well as it was interesting for me as an evaluator. The guidance for the focus group and the two studies were very instructive, easy to understand and worked out very good in practise.
- Many thanks to the core-team for a stimulating and interesting co-operation.

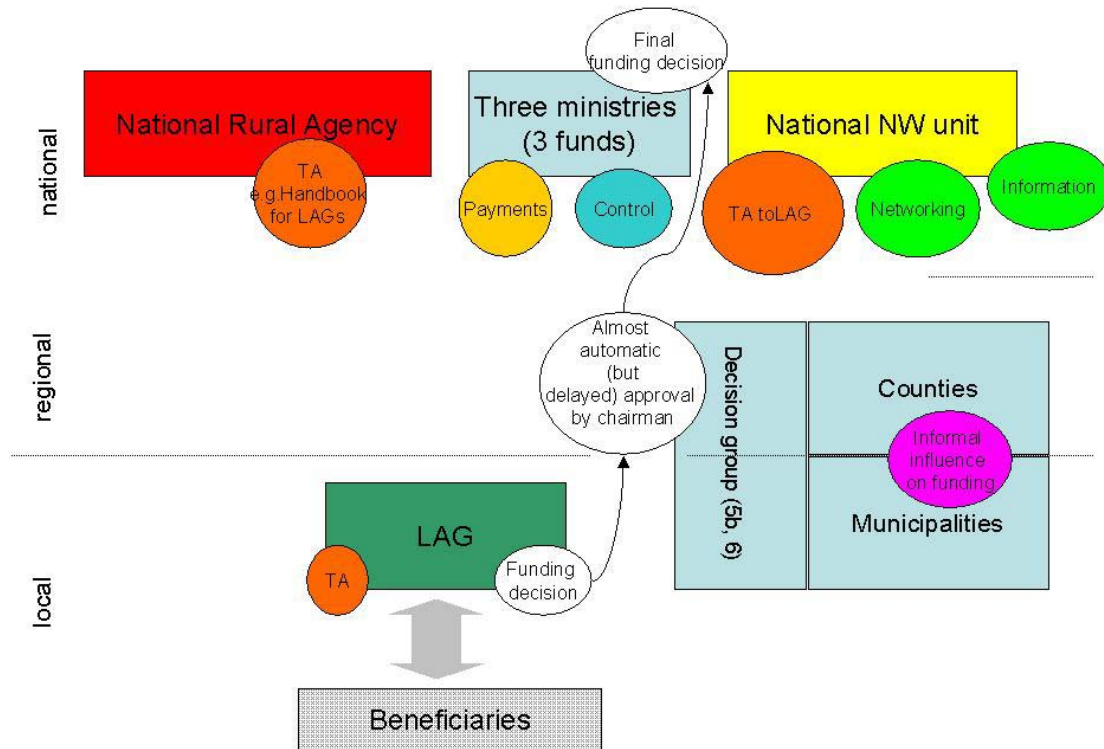
SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: LEADER II Objective 6

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	It has been very clear in the implementation	The projects have been more like traditional development projects to meet the local needs	–
Bottom-up approach	<p>It has been very clear in the implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ voluntary work and private work were accepted as private co-financing ▪ based on earlier mobilisation which also developed during the start up of LEADER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The projects have been more like traditional development projects to meet the local needs ▪ The voluntary work and entrepreneurs using their own working time as private co-financing have injected rural development with considerable resources. ▪ Many thousands of people engaged ▪ Empowerment and increased knowledge ▪ Women strongly engaged ▪ Readiness and consciousness reinforced to take on local responsibility and future development work 	–
The local group	LAG autonomy in relation to traditional public actors was a new element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The autonomy made it difficult to establish a close co-operation at county level ▪ The autonomy – but not traditionally based in a democratic sense – also caused problems with co-financing ▪ The private sector participation in the partnerships were limited. 	–
Innovation	Positive possibilities to fund ideas and projects not streamlined for traditional measures could be funded.	Has not been fully implemented (see area-based and bottom-up) bottom-up, local mobilisation and to start and run projects were in focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Call for proposals can ensure a more close relation to the strategy, objectives and indicators ▪ develop a more programme orientated view of development, instead of projects oriented, by the involved actors

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Multisectoral integration	The partnership model has been established.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farmers and businesses have not participated as much as planned. ▪ Co-operation between local actors and municipalities have developed 	–
Networking	LEADER II Network was established and good relations developed between the LAGs and the network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More seminars were organised than planned ▪ Facilitated the implementation of the programme and inspired finding solutions of rural area problems. ▪ A fast channel to the whole rural Sweden ▪ Initiated and run the programme Method LEADER. ▪ unclear roles/responsibilities according analysis and bringing back (influence) experiences to the policy making level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More clear roles; MA keeps the role to analyse and influence, the network handles the information
Trans-national cooperation	Extensive co-operation but only a few projects at C-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less focus on business projects than expected ▪ important source for stimulation, knowledge and experiences how to implement LEADER 	–
Decentralised management and financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LAG autonomy – not based on democratic principles – sometimes caused problems in relation to traditional elected local and regional actors and the voluntary sector as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ complex and slow funding administration with three different funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA and LAG must be given enough resources ▪ funding adm. problems solved in LEADER+
Other important issues	–	–	–

Model of implementation



II.5 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT SPAIN

Contents

1.	General Introduction	197
2.	Report on Focus Groups	203
2.1	Focus Group Lanzarote, Canarias	204
2.1.1	Introduction and Methodology Used	204
2.1.2	Main ideas and conclusions of the debate	207
2.1.3	Final Assessment and Impressions on the Whole Process	211
2.2	Focus Group Terra Chá, Galicia	212
2.2.1	Introduction and Methodology Used	212
2.2.2	Main ideas and conclusions of the debate	216
2.2.3	Final assessment and impressions on the whole process	220
2.3	Focus Group Somontano de Hiesca, Aragón	220
2.3.1	Introduction and methodology used	220
2.3.2	Main ideas and conclusions of the debate	224
2.3.3	Final assessment and impressions on the whole process	229
2.4	Focus Group Condado de Jaén, Andalucía	230
2.4.1	Introduction and methodology used	230
2.4.2	Main ideas and conclusions of the debate	234
2.4.3	Final assessment and impressions on he whole process	238
3.	Report on National and Regional Program Evaluations	240
3.1	Introduction	240
3.2	The Implementation of LEADER II in the Regions according to Regional Evaluators: Methods, Practices, Limits and Constraints	241
3.2.1	Area – Based Approach	241
3.2.2	Bottom – Up Approach	242
3.2.3	Participatory Approach	242
3.2.4	Innovation	243
3.2.5	Multisectoral and integrated approach	243
3.2.6	Networks	243
3.2.7	Cooperation	244
3.2.8	Decentralised management	244

3.3	Main Effects of LEADER and Recommendations according to Regional Evaluators	245
3.3.1	Area – Based Approach	245
3.3.2	Bottom – Up Approach	245
3.3.3	Participatory Approach	246
3.3.4	Innovation	247
3.3.5	Multisectoral and integrated approach	248
3.3.6	Networks	248
3.3.7	Cooperation	249
3.3.8	Decentralised management	249
4.	General Appreciation from the Perspective of the Geographical Evaluator	251

1. General Introduction

To carry out the tasks of the ExPost Evaluation of the LEADER II EU Initiative in Spain, the following working team was configured. Roles and responsibilities inside the team were distributed according to the evaluation needs and the skills of the members:

1. Dr. Javier Esparcia: Associate professor of Geography. Head of UDERVAL (Research Unit for Rural Development and Evaluation of Public Policies), University of Valencia. Person in charge of the evaluation team. He has supervised the overall organisation of the evaluation tasks, and has coordinated the rest of the evaluation team. He has taken the lead for the Focus Groups (F30), relations with the national authorities, and the transnational cooperation analysis and cost benefit analysis.
2. Dr. Joan Noguera: Assistant professor of Geography. Member of UDERVAL. He made translation of the different methodological tools into Spanish and back into English once completed. He contributed to carry out and follow up of questionnaires to regional authorities (Q34), LAGs (Q202), focus groups (F30), transnational cooperation and cost-benefit analysis.
3. Jenaro Parra: Geographer and PhD student. He supervised all the work related to the compilation of statistical data (OP102, L1000, Q202 and Q34). He has contributed to the interviews to regional authorities (Q34) and focus groups (F30).
4. Eduard Rodrigo: Geographer. He has take responsibility for the organisation and follow up of questionnaires to LAGs (Q202). He has contributed to the compilation of statistical data and to the organisation of focus groups (F30),
5. Katharina Günther: Spatial Planner, University of Dortmund (with a two months stay at UDERVAL). She has been in charge of the elaboration of cartography.

The evaluation in Spain started right after the official communication of the approval of the ex-post evaluation partnership by the EU Commission. The first task was, as well, an official communication by letter from the head of the evaluation in Spain, professor Javier Esparcia, to the General Direction of Rural Development of the Ministry of Agriculture (intermediate body responsible of LEADER II). Apart from this official communication, there was a more extensive informal contact by telephone, and a meeting with LEADER responsible staff at the Ministry, in which details were given on the flow of tasks, methodology and work plan of the Ex-Post Evaluation. Obviously, support from the Ministry of Agriculture was essential in order to have basic documentation and improve response form regional authorities and LAGs. This support was offered by the Ministry and it is assessed by the evaluation team as positive, although slow procedures and bureaucracy did delay some stages of the evaluation.

Immediately after the contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, the team contacted regional authorities responsible of LEADER II in the four regions in which the evaluation was to be undertaken in deep (Andalucía, Canarias, Aragón and Galicia)¹⁴. An official communication by letter and accompanying telephone calls and emails were sent explaining tasks, methodology and work plan in each region. In three of the regions (Andalucía, Galicia and Aragón) General Directors responsible for the LEADER program could be contacted and showed willingness to cooperate.

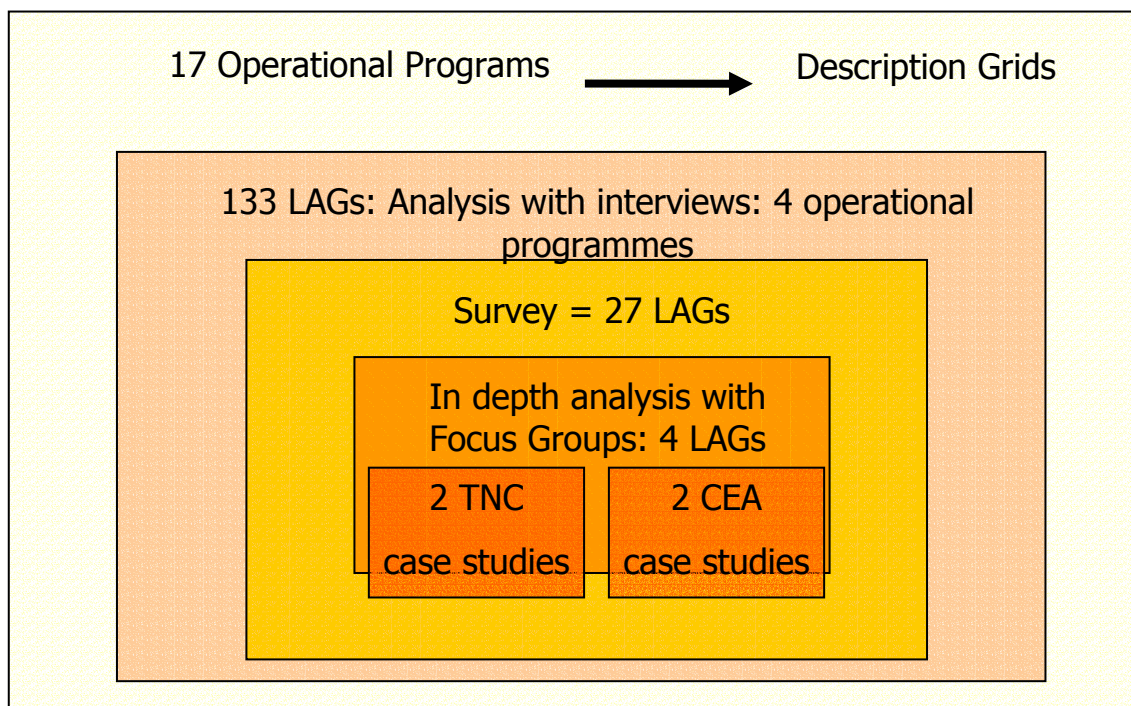
Next step consisted of contacting LAGs that would be asked to participate directly in the evaluation by answering a questionnaire. The sample of LAGs in Spain¹⁵ included a total of 27 LAGs distributed among the four reference regions (see Figure 2). Although the evaluation team considered that a face-to-face interview would have been convenient, budgetary and time restrictions made it impossible to undertake 27 trips to 27 areas in Spain, some of them distant more than 1.000 km. Instead, a more intense telework was carried out to contact LAGs by telephone and kindly ask for their cooperation. Presentation letters and an electronic copy of the questionnaire were sent out along with guidelines to complete it. To increase participation and interest from LAGs emphasis was put in two aspects: on the one hand, the importance of the evaluation exercise as an opportunity to reflect on LEADER experience and lessons learned; on the other hand, the possibility to contribute to profile future EU rural development policies and programs.

¹⁴ The four regions were selected principally according to geographical criteria and total number of LAGs

¹⁵ The sample of the 27 LAGs was selected by the Core Team randomly from the total number of LAGs of the four target regions in Spain (Andalucía, Canarias, Aragón and Galicia).

Figure 1

Methodology used in the ExPost LEADER II Evaluation in Spain



Part of the information required in the questionnaires to regional authorities and LAGs could be filled in, in advance, by the evaluation team. This helped to reduce the amount of time needed for face to face interviews (regional authorities) and made easier the task of LAGs that complained frequently about the length and complexity of the questionnaire.

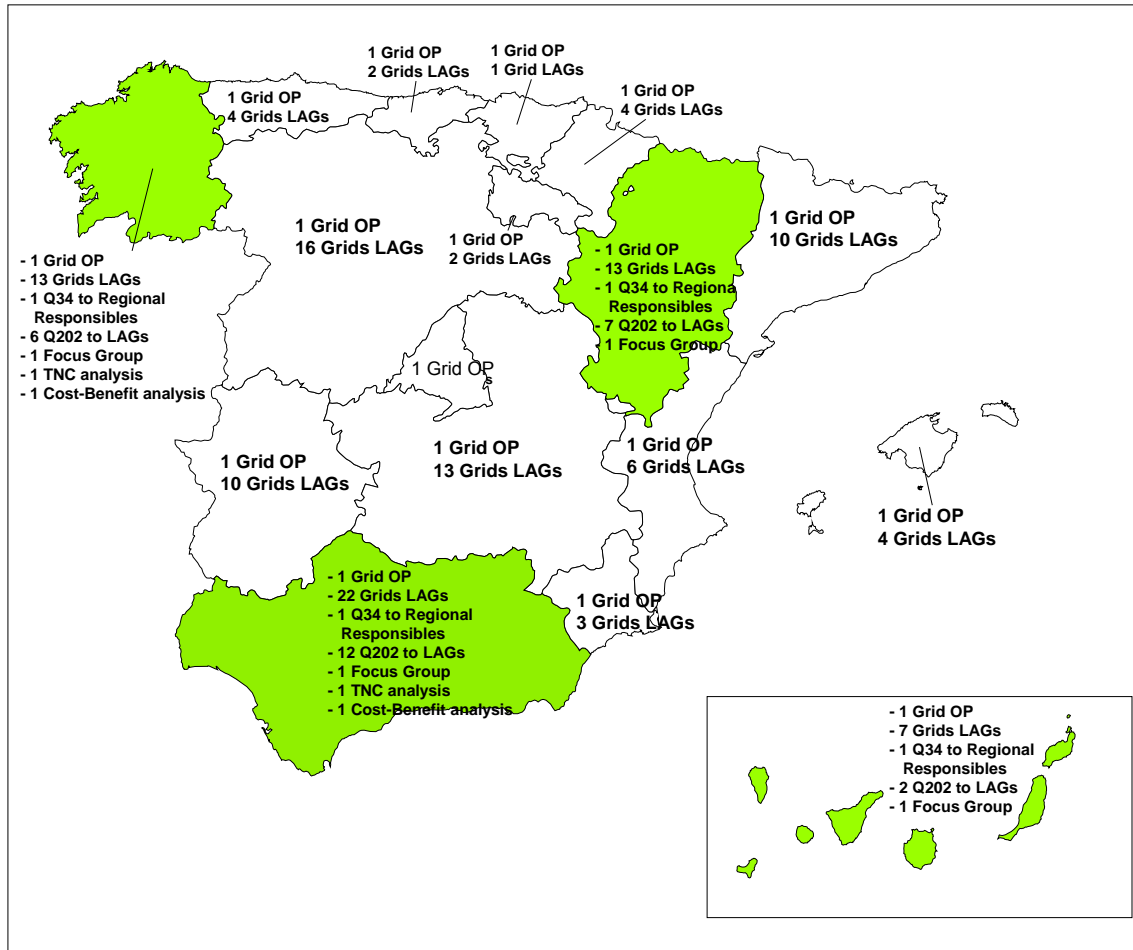
The process of sending out questionnaires to LAGs and their follow up was very time-consuming. Although regional authorities contacted LAG representatives and asked for cooperation in the evaluation exercise (at least in Andalucía and Galicia), and continuous follow up telephone calls were done to LAGs, it was necessary a severe warning letter to about half of the sampled LAGs that were not answering to the calls nor sending the questionnaire even after some deadlines. In any case, many of the questionnaires sent back show a lot of blank spaces meaning a “quick” answer to the questionnaire. The evaluation team, on the other hand, had to fill in partially four questionnaires of the sample with available data due to the fact that the LAG either did not want to cooperate at all or because it was not operating anymore and was impossible to contact responsible staff.

All the above indicates that the evaluation culture in Spain is not well rooted. With some outstanding exceptions (ie. regional authorities of Andalucía, some LAGs cooperating in the different parts of the evaluation exercise like Condado de Jaén, etc.) the evaluation exercise

was not seen as an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of LEADER II, but it was rather perceived as an external obligation that had to be done.

Figure 2

Distribución geográfica de las tareas relativas a la evaluación LEADER II



In the meantime, the evaluation team was in contact with the Ministry of Agriculture to obtain copies of the 17 LEADER Operational Programs needed to fill in the OP102 grids. Also from the Ministry were expected copies of the final evaluation reports of LEADER II in each region and the final financial information of every LAG and Operational Program. Although willingness to cooperate existed from the Ministry, the availability of human resources and the final review of the financial information, delayed substantially delivery of information to evaluators.

The evaluation had a second stage after the compilation of information through interviews and surveys. This second stage was more qualitative in nature and consisted of four Focus Groups,

one in each study region, with LAGs of the sample that showed willingness to host this exercise and provide positive feedback to the survey. Focus Groups were aimed at generating an open debate with a selection of local actors, LEADER managers and external observers, on the implementation of LEADER II I in the area. Therefore, it was necessary that the LAGs hosting this exercise were willing to review in depth their experience in the light of an evaluation methodology. Moreover, the selection of LAGs was crosschecked with regional authorities to avoid any unexpected setback.

A working methodology was developed for the Focus Groups including some specific materials. LEADER managers and presidents of the four LAGs were informed in advance on objectives and needs of the Focus Group. Four members of the Evaluation Team in Spain participated in the organisation and fulfilment of the Focus Groups: on the one hand, Javier Esparcia and Eduard Rodrigo took charge of the LAGs Terra Chá (Galicia) and Lanzarote (Canarias); on the other hand, Joan Noguera and Jenaro Parra undertook the meetings of Condado de Jaén (Andalucía) and Somontano de Huesca (Aragón).

During the Focus Groups sessions, cooperation was sought for the final part of the evaluation: the analysis on Transnational Cooperation and the Cost Benefit analysis. Different circumstances explain that the initial willingness to cooperate from some LAGs turned out to be lacking or insufficient afterwards. For these reasons, the evaluation team was forced to contact new LAGs in the sample asking for cooperation with this final part of the evaluation.

Finally, to complete the perception on the final evaluations at the level of the Operational Programs, a grid – questionnaire was developed and sent to the persons in charge of the final evaluation in each region. Several of these grids have come back, but not all. In any case, it has been possible to get an objective view on the functioning and characteristics of the implementation of LEADER II in the different regions of Spain.

Figure 3

Flow of tasks of the ExPost LEADER II Evaluation in Spain

	December – Janua	1-15 Febr	16-28 Febr	1-15 March	16-31 March	1-15 April	16-30 april	1-15 May	16-31 May	1-15 June	16-30 June	1-15 July	16-31 July	August
1. Contact with national and regional responsible	■	■	■	■										
2. Contact with LAGs				■	■									
3. Request for documentation to the Ministry of Agriculture (OP, financial information, evaluations)		■												
4. Translation and adaptation of evaluation tools		■	■	■										
5. Fulfilment of Q34 to regional authorities						■	■							
6. Sending Q202 to LAG						■								
7. Reception of Q202 from GAL							■	■	■	■	■			
8. Fulfilment of F30 Focus Groups									■					
9. Elaboration of F30 Focus Groups Reports										■	■			
10. Elaboration of Grids OP102 and L1000			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
11. Fulfilment of Transnacional Cooperation análisis (TNC) and report												■	■	■
12. Fulfilment of Cost – Benefit analysis (CB) and report												■	■	■
13. Elaboration of cartography											■	■	■	
14. Elaboration of Geographical Report													■	■

2. Report on Focus Groups

This section compiles the results of the four Focus Group carried out in Spain, in the context of the Ex-Post LEADER II Evaluation. The four focus groups were organised in LAGs of the four study regions as follows:

- Terra Cha (Galicia)
- Lanzarote (Canarias)
- Condado de Jaén (Andalucía)
- Somontano de Huesca (Aragón)

Each report includes an introductory section explaining organisational and procedural aspects, the composition of the Focus Group and other general details. A second part of the report resumes the main ideas and arguments used during discussion. Finally, there is a concluding section with a general assessment of the exercise.

The methodology used for the four Focus Groups has been the same. Participants were divided into small working groups (two or three persons) and discussed around the following four questions that were, then, discussed in the general group:

- Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?
- How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?
- What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)
- How could the impact of each specificity of LEADER be improved?

In the case of the last three questions, comments were in relation to the seven LEADER specificities.

There were two evaluators in each focus group in order to respect the proposed methodology. Thus, one evaluator moderated the discussion while the other took notes on answers, behaviours and intangible impressions of the day.

The working session generally started mid-morning (about 11:00) and went on until lunch time (14:00). A second session was carried out during the afternoon and part of the evening (16:30 to 20:00).

Working sessions were video recorded for later transcription.

2.1 Focus Group Lanzarote, Canarias

2.1.1 Introduction and Methodology Used

Name of group: Asociación Para el Desarrollo Rural de la Isla de Lanzarote (ADERLAN)

Interlocutor: Mercedes Robayna, Manager of the LAG during LEADER II (and beyond)

Participants:

- **Mercedes Robayna.** Manager of the LAG Lanzarote during LEADER II.
- **Valentín.** President of the LAG LEADER II Lanzarote.
- **Miguel Ambrosio Rodríguez.** Member of a local third sector association.
- **Magda Foschi.** Member of the association El Cribo.
- **Jesús M. Alonso Barreto.** Local development agent – Arrecife.
- **Juan A. Betancur Brito** Technician of the LAG LEADER II – Member of Tazzay.
- **Carmen Figuera Gonzalez.** Member of the local council of the town of Haria.
- **Carlos Dim,** Manager of “Las Praelas”
- **Miguel Fco. Febles Ramirez** University of La Laguna (Tenerife), External Observer.

Composition of the working groups

Grupo 1	Grupo 2	Grupo 3
Mercedes Robayna	Jesús Alonso	Carmen Figuera
Miguel Febles	Magda Foschi	Miguel Ambrosio
Carlos Dim	Juan A. Betancur	Valentín

Dates and schedule:

- **2 of june:** 11:30 to 15:00 and 17:00 to 20:00

Process from the first contact until leave

Evaluators reached Lanzarote the evening before the meeting, via Madrid from Galicia where another Focus Group had been held two days before (Terra Cha). At 9:30 on the day of the meeting, the evaluators arrived to the LAG offices in order to meet the manager and leave together for the meeting place.

The meeting started sometime after eleven due to the absence of the president of the LAG that came with some delay. Other two members of the focus group said that they would only be able to stay during the morning session, so the evaluators tried to extend meeting time (until 15:00) to take advantage of the “full focus group”. During the afternoon session, the president of the LAG could not come either, so the initial composition of the working groups could not be maintained and evaluators had to change methodology to a more open debate.

At the beginning of the working session, the manager of the LAG welcomed everybody and made a brief introduction to the recent history of the LAG, some of the difficulties it has gone through, and some of the more outstanding achievements.

After this presentation, the evaluators explained the goal of the working session, including some briefing on the objectives of the LEADER II ex-post evaluation. From the beginning, it was made clear that the main purpose of the focus group, was not a traditional evaluation, but a learning process on the implementation of LEADER II and its specificities, in the area. And this in order to search for the main problems detected and lessons learned as a opportunity to influence the design and implementation conditions of future rural development policies and programs.

Evaluators explained the reasons behind the selection of the Lanzarote LAG, and thanked the manager for all the arrangements carried out to facilitate the meeting.

Due to the number of members of the working group, it was decided to video-record the meeting in order to have guidance for the latter transcription of results. The map of the working environment is shown in Figure 1.

Four questions were launched to guide discussion:

- Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?
- How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

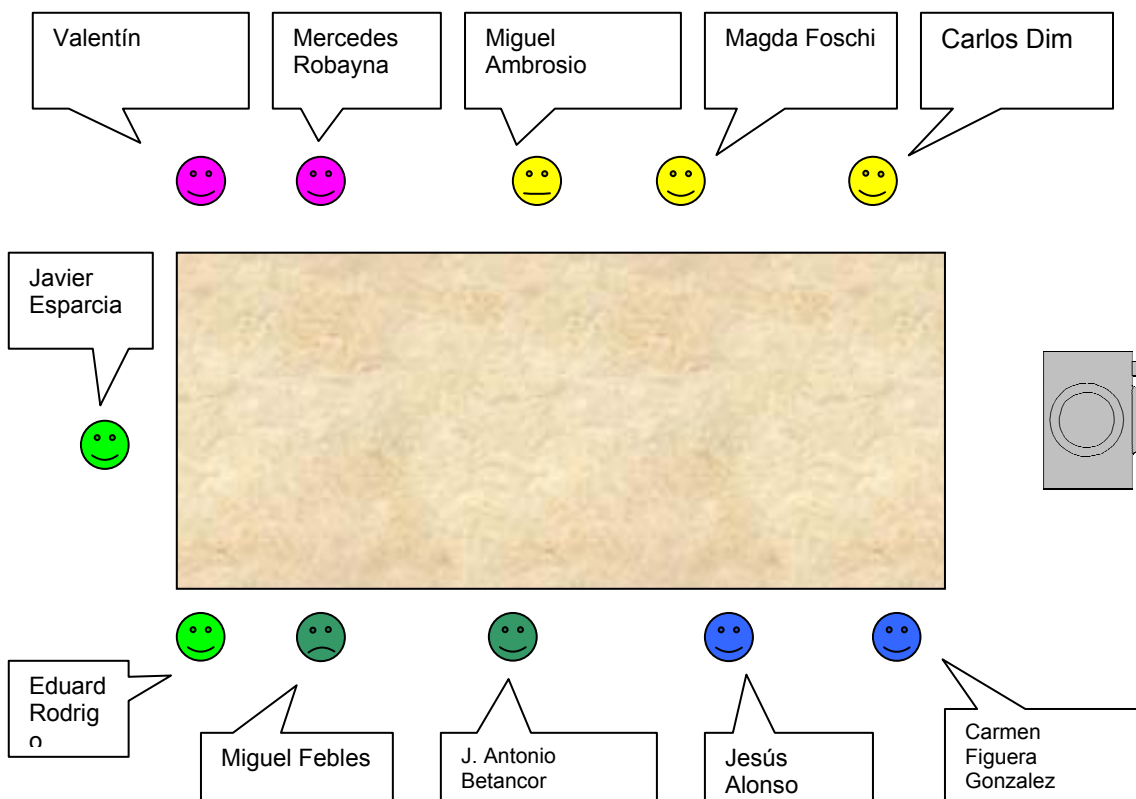
- What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)
- How could the impact of each specificity of LEADER be improved?

The composition of the working groups had to change from the morning session to the afternoon session due to some absences after lunch. The methodology to deal with the four questions was as follows:

- The questions was read and commented to clear any misunderstanding
- Each working group of three persons met and discussed separately in order to avoid interferences and “noise”. The group agreed one or more answers to the question (not necessarily common).
- Each group presented its conclusions to the general focus group. Main ideas were written on a clipboard in order to help visualise results.
- At the end of each debate there was time for a general agreement

Figure 4

Working environment



Note: colours indicate the working groups formed for discussion

2.1.2 Main ideas and conclusions of the debate

2.1.2.1 Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES	
■	Lack of coordination in territorial management
■	Declining primary sector → damage of traditional landscape
■	“Booming” coastal tourism, promoted from other institutions in the area. This was causing a negative impact on the local heritage
■	Crisis of the “sun and beach” model
■	Local population was aware of alternative touristic potential of the area (Cesar Manrique heritage)
■	Promotion of fishing, commerce and agribusiness to sell local productions in the local market
■	Support of social and economic collectives
■	Conservation and knowledge of the local environment (valorisation of traditional behaviours and ways of living)

2.1.2.2 How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of coordination in territorial management ▪ Existing network of local development agents that it is not, however, carrying out a role in relation to sustainable development of the territory ▪ Lack of common development action in the island (lack of island-level development agency) ▪ Social polarization ▪ The insularity provides territorial, social, economic and environmental homogeneity in relation to problems and potentials. Any development project can be valid for most of the area.
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All social and economic collectives and organisations of the area are represented in the LAG ▪ A real “bottom-up” process was carried out for the definition of a development strategy from the local population This had an important time cost but allowed for more agreement on the mission and the main objectives
Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most social and economic sectors are not structured and this constraints participation ▪ Basic structures of LAG were open to participation of the local population (board of directors and assembly) ▪ Moreover, two main structures were set in progress: (i) on the one hand, thematic working groups to deal with specific sectoral problems and strategies; (ii) on the other hand, local development agencies to promote development at municipal level and support implementation of the development strategy. However, some local development agencies were controlled and/or blocked by local politicians.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The fact that there was a local development partnership, designing a development strategy with the participation of the local society was the principal innovation for the area. ▪ In relation to this, the LAG promoted the following innovations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strategy adapted to local specificities and problems – Promotion of local products (production and marketing), specially craftsmanship and rural tourism – Training and formation (environmental, marketing of agrarian products, for disabled, etc.) – Maintainment of traditional rural landscapes (never valued since mass tourism booming) that have social, cultural and environmental functions. – Needs not covered with other programs: craftsmanship promotion, livestock (farm restoration, formation, cooperativism promotion) – Animation of public administration: new, non traditional public projects ▪ Main constraints for innovation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Urgency of results (short term vision) – Lack of local entrepreneurship

Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most projects supported have integrated and multisectoral approach. However, local economy is focused on tourism and this constraints diversified development ▪ Tourism is felt as the main development opportunity, but needs to be a different product than “sun and beach”, linked to the promotion of local products (craftsmanship and agriculture). Otherwise, it could become a development constraint, reducing possibilities for other economic sectors and endangering conservation of natural and cultural heritage. ▪ Not sufficient relationships between complementary economic sectors, and lack of internal cohesion (same sector). ▪ Women are given a essential role in the generation of new projects and ideas
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Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is not a formal regional network that could improve cooperation among LAGs. ▪ Regional Government does not support networks. ▪ A cooperation project has been developed (Proyecto Identidades). ▪ A craftmen association was created.
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Management and funding processes

2.1.2.3 What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II? (positive and negative)

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participation of local society – Administrative structure of the Island – Tourism (important market) – Coherence and homogeneity of the territory – Reduced distances and easy communication ▪ Negative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problems to translate LEADER approach to the urban areas – Low political stability reduces capacity of action – The Territorial Insular Plan does not introduce necessary changes. It is too strict – Importance of tourism can be a constraint for initiatives in other economic sectors and a danger for environmental conservation and territorial management – LAG actions have not impact on local media
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“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participation of the local society in the development plan and the structures created – Important local movement in favour of behavioural changes (sustainable development) ▪ Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political control of processes – Citizen participation controlled – Public projects and proposals are not “bottom-up”
Participatory approach	Idem “bottom-up” approach
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Peculiarities and specificities of the island (landscape and agriculture) ▪ Negative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mass tourism blocks other initiatives – Fear of “the new”
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Possibilities of integration of primary and third sectors – Administrative structure at island level that can contribute to the integration of sectors (Cabildo Insular) ▪ Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Importance of tourism can be a constraint for initiatives in other economic sectors and a danger for environmental conservation and territorial management – Few institutional support for integration – Political conflicts – Lack of social cohesion
Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Existing formal and informal networks – Exchange of knowledge and information with other LEADER and PRODER groups – Regional confederation of craftsmanship (common strategy) ▪ Negative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Geographic isolation, remoteness, costs related to this location – Networks do not produce concrete projects
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Competent technical team of LAG – Partnership generates more consensus in decision making – Local and regional management increases effectiveness ▪ Negative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Cabildo Insular has tried to control actions of the LAG. – Lack of technical support from regional government and Cabildo

2.1.2.4 How could the impact of each LEADER specificity be improved?

- *Ellegibility criteria should be more clear in order to limit speculation. Projects should have a clear link to the objectives of the programme.*
- *Networks should be empowered*
- *Increase simplicity and flexibility of management and funding processes*
- *Less control and more monitoring*
- *Increase technical support and follow-up of promoters*

2.1.3 Final Assessment and Impressions on the Whole Process

Some delay was experienced in the initial time of the working session. At the beginning, participation was “shy” and short, but some time later, the “ice was broken” and participant made deeper and longer contributions.

All participants did have the chance to express his/her ideas and there was not outstanding monopolisation of the dialogue.

There was a common position of civil society participants against the institutional position and role (mainly lack of support and confidence).

The LAG is well structured and management has and important role.

The lack of air conditioned in the working room made it a little uncomfortable during the afternoon session.

2.2 Focus Group Terra Chá, Galicia

2.2.1 Introduction and Methodology Used

Name of group: Fundación para o Desenvolvemento da Comarca de Terra Chá

Interlocutor: Anxo Fernandez Garcia, Manager of of the LAG during LEADER II (and beyond)

Participants:

- Jose Lodos Terreiro, beneficiary of LEADER II (B3)
- Celestino Graña Vena, beneficiary of LEADER II (B4)
- Manuel Montero, beneficiary of LEADER II (B4)
- Arcadio López Gonzales, president of a local cooperative
- José Maria Lamela Pérez, member of an association
- Gonzalo Hermida Carreiras, Local Development Technician in the Local Council of Vilalba.
- José Luís Alonso Turneño, financial and administrative in charge person of the LAG LEADER II
- Armando Castosa Alvariño, Major of local council of Cospeito
- Arturo Pereiro Vilariño, Major of local council of Castro de Rey, vice-president of the LAG LEADER II
- Anxo Fernandez Garcia, Manager of of the LAG during LEADER II (and beyond)
- Sonia Relvas, Member of the Portuguese evaluation team
- Rafa Crecente. Expert and academic.

Composition of the working groups

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Manuel Montero	Arcadio López	J. Luís Alonso	Armando Castosa
José Lodos	José M. Lamela	Gonzalo Hermida	Arturo Pereiro
Celestino Graña			

Agreed dates and schedule:

- **30 of may:** 16:00 to 20:00
- **31 of may:** 11:00 to 14:00.

Real dates and schedule:

- **30 of may:** 17'45 to 22'30

Process from the first contact until leave

Main interlocutor has been the LEADER II manager Anxo Fernandez. He and the LEADER technical office were willing to celebrate a working day for discussion of LEADER II dynamics in the area and facilitated all arrangements (including accommodation). However, as we explain later, the real purpose of the working exercise was misunderstood and the evaluation team had to do a great effort to achieve the initial objective.

The evaluation team travelled by plane to A Coruña from Valencia (about 1,000 km), and then reached by car Villalba (Ourense), the main town of Terra Cha, at 11:0 of may 30th. There was a previous meeting with Rafael Crecente, lecturer of the University of Santiago de Compostela, and observer of the F30 exercise, who gave an introduction to the socioeconomic and political details of the area.

At 13:30 of May 30th, the evaluation team reached the Terra Cha LAG offices. The LEADER manager, Anxo Fernandez gave a tour around the building. A journalist of the local newspaper "El Progreso" asked for an interview with the evaluators that turned out to be a new in the newspaper of the following day.

The meeting was held in a LEADER II funded rural tourism complex whose manager was one of the members of the panel. An appetizer, abundant wine, a copious lunch and a tour around the tourism complex were part of a strategy to minimize the important of the evaluation exercise¹⁶. Some members of the panel even commented on the possibility to cancel the working session since the previous hours were a demonstration of the achievements with LEADER in the area. This speaks loudly on the insufficient information given to the panel members by the manager (although a complete set of instructions was provided in advance).

When the evaluators indicated that holding the meeting was the real purpose of the presence there, and that it was necessary, panel members accepted, but made clear that only Friday

¹⁶ During the appetizer, lunch and walk the evaluators noticed that there was an important political bias in the group. Although clear instructions on the need for a balanced group were provided to the manager, all members of the panel had the same politic ideology, and some of them even tried to find out which is the ideology of the evaluators.

evening would be available for the meeting, since Saturday morning (previously agreed with the manager as the “second session”) would be impossible due to most panel members having other duties. There was no alternative and the evaluators accepted a single session that lasted until 22:30 in the evening of Friday.

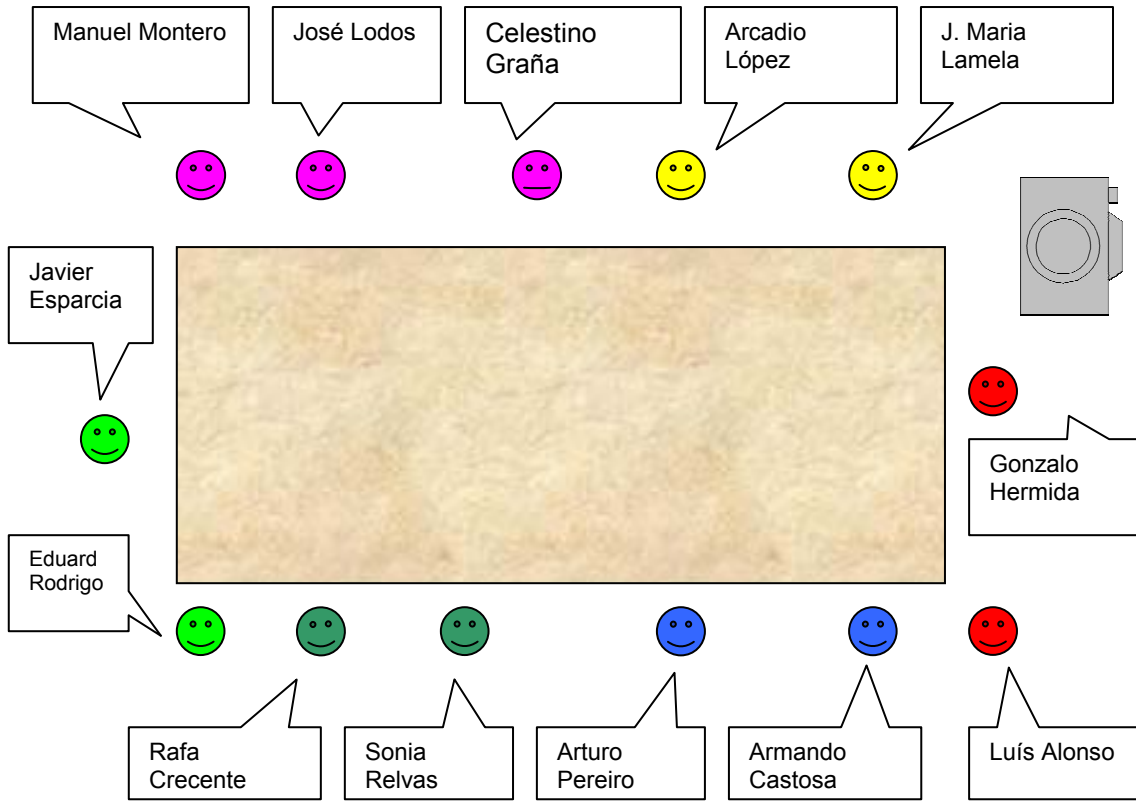
Due to the number of members of the working group, it was decided to video-record the meeting in order to have guidance for the latter transcription of results. The map of the working environment is shown in Figure 1.

The meeting started with an introduction from Javier Esparcia (Evaluator) explaining the agenda for the day, then methodology used and the objectives pursued. Four questions were launched to guide discussion:

- Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?
- How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?
- What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)
- How could improve the impact of each specificity of LEADER?

Figure 5

Working environment



Note: colours indicate the working groups formed for discussion

The LEADER II manager made a presentation with overheads explaining the evolution of the area from 1991 to date, pointing out achievements and difficulties. Terra Cha did not have LEADER I and, therefore, no much local development experience had happened before the implementation of LEADER II. However, some aspects can be pointed out:

- *In 1991 there was an agreement with the regional government (Xunta de Galicia) to write a County Development Plan (CDP)*
- *Between 1991 and 1993 structures of the CDP were created*
- *In 1994 strategic actions are proposed in the frame of the CDP*
- *In 1995 the Foundation for the Development of Terra Cha County is established to promote territorial development and to elaborate the proposal for LEADER II.*
- *In 1996 LEADER II is launched in the area*

After this presentation, each member of the panel introduced him/herself, working groups of two/three persons were created and discussion was initiated around the four questions pointed out previously. Questions were structured in tables that were given to attendants. Discussion happened question by question in the frame of each group, with a common debate for each question.

2.2.2 Main ideas and conclusions of the debate

2.2.2.1 Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

- Business creation using local resources
- Valorisation and marketing of local resources in local and non local markets
- Economic diversification to reduce dependence from livestock (transformation of primary products and rural tourism)
- Formation to increase employment opportunities for youth people
- Reform of the primary sector (new agribusiness to generate income and employment)
- Improve infrastructures and promotion of the territory
- Promote county identity, linked to the concept of territorial quality mark

2.2.2.2 How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Territorial cohesiveness: Terra Cha is a geographically, socially, economically, politically and historically consolidated territory. ▪ The previous territorial development initiative (County Development Plan in 1991-1995) defined considering the same area. ▪ Depopulation ▪ Existence of area-based development structures gestated during the CDL (1991-1995) and consolidated with LEADER II
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of the strategy from the territory (based on socioeconomic study and a diagnostic) to promote local resources, but without direct participation of local agents.
Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adequate development structure with participation of political, social and economic sectors of the county ▪ Initial “push” from local public institutions (local governments) that facilitated indirect participation of all the local society in the development process. Power was in the hands of the public sector during all LEADER II. Later, due to legal requirements, the group has opened to the local society (LEADER+). ▪ Many project proposals could not be funded due to the high mobilisation of the local society. LEADER funding ran out soon after the start of the implementation period. ▪ Power in hands of the public sector. ▪ Existence of previous development structure (<i>Foundation for the Development of Terra Cha County</i>).
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key element of the development strategy. Innovation has been achieved in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – New products and production methods in agriculture with the use of new technologies – Creation of a rural tourism offer – Valorisation of heritage – Renewed respect for natural resources – Transformation and valorisation of local products – Creation of a virtual market (web portal) – Actions not covered by other initiatives – Marketing strategy to open new markets
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint promotion of all economic sectors through a web portal ▪ Creation of a territorial promotion mark “Terra Cha, Naturalmente” ▪ Promotion of interrelations and synergies between funded projects (specially between tourism and service sector)

Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several initiatives of exchange of information: explanation of experiences of other territories to entrepreneurs of the area, exchange of experiences, joint promotion of the area with other neighbouring areas in Madrid. ▪ LEADER II has facilitated knowledge about experiences and initiatives of other rural territories. ▪ LEADER publications have contributed to know experiences that can be adopted in the area.
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decentralised management has been one of the key elements of success of LEADER. However, there have been the following constraints: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Delay in payments from upper administrations – There were not eligibility criteria – Maximum percentage of grant was given due to initial lack of projects and a fear that money would not be spent. – Only final certification made difficult some projects. Partial certifications would increase agility of payment.

2.2.2.3 What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)

Territorial approach	<p>Positive elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong compromise from local institutions and population in the implementation process ▪ Similar economic, political and institutional structures <p>Negative elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High number of settlements and sparse population have diffculted implementation
“Bottom-up” approach	<p>Positive elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local actors have promoted animation and compromise ▪ County Foundations were an appropriate interlocutor at the beginning of the program (ie. the “top-down period”) and the referent to the later promotion of a bottom-up approach. ▪ LAG technical team has been essential for promotion of strategy and implication of local population ▪ Interaction, exchange of knowledge and information between local actors <p>Negative elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of tradition in co-responsibility in development processes.
Participatory approach	<p>Positive elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proximity of the LAG, its management capacity and credibility have favoured confidence and implication of the local population. <p>Negative elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most of the LEADER II period the LAG was composed only with public authorities ▪ Sparse configuration of population settlement has made difficult participation. This has been solved partially with the support of local development agents in each town. ▪ Low financial capacity of promoters in rural areas

Innovation	Positive elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formation plan adapted to the needs of the area, to promote innovation
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	Positive elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promotion of relationships between sector associations Negative elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generalised individualism ▪ Relations between economic and social sectors have not been optimal, but some promotion has happened among entrepreneurs
Cooperation and networks	Positive elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entrepreneurial cooperation promoted with improved marketing strategies ▪ Importance of support from local institutions for promotion of products of the area ▪ Joint promotion of the territory Negative elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of formation and tradition
Management and funding processes	Positive elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pernicious delays in payments from Commission that affect speed of implementation and effectiveness. ▪ Partial payments to promoters would increase effectiveness

2.2.2.4 How could the impact of each LEADER specificity be improved?

- *Provide more economic resources to the LAGs (funding ran out long before the waiting list of projects was completed)*
- *Improve administrative procedures:*
 - Support rapidity of execution of projects
 - Speed up payments from EU and National-Regional Administrations to the group
 - Speed up answers from Intermediate Body (Regional Government) to questions posed by LAGs
 - Reduce controls over LAG functioning (ie. checking of projects by regional government)
- *Increase competences of LAGs*
- *Ensure the continuity of the LEADER concept beyond 2006*
- *Partial payments before the project is finished (partial certifications)*
- *Budget more appropriate to the socioeconomic characteristics of the area*
- *Improve the demonstration effect by showing innovative actions to the population*
- *Promote coordination in marketing and production*

- *Improve information on LEADER to the local population (ie. use the Internet to provide guidelines and information on LEADER to potential promoters and to the local population)*

2.2.3 Final assessment and impressions on the whole process

The meeting started two hours later due to the big meal offered by hosts and to the lack of willingness to have a formal meeting. During the first part of the meeting, participation was low, and the LEADER manager walked from working group to working group indicating what should be answered. Evaluators asked several times the manager not to guide answers from participants and he accepted unwillingly arguing that “they did not know the answers”. Evaluators had to indicate to the manager that the aim was not to find “correct answers” but perceptions.

From the meeting it became clear that the manager plays an important leadership in the definition, execution and we would also say “control” of the development process. However, it seems that there have not been clear eligibility criteria and that the strategy has not been the driving force for the LAG action: projects were granted with the maximum possible percentage of money, fearing that not enough promoters would apply. Therefore a “first come, first takes” philosophy has been applied and, as a consequence, money ran out long before the end of the implementation period.

2.3 Focus Group Somontano de Hiesca, Aragón

2.3.1 Introduction and methodology used

Name of group: Centro de Desarrollo Integral del Somontano de Huesca

Interlocutor: Paloma Fábregas, Manager of the LAG during the late LEADER II implementation (and beyond)

Participants:

- **Paloma Fábregas.** Manager of the LAG Centro de Desarrollo Integral de Somontano.
- **M^a Luz Hernández.** Señor Lecturer of the Universidad de Zaragoza, Director of the Course Management of Rural Development (Huesca) and external observer.
- **Alfredo Larrosa.** President of the Olive Oil Cooperative San Antonio and member of the LAG assembly)
- **M^a Eugenia Claver.** President of the LAG during LEADER II and exmajor of the main town of the area (Barbastro). Member of the local council of Barbastro (PAR Partido aragonés).

- **Pedro Cortina.** Member of the Centre of Studies of Somontano. Member of the LAG assembly.
- **M^a Carmen Nasarre.** LEADER II beneficiary from the tourism sector.
- **Angela Mora.** LEADER II beneficiary from the tourism sector.
- **Núria Gil.** Local Development Agent from the County Council of Somontano (Mancomunidad del Somontano).
- **Ricardo Calvo.** President of the County Council of Somontano (Mancomunidad del Somontano) and member of the Board of Directors of the LAG.
- **Carlos Domínguez.** LEADER II beneficiary of the agriculture sector (olive oil production).

Composition of the working groups

Grupo 1	Grupo 2	Grupo 3	Grupo 4	Grupo 5
Carlos Domínguez	Alfredo Larrosa	M ^a Carmen Nasarre	Ricardo Calvo	Pedro Cortina
Mari Luz Hernández	M ^a Eugenia Claver	Paloma Fábregas	Ángela Mora	Nuria Gil

Dates and schedule:

- **31 of may:** 11:30 to 14:30 and 16:30 to 19:30

Process from the first contact until leave

Main interlocutor has been the LEADER II manager Paloma Fábregas. She was willing to celebrate a working day for discussion of LEADER II dynamics in the area (as stated in the Q202 and in one telephone call). However, she saw some difficulties afterwards and tried to cancel the focus group, arguing that they were very busy. After some days of uncertainty, an affirmative answer was given and all arrangements put in place for the celebration of the focus group.

The evaluation team travelled by car to Barbastro (Huesca) from Valencia (about 550 km), where they arrived at 20:30 on the night before the meeting. At 10:00 next morning, evaluators met the manager of the LAG, Paloma Fábregas at the Development Centre, a small one-floor office with 4 persons (including technicians and administrative staff). Evaluators held a small preparation meeting with the manager paying special attention to general aspects of the LAG constitution and functioning, and discussing methodological aspects for the focus group. Several times the manager made comments in relation to the “difficulty” of the proposed methodology and the inadequate times given during all the evaluation process. She complaint on the length of the Q202 questionnaire and the level of reflection/analysis it required in relation

to the available time and the human resources of LAGs. Finally, she thought that the “intensity” of the focus group was too demanding for local people that is not used to spend one full journey discussing around a table. Later, during the discussion, it became evident that this attitude was too pessimistic, although some fatigue appeared at some points.

During the preparatory meeting, the manager informed on the attendants and the role each one played in LEADER II. Basically, the structure proposed had been respected and there were a wide representation of the public and private components of the LAG.

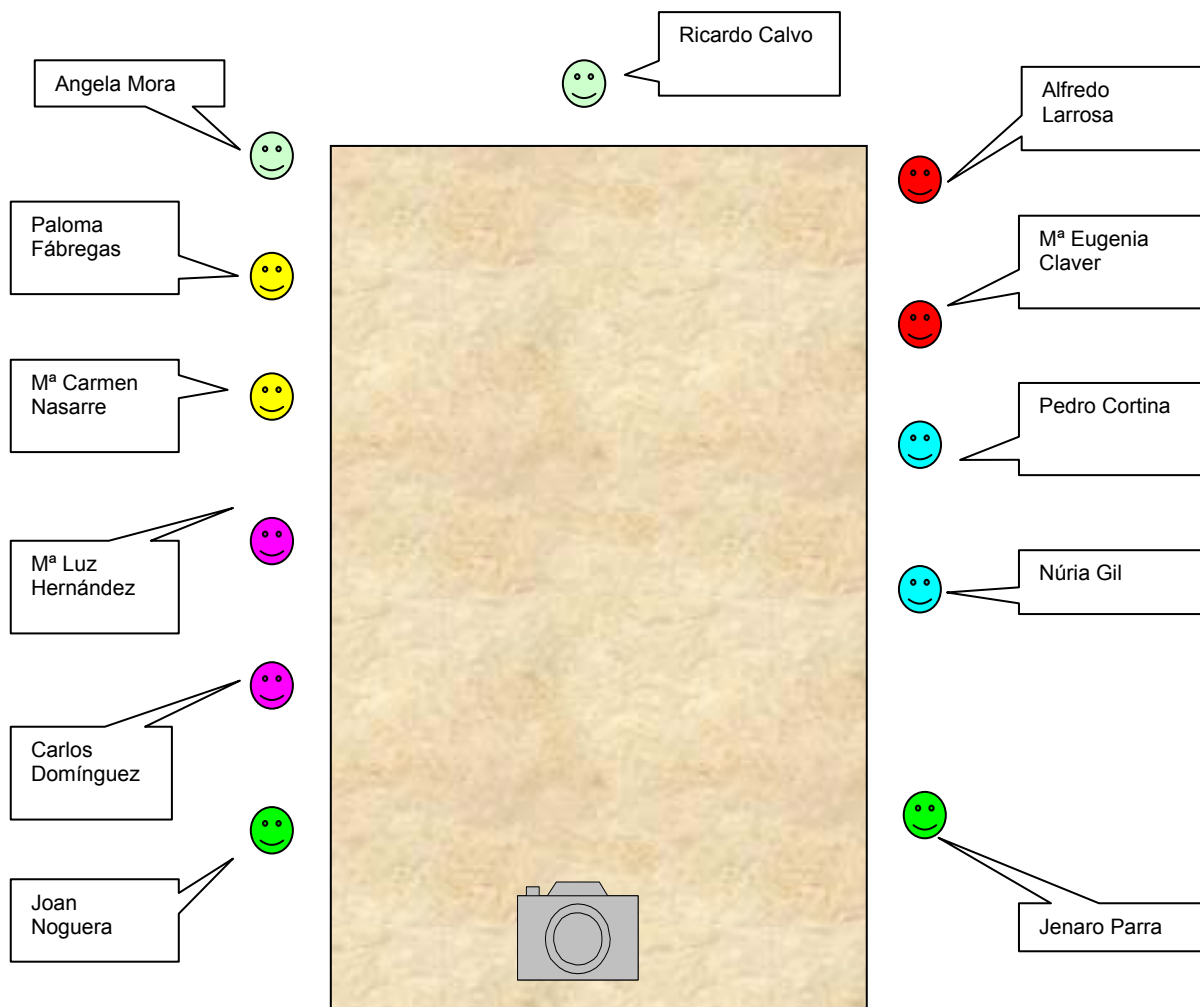
Evaluators and the manager reached the see of the Mancomunidad del Somontano at 11:00. The room for the focus group was very adequate, with a big, oval table and enough isolation from noise and disturbances. Some members of the focus group arrived late and the meeting started sometime after 11:30. In relation to the schedule proposed, meetings in the morning would have worked better if started earlier. Early meetings (say, 9:00) facilitate that members do not start another activity before that prevents them from arriving in time. Early meetings allow also for a long, and usually very productive, mornings.

Cell phones were quite an issue not only in Somontano but also in the other focus groups. Many interruptions happened as a consequence of telephone calls to mobile phones and only few people disconnected their phones.

Due to the number of members of the working group, it was decided to video-record the meeting in order to have guidance for the latter transcription of results. The map of the working environment is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 6

Working environment



Note: colours indicate the working groups formed for discussion

The meeting started with a welcome from the manager of LEADER II and a later introduction from the evaluators explaining the agenda for the day, the methodology used and the objectives pursued. Four questions were launched to guide discussion:

- Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

Groups of two/three persons discussed internally the answers to this question (the groups are identified with different colours in figure 1). After the internal discussion, the spokesman of each

group presented the ideas and comments to the whole group. These comments were discussed by the group.

- How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Groups of two/three persons discussed internally the answers to this question in relation to each of the seven specificities of the LEADER approach (the groups are identified with different colours in figure 1). After the internal discussion, the spokesman of each group presented the ideas and comments to the whole group. These comments were discussed by the group.

- What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)

Groups of two/three persons discussed internally the answers to this question in relation to each of the seven specificities of the LEADER approach (the groups are identified with different colours in figure 1). After the internal discussion, the spokesman of each group presented the ideas and comments to the whole group. These comments were discussed by the group.

- How could improve the impact of each specificity of LEADER?

This question was discussed openly in a brainstorming exercise (without previous discussion in groups) due to demands of members of the panel that were tired after the meal.

2.3.2 Main ideas and conclusions of the debate

2.3.2.1 Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

CHALLENGE	ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN
Counteract depopulation and demographic devitalisation	<p>Aragón is one of the regions in Spain that has suffered most of depopulation of rural areas. As a consequence many villages have been completely abandoned, services and equipment have closed or are deteriorated. A very important "side effect" is that Aragón is not considered as Objective 1 region despite the degree of territorial devitalisation and the bulk of problems generated for a sustainable and equilibrated development. Zaragoza the regional capital, concentrates more than 50% of the regional population, but many of the youth and more dynamic people of the area and other rural areas migrated outside the region (Barcelona, Valencia).</p> <p>Average age of population is high.</p> <p>Main actions undertaken in the area include: (i) promote activity in satellite towns around main centre in order maintain population; (ii) diversification of economic activity and promotion of synergies; (iii) create new sources of income from under-utilised local resources; (iv) maintain and valorise cultural and natural heritage as the main development potential.</p>

Lack of social structuring	<p>Although Somontano is a geographically homogeneous territory, the initial situation (before LEADER II) presents a sectorally-based institutional structure with few interrelations and cooperation mechanisms.</p> <p>On the other hand, society is not structured and, therefore, associations and cooperatives are weak, when existing.</p>
Economic devitalisation and low employment opportunities	<p>High depopulation has caused that only the main settlement of the area enough economic fabric to maintain population. Somontano benefits from the existence of this county centre that has prevented a bigger depopulation.</p> <p>Main potentials of the area to achieve economic vitalisation and employment generation are: (i) Barbastro as the county centre with sufficient services and equipment; (ii) the wine as a development industry that has been able to promote the territory very successfully (Vino del Somontano), and helping to achieve a territorial quality image; (iii) important natural and cultural resources currently under-exploited with a low quality tourism; (iv) increase value-added of local resources with in-site transformation and new marketing strategies.</p> <p>Main threats of the area to achieve economic vitalisation and employment generation are: (i) reduced innovation capacity and formation of entrepreneurs; (ii) difficulties for youth and women to join the labour market; (iii) lack of modernisation of the productive sector, specially agribusiness; (iv) low specific formation for new activities and employments.</p>
Lack of infrastructures and equipment	<p>Bad and congested roads.</p> <p>Lack of tourism infrastructure</p> <p>Specialised services in the area are not developed.</p>
Governance	<p>Institutions did act independently and locally. There was not a culture of collaboration. There was not a common vision of the area and a common development strategy.</p> <p>Some actions had been undertaken by local actors: (i) creation of a public cooperation structure (Mancomunidad del Somontano) that later became the County Council with several competences on the provision of services and territorial management; (ii) program of the province government (Diputación) to promote tourism; (iii) local fair in Barbastro to promote products of the area and to exchange information.</p>

2.3.2.2 How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEADER II has made possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of a development strategy that focus on the territory and has been agreed by the main local actors in a participatory and “bottom-up” process. – Generation of territorial identity on the base of a common development strategy and the demonstration effect of LEADER. – Special attention to territorial cohesion and support to small and remote municipalities ▪ LEADER has benefited from the impulse of the Somontano wine quality label, that has created an image of territorial quality. The quality mark has been adopted for the remaining products and services of the area.
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEADER II has made possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision-making capacity at local level (with accompanying financial resources) ▪ Creation of a participative decision structure to support entrepreneurs and to provide information and technical advice. ▪ The existence of a technical team, essential for the consolidation of the development process. The accompanying function to the promoters has been the key element of success. ▪ Generate awareness among local population on development possibilities and new development resources. ▪ Common definition of a development strategy from a participatory, “bottom-up” approach.
Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEADER II has made possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The local partnership widely represents collectives and organisations of the territory (social, economic, cultural, political). This has facilitated information to potential beneficiaries. – Creation of a participative decision structure to support entrepreneurs and to provide information and technical advice.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism: new lodgings, new products (cultural, adventure) ▪ New economic activities (craftsmanship of products not used before, agri-business, etc.) ▪ Global promotion of the area ▪ New production processes to increase quality and to diversify productions. ▪ Quality in the centre of the development strategy ▪ Specific formation that has introduced new knowledge and skills in the area
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on maintaining youth and women in the area ▪ Each economic activity has benefited from structuring and dynamisation of the rest. ▪ Synergies have been promoted (tourism, quality products, heritage, associationism) ▪ The development strategy has contributed to the coherence of actions in different sectors.

Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEADER II has made possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coordination of development efforts of all institutions and organisations of the area – Opportunity for cooperation and common work, favouring dialogue and consensus to achieve common goals. – Creation of sectoral networks – Creation of regional level network of LAGs – Participation in different levels of cooperation and networks that have
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ By the first time management and funding procedures happen close to the final beneficiary. This has had all kinds of beneficial effects: (i) better monitoring and technical advise to promoters; (ii) better knowledge of the local resources and development potentials; (iii) more proactive role of the management office in the search for projects; (iv) friendly and close relationship between promoter and management; (v) increased speed of bureaucratic procedures. ▪ However, several constraints can e pointed out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A bigger share of the grant given to the beneficiary at the beginning of the project (when it is more needed and in order to avoid having to ask for a bank loan) – The 20% final share of the grant is still unpaid in some cases. The delay in payment of this final share is scandalous in some cases (specially for those projects approved at the beginning of the implementation period) – Certain public institutions tend to control administrative procedures of LAGs arguing that public funds are being managed.

2.3.2.3 What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II? (positive and negative)

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well defined territory. Moreover, in the case of Aragón, comarcas are administrative units with powers for the implementation of certain policies and programs. The LEADER II are matches the Comarca. ▪ Organizations in operation at county level (Mancomunidad). ▪ The territorial image promoted by the wine industry contributed to a big extent to create a territorial identity and the preconditions for the territorial approach of LEADER II. ▪ The president of the province government (Diputación) is the major of the county centre (Barbastro). This has facilitated communication and certain initiatives. ▪ Except for the pointed out organisations (Mancomunidad, Wine territorial mark), there were not any common project or structure at county level.
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local population has taken the chief role in the definition of the future vision of the territory and in the decision on the projects to promote to achieve it. ▪ Local resources have been in the basis of the development strategy. ▪ Decision capacity at the local level. ▪ The dynamic of cooperation promoted by the LAG has favoured the compromise of the main local actors with the development of the area.

Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LAG is not identified with a particular political option. It has been a plural organisation. ▪ The dynamic of cooperation promoted by the LAG has favoured the participation of the main local actors in key decisions on the development strategy and actions.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New forms of collaboration between institutions, between social actors and between economic actors have been promoted. ▪ Creation of new development structures. ▪ The entrepreneurial structure (medium size industries) in some sectors (wine production, meat) has facilitated the adoption of innovation. ▪ Information and development of networks have favoured a better diffusion of the innovation.
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEADER has focused in the promotion of the different resources for the development of the area. ▪ The global development project includes all resources and potentialities available in the area. ▪ New attitudes towards cooperation between actors → new relationships and synergies between sectors and collectives.
Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience gained in management of European programs and related cooperation and work in networks. ▪ Regional LAGs network has been very active. The group has worked regularly with the networks o LEADER.
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision-making capacity by a local public-private partnership is very positive. However, complicated bureaucracy and the lack of experience have reduced time for strategic thinking. ▪ Delay in payments (specially the last 20%)

2.3.2.4 How could the impact of each LEADER specificity be improved?

- *Reinforce the LEADER philosophy beyond 2006. Local actors need to have autonomy in designing their future.*
- *Maintain the idea of a public-private partnership with increased decision-making capacities for strategic development of the area (implementation of policies and programmes, provision of services, etc.). The model of Aragón with county level institutions (Comarcas) could be the basis for a mixed County Council.*
- *Avoid restricting too much the themes for strategies under LEADER.*
- *Promote complementary formation programs for population and key collectives.*
- *Focus on relationships between actors and sectors in and between areas.*
- *Reduction or simplification of bureaucracy*
- *Speed up payment*

2.3.3 Final assessment and impressions on the whole process

There were not outstanding difficulties or problems in the methodology proposed, although the manager had some doubts about the feasibility of the proposed working program.

Discussion in the Focus Group has been intense. Participation has not been equilibrated. Several participants did discuss in the frame of the small working groups, but they never talked in the open debate. The methodology used included debate around four questions in two stages: (i) the group was divided into several subgroups of two or three persons; (ii) internal discussion on each question; (iii) open debate of each question in the main group. This methodology has been positive for the following reasons: (i) each participant has made an initial reflection and has discussed his/her ideas with other member. A degree of consensus has been promoted; (ii) each group did express the conclusions of internal debate to the rest of participants and a debate happened; (iii) the frequent monopolisation of debate by those more prepared or more dynamic was avoided giving all members the possibility to express themselves.

Local interlocutors have fully respected guidelines provided by evaluators: firstly, the meeting room was adequate with a round table in which each participant could see the rest; secondly, the proposed profiles of participants have been strictly followed, and all invited participants did show up, so representativeness of the group was very high.

The Somontano area did not have any local integrated development program before LEADER II. However, there were some institutional and productive structures already operating at county level, that have contributed to the success of the LEADER program. These structures are, on the one hand, the Mancomunidad del Somontano, an association of all local governments of the area in order to provide some basic services in common. This structure has evolved to the recently created administrative units “Comarcas”, with local “parliaments” and decision making power devolved from the local and regional levels. On the other hand, the second structure working at county level is the association of wine producers under the Quality Label “Somontano”. The high modernisation of processes and marketing strategies at national and international level, makes wine one of the best ambassadors for Somontano.

LEADER II has made possible:

- A strategic thinking process previous to the implementation of the initiative. The process has required creating participatory structures (thematic groups), an increased awareness of the situation of the area, and the valorisation of the local development potentials.
- Offer training and formation in line with the observed needs and potentials.

- Consolidation of a technical structure working for the development of the area, from inside the area. Efficiency and impact of actions have increased as a result.

LEADER II strategy had different focus in the area. On the one hand, the northern area had a predominant tourism orientation in relation to the proximity to Pyrenees and a more attractive landscape. On the other hand, the southern part of the county was more oriented towards innovative agriculture production. In both cases, priority was given to investments from small and remote municipalities.

Bottom-up approach has been promoted in two ways: first, the creation of working groups discussing strategic aspects and creating a dynamic of cooperation and common understanding; second, the promotion of development projects from local promoters (proactive attitude) through monitoring and technical support.

Lack of self-criticism was an outstanding issue during discussion. Several times evaluators pointed out to possible weaknesses in the implementation of LEADER in the area. No one was recognised.

2.4 Focus Group Condado de Jaén, Andalucía

2.4.1 Introduction and methodology used

Name of group: Asociación para el Desarrollo Rural de la Comarca de El Condado (Jaén)

Interlocutor: Sebastián Lozano Mudarra, Manager of the LAG during LEADER II (and beyond)

Participants:

- **Sebastián Lozano Mudarra.** Manager of the LAG Condado de Jaén during LEADER II).
- **Manuel Cuadrado Ibáñez.** Director of the LEADER II Evaluations in Andalucía. Desarrollo Agrario y Pesquero de Andalucía S.A.
- **Santiago Ramiro Tornero.** Manager of olive sector enterprise, non-beneficiary of LEADER II and member of the Board of Directors of the LAG LEADER II).
- **José Álvarez Molino.** Major of Santisteban del Puerto and member of the Board of Directors of the LAG LEADER II.
- **Encarnación Alcázar Quesada.** President of the Women in Business association of the area.
- **Francisco Bayona Fernández.** Major of Arquillo (PSOE) and president of the LAG LEADER II.

- **Mercedes González.** Technician of the LAG LEADER II.
- **Aniceta Bico Guzmán.** Entrepreneur supported by a LEADER II Project (crafts with olive tree wood).
- **Francisco García García.** Entrepreneur and member of the board of directors of LAG LEADER II (organic eggs).
- **Francisco Macías Coronado.** Entrepreneur and president of the Craftman association of the area. Vice-president of the LAG LEADER II. Not supported by LEADER.
- **Domingo Rodríguez Calero.** Major of Chiclana (PP) and member of the board of directors LAG LEADER II.

Composition of the working groups

Grupo 1	Grupo 2	Grupo 3	Grupo 4
Manolo Cuadrado	Santiago Ramiro	José Álvarez	Francisco Bayona
Encarnación Alcázar	Aniceta Bico	Mercedes González	Sebastián Lozano
Francisco Macías		Francisco García	

Dates and schedule:

- **2 of june:** 11:30 to 14:45 and 17:00 to 19:30

Process from the first contact until leave

Main interlocutor has been the LEADER II manager Sebastián Lozano. He and the LEADER technical office were willing to celebrate a working day for discussion of LEADER II dynamics in the area and facilitated all arrangements.

The evaluation team travelled by car to Santisteban del Puerto (Jaén) from Valencia (about 300 km), where they arrived at 10:15 on Monday june 2nd. The evaluators met Santiago Lozano and the rest of the technical team of LEADER+ Condado de Jaén in their brand new, three floor building (Development Centre). The centre includes activities of the LAG (LEADER, Equal, etc.), a business association and a Corporation.

Before the meeting the LEADER manager, Anxo Fernandez gave a tour around the building. After this tour, the evaluators discussed with the manager details of the day: organisation of the working room, methodology, etc. The conditions proposed matched those already negotiated in advance and not significant problems were posed.

The meeting was held in the same Rural Development Centre. The first session started with some delay due to the arrival time of some members of the panel. This delay was due to (the manager pointed out) a trip to Barcelona over the weekend that ended late the day before. The trip is part of a trans-national cooperation project initiated in LEADER II centred on the concept of Territorial Quality Label. This is the “flag-project” of the LAG due to its long-term, strategic component. The trip’s aim was to visit migrated people of the area that live in Barcelona (main colonies are in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid). The visit takes the form of a festival showing all the initiatives being implemented in El Condado de Jaen, the concept and actions of the Territorial Quality Label. The objective is to inform and get the commitment of the migrated people to act as “ambassadors” of El Condado.

Due to the number of members of the working group, it was decided to video-record the meeting in order to have guidance for the latter transcription of results. The map of the working environment is shown in Figure 1.

The meeting started with a welcome from the manager of LEADER II and a later introduction from Joan Noguera (Evaluator) explaining the agenda for the day, the methodology used and the objectives pursued. Four questions were launched to guide discussion:

- Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

This question was answered by Sebastián Lozano in the form of an introduction to the situation of the area before LEADER II. All members of the panel agreed with the comments.

- How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Groups of two/three persons discussed internally the answers to this question in relation to each of the seven specificities of the LEADER approach (the groups are identified with different colours in figure 1). After the internal discussion, the spokesman of each group presented the ideas and comments to the whole group. These comments were discussed by the group.

- What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II in the area? (both positive and negative)

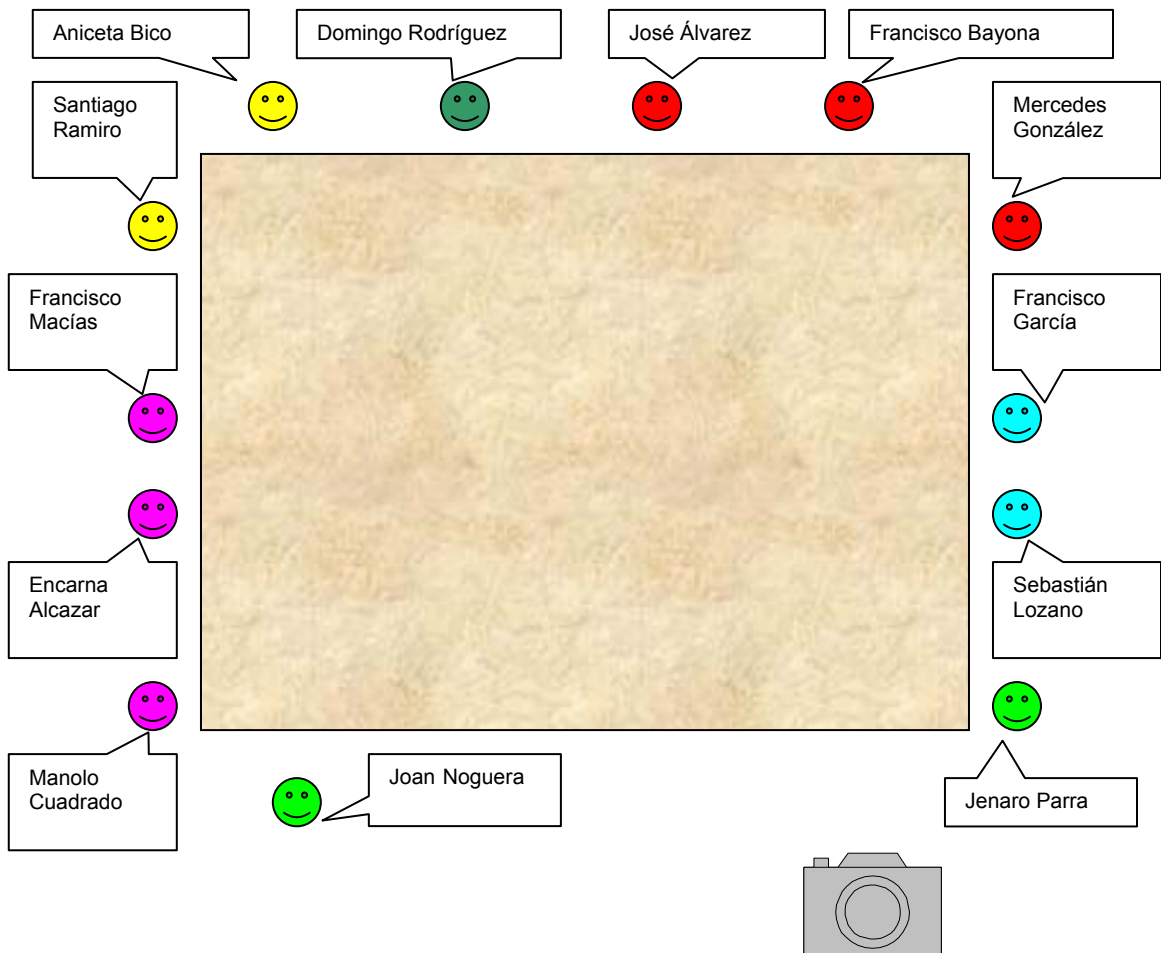
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- How could improve the impact of each specificity of LEADER?

This question was discussed openly in a brainstorming exercise (without previous discussion in groups) due to demands of members of the panel that were tired after the meal.

Figure 7

Working environment



Note: colours indicate the working groups formed for discussion

2.4.2 Main ideas and conclusions of the debate

2.4.2.1 Which were the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II was set in progress? What actions did local actors undertake to achieve a sustainable development of the area?

CHALLENGE	ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN
Territorial Identity	The county was not perceived by inhabitants as a territorial unit. Due to high outmigration during S. XX, most settlements of the area have lost about half of their total population (the most dynamic and young). Population was pessimistic on development possibilities for the area.
Social structuring	Local society lacked structuring. Productive or civil associations were rare.
Employment and economic diversification	Economy totally dependent on olive oil production for both employment and income generation. Moreover, the olive oil was produced mostly in bulk. This caused that most of the potential added value of the product was gained outside the area. All other economic resources of the area (tourism, alternative productions, environmental heritage) were underused or not used at all.
Infrastructures and equipment	Bad roads to reach and to move around the area (specially national road Valencia – Úbeda) Insufficient equipment and basic services due to the traditional population loss.
Governance	Institutions did act independently and locally. There was not a culture of collaboration.

Condado de Jaén did not have LEADER I. Therefore, the situation and the main challenges for the sustainable development of the area before LEADER II were those common to other inland rural areas where the effects of spontaneous evolution had caused loss of population, loss of economic activities, loss of services and deterioration of infrastructures.

This initial assessment was made by the manager, Sebastián Lozano, with general agreement of other members.

2.4.2.2 How was each of the seven LEADER specificities translated to the area? To which extent has an adequate implementation process been ensured? Which constraints have appeared?

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of the LAG association (ASODECO) to promote development actions for the area. ▪ Coordination of main public and private actors of the county to design a development strategy and a plan for joint work to implement it. The strategy includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public solidarity between towns for investment (equal shares rather than quotas according to population) ▪ Transversal projects: Territorial Quality Label ▪ Structuring of economic sectors (creation and promotion of associations and networks) ▪ Creation of several development centres in the area ▪ Promote cultural interaction between towns of the area
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of equipment and services raises the need to involve local population in the promotion of development projects (social, cultural and economic) to complement infrastructural development that was being promoted from the regional and central governments. ▪ The final diagnosis of the area and the definition of development strategies have been carried out by working groups with the participation of local actors. ▪ The LAG soon understood that LEADER is not enough to support a territorial development strategy (although it has been the catalyser). For this reason, more projects have been assumed and implemented (NOW II, EQUAL, etc.).
Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diagnosis and definition of development strategies have been carried out by working groups with the participation of local actors. ▪ Working thematic groups have been in operation during LEADER II to facilitate participation in the decision making process, to contribute to structure economic and social sectors and to solve common problems. ▪ Information on the development strategy and other basic projects has been extensively distributed to the local population and to migrated population in order to involve them in the development process. ▪ Some sectors (education, health) have not been sufficiently involved and there is the need for a continued work to involve the less represented local groups and sectors.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of a Territorial Quality Label setting production and working requirements to all products and services offered in the area. ▪ Promotion of IST (tele-centres, webpages, etc.) ▪ Creation of enterprises and activities in the service sector (rural tourism, restaurants, etc.) and the agribusiness sector (valorisation of local productions as canned foods, honey, cheese, etc.) ▪ Economic diversification with alternatives to the olive oil sector (greenhouses, ostrich farms, plant nursery, etc.) ▪ Support to formation ▪ Detailed information on possibilities to support projects. ▪ New forms of participation of local actors in the development process ▪ Cooperation and work in networks

Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The integrated development strategy includes most potential resources for development. ▪ Territorial Quality Label: participation of all economic and social sectors in the definition of quality parameters. ▪ Institutional coordination with province and regional institutions.
Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several trans-national cooperation projects, cooperation between sectors and companies of the area and the network work with other Spanish LAGs (via Observatory and National and Regional Networks). Some outstanding cooperation projects include: several transversal projects of LEADER, NOW II and III, article 10 of ERDF, Territorial Quality Label, Leonardo. ▪ Demonstration effect, mutual enrichment, exchange of ideas and innovation are the main effects of cooperation.
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decentralised management and funding have made possible the creation of a local development technical team that constitutes one of the main tools of LEADER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continued support to promoters – Increased efficiency in public expenditure as compared with other traditional systems – Possibility to attract different projects and adapt them according to the strategic development plan. ▪ The evaluation culture has been introduced as the way to learn about progress and needed changes. Particularly, the concept of continuous evaluation has been pointed out as the best way to evaluate. ▪ Frustration for projects that could not be developed due to lack of resources.

2.4.2.3 What was the role of the context (social, economic, political and institutional) on the implementation of LEADER II? (positive and negative)

Territorial approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Before LEADER II implementation, local society was not structured at all, ▪ The economy was devitalised with a complete dominance of the olive oil production. ▪ Institutions did not work together ▪ Formation of the population and entrepreneurs was low ▪ Infrastructures were bad ▪ Healthcare did not exist in the area ▪ The territory was not perceived as a unit ▪ Pessimistic attitudes due to several failed experiences ▪ Homogeneous area ▪ Political cohesion (dominance of one political party) ▪ Institutional support from regional government
“Bottom-up” approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Willingness from administrations and social collectives to collaborate in the design and implementation of an integrated development strategy. ▪ Lack of funding in the local institutions to undertake all necessary projects. ▪ Lack of initiative and lack of experience conditioned implementation.

Participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low formation constraints participation. ▪ Some sectors (education, health) have not been sufficiently involved and there is the need for a continued work to involve the less represented local groups and sectors. ▪ The configuration of settlement in the area (reduced number of medium-size towns) has favoured participation
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of information, formation and planning were fundamental constraints for innovation that was perceived as “something dangerous”. ▪ Due to the economic focus on olive oil production. Innovative activities in the area were easy since most of the other development resources were underused.
Integrated and multi-sectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The economic focus on olive oil production was an important difficulty for an integrated development strategy. ▪ A lot of time was needed to convince entrepreneurs on the importance of cooperation for a common goal. ▪ Lack of experience in institutional coordination
Cooperation and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was not tradition of cooperation or work in networks. ▪ Language barriers
Management and funding processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The decentralised management with a technical team and a LAG was an innovative model.

2.4.2.4 How could the impact of each LEADER specificity be improved?

- *All aspects of the LEADER concept have been positive for the area. Therefore, the best way to improve the impact of each specificity of LEADER is to let the program continue with its dynamisation capacity.*
- *LAGs still are too dependent on external funding (project-oriented cooperation), but rural institutions are not able to provide enough financial support. However, local compromise could improve if there is a wider external compromise to continue with a locally based, territorial and integrated rural development action.*
- *We are reaching a dangerous point in which all LEADER money is being compromised early in the implementation period with projects meeting strategic criteria. This means that LAGs could quickly loose credibility if they need to say no to every new proposal coming in. This is what is NOW happening in Condado de Jaén in relation to LEADER+.*
- *If the LEADER concept is something good and useful as a development model for rural areas (and it seems to be according to many sources of information, research and evaluation), two requirements are essential:*

On the one hand, to clearly define powers of LAGs according to its management capacities

On the other hand, to provide funding accordingly.

- *It seems that autonomy to allocate funding is being cut down progressively with controls from regional governments, and with conditions (eligibility criteria) from national and regional governments. LAGs have demonstrated capacity to administrate public funding with high standards of efficiency and accountability and these increased controls reduce one of the main advantages of a decentralised management.*
- *Implementation periods need to be longer than 3-4 years. In this sense, “dead periods” between the end of one phase and the beginning of the next should be minimum (ie. the “dead period” between the end of LEADER II and the beginning of LEADER+ has been longer than 2 year). “Dead periods” block the action of the LAG and the development dynamic.*
- *One payment for the implementation period, not one payment per year.*
- *Improved cooperation mechanisms: cooperation should always have a strategic component.*
- *LEADER in the future should not be “coffee for all”. Instead, some kind of quality criteria should be set in progress to reduce support to LAGs that are “learning”. A proposal is to create a European Territorial Quality Label indicating that a territory is producing goods and services according to official quality criteria. This label would be the key to apply for future development initiatives.*

2.4.3 Final assessment and impressions on the whole process

There were not outstanding difficulties or problems in the methodology proposed. Opinions were more or less homogeneous and there were not important discrepancies. The LEADER II Manager, Sebastián Lozano, was manager of a LEADER I LAG in Guadix (Andalucía) where some conflicts arose with public authorities due to different approaches to development. He has found in Condado de Jaén a “virgin” territory where he can propose his development philosophy. Therefore, the manager plays an important leadership in the development process of the area.

The consideration of strategic aspects and the focus on a Territorial Quality Label are two of the main processes in relation to the implementation of LEADER II in the area. These aspects are impacting positively development of the area and will surely influence beyond LEADER.

Discussion in the Focus Group has been intense. Participation has been equilibrated, away from monopolisation from one or some members. The methodology used included debate around four questions in two stages: (i) the group was divided into several subgroups of two or three persons; (ii) internal discussion on each question; (iii) open debate of each question in the main group. This methodology has been positive for the following reasons: (i) each participant has made an initial reflection and has discussed his/her ideas with other member. A degree of

consensus has been promoted; (ii) each group did express the conclusions of internal debate to the rest of participants and a debate happened; (iii) the frequent monopolisation of debate by those more prepared or more dynamic was avoided giving all members the possibility to express themselves.

Local interlocutors have fully respected guidelines provided by evaluators: firstly, the meeting room was adequate with a round table in which each participant could see the rest; secondly, the proposed profiles of participants have been strictly followed, and all invited participants did show up, so representativeness of the group was very high; thirdly, it is important to point out that there were two entrepreneurs with projects not granted by LEADER II and whose opinions did not differ significantly from the rest.

During discussion several weaknesses of LEADER II implementation were pointed out by different participants. This is important since many LEADER groups, specially those having good results, tend to be too enthusiastic on LEADER implementation and impact and forget about any negative aspect.

In any case, evaluators need to rely on the organisation of the group by LEADER members. This introduces some doubts about the objectivity of participants.

3. Report on National and Regional Program Evaluations

3.1 Introduction

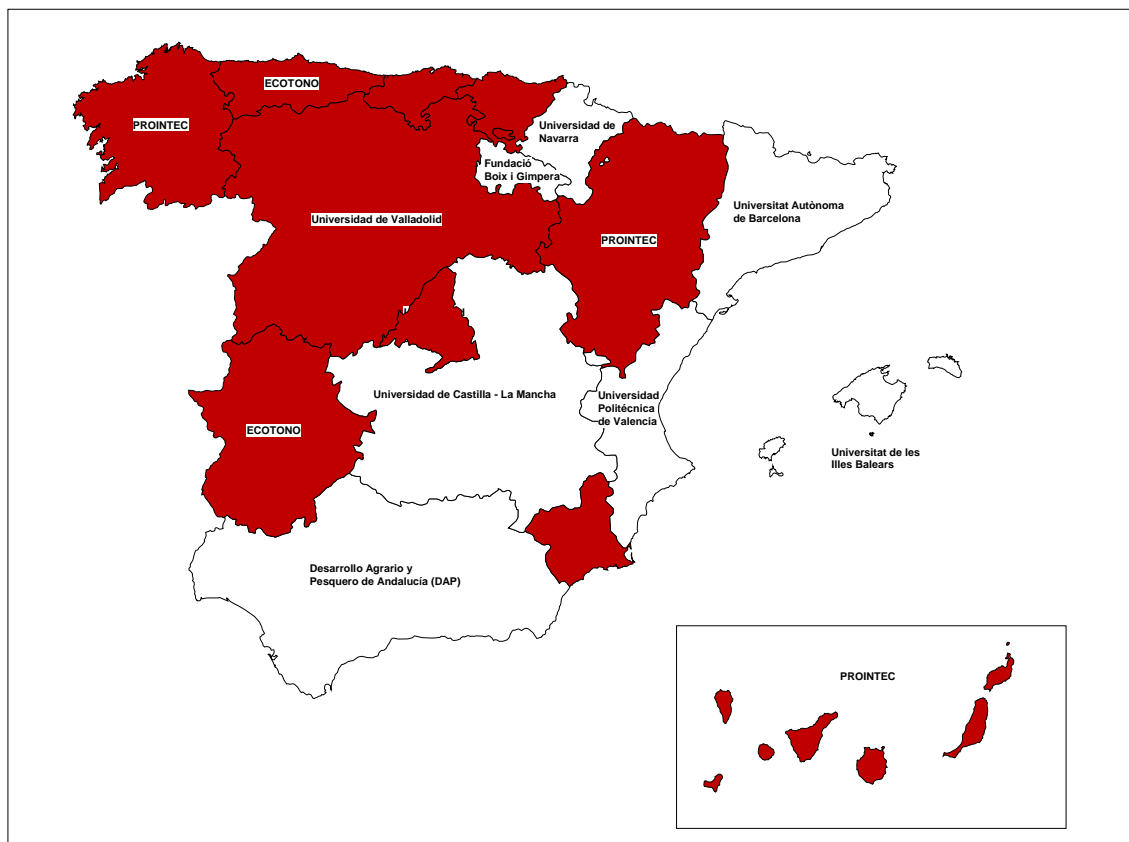
Due to the existence of 17 Operational Programs for LEADER II (regional programs), the review on LEADER II evaluations in Spain has been complex. A range of agencies and organisations, from universities to private consultancies, have been involved in the evaluation of LEADER II. Each regional authority had autonomy to contract the evaluation tasks (interim, final, etc.). Common guidelines existed in the form of indicators, but the final shape of evaluations is different from region to region.

The methodology used to gather information on the evaluation exercises of LEADER II in Spain includes a grid-questionnaire sent to regional evaluators. This grid makes three basic questions for each of the seven specificities of the LEADER approach: (i) methods, practices, limits and constraints of LEADER II implementation; (ii) effects of LEADER II in the region (intended and unintended); (iii) recommendations

Although evaluators were contacted by telephone and asked for cooperation, not all grids have been properly completed and returned to the evaluation team. Figure 8 shows regions for which the grid – questionnaire to regional evaluators has been completed and returned.

Figure 8

Regional Evaluators answering to the request from the ExPost evaluation of LEADER II (shaded regions indicate returned grids)



3.2 The Implementation of LEADER II in the Regions according to Regional Evaluators: Methods, Practices, Limits and Constraints

3.2.1 Area – Based Approach

- Territorial identity has not been a central criterion for many LEADER areas that have been built artificially, not matching homogeneous or historic territories (Murcia, Extremadura, Aragón). There have been, however, particular regions (ie. Galicia) in which the territorial approach has been a central criteria in the definition of the LEADER areas.
- Different aspects have influenced the definition of the LEADER areas: clear physical divisions of the territory (ie. Cantabria, Canarias), previous experience in LEADER I management, existence of county-level organisations (ie. Mancomunidades), political issues, current functionality or accessibility, etc.

3.2.2 Bottom – Up Approach

- Programs have been designed and conceived from the territory¹⁷. To some extent, key local actors have been present in the definition of the development strategy of LEADER. However, only in few cases there has been a real participatory strategic thinking process¹⁸. Instead, development strategies have emerged from technical studies or from the work of a reduced number of local and/or external agents. Real implication in the configuration of the LAG and its development strategy has been limited.
- Public leadership has been dominant in many cases, preventing a real implication from a wide representation of the local society. There are some regions in which this trend has been particularly important (Balears, Canarias, Murcia etc.).
- Small territories have followed better the bottom-up principle (easier capacity to mobilise local actors).
- Some structural factors have constrained a better implementation of a bottom-up approach: long term depopulation and resulting aged society, low development of communication channels.

3.2.3 Participatory Approach

- Public leadership has been dominant in many cases (see footnote 4 above), preventing a real implication from a wide representation of the local society. There are some regions in which this trend has been particularly important (Balears, Canarias, Murcia etc.).
- In some LAGs, private participation has been outstanding (ie. entrepreneurs in many groups of Extremadura).
- The role of the management team has been essential to promote a real participatory approach (ie. dissemination of information and proactive action for implication of local society in the development process).

¹⁷ In many cases an initial impulse from the regional authorities has been necessary. Usually, this “impulse” took the form of a call of the regional authority responsible for LEADER to local politicians in the potential LEADER area. The regional authority informs local actors on the existence of the program and the possibility to implement it in the area. Then, local authorities (politicians) take the lead for the constitution of the LAG. It is also very usual that they contact a qualified technician to prepare the proposal and help coordinate the LAG.

¹⁸ The evaluator of the region of Asturias points out that: “Rural Innovation Programs lacked a participative design”

3.2.4 Innovation

- The implementation of the innovation principle has been weak. There have not been official definitions or guidelines on what should be considered as innovative¹⁹. As a consequence, LAGs have applied the concept according to their own understanding. Frequently, innovation has been anything that did not exist in the area (sometimes evening a particular municipality).
- However, most evaluators have a positive opinion on the implementation of the innovation under LEADER. This opinion does not seem to be taking into account the nature of the innovation achieved, but the fact that a project was considered innovative by the LAG. Since LAGs have applied very “flexible” criteria for innovation, it is likely that real innovation has been reduced in LEADER.
- Main types of innovation include: new products and services offered, new funding procedures and sources, new forms of association, search for new markets, use of new methods and procedures.

3.2.5 Multisectoral and integrated approach

- Rural Innovation Plans (LEADER strategies) have a clear focus on multisectoral integration.
- However, most LAGs have funded projects as they were coming in, without a clear strategy.
- Very few LAGs have had, in advance, a list of actions or projects central for the development strategy.

3.2.6 Networks

- Several regions have created their own LAGs networks. These networks gain power from two sources: firstly, the LAGs pay quotas to the network to maintain a permanent staff and to develop certain activities (information, formation and negotiation); secondly, some regional governments provide funding for some activities.
- Work in network has been incipient during LEADER II. Several elements have constrained a greater development of this tool: lack of experience, administrative and bureaucratic load of work, etc.

¹⁹ One of the evaluators points out that “There has not been innovative approach at all in the implementation of the LEADER programs. The only innovation has happened in the promotion of tourism, that did not exist before.

- Networking has been useful for dissemination of innovation and development of inter-territorial projects. In any case, several evaluators consider that networking requires a learning and adaptation period, specially in traditional societies as the rural. Therefore, it is expected that this function will be more and more important as time passes and groups consolidate and gain experience.
- There are two national associations of LAGs that integrate most LAGs. At present, they are gaining capacity of action and negotiation, and seem to be more developed than other similar structures around Europe. Their basic functions include dissemination of information, negotiation for LAGs interests and promotion common action and projects.

3.2.7 Cooperation

- More important in certain regions than in other (ie. in the case of Extremadura or Galicia, all LAGs have had transnational cooperation projects. In other regions as Murcia or Asturias, this function has been secondary and some groups have not had cooperation at all).
- Main constraints for an adequate implementation of Measure C have been: language barriers, lack of experience, difficulties to find adequate partners (in terms of territories with same problems or strategies).
- The LEADER Observatory has been an essential tool in order to find partners and common interests for cooperation.
- In many cases, transnational cooperation has not gone beyond a simple exchange of visits, without a clear cooperation plan.

3.2.8 Decentralised management

- The “style” of implementation in LEADER has been innovative and more decentralised than traditional systems. LAGs have had a high degree of autonomy in most cases and have been able to define their own development strategy (though few have done this) and to allocate public funding according to decisions taken in the partnership.
- However, LAGs have had (and still have) important dependency on “influential” local actors (politicians). Moreover, regional authorities tend to control the action of LAGs and to limit this action to the strict implementation of the LEADER money. Any intention of “extending” scope of action is not perceived as positive by most regional authorities. There are some exceptions to this rule (Andalucía, Extremadura).
- There have been some important difficulties in relation to delay of payments from the Ministry of Agriculture, lack of guidelines on how to proceed with funding of projects, etc.

- LEADER technicians (management team) have been an essential part of the success of the decentralised management of LEADER. Where there was not good coordination and confidence between technicians and Lag, the implementation of LEADER has been very weak.

3.3 Main Effects of LEADER and Recommendations according to Regional Evaluators

3.3.1 Area – Based Approach

- Creation or consolidation of a territorial identity in most of the cases. In certain areas, however, the effect has been the opposite due to a bad configuration of the initial territory (lack of homogeneity, lack of common problems, etc.).
- The territory has been in the centre of the development strategy. By the first time in most areas, policy action has not considered only one element of the territory, but the territory as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
■	Localisms are the worst enemy for the development of a territorial strategy at upper level.
■	Pay special attention to the configuration of the territory in future initiatives, considering success factors.
■	Institutional cooperation is essential to create a image of a territory and a sense of identity, specially in rural areas where localities have had the dominant role for ages.

3.3.2 Bottom – Up Approach

- The organisation of the local cooperation has been somehow driven by local authorities and more influential actors. The parts of the local society that were less structured have had less chance for active involvement.
- The strategy for the implementation of LEADER has been produced principally without a substantial implication of the local society. It has been frequently entrusted to external consultancies.
- In any case, there have been some generalised good practices (ie. creation of LAGs, consolidation of a supra-municipal cooperation, creation of participation and discussion structures, etc.)

- Regional authorities have not promoted good strategic planning processes in LAGs. In most regions, the “vigilance” has been on the administrative side of the program, not on the strategic side.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a partnership structure really representative of the local society that does not reproduce the balance of power. Instead, it is a institutional neutral space in which equality is the base and decisions tend to be reached by consensus. ■ Promote the structuring of the local society ■ Create procedures and norms to ensure compromise of partners with an active participation. ■ Put the development strategy in the centre of the LAG action. This is the only way in which the LAG will increase its own sustainability and the sustainability of the development process that promotes. Strategy will also ensure more multisectoral integration and synergies. 	

3.3.3 Participatory Approach

- Participation has been more formal than real. The participative approach has not been assumed by local authorities in many areas. As a consequence, there have been difficulties for the participation of local actors in some regions (ie. Murcia where only public administrations and agricultural lobbies control LAGs, dominance of Cabildos Insulares in Canarias, etc.).
- Some of the effects achieved include: empowerment of the local decision making, impulse of collective projects, demonstrative effect.
- LAGs with a high number of partners (notably those admitting individuals), have had more difficulties due lo the low implication of most partners.
- Assemblies have not allowed for a real implication of partners (meeting once a year). Therefore, where sectoral participation structures have existed (ie. thematic groups), the voice of the local society has been much more present in the action of the LAG. Otherwise, the board of directors (usually controlled by local authorities), has been the principal decision maker (along with the manager who usually had to watch over the long term objectives of the partnership).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a partnership structure really representative of the local society that does not reproduce the balance of power. Instead, it is a institutional neutral space in which equality is the base and decisions tend to be reached by consensus.
- Create direct participation mechanisms (for a, working groups, thematic committees, etc.). For these structures to be operative and useful they need to include the adequate people and have clear objectives and rules.
- Make sure that the local cooperation is opened to anybody that wants to participate.

3.3.4 Innovation

- The concept of innovation in LEADER has been too flexible and wide. This is true specially in low populated territories where anything that was new in the area (could be a restaurant) was considered an innovation. The lack of clear guidelines on this has contributed to create some confusion.
- Innovation has happened mainly in the tourism sector (lack of infrastructures and offer at the beginning of the program in many areas) and in the valorisation of the local productions (new processes and methods).
- Positive effects have happened in the creation of new products and services, and the search for new markets. However, innovation has been weak in new methods for funding and innovative forms of association.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Demonstrative projects and trips are important to animate local promoters.
- Increase exchange of information and cooperation between LAGs and a better dissemination of results and experiences.
- Create a clear definition of innovation with clear guidelines and selection criteria.

3.3.5 Multisectoral and integrated approach

- Although LEADER aims at a real integration of the different resources in the territory, the action of LEADER II has achieved the multisectoral action, but not the integration of this multisectoral action into a single strategy in order to maximise synergies and positive effects.
- There were several funding “boxes” (ie. tourism, local product valorisation, etc.) and projects were funded as they were coming in. However, in very few cases there was a development strategy guiding the concrete projects that were needed and the way in which they should be implemented.
- Multisectoral integration is linked to the existence of a clear implementation strategy. Groups with experience in LEADER I have been more successful in multisectoral integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Promote exchange of information and relationships between sectors, to increase common action and strategies.■ Promote territorial quality labels to facilitate a real multisectoral and integrated strategy that increases competitiveness of local productions and services.■ Promote participation and protagonism of local entrepreneurs.■ Introduce elements of strategic planning in the programming of LAGs

3.3.6 Networks

- Several structures and networks have been created (ie. LAGs managing Carrefour, thematic networks both intra and interregional, structuring of some local sectors, etc.).
- The role of the LEADER Observatory is assessed as good in the promotion of networking.
- Creation of regional LAG networks in many regions, and creation of two national LAG networks.
- The consequence of all the structures created is the consolidation of important exchange of information on common problems and difficulties. The most important achievement has been the reduction of the traditional isolation of many of the rural territories.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create specific working groups for transversal themes.
- Consolidate regional networks of LAGs and their functions of negotiation and representation.
- Improve availability of information
- Increase knowledge on the need of LAG partners

3.3.7 Cooperation

- Many cooperation projects have not been more than an exchange of visits, without a clear cooperation strategy behind. Cooperation has been perceived as an “obligation” rather than as an opportunity.
- Most cooperation projects have been conceived and designed by technicians of LEADER.
- LEADER Observatory has been key for the identification of potential partners and cooperation projects.
- Language barriers have been determinant in many cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promotion of thematic networks
- To define a clear cooperation strategy.
- Increase funding
- Increase formation of the technical staff, specially in languages.

3.3.8 Decentralised management

- The presence of a local technical office (CEDER) linked to LEADER has been essential for the promotion of the development strategy.
- The “local office” has allowed for a more friendly administration, increasing the chance of success of many local projects.

- Managers and technicians complain that bureaucracy and administrative procedures prevent them from having a more strategic function. This is also in relation to the low strategic role played by most local actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creation of a common working methodology from the beginning of the implementation period.
- Reduce the control of expedients from regional authorities.
- Reduce delay in payments.
- The existence of a computer program for monitoring and management has implied some extra work for groups but has facilitated, to a great extent, the management of the regional program (ie. Aragón).
- LAGs should try to be self-sufficient in relation to the financial cost of the management team.
- Co-funding with the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Create a typology of management expenditure of LAGs.

4. General Appreciation from the Perspective of the Geographical Evaluator

In many ways, LEADER has been a very significant intervention in rural Spain. Prior to LEADER, rural development policy was almost completely unknown in Spain and, for this reason alone, LEADER represented a new force in rural affairs; LEADER II means a consolidation of this new force from the starting point of LEADER I. The invitation to form territorial collaborations was also novel and local actors were quick to perceive it as an important political tool with which to tackle both the problems of rural areas and the challenges presented by the new roles being assigned to the rural world. Furthermore, LEADER has subsequently produced material, local impacts through its ability to generate investment in development projects.

The progress of LEADER has, of course, been refracted through (some might say 'hindered' by) the institutional conditions of the politico-administrative system. LEADER has been used as a political power tool by the various administrative and territorial levels, leading to confrontations in order to gain control over the programme; this is specially important in the case of local level, in which LEADER had been seen –by the different actors involved- as a instrument of influence –and even of control- in the local society. Nevertheless, awareness and acceptance of the deeper philosophy behind LEADER has been gaining ground so that it is increasingly acknowledged as a powerful tool for the promotion of rural development in general and for the animation of local, collective action.

It would be inaccurate to describe LEADER as a 'great success'. Rather, it has started an incipient process in which a new democratic and co-operative culture in rural areas is being created and in which rural entrepreneurs are acquiring an enhanced capacity for decision-making. However, some case-studies show that this new democratic culture and the conception of LEADER as an instrument to promote development in rural areas, were hindered by the use of it, by many actors, as an instrument to influence, control or reinforce their position in the local society or local structures of power.

The understanding of LEADER by many local actors is quite simple, in the sense that the concepts they use mean a narrow view of the programme. In this sense, specificities are still a complex set of concepts that members of LAGs use with some difficulties. This explain that the strategies wrote down in the Business Plans used to be limited in a broad conception of all the specificities.

The most common is that LAGs are focused on a short number of specificities, which can be considered as the most “successful” in general terms:

- **Territorial approach** is probably the element that was more clearly taken into account in the Business Plans. However, in many cases, this territorial approach was much more in the head of the manager team than in the written documents. As a consequence, we can not always say that there was a formal common and shared strategy for the territory. At the same time, the objective of integrating actions (in the same or different sector), search for complementarities between actions and/or projects, or the promotion of actions or projects taking into account their multiplier effects, was not sufficiently followed by the managerial teams and the Boards of Directors of the LAGs. Thus, the important aspect to point out is that the initial territorial approach does not correspond with a real integrated and multi-sectoral approach. We can say that there are few LAGs that could develop and implement a real and effective integrated development strategy.
- **Bottom-up concept** is also very present in the conformation and operation of LAGs. Frequently it was used as a way to reinforce the position of local actors before regional structures, focusing on their new and protagonist role in this context. However, from the internal point of view, it can not be said that the decision making process was also sufficiently shared among all members of the LAGs. The existence of a Board of Directors as the effective structure of decision making have had critics, sometimes very strong, from the remainder members or groups of actors in the LAG. The reason was usually that the information flows from the Board of Directors were insufficient. In other occasions, local population and even some members of the LAG -non in the Directive Board- had the feeling that those who were in that structure use this position in their own benefit.
- Local actors were aware of the **participative approach** as a distinctiveness of LEADER, despite each of them could have very different expectations from their involvement in the LAG. At least at the beginning, most local actors and associations were willing to participate in the LAG as a structure of cooperation. Conflicts arise when some of these actors in the local society were not sufficiently taken into account. In this sense, the role of regional authorities has been important as they promote a wide representation of local society and their different representatives, following LEADER philosophy. In some cases, direct participation of regional authorities in the LAG was a way to avoid conflicts but also a way to have certain control over the LAG. On the other hand, it is important to point out that most of the LAGs have a shared, public and private structure. However, although to a lesser extent than in LEADER I, there still are some LAGs with an exclusive public character. In these cases, conflicts, in a latent or real way, were evident. Another source of conflicts were the balance between public and

private agents. The first ones used to have more official representation or, at least, more influence in the decision making process.

- In relation to the **innovation aspects**, this was one the specificities that worried more to the persons in charge of the managerial teams. Managers tried to promote innovative actions –at least innovative in the municipalities or territories where they had to be implemented-; however, frequently other criteria, such as the creation or maintainment of employment, or even just the need for some actions, were took into account to take decisions on funding. Finally, some actors found that many proposals were presented in a nice way, showing a high degree of innovativeness, but which did not correspond to a real innovation.
- Managers and members of LAGs were much more aware of the technological side of the concept of **innovation** than the remainder perspectives. Thus, very few of them consider, for example, an effective, participative and cooperative LAG as an innovation that could allow them to go forward to a contribution in the “management of their territory”. It is still low the number of LAGs that conceive this as a cooperative structure that could serve to undertake some other challenges different to the management LEADER; however, more and more LAGs try to cope with other programmes, initiatives, etc., related to their territories, being those complementary of the actions under LEADER. Some LIFE projects were the starting point in this new conception, but recently some regional governments try to give to the LAGs the possibility to cope with certain aspects of the regional policies (mainly in Andalucía and Aragón).
- **Networking** has been a need for the LAGs. All actors agree on the critical importance of networks, internal and external, to be more effective and to reach higher effectiveness in the implementation of the programme. Everybody was highly critical with the great difficulties to establish a proper cooperation with other LAGs of the same country. On the other side, in spite of the support to do cooperation with no national LAGs, the different actors recognized that language was an important barrier for them. This explain that the really successful transnational cooperation projects were scarce, in spite that all of them started some kind of relationship –with the high valuable support of the European LEADER Observatory- and even some common projects. At the end, all these projects were more focused and useful for the LAG members, the managerial team, or a scarce number of local entrepreneurs; local actors do not have the filling that transnational cooperation benefit the area in a wide sense: they were the starting point for individual and concrete initiatives, that could have bigger and better impact in a medium-long term. On the other hand, LAGs and mainly managers recognize also the useful task of Spanish Unit of LEADER Observatory, since they gave three types of very accessible and useful inputs, through the Journal “*Actualidad LEADER*” (four numbers per year), the web site with actualized information on many events and other useful information, and the multiple and high quality of training sessions. The Spanish Unit

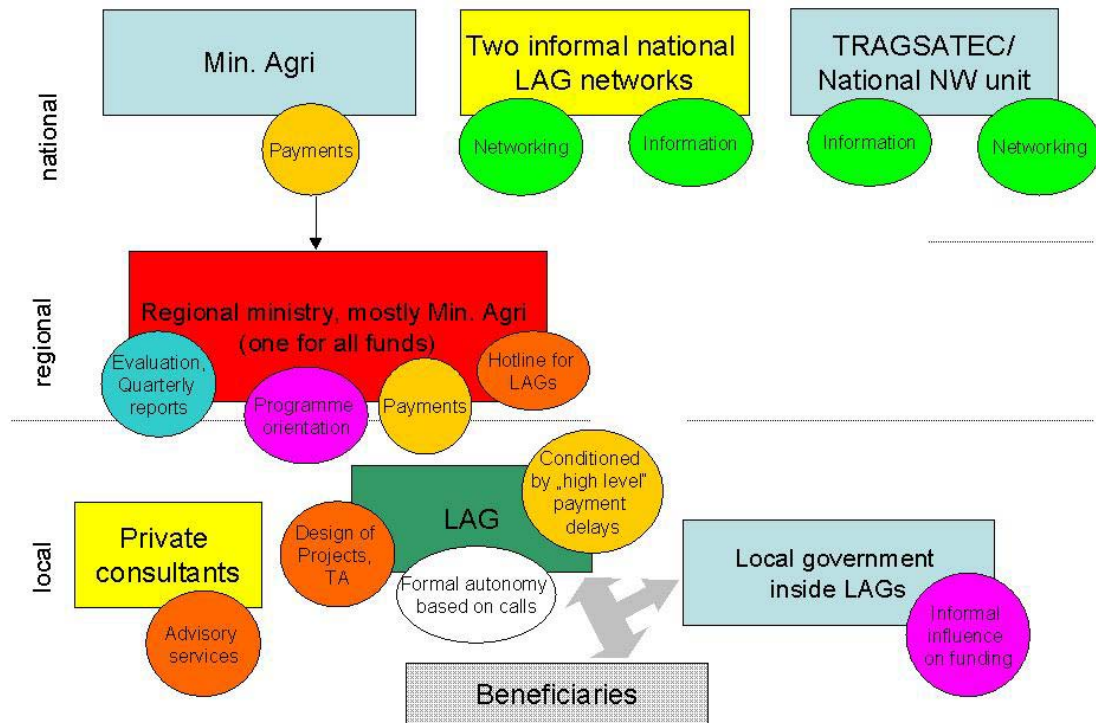
also have inputs from the LAGs through regional structures of support (*Antenas regionales*).

Unquestionably, LEADER has had a significant impact in Spain. At the very least, it has helped to raise awareness among politicians and professionals of the dynamics of rural areas. Private sector investment has been mobilised and some employment created, although there is no sufficient information about the survival rates of projects started through LEADER. In terms of concrete projects, the ability of LEADER to inspire 'innovative' actions appears to have been limited.

A major problem facing the scientific analysis of LEADER in Spain is the absence of a framework to enable comparative investigation, evaluating projects within and outwith LEADER. An important element of such a framework would be control areas free of the LEADER effect. In the absence of such a framework, uncertainty remains and other aspects of LEADER assume a greater significance in analyses: the democracy-learning process; the rural development education function; the improvement in the capacity for decision-making; participation; the territorial approach to the design and implementation of policies; the Europeanisation of rural actors.

In the Spanish context, however, this must be juxtaposed with the apparent susceptibility of LEADER to being used by the institutions of the politico-administrative system to legitimise their own agendas and interventions. Local actors showed a willingness to participate and collaborate in the initial stages of LEADER, when the Business Plans were being written and about to be implemented, but subsequently each LAG tended to fragment into a number of narrow interest lobbies, each trying to use LEADER as an instrument of power. It is only now, as LEADER II has finished, that they recall the theoretical underpinnings of the programme, such as community participation, social dynamisation and co-operation.

Model of implementation



II.6 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT FINLAND

Contents

1.	Introduction	259
2.	The focus group evaluation	260
2.1	Most significant changes and LEADER II specificities	260
2.2	Where did LEADER have no effect?	262
2.3	How should the LEADER-method be developed?	263
3.	The LEADER II programme evaluation	264
4.	General appreciation of the evaluator	266
4.1	LEADER as an investment to social capital	267
4.2	Recommendations	268
4.3	Some comments on the evaluation process	268

1. Introduction

Finnish LEADER II Local Action Groups (total 22) had been responsible for implementing about 3000 rural development projects. The geographical areas served by these groups had a combined population of 814 000 persons living in 157 municipalities, with each group covering 2-16 municipalities. The mean population of the area covered by one group was 37 000 inhabitants.

In this European evaluation process together with two LEADER II programmes four local action groups were analysed as cases. These LAGs were:

- Rieska LEADER ry, Programme 5b
- I Samma Båt Programme 5b Swedish-speaking area
- Tornionlaakson LEADER Programme 6
- Koillis-Savon LEADERII Programme 6 also selected as focus group

Doctor *Torsti Hyyryläinen* has made the programme level interviews and researcher *Asko Hänninen* has collected the data concerning the local action groups. As a Finnish geographical evaluator doctor Hyyryläinen is responsible for the evaluation process and the results.

2. The focus group evaluation

Koillis-Savon LEADER II -LAG was selected as the focus group. Members of focus group were:

Mr. *Pekka Stjerna*, company analyst, Rural Department of Employment and Economic Development Centre, North Savo

Ms. *Päivi Puustinen*, Project Manager in financed LEADER II-project

Mr. *Matti Rahunen*, Expert, Koillis-Savon LEADER II

Ms. *Reeta Rönkkö*, Coordinator, Koillis-Savon LEADER II

Mr. Torsti Hyyryläinen, Ph.D., responsible evaluator, University of Helsinki

Mr. Asko Hänninen, M.Sc., researcher, University of Helsinki

The first contact was taken at the middle of the March by email. Matti Rahunen was interviewed (Q202) in 25th of April. Mr. Rahunen proposed possible candidates for focus group. We decided to organise one-day workshop. The date for focus group was 21st of May. Meeting was arranged at Employment and Economic Development Centre in Kuopio. The workshop focused the most significant changes and the role of LEADER specificities in these. We both engaged to the process, Asko was an observer and Torsti lead the working procedure as an animator. In the workshop the group discussed the given themes and used certain innovative and systematic techniques (brainwriting pool, ideas on the wall etc.).

2.1 Most significant changes and LEADER II specificities

According to the group members LEADER II had effects on many issues. In our workshop 20 **significant changes** (listed here below the sub-titles) were mentioned. Main changes are following:

- Changes in attitudes, enlargement of consciousness
- Cooperation increased and diversified
- New actors participated
- Know-how developed and grow

Changes in attitudes, enlargement of consciousness

- Regional administrators own interpretation of countryside widened
- Local actor's sense of responsibility increased
- Actors learn to know better their own area (the sub-region)

- Villagers became more active in responding to local problems and drawbacks
- Regional awareness increased
- The people adopted the concept of innovation as a part of project thinking

The change of attitudes is the most remarkable LEADER II accomplishment. The level in consciousness has increased among grass-root actors and regional state officials. Local people have realised in concrete that rural development could be in their own hands. Especially bottom-up approach has affected on these matters. Area-based and innovative approaches were also counted as important. People began to think rural development in wider regional context.

Cooperation increased and diversified

- Internal cooperation increased in administration
- Farm entrepreneurs came along in cooperation
- Cooperation between associations activated
- Cooperation with different actors became reality
- Cooperation between local actors and regional authorities increased
- Internationalisation developed
- Role of The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (farmers association) transformed

Cooperation increased and diversified in many ways. Contacts between local actors and the authorities, especially sources of finance, increased with time. These alterations were particularly based on partnership and area-based approaches. Decentralised managing and financing, bottom-up approach and innovative principles were seen also as considerable. Networking and international connections were seen remarkable too.

New actors participated

- Beside municipalities, other local action groups got a role in rural development
- Prevention of social exclusion

LAG has got an active role in rural development. LEADER has brought along new actors and activated passive citizens. LEADER has encouraged new people to engage in development work and have offered new opportunities for putting their ideas into practice.

Know-how grew

- Learning of project work
- Already existed project activity on the area continued
- Networking skills and methods developed

Know-how has been grown in great extent. Project-work skills have also been improved. Implementation of decentralised managing and financing -principle has affected on these changes. LEADER -specificities as partnership and bottom-up were also evaluated positively.

2.2 Where did LEADER have no effect?

Despite of many effects LEADER II has not been as successful as assumed. Particularly following questions came up in our workshop:

- Entrepreneurship and number of new jobs
- Bureaucracy
- Regional structures and migration

Entrepreneurship and new jobs

Creation of new jobs was much more difficult than expected. Goals, which were written in LEADER business plan, were too optimistic. LEADER II has not succeeded in increasing entrepreneurship directly. According to the focus group, increase of entrepreneurship and employment is connected to larger structural changes. LEADER is one tool among others.

Bureaucracy

At the beginning, it was believed that LEADER -method would be less bureaucratic than conventional modes of development work. Unfortunately this was an illusion. Bureaucracy has not been decreased essentially. Even if, the decision-making system is decentralised, the public funding causes that there always will be formal norms.

Regional structures and migration

LEADER II has not succeeded to stop migration. Migration is still going on. However it is slowing down in some extent. LEADER is not big enough to prevent migration alone.

2.3 How should the LEADER-method be developed?

Generally LEADER -method was assessed positively and it was seen valuable. LEADER is needed in rural development. At the moment, they are reflecting actively LEADER -activities and practices in Koillis-Savo. They are seeking solutions for observed problems. Focus group mentioned three distinct problems:

- How to cross the administrative boarders?
- How to develop the organization of LAG?
- How to change the bureaucracy?

Removal of boarders preventing the activity

Borders of municipalities have been experienced artificial in LEADER-projects. Focus group suggested that wider regional and area-based thinking should be increased.

Organisation mode of LAG must be reconsidered

Association based organisation in LEADER-activity does not bind LAG-members strong enough. LAG Koillis-Savo does not have any membership fee. If LEADER –association does not have funding, local people are not interested in rural development even in free basis. In June 2003 there will be a meeting concerning LAG organisation in Koillis-Savo area.

Bureaucracy must be decreased

Decision-making and financing processes of LEADER projects should be rationalised. LEADER-project should be divided in two sectors: action and administration. Regional authorities should only monitor. In that way administration would not cost too much. Project should also be seen as one knit process, not separated in calendar years. In that way we can save money, time and effort. There is at least 35% over-bureaucracy at present. Decentralised managing causes double decision-making, which confuse the entrepreneurs. Also the claim of private funding is problematic for start-up entrepreneurs.

3. The LEADER II programme evaluation

Finland had two LEADER II -programme documents, one for **Objective 5b** areas and the other for **Objective 6** areas. LEADER II community Initiative Programmes were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Even there were juridical two separate programmes, in practice both programmes were governed with the same way and the implementation processes were identical. *LEADER theme group* in which several ministries and organisations were represented, took care of the national implementation of both LEADER II programmes.

On the basis of the programme evaluation we can say the following

- LEADER specificities played key role in the selection process
- Trans-national cooperation did not develop strong enough
- New type of co-operation was created in all levels of administration
- Core stakeholders were strongly committed to LEADER implementation
- Effects to horizontal objectives were not direct, except in creation of equal opportunities
- LEADER was crucial for local small-scale projects
- As practical example LEADER II stimulated new kind of thinking
- LEADER effected most to social sustainability of rural areas
- LEADER delivered clear added value to Finnish rural policy

In the LEADER II selection process the explicit quality criteria were stronger than other factors. The local development plans (made by local action groups) were crucial. True competence, clear targets and strategies were asked. It can be said that the LEADER specificities played key role in the selection process. One of the most important criteria was “true” bottom up. Of course the political aspect existed too. It was important to get LEADER type of example to every part of the country.

Trans-national cooperation was encouraged by the administration in different ways. At the initial stage most of the time went for the starting of the operations. There was serious lack of time for the planning of international projects at the local level. It is also true that many of the Finnish LEADER groups established preliminary contacts with the LEADER groups in other countries and sometime entered into agreements with them.

Before LEADER II, people in Finland didn't know much about this type of local developing procedures. LEADER stimulated new kind of thinking. It was new mode of action. LEADER put turbulence to different administrative units in many levels. It brought new concepts on field of

administration, for example partnership was relatively new and unclear word. Some thought that LEADER is not juridical coherent enough. Finally it is question of the power and power relations. LEADER mixed some traditional ways to administrate and use (public) power.

Even there were many suspicious minds at the beginning, some key persons at the central administrative level committed very strongly to LEADER. The LEADER Theme Group had the main role in the implementation process. It supported local groups in many active ways. In Finland the administration supported local groups well in given limits of resources.

LEADER II was not so effective in terms of agricultural adjustment and diversification. In some cases farmers were encouraged to participate new type of projects. LEADER was not so effective either in employment or income enhancing. Using other words: the effect was not so strong as expected. LEADER had little more effectiveness in environmental protection and improvement. Many small projects were done in that field. Most effective LEADER II was in creation of equal opportunities. New activists came to local fields of action. LEADER had very clear effect to women participation. In some LAGs women took the key role.

LEADER II was crucial when funding rural development projects beyond the limits of structural fund programmes. Generally LEADER was understood as a resource for small-scale project funding. The decision making process was perceived very much decentralised. LEADER II promoted an alternative practice. It was a social innovation. It stimulated new kind of thinking and gave very concrete example of doing things different way. It stimulated small-scale administrative innovations on many stages. The most important effect was, that it forced people to cross-sectoral cooperation.

LEADER promoted mostly social sustainability. It was the mode of small-scale projects, human size of actions. It created self-confidence and trust to local possibilities and improved empowerment of local people. As a summary it can be said, that LEADER delivered clear added value to Finnish rural policy. It also delivered clear added value compared to other structural funds programmes operating in Finland.

4. General appreciation of the evaluator

Finnish rural policy has made significant practical efforts to create new local structures and partnerships. Perhaps the most important single factor in this has been the setting up of a nationwide network of Local Action Groups, partly under the stimulus of the European LEADER-programmes and the equivalent national POMO-programmes since 1996. At present there are 59 of these action groups in different parts of the country, and experiences of their work have been encouraging, in that more extensive cooperation is now taking place between the local inhabitants, communities, entrepreneurs and municipal authorities and new people and ideas have been mobilized. These new local partnerships have blended in well with the long tradition of local (municipal) government in Finland and contribute to the continued strengthening of local participation.

The national evaluation of LEADER II programmes (6 and 5b) in Finland documented the impacts achieved as follows:

- LAGs had been responsible for implementing about 3000 projects
- 556 000 participants in activation and other meetings
- 480 new enterprises created
- 3900 new jobs created, of which over 700 were full-time jobs
- The highest proportion of projects implemented (27%) were for improving the environment or living conditions
- Artisan, service and small enterprise projects amounted to 20% and tourism projects to 19.7%
- There were only 14 trans-national projects
- Two-thirds of the projects were carried out by communities or companies
- Among public organizations, the municipal authorities were responsible for the largest number of projects, 257.
- The work of the LAGs was a new thing for everyone at first and required much learning.
- The local emphasis was visible in the goals set for the local strategies and programmes.
- The numbers of participants increased as the work progressed.
- The board members of the LAGs felt that they were working independently.
- Ways of working became more flexible with time and adjustments could be made for the bureaucracy involved.

- Contacts between local actors and the authorities, especially sources of finance, increased with time.
- Cooperation with the local authorities strengthened and confidence in their actions increased.
- New people became involved in the local development work, but even so,
- the broader-scale project work was left to an excessively small number of participants.
- Cooperation between the local authorities and various associations increased.
- The work of the LAGs complemented the range of economic development measures available to the local authorities.
- The state's regional administrators became more favourably disposed towards these projects as the process advanced.
- The goals for the development of entrepreneurship were not achieved in all respects, but
- Cooperation and networking between enterprises did improve.

4.1 LEADER as an investment to social capital

It can be said that LEADER II marked an important investment in local *social capital* in Finnish rural areas. LEADER II was very successful in activating local participants by comparison with other forms of development, and it is particularly notable that no other developmental approach has been able to achieve comparable results at the local level.

One important precondition for cooperation at the sub-regional level is that the sub-region should possess the corporate networks and responsibility structures on which cooperation can be built up. *Social capital* implies a capacity for working together with others in groups, organizations and social networks for the common good, and can be learned only by experience of such interaction and activated by establishing interaction and networking.

Local activity, personal commitments and investments in *social capital* are of great importance in the context of rural policy. Both physical and human capital is to be found in the countryside, but both are sparsely distributed. Given the correct procedures, these scarce resources can be identified more efficiently and gathered together so that they can have a creative influence on each other.

Our evaluation results suggest that the LEADER programmes have encouraged new people to engage in development work and have offered opportunities for putting innovative ideas into practice. LEADER method is relevant for sustainable rural development, but LEADER

specificities are not easy to put in practice in different contexts. According to my opinion, the majority of the problems of LEADER method were caused by the Finns administrative system itself. More flexible and trustworthy ways to use public funds must be studied. If we want to change administrative routines, we have to change power structures too. That is not the easiest way to promote more sustainable rural development, but it might be the only one.

4.2 Recommendations

- More resources to local action groups
- Less bureaucratic ways of managing and financing projects
- More investments to method-training (problem-solving and networking) of local people
- More investments to effective marketing of LEADER-idea and method
- More education to local and regional administrators
- Better self-evaluation procedures
- Better systems for local, national and international evaluation data collection
- Better help-systems for trans-national projects

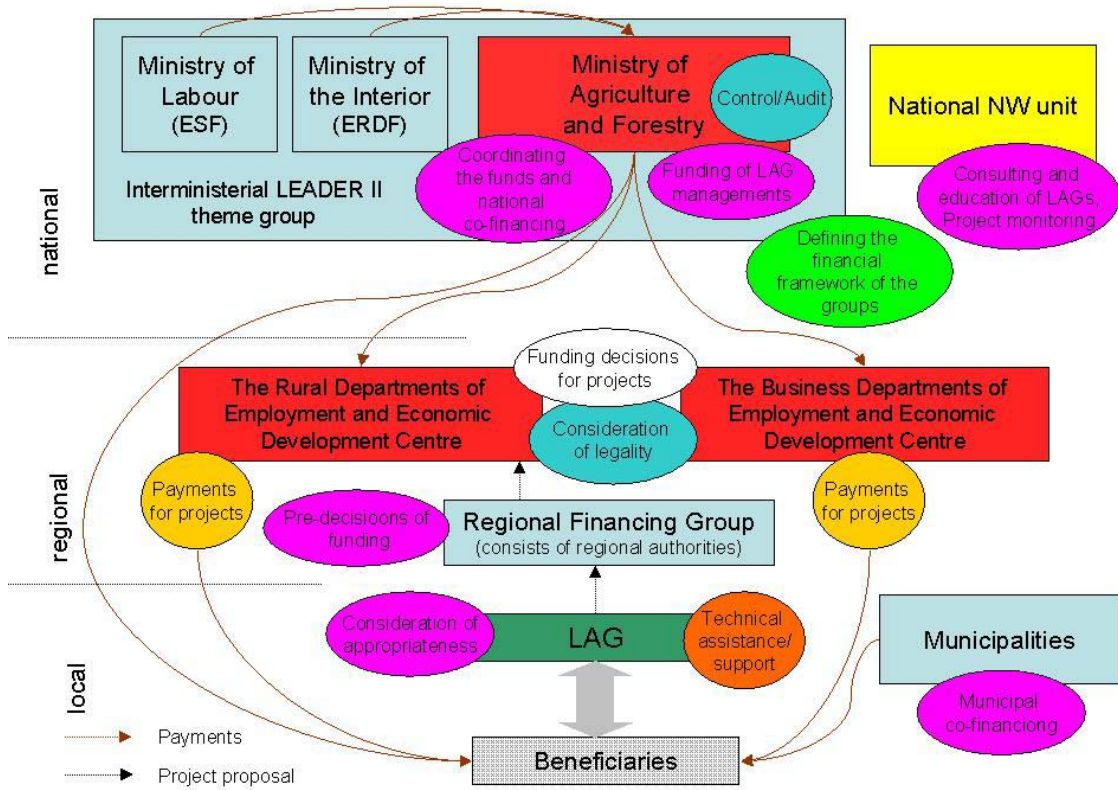
4.3 Some comments on the evaluation process

The evaluation process contained some typical problems. The budgeted time-resources were too minor for the performing of the given tasks and the necessary information had to be gathered from several statistical sources.

The interviewees' busy was the biggest problem. Their schedules were not suitable for the timetables of the project. Also the answers differ at certain questions from each other a lot. One reason could be, that each person is in different life-situation at present. The degree of the criticalness of the interviewees varies. When analysing the results, it is good to keep in mind, that it is not easy to examine the past coolly if it is difficult right now on itself. So the present is reflected in the one, which had gone (for example the question 22321).

The interview-forms were extremely challenging. Firstly, there were too many questions. One interview that was carefully made lasted about four hours! Especially the LAG-interviewees regarded the forms as laborious. They had also difficulties to understand some of the questions. However, the logic of forms was good and the grouping of questions to three types also functioned well. The focus-group method functioned especially well and gave relevant and interesting results.

Model of implementation



II.7 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT FRANCE, WALLONIE/BELGIQUE, LUXEMBOURG

Contents

1.	General introduction	273
2.	Report on focus groups	274
3.	Report on national and regional programme evaluations	295
3.1	Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level	295
3.2	Overall assessment	296
3.3	Relevant conclusions and recommendations	296
4.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	299

1. General introduction

The team for evaluation work was organised as follows:

The work at senior expert level has been carried out by two persons : Jean-Claude BONTRON from SEGESA and Denis PAILLARD from MC² Consultant (evaluators of several LEADER programmes) in France. They covered all the main strategic and technical tasks detailed in the methodology provided by the core team, the initial contacts with national / regional programme managers and the final reporting.

They have been assisted by:

- **Hélène Carrau** for three regions (Centre, Champagne and Rhône-Alpes), for a TNC case study and for and other data entry.
- **Jean-Christophe Boué** for the questionnaires and focus groups of two regions (Bretagne and Aquitaine)
- **Nathalie Garnier** for Q1000, Q102 and database completion.

Jean-Claude Bontron covered the programmes for Wallonie/BE and LU.

SEGESA ensured the translation of questionnaires (Q34 and Q202) and data collection, the identification and research of the different case studies, the provision of technical support by telephone and e-mail for questionnaires completed by LAG representatives.

Contacts with the French central level: Ministry of Agriculture, DATAR and the Intermediary Organisation for implementing and monitoring LEADER II (CNASEA) were rather uncomplicated, but of the two main responsables of LEADER II in France one is now in Poland, the other in New Caledonia. People responded positively and agreed to facilitate the evaluation work. But many problems appear at the regional and LAG level across France, regarding LAGs activities, data on financial allocations / expenditure and final reports. It was not easy because of the considerable turnover of civil servants and animators, and overcharge in the offices.

The evaluators also used the relevant existing documentation (regional programmes, documentation on selection, implementation and monitoring procedures, financial tables of the intermediary body, report on the closing of the programme for some regions.

The presentation of the results for Wallonie/BE and LU are at the end of this paper.

2. Report on focus groups

Four focus groups were selected in four operational programmes.

1 – LAG « Centre Ouest Bretagne »

The focus group took place on June 20, 2003. Initially we had a discussion with the organizer of the programme LEADER II, then we met 6 participants for an exchange.

The main interview partner of the LAG was Mrs. Le Meur and the 6 participants were composed of technicians and political representatives:

- Mr. GUEN (Vice-president Communauté de commune / commission environment / director of a structure of insertion)
- Mr. ALLE (journalist and writer / political representative / commission culture)
- Mr. MOELO (ex secretary of LAG COB / Commission tourism / culture / mayor of Sylviac)
- Mrs. LECLEZIO (Vice-president of LAG COB)
- M. CANN (Director of LAG COB + « Pays » since 2001)
- Mrs. LE MEUR (secretary and administration / political representative since 2001)

Reports and reactions

The results presented here correspond to a general consensus of the participants at the focus group.

Territorial approach:

The characteristic of the COB territory was a lack of dynamism. Besides this, the animators of the programme had a fundamental role to make mediation beyond cleavages, because without alliance, they could not set up any project. The claim of rurality by the local actors was a factor of cohesion beyond the political sensitivities. LEADER II allowed to diffuse much information to political representatives, with a relevant transparency. The commissions had a fundamental role for the definition of the local criteria.

Bottom-up approach and local partnership:

The shared diagnosis led to a reflection upon the territory: not simply to define a space to activate, but to build sustainable projects. The culture of project has been developed by the

LAG. They were the precursors and worked together with motivation, which consolidated the idea of a collective project. That fact constituted a great added value for the territory. Other elements which came to facilitate the installation of the partnership and the projects: a long period of reflection of the political representatives and local stakeholders on the development paths for the territory, in the years 1970, but also a general commitment in the Territorial Charter.

Factors of identity characterise the territory of the LAG: culture "Bretonne", its geography and the mixed farming (little farms with animals).

We can note that the commissions of the programme LEADER II had a fundamental role in the definition of the local criteria. Besides this, the animators had the role of installing tools of local regulation in order to limit the risks of each projects.

The territory of COB extends on 3 administrative departement levels. There is not political strong leadership and consequently no established political stakes.

There is a particular sensitivity of the professional chambers on the territory, which is related to the personality of the chamber's agents involved in the LEADER programme: many of them were born in COB.

In 1999, the migratory balance was positive for the first time since many years, particularly in the periphery of the COB territory. Thanks to the programme LEADER, projects were accompanied in an effective way: improvement of the environment and of the public infrastructures for meeting the local needs.

One of the topics of LEADER is the reception of new people from outside. There was a programme to accommodate the foreigners who want to install themselves on the territory. For example, many English people came and created rural lodgings, with a dynamising effect.

Acceptance of the innovation:

The institutions were rather supportive, but they became factors of deceleration. The innovation was defined upstream, before the call for tenders, with a methodology specific to the LAG COB. The project "Terre d'Enchanteur" represented the ambition to show that there was animation on the territory, which characterised the territorial membership.

Today, the existence of the "pays" starts to emerge with its appropriation by the population (10 years). The inhabitants assert their adherence to the territory. There is a will to distinguish institution (LAG COB) from the territory, but people adopted this name both for the institution and the territory. There is also a real recognition by the institutions (professional chambers,

enterprise groupings). The state administration created the CECOB, an innovative public office adapted to the specificity of the COB territory (straddling over 3 administrative departments).

Multi-sectoral approach

There were relatively few multi-sectoral actions. They accounted for 12% of the total of the actions. For example, there were restoration works carried out with local restaurants, and local food and gastronomy were promoted. All this has been carried out thanks to specific rules and to a charter of engagement. A cultural platform was created representing a legal and technical support to many cultural activities.

There was a noticeable implication of LAGs in the networks, and the local actors' will for exchange. 10% of the funds allocated to the COB were obligatory dedicated to networking and co-operation. These funds financed a large part of the cultural animation. The approach remains relevant, with many difficulties related to the necessary time to develop actions, and gaps between the needs, possibilities, and the conditions of implementation of a trans-national co-operation.

Interest and limits of the regional network:

The actors of LAG COB preferred the national and European networks. They thought that the regional level was not relevant for them. The regional networking was informal.

Policy recommendations

Keys of success: to build a territory, a strategy and common goals with motivated actors. The operational work must be done by another structure.

The "pays" is the right level of animation. Management is made by the administrations within the 3 administrative department levels. In case of absence of organisational interfaces between the different administrative and territorial levels, there could appear delays and difficulties, and risks to lose the contact with the local stakeholders.

Today, there are a certain trend to sluggishness and stiffness of the procedures and structures: The territory is not associated to the programme management any more.

The main factors of success are the continuity with the people involved in the local action, confidence between local actors and with administrations, the implication and the conviction, the nearness, the mediation between opposite representations or strategies, and a good management (not just administration).

2 – LAG Euradour « Pays du Val d'Adour »

The focus group took place on June 16, 2003. Initially we had a discussion with the organizer of the program LEADER II, then we met 9 participants to have an exchange.

The interlocutor of the LAG is Mr. Febvre and the 9 participants were composed of technicians and political representatives:

- Mr. Latapie Joseph (SDCEA)
- Mr. Febvre Eric (SEMADOUR)
- Mr. Solari Pierre (« rencontres Maubourguet »)
- Mr. Back Thierry (« Villages Accueillants »)
- Mr. Condotta David (Communauté de Communes de Lembeye)
- Mr. Mondat Lucien (Communauté de Communes de Lembeye)
- Mr. Germa Ludovic (trade union: SIAVBA)
- Mr. Serena Alain (trade union : AAPPMA « Le Pesquit »)
- Mr. Dartau André (trade union : AAPPMA « Le Pesquit »)

Reports and reactions

The documented results correspond to a general consensus of the participants at the focus group.

LEADER II, which was at the origin of the creation of the "pays", allowed to create new links and to gather people around a single topic: water. There was a real added value thanks to trainings and the exchanges between technicians. But there were problems with the public services of agriculture which were not integrated at the beginning. However, the LAG operated on 2 areas and over 4 departments. LEADER II allowed the involved institutions to know each other and to cooperate.

The local actors reacted favorably at this hypothesis.

The single and broad topic of water made it possible to focus the energy around these problems. It was appreciated by the local actors. Besides this, LEADER II sensitized several social and economic actors in respect to the topic of water which implicated environment, waste management, health...

This single subject made it possible to work on multi-sectoral projects (schools, agriculture, small built heritage). The topic of water also allowed to develop the image of the territory with the restoration of the aquatic environments and the ecosystems. It was necessary to go beyond the hydraulic point of view. Water has a pedagogical aspect, too. The LAG created the "great water play" financed by LEADER II which gave the possibility to schools to get involved in this activity.

A trans-national cooperation project has been created to share experiences with Luxembourg (actions related on water management and maintenance).

Everyone agreed that LEADER II was a catalyst, because it offered funding possibilities for creating and developing projects. The programme contributed 71% of investments, which made it possible to complete the projects, but in general the time requirement for the actions was underestimated.

The local actors emphasized that LEADER II was a means to upgrade soft skills and to involve or to reintegrate people in difficulties, but that this was not central to the program. In general, the programme raised the qualification level through training measures. It also allowed the LAG to utilize qualified experts to carry out the necessary technical before the projects got implemented.

LEADER II allowed to create jobs: 4 young employees ("brigades vertes") for the maintenance of the banks and other environmental works. But there was the problem of continuing this employment after the programme has finished. The local actors found it essential that there is a market to make these jobs self-sustaining.

Conclusions and recommendations

LEADER II allowed the local actors to know each other, to work and develop projects together. More (ESF) means for animation would have been necessary. Also, it would have been necessary to structure ERDF funding (for refurbishing the traditional water constructions) in a better way. Actions on tourism should be developed thanks to the support of the network effect.

On the programme LEADER II in general, the focus group stated that to be more effective from the beginning, there should be more exchange and a better information flow on the functioning of the programme. Also, it would be necessary to start from an immediate need to set up viable projects. Whatever the duration of the projects, there should be a long term vision. That's what the LAG EURADOUR did with the project "Aquafil" (partnership with Romania and has Bulgaria), involving different economic sectors through technical exchanges and a consistent training pedagogy. The long term vision raises the local partners' desire to continue.

In order to have an effective programme on the territory, it is necessary to employ technicians who understand the operation of the European programmes. It is necessary to respect the different phases before setting up a programme: diagnosis, objectives, prospects. The phase "upstream" must be used to assemble the projects and the phase "downstream" must be used to consolidate the projects and to make the measures sustainable. An organization like SEMADOUR is essential to coordinate all the actors all the structures. And it is necessary to have reliable interlocutors and common interests to develop projects in partnership.

3 – FOCUS GROUP Saint Amandois (Centre – FR)

Le contexte territorial

Le territoire du GAL « Berry St Amandois » recouvre le bassin d'emploi de St Amand-Montrond, (petite sous préfecture de 12.000 habitants) qui concentre les 2/3 de l'activité industrielle du pays et 31% des emplois salariés. Au total il compte 83 communes et regroupe 48.000 habitants. Le Syndicat Mixte de Développement du Pays Berry-St-Amandois (SMADSABEM), porteur du projet LEADER correspond exactement au territoire du Pays. Il s'agit d'une zone rurale (25 hab./km²) comportant des systèmes agricoles variés avec des céréales, de l'élevage et un peu de viticulture. Elle a connu un certain essor industriel dans le passé autour de carrières, de la porcelaine, de fours à chaux, du travail de l'or, Aujourd'hui l'industrie compte 4000 emplois dans l'imprimerie, la chaussure, le papier-carton, la bijouterie, ...dont la conjoncture est parfois difficile. Le patrimoine bâti et paysager est de qualité et sous tend un tourisme naissant.

Un fil conducteur pour comprendre le rôle de LEADER : la chronologie

De l'avis des partenaires c'est la meilleure entrée pour comprendre le sens de la démarche LEADER II, sa place et sa valeur ajoutée dans le développement local.

Dès 1989 les communes procèdent à l'embauche d'un animateur pour mettre en place différentes procédures financées par l'Etat et la Région : le Contrat Régional d'Initiative Locale (Pays de 1^{ère} génération de la Région Centre), l'OPAH (actions sur l'habitat), l'ORAC (restructuration du commerce et de l'artisanat). En **1995** les CRIL s'achèvent et la Région les remplace par une **procédure de Pays régional**. Dans le même temps la DATAR mène une **expérimentation de Pays-tests** dans le cadre de la nouvelle Loi d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire. Le Saint Amandois est retenu et commence les consultations pour établir une charte de développement. C'est à ce moment que LEADER arrive.

La préfecture de Région, gestionnaire du programme opérationnel LEADER, lance en **août 1996** son **appel à candidature**. Un groupe de travail informel, mais essentiellement composé d'institutions (collectivités territoriales et chambres consulaires), se réunit pour examiner la faisabilité d'une proposition LEADER autour d'un projet de « Cité de l'or ». Dans le contexte d'incertitude sur les stratégies qui sont en voie d'élaboration dans les procédures de Pays, il demande à bénéficier de la mesure A pendant 6 mois.

Le 7 **novembre 1996** le Syndicat mixte présente un **projet de volet acquisition de compétences** autour de 6 mesures, au niveau du département et de la Région. Diverses modifications sont demandées et le **projet modifié** est transmis fin **janvier 1997**. En **mars 1997** a lieu une **audition** des porteurs du projet devant le Comité 5b, le **18 avril** les services de l'Etat font part de l'**acceptation du dossier**. Une convention de partenariat entre les membres du GAL définissant les engagements et le rôle de chacun est établie et transmise à la Préfecture. Le **29 septembre 1997** le Syndicat mixte reçoit le **projet de convention-cadre** qui sera **signée par l'ensemble des partenaires le 20 mars 1998**. Nous sommes déjà 20 mois après le lancement de LEADER, les demandes de subvention peuvent être présentées, l'acquisition de compétences peut commencer ! .

Après la phase de réalisation du volet A un dossier de **candidature pour le Programme d'innovation rurale est déposé en septembre 1998**. Après examen dans les services de l'Etat, la **Convention cadre** de mise en œuvre sera **signée le 22 février 1999**. Nous sommes à 10 mois de la clôture du programme. Deux avenants viendront par la suite modifier la maquette !

Cette histoire n'a pas seulement pour but de montrer comment la bureaucratie peut s'emparer d'un programme qui se veut le reflet d'une démarche locale, mais aussi de faire comprendre que LEADER va se télescoper avec l'initiative du Pays dont la charte de développement a été approuvée le 7 mars 1997. Au lieu d'être le pilote du développement il va devenir un accompagnement.

Une stratégie d'accompagnement de la démarche de Pays

Ce sont les techniciens présents sur ce Pays qui sont à l'origine de sa candidature au programme LEADER II. En réalité, en raison du retard pris par le conventionnement avec l'Etat du programme LEADER, il y a eu un décalage entre la procédure des contrats de pays et celle de LEADER II. Le fait que le Pays ait été approuvé avant le GAL a fortement marqué la mise en œuvre de LEADER.

La stratégie générale du territoire a été « d'enrayer la désertification du Pays », elle a été déclinée en 3 axes :

- favoriser l'emploi en développant les activités économiques
- préparer l'accueil des populations et des chefs d'entreprises, améliorer les services, le logement, le cadre de vie
- valoriser les atouts de pays

Dans l'esprit des acteurs institutionnels il y a un double partage des rôles : LEADER II doit « permettre de fédérer les acteurs et les amener à un projet collectif », le 5b « prend le relais pour réaliser les projets en grandeur nature ». Sur le terrain LEADER II porte principalement sur des actions immatérielles (diagnostics, études, animation, assistance technique, mise en réseau, ...) alors que les investissements matériels sont pris en charge par le Pays. Le programme du GAL est donc complémentaire de celui du Pays.

Dès lors, les axes du programme LEADER du Saint Amandois sont une extraction des actions du Pays pouvant entrer dans le cadre de LEADER II : Valorisation du Pays, Développement des services aux entreprises, Tourisme. La partie la plus importante du programme va être axée sur le tourisme qui constitue le point fort du territoire, notamment grâce à la richesse de son patrimoine.

Il n'y a pas de ligne « ouverte », toutes les actions sont pré-désignées car l'autorité gestionnaire a voulu que les contre-parties soient préalablement inscrites. Il en résulte un manque de souplesse et la nécessité de modifier la maquette financière chaque fois qu'une action ne marche pas ou qu'une nouvelle action apparaît utile.

Dans LEADER la taille des projets réalisés est relativement modeste (en moyenne 250 000 F). Sur les 22 opérations effectivement réalisées, aucune opération n'est supérieure à 350 000F. Plus du tiers des réalisations ont été axées sur le tourisme, principalement autour de la Cité de l'Or, suivent à part égale des actions dans les domaines de la valorisation des paysages et de l'environnement et des NTIC, avec la réalisation d'un site Internet de Pays. On y trouve : études, inventaires, plaquettes, intranet, animation, ... presque aucun investissement matériel.

Un dispositif d'accompagnement est mis en place (technicien Chambre d'Agriculture, animateur tourisme, animateur économique), mais c'est celui du Syndicat mixte et du Pays. L'animatrice (Mme Servant-Massé) plus particulièrement en charge de LEADER y consacre environ 15% de son temps, principalement à la gestion administrative ; les autres interviennent sur les dossiers en fonction des thématiques qui les intéressent. Les techniciens sont perçus comme ceux du Pays et non comme ceux de LEADER.

La dominante du secteur public et de l'économie

Nous avons déjà relevé que le partenariat du GAL est très institutionnel :

Syndicat mixte

Chambre d'Agriculture

Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie

Chambre des métiers

Conseil Général

Ville de Saint Amand

Comité d'expansion

Le résultat est que ce sont exclusivement le SMADSABEM et la ville de Saint-Amand (plus la commune de Châteaumeillant) qui ont été bénéficiaires du programme, pour 16 projets représentant 71% de la dépense totale ils ont mobilisé 83% de l'enveloppe communautaire ! Les maîtres d'ouvrage privés (associations, personnes privées, entreprises) sont absents des bénéficiaires. L'effet levier sur les fonds privés est donc très faible (9% dans la maquette initiale et 5% dans les réalisations). Pour les acteurs locaux ceci vient du fait que LEADER s'est trouvé « en amont des projets ». En revanche, les collectivités territoriales locales ont beaucoup investi dans le programme (38% auxquels s'ajoutent 21% de fonds du Département de la Région et de l'Etat, 1% pour ce dernier !).

Soulignons que les actions portées par des associations et qui ont été abandonnées étaient souvent innovantes dans leur contenu, par exemple un atelier d'insertion pour les femmes qui devait mobiliser du FSE, route du paysage, En définitive le FSE n'a pas été sollicité par le GAL (« trop complexe à mobiliser »).

L'innovation n'est cependant pas absente des projets réalisés qui apparaissent de grande qualité comme par exemple la réalisation d'une charte d'urbanisme commercial à l'échelle de tout le territoire, une étude paysagère sur les noyers qui a permis la relance de la filière noix ou l'étude des sentiers de Pays en collaboration avec le service national de cartographie (IGN).

La valeur ajoutée de LEADER

Pour les acteurs locaux elle se situe très clairement du côté de la possibilité de financer des opérations immatérielles, ce qui est souvent difficile dans les programmes nationaux.

LEADER II aurait pu avoir une plus grande efficacité s'il y avait eu :

- moins de complications administratives. Par exemple, le système de modification de la maquette était trop lourd : « dès qu'il y avait une modification de plan de financement par rapport au budget prévisionnel, même à quelques francs près ce qui est quasi inévitable, il fallait que la maquette générale soit modifiée, donc avenant à la convention, signature du préfet et du président du GAL, contrôle financier déconcentré.... »
- moins de retards. C'est la principale raison qui fait que le GAL n'a pas programmé ni réalisé d'action de coopération transnationale
- une meilleure articulation dans le temps avec la démarche de Pays
- une meilleure articulation avec le 5b

Une raison tient sans doute dans la « concurrence » que se font les services de l'Etat et ceux de la Région, ainsi que ceux de la Région et des départements, à propos du développement local. C'est ainsi que le Conseil Régional a refusé de créer une ligne financière spécifique pour le soutien à LEADER (contrairement au Conseil Général du Cher).

L'autonomie du groupe a été très faible dans tout le processus de sélection des projets dans lequel les services de l'État sont constamment intervenus, y compris les services de paiement qui pratiquaient une sorte de contrôle d'opportunité. « La démarche LEADER n'a pas été appropriée par tous les acteurs de l'administration ».

Malgré tout le Groupe a déposé une candidature pour LEADER + sur le thème « publics cibles jeunes », et a été sélectionné.

Suite aux discussions, on peut synthétiser la mise en œuvre des spécificités dans le tableau suivant

La mise en œuvre des spécificités LEADER sur le GAL

L'approche territoriale

Le territoire avait déjà une habitude de travail en commun (2 CRIL, 2 OPAH, 1 ORAC, Contrats de Pays CR), le périmètre du Pays était déjà défini et le Syndicat Mixte (SM) avait déjà une équipe d'agents de développement : tous ces facteurs ont favorisé la mise en œuvre de LEADER sur le Saint-Amandois. Le périmètre trouve aussi sa cohérence dans le bassin d'emploi.

Cette approche aura permis de mieux identifier les ressources locales (bijouteries, noyers, paysages,...)

La démarche ascendante

Si l'initiative de déposer un programme LEADER revient aux techniciens des différentes structures de développement local présentes sur le territoire, la définition de la stratégie et des objectifs est issue des réunions de travail avec les élus du SM, la ville de St-Amand, les chambres consulaires, le Conseil Général, le Pays d'accueil et le Comité d'expansion du Cher (3 réunions).

Cette démarche ascendante s'est concrétisée par le lancement, en avril 1998, d'un vaste appel à projets auprès de 150 structures (mairies, associations, partenaires) avec une fiche-projet à retourner. Les élus ont eu quelques réticences à faire appel aux partenaires non institutionnels par manque de confiance.

Le partenariat local

Le GAL est composé de représentants du Pays d'accueil touristique, des consulaires, du CG, de la Ville de st Amand, du Comité d'expansion : une convention de partenariat a été établie entre ces différents membres. Parmi tous ces partenaires, les membres les plus influents ont été la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, le Conseil Général et le Syndicat de Pays.

Le GAL, par sa composition, reste très institutionnel, en particulier dans son instance de décision.

L'innovation

Il semble que l'innovation soit apparue de manière aléatoire, les actions soutenues dans LEADER étant avant tout des actions tirées de la Charte de Développement du Pays.

On ne peut que constater que les opérations présentant le plus grand caractère innovant n'ont pas pu être réalisées. Les freins sont avant tout été des problèmes d'éligibilité et de cofinancement (atelier d'insertion pour femmes ; résidence chanson) et parfois politiques (centre de la Presse).

L'approche multisectorielle et intégrée

Les actions liées au développement de la bijouterie via la Cité de l'Or sont à replacer dans un contexte plus large et multisectoriel (formation professionnelle, artisanat, tourisme,...). Le public cible est lui-même très large : artisans, PME, Associations, professionnels du tourisme, établissements de formation et collectivités locales. Cette approche a permis de créer une plus grande synergie et des liens durables entre les acteurs.

La mise en réseau

Le réseau régional était trop informel (absence d'animateur identifié ni de réelle volonté de faire vivre ce réseau) et n'a pas permis de réduire de manière évidente l'isolement des animateurs.

L'animatrice a eu parfois recours à l'Unité Nationale d'animation pour certains renseignements techniques, administratifs ou encore des exemples d'expériences tout en regrettant que les trop grandes disparités régionales "*empêchent des vrais transferts d'expérience*".

La coopération transnationale

Le concept de coopération transnationale n'a pas été compris par les acteurs et était loin de correspondre aux préoccupations locales. La Région n'a pas poussé les groupes à s'investir dans ce domaine. De fait, ce volet n'a pas été inscrit dans la maquette du GAL.

Les modalités de gestion et de financement

Le degré d'autonomie a été plus large dans le choix du périmètre et un peu moindre dans la sélection des projets. Il est ainsi reproché à l'Etat sa trop grande "présence" dans la sélection des projets en particulier les services de la Trésorerie Générale, avec le sentiment d'un contrôle d'opportunité apposé sur chacune des actions programmées, ce qui est contraire à la démarche LEADER.

Le FSE a été particulièrement impossible à utiliser en raison de la difficulté à lever des contreparties.

Il semble enfin que l'intermédiaire que constituait l'échelon départemental ait posé un véritable problème pour le GAL (alourdissement et allongement des procédures). L'arrivée des contreparties financières avec énormément de retard a posé énormément de problèmes pour les bénéficiaires (notamment pour les porteurs de projets autres que publics).

Observations de l'évaluateur

Le volet acquisitions de compétences n'a pas véritablement été utilisé comme tel, avec l'argent on a commencé des actions qui ont été poursuivies dans le volet B. Le territoire qui avait déjà une longue pratique et une bonne équipe d'animation en avait-il besoin ? Cet épisode a sans doute retardé l'ensemble du processus.

Les principaux acteurs témoignent d'une bonne connaissance de la méthode et des exigences de LEADER, mais derrière la rhétorique LEADER n'a-t-il pas été perçu comme une simple ligne financière (sans doute plus compliquée qu'une autre dans le contexte régional°).

On peut penser que la réalisation du programme a été facilitée par la définition préalable du Contrat de Pays, mais LEADER n'avait plus de dynamique propre. On peut par exemple constater que la « lisibilité » de LEADER est faible dans les documents de communication (très riches en contenu et très bien réalisés par ailleurs). Si le LOGO est partout présent, ils apparaissent en effet comme les documents du Pays et non du GAL. Une préface du Président du Pays, qui retrace l'histoire du territoire et de sa démarche de développement, dans une plaquette sur le Pays en février 2000 ne cite nullement l'initiative LEADER !

4 – FOCUS GROUP Avant-Pays Savoyard – FR

Le GAL

L'avant-Pays Savoyard regroupe 55 communes, couvre un territoire de 4687 ha et compte 25.000 habitants. C'est une zone rurale encore assez largement agricole, longtemps séparée de la capitale du département (Chambéry) par une chaîne montagneuse, où le tourisme totalise cependant 9250 lits. Le percement d'un tunnel a changé la donne et provoqué l'arrivée de nouvelles populations tant pour le tourisme que pour la résidence permanente. Le territoire, qui n'était pas en zone éligible en 1990, n'avait pas bénéficié de LEADER I.

Le déroulement du Focus Group

Le workshop s'est déroulé sur une journée, dans les locaux du GAL, en 2 sessions (matin consacré aux spécificités, après-midi aux 4 questions du Manuel) séparées par un repas pris en commun. Il a réuni la participation de l'évaluateur (JC Bontron), des deux principaux animateurs du programme (Ph. Beluze, JM Guillot), du Président de la Communauté de communes membre du GAL (G. Guigue). Le Président du GAL, hôtelier, n'a pas pu se joindre à la réunion contrairement à ce qui était prévu, mais a été interviewé en fin de journée sur son lieu de travail. L'ambiance a été très conviviale, les prises de parole sans retenue, les documents

disponibles mis à disposition. Les acteurs locaux ont témoigné d'une bonne connaissance des spécificités et de la rhétorique LEADER. Les propos relatés viennent tous de l'expression des acteurs locaux, ils ont été ré-ordonnés.

Le Q202 était pré-rempli, et a été complété au fur et à mesure de la discussion.

Le contexte institutionnel local

Les interlocuteurs ont spontanément replacé l'émergence de LEADER II (1997) dans une histoire plus longue (depuis 1980) et plus large (celle de l'intercommunalité, et des autres programmes de développement rural). Pour résumer : un premier contrat de « Pays d'accueil touristique » est signé en 1985 sur une partie du territoire, puis il bénéficie de l'article 12 du Contrat de plan Etat-Région pour le soutien au développement territorial local (1990), puis d'un « Contrat global de Développement » (procédure régionale) en 1995, puis du classement en zone 5b et de la possibilité d'émarger au DOCUP, puis de LEADER II en juillet 1997 sur le même périmètre que le CGD. Il y eu en fait un partage des rôles entre le Contrat Régional (soutien aux investissements lourds) et le Programme LEADER (plutôt soutien à l'immatériel et aux petits projets).

1 – Les apports de LEADER II

La mise en œuvre de la méthode (points essentiels)

Nb : Le programme n'avait pas fait appel à la mesure A. 61 dossiers ont été programmés, avec un taux moyen de subvention européenne de 39%, le volet B a été réalisé à 92% et le volet C à 100%

Approche Bottom-up

LEADER est considéré ici comme un programme innovant et spécifique :

- parce qu'il est différent des autres programmes : contrats très thématiques (tourisme ou habitat), 5b qui est une « logique de guichet », Contrats régionaux qui financent des équipements de base,
- par sa procédure qui le distingue du Contrat Global de Développement (CGD = Pays de la Région)
- par la possibilité de prendre des risques et d'innover.

Dans le CGD le filtre des actions est en amont et prend la forme de fiches d'actions prédéfinies, dans LEADER l'instruction des dossiers est locale, en prise directe avec les acteurs. Cependant

il n'est pas question de « court-circuiter » le niveau politique, l'idée de travailler avec les élus est perçue comme positive, en réalité il n'y a pas eu de projet refusé. Au contraire de l'Objectif 5b LEADER a été un ensemble d'actions bien coordonnées et bien suivies, avec à la clé moins de conflits, moins de désaccords et moins de lenteurs.

Partenariat

Le thème choisi impliquait la volonté d'une gestion partagée du territoire. Le partenariat est parti du politique, mais a été élargi aux acteurs socio-économiques (Consulaires, Agence économique de la Savoie), au monde associatif et à des administrations comme l'éducation nationale, l'ANPE. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une participation départementale, car il a été constitué des échelons locaux de ces partenaires : Association de l'Avant Pays Savoyard Tourisme, Maison locale des agriculteurs (qui regroupe 2 GVA), Antenne locale de l'Association Savoyarde des petites et moyennes industries. Un réseau informel des acteurs de l'environnement s'est également constitué. Le GAL (12 membres) représentait bien les intérêts en présence, mais à travers des institutions, le partenariat a aussi pris son véritable sens au niveau des acteurs de base qui ont accepté de travailler ensemble.

Intégration et multi-sectorialité

On peut parler de développement intégré si l'on additionne tous les programmes en cours sur le territoire. Pour cela il a fallu croiser la vision stratégique sur l'avenir du territoire et les projets réalisables dans la période. Tous les projets retenus sont « complémentaires et scotchés au territoire, même si les enveloppes financières étaient différentes».

Le choix du thème (transversal et ayant de nombreuses déclinaisons) a largement favorisé la mise en œuvre de projets impliquant des acteurs et des secteurs différents. Le partenariat tourisme – agriculture, par exemple, a mis en relation deux mondes séparés.

Gestion financière

En France il n'y avait pas de dotation globale, mais les différents fonds structurels ont cependant permis de financer tous les types d'actions, au prix de changements dans la maquette financière. C'est ainsi que la coopération transfrontalière initialement prévue sur du FSE a été en définitive financée sur du FEDER. Le FEOGA a été abondé, ainsi que le FEDER. Une opération FEDER a dû être abandonnée en raison de difficultés liées à des autorisations administratives, pour le FSE des arrêtés de subvention trop tardifs ont aussi annulé quelques opérations. Dans l'ensemble les crédits européens ont été bien mobilisés, et les modifications de maquette n'ont pas posé de problème.

Travail en réseau

Le travail en réseau a surtout été régional, avec un total de 30 rencontres avec les groupes de Rhône Alpes. Ce travail a d'abord permis de résoudre les principales difficultés de mise en œuvre du programme et de mettre en place la coopération transnationale, mais il a aussi permis de faire avancer des actions collectives tels que la communication (journal des groupes), la sensibilisation à l'évaluation. Le réseau national a peu été sollicité car jugé peu performant pour des acteurs confirmés, la méthodologie est essentiellement venue de l'Observatoire européen.

Les facteurs clés du changement identifiés

Parmi tous les changements que l'on peut identifier avec la mise en œuvre de LEADER, le débat en a fait ressortir quatre :

La prise de conscience (découverte) des ressources du territoire

LEADER a généré un autre regard sur les ressources du territoire. L'intérêt porté par les « extérieurs » sur le patrimoine local (produits agricoles, savoirs-faire, bâtiments, sites naturels, ...) a ouvert les yeux des habitants au point de reconsidérer la cible de certaines actions prévues pour les touristes, qui en définitive ont intéressé principalement les habitants. La volonté de donner une identité à un territoire qui n'en avait pas (c'était un « avant Pays », en partie séparé de son département à forte identité la Savoie) est devenue un fil conducteur de l'action et une base du développement de son attractivité et de son économie.

Le développement des partenariats

LEADER a permis la création de nouveaux partenariats locaux (écoles, groupes de protection et gestion de la nature, offices de tourisme, associations de producteurs, collectivités locales, ...). De faire partager des projets à des milieux qui cohabitaient en s'ignorant, de mieux faire comprendre le travail et les contraintes des professionnels et des élus. Pour que le partenariat prenne une réelle consistance il faut « des projets riches et ambitieux dans le cadre d'un programme mobilisateur ». Cela a été le cas dans le programme LEADER II autour du slogan « utilisons et valorisons nos ressources et nos acquis ».

La nécessaire autonomie du groupe

La structuration des acteurs ne peut porter ses fruits que s'il y a un diagnostic partagé sur la situation du territoire et une appropriation consensuelle du projet global et des projets

individuels. Si des contraintes administratives extérieures viennent contrarier cette vision et ces efforts, il y a beaucoup de chances pour que la démobilisation s'installe. Dans ce cas de figure on peut dire que l'Administration et les Collectivités régionale et départementale ont joué le jeu de l'autonomie des groupes. Mais il faut alors admettre que l'autonomie doit s'assumer, c'est à dire qu'il faut être en capacité d'analyser, de débattre, d'arbitrer, ce qui demande des investissements dans l'accompagnement et le suivi des programmes et l'instauration d'une démocratie participative, ou au moins transparente.

L'ouverture transnationale

Au départ il n'y avait aucune expérience, c'est le séminaire de Dieulefit (organisé par l'Observatoire avec l'appui de la Région) qui a été le déclencheur. Elle a pris la forme d'une coopération relativement étroite avec un GAL Espagnol (Somontano de Barbastro) sur le thème de l'eau commun aux deux groupes. Les aides à la prospection (5.000 et 20.000 écus) ont été utilisées et le programme a mobilisé 900.000 FF (50% UE). 10 rencontres avec les partenaires ont été organisées, les actions ayant principalement porté sur les méthodes de gestion de l'eau et la mise en œuvre d'un contrat de rivière, sur la pédagogie de l'environnement avec la réalisation d'un « **Forum de l'environnement Bleu et Vert** ».

De l'avis de tous c'est une dimension très lourde à mettre en œuvre (pas tellement pour des raisons linguistiques), mais il faut continuer car « les échanges sont très riches et cela permet de mieux comprendre l'Europe ». Les techniciens et les élus ont aussi acquis une expérience. En revanche on voit moins les suites que cela pourrait prendre en l'absence de financements relais.

2 – Les quatre questions principales

1. What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operation principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?

■ **Leader II est l'aboutissement d'une démarche qui a cheminé progressivement dans les esprits et dans les institutions**

LEADER II n'a pas été construit sur une « table rase ». A chaque étape les structures de regroupement et de gestion se sont consolidées et adaptées, pour aboutir à la constitution d'un syndicat mixte, structure « légère » assurant la réflexion, la programmation et l'accompagnement, d'une démarche de développement qui est de plus en plus intégrée. Il a fallu d'abord consolider le territoire dans des dimensions inhabituelles, les pratiques de travail en commun des uns et des autres, faire admettre une cellule d'ingénierie, sortir d'une logique de restauration des activités anciennes et intégrer la prospective dans les diagnostics, ...

Certes LEADER n'est pas un point d'aboutissement, mais une étape qui n'aurait pas pu se dérouler avant avec la même qualité

■ **Le choix du thème a été favorable à la mise en œuvre de la méthode**

Le point de départ des projets de développement a été une réflexion sur « comment faire du tourisme sans neige, et comment tirer partie de l'ouverture du tunnel qui risque de transformer le secteur en zone péri-urbaine ». Le Programme Régional imposait le choix d'un thème fédérateur, celui choisi par l'Avant Pays Savoyard a été « pour un développement touristique au fil de l'eau ». Il est apparu comme un lied-motif dans la discussion, que ce choix avait joué un grand rôle dans la mise en œuvre de la méthode Leader comme dans la réussite des objectifs du Programme.

- Le programme a permis de décliner le thème dans toutes ses composantes : contrat de rivière, équipements de loisir, filière pêche, activités sportives, Maison du Lac, promotion du tourisme, pédagogie de l'environnement, patrimoine historique et culturel lié à l'eau,
- Il a été un facteur de cohérence qui a permis à toutes les parties du territoire de se sentir concerné.
- Il a été favorable à la mise en œuvre de projets multi-sectoriels
- Il s'est révélé très fédérateur (90% des maires et une population nombreuse ont par exemple assisté au forum organisé à mi-parcours),
- Il a donné une grande lisibilité au programme pour le public. On s'est d'ailleurs aperçu que « la valorisation des ressources locales intéresse le public local autant que le public extérieur »

Notons que le Business Plan a été rédigé par les animateurs et que ce sont eux qui ont proposé le thème, « mais c'était dans l'air » d'après les élus.

■ **La présence d'une équipe d'animation solide, qui avait la confiance des élus**

Dès le départ ce territoire disposait d'une équipe d'animation conséquente avec un animateur de Pays, un animateur touristique. Un agent a été recruté pour assurer le secrétariat et la gestion du GAL, des renforts ont été ajoutés pour la coopération transnationale et la mise en réseau. S'y ajoutent un technicien randonnée et un autre de la chambre d'agriculture. Les compétences techniques et administratives de la structure d'animation ont été unanimement reconnues. Ils ont mis en place un tableau de bord de l'avancement physique et financier des différents programmes, et assuré la liaison entre tous les niveaux.

■ **La mobilisation de tous les acteurs**

Nous avons déjà évoqué le rôle du partenariat, ajoutons que la préparation du Forum a joué un grand rôle dans la mobilisation parce qu'elle a obligé à impliquer tout le monde, alors que le GAL était perçu comme plutôt « institutionnel ».

■ **L'appui des institutions (la cellule technique régionale et les administrations)**

Le Conseil Régional avait mis en place une Cellule d'appui technique (en réponse à une auto-organisation des GAL) pour faciliter la mise en œuvre de LEADER, notamment dans sa dimension Coopération transnationale. Elle a été très active et a notamment assuré un relais avec l'Observatoire Européen dont elle a été un correspondant très efficace. La collectivité Régionale a investi des financements dans le fonctionnement de cette cellule et fortement contribué au co-financement du volet Coopération. C'est un peu une exception en France, aussi faut-il y insister.

De son côté, la préfecture du département avait créé une cellule « Europe », relais des services de l'Etat, qui a assuré une bonne assistance pour l'instruction des dossiers et facilité la mobilisation des co-financements. Toutefois le comportement des acteurs institutionnels est à la merci des changements de personne.

2. **What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?**

■ **Elargir le périmètre et la connaissance du territoire**

Les territoires de projet sont souvent trop petits pour développer des projets ambitieux, il faut atteindre une certaine taille, tout en conservant la cohérence du couple « territoire-projet ». Pour LEADER + le territoire a d'ailleurs été étendu.

Il faut regarder de plus près les spécificités de chaque territoire rural et non les considérer comme ayant tous les mêmes possibilités de développement. La détection et la mise en valeur des ressources locales supposent d'en avoir un bon inventaire et une évaluation qui prenne en compte les nouvelles valeurs que peuvent lui attribuer la société locale et les populations urbaines.

■ **Approfondir la coopération entre acteurs**

Il y a 10 ou 15 ans le développement local était uniquement l'affaire des élus, aujourd'hui cela ne suffit plus, il faut une participation de tous et en tout cas une majorité qui adhère au projet. Tous ces nouveaux acteurs ne doivent pas seulement avoir des idées, mais pouvoir apporter des fonds et avoir une bonne connaissance des contraintes du développement local. Cette coopération doit cependant respecter les prérogatives de chacun selon ses compétences et ses

responsabilités. L'équilibre entre acteurs public et privé dans les instances de décision demeure un point sensible comme le montre les récents débats sur le Conseil de Développement du Pays.

■ **Perpétuer le dispositif d'animation, de coordination et de suivi**

L'assistance technique et de l'animation sont considérées comme décisives pour la réussite de LEADER par tous les acteurs. LEADER en apportant des fonds a précisément permis son développement. Mais pour que les acquis perdurent il faut des moyens de fonctionnement, d'autant que de nouveaux besoins se font jour, par exemple des « animateurs de patrimoine ». En plus de l'accompagnement des porteurs de projets il faut aussi assurer le suivi des programmes. Les zones rurales n'ont pas à elles seules les moyens de pérenniser ces structures.

3. What should be changed at the level of programme administration (nationally/regionally) and LEADER network in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?

Le partenariat vertical suppose à la fois une dose d'autonomie et une dose d'accompagnement. Nous ne voulons pas « moins d'administration » mais moins de bureaucratie. Monter des dossiers c'est simple, mais les programmes européens sont parfois des « usines à gaz » et découragent les initiatives. Les règles du jeu doivent être fournies au départ et ne pas être modifiées en cours de route. La connaissance des spécificités de LEADER ne doit pas seulement être présente chez les acteurs locaux mais à tous les niveaux de la chaîne du partenariat vertical (y compris les services financiers).

Il faut une continuité dans les services de l'administration de l'Etat et des Régions, ce qui n'est pas le cas en raison des changements de personnes et du manque de capitalisation (moins le cas qu'au niveau local). La culture du travail en partenariat (horizontal ou vertical) ne sera jamais un acquis définitif, c'est une culture qui peut se perdre.

Il y a aussi de grosses difficultés pour mobiliser des financements, surtout pour des activités dans lesquelles les collectivités rurales n'ont pas l'habitude d'investir : la matière grise, le travail en réseau, la coopération avec l'extérieur, ...Hors, pour pouvoir travailler il faut du « carburant ».

« Les procédures comme LEADER nous apportent parfois une bouffée d'oxygène contre une grande débauche d'énergie »

4. What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?

Pour l'instant la valorisation des ressources locales est le créneau le plus porteur pour développer la méthode LEADER et pour obtenir des impacts de développement. Mais il faut aussi s'intéresser aux relations entre villes et campagnes. Aujourd'hui « la campagne est le lieu où l'on essaie de régler les problèmes des urbains, il faut adapter les lois, qui sont principalement faites pour les urbains ». Par exemple, dans notre territoire, on a pas les moyens d'accompagner les arrivées de nouvelles populations au niveau de l'habitat et des différents services collectifs, ni d'assurer la permanence de l'agriculture.

La mise en œuvre de LEADER sur le territoire va déboucher sur une démarche de Pays dans le cadre de la LOADDT. Nous avons également obtenu l'agrément de notre programme LEADER +.

3. Report on national and regional programme evaluations

3.1 Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level

There was no ex ante evaluation in France for LEADER II, but the decision to implement regional programmes in contrast to the previous national LEADER I programme.

There were 18 Operational Programmes in the 5b area and 2 in Objective 1 (Corsica and Hainaut). No national office was in charge of the overall monitoring of the Initiative. The CNASEA monitored the financial expenses. The National Unit had no clear commission to build a database on the LEADER implementation and results. As it was impossible to impose a single software solution to the regions, each region set up its own monitoring system. Consequently there is a lack of global information on the realisation and results of LEADER II in France, without a common framework of financial, physical or qualitative indicators.

In the context of the **late start** of LEADER II Operational Programmes, the interim evaluation studies were required at a too early stage (1997) for being useful to many regions. Therefore, it has been decided in concordance with the Commission that the **interim evaluation could be carried out as an « evaluative assessment »** (detailed internal execution report), complemented by results of self-evaluations of LAGs. In some regions the mid-term evaluations led to recommendations encouraging the creation of regional networks (Aquitaine/FR) or actions of technical assistance directed towards the groups facing start-up difficulties (Rhône Alpes/FR).

The **ex-post evaluations were carried out comprehensively**, in general making use of the guidelines published by the Commission, and for half of them using the standard questionnaire for LAGs produced by the group of experts of the European Observatory. All have been transmitted to the Commission, without English summaries.

The National Unit and the CNASEA have also been evaluated. Finally, the ex ante evaluation of LEADER+ includes an evaluative synthesis on the LEADER II implementation in France.

At the level of LAGs, the situation is more diverse: half of LAGs assert that they have carried out a self-evaluation process (in fact only a soft monitoring!), but some have commissioned evaluations to external consultants on the basis of an earmarked budget in their own business plans: for example Préalpes Drômoises in Rhône Alpes, Hérault in Languedoc or Nord Haute Vienne in Limousin. The Région Auvergne funded an external evaluation for all LAGs based on a common call for tender and terms of reference.

Rhône-Alpes and other regions tried to develop common indicator grids for all LAGs, but this activity has not been carried out through the whole period due to overcharge and lack of human resources at the local groups' level.

3.2 Overall assessment

The regional ex post evaluations, and some local one, provided a useful tool to the geographical evaluators for a better understanding of the way the Community Initiative was implemented in France and how its operational principles and specificities were actually applied (see recommendations).

The relevance of the evaluations for learning at local level is good and enhanced a local culture of evaluation, but at regional and national levels few evaluation reports were made available through Internet. Some relevant publications were made available for a larger public in Auvergne and in Rhône-Alpes for example, but in general evaluation continues to be considered as an administrative exercise for many actors (not the animators). The concern for evaluation comes very late in the implementation process and it is often impossible to build relevant indicators at the end, without monitoring system.

The lack of a system of monitoring indicators and reporting requirements at national level, have limited the ability of evaluation teams to report in depth on quantitative outcomes from projects, measures and programmes. The classical evaluation tools are not sufficiently relevant for LEADER evaluation. The necessary methodological work cannot be done by the institutions in charge of day-to-day implementation of LEADER, but by an external expert.

3.3 Relevant conclusions and recommendations

In France, the implementation of the LEADER II Community Initiative had an overall positive effect and impact on rural areas involved, and beyond. It has changed mentalities and attitudes of local actors: many "intercommunalités" come from the LEADER experience, and the establishment of the local partnership is understood as a necessity. The programme has also highlighted the role of technical assistance and "matière grise" (grey cells) in rural areas more isolated than urban ones, and the great importance of exchange and networking.

On the one hand the added value established under LEADER I was strengthened under LEADER II in a good institutional context, but some actors think that LEADER II was more bureaucratic, leaving less autonomy to local groups.

■ **Area based approach:**

The size of the area proved in most cases of high relevance, but with the smallest group of 4000 inhabitants and the largest of 130.000, there were large inequalities between LAGs, the little ones missing the critical mass, the largest doing hard in overcoming distances.

Some areas have been created according to rational criteria linked with the development theme, other areas were more incidental coinciding with the 5b zone or with administrative limits (e.g. the department). The political logic prevailed sometimes over the project logic.

There has been no effective selection of the local programmes (but an improvement of the business plans with measure A means).

■ **Bottom up approach**

The bottom-up principle was an innovative approach to local development in many areas. It has involved different types of communities, economic and social interest groups, with the public actors in the dominant role. The mobilization of the local population was not significant everywhere, because of a too institutional approach and the complexity of the application process. But on the whole LEADER has improved the community involvement and built up local capacity for development and contributed to the mainstreaming of the method through the "pays" procedure.

■ **Partnership**

Partnership was an operational principle experienced in other French procedures (Territorial Charter, pays,...). LEADER II LAGs were sometimes not open to a balanced representation of the local society; by tradition the public sector is overrepresented. In many programmes the partnership basis was narrow and mainly composed of public actors. This fact plays a role in the lack of local bottom up process in many groups.

■ **Innovation**

A pragmatic and rather vague approach was adopted by regions and LAGs in applying innovation criteria to actions. Innovation was most frequently interpreted as "not implemented before in the LAG area", which is the weakest concept. The most efficient LAGs tried to adopt a more rigorous approach and to support innovative processes and products in the spirit of the Initiative. The little involvement of private entrepreneurs and bureaucratic financial rules limited the capacity to innovate.

■ **Multi sectoral approach**

This approach is often used by adding up actions from different sectors, to satisfy different interests in the partnership combination. Many LAGs perceived LEADER as an opportunity for additional funding (in France this was called “5b bis”). In fact, in areas where Leader I was implemented before, and in LAGs having chosen a main theme, the multi-sectoral approach succeeded most. In these cases it was easier to build a clear strategy and to ensure the integration of actions of different actors and sectors.

■ **Networking**

Networking was the most innovative practice in LEADER I in the French context. Local areas had no experience in this field. Several LEADER I groups were strongly involved in the previous European network, and they continued to do so with the LEADER II Observatory. The new groups have been less interested because the methodology was quite established and members had less time for networking than they would have needed. The National Unit takes was established later and the LAGs needed closer exchanges in order to solve urgent problems. Regional networks, wherever they existed, were more effective and accessible structures for networking than the National Unit or the EU Observatory.

■ **Transnational cooperation**

Under LEADER II the French DATAR supported trans-national cooperation. Some For a great majority of the groups TNC was not a priority. It consumed much time for modest results in terms of local development. One Région (Rhône-Alpes) decided to invest in this field and created a special technical assistance (Cellule d’appui technique regionale) to support the LAGs. The concerned LAGs spent 15% of their budgets in TNC (compared to a national average of 4%). For the whole country, 35% of the LAGs asked for the 5.000 or 20.000 ECUs funding for the preparatory phases for measure C. Many projects failed to go on, but some LAGs deeply involved in TNC considered TNC as a very positive experience.

■ **Decentralized management and funding**

Decentralized management was effective for all technical tasks and arrangements: LAGs were free to develop their own appropriate partnership structure, to set up their business plans, to recruit staff and to communicate. But the autonomy stopped where the funding procedures started. There was no mechanism of global grant (some regions, e.g. Aquitaine, tried to operate a quasi global grant system in giving partial autonomy to the LAGs). Each structural fund was managed separately. Administrative centralization at the national level in LEADER I had been replaced by an administrative centralization at regional level in LEADER II.

4. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

The final balance of LEADER II shows very positive aspects, in the territories already experienced from LEADER I as well as in the new territories: self-organisation of local actors, exchanges, leaving behind over-individualistic behavioural routines (the considerable growth of inter-municipal groupings is an indicator for that), learning processes in the local partnerships and integrated strategies, and negotiation with external partners. This programme has also highlighted the essential role of animation and knowledge management, as well as the necessity for a greater professionalisation of development processes, finally it has underlined the importance of exchanges and networks.

Besides these very interesting achievements, LEADER II has shown a very strong diversity of regional programmes and of implementation modes at the level of LAGs. Administrative tasks and the operational management were considered as burdensome. The heterogeneity is plausible, if one takes into account that the same programme has addressed quite experienced local groups as well as newcomers in the same way :

- if the implementation happened in a more structured manner, LEADER II was a powerful factor for experimenting and consolidating the new methodological orientation. The relative importance of immaterial, structuring investments has to be emphasized, such as the organisation of local actors, common strategies of qualification and implementation, and integrated answers to specific challenges and difficulties;
- for the majority of LAGs, LEADER II was a first experience of local partnership, with – understandably – less structured programmes. Among them, some LAGs have chosen to focus on a few strong themes. With the support of committed council members and a very good local animation staff, they advanced quickly, leaving behind traditional communication problems and sectoral logics, achieving innovative strategies and methods of implementation. Other newcomers decided to embark on large spectrum programmes, which enabled them to experiment new working methods and partnership structures and networking practices at local level;
- however, there was a third category of LAGs which has not exploited the potential of the programme, just advancing little on building local development strategies: they could be called « opportunist areas » which used LEADER II as an additional funding source in order to achieve pre-established targets, at times accompanied by a distribution of funds among sub-areas and institutional partners. These LAGs were characterised by a higher rate of material investments (specifically the restoration of built heritage) and of promotion and communication. However, the establishment of links between actors unknown to each other hitherto, and the possibility to learn to know each other's interests in a structured process was an achievement in itself.

The necessity to learning how to manage European funds (for both administrators and LAGs), to organise funding from different sources with their respective modalities, to raise multiple part-funds for the same project, finally the lack of administrative competence at the level of local actors, constituted heavy obstacles for a smooth programme implementation. The « monofund » principle and the introduction of a global grant system in LEADER+ should contribute to a simplification of administrative tasks, but these changes will not solve all the problems observed in LEADER II.

There can be made many general recommendations for the future. Here we restrict ourselves to three only:

- keep a clear focus on the pilot character of the LEADER initiative;
- give more resources and attention to appropriate monitoring and evaluation, notably self-evaluation ;
- transfer the achievements into the mainstream programmes.

The operational programmes of Wallonie/Belgique and Luxembourg

As there were no focus groups, CEA or trans-national cooperation studies, and only one selected LAG in the Q 34 (LU), there was no fieldwork in these regions.

LEADER II context

- In Wallonie/BE LEADER I was established through only one LAG on the eligible area 5b (128.000 inhabitants) with a beneficiary organisation of five institutional partners. The actions financed were technical support for rural development, rural tourism, local services for small businesses and diversifying agriculture.
For the LEADER II period, Wallonie was eligible to the Objectives 1 and 5b. Two operational programmes have been implemented for a total of 17,2 MECU with an EU contribution of 7,4 MECU. LEADER II and rural development policies fell under the responsibility of the Wallonian Region, managed by the Directorate General for Agriculture. The Ministry appointed the Wallonian Rural Foundation to become the LEADER interface (coordination between LAGs, assistance for local players and information). The WRF has assisted rural development in Wallonia since a long time and has a good knowledge on European procedures, regional policies for rural development and the specific conditions of Wallonian rural areas. The selection of the 16 local groups was delayed, because the regional programmes was only approved in May 1997 for Objective 5b, and in July 97 for Objective 1, after a long negotiation period with the European Commission and a complete re-writing of the two operational

programmes because of the “*lack of a bottom up approach*”. After several dozens of meetings, applicant local partners drew up their rural innovation programmes with the methodological support of the WRF. After two selection meetings 16 Rural Innovation Programmes were accepted in October 1998 and started their activities at the end of 1998.

- In Luxembourg, there was also a positive LEADER I experience with one LAG. The LEADER II programme started in time (1995). Two LAGs were designated by the national level, but their development strategy was designed at local level. The Ministry of Agriculture, which headed the Monitoring Committee, was responsible for the implementation and for financial decisions. A one-stop office for SME was introduced between LAGs and final beneficiaries for some operations. The programmes were mainly targeted on technical assistance for local actors, and on tourism and heritage for the investments.

National and regional programme evaluations

- In Wallonie/BE both programmes were managed in the same way and the implementation processes were identical. Neither ex ante and nor mid term evaluations have been carried out due to the time loss in the inception phase. There was no ex post evaluation for Wallonia, but a “*Rapport final de la subvention relative à la mission d’interface LEADER II en Wallonie*” from some assessments could be extracted:
 - the territorial approach was different between Objective 5b (municipal or thematic initiatives) and Objective 1 area (larger and more coherent areas around existent or emerging nature parks);
 - the bottom up approach was mainly applied in LAGs having implemented rural programmes before (municipal rural development programmes or nature parks);
 - local partnerships were effective and their composition quite balanced (local authorities, economic sectors, civic associations, environmental NGOs...), but their autonomy was limited by the administrative pressure;
 - the innovative character was ensured through the choice of new themes and activities for the territories (market niches for local products, labels, social actions, IT) but hampered by financial and administrative rules;
 - the multisectoral principle was described as the attempt to create synergies by coordinating environmental, tourism, agricultural and other activities;
 - networking did not benefit from a national coordination unit financed by EU funds, but a network of Wallonian LAGs has been initiated by the interface structure. The lack of time was a hindrance for building up external exchanges and trans-national cooperation was carried out by few LAGs, mainly with border groups;

- the financial modalities were not satisfactory in the local actors' point of view, because the local groups did not have any autonomy. The funding authorities used to close direct contracts with the project promoters.
- In Luxembourg the evaluation activities were more consistent. There was no ex ante evaluation, but a mid term evaluation, and an in-depth ex-post evaluation for two groups. The LAGs also undertook an on-going self-evaluation. The ex post evaluation assessed the successful implementation of the programme and the LEADER method.

General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

Local actors had gathered experience in programmes prior to the LEADER Initiative: the communal development plans in LU and municipal rural development programmes in Wallonie/BE. Most of the problems came from the low level of inter-municipal cooperation, from the heterogeneity of some areas and the difficulty to achieve a critical mass in a densely populated context, marked by scattered settlement structures. The experience of the LEADER I group in Luxembourg and the support of the Wallonian Rural Fund has enabled the Community Initiative to get integrated into the existing governance structures more rapidly. More involvement of local actors would have produced better results. The Wallonian final report underlined the lack of information and coordination in the vertical partnership.

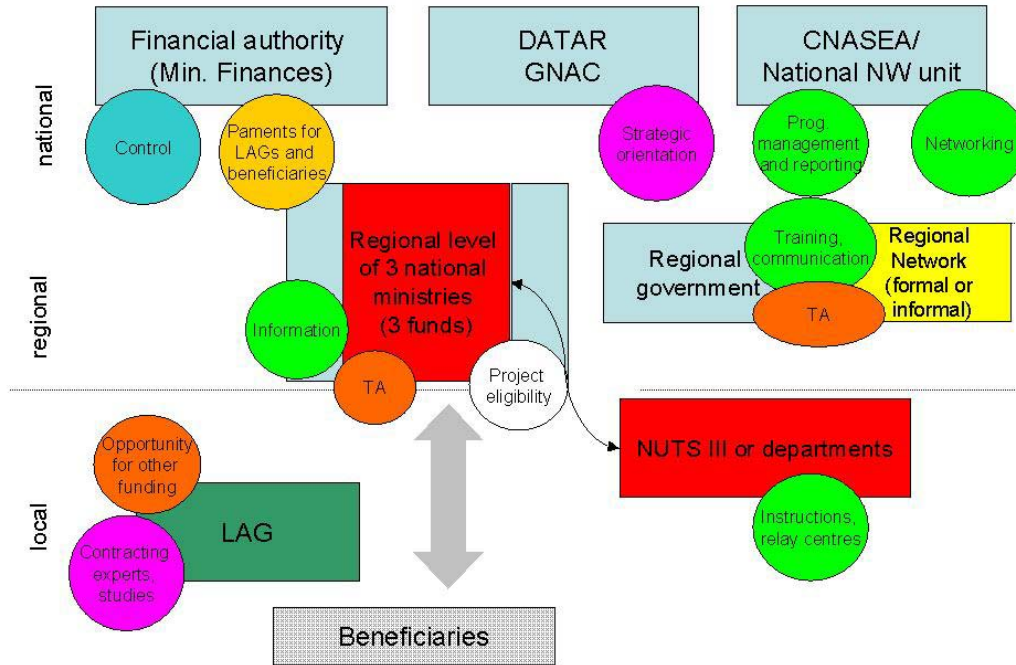
Recommendations

In the three programmes, LEADER was implemented in “residual” rural areas under high urban influence. Two recommendations can be made in this respect :

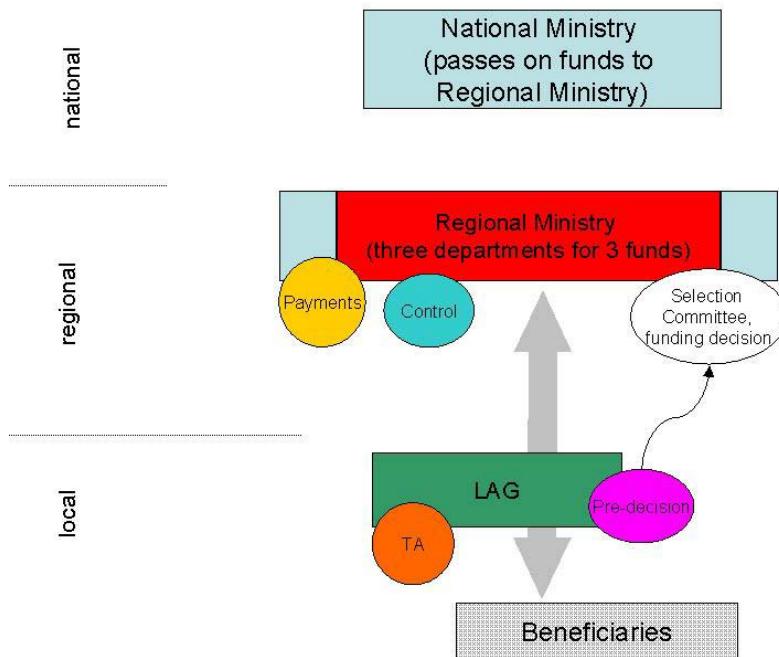
- in these partly peri-urban contexts rural development is more diverse and transversal than everywhere else. Therefore all administrations, not only the Ministry of Agriculture, have to be convinced and involved into the programme, and informed about its specificities;
- rural development in this type of rural areas must pay attention to not become conservationist in the sense of transforming parts of these areas in landscape museums or history worlds. New ways of rural/urban integration should be explored instead.

Models of implementation

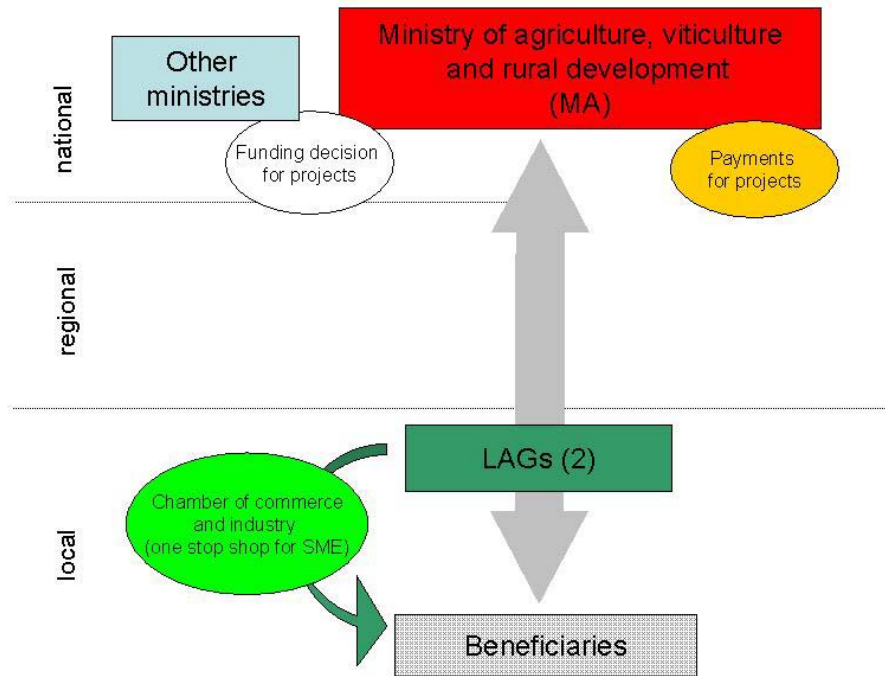
France



Belgium – Wallonie



Luxembourg



II.8 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT GREECE

Contents

1.	General Introduction	307
2.	Report on Focus Groups	309
2.1	Focus Group «KENAKAP SA» (EL- TH02)	309
2.1.1	Introduction	309
2.1.2	Description of partnership and activities	310
2.1.3	Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area	310
2.1.4	Conclusions and recommendations	313
2.2	Focus Group “ACHAIA” SA (EL-DE03)	314
2.2.1	Introduction	314
2.2.2	Description of partnership and activities	314
2.2.3	Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the LEADER II implementation in the area	315
2.2.4	Conclusions and recommendations	316
3.	Report on national and regional programme evaluations	317
3.1	Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level	317
3.2	Overall assessment	318
4.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	319
4.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II Initiative	319
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	320

1. General Introduction

The team that worked for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II in Greece consisted of Prof. S. Efstratoglou and Ms Sophia Mavridou. The work organisation followed the methodology provided by the core team and covered the relevant tasks as shown below:

Mobilisation and data collection

Within this task the team has carried out the following:

1. Contacts with the Ministry of Agriculture, Intermediary Organisation for implementing and monitoring LEADER II. The Intermediary Organisation (LEADER Office) responded positively and agreed to facilitate the evaluation work. They also provided the evaluators with relevant documentation appearing below:
 - (a) National Programme and contract between the European Commission and the Intermediary Organisation.
 - (b) Documentation on selection, implementation and monitoring procedures.
 - (c) Final reports submitted by the LAG and CBs and financial tables
 - (d) Report on the ex-post evaluation of the National Programme
 - (e) Report on the closing of the Programme.
2. The list of LAGs and CBs under LEADER II was prepared and sent to SEGESA for sampling purposes.
3. Finally in the Inception Seminar organised by the management team (OIR), the geographical expert prof. Sophia Efstratoglou participated.

Task 3: Evaluation of National/ Regional programmes

1. Under this task the Grid OP102 was completed in excel format for the National LEADER Programme.
2. Also the Grids 1000 for all LAGs and CBs were completed in Excel format. Relevant data were derived from their contracts signed with the Intermediary Body (Ministry of Agriculture) and their final reports submitted to the Ministry upon the closing of the Programme.
3. With regards the “detailed analysis” of OP (Q34), the work carried out has been as follows:
 - Translation of the Q34
 - Completion of the data on factual questions
 - Selection of 6 key persons at national level, involved in different aspects of the programme. These are:
 - Manager of the Leader II, Director of the LEADER Office, Ministry of Agriculture

- Officer of the LEADER Office with Planning- Implement responsibilities
- Officer of the LEADER Office with Monitoring responsibilities
- Officer of the LEADER Office responsible for Financial management, controls, on the spot checks
 - The expert responsible for the on-going and ex-post evaluation of the National Programme
 - Co-ordinator of the informal National LEADER Network of the LAGs and CBs (functioning since LEADER I and being active also under LEADER+).
- Completion of interviews, translation of the answers provided and transmission of the Q34 questionnaires to the core team.

Task 4: Evaluation of the Local Action Group

Under this task, the finalised Q202 was translated and the factual questions were filled in to the extent possible. Contacts with all 11 LAGs were necessary to explore their willingness and possibility to complete the Q202. All responded positively. In very few cases as LEADER II LAG was not under LEADER+, or there were changes in managers etc., staff responsible under LEADER II were located and co-operated. After that the questionnaires were sent to each of the 11 LAGs selected for checks and completion of the remaining questions (green and red). Upon reception of the completed questionnaires, the answers to all the questions were translated in English and the Q202 questionnaires (completed in Word doc. and Excel Grids) were sent to the core team.

Task 5: Participatory evaluation of 30 LAGs

For the participatory evaluation 4 out of 11 LAGs responded positively and two of them, Kalambaka-Pyli and ACHAIA were selected. Following the finalisation of the selection of the two LAGs that would participate in the evaluation as Focus Groups, the geographical expert contacted the managers of the LAGs, explained the task, discussed the specifics of its organisation and arranged the dates where the meetings took place. After the completion of the Focus Group workshops, the two reports on the task were prepared.

Task 6: Synthesis and Reporting

Within this task, the geographical evaluator had to prepare a geographical report (this document) summarising the main findings of the evaluation process at local level and send it to the core team.

Trans-national Cooperation and Case Study on Cost Effectiveness

The geographical evaluator was assigned the above tasks and specifically the analysis of the Trans-national Cooperation project “European Wilderness Challenge” where the Focus Group KENAKAP (Kalambaka-Pyli) was a partner and a case study in the same LEADER II area of two agro-touristic projects.

2. Report on Focus Groups

2.1 Focus Group «KENAKAP SA» (EL- TH02)

2.1.1 Introduction

The first Focus Group selected for Greece, was KENAKAP S. A., KENTRO ANAPTYXIS KALAMBAKAS – PYLIS (EL- TH02). The workshop took place on the 17th of May at the LAG's headquarters in the town of Kalabaka and was carried out in two sessions with a one-hour interval in-between.

The Focus Group consisted of five members plus the two evaluators. More specifically the participants on behalf of the LAG were:

1. Panagiotis Patras, Managing Director of the LAG
2. Dimitrios Spyropoulos, President of the Board of LAG, LEADER II and Vice President under LEADER+ and Local Council president.
3. Angelos Tsiaras, Engineer, Directorate of Agriculture, Prefectural Administration of Trikala. Member of the Committee for the certification of the LEADER II projects.
4. Christos Batsios, President, Mountaineering and Skiing Association of Trikala.
5. Christos Hondros, President of the Local Quality Pack for Tourism in the LEADER II area and beneficiary.

The two evaluators were Prof. S. Efstratoglou and Ms S. Mavridou.

For the preparation of the workshop, the geographical evaluator provided the Director of the LAG with all the necessary material and discussed with him extendedly in order to clarify the purpose and the procedures of the Focus Group session. The Director of the LAG prepared a list of potential participants that were considered to fit the requirements of the task, submitted it to the evaluator and together they finalised the composition of the focus group. It was decided to hold a one-day workshop on a Saturday as it would allow for more time to be exclusively committed to the workshop and the date for that was set.(17th of May). The persons selected were informed of the focus group session and invited. All of them accepted the invitation.

2.1.2 Description of partnership and activities

The Local Partnership was established in 1992, with a legal status of SA company. It is a broad partnership consisting of 270 partners, of which 23 local municipalities, the Union of the Local Municipalities, 3 agricultural co-operatives. Two professional bodies (the regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the regional local Labour Union), local NGO's and the rest of private enterprises, consultants and individuals. The majority of the shareholdings (82%) is owned by the local authorities, 6% by the co-operatives, 2% by professional unions and the rest by private enterprises and individuals.

Along with the implementation of the Leader II , the LAG carried out also other actions like a YoythSTAR program, A Leonardo Davinci program, and other programmes under the Operational Regional Program of the Region Thessaly (programmes on environment, rural population networks, establishment of the Pindos network etc). These expanded its operation and its economic viability. The Leader II program implemented a budget of 1.1 mil. Euro and its over-spending was 63% of its initial budget. Under Measure B, the allocation of funds was 35% on rural tourism, 25% on agricultural products, 17% on SME, 9% on the environment and 10% on technical support.

The LAG has been selected under Leader +, and has undertaken a new role in the supporting mechanism of the Operational Programme on Agricultural and Rural Development (3rd CSF), priority axis "Integrated Development of Mountainous Areas" (mainstreaming elements of Leader).

2.1.3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area

Before referring to the hypotheses developed during the focus group, it is considered useful to present the background to Leader II, which was a key issue of the Focus Group discussions .

KENAKAP entered LEADER II, based on its experience on LEADER I. **The added value of LEADER I in the area has been a great asset for Leader II.** Leader I has been considered in general to have a successful implementation in the area. Key factors behind it, have been the very effective partnership of local actors (strong local leaders and initiators were the mayors of the two rural towns, of Kalabaka and of Pyli), a homogeneous designated area that allowed a thematic integrated approach (based on tourism and culture) and a competent LAG that mobilised local population. The mix of those innovative for the area operational principles were reinforced by the decentralised management of the LEADER and the very flexible status of the LAG for decision-making (SA company). All these created a local development agency, highly needed in the area. Also, the hesitation of the local population to respond and trust an innovative programme such as Leader I (up to then only top-down delivery of policies and

programmes existed), along with the lack of experience of the LAG in bottom-up approach, were replaced by the end of Leader I, by the social acceptance of the LAG and its trust. **The LEADER II planning and implementation was based on this “social capital”.**

The hypotheses formulated were:

1. *A strong local partnership, geographically balanced/representative and with strong social consensus is a key factor to successful implementation of Leader program. However, a strong local partnership requires as well a competent LAG to ensure the implementation of the operational principles of the Leader method.*

The **“local partnership”** continued to have a broad *social acceptance*. This was the main factor that contributed to the effective implementation of the Leader program, Although local elections resulted in changes in the administrative board, this did not affect the course of the LAG. Political interventions were faced through consultations without conflicts, as attitudes and mentalities on consensus (behavioural changes) were established through Leader I and II.

2. *The continuity and functionality of the designated area is a necessary condition for strategic planning (multi-sectoral approach) and for the effective implementation of their business plan. This continuity and functional links between rural areas and small rural towns could be a factor that can stimulate multiplier effects and reverse depopulation trends in remote rural areas.*

The **territorial approach** continued to be a leading principle also under LEADER II. The area was decided by by the LAG in Leader I and Leader II., and it was expanded under Leader II ,covering also the Northern part of the prefecture (the Farkadona area) with no experience in the Leader programme. This had positive effects as it increased the critical mass of the area (population increased from 55000 to 80000 inhabitants), it broadened the partnership and strengthen the LAGS presence in the area., through consensus processes .

However, integration of a sub-area with no experience in Leader, had an effect in the bottom-up approach (mobilisation and animation) as there were differences in responses and mobilization of local population. “In the old Leader I area, local population was coming to us with project ideas, while in the new area we were looking for beneficiaries and trying to mobilize them”. However, what proved to be the determining factors that slowly closed gaps between the two geographical parts was the strong and geographically balanced **local partnership and the competent and experienced LAG.**

A contextual constrain to the **“bottom-up”** approach has been also the weak endogenous potential of this mountainous remote with low population density area. However, the continuity and functionality of the designated area allowed the strengthening of its socio-economic fabric

through the return of younger beneficiaries and investors that were living in the small rural towns of the area (Kalambaka, Pyli, Farkadona).

3. *Innovative approach requires not only innovative ideas/projects but mainly mentality by local actors groups to promote, operate and maintain them.*

The concept **of innovation** has been rather weak under Leader II. “Leader I actions were more innovative compared to Leader II” was said. Main reason behind it was that innovative projects under Leader I faced problems as local actors groups were not very supportive in their promotion or operation. Local actor groups tend to promote projects with more tangible and direct effects in the local context. As the Manager of KENAKAP said with regards *innovation* “you cannot move faster than what local community allows you. Innovation is perceived but difficult to put in operation”.

4. *Leader method has contributed significantly in changes in mentalities attitudes and proved that there is another way to rural development than the top-down approach know before Leader’s initiation.*

Local population, mainly of the geographical part where Leader I was implemented, responded positively and dynamically, as a learning process was already established there. “Proposals and ideas for new projects and investments, submitted by the local population during the mobilisation stage amounted to 13 bil. Drs, compared to our 3,6 bil. Drs budget, almost 4 times over our budget. Our exhaustive visits in every corner and every coffee-shop in the Leader I area, paid-off under Leader II. Moreover, Leader II allowed us to create added value on projects of Leader I and deepened **our integrated and multi-sectoral approach**. This learning mentality slowly was also embedded in Falkadora area , where local representatives joined forces with us and they play akey role in our partnership. The local partnership successfully resisted political pressures and interventions as they had proved that Leader is “another way of doing things” were differences in responses and mobilization of local population too. As it was stated characteristically “in the old Leader area local population was coming to us with project ideas, while in the new area we were looking for beneficiaries and trying to mobilize them”.

5. *The LAG proved to be a necessary and innovative instrument that contributes to sustainable rural development, in a centralized administrative context with long tradition in top-down policy delivery.*

2.1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

The main conclusions drawn from the Focus group workshop could be summarized as follows:

KENAKAP, as it was stated before, entered Leader II, with a successful experience under Leader I. Key factors to this success, were the establishment of a local partnership and a competent LAG, by strong local leaders, that achieved broad social consensus. The perception of the Leader program by the local partnership as an innovative approach (bottom-up) to rural development “opened new horizons” which were broaden even more under Leader II. As the local partnership effectively resisted political pressures and interventions, due mainly to its broad social consensus, almost all operational principles of the Leader method were implemented in the area. Difficulties and constrains were faced with regards “innovation”, as local actors do not easily perceive its effects and do not support its promotion.

Most important conclusion reached finally by the Focus Group relates to the changes that the Leader method have brought in attitudes and mentalities of the local population and as well as to processes in sustainable rural development.

Key recommendations made by the Focus group were:

1. More decentralization in management and funding, less bureaucratic procedures and more effective controls. These will allow release of human resources to more effective implementation of the other Leader principles.
2. In Leader I and Leader II, the Leader area was decided by the LAG on the basis of its continuity, functionality and homogeneity. However, under Leader +, this is not possible anymore, as selection of the Leader area is based on institutional decisions (only mountainous communes, leaving out small rural towns such as Kalabaka and Pyli).
3. Need for mainstreaming decentralization and bottom-up approach in other Structural Funds Difficulties and constrains were faced in the “innovation” principle as local actors do not easily perceive its effects its promotion.

2.2 Focus Group “ACHAIA” SA (EL-DE03)

2.2.1 Introduction

The second Focus Group selected for Greece, was ACHAIA S. A., Development Agency of Local Government (EL-DE03) which was established in 1998 specifically for LEADER II.

The Focus Group consisted of six members plus the two evaluators. More specifically the participants on behalf of the LAG were:

Ms Argyro Tsibri, Director of the LAG

Mr Dimitrios Varvitsiotis, member of the LAG's board (he was the president of the board during the implementation of LEADER II) and agriculturist of the Union of Agricultural Co-operatives

Mr Haris Kakanas, Architect-Engineer, LAG Officer

Mr Panagiotis Boutopoulos, Agriculturist, LAG Officer

Mr Pavlos Theologos, Architect, beneficiary of LEADER II programme, member of the local government Council

Mr Giannis Theologos, Civil Engineer, beneficiary of LEADER II programme, member of the local government Council

In order to arrange the meeting and the focus group session, the geographical evaluator contacted the Director of the LAG, described the task and explained the process with the aid of the users' guide (F30). The Director of the LAG suggested a number of participants that were considered to fit the requirements of the task and together with the geographical evaluator they decided on the final composition of the focus group. It was decided to hold a one day workshop and the date for that was set. After that, the people selected were contacted and informed of the focus group session and invited. All of them accepted willingly the invitation.

2.2.2 Description of partnership and activities

The partnership consists of 11 partners which represent local authorities (8) and private enterprises (3). The LAG's status is an S.A established in 1998 specifically for LEADER II. It has also been selected to implement a local programme under LEADER+. The LAG has been mainly involved in the LEADER programme and has also undertaken some projects of the Ministry for Development with regards e-trade.

The LAG, despite the delays in its establishment, realised fully its initial budget (realistic business plan), almost without any diversions. Of it 61% went to priority rural tourism, 8.7% to agricultural products, 7% to environment and 4% to SME.

2.2.3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the LEADER II implementation in the area

1. *The political intervention exercised (context variable), acted as an inhibiting factor on the local partnership cohesion (local partnership) and on the homogeneity of the intervention area (territorial approach).*

As the previous discussion indicated, the political intervention brought a certain imbalance and introduced competitive attitudes in the local partnership. Moreover it affected seriously the homogeneity of the area and this acted as a determining factor in the implementation of the local programme. Had the area been more homogeneous, the bottom up approach and the multi sectoral integration would have been more effectively implemented.

2. *More decentralisation and less bureaucratic procedures under LEADER II would have released human resources at the LAG level, to be devoted to animation, mobilisation and more effective bottom up approach.*

Demanding and bureaucratic administration procedures absorbed significant amounts of time and human resources on the LAG's part, which could have been used for animation and mobilisation purposes in order to reinforce the bottom up approach. Although no other particular problems were encountered regarding the decentralised management, there was still the requirement for more simplified procedures.

3. *Where LEADER II appeared for the first time (in geographical areas where no LEADER I or similar programme had been previously implemented), it encountered hesitation by the local population, conservative attitudes towards investment initiatives and this affected the bottom up approach and the multi-sectoral integration.*

As practice indicated, in these cases there is need for a strong animation and mobilisation mechanism in order to overcome this obstacle. Moreover, additional time is required to work on people's attitudes and conservative mentalities and encourage entrepreneurship in a variety of sectors, meeting the local needs and exploiting local resources.

4. *Despite the obstacles encountered, LEADER II as an innovative initiative in the area mostly affected the population's mentality and attitudes towards local development providing new ways of thinking, of working together and exploiting the endogenous potential.*
5. *The LEADER II operational principles (the seven specificities) are highly inter-related and have cumulative positive, if applied properly, or negative, otherwise, effects.*

The statements had a positive response from the group and were approved.

2.2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

The main conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the focus group workshop, could be summarised as follows:

1. Exogenous interventions, be it political or otherwise that have a serious effect on the operational principles (in this case, on the local partnership and the territorial approach), have also a serious effect on the overall results of the programme due to their inter-related nature.
2. The intervention area homogeneity in geographical terms and as regards its population and structure, is a very significant factor for the successful implementation of the local programme. It allows for an integrated strategy to be implemented with particular emphasis on multi sectoral integration and also for the overall effects of the intervention to become more visible and tangible to the local population.
3. As regards the local partnership, its effectiveness improves significantly with the broad participation of the local population through their representatives. However for this broad partnership to work uninhibited, it would be wise to build a strong participation framework first and broaden the partnership gradually.
4. Another issue concerning the LAG's effectiveness relates to its establishment locally, i.e. within the boundaries of the intervention area and not in the area's urban centre. This is considered very important because the LAG officers are actively involved in the local context and are aware of any situations that might occur (conflicts, political or other alliances etc.). The establishment of the LAG locally is perceived crucial also by the local population since they learn to consider the LAG part of their community.
5. The bottom up approach would benefit considerably from the establishment of a strong animation and mobilisation mechanism. The diffusion of information regarding the Community Initiative and its particular characteristics, its specificities and its requirements, would be of great usefulness not only to the local population and potential investors/ beneficiaries but also to a broader network of the local population such as consultants and other actors involved in the administrative procedures concerning the programme (i.e drafting and submission of proposals, licences issuing etc).
6. For a more effective decentralised management, it is necessary for bureaucratic procedures to be reduced which will result to reallocation of the LAG's staff to effective bottom up approach.

Overall it could be said for the Focus Group workshop, that it had been a useful exercise for the geographical evaluators and for the local actors as well. It helped clarify a number of issues on the implementation of the LEADER II programme and its operational principles and provided a clear picture of the way that local development is perceived locally. Moreover, local actors considered it an opportunity to express their concerns and hopes regarding rural development programmes and more specifically LEADER+, which is about to begin being implemented in the area. They expressed an interest in the overall results of the evaluation and asked for feed back with any material that could be useful to them in the implementation of LEADER+.

3. Report on national and regional programme evaluations

3.1 Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level

In the case of Greece there was one Operational Programme for LEADER II covering the entire country (Objective I area). During its implementation, an on-going evaluation was carried out (there were six reports in July 1997, February 1998, September 1998, June 1999, March 2000 and October 2000) and at the end there was also the ex-post evaluation of the programme, which was completed in June 2001.

(a) The on-going evaluation

For the on-going evaluation purposes, an evaluation basis was created which contained all the projects included in the business plans of the LAGs/ CBs, analysed with specific quantified objectives and indicators. In addition to that, an information system was also developed which supported the evaluation basis and was able to provide the necessary data in order to monitor the implementation of the local programmes. More specifically the evaluation basis, through the information system, would link the economic data for each activity with the physical output produced and was able to provide evaluations for 4 sets of indicators:

- a. Capacity indicators that were used to estimate the extent of the interventions in each economic sector
- b. Operationalisation indicators, that assessed the effectiveness of each activity in relation to specific operational parameters
- c. Impact indicators, which forecasted and estimated the impact of the interventions on sectors such as employment, entrepreneurship, tourist activities etc.
- d. Performance indicators which provided the relationship between unit and standard cost.

Certain difficulties encountered in the collection of data for the evaluation basis were related to the fact that the LEADER areas did not coincide with administrative boundaries and no official statistics and data existed on employment, unemployment, population flows, products, cultivated areas etc. since such statistics are usually available at prefecture level (administrative level).

(b) The ex-post evaluation

The ex-post evaluation was based on the methodology proposed in the DG AGR1 working documents "Guidelines for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II" (letter no 30108/03.08.99 addressed to all MS). The report comprised of one volume (about 80 pages) and several

Annexes (about 200 pages) and assessed the five specific evaluation requirements of LEADER II, namely the territorial dimension, the bottom up approach, the innovative character, transnational cooperation and networking and financing.

A difficulty pertaining to the evaluation of LEADER II involved the provision of information to the evaluator on behalf of the LAGs and the accuracy of the data provided. On several occasions the Ministry of Agriculture had to issue formal notifications to the LAGs in order to facilitate the evaluator's work. It should be noted that approximately 10% of the LAGs/ CBs did not respond to completing the questionnaire for the ex-post evaluation.

As far as the dissemination of the evaluations is concerned, no significant activities of this type took place. The ex-post evaluation report which was transmitted to the Commission (reception date: 16/11/01) was approved by the national administration (the Ministry of Agriculture) on July 2001 and a quality assessment was carried out by the DG AGRI operational unit (E.2). At national level the evaluation reports were not made available through internet and no relevant publications were made available for the public either.

3.2 Overall assessment

The reports of the on-going and the ex-post evaluation provided a useful tool to the geographical evaluator for the better comprehension of the way the Community Initiative was implemented in the country and how its operational principles were actually applied. Since the ex-post evaluation report included several annexes on the performance of each of the LAGs/ CBs, this was a valuable tool for the completion of the Grids1000, the Q202 questionnaires and also provided helpful information for the preparation of the two Focus Groups (factual questions).

Both evaluations have been highly relevant as they followed "Guidelines for the evaluation of LEADER II" and enlightened constraints and effects of the LEADER method. Their usefulness seems to be directed mainly and exploited only by the IO (Ministry of Agriculture). This is derived from the fact that recommendations of the evaluator were integrated into LEADER+ (e.g. the required higher presence of the private sector in the LAGs, more decentralized management for LAGs that are now responsible for the certification of the projects' completion).

However evaluation reports were not publicized and extremely useful information was not diffused to LAGs, the research community or rural development practitioners. For future evaluations (LEADER+ or Operational Programmes) we recommend that publicity becomes obligatory by the IO through the Internet or other means (reports, CDs etc.). Also other useful tools developed as the information base should be accessible at request by researchers, evaluators etc.

4. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

4.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II Initiative

The implementation of the LEADER II Community Initiative had an overall positive effect and impact on rural areas of Greece and, as its predecessor LEADER I, brought about significant progress in rural development processes and changes in mentalities and attitudes, especially in declining or depopulated areas. Its **added value** for those LAGs that were established under Leader II, was the innovation of the establishment of the local partnership and the decentralized, for the first time in their area, management and funding of a programme on a area-base. For those LAGs that were also under Leader II, the value added of Leader II was the empowerment and embeddedness of the LAG in the area and the deepening of the bottom-up and multi-sectoral principles. More specifically:

Area based approach: the selection of the area was LAG's responsibility and part of the bottom-up process. The size of the area proved in most cases of high relevance. In some areas however, due to interventions, designated areas were not homogeneous at the expense of multi-sectoral approach.

Bottom-up approach: in areas where LEADER I was not implemented, the bottom-up principle was an innovative approach to local development. The mobilization of the local population was significant, particularly in areas that LEADER I had been previously implemented. Bottom up approach could be promoted significantly if bureaucratic procedures of the programme implementation were eliminated and released human effort be directed to animation and mobilization.

The Local Group: the local partnership operational principle has been an innovative principle to rural development, in the areas that Leader was implemented for the first time. The local group competencies and its social recognition proved to be key factors for success. The LAG should be socially and geographically balanced, and established through local consultations, without interventions.

Innovation: the concept of innovation has been rather vague in LEADER II and innovative actions were considered those not implemented before at local level. Moreover, innovative ideas required more animation to be turned into effective business plans. Also innovative actions require significant support by local actors to be promoted and operated.

Multi-sectoral approach: very often, the heterogeneity of the designated area, restricted multi-sectoral integration. In areas where Leader I was implemented before, the LAGs

succeeded to deepen their multisectoral approach, by adding value to Leader I actions. However, many LAGs did not perceive the Leader method and addressed the programme as an opportunity for additional funding in their area. In these cases strategic and multi-sectoral planning was hardly implemented and replaced by intervention mechanisms. As a result of it, only half of the Leader II LAGs were selected for Leader +.

Networking: networking under LEADER II acted as a “locomotive” for the new LAGs under LEADER II. As experiences and good practices of older LAGs were transferred to new LAGs. As a new LAG manager said: “the informal network was for me a school and the best councillor” The informal LEADER Network should obtain a formal status.

Decentralised management and funding: this operational principle proved of high importance for the delivery of bottom-up initiatives, in a context with tradition in highly centralized administrations, as Greece. Despite its shortcomings with regards bureaucratic procedures, it established new mechanisms and approaches to local decision making.

In conclusion, despite difficulties and shortcomings, Leader II implementation by 56 LAGs and CBs, had a significant impact on rural areas, through the establishment of the local partnerships, the decentralized management and funding, its bottom-up approach and the area based approach. One of the most important effects of the Leader in Greek rural areas was the changes resulted in mentalities, attitudes and the creation of beliefs that “there is another way to rural development and another way of doing things”. The role of the IO in the implementation of Leader II was significant and positive, as it perceived its operational principles and tried to develop an institutional framework that would facilitate their implementation. The LAGs proved to be a necessary instrument for rural development in a context that only top-down policy delivery was in effect before Leader. As this message has been perceived by regional/central administrations, mainstreaming of some of the Leader elements have been introduced in the Operational Programme on Rural Development (3rd CSF), priority axis “Integrated Development of Mountainous and Disadvantaged Areas”.

Also new roles were undertaken by dynamic LAGs in the supportive mechanisms of the implementation of the above programme.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

The evaluation process developed satisfactorily as all involved parts, the IO, the LAGs, the Informal Network leaders, the ex-post evaluators responded positively and contributed to this evaluation. They provided us with useful material (reports, data, reported in the beginning of this report and willingly participated in interviews

Difficulties were faced in the completion of Q202 in some cases, where the LAG sampled was not selected under Leader +, or there was a change in managers or responsible officials. In this case an effort was made to locate old managers that willingly cooperated in the completion of Q202. This process however required extra time and effort. Some problems also appeared with the meaning of questions that some LAGs brought to the evaluator. The questionnaires were characterized by all Lags as “too long and too demanding in time”.

In general the completion of all Grids, questionnaires, interviews and their processing in excel Grids including their translation proved to be demanding in time and required much more labour resources than those allocated to the geographical evaluator.

Methodological tools (GRIDS, Q202, Q34, Focus Groups), provided significant information both quantitative and qualitative to geographical evaluator and the core team. However, as the analysis of some of these tools, (Grids and of the Q202) was done only by the core team, the geographical evaluation team that gathered this information, did not benefit from this quantitative and qualitative database formed, (something that was done under Leader I ex-post evaluation). Moreover, it would have been extremely constructive for the geographical evaluator to integrate and synthesize in his evaluation, all evidence resulting from the methodological tools applied.

Main knowledge for the geographical evaluator resulted from two tools: the Q34 and the Focus Group, which proved both very useful as they both enlightened and elaborated key issues of the implementation at national/regional and local level.

In general the methodology applied was a very good methodology. Coordination and support to the geographical evaluators was excellent.

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

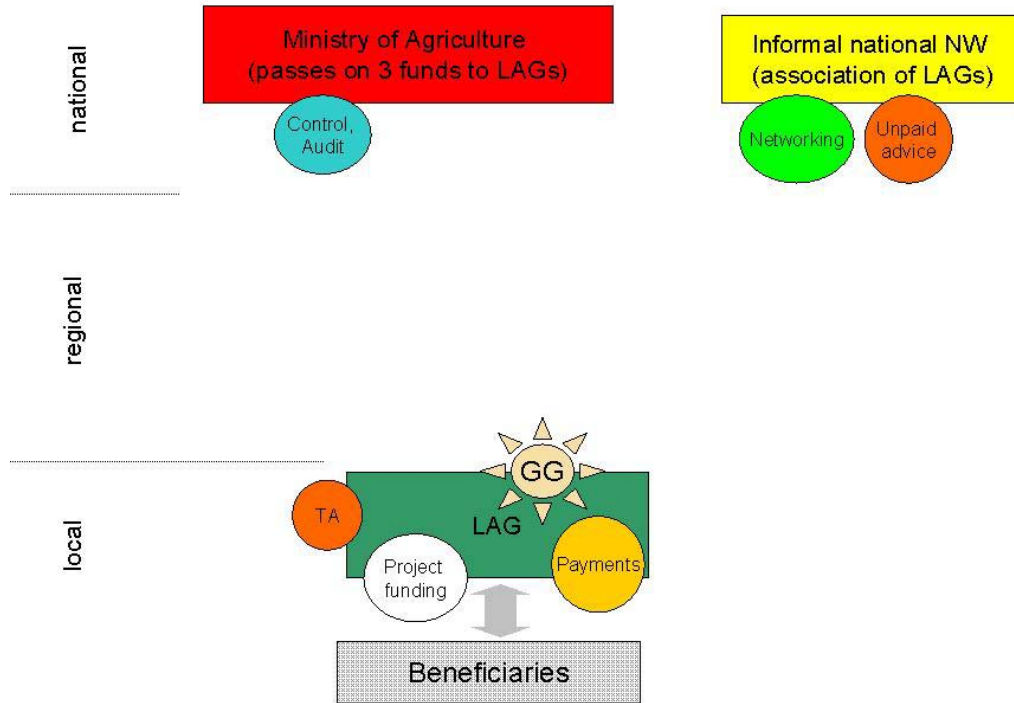
Operational Programme: 95EL06001

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	The delimitation of the intervention areas in Greece were developed within the administrative units (prefectures) boundaries and followed in most cases the local administrative boundaries' reasoning instead of selecting areas with common characteristics for the development of a coherent and effective development plan.	By delimiting the intervention area within administrative boundaries (excluding each time the major urban centre), the implementation of the programme was facilitated however this did not allow for the development of dynamics of collaboration among areas with common characteristics and potential for development.	The LAGs seem to have realised the need to support the most unfavourable zones in the intervention areas. A considerable number of LAGs would be willing to reconsider the delimitation of the intervention areas without taking into consideration administrative boundaries but functional territorial limits, in view of the next programming period (2000-2006).
Bottom-up approach	The bottom up approach concept was mainly implemented through calls to the local population for ideas and suggestions that could become investment proposals within the local programme.	The mobilisation of the local population was very strong and the response was enormous. However neither the initiatives nor the population were organised under viable and coherent schemes (groups of professionals or initiatives etc.). There appeared to be some confusion between the bottom up approach and publicity activities for the local programme. It has to be noted though, that in some cases there came forward quite interesting and effective practices concerning the participation of local actors in the consultation and the decision making process.	The implementation of the LEADER II initiative brought about the ability of certain LAGs to design development strategies using the bottom up approach and this ability should be transferred into the mainstream programmes.
The local group	LEADER II was implemented through local partnerships organised as SA companies and which on many occasions overcame traditional schemes and methods of implementing development programmes at local level. The managing core of the LAGs consisted of specialised personnel with high level education who acquired valuable experience.	The implementation of LEADER II through LAGs helped create a support mechanism in rural areas for promoting entrepreneurship and the encouragement of small investors. However in some cases the LAGs implemented an incoherent plan and financed a series of investments without any overall objective. Moreover there was the case of some LAGs' boards where there participated a number of municipalities' and other local actors' representatives with no involvement in the local programmes.	There should be more strict criteria in the LAGs' selection process based on their performance in LEADER II. Moreover, better preparation of the LAGs in the role of local animator that is highly qualified staff, is required. The local population acknowledge the LAGs as development actors in the local context and feel that their role should be further reinforced in other sectors such as SMEs, studies and organisation services, financial advisory services etc.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Innovation	The characterisation of actions as innovative was based on the criteria described in the typology produced by the European Observatory. On very few cases did the LAGs seek for expert advice in order to design and implement an innovative activity.	The implementation of innovative actions was sometimes impeded by problems of eligibility of expenditure, the lack of specialised expert advice at local level or time consuming procedures (i.e. licence issuing etc).	As the evaluation indicated there were inadequate support mechanisms for precarious initiatives. LEADER II left a void in the mechanisms necessary for the transfer of know-how and expertise in rural areas and the application of pilot activities for the establishment of modern financing tools.
Multisectoral integration	In general, most LAGs tried to include in the local programmes investments representing all the economic sectors. However, in very few cases was there a systematic effort to integrate the sectors..	In most cases the attempt to achieve multisectoral integration went as far as to combine agrotourism activities with local production and small scale and crafts industry. As the evaluation of the OP indicated, there was no development of strong local productive systems in terms of inputs-outputs or common product and services identity. In very few cases did "territorial sectors" emerge as a result of the programme's implementation.	Multisectoral integration could benefit significantly from the involvement of applied research and technology institutes. The establishment of a communication channel would contribute to successful planning for the next programming period
Networking	LEADER II acted as a catalyst for the development of a large number of collaborations, formal or informal, among the LAGs and CBs. Practically all the LAGs/ CBs participate in the informal LEADER Network. Moreover a number of collaboration was developed in regional level.	Networking put an end to the isolation of the LEADER areas and introduced them to procedures and networks for the exchange of ideas and experiences that were useful also for tackling difficulties on the implementation of the programme. Networking however seems not to have worked in the case of groups of beneficiaries with similar characteristics.	A more intense effort on behalf of the LAGs is required for the promotion of networking among groups of beneficiaries and local actors in the next programming period.
Trans-national cooperation	Trans national cooperation was not at all implemented by more than half of the LAGs/ CBs and of those projects that were actually implemented, very few were in the form of a common business plan. A very small number of trans national cooperation plans was actually based on a business plan oriented towards the development of market channels for ideas, products or services.	The majority of trans national cooperation plans consisted of small-scale investments with no specific objective to be achieved through them.	.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Decentralised management and financing	<p>The LAGs/ CBs had the responsibility for the management of substantial amounts of funds and their distribution to the final beneficiaries based on criteria and priorities set by their administration.</p> <p>The financing method for LEADER II investment plans followed the traditional systems and methods of the banking system which acted as a discouraging factor on several occasions.</p>	<p>Decentralised management and funding that LAGs/ CBs successfully implemented, provided them with significant independence and autonomy which was however inhibited by a particularly heavy system of bureaucracy and controls regarding the projects implemented. This system was also responsible for delays and misunderstandings regarding the responsibilities of the control officers.</p> <p>The lack of the appropriate institutional framework and modern financing tools and techniques was an inhibiting factor to new and innovative entrepreneurship. As the evaluation indicated, the beneficiaries under LEADER II, were entrepreneurs with sufficient capital so as to avoid lending or other means of financing.</p>	<p>Transfer of the decentralised management and financing into mainstream programmes in the next programming period and simplification of the administrative procedures.</p> <p>There is need to introduce modern financing tools that would encourage new entrepreneurs.</p>
Other important issues			

Model of implementation



II.9 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT IRELAND

Contents

1.	Overview of all studies and evaluations	329
2.	Overall assessment	333
3.	Summary of conclusions and recommendations	334
4.	Perspective on LEADER II and the evaluation process	336
4.1	Synthesis of main outcomes	336
4.2	Final comments	337
FOCUS GROUP REPORT I		339
1.	Introduction	339
2.	Description of Partnership and Activity	339
3.	Focus on specific features	340
4.	Key points in concluding session	342
FOCUS GROUP REPORT II		344
1.	Introduction	344
2.	Description of Partnership and Activity	345
3.	Focus on specific features	345
4.	Key points from concluding session	348

1. Overview of all studies and evaluations

Mid-Term Review Report February 1997

The Terms of Reference for the ongoing Evaluation, including a report for the purpose of the Mid-Term Review of the Programme in the initial period of the assignment, consisted of analysis and preparation of regular reports on:

- a) The performance of the Groups in implementing their Business Plans and in meeting the general objectives of LEADER II
- b) a qualitative and quantitative assessment of progress of the Programme and
- c) the structural, institutional, economic or other constraints identified with the implementation of LEADER II.

This Report placed LEADER II in context, its establishment, features of Groups, progress and implementation, performance indicators, observations and recommendations. Observations related to financial plans, operating rules, monitoring system co-ordination, performance indicators and other issues such as innovation and training. Recommendations related to training, animation, networking innovation, co-ordination, monitoring and performance indicators. Priority issues for consideration were stressed relating to performance, co-ordination, animation and capacity building, training and the need to develop a comprehensive set of performance indicators.

Progress Report August 1997

The report consisted of:

- A progress update especially with reference to expenditure patterns and general issues in the performance of the Groups,
- A review of the manner in which the ACB(Animation and Capacity Building) sub-measure was being implemented and drawing attention to notable problems,
- A report on how the LEADER Groups were operating their Training and Recruitment Measure and the nature of the actions undertaken,
- An investigation of how innovation was perceived by Groups and how it was operationalised in practice.
- There was a tendency among Groups to concentrate ACB activity in the area of support, advice and guidance, to both individual promoters and community Groups;
- The main changes arising from the receipt of training noted for staff were in the area of computers and administration; for promoters it was in functional areas of business such

as finance, marketing etc. and for Board members it was in the area of strategic planning.

- The LEADER Programme provided an opportunity to develop models that will encourage innovative approaches to rural development. The research results presented confirm that the approach to the implementation of the Programme in Ireland does facilitate the achievement of the innovation objective. The Business Plans prepared by the Groups and the structures which they have put in place have contributed to the promotion of a culture of innovation, albeit frequently on a very small scale. The data collected on individual projects suggests that there was a high level of innovative activity and that it is widely dispersed. The data also confirm the existence of significant differences between Groups in their capacity to foster and sustain innovation processes. More effort is required to accelerate the learning process in some areas.

Progress Report April 1998

The Report consisted of:

- Monitoring and analysis of financial draw down by Group and Measure,
- On-going review of projects and performance by Groups
- A review of the state of complementarity/co-ordination between LEADER and other relevant policies,
- A review of the role of the national networking service,
- A brief examination of progress in operating the Consolidated Reporting guidelines.

Key issues for consideration including the differential pattern of performance across the country and the funds for administration.

Progress Report July 1998

The Report consisted of:

- Monitoring and analysis of financial draw down by Group and Measure,
- An assessment of the value-added dimension of the LEADER Programme,
- A preliminary examination of the quantitative impact of the Programme derived from the Quantitative Reports,
- A preliminary examination of the qualitative impact as derived from the Qualitative Reports,

The Report put particular emphasis on impacts by Measure and the quality of Quantitative and Qualitative Reports.

Progress Report April 1999

The Report consisted of:

- Monitoring and analysis of financial draw down by Group and Measure,
- An examination of the quantitative impact of the Programme derived from the Quantitative Reports,
- An examination of the qualitative impact as derived from the Qualitative Reports,
- A report on a pilot study on the spatial distribution of LEADER projects.

The report put special emphasis on LEADER impacts and the spatial distribution of projects. The exercise showed that urban areas did not have a high density of projects relative to their greater population.

Progress Report September 1999

The report consisted of:

- Monitoring and analysis of the financial draw down by Group and Measure,
- An examination of the qualitative and quantitative impacts of the Programme derived from the Qualitative and Quantitative Reports,
- An examination of the progress of the Collective Bodies to date.

The Evaluator visited all 34 Local Action Groups over the period 17 May to 7 July to, inter alia, see at first hand the operations of Groups with respect to the allocation of funds and financial progress, the issues which were affecting progress, and the extent of their participation in other programmes.

Final Report January 2000

The report consisted of:

- Monitoring and analysis of the financial draw down by Group and Measure,
- A review of the performance of the six Groups selected for the survey of promoters,
- A report on the experiences of the promoters with LEADER,
- A review of the projects of the Collective Bodies to date.

The Report placed particular emphasis on a survey of promoters/beneficiaries; almost 86% had a very positive attitude to LEADER II.

Ex post Evaluation November 2000

Terms of Reference (Abridged)

The overall objective for the LEADER II Ex post Evaluation was to *“undertake an evaluation of each of the measures under the LEADER II Programme at national level from the date of commencement of the programme in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency in contributing to the development of rural areas and, in the light of the evaluation, to make recommendations in relation to the possible continuation of elements of the programme in order to ensure the maximum contribution to the economic and social development of rural areas in the period 2000 – 2006.”*

More specifically, the Evaluator was required to analyse, report on and evaluate:

the **initial situation**;

the **processes** involved in the programme including the institutional framework within which the programme operated;

the **outcome and impact** of the programme with specific reference to the performance indicators, and

(a) **good practice** or the valuable experience and lessons of the programme.

The Evaluation was required to establish whether the LEADER approach made the developments undertaken more effective than other development methods and policies. The evaluation must therefore be carried out by reference to the specific characteristics of LEADER II.

In summary, no particular problems were encountered in the course of undertaking the respective elements of the Evaluation although at times the response from Groups was uneven. The various reports were presented to the Intermediary Department and discussed at the Monitoring Committees at which a Member of the Commission would be present.

2. Overall assessment

Evaluation is an in-depth analysis of a programme or intervention. It may utilise information from the monitoring system. Monitoring information may also serve to highlight areas of underperformance or best practice. While the two processes are linked, it is important that the evaluation should provide an analytical value-added over and above what could be derived from monitoring data.

Stages of evaluation

Ex-ante evaluation takes place while the development plan is being developed and finalised. It is necessary to assess the likely outcome of the intervention, including the expected cost-effectiveness, the adequacy of management, implementation structures and compliance.

Intermediate evaluation or on-going assessment takes place during the implementation of the intervention, and not only allows early confirmation of the success of the operation but also provides feedback which should inform adjustments to the programme while it continues. It is closely linked to monitoring through a critical analysis of the data collected. The process proceeds through the development of indicators, project selection criteria, mid-term evaluation including a preliminary examination of effectiveness and efficiency, and moving towards impact and ex-post assessment.

Ex-post evaluation should take place after the effects of the intervention have had sufficient time to work through, and so allow a thorough analysis of the positive and negative outcomes. The emphasis is on impact and the degree of attainment of the objectives.

The evaluations which were carried out in Ireland for LEADER II largely followed the stages outlined above but were strongly influenced by the national character of the programme and the way in which it was administered by the Intermediary Department. Very detailed guidelines and operating rules were established at the outset and the LAGs were obliged to implement and adhere to them. In some respects then this narrowed the difference in performance between LAGs but the evaluation process itself is of course dictated by the Terms of Reference given for the evaluation. In fact, while the ex-post evaluation in Ireland had to be carried out by reference to the specific characteristics of LEADER, the Groups (LAGs) were not always enthusiastic about this approach because they considered these aspects as given. These requirements were laid down at the outset and LAGs would not be selected if they did not have these specific features. Consequently LAGs were at least equally concerned with standard of living and quality of life impacts and about the methodology of community/local development. While the Terms of Reference were adhered to, another aspect which might receive more attention also although it might be difficult, is not just to focus on LAG structures but on the quality of structures e.g. the LAG Board and staff.

The evaluations were generally well received and the approaches adopted should be largely followed for further programmes. It would be important that a common approach is applied to evaluations across all structural funds and rural development programmes so that impacts can be examined on a comparable basis. A few additional points in this regard are made at the end of this report.

3. Summary of conclusions and recommendations

The general conclusion is that under LEADER II in Ireland, the LAGs were successful in relation to achieving their intended impacts under the various headings. Much of this success was visible and apparent at the close of the Programme, and continuing impacts will materialise in the coming years. Although not the single primary objective, the initiative is estimated to have supported the creation of 4,849 FTE jobs and sustained a further 3,508 FTE jobs. To varying degrees, all Measures contributed to these results, and further employment impacts can reasonably be expected with the ongoing development of existing and finalisation of new projects supported. Other quantifiable impacts are evident in terms of numbers of enterprises/individuals and groups supported, established or improved, new and innovative products and services developed and new markets established.

Of equal if not more importance have been less easily quantifiable impacts. LEADER II, particularly but not only through animation and capacity building activity, has achieved much in relation to rural identity, self-confidence, vibrancy and development awareness. Practically all stakeholders and consultees concur with these impressions, and their importance ranked higher and higher as the Programme has developed.

Recognition has widened under LEADER II that both the results and the challenges of contemporary rural development in Ireland must be thought of in terms of individual and community development “capacity”. The objectives of, scope for and ultimate benefits of development activity must be shared, understood and to a degree “internalised” by those for whom development is intended to support. In the absence of such “capacity”, quite amenable development opportunities may not be taken, and policy supports may be less effective. Very few project promoters have reported that the supports began and ended with a financial support. Pre- and post-project ongoing work has been widespread and positively viewed by its recipients. Groups felt that levels of engagement have increased as the Programme has progressed, generic and specific skills have been developed among target Groups, and local development “energy” was felt to be continually increasing.

Among the entire population outside Dublin, rural areas are generally found to have noticeably improved over the last five years, and about a third of that population have heard of the LEADER initiative. So while animation and capacity building may have become increasingly

focused on target Groups or individual project promoters, a significant degree of general wider public awareness of the programme has been achieved. The animation and capacity building process, which effectively has been part of all LEADER II activity, is increasingly being seen as pre-requisite to, as well as the source of, sustainable and beneficial development projects and initiatives. A majority of LAG managers felt that these impacts are the best indicators of achievement, and practically all of them ranked the ACB Measure as the most important under LEADER II, as well as under any new programmes.

The question arises as to how these achievements were influenced or supported by the specific features of LEADER. In terms of the local approach, we would argue that this has facilitated the achievements made. The programme has had much emphasis on, and success in, community development, and enhancements in regional identity are a commonly cited impact. Given the sizes of communities targeted and the hands-on approach which local implementation allows, it is difficult to imagine more centrally implemented initiatives being more beneficial.

The evidence also shows that impacts have also been attributable to the “bottom-up” nature of the Programme. While it is arguable that sectors, eligibility boundaries and support ceilings, for example, have been constraining features which have been handed down from central administration, it remains unarguable that the needs assessment, planning, project identification and selection processes have incorporated primarily bottom-up features. The matching of supports with identified and acknowledged local needs is a principal result of these bottom-up characteristics.

The extent to which results can be attributable to the local “group” structure is more difficult to assess. Some Groups were clearly more successful than others, although each had broadly similar structures. The structures and sub-structures adopted are likely to have been more influential with respect to efficiency and outputs than to impacts. Likewise, innovation is difficult to assess in relation to its influence on impacts. Many projects were genuinely innovative, but it is unclear to what degree this influenced overall impacts, either quantifiable or qualitative. Innovation will have had positive demonstrative effects, with high profile innovative projects attracting much attention and generating further development momentum among observers of such successful projects.

Finally, the integrated and multi-sectoral character of the actions is felt to have been critical to the impact achievements. Any assessment of projects supported will notice their extent of multi- or cross-sectoral definition. Project officers and managers value the flexibility, which multi-sectoral implementation allows, and many would argue that only with such an approach can genuinely innovative projects arise and develop.

4. Perspective on LEADER II and the evaluation process

4.1 Synthesis of main outcomes

The date of approval for the Irish Programme was March 1995 and the date of official closing for commitments was December 1999. There were 34 LAGs and three Collective Bodies in the Programme with a final commitment of €203.9 million and a final achievement of nearly 98%. Ninety six percent was spent on Measure B – the Rural Innovation Programme. Of the latter, over 20% was expended on technical support, including animation with nearly 32% on rural tourism; the balance was spent on training, small enterprises, natural resources and environmental projects. Over 52% was paid out in 1998/1999.

Animation and capacity building activity included promotion, direct animation assistance and co-ordination activities. **Training** and activities supported over 3,500 bodies and nearly 100 projects have arisen as a result. **Rural tourism** activities were strongly supported and directed to the improvement of existing accommodation and the development of new accommodation and amenities. **Marketing** was also supported.

Support was provided for existing and new **firms, enterprises and services** and the impacts were quite significant and a considerable boost to small businesses. Market support was less effective in developing international markets in this Measure, and as for tourism, and was mainly focused on a local markets.

The level of demand was considerably less than anticipated for **agriculture**, forestry and fisheries due to the nature of the operating rules and the high level of supports under the main Natural Resource Programmes. Activity under the **Environment and Living Conditions Measure** was considerable, particularly under the built/social and cultural environment and the results were also positive in relation to natural environment projects.

In total, over 10,000 projects were funded. Private promoters accounted for one-third of the total with community groups accounting for a further 22%. LEADER Groups and voluntary bodies accounted for most of the remainder. About 5,000 full-time job equivalents were created and a further 3,500 FTE jobs sustained. A high proportion of jobs created and sustained were in the SME Measure and nearly one half of the total were accounted for by women.

A survey of promoters and a number of focus group meetings were also carried out indicating a very high level of satisfaction with the Initiative, while the views of Board Members and other agencies were also elicited. A survey regarding public awareness and knowledge of LEADER was also undertaken, indicating a high level of awareness of the programme. With regard to spatial distribution of projects, a more dispersed pattern can only be achieved where a deliberate strategy of spatial targeting is adopted.

Assessment of the specific features of LEADER also accounted for a major part of the ex-post evaluation and is included in that report.

Finally, while many other measures and actions will also have a vital bearing on the viability of rural areas, LEADER like programmes have a distinct and special rural focus. Given the range of problems and the need for as wide a range as possible for economic, social and environmental opportunities to address them in vulnerable rural areas, we endorse the multi-sectoral nature of LEADER. The experience of LEADER II was that all of the sectors contributed to the development of the areas to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the perceived needs and variation in resources in respective areas, and therefore it is appropriate that this multi-sectoral feature is retained. The outturn with respect to the balance of expenditure and impact also suggests that the multi-sectoral approach would still be relevant. With the growing emphasis on the quality of life and the environment, it is appropriate also that a multi-dimensional aspect of the programme, incorporating social and environmental features be retained.

4.2 Final comments

The LEADER II evaluation process was a stimulating and enlightening exercise and received the support and co-operation of the LAGs and Intermediary Department. The work of the evaluation of course imposes extra demands on the staff of the LAGs while the reporting requirements to the Department can be demanding and time-consuming. LAGs should be clearly informed at the outset of the nature and extent of the evaluation process, and the monitoring data, which will be required for evaluation in terms of input and activities. It is better to have fewer but clearly defined input/output and activity indicators than a very long list of indicators, which are not clearly specified or understood. A LAG should be only required to record and report data, which is subsequently needed in the evaluation process, although the LAGs themselves may wish to record additional or separate data for their own purposes. Furthermore, requesting data, which hasn't been recorded from the outset, at the mid-stage of an evaluation, should be avoided if at all possible.

Another issue which perhaps merits more attention is the evaluation of the programme Measures as well as the specific features. This is also of special interest to the LAGs as it is the most visible manifestation of impact in the local context. Here again a distinction must be made between outputs and impacts of "economic" interventions, such as funding from enterprise projects like tourism and small businesses and funding for animation and capacity building, which is essentially a human resource intervention. It was felt that insufficient attention was paid to evaluation methodologies for the latter dimension of the programme.

Timing of evaluation is also an important issue. Mid-Term Reviews should not be undertaken until programmes are well established although monitoring should commence from the outset

while ex-post evaluations should commence as the programme is ending or immediately afterwards. Another issue, which unfortunately cannot be assessed in on-going evaluation is the sustainability of projects. It is all very well for a programme to generate considerable economic and social activity through the projects it supports but what is the survival rate of these projects?

Finally while evaluation should clearly address the effectiveness, efficiency and impacts of LEADER type programmes, it should also be concerned with the rationale for the intervention and the continuing relevance of the programme. Whereas the rationale for the programme may be valid at the outset, it may change with changes in the external environment.

FOCUS GROUP REPORT I

1. Introduction

LOUTH LEADER II: IR.08 **DATE OF MEETING: 15/5/2003**

INTERLOCUTORS: Brendan Kearney (BK) & Joan Kearney

PARTICIPANTS:

Board Members:	Hugh Mc Mahon	Community
	Odile Glynn	Community
	Seamus Mc Quaid	Community
	Elaine Hobson	Community
	Paddy Callan	Business Partner
	Sean Collins	Elected Representative/Local Authority
	Tommy Reilly	Elected Representative/Local Authority

Manager: Maureen Ward

BK outlined the rationale and purpose of the Focus Group and introduced the concept of the LEADER method, with its seven Operational Principles (Ops) or specific features. He mentioned in particular the need to explore to what extent the LEADER method had been implemented and the connection between the way implemented and the effects on the area. It was pointed out that what really makes a difference to local development is a key characteristic of any initiative and such will be reflected in the way in which behaviour is changed. He also stated that behavioural changes might include better problem-solving, selling the area to the outside world, more value-added locally, better ways for collective action, experiment with new ways of development and more communications between local people. These changes must be reflected in such indicators as higher standards of living and a better quality of life. The purpose of the Focus Group should be reflect on those changes which in the opinion of the Group really make a difference to local development.

BK then presented a short comment on the outcome of LEADER II for Louth and its achievements. The Focus Group thought it best to go through the specific features one by one. In this regard the key issues were put before the Group and discussed with them. This was done in the first session.

2. Description of Partnership and Activity

This area is located in the Northeast corner of Ireland with a population of 92,166 in 1996 and over half its population is concentrated in two main towns. It borders Northern Ireland and up until recently this has hampered investment in the area. The rural typology of the area is mainly

Type 2 but agriculture as a sector is in decline while other sectors in the local economy are stable or slightly increasing. The LAG was established in 1995 by 12 members from State Agencies and the Voluntary and Business sectors. Since then it has expanded to 24 to include representatives from the communities and local authorities.

The Group has had a successful LEADER II Programme with over 200 actions and an expenditure of nearly 5 million Euro with the bulk of support focused on rural tourism, technical assistance, training and small and medium enterprises. The programme had significant positive social and economic effects in the area, with considerable impact on rural problems and community vitality.

3. Focus on specific features

Area-based approach

The County was taken as a unit – this was never really a problem although certain parts of the neighbouring County may have had more in common with this LAG especially as regards tourism development. The introduction of LEADER raised the image and profile of the rural areas in the County, which has two relatively large towns and helped to bond town and country. By focusing on tourism and food development and adding value to these sectors, it helped to enhance the image of the County. In general the Group did not see any negative aspects to the choice of area with the exception of the point mentioned above. It also felt that the area provided critical mass and gave a new vitality to the network of communities across the county.

Bottom-up approach

At the outset of LEADER and especially in its pre-development stage, every effort was made to enlist the full participation of all community associations and small interest groups in the County. In due course this aided communication between community groups bringing them together to exchange information and they soon came to realise that LEADER was about more than granting financial assistance. Initially expectations engendered by the introduction of LEADER were too high and were moderated over time as the empowerment potential of LEADER was realised. The process adopted by LEADER in undertaking a needs assessment as an input to the Business Plan for the area was adopted in turn by the Local Authority programmes. In the course of LEADER II, it became apparent that it is difficult to maintain community spirit and that voluntary effort is dwindling to some extent. This is perceived to be a major issue for the future, due perhaps to a decline in the spirit of volunteerism. If this were to continue, it poses a threat to decentralisation. At the same time the bottom-up approach is seen to be indispensable to rural development but will need a considerable amount of support for the future. In the early stages, LEADER was perceived as a threat to existing agencies because of its unelected status, but this has diminished over time. The bottom-up approach met with strong approval, the only exception being the considerable degree of bureaucracy and amount of paperwork associated

with the application and approval process for potential promoters, especially where only small financial supports are sought.

Local Partnership

Initially the motivation for participating in LEADER came from the Louth Enterprise Fund and then the challenge was taken up by local communities which formed an active network. The composition of the Board was considered to be very representative with all the community fora engaged in the process of nominating their representatives to the LAG. Even though representatives came from different sectoral interests, they quickly gelled together to promote the role of LEADER in local development. The Board dynamics were perceived to be healthy, and initially the community representatives had the biggest learning curve due to their lack of experience in institutional decision-making and with working with partners from other sectors. There was considerable concern about the future viability of LEADER. Apart from financial considerations, the depletion of staff is a major concern and the interruptions in funding contributed to this problem. The depletion of staff considerably reduces the interaction with communities as the remaining staff have to cope with administration and day to day running of the initiative. It was strongly felt that the loss of LEADER type programmes would be the death knell of rural Ireland and without a programme of this type, all the skills and competence acquired in the course of the LEADER programme would be dissipated.

Innovation

The concept of innovation was perceived to be difficult. The four categories of innovation as per the European Observatory dossier were outlined and the most innovative aspect in the LAG was considered to be the actions carried out by LEADER, which were not in other programmes and countering weaknesses in the local social structure. These included projects related to IT, organisation of a Food Fair marketing local products, and collective marketing of tourism. It was strongly encouraged at Board level with a focus on the development of the natural assets of the County. Innovative ideas which were supported and encouraged by the Board, mainly came from individuals. Inclusion of different bodies at Board level and their interaction made the Board receptive to innovative ideas. Innovative ideas were also exchanged between communities via the network system.

Barriers to innovation included the considerable amount of time and resources allotted to raising matching funds so as to enable drawdown and the stop-go nature of the LEADER programme. It was also difficult to keep up the momentum of innovation and it is a constant challenge to the vision of the Board.

Linkages and multisectoral character

This specific feature provoked the greatest diversity of views due to the wide interpretation given to the concept by respective interests. The projects mentioned included the establishment of tourism co-operatives with a marketing dimension, and the undertaking of feasibility studies at village level linked further to village enhancement. Other projects included the collective marketing of accommodation establishments and support for childcare facilities, which are listed in a directory. There were few instances of intersectoral integration. It was perceived that the longer time-scale involved with multisectoral projects was a constraint. At the same time it was felt that the viability of one project in a sector could be enhanced by the creation of complementary activities in that area.

Networking and Transnational Co-operation

The Group was not involved in Measure (C) projects. It was considered that such involvement required a considerable degree of time and resources and suitable projects were hard to access. Language and cultural differences were also perceived to be barriers to transnational co-operation and perhaps transnational links could be encouraged initially by cultural exchanges particularly involving young people. However, networking between Groups was strongly advocated and supported and contributes significantly to the development of the LEADER concept and as a vehicle for the promotion of best practices.

Management and financing

One of the main attractions of the Global Grant concept is the autonomy it provides for the LAGs in terms of flexibility of spending over time. It enables project ideas from local areas to be realised over a longer time frame. However, the gaps between the respective LEADER programmes were perceived to be a real barrier to the continuity of effort by the local partnership and was a source of great uncertainty to the staff. The negative features noted were the considerable amount of paperwork required with this approach and the reporting requirements were considered to be excessive and cumbersome possibly reducing the effectiveness of LEADER, although it is acknowledged that accountability is necessary. With respect to the management of LEADER by the administration, the Group were of the view that the bottom-up and area-based approaches were very strongly supported by the Administration.

Session II

4. Key points in concluding session

The three types of context (geographic/socio-economic, institutional, socio-cultural) were kept in mind when focusing on each Operational Principle. Again it facilitated the discussion by

considering the OPs in relation to the local contexts and which factors had a positive or negative impact on the respective Ops. The discussion centred around the following questions:

- a) What are mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces, which influence the effective implementation of which OP? How does it express itself locally?
- b) What should be changed locally to improve the effectiveness of LEADER?
- c) What should be changed at the level of admin and networks to improve the effect of LEADER?
- d) What are the key criteria for an RD programme to take positive effect on the specific area-based context?

a) Bottom-up approach means that the problems that come up are those of the area in question. It is important therefore to have the goodwill of the local authorities and agencies. The influence of LEADER was very evident in the way in which the urban-rural divide was reduced and LEADER had a significant impact in bringing all the agencies together and working for the benefit of the local community. However, LEADER may not have been gained enough credit for bringing about this convergence of interest because it does not receive enough national publicity.

b) One has to live with the context one faces and the initial local divergence of interests were largely sorted out in the course of the LEADER programme. Not every agency however agreed with the LEADER concept as the State Advisory agency tried to abrogate to itself all matters relating to rural development. There were specific examples of this in the course of LEADER II but generally the majority view prevailed.

c)/d) Effectively, LEADER cannot change the local context as each context variable has to be accepted as endemic to each area. Some of the problems here relate to the level of matching funds required in particular instances, e.g. community groups may have to contribute 50% of a project and that may be exceptionally difficult to raise. Some LAG areas may have better local financing mechanisms than others for raising matching fund requirements. Larger co-operatives come to mind in this regard. The same might be said for the less endowed private promoters. With respect to the nature of LEADER, it was strongly felt that a multi-faceted approach was required and not just focusing on a particular theme. The flexibility of the LEADER programme should be maintained because it is difficult to anticipate with any degree of accuracy the nature of projects which will come forward. Finally before the intermediary department considers changing the nature of the LEADER programme there should be meaningful consultations between the LEADER network and the Department. It is important to maintain the degree of local autonomy which is characteristic of LEADER.

FOCUS GROUP REPORT II

1. Introduction

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT LTD: IR.02

DATE OF MEETING: 28/5/2003

INTERLOCUTORS: Brendan Kearney (BK) & Joan Kearney

PARTICIPANTS:

Board Members:	George Finch	Community
	Brendan Corrigan	Enterprise
	Nick O Neill	Government Department
	Seamus Hyde	Appraisal Committee
	Sheena Hanrahan	Community
	Paddy Mc Auliffe	Elected Representative Local Authority

Manager: Carmel Fox (also Board Member)

BDL Staff: Eleanor Forest
Martha Potter
Cora Horgan

BK outlined the rationale and purpose of the Focus Group and introduced the concept of the LEADER method, with its seven Operational Principles (Ops) or specific features. He mentioned in particular the need to explore to what extent the LEADER method had been implemented and the connection between the way implemented and the effects on the area. It was pointed out that what really makes a difference to local development is a key characteristic of any initiative and such will be reflected in the way in which behaviour is changed. He also stated that behavioural changes might include better problem-solving, selling the area to the outside world, more value-added locally, better ways for collective action, experiment with new ways of development and more communications between local people. These changes must be reflected in such indicators as higher standards of living and a better quality of life. The purpose of the Focus Group should be reflect on those changes which in the opinion of the Group really make a difference to local development.

BK then presented a short comment on the outcome of LEADER II for Ballyhoura and its achievements. The Focus Group thought it best to go through the specific features one by one. In this regard the key issues were put before the Group and discussed with them. This was done in the first session.

2. Description of Partnership and Activity

Ballyhoura Country is located in South Limerick and North Cork in the Southwest of Ireland. It had a population of 61,857 in 1996 with a population density of 38. It comprises 50 local communities but some areas suffer from severe population decline. The rural typology of the area is mainly Types 1 and 2 but agriculture as a sector is in decline while other sectors are stable or slightly increasing. The LAG has been in existence since the late eighties and there is a partnership of voluntary, commercial, community and public interests. Its purpose is to stimulate sustainable development actions from local communities and the private sector and interface with the public sector in strategic planning, mobilising resources and co-ordinating development for the benefit of the area and its residents. The Group has had a successful LEADER II Programme completing over 300 development actions and an expenditure of nearly €6 million, with the bulk of the support addressed to training and recruitment, rural tourism, small and medium enterprise development and the environment. It has carried out many innovative actions focusing on tourism, rural transport, information and communications technology and sustainable development. It has also laid particular emphasis on community development. In summary it has made a major contribution to the economic and social development of the area and its approach is a very good illustration of the LEADER model.

3. Focus on specific features

Area-based approach

The area grew organically as more community Groups wanted to join. Originally it was mainly agricultural and needed to diversify, but the area is now peri-urban and rural. Indeed a small part of the County which is now part of a different LEADER Group should be included. The area has an advantage in that it operates another Local Development Programme also. LEADER added value to the local resources in the area. It allowed communities to work together in an integrated way thus benefiting the whole area and conferring a positive impact on it. Planning is undertaken around communities. The LEADER II Programme contributed substantially to branding the area, and without it very little would be happening. An exercise was undertaken to refocus the overall strategy in 1998 giving it a sharper direction and concentrating on a few key issues, especially the very rapid decline in agriculture and the stark difference between earnings in agriculture and in other sectors, and the potential for new technology. It was considered that all areas were well represented in the catchment of the Group, except perhaps in the peri-urban strip. Even the remoter communities have interaction with entrepreneurs through the outreach offices, although it was felt that generally fewer people are now involved in community activities. However, the area-based approach confers a sense of ownership on the programme, a sense of belonging to one's own place and because of this feeling of involvement it is easier to get people to co-operate. Communities have become much more professional since LEADER began. The weaker or dormant communities were greatly helped by the activities of the

Community Consultative Committee (CCC) which has increased the level of learning across communities and local community development activity.

Bottom up approach

The bottom-up approach has given people a lot of confidence and capacity to take part in local development especially from weaker areas. This was ensured through providing extra supports to weaker communities e.g. through the provision of IT training. This in turn attracts support from the State and other development agencies for these local districts. This of course has been a feature of this area even before the advent of LEADER II. The bottom-up approach also needs a top-down response to facilitate local development. There was some concern expressed that because of lack of funding, some outreach offices had to be closed. Considerable resources are required to support community development needs, as formal training is required. In assessing the needs of the area, a considerable degree of consultation was undertaken and much time was spent listening to, refining and reviewing the local needs which were articulated. Arising from this process, sectoral studies were initiated which identified particular problems and this provided a considerable input into planning the local development programme. Indeed this is now an ongoing process and is constantly under review. There is now wide appreciation of the time-lag between problem identification and action because of the much greater understanding of the process by local actors and communities.

Local Partnership

The LEADER had its origin in the Tourism Co-operative, founded in 1988. Gradually more communities joined the Co-operative and its remit expanded to multisectoral activities to become Ballyhoura Development Ltd. State agencies and other representatives came on board as an organic development. At an early stage the Group set out to develop a comprehensive plan on an area basis with the full participation of all the agencies who acted in the best interests of the Group and who put the objectives of the Group first. It is difficult to maintain that earlier spirit because of competing demands on the agency personnel. The main input from the agencies was in establishing what they could do to help implement the plan formulated by the Board. With respect to the future viability of the partnership, there is a strong will to survive and thrive but a question mark surrounds the resources which will be required. In this context many of the agencies are re-evaluating their own activities and *raison d'être*. However, any move towards absorbing the Group into existing structures will be strongly resisted and there is an imperative to maintain its own identity. A clear role for local development has been established and irrespective of funding for LEADER in the future, it is almost certain that LEADER-type programmes will be mainstreamed.

Innovation

Clearly identified problems in the past were dealt with by innovative solutions relating to such issues as rural transport and eating out facilities. Further examples of innovation were evident through the community planning process, through the CCC where examples of good practice were rolled out and evaluated in successive communities and are now used as a national model. Innovative approaches were also used in establishing back to work activities. When problems arise which require solutions, considerable amount of time is given to devising answers and expertise is brought in to assist in the process. Some of the impediments to innovation were also discussed. It was considered that the bureaucratic requirements of implementing LEADER demand a considerable amount of resources, which takes from the business of being innovative. Innovative approach needs to be constantly nurtured and there must be a tolerance of failure.

Multisectoral approach

The multisectoral concept was well understood especially within sector beginning with technical assistance through training, mentoring and capital support. For instance the food sector was developed creating an awareness of local foods which in turn were promoted in the tourism sector. The latter would be considered an intersectoral approach. Other examples of the multisectoral approach were evident in the linkage between environmental and living conditions projects and the tourism sector. The point was made that individual communities are not in the best position to engage in multisectoral activities and linkages should be facilitated by the parent group i.e. Ballyhoura development.

Management and Financing

The most positive aspect of the management and financing specificity is its multiannual character and the degree of flexibility it confers. Incidentally, this seems to be considerably less in the LEADER + Programme. There was widespread satisfaction with this feature of the LEADER method. However, it was felt that the administration of the programme was focused too much on accountability rather than contributing to the effective implementation of the initiative. For instance, the intermediary department seems to have been overly concerned with accountancy minutiae than with the central features objectives, and support for the programme.

Networking and Transnational Co-operation

The first part of this discussion was concerned with the national networking arrangement and general satisfaction was expressed with its functioning. The discussion then turned to the impact of the transnational project. In brief, in terms of TNC planning it is critically important to have a clear view at the outset as to what the Group wants to achieve. In the case of the Ballyhoura TNC project, in the beginning it largely was a one-way process although the other partners also gained from the experience. Joint projects of this nature usually mean that the

respective partners are involved in the learning process, each group developing a particular skill from interaction with the other. The real challenge is for the partners to get to know each other and this can be facilitated by utilising the technical assistance provided to the maximum extent. The effective use of this assistance is fundamental to the ultimate success of the project.

With respect to implementation it is not helpful that two agencies are involved in TNC i.e. the Observatory and the Intermediary Department. It is also very important that language competence should be a feature of the programme and the language issue should not depend on translation. In the process of implementation, the timeframe should clearly delineate the sequence of actions in the overall project. The different cultural contexts must be well understood and appreciated and there ought to be an ongoing evaluation of the progress of the project.

With respect to project diffusion, no clearcut lesson was emerging. This aspect should be outlined at the outset of the project and all the partners engaged in it should be party to the diffusion process and this should be made clear at the beginning of the project.

Session II

4. Key points from concluding session

The three types of context (geographic/socio-economic, institutional, socio-cultural) were kept in mind when focusing on each Operational Principle. Again it facilitated the discussion by considering the OPs in relation to the local contexts and which factors had a positive or negative impact on the respective Ops. The discussion centred around the following questions:

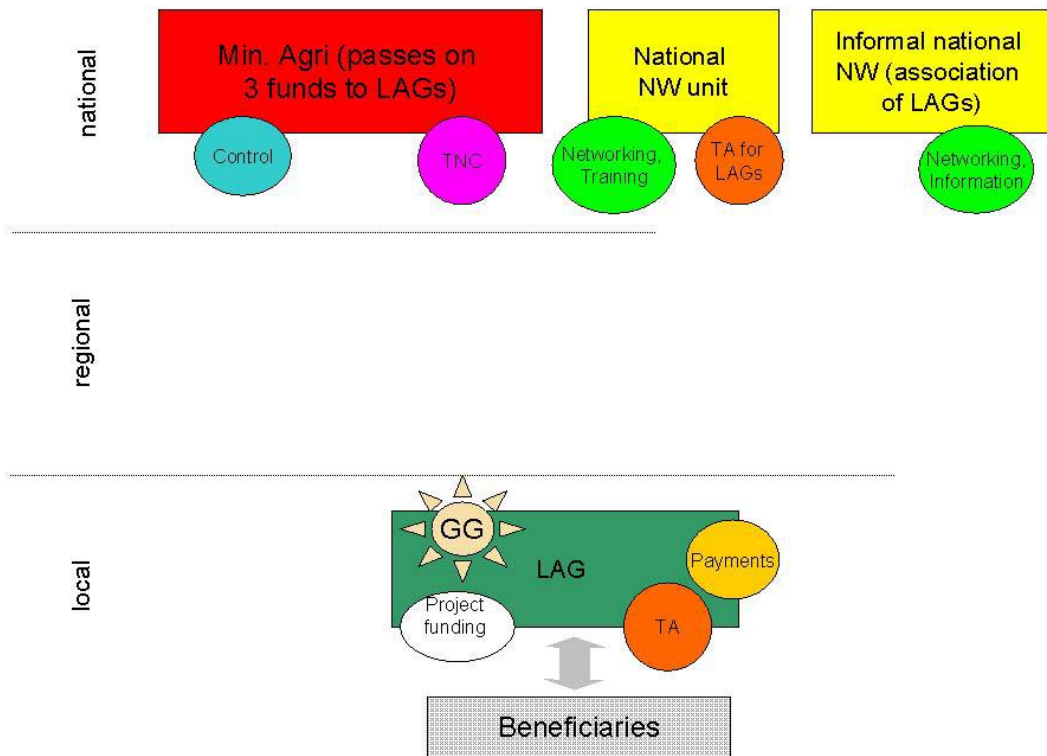
- e) What are mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces, which influence the effective implementation of which OP? How does it express itself locally?
- f) What should be changed locally to improve the effectiveness of LEADER?
- g) What should be changed at the level of admin and networks to improve the effect of LEADER?
- h) What are the key criteria for an RD programme to take positive effect on the specific area-based context?

- a)** In the local context some forces are driving development while others restrain it. The former is represented by a ultra-conservative agricultural sector while the strong partnership base would be a driving force in the area. The area also suffers from having no large towns or no local government substructures. In the early stages the area was characterised by very little action or decision-making and this gap was filled by LEADER through its community development activities. The community structure should not be

limited by administrative boundaries. There are no resources for local planning other than through the medium of LEADER.

- b)** It facilitates development if all groups could be under one umbrella and this is what LEADER tries to achieve – a type of pan-community structure. It is also useful when enterprise and trader networks interface with the general community. However, a realistic view must be taken in regard to industrial development and it requires a considerable amount of collaboration between the agencies and the community. In general, there is a lack of financial resources to get action with respect to economic development and communities must be constantly supported. Furthermore, there is a large deficit in the local physical infrastructure which impairs development. Much of the achievement of the LEADER Programme is not amenable to quantitative analysis, so the animation impacts are underestimated. Therefore the empowerment effects of LEADER are insufficiently recognised. Also the ripple effects of the LEADER Programme should be examined further. There is as yet no well defined system to capture and measure the qualitative impact of the LEADER initiative. With respect to making LEADER a better programme there must be sufficient flexibility to accommodate local needs – this should be recognised by the administration. Furthermore, much can happen over the life of a LEADER Programme as changes in the external environment might necessitate adjustments to the constituent parts of the development plan. There is thus a constant imperative to work innovatively and be sensitive to the changing requirements in local areas and this demands considerable involvement and interaction between the partnership and staff of the LAG. A further problem here is the degree of uncertainty created by the time-lag between programmes which creates problems for the administration of the LAG. Therefore there should be core funding to sustain the administration of the local Group in the interests of continuity. It would also be useful if there was professional support at the level of the intermediary department to assist best practice in the management and organisation of Groups in the form of individuals with specific responsibility for this task as distinct from the administration of the initiative.

Model of implementation



II.10 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT ITALY

Contents

1.	General introduction	353
2	Report on Focus Group	355
3.	Report on national and regional programme evaluation	396
3.1	Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level (4 pages)	396
3.2	Overall assessment	405
3.3	Capitalisation on relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the national and regional evaluation reports of the 34 selected programmes – (grid) (2 pag.)	406
4.	General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator	411
4.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the Leader II initiative (1 pag.)	411
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process (1 pag.)	421

1. General introduction

To carry out the tasks of the ExPost Evaluation of the LEADER II EU Initiative in Italy, the following working team was organized:

- Rossella Almanza and Carlo Ricci: They were in charge of the evaluation team. They supervised the overall organisation of the evaluation tasks, and coordinated the rest of the evaluation team. In particular they took care directly of interviews at program level, focus groups animation (with the assistance of Danilo Ciampella and Bruno Coletta), case studies on trans-national cooperation and geographical report.
- Bruno Coletta and Vincenzo Molinari followed the LAGs in order to receive the answers of the Q-202 questionnaires.
- Alessandra Pesce prepared the Cost Effectiveness Analysis on Casizolou cheese.
- Danilo Ciampella supported the group in research of documentation.
- Kristiina Salmela supplied language assistance.
- The whole group was involved in numerous and repeated contacts with Regional and National Authorities in order to relieve data from all the Italian LEADER II programs.

The evaluation work started right after the official communication of the approval of the ex-post evaluation partnership by the EU Commission. The work team immediately has established contacts with the program authorities both at national and regional level with the purpose to inform them around the activities of evaluation in progress and to require their collaboration to track down the documents and the necessary information. Such contacts occurred both formally (through letters) and through informal telephone contacts with the different responsible officials. Following step consisted in contacting LAGs that would be asked to participate directly in the evaluation by answering the Q-202 questionnaire. This was made through intensive phone contacts, presentation letters and delivery of a copy of the questionnaire and guidelines to complete it. In order to motivate participation and elicit interest of LAGs, it was emphasised the importance of the work to give answers useful to design the future EU rural development policies and programs. Parallely with the contacts with LAGs, interviews at program level have been effected. The final phase of the work concerned the focus groups organization and the realization of case studies.

Altogether the evaluation work effected in Italy has included the following tasks:

- General scanning of all the Italian LEADER II Operational Programs (grid OP-102 and grid L-1000) and many connected documents including all the evaluations and final reports, with contacts with program managers to collect the available information and data.

- Detailed analysis of 5 Italian OP according to a standardized analysis grid for data.
- Interviews with LEADER interlocutors at national and regional level.
- Verification, regional analysis and synthesis.
- Analysis of documents, organisation of interviews and written questioning (distribution, animation, collection and verification of Q 202-questionnaire) of 40 selected LAGs and collective bodies in five regions: Calabria, Toscana, Emilia-Romagna, Piemonte and Sardegna.
- Participatory evaluation of LAGs: Organization of focus groups in 5 LAGs in each sample region.
- Preparation of three case studies (two on trans-national cooperation and one cost effectiveness analysis).
- Preparation of the present Geographical Report.

2 Report on Focus Group

a) VALLE DEL CRATI (CALABRIA)

a) 1 Introduction

LAG name	LAG Valle del Crati
Place and date	Torano Scalo (CS) – 06/11/2003
LAG interlocutors	
A	Mrs. Fagiani – President
B	Mrs. Annamaria Rosa – animator and secretary of the LAG
C	Mr. Riccardo Bruno – technical responsible of the LAG
D	Mr. Ettore Chimento – councillor of the commune of Luzzi and member of the local board
E	Mrs. Marinella Tedeschi – member of the local board
F	Mr. Giovanni Boscarelli – beneficiary (farmer and breeder)
Evaluator	Mrs. Rossella Almanza
Assistant	Mr. Danilo Ciamparella

The first contacts took place between Mrs. Rossella Almanza and Mrs. Valeria Fagiani. The reason to select this LAG as a focus group derived from the double need from one side, to substitute the LAG « Alto Jonio Cosentino », already selected as a focus object, because its president had too many business engagements and therefore would not have been able to meet us before the end of June, and from the other side to acquire a new LAG within the regional sample because the LAG « Presila Krotonese » did not answer to the questionnaires Q202 (as a matter of fact, the evaluators received this documentation afterwards).

The members of the LAG « Valle del Crati » provided an interesting documentation containing :

- a descriptive videocassette about the area and about some realised interventions; it was utilized by the president for the initial recreation about the LAG's history ;
- the final report about the activities carried out during the Leader II;
- a sampling of the cultural productions realized with the project ; in particular is to point out the publication edited by the LAG and the University of Calabria entitled « Environment – landscape – territory – Val di Crati ».

The focus group performed as follows :

- 1 After the presentations, the evaluator illustrated briefly the contents and the aims of ex-post evaluation of Leader II in order to contextualize the day's job referring to the entire process.
- 2 All the participants presented themselves and described briefly their activity and the role played during the Leader II experience.
- 3 Then the evaluator invited the president of the LAG (Mrs. Valeria Fagiani) to « guide » a « recalling » about the Leader II experience through the presentation of the main stages of this experience ; this activity was carried out with the help of the realized CD-ROM.
- 4 Moreover the evaluator invited all the participants to intervene and asked them all the questions : For what the realization of Leader II could be remembered ? In which fields/sectors/behaviours was it mostly impressive? What kind of continuity will have the action carried out in these years with Leader II?.

Through the dialogue that followed some issues on change which were felt as the most significant ones were identified by the group:

- 1) For the first time the territory identified within the area of the LAG was able to express specific and autonomous development lines.
- 2) The local community acquired major confidence in the institutions and in the development tools.
- 3) The dialogue and the integration found space within the system of the local institutions and the entrepreneurial world

The group had therefore worked around these " key matters", in order to explore mechanisms, driving or inhibiting forces, specific ways of expression of the operational principles, criteria and recommendations.

a) 2 Description of partnership and activities

The LAG "Val di Crati" was constituted as a not-profit making cooperative association in 1996 to realize specifically the LEADER II programme in the area of Crati. The social base is formed by 11 members, public and private ; two mountain communities and various trade associations joined to the LAG without becoming members of it in all respects.

The area of reference for the interventions foreseen by LAP extends for 387.85 Km² between the urban area of Cosenza and the Sibaritide. It is characterised by a precious, but scarcely safeguarded, woodland (beechwoods, Turkey oaks, chestnuts) and environment that presents, in some cases, forms of environmental deterioration determined by the same geomorphic

conformation and by anthropic interventions. The structure of the territory is strongly marked by the course of the river that shows dishomogenous situations on its opposite riversides, also in terms of economical development : some communes – situated on the left side of the River Crati at the altitude between 450-600 metres – classified in the 2nd category, present a socio-economic situation more underdeveloped in respect of those communes classified in the 1st category, located on the right side of the River Crati. The expansions and the most recent interventions, moreover, were localized, progressively always more towards the valley, and favoured by the absence of a precise development plan; thence it arises disordered settlements, characterised by the contemporary presence of residential and productive functions and remaining agricultural areas.

The primary sector is still the most important of the area with the 23,5% about the employees and is characterised by the backwardness of management and productions methods and by the poor mechanization of the farms that are more or less small or micro ones. Only few farms practice modern agriculture. The principal productions of the area are : oil (presence of a IGT (=typical geographical indication) ; wine (1 DOC = denomination of controlled origin); market gardening and orchards. At national level is relevant the saddle-horse breeding. Significant are also the traditional handicrafts : the art of making lutes (school of Bisognano), pottery, wrought iron manufacturing and weaving.

The valorisation of such local specificities was the strong point on which the LAP worked in order to stimulate the economical development, also by taking into the consideration a certain propensity towards the small and micro enterprises demonstrated during the last years from the part of this territory.

The Local Action Plan LEADER II realised by the LAG bases on the following objectives :

- valorize the rural environment through integrated interventions in different sectors;
- reach acceptable levels and quality of life;
- create the basis for the diffusion of an environmental culture lacking in the whole area.

The operative strategy adopted in order to reach the described objectives foresaw the following actions:

- Interventions of environmental valorization in synergy with various sectors (rural tourism, cultural heritage, promotion of typical products) with the spin-offs for the employment;
- Technical support (information desks) for small and medium concerns of the manufacturing and agro-industrial sectors targeted to the valorization and the diffusion of the typical local products;

- Promotion of interventions for environmental and cultural sensitizing in more internal centres targeted to the development of the rural tourism;
- Courses for young people to learn the traditional handicraft forms.

a) 3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area

Hypothesis N.1 a new territorial ambit, endowed with history and identity, appeared on the scene of the regional programming

The poor relationships between the two riversides of the River Crati represent a historical custom that had influenced the development of the settlements present on both sides of this river : the river was considered more a separating element than unifying. This territory, included between the strong area represented by the conurbation of Cosenza and the wide, agricultural plain of the Sibaritide, was always, until the most recent planning experiences, aggregated alternatively to the urban or to the agricultural system, by sharing involuntarily the respective destinies. In this sense the Leader programme was an occasion of liberation for the area of the Media Valle del Crati that finally was able to establish the independent and specific development directions : the LAG was the first reality to call the forces of this territory for the self-planning.

It is opportune to highlight the prevailing condition of passiveness of the territory, the scarce habit to elaborate plans and strategies, that made it necessary to have, in the first place, a substantial consulting contribute and animation activity in order to guide the planning phase, shared with a gradual and always more awareness by the local actors. Once passed the start-up phase the participation was so wide to get also the same beneficiaries involved in the planning of the single interventions.

The general conviction was that the reason for the unrealized development of the region was in the first place more a cultural problem than economical, the LAG and its animators provided for a rereading in a positive way about the territory and the geographic elements present there by enhancing the similarities between two riversides and by interpreting the differences, where present, as a common heritage to be considered a source for mutual enrichment. In general it was tried to catch the weaker realities represented by the communes of the 2nd category in front of those more dynamic and productive realities of the valley floor. In this context and as an excellent example, it is significant to point out the presence of an ancient Albanian community settled on the left riverside of the Crati, still today not very inclined to a real integration : the intervention of the LAG to valorize the age-old tradition of the embroidery was important above all in order to break the isolation and the typical distrustfulness of those realities and the hope to see them always more involved with the life of the territory.

The evidence attributed to the specific territorial reality, united to the work of the LAG's animators that knew to realize a good involvement of the local actors in the planning process, permitted not only to recognize the existent resources but also to attribute them the right value: local productions, traditional trades, landscape elements considered always passively as a collective heritage with poor valorization perspectives were finally perceived as resources on which to intervene and to be able to count on in order to generate a new development process. At the same time, in working on the existing resources and in considering duly the needs of the local population it was possible to elaborate a strategy capable also to generate new forms of coordination and of net-working among the actors, condition strongly innovative for this territory.

The different participants of this focus group agreed greatly to recognize that the obtained considerable results, synthesized here above, were strongly favoured explicitly from the territorial Leader planning that, in the contrary of the previous experiences of planning, was able to put unitary and specific emphasis on this territory.

It was, anyway, pointed out with regret that this lesson learned, by the LAG and by the territory, was not acquired in the same way by the region that in the new planning for 2000-2006 defined again zonings according to the logic completely unconnected with the vocations and with the endogenous forces of the areas. It is, in fact, precised that in the integrated projects included in the POR (= Regional Operative Plan) the methodology and the experience of LEADER II were only formally of reference for the planning. Also the new zoning foreseen for LEADER+, not only provides a substantial enlargement of the territory of the LAG "Valle del Crati", but most of all corresponds to an area on which will be carried out more than 4-5 integrated projects. The reading of the territory is notably more complicated and a return to a centralized political management took place. It is still impossible to perceive a plan if not as an increase only in quantitative sense, without comprehending that the environmental sustainability of the interventions in a long term will be the discriminating element between the winner areas and the loser areas.

Hypothesis N.2 the local community acquired more trust in the institutions and in the development tools

The area in which the LAG carried out its activity is characterized by a strong cultural inertia and by an endemic distrust in the public institutions. The area is in financial difficulties which reflect the incapability from the part of the bodies of the public administrations to comprehend the real needs of the territory and the consequent impossibility to assist these needs correctly; from the other part the old-age divisions, the exaggerated local pride and a certain passivity prevented the local forces from the autonomous mobilization in sight of the attainment of common objectives.

In this socio-economic and cultural context the specificities of the “LEADER II” programme were adopted entirely by the LAG that intervened in the area by operating as a real and proper development agent, above all through an assiduous informative activity and a territorial animation.

The LAG in question is particularly proud of the fact that it managed to create a good relationship with the entrepreneurial realities and with the trade associations. At the beginning these last were very distrustful and interpreted the Leader programme as one of the public interventions from the top not able to meet the real territorial needs. The territorial animation and sensitizing performance realized by the LAG managed to gain credibility towards the programme and the persons who were carrying it out coherently in the area; and another important fact was that after the initial sense of distrust, progressively took place a willingness to collaborate that was concretized then with numerous interventions realized and with good response for the local operators

The result of this approach was the creation of a new atmosphere of trust in the institutions and in the development tools. The LEADER method, in fact, is able to ignore some bureaucratic procedures that make the realization of any kind of action difficult and slow. With the activation of the programme Leader, the territory perceived a certain difference in the management of public funds, particularly in the method: definitely a certain change was perceived from the part of the inhabitants of the territory, particularly what concerns the clearness in the realization of the interventions, the clear rules and the efficiency. This begot trust in methods and new persons, who did not share the age-old and predominant logic of patronage favours in the area, but favoured a new kind of positive approach from the part of the local populations towards the institutions. The LAG precises, however, that the four-year period of the realization of the LEADER programme risks to be too short in order to allow to get over those historical, behavioural conditions.

Hypothesis N. 3 The dialogue and the integration found space within the system of the local institutions and the entrepreneurial world

With the LEADER II planning the environmental and cultural specificities of the area in question were taken for the first time into consideration. Around them it was possible to mobilize the existing forces in the area and from this identification of typical products, traditional handicraft manufacturing, environmental resources and local culture was originated the label “Valle del Crati” that meant for the area a passage from a condition of “not existence” to its valorization.

The LEADER method naturally favoured a planning for the first time integrated, harmonized and shared by the local people: the system of the programme realization foresaw the comparison, the constant and systematic verification about the validity of the interventions proposed with the local population and eventually the predisposition of harmonized and shared variants. From the

information desk, “ a real and appropriate open door to the territory” and therefore a contact place between the LAG and the local operators, with the passing of time the LAG’s office was considered a privileged place to meet: the entrepreneurs, who did not know each other, were able to verify to have in common same needs and strategies. In the LAG’s office were put into effect real and appropriate collaborations that then followingly developed toward interventions marked by the tendency to form associations and organization of food chains, in the area hostile towards any kind of activity to form associations. A LEADER effect was the formation of two associations for the protection and of a PIF (= integrated territorial project) in the fields of agriculture and agroindustry (PIAR = integrated plan for the rural areas) and PIF (= integrated territorial project) for the fig of the Cosenza area).

The activating of LEADER, moreover, gave rise to many behavioural changes also within the local institutions, in particular within the communes of the area, generally very little inclined not only to have close relationships among them but also to be compared with each other. The representative of a commune of the LAG (the participant n° D) precised that “ the collective awareness noticed the necessity/opportunity to dialogue with the other communes: the LEADER experience gave birth to a district of communes and to an association of “Valle del Crati”. Also a new mentality took place that searches for the complementarities: none of the communes would nowadays create on its territory an activity present in the neighbouring areas because then it would be a question about a “specialization” of other commune.

a) 4 Conclusions and recommendations

The role of the LAG appears decisive for the effective implementation of the operational principles because the LEADER approaches were not at all habitual for the area and were introduced gradually during the course of the programme activating. For nothing was granted the delimitation of the LAG area, traditionally considered a “peripheral area”, appendice of other realities.

The possibility to put into practice the operational principles appears, anyway, in this context, strictly connected to the capability of the LAG – or of the development agency – to realize a strong animation action and acquisition of consent around the fundamental strategies. It emerges from the considerations explicitly made within the focus group that the “willingness of renovation demonstrated by the LAG” could have been transmitted with major facility and success if the region would have offered a wider support.

The LAG highlighted that the fundamental element for the programme’s success is the necessity to have “ a good and solid partnership characterized by a good internal balance”.

During the conversations was principally named the role of the region. The disappointment was emphasized towards the actual regional planning that does not seem to have really interiorized

the LEADER experience. This consideration is verifiable in the actual planning. Such a condition does not guarantee the action continuity of LEADER II that, instead, still needs reinforcement if you do not want to make the carried out work fruitless.

The LAG states that the main problem of the territory of the Valle del Crati is more of cultural character than economical. In this sense it appears strategic to intervene by modifying the atavic behavioural rules, rooted both in the entrepreneurial world and in the institutions.

It seems evident that this is a pre-condition for any type of development programme and it was the field on which the LAG intervened prevailingly, although, as it is natural, the realization of the programme also pursued and obtained concrete results in terms of physical realizations of the projects. The LAG, in fact, carried out most of all material interventions because the local actors, and in the first place the trade associations, had the necessity to see physical realizations in order to trust in the programme and in the LAG.

In short, for the next future, the planning still needs to invest strongly on the animation that should in particular be aimed to diffuse a mentality of productive chain, by starting from the work carried out since here and by stimulating the relationships between the operators already activated.

b) DELTA 2000 (Emilia Romagna)

b) 1 Introduction

LAG name	Delta 2000
LAG interlocutors	Paola Palmonari ; Giancarlo Malacarne
Date:	The meeting was held in Ostellato on 9th June 2003. It started at 10 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m.
Participants:	
A Giancarlo Malacarne	Responsible for tourism of the LAG 'Delta 2000'. As a first thing he highlighted the fact to not have utilized the Leader as a simple funding instrument but as a formation process for a development agency.
B Roberto Ugolini	Beneficiary entrepreneur and owner of a camping place. Mr. Ugolini is very satisfied because the participation to this project marked a turning point of 360° for his business activity, in synergy with the other local leading actors.
C Silvia Forlani	Ex collaborator of the LAG, at the moment responsible for formation and tourism. Mrs. Forlani offered support for the beneficiaries and was one of the four animators working for the LAG
D Menotti Passarella	Tourist guide specialized in birdwatching involved from time to time in different initiatives activated
E Angela Pezzoni	Leader of a cooperative for environmental education called Atlantide (this cooperative operates in Cervia, outside of the Leader area, and although it was very involved in the most important activities of the LAG, it did not benefit from any kind of funding)
F Stefania Loia	Colleague of Mrs. Angela Pezzoni
Evaluator	Carlo Ricci
Assistant	Bruno Coletta

The preliminary contacts took place between Mr. Carlo Ricci e Mrs. Paola Palmonari (administrative responsible) who, together with Mr. Giancarlo Malacarne, took care to organize the meeting and to invite the participants.

The members of the LAG 'Delta' provided an interesting documentation, including:

- the report about the activities performed during the Leader II;
- a settle of samples about the cultural productions realized together with the project;
- documentations concerning the local self-evaluation;
- documents relative to the project of trans-national cooperation.

Thanks to this material, together with the replies provided from the Q202, the evaluators were able to learn to know the history of the LAG and of the Local Action Plan. The Local Action Plan LEADER II realized by the 'DELTA 2000' for the area Basso Ferrarese (in the province of Ferrara), intervened initially over an area of seven municipalities. This territory is strongly characterized by the great delta of the river Po. The delta, anyhow, comprises a wider territory that includes part of the provinces of Ravenna and of Rovigo (Venetian Region).

As you can figure out from the participant list, for various reasons regional officers and local administrators did not participate to the meeting. The group represented different kinds of figures (animators, technicians and beneficiaries) prevailingly connected to the tourist and environmental sectors. This aspect, did not compromise the interest of the meeting because the tourist and environmental valorization of the delta of the river Po was the "leading idea" on which was designed and implemented the Local Action Plan.

The Focus group operated in a following way:

- 1 All the participants introduced themselves and described briefly their activities and the role played by them during this LEADER 2 experience.
- 2 The evaluator illustrated shortly the ex-post evaluation of the Leader II in order to contextualize the day's job referring to the entire process.
- 3 Then the evaluator invited the responsible of the LAG (Mr. Giancarlo Malacarne) to lead a "recalling" about the Leader II experience with the help of a presentation. The evaluator specified that the presentation should not be for the benefit of the external evaluators, but for the benefit of the participants in order to "recall" those common experiences shared years ago. He also invited as well the other participants to intervene and asked them all these questions: For what the realization of the LEADER 2 could be remembered? In which fields/sectors/behaviours it was mostly impressive? Where the impact was inferior to the expectations?

Through the dialogue that followed some issues on change which were felt as the most significant ones have been identified by the group:

- 1) The perception of the territory with its specific characteristics and development potentials got stronger among the public actors as well as among the private ones. They considered it as a system of resources on which is possible to intervene in an integrated way.
- 2) Public and private actors experimented and learned methods of local networking by producing coordinated action able to improve the competitiveness of the local system.
- 3) The GAL assumed the function of development agency for the delta of the river Po.

The group therefore worked around these "key matters", in order to explore mechanisms, driving or inhibiting forces, specific ways of expression of the operational principles, criteria and recommendations.

b) 2 Description of partnership and activities

The LAP was based on the objective to valorize in an integrated and coherent way the resources and the territory of the Basso Ferrarese in order to prevent phenomena of abandoning from the part of the local population, especially from the part of the young people, that often do not manage to find out the "environmental, cultural and economical" conditions sufficient to justify to get rooted with their own territory and collectivity.

The plan was concentrated on the qualification and promotion of the tourist, environmental and agricultural products. It was determined to reach first the setting up of a package of qualified products and more on the whole of the Park territory in its complex. The interventions were consequently concentrated on the prevailing economical sectors: the agriculture and the tourism.

The LAP of the LEADER II intended to pursuit two specific objectives:

1. to promote stronger relationships between the resources and the more important economical activities of the territory;
2. to promote an atmosphere of stronger and stable trust and collaboration between the economic operators and the local institutions.

The adopted operative strategy in order to reach the described objectives was:

- to make more efficient and coherent the relation between the agriculture and the environment;

- to make more articulated, capable and rich the relation between the tourism and the environment;
- to improve and to qualify the relation between the landscape and the environment.

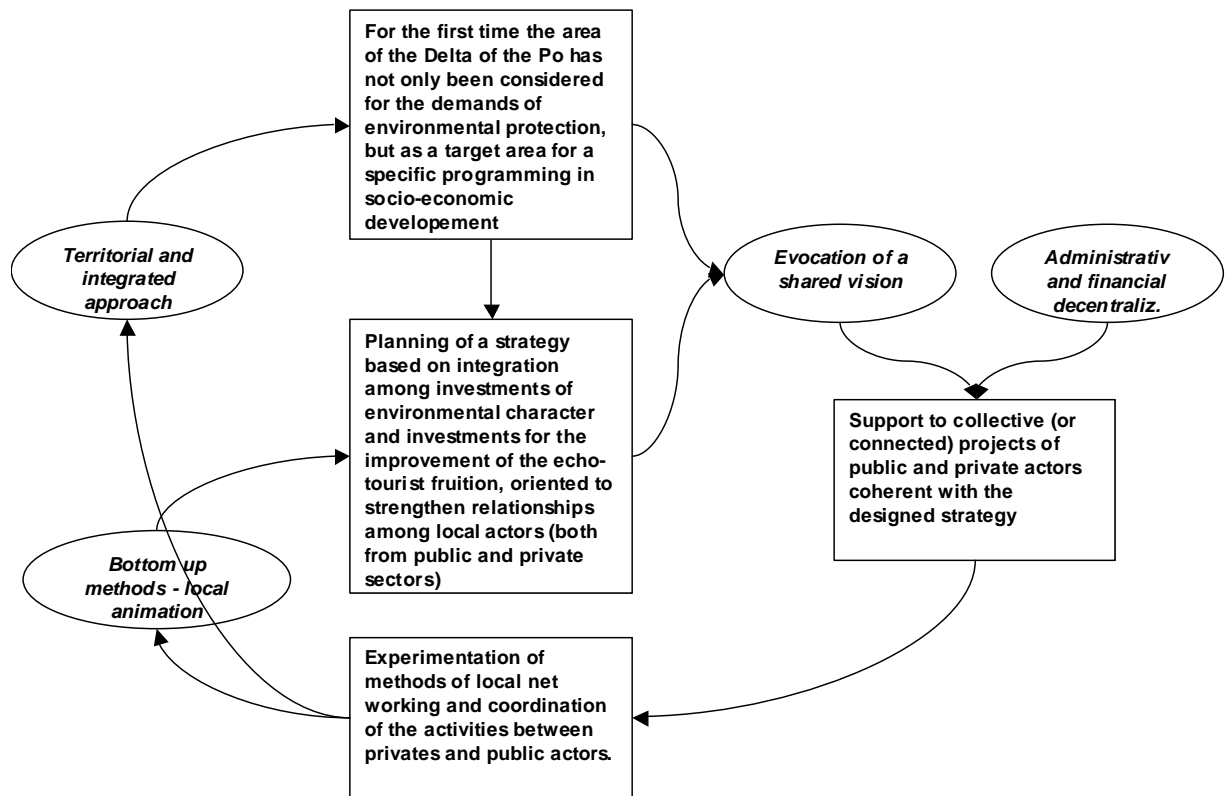
b) 3 Hypoteses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area

Hypothesis N.1 The common perception of local potential increased.

The combination of the territorial and intergrated approach and the participative technics based on the local animation allowed to perceive the potential and the identity of the territory in a new way: in case of the delta of the river Po, for the first time the area was not considered only from the point of view of the needs of the environmental safetyguard, but as a territorial system of reference for a specific socio-economic programmation.

According to A “ ... thanks to the Leader the perception about the territory changed from the part of many subjects. The arrangement is now more complete and the reflector is pointed to light the emergencies of the territory which are considered very important and a decision made to do an integrated project by putting the resources to a system”.

In this way, particularly performing on the needs of the local actors it was possibile to elaborate a shared strategy, that facilitates the promotion of initiatives and of coordination and net-working among the actors and the phenomenon of learning that generates from these experiences by strengthening the identification with the territory and by improving the capacity to promote integrated strategies.



Naturally this stimulus to work together was facilitated by the administrative and financial decentralization because the requirements of consistency with the strategy and connection among more subjects became important selection criteria for the projects.

Determinative for the efficaciousness of the process was the individuation of a largely shared vision about the future development of the area

Hypothesis N.2 Public and private actors learned to work together to improve the competitiveness of the local system

The public and private actors started a common programming and it became a diffused habit to work together:

- the local public administrations adopted partecipative working methods;
- the local actors created new tourist products based on the environmental fruition and on the net-working activities among the economic operators.

This was possible thanks to the combination of two main functions of the LAG:

- Animator and networker that work constantly for the facilitation of the contacts between the operators;
- Manager of financial resources that encourages concretely the projects coherent with the strategy and innovative in method (collective dimension) and in contents (new tourist environmental products for example).

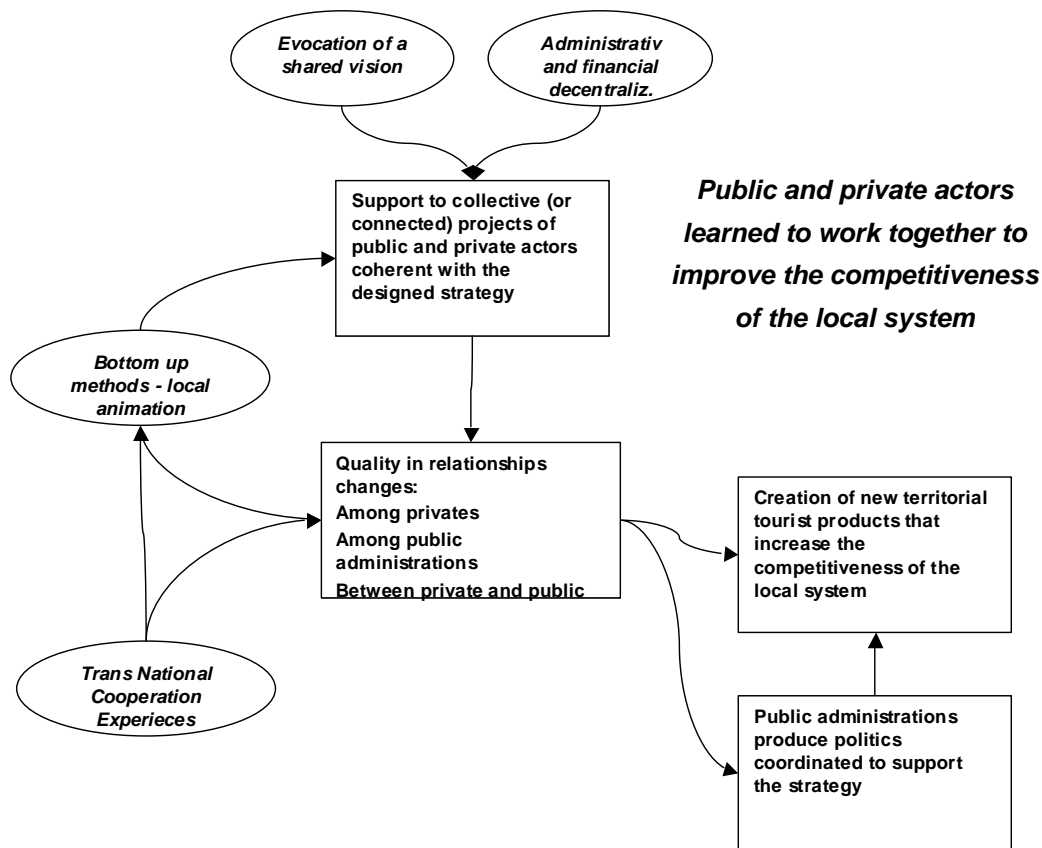
This “experimentation” made with the Leader II produced effective behavioural changes. From this point of view the reply of the private was perhaps better, as B states: “... the way to relate among themselves in order to face together the market changed completely between the economical actors. From the point of view of the investments, we private operators built up territorial communication instruments in which the single companies were only a part of territorial networking system. The Leader helped us to understand that it is necessary to sell the territory and it permitted us among the other things to carry out efficacious promotion also to smaller companies. The manifestations were synergic also with the other public bodies

The reply of the public administrations was slower also because their times are slower. But they adopted the same coordination practises for the interventions.

The last interesting aspect of the local networking is that to create a connection between the public and the private, as E notices (from the cooperative for tourist services): “... the work of the LAG facilitated the relationship with the local administrations. This meant to relate with the higher part of the territory of the delta of the river PO, that really important one under the naturalistic aspect. We were facilitated with the building up of the product both with the public and the private.

This stimulus to the coordination produced concrete effects in terms of adjustment and marketing of innovative tourist offers, as E remarks: “ We averagely, during the period of excursions, verified a very very notable peak of growth of presences, about 27.000. In that period we had good 93 collaborators

In this work, the trans-national cooperation gave a noticeable contribute in terms of know-how and innovation (the LAG cooperated with an Irish group for the adjustment and marketing of the bird-watching products). E describes: “....We had at disposal a new, great product created by the trans-national cooperation on which to invest and to count on also in future”.



This change happened in local relationships can be interpreted as a learning phenomenon because it demonstrated its capacity to keep going on also after the Leader. The following was confirmed by all the participants: “ The operators went on working together, something that was unthinkable before, and it was also functional for other initiatives. These agreements (those that took place with the Leader) led to the real and proper temporary associations of enterprises in order to realize other initiatives. The territory had an increase of collaboration in the sector of environmental tourism that obtained good results which then had effect distributed and acknowledged over the whole territory..... nowadays, who has money to invest, pushes himself and obtains results.First the communes worked only for themselves, but now their approach is more territorial.....”.

In order to describe these phenomena the local animation and the adoption of bottom up methods revealed to be as one of the concurrent factors. It is anyway good to highlight that the constant operating of the animation represents, in effect, the essential condition for success.

More than on specific methods, the efficaciousness of this activity depends, in order of importance:

- on the motivation of the animators, on their identification with the vision and the mission of the LAG;
- on the knowledge of the territory, understood above all, as local subjects that interact in a system;
- on the synergy with the work of administrative and financial decentralization in which the results can increase or decrease the animator's credibility.

Hypothesis N.3 The LAG assumed the function of Delta's local development agency

The method and the adopted approach, together with the obtained results allowed to the LAG to assume the function of local development agency. According to A: " The LAG in a long term transformed into a development agency that worked with the local operators, also thanks to the attitude of local bodies. So they kept on working not only with Leader but also with other initiatives that were assisted from every point of view, starting from that planning one..... Another role of the LAG is to do in that way that everything around it keeps on working and substantially the LAG imposed itself as a meeting place for the public and the private, where it is possible to discuss and to confront each other. The LAG also assumed the role of "sensitizer of the public administrations."

These last involved the LAG also in other initiatives that required an ability of local animation.

The involvement of the administrations needs anyhow more time and work, it is necessary that in some way takes place a process of acknowledgement of legitimacy for the role of the LAG.

In effect, the LAG appears on the territory without a proper identity, so it is easy that it is perceived as a forward project diffused by some local actors. With time and work this perception changes and the local function, that represents the whole territory, is recognized.

This is happened to the 'Delta' cooperative during the passage from the Leader II to the Leader +.

b) 4 Conclusions and recommendations

ONE

An important, propelling factor was represented from the strong identification of the territory with the development vision

but

the vision of the delta of the river Po belongs to a wider area than that of the Leader II (its borders were defined within the provincial territory). When on the territorial marketing projects were under the work this “geographical imbalance” manifested its limits. This question was solved with the Leader + by extending the area to cover the whole regional delta and by starting interterritorial cooperation actions with the Venetian delta.

TWO

The integrated approach (between sectors, kinds of action and local actors) determines the creation of new relationships or better said of relationship established on new bases. This helps the promotion of innovative actions. The LAG manages to become a “guarantor” of such relationships; i.e. guarantees that they develop so that they can carry out a specific mission.

but

the multi-sectorial approach of the Leader II, where the “priorities” were proposed like a grid of measures and actions, can offer space for local lobbies that try to allocate financial resources also for initiatives with no priority (or strong coherence) in respect of the development strategy.

THREE

The possibility to combine territorial and integrated, bottom up approaches, and administrative and financial decentralization produces powerful synergies to stimulate the innovation and the participation to the project.

but

the decentralization can produce boomerang effects because the length of times jeopardizes the local credibilità of the LAG and foments conflicts, meanwhile the excessive bureaucratic load requires human resources that will be taken away from the the animation.

FOUR

The Leader approach helps to set up a local function of development agency

but

this process requires inevitably a great investment in terms of animation and a time of necessary maturation until the local actors can recognize this role beyond the project.

It is necessary that within the administration of the programme would verify a learning process similar to the one that interests the LAG. The decentralization is a delicate and strategic function. In Emilia there were a good assistance to the LAGs from the part of the region, but it is still necessary to draw lessons from the past in order to find a right balance in terms of:

- streamlining of bureaucratic procedures;
- shortening the times.

The system of decentralization of financial and administrative responsibilities (similar to a mini global grant that is typically Italian) is still considered valid. According to A: “.....It was an advantage, it allowed us to close a circle: from the animation to the allocation. Some problem is referable to the region that could, we hope for that, to speed up its procedures that evidently must be heavy for them. For instance, we started with the Leader+ some actions by taking out a loan for that. The same happened for the allocation of the 50 % in settlement of the Leader II contributions for the private. This all, I mean the delays, is not compatible with the territorial planning.”

A further worrisome element in terms of learning of the vertical partnership is that it looks out that in Leader+ all the attention is concentrated on the problems connected to the distribution of the financial resources (with increasing complexities); this makes to lose the sight of the LAG's role and the nature of its mission.

The actual inputs do not give the sensation that the management authorities are “learning organizations”.

The local work of a development project is a learning process:

- in the knowledge of the territory and the relationships that insist on it;
- in the ability to move inside the system (to animate, to manage the resources and the bureaucracy, to cultivate relations ecc.).

In order to reach interesting levels of quality a great investment on such elements is necessary.

So the main lesson here is that it is necessary to be able to capitalize this work in terms of learning of the organization (LAG). This learning capital can be acquired only in small part through traditional formation systems, it is mainly a question about a ‘learning by doing’.

c) GARFAGNANA (TOSCANA)

c) 1 Introduction

LAG name	GAL Garfagnana
LAG interlocutors	Stefano Stranieri
Date:	The meeting was held in Castelnuovo Garfagnana on 23rd June 2003. It started at 10 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m.
Participants:	
A Stefano Stranieri	He has been the LAG co-ordinator since the LEADER I.
B Luigi Favari	LAG's president. He was an animator during the LEADER I implementation. He is also a local administrator deputy in the local "Comunità Montana" (= municipalities association which is typical Italian institution gathering together communities of the mountainous areas)
C Paola Aloisi	She runs an agro-tourism business and was a beneficiary of LEADER II
D Stefano Marchi	He runs an agro-tourism business and was a beneficiary of LEADER II
E Sandro Pieroni	He was the co-ordinator of a local consortium "Garfagnana produce" formed by farmers (producers and agro-tourism entrepreneurs) during Leader II.
F Piero Biagioni	He is a consultant, strongly committed in projects for the development of the local culture, he is also an expert in projects held by public administrations.
G Donatella Ciofani	She is a student at the university of Pisa and has prepared a degree thesis on the Garfagnana LEADER II experience
H Irene Annuzzi	Researcher at the Pisa University in the department of economy of the agriculture of the agri-forest environment and the territory. The department had a contract with the LAG for the monitoring system.
Serena Da Prato	She's attending a stage in Garfagnana
Evaluator	Carlo Ricci
Assistant	Bruno Coletta

The preliminary contacts took place between Carlo Ricci and Stefano Stranieri (technical co-ordinator) who took care to organize the meeting and to invite the participants.

The LAG "Garfagnana" provided an interesting documentation, including:

- Report about the activities performed during the LEADER II;
- Study about the implementation of LEADER II in the area (elaborated in the ambit of preparing a degree thesis).

Thanks to this material, together with the replies provided from the Q202, the evaluators were able to learn to know the history of the LAG and of the Local Action Plan.

The Focus group operated in a following way:

- 1 All the participants introduced themselves and described briefly their activities and the role played by them during this LEADER II experience.
- 2 The evaluator illustrated shortly the ex-post evaluation of the LEADER II in order to contextualize the day's job referring to the entire process.
- 3 Then the evaluator invited the co-ordinator of the LAG (Mr. Stefano Stranieri) to lead a "recalling" about the LEADER II experience with the help of a presentation. The evaluator specified that the presentation should not be for the benefit of the external evaluators, but for the benefit of the participants in order to "recall" those common experiences shared years ago. He also invited as well the other participants to intervene and asked them all these questions: For what the realization of the LEADER II could be remembered? In which fields/sectors/behaviours it was mostly impressive? Where the impact was inferior to the expectations?

Through the dialogue that followed two main issues on change, a positive and a negative one, were identified by the group:

- 1) The LEADER approach modified the perception of the local potential and it stimulated network dynamics among the territorial actors changing their behaviours.
- 2) During the passage from LEADER I to LEADER II the load of the bureaucratic and administrative fulfillments in charge of the LAG, necessary for the funding of the projects, increased remarkably, for both the LAG and the beneficiaries with different repercussions on the implementation of the plan and the relationships between the LAG and the actors of the territory.

The group therefore worked around these "key matters", in order to explore mechanisms, driving or inhibiting forces, specific ways of expression of the operational principles, criteria and recommendations.

c) 2 Description of partnership and activities

The LAG "Garfagnana Ambiente e Sviluppo" was one of the ten selected LAGs by the Tuscan regions and operated in a mountainous area of the province of Lucca, entirely interested by the Objective 5b, including 25 communes and about 80.000 inhabitants.

The limited company "Garfagnana Ambiente e Sviluppo" was instituted in 1991 with the aim to put a LEADER I plan into practice. At the moment it is formed by 17 partners, seven of them are public bodies: two communes, three municipalities associations, a park body and the Chamber of Commerce of Lucca; four trade associations and four private organizations on behalf of four trade associations, a banking company and the official cooperative limited company of the

Community Initiative LEADER II "Leader Appennino Pistoiese e Pratese" (recently joined for the realization of the LEADER +).

The technical-organizational structure of the LAG consists of a manager, a person in charge of the administration, four animators and a person in charge of the secretarial office.

The Local Action Plan was approved for the first time in 1997 and, definitely, in 1999. The period of time available for its realization was not therefore very long.

The strategy of local development promoted by the LEADER II was strongly steered into the environmental valorisation and the tourist development with the particular reference to the agro-tourism sector and to the promotion of the local products.

As you can figure out from the participant list, the group represented different kinds of figures: animators, technicians, evaluators and beneficiaries. The regional officials in charge of LEADER II could not participate.

c) 3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area (2 pag.)

Hypothesis N.1 the LEADER approach has modified the perception of the local potential and it has stimulated network dynamics among the territorial actors changing their behaviours.

All the participants, with different expressions, agreed on the fact that two essential changes which took place in the territory were determined or at least facilitated by the LEADER approach:

- The perception of the local potential of development. The importance attributed to all the elements of local identity in the development strategy of the territory increased (the natural and cultural heritage, the local products, the gastronomic culture and the rural-tourism hospitality).
- The relationships of collaboration between the local public and private actors improved.

Through the animation work the LAG managed to awaken the territory to the above mentioned elements of identity, in order to say as A says: "After a serious economic crisis, the Community politics reversed the awareness about the most general themes of environment, development and local resources. These resources, first lived with the critical state, successively they became strong points on which to build the restarting through a change of mentality". The bottom-up approach was a determining factor for the building on such themes a shared strategy, according to D: ".... The area was used to be interested by periodic funding on standardized themes. LEADER changed radically this custom by increasing the territorial

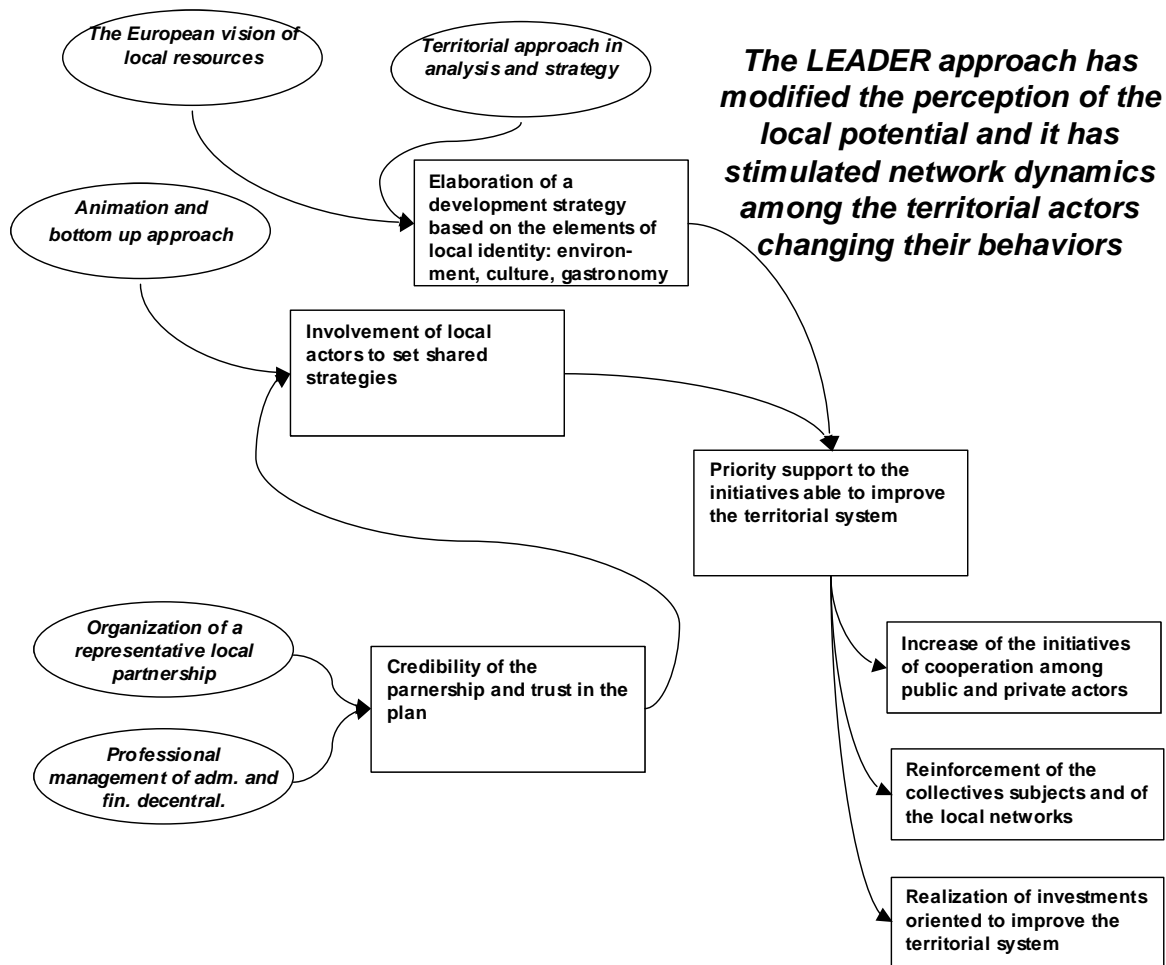
participation to the development politics....”, and, more again, from the point of view of F: “.....the local identity was reinforced and if you today propose rural development projects, nobody considers you crazy.”

The logical consequence putting on the basis of the development strategy the territorial identity characteristics was that to support in the first place those initiatives capable to obtain improving effects of the territorial system in respect of the interventions of individual type disconnected from the others.

This logical passage, that can seem banal, encouraged in fact considerably the behaviours of collaboration and of networking.

An emblematic example was the formation of a consortium between agro-tourism and local products enterprises called “Garfagnana produce”. For the first time these local operators started a series of collective initiatives: promotion activity of the products, a booking centre for the agro-tourism accommodations etc... But perhaps, the main effect was that to give a different dimension for the relationships, as some entrepreneurs stated during the focus group meeting: “.....A new young entrepreneurial class was born that reacquired and reaffirmed the awareness of belonging.we pass the clients, we have made an analysis together and everyone decided to promote particular aspects in such a way that the overall offer would result adequately complete.....Differently from us, the local hotelkeepers act separately among them. The same agro-tourism enterprises of Lucca are not organized as we are.”

A similar effect was obtained also with the public administrations that started a set of common activities and interventions in network.



In this process of change, beyond the animation and the territorial approach, also the other specificities of the LEADER approach played an important role:

- the acquired credibility of the local partnership that has been obtained by making the resources available for the local initiatives in a transparent and efficient way represented a change that contributed to create an atmosphere of confidence;
- the same trans-national cooperation turned out to be an important stimulating factor, as D explains with easiness and efficiency: “.....We made a stage in Ireland where we observed the network of connections that they had created and then we tried to reply it.....”

The network dynamics baited make it simpler to communicate with the local actors; the realized initiatives, through demonstrative effects strengthen the strategy and the image of the partnership.

The consortium experience led to integration and its office became a sort of information centre. Through this kind of organization many initiatives and a team spirit has been created with a constant process of relationships between the operators that, by these last, is considered as a strong point.

This has given to local public and private actors the awareness that in five/seven years the capacity of the territory to seize the opportunities has increased. As A says:

“The interesting mechanism is that the LAG can not hide the fundings, but on the contrary, it must be active to find them, otherwise the punishment will be the failure of the same local programme. The LAG has to find the beneficiaries because it must realize the packages. Otherwise it would not manage to spend”.

Today in Garfagnana the LAG is recognized, also by administrations as the Province and the Region, as a kind of local institution that represents the point of reference for development, research of opportunities and management of local programs.

Hypothesis N.2 the excessive bureaucratic load weights the functions of financial decentralization reducing the potential of innovation of the LEADER method

The question about the relationships “program manager (Region) – LAG – beneficiaries” revealed to be since the beginning of the focus group as the most relevant one for the participants. The motive for this is that the major part of them, in particular the persons involved in the LAG, lived with frustration the evolution of such relationships, from LEADER I to LEADER II and to LEADER +, towards always a major bureaucratic load.

In substance the impression is that the region, with the aim to make clear and univocal the interpretation of the regulations of the Community funds, has built a system gradually more detailed of procedures that the LAGs must have adopted for the administrative and financial management of the funds. The inconveniences connected to this problem increased by the fact that procedures and general rules were modified during the implementation of the programme. This led to different consequences:

- Reactions of intolerance from the part of the beneficiaries in respect of the required bureaucratic performances and therefore the change of the image perceived of the LAG. The beneficiaries present in this focus group, for example, sustained that the bureaucratic executions required by the LEADER II were much more tiresome than those of the other contemporary regional measures. As C said: “...if I had known since the beginning all the executions, I would not have participated”.
- Increase of the requirements of human resources dedicated to the administrative and financial decentralization to the disadvantage of the work of local animation.

- Reduction of the margin of manoeuvre in respect of the typologies of admissible interventions;

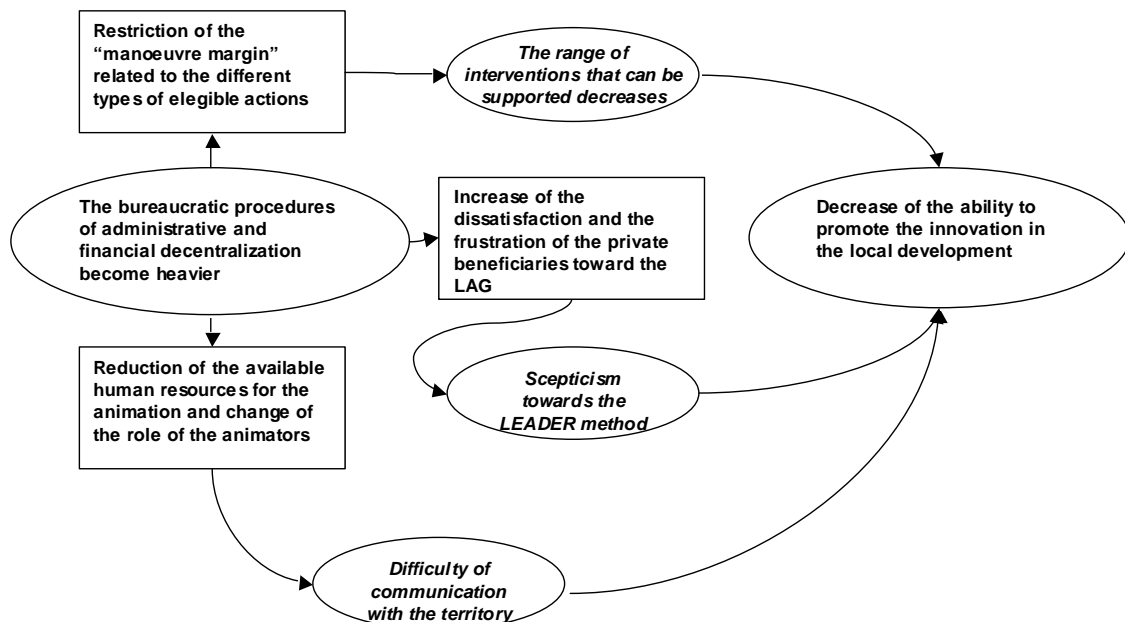
This phenomenon influenced remarkably the image of the LAG and its relationships with the territory:

- The LAG is perceived more “bureaucrat controller” than “promoter of innovation”. It is an effect particularly frustrating for the animators obliged, against their will, to assume the role of “controller” as states the co-ordinator of the LAG.
- LEADER becomes notorious as a “difficult programme”. In this regards the words of D are representative: “.....Also who has participated, says: yes, they look out nice things, but be aware because they make you crazy! The rumours of this type go round and the image circulates and spreads becoming the characterizing mark for the programme.”

These aspects came out also from the monitoring and self-evaluation work, as H tells: it was scared strongly that the message of the innovative method of LEADER, would end instead to be known for its exasperated bureaucracy and complication of the procedure.

In the following scheme is described how this process becomes a disadvantage for the potential of innovation of the programme.

An excessive bureaucratic load weights the functions of administrative and financial decentralization reducing the potential of innovation of LEADER method



During the duration of the focus group it was not possible to analyse thoroughly the topic of the reduction of the potential of innovation (what really it means), anyhow some signs came out:

- 1 Difficulty to reach the population and specific categories of local actors. The coordinator expressed clearly his dissatisfaction in the capacity of the LAG to communicate the LEADER approach “beyond” the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the initiative and to reach and to sustain better determined strategic targets like for instance the young people.
- 2 Difficulty to supply an adequate technical support for the single projects in order to promote their quality, to support their start-up and to take care of the connections between the initiatives and the beneficiaries.

c) 4 Conclusions and recommendations

Many of the elements emerged from the focus are emblematic in respect of some of the main mechanisms which influence the effective implementation of the operational principles of LEADER II.

- 1 The different operational principles strengthen among themselves

With the practices of participative programming coupled with the network activities and the cooperation are characterized new ways of intervention which then have been made practicable thanks to a correct management of the financial and administrative decentralization. The “capacity to realize” grants credibility to the partnership and therefore stimulates in its turn the local actors to participate more. From the other part the “necessity” to realize (i.e. to put into practice the own business plan) induces the local partnership to search continuously the contact with the other local actors and to stimulate initiatives.

- 2 Among the operational principles and the behaviours that they stimulate a circuit of reinforcement will be created.

If from one side, as it has been illustrated in previous chapters, the LEADER implementation leads naturally to favour the collective initiatives and the work in the network among local actors, from the other side the reinforcement of these relationships of network between the operators facilitates a lot the dialogue and so the application of participative methods.

- 3 The relationships with the programme authority have repercussions on the nature and on the identity of the partnership

The question about the bureaucratic and procedural load can have deep repercussions also on the identity of the partnership. If the procedures become the “the critical point” all the attention will be focused on them. The LAG will be considered as a local expert of funding procedures and not as an organization capable to “mobilize” the territory. This, from one side can have the

positive aspect to activate locally a specialized function in the management of the Community funds that allows to the territory to seize better the existing financial opportunities, but from the other side, in a long term, risks to alter the partnership because the skills of financial management become “dominating” in respect of those of bottom up, animation and strategic analysis. In substance there is the risk that the LAG becomes a “Europe Office” of the territory, but loses the capacity to implement economical animation dynamics and to promote the innovation.

It is necessary to guarantee a widespread animation process that reaches different actor categories. For this sake must develop the animation activity with adequate resources and methods. This implies an active role in the animation process of private collective subjects, like the unions operating in the territory, and of the public administrations.

The question about the procedures of administrative and financial decentralization must be dealt with in a more strict way: from one side the region has to give clear indications about the eligibility of the expenditure and the responsibility and to organize an effective (and frequent) control system, from the other side has to allow a major liberty about the choice of the initiatives to carry on at local level. But it is also necessary a different approach from the part of the programme authorities in their relationships with the LAGs, as the co-ordinator of the LAG says: “They have to finish considering us as dangerous subjects if not put into a cage with maximum operational rigidity they would cause you many problems ...”

Another aspect regards the critical mass: if at local level must be organized an efficient and professional structure, it must be justified by a “critical mass of the programme” and that’s to say territories and investments of adequate dimensions in respect to the mobilized energies.

As regards the procedures, the participants wanted to precise also their importance to guarantee the quality of the projects; what emerged from the dialogue was not therefore an attitude of generic protest against the procedures, but more a sign of danger to point out the problems that can be generated by the bureaucratic load. The decentralization is a very delicate issue, there is a risk to build a bureaucratic cage that, if from one side it facilitates some operations from the other it makes extremely muddled the whole process and precludes a series of action opportunities.

d) VALLE ELVO (PIEMONTE)

d) 1 Introduction

LAG name	GAL Valle dell'Elvo
LAG interlocutors	Dott. Mosca
Participants and dates	Biella, 16/06/2003
Participants:	
A	Dott. Mosca – coordinator of the LAG
B- provincial spokesman for agriculture
C	Dott. Gerardi – administrative responsible
D	Dott. G. Carpa – responsible for cooperation project
E	Gianni Bonino – beneficiary, mayor of the commune of Donato
F	Albertini – beneficiary – farmer
G	PL. Perinotto – beneficiary – tourism
Hrepresentative of the association 'Ecomuseo'
Evaluator	Rossella Almanza
Assistant	Danilo Ciampanella

The preliminary contacts took place between Mrs. Rossella Almanza e Mr.Mosca who demonstrated to appreciate and to share the initiative and collaborated with enthusiasm to organize the meeting.

The focus group performed as follows:

1. All the participants presented themselves and described briefly their activity and the role played during the LEADER II experience.
2. Then the evaluator invited the president of the LAG to « guide » a « recalling » about the LEADER II experience through the presentation of the main stages of this experience; this activity was carried out with the help of the presentation.
3. Successively the evaluator invited all the participants to intervene and asked them all the questions: For what the realization of LEADER II could be remembered? In which fields/sectors/behaviours was it mostly impressive? Which innovative approach was promoted in the territory? Which was the main change introduced by the LEADER II in the territory?

Through the dialogue that followed some issues on change, which were felt as the most significant ones, were identified by the group:

1. The perception about the territory reinforced both among the public and private operators and about its specific characteristics and potential of development as a system of resources on which it is possible to intervene in an integrated way.
2. Public and private actors experimented and learned methods of local networking by producing coordinated action able to improve the competitiveness of the local system.
3. The actions put into effect with the LEADER II found continuity within the local initiatives.

The group had therefore worked around these "key matters", in order to explore mechanisms, driving or inhibiting forces, specific ways of expression of the operational principles, criteria and recommendations.

d) 2 Description of partnership and activities

The group was founded in 1997 as a limited consortium company by 12 promoting partners in order to put into practice the LAP (= Local Action Plan) of the LEADER II. The main promoter of the initiative in the area was the province of Biella.

The LAP area is corresponding to the mountain communities of "Alta Valle Elvo" and comprehends 12 communes in the province of Biella. The Biellese area is characterized by the strong industrial tradition (textile, mechanical) supported by a good infrastructure. It is possible, in particular, to individuate two distinct socio-economic areas: the first one is that of the "valley" that consists of Biella and communes around it, characterized by a high density of population and by low ageing and unemployment rates, which is due to the driving productive articulation of the Biellese industrial division; the second one is that of "hills and mountains" characterized, contrarily to the valley area, by a low density of population, by a high ageing rate and by an accentuated abandonment of the productive activities most of all relative to the agriculture. The strong points are expressed above of all from the valley areas and can be summed up in the good sensitive capacity of the Biellese industrial sector that, in front of the crisis of the last years, has managed to stand up both from the occupational and productive viewpoint in respect of the rest of Piemonte and of the diffused entrepreneurial culture and mentality.

In spite of the potential of the territory, the tourist facilities and services structures are insufficient and need therefore absolutely structural interventions to be realized prevalingly through the renovation of the pre-existing rural buildings.

The basis for the LAP is the conception about the territory as a unique and integrated unit of resources and potentials that can be activated with more efficiency thanks to a major involvement of the population on the development themes.

For this reason was individuated a series of actions characterized by a high level synergy and complementarity:

- Support experimental and innovative initiatives concerning the tourist facilities and services;
- Create innovative and demonstrative occasions concerning the cultural and environmental heritage;
- Boost the bovine and sheep farming and promote the relative products – meat, wool – through an area marketing activity.

d) 3 *Hypoteses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area*

Hypothesis N. 1. The perception about the territory reinforced both among the public and private operators and about its specific characteristics and potential of development as a system of resources on which it is possible to intervene in an integrated way.

The programme LEADER II favoured the improvement of the relationship system among the local actors, by intensifying and qualifying their activities. In particular, it allowed 1) a major knowledge and collaboration between public and private subjects; 2) a major knowledge about the mutual initiatives and coordination possibilities between these; 3) to embark on new collective actions and to put at disposal common resources; 4) the insertion of the initiatives realized into the future planning of the public bodies in order to guarantee the partnership beyond the Programme.

Under this aspect, the LAG, preceded by a wide work of diffusion of information and of territorial animation, built up the contact between institutions and territory. On the basis of the formation of a balanced and solid partnership there was a good interaction between the consultancy and the social parts. The LAG members in their turn were members of the different local trade associations and, some time, too, presidents of these associations. Every member of the partnership contributed to the realization of the interventions in the measure of his own competences. Most of all for the agricultural associations this was very significant and some concrete success were reached. In particular what concerns the question of the quality certifications of the products and the adjustment of the equipments according to the regulations in force it was possible to involve actively in the projects the local health department that carried out an activity of assistance and consultancy for the operators. This produced new trust among

the users that did not perceive the institution only as controller subject and contributed to the diffusion of good practices about the certification of the products: the beneficiaries were object of the convincement that it is convenient to get the certification because the product's image will be reinforced and could be also more easily marketed. As Mr. Gerardi affirms (participant C): "This is a good example how the public-private partnership can activate virtuous circles and to be a starting point for the realization of good practices".

A single citizen felt, in this manner, the institutions closer and this made the initiative successful. Also in a context like that Piemontese, characterized by a good functioning of the public administration, still the difference between the traditional bureaucratic procedures and those of the LAG, without doubt easier and more direct, was perceived.

Hypothesis N. 2 a project that returns identity to the territory by generating participation

One of the most important projects carried out by the LAG was the 'Ecomuseo' that is considered the symbol of the territorial capacity to aggregate different local actors around the cultural and environmental identity of the area. It was possible to realize the 'Ecomuseo' only thanks to the LEADER II: the project assumed such characteristics that permitted to obtain good results because the intervention was programmed from the bottom in mobilizing energies that still then were present and not expressed in the area. The project, in fact, generated the meeting of different groups of local actors operating autonomously, everyone in its own sector and gave them unity and motivation to work together.

The museum is structured in sites and this naturally amplifies its visibility and impact on the territory. The I° site is the 'Museo dell'oro' (= Museum of Gold), situated near to the archaeological site of the "Bessa" and makes up an accurate reconstruction about the story of gold, the gold diggers in the area and the techniques utilized to dig for gold. A II° site is that relative to the iron production with two examples of industrial archaeology represented by two forges with relative machineries. Inside of these forges is told – through the recorded voice of the men who worked there – the story of the factory, of the production techniques adopted and of the utilized technologies on placing side by side this reconstruction with the story of the territory that naturally influenced its development. A III° site is that of the folk wisdom organized thanks to the involvement of the Association "Amici di Bagneri" (= "Friends of Bagneri"). Bagneri is a reconstructed alpine village where is active a didactic area and a new joiner's workshop next to an old one, an age-old monastery which own Romanesque specificities, as of many other buildings present in the area, have been valorised. The monastery has already become an international destination for the Boy Scouts who sleep there in the guest quarters.

The strong integrated character of the initiative is evident and it has invested manifold sectors of activity of the territory present and still characterizing for the area. This allowed a unitary

rereading of the territory and of the work of its inhabitants and a rediscovery of memories and practices that represent the heritage of small communities different among them, but that together make the history of this territory and contribute to the development. On this basis and on these contents the project was able to develop a strong participative character, by bringing the local actors into constructive communication and reached the popular and didactic objectives, most of all in front of the younger generations whom were given the possibility to recognize and to maintain the contact with their own roots.

The authenticity of the contents of the project and the effective results obtained in terms of involvement, participation and reinforcement of the identity awareness of the local communities led moreover to another important objective, certainly not priority in a project without marketing purposes. The 'Ecomuseo' , in fact, was the promoter for the origin of the "area trademark", identification symbol between the territory and its peculiarities, between the environment and its products.

Hypothesis N.3 The actions started with LEADER found continuity in local initiatives

For the area of the 'Valle Elvo' the LEADER II was not only a financial opportunity, but it made possible a new and interesting experience of territorial and participative planning. Notwithstanding the poor financial endowment, the LEADER II represented a real pilot experience: the modest resources at disposal obliged the LAG to reward the projects that corresponded mainly to the programme's specificities. This is why the community initiative LEADER was successful not only because it represented a financial opportunity, but most of all thanks to the philosophy behind it. The direct involvement of the local actors into the planning favoured the individuation of initiatives that still proceed autonomously and promise to obtain concrete effects also what concerns the increase of employment rate and therefore on the income of the area.

According to this point some initiatives are to be emphasized as examples:

Within the intervention line in favour of the agro-industrial productions the LAG had thought to go forward with a project relative to the slaughter of the sheep meat in base of the methods in accordance with the precepts of the Islamic religion. From one side the reason for this were the difficulties faced by this product on the market and from the other side the considerable number of Islamic immigrants. The project presented also evident cultural consequences by promoting a major knowledge and integration of different traditions and cultures; actually this project was not realized by the LAG, but it was then put into effect by the local operators that already had noticed a substantial sale rise.

Also in this way the initiatives rose with the LAG in favour of the dairy-industrial productions created new relationships between the operators and new ideas. One of the hypotheses to be

concretized is the founding from the part of a mixed company (mountain communities, province, trade associations) of a dairy-laboratory, or rather a school specialized in formation of new professional figures capable to give a further stimulus for the typical local productions. The representativeness of its public and private partners, what's more, should also stretch to attribute further functions for the company that, in a certain sense, can be interpreted as the heir of the LAG, particularly in the light of the non-funding with the new LEADER + programme. The idea is to feed a development process able to prepare the ground for a prosecution with time, independently from the supports of a public funding.

d) 4 Conclusions and recommendations

The action of the LAG was certainly facilitated by the territorial homogeneity of the area that coincides with the territory 5b of the province of Biella, from which were excluded the communes with the respect to the parameter of the "concentration of resources". The LAG pointed out that at least for one of the communes the exclusion was particularly penalizing and in this the LAG recognized a not opportune rigidity of the community and regional regulations. To give value to such a consideration was mentioned the relative limit to the rate of inhabitant density which is a reference for the planning of LEADER +: in order to respect the required parameters of density could be necessary to unify territories not homogenous by complicating noticeably the definition of a coherent strategy. For instance, characteristics completely different, notwithstanding the territorial proximity, can be found in the 'Alta Vall'Elvo' and in the 'Dora Baltea Canovese'.

The bottom-up approach involved the local actors and beneficiaries into the planning and positioned in the middle of the programme the local population called, for the first time, to be the leading actor of their own development model. The local actors acquired major awareness of their belonging to the territory and it improved their capability of planning intended as active participation to the construction of an environment more liveable and near to the real needs of the population. The correct carrying out of the LEADER approach was facilitated by the good relationship at political level of the provincial administration: the LAG, in fact, emphasizes that frequently the major obstacle was represented by the unwillingness to share the bottom-up approach from the part of the administrations.

Furthermore, the application of a planning from the bottom is strictly connected to the existence of a good partnership, which formation, in case of the 'Valle dell'Elvo' LAG, was made possible by the detailed animation and sensibilizing work carried out on the territory before the predisposition of the LAP.

Mr. Dr. Gerardi (participant C) affirms that "the animation of LEADER really provided the occasion to rehearse forces never expressed before on the territory, it permitted to the local actors to develop their own capacity to activate and to build up visions".

The integrated and multi-sectorial approach was without doubt put into practice by the LAG in its plan: the valorisation of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life on the territory were always strictly related to the initiatives aimed to improve the awareness that the territory itself had about its potential and resources; the rural development was intended in a wider sense, with the conviction that only an increase of the system as a whole could be a solution for the problems of the fragile and marginal rural areas. In this sense also interventions of recovery of the historic-cultural heritage were not ever before been considered to be an end in themselves but, like for example in the recovery project of the historical residence “Franco Antonicelli”, functional for the birth of a circuit of cultural tourism in the area, the theatre and exhibition activities of different kinds were realized side by side with the actions of promotion and valorisation of the local handicraft and agro-industrial products. An obstacle to the realization of the integrated approach can be recognized in this specific territory in the presence in the valley area of the strong specialization and the preponderance of the industrial sector: the traditional vertical and specialized organization of the Biellese industrial sector can be an obstacle, also psychological and cultural one, for the realization of integrated interventions of rural innovation which are often considered particularly dispersive instead to be capable to carry out in strategic manner and in a long term the potentials of the area.

Even though the partnership of the LAG “Valle Elvo” was judged solid and balanced, it seems opportune a major involvement of private subjects that could guarantee an important support, also in the decisional phase, to the definition of strategies strictly connected to the needs of the territory.

At regional level the model of interaction between the local bodies functioned well. The LEADER planning, notwithstanding the feasibility of the resources at disposal, allowed the start of virtuous circuits of collaboration and exchange of information between the local and regional actors. This model should be reinforced, by amplifying and by institutionalizing it also through a major coordination between the LAGs.

The stimulus effect generated by the initiatives put into action, the new awareness about the potentials, the habit and the capacity to project together were the achievements of the LEADER programme. Even though the mountain communities conceived their own plans of socio-economic development in base of the methodology proposed by the LEADER and the same DOCUP (=Document Unique de Programmation) placed itself as a piece to the puzzle of the programmes of integrated development carried out in the area. It must be said that the complete transfer of the method into the procedures of the public administration would require longer times: the limited period of the realization of the programme risks to remain an important experience only for the few officers participants. The non-funding of LEADER + is surely a serious handicap for the growing process of the territory and the LAG intends to find adequate modalities to carry out equally the initiatives hoping that the learning process tested by the LAG

could be transferred to the local public administration in order to favour a strategic continuity of action in the next future.

The capacity to individuate integrated projects with strong potential of involvement of the public, private actors and of various sectors resulted fundamental.

An important element for the success of the LAP is to attribute to the role played by the province that supported the LAG's action by making it credible on the territory.

The deep knowledge of the territory and the efficient animation action carried out made possible the identification of themes and subjects particularly vocative and predisposed to carry into effect development actions: the project of trans-national cooperation entitled "Valorisation of the autochthon wools" (confront the TNC case study), is an example about the taking root of the project in the territory.

e) ANGLONA MONTE-ACUTO (SARDEGNA)

e) 1 Introduction

LAG name	GAL Anglona Monte Acuto
LAG interlocutors	Pietro Brundu
Date:	The meeting was held in Ozieri on 6th June 2003. It started at 11 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m.
Participants:	
A Pietro Brundu	LAG's president. He had also an operative role of co-ordination.
B Leonardo Vargiu	Member of the Board of Directors as a representative of the mayors' assembly. Actively participant to the activities of the LAG.
C Lucio Fazi	Responsible and administrator of the LAG. He is also the secretary of the municipalities association.
D Marisa Sanna	Employee of the LAG: she was responsible for the secretary's office and the accounting.
E Tiziana Buscarino	Beneficiary of Leader II – member of the Anglona Country
F Piero Usai	Beneficiary of Leader II – president of the Anglona Country
G Gavino Sechi	Member of the Board of Directors as a representative of the municipalities association, he is ex-mayor of a village in the area
H Antonello Poddighe	Member of the Board of Directors of the LAG as a representative of the Chamber of Commerce, Artisans and Agriculture of the province of Sassari.
I Giovanni Galleu:	Beneficiary of Leader II in the ambit of an action connected to rediscovery of ancient flours grinded with millstones
L Irene Melis	Co-ordinator of the LAG – assisted to the meeting in the afternoon
Evaluator	Carlo Ricci
Assistant	Bruno Coletta

The preliminary contacts took place between Carlo Ricci and Pietro Brundu (President of the Local Action Group) who took care to organize the meeting and to invite the participants.

The LAG provided an interesting documentation describing the experience of LEADER II in the area and the main activities implemented within the Local Action Plan.

The Focus group operated in a following way:

- 1 All the participants introduced themselves and described briefly their activities and the role played by them during this LEADER 2 experience.
- 2 The evaluator illustrated shortly the ex-post evaluation of the Leader II in order to contextualize the day's job referring to the entire process.
- 3 Then the evaluator invited the President of the LAG (Mr. Pietro Brundu) to lead a "recalling" about the Leader II experience with the help of a presentation. The evaluator specified that the presentation should not be for the benefit of the external evaluators, but for the benefit of the participants in order to "recall" those common experiences shared years ago. He also invited as well the other participants to intervene and asked them all these questions: For what the realization of the LEADER 2 could be remembered? In which fields/sectors/behaviours it was mostly impressive? Where the impact was inferior to the expectations?
- 4 All the dialogue that followed was influenced by a sort of paradox that came out from the experience of LEADER II in the Anglona Monte Acuto: notwithstanding the realization of LEADER was a great success both in the area and in the ambit of the network, when it was the moment to get organized for the LEADER + the local administrations and the principal unions of the territory did not want that the LAG would carry on a new experience and so they formed a new partnership in order to prepare an action plan. Naturally this fact was a shock for both the administrators and for the persons who had worked in the LAG and, inevitably, this "failure after the success" represented a recurrent theme during the whole focus. For this reason the evaluator, reacting to the group's entreaties, decided to not evade the theme, but to animate the dialogue also with the aim to study in depth the mechanisms and the forces which determined this outcome.

In substance therefore, two issues on change which were felt as the most significant ones, were identified by the group:

- 1) The adhesion to the "vision" proposed by the LEADER produces "energy for change" and the combination of different elements of the LEADER approach is able to stimulate effects of motivation and of mobilization much stronger than those induced by the traditional programmes.

- 2) The innovative contents of the LEADER approach can determine a sort of “leap towards” of the promoters capable to provoke “reactions of rejection” from the part of the organisms representing the governance of the territory.

The group therefore worked around these "key matters", in order to explore mechanisms, driving or inhibiting forces, specific ways of expression of the operational principles, criteria and recommendations.

e) 2 Description of partnership and activities

The surface of the LEADER II area Anglona – Monte Acuto is 1.907 square kilometres and the total population counts 64.380 inhabitants distributed in 25 communes of which only one has more than 10.000 inhabitants (Ozieri) and well 6 that have less than 1.000 inhabitants. The prevailing economical sectors are in order: sheep breeding, commerce, industry, handicrafts and services. The demographic tendency can be summarized in a slow abandonment of the internal zones in favour of the coastal villages.

The LAG ‘Anglona Monte Acuto’ is a limited cooperative company, composed of 32 members: 20 of them are public administrations (17 of them municipalities) and 12 are private, constituted prevalingly by collective subjects (unions, agricultural cooperatives and associations).

The stable technical-organizational structure of the LAG was composed by an administrative responsible, a co-ordinator and three collaborators (a development agent and two office assistants).

The ‘Anglona’ was the first LAG in Sardinia to present an action plan and to organize a managerial structure. In general the strategy of local development promoted with LEADER II is steered to create a collaborative climate between the actors of the territory for the promotion and the starting of actions of integration between agriculture, handicrafts, tourism and environment in order to build, with the participation of the local forces, a system capable first to develop a strong sense of belonging to own territory, so to valorise its products and to utilize all those resources still neglected or poorly utilized. On this basis with the LEADER II were realized projects with strong innovative contents that interested different sectors of rural development. Among them can be individuated both single initiatives with a demonstrative value, like for example the first activity of fishing tourism in the area, and projects in network of wide territorial importance like that of the consortium ‘Anglona Country’ directed to institute a network of operators in order to realize a project of “diffuse hotel”.

Anyhow the initiative of major success, also in the ambit of the European LEADER network is represented without doubt by the consortium “Leaderfidi”. In the ambit of this project was activated a guarantee fund and honour loans for the support of small and medium enterprises.

The action became concrete with the creation of a cooperative of guarantee and credits "Leaderfidi" registered by the Italian exchange office that stipulated a convention with the Bank of Sardinia. The cooperative was formed by more than 250 members that could get bank loans, without interests, until 50.000 euro in order to boost existing activities or to create new ones. The loan is at zero rates and is paid back in the space of 5 years with quarterly instalments. In the ambit of this action were supported, with a very easy procedure, more than 60 projects of different sectors from the agro-industrial to handicraft, tourist and commerce, for a total investment of about 1.350.000 euro with a public expenditure of 200.000 (to cover the interests) that can be considered extremely low in respect of the help intensity degree diffused in the Objective 1 areas.

e) 3 Hypotheses on the main issues concerning the Leader II implementation in the area

Hypothesis N.1 The adhesion to the "vision" proposed by the LEADER produces "energy for change" and the combination of different elements of the LEADER approach is able to stimulate effects of motivation and of mobilization much stronger than those induced by the traditional programmes.

In the Anglona, before the LEADER II, existed already a group of local actors, operating both in the public sector as well as in the private one, and it had conceived a development strategy based on the rural tourism, on the valorisation of the local identity and on promotion of networking of the local public and private subjects (this became then the project of "diffuse hotel" of the consortium 'Anglona Country'). The forthcoming launching of the Community initiative was immediately interpreted by this group as an opportunity to not lose and therefore, still before that the Sardinian region issued activating procedures, the LEADER promoters of Anglona were already at work.

The good tuning between the local vision and the approach proposed by the European Union formed immediately a factor of confidence for these persons. From the other side the perception how much this approach would be innovative in respect of the fashionable habits in the local context represented a spur to individuate the "right way" to promote the initiative, as G says: "You had the pleasure to understand the mechanism that was functional for the start of a development idea that you already had. It was a thrilling instrument" or B: "The public administration should promote the ideas, but very often it is obliged to run after the problems. Therefore we from the LAG felt to be appointed to the mission to produce analysis and strategies for the territory". So, thanks also to the methodological support of an expert, the promoters, beyond the formation of the LAG, started an itinerary coherent to the LEADER approach:

- A wide and representative partnership of the collective interests of the territory was formed;

- to the work of social-economical analysis of the local context was coupled an activity of minute consultation of the area's actors that helped to collect more than 250 schedules relative to local initiatives;
- in order to give efficiency and clearness for the administrative and financial decentralization were defined some hypotheses of procedures.

The element that emerged very strongly during the dialogue was the "climate" of motivation that was created among the persons that lived close up the experience of the LEADER II. In Anglona this factor "contaminated" in the first place the members of the Board of Directors (the same presence to the focus is in some way a demonstration about it) who, in a volunteer way and substantially not remunerated, operated as a work team with continuous meetings (more than four times per month) following, also in the operative aspect, all the activities of the LAG. In the same way also the staff and the collaborators of the LAG interpreted their own activity with strong motivation.

This "recruitment" to the LEADER vision really did so that the local animation would be considered as a real and proper mission in which to lavish with conviction the maximum of the energies.

This way to operate, together with the elements of clearness and efficiency adopted in the administrative and financial decentralization allowed to the LAG to establish a privileged relation with the actors of the territory based on the direct support and on the credibility. As they stated during the focus: ".....there was an awarding mechanism and the projects were an instrument of demonstration and not a tool for a sort of "rain distribution" of EU funding.

In substance the LAG became a charismatic subject legitimated by different elements: to be a local expression of a European vision; to be holder of strategic indications collected directly on the territory; to be strongly innovative with the behaviours. These elements stimulated some significant changes at local level:

- Some new collective organisms like the consortium 'Anglona Country' and in the cooperative 'Leaderfidi' (mentioned in previous chapter) were born and widened;
- the way to invest of the public administrations, that today are much more sensible toward the themes connected to the identity;
- the language and the relations were changed most of all in the public organisms that introduced harmonizing methods and promoted initiatives in common by "emulating" LEADER.

You can say it with a couple of words: the LEADER approach convinced the territory. This process, according to the participants, was facilitated also by other factors:

- The good relationships with the region (authority of programme) that, also in front of procedural difficulties had an encouraging attitude of the LAG;
- the trans-national co-operation contributed to the process in different ways: it helped, through the comparison with other realities, to “see” actually that the local problems were the same in all the Europe; created confidence to verify that an area like Anglona, considered weak, could also assume a role of leadership in front of areas considered “advanced” (as was happened with the project of the Romanico area.)

Hypothesis N.2 the innovative contents of the LEADER approach can determine a sort of “leap towards” of the promoters capable to provoke “reactions of rejection” from the part of the organisms representing the governance of the territory.

As already said, in order to promote the initiative LEADER +, many of the same organisms that were the members of the LAG ‘Anglona Monte Acuto’ decided to form a new LAG; so they wanted completely to turn the page in respect of the precedent experience. This fact took place also even though none of them judged the LEADER II experience as a failure. What was the determinant fact that can be defined a failure after the success?

This argument was constantly present during the focus because also a great part of the participants had been administrators of the LAG.

Certainly the alternations in the top management of the main public administrations determined the willingness to change the leadership of the programme from the part of the new elected and from the part of the representatives of organizations who, in some way, considered themselves “excluded” (even though they were members of the LAG) during the precedent period. This movement took place also because the fame of the LEADER was increased and therefore to take part in its management was considered much more important in respect of the past.

But during the dialogue was tried to go beyond the simplest explanations. Why perhaps, the behaviour of local administrations and unions was not that to change the top management of a structure that substantially belonged to it but, paradoxically, to ignore completely such a structure in order to create a new one? This behaviour implies some reflections in terms of perception of the partnership:

- The LAG is not perceived as a proper instrument from the part of the partners;
- the know-how and the gained experience in LEADER II are not perceived as a local capital to conserve and consequently there is no realistic perception what does it mean to start from zero.

Starting from this kind of considerations the group dwelled upon the relations among which those that could be called the “activists” of the LAG (administrators and technical team) and the other partners and, in effect, it is recognized that during the period of frenetic activity that characterized the implementation of LEADER II there were some “black holes” in the communication. In particular two types of problems were found:

- 1) The energies of communication were invested exclusively to reach the actors of the territory, the potential holders of the innovative projects, the agents of the change. Paradoxically there were efforts to make comprehend the LEADER on the territory by taking for granted that it could be sufficient also for the partners.
- 2) In the ambit of the partnership a sort of division was created between the “followers” and the other partners.

A further influential factor in this sense was the time factor according to the opinion of all the participants: the three years at disposal for the implementation of the whole process were not sufficient. In a period like this it is possible to work to demonstrate that like those changes described can be reached, but it is not possible to work for their consolidation. In fact, when the LEADER II finished, all the most innovative initiatives realized in Anglona were just hardly started up and in this way they did not have the necessary support to get over the start up phase. The same happened also with the LAG, probably, if it had had more time, it could have worked better on the partnership relations and on the consolidation of its role as a development agency.

e) 4 Conclusions and recommendations

In order to sum up what emerged from the focus, the following elements influenced positively the implementation of the operational principles:

- The existence of a group of promoters that was able to be immediately “tuned in” the LEADER approach, to interpret it correctly and to move rapidly. This allowed to apply the bottom up approach since the first phases of conceiving the plan.
- The acquisition of a methodological external expertise allowed to prefigure a series of managerial problems of the financial and administrative decentralization and to individuate efficacious solutions.
- The adoption of clearness practice in the management of the resources helped the LAG to obtain credibility.

The following elements instead influenced negatively the implementation of the operative principles:

- The time factor in the first place limited the possibility to consolidate the innovative LEADER approach and all its principles.
- The contemporary presence of development programmes (LEADER and territorial pact) operative in the territory without any connection creates different disturbing effects.
- The excessively rigid and laborious procedures are not coherent with the limited time at disposal and the necessity to be able to re-modulate the programme.

Naturally the question that was discussed mostly regarded the management of the internal relations of the partnership. The LAG should cure with attention the involvement of all the partners, the growth of their sense of ownership and the communication with the territorial actors that were not direct beneficiaries of the programme.

Recommendations at the level of programme administrations and official networks (regional, national) in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II:

- The uncertainty about the procedures is a great risk and it is necessary that they are defined first with clearness through an in depth study of the different problems.
- To ensure a sufficient time for a real implementation of the programme or “systems of continuity” after the end of the programme.
- Greater flexibility in the modalities of remodulation because these programs need a constant adjustment.

Key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context:

- Professionalism in the administrative and financial decentralization.
- Special care to manage the partnership relationship
- Intense activity of animation based on the direct contact with the local actors, both for the collecting of strategic indications, and for the involvement of the potential beneficiaries and for the support of the initiatives during the start up phase.

3. Report on national and regional programme evaluation

3.1 Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level (4 pages)

a. The evaluation process of the regional LEADER II programmes in Italian regions

As it is known in Italy the Initiative LEADER II was put into practice through the Regional Operative Programmes and therefore the regions had the task to entrust the evaluation services of their respective programmes. All the regions fulfilled this obligation.

At national level, moreover, was elaborated, in June 2002, by the INEA (= National Institute of Agrarian Economics) on the behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry a report named "Evaluation of synthesis at national level of the programme of the Community Initiative LEADER II" concerning the examination of the carried out regional evaluations and their syntheses.

The same Ministry, moreover, commissioned the ISMEA (= Institute of Services for the Agroindustry) for the ex post evaluation of the National LEADER II Network, programme realized by the INEA (= National Institute of Agrarian Economics) in the course of the years 1996-2001.

Taking into consideration the evaluations of the regional programmes and referring to the three divided phases of the evaluation process – *ex ante evaluation*, *intermediate evaluation*, *ex post evaluation* – it comes out evident:

- **Ex ante evaluation:** the documents of the regional LEADER II programme do not present generally a formally identifiable analysis with the ex ante evaluation. Within themselves they develop, with very differentiated degrees of study in depth, territorial and socio-economical diagnosis often concerning the entire regional ambit (in case of the regions Objective 1) or the corresponding ambit to the territories 5b (in case of the regions 5b) but not regarding the area identified as eligible to LEADER II, whenever this present different perimeters. In this way also, the range of objectives of various level and the relative indicators are in major part of the cases handled in general terms since their precise determination referred to the Local Action Plans.
- **Intermediate evaluation:** In case of the Italian regions the evaluation tasks had as an object generally the intermediate evaluation and the in itinere evaluation, in a not a rare confusion of their specificities for reasons deriving, from one side, from a codification less strict of the evaluation instrument from the part of the same Community provisions for the programming period 1994-99 as regards the actual phase, from the other side, from a minor knowledge and awareness of this type of analysis from the part of the same administrations responsible for the realization of the LEADER programmes. The

evaluation tasks were entrusted by the regions to an independent evaluator selected through competitive procedures, generally object of calls specifically concerning the LEADER Initiative except some cases, prevalingly located in the regions Objective 1, where the evaluation of the LEADER II programme was jointed (and often overcome) to the evaluation of the Operative Programme Objective 1.

Approximately the evaluation activities were started with a certain delay, in some case the entrusting took place in 1999 close to the closure of the engagements. The activities were articulated, as the same methodology foresaw, in a first phase relative to the verification of the ex ante evaluation, in a report of intermediate evaluation relative to the state of realization of the programmes in December of 1997, and in a series of annual reports, sometimes with six-monthly updatings, of which the last relative to the date of closure of the programme, December 2001.

- **Ex post evaluation:** from the moment that the Community regulations of the period 1994-99 referred to a ex post evaluation of competence of the European Commission, the regions had not proceeded with the entrusting of this analysis and therefore, the tasks relative to the intermediate evaluation and in itinere at most referred to a conclusive phase of the activities named "preparation of the ex post evaluation". When in 1999 the European Commission stated that within September of 2001 the ex post evaluations of the programmes should be elaborated, only few regions were able to proceed with the entrusting of this specific activity, also because, frequently, the Monitoring and Evaluation Measure did have anymore resources available because the programme had already undergone the opportune re-allocations previous to the enclosure of the expense commitments. In the major part of the cases, so, the ex post evaluation was carried out by the same evaluators that had in course with the different regions the contracts of *intermediate – in itinere* evaluations. The ex post evaluations were elaborated and delivered between September and November 2001.

As regards that specific phase of the evaluation process, it is to precise that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, assisted by the INEA, took upon itself the coordination of the methodological aspects, by activating a work team together with the regions and the evaluators. All the regions were invited to participate in the activities and, successively to follow the common formulation defined for the evaluation process and for the articulation of the same report. This activity gave rise to homogenous reports concerning their contents and easily comparable. Only the regions Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardegna and Liguria followed autonomous formulations.

In the ambit of the same coordination activities was suggested to all the evaluators the adoption, which as a tool for analysis, of the questionnaire elaborated by the European Observatory relative to the Evaluation of the added value of LEADER. Also this indication was accepted from the major part of the regions and therefore the Italian situation of the evaluations of the Initiative LEADER II presents itself particularly complete even though, as it is natural, the evaluations are different what concerns the

degree of study in depth and the priorities attributed to the different aspect of the analysis.

At the end of the 2001 the ex post evaluations of the regions Veneto, Campania, Puglia and Calabria resulted still not ready and successively they were consigned during the 2002.

b. **Encountered main problems** (*What problems and constraints, if any, were encountered?*)

The realized interviews with the regional administrations and the LAGs, as well as the personal experience gained by the evaluator in the ambit of the activities of evaluation of the programmes allow highlighting some problems and critical states:

1. The poor capability of the evaluation to influence on the realization of the programme.
The delay in many entrusted evaluations, the timing of delivery of the reports, necessarily successive to the elaboration of the monitorings and therefore, generally corresponding to a six-month period following to the state of progress taken into consideration, the excessive “diplomacy” of many evaluations made often poorly efficacious the evaluation activity that frequently commented upon the events already passed and found itself in front of the solutions already predefined. For certain reasons, it is possible to say that the value and the main utility of the evaluation is to find in its process, while the better results of the activity seem to reside in the formative role and of acquirement of awareness, reached in those cases positively distinguished by a participation widened to the administrations, the LAGs, the evaluator.
In the light of what said here above it would seem more profitable to accompany constantly with the evaluation the realization by producing thematic studies in depth ad hoc, adequate to the phase and to the specific problem that the programme is going through, rather than burdensome annual evaluations, usually temporarily dodged.
2. Difficulties with the acquisition of monitoring information. Frequently the evaluator encountered great difficulties in acquiring the data that in the best case regarded the financial advancement, rarely the physical monitoring. The problem was not uniquely the management of the monitoring system but in many cases of the original lacks of the regional programming documents approved by the Commission and of the local programmes, approved by the region. In both cases there were gaps in the definition of the objectives and in their quantification making extremely complex the evaluation of the results and the impacts of the programme. Often the evaluator had to reconstruct the needed information system by dedicating energy and time not foreseen and, naturally with the risk to reach results not perfectly reliable or often different from those reported by the official sources. This problem could be considered from one side, the effective cause of the weakness of some evaluations from the moment that the acquisition of the data is essential for the completion of the evaluations, from the other side the

justification which is used as pretexts of the same points of weaknesses as, it is known, the evaluation has to face also aspects and profiles of thematic and qualitative analysis that can be anyway produced in an independent way from the monitoring information.

3. Excessive load of information requests to LAGs. The surveillance system realized by various regions (in particular the monitoring activities), the network initiatives (in particular the various surveys and study cases carried out), the activities of the independent evaluator and of the ex post evaluator followed one another in a scarcely coordinated way to create in some cases the overlapping of surveys. The LAGs tried to face all the requests, often mixing up also the roles of the different subjects, by offering, sometimes, modest contributes because too loaded from many requests in front of few information. It is considered necessary, in order to optimize the whole system and to not make too heavy the work of the LAGs, to coordinate the process of the information gathering from the part of the numerous subject involved under different nominations with the realization: a solution could be found in the limitation of the direct relationships towards the groups and in the attribution to the regions the task to examine the opportunity of the requests and of the surveys also in distributing them in correct times that guarantee no overlapping with important phases of the realization of the programmes.

c. **Ex post evaluations of the regional LEADER II programmes**

(Complete overview per member state and OP)

In the ambit of the present study were gathered all the ex post evaluations of the regional programmes (in some cases, characterized by an extreme conciseness in the ex post evaluations also some evaluations in itinere were gathered), acquired partly at the regional administrations and partly at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Moreover the Ministry provided the evaluation of synthesis for the Programme of LEADER II Initiative.

The following represented table has been reconstructed on the basis of the analysis about the above mentioned documents and therefore it bases upon the contents of the ex post evaluations. In short it is to highlight that the ex post evaluations were carried out before the closure of the programmes and precisely they take into consideration the state of realization on 30/06/2001.

As already said, the adopted methodology and the articulation of the relationships, thanks to the coordination of the Ministry and of the INEA, are the character of homogeneity and allow therefore a comparative reading. So they return the main results of the realization deducible from the contents of the evaluations and from the document realized by the INEA "Evaluation of synthesis at national level of the LEADER II PIC" in which the information have been integrated as well as elaborated by the Institute in the ambit of the activity of the national network.

1. *The programming and selection phase of the LAGs.*

This activity of regional character, in Italy follows a preparatory phase centralized at national level (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – MIPAF) and harmonized with the inherent regions: the allocation of the financial resources for the state member; the elaboration (October 1994) of the Guide Lines of the Community Initiative; the elaboration of technical-administrative procedures of surveillance, evaluation and attribution of tasks and responsibilities to different subjects and bodies operating for the realization of the Initiative (October 1996).

- The programming phase led to the first Community Decision of approval of the Regional LEADER Programmes lasted for a long time: the first approved programmes were those of Abruzzi, Campania and Basilicata (April 1995); the last ones were those of Sicily and Lazio (August and October 1996). These times extremely long are due to the complexity of the Initiative that required the application of its priority principles: *approach from the base*, that meant to pass to the gathering phase from the territory of the manifestations of interest that were the basis on which were constructed the strategies of the regional programmes; the *complementarity* with the other regional programmes that required numerous studies in depth at all the levels, local, regional and Community; the *definition of the territorial ambit* of realization of the Initiative that most of all in those cases in which it was considered opportune to express a more selective strategy it led to laborious harmonizing phases (for instance Umbria, Molise).

For this phase 753 days were necessary which were divided as follows:

I Phase: Programming	Date	Days for single sub-phase	Accumulated time
Communication to the Member States	01/07/94		
Invite for the presentation of manifestations of interest (average date for 6 regions)	23/08/94	53	53
Approval with Community decision (average date of 21 Regional LEADER Plan)	11/01/96	506	559
Formal formulation of the Partnership of Planning and decision (average date for 10 regions)	22/07/96	193	753
Total Phase I		753	

Source INEA Report "Evaluation of synthesis at national level"

- The selection phase of the LAP programmes turned out to be also complex and averagely long owing prevalingly to the great adhesion to the initiative from the part of the regional territories that put forward an elevated number of proposals (for example in Sicily: 80 manifestations of interest 57 LAP presented), all that was followed by a heavy proceedings work, and often the quality of the reached proposals was modest and required therefore long times of integrations and modifications.

II Phase: Approval	Date	Days for single sub-phase	Accumulated time
Publication of the approved RLP del PLR (average date 21 regions from the date of the Decision)	03/07/96	174	733
Deadline for the presentation of the LAPs (average date 19 regions)	02/01/97	184	917
Official approval of classification or first LAP (average date 21 regions)	18/07/97	197	1114
Total II phase		555	1114
Allocation I advance to LAGs (average date 6 regions)	21/10/98	460	1574

Source INEA Report "Evaluation of synthesis at national level"

The sent in and selected LAPs

	Manifestations of interest	Sent in LAPs	Selected LAPs
Total Objective 5b	148	95	81
Total Objective 1	295	206	122
Totale	443	301	203

Source INEA Report "Evaluation of synthesis at national level"

1. *The realization phase (for the financial aspects, please, look the bans).*

The realization procedures were contained in all the RLP (= Regional LEADER Plan), some regions (Emilia Romagna, Piemonte, Basilicata, Sicily) issued a specific document that rules in detail the tasks, obligations, responsibilities of the LAG, realization modalities of the Measure C, control and financial statement procedures.

The following most significant aspects are to be highlighted:

- The LAGs are organized in mixed (public-private) companies articulated as follows: 1) partners' general assembly; 2) board of directors (decisional body); board of auditors; administrative staff; technical staff; structures of support (of managerial character represented by the harmonizing tables etc.; of technical type like the structures of technical assistance, evaluation groups of the projects).
- The monitoring committees of the LEADER programme coincide with those of the Objective 5b in northern regions and of the MOP (=Multifund Operative Programme) or of the POP (=Plurifund Operative Programme) for the regions Objective 1.
- In order to realize the LAPs two procedural courses are to be found: 1) direct individuation of the projects and of the relative persons that realize them in cases which objective is both "of public nature" and in the projects which beneficiary is the LAG that,

frequently, adopted anyway examination procedures in order entrust the tasks to professional people and companies; 2) activation of competition procedures for the other typologies of project. The public expenditure announced results to be equal to 70 % of the total amount; the completion of the calls required averagely 4 months.

2. *The application results of the Initiative LEADER II (the LEADER specificities and other evaluations)*

In respect of the articulation of the ex post evaluations reports, agreed between the Ministry and the regions, almost all the evaluations deal with a) the analysis of the specificities and the added value induced by the evaluations; b) the evaluations of the impact of the RLP in respect of the objectives of the rural development; c) the evaluation of the impact of the RLP in respect of the objectives of the EU.

a) the evaluation of the added value of LEADER II was carried out on the basis of the questionnaires elaborated by the European Observatory and distributed to the LAGs; such an evaluation, certainly interesting, anyway rarely manages to read coherently the results of the realizations of the programme with the advantages deriving from the specificities.

Territorial approach: averagely the main results are to be recognized in the “better individuation of problems and local needs” and in the second place in the “individuation of the local needs”. The resources principally valorised in consequence of this approach were the “historical-cultural resources” followed by the “environmental” and “agricultural and forest”.

Bottom up approach: on the whole the results most significant are to be found in the “better individuation of problems and local needs” and in the second place in the capacity to “stimulate new ideas and projects” and to favour a “better organization of the local actors”. The participation was everywhere wide, particularly during the realization phase in respect of the programming phase and in case of the “farmers” and of the “local administrators”; less intensive from the part of the “associations” and of the “young people”.

Local Action Group:

Composition of the social basis of the LAGs/CB

	Objective 1	Objective 5b	Total
Public partners	823	810	1633
Private partners	1101	972	2073
Total	1924	1782	3706

Source INEA Report “Evaluation of synthesis at national level”

The LAGs were largely formed as limited companies of cooperative type. A recognized tendency of the LAGs is to privilege in their activity the phases of administrative management in respect of the animation. On the whole the groups managed to gain credibility in the territory so much to lead the same partnership towards new initiatives, most of all for the programming 2000-2006.

The innovative character of the actions. All in the entire LEADER favoured the individuation and the experimentation of new solutions for the development of the territory. The innovation invested prevalently and transversally the LAP, connected essentially to the method and in some cases assumed also characters more punctual, i.e. circumscribed to some projects. It was prevalently caused by the LAG. The ambit in which the innovations acted for all the LAGs was in the first place the diversification of the economical activities and in the second place the development of local and external networks. The main induced results of the innovative character can be recognized in the act of favouring to gain credibility of the LAG on the territory as development agency and in the effects of ability to demonstrate and to transfer. The main constraints were identified in the problems of coherence with the Community regulations and therefore of admissibility of the expenditure and in the factor time, too limited.

The integrated and multisectorial character. It deals with an approach all in all widely adopted by the LAGs and it based prevalently on the integrating theme for the promotion of the rural tourism that necessarily requires the adaption of integrated strategies. The most important result are to be identified in the creation of stable links between the operators, public and private that in cases more mature led to embark also on other initiatives and in the realization of synergies between the sectors. The main constraints are to be recognized in the difficulties to overcome the traditional individualism that distinguished the activity of the operators of many LEADER areas and in the times excessively long between the programming and the realization and in the calendars of the advancement of different funds.

The trans-national network and cooperation: In Italy operated the European network and the national network, beyond these, prevalently informal ones that arose in some regions (Abruzzi, Sicily, Tuscany, Liguria and Piemonte). The LAGs demonstrated averagely a good level of participation to the activities of the networks that anyway were conditioned by the very concentrated work load under which the groups were subjects for the delays with the starting of the programmes and limited their participation. Moreover is to highlight that the participation limited itself to the technicians of the LAGs and did not manage to involve the economical operators. The results: the European network favoured the surmounting of the isolation and allowed the actuation of the cooperation projects; the national network favoured the informative and methodological exchanges, improved the local skills.

The financial management. the regions followed parallel procedures of transfer of the resources to LAGs happened according to the successive advances following the presentation of bank

guarantees of the resources from the part of the LAGs. Two exceptions are to be pointed out: the autonomous Province of Bolzano that does not credit the financial resources to the LAGs but allocates directly to the beneficiaries, selected in complete autonomy by the LAGs, advances and settlement; the Tuscan region sets up a third subject “the cashier body” responsible for the financial management of the funds. In both cases, the LAGs express their satisfaction with the adopted solutions that streamline their work by guaranteeing at the same time their autonomy and power to decide.

What concerns the *Evaluation of the impact of the RLP in respect of the objective of the rural development* (development and improvement of the agricultural and forestal sector; improvement of the standards of life in the rural areas; the development of the handicrafts, of the commerce and tourism; protection and safety guard of the environment) and the *Evaluation of the impact of the RLP in respect of the objectives of the EU*, the evaluation reports deal with such aspects with methodologies prevalently qualitative, which results are in a difficult way to be synthesized, with some exceptions that adopt tools and methods directed towards the introduction of objectivity principles:

- In Piemonte is carried out an analysis swot regarding the RLP;
- In Liguria is carried out an analysis capable to demonstrate and to transfer the investments for single action and made a comparison between the indicators of final performance of the LAGs and the utilized selection system;
- In the autonomous Province of Bolzano, in Emilia Romagna, in Tuscany, in Abruzzi, in Sicily is proposed a reclassification of the investments in six macro-categories (functioning of the LAG, help to the private, formation, services, infrastructures, studies and researches), by distinguishing between public and private, material and immaterial and therefore comparison the weight of the LEADER investments with the resources of the provincial/regional budget destined to different sectors.

d. The diffusion of the evaluation results

(How were evaluations processed at national level?)

The intermediate and in itinere evaluations were transmitted by the regions to the monitoring committees and in this sense reached all its members, in particular the European Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It seems, instead, that the diffusion of the evaluations among the LAGs was not particularly pursued.

The ex post evaluations were transmitted by the regions both to the Ministry than to the European Commission. In some cases these evaluations are available at the regional web site.

3.2 Overall assessment

The process of ex post evaluation carried out on the Operative Programmes of the Italian regions had the fortune to be initially coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (supported by the INEA) that suggested a common articulation of the relations and the application of common methodologies, in particular the utilization of the questionnaires defined by the European Observatory relative to the Evaluation of the added value of LEADER II. This co-ordination in the metodological formulation more to represent a significant advantage in terms of comparability of different evaluations was particularly opportune as it induced the evaluators to adopt an instrument of analysis (the questionnaires of the Observatory) that turned out to be extremely efficient properly for the learning process both at local and regional level. In fact, even though the work on the LEADER specificities was carried out in a different way in the ambit of the different evaluations, in some cases through a simple distribution of the questionnaires to the LAGs, in some cases assisting their elaboration with moments of debate and of more enlarged participation, somehow the treated arguments, prevailingly concentrated on the qualitative aspects and of process in relation to the realization of the Plans, were particularly appreciated by the LAGs as able to valorise at best their work and able to lead the Groups to the moment of reflection and of self-evaluation particularly opportune in an important period also for the new programmation 2000-2006.

On the basis of the information and knowledge acquired by the evaluator, in particular in the ambit of the studies in depth on the sample regions, can be summarized the following considerations:

- On the whole the evaluation process (both in itinere and ex post) seems to be experienced with major participation by the LAGs above all than by the regional administrations that seem to have had less utility because the evaluations did not always express clear conclusions and recommendations and presented temporal dislocations in respect of the needs of the realization phases of the programme; comes out moreover from the part of the regional offices preposed to the realization of the LEADER programme the sensation that the aspect connected to the advancement of the expenditure remains all the same the element of principal interest, inside the monitoring committee;
- In cases where the evaluations of the LEADER programme were entrusted in the ambit of an unique charge including also the evaluation of other regional programmes of major financial importance, in particular in the regions Objective 1, the LEADER programme did not receive enough importance.

For the future it seems opportune

- To set up the evaluation process since the first realization phases, by requesting to the evaluator in the course of his/her activities eventual thematic or sectorial studies in depth aimed at the evaluations of specific problems that appear during the course of the realization;
- To organize periodical meeting between regional administration , LAG and evaluator in order to acquire major awareness about the evaluation process in act and to individuate specific focus of the idoneous analysis to represent better the characteristics of the different programmes;
- To spread and in particular to transfer to the LAGs the evaluation results, also in the ambit of specific meeting debates;
- In the light of the experience of co-ordination of the ex post evaluations carried out by the Ministry, moreover it is considered useful that would be carried out an activity of address in respect of the regional evaluations aimed at guaranteeing a common base of information and of tools and methods.

3.3 Capitalisation on relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the national and regional evaluation reports of the 34 selected programmes – (grid) (2 pag.)

Area-based Approach:

The individuation of the eligible territories to the LEADER II was carried out by the regions; inside of these ambits the local partnerships defined the perimeters of the areas of effectiveness of the LAGs. It is to highlight:

- the case of the Calabria region that individuated ex ante 22 areas on which to carry out the LAPs. In this way were created smaller areas and therefore the realisation of partnerships was easier;
- the case of the Tuscany region that, as the major part of the regions 5b, defined eligible the whole territory 5b and referred to the provinces the harmonizing preparatory phase to the birth of the LAGs.

The administrative criterion and the geographical criterion generally guided the choices of the perimetric action and in some cases was determinate the political will of the local bodies.

The area-based approach favoured the acquisition of a major awareness about the local resources, a more exact definition of the problems and of the needs, a general reinforcement of the sense of belonging to the territory. In the territories characterized by a major habit for the

local programming (Emilia Romagna, Tuscany), this approach favoured also the better utilization of the resources.

Bottom-up Approach:

Approximately a good participation was reached, in the cases of Emilia Romagna and Calabria more intense during the starting phases (analysis and definition of the strategies) and less intense during the course of the realization.

In Calabria was the entrepreneurial category to show itself more actively participative; in other cases the institutions, in unison with the economical operators, the associations, played an important role. The involvement of the population was not generally reached, if not in case of the Tuscan region during the activation, thanks to numerous actions aimed at the territorial knowledge and the valorisation of the local specificities.

The positive results of the bottom-up approach can be recognized in the capacity to individuate the local problems and needs, organizing them in an only model of territorial development and improving the organizing capacity of the actors. The harmonization made possible a strengthening of the decisional capacities and a major consent about the choices. The progressive participation led also to an increase of visibility of the initiative LEADER. The experience LEADER was transferred to other forms of intervention of harmonizing type, on becoming general rule for the territorial development.

The local group:

In the regions 5b, where the harmonizing habits more rooted are recognized, in particular Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, the partnerships of the LAGs represented the local realities; in these contexts the institutional subjects played decisive roles and frequently were promoters for the birth of the LAGs. In case of the Calabria region, on the contrary, during the starting phase the initiatives assumed by the private subjects like the agricultural organizations, the associations among professional figures, the cooperatives were prevailing whilst the local institutions demonstrated a modest participation deriving from an initial scarce confidence in the potentials of the programme.

In the contexts in which the system of relationships among the local subjects was already more consolidated the LAGs represented permanent harmonizing tables that facilitated the decisional process, the consent about the choices and the individuation of collective actions of innovative character, giving origin for important participative experiences, concerning for example the process of coordination of some bodies and the stimulus for the starting of cooperation experiences with the private.

The LAGs during the realization phase reinforced their role as a catalyst of the local development, assuming the function of local development agency, with effects of strengthening of connections between the territorial subjects so much that, in different cases, the partnership pursued the proper action also in other initiatives of local development. In all the experiences it is possible to recognize, anyhow, which main results the control of the consistency and integration of the interventions, the demonstrating role of the partnership model, the stimulus to the realization of initiatives of collective character.

Innovation:

The innovation regarded in the first place the development of the local offer through the introduction of new products and services (in all the experiences, new forms of marketing (in Emilia Romagna), the development of local networks, and an easier access to the new information and communication technologies (Tuscany). Prevalently the innovative interventions regarded the sector of agro-tourism, through proposals aimed at advertising the image and at rendering thematic the offer.

In Emilia Romagna the innovation was particularly favoured by the regional instructions that directed the Plans towards actions prevailing of immaterial and collective character excluding the financing of individual interventions of structural character.

On the whole the research of the innovation was principally stimulated by the LAGs with a good contribution also from the part of the project promoters. The main obstacles are to be recognized in the admissibility of the innovative interventions, in long times for the planning and realization of the interventions and in difficulties to find the resources for the co-financing of the projects.

The results prevailingly deriving from the realization of innovative actions, were the effect of demonstration and therefore of transferability, the better credibility of the LAG in the area where it operates as a promoter of new approaches. In some cases the projects favoured the formation of new forms of partnership and the individuation of new markets in particular for the action that mixes up the tourism (connection in the network of farms and tourist operators) and the artisans (Emilia Romagna).

Multisectorial Integration:

On the whole the Plans show a good state of application of the integration principle. The dominating theme around which were built integrated strategies, is almost everywhere the tourist development and of the linked services, which are followed by a driving force relative to the valorisation of the typical products and the environmental resources. In some cases (Calabria) the absence of a sector of economical activity dominating on the sector favoured the multi-sectoriality, whilst the individualism of the local actors represented an obstacle. Some

LAGs (Emilia Romagna) apply themselves with particular engagement to actions of programming and planning of territorial wideness and of support to the activities of the bodies operative in the area.

The main results of the integration can be recognized in the creation of stable connections between the actors, secondly in the best sustainability of the projects and in the development of synergies. It is presupposed therefore, that this action modality had triggered a positive process of collaboration between different subjects that could go on beyond the conclusion of the LEADER initiative and could spur the starting of other actions of integrated local development.

Networking:

The participation to the networks from the part of the LAGs was approximately high but regarded principally the technicians of the LAGs and in minor measure the operators and the populations. The exchange took place through the reinforcement of the connections with the national networks (INEA) and the connection with the European network of the Observatory. The networks were utilized for the search of partners both at local and trans-national level. During the establishment of the connections and links was of great utility the participation the seminars organized by the European network AEIDL. In the Tuscan region a local network was founded, with frequent meetings between the managers of the LAGs and in the framework of a feasible relation with the regional bodies.

The main obstacle for the participation to the activities of the LEADER networks is to be individuated in the load of engagement of the LAGs that were very pressed with their tasks to carry out in too strict times.

The work of networking stimulated processes of internal innovation and gave major visibility to the rural areas.

From the participation to the networks at different levels follows an improvement of the skills (application of innovative methods for the territorial valorisation) and of the offer, a major support for the innovative activities and the activation of co-operational projects.

Trans-national Cooperation:

Everywhere was decisive for the realization of the co-operational projects the work of the LAGs' technicians and in general little significant the contributions of the institutions, of the local realities etc. with the exception of the Emilia Romagna where was also profitable the relation with the subjects belonging to the economical world, with local bodies, with the cultural organisms. The lack of time hampered the origin of an effective harmonizing over the co-operational projects and this was the prevailing reason for the failures verified. The financial

support was judged approximately insufficient to the realization of projects effectively innovative and efficacious.

The main results regard the exchange of experiences, the stimulus to the definition of innovative actions and the involvement and the interaction between the subjects that unlikely would have been activated without this opportunity.

Decentralized management and financing:

On the whole the operational process was characterized by a high autonomy of the LAGs, in particular in the selection phase of the projects. In case of Tuscany there is the particularity of the institution figure called "Cashier Body", public subject in charge of collecting the regional advances and seeing, on behalf of the LAG and according to the indication of this last, to the payments to the final beneficiary. The most frequent problem is the slackness in the regional controls which follow the redemptions of the fidejussions of the LAGs.

The administrative and financial decentralization generated and stimulated the innovation and the participation widened to the project, allowing bureaucratic streamlining. In respect of the particular case of the Tuscan region, the figure of the Cashier body was judged positively by the LAGs: in some way the LAGs felt themselves more guaranteed not having the burden of the responsibility of the financial management and of the eventual bureaucratic complications.

4. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator

4.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the Leader II initiative (1 pag.)

(Synthesis of the main outcomes and learning from the Leader II initiative in the area covered by the geographical evaluator)

Regione Sardegna

Impact of the LEADER method on sustainable rural development

The precedent LEADER I experience was considered of little importance for both the role played by the regional administration and for the reduced extension of the involved territory. LEADER II, however, represented the first real experience of harmonized local programming and supplied a concrete contribution in terms of method and of experience for the initiatives of territorial integrated programming actually in course in the ambit of the new programming of the structural funds, revealing itself therefore efficacious in terms of transferability of experiences also for the same region.

The local subjects, public and private, are, somehow, the main beneficiaries of the experience that provided the first real opportunity for the rising of local partnerships and enriched their skills in the field of decentralization and local development. From this point of view, technical support and training opportunities provided by the region to the LAGs through the animation of the regional network has been very effective.

The long time consumed to carry on the start up procedures of local action plans has reduced the period for the real implementation of Leader and the consolidation of the undertaken innovative actions has suffered for this.

Impact of LEADER on horizontal objectives

The non-structural characteristic of the investments realized with LEADER II in front of the considerable weak points of the local economical systems lead to individuate the principal effects of the initiative that had originated processes of integration between sectors and public and private subjects and above all to have originated and experimented local partnerships. Less evident result the direct effects on the horizontal objectives of the structural funds and in general on the economical various priorities in reason of the practicability of the funds if compared with the needs of the territory and the scarce level of the realization, not sufficient to the consolidation of the important changes induced by the programme.

Agricultural adjustment and diversification

Leader had an important effect to encourage the creation of added value inside the farms even though they were small ones. This process concerned at least three specific aspects on which the Leader effect was important: 1) valorization activities of raw materials (transformation and marketing); 2) farm holidays 3) the development of the food chains connected to the biological productions.

Employment

The perception of the effect on the employment regards: the preservation of jobs in the farms and very light creation of new jobs in tourism and in the valorization of the products; the creation of direct employment collegated to the realization of the projects; the activation of small business

Environmental protection and improvement

In this field the effects concern: the promotion of the biological methods in agriculture; few isolated interventions of the environmental protection; some important recovery interventions of the architectural patrimony; an important effect in sensitizing local actors

Income

The income increase was not a result explicitly attended from the initiative. Both the regional administration and the LAGs considered that partial and punctual improvements were reached; anyhow it is not possible to quantify them.

Equal opportunities

A specific effect in this field was not expressly foreseen in the program and in the local plans. A certain effect is visible comparing Leader with other programs. Nevertheless, the greatest involvement of women in the projects sustained by Leader is not due to a specific politics on the contrary it comes from its ability to mobilize the existing potential of the territory also in the field of human resources.

Complementarity to other measures

An important element of complementarity is connected to the cultural approach of the Leader 2 and particularly to its capacity to integrate typologies of interventions and different actors focused on a single object or product. From the point of view of structural funds invested in the region, Leader succeeded in intervening in the small local niches that could not be struck by the "great" programming of structural funds. Nevertheless a real complementarity has been hindered by the difficulty of the structural funds to put into practice integrated interventions.

Regione Calabria

Impact of the LEADER method on sustainable rural development

The precedent LEADER I experience was considered of little importance for both the role played by the regional administration and for the reduced extension of the involved territory. LEADER II, however, represented the first real experience of harmonized local programming and supplied a concrete contribution in terms of method and of experience for the initiatives of territorial integrated programming actually in course in the ambit of the new programming of the structural funds, revealing itself therefore efficacious in terms of transferability of experiences also for the same region.

The local subjects, public and private, are, somehow, the main beneficiaries of the experience that provided the first real opportunity for the rising of local partnerships and enriched their skills in the field of decentralization.

From the focus carried out by the LAG 'Valle del Crati' and by the interviews made with the regional responsible for the realization of the LEADER II programme, comes out in relation to the managerial aspects the presence of considerable difficulties deriving from the poor dimension of the regional offices, dedicated to the programme, which provided an assistance appreciated by the LAGs for the engagement of the single officers but anyhow not sufficient. In particular the slowness with the controls and procedures not very swift are to point out.

Impact of LEADER on horizontal objectives

The non-structural characteristic of the investments realized with LEADER II in front of the considerable weak points of the local economical systems lead to individuate the principal effects of the initiative that had originated processes of integration between sectors and public and private subjects and above all to have originated and experimented local partnerships. Less evident result the direct effects on the horizontal objectives of the structural funds and in general on the economical various priorities in reason of the practicability of the funds if compared with the needs of the territory and the scarce level of the realization, not sufficient to the consolidation of the important changes induced by the programme.

Agricultural adjustment and diversification

Inside of a logic of sectorial integration, the objective of the development and of the improvement of the agricultural and forest sector played certainly an important role and expressed itself in the first place towards the improvement of the quality of the productions, the consolidation of some market segments, the diversification of the enterprise activities, in particular in the direction to intensify the agro-tourist offer. The complementarity with the interventions realized in the ambit of other programmes is to be found essentially in a good

grade of innovation of some interventions, most of all in relation to the involvement and to the integration of more subjects and to the co-ordination carried out by the LAG on the territory.

Employment

In relation to the resources invested it can be recognized a local effect on employment that, anyway, at regional level, does not represent a significant value. LEADER created most of all professionalism through the qualification of the existing figures and the birth of innovative profiles.

Environmental protection and improvement

The effect of LEADER was consistent: together with punctual interventions of rediscovery and environmental valorisation, through numerous initiatives (animation campaigns, centers of diffusion and information, seminars) favoured the increase of the sensibility towards the environmental problems, were born agencies that operate in the sector of reutilization of alternative energies, were established good relations between the LAGs – and therefore their partnerships – and the park bodies.

Income

The income increase was not a result explicitly attended from the initiative. Both the regional administration and the LAGs considered that partial and punctual improvements were reached; anyhow it is not possible to quantify them.

Equal opportunities

The female participation was wide both in terms of participation to the partnership and of management of the activities, and in occupational terms as well as in terms of access to the fundings. The presence of women in the structures of the LAGs was very high.

Complementarity to other measures

A real complementarity of the investments made with the LEADER II in respect of those realized through other programming tools did not take place. Their value consists in the first place of the co-ordination and of the integration that they had inside the LAGs. This condition seems to derive partly from the dispositions of the same Community regulations that did not facilitate the complementarity and the innovation of the LEADER investments, from other reasons and most of all from the poor co-ordination of the regional programming.

Regione Emilia Romagna

Impact of the LEADER method on sustainable rural development

The LEADER II experience was lived with great participation and confidence from the part of the regional administration and the selected territories. Even though in the region was not put into practice the LEADER I, anyhow, forms of partnerial aggregation and experiences of harmonization were already present on the regional territory. The LEADER II was strongly connected to these traditions in order to assist for their consolidation giving major substance for the partnerships, by promoting a better co-ordination of the local programming and by developing innovative initiatives in relation to the needs of the different territories. On the whole the LEADER experience had a relevant impact : particularly, in the new regional programming activity where are evident the principles of the decentralisation of the programming and managing trusted to local partnerships.

Impact of LEADER on horizontal objectives

Agricultural adjustment and diversification

The effects of the LEADER should not been searched in the interventions directly intended to the agricultural sector but most of all in terms of diversification and of improvement of the marketing phases of the products. In particular some LAPs were able to identify innovative actions for the sector that originated initiatives that did not end with the LEADER; an example of this is the project of the LAG 'Delta 2000' for the reintroduction of the hemp cultivation, that initiated a process chain, determining the engagement of industrial enterprises of the textile and paper sector for the possible utilization of the finished product and for the formation of the 'Consortium Canapaltalia' for a possible development of the hemp cultivation in the province of Ferrara; the initiatives of the LAG 'L'Altra Romagna' favoured the growth of the farms dedicated for the biological and typical production and the origin of the networking of the educational farmyards.

Employment

The job creation should not be considered as an objective of LEADER due to the modest fundings foreseen from the programme. All the same the started activities contribute to the formation of conditions for the creation of new jobs in rural areas and for the preservation of those already existing. This thanks to the implementation of integrated and co-ordinated activities and to the settlement of new relationships between tourism, handicraft and agriculture. A significant result can be seen in a general improvement of professional skills.

Environmental protection and improvement

The environmental safeguard matters were widely considered in LAPs and in their targets. In particular, the actions targeted to the reintroduction of the tourist offer and those actions

directed to the agricultural sector contributed to the landscape improvement and the environment safeguard by acting respectively on the valorisation of the natural tourist resources and on the agricultural production processes of quality and environment friendly.

Relevant interventions were realized by the LAGs inside the protected areas: the LAG 'Delta 2000' in the park of the Po delta realized pilot projects targeted to the conservation and valorization of the naturalistic heritage and to the definition of recovery modality of the rural landscape in its architectural and ecosystemical acceptions; the LAG 'Soprip' sustained the start of the regional park "Cento Laghi".

Income

In general the LAGs do not manage to estimate the impact on the income of the realized initiatives that anyway generated a sensible increase of the investments from the part of the local operators and a light increase of the investments outside of the area. Moreover some initiatives above all in the tourist sector targeted to the lengthening of the tourist seasons favoured without doubt some occupational forms.

Moreover it must be pointed out that thanks to the LEADER initiative were reached such subjects that were not been involved by the other regional programmation tools and this naturally extended and diffused the benefits of the initiative.

Equal opportunities

In general the equal opportunities are not a problem in the Emilia Romagna region and therefore it was not represented, as an objective of the programme neither was not specifically taken into consideration by the single LAGs.

Complementarity to other measures

The regional administration favoured the complementarity of the LEADER II with the other programmes indicating the typologies of admissible interventions, clearly differentiated as much realizable for instance with the Docup Objective 5b. The LAGs highlight the difficulty to activate a real complementarity because of a traditional rigidity in the programmation that operated prevalingly for sectors or also because of temporal dislocations in the realization of the different programmes that hinder the originating of effective synergies. The best results are evident in the cases where was favoured and maintained active in the course of the LEADER activation a process of permanent consultation between local administrations and trade associations for the definition of the intervention lines (LAG 'Delta 2000).

Regione Piemonte

Impact of the LEADER method on sustainable rural development

The LEADER II was the first experience of local harmonization because the activation of the LEADER I was very circumscribed territorially and the region had a marginal role. The LEADER II experience permitted to the local actors to learn to know new programming forms and favoured their growth thanks to the harmonization.

The LEADER allowed to the regional structures to activate common planning processes and influenced the new planning: some LEADER II local partnerships started integrated projects. However the realised harmonisations outside the LEADER were weaker because they appeared "forced".

Leader brought a great benefit both to regional services and to local administrations because people involved in partnerships acquired many skills.

Impact of LEADER on horizontal objectives

Agricultural adjustment and diversification

The impact of the LEADER programme on the agricultural sector was approximately and particularly high what concerns the creation and the promotion of local productions of quality and of specialized sector in a vision of integration and of increase of the territorial characterization. The initiatives in the specific sector were particularly followed by the regional administration that favoured the research of the innovation and of the coherence between the actions of the LAPs.

Employment

The regional context does not present specific occupational problems. The LEADER seemed to be a suitable tool to influence in terms of professional qualifications and to foster the birth of right actions in order to constrain the flight from some areas where it is really a problem.

Environmental protection and improvement

Leader had a very relevant effect especially in creating a new environmental awareness in areas where the problem had not been faced before; moreover many interventions were dedicated to the reinforcement and to the valorization of activities characterized by a high environmental sustainability, in particular some interventions in the agricultural sector and those addressed to the tourism had effects on the environmental improvement.

Income

The LEADER had direct and indirect positive effects, notwithstanding the modest financial dimension of the initiative, because the financed enterprises were many and most of all because it offered the possibility to have access to the funds for small enterprises that would not have obtained easily funds from other programmes or financing regional lines, generally directed to the big enterprises. Moreover, as a result of the LEADER action was originated many initiatives that permitted a sensible revitalization of the areas confirmed by a tendency to the population stability and by positive migration movements.

Equal opportunities

It was not an explicit Leader objective but it gave all the same to all the interested subjects the possibility to bring development initiatives into effect. The interventions carried out, however, contributed to sustain and to qualify the skills and they had influence also among the female population. Moreover can be pointed out the high participation of women in the LAG structures.

Complementarity to other measures

The birth of permanent and durable partnerships allowed to embrace the planning entirely and therefore to be able to reflect on the synergies and the complementarity of different tools. This effect was particularly clear in those territories where the institutional organization did not provide intermediary bodies like, for example, the municipalities association. Moreover LEADER demonstrated to be complementary what concerns the number of beneficiaries because it was able to reach certain parts of population not usually reached from other programmes. The harmonization between the local bodies favoured the expression of complementarity and synergetic projects with other initiatives.

Regione Toscana

Impact of the LEADER method on sustainable rural development

The participation and the harmonization form an affirmed tradition in the Tuscan region also in the rural areas. The LEADER II, so, was applied into a context already mature to perceive one of the main strategic approaches of the initiative that in fact, assumes, most of all in the first phases, a character more structured in respect of other experiences and it is characterized for a institutional direction that saw the provinces to play a main role in the conduction of the harmonization that led to the selection of the LEADER territories and of the LAGs. In this context the LEADER II, that follows a precedent experience LEADER I of poor importance for the reduced extension of the interested territories and for the marginal role played by the regional administration, represents a valid tool for the consolidation of the system of already existing relations, by enlarging the adhesion of the partnership towards the private subjects and for the guarantee of a major co-ordination of the local programming also by favoring the

adhesion of the partnerships to new initiatives. The result is an affirmation of the LAGs in their role of catalyst of the local development and how they knew to pass from an initial involvement particularly of the institutions during the realization phase to a wide involvement also of the local population.

To the LEADER initiative is due the capacity to have introduced in the programming of the local bodies the concepts of rurality, sustainable development, immateriality of the intervention, reproduction of the initiative, networking and to have made more familiar the Community programming, inducing an increase of the projectual quality. The LEADER developed moreover, on the wave of the concept of integrated development and of the partnership, associative forms more or less structured to meet common needs. The LEADER method obliged with the facts the single local administrations to face themselves with the territorial context by predisposing inserted projects in a strategic context at over-communal level and above all with the enterprises in such a way to realize the maximum synergy and co-ordination between public and private interventions.

As emerged from the focus group, the load of bureaucratic procedures was very binding and time consuming both for LAGs teams and beneficiaries.

Impact of LEADER on horizontal objectives

Agricultural adjustment and diversification

It comes out more clearly that the development incentive more efficiently operated from the initiative Leader is referable to the synergy between agriculture and tourism, in a particular way rural tourism, in line with the delineated courses of the new Community politics, from Cork going on, that individuated in the multi-functionality of the farm one of the mainstays of economical development in rural areas.

The more relevant results concern the dimension of the development adhering to the improvement of the farms, in particular, in our case, with reference to the marketing, and that relative to the qualitative improvement and to the diversification of the productions. This last result is strictly connected to the numerous initiatives concerning the diffusion of the techniques of biological agriculture, the realization of some relevant infrastructures aimed at the allocation of services for the farms, the introduction of the quality trademarks and the widespread intervention of valorisation relative to the realization, in almost all the involved areas, of so called Wine Roads. It's also to highlight how various LAGs activated support interventions for the quality certification and the adjustment of the HACCP manuals at the farms.

Employment

The LEADER intervention in Tuscany certainly contributed to the starting of positive actions in favor of the improvement of the occupational conditions, and it really did it, thanks to the correct interpretation of the LEADER specificities, by acting, essentially, through two different operative modalities.

Beyond the direct action in favor of the occupational increase concerning the professional formation and the assistance for the professional insertion, numerous were the integrated and coordinated interventions, addressed to a local development that would stimulate the intersectorial relationships between tourism, agriculture and characteristic handicrafts.

Also in the management of the numerous initiatives for the creation of Wine Roads, or in the network points for tourist information, LEADER had a qualified occupation, not always at full-time, but certainly lasting, and therefore significant in a framework of pluriactivities.

At last we mention the occupational requirements generated from the activation of the telecommunication networks and the web portals.

Environmental protection and improvement

The LEADER action in relation to the safeguard of the environmental heritage and to its valorization resulted to be less incisive of that concerning the support for the productive sectors.

In any case almost in all the measures it's easily to notice an attention towards the themes of the environmental protection, with actions for the formation of operators specialized in the environmental recovery, creation of data banks and the GIS (= geographical informative system) relative to the wooded areas and to the management of the forests, interventions of valorization, with tourist intentions, of the naturalist areas. Numerous were the interventions for the recovery of degraded areas, the introduction of innovative systems of collection and treatment for the waste material, the depuration of the residual waters, the utilization of the alternative energies. The totality of the actions implemented presents the common result to contribute to the improvement of the forms of safeguard and valorization of the natural and social-cultural heritage and the rural landscape.

Income

In substance it can be pointed out how the intervention of the PLR (= Regional Leader Plan) contributes in a relevant manner to the improvement of living conditions, but also thanks to its overall action, at least in that measure in which the activated development processes give rise, in the middle-term, to the employment and income increases. For the attainment of an increase of the employment opportunities contribute the actions relative to the activation of the new

services, particularly in the tourism sector, enable to give rise to the jobs for secularised young people and those relative to the multifunctionality of the farms.

Equal opportunities

Not any particular importance was given to this objective. Somehow, frequently the LAGs during the selection process, attributed an increase of points to the projects that involved disadvantaged categories.

Complementarity to other measures

The regional programming paid particular attention to the aspects of the complementarity and of the synergy of the interventions. Also some LAGs operated to this direction in the ambit of the harmonization process. It is an example case of the LAG 'Garfagnana' that during the predisposition phase of the LAP defined with the delegated bodies the level of intervention of the LEADER plan in respect of the relative programmations (for instance the bodies made interventions in order to support productions, the LAG on the promotion and marketing, the bodies financed restructuring interventions for the creation of new agro-tourist farms, the LAG intervened on the quality of the hospitality service).

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process (1 pag.)

(Recapitulation of the problems and difficulties encountered, of solutions found; comments on methods; proposals for improvement)

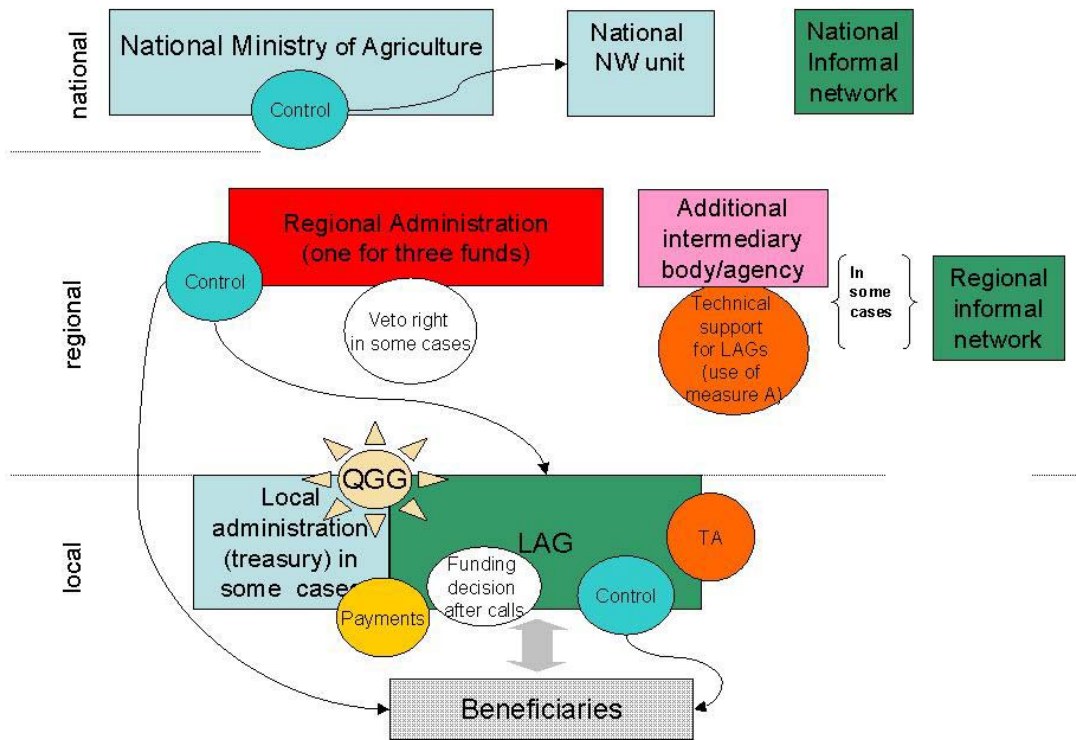
In respect of the foreseen methodology, the carried out work on the LEADER II experience in the Italian regions encountered the following difficulties:

- The activities of first phase, related to the compilation of the grids, of extreme engagement for the considerable number of the Operative Programmes and of realized LAPs, encountered a first obstacle in gathering information of financial character as for only few regions had then produced in the first three months 2003 the final statement of assets (in fact, it was possible to send it in within June 2003) and had still in course the controls by the LAGs. This meant from the part of the work team an intense activity in order to guarantee equally the maximum of information, in gathering in a first phase also provisory data that, somehow, required a successive punctual verification, carried out during the month of July. Also following upon this last gathering of information, anyway, it was not possible, to satisfy all the data requests in particular those relative to the composition of the expenditure because not all the statements of assets returned the advancement according to the required articulation: national funds, Community ones at their turn distinguished in Feoga, Fesr and Fse, and private; Measure A, B, C and D.

- The distribution of the questionnaires Q202 revealed itself particularly binding and not always really effective in terms of returned information. It is, in fact, well known that the LAGs were not operative during the period when they were contacted by us and that their technical structures, then still existing because engaged with the new programming of LEADER plus, worked solely thanks to the voluntary spirit of their technicians. Moreover, it must be brought to notice that the evaluation activities object of the present study followed the numerous surveys carried out in course of the realization years of the LEADER II that, naturally, identified in the LAGs the best resource of information. This meant a certain resistance from the part of the groups to accept this last request of survey and from our part an intense pression both on the LAGs and on the regional administrations so that they could play a role of sensibilization and solicitation. Moreover, as many times highlighted the carried out evaluations in many Italian regions foresaw the adoption, in quality of survey tool, of the questionnaires elaborated by the European Observatory, utilized abundantly over about 70 % of the LAGs. Such exercise has many analogies with the Q 202 one and this made worse the sensation of repetition and overcharge of surveys.

- Owing to all this, through a certain number of replacements of LAGs, we managed all the same to respect the work schedule but it seemed opportune to us to point out that from one side, the replies of some LAGs are certainly too synthetic and of scarce interest from the other side, the applied methodology did not foresee an effective re-elaboration (at regional level) of this information which seem notwithstanding little valorised. During the conclusive phase of the carried out activities much more efficacious are considered the working phases that foresaw direct contacts between the evaluator, the LAGs and the regional administrations in the ambit of the realization of interviews, focus groups and different study cases. In course of these activities assisted, in fact, to a great participation of different subjects, in general motivated to face a process of evaluation/self-evaluation carried out in an active way on specific aspects of the realization of the Plans. Such survey tools, beyond naturally the analysis of the reports of regional evaluations, provided the most important and significant elements for the realization of the present work.

Model of implementation



II.11 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT PORTUGAL

Contents

1.	General introduction	427
2.	Report on the Focus Group	428
2.1	Introduction	428
2.2	Description of partnership and activities	429
2.3	Hypothesis referring to the main implementation questions of Leader in the intervention area	430
2.4	Conclusions and recommendations	433
3.	Report on the evaluation at national level	435
3.1	Overview and synthetic description	435
3.2	Overall assessment	437
3.3	Relevant conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation reports	438
4.	General appreciation of the geographical evaluator	441
4.1	General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of LEADER II	441
4.2	Critical reflection of the evaluation process	442

1. General introduction

The portuguese expert participated, in Brussels, in the meeting of the team for the ex-post evaluation of LEADERII and after the reception of the final versions of the instruments for the empirical research, organised the implementation of the following tasks:

- formal letter to the Institute that, in Portugal, is responsible for the management of LEADER, asking for permission to have access to files concerning the national Programme and to the 10 selected LAGs;
- several working meetings with the staff that followed the co-ordination of the programme at national level (the responsible persons for the management were replaced in 2001) – to fill in the financial and the factual part of Q34;
- contact with the co-ordinators of the 10 selected LAG to know about their availability to answer Q202;
- translation to portuguese of Q34 and Q202, since the co-ordinators of LAG didn't accept to be inquired in a foreign language;
- arrangement of interviews for the application of Q202, since – with one exception- the LAG co-ordinators didn't accept to answer by mail or e-mail;
- interviews with a duration of more than 1 working day; this duration is explained by the fact that the human resources of the LAG are scarce and by the strong difficulty to fill in – with reliability- the financial fields and other data related to the selected projects; these constraints obliged to a direct consultation of the paper files by the team; there was a limited availability of the LAG co-ordinators to answer the questions of Q202 without interruptions caused by other tasks;
- insistent phone calls to get data that was not available when the team went personally to the intervention areas; only one entity – DESTEQUE – Terra Quente Transmontana – refused to answer (it took 4 months!);
- case study of a transnational project (Paralelo 40);
- participation in the session of the “focus-group” of the spanish colleagues in Terra Chã (Galiza);
- preparation and organisation of the session of the “focus-group” with the LAG LEADERSOR (1 working day);
- translation into English of the 10 case studies (9 + transnational project).

The team for the implementation of the described tasks was: A. Oliveira das Neves (economist, responsible evaluator), Sónia Relvas and Vanessa Sousa (sociologists and interviewers) and Emília Andrade (translator).

2. Report on the Focus Group

2.1 Introduction

The session of the focus group was organized with the partners of a local entity, responsible for an intervention area in the north of Alentejo and individual promoters of Leader projects, supported in the framework of the LAP of LEADERSOR. This entity has private partners, entrepreneurs and producers' associations

The contact was established at the beginning of June, after the insistence of Carlo Ricci and after the enquire was sent. The session was arranged to 18 June, after several diligences of the co-ordinator of the LAG to call the participants.

The session too place in the meeting room of LEADERSOR, with the following participants:

- Quinta do Belo Ver – tourism in a rural environment – José Fernando Pereira (project promotor)
- Raul Martins Lobato – entrepreneur (project promotor)
- AG Terra – Estudos e Gestão Rural (project promotor)
- ACORPSOR – ovines producer (partner in LEADERSOR)
- NATURSOR (partner in LEADERSOR)
- Associação Montes Alentejanos – tourism in a rural environment (partner in LEADERSOR).
- Banda Musical Alterense – cultural group (project promotor)
- AFLOSOR – Associação de Produtores Florestais do Sôr (partner in LEADERSOR).

2.2 Description of partnership and activities

LEADERSOR – Associação para o Desenvolvimento Rural Integrado do Sôr (association for sustainable development of Sôr) is constituted by associative entities, local public entities and private members, mainly agricultors, namely:

- ACORPSOR – Associação de Criadores de Ovinos da Região de Ponte de Sôr, that represents the cattle producers (1.000 members).
- AFLOSOR – Associação de Produtores Florestais da Região de Ponte de Sôr, that represents the forestal producers of the region (110 members).
- G.E.S. – Gabinete de Engenharia do Sôr, does technical and economical projects and trades agricultural equipments and alternative energies.
- Caixa de Crédito Agrícola Mútuo de Ponte de Sôr.
- Associação Gente – Association for local development .
- Montes Alentejanos – Associação de Turismo Integrado (it promotes and organises resources of integrated tourism in a rural environment – with 14 members).
- Câmara Municipal de *Gavião*, de *Mora* e de *Alter do Chão* (local administration bodies – it corresponds to a half of the six councils of the intervention area).
- Individual members (agricultors, forest engineers and agronomists, etc.).

The main activities of LEADERSOR are the promotion and management of the global grant that supports the LAP, in the intervention territory. At the same time, it has implemented a transnational project in the framework of 'volet 2' of the Programme – *Paralelo 40*.

No other activities are known, for example, in the management of other community programmes, a complementarity that is frequent in other associations for local development of LEADER II.

2.3 Hypothesis referring to the main implementation questions of Leader in the intervention area

The type of the raised questions was influenced by the compared experience with the session in Galiza (Spain) that was attended by a member of the portuguese team. During the session four type of questions were raised:

1st group of questions – strategy

- What was the defined strategy for the intervention area before the programme?
- How does the idea to apply to programme arise? To answer to which needs and with which priorities?
- How is sustained development faced in the intervention area? What strategies were defined to approach rural sustainable development in the territory?
- What were the initiatives developed by local actors towards a strategic and sustainable development in the territory?

2nd group of questions – LEADER approach

- *Area-based approach.* Degree of coherence of the selected territory to the intervention area. Coherence and adequacy of the strategy to the territory. Strong and weak points of the territory. Degree of coherence of the defined strategy in terms of sustainable development.
- *Bottom-up approach.* What were the motivation procedures for local actors (public and private)? Which degree of participation did the economic agents have in the territory needs analysis? How did this diagnosis reflect the problem-dimensions of the territory and of the main but also supporting actors?
- *Participation.* Participation in the sensitizing meetings addressed to the different types of agents – public and private (social, cultural, environmental): how was this type of actors represented in the LAG? The Lag was specifically created for the management of LEADER II or did it exist before and with which type of activities?
- *Innovation.* Which innovative elements are to highlight in the region? What kind of innovation: new forms of presenting the products? A rural development different of other projects? The use of new technologies facilitated the production for the market? What were the strategies of the LAG to answer the needs of specific target groups (women, long term unemployed and youngsters)?
- *Multi-sectoral approach.* What were the relationships developed in the framework of the rural economical activities? How did Leader promote multi-sectoral integration?

- *Development of partnerships.* How did the cooperation work, namely with the European Observatory and the CB? Was there, or not, work developed in partnership (local or transnational with other LAG)?
- *Decentralized management.* How formal were the criteria to the selection of projects? How were the selection procedures and the financial procedures valued? Was there a lack of financing in some areas or not? If yes, in which ones?

3rd group of questions – operationalisation of the principles/ Leader specificities

Classification in terms of Positive/negative, relating to aspects (external to the LAG) that influenced the development of the Programme and the performance of the LAG in the intervention area (for instance, training for touristic guides to dynamize the TER).

- *Bottom-up approach* (training; participation of public or private agents – reasons for the inhibition of the private ones; elements that facilitated the work of the LAG).
- *Innovation* (degee of interconnections between Programmes – what kind of exploitation).
- *Cooperation/partnerships* (at formal level what can have been a difficulty for the development of partnerships/cooperation – positive and negative aspects).

4th group of questions – learning for the future

How can each of the LEADER principles be improved? How can the Programme work better (from the outside to the inside)? Description of some elements *(i)* to go from local administration to local population? *(ii)* What are policies to be implemented at european level to improve the programme?

The **main answers from participants** are presented according to the group of questions presented before.

A. Strategy of the intervention area

The action strategy of Leadersor , in a 1.st phase, was oriented to the diffusion and motivation of rural world, in a double folded perspective:

- (i)* creation and/or reconversion of the work placements that occurred from the integrated exploitation of intervention area endogenous potential;
- (ii)* valorization of environment, by its protection and as a touristic resource;
- (iii)* transformation and commercialization of local products;
- (iv)* supply of services and technologies with an innovative character.

The concern with sustainable development rises mainly in the ways the landscape and environmental resources are integrated in the touristic offer (farms, fluvial beaches, etc). The rural touristic promotion has a key role in this intervention area, also as an answer to the need to diversify the concentration of activities in agriculture.

B. Principles of the LEADER approach

- (a) the territorial area is adequate to the objectives to be reached, either on a geographical point of view or in what concerns the resources-type for the intervention strategy, very centered in the economical valorisation of elements of a composed touristic product, differentiated by the 'environmental' competitive advantage.
- (b) Information sessions for the direct contact/information with population were organised. The 'philosophy', actions and resources of the LAP were diffused in local radios and newspapers. The local administration bodies had a relevant role in the Programme in the motivation of the region – that was fairly positive. Most of the present promoters valued the individual support given by the LAG in each of the applications and in the definition/design of the project. Having this in mind, the open information sessions seem not to have been clarifying enough and there is no correlation between participation in the open sessions and the presentation of projects.
- (c) Most of the projects are individual and there is a trend to the diversification of sectorial activities, making the best of advantage around natural and productive resources. this individual approach in the promotion of projects related to available resources, is sometimes not accompanied by a strategic vision of the territory – this is, the promoter develops a project in a territory, but lives too closed in himself and is not opened to what happens around and to the potentialities that his territory can offer to him/his project. Summarising: there is a lack of a culture to work in partnership with other promoters.
- (d) Some local projects in partnership were presented, namely in the diffusion of the network for tourism in rural environment. This doesn't render invalid the fact that the mentality of individual promoters is not very open and that they are reluctant to build associations and to work in partnership.
- (e) In what concerns financing and due to centralization in this matter the management authorities are not able to answer immediately to the needs of promoters. The same does not happen with management and monitoring of the Programme – where the technical structure of the LAG has a supporting role to promoters that is considered satisfactory.
- (f) In this intervention area and through the supported projects, innovative activities in the existing sectors appeared – namely by the promotion and creation of a 'network' of new endogenous micro-poles, with the capacity of economic self-support and to create work placements inside the activities of a rural economy.

C. *Operationalisation of principles/specificities of the LEADER method*

One of the great obstacles was the start of the Programme with the late signature of the Financing Local Contract. Besides, there was the concern with the regularity in payments.

In what concerns the external factors that influenced positively the Programme implementation, the potentialities of the region had a determinant role. The following elements, related to the operationalisation conditions and to efficacy were also highlighted:

- the coherence of the territorial area influences positively the fight against isolation and human and physical desertification of the rural world;
- the insufficient initiative capacity of the possible promoters, is less connected to the lack of 'ideas' and is more linked to the fear of delayed financing/payments, as it happened in LEADER I. The referred fear includes the generality of activities – this fear is the main negative factor and gives origin to great expectations concerning the 'new' programme;
- the cooperation of the local administration bodies and the management structure influenced very positively the implementation of the Programme;
- there were some difficulties in the implementation due to the centralization of information, although this was important in the application phase.

Finally, in what concerns **learning for the future** (4.th group of questions in the session), the participants highlighted the following aspects:

- To maintain the principles of the LEADER approach that proved to be effective in the support to the needs in the framework of the Programme;
- more flexibility in the financial 'path', which must be less slow and more open/transparent.

2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

The main results give value to an approach based in the deep knowledge of the intervention territory, of its potentialities and weaknesses. Mainly, people wish to have a grounded technical diagnosis that can be adequated to a positive intervention in what concerns the transformation of local resources.

This transformation should favour the concerns/objectives of sustainable development – what sometimes involves a sensitizing work (the staff of the LAG, but also of public bodies with technical competences) around the norms and requirements of environmental nature to be followed in projects of industrial transformation, of the occupation of rural space, of the recuperation of ancient houses or the fruition of natural landscape.

In the recommendations to the local actors are also important the objectives related to the technical dimension of projects and to the need to give more importance to aspects linked to commercialisation in general, including 'design', packing and presentation to clients and also the integration in networks of valorisation of traditional/regional products.

The difficulties of the financial and administrative circuits justifies the need of a higher investment of private promoters in the organisation of documental and accounting files in order to facilitate the checking processes either of expenses or financial processing. A better organisation would also allow more consistent elements on the point of view of monitoring and evaluation by national coordination and by external evaluators

Concerning recommendations to the responsible – people and structures – for the design/elaboration of programmes, the main points refer to :

- flexibility in the administrative and financial rules and procedures. Both should be compatible with the dimension of projects, the competences of local actors and with their distance to the decision centres;
- the national programmes should include a strategy for financement, in such a way that the application of the selection criteria '(re)guides' the projects of private promoters to the most adequate financing instruments. In this way LEADER could support the projects of a smaller dimension, with local roots and a better capacity to produce situations of a better use of resources as well as creation of employment and income for local population.

3. Report on the evaluation at national level

3.1 Overview and synthetic description

Portugal benefited of a single operational programme for all the rural territories, separated in 48 intervention areas in the continent and the autonomous regions (Açores e Madeira).

The General Directorate for Rural Development, with the support of the European Commission, signed a contract with an external entity to develop a *Study for an intermediary and on-going evaluation of the LEADER II Initiative*, in which framework several reports were produced. The on-going evaluation up-dated the data on 31/12/99, through an adenda to the initial contract.

During the phase of the intermediary evaluation, the National Programme was object of assessment at the level of policies and problematics of rural development and there was a deep analysis of the key dimensions that were a requirement for the time of the evaluation. The table of contents gives an idea of the work developed.

- I. **Framing of the Programme:** problematics and policies of rural development that embrace the appreciation of LEADER in the context of these policies.
- II. **Diagnosis of the starting point of LEADER II,** with the characterization and typification of the intervention areas and analyses of the diagnosis made in the framework of the LAP.
- III. **Dynamics of financial and physical execution,** involving a global analysis and characterization and typification of the selected projects.
- IV. **Study cases of final beneficiaries,** with a synthesis view of the answers on the operationalisation of projects and typology of results.
- V. **Key dimensions of the intermediary evaluation,** judging the diagnosis and planning dimensions, the general conditions of efficacy of the initiative and the profile of adhesion and the plans carried out.
- VI. **Balance and recommendations** according to the criteria of opportunity and relevance, of rationality and internal and external coherence and with a set of recommendations on the point of view of the management and development of the Programme.

The main problems identified in the report refer to the following aspects:

- very unequal levels of cooperation/development between the regional structures and the sectorial departments;
- very limited complementarities with other community financed programmes;

- scarce results in what concerns partnerships and transnational cooperation;
- preponderance of the individual logics of the promoters that make impossible the implementation of projects based on threshold levels of associations of interests;
- weakness of the projects monitoring arrangements, with objective difficulties in their development at the level of the intermediary structures (e. g., Regional Directorate for Agriculture and Regional Coordination Commission);
- conflict between the need to speed up the execution rhythms and the need to make viable the philosophy of the Initiative.

On the phase of the continuous and final evaluation the report had the following chapters:

- I. **Dinamics in the selection and implementation of projects**, where besides the aspects of financial execution, the characterization and tipification of the approved projects was done.
- II. **Analysis of the organization and functioning of the LAG** according to their capacities and institutional dynamics to promote local development and the modalities of management and development of the LAP.
- III. **Analysis of complementarities in what concerns financing and local development** highlighting the real complementarities in the projects, namely training and the certification of local products and values.

This report includes a set of signed texts written by several experts who reflected on the problematics of services at a local scale, the answers given by social policies in depressed contexts, the socio-local animation for development, environment as factor of local development in the context of the valorisation of transversal priorities in the management of structural funds, namely in equal oportunities.

The European Commission followed the several phases evaluation phases, namely in the framework of the Programme Monitoring Units, where there was a point in the agenda for the external evaluator to present the reports and to speak on the status of the studies.

One of the aspects highlighted in the reports and in the discussions with the European Commission is associated to the LAG's responsibility – that manage public funds in an autonomous way – to stimulate collective action and the initiative for local projects, in order to stimulate an economical initiative that is oriented to the dinamization of local territories and the exploitation of endogenous resources.

In what concerns planning the recommendations value aspects as the technical/theoretical fundamentation of the LAP (correcting insufficiencies in what concerns the knowledge of the

territory), the reinforcement of the programmes management capacities and projects for development (a more demanding relation between results/effects and the added value of the interventions) and the adoption of perspectives for future sustainability, grounded on management and resources indicators and on middle/long term activity plans.

3.2 Overall assessment

The evaluation exercises are frequently seen as an intromission in the autonomy defined by the modalities of management of the global grant. As the external evaluation work proceeds and intermediary results are attained (reports with analysis and recommendations), some LAG change their position and the same happens with Programme National Management.

The National Management/coordination changes from a formal attitude (evaluation as an obligation that occurs from the community commitments) to a collaborative attitude that tries to understand in which way the external evaluator can contribute to a better efficacy in the Intervention, in the application of resources and in the relation with the LAG – inside the local monitoring committees (in the regions where they were built and functioned)

The work of the CB , mainly in the thematic plans, introduced positive and innovative elements, namely in what concerns the involvement of the LAG in participative evaluation, in this way benefiting from works developed in the framework of the European Observatory. The design and operational development of the PES method created – during a certain phase of the CB activities – great expectations towards results, namely in what concerns the development of learning at local level (diagnosis of the territory, strategic development plans for the intervention areas, bottom-up approach and partnerships, etc.).

The present phase, in LEADER+, the main concerns have a more self-centered nature, caused by the difficulties and constraints imposed by the management model adopted by the new programme.

However, in the geographical expert's opinion, the evaluation exercise of LEADER +, benefited at institutional level from the previous evaluation exercise (in the framework of LEADER II).

The first proposal of the National Programme was object of several critical appreciations, even previous to the ex-ante exercise. Those critics reflected the conclusions of the final evaluation of LEADER II that were not sufficiently incorporated in what concerned design/conception, planning and implementation.

The proposal for the National Programme was substantially reformulated in order to be appreciated by the European Commission and the text includes a grid with the adjustments that result of the incorporation of the recommendations of the ex-ante evaluation.

However, in the balance done at the moment, with the changes of the political cycle that occurred simultaneously with the approval and beginning of LEADER+, it seems that there is a low priority given to rural development in the public policies of the Ministry of Agriculture. The disconnection of the regulating functions of the Regional Directorates of Agriculture (more centered on bureaucratic and formal control questions) weakens the possibility of a better integration between the policies for the development of the territory and the development of rural economies.

Therefore, the recommendations for future evaluations are around three fundamental dimensions:

- clearness in the processes of conception/design and planning of policies in order to stimulate a more effective approach of structural funds, on the point of view of the development of the territory and of the sustainable exploitation of its natural/active and economical resources, etc.;
- flexibility in the modalities of management and implementation of the LAP in order to safeguard the specificities related to the nature and quality of partnerships, the initiative and of project capacities capacities (logistic and financial) of promoters and to the needs concerning technical support (organisational, productive, technological, commercial, ...);
- light information arrangements containing monitoring elements that can be useful either in a bottom-up relation (LAG/promoters) or in a top-down relation (LAG/management of the Programme), with consequences on the quality of the information to be sent to the European Observatory and European Commission, in a retro-action register.

3.3 Relevant conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation reports

The following filled in grid answers this item and tries to reflect some of the essential aspects of the implementation and the kind of results/effects obtained by LEADER II in Portugal, in a broad vision that considers the 48 intervention areas in which the implementation of the Programme in Portugal was structured.

Summary appreciation from the regional evaluation report

Operational Programme: Portugal

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	<p>The LEADER flexible approach allows a local adaptation able to give origin to dynamics of exploitation concerning local resources.</p> <p>The elaboration of diagnosis in the intervention areas revealed imbalances between the variables of the characterization of the territory and the perspectives of strategic development and modalities of action, according to specific and operational objectives.</p>	Strategies of dinamization adjusted to social and economical realities of the local territories, supported by selective diagnosis of the intervention areas.	Improvement in the theoretical fundamentation of the LAP turning them into real Strategic plans for local development, as a platform to the access of diverse financing instruments.
Bottom-up approach	The modalities of diffusion of the LAP to potential promoters, as well as the logistic organisation of the LAG – with branches and nucleus in several places of the intervention area – contributed to an effective relation with promoters.	The meaningful number of LAP that incorporate proposals and actions resulting of participative work of the basis and of others that result of the recuperation/extension of previous interventions.	Reinforcement of technical resources of partners in order to improve their intervention in the phases of conception/planning and management of the LAP.
the Local Group	Recruitment of qualified staff living in the intervention area for the LAG. With them it was possible to organise teams of a diversified background.	Capacity to integrate other technical competences than management, that can integrate useful dimensions to a better intervention by the promoters.	To improve LAG capacity to support promoters in the implementation phase of the projects.
Innovation	Difficulty in the transmission of new knowledge, not only on account of the high costs but also on account of the resistance of promoters of a higher age level. Difficulty in meeting partners to develop pilot projects in new cultures.	<p>to set up workshop schools/training centres connected with traditional arts and crafts.</p> <p>Recuperation of estate heritage oriented to support the valorisation of local products in the market.</p>	To use the new technologies in the recuperation and capitalisation of traditional knowledge (traditional production, associated with design, marketing and certification)
Multi-sectoral integration	Change in attitudes concerning entrepreneurship, on the point of view of a more integrated capitalisation of the local resources. Training for 'animateurs' for rural development.	Rehabilitation of jobs that are meaningful in the diversity of activities of the rural world.	Need of a more effective connection between the systems of education and of training for development.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
networking	Levels of cooperation mainly institutional (for instance between the local entity, the Council and associations of producers). Exchange and sale of several LEADER products.	Training to the support to the management of projects of sauce-local 'animation'. This unintended result has the potentiality to produce good results in the future.	Better capitalisation of the thematic aspects in the constitution of networks (e.g. central booking TER, fairs of traditional products).
transnacional cooperation	Great dependence of the initiative of external partners. Insufficient 'investment' of integration in strategic networks.	Very limited transferability of experiences in management and local capitalisation interventions.	Better integration in thematic and strategic networks, to facilitate the access to information and to co-operative learning arrangements.
decentralised management and financing	Compared with other incentive systems, the solutions for the management of financement revealed to be positive. There were difficulties with payments that were delayed during the transition phase.	The proximity of the Initiative to local communities led to a new focus referring to the management of financial resources and the type of projects to privilege.	Maintenance of the decentralisation principles, with the assurance that the financial amounts are transferred on time so that the implementation of projects is not at risk.
Other important issues (Demonstrativity)	Development of new local solidarities and of neighbourhood. Good local work concerning certification of local products, whose recognition by the intermediary structures of the Ministry of Agriculture was limited.	Good regional reputation of Leader projects, as a contribution to highlight the possibility of exploitation of resources and opportunities.	Creation and development of simple arrangements for dissemination of good practices, e.g. from the results of pilot initiatives.

4. General appreciation of the geographical evaluator

4.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of LEADER II

On the whole, we can conclude on a positive balance concerning implementation and effects of LEADER II in Portugal. The political options of enlarging the geographical areas and the population included (in the transition from LEADER I and II) reflected an option to enlarge the scope of final beneficiaries.

In the final phase of the Programme, the need to speed up the rhythms of implementation was not accompanied by clear guidelines for the priorities in the selection of projects. This led to decisions of supporting institutional promoters, with entrepreneurial and project capacities, instead of to deepen the animation methodologies for the development of the initiative, mainly of innovative projects and with demonstrative potentialities.

One of the important limits to the implementation of the programme refers to the relevance of the objectives connected with the valorisation of human resources. The training of competences for the development of rural development, recognised as a strategic instrument, was not seen as that in the dynamic both of promoters and LAGs.

The explanations are not linear – the predominant is that the eligibility requirements are filled with difficulty by rural dynamics (e.g. limits for the composition of the groups of trainees, kind of expenses for trainers in affected areas, duration of the actions, specificities of the areas ...). At the same time, either on the point of view of trainees or of the 'host' entities (enterprises, organisations...), there are difficulties in the organisation of actions: the wished training is punctual, specific, of direct answer. The constitution of classes for the training implies the involvement of several entities, due to the very small size of most of enterprises/organisations existing in the rural areas and therefore with a low capacity as employers. The evaluation of LEADER II proposed that together with a greater flexibility in the application of the rules of ESF to the predominant type of promoter and wished training. It should be constituted 'stock lists' of trainers with specific competences and that are able to assure an ambulatory service, that are paid with a 'cheque/service' by the individual promoters.

4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process

In what concerns problems and difficulties of the evaluation process we highlight the following aspects:

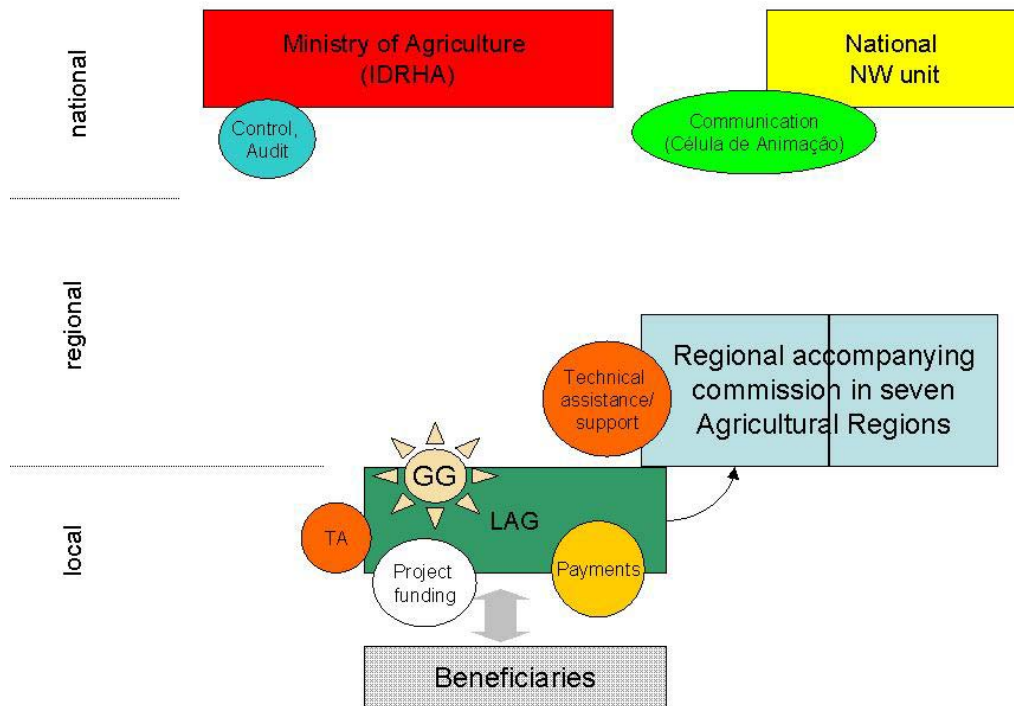
- the high level of expertise of the questionnaires, that causes understanding problems to the local and national responsible persons;
- rotation of the human resources inside the entities, what makes difficult to answer the questions referring to the amounts of, for example, the design/elaboration of LAP, the definition of the strategy for the territory as well as the implementation in the initial phase of the Programme;
- absence of co-ordinators during the implementation of the study, being impossible to get the answers from other people in the entity;
- difficulty of the entities to access to data referring to years 94-99 that are already in archives, what means a long and slow researching process
- difficulties in the identification of projects specifically addressed to a type of beneficiaries, since this implies to check the list of all projects to identify the promoter's main activity;
- Difficulty in the identification of projects specifically addressed to environmental preservation – in the several required dimensions – what also implies to go along the whole list (in paper) of the developed projects.

(These are tasks that have to be accomplished by the evaluator, because the LAG neither have the human resources nor show to be available to do the task).

- difficulties in filling in the fields related to financing, due to the fact there were many changes not only in the amounts referring to what was planned but also to the final executed amount, what brings doubts in the decision on what are the amounts to be used;
- Concerning the Management of the Programme, the manager who followed the implementation phase of the programme was replaced, and anyway he was not responsible during the design/planning phase; those facts were in the origin of several (and important) constraints concerning the answers to sensitive parts of Q34. The available technical staff didn't see themselves in a position to answer a meaningful part of the questions.

The main suggestions for future evaluations are to separate the quantitative executed dimension (to be filled in on the basis of information arrangements of the co-ordination structures) of the qualitative dimension – more associated to management and implementation of Local Plans, where the work of the direct intervenients should be concentrated. This implies a different distribution of financial resources and of time to the evaluation activities.

Model of implementation



II.12 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT UNITED KINGDOM

Contents

1.	General Introduction	447
2.	Focus Groups	450
3.	National and Regional Programme Evaluations	451
3.1	Overview	451
3.2	Overall Assessment of the Evaluations	452
3.3	Conclusions and Recommendations from Regional Evaluation Reports	455
4.	General Appreciation from Perspective of Geographic Evaluator	459
4.1	Implementation and Effects of LEADER II Community Initiative in the UK	459
4.2	Critical Reflection on the Evaluation Process	461

1. General Introduction

The Team

All work at senior expert level has been carried out by **Robin McDowell**. This has encompassed all the main strategic and technical tasks detailed in the contract:

- design of contextual materials to introduce the aims and method of the evaluation and present the questionnaires (Q34 and Q202) and Focus Groups
- all the initial telephone contacts and face to face interviews with national / regional programme managers and other strategic players
- provision of technical support by telephone and e-mail for questionnaires completed by LAG representatives
- contacts with LEADER II administrations across the UK regarding data on financial allocations / expenditure and final reports on the programme for LAG 1000 and OP 102
- identification and research of the transnational co-operation case study.

He has been assisted by:

- **Suzie Mizrahi** (freelance project worker, Bath, England) for search and contacts of with LAG interlocutors for Q202, liaison re. supply of documentation and questionnaire completion, database and monitoring of progress, and codification responses and other data entry.
- **Tony Kerr** (freelance regeneration consultant, Bristol, England) for conduct of Focus Group for Cumbria Fells and Yorkshire Dales LAG
- **Meg Rodger** (freelance rural development consultant, Western Isles, Scotland) for conduct of Focus Group for Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh LAG

Q34 Method

Interviews for the Q34 survey were carried out during March and April with national and regional programme managers and other strategic players for the sampled regional programmes of England and the Highlands and Islands. Prospective interviewees were contacted initially by telephone by Robin McDowell to discuss participation in the survey. The overall EU evaluation project was introduced and background materials including a summary of topics to be covered in the interview (based on the grid) sent by e-mail. Almost all approached agreed to participate. In the few cases where people declined, the reason was usually a referral to another official with greater knowledge and/or longer involvement in the programme. Finally, ahead of the meeting, a copy of the colour-coded grid for interviews with guidance notes (based on the Q34 manual) was e-mailed. A total of 8 out of 10 participants were interviewed 'face to face', the rest by

telephone. After the interviews, some further information and clarifications were requested by the evaluator by e-mail, and most queries received a ready response. The following participants were interviewed:

ENGLAND

National level – ‘face to face’ interviews:

- **Garry White**, Office of Deputy Prime Minister (formerly Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions – lead department for LEADER II)
- **Dean Thomas**, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (formerly Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), London – administrator of EAGGF
- **Helen Judge**, former Manager of UK LEADER + Network Unit (2000-01), operated by LRDP Ltd, London

National level – telephone interviews:

- **Eileen Humphreys**, former Manager of UK LEADER + Network Unit (1998-2000), LRDP Ltd

Regional level – ‘face to face’ interviews:

- **Stuart Tarr**, Government Office for South West, Bristol, and lead regional representative to the England Programme Monitoring Committee

Regional level – telephone interviews:

- **Ed Husband**, DEFRA, formerly of MAFF South West Regional Service Centre, Exeter, and Regional EAGGF Manager.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Regional level – ‘face to face’ interviews (all held in Inverness):

- **David Smillie**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, LEADER Programme Manager
- **Melvyn Waumsley**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and member of the Highlands and Islands Programme Monitoring Committee

Note: **Frank Gaskell**, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Chief Executive, and former Chair of the HI PMC, also participated in some of the discussions.

- **Richard Robinson**, Scottish Natural Heritage, and member of the HI PMC

Note: no interviews were held with the Scottish Executive, as they played a very limited role in managing the programme, as Highlands and Islands Enterprise was the global grant holder contracting directly with the European Commission, and did not have a consistent representation at the Programme Monitoring Committee meetings.

Q202 Method and Issues

Some 16 LAGs (10 in England and 6 in Highlands and Islands) were sampled for the Q202 survey. Due to the wide geographic dispersal of the LAGs in England and Scotland, the time constraints to carry out personal interviews and the limited allowance for travel and subsistence expenses, it was decided to identify lead contacts for each LAG, explain the purpose of the evaluation project and survey by telephone and seek their co-operation to self-complete the questionnaire individually or in conjunction with others experienced in the work of the LAG as a co-ordinator or Group member.

A project assistant was contracted to research, identify and set up the appropriate contacts (after briefing from Robin McDowell), and, as was often necessary, to encourage and persuade them to participate, as well as to provide background information (the introductory letter from the Commission and survey topics summary) by e-mail. Once they had agreed in principle to assist, the full survey was e-mailed along with 'user-friendly' guidelines (based on the Q202 manual), which indicated the relative priority of the red, green and black-coded questions, and requested the sending of reports and documentation to us in order to analyse or extract the factual data needed. The availability of telephone support to assist understanding of the Q202 from Robin McDowell or his assistant was strongly emphasised.

The initial process of searching and locating LAG interlocutors commenced from early March. It took over two weeks to make contact with the best informed people to work with and send out introductory materials, and then to obtain agreement co-operate with the survey. By 24 March, the Q202s and guidelines were sent out with indicative deadline for return by 17 April. The rate of response was poor and the deadline extended to 30 April. Considerable effort was made by the team to follow up non-returners by telephone and e-mail, but many indicated they had been deterred by the length of the questionnaire, the complexity of the issues and difficulty of answering them so long after the end of the programme. Some even expected to be paid to answer the questionnaire ! Nonetheless, by the end of May, we had received returns from 14 out of 16 with at least most of the red, and some green questions answered.

There remain large gaps in the black-coded data completion, due partly to the paucity of documentation found by LAG contacts and sent on to us, and partly to the fact that a large proportion of the financial, project and beneficiary data requested has simply not been captured or analysed by the LAGs or the regional government offices / intermediary body to the level required for this evaluation. We believe that the problem of these data deficits would be

endorsed by the team currently undertaking the England ex post evaluation (Alec Fraser and Associates of Stirling, Scotland) and by the Cambridge Economic Associates team, who undertook the Highlands and Islands ex post evaluation in 2001. Finally, in our opinion, there may be serious weaknesses in the regional financial tables, which summarise the final allocation, commitment and expenditure for their respective LAGs , and have been aggregated to provide the England summary table in Annex C to the Final Report for the England LEADER II programme (submitted to the Commission for 31 March 2003). Three regional government offices (West Midlands, East, and North East) have been wholly or partly unable to sub-analyse their figures down to individual LAG level. This has prevented satisfactory completion of the LAG 2000 grid, as well as the relevant parts of Q202.

We believe it may still be possible to obtain or construct from LAG files a substantial proportion of the missing black-coded data for the 16 LAGs, but more time and expert resources will be required to achieve this. Robin McDowell has been unable to give any sustained attention to solving these problems during May due to the need to prioritise work on the Focus Groups and TNC case study.

2. Focus Groups

Report already supplied on 8 June.

3. National and Regional Programme Evaluations

3.1 Overview

The table below summarises the official or statutory evaluation reports and other specific studies carried out for the five LEADER II programmes across the UK to the best of our knowledge based on contacts and surveys with the programme managers / administrations.

Regional Programme	Ex-ante	Interim	Ex-Post	Other Studies
England	None	Yes (1997)	In progress (to complete July 2003)	LAG group evaluations and 'exit strategies' for 5b regions – South West, North Uplands, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, West Midlands (1999).
Highlands & Islands (Scotland)	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Lowland Scotland	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Northern Ireland	None	Yes (1997)	Yes (2001)	None
Wales	None	Yes (1998)	In progress (to complete July 2003)	Qualitative evaluation of experience of Wales Leader Groups, Leader model, and forward strategy for LEADER + (2000)

Problems and Constraints

Programme managers across the UK have rarely mentioned any very specific problems or constraints with the official evaluations relating to insufficient resources or lack of co-operation of LAGs or beneficiaries, but tend to mention two general points:

- i) in the context of the late start made on LEADER II implementation – especially in England – the interim evaluation studies were required to be undertaken mostly in 1997 at too early a stage, before there was a sufficiently large body of projects completed or underway to measure progress on financial, physical or qualitative indicators in a meaningful way.
- ii) the lack of clarity and completion of a system of monitoring indicators and reporting requirements at European level, and hence inconsistent implementation of systems cascading from national and regional to local levels and in place at the start of programmes, have hindered the ability of evaluation teams to report in depth on quantitative outcomes from projects and measure the wider economic, social and environmental impacts of the whole programme or measures over its lifetime.

Procession of Evaluations at National Level

To our knowledge, the national / regional programme administrations have generally processed results of evaluations in three ways:

- i) distributed copies to strategic partners on the national / regional PMCs, including the Country Desk official of the European Commission, and discussed the findings at one or more PMC meetings.
- ii) published either a summary or full report for downloading from the administration's web site (e.g. Northern Ireland, Highlands and Islands and Lowland Scotland ex post evaluations).
- iii) sent copies of the summary or full report on request to LAGs and national / regional / European network units.

3.2 Overall Assessment of the Evaluations

England

The **interim evaluation** was conducted during July- November 1997 at a still very early stage of implementation of the programme due to the slow progress (relative to the other UK programmes) of the establishment of the 22 LAGs and approval of the LAG Business Plans by the regional government offices in England. The study reported on the situation at June 1997, when only 15% of the available EU funds for the programme had been committed and only 6% claimed. In terms of commitment against individual measures, most progress had been made with Measure A, as one would expect, (37% of total funds committed) and with B3 rural tourism (33%); all the others, with the exception of B1 technical support, had committed less than 10%. These facts effectively speak for the limitations of the evaluation findings on use of funds at that time.

However, the interim evaluation did give a substantial coverage of the programme background, LAG structures, project activities and plans, and process issues around capacity building for local development, partnership working, networking, project delivery, and local and regional administration and monitoring procedures. There were some 26 recommendations, of which 15 were on process issues and 11 on financial re-allocations. These were framed in somewhat simplistic terms but were generally practical and to the point and yet broad in scope. It is, however, not at all clear how influential the report was on the England and regional PMCs in driving forward change and improving performance in the final two years up to December 1999. There were a number of criticisms made of the superficiality of the study, but our view is that the evaluation was as good in quality as one could expect, given the lack of concrete results on the ground.

The **ex post evaluation** was only commissioned in January 2003, and the study has not yet been completed. It is therefore not possible to offer any opinion on it here. There are various explanations for the delay in commissioning the evaluation, including the late closure of the programme due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in 2001 and also the restructuring of the national government departments responsible.

Probably the most useful studies in stimulating some real learning at local and institutional level were the **local external evaluations and exit strategies** funded by the national administration (DETR) but commissioned by the regional groupings of LAGs in 1999. Altogether some six studies were commissioned, one for each Objective 5b area grouping of LAGs – i.e. for the Northern Uplands, Midlands Uplands, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, the Marches and South West. These not only provided a substantial review of activities, processes, and outcomes (as far as then known) for each LAG in each regional group but also gave practical recommendations on the transition strategy to LEADER + and the general sustainability of the LAG structures and projects. There is good evidence that these studies were useful to both the LAGs and the incoming DEFRA officials who took over the preparation and administration of the new LEADER + from the DETR.

Wales

In Wales, in comparison with England, the programme implementation started earlier and the interim evaluation was conducted 8 months later with the result that a much greater proportion of the EU funds had been committed to projects, and there was much more activity in progress and evidence of 'process' on which to base the evaluation. Accordingly, it offered a more comprehensive scope of analysis and was far more detailed in its recommendations for changes to management and administration at local and regional levels, especially the 'unworkable' system of monitoring indicators.

Again, as in the case of England, the official ex post evaluation study was delayed for similar reasons, and has not yet been completed at the time of writing. But it is important to note that an evaluation of the experience of Wales LEADER II groups and of the LEADER approach was commissioned in 2000 by the Wales LEADER Company (the regional network) with official support of the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh European Programmes Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. This was a substantial piece of work examining the performance and qualitative impacts of the LEADER Groups, and drawing out a number of policy-making and administrative lessons for LEADER +, which have proved to be quite influential in shaping the current programme.

Scotland

In the case of the **Highlands and Islands** and **Lowland Scotland** programmes, which were managed by intermediary bodies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise

respectively, both the interim and ex post evaluations went ahead in good time in 1997 and 2001. The **interim evaluations** were both of a standard format and quality, and had some relevance in recommending improvements to monitoring systems and the allocation of funds between measures, as well as other changes to structures and processes. However, there is nothing to suggest that they were especially important in so far as the Global Grant system was working satisfactorily for both programmes, and there seemed to be no really serious operational or policy problems to address at that stage.

Equally, the **ex post evaluations** were sufficiently comprehensive in coverage of both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, the role of the LEADER specific features in relation to those outcomes and in making recommendations for LEADER + and future rural programmes. But the Lowland Scotland study had some difficulty gathering full and consistent data from LAGs against the indicators used due to weaknesses and gaps in monitoring practices. Highlands and Islands also lacked robust quantitative outcomes in certain areas. HIE and LAGs had used the AEIDL monitoring framework which was mainly process-oriented, but felt the evaluators did not make sufficient use of this. There were some reservations expressed by HIE about the lack of new research undertaken by the evaluation team to generate more outcome and impact data, whilst the evaluation team were quite critical of the lack of a pro-active and consistent approach to monitoring systems on the part of the HIE network (which in turn was attributed to a lack of clarity on the part of the Commission at the outset of the programme). Both studies drew out a number of lessons and practical proposals for the future, but it is hard to confirm the extent to which these findings have been taken on board by the Scottish Executive, which is now in charge of LEADER + in place of HIE and SE as intermediary bodies.

Northern Ireland

Of all the UK programmes, it can be asserted that Northern Ireland has exhibited probably the most rigorous and policy-driven approach to the commissioning and use of its ex post evaluation. It provides the most detailed analysis of the experience of its 15 LAGs and 9 OCBs (the only UK programme to have the latter) and of the physical and socio-economic impact of projects and the programme as a whole (56 pages on processes and delivery mechanisms, 23 pages on activities supported, and 45 pages on outcomes). It has also made extensive use of the findings in preparing the policy, structures and action focus of the main Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme for 2000-06, including, of course, LEADER +.

3.3 Conclusions and Recommendations from Regional Evaluation Reports

The grid on the next pages summarises the main conclusions and recommendations on the effects and implementation of the LEADER specific features derived from the ex post evaluation report for the **Highlands and Islands** Programme.

No grid has been provided for the **England** programme because the ex post evaluation study has not yet been completed. However, it is pointed out that a draft report is expected to become available within the next month. It was not considered appropriate to attempt to summarise from the evaluations carried out in 1999 of the sub-regional LAG groupings in England. The difficulties are two-fold: these studies preceded the final implementation of projects under the programme; also they adopted different evaluation approaches and did not systematically address the application of the LEADER specific features in each area.

SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

Operational Programme: Highlands and Islands

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Area-based approach	<p>This was implemented efficiently and effectively via the Highlands & Islands Enterprise Network of Local Enterprise Companies established in 1991 which operate in delimited local areas. All of these areas were adopted for LEADER II (a requirement of the EC after LEADER 1) except in one case where two areas were combined (WISL). Smallest area had population of 20,000 and largest of 69,500. The LEADER II measures were judged relevant to the conditions prevailing in all of the areas. Three limitations were evident:</p> <p>i) a very limited local base of financial resources apart from LEC funds and LAs to a lesser extent.</p> <p>ii) inequalities between areas in the extent of community engagement with LEADER</p> <p>iii) one area, where union of two former administrative areas did not work well</p>	<p>Sub-area 'hotspots' of development emerged - small groupings of communities within certain local areas were catalysed by LEADER to achieve a real critical mass of community spirit and confidence, and hence launch activities and multiple projects (eg. Applecross and Loch Ewe within Ross and Cromarty, Nethy Bridge in Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey, and Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan peninsular in Lochaber).</p> <p>Projects typically focused on use of local resources and obtained local match funding.</p> <p>The LAGs benefited from well established arrangements of the LECs as part of HIE network.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To continue to invest in and support with policy and programmes an approach based on coherent local areas and use of local resources of all types as the starting point for local development. ▪ To continue to use the LEC network for delivery of programmes including CED priorities and promoting integrated approaches.
Bottom-up approach	<p>Various 'bottom up' methods of engaging different types of community and social interest groups were positively adopted by most LAGs, including mobile animateurs, local community appraisals and agents networks. LEADER II coincided with and assisted a policy shift within the HIE network to seek to strengthen community involvement and build up local capacity for development.</p> <p>But factors such as the inadequate resources for animation in some areas, lack of direct community representation on LAGs, and the complexity of the application process did hamper 'bottom-up'. Also animation and representation of private sector interests was weak in some areas.</p>	<p>Different methods of animation, outreach and support were applied with different results across local areas, but generally LEADER succeeded in setting in place new structures and processes for community participation, developing skills and capacity of local groups to initiate and manage local development, and catalysing new investment in physical assets and facilities to strengthen communities and their base of resources (a central objective of regional policy via the HIE Network).</p> <p>This work has provided a new infrastructure of human, technical and physical resources for the benefit of future programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The design of future programmes must draw up on the wide evidence now assembled (largely due to LEADER II) of both <i>rural</i> /sector development and <i>community</i> development needs and opportunities ▪ Identify and involve local business sectors earlier (at the strategy development stage), clarify sectors to target, benefits to LAG etc ▪ Local animation systems used should be subjected to a deeper comparative evaluation ▪ Whilst still retaining respect for local variances, <i>some</i> aspects of local animation could be standardised – terms and conditions of staff, core training and qualifications etc. ▪ Continue work to make project application procedures simpler and more accessible.

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
The local group	Even taking into account the need for LAGs to have representation appropriate to local circumstances, some LAGs (e.g. Lochaber and Argyll & the Islands) were too small and entirely comprised of the public sector, and should have been broadened during the programme. Mixed opinions of LAG composition – from ‘genuine partnership of equals’ to ‘domination by the LEC lead bodies’. Some LAGs were able to include and integrate well other organisations and sectors, but truly equitable decision-making was difficult, as global grant system required LECs to have final accountability for funds in each area. This resulted in a lack of identity or legal structure of LAGs independent from LECs. But HIE network commitment to bottom–up principles compensated – at least theoretically.	The best LAGs were those that achieved a <i>balance between breadth of representation and depth of commitment from core partners</i> able to match their funds to projects (e.g. LECs and Local authorities); also a <i>strong sense of shared identity and purpose creating momentum and critical mass of projects</i> . These factors of <i>cohesion and leadership</i> also had beneficial impact on public profile of LAG and participation of communities. Evidence of continuation and broadening of LAG structures for the new CED Priority of Objective 1 Special Programme for HI and other programmes. BUT some community interests were alienated or dis-empowered by perceived domination of LAG by LEC/ LAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider feasibility of <i>permanent rural partnership structures</i> building on LEADER II LAGs and now Obj. 1 CED priority LAGs with fully integrated multi-thematic remit. ▪ More effort required to ensure <i>appropriate community representation</i> on the LAG and sub-structures – ie. beneficiary groups to have more influence on the general strategy for and delivery of community support ▪ More effort required to find an appropriate role for the local <i>private / business sectors</i> in rural development partnerships ▪ Ensure that the LAG partnership can develop a stronger identity independent from the LEC lead body, but still consistent with financial accountability role of the LEC
Innovation	A highly pragmatic approach was adopted by LAGs in applying innovation criteria to projects. Innovation was interpreted to be: designing a project using new consultation techniques, managing in a different way, e.g via community-owned enterprise, and delivering a type of service or product new to the applicant <i>community/ village</i> . This last was the most widely used, but also the weakest criterion. Obstacles were low levels of capacity to innovate, despite LEADER 1, or lack of early or consistent involvement of private entrepreneurs in many areas; also lack of a clear consensus about what constitutes innovation	Only 45% of project promoters surveyed actually considered their project innovative. But evaluators’ review of project files indicated a much stronger rating of relative innovation in terms of new ways of thinking and working at <i>community level</i> , which they considered the most important level. There were also several projects across the B measures which were recognised as exemplary and innovative at the wider regional, national and EU level. The majority of projects were judged to be innovative according to the European Rural Observatory definition.	None specific, but related recommendations are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The design of future programmes must draw up on the wide evidence now assembled (largely due to LEADER II) of both <i>rural /sector</i> development and <i>community</i> development needs and opportunities ▪ Identify and involve local business sectors earlier (at the strategy development stage), clarify sectors to target, benefits to LAG etc ▪ More publicity and promotion of examples of successful innovation at local / community levels
Multisectoral integration	LEADER II in HI was to a large extent and deliberately non-prescriptive of actions (beyond the broad fit with each B Measure) and therefore lacked any clear strategy to secure integration of activity – ie. it lacked targeting to achieve a geographical or sectoral focus. The LAGs approach was to advertise the funding opportunities and react to demand rather than to plan strategically for sectors and inter-linkages.	The LAGs with smaller budgets achieved a large number of smaller projects spread throughout their local areas. Survey of project promoters showed only 13% of projects linked to another LEADER II project. BUT 65% had links to projects from other funding sources. Of these 53% had sustained links beyond the lifetime of LEADER II project. Some evidence of local clusters of linked projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A more pro-active approach to encourage integrated development of projects and stronger linkage of issues and actions <i>at the community level</i> – via support for development and delivery of more localised or sub-area strategies, and better linkage of existing to new projects

	Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)	Intended or unintended effects	Recommendations
Networking	Due to pressures to deliver the programme LAG co-ordinators and members had less time for networking than was desirable or originally expected at the outset. Some good practice was noted in terms of transfer of project ideas within and between LAGs and a limited amount of joint project work by LAGs. The Scottish Leader Network was more effective and accessible a structure for networking than UK or EU networks	Networking mainly at Scotland level, but to some extent at UK and EU levels, did assist spread of ideas and methods for project development and with sharing problems of programme implementation, but real transfer of actions and methods was quite limited. Guides on animation techniques, funding sources, foot path development were examples of successful dissemination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More resources – particularly staff time – needed for future programmes with priority on HI and Scotland levels ▪ Where outside providers are commissioned to support networking, LAG practitioners / users of services should have a role in the selection process
Trans-national cooperation	TNC was as time consuming and resource intensive activity, which only achieved modest results on the ground. The limited timeframe for implementation after the long project development phase and competing local delivery pressures were major barriers. However 6 LAGs generated multiple projects (4 – 14) under Measure C and some derived real local benefits from the exchange of know-how. But Measure C was only about 2% of overall LAG spend.	7 out of 9 LAG areas encouraged and promoted some form of TNC project work, but with variable success in terms of transfer of ideas and sustainability of the project networks. Those involved did however learn new skills and benefit from the experience.	<p>No specific recommendations but doubt expressed that the added value of TNC always outweighed the extra costs involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More resources should have allocated to both regional networking to initiate project development and to best practice transfer at national / European level, rather than bilateral meetings ▪ More advice, guidance and training for TNC project promoters / participants needed
Decentralised management and financing	The use of the established network of LECs corresponding to local areas was the key mechanism by which the global grant held by HIE was further decentralised and managed at the local level. LAGs were free to develop their own locally appropriate partnership structure, business plan and links to local match funding sources. But the downside of autonomy was a failure to put in place a consistent monitoring system for outputs and impacts across all of the LAGs.	The delivery mechanism of global grant to LECs via HIE was considered highly effective, and has continued for use for delivery of main programmes and LEADER + after the end of LEADER II (CED Priority of Objective 1). Funds flowed relatively quickly to project promoters and beneficiaries. However, despite highlighting in the interim evaluation, nothing was done to rectify the weaknesses in monitoring systems. The	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue work to make project application procedures simpler and more accessible. ▪ Use existing information and new research to establish measurable baselines prior to programme implementation to enable formulation of clear, measurable strategies ▪ Make monitoring databases more robust and flexible to allow for innovations in indicators ▪ Monitor expenditure levered in by programme funds via grant claims process
Other important issues – sustainability of projects	The sustainability of projects at both the programme and LAG level was viewed less in terms of strict environmental criteria but rather their viability and potential to continue after the end of LEADER programme funding or give rise to a new project or phase of implementation. This factor was a major concern of local communities.	According to survey 62% of projects have been sustained after the end of LEADER II, many without the need for main programme funding. This is an indicator of the general quality and local user / community support for most projects. It also suggests that skills and capacity gained at local level can be sustained.	No specific recommendations.

4. General Appreciation from Perspective of Geographic Evaluator

4.1 Implementation and Effects of LEADER II Community Initiative in the UK

Across the five LEADER II programmes in the UK, it is possible to define several commonly experienced challenges of implementation. But equally the significance of differences in the regional programme management regimes needs to be highlighted. There is no doubt that those programmes which allowed decentralised control of funds under the system of global grants channelled through a single regional intermediary body enabled a greater local 'ownership' of the LEADER process and ease of access to grant funds for LAGs and project promoters, in contrast to the conventional operational programmes, under which each structural fund strand was managed by a different national government department usually through regional offices, but sometimes requiring processing at both national and regional levels. In England, in particular, the lack of connection to LEADER 1 (except two areas), the later start to LAG operations combined with the structural complexity and delays in the administrative system threatened to have a significantly negative effect. However, this was in the end minimised in most areas by the skill and efforts of LAG staff and board members to promote the benefits of the LEADER opportunity and ethos locally and use the regional network and PMC structures to solve the problems.

The common challenges were mainly experienced at the level of the LAG and the technical support team:

- i) creating the optimum 'laboratory' conditions for real innovation in activities and methods to emerge – of a local entrepreneurial culture, adequate technical and administrative support systems, strong co-operation of local organisations and agencies, access to risk finance, external networks etc

In practice, only a minority of LAGs – usually those benefiting from LEADER 1 – were able to put a comprehensive local support infrastructure in place, which *both* enabled a 'bottom-up' development process *and* generated some really innovative actions or methods for transfer to wider regional, national or international levels. Across the UK, the approach was typically pragmatic and concerned with delivering new types of activity, community-led structures for delivery and inclusion of new groups in the local area context, and, to this extent, every programme and almost every LAG recorded successes. Certainly, new capacity was built to formulate strategy, manage local development programmes, network and generate projects at the level of local sectors, and of town and village communities, but there have been real difficulties or failures in many areas to consolidate and sustain this local knowledge, partnerships and networking into LEADER + and other rural programmes for a whole variety of reasons.

- ii) giving sufficient priority, staff time and financial resources to national and international networking and early development of transnational co-operation projects

Whilst individual LAGs from all five programmes have made notable contributions to UK and EU levels, there was overall an under-achievement which it would be unfair to attribute solely to lack of interest or effort by LAGs. Their positive valuation of networking and co-operation per se was evidenced by the active participation in regional networking in each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The background problems were a collective inertia of the managing authorities to ensure that the UK national network was set up at a sufficiently early stage and properly co-ordinated with the European Observatory to support TNC, an under-resourcing of national and regional networks to provide on-going technical support and dissemination of practice (beyond the training events), and a generally low priority given by PMCs and managing authorities to Measure C in comparison with Measure B actions.

- iii) achieving broad-based but locally-rooted representation of interests and sustaining local area partnership structures in a context of time-limited funding and parallel local programmes

In the UK there was a wide variation in quality and format of LAG partnerships – from the LEC-led structures in Scotland to local authority-led groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to LEADER companies in South West England and independent local development agencies in Wales and Lowland Scotland. Whatever the structure, there has been a common challenge to sustain partnership and/or extend local representation of sectoral and community interests during and beyond the life of programmes. As it has turned out, and despite the long transition period, the majority of LEADER II LAGs have proved enduring and adaptable for LEADER + and/or a more locally accountable implementation of main programmes (e.g. Objective 1 and 2). But a longer-term strategy and framework of core funding is still needed in each country / region of the UK (with possible exception of Scotland) to convert single programme-oriented LAGs into independent, permanent, and locally-owned institutions capable of promoting integrated rural development by combining resources from multiple funding programmes. Furthermore, there remains a real problem or risk of duplication of these structures, and lack of clarity in some regions about the appropriate and effective geographic areas for organising local economic partnership, as distinct from multi-policy themed partnerships.

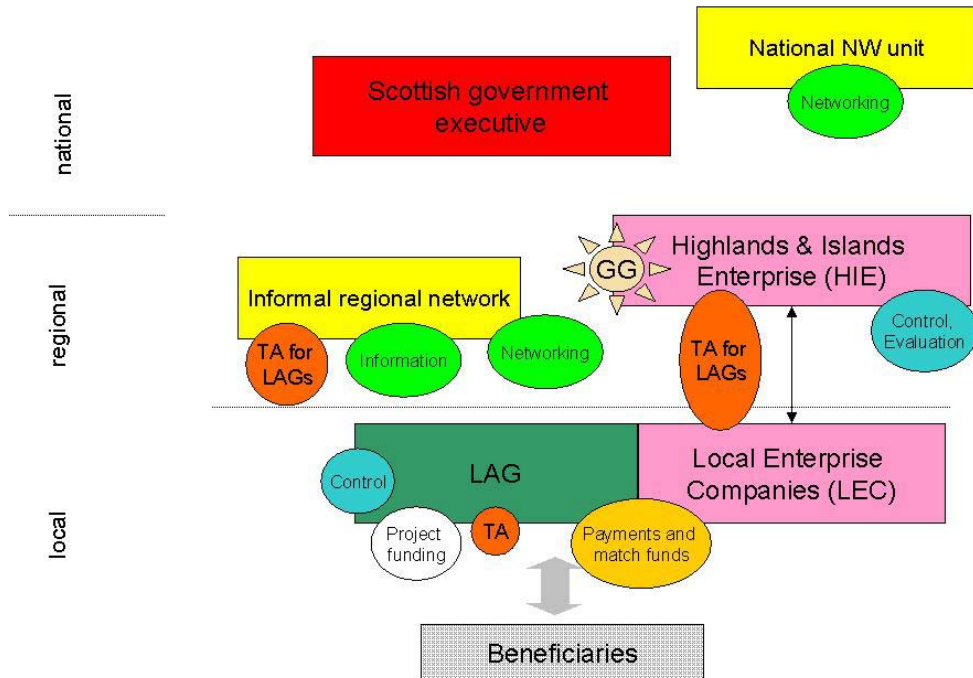
4.2 Critical Reflection on the Evaluation Process

It would have been much more productive of co-operation at LAG level with this final EU level evaluation if all the ex post evaluations for the five regional programmes in the UK could have been carried out within the same year, ie. in 2001 and if some framework had existed for closer linkage of the EU level objectives focused on the efficacy of the LEADER model to those at regional level relating to qualitative assessment of programme management and LAG processes in order to avoid repeating the same questions and encountering resistance due to 'evaluation fatigue'. There are plausible explanations as to why these things did not or could not happen – late closure of the programmes due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis and several national administrative reorganisations in England and Wales etc. However, at this late stage, there have been some very real practical obstacles to getting access to the key interlocutors and information sources – principally turnover of the original staff, archiving of files, transfer to other offices etc. There is also the fact that especially since the creation of devolved administrations and new regional agencies since 1997 there are now a multiplicity of integrated rural development programmes, at EU and national / regional levels, with variable timescales and area-based approaches, operating in each of the UK regions, which tends to create quite a short-term 'organisational memory' for any single programme, even one as distinctive as LEADER. This has been a particular problem in England, where LEADER II generally had a lower public profile and relatively smaller, fragmented administrative resources dedicated in the government offices in comparison to Objective 5b programmes. In terms of the quality and depth of analysis of financial and physical completion of programmes, there are problems of consistency and availability of data at the English sub-regional level (some much worse than others) hindering ability to draw conclusions at England level; in the Highlands and Islands, financial analysis is more comprehensive but there are gaps in data for project outcomes and beneficiary analysis due to shortcomings in the monitoring system (highlighted in the ex post evaluation).

Finally, apart from the obvious lesson (already being implemented) to improve monitoring frameworks for LEADER + and achieve inter-regional consistency in this aspect, there may be something to be gained from promoting better at local level, and before the end of the programme, the practical application and outcomes from EU level evaluation exercises in order to stimulate more interest and co-operation. Also, the possible differences in cultural and political attitude between UK and continental European players to the theory and practice of a unified LEADER model of rural development and to what are perceived to be 'remote' processes for EU regional / rural programme and policy-making are worthy of some further exploration in an open and honest way. In the course of this evaluation work, a full spectrum of views has been encountered about the validity of the model from scepticism about its lasting impact on the ground in relation to the 'opportunity cost' imposed by overarching bureaucracies to great enthusiasm and pride from Lands End in Cornwall to Fetlar in the Shetland Isles about what has been achieved to advance empowerment and entrepreneurship in local communities and sectors under the banner of LEADER.

Models of implementation

UK – Highlands & Islands



UK – England

