

Revitalisation of the rural
economies & societies with
LEADER action groups

STRENGTHENING LEADER AND RURAL AREAS. NOW!

LEADER is regional development run by local people and promotes the resistance to crisis and the capacity for innovation of rural areas. Supporting LEADER as participatory regional development right now might be the way to success.



Supported by ELARD and the European Union



European Leader Association
for Rural Development
Brussels, www.elard.eu

SWEDISH
PRESIDENCY
2020-2022

LUS
LOCAL UPGRADE
SWEDEN



THE CURRENT SITUATION

How do we as a society deal with unexpected crises without abandoning our previously set sustainability goals? The regional structure of LEADER offers various opportunities for crisis management and crisis transformation.

Transformation is based on problem-solving that requires civil participation and commitment by the local population.

The LEADER principles of self-organisation, personal responsibility, and the commitment of those affected are criteria for the resistance to the crisis in a rural area. However, using our own problem-solving resources should not prevent us from understanding the overarching contexts.

The functions presented here show the capacities of LEADER/ CLLD for economic and social development even in challenging situations.



THE LEADER UNIQUE SERVICE PROPOSITION

LEADER is participative regional development serving rural communities, the private sector, and civil society. Participation in it involves not only co-creation but also co-financing.

A Local Action Group (LAG) is a public-private partnership in the area and plays several roles as a citizen participation forum: funding advice, networking units, and innovation-oriented enterprise.

LEADER gives the greatest thematic leeway in the realm of regional development, as the project choices are made by the LAG. This form of self-determination only exists at LEADER.

For LEADER/CLLD the EU has allocated **multi-fund financing** (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF) including national co-financing and a wide range of funding options.





EUROPEAN LEADER ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ELARD is an international non-profit association set up to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain their population through sustainable, integrated local development.

The distinctive feature of ELARD is that it brings together Local Action Groups committed to involving all stakeholders in rural development at a local level. The European LEADER Association joins together almost 2 500 Local Action Groups and Fisheries Local Action Groups from 29 countries, including from countries that are not members of the European Union but have adopted and are implementing the LEADER methodology.

Our vision is

“A viable Europe through participatory democracy in all rural areas and beyond”



I. THE METHOD: INTEGRATIVE & PRACTICE-ORIENTED

Based on a tried and tested participation model, LEADER equally fosters all three areas of the regional society: municipalities, the private sector, and civil society. LEADER is ideal when ideas need to be found at the grassroots level and when self-organisation and self-problem-solving skills can help.

Independent regional development emerged from coping with a crisis: The key event was the first oil price crisis in 1973. As a consequence, the importance of regional resources was rediscovered. LEADER is innovation-oriented: Further, development is achieved by trying out the unconventional.

The LEADER method has 7 principles: bottom-up projects, local development strategies, local action groups, networking, innovation, cooperation, and multi-sectoral actions.





II. THE ORGANISATION: NETWORK OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

LEADER/CLLD requires a public-private partnership: Every Local Action Group (LAG) has an office in the region and is the central management unit that can react rapidly and location-specific – especially in crisis situations. A LAG also advises on funding issues, networks players and can act entrepreneurially.

The organisational form of a LAG reflects the basic democratic stance: Decision and public funds are handed over to a self-organised group that is responsible for the local strategy and its implementation. Civil society representatives are represented by the majority in each group. Through the principle of autonomy, which means self-determination with personal responsibility, an activating effect of the population to solve their own problems is achieved.



III.FUNDING: PARTICIPATION THROUGH CO- FINANCING

Primarily financed by EU public funds as well as national co-financing, LEADER provides financial support for ideas and projects for the development of rural areas. But LEADER is much more than only funding: It is a concrete form of participation through the co-financing of regional and often also private actors.

LEADER is currently being implemented with a minimum financial share of 5% of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Each project fund consists of an EU share of 80% and a federal and state contribution of at least 20%. However, in the variety of projects LEADER often represents the entire field of rural development.

Implementing the principle of co-financing by the regional public- and private-sector actors, a volume of investment representing a multiple of public funds is reached in the region.





5

THE

LEADER/ CLLD-FUNCTION WITH THEIR AREAS OF INTERVENTION AND IMPACT

LEADER can fulfill functions and services for the society of rural areas, which in this combination are unique. LEADER also generates a high degree of crisis resistance and innovative power in rural areas. Today, these effects are more relevant than ever.

1 FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF EDUCATION AND DEMOCRATIC POLICY

Democratisation: Groups affected by problems work out their own solutions to improve their environments and their living spaces. The LAG helps to generate ideas and to implement new solutions, using the experience of those involved – participatory democracy through regional citizen participation.

Promotion of identity: Working in a LAG is carried out on a voluntary basis and forges a strong bond between its members. This form of identity is not tied to the boundaries of administrative policy, but promotes a culture of cooperation.

Knowledge transfer: LEADER integrates people who embody regional knowledge: e.g. farmers and craftsmen, who have gained a profound knowledge through experience that is particularly valuable in application-oriented innovation processes.

A NEW RURAL SCENARIO

SPAIN



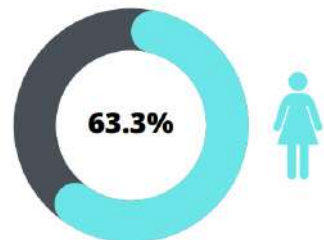
● Photo by Jason Goodman on Unsplash

"A new rural scenario: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030 Agenda and LEADER" was an online course implemented by REDR during 2020 and 2021.

The objective was to raise awareness about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2 editions

2.483 people registered

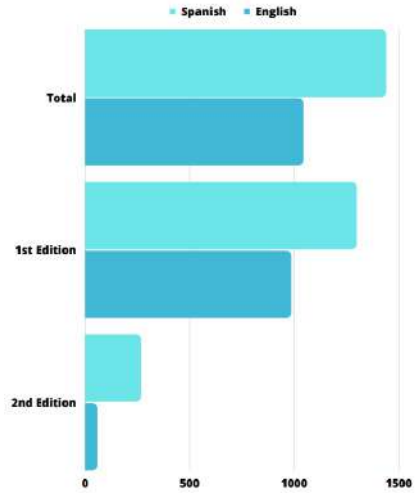


Impact and evaluation

The course offered practical tools for its implementation in rural areas with real indicators (impact and evaluation).

Participants who considered the course met their expectations

97%



2 LABOUR MARKET & SOCIO-POLITICAL FUNCTIONS

Job creation and promotion: New sales markets, new opportunities for tourism – most LEADER activities create jobs. Not to forget: There are a lot of about 8250 people working in LAG management in Europe. Furthermore, there are over 280 000 project staff members. Together with businesses, LEADER works to create future opportunities for skilled and handicraft trades.

Social affairs: Aiming at an improvement of the work-family balance is an example of the activities LEADER promotes. LEADER creates demand-based social offers that support, for example, disadvantaged young people or elderly people in need of care.

Representation of underrepresented groups: As a non-partisan forum, a LAG has the task of actively including groups of people who usually do not take part in decision-making processes. This applies to adolescents, older people, migrants, newcomers in a region etc.

WOMEN ACTIVE IN SOCIETY

IRELAND



● Copyright: Terry Keenan

Initiated by North, East and West Kerry Development Company (NEWKD) in Ireland and funded under the Rural Development Programme, the 'Women Active in Society' LEADER transnational cooperation project set out to support female leaders across the region to grow and develop their businesses while meeting like-minded entrepreneurs, farmers and producers.

Participants were given the opportunity to meet, share and learn from the experiences of their peers in Ireland and Poland under the leadership of the project's content experts from the Entrepreneurs Academy, who provided support on their journey of growth for both themselves and their business.

MOVIE

Exposed to new ideas and perspectives

A key component to the programme was the creation of a small, trusted group of like-minded women across sectors for collaboration and within three cohorts: female entrepreneurs, female farmers and female makers (i.e. artists, creators and poets).

Above all, the Women Active in Society Cooperation project has connected like-minded individuals in Ireland and Poland and has opened up a network to those involved.



The combination of training via online and in-person workshops coupled with the hands-on experiences of visiting their counterparts in another country has equipped these women with new skills, exposed them to new ideas and perspectives, and has given them the confidence to pursue their own interests moving forward.



3 ECONOMIC POLICY FUNCTION

Promotion of the circular economy: LEADER promotes regional value chains, site development, and innovations in tourism in proposal preparation – in any case, the focus lies on creating an ecologically effective economy as an alternative model to the “throwaway society”.

Regional production methods: In the LEADER context, regional production is characterised by (re)establishing contact between producers and consumers as a trustworthy relationship. Consequently, economic capital is multiplied through social capital.

Promotion of innovation: One of the main tasks of LEADER is the promotion of technological innovations as a means of ecological modernisation and the promotion of social innovations as “reforms by the people concerned”. LEADER is seen as a laboratory for innovations with the goal of diversifying the rural economy.

BRAND "SAMMTISA"

GEORGIA

Aragvi Local Action Group established the local area Brand "SamMtisa", which is the first state recognized local brand in Georgia.

The brands aim is to serve as quality scheme and sign for popularization of unique, local products and services, facilitate partnerships among local businesses and joint marketing schemes.



The vision behind this project is to strengthen the positioning of local culture, traditions, products and services at national and international markets and create recognition for quality of rural economy.



4 FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE POLICY

Ecological modernisation: In agriculture, LEADER pursues modernisation by means of digital methods in order to increase resource efficiency. Also relevant to LEADER is the Smart Villages initiative as well as the consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Adaptation to climate change: Municipalities and regions view the strategies for dealing with climate change as implementation levels. Their effectiveness shows at the regional level. LEADER supports climate-relevant projects to reduce negative consequences- and to use the side effects as opportunities.

Crisis and transformation management: A LAG trains its members to deal with the unexpected and uncertainty. This strategy broadens their self-organization and rapid, location-specific problem-solving skills in order to enable them to react to global challenges. Crises create opportunities for further development without failed adaptations.

GREEN EVENT PLANS

ESTONIA



● Copyright: Kristiina Tammets

The green event plan is a solution for helping rural event organisers to deliver 'greener', more sustainable and environmentally friendly events. Individual green plans are developed for specific events covering several aspects of event organisation that impact on environmental performance.

This includes:

- Waste management (including food waste)
- Food & catering
- Materials and purchases
- Transport
- Energy and resources
- Communication before, during and after the event
- Organising committee (incl. volunteers)

Capacity and awareness

The development of green plans is greatly facilitated by the organisation of training and other capacity building activities to present and explain the requirements of the green plans and recommendations to event organisers.

It has also been found useful to provide mentoring support for event organisers to help them through the process of preparing and implementing an individual green plan for their event.



One of the result was increased capacity and awareness about how to organise green events in practical terms.

In total, the information reached about 180,000+ people.



5

FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF EUROPEAN POLICY

Networking competency of the regions: LEADER is a part of the Europe of the Regions. Thus, the principle of self-determination also involves EU integration and solidarity. LEADER regions work together in an established network (ENRD: European network of rural development) of 3,300 action groups in Europe.

European understanding at the local level: Improved communication of the political-economic objectives of the EU is critical. This involves an equal fostering of the European and regional identity. Therefore, LEADER conveys a Europe that is close to the people.

Transnational cooperation: The goal is an economic and cultural opening – vitality as a result of local business formations and international contacts of the people who train their skills through intercultural exchange (e.g. foreign language skills and ways of life).



EUROPEAN SLOW TRIPS

Transnational Tourism Project



● Copyright: Christian Strassegger

Tourism for once unusual and curious. Slow Trips don't show sights from glossy brochures. Taking part and getting to know people in different parts of Europe in their everyday lives are the goals.

The 9 partner regions are located in Luxembourg, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Lithuania and Austria.

Sample project of the LAG Oststeirisches Kernland (Styria) & Urfahr West (Upper Austria) and 8 European LAGs.

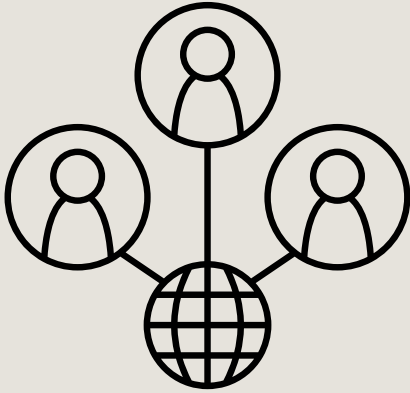


The 3 Roles of Local Action Groups:

FUNDING ADVISORY CENTRE

The tasks include giving funding advice, offering project support, and quickly evaluating the ideas and projects submitted by regional actors in accordance with the local development strategy. I.e., approved projects are supported in their implementation and accounting processes.

The self-determination of the LAG means, in its simplest form, the selection of LEADER-relevant projects. Professional LAG management with an office in the region is staffed by at least two people.



The **3 Roles** of Local Action Groups:

NETWORK UNIT

The LAG is destined to foster the establishment of a regional and transnational network of economic and personal relations. This means that social capital promotes economic capital. In the decision-making and working group of the LAG “key players” are represented. Through their abilities or positions, they can exert a positive influence on the importance of the dissemination of LEADER projects.

The LAG actively represents regional projects to the outside world and takes on the roles of an innovation broker and a local network unit for information on strategic topics at the EU, federal, and state levels. A LAG offers a wide range of services: methodical consulting, organisational support such as initiating cooperation and negotiating of public funds for project implementations.



The **3 Roles** of Local Action Groups:

SOCIAL INNOVATION BUSINESS

A LAG can also become a non-profit entrepreneur itself, especially if no project applicants can be found in strategically relevant subject areas. The LAG is characterised by numerous innovation-oriented LAG projects and transnational cooperation projects in the Europe network. In this case, its role is entrepreneurial, as the projects are pre-financed, financially and content managed and co-financiers are sought and the responsibility is taken for them.

In addition to the LAG management, human resource management also concerns the innovation and participation processes including communication, creativity, and mediation techniques.

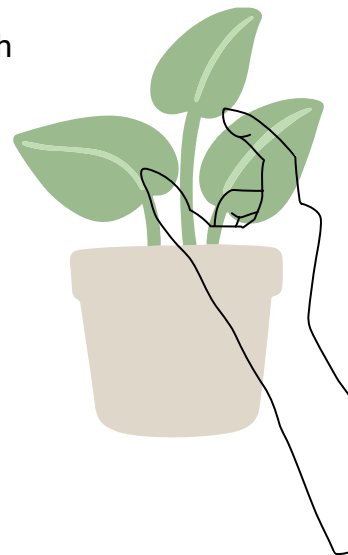
In this respect, regional problem-solving and transformation processes are central.

FROM LEADER TO CLLD

LEADER (liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale) was propagated by the European Commission as community approach and implemented from 1991 onwards. LEADER started as a revitalisation program for the rural economy and developed into a program of active participation for the local population (**CLLD: community-led local development**).

The success of LEADER throughout Europe resulted in the application of the method and its organisational form in the European structural and investment funds (in the area of rural, maritime, and regional development and in the area of social services).

LEADER can do a lot more: Using a multi-fund concept, LEADER/CLLD explores new topics such as urban and rural development, and new beneficiaries such as social and business enterprises. Therefore, CLLD with multi-fund financing represents the future prospects of LEADER as participatory regional development. This strategy can further boost the population's existing potential to achieve joint regional goals, and for the LAG it involves better planning of funding (European Committee of the Regions).



LEADER WORKS



3.300

Number of LEADER regions in the EU: 3,300 local action groups implement LEADER / CLLD.



LEADER/CLLD is mainly financed by European Structural and co-financed by federal and state funds.



250 000

More than 250 000 of LEADER/CLLD projects have been approved

LEADER: ESPECIALLY RIGHT NOW!

DEMOCRATIC
SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE
ECONOMIC
ECOLOGICAL
EUROPEAN



European Leader Association
for Rural Development
Brussels, www.elard.eu

SWEDISH
PRESIDENCY
2020-2022

