



LEADER/CLLD EVALUATION: LAYING THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE APPROACH

FACTSHEET OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPSDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT - DECEMBER 2016



LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF THE LEADER APPROACH THROUGH THE EX POST EVALUATION

The history of LEADER¹ and its evaluation is extensive and has grown progressively over the past twenty-five years. LEADER began as a pilot initiative in 1991 (LEADER I) and has evolved with numerous iterations (LEADER II, LEADER +) into a widespread, mainstreamed policy instrument used to support the development of rural areas across the European Union.

The findings and recommendations of various LEADER evaluations proves that this policy tool has played a critical role in improving and developing the conceptual foundation of the LEADER approach. The path of LEADER evaluations conveys a particular story, one of institutional and societal learning.



25 YEARS OF EMPOWERING RURAL TERRITORIES THROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The first evaluation of LEADER was the European ex post evaluation of the LEADER I initiative (1991-1993) (EU12)². Based on survey data of all 217 LAGs involved in LEADER I, a qualitative inquiry of 50 of these 217 LAGs was conducted to observe the results and impacts of the LEADER interventions through the assessment of their local action plans, modes of functioning, and the observable impacts on the local communities. More importantly, the ex post evaluation of LEADER I provided a model and exploration of how LEADER's particular features contributed towards achieving a more effective approach to rural development. Apart from assessing local results and impacts in terms of employment, business creation and development, the evaluation placed special emphasis on the overall governance system in LEADER (e.g. the implementation of partnerships, bottom-up and networking principles, and changes in institutional patterns triggered by decentralised implementation procedures). The importance given to governance in the first ex post evaluation of LEADER I had major repercussions on shaping LEADER beyond simply a financing instrument, into an institutional means of integrating rural areas into the wider EU system.

“for many rural areas, which felt possibly marginalised or not connected to other countries it was a possibility to be connected with other Member States and to have transnational cooperation possibilities with other countries, this was a major added value”, suggests one LEADER practitioner from France.

The ex post evaluation of LEADER I helped to codify what would later become the seven LEADER features,



FURTHER READING ON THE EVALUATION OF LEADER

- [Ex post evaluation of the LEADER I Community Initiative](#)
- [Ex post evaluation of the Community Initiative LEADER II](#)
- [Synthesis of mid-term evaluations of LEADER+ programmes](#)
- [Ex post evaluation of the LEADER+](#)



Local Action Group in Bornholm, Denmark - October 2016

or “operational principles” of bottom-up strategies, local public partnerships, innovation, multi-sectoral and area-based approaches, cooperation and networking.

Solidifying a bottom-up approach through evaluation requirements

With the conceptual framework laid through the ex post evaluation of LEADER I, the ex post evaluation of LEADER II further reinforced the development of the LEADER approach. LEADER II showcased that in just 5 years nearly half of the surveyed groups implemented the LEADER method to a certain extent and that the implementation of the method was highly correlated with positive outcomes.

“It was really improving the governance at the local level so the rural communities could really see the benefits of LEADER... although it was not an easy method to implement with European funds, with a lot of reporting rules, it was accepted at the local level as a very useful tool”, states one LEADER expert.

The LEADER II ex post evaluation focused LEADER into becoming both a financial development instrument and an effective tool for reshaping governance in rural society. The evaluation demonstrated that less successful outcomes were predominantly related to cases where the initiative was used as a funding instrument alone without directly engaging the LEADER principles (i.e. hindered by centralised governance, causing weak local partnerships and numerous institutions and agencies contesting for the leading role). The ex post evaluation of LEADER II further showed that more LAG autonomy facilitated increased participation and structural changes at the local level. This autonomy also fostered stronger inter-institutional modes of interactions between LAGs, and programme administrations at regional, national and EU levels.

Despite some difficulties, the results of the ex post evaluation of LEADER II were sufficiently encouraging to give the European Commission reason for a follow-up study on assessing the possibilities of embedding the LEADER approach in mainstream rural development policies³.

Evaluations of LEADER + continued these findings and the solidification of the LEADER approach, clarifying evaluation requirements defined for the European level, allowing for a progressively more detailed LEADER approach for programme authorities in the Member States.

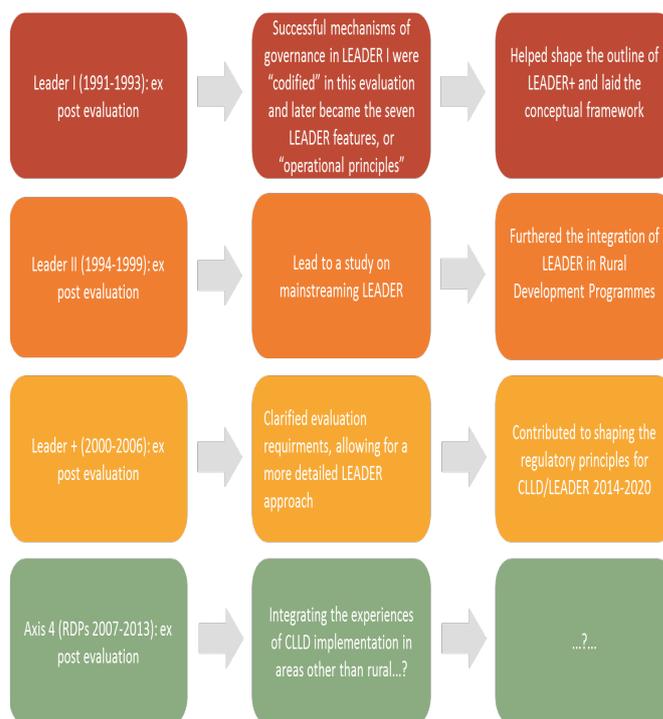
“It was a good Community Initiative for three generations and then it was considered to be mature enough to be mainstreamed”, indicates a member of ELARD.

The 2007-2013 programming period saw the mainstreaming of the LEADER approach into rural development policy, solidifying its effectiveness as a policy instrument.

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD): Broadening the LEADER approach to all ESI Funds

LEADER's wide scale success in the EU's rural areas has inspired other EU Funds to extend the application of this approach in other areas. In the programming period 2014-2020, the scope of the LEADER approach has been further broadened through Community-led Local Development (CLLD) – a territorial policy instrument, which supports the mobilisation of local potentials at the sub-regional and local levels in rural, fishery and urban territories. As such, CLLD is a tool designed

The LEADER Learning Ladder



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development. 2016

to reinforce the coordination and integration of several ESI Funds⁴ and achieve synergies among them at the sub-regional and local levels, supporting the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Local development actors in the EU have acknowledged, “the impact of LEADER on local governance goes beyond the rural development policy and CAP. Therefore, it became a model of governance for local development applicable for the sectoral policies and urban policy”.

CLLD is funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds, and therefore is subject to monitoring and evaluation activities. Local Action Groups will play a key role in the evaluation of the CLLD strategy. Experiences from past evaluations will continue to act as an important source of knowledge and information, as well as serving as a crucial support to build new capacities and ideas for future evaluations.

¹ In French, Liaison entre actions de développement rural.

² Published in 1999. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leader1/index_en.htm

³ Published 2004. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/reports/leader/sum_en.pdf

⁴ Point 3(g) of Article 34 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013



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The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit E.4 (Evaluation and studies) of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

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