

Ex-post evaluation of Leader+

Zélie Peppiette



Contract details

- Commissioned and managed by DG AGRI
- Carried out by METIS, AEIDL and CEU
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Objectives

- effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability of LEADER+ programmes (EU15) and LEADER+-type measures (EU10)
- impact of the programmes
- coherence in relation to other EU interventions in rural areas



Objectives

- effectiveness of LEADER+-type measures in preparing development of area-based, bottom-up RD strategies
- added-value of the LEADER method compared to traditional RDPs
- conditions for successful application of the LEADER method
- examples of successful experiences



Eight evaluation themes

- Theme 1: Relevance and Community Added Value
- Theme 2: The actions of LEADER+
- Theme 3: The implementation of the LEADER method
- Theme 4: Impacts
- Theme 5: Governance and rural citizenship
- Theme 6: Management, control and finance systems
- Theme 7: Monitoring and evaluation
- Theme 8: Rural activity/excellence clusters



Methodology

- Building on previous programme level evaluations
- Inventory of programmes
- Fieldwork:
 - survey of 10% of all Local Action Groups (LAGs);
 - survey of Managing Authorities (MAs);
 - interviews with National Network Units (NNUs)
 - ten case studies
- Aggregation and cross-tabulation of survey data
- Analysis by themes and evaluation questions



Relevance and Community Added Value: Findings

- addressed a large number of needs of rural areas
- important complement to mainstream policies and agencies
- contributed to economic diversification, quality of life and preservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of rural areas
- distinguished from other mainstream programmes through its flexibility, sensitivity to local needs, and small scale
- addressed needs and exploited potentials considered 'unreachable' by more conventional channels



Relevance and Community Added Value: Recommendations

- innovation should be more strongly embedded, with appropriately diverse financial and technical support to meet different needs
- concentrate on increasing the adaptive capacity and resilience of the area, rather than boosting short term productivity and market success for local value chains



Action 1: Integrated territorial rural development strategies of pilot nature: Findings

- innovation fostered by:
 - enabling local actors to work in new ways
 - combining existing activities in new ways
 - linking local competences to external sources of knowledge and technology
- success factors:
 - co-operation
 - networking
 - participation at local level
 - communication



Action 1 Integrated territorial rural development strategies of a pilot nature: Recommendations

- LEADER should maintain its 'laboratory' character, with a strategic perspective.
- Additional emphasis and support should be given to meet the needs of minority, disadvantaged or marginalised groups



Action 2: Support for cooperation between rural territories: Findings

- brought local actors together
- joint projects through cooperation with neighbouring LAGs
- within-country co-operation encouraged information exchange e.g. better project management
- between-country cooperation with LAGs was a source of inspiration on alternative ways of doing things
- successful co-operation worked best where there were common interests and concerns



Action 2: Support for cooperation between rural territories: Recommendation

- Territorial co-operation should continue to be a keystone of the LEADER approach, for more experienced LAGs as well as for new groups



Action 3: Networking Findings

- valued, but could be enhanced if benefits more clearly articulated and geared to solving common problems
- National Network Units and the European Observatory could play a critical brokering role
- NNUs had a strong role in identifying needs and providing information on LAG activities
- the Observatory was more useful for finding partners outside the country



Action 3: Networking Recommendation

- Targeted opportunities for peer learning for LAGs, should be further developed, both within and between countries



The implementation of the LEADER method: Findings

- promoted multi-sectoral and integrated development and contributed to strengthening the local economy and the social capital in rural areas
- promoted more efficient use of endogenous resources, strengthening local value-added systems and providing a test ground for sustainable production processes and products
- added-value to local resources



The implementation of the LEADER method: Recommendations

- continue to focus on multi-sectoral development of rural areas, enhancement of social capital and increased territorial competitiveness
- increasingly integrate local responses to global social and environmental concerns
- the autonomy of LAGs should be further developed.



Impacts: Findings

- LAGs promoted small scale and craft enterprises directly which helped to create or sustain employment and income
- LEADER+ activities contributed to the creation and maintenance of employment, directly and indirectly (type of support and innovative approach important)
- LEADER+ activities particularly benefited small scale manufacturing, food processing and tourism



Impacts: Recommendations

- due consideration to both creation of employment opportunities and income, and the improvement of the rural environment
- integrate target groups fully into the decision making process
- positive discrimination for specific target groups



Governance and rural citizenship: Findings

- significant positive effects on local governing capacities
- significantly enhanced the capacities of rural communities in the NMS to develop and implement local strategies
- level of autonomy was linked to effective implementation



Governance and rural citizenship: Recommendations

- active promotion and support for the establishment of effective public-private partnerships with a clear allocation and understanding of the respective roles
- continuity of systems, organisations and individual actors
- limit low autonomy, high autonomy should be explicit objective
- appropriate capacity building and support



Management, control and finance systems: Findings

- admin and finance arrangements between LAGs and MAs appear to have worked well
- with continuity of staff and partnerships, elements of this have translated well into 2007-2013 period
- 2007-2013 more complex and bureaucratic
- greater fiscal autonomy contributed to increased value-added
- small LAGs lower overhead budget limited development capacity



Management, control and finance systems: Recommendations

- administrative procedures must not impede LAGs from development work nor exclude actors with lesser admin capacity
- seamless transition between programming periods
- adequate resources for animation, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation
- reconcile accountability and autonomy



Monitoring and evaluation: Findings

- EU wide comparison and aggregation of monitoring data very seriously compromised by systemic weaknesses
- substantial proportion of LAGs had no established systems for local development monitoring
- limited development of evaluation capacity and local ownership of monitoring
- more autonomous LAGs did more



Monitoring and evaluation: Recommendations

- reliable methods to assess success or failure in enhancing social capital needed
- active monitoring of high quality, dynamic local territorial strategies needed to increase accountability and ownership
- development of evaluation capacity within LAGs
- active management and real accountability needed at all levels to build evaluation capacity, awareness, structures, resources and commitment
- final evaluation of LEADER programmes should be mandatory.



Rural activity/excellence clusters: Findings

- virtually no LAGs explicitly described their activities as clustering
- networking to open up new economic opportunities was a primary objective for > 75% of LAGs surveyed
- LAGs played a practical role in starting up new products and services, mainly through brokering new relations between diverse actors



Rural activity/excellence clusters: Recommendation

- more effective links to the wider development context and to other actors and stakeholders are needed

