



Designing LEADER

LEADER case study A participative process to inform LEADER programme design

Maria José Murciano Sanchez, REDR, Spain

In 2019, the national rural network in Spain (REDR) initiated a comprehensive research process involving all 185 Local Action Groups (LAGs), REDR Steering Committee and all 11 Regional Networks to explore their views and aspirations for the new programming period (2021-2027). The findings of the research fed into the position paper 'The future of LEADER 2021-2027', which informed policy-decision makers.

Launched in 1995, REDR acts as the interlocutor between the LAGs, Regional Networks and the relevant national and European administrations by facilitating dialogue and reflection about policy development and programme design. REDR was therefore well placed to undertake the nation-wide research. A bottom-up and participative process was applied throughout.

Over a four-months period, the interactive process incorporated the following stages and activities:

- 1. Research Method and Survey Design:**
 - A mixed method approach (online survey, face-to-face consultations) involving all REDR members;
 - A structured questionnaire including closed and open questions to encourage free answers;
 - Semi-structured, facilitated and interactive conference and focus groups; and
 - An interactive process of feedback and additional comments on first findings.
- 2. Information Capture:**
 - The online survey was distributed to all REDR members, who in turn consulted and agreed their responses with their own stakeholders;
 - A one and a half day conference in October 2019 with more than 100 participants from across Spain. The conference was designed to encourage active participation, reflection and debate whereby various thematic roundtables and mini-plenary sessions captured the LEADER experience and views of participants about possible improvements in future; and
 - A series of meetings with the LEADER Representative of 17 Autonomous Regions of Spain at REDR.
- 3. Analysis, Synthesis, and Reporting:**
 - Extensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the findings (840 responses) and production of the first draft report;
 - Dissemination of the draft report to all REDR members to receive feedback on the synthesised findings (this was considered very helpful in the research process as it allowed stakeholders to reflect and re-consider their opinions);



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- Refinement of the draft report on the basis of the feedback received;
 - Meeting with the LEADER Representative of 17 Autonomous Regions of Spain at REDR and the REDR Board of Directors to agree on the final document; and
 - Production of the final position paper.
- 4. Dissemination and Lobbying:**
 - Sending the position paper to all Regional Rural Networks and LAGs;
 - Presentation and debate of the document at the national LEADER Subgroup and the Specific Objective 8 Sub-Working Group organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Spain; and
 - Dissemination of the document to REDR associates, ELARD and its partners.

Some of the strongest recommendations of the position paper relate to the wide-spread desire to renew the LEADER approach in its original principles (bottom-up, area-based, partnership, integrated and multi-sectoral, networking, cooperation and innovation). Over many decades, the LEADER approach has successfully improved rural governance in Spain with LAGs evolving into effective and capable players and project promoters at the local level. However, their role and autonomy to decide about local interventions have increasingly been reduced in recent years. This is concerning for most REDR members.

The risk of diluting the LEADER approach and thereby reducing its effectiveness in responding to local needs is considered high and unwarranted. The position paper sees the design of the new programming period as an opportunity to redress these issues.

Contact: redr@redr.es

