CHAPTER IV  The bottom-up approach

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CHAPTER IV

LEADER II dossiers

Innovation notebooks
No. 3: From strategy to action: project selection (1998)
No. 4: Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach (1999)
No. 8: Fighting social exclusion in rural areas (2000)

Observatory dossiers
No. 3: Mainstreaming LEADER in future rural policies (1999)

Guides
Methodology guide for the analysis of local innovation needs (1996)
Training in aid of territorial development (2000)

LEADER Magazine
No. 16: Special LEADER Symposium
“Towards a new Community Initiative for rural development: 800 leaders give their views” (Winter 1997-1998)
LEADER I dossiers

Technical dossier
Involving people in local development

Examples

“Innovative actions” factsheets
E15
P53
S23 - S26
T01 - T06 - T09
Even though, as a “Community Initiative programme”, LEADER itself originated from a “top-down” decision, it advocates a “bottom-up” rural development approach based on the expectations, ideas, projects and initiatives of local communities.

The bottom-up approach, which cannot be dissociated from the issue of engaging development players, so crucial to a quality integrated area-based approach, is one of the most novel features of the LEADER approach. The bottom-up approach has also introduced innovation into Structural Fund support.

Depending on the local context, the bottom-up approach puts issues like social cohesion, concertation and decision-making transparency onto, or back onto, the agenda. In all cases, it encourages reflection about the development and adaptation of the “animation” methods that are at the heart of the approach.

The importance accorded in LEADER I and II to expenditure on “animation”, capacity building and technical support shows how much interest there is in the bottom-up approach and reflects the changes that LEADER has introduced in the design and implementation of development programmes.
Although “bottom up”, “participatory”, “local democracy”, “concerted management” and other such approaches are not exact equivalents, they are all variants of a local concertation approach and of a collective process whereby a local community can take charge of the future of its own area.

It is an approach that allows the local community and local players to express their views and to help define the development course for their area in line with their own views, expectations and plans.

However, the bottom-up approach cannot be applied (nor is it applicable) systematically to all places in all circumstances. Depending on the specific cultural context of each Member State and in line with the principle of subsidiarity, the participatory process is often more of a trend or a desirable working approach than a day-to-day reality. However, there is no doubt that efforts are being made to put local communities and local development players back at the heart of the rural development process.
At each stage of a development programme, it is necessary to consider which are the most appropriate tools and methods for fostering local participation. Whether at the stage of programming, decision-making or implementation, “participation” occurs at different levels, with different people or groups and different resources that have to be set in motion at the right time. The four levels proposed below are not “sequential” but simultaneous levels that are brought into play to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the programme phase.
## Four levels of “participation”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Who?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>Public meetings</td>
<td>Initial phase, programme implementation phases, project identification phase</td>
<td>The entire community, LAG partnership, project leaders, institutions, decision-makers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media and telecommunication, fairs and exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation</strong></td>
<td>Village audit, Methods of participatory analysis, training “animators”</td>
<td>Initial phase, development of the strategic plan</td>
<td>Active community groups, associations, interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint development</strong></td>
<td>Specialist working groups, “animation” of the partnership, training “animators” and local players</td>
<td>Launch of the projects, implementation of the programme, participatory evaluation (self-assessment)</td>
<td>LAG partnership, sectors concerned, interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective decision-making</strong></td>
<td>Participatory selection of projects, “animation” of the partnership</td>
<td>Definition of courses of action and strategies Implementation of the programme, new analysis following the participatory evaluation</td>
<td>LAG partnership, project leaders</td>
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</table>
The bottom-up approach in LEADER

The bottom-up approach is one element that makes the LEADER approach even more useful.

It aims to encourage a process of local participation in every aspect of development policy. The involvement of local players is sought at all levels, either through consultation or by involving them in the partnership. It is aimed at the whole community, promoters of ideas and projects, the civic and voluntary sector, economic and social interest groups and representative public and private institutions.

Participation is encouraged at every stage: during the definition phase, during implementation, during evaluation and the revision of the programme – either directly or through those bodies representing collective interests (professional organisations, women’s groups, cultural associations, etc.)
The bottom-up approach at the heart of the LEADER approach has a number of objectives:

> **To involve the local community** – Securing the active participation of the community and of economic and institutional partners and associations in the development process entails organising the circulation of information, facilitating access to training and finding suitable methods of “animation”, whilst at the same time ensuring transparent decision-making procedures. In most cases this involves first and foremost **giving renewed confidence** to local communities and players not accustomed to expressing their needs, expectations or plans.

> **To draw out ideas and generate initiatives** – Which calls for a degree of open-mindedness and acceptance of the risks associated with innovation. Fostering meetings and dialogue between people, convergence between sectors, the exchange of knowledge and complementarity between skills are all aspects that “animation” will seek to develop among a multitude of target groups, both present and yet to come.
To build consensus – Where participatory decision-making works effectively, it can ensure broad and fair representation of all interest groups, thereby providing an opportunity to build consensus, manage conflict and foster new links between sectors and groups.

To delegate decision-making powers – Adopting the bottom-up approach means delegating decision-making powers from other levels of governance to the local level. Participatory local decision-making allows new ideas and projects that have emerged to be managed and integrated to the full. Hence the need to implement this approach as early as possible, from the stage of analysis and drawing up the local action plan.
The bottom-up approach requires “developers” to support a number of values:

> To respect ideas and people – No exchanges or joint efforts are possible where there is indifference or contempt;

> To recognise the existence of diverse needs – Social and economic cohesion is one of the key elements for balanced and sustainable development. It is therefore vital to seek a balance between the needs of farmers and of other rural players, such as the tourist sector;

> To introduce transparency – In the distribution of tasks, in decision-making, etc.

Calling for flexibility and pragmatism, the bottom-up approach calls for adaptations to be made to suit the different contexts, players, goals and objectives involved.

For this, the key concept is “animation” – in the field, in working groups and in the global approach.
SLIDE 7

Participation + collective decision-making = project ownership

The bottom-up approach is based on the above equation. In order for the local community to truly take control of the development project, it must be fully involved in the process and must be included in some way in the decision-making process, in a way that:

1° Evolves as the programme develops

> During the analysis phase, the bottom-up approach calls for awareness-raising (through information) and engagement in order to analyse the rural area’s strengths and weaknesses and to identify needs and expectations (using methods of participatory analysis). This stage targets the entire community, plus the active groups.

> During the phase of planning the strategic choices of the programme, the bottom-up approach calls for the participation of various interest groups (by setting up ad hoc working groups).
2° *Is tailored to suit the context* – The initial local context will determine a multitude of different forms of engagement. In this respect, it is important to distinguish between:

> Contexts that require a partnership founded on an *engagement rationale* – where the aim is, for instance, to reconcile conflicting parties, remedy certain shortcomings in institutions, refocus local energies on the rural area, etc.

> Contexts that require a partnership founded on a *structural approach* – where institutions are strong, there are long-standing partnership practices, etc. The main aim in this case is to link the different institutional functions and sectors of intervention.
Whatever the case may be, it is possible to engage the community and local players only:

> If they feel that they have “something to gain” from the process.
> If they quickly see tangible improvements in the quality of life in the area.
> If the approach takes into account all of the problems as a whole, instead of concentrating solely on the difficulties of certain community groups or sectors of activity.
> If it extends the community-engagement principle further than the stage of the area-based analysis (organising the circulation of information, exchange situation, monitoring of project results, etc.)
> If the partnership has a spin-off effect, leads to the development of the local action group and/or to the emergence of new forms of organisation and collective learning processes.
Combining the diverse, or even conflicting, interests of the different players involved in the development process transforms the vision of the “area project”.

It allows for a richer, more complex and coherent interpretation of the new framework of reference represented by the area project:

> **Richer**, because recognition of the diverse viewpoints makes it possible to get away from “clichéd” ways of thinking handed down from generation to generation and attitudes of “what just is not done” that have led to the time-honoured caution of most rural areas.

> **More complex**, because it reveals existing obstacles that are so characteristic of community groups whose opinions are not taken sufficiently into account. It reveals the existence of hitherto disregarded human resources and innovative ideas.

> **More coherent**, because the expression of differences, or even diverging points of view, though annoying at first due to the latent conflict to which they may lead, is essential for the creation of new identity references. It is through action, through the development of a collective project that it becomes possible to overcome the conflict arising from these first encounters and to develop initial views.
“Animation” activities are a strategic component of the bottom-up approach. Local action groups have fully understood this and have invested time and money in “animation” activities. The job of “development agent” has developed and become a profession. In the programmes, there have been significant intangible investments to complement Structural Fund investments.

LEADER has explored numerous avenues for putting the bottom-up approach into operation:

- **Creating meeting places** (organisation of events, public meetings, village audits, training courses, etc.)
- **Managing conflict** (encouraging conflicting views to be expressed, initiating negotiations or even arranging mediation, etc.)
- **Encouraging links between sectors and groups** (thematic meetings, organising visits, discussions, etc.)
- **Decentralising responsibilities**, whilst bearing in mind that true power sharing has to be approved by those who have the power in the first place. As a result, formal management of the local partnership very often remains under the control of certain types of “dominant” partner, usually the public authorities.
- **Enhancing the professionalism of communication** (targeted and interactive use of means of communication, fairs, exhibitions, etc.)
The bottom-up approach is at the heart of the emergence of initiatives and projects. “Animation” plays a decisive role in this.

There are two coexisting phases of “animation” that mutually influence one another:

> A preparation phase (study, analysis and communication of the “strategic course of action”) – this phase targets the whole community, in particular its most dynamic members, as well as the members of the local partnership, institutions and potential project leaders.

> An implementation phase (calls for and selection of project proposals) – in this case “animation” operates at two levels:
  - Collective – The call for project proposals is the subject of wide public dissemination, and coherence with strategic priorities is a major selection criterion.
  - Individual – Support and guidance for each project leader. Direct contacts with potential project leaders is the rule in this case. Applicants are provided with customised support and guidance in putting together their applications. The local group can help project leaders to financially engineer their projects.
For many LAGs, the project selection process relies partially on new, sometimes complex procedures that very often differ from the more classic procedures. It is possible to compare these new and classic approaches in line with their:

- adaptation to the specific characteristics of each rural area;
- coherence with strategic objectives;
- optimisation of the effects of selection in terms of local dynamics.

The table on the following page illustrates the advantages and limitations of each formula.
## Bottom-up approach and the selection of projects

### “Classic” approach versus the “bottom-up” approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Concerns to which it may respond</th>
<th>Possible drawbacks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More “classic” approach</td>
<td>Separation between criteria designers and applicants</td>
<td>To avoid interference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bottom-up” approach</td>
<td>Potential beneficiaries participate in defining the criteria</td>
<td>To foster participation and ensure the quality of selected projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More “classic” approach</td>
<td>Same conditions for all applicants</td>
<td>To guarantee equality between potential applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bottom-up” approach</td>
<td>Introduction of differentiated criteria</td>
<td>To reduce local and/or social imbalances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More “classic” approach</td>
<td>Relatively limited and precise criteria</td>
<td>To avoid ambiguities and possible dispute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bottom-up” approach</td>
<td>Broad criteria that stimulate debate</td>
<td>To encourage greater openness to new ideas</td>
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### Bottom-up approach and the selection of projects

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>More “classic” approach</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undifferentiated dissemination</td>
<td>To treat all proposals on an equal footing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactive approach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Complementary forms of distribution</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Bottom-up” approach</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustive application dossiers, sometimes in complex administrative language</td>
<td>To include more disadvantaged groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplified application dossier</td>
<td>To have available all of the elements needed for selection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance given to the oral element</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More “classic” approach</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project selection by an ad hoc group of independent experts</td>
<td>To make a totally independent selection</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Bottom-up” approach</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential beneficiaries participate in project selection</td>
<td>To encourage consensus, common references and social cohesion</td>
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<td><strong>Level II</strong></td>
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Possible drawbacks:
- Does not target the desired beneficiaries
- Projects not so attractive in terms of short-term economic effects
- Discourages beneficiaries, especially smaller ones
- More difficult to select and follow up applications
- Can lead to standardised projects
- Risk of dispersing funding over a large number of beneficiaries
- Risk of insufficient transparency for non-beneficiaries
Looking ahead

> Which community groups are active in local initiatives?
  1. Farmers
  2. Non-farming professionals
  3. Other working residents
  4. Non-working residents
  5. Local political representatives
  6. Environmental associations
  7. Cultural associations
  8. Women’s associations
  9. Young people
  10. Other

> Who has participated in, or could participate in, a consultation on the LEADER programme?

> How is it possible to encourage or improve:
  1. Consultation with the different groups?
  2. Collective decision-making with the groups concerned?

> What methods of “animation” and participatory decision-making have been devised or used?

> How is conflict expressed and how is it managed?
> What results are expected in the area from a bottom-up development approach?
   1. More clearly identified local problems and needs
   2. Better organisation of development players
   3. Better understanding of local decisions by the community
   4. Greater acceptance of local decisions by the higher authorities
   5. Stimulation of ideas and projects
   6. Demonstrative effect(s) for other development programmes
   7. Other

> What are the strong points and obstacles to the bottom-up approach in the area? How can the effectiveness of the approach be improved?