

LEADER: Where it came from and what's still in it

robert lukesch



Mit Unterstützung von Bund, Land und Europäischer Union

 Bundesministerium
Land- und Forstwirtschaft,
Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft

WIR leben Land
Gemeinsame Agrarpolitik Österreich

 Das Land
Steiermark
Region


Kofinanziert von der
Europäischen Union

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Introduction.....	5
Global political and economic shifts.....	7
When the bipolar world order crumbled	7
The neoliberal turn.....	7
Globalisation under the neoliberal lodestar	8
The countercurrent that sees the world as finite	9
German unification and British sceptics.....	9
A touch of Euro-optimism	10
The European Union in the making.....	11
The origins of agricultural and structural policies	11
The buildup of European institutions.....	11
The institutionalisation of Cohesion Policy	13
Shifting targets for the Common Agricultural Policy.....	14
The CAP transition to area-based payments.....	15
The European Commission under Jacques Delors	16
Bureaucracy asserts itself.....	19
The emergence of new approaches to local and regional development.....	20
The apparent weaknesses of top down planning and investment concepts.....	20
The call for an end to dependence.....	20
The paradigm shift towards endogenous and place-based development approaches	21
Local development as an emancipatory concept.....	23
Scaling up: the shift towards place-based approaches in mainstream policies.....	24
The genesis of LEADER	28
Prelude	28
The DG V (Employment), the incubator of LEADER in the EC	29
The OECD, a most significant source of advice	30
The focus of LEADER precursors: local employment, education and training	30
Towards integrated territorial development	31
Networks acting as accelerants of sparkling ideas.....	32
The time was ripe for LEADER	33
LEADER arises: From the Community Initiative to the method	34
From the ELISE network to the LEADER I Coordination Unit	34
LEADER I, the radical institutional innovation.....	35

LEADER II and the European LEADER II Observatory	36
Deciphering the code: the LEADER method	38
“800 Leader give their views”	39
LEADER as a driver of innovation	40
LEADER as an emancipatory approach.....	41
The small, but significant reconfiguration of the LEADER specificities	42
The mainstreaming of LEADER	43
LEADER+: A bumpy transition	43
The institutionalisation of LEADER as CLLD	44
The rural network grows, staffing for LEADER shrinks.....	45
LEADER spreads out.....	45
The LEADER community, spanning institutional and civil society networks.....	47
Synthesis: overview of six phases of LEADER implementation	48
Recent developments in European agricultural and rural policies	52
Ambitious objectives, implementation delegated	52
The journey continues.....	55
Turning the page: How can the lessons from the past nurture future prospects?.....	57
Growing diversity, rising complexity	57
Territorial inequalities, an underestimated evil.....	57
Remarrying global challenges with place-based approaches	58
Cultivate what has been achieved and venture the new	59
Lessons to heed	61
Scattered thoughts on the future governance.....	62
Laughing against the wind.....	63
Summary: Key proposals emanating from this treatise	64
Bibliography.....	65
Repertory of LEADER II and FARNET publications.....	68
Direct links to LEADER II publications.....	68
Titles of FARNET publications accessible on the AEIDL website	69

Foreword

This is a personal account. Although I authored a many an expertise during my professional life, here I want to tell the story from my personal viewpoint. No worry, this does not mean that it is riddled with purely subjective or even untenable suppositions. In my endeavor to come close to the “best obtainable version of the truth”¹ I asked for help from colleagues, to cross-read it and to add precious bits and pieces of information. Their willingness to help was overwhelming. I therefore want to express my gratitude to Yves Champetier, Gilda Farrell, Stefan Kah, Michel Laine, Hannes Lorenzen, Haris Martinos, Paul Soto and Jean-Pierre Vercruysse who generously supported me with their memory, expertise, text pieces and recommendations. The contributions of Yves actually amount to a co-authorship particularly in Part II. He also unearthed the repertory of LEADER II and FARNET publications for this treatise. Without their contributions the paper would feature enormous gaps. THANK YOU!

The paper is supposed to help younger generations – those who have taken over or are about to take over responsibilities in the realm of LEADER, be they advisers, experts, LAG managers, administrative officials, networking agents, or local policy makers. Understanding the background from which LEADER emerged and following its lifeline until what it is today might be helpful for you. The paper is long, but it can be read in parts. Redundancies in the text make piecewise reading easier.

Part I illuminates the background from which LEADER has emerged, Part II the voyage of LEADER through time. The main focus lays on LEADER I and II and the mainstreaming transition. The esteemed reader will comprehend that I put less emphasis on more recent developments, since they are far better documented and livelier in our memory.

Concerning Part III, it would have been a big mistake to miss the opportunity to add some thoughts on the future – OUR COMMON FUTURE.

Robert Lukesch, 03 March 2024

¹ A quote from Carl Bernstein, the legendary Watergate investigative journalist. He also said: “The truth is not neutral.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz52HWmbw4>

Introduction

Not least because of its dignified age, the history of LEADER² since 1991 has been recounted in many ways. In contrast the prenatal story has not nearly been told as often; however, I think understanding the circumstances from which the initiative had emerged is the prerequisite to fully grasp its purpose and mission even nowadays.

The European unification process has a father and a mother. In ancient Greek mythology, the father of the goddess Ἀφροδίτη was Ares, the God of War, and her mother was Ἀφροδίτη, the goddess of love and beauty. You sense the dialectic? We can draw an analogy: The father of the European unification process was the terrible suite of world wars I and II, the mother the recognition of the immense value which a peaceful and harmonious Europe would constitute, and the firm will to build a unified, enlightened political and economic space in all its geographical and cultural diversity....not least to show the rest of the world that humans are able to co-exist peacefully leaving behind the long history of humiliation, discrimination, exploitation and murderous warfare.

Quite early in my explorations I got aware that it would not make sense to just describe the context of the emergence of LEADER, before and around the early nineties of the past century. In order to get the whole picture in view, we have to consider the policy environment and its evolution, and the professional discourse on local and regional development through time, taking a closer look at the actors' networks comprising researchers, experts and practitioners as well as policy makers and shapers in the member state and EU administrations on the other. We proceed from the general to the specific, from the outer leaves of an onion bulb to its spicy core from where the bulb shoots its new sprouts, when temperatures rise and rain waters the fertile soil.

The treatise is divided into three parts which are subdivided into sections which should make it easier to look up certain items without having to read the whole story. These sub-sections contain redundancies which should allow for cross-reading and cherry-picking.



Figure 1 The LEADER logo

Part I: The background of LEADER. Here I describe the global, European, political, economic, cultural and social context from which LEADER has emerged.

Part II: The voyage of LEADER through time. Here I try to produce a picture of the early periods, namely LEADER I and II until the turn of the century, with less detail and emphasis the more recent it gets.

Part III: LEADER at the crossroads. This part gives a short overview on the overall context and the policy environment of LEADER in these days and on the options there are to revive its core purpose.

² Liaison Entre Actions du Développement Economique Rural (Linking Rural Economic Development Actions).

PART I

THE ORIGINS OF LEADER

Global political and economic shifts

When the bipolar world order crumbled

The decades after World War II had seen a **bipolar world order** with the two superpowers US and NATO on the one and the USSR and the Warsaw Pact on the opposite side. The nuclear overkill capacities on either side were mutually tied in what has been called the “**balance of terror**”. Communist China held distance to both superpowers, until Secretary General Deng Xiao Ping laid the groundwork for its gigantic rise from the eighties on. Many countries, which were not under direct control of one of the superpowers, most of them in the Global South, tried to make their voice be heard, gathering in the “**non-aligned movement**”, around political leaders such as Josip Broz Tito from Yugoslavia, Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana, Julius Nyerere from Tanzania, Jawaharlal Nehru from India or Sukarno from Indonesia. This geopolitical configuration has framed global political interactions in the years between 1945 and 1990.

Soon after **Mikhail Gorbachev** became Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on March 11, 1985, the global political landscape got reshaped in a breathtaking speed. His reforms headlined **Glasnost** and **Perestroika** (which can be roughly translated with **Transparency** and **Transformation**) aimed at disrupting the cold war logic and the concomitant arms race, which consumed enormous resources, putting an end to the costly military occupation of Afghanistan, combating corruption and overcoming economic stagnation, ultimately aiming for a modernized version of a more open and democratic socialist society. Although the reforms were not meant to dismantle the Soviet Union as a political entity, exactly that happened in 1991, leaving the Russian Federation as its rightful heir and the other Soviet states as sovereign nations such as finally sealed in the **Budapest Memorandum** signed on December 5th, 1994³. This memorandum affirmed the independence of the ex-Soviet states⁴ and the transfer of the remaining nuclear capacities (Ukraine, Kazakhstan) to the Russian Federation.

The neoliberal turn

After the **abolition of the “Bretton Woods system”** (the detachment of the dollar from the gold price peg)⁵, two “**oil price shocks**” in 1973 (Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur war) and 1979/80 (Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent war between Iran and Iraq), Europe underwent a phase of economic stagnation, inflation and persistent unemployment until the mid-eighties.

In France, the political arena was marked by the socialist President François Mitterrand (1981-1989). Although the first term of his presidency was guided by a socialist and social-liberal agenda (nationalization of key firms, reduction of weekly working hours to 39 hours⁶, abolition of the death penalty), it bowed more and more to the ever-stronger neoliberal winds blowing from the Anglo-Saxon world. From 1986 on he had to “co-habit” with liberal-conservative governments. Similar changes occurred in Germany where after a period of social democratic dominance, with the

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budapest_Memorandum

⁴ ...which got, after first incursions in Georgia 2008 and the annexation of the Krim peninsula and of parts of the Donbass from 2014 on, definitely violated by the Russian invasion of the Ukraine in 2022.

⁵ A consequence of the Vietnam war of the US. Its direct consequences were increased currency market volatility and rising inflation in Europe.

⁶ In France, the weekly working hours have been further reduced to 35h in 2000 (for enterprises with more than 20 employees) and 2002 (for smaller enterprises) under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (under the Presidency of Jacques Chirac). The law (*Loi Aubry*) is named after its initiator, the Minister of Labour, Martine Aubry – the daughter of Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995.

chancellors Willy Brandt from 1969 to 1974 and Helmut Schmidt until 1982, a conservative-liberal coalition under Helmut Kohl has taken over the same year.

Globalisation under the neoliberal lodestar

When **Margaret Thatcher** became Minister of Education under the conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath in the United Kingdom in 1970, one of her first acts was the abolition of free milk in elementary schools. How many people would have thought back then that the “milk snatcher” would succeed Heath to become leader of the conservative party (Tories) in 1975 – in the very year the referendum took place, which sealed the UK accession to the EU? And who would have thought that she would become Prime Minister of UK in 1979?

Thatcher had gathered a network of monetarists and followers of the economists Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman around her⁷. Their response to high unemployment and inflation and stagnation was austerity in state spending and unleashing the institutional and regulatory ties, which bound the financial sector, paired with a radical dismantling of unprofitable mines and industries, whose demise also sealed the fate of the once powerful workers’ unions. Thatcher’s rise mirrored – and mutually reinforced – the same tendencies on the other side of the Atlantic, where Ronald Reagan got elected as the 40th President of the US in November 1980.

These two politicians epitomize the removal of limits and barriers to financial transactions and the further removal of any barriers limiting the free flow of goods and services across the globe; they stand for radical privatization and deregulation. Gradually, and not everywhere at the same speed and intensity as in the UK and US, **the guiding principles of economic policies glided away from “the social democratic decade” in the seventies dominated by Keynesian⁸ state interventions into the national economies) to neoliberal and monetarist policies (“Reaganomics”)** which still dominate the capitalist countries and the policies of the multilateral organisations (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and their handling of financial transactions between the Global North and South. From 1990 on, the **“Washington consensus”⁹** tied credits and investments to policy requirements such as budget cuts and market deregulation. The concomitant monetary policy of high interests did not only lead to an excessive accumulation of debts in the Global South, but also to weakening the socialist countries of the European East as debtors on the global financial market.

These developments coincided with the proclamation of a **“socialist market economy” in China** under Deng Xiaoping, Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party from 1978 to 1989. The Chinese leadership was wary of what happened in the Soviet Union. Mounting protests and expressions of freedom by the citizens were eventually quelled with the **Tiananmen massacre in 1989**. In the following, the Chinese political elite worked out a system which combined a capitalist economy with authoritarian one-party rule, bringing about poverty reduction and economic growth at a breathtaking pace.

⁷ In the political arena this orientation runs under “neoliberalism”. This term has been used in manifold ways and ranges from anti-monopolist views (of Hayek himself who regarded himself an ordo-liberalist) to the vision of authoritarian neoliberals (promoters of an “illiberal democracy”) and “conservative libertarians” who would like to see monopolist entrepreneurs running the planet which sums up into a global oligarchy, as proposed by Peter Thiel (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Thiel). All of these schools of thought converge into a negative perception of inclusive institutions and state interventionism at any level, with few exceptions (e.g. the pursuance of order, protection of private property etc. assuring that the super-rich remain in charge) and a view of the public sphere as inherently parasitic. For more details see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism>

⁸ Named after the British economist John M. Keynes (1883-1946).

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_Consensus

The removal of barriers to the free flow of capital across the planet and the rapid globalization based on the worldwide division of labour and the buildup of planetary value chains gave a boost to economic growth on the one side; on the other it kicked off an accelerating dynamic of **growing income and wealth disparities** between and within countries. Until the nineties, nearly the whole planet seemed to commit itself to a philosophy of unleashed and infinite economic growth and the free flow of capital, goods and services. The transition of former socialist societies to capitalist economies was deeply influenced by the belief into the formative power of the unbridled market economy, which had become the hegemonic ideology among economic advisers and policy makers. Eventually, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), having started in 1947 with 23 countries, morphed into the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**, established by 123 nations in Marrakesh on **15 April 1994**. China applied to become a member since 1986, which it actually achieved in 2001.

The countercurrent that sees the world as finite

Of course, since the early 1970s at the latest, there has been another voice of growth sceptics in the score of the world concert, getting louder and louder, starting with a thorough criticism of the evolution of industrial agriculture and its massive use of toxic substances¹⁰, followed by the Club of Rome's path breaking opus on the *"Limits to Growth"*¹¹, just to name a few chords. These voices climbed a first fortissimo in the **UN Conference for Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED)** aka **"Earth Summit"**, during which the **Agenda 21** was approved by 178 States, providing guiding principles for **sustainable development in the 21st century**. The Ariadne thread leading to this achievement, had been spun by the so-called **Brundtland Report (1987)**, published by the **Brundtland Commission**¹² (founded in 1983). The title of this report was **"OUR COMMON FUTURE"**. This report provided the definition for "sustainable development", still in use and widely known, as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.

German unification and British sceptics

Simultaneously with Margaret Thatcher in the UK and François Mitterrand in France, we see Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Christian Democratic Party as the long-term leader in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1982 to 1998. During his tenure, **German unification (3rd October 1990)** took place as a direct consequence of the disappearance of the Soviet Union and **the political transformation taking place in the former European Soviet and Warsaw Pact states**.

Whereas François Mitterrand and Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, unison with US President George Bush senior, had signaled green light for German unification already at an early stage of negotiations, the UK under Margaret Thatcher remained reluctant. The approval was finally reached on the basis of two pledges:

¹⁰ E.g. Rachel Carson's *"Silent spring"*, published 1962.

¹¹ Club of Rome 1972: *The Limits of Growth. A Report on the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. The report was based on a computer-based system analysis and simulation program developed in Jay Forrester's Institute of System Dynamics on the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technologies). The report has been commissioned by the Club of Rome (an association of experts, founded 1968, who were concerned about the future of mankind on the planet) and, interesting to know, mainly funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

¹² The namesake was Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former Prime Minister of Norway and leader of the Labour Party from 1981 to 1992. Later she acted as Director of the World Health Organisation from 1998 to 2003.

- full NATO integration of the unified Germany, and
- an **accelerated process of European integration**.

The discourse on European integration was originally dominated by the idea of a single market and therefore driven by corporate business and economic stakeholders. But in the wake of the fast changes in the world economy, the political left gradually joined in. A political union seemed to cope better with the rapidly growing influence of globally operating multi-national corporations and investment firms on working people and consumers, but also in tackling social and territorial disparities as well as in setting environmental standards.

Hence, the approval vote in 1990 for German unification in the British Lower House under the new British Prime Minister John Major went off quite harmoniously. However, when it came to the ratification of the **Maastricht Treaty (Treaty of the European Union 1993)**, the Tory majority under John Major got squeezed between a determined no-vote of the Labour Party, which called for a European Social Policy – still nonexistent until today – for their approval, and the renascent “Eurosceptic” faction in his own party. Finally, the pro-vote was won by just 40 (from 651) MPs just because Major tied it to a confidence vote for his whole government. At this point in time we already see the seed of Brexit germinate; but it took another 23 years to grow into the referendum sealing the historic withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

A touch of Euro-optimism

All in all, a spirit of optimism continued to prevail in Europe, however darkened by the Yugoslav disintegration wars during the nineties and the rise of Islamist terror culminating in 9/11 – the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York.

As positive as the opening of borders was generally perceived, it also aroused fears, and European integration seemed the natural response to most national governments, but also in the opinion of the broad public, which approved of meeting these challenges with the required supranational instruments, not in isolation.

To sum up, the surprisingly rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Iron Curtain in Europe in 1989 and the prospect of new economic exchanges, connections and synergies came as a huge relief to most European citizens in the West and in the East and especially to economic actors. The German unification process gave a boost to economic growth and further European integration toward creating a supranational (i.e. post-national¹³) entity and a European currency, the EURO, ultimately in order to banish the specters of the inglorious 20th century.

The esteemed reader may ask him- or herself what all this has to do with the emergence of LEADER. Nothing in direct, I would answer, but it provides the context of the context which we now proceed to lay bare by peeling off the second layer of our onion bulb, turning our attention to the making of the European Union.

¹³ The word „nation“ bears two distinct connotations. One is that of a territorial entity with a population governed according to the principles of its constitution. The other one refers to the essentialist idea of people sharing a common (mental, cultural, sometimes even physical) identity and a distinct hierarchy of values. “Post-national” would mean, that the essentialist meaning of the word be dropped as a means to define the people of a specific country or to determine their ways of life and expression. The principles shared by the people in a post-national Europe would be based on its constitution (which in turn would be based on universal human rights) and by the governance systems and contractual relationships deriving from this constitution (See for example: Robert Menasse 2024; Erik O. Eriksen and John E. Fossum 1999).

The European Union in the making

The origins of agricultural and structural policies

What we know today as the European Union, started as the **European Coal and Steel Community in 1951**. The High Authority of the Mining Industry constituted the first supra-national authority in the European space (with Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands as founding members). These six countries formed the **European Economic Communities (EEC 1958) based on the so-called Treaties of Rome (1957)**.

With the EEC

- the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** entered into force, allowing the member states to transfer a considerable part of their powers concerning interventions in the agricultural sector to supra-national institutions; however it took until **1962** to become operational with the **European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund/EAGGF**).
- the **European Social Fund (ESF)** was created in **1958** with the aim of reducing unemployment and to increase workforce mobility. Starting its operations in 1960 with qualification and inclusion programmes, the ESF is actually the oldest European policy instrument.

Harmonizing trade, tearing down barriers and slashing customs duties served economic growth, stability and peace – as it was planned – but it also accentuated and widened economic disparities between old and new industries, small-scale and large-scale production within and between countries. Not least to offer the accession countries **United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark (1973)** a new tool of distribution of common funds (above all to support the transition from the old mining and heavy industry sectors to other industries in order to cope with the needs of the emerging consumer society), the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** was put in place.

However, unsatisfying results of redistributive top-down policies in an increasingly neoliberal policy environment put the topic of **regional economic disparities** on the table in a more severe form, and all the more, when after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the accession of central and eastern European transformation countries came into view. We will come back to this further down.

The buildup of European institutions

The European Commission dates back to 1967, when the three constituents, the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community were concentrated under one Commission of the European Community which later got renamed into **European Commission** from 2009 on (with the **Treaty of Lisbon**).

The late seventies and early eighties had been marked by relatively low economic growth, persistent unemployment, particular in traditional industrial and rural areas and the experience that redistributive policies from top down at national level did not really mitigate the trend toward growing regional disparities. The European Commission still had relatively narrow room of margin for action simply because of its lack of instruments and intervention mechanisms. The development of

European institutions seemed to be in a state of limbo. This situation has been named “euro-sclerosis”¹⁴ by some observers. Keynesian approaches were more and more opposed by neoliberal scholars and politicians. The conflict of narratives started in the UK but quickly spread to the continent. The British Labour politician Roy Jenkins, European Commission President from 1977 to 1981, had to cope with Margaret Thatcher from the opposing political party in the British Prime Minister’s seat.

Jenkins’ successor Gaston Thorn from Luxembourg (1981-1985) led the difficult negotiations for the **South enlargement of the EU (Greece: 1981; Spain and Portugal: 1986)** and paved the way for the **Single European Act (SEA) taking effect on 1 July 1987** already under the Presidency of **Jacques Delors**. The SEA was created in response to the complaints of business leaders and business-friendly political leaders of the now twelve Member States that trade barriers had not been effectively removed throughout the years and that effective stimulus was urgently needed to restart the economy and boost employment growth.

The SEA constituted the foundation for setting a milestone in European institution building, namely the **Single Market by 31 December 1992** which was sealed by the **Maastricht Treaty** whose rightful name is the **“Treaty of the European Union” (1993)**. The creation of the free trade zone was actively pursued by the UK, but the concomitant commitment to create a **political and monetary union** with a common currency was only accepted with reluctance by Margaret Thatcher, “*pressured by Helmut Kohl*” as one historian put it.¹⁵

The steps toward political integration, as laid down in the SEA, can be seen as the institutional petri dish from which European deepening and enlargement was finally able to unfold. But, as we have argued above, the seeds of discontent were already germinating that ultimately led to Brexit in 2016 and to a general resurgence of nationalist and sovereigntist discourses after the turn of the century. Obviously, a remarkable foreboding of this was Thatcher’s quote “*I want my money back, and I want it now!*” at a 1979 summit in Dublin, but much more significantly her **“No.No.No. speech”**¹⁶ in the British House of Commons in 1990, right before she was forced out of office by her own party not least because of the political and economic consequences of her market fundamentalist and eurosceptical orientation in the UK.

The Treaty of the European Union sets out the foundation of Europe as a supranational political entity with constitutive elements such as shared citizenship, a single currency, common foreign and security policies and the roles and functions of the three main bodies: the European Parliament, the European Council of Ministers and the European Commission. The consent was narrowly reached through referendums (twice in Denmark, and with only a thin majority of 50.8% in France) or parliamentary vote. After **the East enlargement of the EU in 2004¹⁷ and 2007¹⁸** the Maastricht Treaty got amended by the **Lisbon Treaty (entering in force 2009)**, which bestows the agreement a quasi-

¹⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurosclerosis>

¹⁵ Helene von Bismarck: *Margaret Thatcher, the critical Architect of European integration*, in: A Changing Europe. Retrieved in Wikipedia on 22 August 2024. This Wikipedia file contains a very valuable overview of the evolution of European treaties. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_European_Act#cite_note-Bismarck-15

¹⁶ “It is our purpose to retain the powers of **this** house and not to denude it of many of the powers... The President of the Commission, Mr. Delors, said at a press conference the other day that he wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community, he wanted the Commission to be the Executive and he wanted the Council of Ministers to be the Senate. **No. No. No.**” European Council Rome (1990). Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, 30 October 1990. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVt_1ByddUQ

¹⁷ Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

¹⁸ Bulgaria, Romania.

constitutional basis¹⁹. By then the European Union was established as an international legal juridical person.

With the accession of **Croatia in 2013** the EU enlargement process came to an end for the time being, with a short-lived maximum number of 28 member states until 2016, when the UK voters decided to leave the EU which actually has taken effect on 31 January 2020.

The institutionalisation of Cohesion Policy

When the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** was put up in 1973, **regional policy was an utterly new policy field and research discipline**. Until the seventies of the 20th century, industrial growth poles in ever increasing demand of labour force had lured millions of rural dwellers into urban agglomerations, whereas in their regions of origin agriculture got mechanized and modernized at a breathtaking pace.

The huge demographical transformation and urbanisation were not only accepted but highly welcomed by political and economic decision makers. **Rural territories** underwent what was called **“passive adaptation”**, the transition to thinned and eventually bled out areas where individual farm units grew larger and larger or were condemned to die out: **“Grow or disappear”** was the motto. In many rural areas, the disintegration of the local value chains and institutions and the rural social fabric progressed ever more rapidly.

After the post-war reconstruction phase and in times of growing international division of labour, European national economies transitioned towards the production of consumer goods and services. The mining sector and heavy industry, but also the textile sector slid into a crisis, and with them, the regions in which they had been concentrated. So, historically, the first major concern of regional policy was not rural areas, but the declining old mining and industrial areas.

The market forces bolstered the “central” economic regions to undergo seemingly miraculous changes towards economic prosperity and well-being (we remember the German *“Wirtschaftswunder”*²⁰, or the *“blue banana”*²¹ aka *“dorsale européenne”*²² from Milano to Liverpool). Other regions seemed to lag behind, caught in a downward spiral of high unemployment, lack of services and amenities with subsequent population decrease.

Still until the eighties, policy makers and planners believed in a kind of **territorialized application of Keynesian policy**: public investments should boost infrastructure development (transport, energy and other supply systems) and lure private companies to invest in more peripheral locations, sometimes accompanied with huge amounts of public co-funding. The advantages for the private sector would be cheaper labour and lower factor cost (e.g. energy or material resources) in the context of lowered transport barriers in the Single Market. Both **rural and “old” industrial regions** got into the focus of subsidies granted through the European Regional Development Fund.

¹⁹ The Lisbon Treaty served as a surrogate for the failed attempt to establish a European Constitution by 2006 which failed due to two referendums in France and the Netherlands that ended in no-votes.

²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wirtschaftswunder>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Banana

²² Brunet R. 2002.

We cannot say that this approach did not work at all, but it often failed. Some conspicuous failures occurred in Italy with its considerable North-South disparities, and the same phenomena could be observed on a European scale.

Why did this top-down redistribution concept not work? Today we know that **regions are complex adaptive systems**²³. Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are systems that have “*a large number of components, often called agents that interact and adapt or learn*”²⁴. Social and cultural patterns of beliefs and behaviour, long-term economic flows and governance systems and their external interactions (e.g. trade, migration or political conflicts and alliances) form an intricate cause-effect fabric which does not respond to financial aid or other incentives in precisely foreseeable ways. What works in one region can turn out as a complete disaster in another. You may invest very little in one region, and people and entrepreneurs quickly get on a self-propelled path to social and economic development, or you can pump enormous sums into another region and gain nothing other than stranded investments, corruption and bad reputation.

And there is the simple fact that the “absorption capacity”²⁵ of subsidy receivers is limited. The more subsidies are injected into a national economy, the more the political, technical and administrative capacities of governance systems at national, regional or local level get challenged. From a certain point on, the inflow of capital can no longer be processed accordingly. Money remains unspent, or spent in pointless projects, or it disappears in the bowels of parasitic structures. The threshold of absorption capacity of public funding may lie somewhere around 3% of the national GDP.²⁶

Therefore, with **Greece (1981), Portugal and Spain (1986)** joining the EEC, to rethink and to redirect regional development policies became a highly important task in the eighties of last century. These three countries had shaken off fascist or military rule just before. After the accession of these countries with their outdated political and socio-economic structures, regional disparities within the European Community and the concomitant challenges reached completely new dimensions.

This was the state of affairs when, **in 1988, the European Commission launched its “Economic and Social Cohesion Policy”** which should cover around 30% of the overall EU budget and be implemented through the Structural Funds.

Shifting targets for the Common Agricultural Policy

The **Common Agricultural Policy** has always been a very relevant policy field. Today its budgetary weight is still considerable²⁷. Since its actual start in 1962 and throughout the sixties and early seventies, it officially aimed to increase agricultural productivity, ensure fair living conditions for farmers and secure supply chains, stabilize markets and harmonize competition rules. It was all about securing the food base – to feed the growing population in a quickly urbanizing Europe and to

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_adaptive_system

²⁴ Holland John H. 2006.

²⁵ Gidişoğlu S. 2007: *Understanding the ‘Absorption Capacity’ of the European Union*. Vol. 9. Nr.4 (2007). SET VAKFI İktisadi İşletmesi, SETA VAKFI

²⁶ Thanks to Yves Champetier for that notice.

²⁷ For the period 2021-2027, the overall budget of the EU amounts to 1,07 trillions of EUR; 386 billions of EUR (36%) are reserved for the CAP.

restructure farming and the entire food chain. The main instrument of the CAP was the **Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)**, divided into two sections. The **Guidance Section** aimed to support the restructuring and modernization of agriculture and the food chain in Europe, whereas the **Guarantee Section** funded market organisation measures and price supports for agricultural products and export.

The increasing support to the agricultural sector culminated in a plan for wide-scaled modernization: the so-called **Mansholt plan** named after the Dutch Agricultural Commissioner Sicco Mansholt (1958-1972) who was also President of the European Commission for several months (1972/73). The Mansholt plan, issued in 1970, aimed at promoting large-scale, quasi-industrial production methods and units – practically a Europe-wide application of what had been deemed a success formula in the farming industry of the Netherlands.

The aims of securing food supply in Europe have been reached rather soon. Already in the seventies, excess production set in. **“Butter mountains”** and **“milk lakes”** grew larger and larger. As the agricultural production exceeded the demand of European consumers, farmers’ incomes had to be stabilized. The EU started with **export subsidies**, whose consequences for the rural communities in the Global South, specifically in Africa, have been frequently criticized but not taken into account in policy change²⁸. Later on, against initial resistance from most farmers’ organisations, **quota systems** (first for milk) were introduced in **1984**.

At the same time, **the CAP was facing new demands**: to promote a wider and more diverse range of products of good quality, and to create new employment opportunities along the agricultural value chains through vertical integration, on-farm and off-farm diversification. In parallel, the EU tried to adapt agricultural production to globalised agricultural markets and free trade agreements.

It soon became clear: what was needed was a comprehensive structural change in rural areas, away from focusing on primary production alone towards diversified production with a healthy share of secondary and tertiary activities.

The CAP transition to area-based payments

When the price subventions for farmers became definitely untenable in the face of the GATT/WTO rules of free trade, **the policy shifted from market support to direct income support to farmers from 1992 onwards**, based on the area of land cultivated and number of livestock maintained²⁹. The instrument of direct payments had already been tested out in earlier years in different countries inside and outside the European Community since the seventies quite successfully, for example in Austria and Switzerland (for mountain farmers). However, it required many more years of testing and negotiations to convince the farmers’ organisations which feared the loss of entrepreneurial autonomy.

The social and economic disparities between rural and metropolitan areas and within rural areas kept growing. Demographic thinning and environmental degradation were perceived as unwanted side effects of the intensification track. And these phenomena manifested themselves in different ways across the rural areas in the growing European Union. Taking all this into account, **socio-**

²⁸ See for example: ZEF 2020. https://www.zef.de/fileadmin/webfiles/downloads/zef_policybrief/Policy_Brief_36_english.pdf

²⁹ Later reduced to the land under cultivation only. With the 2003 reform, the aid was totally decoupled from volumes produced. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/107/the-common-agricultural-policy-instruments-and-reforms>

structural and environmental accompanying measures to the farm subsidy system gained in importance. The first **agri-environmental payment scheme** was introduced in 1992, including support for organic agriculture, under the **Irish Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Ray MacSharry (1989 to 1993)**. Apart from the support for **farm modernization** (called **Objective 5a**), the **Guidance Section of the EAGGF** was also used to co-finance development measures in **“lagging rural areas”** (the so-called **Objective 5b**) in the framework of a **multi-funds regional development support system between 1994 and 1999**, alongside the ERDF and the ESF.

With the **“Agenda 2000” reform (1999)**, the socio-structural measures funded by the CAP Guidance Fund and the “accompanying measures” were integrated into the **Second (Rural Development) Pillar of the CAP** under the **Austrian Commissioner for Agriculture Franz Fischler (1995-2004)**. The **First Pillar** continued to disburse direct payments to farmers. With the so-called **“Health Check” Reform 2003**, these payments got completely “decoupled” from product markets and prices.

With the start of the budget period 2007-13, **the Guidance Section of the CAP eventually morphed into the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development)**, which became the financial instrument for the second pillar until nowadays.

The European Commission under Jacques Delors

The dynamics under which LEADER emerged can hardly be explained without highlighting the interaction between institutional developments and the particular interests and actions of the main actors. A most prominent key actor was **Jacques Delors, who chaired the Commission through three terms, from 1985 to 1995**.

The growth phase of European institutions and instruments during the eighties and nineties coincided with Delors’ tenure, whose specific interest in territorial cohesion on one side and in the development of rural areas on the other should have a strong influence on the genesis of LEADER.

Born into a catholic family in the French region Limousin in the Northwestern part of the *massif central*, he first joined in 1945 the Catholic workers trade union (CFTC³⁰), in 1964 the CFTD trade union (Confédération française démocratique du travail, and in 1974 the Socialist Party. He got elected as Member of the European Parliament in 1979, but moved back to France to become Minister of Finance and Economy in 1981 under President François Mitterrand and Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy. Finally, he became President of the European Commission succeeding Gaston Thorn from Luxembourg (from the conservative Parti démocratique).

Delors was one of the most pronounced architects of the Maastricht Treaty and the Common Market. He pursued this goal not so much, as one would presume with regard to him as a socialist in the Mitterrand era, by addressing institutions representing the working class. It can be shown, that already during his tenure as the French Minister for Economy and Finance he resorted to austerity policies advocated by the neoliberal pundits in order to counter persistent unemployment and economic stagnation, not least to safeguard the French Franc in the European Currency System established in 1979³¹. He built up excellent contacts with the corporate representatives in France and

³⁰ CFTC = Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens

³¹ The introduction of the European Currency System was the necessary step to prepare the European Currency Union and the introduction of the EURO ten years later. The ECS built on a mechanism called “European currency snake” introduced in 1972 after the abolition of the Bretton Woods System in order to stabilize the exchange rates across European currencies.

across Europe. His frequent interactions with the ERT (European Round Table for Industry)³² brought him to advocate the free flow of people, products, services and capital and to build effective infrastructure, first and foremost transport links, to boost the European productive sectors on a global scale.

It seemed to be indispensable for him **to justify the Common Market in the language of Reaganomics**; otherwise, Margaret Thatcher would never have signed the Single European Act in 1986, which became the reference document for all the following treaties (Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisboa). However, Delors was always aware that the economic integration should go hand in hand with a **European Social Policy** and a harmonization of social standards. Looking back, he expressed his regrets that this actually never happened. He wrote in his memoirs:

I must admit that the balance was not easy to find between, on the one hand, the creation of the large market accompanied by a certain deregulation which was in the air at the time, and, on the other, new forms of regulation and social consultation. (...) I wanted a balance between the two....I could not accept that their (note: the entrepreneurs') aspiration for a more flexible, more competitive, more open economy had been met, and that, on the other hand, the bosses did not want to think about how to maintain the achievements of the various European social models, given that I myself agreed to adjust them.³³

The socialist Member of the European Parliament, Raphaël Glucksmann, wrote in the obituary for Delors, published in the *Nouvel Observateur*³⁴:

He knew that the giant leap he had made in European construction during his years at the head of the Commission was not an achievement in itself. Far from these parents who live in idolatry of their offspring, he had warned: 'We do not fall in love with a single market. And no more than with a bank note, however important it may be. We fall in love with a project of justice, peace, solidarity. We fall in love with a social, ecological, political model.

Delors was an excellent networker, capable to closely communicate and to forge alliances with partners across a wide political spectrum, holding close ties to conservative politicians in spite of maintaining his social democratic views. In his efforts to implement the Single European Act as effectively and quickly as possible, he acted as a value-oriented politician with foresight. He strongly advocated a European Social Policy which put him in strong opposition, first and foremost with the UK government dominated by the Tories at that time, but also with conservative and liberal parties in nearly all member states, without losing the capacity to stay in touch and communicate with political partners across divergences in the political orientation.

Mindful of his rural background, he very soon got aware of the negative consequences of agricultural specialization, the degradation of traditional crafts and industries and the out-migration of young people to Paris and other urban agglomerations, leaving villages deserted and deprived from basic services.

These concerns and perceived challenges across the EU 12 were highlighted in the **Commission Communication "The Future of rural society"**³⁵ from 1988, which many experts deem as the "act of

³² <https://ert.eu>

³³ Ruffin F. 2024. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2024/02/RUFFIN/66572> Thanks to Gilda Farrell, who sent me the link to this article.

³⁴ Issued on January 4, 2024, p. 20.

procreation” not only of integrated structural policies in rural areas, but also of LEADER. The communication marked a breakthrough through considering **rural societies as complex, cross-sectoral territorial systems** and no longer as something derived from or annexed to agricultural production systems. According to the Communication, the multiple challenges rural areas were facing required appropriate Community intervention using the Structural Funds in a purposeful way. This claim is essentially laid out on page 5 of the Communication:

The new approach as ... advocated by the Commission, ... has three key features: Community action must complement (not supplant or replace) national, regional or even local schemes; an effective partnership must be sought between all the levels of public administration involved, and there must be internally consistent planning of all the schemes to be implemented, within a Community support framework. Rural development as an objective has been chosen explicitly and implicitly as one of the priority objectives ranking for future intervention from the Structural Funds...

... and as a conclusion (page 14):

The countryside accounts for nearly 80% of the Community, and those living and/or working there form more than half of the entire population of the Community. These facts, and the sheer importance to civilized life of nature in its own right, demand of the Community that it take the proper action to ensure the development of rural society. This is the objective, the proposals, suggestions, and paths to progress, traced out by the Commission in this communication.

Most importantly, Delors shared his views with the **Irish Commissioner for Agriculture³⁶ Ray MacSharry**, whom Delors appointed during his second mandate in 1989. MacSharry orchestrated the difficult **transition from market to direct payment support and the introduction of agri-environmental payment schemes in 1992**, as mentioned above. Both were convinced of the ingenuity of local communities to create new employment opportunities in the quest of surviving the massive structural changes. **People and places have finally entered centre stage³⁷**, at the expense of one-sidedly productivist views. Local economies were seen as intricate systems in which agriculture had its place among other activities, traditional and new ones, be they targeted towards income generation or towards the improvement of the living conditions.

Another simple fact which made the tenure of **Jacques Delors** so impactful was that he **was a French politician**. He was not only close to the then-President Mitterrand and to other political figures across political party boundaries. The French language dominated the agricultural and rural discourse in Europe until the turn of the century.³⁸ It was in France that the massive depopulation of some areas, notably in the centre (to which Limousin belongs) got noticed as severe problems, and it was there that local initiatives in rural areas had been tested out and been discussed at European level because of the closeness in language, of the acting individuals such as EC officers in DG V (Employment), DG VI (Agriculture), DG XVI (Regional Policy) and DG XXIII (Structural Funds Coordination) together with the network of experts and practitioners working on behalf of and with

³⁵ The Communication can be downloaded under <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148844171.pdf>

³⁶ The addendum “Rural Development” was not yet in use in those times. The full name “Agricultural and Rural Development Commissioner” was introduced 2004 under EC President José Manuel Barroso.

³⁷ McCann P. 2023.

³⁸ It finally switched to English with the East enlargement of the EU in 2004.

them in different contracts. In the course of the lively exchanges in these networks (with EU but also extra-communitarian experts e.g. from Nordic countries, Austria and Switzerland) it quickly became apparent that the problems observed were widespread across rural areas in Europe in general.

Bureaucracy asserts itself

This relatively high degree of liberty of the European Commission in the accomplishment of its mandate to make policy proposals, and of the surrounding experts in shaping concepts, approaches and ultimately policies could be maintained until the late nineties. From hindsight we can say at which point in time this era came to a rather abrupt end, although it took a while until it was actually felt: the turning point was **the corruption scandal which had started in the area of responsibility of the French Research Commissioner Edith Cresson and which eventually led to the resignation of the whole Commission under President Jacques Santer in 1999** in the wake of the findings of an investigative committee, which had thoroughly scrutinized the contract management and delegation of tasks. As a consequence, this regime has been put under strict rules, which tend to get even more severe over time.

From the zero years on, bureaucratic hindrances, red tape and inflated administrative processes have become a steady source of complaint in the implementation of European policies (particularly of Cohesion and Agricultural Policies). Paradoxically, repeated attempts for “**simplification**” seem to end up in more complexities. The problem is not mitigated by the delegation of implementation powers to the member states. To the contrary, regulative and control systems pile up in the **multi-level architecture** whose “*effective coordination depends on the willingness of governments to share authority*”³⁹. In the frequent case where this does not happen on the basis of the requisite mutual trust, confidence and results orientation, we are facing the deplorable phenomenon of “**gold-plating**”⁴⁰, which has been defined as “*an excess of norms, guidelines and procedures accumulated at national, regional and local levels, which interfere with the expected policy goals to be achieved by such regulation*”.

Today it has become unthinkable to convey tasks to an external agency which practically amount to that of an operating think tank in the way it used to be in times of the European LEADER II Observatory which we will look upon a bit later.

- ➔ Before exploring further the institutional seedbed of LEADER, we turn to another layer of onion leaves, looking at a major shift in the understanding of “development” in general and on local and regional development in particular, between the seventies and the nineties of past century.

³⁹ Arian H. Schakel: Multi-level governance in a ‘Europe with the regions’. Sage Journals, August 20, 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1369148120937982>

⁴⁰ Boci M. e.a. 2014.

The emergence of new approaches to local and regional development

The apparent weaknesses of top down planning and investment concepts

As was set out above, the late seventies and early eighties already showed that the emulation of industrial growth through public interventions and considerable financial investments in peripheral regions as a surrogate to private capital which would not be allocated there for reasons of lacking profitability sometimes actually worked, but in most cases did not work well and sometimes not at all. Too many factors were left unconsidered in this “top-down planning” or “engineering” approach, some of them “hard” factors such as missing transportation links, reduced accessibility or weak energy and other supply systems. However, “soft” factors counted much more: the inadequacy of the social and human capital and local governance structures, missing links to sources of skills and technical competence, and environmental and cultural circumstances, which make the place an improbable choice for living. All in all, the pattern of mimicking the dynamic centres of economic activity by means of a catching up processes seemed to be knitted the wrong way round.

The call for an end to dependence

This fallacy has not been limited to peripheral regions in Europe. It has been observed on a large scale in the Global South⁴¹. Sociologists⁴² came up with a theory which could be considered as the territorial application of dialectic materialism (aka Marxism), the “**dependence theory**”. This theory stipulates that copying the policies of the industrialised part of the world would accelerate the downward road to misery, because the wealth accumulated in the capitalist countries was causally and inseparably tied to the continuous exploitation and impoverishment of the Global South. Thus, participating in the same game would see these countries always and necessarily as losers condemned to provide raw materials at ever more unfavourable terms of exchange. The solution to this death spiral would be “**decoupling**” or, as it was put back then: “**autonomous development**”.

This was actually tried out in different forms and variants, first and foremost in the beacon countries of the “non-aligned movement”, such as Yugoslavia or Tanzania. Other countries followed a similar pattern, but more closely aligned to the Soviet Union, such as the ex-Portuguese colonies after the carnation revolution and their independence gained in 1974, Madagascar or North Korea⁴³. However, the **self-reliance movement** was much stronger in countries, which were not aligned to the Soviet Union, because their understanding of “autonomy” was to pass decision power down to the local communities, which did not work in countries practicing “democratic centralism” according to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine or, to put it bluntly, using this as an excuse for totalitarian dictatorship.

These decoupling experiments at nation state level have ended in different ways. All in all, the concept did not work out and the countries amassed enormous amounts of foreign debt. Ultimately the experiments ended with the death of the founding fathers: Tito’s Yugoslavia violently broke apart⁴⁴, the Tanzanian “Ujamaa”⁴⁵ concept under Nyerere has been abolished to give way to the country’s integration in the capitalist world system. The basic idea of self-reliance, however, that of

⁴¹ Most frequently labelled as the “Third World” in those days (with reference to the bipolar world order until 1990). The “First” was the capitalist, the “Second” the communist “World”.

⁴² Most prominent in those days: André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Dieter Senghaas...

⁴³ The former changed their paths sooner or later, North Korea persisted due to the firm grip of its government on its population.

⁴⁴ There are certainly more and more influential reasons for Yugoslavia’s collapse than just economic stagnation.

⁴⁵ Ujamaa means „fraternity“ in Swahili and signifies something like the “sense of community”. It stands for a socialist concept of society pursued in Tanzania from the independence in 1963 until 1985.

community-led development, was taken up in capitalist countries on one side by the catholic church⁴⁶ (notably in Latin America, well-known under the name “liberation theology”⁴⁷) and by non-orthodox Marxists and other socialist and communitarian scholars and activists. Working mainly with poor illiterate people in rural settlements and urban neighborhoods, the activists have developed group discussion and visualisation methods, role plays, constellation work etc. These methods were taken up, re-contextualized and refined until they are now widely used by moderators and trainers at conferences and workshops.

The firmly established social and political post-war structures and the societal mesh have been shaken by the revolutionary activities epitomized with the “May 1968” in France and similar events in other countries of Europe (not only in the West, but also in Central-Eastern Europe – just remember the “Prague spring” in the same year). Inspired by the North American “hippie” movement, many young people (in popular parlance called “hippies” at that time, today one would speak about “new rurals”) sought alternative ways of life in rural areas, settling especially in the more remote and economically declining areas of France and the Iberian Peninsula. Some of these have actually taken roots – maybe 10% of them⁴⁸ – after the first visionary enthusiasm has faded. The finally successful peaceful fight for over 10 years for the preservation of Larzac (which was destined to become a huge military training area), with thousands of inhabitants of the wider region, as well as activists for peace and environment from France and abroad, alongside about hundred traditional, mostly sheep breeding farmers and producers of Roquefort cheese, can be seen as a historic landmark of these movements during the seventies. When François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, the embattled expansion plan was dropped⁴⁹. This successful fight nurtured a growing political movement, mainly supported by the workers union CFDT⁵⁰ and other syndicalist, regionalist and “alter-globalisation” groups, called “*Vivre et Travailler au Pays*”⁵¹. Similar phenomena crystallised around the anti-nuclear movements in German-speaking countries, which triggered the emergence of Green Parties in the political spectrum. After the carnation revolution in Portugal, rural workers organised themselves, occupied swathes of land in the possession of absentee landlords and built up cooperatives. Older examples of cooperative economy, such as the Basque Mondragon Corporation, came into focus⁵².

Until the eighties, community-led action and participatory methods have become a mainstream approach in non-governmental development cooperation, with considerable influence on bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The paradigm shift towards endogenous and place-based development approaches

In certain ways, **the endogenous development approach in Europe signifies the homecoming of something which has grown in international cooperation**. By the way, in Austria, the first conceptual outline of the local development approach was actually called “**autonomous development**”⁵³ in the late seventies, but soon got renamed into “**endogenous development**”, following the international

⁴⁶ Although it also spread to the ranks of protestant churches.

⁴⁷ The movement started in Brazil, most popular with landless rural workers, and soon spread to other Latin American countries and elsewhere. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_theology; or also <https://theconversation.com/after-50-years-liberation-theology-is-still-reshaping-catholicism-and-politics-but-what-is-it-186804>

⁴⁸ Rough, but plausible estimation of Yves Champetier.

⁴⁹ Thanks to Yves Champetier for this reference.

⁵⁰ CFDT = Confédération française démocratique du travail.

⁵¹ Live and work in the countryside.

⁵² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mondragon_Corporation

⁵³ See for example: Glatz H., Scheer G. 1981; in France the term “développement auto-centré” was in use (Yves Champetier 2003).

discourse, and ultimately as an adjustment in order not to get thrown into one pot together with the obvious failure of “total decoupling” in some states of the south or with increasingly radicalized groups of young and unemployed house squatters in European cities (Zürich, Berlin, Hamburg) claiming the same designation for themselves.

The idea of **self-reliant communities** was not territorial by definition. It was people-centred and embedded in a **renewed concept of cooperative economy**. The first wave of a new generation of “**self-organised enterprises**” based on collective ownership has emerged in France and UK in the seventies during the crisis of traditional industries⁵⁴ and soon spread to Germany⁵⁵ and other countries. The initial political momentum noticeably diminished over time; however, the movement unfurled into the highly diverse family of community-based, cooperative and social enterprises in our times⁵⁶. **We have to consider that back in those non-digital times *people-centred* was hardly separable from *place-based*.**

The gradual change of perspectives in local and regional development and therefore in regional policy concepts was irreversible and quite profound: from trying to catch up and mimicking dynamic growth poles in order to get on the same generic trajectory of development, the peripheral areas were called to reflect on their **uniqueness**, their particular endogenous resources and talents, often accompanied by a recourse to history, but in the same way bound by a common – the people’s – vision of their own future. The **paradigmatic shift** led to the acknowledgment that the “periphery”, hitherto disregarded by top-down planning approaches, actually has plenty of resources, embodied in

- the people, their historical background and cultural heritage, their individual perspectives, their skills, tacit knowledge and collective practices of self-organisation,
- the web of crafts and industries,
- its natural environment and resources which in many cases were either dormant or controlled by external powers.

Local development had to be **area-specific** and not generic, based on **citizen and stakeholder participation** and not on central planning and engineering.

I am aware of a possible confusion at this point. I seem to mix up “regional” with “local” development. There is a national or European “regional policy”, but something like “local policy” does not exist at this level. **Local policy is crafted locally, period.**

This does not mean that a national government or the European Union does not need to have an idea or concept for local development. It can do a lot to enable local development by fostering a favourable political, institutional and cultural environment. It is the ultimate context shaper for local development.

⁵⁴ The watch manufacturer LIP in Besançon which was taken over by the workforce in 1973 became the model for this movement. There is also the trailblazing example of an alternative worker-user plan in Lucas Aerospace (1976) showing the technology and skills of workers in an arms factory could be used to produce health equipment and other useful products (thanks to Paul Soto for this hint: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucas_Plan).

⁵⁵ The association “Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe” aka “Arbeiterselbsthilfe”, founded 1975 in Frankfurt am Main, is known as a pioneer of alternative economic practice in Germany. See also: Kuentler P, 1984.

⁵⁶ Some of the early and more radical initiatives survived until today, e.g. the Longo Mai network of rural cooperatives dating back to 1973. <https://www.prolongomaif.ch/>

The above-mentioned community-led participatory approaches arose in the context of local development, but the stories and reports about experiences made at this level soon seeped upward to larger scales. In German speaking countries, the semantic spaces encompassed by the terms “local” and “regional” are not as clearly delimited as in other countries respectively languages. In any event, **the concept started at the local end of the scale and gradually gained ground in the regional development discourse.** Therefore, I blur the boundaries deliberately here.

It should not be forgotten, though, that bottom-up development has been fully adopted as the “golden path” in local development in democratic societies and multilateral organisations, whereas if you crawl up the territorial ladder of increasing size and scale, top-down approaches are lingering. One-sided top-down approaches tend to negate the importance of socio-cultural place-specific characteristics, whereas bottom-up approaches highlight the unique features and potentials of places and regions, which get sidelined by one-size-fits-all policy interventions. In practice, bottom-up approach always require complementary top-down measures (when it comes to institutional, infrastructural and financial provisions) to fully exploit its potential.

Different schools of thinking have the upper hand in different times and in different institutional environments. A striking example of this divergence of perceptions has been delivered by the OECD and the World Bank in 2009. In the same year, both organisations published relevant documents proclaiming more or less opposite messages⁵⁷.

Over time, the tenets of endogenous development more and more mixed with approaches oriented towards technological innovation and new production and consumption patterns derived from the sustainable development discourse. Some scholars speak about “**neo-endogenous development**”⁵⁸ in this respect. Interdependencies and linkages are actively sought for and no longer rejected; however, the terms and rules of the game have to be inclusive, at eye-level. As the national and regional governance context has been identified as a crucial frame for sustainable change at local level, the **multi-level partnership** emerged as the dominant pattern of governance for territorial development in the nineties.

Local development as an emancipatory concept

It would be too simplistic to trace all of these new local development concepts back to the “centre-periphery” discourse led by the dependence theory, as influential as they were. They were based on an **emancipatory worldview** with strong emphasis on freedom of expression, independence, respect and solidarity. They did not embrace “localist” views of “we against the world”. To the contrary, they questioned traditional hierarchies, patriarchy and paternalism from the local to the global level. They understood themselves as the territorialised version of other emancipatory movements, such as feminism or environmentalism.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ World Bank Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography. It rebuffs place-based approaches and summarizes the problems of lagging regions under the 3 Ds: (Lack of) Density, Distance, Division, proposing the 3 Is as a solution regardless of place: Institutions, Infrastructures, Investments. In contrast, the OECD 2009: Regions Matter. Economic Recovery, Innovation and Sustainable Growth. This publication advocates context-shaping interventions to foster the development of Regional Innovation Systems, which largely rely and thrive on their own growth potential. Obviously, the OECD had more influence on EU policies.

⁵⁸ See for example: Chatzichristos G., Nagopoulos N. and Poulimas M. 2021.

⁵⁹ The Austrian school of endogenous development had a fervent supporter in the „Austrian Mountain Farmers Association“ (ÖBV) created in 1974. Among the founders were two brothers, Anton and Franz Rohrmoser, from mountain farming families who had just come home from working with indigenous communities in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso. ÖBV is still active member of Via Campesina with 180

Nevertheless, more traditional federalist⁶⁰ and communitarian views were also present in this debate, getting along quite well and blending into the new paradigm⁶¹.

There was also applause from an unwanted side. Neoliberalist scholars and policy makers argued that the state should not invest into local communities more than the absolute minimum, because this would just suffocate private initiative and the self-help capacity of the communities. Experts and activists promoting endogenous decision-making and community-led action rejected this approach by saying that the state should not be relieved of its duties to assure the provision of adequate infrastructures (energy, water, waste, communication...) and services (education, culture, health, welfare...), regardless of cost differentials, all over the territory, as well as positively discriminating fragile and lagging areas, by providing development incentives (funding technical assistance and model-like projects). However, this subsidiary task of the public sector should in no way jeopardize the autonomy of local communities which would unleash their creative potential in an enabling ecosystem, thus contributing to stabilising the European integration process.

Voluntary work, small- to medium scale private investment and cooperation – so much needed in endogenous local development – does not thrive in a context of inequality, disempowerment and growing deprivation.

Before we come back to the evolution of territorial policies in the EU, we let the Scottish researcher John Bryden summarise⁶²:

“From the 1980s then, at least three schools of thought could be identified. First, there were those who viewed state downloading of responsibilities to local level as an abrogation of previous responsibilities and indeed an attack on the social contract itself – an attack on the idea and practice of citizen equivalence across national space and social groups, as well as on the political values underpinning those. Second were those who welcomed such devolution and considered subsidiarity to be positive and necessary to improve the effectiveness of development and welfare policy in a complex modern world. Third were those who believed in a more radical agenda of self-reliance, with much greater local control over key assets like one’s own labour, land and capital, usually in cooperative or other joint forms.”

Scaling up: the shift towards place-based approaches in mainstream policies

The financial crisis and discontent with the implementation of the Structural Funds and their top-down approach led to a rethinking of **European Cohesion Policy**. **Placed-based approaches** have arrived in the centre of the debate, first and foremost in the think tanks of the **OECD**. The EC followed suit.

Through the nineties, the school of thought gradually gained ground in the regional policy discourse and eventually arrived in the core of policy making during the first decade of this century. The main reference document is the so-called **Barca Report**⁶³, named after the Italian civil servant and

organisations in 81 countries, one of the most outspoken advocates of socially just and environmentally sound food sovereignty on the basis of self-reliant farming and craft structures in rural areas all over the world.

⁶⁰ Committed to the subsidiarity principle.

⁶¹ E.g. the German/Austrian concept of “Dorferneuerung” (village renewal) was in accordance with the principles of endogenous local development but did not specifically emphasize the emancipatory part.

⁶² Bryden J. 2010, p.4.

⁶³ Barca F. 2009.

politician **Fabrizio Barca** who chaired the OECD territorial policies committee in 1999 and was entrusted, in 2009, to develop an independent report for the European Commission (under the Polish Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner) entitled: ***An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy***. Barca's main argument was that growing inequalities divide people and produce an "authoritarian dynamic" which would end up in tearing up the societal consensus and reversing the European path towards integration. Of course, the nature of inequalities is multidimensional, but **territorial disparities** figure among the most pressing ones.

"Territorial cohesion" got integrated into the Lisbon Treaty in the same year (2009) as the third goal beside "social and economic cohesion". Fabrizio Barca's recommendations led to a reform which tied together five Funds⁶⁴ into one coherent framework⁶⁵, and the EAFRD became one of them. These five ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) were supposed to deliver integrated results in five policy areas⁶⁶ during the budget period 2014-2020. Until today, the reform has left significant traces, for example in the "smart specialization strategies".⁶⁷

However, having exceeded its zenith with the period 2014-2020, advocacy for place-based cohesion policy gradually slid into the background, with other issues rising to the top of the agenda (Russia's invasion of Ukraine and intensified debates on security issues, increased migration from Africa and from the Middle East in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war and with the Taliban retaking power in Afghanistan, Islamist terror threat becoming notorious, looming trade conflicts with China and the US, etc.), all in all **boosting the rise of the nationalist discourse**. This discourse reinforced the shift of decision-making from the European level towards the Member States and from the European Commission towards the European Council.⁶⁸

What has been left unfinished is what Fabrizio Barca stated at an ESPON conference in Sofia (2018):

"...Experimenting through Cohesion Policy some prototypes of a EU-wide social model gradually loosening the tensions with social contracts (a long-term but fundamental process in the EU);.....

"Turning the current five CP Funds in sub-funds of a unique Fund while retaining the rules and fund-reserves of the different domains; it would strengthen the EU's governance and would overcome the obstacles that places encounter in designing integrated projects;

*Investing in 500 new human resources, facilitators of development on behalf of the EC, to be deployed on the field: a necessary condition for the EU to be a 'fair and impartial spectator'."*⁶⁹

⁶⁴ European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); European Social Fund (ESF); Cohesion Fund (CP); European Agricultural Fund for Rural development (EAFRD); European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

⁶⁵ In essence this concept was based on the same idea, which stood behind the creation of the short-lived Structural Funds Coordination DG XXIII in the eighties. See below and footnote 87.

⁶⁶ Research and innovation; digital technologies; supporting the low-carbon economy; sustainable management of natural resources; small businesses.

⁶⁷ European Commission, DG Regional and Urban Policy: Connecting Smart and Sustainable Growth through Smart Specialization. Bruxelles, Nov. 2012.

⁶⁸ The heavyweight of national interests has impeded the full implementation of the provisions laid down in the Lisbon Treaty (signed 2007, entering into force in 2009): e.g., the number of Commissioners would have to be reduced for the sake of effectiveness, and it is still equal to the number of member states. The European Council, which is designed to have a supervisory role in policy making, is still the main decision-maker in operative terms.

⁶⁹ Fabrizio Barca: The need for a place-based approach. Key note speech at the conference: Territorial Cohesion post-2020: Integrated Territorial Development for Better Policies. 20-31 May 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria. Slide 11/12.

<https://archive.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/Fabrizio%20Barca.pdf>

- ➔ Until this point we have brought together the bits and pieces which are necessary to understand the conditions and circumstances of the LEADER genesis. We had to jump forth and back in time to follow the different strands of the narrative. Now is the moment that we can advance to the core of the onion bulb, telling the LEADER story along the time arrow.

PART II

THE VOYAGE OF LEADER THROUGH TIME

The genesis of LEADER

Prelude

During **Delors' tenure**, the European Commission, striving to develop the capacities required to fulfil its role in the preparation and proposal of policies as well as in the execution of regulations and directives, had ample scope to draw on external scientific and practical expertise, often delegating these tasks to contracted agencies. The Commission also had enough leeway to help testing out experimental support schemes within and across member states. This liberty proved to be extremely useful in providing support to

- a **network called ELISE⁷⁰** (European Network for Information Exchange on Local Employment Initiatives), created in **1984** by three non-profit organisations, supported by the **OECD LEED (Local Employment and Economic Development), Programme⁷¹** and the **EC Directorate-General for Employment (DG V)**. The associative process which ELISE set in motion can be regarded as an incubator of **AEIDL (Association Européenne pour l'information sur le Développement Local)**, a group of experts who created this NGO in response to the requirements to acquire larger contracts on behalf of the European Commission. From 1988 to 1991 they assured the animation of the ELISE network (see box below);
- the **EC programme EGLEI** (European Group for Local Employment Initiatives, **1983-1988**), aimed at promoting local-level employment solutions across Europe. The focus of EGLEI was to support and guide local authorities, communities, and organisations in creating employment opportunities by fostering innovative local employment initiatives. EGLEI was also member of the ELISE network; both networks helped speeding up learning across member states, expert groups, member state officials and the EC;
- the rather short-lived **ERGO programme (1984)** of the EC, focusing on long-term unemployment⁷²;
- the **Local Employment Development Action programme (LEDA)**, an EU-funded action research programme. It operated from **1986 to 1996**.

AEIDL (Association Européenne pour l'innovation dans le développement local)⁷³, was founded in 1988 by like-minded individuals, majority women, who believed that European integration could make a positive contribution to citizenship and to the sustainable development of local communities. Its objective was to contribute to bringing Europe closer to its citizens and to promote interaction at local level, between all those who wanted to open up new development opportunities. As a non-profit organisation, it allocates its economic returns into improving the working conditions of the teams employed and to supporting initiatives consistent with the objectives of the association. For example, the

⁷⁰ ELISE ceased operations in 1992.

⁷¹ It was originally called LEI (Local Employment Initiatives). The programme was led by Chris Brookes, who previously worked in the YouthAid project in the UK. The LEED programme is still active in the OECD after forty years; LEED provided insights and policy recommendations in respect to local economic development, social inclusion, innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as capacity development and the exchange of expertise at international level. First and foremost, LEED had more influence on the regional policy debate (DG XVI) rather than on the deliberations going on in DG VI (Agriculture).

⁷² ERGO and EGLEI were inspired by the late Peter Kuenstler, a British civil servant and from 1982 to 1993 the Director of the Centre for Employment Initiatives (London and Bruxelles) and consultant for the EC and other many other organisations. Kuenstler's influence in both programmes was significant, as he helped to raise awareness of the importance of regional and local action to combat unemployment and played a key role in shaping European labour market policy in the 1980s. Through his entire career, he carried out numerous missions to anglophone African countries, a biographical aspect which he used to passionately emphasize (according to a personal message from Yves Champetier per email from Jan. 08 2025).

⁷³ <https://www.aeidl.eu/about-aeidl/>

AEIDL strongly supported the start-up of the European network ECOLISE (Empowering Communities for Future), a European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability⁷⁴. For the 25th anniversary of AEDL, AEIDL organised a major symposium at the European Parliament (“Reinventing Europe through local initiatives”)⁷⁵. Today, AEIDL runs ELIF (European Local Innovation Forum)⁷⁶, a platform for exchanges between experts and organisations on local innovation, using its own funds.

All these initiatives and programs were financially supported from an EC/DG V (Employment) official named John Morley.⁷⁷

The growth and development phase of the Commission under Delors offered a unique window of opportunity, during which such initiatives could thrive and quickly yield positive feedbacks among a growing network of actors committed to do more and create a new generation of policies fostering endogenous development at local level, and to a certain extent, and at a slower pace, at regional level where the discourse on “place-based approaches” peaked after the turn of the century, and over time (after the financial crisis in 2007), interfused with the discourse on **resilient regions**.

The DG V (Employment), the incubator of LEADER in the EC

The focal point of absorbing and spreading the local development narrative in the European Commission was the DG V (Employment). It is worth mentioning at least two persons who were among the most important enablers of the institutional innovation which ultimately begot LEADER:

- **John Morley**, Head of the Policy Unit: this unit was responsible for experimenting on the themes of new jobs, new forms of entrepreneurship, and local initiatives for employment. He launched the rather short-lived **ERGO (European Growth and Employment) Programme**, focusing on long-term unemployment in 1984 and the **action-research LEDA programme in 1986** (see further down). He also funded the network **ELISE** and field experiments⁷⁸ involving people who did not benefit from the assistance of traditional organisations ; John Morley consistently cooperated with external experts, advisers and researchers, operating in networks and commissioned with implementing experimental programmes or providing accompanying policy advice.
- **Sandro Gaudenzi**: he was at the heart of what the “raison d’être” of the DG Employment had been from the beginning, supporting industrial transformation with the **European Social Fund**, and therefore financing the training of thousands of employees affected by the reconversion of traditional sectors like mines, textiles, etc. His concern was to finance different training policies likely to generate and support different development policies, allowing populations to be able to live where they wanted to live, be they lagging rural or industrial areas searching for new prospects. The approach used to be called “training-development”.

Certainly there were other eminent figures in the different DGs V, VI, XVI and XXIII, who nurtured the debate and set the stakes with practical approaches and hands-on solutions. However, exhaustively

⁷⁴ <https://ecolise.eu/>

⁷⁵ <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/Record.htm?idlist=1&record=19159107124919773899>

⁷⁶ <https://www.aeidl.eu/forum/>

⁷⁷ Thanks to Haris Martinos for this important notice.

⁷⁸ In France, this would lead to the creation of “management boutiques” providing support to non-traditional entrepreneurs, job seekers, neo-rurals, etc. and fostering the creation of businesses, chambers of commerce, trades, agriculture, etc...

explore their actions and naming them to do justice to their contributions would largely go beyond the limits of this paper.

The OECD, a most significant source of advice

One of the most significant boundary spanners between the **OECD and the EC** was **Chris Brookes** who headed the **Local Employment Initiatives (LEI) Programme** which was soon renamed into **Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme**. Chris Brookes was very close to John Morley.

- Chris Brookes brought **Jean-Pierre Pellegrin**⁷⁹ into the OECD. First having been principal administrator of the OECD Directorate for Education, Employment and Social Affairs from 1975 to 1990, he later moved to the Directorate for Territorial Development until 1998. His collaboration with the EC DG V (Employment) and external experts was essential for the creation of the **LEDA Programme**⁸⁰ (see further down).
- Furthermore, Chris Brookes also introduced **Haris Martinos** into the LEI (then LEED) programme and through this to John Morley and LEDA.

The focus of LEADER precursors: local employment, education and training

In response to the broadly perceived challenges in old industrial and rural areas, **the first generation of participatory local development approaches based on multi-actor local partnerships emerged.**

- **One strand focused on employment initiatives.** The main objective was to keep people in their area of living and giving them opportunities to co-create their own jobs. Many of these jobs were based on the agricultural value chain, but there were also initiatives to save crumbling industrial enterprises through public support for a takeover by the workforce or other cooperative solutions at local level.
- Not all of these local initiatives chose local employment as the only leverage point. In the same vein, a number of **local initiatives focusing on education and sensitization** popped up, not least because the strong involvement of universities and regional education and training centres. Their ambition was to help lagging areas, whether at local or regional level, to promote and support new development policies, either in disadvantaged rural areas or in territories undergoing reconversion. Hence, their approach was about "territorial development" in a cross-cutting, comprehensive meaning, based on the assumption, that only new and hitherto untrodden paths would lead to different results, but different ways to act would require new human and social capacities and attitudes. One among other fervent supporters of these education-based development initiatives, the late **Sandro Gaudenzi (DG V/Employment)**, started with supporting a **triennial rural training programme** in the French region Ardèche (1978-1981)⁸¹, later extending that model to 13 more regions in Europe. **Yves Champetier**⁸², who later would head the **LEADER I**

⁷⁹ Jean-Pierre Pellegrin was member of the AEIDL board for several years, serving as chairman from 2008 to 2011.

⁸⁰ LEDA = Local Employment and Development Action.

⁸¹ The main initiators of this programme were André Boutin, responsible for vocational training in the Rhône-Alpes region, a geographer at the University of Lyon, Maurice Allefresde, as well as René Caspar from the French state agency DATAR (*Délégation Interministérielle du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale*, which was later renamed into *l'Attractivité Régionale*, established in 1963), the main promoter of ADEPFO (see next page), Patrick Sénault who was involved in the IMP missions (see next page).

⁸² He was actually born in Ardèche from a wine growing family. After having obtained a Master Degree in Development Economy in Grenoble. He worked as an intern in a research institute in Argentina in the framework of French international cooperation from 1973 to

network animation unit, got involved in in the Ardèche team and after 1992 in the Pyrenees⁸³, where the **ADEPFO (Association de Développement des Pyrénées par la Formation)** was created, which he headed as its director from 1981 to 1988. In his quest to deliver integrated territorial policies, Sandro Gaudenzi did not only put strong emphasis on the training of those involved in implementing the programmes, but he also held frequent contact with these to receive feedback and to foster learning among the key actors.

Towards integrated territorial development

It was clear that neither a narrow focus on employment nor on education and training would deliver sufficient leverage to redevelop disadvantaged regions, and that there should be low-threshold funding to test out promising innovative practices, and moreover to provide technical support and advice to these new development approaches.⁸⁴

At that time, Spain and Portugal were preparing to join the European Economic Community, which was a formidable challenge for Italy, Greece and the French Mediterranean regions. ADEPFO in particular would allow Sandro Gaudenzi to test what would become the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs) to meet this challenge. In 1985, Sandro Gaudenzi entrusted a mission to a consultant to define the profile of "development agents" likely to contribute to the development of integrated development policies. In 1986, this would lead to the creation of "IMP support missions" in France, Italy and Greece to organize training for these future professionals in the integrated management of structural funds. In France, this mission, initially managed by ADEPFO, would continue well beyond the IMPs to support and train all those likely to work towards the implementation of integrated programmes. Similarly, at the initiative of Sandro Gaudenzi, a dozen "pre-IMP" programs, including one in a Pyrenean valley, were implemented in a dozen Mediterranean territories to test what this approach could trigger off. Obviously, subsequently, the Integrated Mediterranean Programs set off at the regional level, and the multiple field experiences would facilitate their definition and implementation.⁸⁵

1975, which he used to extensive travelling in Latin America. Back home in Ardèche, he soon got involved into local development: One of the very first "*contrats de pays*" had just been signed. Michel Poniatowski, then Minister of the Interior, was behind it. The idea was for the State to experiment with a new way of working with local authorities by promoting actions that then oscillated between rural planning and local development. Thanks to Yves Champetier for this personal information, sent by email on 12 October 2024.

⁸³ Between the end of his work in Ardèche and his activities in the Pyrénées, Yves Champetier was welcomed for three weeks at DG V in the unit headed by Sandro Gaudenzi. During all these years in Ardèche, then in the Pyrenees, he participated in multiple field study visits, seminars or conferences organized by ELISE or EGLEI. In particular, following an exchange visit to Lebrija in 1986, an agricultural town 50 km south of Seville, he wrote a report "*LEBRIJA, creatividad et solidaridad*" which was one of the starting points for one of the first integrated development operations at the sub-regional level in Spain, "the integrated development program of the Bajo Guadalquivir". Champetier also participated in exchanges with Quebec on training and development policies. At the initiative of Peter Kuenstler, he took part in a study trip financed by the German Marshall Fund to the United States on policies to support employment and local initiatives in rural areas of various US States.

⁸⁴ One could assume that the convergent lines of thinking in the English-speaking regions was more pragmatically oriented towards local solutions for employment whereas the French speaking sphere was more interested in changing the discourse on local development and winning over local opinion leaders to a better cross-sectoral coordination towards integrated local development. These lines were perfectly complementary. For the French actor-centred approach see also footnote 98.

⁸⁵ I owe the information provided in this paragraph to a notice per email from Yves Champetier (18 October 2024).

Networks acting as accelerants of sparkling ideas

Aware of these contingencies, the DG V (Employment) in 1984 launched the rather short-lived **ERGO (European Growth and Employment) Programme**, focusing on long-term unemployment, and finally the more relevant **action-research LEDA programme in 1986**.

- **The LEDA programme** supported different types of local areas (rural/underdeveloped, urban/industrial decline) to develop their own responses to employment and economic development challenges, by providing international and (through small grants) local expertise and animation support, and by promoting the exchange of experience and knowledge between the participating areas.⁸⁶
- In its **1st phase (1986-1990)** the programme promoted networking activities between the participating areas and gradually a fully functioning network with more than 25 areas was in operation. During its **2nd phase (1991-1996)**, the LEDA network more than doubled covering new member states (AT, FI, SE) and the future enlargement countries in Central/Eastern Europe. The second phase already ran in parallel respectively overlapped with LEADER.
- LEDA was coordinated by **LRDP (Local and Regional Development Planning)**, a group of regional development experts created in the mid-eighties. **Haris Martinos** managed LEDA jointly with Jean-Pierre Pellegrin on secondment from the OECD's LEED programme (until the end of the 1st phase of LEDA).

Area based approaches, local strategies and local partnerships emerged as key features of the development philosophy of LEDA as "learned" from the participating areas. This marked a transition from isolated local employment initiatives or strategies to attract large foreign investment into restructuring or underdeveloped areas. The programme nourished new ideas and supported them with practical tools (local development workbook, international summer schools, collaboration with business management schools, etc.).

LRDP also worked extensively with DG XVI (present-day DG Regio) and other departments of the Commission, as well as member state authorities. It was running the UK LEADER network from 2002 to 2006. In 2003, LRDP merged with KANTOR, a consultancy firm with larger financial capacity, for becoming capable to go for bigger contracts. **LRDP KANTOR** eventually won the bid for managing the Contact Point of the LEADER+ Observatory of Rural Areas with Véronique Ammeux as a team leader (Haris Martinos ran the British network unit at that time), with a belated start (2004), but a prolonged mandate until 2014 (see further down).

The LEDA network continued to operate without EU support (and participating areas continued to collabourate) after the end of the programme and well into the 21st century, having formed their own independent association (LEDA-partenariat). Rosalba La Grotteria was the last president of the association. This partenariat became the germ for the emergence of the expert network **LDnet set up in 2011** (see below).

⁸⁶ One of the active participants in the LEDA programme was Jean-Baptiste Lanaspèze, who led the local development programme of the Baronnies in the French Département Drôme (France). He was also one of the main experts of the LEADER I animation unit, and of the tourism expert group of the European LEADER II Observatory, one of the early developers of thematic roads (such as the "route de l'olivier en Baronnies").

This hinges on one person: **Sandro Gaudenzi**, who had moved first moved from the DG V into the short-lived **GD XXIII (Coordination of Structural Policies)**, which was put up to coordinate the Regional, Social and Agricultural Guidance Funds⁸⁷. This DG was abolished a few years later because it was felt as an interference in the other DGs involved (Employment, Regional Policy, Agriculture). Subsequently, **until 1986, Sandro Gaudenzi moved into the DG XVI (Regional Development)** in the year the LEDA programme started.⁸⁸

The time was ripe for LEADER

The initiatives put in place in EU member states occurred with the support and under direct observation of committed persons in the European institutions, but during the same time, similar policies popped up in countries outside the EU, too. E.g. in Austria, the first pilot initiative of community-led integrated local development was implemented with the support of a federal programme for lagging rural areas, which at first doubled up cooperative investments generated by local groups, but soon moved towards financing integrative territorial approaches at local level. Already during the eighties, the ÖAR⁸⁹ supported such territorial projects with technical advice. The ÖAR had itself been created as a federation of local development initiatives in 1983.

So, the dish was ready to serve. The local development approach promoted by **John Morley** in the DG V (Employment) and funded from ESF spread from there to other DGs, mediated by distinct officials. We have already traced **Sandro Gaudenzi's** journey through three DGs, starting in DG V (Employment), then changing into DG XXIII (Coordination of Structural Funds), and from there to the **DG XVI (Regional Policy)**, where he pursued similar initiatives funded from the **ERDF** (for example the introduction of global grants)⁹⁰.

However, don't get me wrong. There is no compelling reason why LEADER would have emerged, lifted out of the primordial soup by the miraculous "invisible hand"⁹¹.

Now there was a man called **Michel Laine**, who had been hired by the Commission in 1983. He joined John Morley's unit which worked on themes that were particularly close to his heart, then moved into the **DG XXIII (Coordination of Structural Funds)** together with Sandro Gaudenzi, and from there to the **DG VI (Agriculture)** in the early nineties. His deeds ought to become the last puzzle stone in the genesis of LEADER.

⁸⁷ Particularly to coordinate structural funds interventions ("Integrated Mediterranean Programmes") in Italy, Greece and South France in view of the great challenges to integrate Spain and Portugal into the EU.

⁸⁸ With regard to territorial development, the DG XVI also promoted local respectively regional development agencies. They usually had a wider territorial remit, with more inhabitants, putting more focus on stakeholder cooperation, enhancing institutional operations and links and infrastructure development. The European networking hub for these agencies, EURADA (European Association of Development Agencies) was created in 1992 as a federation of these agencies.

⁸⁹ The acronym means "Austrian Work Group on Endogenous Regional Development. As was said before, the German notion of what in English is "regional" is very often to applied to smaller levels of scale. In Anglo-Saxon terms the ÖAR would have referred to "local development". ÖAR was created 1983 as a national federation of local development initiatives. In 1989, the NGO created a subsidiary company of limited responsibility in order to accomplish consultancy tasks to these initiatives. In 1997 the consultants took over the whole firm in a form of buyout, abandoning its NGO status, and creating the ÖAR Regionalberatung GmbH which got renamed into ÖAR GmbH in 2015.

⁹⁰ In vivid learning exchange and collaboration with LRDP and Haris Martinos as field partners.

⁹¹ A term used to describe the beneficial outcomes of market forces at societal level in Adam Smith's "*Wealth of Nations*" (1776). We would not do justice to Smith if we believed that he meant this literally. It was only the pioneers of neoliberal thinking (especially Helmut von Mises in his opus "*A Treatise on Economics*", 1949) who took up the metaphor to justify the neoliberal principles of unleashed market forces.

It was, after all, a bunch of visionary people, passionately committed to the cause of local communities and the well-being of people in a peaceful world who brought the concept to life.

LEADER arises: From the Community Initiative to the method

Michel Laine had studied theology. Following his inclinations for psychological and social development issues, he started his work in the HR department of the French branch of the American company Gillette. This role provided him with profound expertise in organisational and operational aspects. Drawing from his experiences with local development initiatives in the DG V together with John Morley and then in DG XXII with Sandro Gaudenzi, Michel Laine, once arrived in DG VI, drafted **LEADER I (1991-1993)⁹² as a Community Initiative⁹³. He also authored the communication for the sequel LEADER II (1994-1999)⁹⁴. We will come back to that further below.**

Community Initiatives were special funding programmes introduced by the European Union to address specific challenges and support innovative approaches across various sectors. Over the years, several Community Initiatives were established to tackle different regional, social and economic issues.

When Michel Laine moved back into DG V, he drafted the Community Initiative EQUAL⁹⁵ (combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market), which existed from **2000 to 2006**. **INTERREG** had also started as a Community Initiative of the DG XVI in 1990. With the effort to streamline and simplify policy delivery these flexible tools were eventually dropped respectively built into mainstream programmes (LEADER, EQUAL, URBAN, INTERREG)⁹⁶.

Until the emergence of LEADER, **the letter L** has been part of all the acronyms relating to local development. No surprise, as *Local* starts with *L*. However, **in LEADER, the L means “liaison”**, the most important letter in the acronym, according to Michel Laine⁹⁷. One of the dimensions of “liaison” is the networking at the European level of the 217 territories that were selected for the implementation of LEADER I, so that everyone could learn from each other’s experiences, and collective know-how could gradually emerge. Substantial human and financial resources would be mobilised for collective learning. It should be noted that at that time, as in the following phase, LEADER was only eligible in the so-called Objective 5b areas (disadvantaged rural areas), or the rural areas of Objective 1 countries or regions, in fact in both cases the most disadvantaged areas of the European Economic Community.

From the ELISE network to the LEADER I Coordination Unit

The experienced networking agency and expert group **AEIDL (we remember that they ran the ELISE network)** got entrusted with the task to manage the **LEADER I coordination unit** in Bruxelles. The six-member expert committee for this unit was chaired by the late **Marie-Elisabeth Chassagne**, an experienced and renowned expert and member of the **ANDLP (Association Nationale pour le**

⁹² Cast in legal form in Regulation (EEC) No. 2078/92 of the Council of the European Communities, adopted on July 30, 1992.

⁹³ With the *Communication from the European Commission* from 19 March 1991 inviting local initiatives to submit their proposals for integrated local development actions under the acronym L.E.A.D.E.R. (Liaison entre actions du développement économique rural”).

⁹⁴ Communication from the European Commission (94/173/EG) from 16 March 1994.

⁹⁵ EQUAL = European Community Initiative to promote equality in the labour market.

⁹⁶ Only LEADER and INTERREG survived as programmes or distinct programme components until nowadays.

⁹⁷ In his keynote address at the 25th anniversary of LEADER in 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0861Jj_ca0

Développement Local et le pays)⁹⁸. Yves Champetier became team leader among around 20 staffers. With the AEIDL also winning the contract for running the **European LEADER II Observatory in 1995, Yves Champetier became its Director.**

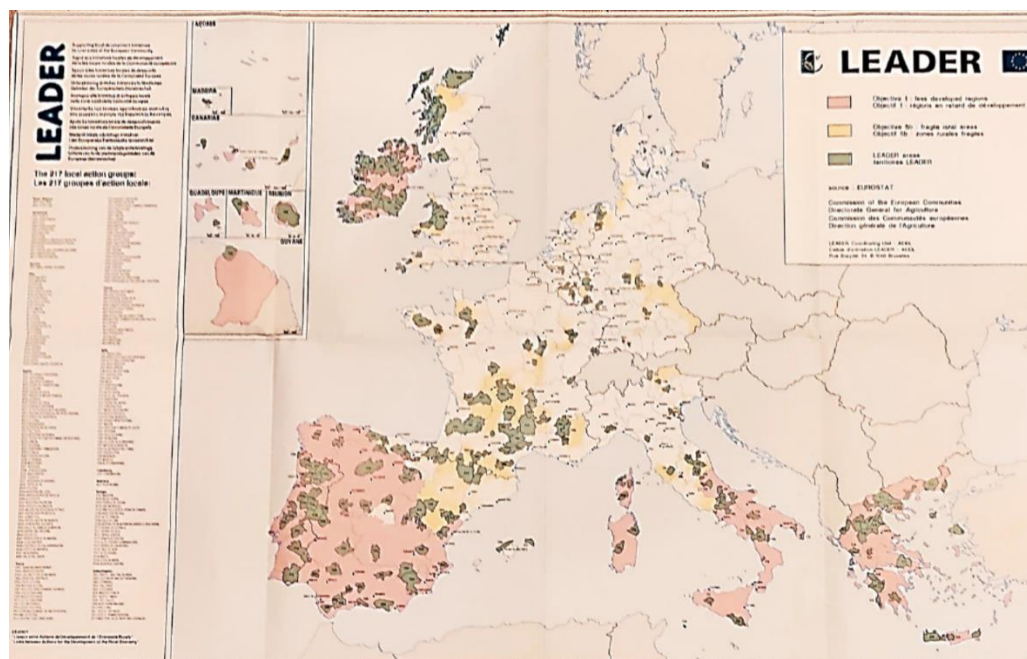


Figure 2 Map of LEADER I (Source: Champetier Y. 2023)

LEADER I, the radical institutional innovation

We have to note that **LEADER I was an institutional anomaly, a radical, if not revolutionary institutional innovation⁹⁹ at that time:** the European Commission selected the beneficiary groups, steered the programme and communicated directly with local actors, bypassing the member states at any level of administration¹⁰⁰. The European coordination unit and people from the LAGs communicated directly, intensively and barrier-free. They shared a common passion. Yves Champetier described the atmosphere during the first large gathering in 1992, with 350 people coming together in Bruxelles:

“At that time, there were 217 LEADER groups from the most disadvantaged areas of the Union. 350 participants at this meeting, few in suits and ties, many in jeans, some with backpacks, most coming to Brussels for the first time in their lives. What pride for each and every one of these representatives from forgotten territories to find themselves in Brussels! Europe, so far away, was finally there to worry about THEIR territories!”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Created in 1964 as functional planning spaces, the French “pays” spearheaded a “territorial approach” for local development since the eighties through the introduction of multi-actor contracts (“contrat de pays”), which went far beyond what was already practiced as inter-communal cooperation. In this notion of “territorial development” the concept of multi-level governance was already present. <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article88772> ; see also Denieul 2008.

⁹⁹ The term “revolutionary” has often been used in Spain. It was the first time that promoters of small project could receive financial support and, moreover, the funding was available without delay: first advance at the start of the project, final instalment upon receipt of all administrative documents. This was actually meant by effective “decentralization management and financing”.

¹⁰⁰ Whoever is interested in the procedures applied back then, can still obtain this information from **the ex-post evaluation of LEADER I**, accessible under: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/exte-eval-leader1-sum_1999_en_0.pdf

¹⁰¹ Champetier, Y. 2000.

Around 15 seminars have been organised between 1992 and 1995, one of them in the Southern French area of the LAG “Pays Cathare”, where diluvian rainfalls destroyed the hotel in which the seminar was held. Paul Soto (we will hear more about him later), then LAG manager in the cherry-growing Valle del Jerte (Extremadura, Spain) lost his suitcase and his portable computer, a very costly object at that time.

The notion of local partnership appeared from the onset. These partnerships have been organized in very diverse ways, depending on the specific contexts of each country, either around local administrations, municipalities or other institutions, or around citizens' associations, or around private companies or cooperatives. In most cases, they were led by highly motivated people, often long-time activists for the future of their territory, who would use the initiative to initiate or strengthen approaches that were close to their hearts. Many personalities could be cited, let us remember two:

- Camilo Mortágua in Portugal, a long-time activist against fascism, who after the Carnation Revolution devoted himself to the redistribution of land of the large latifundia and to the revitalization of the rural environment in Alentejo¹⁰².
- Lorenzo Barbera, a great figure of the Italian Mezzogiorno, promoter of multiple local initiatives, one of the leaders of the great marches for the development of the *Mezzogiorno*¹⁰³ in the sixties.¹⁰⁴

At first all these activities went on largely unnoticed. The more LEADER I turned out as a quite successful intervention, bringing forth innovative solutions and model projects in rural areas with very little financial input, but a lot of enthusiasm in acting, communicating and networking, the call for an expanded sequel became indisputable. However, the member states refused to get bypassed this time. They demanded that LEADER II should be incorporated into the regional or national operational programmes, with the respective administrations as managing authorities and/or implementing bodies.

LEADER II and the European LEADER II Observatory

And so it happened. Michel Laine also authored the Council Regulation¹⁰⁵ for LEADER II, this time as a Community Initiative enshrined in the multi-fund framework of structural funds 1994-1999. The Regulation was published mid-1995¹⁰⁶. It provided more precise orientations concerning the local partnerships in the sense that their composition should be representative and reflect the diversity of institutional, economic and social actors, with no single group getting the upper hand¹⁰⁷; the

¹⁰² He died on 01 November 2024, at the age of 90.

¹⁰³ Common denomination for the Southern part of Italy.

¹⁰⁴ Both would continue as experts for the LEADER II Observatory (in the work group on “methodologies” led by Samuel Thirion).

¹⁰⁵ Nr. 2091/93 following Council decision from 10 July 1993, regulating the support for rural areas from the European structural funds.

¹⁰⁶ Following the British officer Philip Lowe, the **Director responsible during LEADER II in the DG Agri was Laurent van de Poele**, Professor at the Catholic University of Leuven. Yves Champetier describes him as a “*great teacher, skilled negotiator, strongly committed to LEADER*” (email message from 12 Nov. 2024). They worked closely together in preparing LEADER+ (the name of which was suggested by Yves Champetier, instead of going on with number III). Furthermore: after Michel Laine as the direct interlocutor for the LEADER II Observatory has moved to the DG V (Employment) during LEADER II, he was replaced by **Doriane Givord**, “*a young civil servant with many talents*”, as Yves Champetier put it (in the same email message).

¹⁰⁷ The experience of LEADER I has shown that the more institutional partnerships tended to focus on aspects of infrastructure or equipment. The partnerships supported by the economic community were primarily concerned with consolidating existing activities. The partnerships organized around citizen initiatives were more focused on a multitude of small actions. The search for a greater balance aimed to guarantee a cross-sectional and richer vision of the territorial strategy and to be able to support projects that had a greater impact in terms of innovation.

Regulation also aimed to go further in networking, with more meetings, more publications and **a new component focusing on encouraging cooperation between territories.**

In the framework of the **European LEADER II Observatory**, the experts employed by or associated with the implementing agency managed by AEIDL got ample scope in shaping the methodology and coordination of the inputs from experts and member state officials. **National LEADER network units** were set up and co-financed in each member state of the **EU 15**. From the very beginning in 1995, experts from the three new member states were integrated (ÖAR Austria, Rural Parliaments from Sweden – where this movement originated – and Finland); they had actually been involved in encounters prior to EU accession, organised by the networks mentioned. **The LEADER Observatory counted 26 employees from 15 different countries.** Its **pool of 36 external experts** was configured into six thematic groups. To be precise, they were experts according to their competence in certain subject matters (such as tourism, local products or new services), and/or advisers with a lot of experiences as activists (see the two examples above).

The strategic coordination was carried out by the **Director (Yves Champetier)¹⁰⁸** and the **Vice Director (Gilda Farrell)¹⁰⁹**, together with the team leaders of the six thematic groups¹¹⁰. From these eight persons involved at least four had a background and strong attachment to participatory approaches and local development in the global south, including myself¹¹¹: **Samuel Thirion** (leader of the thematic work group on methodology), founder of INDE, a Portuguese cooperative carrying out consultancy work particularly in Portuguese speaking countries. Most remarkable in this respect was the curriculum of Gilda Farrell: born in Ecuador from a Neapolitan mother and an Irish father, she studied in Rome, Paris and Toronto and became active in advisory field work in Peru and other countries of the South, but also in Poland.

After two years, the initial structure was reorganised and individual experts were put together in small teams for specific contributions.

The LEADER Observatory followed annual action plans designed in close collaboration with experts, national units and the Commission. On each validated thematic working area,

- a repertory of innovative actions (“innovation fiches”)¹¹² was created and used for analysis;
- seminars or workshops were organised with the following principles that are interesting to recall as situations have evolved today:
 - the seminars always took place in one of the LEADER territories carrying out one of the innovative actions analysed. These seminars stretched over four days, from Wednesday to Sunday, taking advantage of cheap rates what used to be called APEX (weekend) rates. At least one day was devoted to field excursions to meet project

¹⁰⁸ Yves’ years in Latin America during the seventies were crucial in his later career: the popular movements at that time were notably inspired by liberation theology, and by intellectuals such as Paolo Freire who, first in Brazil and then internationally, highlighted the importance of education as a process of liberation and awareness of individuals. He left the Observatory in 2000.

¹⁰⁹ She left the Observatory a few months before Yves Champetier to become Head of the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division in the Department of Social Cohesion and Diversity of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

¹¹⁰ I happened to be the one leading the thematic group on environment. The other groups were focusing on methodology (coordinated by Samuel Thirion); local products (coordinated by Paul Soto); new activities and services (coordinated by André Faggion, specialised in new IT-based services for local development and space planning); tourism (coordinated by Peter Zimmer, founder and manager of FUTOUR, an international tourism agency specialised in sustainable tourism, based in Munich, Germany); and future prospects (coordinated by John Bryden, Scottish University Professor and an outstanding expert on rural development issues in Europe and North America).

¹¹¹ During the eighties I managed a rural development project in Rwanda for some years and in the beginning of the nineties I worked in a local development agency in one of the most peripheral rural areas in South Burgenland (Austria).

¹¹² These “innovation fiches” were short, well-structured stories of innovative actions across the six thematic areas.

leaders, local stakeholders, furthering a thorough understanding of the context in which the innovative action has been carried out.

- The seminar was limited to 40 people, three working languages, including many exchanges in small groups.
- In the aftermath of each seminar, an Observatory file, an “innovation dossier” or technical guide¹¹³ was produced in 1.500 copies and seven languages.
- A periodic LEADER Magazine (30.000 exemplars in 10 languages, 30 dispatched to each LAG) allowed for reaching an even wider public.

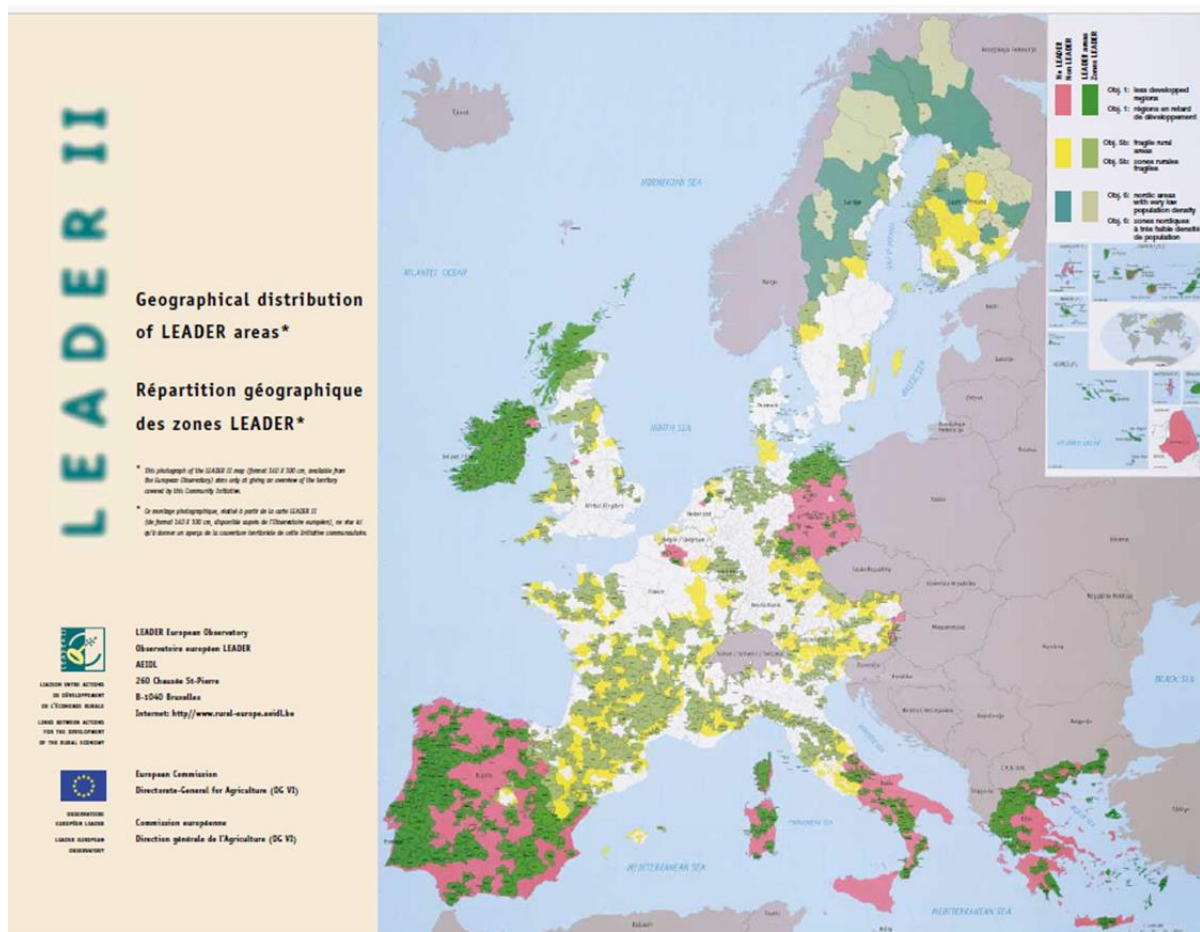


Figure 3 Geographical distribution of LEADER II areas (Source: Yves Champetier, email message 12 Nov. 2024)

Deciphering the code: the LEADER method

It was the thorough analysis of this thesaurus of several hundred “innovation fiches” and the ex-post evaluation of LEADER I which was entrusted to like-minded researchers¹¹⁴ that the **LEADER method** got codified. The presentation of the final results of the LEADER I evaluation during the first general meeting in Bruxelles, to which representatives of all (around 1000) LAGs have been invited besides

¹¹³ See the AEIDL archive: <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecord.htm?idlist=1&range=0002> Most publications authored by the “innovation work group” are listed in the bibliography. Many of these dossiers have been translated into Romanian language. This happened due to the presence of a young intern named **Dacian Cioloș** who would, a few years later, become Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development from 2010 to 2014. Source: AEIDL/UNADEL/Yves Champetier: *L'Europe, acteur majeur du développement des territoires*. Online since 01/02/2010 by Cairn Info. <https://leaderfrance.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/champetier-unadel-fr-1.pdf>

¹¹⁴ **Elena Saraceno** from CRES, a social research institute in Udine/IT; **Heino von Meyer**, an influential OECD expert for rural development; **Jean-Claude Bontron**, a rural development researcher (later also involved in the European ex-post evaluation of LEADER II), and others.

representatives from managing authorities and associated experts, was the main event, during which the **seven LEADER specificities** were broadly disseminated. **The first Cork conference on rural development in November 1996 and the respective Cork declaration** were imbued by the place-based and endogenous development narrative. **Agricultural Commissioner Franz Fischler**, who took the relay from Ray MacSharry in 1995, showed a thorough understanding of what was at stake while promoting the area-based approach in a Directorate-General, which was dominated by top-down sectoral interventions. It was Fischler who coined LEADER as the **“laboratory for innovation in rural areas”** at the Cork Conference and paved the way for safeguarding **LEADER+ (2000-2006)** as the only remaining Community Initiative under the umbrella of DG VI (Agri).

“800 Leader give their views”

(this sub-chapter has been contributed by Yves Champetier)

The major LEADER II conference was held in early November 1997, one year after the first Cork conference. It was organized at the request of Commissioner Franz Fischer, who wanted to take stock of the LEADER Community Initiative and initiate a debate on its future. The preparation time was short for a conference of this size: five months.

All the LEADER groups were interested in discussing the future of the Community Initiative, but they were also concerned about the significant administrative burdens¹¹⁵. The implementation of LEADER was carried out from this phase onwards through the national or regional administrations responsible for implementation. Delays in launching the Initiative, in selecting local action groups, and complicated financing circuits created certain unease, particularly for those who had experienced the flexibility of intervention in the first phase of LEADER.

The title proposed by the Observatory team: **“Towards a new Rural Development Initiative, 800 Leaders speak out”** was validated. The challenge was that each LEADER group could express itself, share the contributions of LEADER, the difficulties encountered, and its expectations for the future.

1.200 participants took part in this major gathering: LEADER groups, administrations participating in the implementation, DG VI (Agri) officers and representatives of other DGs, European parliamentarians, NGOs, etc.

The first day of the meeting was a Sunday.¹¹⁶ The Commission's Borchette conference centre had been mobilised for around **fifty bilingual working groups**, covering both methodological issues and thematic approaches.

At the same time, the **Palais des Congrès in Bruxelles** had been reserved for the three days. On the ground floor, each country presented its achievements, offered tastings of local products, and highlighted its tourist aspects. Meeting points allowed groups who wished to do so to present their approach and an action that they considered exemplary.

A vast cooperation space organised by theme allowed local groups to meet and initiate projects. 300 LEADER beneficiaries were able to meet potential partners. Around a hundred

¹¹⁵ Sounds familiar?

¹¹⁶ This sounds strange to our ears nowadays, but at that time it was a reasonable choice, because weekend flight tariffs (called APEX tariffs) were much cheaper.

cooperation projects could be initiated. This marked an essential starting point for this new feature of LEADER.

And then, it was necessary to learn about the joys of the internet, still in its beginnings. A rural cyberspace allowed participants to show their website, and discover the multilingual site of the European Observatory. **For several years, it figured among the ten most multilingual sites worldwide.**

The following two days, the plenary sessions were held in ten languages, the workshops and working groups in three languages. A summary of the survey of the LEADER groups was presented. Commissioner Fischler presented his expectations and his vision for the future, emphasising once more the role of LEADER as a **"laboratory for innovation in rural areas"**.¹¹⁷

LEADER as a driver of innovation

Among the working groups created within the LEADER II Observatory after the review of the expert pool structure was one outstanding group led by Gilda Farrell, the **"innovation work group"**. Apart from myself, this group consisted of Samuel Thirion, Carlo Ricci (an Italian expert on local product development and marketing), the late Martine François (from the French NGO GRET/Groupe de Recherche et d'Échange Technologique, having extensive experiences in working in the global South), Elena Saraceno and **Paul Soto**. The latter had been raised in London by a Spanish father and an English mother and started his career working on local employment projects in deprived London neighbourhoods and later on extending these through the employment strategy of the Greater London Council¹¹⁸. He then moved to Extremadura where he became the manager of one of the first Spanish LEADER groups and one of the key advisers (as coordinator of the expert group on local products) in the LEADER Observatory. He moved on to Bruxelles in 2000, becoming a consultant for AEIDL in particular. From 2004, he was involved with Yves Champetier in assisting the Commission to define what would become Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (see further below), the equivalent of LEADER for areas dependent on fishing (from 2007 on). A call for tenders was held to set up the network of these territories, which took the name FARNET. A consortium bringing together AEIDL and "Iniciativas económicas y ambientales" (Paul Soto's company) won this call for tender and Paul Soto became team leader of FARNET in 2007; one period later, he eventually **became team leader of the European Network for Rural Development 2014-2020**.

¹¹⁷ The event has been documented in AEIDL Magazine Nr. 16, Winter 1997-1998. https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/GED_CYY/195023591320/LEADER_Mag16-EN.pdf

¹¹⁸ Representing the company in Extremadura which he co-founded - Grupo Alba – in a consortium with AEIDL, IEEP and the Rural Development Company from Scotland. It is worthwhile to present **Paul Soto's personal account** communicated to me via email on 02 October 2024: *"In my case I cut my teeth in urban community based responses to the vicious industrial restructuring that took place during the successive oil crises – place based trade unions bringing together the employed, unemployed and linking issues around jobs, housing and services. Alternative worker-user plans such as Lucas Aerospace showing the technology and skills of workers in an arms factory could be used to produce health equipment and other useful products. These approaches were taken up and articulated by the Greater London Council and other UK metropolitan councils. At their overoptimistic height there was a belief that these participative urban movements could link up with the demands of the miners and organised working class movements.... Only to be swept away by the tides of neoliberalism unleashed by Thatcher and co. Once in Spain I was dismayed to find that the mistakes we had made in the UK by creating a top down bureaucratic welfare state were being repeated by pouring money into a largely unreformed civil service and standard infrastructure. So I found the possibility of marrying the well organised community energy of the Jerte Valley with EU money and a programme like LEADER an incredible opportunity to achieve some practical changes which affected people's lives."*

The in-depth exploitation of the “innovation fiches” and regular meetings in an about two-monthly rhythm allowed the group to produce further dossiers on territorial innovation and the LEADER method during the later years of the nineties. These were also presented at international conferences, for example of the ERSA (European Regional Science Association)¹¹⁹. The work of this group brought forth significant referential documents capturing the purpose and essence of the LEADER method.

LEADER as an emancipatory approach

Against the backdrop of its conceptual history, the inspired practice and the vivid exchanges on the experiences made it is clear that **LEADER had a strong emancipatory momentum**. Rural voices were heard in a different way than before. They were not mediated by planners, politicians or economic stakeholders, they came directly from local people, who ventured in social innovation, disrupting heteronomous patterns of action, showing that taking things in the own hands open up new trajectories for local communities.

From nowadays perspective it may sound trivial that about half of the actions implemented under LEADER I were local tourism projects. Apart from the fact that in those times rural and eco-tourism were not as self-evident and ubiquitous as they are today (particularly in many regions of the European South rural tourism was virtually inexistent), it was the experience that benefits for the whole community were achieved through local people actually pulling together, overcoming silence and mistrust and engaging in passionate collective action. Wherever this participatory departure occurred (which was certainly not the case in all the 217 Local Action Groups of LEADER I) it turned out as **a significant opportunity to experience democracy first hand**.

However, explicit reference to local democracy is missing in official LEADER publications at least during the first decade. Maybe, the Commission did not want to stress this point, as it could be interpreted as a transgression of its defined area of responsibility by ill-minded observers.

Later on, the LEADER-democracy nexus got more openly emphasized. The former Commissioner Franz Fischler, who attended the **Second Cork Conference on Rural Development (Cork 2.0, titled “A better life in rural areas”) in 2016**¹²⁰ as an independent adviser, reportedly said there:

*Our bottom-up approach is not only important to mobilise rural people and to reflect on their own future. It is also a means of implementing the values of democracy.*¹²¹

To sum it up, I refer to what Michel Laine and Yves Champetier said in a retrospective during the AEIDL General Assembly in December 2023. They consider the **coincidental occurrence of three decisive factors** as decisive for the genesis and creative phase of LEADER until the turn of the century:

- **the general positive institutional culture at the European Commission under Delors, which welcomed and actively encouraged innovation,**

¹¹⁹ https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/113408/1/ERSA1998_066.pdf

¹²⁰ Organised under the Irish Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner Phil Hogan on 5-6 September 2016 in Cork, Ireland. https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/sites/default/files/cork_newsletter-digital-print.pdf

¹²¹ Yves Champetier: L'Europe, acteur majeur du développement des territoires. AEIDL/UNADEL 2010, p.8.

- a committed group of militant civil servants in key DGs of the Commission and in national administrations, and
- a highly motivated and creative band of networkers, implementers and spreaders of the message.

The small, but significant reconfiguration of the LEADER specificities

The LEADER method has been defined as the combined application of its **seven specificities**¹²². According to the LEADER I evaluation and the innovation dossiers of the European LEADER II Observatory, the seven LEADER specificities¹²³ were:

- The area-based approach
- The bottom-up approach
- The local partnership
- Innovation
- Multi-sectoral approach
- Cooperation and Networking
- Decentralised management and financing.

During the transition from LEADER II to LEADER+ these seven principles have been surreptitiously modified by the Commission. They remained seven, but the core principle of local governance, the decentralised management and financing disappeared. Instead, Cooperation and Networking were separated. I repeatedly brought this up¹²⁴, as well as Yves Champetier, but we never got a really plausible explanation for this switch. Yves Champetier writes:

*At one point, a specificity that was nevertheless essential disappeared, that of the local management and financing. However, this was a very bold innovation: not only do we decide locally, but we manage the funds locally, not only the European funds, but also the national counterparts (whether from the State or from the various levels of local authorities). These counterparts should not be allocated to the local action group project by project, but globally, in co-financing of the entire strategy. The objective was (is) to go all the way with the delegation of responsibility to local actors, giving them a lot of credibility to effectively support local projects. And it is in this area that the most significant difficulties would arise, and increase from one period to the next.*¹²⁵

15 years later, the seemingly “lost” governance feature got reintroduced with the drafting of the CLLD Measure in the Common Provision Regulation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (we’ll come to that two pages further down). It limits the tasks of Managing Authorities to checking the eligibility of actions planned, and explicitly not on the decision on the selection of projects.¹²⁶

¹²² According to the first page of the latest LEADER Evaluation Guidelines of the Helpdesk of the EU CAP Network (May 2024). The “specificities” are also called “characteristics”, “key features” or “operational principles”.

¹²³ See the original definition in AEIDL 1999a, Rural Innovation Dossier Nr. 4, written by a work group led by **Elena Saraceno**: <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecordVisio.htm?idlist=1&record=19159294124919774769>

¹²⁴ E.g. during my keynote speech for the Conference “LEADER Reloaded” (Evora, 27 Sept. 2018): Footnote 15 on page 3 of the keynote paper. <https://leaderconference.minhaterra.pt/rwst/files/I21-20181009XLEADERXRELOADEDXPAPERXROBERTXLUKESCH.PDF>

¹²⁵ Yves Champetier/AEIDL/UNADEL 2019, p.4.

¹²⁶ Relating to the political debate which finally led to this outcome, I quote **Jean-Pierre Vercruyse** who had moved from AEIDL to the DG MARE and actually drafted parts of the CLLD Regulation: “This was a difficult battle in Trilogues and only stayed intact thanks to the strong intervention of **Nicolas Martin**, a British Director in DG REGIO at the time.” (Email from JP Vercruyse to Yves Champetier from 27 Nov. 2024, forwarded to me by the latter on Jan. 08, 2025).

Nowadays, the LEADER method as the “combined application of the seven principles” is defined in the following, slightly modified way:

- Bottom-up approach
- Area-based approach
- Local partnership
- An integrated multi-sectoral strategy
- Innovation
- Networking
- Territorial cooperation.¹²⁷

The mainstreaming of LEADER

LEADER+: A bumpy transition

Further above I have mentioned that the LEADER + Observatory of Rural Areas for the period 2000-2006 started only with a considerable delay (2004). This hiatus was not accidental. It was characteristic for the tidal turn of the relationship between the Commission and its satellite system of experts.

A first call for a LEADER+ Observatory was issued in due time. A consortium around Paul Soto, members of the LEADER II Observatory innovation work group and more partners submitted a comprehensive bid, which contained similar or even wider competencies compared to that of LEADER II.

But the rules of the game have changed after the downfall of the Santer Commission. The bid was revoked and a new call for tender was eventually published. In the second edition of the bid the Observatory was conceived as sitting inside the Commission; what was put on tender henceforth was the **Contact Point of the LEADER Observatory of Rural Areas**. As was said above, this bid was won by LRDP Kantor. Due to its late start (2004) it operated until 2014, practically stretching over the next funding period (the LEADER Axis of the EAFRD).¹²⁸

Looking back to the first years of the 21st century, we could observe a second hiatus: high-ranking officers within the EC and in certain member states allegedly (it can only be reported by hearsay) were inclined to stop LEADER by 2006. However, the **European ex-post evaluation of LEADER II**¹²⁹ and a subsequent study about the pros and cons of **mainstreaming LEADER**¹³⁰ bolstered the stance of the pro-LEADER faction in the EC and in the member states **for continuing and consolidating LEADER by integrating it into the EAFRD as an obligatory measure** (to be endowed with at least 5% of the overall rural development budget). This happened eventually.

¹²⁷ Explained more in detail under https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/networking/leader/leader-explained_en

¹²⁸ As for the “bumpy transition”, Haris Martinos made a similar observation: “It was a longish period of lack of EU level network support creating problems for the national networks and I offered to step in, in close cooperation with the Swedish (Hans-Olof Stålgren) and French (Dorothee Duguet) networks. I couldn't be TL as I was running the UK network and had other commitments. I moved into that position in 2009/10 before officially retiring” (Email notice from Haris Martinos from 30 October 2024).

¹²⁹ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/ext-eval-leader2-full1_2003_en_0.pdf

¹³⁰ I happened to be the team leader in both assignments.

The institutionalisation of LEADER as CLLD

The integration into the rural development programmes entailed more bureaucracy, and at least in some member states, an emboldened sectoral influence, which was finally rectified by the CLLD measure in the **Common Provisions Regulation (No. 1303/2013)** by which the LEADER method got generalised as **Community-led Local Development (CLLD)** across the ESI Funds¹³¹.

We have already recognised and exemplified the eminent role of committed people in the transfer of innovative ideas and of LEADER in particular from one network node to another. The encryption of LEADER into the genetic code of cohesion policy as CLLD has very much to do with **Dirk Ahner**, who moved from the DG Agri as Vice Director General into the DG Regio as Director General. In the DG Agri he had been one of the architects of the decoupling of area-based payments and a strong voice for concerns in respect to climate change¹³². He served in the DG Regio from 2007 to 2011 (until his retirement), in the time when the Barca Report was published (2009), so to say in the peak phase of place-based territorial development. Dirk Ahner was also a strong supporter of the transfer of area-based local development approaches to the West Balkans¹³³.

Now CLLD has become an instrument of European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 for local, rural, urban and peri-urban development¹³⁴, based on a single methodology and optional mono- or multi-funds support from ESI Funds.¹³⁵ The potential of multi-funding has not been exploited so far. During the period 2014-2020 only 15 member states have actually used the multi-fund option, and the current period does not show much progress in this direction. Paul Soto has a blunt judgment on this issue:

“Integrated multi-sectoral local strategies do not require multi-funding. They simply require all funds to have the flexibility to fund what local people say is needed at local level. Unless the rules between funds are unified you multiply the complexity faced at local level by the number of funds.”¹³⁶

The re-adjustment of the legislative text towards a truly area-based, participatory, innovative and multi-sectoral intervention tool called CLLD, promoted and implemented by an autonomous local multi-actor partnership, happened in the course of incessant discussions involving EC and member states officials, the European Network for Rural Development¹³⁷ and the Commission. The tireless

¹³¹ EAFRD, ERDF, ESF, EMFF. CLLD remains mandatory in the EAFRD only.

¹³² Dirk Ahner said during the European Week of Regions and Cities: “Climate change – both, as far as fighting climate change is concerned, and as far as adaptation to the effects of climate change is concerned – needs best to be done at the regional level, because it depends very much on the existing local conditions. So regional policy is particularly well placed to respond to these criteria.”

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/videos/open-days-2009-interview-with-dirk-ahner-director-general-for-regional-policy

¹³³ See for example EC/DG Agri 2014: “Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans.” This report also highlights the eminent role played by PREPARE in the transfer of integrated area-based local development in South East Europe. Thanks to Hannes Lorenzen for this important reference.

¹³⁴ The LEADER method had already been introduced in the Fishery Fund Regulation of the previous period, 2007-2013. Similarly to what happened in the DG Fisheries, the pollenisation of the DG Regio with LEADER has to do with the movement of key staff from the DG Agri to the DG Regio.

¹³⁵ https://elard.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/community_en.pdf

¹³⁶ Paul Soto in an email from 10 October 2024.

¹³⁷ Funded from the EAFRD to accompany rural development implementation. Since 2008 the European LEADER Network has become a sub-section of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), from 2023 onward renamed into the EU CAP Network.

efforts of some committed officers in the Commission (across all ESI Funds) shall be highlighted here.¹³⁸

Although the EAFRD has been removed from the ESI Funds by 2023, the CLLD approach has been institutionalised to such a high degree that it has become mainstream policy in its own right – even if quite a minor and isolated one.

The rural network grows, staffing for LEADER shrinks

From 2014 on the Observatory which until then had focused entirely on LEADER became the **Contact Point of the European Network of Rural Development**. The management of the **Contact Point of the ENRD 2014-2020** was entrusted to a consortium including AEIDL, IEEP, the Rural Development Company from Scotland, with Paul Soto from *Grupo Alba* as team leader. It had roughly the same number of staff as the three observatories that had existed up to then but from then on, they had to deal with the entire Second Rural Development Pillar of the CAP. **From around 20 full timers working in Brussels on LEADER the numbers fell to around one – and have stayed at this level ever since.** The top theme of work groups facilitated by the network staffers remained more or less unchanged over time: to find ways and means to simplify administrative procedures and to make LEADER more impactful on the ground.

Since 2022 the structure grew into the **European CAP Network**, with an Assembly as the main governance body (comprising up to 200 members representing various stakeholder groups) alongside a Steering Group. The Assembly has three permanent sub-groups, one of which is the subgroup on LEADER and territorial development.¹³⁹ Following the trend to all-inclusive servicing, the **CAP Network now has to cover the entire Common Agricultural Policy and not just the second Rural Development Pillar**. It can be concluded that *“resources devoted to networking specifically around LEADER have developed almost in inverse proportion to the expansion of the number of groups.”*¹⁴⁰

But there are increasing opportunities for more exchange and discussion taking place outside the networks framed by European institutions. In **2011**, a small expert group around the founder of LRDP, Haris Martinos, reactivated the long-time dormant LEDA network¹⁴¹ and initiated the voluntary **LDnet expert group**¹⁴², which runs the only web resource covering all kinds of information for local development in Europe (and also beyond), be it from urban, rural or coastal areas.

LEADER spreads out

CLLD implementation in coastal areas (funded from the EMFF since 2007) got its own EU-funded network coordination hub and think tank servicing the (around 350) Fishery LAGs (**FARNET/Fisheries Areas Network, put in place 2007**).

¹³⁸ Apart from the abovementioned Dirk Ahner, it is noteworthy to mention Nicolas Martin (DG REGIO) and Jean-Pierre Vercruysse at this point.

¹³⁹ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/european-cap-networks-assembly_en

¹⁴⁰ Paul Soto in an email from 10 October 2024.

¹⁴¹ See above: dating back to the beginning of the nineties of last century!

¹⁴² www.ldnet.eu. Already in their retirement, Jean-Pierre Pellegrin acted as treasurer and Haris Martinos as secretary of LDnet.

It was **Stefanos Samaras**, head of unit at DG Fisheries, who initiated the implementation of Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund. **Stefanos Samaras was previously head of unit at DG VI, working together with Michel Laine.** In 2004, he wanted to implement a LEADER-type approach for areas dependent on fishing in order to better promote fishery products, develop complementary players, and diversify the economy of these territories. He called on Yves Champetier and Paul Soto to support him in implementing this orientation. At first, it was necessary to raise awareness and mobilise the national fisheries administrations, which were initially very reluctant. To this end, six European seminars were held between 1994 and 1996, the first taking place in Tallinn, Estonia. **Jean-Pierre Vercruysse** from the LEADER Observatory joined the team, some years before he changed sides and got employed in the (then so-called) DG MARE 2008 to 2017. A specific mission also took place in Romania in 1995, with Dacian Cioloş as Minister of Agriculture at that time. As part of this Axis 4, the FARNET network has been set up and Paul Soto took charge. A small team of high-level specialists in local development and in fisheries used methodologies quite close to those having been used by the LEADER Observatory, including the depiction and analysis of innovative actions, field seminars, FARNET Magazine, technical files and guides. These products remain highly relevant for all those who are involved in local development, whether or not in coastal areas.¹⁴³

FARNET brought together some of the old LEADER experts with new ones (e.g. **Urszula Budzich-Tabor** from the pre-accession support NGO **PREPARE**¹⁴⁴) to experiment with community-led development in areas shaped by a traditional sector like fishing thus injecting some new blood, enthusiasm and many more innovatory examples.¹⁴⁵

Through the European pre-accession programmes **IPARD I-III** and the neighbourhood programmes **ENPARD II-IV** the LEADER approach spread to the Western Balkans, to Türkiye and other Mediterranean countries, to Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, sometimes with co-funding from UNDP or USAID. Individual LAGs and national networks (e.g. the Spanish, Portuguese and Finnish network hubs) contributed to transferring the experiences to other continents (Latin America, Africa), whereas **ELARD** (see further below) followed invitations to Russia and China to present the approach. These efforts were carried out with great enthusiasm, but very often the lack of political understanding and will of the relevant authorities, the lack of continuity in funding and the lack of resources to experiment and to customise the approach to these new and particular environments stood against a full-fledged take up and self-propelling evolution of LEADER abroad. What undoubtedly remains is inspiration.

However, **CLLD in urban areas** (funded from ESIF, since 2014) remains without any related network hub or think tank, apart from the expert network **URBACT (since 2002)**, which had not been created for that purpose and is not commissioned to servicing CLLD groups. In practice there are many links between URBACT experts and urban CLLD activities, but all in all it is fair to say that CLLD funded from the ERDF, and particularly from the ESF, has no network hub to hold on to. In a study on *“The ESF and community-led development: Lessons for the future”* the authors fall short of explicitly

¹⁴³ Thanks to Yves Champetier for this information.

¹⁴⁴ PREPARE (Pre-accession Partnership for Rural Europe) was founded in 1999 in the aftermath of a so-called “travelling workshop” organized by Estonian and Swedish NGOs. Its roots are therefore linked to the spreading of the Rural Parliament movements which originated in Sweden.

¹⁴⁵ AEIDL keeps the archive of FARNET on its download site: <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecord.htm?list=table&table=-3&idinlist=3&what=farnet>

demanding a networking support unit at European level, but its recommendations are unmistakably pointing into that direction¹⁴⁶:

“LAGs and other actors want more open and regular communication across all EU funds. Exchanges of different LAG experiences are essential for knowledge sharing and community building among geographically dispersed localities and actors. Learning can be facilitated by creating links within and between actors and projects, and by drawing lessons from both within and outside different Member States with special attention given to what has worked and what has not, and the reasons for this. To support such processes, efforts by the Commission to promote detailed information exchange about CLLD experiences across Member States and ESI Funds are recommended.”

The LEADER community, spanning institutional and civil society networks

All in all, what we observe over the past four decades is a vibrant and growing **European cluster of committed experts, officials and development agents** who change roles and positions over time, but stay committed to the cause of area-based, bottom-up, partnership-based, innovative and multi-sectoral local development, with systematic reliance on internal and external networking, inter-regional and trans-national cooperation.

We could look at many a biography of experts engaged in external consultancy, some switching into pluri-annual positions in network nodes (be it the official networks or the bottom-up network of associative national networks¹⁴⁷ called **ELARD¹⁴⁸, founded in 1999**), or even into the ranks of the European Commission itself, as we see in the examples of **Jean-Pierre Vercruysse** (expert for AEIDL in the LEADER I coordination unit and in the LEADER II Observatory, eventually moving to the EC-DG MARE being responsible for the Fishery LAGs (FLAGs) from 2008 to 2017; or **Pedro Brosei** (from the German National Network Unit to the FARNET contact point); or **Maria-Christina Makrandreou**, starting as member of the LEADER I coordination unit and the LEADER II Observatory, then head of the Greek LEADER National Network Unit, eventually becoming officer in the DG Agri; or the Hungarian **Edina Ocsko**, having started after her studies with LRDP in London, then working in the LEADER+ National Network Unit in UK, moving to Bruxelles to become ENRD team member and finally, as managing director of the E40 consultancy firm, leading the preparatory actions for Smart Villages; or **Urszula Budzich-Tabor**, who liaised, as the Director of the Polish Rural Development Bureau and Cooperation Fund, local actors with the PREPARE network during the pre-accession phase, joined the FARNET team in 2009 (which in 2022 morphed into the FAMENET¹⁴⁹) and now works for the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) under the responsibility of the AEIDL, besides being President of LDnet since 2020; or **Marta Marczis**, having worked for 25 years in LEADER programmes

¹⁴⁶ European Commission/GD for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 1922, p. 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ It would be worthwhile to write a biography of the “non-institutional” national networks which eventually formed ELARD, as their emergence has not been foreseen or planned in the first place. All of them have a very particular history of coming into being. Jean-Pierre Vercruysse writes in their respect: “They (the associative networks) were and still are a strong lobbying force behind LEADER. The French network was originally set up as an answer to the arrogance of the officials of DATAR in charge of LEADER who practically insulted the groups in a meeting which in turn led to the immediate creation of the French network” (JP Vercruysse in an email to Yves Champetier on 27 Nov. 2024, forwarded to me by the latter on 08 Jan. 2025).

¹⁴⁸ European LEADER Association for Rural Development. The founding organisations were the national LEADER networks of France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain, aiming to support rural development across Europe by promoting the LEADER approach. The organisation has since expanded to represent over 2,500 LAGs from 26 countries, including some non-EU member states, reinforcing rural communities by supporting policy advocacy, international cooperation, and knowledge-sharing activities.

¹⁴⁹ The “Fisheries and Aquaculture Monitoring and Evaluation Network” having a wider scope of tasks than FARNET which had been focused on CLLD implementation by Fishery Local Action Groups (FLAGs).

in several areas of the Balkans, originating in her involvement as co-founder of PREPARE, together with the late **Michael Dower**¹⁵⁰. She was elected president of the AEIDL in 2010. We also find **Hannes Lorenzen** as one of the boundary spanners and connectors at European level. Having started as a staffer of the Green faction in the European Parliament from 1985 on, he served as a senior adviser in the European Parliament since 1990 until his retirement in 2019. He was founding member of PREPARE, ARC2020 and the Forum Synergies. Post-retirement he acts as president of ARC2020.

We actually see **Michel Laine**, the author of the LEADER I, LEADER II and EQUAL communications and regulatory documents, closing his career cycle to join the AEIDL as a board member long after his retirement from the Commission in the zero years. At present he is Vice-president of the AEIDL.

Synthesis: overview of six phases of LEADER implementation

- **LEADER I** was a Community Initiative funded from the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund/Section Guidance (EAGGF-GU) directly to Local Action Groups (as direct project beneficiaries). The fact that the local action groups directly responded to the call for proposals suggests that there was already a certain status of social capital in the area which was strong enough in the sense of “bonding” to allow for a collective endeavour and also innovative enough in the sense of “bridging” to reach out to opportunities for direct support from the European Commission and to learning from and with other like-minded local action groups.
- **LEADER II** was a Community Initiative with the member states and regions as intermediaries. LEADER II was implemented in regional or national operational programmes. It was applicable only in Objective 1 (less developed) and Objective 5b (lagging rural areas). EAGGF-GU, ERDF and ESF were contributing to these OPs in a multi-funds approach. Whereas the main source of LEADER was EAGGF-GU, the money which was handed down to LAGs was not tagged, but delivered from the managing authority of the national or regional LEADER Operational Programme. Indeed, Member States have grasped the atmosphere in which they are participating in something new, innovative and even ground breaking. Thus the networks taking shape around LEADER got enriched with administrative officials at the level of national and regional administrations. However, the establishment of an additional management and administrative layer is not possible without the use of additional procedural and control mechanisms and the gradual transformation of LAGs from initiatives with a majority of local activists into partnerships comprising a growing number of delegated members representing the institutions and authorities which have not subscribed to the innovative thrust of the initiative with the same intensity of commitment.
- **LEADER+** was a Community Initiative exclusively funded from EAGGF. In Objective 1 areas (whose development was lagging behind) from the Agricultural Guidance Fund (EAGGF-GU), in all other rural areas from the Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGGF-G)¹⁵¹. Having learned from past experience, the programmatic orientation of LEADER+ tried to influence local strategies to become more focused, with less, but stringently pursued strategic priorities, and more clearly set, measurable targets. The widening of eligible zones and the good reputation of LEADER led to a constant growth of local action groups in number and also in size of single groups. Many

¹⁵⁰ **Michael Dower** managed the National Park of the Peak district in England, acted as Director General of the British Countryside Commission, co-founded ECOVAST (the European Council of Villages and Small Towns), PREPARE and the AgriCultural Convention (2003), renamed into ARC2020.

¹⁵¹ An unusual arrangement, but I cannot explain why that was done. It makes the impression of a makeshift solution.

member states pursued the strategy of quasi total area coverage. While average area size and number of LAGs kept growing, funding did not grow proportionally so that the intensity of animation which was typical for some of the pioneer LAGs of the early days could not be upheld even in the managing authorities' best intent.¹⁵² This growth took a further toll on the innovative edge of many local development strategies so that the original intention to sharpen their strategic focus on the basis of a thorough understanding of the particular local advantages often had the opposite effect, namely further dilution and dispersion of the activities of local action groups.¹⁵³ This was highlighted and seriously criticized by the European Court of Auditors in its Special Report on the Implementation of the LEADER Approach in the year 2010.¹⁵⁴

- **The fourth transversal LEADER axis of the EAFRD (2007-2014)** was funded from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) created in 2007 as a self-standing continuation of the former Guidance Section of the EAGGF. The successful integration of LEADER into the regulatory corset of the CAP marked the final stage of the innovation cycle of LEADER as a rural development initiative.¹⁵⁵ Owing to the integration into the EAFRD, the sectoral influence gained traction in many countries so that the transversal character of the intervention got a few scratches.
- **Community-led Local Development (CLLD) 2014-2021/23** has been conceived as the generalised local development approach over all Cohesion Funds. In rural areas CLLD continued to get funded as Measure 19 of the EAFRD (2014-2022) under the name LEADER. The CLLD Measure in the CPR Regulation can be considered as the most elaborate version of all times; it fixes some of the shortcomings highlighted in the above mentioned ECR report as well as admonished by LAGs and LEADER networks during the previous period.
- **CLLD/LEADER 2023-2027** is funded from the EAFRD under Intervention Area 3 of the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The Second Special Report on LEADER by the ECR, issued in 10/2022, stated progress compared to the issues raised in the first report, but still points out the implementation shortcomings of this very good approach. It urges the managing authorities and the EC to monitor the expected impacts on improved social capital and local governance, apart from the required enhanced quality of realised projects.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Paul Soto told me the example of his LEADER I LAG in Valle del Jerte (Extremadura, Spain) where he, as a LAG manager, had four assistants in an area of 11 villages with 12.000 inhabitants – unthinkable nowadays. Source: Paul Soto, email from 10 October 2024.

¹⁵³ This phenomenon also has seemingly affected the Smart Specialisation Strategies, eligible for funding from the EFRD (DG Regio) since 2013. There is nothing to wonder about it. Successful innovations entail institutional changes. These changes raise their responsiveness and capacity to absorb a higher variety of requirements. This means rising complexity and challenge to absorb this complexity by setting standards and norms which hit back to the innovative actors (who actually had started the innovation cycle) who feel their room of expression and development shrink. The element of surprise, so important for innovation, especially the disruptive kind of it, takes a farewell, at first almost imperceptibly, but irretrievably over time.

¹⁵⁴ European Court of Auditors (ECR) 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Drawing an analogy with the fact that the human genome consists of integrated viral DNA to at least 8 to 10% (some authors mention a much higher percentage; the research is still ongoing) is intriguing. De Carvalho, F.P.R. et al. (2016): *Endogenous retroviruses: an evolutionary history*.

¹⁵⁶ European Court of Auditors (ECR) 2022.

Stage	Period	Funds eligible ¹	No. of LAGs
LEADER I	1991-93	EAGGF, ERDF, ESF	217
LEADER II	1994-99	EAGGF, ERDF, ESF	821
LEADER+	2000-06	EAGGF	1,153
LEADER axis	2007-13	EAFRD, EMFF	2,200
CLLD	2014-20	EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF, ESF	3,333
CLLD/LEADER	2021-27	EAFRD, EMFAF, ERDF, ESF+	tbc ²

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the CAP Implementation Contact Point

Figure 4 CLLD/LEADER phases, contributing funds and number of Local Action Groups¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Kah, S. 2024, p.1.

PART III

LEADER AT THE CROSSROADS

Recent developments in European agricultural and rural policies

Ambitious objectives, implementation delegated

As was mentioned above, the initially creeping¹⁵⁸ and now accelerating trend towards re-nationalisation and re-sectoralisation¹⁵⁹ of EU policies led to a reversal of the integration of the **EAFRD** into the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), **back into the fold of the CAP (EAGF)**. What remained was an overarching **result orientation**, which, for the first time, comprised the direct, area-based payments from the Guarantee Fund as well. With the **post-2020 reform**, the two CAP pillars were merged into one single CAP including all co-funding titles, to be operationalized in **national CAP Strategic Plans**, which are supposed to contribute to **ten specific European objectives**. Rural areas figure in only one out of these ten objectives. LEADER which looks back on outstanding achievements regarding its relatively modest volume is not mentioned at all on the respective website.¹⁶⁰ Among the **eight types of measures and schemes** six are focused on the agricultural sector, one on climate, environment and animal welfare, and one (**“projects on rural development”**) on the development of rural areas.

In 2022, the European **Long Term Vision for the Rural Areas (LTVRA)** has been elaborated in an extensive consultation process across the 27 member states. This vision informs the **Rural Pact**¹⁶¹

which was endorsed by agricultural and rural stakeholders on **16 June 2022**. Under the headings **“stronger”, “connected”, “resilient”** and **“prosperous”** an **Action Plan** has been elaborated, which provides the scope of work to be accomplished until **2040**. A Rural Observatory with comprehensive statistical material, maps and thematic analyses has been put online, accessible through the Rural Pact homepage¹⁶².



Figure 5 The ten specific objectives of the CAP 2023-27

The LTVRA does not only affirm the important role of local empowerment in rural development¹⁶³, it also mirrors the main principles and goals of the **Green Deal** of the Commission, constituting one out of six priorities set under EC President Ursula von der Leyen for the period 2023-2027. The **Green Deal** stipulates **climate neutrality by 2050** and other health, environmental and biodiversity related goals. It is unnecessary to say that the implications of the Green Deal on production limits and quality

¹⁵⁸ This trend may have started around the turn of the century, but gained traction with the global financial crisis and the subsequent debt crisis, which damaged trust in the Euro (temporarily) and between member states (enduringly).

¹⁵⁹ Both are no strategic choices, but consequence of political power play and lobbying.

¹⁶⁰ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27/key-policy-objectives-cap-2023-27_en

¹⁶¹ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

¹⁶² <https://observatory.rural-vision.europa.eu/?lng=en&ctx=RUROBS>

¹⁶³ See for example the “Compass for Local Empowerment in Rural Areas” (co-produced by the European Partnership for Citizen-empowerment/SBEW) and the European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA in May 2024) which draws its rationale directly from the LTVRA. <https://cdn.ruralcommunities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ERCA-SBE-Compass-Local-empowerment.pdf>

requirements have raised concerns and resistance among farming organisations – again¹⁶⁴. In the wake of their violent protests in Bruxelles and in the capitals of member states a number of measures were revoked or watered down; the outlooks for the Green Deal are bleak, considering the latest national election results in member states.

To say it bluntly, a stale taste remains while thinking about all these well-meant initiatives, wordy promises and programmatic declarations. They are increasingly detached from factual policy implementation which is increasingly determined by national decision makers and powerful stakeholder groups.

The latest leaks about **the idea (for the period 2028-2035) of merging the over 530 programs – from cohesion to the CAP – into a single fund divided across different sectors and disbursed in the form of 27 national budgets** (one per member state which would define how, to whom and where to spend the money) has raised eyebrows and put pupils in rotation: *“A fund management model very similar to that of the Recovery Fund with which there is a risk – this is the j'accuse of local authorities – of renationalising, and not decentralizing, the spending of cohesion funds.”*¹⁶⁵

The ARC2020 draws a bleak picture of the future, guessing that the President of the Commission, Von der Leyen, is in favour of this idea:

*“Essentially, the last CAP reform was a dry run for rolling this out on a larger scale. And, from the lessons learned over the past few years, that means we can have a few ideas about how this might go... This re-nationalisation could reduce the role of regions from being managing authorities to intermediate bodies or even simply beneficiaries, shaking up the division of powers between the different levels of government in many member states. The loss of regional power would likely be particularly pronounced in centralised member states like France, and risks competition between municipalities for their share of the centralised money pot. This would be particularly destructive for bottom-up approaches and programmes, such as LIFE, LEADER, HORIZON, which have for decades mobilised local initiatives, enhanced voluntary work and attracted private investments thus stabilising a rural infrastructure to create added value and income on the local and regional level.”*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Attentive readers might feel the annoyed mood in which this phrase has been written. I have no doubts in the legitimacy of many issues raised during these protests. But they are deeply distorted. First, the protests denounce EC/government measures which make true sense for one part and seem utterly unreasonable for others. The uniform and indistinct treatment of all farmers and all production systems is an accident waiting to happen. Fortunately, this bias was at least addressed in the latest Report on the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture (https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/main-initiatives-strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en). Secondly, the big farming organisations (the “agricultural lobby” in common parlance) pretend to represent all farmers equitably, regardless of conventional or organic, as if a subsistence farm or a small-sized family farm had anything in common with the agricultural estates run by shareholder companies. Smaller organisations such as organised in the Via Campesina are simply ignored in the political arena. In reality, small and medium-sized family farms have more in common with other non-agricultural professions, businesses, initiatives and rural actors of all kinds than with world market producers and agribusinesses upstream and downstream of the value chain. This representation gap has not really been addressed so far.

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.vogon.today/economic-scenarios/this-is-why-it-is-important-to-centralize-cohesion-funds-by-vincenzo-caccioppoli/2024/10/12/>

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.arc2020.eu/the-eu-is-mulling-a-seismic-budgetary-shift-what-would-this-mean-for-agri-and-rural-areas/> ; see also the message from AEIDL: <https://www.aeidl.eu/news/news/post-2027-eu-budget-be-careful-what-you-wish-for/?cmplz-force-reload=1730046922129>

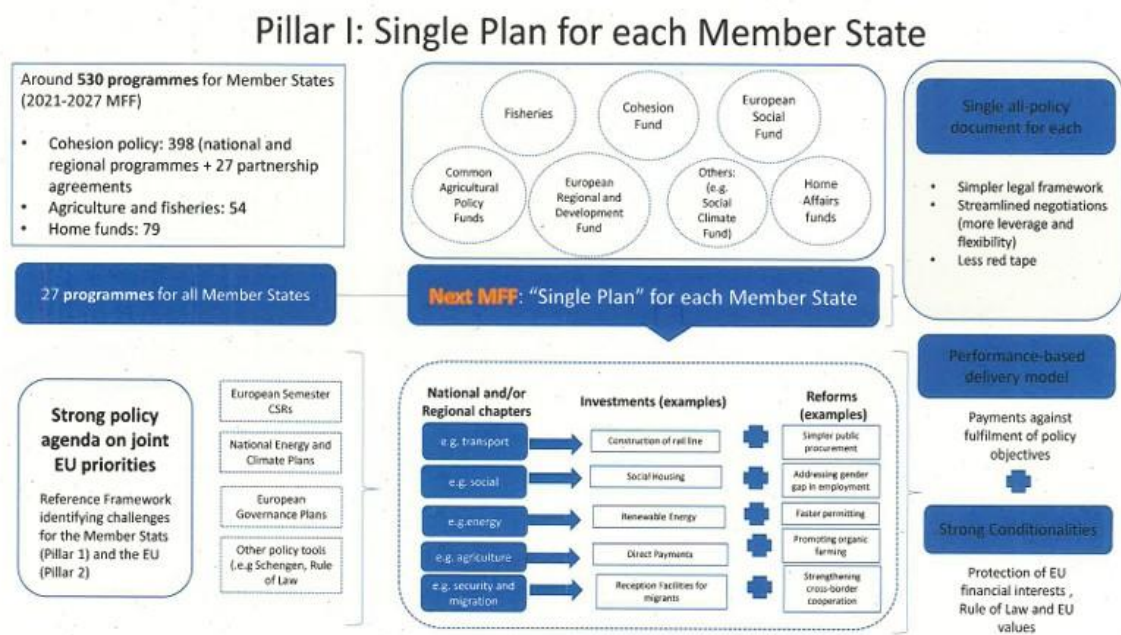


Figure 6 The structure of the leaked budget reform plan

Not surprisingly, the President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Vasco A. Cordeiro, expressed his strong opposition to that idea, pleading for the opposite: strengthening place-based approaches, i.e. **a stronger emphasis on the territorial aspects of agricultural rural development** and the **handing down of the CAP fund to the regions, placing greater emphasis on structural policy measures** in sparsely populated areas. The opinion of the CoR, laid down in the Logroño declaration from 31 October 2023¹⁶⁷, also demands the reinforcement of Community-led Local Development (CLLD) under cohesion policy to finance non-agricultural rural development. The CoR has called on EU institutions and Member States for access to the LEADER programmes to be simplified – for the umpteenth time.

These thoughts resonate with the observations made by Andrés Rodríguez-Pose in his Article titled *"The revenge of places that don't matter (and what to do about it)"*: He argues that while interpersonal disparities have been analysed as drivers of populist voting in Europe as well as in the United States, **territorial disparities** most probably have a much larger effect on the inhabitants of "places that don't matter":

"The populist revolt is being erected along territorial cleavages and will affect, first and foremost, the very areas that are pushing it forward..."

...meaning the more dynamic, diverse and prosperous urban agglomerations that thrive best under conditions which the *"leading thinker on creativity"* Richard Florida¹⁶⁸ has acronymed "the 3T": talent, technology and tolerance. Just think about the Brexit vote in 2016, one of the first events in the cascade of revenge at the ballot box – the second one of this kind followed with the election of Donald J. Trump to become the 45th President of the United States...and the 47th, to top it all off.

¹⁶⁷ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/thriving-rural-areas-are-key-eus-future-regions-and-cities-underline>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/innovation-industry/news/talent-technology-and-tolerance-key-to-attracting-creative-workers/>

In my paper “**LEADER Reloaded**” for the Conference bearing the same name¹⁶⁹ in the Portuguese town of Évora in 2018, I had pointed out the latent danger which lurks in rural estrangement. The “calls for a radical renewal of LEADER” quoted in this paper sound eerily topical, simply because they have not been heeded by the relevant authorities¹⁷⁰.

It’s not just the feeling of being left behind, but also the conscience of increasingly depending on transfer incomes and the perceived loss of autonomy and self-reliance which contributes to a simmering feeling of dissatisfaction and the need for revenge at the ballot box. Rodríguez-Pose states that these disquieting tendencies would have to be tackled by better regional policies:

“Tapping into untapped potential in all regions in a co-ordinated and systematic way requires policies aimed not at providing transfers or welfare, but at enhancing the opportunities of most territories, regardless of their level of development or economic trajectory and taking into account local context. In this scenario tackling institutional inefficiencies and bottlenecks head on and emphasising portable skills through measures aimed at boosting training, promoting entrepreneurship, and facilitating the assimilation of knowledge and innovation, becomes a must.... There is no complete guarantee that this type of policies will stem all the risks, but they do provide the best options to enhance the opportunities of individuals and workers to thrive and prosper, regardless of where they live. Not trying will only make things worse, bypass economic development opportunities, and lead to a world in which the revenge of the places that don’t matter will be fully justified as continued economic, social, and territorial conflict continues to erode the economic, social, and political foundations on which current and future well-being are based.”¹⁷¹

The journey continues

After all the conceptual modifications, most of which are positive, the implementation of LEADER or other CLLD is becoming increasingly complex in many countries, forcing groups to use up their strength trying to resolve administrative problems, discouraging many project leaders, who do not have sufficient cash to wait for the disbursement of public co-funding.

However, the idea of innovation remains relevant, even if it is combined in very different ways from one country to another; LEADER groups that are more dynamic than others find solutions with their management authorities to facilitate the implementation of projects.

Also, some Member States, despite many delays in starting programming periods, find ways to keep technical teams in place, in order to avoid the loss of know-how that occurred in many countries when technical assistance funding disappeared.

Unlike in the early days of LEADER, rural areas and people are now represented by social and institutional networks. Rural areas do have a voice. However, the question remains how much political clout they have gained compared to other well-represented interest groups belonging to the agro-industrial complex or metropolitan areas.

¹⁶⁹ Organised by the European LEADER network ELARD and the Portuguese LEADER network MinhaTerra from September 26 to 28, 2018, in the Portuguese town of Évora.

¹⁷⁰ Lukesch R. 2018, p. 11. This conference was designed as a sequel of a conference organised by the LEADER + Observatory of Rural Areas on 22-23 November 2007 at the same place devoted to reflect on “15 years of LEADER”.

¹⁷¹ Rodríguez-Pose A. 2017, p.32-24.

However, they are there, a steadfast crowd of rural activists, farmers, academics and other experts, whose main focus always lay on the potential of small-structured, diverse, low-input and resilient production systems in syntonny with the regenerative capacity of the natural environment and the pluri-active nature of rural economies. These viewpoints have been and are reflected in the ongoing dialogue in the networks and publications from academics around the **Groupe de Bruges**¹⁷², and by the deeds of committed experts, public officials and practitioners in the **Via Campesina movement**, the **Agricultural and Rural Convention (ARC2020)**¹⁷³, or the **European Forum Synergies**¹⁷⁴ which intricately interweave with the networks around **LEADER**, such as **ELARD**, and around **the European Rural Parliament**¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷² The last sentence of their mission statement: *"We regard food, environment and rural areas from a holistic, integrated, systems approach, involving the different levels (local to global) of governance (public and private) to achieve the ecological modernisation of agriculture."* <https://groupedebruges.eu/>

¹⁷³ Documented in the ARC2020 Communication from Nov. 2010. <https://www.arc2020.eu/communication/> whose main author, the late **Michael Dower**, has substantially contributed to the different manifestations of this school of thinking and practice (e.g. for the European Rural Parliament). See also the **Seeds4All Project**, a vibrant offspring of ARC2020 dedicating its work to the preservation of the genetic diversity of crop species.

¹⁷⁴ https://www.forum-synergies.eu/index_en.html

¹⁷⁵ The European Rural Parliament, nowadays representing 40 national rural parliaments, is a scaling-up of an initiative which has started in Sweden (with the movement "Hela Sverige ska leva" = "All Sweden shall live") in the year 1989. This initiative aimed to strengthen rural communities by promoting local action and cooperation across Sweden, fostering rural empowerment, and influencing policy on a national level. The Rural Parliament model from Sweden later inspired other European countries to create similar rural gatherings for community-driven development and advocacy. With Sweden's EU accession, **Staffan Bond**, one of its founders, made the LEADER community familiar with it and also spread it out to the EU accession candidates via the pre-accession NGO PREPARE. The European Rural Parliament was established in 2013 by three networks: The European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), the Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE) and the European Rural Community Association (ERCA), also founded on Staffan Bond's initiative in 2009.

Turning the page: How can the lessons from the past nurture future prospects?

Growing diversity, rising complexity

LEADER has emerged in times of an expanding EU space, in a dynamic development phase of EU institutions and structural policy instruments. Still in the EU 12 and 15, the kind of challenges rural areas were facing remained within a certain range. With all the diversity between the Irish coastland and the Alpine mountains, between Scandinavian forests and Andalusian olive groves, rural people involved in LEADER quickly found a way to team up and learn from each other. Scottish oysters met Sicilian lemons¹⁷⁶.

The European Commission engaged in action research programmes in direct exchange with practitioners, experts and academia. Territorial cohesion rose to the top of the European agenda. There was room for institutional innovation and there was a vivid discourse on local development and regional policies going on, which made it mandatory to try out new methods and institutional arrangements, in a political climate that furthered participatory, inclusive, partnership-based and multi-level approaches. It wasn't all sunshine and rainbows but all in all, the global political and economic situation seemed much more secure and predictable than nowadays.

The genetic code of LEADER has spread and created clads and sub-clads which have found their niches in particular socio-economic and governance contexts all over Europe. The enormous diversity of LEADER realities that now exist across Europe ranges from the huge budgets and infrastructure investments run by LEADER in mono-fund Saxony and multi-fund Saxony Anhalt to thematic teams working on innovative "anchor projects" in some LEADER groups of Belgium, to small "soft project engineering" in France, standard calls for standard projects in much of Spain, Portugal, Poland and others and mixed models combining a bit of all each. LEADER seeds have spread to South East Europe and Türkiye, Latin America, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, even to China. One of the challenges is that these realities and starting points are so different. And concerning the standing of local partnerships in European rural areas, this immense diversity makes it difficult to formulate common and consistent perspectives and proposals.

Be aware that not just LEADER, it's the rural areas themselves which have become so diverse, and the patterns of disparity vary enormously. The only thing which rural areas seem to have in common, apart from lower population density, is the fact that rural voters incline significantly more towards right-wing and authoritarian populist parties than those living in urban agglomeration areas.

Territorial inequalities, an underestimated evil

In some way Fabrizio Barca's prediction has proven true, but not exactly in the way he meant it, because the phenomenon of "the revenge at the ballot box" can be observed in all types of rural areas, be they prosperous or lagging ones, may their population shrink or grow, most probably with or without LEADER (the latter being too rare to make the case). Maybe **the fear of economic deprivation** plays a role in that, but the situation appears to be far more complex. There are cultural

¹⁷⁶ Allegedly a love story and subsequent marriage developed during a trans-national cooperation project between LAGs from these areas (One of the stories going around during LEADER II).

factors at work, such as xenophobia, fear of the erosion of traditional certainties and values, all in all a **fear of losing control over one's own life** in the most generic sense.

The blatant inequalities at global and regional level, brought forth by more than forty years of a global economy shaped by the neoliberal credo, structured in global supply chains and increasingly dominated by borderless tech giants, the inability (and growing political unwillingness) to properly address climate change and habitat losses and the spreading of violent conflicts and regional wars¹⁷⁷, leave people in the chronic feeling of insecurity, powerlessness and disorientation. Already before the outbreak of Covid19 and the Russian war of aggression against the Ukraine, Yves Champetier wrote:

*Our democracies are in great danger. Gangrened by withdrawal to oneself, mutual fear and mistrust, the rise of populist movements, the feeling of being left behind. The manifold crises Europe has experienced (banking and financial crisis, austerity, migration flows...) have led to a spectacular rise of euroscepticism, of which Brexit is just one illustrious example. The growing social and territorial rifts weaken the hope for a better economic, social and territorial cohesion, an objective of European Union policies since the Single European Act and in its full-fledged form since the Amsterdam Treaty (in effect since 1999). People simply feel abandoned.*¹⁷⁸

Remarrying global challenges with place-based approaches

In fact, cross-cutting cohesion policy seems to have been largely crowded out from the Community agenda by thematic issues such as **uncontrolled immigration, border security issues, the loss of global competitiveness, slow digitalisation, the pandora box of artificial intelligence, climate change, the ongoing loss of biodiversity**, and the deep transformation processes which are conjured up as indispensable remedies to heal these dripping wounds. Compared to the swift vessel that it seems to have been still in the eighties and nineties of the past century, the EU has become a Titanic cruise ship whose steering mechanisms do hard to cope with the iceberg slalom it is facing.

The Long-Term Vision of Rural Areas/LTVRA (2021), the Territorial Agenda 2030 (2020), the European Green Deal (2019), the 2030 Digital Compass (2021), the 8th Cohesion Report (2022), **they all emphasize place-based, tailor-made, community-based approaches, but the above-mentioned issues of concern are not sufficiently reflected in these terms.**

José Manuel Henriques from the Federation Minha Terra writes:

If a 'place-based' approach is related to the mobilisation of the 'endogenous potential' as formulated in the Barca Report (2009), and is designed as 'New Paradigm of Regional Policy' by the OECD (2009)¹⁷⁹, then the local concreteness of the ecological transition (European

¹⁷⁷ The UN states that the number of conflicts worldwide is currently at its highest level since WW II. At the same time, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) highlighted that the past decade has been one of the deadliest periods for non-state violence, including gang conflicts.

¹⁷⁸ Slightly modified translation from Yves Champetier/AEIDL/UNADEL 2019, p. 8.

¹⁷⁹ One thing should not remain unmentioned: as the European Commission seems to distance itself from place-based approaches and focus more and more on the big geo political challenges – the OECD provides a respected international institutional counterbalance in favour of place-based approaches. Through figures like **Heino von Meyer** and more recently **Enrique Garcilazo** (current Head of the Regional and Rural Policy Unit) they have played an important role in the development of the **Smart Villages approach**, the **Long Term Vision for Rural Areas** and the **Rural Pact and its Support Office**. I would give more prominence to these and consider some of the proposals that are being discussed for the future in the final section on turning the page

Green Deal) and the digital transition (2030 Digital Compass) means a very complex challenge; the ecological transition will involve economic restructuring (in favour of low carbon activities) and should avoid impoverishment and social exclusion with the help of the Just Transition Fund (aka “Mechanism”)¹⁸⁰; the digital transition should meet the challenge of better public and private services or new economic opportunities favoured by connectivity in rural areas; but should also avoid risks that can be anticipated (depersonalisation of access to public services; lack of digital literacy and deskilling; unpreparedness of school systems to meet the development of ‘skills of the robotic age’; digital misuse of digital platforms etc.).¹⁸¹

Henriques also cites the LTVRA which stipulates that “local communities are best placed to assess the relative strengths of their territories to build on them” and its emphasis on “experimental action, learning and evaluation”.¹⁸² This may refer to **social innovation**, which is supposed to be triggered by the combined application of the LEADER features¹⁸³, as well as to technological innovation such as emphasized in the **Smart Village approach** in operation since 2017.¹⁸⁴ Its idea was explicitly that LEADER groups or other community-led organisations should be the drivers where they existed and wanted but that where these organisations did not exist or had become simple administrators of top down funds – it could provide an opening for new actors and new ideas. The Commission did not provide any funding but some countries and regions have launched calls which can lead to interesting results – even if now just about everything is smart so at a first glance it is difficult to distinguish genuine innovations from banal repetitions.

All this makes the fruitful interaction between all levels of scale, from local to regional, national and the EU, become paramount.

Cultivate what has been achieved and venture the new

Henriques makes the case for distinguishing “experimental” and “non-experimental” programmes.

Experimental programmes assume that there is “insufficient knowledge related to problems to be tackled...Adequate knowledge should be produced through direct involvement in transformative action.”¹⁸⁵ Looking back into the history of European programmes, we clearly recognize **LEADER I** as such a programme. It provided the liberty to produce “deep knowledge” about the challenges and their nature and for identifying the possibilities of finding appropriate solutions, associated with the potential for mainstreaming to other contexts or through generalisation through innovation in public policies. Experimental programmes are necessarily small in scale (to keep the risk of failure low). This also implies that, according to Henriques, “projects are chosen not based on the severeness of problems but on the capacity to develop innovation-oriented experimental action.” I would add, this does not only pertain to projects, but also to LEADER areas and LAGs as their instruments.

Non-experimental programmes assume “that sufficient knowledge exists about the problems and their nature” and that there are proven measures to find solutions. If we take a sober look on the

¹⁸⁰ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en

¹⁸¹ José Manuel Henriques (2024): *Rethinking LEADER and the Future of European Rural Areas. A Personal Contribution*. Federação Minha Terra.

¹⁸² European Commission 2021: *Long-Term Vision of Rural Areas*. https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

¹⁸³ The capacity of the LEADER method to enable social innovation has been shown in an Austrian empirical study (Lukesch e.a. 2019).

¹⁸⁴ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)689349](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)689349)

¹⁸⁵ Henriques, p. 21.

practice on **LEADER/CLLD** implementation, we have to state that the whole system is set up as a non-experimental programme. In non-experimental programmes *“the potential relevance of action is associated with territorial relevance: taking advantage of an exceptional funding opportunity and creating the institutional, organisational, and technical conditions for actions with structuring relevance and ensuring their self-sustainability.”*¹⁸⁶

Both types of approaches have their virtues. **Experimental and non-experimental approaches should co-exist and complement each other. At present, LEADER/CLLD mainly represents the non-experimental variant**, allowing some experimental actions nested in pockets created by simplification mechanisms called “umbrella projects” or “small projects”, and other ideas popping up spontaneously in LAGs here and there, which usually quickly spread out across the LEADER networks.

Henriques advocates the experimental approach to be reintroduced through a *“LEADER/CLLD Acting Framework”* focused on territorial animation for place-based development, operationalised in *“small networks of LAGs organised on a voluntary basis (thematic networks, thematic groups, ‘communities of practice’, etc.). It could involve innovation-oriented action and research (academy and ‘knowledge alliances’, etc.) as well as practice-oriented evaluation.”*¹⁸⁶

We cannot wind back decades of LEADER/CLLD in order to rejuvenate it. We can look back on the achievements with some satisfaction. **I think that in its institutionalised (non-experimental) form, it is an indispensable component of territorial, place-based policy and should be maintained**, always in the pursuance in making its delivery mechanisms simpler, more citizen- and community-friendly and more effective in the whole.

However, there is room – and the necessity – for putting in place an experimental programme component, accessible to LAGs, which have the guts and the capacity to go for more. How they would be identified, selected as eligible and dealt with by funding and support structures, let’s leave that aside for now. First we’d have to convene on the principle.

What we instinctively know and what should be indelibly written in our minds is the fact that committed people can move a lot at local and regional level, which allow for humane interactions, face to face encounters, vivid discussions, **making pledges and conclude local pacts to change course**, to become energy and carbon neutral, to stop soil sealing and degradation, to restore the natural heritage, which we borrowed from our children, to boost employment in the spirit of building the circular economy, to welcome and involve new citizens, wherever they may come from, and to invest in infrastructures which provide us with services of highest quality and least impact on our footprint on the piece of planet we inhabit and exploit to make our living.

We see governments fail while trying to implement well-intended but not-so-well-crafted solutions to the global challenges mentioned above¹⁸⁷. You could say: craft them better! There is always some room, but the limits are narrow. Whoever wants to introduce effective measures against climate change and environmental degradation, will always have an opposition majority of at least two thirds¹⁸⁸. The huge and ever growing disparities in wealth, income, career options and quality of life make uniform measures from top-down obsolete from the very onset. People do not think that these

¹⁸⁶ Henriques, p. 22.

¹⁸⁷ One example in France: the *mouvement des gilets jaunes*.

¹⁸⁸ One third doesn’t buy or care about these issues at all; one third agrees with the discourse, but opposes any tangible measure which would affect their own perceived freedom of choice. This is not a scientific assessment. It is based on my own experience with almost fifty years of sustainability sermons.

solutions might work, or they are not willing to pay the price, or they do not even believe in the good intention: *“In short, in matters of the ecological transition, the bottom-up (sectoral) and top-down (regional) approaches do not align.”*¹⁸⁹

But there are signs that agricultural and rural policies could find a new common vantage point, if broken down to territorial, place-based approaches:

*“In this context, it is likely that rural development policies and agricultural modernisation policies will find common ground through greening and diversification of agricultural activities on the one hand and return of sparsely populated areas as a resource for development to support the energy and ecological transition on the other.”*¹⁹⁰

Local strategies and actions will become the mould in which solutions for planetary problems get formed. Their mission is to become laboratories for transformation, through developing vision-led strategies, enacting adaptive participation and steering structures, living a culture of respect and curiosity.

Lessons to heed

The past teaches us that every new start will, sooner or later, run into wicked problems. Problems are called wicked when there is no solution to them. They can at best be ridden out. The essential task is to stay in the saddle.

The first weakness of LEADER and other community initiatives is the **lack of transferability and scaling up of innovative ideas into mainstream standard policies**. Whenever successful experimental programmes get linked up or even integrated into mainstream policies – an understandable move to achieve tangible societal changes – the mainstream corset will impose controls on the experimental and trim it down to a gear in the big machine. But if we create a “cordon sanitaire” around the experimental projects there is a risk that eventually they become isolated and drown in their own utopian soup. So what conditions are required for a truly creative interface which keeps the experimental and the non-experimental part poised in a state of togetherness in which each of them can unfold its particular virtues?

The second challenge is the inevitable **attempt of local and regional stakeholders and keepers of the traditional to gain control over the local partnership** whenever their interventions start to become relevant and attract more attention than just a few isolated actions. The local level is in no way different to other levels of scale in respect to an unequal distribution of wealth and power, to disparities and social or economic exclusion. The more “representative” the LAG tries to become – and for good reason – the more it risks falling into the autopoietic scheme of self-reproduction, often illustrated as “old wine in new bottles”.

Paul Soto summarizes his experiences made with good intentions turning into less than good results for LEADER under three deficiencies which he called **“the three riders of the apocalypse”**¹⁹¹:

¹⁸⁹ ANCT, p.46.

¹⁹⁰ ANCT, p. 43.

¹⁹¹ Quoted from a paper produced by Paul Soto in preparation of a meeting with LEADER experts (Gilda Farrell, Samuel Thirion and others) at their institute CARMEN in South Portugal on the occasion of 25 years of LEADER. Many thanks to Paul for sending this paper with the email from 10 October 2024.

1. The erosion of decentralized finance and the creation of increasingly bureaucratic controls.
2. Insufficient capacity at both local level and very importantly in the entire delivery chain, particularly with the extension of LEADER to areas with little or no experience of collective community action, poor leadership, little social capital, unprepared and unmotivated staff.
3. Capture by public sector bodies, political parties and specific interest groups.

Paul Soto's proposals for improvement (made in 2016, but still highly topical) offer three main lines of thought:

- **Democratising local finance supported by a compulsory minimum reserve for citizen-led (local) development and innovation in all relevant funds (at present: ESI Funds and EAFRD)**, with no demarcation, awarded to local partnerships to achieve a series of results agreed ex ante, notably supporting citizen-led investment in strategic local assets and enabling conditions (e.g. community land buy outs, energy communities, locally owned fiber networks, locally run social care, health and education etc.) using diverse sources and forms of finance (rolling funds, crowd funding, voluntary labour and contributions, financial instruments, private contributions, small scale seed grants, etc.);
- **Building capacity and trust horizontally at local level and vertically in other levels of governance**, explicitly recognizing that one type of LEADER does not fit all types of areas, characterising the different roles that LEADER can play depending on both local needs and the existence of other support systems in the territory, including mandatory (and continuous) exchanges and capacity building for LAG teams and other actors in the LEADER delivery chain.
- **Clarifying the rules of engagement for creative public-private-civil society partnerships**: there needs to be a bigger shift from the concept of balance and proportionality to one of outreach, engagement, mobilisation and empowerment. The rules of engagement need to be more inclusive inwardly - not only reaching disadvantaged groups but also hidden voices, and more open externally - explicitly welcoming and integrating outside sources of ideas (from research to migrants). LAG partnerships and teams need to have sufficient resources (and skills), over and above the time dedicated to administration, for community organizing, animation and brokerage.

Scattered thoughts on the future governance

This is not the place to speculate on the pros and cons for diverse governance options for LEADER/CLLD at the EU level. Here I list them ranking from the most probable to the most improbable one:

- 1 **Business as usual**: LEADER mandatory for EAFRD, CLLD facultative for ESIF¹⁹².
- 2 **Enhanced CLLD**: CLLD mandatory with a minimum of 5-10% in each of these funds.
- 3 **A facultative CLLD Fund**: One fund for local development accessible to local action groups in rural, coastal and urban areas, endowed from the EAFRD and ESIF budgets respectively.
- 4 **A mandatory CLLD Fund**: One fund for local development in all rural, coastal and urban areas, with a minimum percentage of 5-10% of EAFRD/ESIF budget volume.

As the esteemed reader may guess, I am most inclined to opt for the least probable variant no. 4. In any event, if CLLD is supposed to unfold its full potential, as it was hoped for in the early days of its first edition in 2014, and considering that these hopes have been dashed or at least been dimmed,

¹⁹² Or the equivalents of them in case the "Single plan for each member state" becomes true (see above and Figure 6).

there has to be an enhanced and equitable networking support at European and national level for all CLLD variants, the rural, the coastal and the urban one; with many more interlinkages and possibilities for rural, coastal and urban LAGs to cooperate. Running three agencies in parallel would really not make sense. So I propose to devise the networking coordination and support hub as a joint agency with three departments and a strong transversal backbone.

Laughing against the wind

Millennials and GenZ are gradually taking over the positions as independent experts, development agents or as administrative officials. They were not involved during the growth and development phase of LEADER; today they cope with the highly institutionalised and complex system with much lower degrees of freedom. They may have learned to recognize LEADER/CLLD as a closely meshed, sometimes contradictory set of rules and mechanisms, barely reflecting the emancipatory momentum behind its early days. For them, the multi-actor partnerships and LAG office and staff are something taken for granted such as town halls, sports clubs or supermarkets.

- This degree of self-evidence is a great achievement, but it may act as a tranquilizer. Too easily the normalcy could turn into blind routine and further on into sclerosis. In this **dystopian scenario** the only outcome would consist in an additional layer of governance mechanisms and bureaucratic procedures for funnelling public money down to the local level. Such a LEADER carcass would get swept away with the next round of budget cuts.
- **The good practice scenario would be that LAGs in rural areas consolidate their role as multi-fund and multipurpose local development agencies** supporting mainly non-experimental projects through networking, training and education, bringing up topical themes, fostering technological and organisational innovation and enhancing local capacities to deal with the challenges of today and tomorrow, helping the areas they represent to become more resilient and resourceful, in short, to contribute to more and better choices for the local population, particularly the younger ones, to live fulfilled lives. We already know the threefold function well-doing LAGs fulfil in this scenario: **the project support agency; the networking hub; the social enterprise.**
- There is room for more. **The visionary scenario** would be that **local action groups** become or incubate **laboratories of transformation**¹⁹³, **agorás** where people come together and discuss their diverse views, thinking up and pioneering new ways of economic, social, cultural and environmental practices on the basis of **locally/regionally negotiated multi-actor agreements or pacts**, combining professionalism with passion, questioning themselves and the status quo, taking serious challenges seriously, tirelessly involving new people and perspectives to experiment solutions for after-tomorrow, being provocative and empathic, and yet feeling the lightness of being when sitting together and laughing beyond reason.

¹⁹³ Very much in the sense of the **OECD Rural Agenda for Climate Action**, launched at the COP 26 in Glasgow (2021). It is based on four pillars: Place-based policies; geography of opportunities; local empowerment; improved access to quality services. See the presentation of Enrique Garcilazo (OECD) at the Policy Lab of the Rural Pact on *Setting the Scene Challenges and Opportunities in the Green Transition for Rural Communities* (19 September 2024 online): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-6il1Xpu9A&list=PLG1wdlKpOOX0nYOrpxzlxnju7aMyXG_Q&index=5

Summary: Key proposals emanating from this treatise

- In the pursuance of excellence and in doing justice to the expectations which have always been laid into CLLD/LEADER, its future role and place in the policy environment is
 - (a) to continue to be an experienced provider of **place-based and endogenous local development in European rural, urban and coastal areas**, and
 - (b) to become a **laboratory for transformation towards sustainable societies**.
- This twofold (both non-experimental and experimental) role of CLLD/LEADER is best assured if its implementation is made **mandatory in all EAFRD, EMFAF, ERDF and ESF at a minimum rate of 5 to 10 %** regardless of how the future EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be configured in detail.
- In order to improve and enhance the delivery mechanisms, the LEADER communities in the member states (Local Action Groups, networks, committed officers in managing authority and intermediary agencies) are called to **establish ongoing dialogue platforms and to devise measures** (wherever deemed necessary)
 - **to improve the financial capacities and the organisational standing and sustainability of Local Action Groups** and thereby their long-term self-reliance,
 - **to improve the relationships and feedback links** with other intervenants in and around their territorial remit, as well as (vertically) with the authorities and institutions having an influence on the intervention frameworks,
 - **to reconfigure the steering and management structures and the participatory nature of the LAGs** in order to make sure that both the non-experimental and experimental actions can be adequately coordinated and managed.
- In order to prepare for a credible and powerful appearance in the political arena when it comes to negotiating the terms for the MFF 2028-2034, there should be organised, in **fall 2025 or spring 2026**, a European congress gathering representatives from the LEASDER/CLLD communities in rural, urban and coastal areas, a **European Congress for Community-led Local Development**.

Bibliography

- AEIDL 1997: *Innovation and Rural Development*. European LEADER II Observatory, dossier nr. 2. Bruxelles. https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/GED_CYY/194878091205/LEADER_INNOV-EN.pdf
- AEIDL 1998: *Towards a new Initiative for rural development. 800 leaders give their view*. Magazin Nro. 16, Winter 1997-1998. Bruxelles. https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/GED_CYY/195023591320/LEADER_Mag16-EN.pdf
- AEIDL 1998: *Methodological guide for the analysis of local innovation needs*. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles. https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/sites/default/files/leaderii_dossiers_methodology_local-innovation.pdf
- AEIDL 1999a: *Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach*. European LEADER II Observatory, dossier nr. 4. Bruxelles. <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecordVisio.htm?idlist=1&record=19159294124919774769>
- AEIDL 1999b: *Territorial competitiveness*. Rural innovation dossier, Part 1, European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles.
- AEIDL 2000a: *Social competitiveness*. Rural innovation dossier, Part 2. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles.
- AEIDL 2000b: *Environmental competitiveness*. Rural innovation dossier, Part 3. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles. <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecordVisio.htm?idlist=1&record=19159342124919775249>
- AEIDL 2000c: *Economic competitiveness*. Rural innovation dossier, Part 4. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles. <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecordVisio.htm?idlist=1&record=19159341124919775239>
- AEIDL 2000d: *Training in aid of territorial development*. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles.
- AEIDL 2001: *Global competitiveness of rural areas*. Rural innovation dossier, Part 5. European LEADER II Observatory, Bruxelles. <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/ListRecordVisio.htm?idlist=1&record=19159350124919775329>
- ANCT (Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires) 2024 : *Rural areas and rural policy in Europe. Comparative approach to five countries : Germany, Spain, Estonia, Ireland and Poland*. Paris.
- Barca F. 2009: *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*. Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy. Bruxelles, April 2009.
- Boci M.; De Vet J.M.; Pauer A. 2014: *'Gold-plating' in the EAFRD: To what extent do national rules unnecessarily add to complexity and, as a result, increase the risk of errors?* Brussels: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union. Febr. 2014. Brunet R. 2002: *Lignes de Force de l'Espace Européen*. Mappemonde 66, 2002.2. <https://www.mgm.fr/PUB/Mappemonde/M202/Brunet.pdf>
- Bryden J. 2010: *Local Development*. Chapter 23 in: Hart K., Laville J-L. and Cattani A.D.: *The Human Economy*. Cambridge, Policy Press.
- Champetier, Y. 2003 : *Un exemple de nouveau management public local : L'initiative LEADER en faveur des zones rurales*. Report for the Interamerican Development Bank, Washington DC.
- Champetier, Y. 2019: *L'Europe, acteur majeur du développement des territoires*. AEIDL/UNADEL <https://leaderfrance.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/champetier-unadel-fr1.pdf>
- Champetier, Y. 2020: Unpublished manuscript.
- Chatzichristos G., Nagopoulos N. and Poulimas M. 2021: *Neo-Endogenous Rural Development: A Path Toard Reviving Rural Europe*. Rural Sociology, Vol. 86, Issue 4.

De Carvalho F.P.R. et al. (2016): Endogenous retroviruses: an evolutionary history.

Denieul P-N. 2008: Développement social, local et territorial: repères thématiques et bibliographiques sur le cas français. Monde en développement, Vol 36-2008/2 no.142; p.113-142.

European Commission/DG Agriculture and Rural Development: *"Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans."* Report drafted by Michael Dower, rapporteur-general of the Western Balkans travelling workshops and conference 2014 and former coordinator of PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe.

European Commission/GD for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 1922: *The ESF and Community-led Local Development: Lessons for the Future*. ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform. Community of Practice on Social Innovation. Bruxelles. Authored by Leda Stott (study lead), Karolina Jakubowska, Inga Pavlovaite, Nazia Chowdhury and Astrid Hampe-Nathaniel and reviewed by Urszula Budzich Tabor and Stefan Kah.

Erik O. Eriksen and John E. Fossum 1999: *The European Union and Post-national Integration*. ARENA Working Papers 99/9. https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/The_European_Union_and_Post-national_Integrati.pdf

European Court of Auditors (ECA) 2010: Special Report on the Implementation of the LEADER Approach. Special Report No. 5, Luxembourg.

https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR10_05/SR10_05_EN.PDF

European Court of Auditors (ECA) 2022: Special Report: LEADER and Community-led Local Development facilitates local engagements but additional benefits still not sufficiently demonstrated. Special Report No. 10, Luxembourg.

https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR22_10/SR_Leader_EN.pdf

EU CAP Network Contact Point: *Assessing the Added Value of LEADER*. Guidelines. May 2024, Bruxelles.

Glatz H., Scheer G. 1981: *Autonome Regionalentwicklung, eine neue Dimension des Regionalismus?* Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, Band 10, 1981, Wien.

Holland John H. 2006: *Studying Complex Adaptive Systems*. Journal of Systems Science and Complexity. 19 (1): 1-8.

Kah, S. (2024): *Multi-funded CLLD: Background paper and outcomes of the workshop in Slovenia*. EU CAP Network. Bruxelles, January 2024.

Kuentzler P. 1984: *Local Employment Initiatives in Western Europe*. International Labour Review. Band 123, Nr. 2, 1984, S. 221 f.

Laine, M. and Champetier, Y. (2023) : *35 years of LEADER I. A 35 years retrospective*. Slideshow presented at the anniversary meeting. Bruxelles.

Lukesch, R. 2018: *LEADER Reloaded*. Conference Paper for the homonymous conference organized by ELARD in Évora, Portugal on 27 and 28 September 2018. <https://elard.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/I20-20181009XLEADERXRELOADEDXPAPERXROBERTXLUKESCH.pdf>

Lukesch, R.; Ecker, B.; Fidschuster, L.; Fischer, M.; Gassler, H.; Mair, S.; Philipp, S.; Said, N. (2019): *Analyse der Potenziale Sozialer Innovationen im Rahmen von LEADER 2014-2020*. ÖAR and ZSI, Wien.

Mc Cann P. 2023: *How have place-based policies evolved to date and what are they for now?* Paper presented at Workshop 1 of the OECD-EC High Level Workshop Series: Place-Based Policies for the Future. 14 April 2023.

Ménasse, R. 2024: *Die Welt von morgen. Ein souveränes demokratisches Europa und seine Feinde*. Suhrkamp, Berlin.

OECD 2009: *Regions Matter. Economic Recovery, Innovation and Sustainable Growth*. Paris.

- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2017) : The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it).). Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 11 (1). pp. 189-209.
https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85888/1/Rodriguez-Pose_Revenge%20of%20Places.pdf
- Ruffin F. 2024: *À Jaques Delors, le grand marché unique européen reconnaissant*. Obituary in Le Monde Diplomatique, February 2024.
- SBE/ERCA 2024: Compass for Local Empowerment in Rural Areas. May 2024.
- Schakel A. H. 2020: *Multi-level governance in a 'Europe with the regions'*. Sage Journals, August 20, 2020.
- World Bank Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography. Washington.
- ZEF (Centre for Development Research) 2020: *EU Common Agricultural Policy Impacts on Trade with Africa and African Agricultural Development*. ZEF Policy Brief No.36. Bonn, August 2020.

Repertory of LEADER II and FARNET publications

Direct links to LEADER II publications

LEADER methodological library ¹⁹⁴	
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental competitiveness: Creating a territorial development strategy in light of the LEADER experience [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 6/3 - June 2000] • Renewable sources of energy, sustainable sources of energy [Methodology guide - October 1999]
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnational cooperation under LEADER II: Lessons from the past, tools for the future [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 11 - March 2001] • Global competitiveness of rural areas: Creating a territorial development strategy in the light of the LEADER experience [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 6/5 - February 2001] • Economic competitiveness: Creating a territorial development strategy in light of the LEADER experience [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 6/4 - July 2000] • Social competitiveness: Creating a territorial development strategy in light of the LEADER experience [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 6/2 - June 2000] • Territorial competitiveness: Creating a territorial development strategy in light of the LEADER experience [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 6/1 - December 1999] • Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 4 - June 1999] • From strategy to action: project selection [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 3 - May 1998] • Organising local partnerships [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 2 - 1997] • Innovation and rural development [Observatory dossier n° 2 - November 1997] • Methodology guide for the analysis of innovative actions [Methodology guide - January 1996]
Local products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing local products: short and long distribution channels [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 7 - July 2000] • The collective organisation of a sector for the local valorisation of agricultural resources: the example of cheese processing [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 1 - 1997]
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research, transfer and acquisition of knowledge in aid of rural development [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 10 - February 2001] • Training in aid of territorial development [Methodology guide - December 2000] • Local financing in rural areas [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 9 - September 2000] • Fighting social exclusion in rural areas [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 8 - July 2000] • Information technologies and rural development [Observatory dossier n° 4 - 2000] • Developing rural services [Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 5 - September 1999] • Support systems for new activities in rural areas [Methodology guide - July 1998]

¹⁹⁴ Source: AEIDL website. <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/>

Tourism

- [Developing walking holidays in rural areas:](#)
Guide on how to design and implement a walking holiday project
[Rural Innovation - Dossier n° 12 - March 2001]
- [Evaluating a territory's touristic potential](#)
[Methodology guide - November 1997]

Titles of FARNET publications accessible on the AEIDL website

Published in 11 languages – available in <https://resource-centre.aeidl.eu/>

GUIDES

FARNET Guide 1: Area-based Development in EU Fisheries Areas 2010

FARNET Guide 2: Working together for EU fisheries areas. Guide to starting Cooperation between Fisheries Local Action Groups | 2010

FARNET Guide 3: Adding Value to Local Fishery and Aquaculture Products | 2011 H

FARNET Guide 4: Steps for success | 2011

FARNET Guide 5: Diversification of Fisheries Areas | 2011

FARNET Guide 6: Green Growth in Europe's Fisheries Areas. 2013

FARNET Guide 7: Axis 4: A tool in the hands of fisheries communities 2013

FARNET Guide 8: Marketing the local catch 2014

FARNET Guide 9: Fisheries and Tourism Creating benefits for the community 2014

FARNET Guide 10: Starting CLLD implementation in practice 2016

FARNET Guide 11: Results-oriented CLLD in fisheries areas 2016

FARNET Guide 12: Boosting business along the fisheries value chain 2017

FARNET Guide 13: Social inclusion for vibrant fishing communities. 2017

FARNET Guide 14: Integrating aquaculture within local communities. 2018

FARNET Guide 15: Evaluating CLLD - Handbook for LAGs and FLAGs. 2018

FARNET Guide 16: Strengthening local resource management 2018

FARNET Guide 17: Circular economy in fisheries and aquaculture areas 2018

FARNET Guide 18: Smart Coastal Areas: A Guide for FLAGs. 2019

FARNET Guide 19: Delivering CLLD effectively: a guide for EMFF managing authorities | 2020

FARNET Guide 20: Forward-looking strategies for fisheries areas 2020

FARNET Guide 21: Nurturing Quality Projects. A Guide for FLAGS. 2021

FARNET Guide 22: Fit for the future. A guide for effective FLAGS 2021

MAGAZINES

FARNET Magazine n°1: New opportunities for Europe's fisheries areas | 2009

FARNET Magazine n°02: Local strategies for global challenges | 2010

FARNET Magazine n°03: Adding value to local fisheries products | 2010

FARNET Magazine n°04: Diversifying Europe's fisheries areas JANOT Jean-Luc ; O'HARA Eamon | 2011

FARNET Magazine n°05: Sustainable futures for fisheries areas JANOT Jean-Luc ; O'HARA Eamon | 2011

FARNET Magazine n°06: The environment as a driver of development in Europe's fisheries areas | 2012 H

FARNET Magazine n°08: Marketing the local catch 2013

| FARNET Magazine n°09: Linking fisheries to the tourism economy 2013

OTHER DOCUMENTS

BROCHURE: EMFF Axis 4: A tool in the hands of fisheries communities

FARNET GOOD PRACTICE DIRECTORY: About 100 case studies