

# THE NEW LEADER ADDED VALUE

NEW TASKS  
FOR LOCAL  
ACTION  
GROUPS

Conclusions from the  
transnational LEADER  
cooperation project  
**OUR COMMON FUTURE**



**LEADER**

Development led by local communities



Co-funded by  
the European Union

# THE NEW LEADER ADDED VALUE

Conclusions from the transnational LEADER project **OUR COMMON FUTURE**, a cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs) from Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal, Bulgaria, and associated LAGs from Sweden, Finland, France, Spain, Latvia and Italy.

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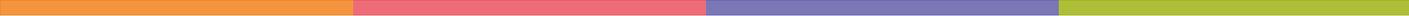
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The aim of the project *OUR COMMON FUTURE* was, following a successful history of more than 30 years of LEADER/CLLD as participatory regional development, to develop new perspectives for the future and to explain why the LEADER approach, as a citizen-focused policy instrument, is so relevant right now. How can we reach people in rural areas better again and increase acceptance of the need for change?

As a result of the many crisis impacts of recent years, we are facing far-reaching changes – challenges that reveal clear societal fault lines. In addition, particularly in Europe’s rural areas, there are communication deficits in conveying the EU’s objectives, as shown, for example, by the causes and consequences of Brexit. Social cohesion appears to have weakened. To address these “gaps” in a mediating way across a wide range of fields, competent intermediary organisations and actors are needed to (re-)establish connections (“links between actions”, which is what the acronym LEADER stands for). Not only, but especially in rural areas, LAGs are well suited to this intermediary role. They have appropriate and proven methods for working with local people to develop improvements in their social, economic and environmental living conditions – that is the LEADER USP, understood as a **unique “service” point**. LEADER regions, with their Local Action Groups (LAGs) as network hubs, have enormous potential in this respect for mediation and for multiplying impact. In future it will become even more important for LAGs to develop new competences for intermediary management at various interfaces within society. These include, for example, the public–private interface or the strategy–practice interface, both of which require competent innovation management.

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# SUMMARY

# **THE NEW LEADER**

# **ADDED VALUE**

## NEW TASKS FOR LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

LEADER in previous “official” terms:

***“Links between actions for the development of the rural economy”***

or in French ***“Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale”*** (LEADER)

or ***“Community-Led Local Development”*** (CLLD) or ***“development led by the local communities”***.

LEADER in different communication contexts:

***“citizen-focused policy instrument”***

(for politics & public administration) and

***“development of the rural economy and society”***

(for businesses) and

***“common development of the region with municipalities and the local population”***

(for municipalities).

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# WHAT LEADER IS

A

**LEADER is the EU's most important citizen-focused policy instrument** in rural areas and a tool for mediating and implementing EU and national objectives at regional delivery level, as well as a method for developing regional strengths independently. As an organization, LEADER has a unique European network of around 3,000 Local Action Groups which, as local development agencies, cooperate trans-nationally and nationally.

The LEADER approach is regarded as **people-centred and participatory regional development** (i.e. led by municipalities, businesses and civil society, while making use of internal strengths and external opportunities). This is because (a) strengths **within the region** (endogenous) are further developed, such as regional products, personal relationships, the circular economy and resilience, etc. At the same time, (b) there is an **agreement between the region and the national public authorities** on the use of a public regional budget to select and support relevant projects. The budget must be used in an impact-oriented way. In addition, (c) **cooperation between regions** is required, opening a "window to the outside" in order to improve the region's capacity for innovation. From this perspective, the paired concepts of "endogenous" and "exogenous" as well as "top-down" and "bottom-up" no longer appear as strict opposites, but as complementary (also described as neo-endogenous).

**Key aspects of LEADER's added value** are therefore its **closeness to citizens** and its **place-based development**, meaning development together with the regional population. LEADER encourages people to get involved and is therefore **participatory-democratic**. It also conveys a **European perspective** at regional level. The advantages of this type of regional development arise from its agility: the ability to act and respond quickly to new challenges, and greater acceptance of innovations among the population. Last but not least, its **orientation towards innovation** is a key element of the added value.



The LEADER-specific Local Action Groups are found primarily in rural areas, but also in coastal regions and urban areas as offices for neighbourhood and district management. They act as funding advisory centers, networking offices and innovation agencies in their respective areas.

**Summary of LEADER's unique selling points** (USP, adapted here to mean unique "service" proposition or point, as the service aspect is at the forefront):

### **LEADER as an intermediary interface**

USP: **INTERFACE COMPETENCE**

and strong connectivity

trend/need: **interface management**

- LAGs are not just funding bodies; above all, they are networkers and bridge-builders between public administration, municipalities, the private sector and civil society.
- This intermediary role is unique in the EU context: no other structure links the local, regional, national and European levels so closely – the "management of the in-between" as a clear added value.

### **LEADER as a place of European closeness to citizens**

USP: **MAKING THE EU VISIBLE AT THE BASE**

trend/need: **worse Eurobarometer figures in rural areas**

- LEADER provides opportunities to communicate European objectives in villages and small towns and to implement them there.
- Especially in regions with a high share of EU-sceptical groups, LEADER can offer a positive counter-narrative: the EU has an impact on our everyday lives.
- Multiplier effects: via LAG bodies involving mayors, entrepreneurs, and volunteers from associations and civil society.

### **LEADER as a place for experiencing democracy**

USP: **CLOSENESS TO CITIZENS AND PARTICIPATION**

trend/need: **(re-)building connections**

- While many EU programmes can appear "technocratic", LEADER offers direct public participation and involvement in regional development.
- LAGs act as interfaces between the "distant" EU and the "nearby" village square.
- Participatory democratic co-creation does not separate people into groups of winners and losers; rather, it is a negotiation process oriented towards consent – making it a perfect complement to representative and direct forms of democracy.

## LEADER as a local partner for municipalities, agriculture and business

USP: **PRAGMATIC SOLUTIONS**

to major challenges

trend/need: **the current municipal and economic situation**

- Municipalities are overstretched and cannot handle more complex EU projects “on the side”. The focus on inter-municipal cooperation needs to be strengthened.
- Agriculture: with new topics such as diversification, smart farming and ecological innovations. LEADER is a driving force for developing future-proof business models.
- LAGs take on the role of local competence centres for development and delivery. New forms of economic cooperation need to be developed.

## LEADER as an innovation agency in rural areas

USP: **SOCIAL (AND TRANSFORMATIVE) INNOVATION**

trend/need: **solutions in times of a triple challenge (economic, environmental, social).**

- LEADER is not a classic business support scheme, but an “innovation lab” (for testing) and an “innovation agency” (for brokering) new solutions in rural areas – especially at a time of accelerating economic, environmental and social change.
- Support for technological and social innovations (the project phases supported are ideation, testing and scaling up/dissemination) – this means focused work with people directly involved in the problem or interested in renewal.
- Future topics: transformation (climate change adaptation, digitalization, resilience).

## LEADER as a national and transnational, EU-wide network

USP: **LEADER PROMOTES TRANSNATIONAL PROJECTS**

without territorial restrictions

trend/need: **European cooperation and joint action – especially now!**

- As a “window to the outside”, cooperation projects strengthen regions’ capacity for innovation: within the LEADER context there is scope for cross-border as well as transnational cooperation – unique in this form. LEADER is therefore not only local development, but a federation of a very large number of network hubs: the Local Action Groups, structured in the same way across all Member States.
- European and intercultural cooperation as distinctive added-value experiences (training language skills and providing inspiration for new solutions).

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# WHY WE ARE TAKING ACTION THE LEADER ACTIONS

B

On the one hand, LEADER has a regional economic mandate; on the other, LEADER is a distinctive form of regional development carried out together with local people to improve living conditions and the environment. Why does this “citizen-focused” mandate in particular require special attention?

The background: the various impacts of recent crises have given rise to a phenomenon described as a **“regional development trap”**. At the same time, wide-ranging and accelerating change in many areas of society has created uncertainty and reinforced fault lines. The “development trap” highlights differences in how this dynamic of change is dealt with at regional level and helps explain the sharp increase in EU scepticism, accompanied by doubts about democracy and criticism of the system. The causes of these rejecting attitudes are described as, on the one hand, **cultural and identity-related factors** and, on the other, **differences in economic development**. A region is in a development trap when it “is not able to maintain its economic dynamism in terms of income, productivity and employment” (see European Commission 2023: The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap).

The current situation underlines the **absolute necessity of place-based development work**. Public acceptance is the key success factor for transformation-oriented regional development. LEADER, as a proven, citizen-focused policy instrument, plays a central role here. Support for innovation and investments in education and training, as well as projects that enable people to experience democracy in practice, can counteract the problem of the development trap.

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# WHAT WE ARE IMPROVING REGIONALLY

## THE LEADER REGIONS

C

LEADER primarily improves **local people's environmental and living conditions** and therefore represents the regional level of action, which should be seen as part of a multi-level system of public and private interventions for the socio-economic development of rural areas. LEADER is also the appropriate delivery structure for higher-level EU objectives.

The **EU Missions** should be mentioned, some of which are of greater significance in a regional context: Soil health, climate change adaptation and climate-neutral cities. There are many overlaps with LEADER fields of action. To achieve greater implementation relevance, coordination with the **"Local Action Groups"** in the LEADER network is therefore advisable. In principle, such cooperation would correspond to a theory–practice interface, where, for example, translation work is needed from scientific specialist language into implementation-relevant, practice-oriented language grounded in everyday experience. According to a recent study, there is significant synergy potential between the EU Missions and regional policy: "However, this potential has so far been used only to a limited extent due to a lack of anchoring in EU regional policy and restrictive framework conditions. Missions can be a lever to make cohesion policy more impact-oriented and focused" (cf. Münch, 2025).



A significant role in this context is also played by the **specific objectives of the new EU fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion** (European Commission, 2025). A selection includes: **prosperity, security, social issues, quality of life, and democracy**, with the corresponding sub-topics.

The **“Long-term Vision for the EU’s Rural Areas”** (LTVRA) has also played a role since 2021 as a forum for discussing future perspectives and as an EU-wide Commission initiative. However, here too there is no concrete implementation level for delivering the 10 common objectives. LEADER shows thematic alignment with almost all goals of the Rural Pact (as the LTVRA’s platform) and provides an established dissemination network.

**For the national level (federal government and provinces), LEADER offers the following solutions at regional level:**

### **LEADER WITH A NEW DUAL STRATEGY: INNOVATION & PRAGMATISM**

- USP: **future-proof yet realistic**  
trend/need: **pragmatism as a medium-term solution**
- Combination of: **practice-oriented projects for municipalities** with options for standardisation (local supply of goods and services, essential services of general interest, digitalisation, community/club life, town-centre development, inter-municipal cooperation).
- **Innovative projects for businesses and civil society** (social innovations, climate change adaptation, agriculture with diversification needs, new forms of participation).
- Through this dual strategy, LEADER provides **everyday solutions while also delivering impulses for transformation.**
- LEADER is the only European policy instrument that combines democracy, closeness to citizens and innovation in rural areas.

# 2

## ASPECTS OF THE REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGY

- USP: a **clear, application-oriented definition of innovation; fostering an innovation ecosystem**  
trend/need: **a new LEADER innovation focus (technological–social)**
- Every LEADER region needs room for **regional design and decision-making**, which must be developed in a region-specific way – only then can regional innovation processes be promoted. The aim is to expand and safeguard this regional “innovation space” and to strengthen the innovation orientation and competences of the LAGs.
- The **4 Ts of economic development** should be mentioned as strategic “levers”: **Technology, Talent, Tolerance, Territorial assets**. Technology: comprehensive digitalization for smart solutions in rural areas. Talent: the abilities and skills of people locally, which need to be identified and nurtured. Tolerance: the leeway to invent and test new solutions. Territorial assets: the building blocks of the regional innovation strategy.
- Fields of application include, for example: a) **Competitiveness** in rural areas: diversification of agriculture; promoting the circular economy & bioeconomy; skills development and strengthening career-choice competence. b) **Town- or village centre development**, Smart Villages & digitalization: re-use/new uses, simulations, digital infrastructures. c) **Innovation through cooperation**: regional clusters (crafts, culture, tourism, social business, volunteer networks) strengthen resilience. d) **Ecological modernization**.

# 3

## POSSIBLE NEW THEMATIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PRIORITIES OF SECURITY AND DEFENCE (LOCAL RESILIENCE)

- USP: **everyday safety and resilience & democratic resilience** in rural areas | trend/need: **new security needs due to emerging risk scenarios**
- LEADER cannot address “**security**” in the general sense, but it can contribute in terms of social and infrastructure resilience, for example: a) Security of supply: projects on local supply chains, energy autonomy, water availability. b) Crisis preparedness: strengthening local networks (civil protection, neighbour-to-neighbour support). c) Social balancing: inclusion, prevention of polarization – social stability as a security factor.
- “**Defence**” as social cohesion: here too, a bridge to the local level is possible – as democratic and civil-society safeguarding: a) Democratic resilience: strengthening participation and citizen involvement, and thus trust in institutions. b) Civil-society capacity to organize: projects that counter polarization and build a positive sense of identity (“places that matter”). c) Digital defence: building competences against disinformation and promoting media literacy.
- In this way, **EU priorities** can be anchored locally. LEADER translates major EU themes into **concrete projects at the base** – where acceptance and impact are decisive for success.

# HOW WE WORK TOGETHER D

## THE LEADER GROUPS

Local Action Groups have excellent applied and experiential knowledge in funding advice and network management (roles 1 and 2). For role 3 as an innovation agency, however, new capacities and competences are often required; these are outlined below. These specific contributions form the core of the new added value and LEADER's unique "service" point in the field of regional development.

- USP: network office with **interface competence**; **high acceptance** through place-based development; **agility**: flexible, quick to act, tailored solutions | trend/need: **new competences for Local Action Groups**
- Local Action Groups operate as **intermediary organizations** and fulfill three roles: funding advisory center, multi-level networking office, innovation agency.

### INTERMEDIARY INTERFACE MANAGEMENT

- The **public-private partnership** interface requires strong local anchoring in order to mediate between the interests of municipalities, businesses and civil society.
- The **theory-practice** interface requires translation competences to turn scientific insights into implementation-relevant results. This can also take the form of a practice-oriented voluntary working group ("community of practice").
- The **multi-level governance** interface functions as a network office for horizontal and vertical connections (within the region, across administrative/political levels, and transnationally).

### NEW INTERFACE MANAGEMENT (GAPS, LAGS, TRAPS & LINKS)

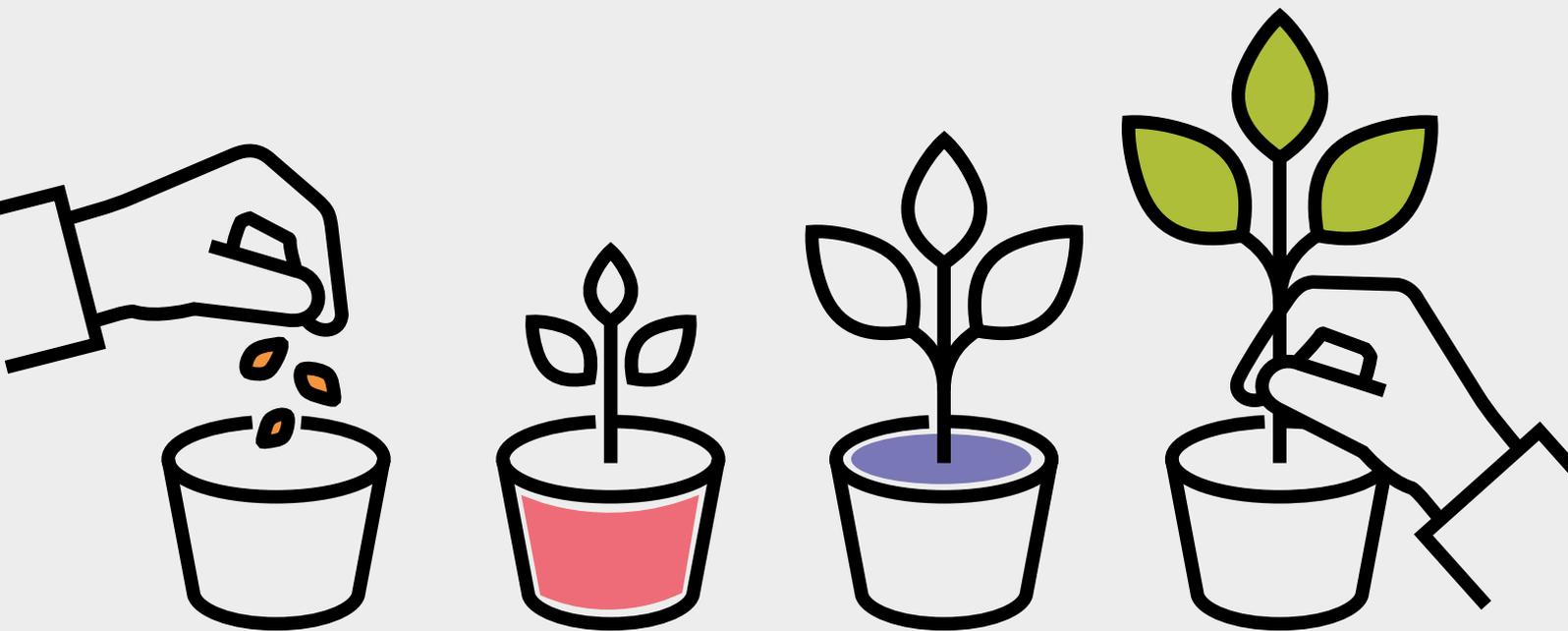
- This involves specific competences for developing projects and **(re-) establishing connections** ("links between actions") in order to reduce societal fault lines or disparities ("social gaps"), improve understanding of technological innovation ("cultural lags"), and enable the participation of "underrepresented groups" ("development traps").
- The **"regional development trap"** can arise, for example, from the non-participation of young people or people with lower levels of education. The aim is to design "experiential projects" with distinctive, high-quality experiences (suited to abstract topics such as democracy, the EU, climate impacts, etc.).

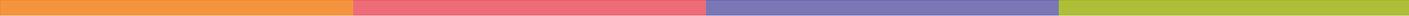
### SPECIALISED INNOVATION MANAGEMENT

- This particular interface work requires specialised competences derived from innovation processes. The **LEADER toolbox** therefore consists of techniques for steering the development phases of social innovation: ideation, testing/piloting, and dissemination/scaling up of new approaches as the output of multi-actor groups.

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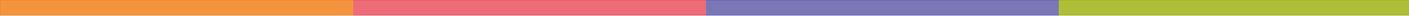
# LEADER: ORIGIN STORY AND PRESENT





# BACKGROUND TO THE ORIGINS OF LEADER

LEADER emerged during **Jacques Delors'** second term as President of the European Commission (FR), during which he was largely responsible for the reorientation of cohesion policy, regional policy and the common agricultural policy. Delors and his Agriculture Commissioner, Ray MacSharry (IE), were convinced of the **innovative capacity of local communities** – in their view, the massive structural change of that time could only be managed through cooperation between different groups in society (a “community approach”). In this context, the Commission paper ***The Future of Rural Society*** (1988) is regarded as a key reference; it highlighted the diversification of the rural economy and a new, area-based focus on innovation in order to respond better to societal challenges. The paper took up the idea of self-managed communities, conceived as a network of municipalities and farms as well as commercial and business enterprises, which would develop tailored perspectives for the future on the basis of the endogenous resources of their territory. The approach built on positive experiences with small-area employment and education initiatives in the Mediterranean region and in the old industrial areas of Great Britain and Ireland, where participatory and local development approaches had been tested. It soon became clear, however, that an overly narrow focus on employment and education would not provide the necessary societal leverage to reorient disadvantaged areas.



# THE TRANSFORMATION FROM LEADER TO CLLD: FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The prehistory of LEADER – as set out in more detail in the report by Robert Lukesch (cf. Lukesch, 2024) – thus grew out of new labour-market and employment initiatives (funded via the European Social Fund) that emerged in many European regions in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the major challenges for the economy and employment following the decline of traditional mining and industrial areas. Old industrial regions and rural areas were subjected to “passive adjustment” as a result of rapidly accelerating outmigration and urbanisation, with the consequence that they fell significantly behind in their economic development. During this phase of industrial change, experts began to view **regions as “complex adaptive systems”**, which could not be steered through such comprehensive restructuring solely by top-down strategies of traditional regional planning approaches. Bottom-up development therefore became an important concept in regional development. For the first time, cooperation between municipalities, the private sector and civil society was recognised as a criterion for success. This was, in other words, an “emancipatory” approach to local development and to profiling regional strengths, starting directly from people’s living and working realities and placing them, as actors, at the centre of development.

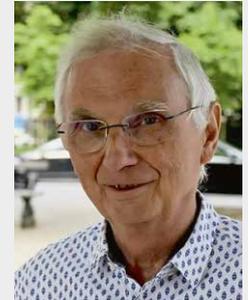
In 1991, LEADER was conceived by **Michel Laine** (FR), a Commission official working across various Directorates-General, as “links between actions for the development of the rural economy”. The first LEADER definition and the first implementing regulation are attributed to him (excerpt: “The objective of the initiative is to find innovative solutions which will serve as a model for all rural areas and ensure maximum integration between sectoral measures. (...) This will enable the groups to act as intermediaries in exchanges by linking up to a series of transmission and database networks (...)”, Official Journal of the European Communities, 1991).

The emphasis was placed on the development and diversification of the rural economy. A focus on technological and social innovation, as well as the intermediary role of local development groups, was already embedded in this initial programme framework.

From 1991 to 1993 (LEADER I), the first 217 pilot regions in Europe were established and selected as eligible for funding by a jury at European level. During the 1994 to 1999 LEADER programme period (LEADER II), the seven LEADER principles were formalised on the basis of the experiences gained in the first regions. At the Cork Conference on Rural Development in 1996, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, **Franz Fischler** (AT), referred to LEADER for the first time as a **“laboratory for innovations in rural areas”**. In 1997, the LEADER Observatory in Brussels published the ground-breaking paper “Innovation and Rural Development”, with contributions from Robert Lukesch (cf. European Observatory LEADER, 1997). From 1994, LEADER and the rural Local Action Groups were financed through Structural Funds programmes; from 2000 through the agricultural fund (LEADER+); and from 2007 through the newly established “European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development”. From 2014 onwards, the LEADER approach expanded significantly in terms of both the number of regions and the funding options available. LEADER was also defined as “Community-Led Local Development” (CLLD), underlining the importance of public participation. New coastal and urban action groups received funding from the Structural Funds (“European Social Fund”, “European Regional Development Fund”, “European Maritime and Fisheries Fund”). By now, the number of all action groups has risen to around 3,000 across all Member States.

**Excursus on regionally based development steered by public funds:** The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stipulates that the Member States must act “in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition”, thereby implying an expectation of efficient use of resources.

This open market economy is governed by fundamental freedoms (for the free movement of goods, capital, services, etc.) and a prohibition on State aid. Nevertheless, in regional development, public funds are used to support selected



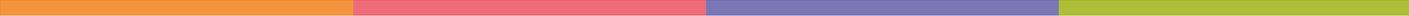
**Michel Laine**



**Franz Fischler**

initiatives – a contradiction? No, because such funding generally serves to cushion inequalities and disadvantages in terms of market participation and competitiveness. The aim is to reduce disparities, for example of a structural nature (as in the case of disadvantaged areas), or to create more favourable framework conditions so that, for instance as an economic policy stimulus, the number of innovations or start-ups is increased, or so that social tasks can be fulfilled more effectively. In principle, the allocation of public funds is steered by regional and administrative policy at EU and national level (cf. Berger, 2025, p. 117). In the case of LEADER, the use of public funds must be viewed in a more differentiated way: it is not merely project funding, but essentially motivational support to encourage shared responsibility for the region among municipalities, businesses and civil society. This particular approach is somewhat awkwardly referred to as “neo-endogenous”.

LEADER represents the **neo-endogenous approach to regional development** (cf. Ray, 2006), with a strong emphasis on the role of actors at three levels: **(A) the intra-territorial plane**, with traditional features such as the regionalisation of production, place-based strategic action, the promotion of social capital, and the formation of local partnerships; **(B) the politico-administrative context**, with features such as the transfer of competences to the region organized as public-private partnership (with e.g. a regional budget), the promotion of European perspectives at regional level, and the evaluation of measures; and **(C) the inter-territorial plane**, with features such as the promotion of cross-territorial and transnational cooperation and participation in a European network of regions. Above all, new forms of collaboration between the regional and administrative-policy levels, as well as interterritorial cooperation, constitute what is meant by “neo-endogenous”. The prefix “neo” does not weaken the bottom-up approach; rather, it situates the region within an interconnected multi-level system of regional, national and European spheres of action – so that “top-down” and “bottom-up” no longer appear as a strict dichotomy.



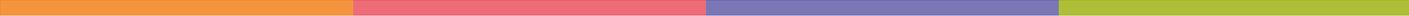
# INNOVATIVE LEADER APPROACHES IN THE EU

At this point – described in more detail in the report by Stefan Kah (cf. Kah, 2024 – a wide range of LEADER innovations in the EU are reviewed in an overview. He structures these innovations into categories such as organisation, administration and process. For him, however, the best innovation in the LEADER context is the **development, testing and dissemination of the LEADER approach** itself – over a period of 35 years. The early years correspond to the phase of idea generation: experiences with labour market initiatives were inspiring in showing how new perspectives could be developed with groups of people affected by problems – this constituted a reform of participation. Drawing on the experiences and trials in the first 217 pilot regions, the LEADER method and the way local action groups operate were derived – this constituted a reform of regional innovation processes. From 2007 onwards, there was finally a major expansion of LEADER areas in all Member States (also promoted by EU Commissioner Franz Fischler). **LEADER, as an organization, method and funding scheme**, therefore represents – according to the definition – a classic process of social innovation (SI) as a “reform from below”: heterogeneous groups of people affected by problems come together and initiate processes to improve their environmental and living conditions.

When considering LEADER as an organization, **three European LAG types** stand out: **rural, coastal and urban LAGs**, which are financed either through a single fund or multiple funds (LEADER–EAFRD or multi-fund CLLD). Building on the experience of rural LAGs, concepts for the first coastal LAGs were developed from 2007 onwards (funded by the EMFF), which were naturally strongly shaped by structural change in marine and inland fisheries.

In 2014, the introduction of multi-fund CLLD saw the emergence of the first urban LAGs (funded by the ESF/ERDF), which applied the LEADER method in neighbourhood and district management. Well-known urban LAGs have, for example, been established in Lisbon (PT) or Timișoara (RO). LEADER can therefore also be firmly embedded in urban areas, provided it is strategically adapted. At present, there are around 2,500 rural LAGs, around 350 coastal LAGs and about 250 urban LAGs across all EU Member States.

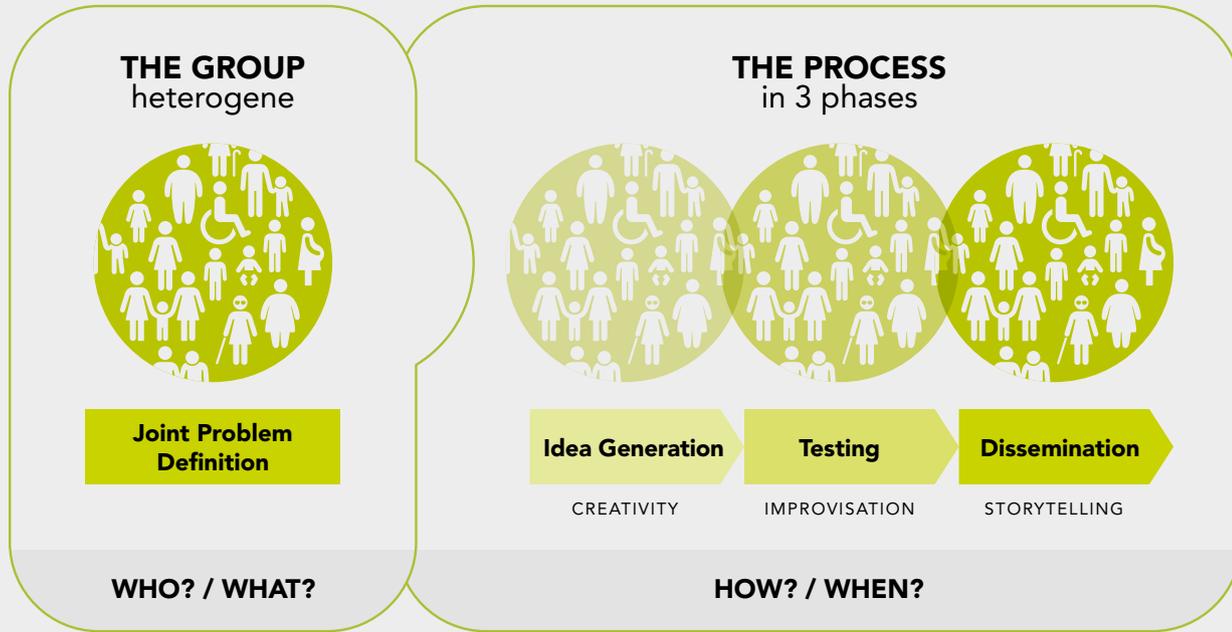
The Austrian LEADER Forum defined **three LAG roles** (cf. LEADER-forum, 2020), which have also consistently been taken up and differentiated in discussions about LEADER's future viability and its core mission: **Role 1 (funding advisory center)** is represented by the funding advisory function, in which individuals and organisations seeking support are assisted with funding-related matters and project management – this is a mandatory task. **Role 2 (network office)** refers to the networking function, with a regional office acting as a network node that brings together groups of people at regional and national level as well as within transnational cooperation. Identifying and connecting key individuals is a success-critical competence here. **Role 3 (innovation agency)** is represented by the LAG as a non-profit and/or innovation-oriented enterprise. The LAG itself assumes strategic responsibility for key projects, i.e. it bears financial and substantive responsibility and therefore acts entrepreneurially. LAG-led projects are strategically significant initiatives. In future, new forms of collaboration between LAGs need to be developed so that they can operate more effectively as a joint network – only in this way can transformation goals be achieved. Because LEADER means: fostering innovation through cooperation.



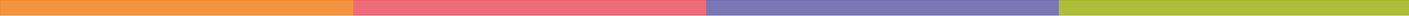
However, role 3 requires not only sufficient capacity but also specific competences in innovation and transformation management, as well as the LAG's own legal personality as an association or a limited company (rarely a cooperative), since project responsibility can only be properly regulated in this way. Other organizational structures would make the implementation of LAG projects or umbrella projects considerably more difficult and would reduce the LAG once again to a funding advisory center and a project selection committee, thereby failing to ensure fulfillment of LEADER's core development mandate.

Paul Soto, the former head of the LEADER Contact Point in Brussels, identified three particular challenges in LAG work that would hinder an innovation orientation: excessive administrative burden, insufficient capacity (e.g. financial or human resources), and increasing external influence (e.g. from political or administrative-policy actors). At the same time, the innovation orientation also has a rather pragmatic background: LEADER can never become "broad-based structural funding" when one considers the public resources available in relation to the needs. However, the so-called "leverage effect" achieved through regional key projects and initiatives is considerable and shows how much can be accomplished with a manageable budget and a great deal of commitment.

In essence, LEADER innovations are often **social innovations** (SI), or phases in their emergence: LEADER supports the formation of a multi-actor group as a structural precondition for an SI, and promotes the functional process phases of SI such as idea generation, testing and the dissemination of new products, practices or services. The difference from technological innovation lies, in any case, in the early and active involvement of the people affected by the problem, who are members of the multi-actor group from the outset and who ultimately appear as users and practitioners, thereby increasing acceptance of the innovation. The context of emergence also distinguishes social from technological innovations. The joint description and delineation of the problem in the initial phase of the innovation process is a collective group effort.



Kah also describes the **relationship between the degree of autonomy available** to a LAG (illustrated by the three LAG roles) and the types of innovation at regional level. In the context of role 1, administrative innovations clearly predominate, such as simplified cost options, “draft budgets” or possible multi-fund financing. In the networking role, the strategic work of a LAG is shown to have either a predominantly regional or a more European orientation. To what extent are European perspectives also taken into account at regional level? This, in turn, gives rise to transnational cooperation projects (TNC), which are the result of networking activities as well as a higher degree of freedom and a wider scope for action for the LAG. The independent (social and economic) action required for LAG role 3 particularly strengthens LEADER’s added value. New forms of participation, European cooperation and innovation orientation are tested and implemented.



# LOCAL ACTION GROUPS AS INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS

The quality – and thus the success – of cooperation between actors from different spheres of society depends on the capacities and competences of intermediary organisations or actors such as LAGs, which are responsible for the **“management of the in-between”**. In the literature, these roles are also referred to as “bridging agents” or “change agents”. In any case, this is a form of **interface management** (cf. Berger, 2025, pp. 122 ff.), which can arise, for example, in the following configurations:

**a) The public–private interface:** the LAG as a group comprising representatives of public administration, the private sector and civil society, including the many voluntary associations and initiatives – in other words, a public–private partnership. In terms of its regional economic significance, this configuration is also referred to as a “trinity of change agency”, since promoting innovative and organisational entrepreneurship and regional leadership are key objectives, or:

**b) The theory–practice interface:** the LAG as a group of practitioners, researchers and other experts with experiential knowledge (also a “community of practice” when it is based on voluntary participation). In this case, the main focus is on translating scientific insights into practical, applied knowledge, or:

**c) The multi-level interface** (cf. the concept of multi-level governance): the LAG as a group of politicians, citizens and people specifically affected by particular problems, maintaining network relationships at regional, national and European level.

Knowledge of the functions of intermediary organizations in participatory regional development is not new. What does need to be redefined, however, are the required competences, which have changed significantly as a result of societal transformation. Supporting capacity- and competence-building in intermediary organizations – and LAGs should be regarded as such – is in any case urgently necessary for the functioning of a free democratic order with strong civil society participation. It concerns strengthening the organizational capacity of civil society (consisting of committed individuals, voluntary associations and initiatives, etc.). Without this specific mediation activity between societal spheres in a world perceived as extraordinarily complex, major mutual problems of understanding will persist, and this clearly has a negative impact on willingness to participate and on the developmental capacity of a region and its population (cf. the social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic). Especially for young people, it is extremely important to see – or to be shown – that there are spaces for social and civic shaping, in which there are tasks for them (“things to do”) that they can also fulfill within the scope of their “agency”.

# DERIVATION OF THE URGENT NEED FOR INTERMEDIARIES

We are currently facing the triple challenge of profound – and seemingly accelerating – economic, ecological and social change. However, this triple challenge can also be viewed in a fundamentally different way: with his contribution on **the triple challenge**, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman provides an unconventional explanation of transformation (cf. Bauman, 2012). We are in a phase of far-reaching upheaval (“interregnum”) – familiar structures are dissolving, while what is new is not yet foreseeable. This triggers a collective sense of general uncertainty. This, in turn, leads to institutional disparity, understood as a redistribution of formerly state responsibilities towards the private and market-based sphere. Yet it is precisely here that the opportunity also lies. By involving affected groups, fears about the future can be reduced and acceptance of innovations increased – at least at the regional level of action as part of a multi-level system.

The need to support intermediary organizations can be derived from three observable phenomena:

**a) The social gap** (social and sectoral), which refers to a gap between different groups in society and points to structural disadvantage and unequal access to resources, etc., for example the “gender pay gap” (cf. European Commission, 2022) or gaps between occupational fields – a divide that is sometimes intensified by technological change. In the longer term, social divergence leads to social instability. Context: **LEADER helps to reduce social inequalities.**

**b) The cultural lag** (cultural and temporal) refers to society's delayed understanding of the changes – and their consequences – brought about by technical and technological innovations. It is a developmental gap between technological and cultural development. This phenomenon can lead to maladjustments and social problems, as certain groups are not yet able to deal adequately with new technologies or their impacts (e.g. AI applications). The term was first used by William Ogburn in his theory of cultural lag (cf. Ogburn, 1923). Context: **LEADER helps people to better understand technological innovations and apply them in a meaningful way.**

**c) The regional development trap** (cultural and economic) denotes the difference in economic development between prosperous and disadvantaged areas. This trap leads to dissatisfaction with politics and the social order and is increasingly articulated in support for system- or democracy-sceptical and EU-sceptical forces – the phenomenon is seen as a response from people in “places that don't matter” (European Commission, 2023, p. 13). For this central problem of regional development, there are, on the one hand, cultural and identity-related causes, which may manifest themselves, for instance, in a fundamental rejection of the need for change, and, on the other hand, considerable economic disparities between regions as an underlying factor, indicated by employment, income or population decline. Context: **LEADER seeks to re-engage hard-to-reach groups.**

Therefore, moving away from the objectives of neo-endogenous development such as LEADER/CLLD would be a cause for concern, as this would endanger the internal and territorial cohesion of a “Europe of the Regions” (cf. European Commission, 2023). Regional economic, social and ecological development needs are confronted with growing scepticism towards development and change. This represents a classic dilemma. All three problem scenarios can be addressed and improved through the work of intermediaries at regional level. Among other things, they help to reduce social, temporal and cultural disparities through targeted strategic initiatives at regional level. Through such initiatives, transformation goals are pursued via awareness-raising, training and participation activities.

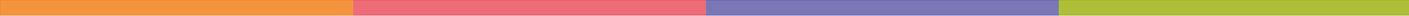
**To summarise once again:** as a result of the many crisis-related impacts of recent years, we are facing far-reaching changes – challenges that reveal clear societal fault lines. In addition, particularly in Europe’s rural areas, there are communication deficits in conveying EU objectives. Social cohesion appears to have diminished. In order to address these “gaps” across a wide range of fields through mediation, competent intermediary organisations and actors are needed to (re-)establish connections (“links between actions”, as the acronym LEADER signifies). Not only, but especially in rural areas, LAGs are well suited to this intermediary task. They have appropriate and proven methods for working with the population to develop improvements in their social, economic and ecological living conditions – this is **LEADER’s USP**, understood as a **unique “service” point**. LEADER regions, with their LAGs as network nodes, therefore have enormous potential for mediation and multiplication. However, they require support to build their capacity and competences.

### **Brief digression: LEADER as a “middle-range intervention”**

The question is often raised as to which challenges LEADER is suited to, and which it is not. It is true that LEADER cannot save the world, but it can – perhaps more than any other approach – reach and engage people at basic level. The ‘range and relevance limits’ concept is very helpful here.

LEADER projects typically take place at local or regional level. In economics, this is often described in terms of micro, meso and macro levels. Our aim is to increase the impact of strategic LEADER projects in future – at least to a ‘middle-range’ level. By this we mean that impacts at the micro and meso levels (that is, locally and regionally) remain measurable, which fits LEADER well. But that is also the limit of its reach.

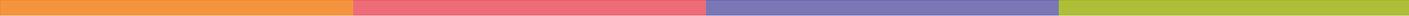
When we talk about transformation, we are initially dealing with a macro-level concept (societal change, shifts in behaviour and attitudes, and so on), where effects are considerably more difficult – or more costly – to measure. In regional development, transformation goals could therefore be pursued more effectively through a network of regions.



# THE DILEMMAS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

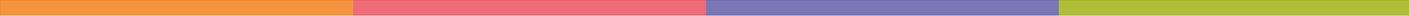
The Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) has repeatedly listed **dilemmas of the regional level of action** as quasi inherent to the system (cf. ÖROK, 2020, pp. 29–30), for example: cooperation versus competition, autonomy versus control, entrepreneurial action versus administrative orientation, efficient structures versus democratic legitimacy, functional space versus identity space, and so on. Managing the regional level of action therefore often also means working with contradictions that appear irresolvable: “This requires sufficient human resources with high levels of qualification and experience. Time-related, organizational and supportive resources should therefore be made available for all actors at the regional level of action: space and time for reflection, intervision, staff development, education and training, as well as organizational development” (ibid.).

A systemic analysis of these dilemmas reveals an interesting spectrum of diverse spheres of interest. Particular attention should be paid to the extent to which **contradiction-laden framework conditions** have an inhibiting effect on regional development capacity. For example, in the LEADER context during the CAP period 2023 to 2027, **a structural dilemma** becomes apparent: how can the original development mandate still be fulfilled – one that legitimises LEADER’s specific structure and way of working of the Local Action Group (LAG), the involved network bodies and administrative authorities – when staffing resources remain unchanged (on average two people per LAG) while administrative workload increases sharply? This dilemma can be summarised succinctly as **“administrative orientation versus innovation orientation”**.



More specifically, the administratively oriented mandate assigned to the region means working in a self-organised, resource-efficient and decision-transparent manner with the public funds provided. Within the framework of neo-endogenous regional development, this corresponds to the so-called “delegation of responsibility” from public administration to the region. The **“self-development mandate”** for the region, however, is the actual *raison d’être* and objective of the regional partnership. How, then, can both mandates – responsibility for public funds and an innovation orientation – continue to be fulfilled at the required level of intensity and quality when staffing resources are limited? An urgent discourse should be opened on this key question. The aim is to improve the future legitimation of the “self-development mandate”. It should also be asked how administrative workload could be reduced or, at the very least, assessed as a predictable and constant effort. This would, in turn, lead to a new comparison: general (i.e. area-wide) regional development versus an innovation orientation which, following the logic of a business model, should be more clearly focused and could not encompass all areas of rural development.

From the dilemma situations mentioned, so-called **isomorphisms** may result, which can also inhibit development. These are (literally translated) “uniformities” in organizational development that cause the actual mandate to slip out of focus. By merely imitating administrative functions – for example as a body for preliminary project screening – a LAG would fall into a uniformity trap (“isomorphism trap”). The phenomenon arises from the drive for legitimacy in organizations that are not yet sufficiently established and is reflected in the imitation of successful institutions and corporate cultures. The three mechanisms are coercion (e.g. through laws, guidelines), imitation (e.g. of best-practice models) and normative pressure (through majority relations) in the regional context. In any case, isomorphisms do not foster innovation.

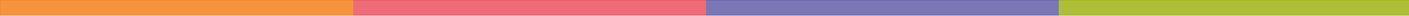


In this context, it must be acknowledged as a matter of principle that each individual LEADER region has its own territorial assets. At a time of scarce funding and resources – when calls for general standardization and structural simplification are, understandably, growing – it should be emphasised that territorial assets and differences remain essential **design elements of innovation strategies**. Times of upheaval require not fewer, but more innovations. A reform based on the motto “one size fits all” would inhibit innovation. In any case, LAGs are not decentralized or scaled-down replicas of higher-level administrative structures; rather, they should proactively seek to align themselves with the new challenges facing rural areas, following the logic of swarm intelligence, without producing “more of the same” at project level.

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# WHAT OUR COMMON FUTURE CAN LOOK LIKE



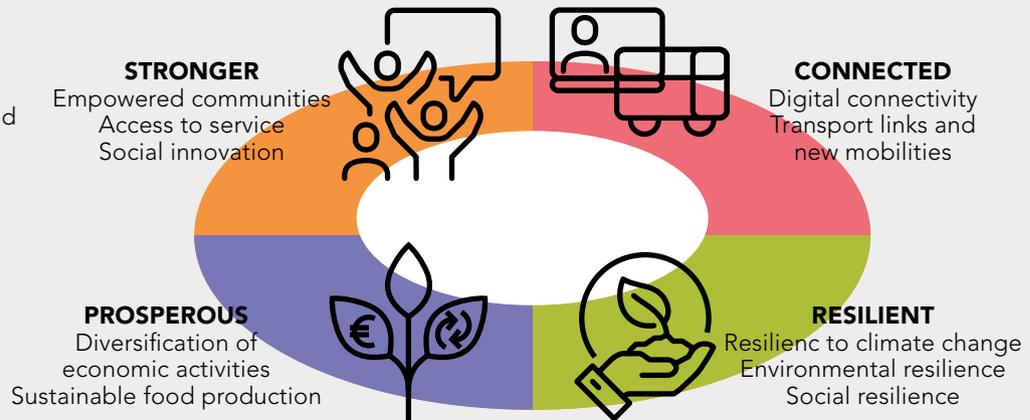


# THE NEW CHALLENGES AND EU PRIORITIES

For the current period, the European Commission identifies seven priorities: prosperity and competitiveness; defence and security; social justice and solidarity; quality of life; democracy; global partnerships; and acting together for the future. However, a clear shift can be observed away from previous focal areas such as cohesion and territorial cohesion towards topics such as defence and security, which entail substantial budgetary needs. At the same time, the Commission's strategy is apparent: while recommending common European action, it increasingly transfers decision-making to the Member States – amounting to a (re-)nationalization that could ultimately jeopardise the continuation of shared and proven measures. In this context, a “Single National Plan” with “National and Regional Partnership Plans” (NRPP) is being discussed; its approval is intended to be linked only to rule-of-law standards, while the use of funds would largely be left to the Member State. Based on current knowledge, no “ring-fencing” of common European actions such as LEADER/CLLD (i.e. anchoring them in implementing regulations with a minimum allocation) is envisaged. This could significantly weaken these scarce EU instruments that promote a regional as well as a European identity. Unfortunately, LEADER is viewed solely as local development, rather than as a common European action or a European network of regions.

From the general priorities mentioned above, a **“Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas”** (LTVRA; cf. Rural Vision, 2021) was already derived in 2021: rural areas are to become stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous territories. To realize this vision, an action plan with 10 shared goals was drawn up: the recommendations for action range from attractive areas to places of diversity.

The main drivers shaping the future of rural areas up to 2040 and the four fields of action



Magda Porta, drawing on the results of the final report of the transnational project “Our Common Future” (cf. LEADER Forum Austria, 2025) and the Europe-wide survey of LAGs (cf. Porta, 2024), has strongly recommended that LEADER regions present themselves as the appropriate structure for implementing the LTVRA and therefore anchor themselves more firmly within the **“Rural Pact”** platform, which was established for this purpose. Porta refers to this as „strategic coherence“:

“Aligning the LEADER approach with LTVRA priorities assures that LAG interventions are focused on addressing the most relevant challenges and opportunities identified at the European level. This strategic alignment is essential for integrating straightforward and efficiently LDS (author’s note: “local development strategies”) into the broader policy framework, providing clear orientation for LAGs in implementing policies at the local level toward common EU objectives. It ensures that local actions are in sync with the broader European agenda, thereby amplifying their impact” (ibid. pp. 19-20).

A review of the 10 shared goals shows that, in essence, all of them reveal a connection with LEADER and LEADER’s added value. LEADER’s contributions to the “major” challenges at EU and national level provide an argument for the future allocation of public funding to LEADER.

But which goals does LEADER represent in particular? Let us take a closer look at three of them:

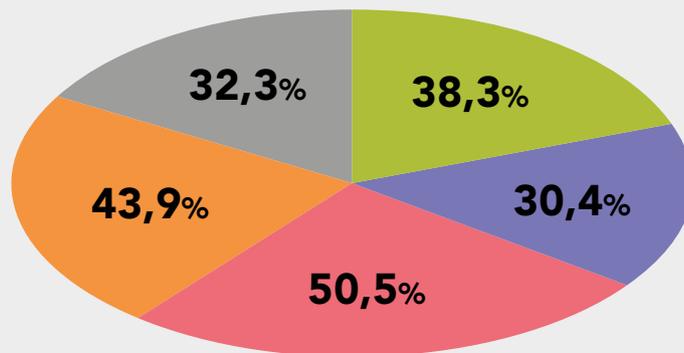
**Goal 2** is the **"promotion of multi-level and place-based governance"**: the network of LAGs, with its different levels of action, has long been regarded as one of the best examples of this.

**Goal 8** refers to the **"support of entrepreneurial-minded, innovation-oriented and skilled people"**: LEADER seeks to identify and support talent in order to counteract brain drain.

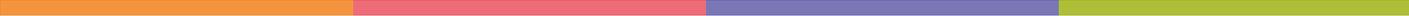
**Goal 10** is **"places of diversity"**: LEADER responds to local differences and supports collective action.

Reflecting on the commonalities between the 10 goals and LEADER brings to mind the so-called four T's of economic development (cf. Florida, 2014): the promotion of technology, tolerance and talent, as well as territorial specificities.

What role can LAGs play in achieving the LTVRA?



- Key role of leading and coordinating efforts
- Leading by example and fostering innovation
- Collaborating with other stakeholders and partners
- Providing guidance and support to local communities
- Promoting inclusive and participatory approaches



# NEED FOR A (NATIONAL) DUAL STRATEGY FOR FUTURE LEADER WORK

In future, LAGs as intermediary organizations will need to pursue a strategy with **two objectives**.

**Innovation management based on the multi-actor approach:** As outlined above, an innovation orientation has been a core element of the LEADER approach from the outset, and of the method that emerged from it: according to former EU Commissioner for Agriculture Franz Fischler, LEADER was always intended as an “innovation laboratory” in rural areas. Today, this **innovation orientation is being complemented by transformation objectives** – “transformative innovation” is the new buzzword. The task is to further develop innovation methods for LAGs and to build intermediary capacities. In this context, interface management also means connecting different cluster networks, i.e. bringing together experts working on technological innovations with practitioners and application-oriented experts in order to increase acceptance of new developments.

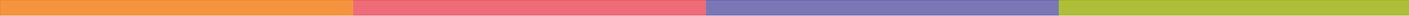
**Network management for municipalities and (agricultural) businesses:** Since LEADER II, municipalities have formed the basis for defining LEADER territories. To this day, many rural municipalities have opted for voluntary membership in a LEADER region. At present, however, municipalities face major challenges – above all in financial terms and in relation to local strategic planning. An initial analysis of LEADER-funded municipal projects shows the **following clusters:** local services and services of general interest, inter-municipal cooperation, local development and re-use, competences in the context of digitalization, support for voluntary associations, and so on. It now needs to be clarified which characteristics an ideal-typical LEADER municipal project should have. What is clear, however, is that implementing an EU project scheme (such as LEADER) cannot simply be done “on

the side” with the existing capacities and competences in rural or smaller municipal administrations.

For this reason, LAG management bodies play an important role when it comes to applying for and disbursing EU funds for municipalities. Administrative simplification would certainly be desirable, but managing EU-funded projects will still not be possible without a noticeable investment of staff time. General standardization of project administration can only help to save resources for certain types of projects. While town- or village-centre development is a good thematic example of a broadly shared problem faced by rural municipalities, the solutions can nevertheless be highly place-specific.

**Good LEADER municipal projects will continue to require practice-oriented project development.** Municipal projects, too, should be innovation-oriented, but above all they should set out pragmatic pathways and help to tackle challenges at local government level. With regard to how a LAG operates, it should also be highlighted that municipalities have significant and direct co-determination with respect to local development and the allocation of public funds – the LEADER regional level is very close to the municipal level. Many mayors are also LEADER chairs.

The same therefore applies to agriculture and the economy: what should good LEADER projects look like in future? In agriculture, the focus for years has been on intelligent or “smart” solutions for **diversifying income sources** and production options for farms. Many LEADER projects address interfaces between primary production, processing and the crafts/trades sector. In addition, there are numerous projects supporting **technological and ecological modernization** in agriculture. LEADER strengthens rural areas overall and thus the spatial and societal aspects of agriculture as fundamental conditions for its success. In the economic sphere, **cooperative business projects** should be prioritized over individual initiatives. Here, too, many tasks for intermediaries can be identified: translating research results into practice, and generating entrepreneurial as well as regional benefits through economic cooperation (e.g. social business).



# VISION OF A TRULY CITIZEN-FOCUSED EU IN RURAL AREAS AND THE VALUE OF PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

It is in rural areas that the EU fails most clearly in communicative terms. Yet we are familiar with the slogan of a **“citizen-oriented Europe”**, which seeks to describe an EU that is more understandable, accessible and more strongly integrated into citizens’ everyday lives – for example through supporting exchange, transparent processes and opportunities for participation such as the European Citizens’ Initiative. Programmes such as Erasmus+ support education and youth exchange, while the European Citizens’ Initiative enables citizens to submit policy proposals directly. Strengthening democratic values and promoting equality and diversity are also intended to be anchored in a citizen-oriented Europe. However, LEADER regions with their LAGs have the potential to deliver genuine citizen proximity in rural areas. They provide regional forums for exchange of views, co-determination and co-creation. The LEADER network structure therefore has enormous multiplier power for transformation goals.

In this context, it is also interesting that **LEADER – with its LAG system – is being transferred by the European Commission as an “export success”** to candidate countries as part of initial steps towards **accession**, in order to promote democratic and civil-society organization there – albeit with limited financial support (cf. Rinne, 2024). By the way: following Brexit, LEADER in England apparently did not continue to receive national funding, whereas in Scotland it was continued using national funds.

The crises of recent years have shown that even in established democratic systems, new forms of participation are needed in order to respond more quickly, in a place-adapted manner, and with a high level of public acceptance. This is about further developing forms of participatory democracy. The key term here is **“place-based development”**, understood as an intelligent allocation of responsibilities. It enables regions and municipalities to shape their own future by defining local priorities and developing solutions tailored to their specific social, economic and ecological contexts – entirely in line with the LEADER approach. The **aspect of acceptance** is central. As the phenomenon of the regional development trap shows, ignoring the question of acceptance will generate further resistance and instability. Participation and acceptance are decisive for success in relation to all overarching missions and transformation goals. The central question is how population groups (in rural areas) that currently scarcely participate in democratic deliberation (within representative democracy) can be won back for co-determination and co-creation – at least at the regional level of action. In future, involving regional stakeholders will be required not only in the context of strategy development, but also in the regular evaluation of the implementation of overarching missions and objectives. The regional composition of so-called stakeholder groups may need to be reassessed using adapted criteria.

# A NEW DISCOURSE ON LEADER'S ADDED VALUE

The LEADER added value described to date (in some member states) points to the following dimensions:

**a) Experience of democracy** (i.e. governance and democracy): groups affected by problems and open to renewal develop solutions themselves to improve their environmental and living conditions. The LAG supports idea generation and implementation. This is about active co-shaping and is understood as a form of participatory democracy that is oriented towards consensus and is not intended to produce “winners” and “losers”. The difference from direct democracy is that it is about co-creation rather than merely yes–no votes.

**b) A European perspective** at regional level (i.e. social capital: regional, national, European): this is about **understanding the EU's challenges in a globalized world and developing local solutions** – facilitated by the LAG.

**c) Innovation orientation** (i.e. innovation and quality of outcomes): far-reaching change generates and requires innovations at local level – LEADER is regarded as a laboratory for innovations in rural areas. The regional level delivers important innovations to improve a wide range of environmental and living conditions. Indicators for this definition of added value have so far been primarily qualitative in nature.

### **The new – complementary – discourse on added value is as follows:**

the whole (LEADER) is more than the sum of its parts (projects), because the actual work of a LAG cannot be captured through impact measurement based solely on project indicators – especially not the democratic, European and innovation-oriented dimensions of LAG work.

The following points should therefore be brought into the current debate on LEADER's added value:

#### **EU level:**

LEADER is exceptionally well placed to contribute to achieving the 10 shared goals of the **"Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas" (LTVRA)**, as Local Action Groups represent established, proven and Europe-wide networked organizational structures. A closer link should be created between the LEADER network and the Rural Pact. LEADER needs to be more strongly associated with EU objectives. LEADER also plays a central role at the local implementation level for mission-oriented regional development with transformation goals. In shaping the **"National and Regional Partnership Plans" (NRPP)**, it is essential to highlight the thematic interlinkage between LEADER and objectives at EU and national level in order to strengthen LEADER's legitimacy.

#### **National level –**

##### **the "strategy of new pragmatism" for intermediaries:**

LAG roles 1 and 2 (funding advisory center and network office) can be applied effectively at intermediary interfaces such as those described above. This involves interface work between different societal levels or sub-systems, such as theory–practice, administration–innovation, strategy–implementation, etc. It may also involve sectoral interfaces that LAGs address in order to achieve better connectivity – for example, to improve project development in areas such as municipal administration or the regional economy. To **strengthen the capacity for deliberation and cooperation** in times of growing societal polarization, intermediary work at regional level is essential.

## **National level –**

### **the “strategy of new innovation orientation” for innovation agencies:**

Promoting innovation remains LEADER’s core mandate. LEADER’s future viability is evident precisely in this approach. Will there continue to be sufficient scope for innovation processes, or will LEADER be reduced to just one funding scheme among many? If so, what would the LAGs then stand for – LAGs that were created to implement the idea of citizen participation, not the other way round as mere funding administrators? LEADER innovations are clearly defined: they can be aptly described using the **toolbox of social innovations (SI)**. At the beginning of the innovation process is the joint description of the problem or need by a group of people who come together because they want to solve something and improve their environmental or living conditions. The process then continues with idea generation, testing in an implementation phase, and – if the tests are successful – moves into the dissemination of the improvement or novelty. Only then does it become an innovation: acceptance through purchase or use is its essential element. In all three phases of the innovation process (invention, testing, dissemination), the LAG provides support – whether through competent facilitation, networking or funding. This is why competence development for LAGs is so important.

Ultimately, this is a political question: do we continue to believe in the **innovative capacity of regional and local communities**, or – at a time of scarce resources – do we take a more structure-oriented route and attempt to steer regional development through directives? However, the history of LEADER shows clearly which path is “more innovative”, and which framework conditions foster the innovative capacity of regions. In the “National and Regional Partnership Plans” (NRPP), attention should therefore not only be paid to listing relevant thematic fields, but also to the methods and instruments for achieving objectives. It is not only about the “what”, but also about the “how”, and thus about goal-oriented innovation and transformation management, which presupposes public acceptance. In debates about the future of regional policy, precisely the LEADER principles are assessed as future-proof – often without explicitly naming LEADER. What is needed, therefore, is not new approaches or structures, but recognition of LEADER’s strategic importance for rural areas and for the regional level of action.

In the EU's current situation, despite all the tasks relating to security and defence, the **importance of internal and territorial cohesion** must not be overlooked. It is about people – with all their commitment, convictions and their capacity to shape the future of their environment and living world together. There are not many European, citizen-oriented instruments to foster this cohesion, particularly in rural areas – **LEADER is a key instrument in this regard**, with enormous potential.

**Chapter overview of the complete report:**

- Chapter 1: Most innovative Approaches in Europe (**Stefan Kah**, UK)
- Chapter 2: Experiences of LAGs outside the EU (**Petri Rinne**, FI)
- Chapter 3: Origin Story and Political Frameworks (**Robert Lukesch**, AT)
- Chapter 4: New Communication Approaches (**Anette Peiter**, LU)
- Chapter 5: Common Themes and EU wide survey (**Magda Porta**, PT)
- Chapter 6: Conclusion - The New Added Value (**Wolfgang Berger**, AT)

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# LEADER: DEMOCRATIC SOCIALY INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC ECOLOGICAL EUROPEAN



The European  
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