

## Clarifying the EU jargon: what does “community led” really mean?

The question stems from a newly appointed manager of a French Local Action Group (LAG). In rural development literature – particularly on LEADER – the term ‘community’ is often used a synonym of ‘territory’ and the nuances of language can be lost in translation. Merging ‘community led’ and ‘territory’ into the concept of ‘place-based’ was the option retained in the Barca report in 2009<sup>1</sup>. This approach is considered as an interesting answer to the demand for new democratic participation and to the request for new opportunities for the direct involvement of local groups (Loris Antonio Servillo, KUL, October 2017).

This short note is an attempt to solve translation difficulties by trying to clarify the term ‘community led’ by reaching a common understanding of the concepts.

The Cambridge dictionary defines a community as people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality. The following examples are given:

- *He's well known in the local community.*
- *There's a large black/white/Jewish community living in this area.*
- *Her speech caused outrage among the gay community.*
- *Drug trafficking is a matter of considerable concern for the entire international community (= all the countries of the world).*
- *There is a real sense of community (= caring and friendly feeling) in this neighbourhood.*

In some countries, this notion of community is deeply rooted in cultural and institutional behaviours through ‘community development’, as in Scandinavian countries, where such behaviours rely on traditions of civic participation. Community development is a way in which communities can attain their rights.

In other countries, the ‘community led’ approach carries along a development pattern of civic society initiatives organised through the third sector movement and social entrepreneurship. France has been one of the most active countries in this field with the adoption in 2014 of the Law on Social and Inclusive Economy (*Economie Sociale et Solidaire*).

Since 2015, Community Led Local Development (CLLD) develops itself under the umbrella of place-based delivery mechanisms supported by funds such as EARDF (LEADER) and EMFF in rural and coastal areas, or regeneration policies in deprived urban areas (URBAN - ERDF). CLLD is related to the vertical integration of policy areas in the fields of:

- Land Planning (transport, mobility, spatial planning);
- Environment (preservation of biodiversity, energy efficiency);
- Climate action (adaptation and mitigation);
- Culture (heritage promotion, local arts and crafts, etc.);
- Social Inclusion (social affairs, social protection);
- Employment (labour market, migration flows);
- Training (vocational models, outreach models);
- Health (silver economy, childcare services, public health, etc.);
- Poverty Reduction (welfare, family, housing, education);
- Economic Development (regeneration schemes, restructuring, business creation, circular economy, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> AN AGENDA FOR A REFORMED COHESION POLICY: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report\\_barca\\_v0306.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report_barca_v0306.pdf)

In rural development, 'community led' covers socio-economic issues like education, professional training, housing, health, leisure, culture and identity from a sub-regional, territorial point of view, defined by human settlements. It includes the secondary and tertiary sectors, local development initiatives and local capacity building. LEADER and CLLD are closely linked to this discourse.

The EU guidance on CLLD states that '*CLLD is a tool for capturing local knowledge and building local capacity to deliver new solutions to the economic, environmental and social challenges faced across Europe today. CLLD will also support the effective integration of European funds to ensure they are used more efficiently whilst enabling local communities to develop multi-sectoral projects which are not limited in nature by any single fund parameters.*'

With regard to local democracy or citizens' representativeness at local level, some Member States are better geared than others. In France for instance, since 2014 the election of a 'community councillor' (in French: *conseiller communautaire*) concomitantly to the election of the mayor is the only formal position whereby citizens' voices can be echoed. This councillor is entitled to attend meetings of inter-municipality groupings, responsible for many local development activities.

In terms of governance, the LEADER guidance recalls that '*the decision-making process in the board of the LAG partnership should not be dominated by the public authorities or any specific interest group. To ensure this the following rules must be respected:*

- *First, neither the public authorities nor any single interest group can have more than 49% of the voting rights at the decision-making level of the LAG;*
- *Second, at least 50% of the votes in project selection decisions have to come from the non-public sector partners. This is to secure an inclusive and transparent process, diversity in the strategy and a reasonable spread of the projects across a range of different sectors.*

In LEADER I, most Local Action Groups had a rather weak component of private partners. Among private operators, agriculture was well represented (23%), followed by the tourism sector (19%) and community development groups (12%). In LEADER II, the majority of the partnerships (56%) were mixed (public private), followed by dominantly public partnerships (27%)<sup>2</sup>.

Whereas local governance should be understood in terms of surveillance and openness, watched by its community – the civil society - through its elected representatives, it often gives way to unpredictable decisions and obscure processes of policymaking. When communities are too weakly organised to turn their needs into effective demands, the local partnership should provide an accountability mechanism to ensure that demands are realised. Shortcomings in empowered governance can lead to the point where they provoke negative discrimination among local people.

The term 'community led' is closely related to 'public engagement'. It encapsulates practices of 'empowerment', 'mutual learning and 'consensus building' between citizens' groupings and public authorities as key principles of 'bottom-up' development for designing 'citizen-driven' services.

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<sup>2</sup> Rural governance and LEADER – PhD thesis – Kolosy K., 2004.