



## **RSA Annual Conference 2018 - Policy Tuesday**

### **Special Session Organised by LDnet**

#### **Background Paper**

##### **1. Title:**

**What the Cohesion Policy needs (but doesn't get) from Research: The Case of Local Development**

##### **2. Background**

The emergence and evolution of local development in Europe has gone through various stages. In the 1980s it was a spontaneous phenomenon that arose mostly in response to an economic crisis which had thrown up new responses such as 'local employment initiatives' (LEIs). This phenomenon was identified and analysed by the OECD's LEED Programme and was nurtured over a number of years by the action-research and networking activities of the European Commission's LEDA Programme. LEDA distilled the key characteristics of bottom-up local development approaches, including the triptych of 'local partnership', 'local area', and 'local development strategy', offering a generic model of area-based development by local partnerships with a whole host of social and economic development objectives.

In 1991 this model was adopted in the Community Initiative 'LEADER' and the bottom-up local development approach. Systematised in successive LEADER periods, became known as 'the LEADER approach'. In the 2014-2020 funding period, it was relabelled as 'community-led local development' (CLLD) and was offered to all types of area – rural, coastal, urban – making it a distinct component of Cohesion Policy. EU Member States were given the option of using four of the European Structural and Investment Funds in support of CLLD: the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

By now, nearly 3,000 local action groups throughout the EU have been approved and are implementing their local development strategies, while the debate has already started about the EU's post-2020 multi-annual financial framework (MFF) and the future of Cohesion Policy. The European Commission will publish its proposals in May, shortly before the RSA Annual Conference. Options already floated include a smaller budget allocation and a major rethink of Cohesion Policy priorities and modalities. In this context the question of CLLD's place in Cohesion Policy post-2020 will also arise while CLLD is still facing practical challenges in the 2014-2020 period regarding national/regional delivery systems and the multi-fund operations, as well as conceptual and methodological hurdles, notably, in the evaluation of the results of the LEADER/CLLD approach as part of mainstream Cohesion programmes.

### **3. Objectives of the session**

‘Policy Tuesday’ will come at a perfect time, soon after the publication of the European Commission’s proposals on the post-2020 MFF and Cohesion Policy, and will offer an opportunity:

- To explore how research in fields related to local development can help make Cohesion Policy more relevant and effective.
- To inform researchers of policy aspects that merit closer links between policy and research and to highlight research opportunities.

### **4. Issues to be addressed at the special session**

There are several big issues regarding local development in the context of the Cohesion Policy rethink, post-2020, and in the broader context of policies pursuing sustainable socio-economic development. They range from what the CLLD approach means and offers, to how to manage effectively EU funding and other external resources, including multi-fund operations.

These issues require a high degree of interaction between research, policy and practice but this isn’t sufficiently developed. As observed by LDnet, there are many research needs to make policy more relevant and effective but it isn’t clear what’s on offer. Therefore, LDnet proposes that the special session should focus on the following three areas of research needs for better research-policy-practice interaction:

#### ***a. Learning about the dynamics of socio-economic change at the local level***

Although CLLD is sometimes perceived (dismissively) as a mere ‘funding mechanism’ the LEADER/CLLD approach has transformed the phenomenon of bottom-up local development into a genuine component of European socio-economic development with a sophisticated array of initiatives, tools, programmes and measures, based on public-private cooperation and genuine collaborative governance. The research needs are thus multi-faceted and evolving but above all concern research at local territorial (local community) level that can relate to broad Cohesion Policy level, but also inform local development strategies and even project development, on topics, such as:

- Indigenous assets / retaining talent / culture and creative industries
- Social innovation in CLLD
- Urban / rural links
- Resilience / sustainability
- Demography / migration

#### ***b. Learning from the linkages between local development and other policy interventions***

There is a whole host of sectoral and regional-level interventions under Cohesion and national/regional policies, impacting on the territories which are subject to local development strategies. Local development strategies cannot be perceived nor pursued in a vacuum and there are considerable research needs regarding:

- The interaction and synergies (or lack of) between CLLD (local development strategies) and sectoral and regional-level policy interventions:
  - what happens now/needs to be done locally and what kind of support/framing is available/needed from the EU/national/regional levels;
  - ‘localism’ (and the limits and risks of local communities ‘going it alone’); using the ‘commons’ as a key principle for promoting citizens' initiatives / the role of civil society in managing the ‘commons’ on a par with public authorities;
  - capacity of local and other sub-national levels in implementing Cohesion and, other development policies/capacity building approaches;
- Implications for political sciences (democracy, governance, subsidiarity).

### ***c. Learning from past performance (evaluation)***

The EU relies heavily on evaluation leaving much of the day-to-day management of the implementation of Cohesion Policy to the national and sub-national levels. However, when it comes to evaluating LEADER/CLLD there are some serious shortcomings and unmet research needs, notably:

- Conventional Cohesion Policy evaluations, such as those done as part of mainstream Rural Development Programmes, fail to capture the full essence of CLLD, often missing out the participation, partnership, social capital, local governance, community resilience, etc. dimensions.
- Evaluation timescales are too short. Some localities have received support over several programming periods and offer a unique opportunity for a longitudinal analysis and an overall assessment of the socio-economic impacts of Cohesion-supported local development strategies, as well as the resilience and prospects of local communities.

## **5. Format of the special session**

The session will open with a presentation of key points from this paper, focused on inputs needed for making the development and implementation of Cohesion Policy effective in the field of local development.

It will be followed by a facilitated discussion involving:

- Researchers working in fields related to Cohesion Policy
- Cohesion policy officials of the European Commission
- Local development practitioners

## **6. About LDnet**

LDnet is an informal network set up in 2011 to bring together knowledge and people in local development.

LDnet provides a forum for sharing information and knowledge among experts, researchers and all those active in local development. Its activities cover both the theory and practice of local development. Its participants come from both urban and rural areas from many European and other countries. LDnet collaborates closely with other networks and organisations, including the RSA and ELARD.