

LEADER APPROACH AFTER 2013 and NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS OF EUROPE

Draft Conference Summary
3-5 October 2011 / Koszęcin, Poland



photo: Courtesy of Luís Chaves

Background:

The international conference 'Leader Approach after 2013 and New Challenges for the Development of Rural Areas of Europe' was held on 3-5th October in Koszęcin, Poland. This event gathered ca. 150 participants: representatives of the EU and Member States institutions, Leader networks, LAGs, scientists and other stakeholders involved in Leader (including candidate country representatives from Croatia). The organisers of the conference were Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Government of Śląskie Voivodship, and Silesian Union of Districts and Municipalities. The ENRD Contact Point was in charge of the technical support for the event (including the Cooperation Corner). The conference was also an occasion to present the new ENRD video about the Leader approach. A number of partners were involved in preparing and delivering this interesting programme: The European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), Polish National Rural Network, Polish Rural Forum, Polish Academy of Sciences, Regional Office of Silesia in Brussels, The Stanisław Hadyna "Śląsk" Song and Dance Ensemble, and Silesian Leader Network.

Programme Overview:

The event offered an excellent opportunity to discuss the Leader approach and lessons learnt from results achieved to-date, with a view to addressing future challenges for rural areas. As a part of the official programme a field visit was organised. Its participants had an occasion to discover Polish rural areas in the Silesia Region and the recent activities in rural development. Among others, conference guests visited Koszęcin Municipality, where they observed rural development projects, such as adventure trails in the woods, story-telling and demonstration of traditional crafts. Additionally, the LAG Spichlerz Górnego Śląska presented its experiences.



Conference Participants during the study trip, photo: D. Misiak.

The conference was opened with the welcoming address from the organisers and the representative of the European Commission (DG AGRI), Director Michail Dumitru. In his presentation, he emphasised the need for making Leader approach stronger in the future. This is especially important, if taking into account a huge diversity of rural areas across Europe and the means offered by the Leader approach: its so called 7 key features. With regard to the future, more attention could be paid to Local Development Strategies as an instrument to implement the priorities of the EU for rural development. Also, strengthening the Leader approach seems to be necessary with a view to new multi-funding perspectives.

Following the speech of the EC representative, the keynote address of prof. Michael Dower (University of Gloucestershire, ARC 2020) drew a

comprehensive picture of rural development and Leader evolution within the past 25 years. Particularly, he stressed the changes that Europe has undergone during the last decades: collapse of the Soviet Union, accession of the new Member States and transformation processes in the 'West'. Furthermore, he interlinked the current rural development and the future challenges for rural areas (such as: climate change, low carbon economy, energy security, food security/safety, farm viability, protection of ecosystems, social exclusion and poverty). Prof. Dower underlined a strong demand to apply the Leader approach in this challenging context.

The first plenary session portrayed the Leader approach from a local perspective. The speakers invited represented Local Action Groups from Finland (Liisa Häme, LAG Paijanne-Leader), Ireland (Ryan Howard, South & East Cork Area Development Ltd), Greece (Anastasios M. Perimenis, Lesvos Local Development Company S.A.) and Austria (Thomas Müller, LAG Sauwald). As the conference was hosted in Poland, there were also three presentations were held by Polish LAG practitioners: Tomasz Pietrek (LAG Spichlerz Górnego Śląska), Grażyna Wera-Malatyńska (LAG Sandry Brdy) and Jarosław Kuba (LAG Krzemieny Ką). This session allowed for getting an insight into the practices of the particular LAGs.



Michail Dumitru, DG AGRI, photo: D. Misiak.

In the second block, the invited foreign experts were dealing with the "Added value of the Leader approach: What worked well, what did not work? What could be done better?" The main focus of the presentations was on the impacts of Leader in

the light of evaluation and analyses. Following speakers were invited to contribute to this session: Carlo Ricci (independent expert), François Osete (European Court of Auditors), Panagiotis Patras (ELARD/Trikala Development Company SA – KENAKAP), Marieke Koot (Dutch National Rural Network) and Juha-Matti Markkola (Finnish National Rural Network). Additionally, there was a side-event organised, which allowed for getting an insight into the projects implemented by LAGs in the Silesia Region. The prepared by the ENRD CP LAGs' Cooperation Corner was opened by Witold Magryś (representative of the conference organisers, Silesian Union of Districts and Municipalities).

During the next plenary session an attempt was made to provide an answer to evaluation and analyses and specifically „How can we make the Leader approach better in this and next period?”. This discussion, moderated by Ryszard Kamiński (Polish Rural Forum) invited the following panelists: Pedro Brosei (DG AGRI), Christine Falter (DG MARE), Sanna Sihvola (Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) and Joanna Gierulska (Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). Speakers informed about the state of play with regard the possible future improvements of Leader. The main topics discussed were: “integration” of different EU funds; ensuring optimal balance between bottom-up approach, bureaucracy and proper control of the public funds distribution; and a great need to change the more and more bureaucratic image of Leader.



Participants of the panel discussion, photo: D. Misiak.

This panel was followed by the discussion on „How can various stakeholders contribute to a more effective implementation of Leader?”. Experts that provided the audience with their positions were representing a wide variety of institutions and stakeholders: Urszula Budzich-Szukała (Polish Rural Forum), Peter Pascher (COPA-COGECA), Roman Haken (European Economic and Social Committee) and Goran Šoster (PREPARE). The moderator (Petri Rinne, ELARD) emphasised the need for more accuracy and local policy delivery for EU 2020 Strategy, taking into account regional diversity across the EU.



Cooperation Corner of the ENRD CP, photo: ENRD CP.

The last day of the event started with the parallel working groups sessions. A number of issues were explored by the participants and discussed during the panel sessions that followed:

WG 1: „Present and future shape of Leader: best practices to be followed – improvements to be made” (moderators: Valdis Kudins, Latvian Rural Forum; Jela Tvrdonova, Helpdesk of the Evaluation Expert Network for Rural Development; rapporteur: Halina Siemaszko, Center for Business Promotion and Entrepreneurship in Sandomierz)

The WG participants identified key issues in the Leader implementation. They are especially visible in: financing projects, a need for capacity building, and limited resources available. The challenge was identified in attracting and retaining the proper staff in LAGs. There is also a need for reinforcing operation of the partnership. In order to achieve this, an action could be carried out within 3 stages: building partnership on existing resources, developing strategy and integrating partners' activities with a view to multiple funding.

Recommendations were also made towards improvement of networking at all levels and sharing good practices. Furthermore, there is a need to enhance self-evaluation mechanisms: this should be mandatory for LAGs and performed in a more participatory way.

The panelists' responses to this workshop addressed the issue of multi-funding (Director Dumitru): its application is foreseen to be optional in the MS. Related with that demand for a better coordination between the EU authorities will require new facilities: the Common Strategic Framework. Another panelist, Jiří Krist (National LAG Network of Czech Republic), highlighted the unique role of Leader in addressing new challenges: there is no other example of an approach that can deal with those issues better than Leader (e.g. rural communities, rural economy, rural development, rural landscape and natural/cultural environment, effective and stable society).

WG 2: „How should the transition period be managed/ delivered?” (moderators: João Carlos Pinho, LAG ADRIMAG; Irena Krukowska-Szopa, The Lower Silesia Network of LAGs; rapporteur: Carlo Ricci, independent expert)

This workshop revealed that transition period will not be simply a continuance from the current to the next Leader, but will transfer LAGs into a new situation. Accordingly, LAGs need to know more about the tools and how to adapt to the changing settings. They expect much support during the transition period. The support should be also provided to managing authorities that will have to make decisions on the design of policy delivery. In particular, they need to be allowed to make faster assessment of applications. To facilitate this, selection procedures for the future LAGs should make use of results of the current programming period: a special attention should be paid to the LAG capacities in addressing local needs. This will also require strengthening horizontal governance at all levels.

In response to the workshop findings, Luís Chaves (Minha Terra), demonstrated experiences of the Leader in Portugal within the past 15 years. He

emphasized that even after such a long time there is still a missing understanding of the approach's nature: although it is very well known in Brussels and local communes, it has not been fully recognized by the central public administration in Portugal, yet. This is mainly due to the certain Leader complicity that requires autonomy and responsibility of decision makers at the same time. Consequently, Leader means sharing the power to decide, but none of those involved wants to lose this power. For the future it is recommended to reinforce the partnerships. The link between partnership and strategy should be more explicit: partnerships are ineffective, if attached to funding. There is also a call to facilitate the transition period by rural development networks.



photo: ENRD CP
Participants of the panel discussion, photo: ENRD CP.

The representative of the DG AGRI (Director Dumitru) stressed the demand to adapt the tools for rural development to achieve the future EU objectives. Financial discipline will be also very important in managing public funds and Member States should adopt an implementation system that suits best their peculiarities. The ENRD is foreseen to be involved in this guidance and NRNs should play a greater role in dissemination and exchanges in this process. Following these remarks, Els Soennen (Flemish Government, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries) pointed out on potential difficulties for managing authorities that may occur when applying multiple funding.

WG 3: “Better Local Development Strategies after 2013” (moderators: Panagiotis Patras, ELARD; Krzysztof Kwatera, LAG Dolina Raby; rapporteur: Petr Kulišek, National LAG Network of Czech Republic)

The discussion in the framework of this WG was stimulated by two presentations. During the first one there was an attempt made on listing the main factors that affect quality of LDS (Panagiotis Patras). The second one depicted linkages between the objectives of LDS and objectives of Leader (Krzysztof Kwatara). The questions and answer session pointed out on specific issues that should be reflected, when improving the LDS: processual nature of LDS vs. regulatory framework, adjusting LDS to territorial dynamics, mainstreaming, coordination between authorities, and the responsibility of Managing Authority for selecting LAGs with best LDS. It was stressed that the time remaining for answering these questions is very short.



Participants of the workshop, photo: D. Misiak.

In response to these findings, Deirdre Kelly (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Ireland) revealed the challenges that will occur for the MA in the new framework: responsibility and sound financial management, ensuring the added value and maximising the impacts of the Leader approach. The so called 3rd model of Leader implementation gives the scope of responsibility to LAGs that does not correspond with the existing LAGs capacities. But there is a hope that LAGs will learn to improve this in time.

WG 4: “Future of TNC: What is a good TNC project and its impact on the local area in future”

(moderators: Sarah Watson, Rural Works; Ave Bremse, Estonian National Rural Network; rapporteur: Tom Burstun, Northumberland Uplands LAG)

The workshop was concentrating around the following key objectives: enthusing about the TNC, developing and understanding of the TNC value, detailing the elements that make a good cooperation project, and exploring long-term impacts of TNC projects. The participants were working in the small discussion groups (5 people per group), in order to present their local experience and to formulate questions. Rapporteurs from each of the groups highlighted key aspects raised during discussion as well as questions seeking the answers from the rest of participants.

All participants attempted to reply to the crucial question: “What makes a good project locally and in long-term perspective”. Dynamic discussion was focused on the small steps to be undertaken regarding the objective to implement a good project with measurable results in the local area. They also focused on the best way to pass from the stage of visits and exchanges to the more advanced stage of concrete results and on identifying optimal indicators to measure them.

Summing up, all the workshops regardless their particular topics, stressed the need for more networking and improving communication between stakeholders involved in Leader.

LEADER AFTER 2013

will need

MORE NETWORKING

In addition, the conference final paper was adopted highlighting the main directions for development of Leader in the future. For more information about the event, click [here](#).