



THE LEADER APPROACH

A basic guide

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The Leader approach: a basic guide

The purpose of this document

This document introduces the Leader approach, explaining how it can work for the development of rural communities. It also sets out some basic information about how it should be implemented at local level, as an integral part of the rural development policy of the European Union (EU).

It includes:

- a description of the Leader concept;
- the key features of the Leader approach;
- a basic explanation of how the Leader approach operates on the ground;
- key contact points for additional information.

It is addressed to all rural stakeholders with an interest in setting up or participating in local rural development initiatives. They may be administrators at national, regional or local level, farmers or other active members of the rural community — all have a potential role to play in Leader.

Our aim is to explain to decision-makers and programme authorities, particularly in the newer and potential future Member States, what Leader is and how to put it into practice. We also aim to show rural communities in the EU that the Leader approach can provide an opportunity for them to take the initiative, and to participate actively, in rural development programmes in their local area (and benefit from the financial support that comes with this).

This document is intended as an introductory, easy-to-read guide. It does not go into every aspect of the history of the Leader initiative, nor of the regulations and the administrative procedures associated with it. Information on these aspects can be found elsewhere (some contact information is provided in this document).



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1. The Leader approach to rural development: what is it?

Rural development policy is an increasingly important component of the common agricultural policy (CAP). It promotes sustainable development in Europe's rural areas addressing economic, social and environmental concerns. Over half of the EU's population lives in rural areas, which cover 90 % of the EU's territory ⁽¹⁾. Leader is an innovative approach within EU rural development policy.

Leader stands for 'Links between actions of rural development' ⁽²⁾. As its name suggests, it is a method of mobilising and delivering rural development in local rural communities, rather than a fixed set of measures to be implemented. Experience has shown that Leader can make a real difference to the daily lives of people in rural areas. It can play an important role in encouraging innovative responses to old and new rural problems, and becomes a sort of 'laboratory' for building local capabilities and for testing out new ways of meeting the needs of rural communities. It has generated valuable results in many rural areas in the EU-15 ⁽³⁾ Member States, and could play a significant role in assisting rural areas in new and future EU Member States to adapt to today's changing realities.

Since its launch in 1991, Leader has provided rural communities in the EU with the tools to play an active role in shaping their own future. It has evolved over time, together with the rest of the CAP. Information from evaluations and rural stakeholders indicates that the Leader approach is a tool that works well, in quite different situations and types of areas, thus adapting rural policy-making to the extreme diversity of rural areas' needs. For these reasons, it has now become an integral part of rural development policy. By encouraging local participation in the drawing up and implementation of sustainable development strategies, the Leader approach may prove to be a precious resource for future rural policy.

For the 2007–13 programming period, Leader will no longer be a separate programme but will be integrated ('mainstreamed') in all national/regional rural development programmes. This opens up new possibilities for the Leader approach to be applied on a far wider scale and

across a much broader range of rural development activities than hitherto.

Leader encourages rural territories to explore new ways to become or to remain competitive, to make the most of their assets and to overcome the challenges they may face, such as an ageing population, poor levels of service provision, or a lack of employment opportunities. In this way, Leader contributes towards improving the quality of life in rural areas both for farm families and the wider rural population. It uses a holistic approach to address rural problems. It recognises, for example, that being competitive in the production of food, having an attractive environment and creating job opportunities for the local population are mutually supportive aspects of rural life, requiring specific skills, appropriate technologies and services that need to be tackled as a coherent package and with tailored policy measures.

Since it was launched in 1991, the Leader initiative has been working to provide rural communities in the EU with a method for involving local partners in steering the future development of their area. The Leader approach has attracted a high level of interest within the EU and far beyond. It has been emulated beyond its own circle of beneficiaries. The interest Leader has aroused has sometimes influenced national, regional and local administrations and policies with its capacity to tackle development problems through new forms of partnerships and linking activities.

Leader complements other European and national programmes. For example, Leader actions can activate and mobilise local resources, by supporting pre-development projects (such as diagnostic studies and feasibility studies or local capacity building) which will improve these areas' ability to access and use not only Leader funds but also other sources for financing their development (for example, wider EU and national rural and regional development programmes). Leader also assists sectors and categories of beneficiary which often receive no support, or only limited support, under other programmes operating in rural areas, such as cultural activities, enhancement of the natural environment, rehabilitation of architecture and heritage buildings, rural tourism, improving the links between producers and consumers, etc.

Leader encourages socioeconomic players to work together, to produce goods and services that generate maximum added value in their local area.

⁽¹⁾ In the EU of 25 Member States (EU-25).

⁽²⁾ In French, *Liaison entre actions de développement rural*.

⁽³⁾ The EU of 15 Member States prior to the enlargement to 25 Member States in May 2004.

A brief history of Leader

Leader was launched in 1991 with the aim of improving the development potential of rural areas by drawing on local initiative and skills, promoting the acquisition of know-how on local integrated development, and disseminating this know-how to other rural areas.

(a) Leader is part of the EU's wider rural development policy

Leader's aims are in line with those of the EU's overall rural development policy. The evolving CAP takes into account the diversity of rural areas and landscapes, rich local identities and the increasing value society puts on a high-quality natural environment. These are acknowledged to be the major assets of the EU's rural areas.

(b) The Leader story

Different rural development approaches tried out prior to the early 1990s were typically sectoral, focusing primarily on farmers and aiming to encourage structural change within agriculture. They used 'top down' approaches, with support schemes decided at national or regional level. Local stakeholders were not always encouraged to acquire the skills to become the architects of the future of their own areas.

An area-based and bottom-up approach, involving local communities and adding value to local resources, gradually came to be seen as a new way of creating jobs and businesses in rural areas. Leader began in an experimental way bringing together, at local level, various projects and ideas, stakeholders and resources. It proved to be an ideal instrument for testing how to expand opportunities for rural areas.

The share of EU territory in which the Leader approach is being applied, the number of Leader groups and the level of funding allocated to Leader-type approaches have increased substantially since Leader was launched in 1991.

(c) Policy context: from pilot initiative to mainstream

In policy terms, Leader was introduced as a 'Community initiative' financed under the EU Structural Funds. There have been three generations of Leader: Leader I (1991–93), Leader II (1994–99) and Leader+ (2000–06). During this time, Member States and regions have had stand-alone Leader programmes with separate financing set aside at EU level. From 2007 onwards, the Leader approach will be integrated ('mainstreamed') within overall EU rural development policy. This means Leader will be included in national and regional general rural development programmes supported by the EU, alongside a range of other rural development axes. Financing for the Leader axis from 2007 will come from within the overall financial envelopes received by each Member State from the EU under the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support rural development.



Leader initiatives	Number of local action groups	Area covered	EU funding
Leader I	217	367 000 km ²	EUR 442 million
Leader II	906	1 375 144 km ²	EUR 1 755 million
Leader+	893	1 577 386 km ²	EUR 2 105.1 million

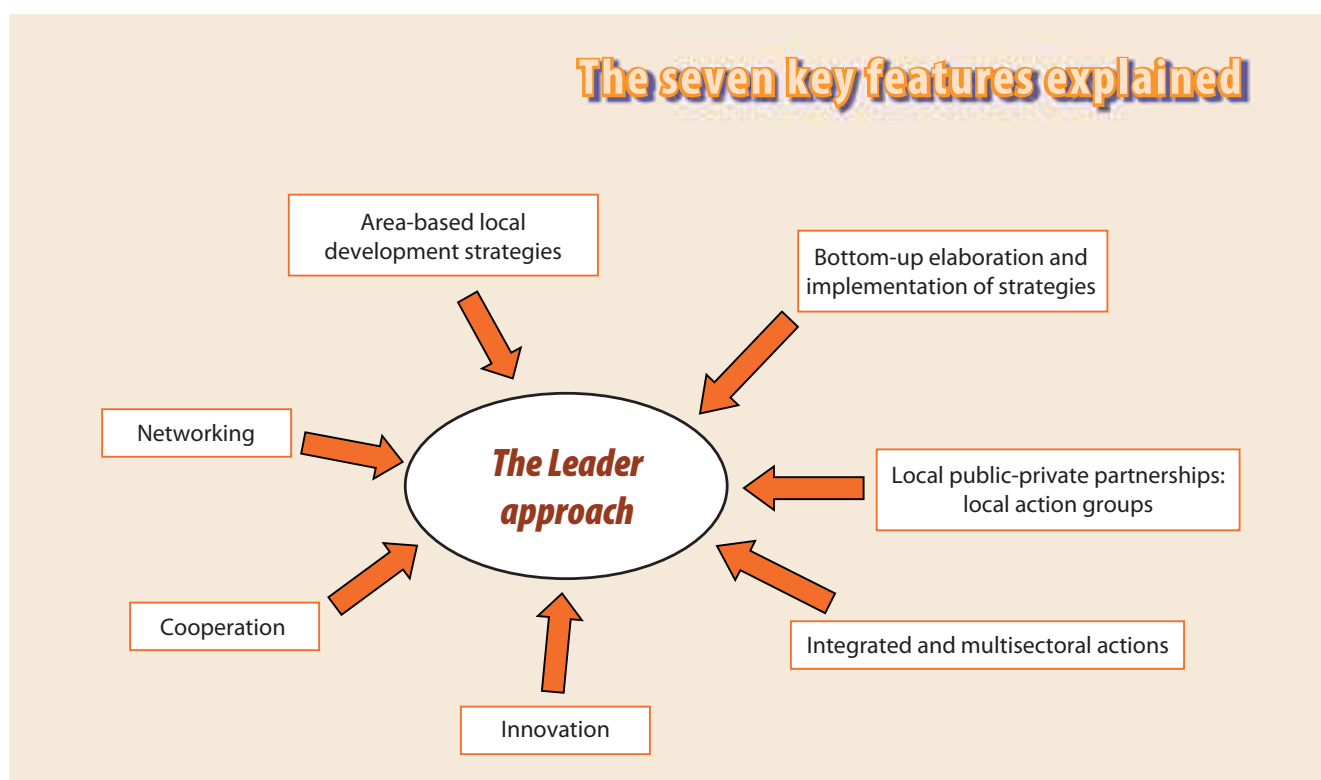
2. The seven key features of the Leader approach

The Leader concept

The main concept behind the Leader approach is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the

relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice.

The difference between Leader and other more traditional rural policy measures is that it indicates 'how' to proceed rather than 'what' needs to be done. Seven key features summarise the Leader approach. They are described here separately, but it is important to consider them as a toolkit. Each feature complements and interacts positively with the others throughout the whole implementation process, with lasting effects on the dynamics of rural areas and their capacity to solve their own problems.



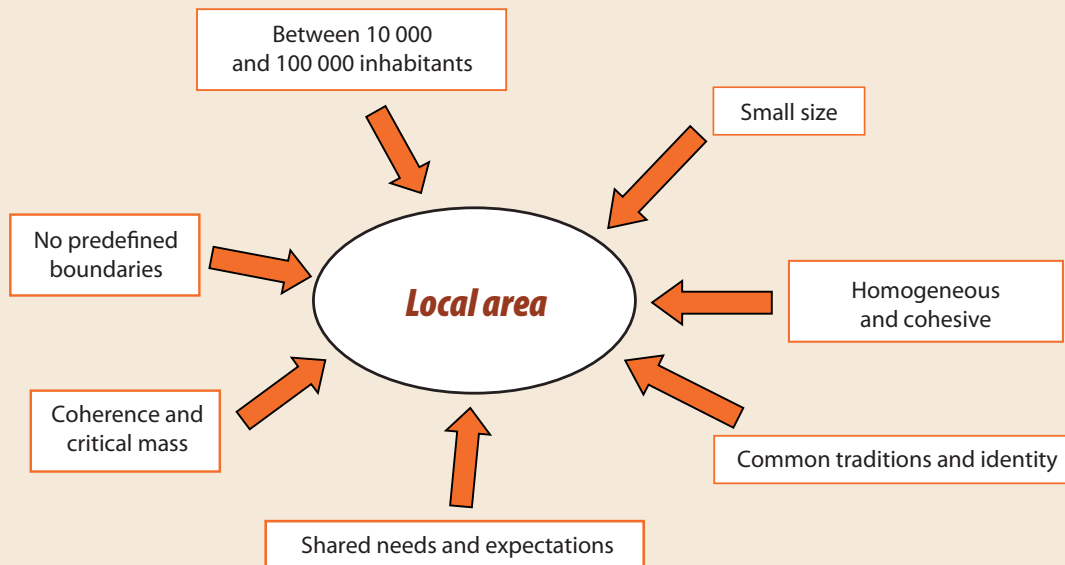
Feature 1: Area-based local development strategies

An area-based approach takes a small, homogenous, socially cohesive territory, often characterised by common traditions, a local identity, a sense of belonging or common needs and expectations, as the target area for policy implementation. Having such an area as a reference facilitates the recognition of local strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, endogenous potential and the

identification of major bottlenecks for sustainable development. Area-based essentially means local.

This approach is likely to work better than other approaches because it allows actions to be tailored more precisely to suit real needs and local competitive advantage. The area chosen must have sufficient coherence and critical mass in terms of human, financial and economic resources to support a viable local development strategy. It does not have to correspond to predefined administrative boundaries.

An area-based approach



The definition of a 'local area' is neither universal nor static. On the contrary, it evolves and changes with broader economic and social change, the role of farming, land management and environmental concerns, and general perceptions about rural areas.

Feature 2: Bottom-up approach

The bottom-up approach means that local actors participate in decision-making about the strategy and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local area. Experience has shown that the bottom-up approach should not be considered as alternative or opposed to top-down approaches from national and/or regional authorities, but rather as combining and interacting with them, in order to achieve better overall results.

Of the seven features of Leader the most distinctive one is the bottom-up approach. Rural policies following this approach should be designed and implemented in the way best adapted to the needs of the communities they serve. One way to ensure this is to invite local stakeholders to take the lead and participate. This holds true in both the EU of 15 and of 25 Member States, but is equally important in countries aspiring to EU membership where there are structural problems in agriculture and many opportunities to improve the quality of rural life.

The involvement of local actors includes the population at large, economic and social interest groups and representative public and private institutions. Capacity building is an essential component of the bottom-up approach, involving:

- awareness raising, training, participation and mobilisation of the local population to identify the strengths and weakness of the area (analysis);
- participation of different interest groups in drawing up a local development strategy;
- establishment of clear criteria for selection at local level of appropriate actions (projects) to deliver the strategy.

Participation should not be limited to the initial phase but should extend throughout the implementation process, contributing to the strategy, the accomplishment of the selected projects and in stocktaking and learning for the future. There are also important issues of transparency which need to be addressed in the mobilisation and consultation procedures in order to reach consensus through dialogue and negotiation among participating actors.

Feature 3: Public-private partnerships: The local action groups (LAGs)

Setting up a local partnership, known as a 'local action group' (LAG), is an original and important feature of the

Leader approach. The LAG has the task of identifying and implementing a local development strategy, making decisions about the allocation of its financial resources and managing them. LAGs are likely to be effective in stimulating sustainable development because they:

- aggregate and combine available human and financial resources from the public sector, the private sector, the civic and voluntary sectors;
- associate local players around collective projects and multi-sectoral actions, in order to achieve synergies, joint ownership, and the critical mass needed to improve the area's economic competitiveness;
- strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between different rural actors, who often have little experience in working together, by reducing potential conflict and facilitating negotiated solutions through consultation and discussion;
- facilitate, through the interaction between different partners, the processes of adaptation and change in the agricultural sector (for example, quality products, food chains), the integration of environmental concerns, the diversification of the rural economy and quality of life.

A LAG should associate public and private partners, and be well-balanced and representative of the existing local interest groups, drawn from the different socioeconomic sectors in the area. At the decision-making level, the private partners and associations must make up at least 50 % of the local partnership.

LAGs may be set up ad hoc to access Leader support, or may be based on previously existing partnerships. Endowed with a team of practitioners and decision-making powers, the LAG represents a model of organisation that can influence the delivery of policies in a positive way. Experience shows that several types of LAG have been developed from these common characteristics, as a result of different forms of regional and national political and institutional organisation, and also with differing degrees of autonomy regarding project approval and financial management. The role and responsibilities of LAGs have also evolved over time in some Member States, as familiarity with the Leader approach has grown.

LAGs decide the direction and content of the local rural development strategy, and make decisions on the different projects to be financed. Actual payments are often



made by a paying authority dealing with public funding rather than the LAG itself, on the basis of project selection made by the LAG.

The rural actors that are most active in local initiatives are:

- professional organisations and unions (representing farmers, non-farming professionals and micro-enterprises),

- trade associations,
- citizens, residents and their local organisations,
- local political representatives,
- environmental associations,
- cultural and community service providers, including the media,
- women's associations,
- young people.



The Local Action Group



A local action group is expected to:

- draw together the relevant interest groups of an area around a joint project;
- have decision-making autonomy and the capacity to take a fresh look at local resources;
- link the different measures;
- be capable of seizing the opportunities offered by the local mix of resources;
- be open to innovative ideas;
- be able to link and integrate separate sectoral approaches.

Local action groups are delegated to take up a large proportion of management responsibilities (for example, project selection, payment, monitoring, control and evaluation tasks) in relation to individual operations. However, the LAGs' degree of autonomy may vary considerably depending on Member States' specific mode of organisation and institutional context. Global grants are the most common form of financing Leader projects and actions. Such grants, co-financed by EU and national public funds, cover a variable portion of a project's financial requirements, depending on the type of project and the type of area.

Feature 4: Facilitating innovation

Leader can play a valuable role in stimulating new and innovative approaches to the development of rural areas.

Such innovation is encouraged by allowing LAGs wide margins of freedom and flexibility in making decisions about the actions they want to support.

Innovation needs to be understood in a wide sense. It may mean the introduction of a new product, a new process, a new organisation or a new market. This common definition of innovation is valid for rural as well as urban areas. However, rural areas, because of their low density and relatively poor level of human and physical resources, have weaker linkages with research and development centres and may find it difficult to produce radical innovations, although this is of course possible.

Innovation in rural areas may imply the transfer and adaptation of innovations developed elsewhere, the modernisation of traditional forms of know-how, or finding new solutions to persistent rural problems which other policy interventions have not been able to solve in a satisfactory and sustainable way. This can provide new responses to the specific problems of rural areas.

Introducing the Leader approach, with its seven features, may be an innovation in policy-making in its own right, which may generate innovative actions by the original policy-delivery method that has been adopted. For example, the bottom-up approach described above may stimulate the emergence of new project ideas which may then be supported by the LAG because it is not bound by a fixed menu of measures. The adoption of information and

communication technologies in rural areas may become an important channel for wider access to innovations by the rural population.

Feature 5: Integrated and multi-sectoral actions

Leader is not a sectoral development programme; the local development strategy must have a multi-sectoral rationale, integrating several sectors of activity. The actions and projects contained in local strategies should be linked and coordinated as a coherent whole. Integration may concern actions conducted in a single sector, all programme actions or specific groups of actions or, most importantly, links between the different economic, social, cultural, environmental players and sectors involved.

Feature 6: Networking

Networking includes the exchange of achievements, experiences and know-how between Leader groups, rural areas, administrations and organisations involved in rural development within the EU, whether or not they are direct Leader beneficiaries. Networking is a means of transferring good practice, of disseminating innovation and of building on the lessons learned from local rural development.

Networking forges links between people, projects and rural areas and so can help overcome the isolation faced by some rural regions. It can help stimulate cooperation projects by putting Leader groups in touch with each other.

There are different types of networks.

■ Institutional networks

These are funded by the European Commission, which defines their role. The EU supports networking structures at both European and national level which bring together Leader groups, administrations, and all other interested partners active in rural development. From 2007, the types of institutional network will be:

- a European network for rural development (run by the Commission);
- a national rural network, to be set up in each Member State.

Networking activities have primarily been focused on Leader only, but from 2007 onwards they will address a much broader range of rural development issues. They will have expert support and undertake practical activities such as preparing publications on different aspects of



rural development, organising seminars, analysing rural development actions to identify good practice, identifying development trends in rural areas, running websites and helping Leader groups search for potential partners and launch cooperation projects. The European network also acts as a meeting point for national networks and administrations in each Member State in order to share experience at European level. Participation in networking activities is mandatory for all Leader groups receiving EU financial support, but other groups are welcome to feed in their knowledge and experience into the network.

■ National, regional and local networks

Networks or associations of Leader groups have also been set up or have emerged more informally at local, regional or national level in some Member States (for example, the network of Irish and Greek groups) and at European level (for example, the European Leader Association for Rural Development — ELARD; see Section 5: Contact points).

Feature 7: Cooperation

Cooperation goes further than networking. It involves a local action group undertaking a joint project with another Leader group, or with a group taking a similar approach, in another region, Member State, or even third country.

Cooperation can help Leader groups to boost their local activities. It can allow them to resolve certain problems or add value to local resources. For example, it can be a way of achieving the critical mass necessary for a specific project to be viable, or of encouraging complementary actions. Examples include joint marketing by Leader groups in different regions whose areas share a specialisation in a specific product (chestnuts, wool, etc.), or developing joint tourism initiatives based on a shared cultural heritage (Celtic, Roman, etc.).

Cooperation projects are not just simple exchanges of experiences. They must involve a concrete joint project, ideally managed under a common structure. There are two different types of cooperation possible under Leader:

- interterritorial cooperation: this means cooperation between different rural areas within a Member State; it may take place between Leader groups, and it is also open to other local groups using a similar participatory approach;
- transnational cooperation: this means cooperation between Leader groups from at least two Member States, or with groups in third countries following a similar approach.



3. Implementing Leader at the local level

The seven key distinctive features explain what the Leader approach is about. Putting these principles into practice means real people designing local strategies and participating in activities. This section describes some basic steps in the process of implementing Leader, in areas where the approach is used for the first time. It does not try to describe every situation that could arise — Leader activities are too diverse for that.

The involvement of local actors in areas where Leader has not yet been applied usually begins when it becomes clear that a Member State or region will at some future point be implementing Leader (for example, on accession to the EU), and so will in due course publish an open call for proposals for potential Leader groups ⁽⁴⁾.

In an ideal situation, the following steps would be taken to implement the Leader approach.

(a) Capacity building

This is the very first step in implementing the Leader approach at the local level. If this innovative approach is to work well, the local actors must have or acquire the necessary capabilities in terms of project ideas and know-how, the human resources to devote to particular activities and, of course, the financial skills to manage those activities. In the past this process was often a 'learning by doing' exercise. Today the accumulated experience should make it easier. Using networking and other communication tools is of great assistance in creating such capacity as it not only provides information about Leader but also serves to raise the interest of local actors in the preparation of a local rural development strategy and associated projects, thus generating the critical mass required. Capacity building is not an individual activity but a collective one, in which different rural stakeholders become aware of the approach and its mode of implementation, thus enabling them to disseminate, participate in and benefit from it.

(b) Bringing together local actors

The second step is often to organise meetings or seminars within the local area to bring together the key interested

players, to help ideas emerge and to allow local actors to discuss the needs of their area on a sound basis. There are many ways of gathering local actors together: seminars and workshops, public meetings, media and telecommunications, and fairs and exhibitions are the most common means for local actors to get together to discuss issues of mutual interest and become aware of the different opinions and projects for the area.

(c) Territory analysis

A detailed analysis of the local rural area concerned is essential. This normally concentrates on identifying the 'territorial capital' — the area's assets (people, activities, landscapes, heritage, know-how), not in the form of an inventory, but regarding the unique features that can be developed. Analysing these features and the key points identified during this area-based analysis should lead to identifying possible local development strategies, specific to the rural area in question. Production of an area-based analysis also commits all of the local players to a medium- and long-term vision of the area. Although expert knowledge is valuable in this analysis, it is important that different 'visions' of the future and of the best strategy for the area have a chance to be publicly discussed and that a high degree of consensus is achieved.

(d) Identifying existing activities/initiatives

A crucial step in the Leader process, linked to the territorial analysis, is for local actors to conduct a review of the existing rural development measures being implemented or planned in their area. Establishing what initiatives already exist is fundamental to deciding whether to build on them or replace them. It also reduces the risks of duplication occurring.

(e) Creation of a partnership

During the analysis phase, the bottom-up approach calls for awareness raising (through information) and engagement in order to analyse the rural area's strengths and weaknesses and to identify needs and expectations (using methods of participatory analysis). This stage targets the entire community, plus the active groups leading the process. During the phase of planning the strategic choices for the local area (i.e. identifying priority topics/projects for which financial support should be sought), the bottom-up approach calls for the participation of various interest groups (for example, by setting up ad hoc working groups).

⁽⁴⁾ In the case of existing Member States, a similar process can arise when Member States or regions organise a new selection process for Leader groups at the beginning of a new programming period, and where rural areas of the country which have not previously been supported under Leader may wish to apply.

Bringing together local actors and the territorial analysis facilitates the identification of those that need to be included in the public–private partnership and manage the implementation. Eventually this leads to the creation of a local action group. The LAG is the partnership which effectively implements the local development approach agreed within the community.

(f) Preparation of a local development strategy

The local development approach is formalised in a local development strategy document. This includes establishment of the objectives, definition of strategic priorities and ranking of the actions to be undertaken. This local development strategy will be the basis of the LAG's application for support under open calls for proposals organised by the Member States/regions for Leader. Member States or regions select successful LAGs and allocate budgets to them for implementation of their local strategies.



4. Leader in the future: mainstreaming

A recent review of the EU's rural development policy concluded that Leader had reached a level of maturity that enables rural areas to implement the Leader approach more widely in mainstream rural development programming. Mainstreamed Leader-type measures have already been adopted by several of the Member States that joined the EU in 2004 in their 2004–06 programmes.

(a) The next programming period (2007–13)

New emphasis on Leader

On 20 September 2005, the Council approved a new regulation for rural development support for the next programming period (2007–13) ⁽⁵⁾. This gives greater emphasis to the Leader-style approach. During the next period, each rural development programme must have a Leader component for the implementation of bottom-up local development strategies. A minimum of 5 % of EU funding for each programme is to be reserved for Leader (as a separate 'Leader axis' within programmes). This percentage is to be phased in for the EU-10 Member States ⁽⁶⁾, which will apply an average of 2.5 % for Leader in the 2007–13 period, given their more limited experience of the Leader approach. Member States or regions will select LAGs based on their proposed local development strategies. Each programme will have the scope to finance the capacity building and

encouragement necessary for the preparation of these local strategies, the operating costs of LAG structures, and the implementation of the local development strategies and cooperation projects between LAGs. There will also be reinforced networking structures with the set-up of the European network for rural development (see Section 2, Feature 6).

(b) Focus on the new Member States and acceding countries

Agricultural activities play a particularly important role in rural development in new and aspiring members of the EU. Institutional and structural changes in the agricultural sector over the past decade have caused higher long-term unemployment, depopulation in some areas and a weakening in the provision of services and infrastructure. The strengthened bottom-up approach of Leader, which gives local authorities and communities more say in designing and implementing programmes to meet local needs and which looks at rural areas as territories rather than focusing on the agricultural sector alone, will also be important in countries aspiring to EU membership. Many of these countries have had limited experience in recent years of such participative approaches. Since accession on 1 May 2004 the EU-10 Member States already have the possibility to apply a mainstreamed Leader-type measure funded by the EAGGF ⁽⁷⁾ Guidance Section. Six of the 10 new Member States have included the Leader-type measure in their 'Objective 1' ⁽⁸⁾ programmes. Strong emphasis will be put on building the administrative capacity to, for example, stimulate and support the establishment of LAGs.

⁽⁵⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (OJ L 277, 21.10.2005).

⁽⁶⁾ The 10 new Member States that acceded to the EU in May 2004.

⁽⁷⁾ The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

⁽⁸⁾ Objective 1 of the Structural Funds promotes the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind (2000–06 period).

5. Contact points for further information

(a) European Leader Observatory established by the European Commission

The Leader Observatory website offers useful information on all aspects of Leader. Homepage menus and general information are available in all the languages of the enlarged EU. Go to:

<http://ec.europa.eu/leaderplus>

At this site there is also a link to the sites of each of the national network units.

Leader+ Observatory contact point:

contact.point@leaderplus.org

Tel. (32-2) 235 20 20

Fax (32-2) 280 04 38

For information on EU rural development measures more generally, go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/index_en.htm

(b) National/regional level

The most immediate sources of information for practitioners are likely to be at national/regional level, depending on the programming structure of the country concerned. These are too numerous to mention here but can be found either by using known national sources or by following the links at:

For existing EU Member States:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/memberstates/index_en.htm

For acceding countries and candidate countries:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/use/index_en.htm

(c) Other useful networks

ELARD (European Leader Association for Rural Development)

ELARD is a non-profit-making association founded in 1999 which represents over 600 LAGs from nine EU Member States, either through their national networks or as individual members.

<http://personal.telefonica.terra.es/web/elard/>

Prepare (partnership for rural Europe)

The Prepare programme aims to strengthen civil society in rural areas, particularly in the 10 new Member States and the accession countries, and to promote multinational exchange in rural development. It has a particular focus on promoting partnership between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government in rural development, and therefore on the Leader approach.

<http://www.preparenetwork.org/index.php>



(d) Leader publications

The latest Leader+ publications of the European Observatory (Leader+ *Flash News* and *Leader+ Magazine*) can be found via the Leader+ website (see 5(a) above).

The **Leader+ Magazine** is produced three times a year and is a reference for information about projects carried out or being carried out under Leader+. Case studies are presented.

Flash News provides regular news about what is happening in rural development, both in terms of Leader activi-

ties and interesting publications, at the EU level. It is a good starting place to be informed about Leader and has its own interactive section where you can contribute and subscribe.

An online subscription form can be used to subscribe directly to *Leader+ Magazine* and *Flash News*.

Member States' Leader national networks also produce regular publications, which can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/publications/nnu_en.htm

6. Examples of Leader in practice

The value of Leader is demonstrated by the many valuable projects supported in recent years that make a real impact on the daily lives of people living in rural areas. The examples presented here give a taste of the variety and creativity of rural development strategies being implemented by LAGs in various regions of Europe. They also show how LAGs have made good use of the opportunities available under Leader to cooperate at a regional, national and European level and to network in order to share experiences and good practice.

Examples (a) to (c) are of projects undertaken at a local level by LAGs, while (d) is an example of a transnational cooperation project between three LAGs in two Member States.

(a) A strategy for quality products from the Montiferru region — Sardinia (Italy)

Region, district:	Sardinia
Name of the LAG:	LAG Montiferru, Barigadu, Sinis
Total project cost:	EUR 8 080 ⁽⁹⁾
EU-funded element:	EUR 4 096
Other public funds:	EUR 2 619
Private funds:	EUR 1 365

Since the 1950s, the area of the LAG Montiferru, which includes Barigadu and Sinis, has witnessed a high level of migration of its rural population to urban areas. As a result, agriculture and many other traditional activities were losing their labour force, and also the knowledge and the skills required to produce the region's traditional products. The gradual worsening of the demographic situation deeply affected the local community, creating a sense of loss of local identity through the disappearance of traditional habits and customs. There are also environmental problems due to the loss of agricultural activity, such as soil erosion, and the disappearance of ecotypes and endemic species.

The main aim of the LAG Montiferru has been to revitalise the socioeconomic system of the region based on its livestock and its small craft-based enterprises. This has been achieved by:

- adding value to local products and facilitating their access to local markets;
- safeguarding the natural resources which are in danger of disappearing;
- promoting the image of Montiferru;
- recapturing the socio-cultural heritage of the local community (the habits and customs that previously characterised the area's rural life).

The LAG has worked on a process of adding value and helping local agro-food reach the market place. The project focuses on a typical local cheese, called 'Casizolu', made with milk from a specific breed of cattle — Modicano Sarda. The cows graze on pasture and produce milk with a distinctive 'wood and leaf' flavour. Investments in Casizolu cheese production have focused on: improving the production process; food safety planning; training courses; funding of processing; marketing assistance; networking with other local quality products (honey, extra virgin olive oil, malvasia wine); strengthening the cheese's presence in the quality catering sector; and helping producers to meet market demand through supply chain management techniques.

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⁽⁹⁾ Total project cost refers to the cost of the specific project described, not to the overall budget for the LAG involved.

(b) Rejuvenating reed and sedge harvesting in the Norfolk Broads (UK)

Region, district:	Norfolk
Name of the LAG:	Broads & Rivers
Total project cost:	EUR 172 425
EU-funded element:	EUR 58 820
Other public funds:	EUR 113 605

A key feature of the Norfolk Broads' landscape is the large expanse of reed and sedge beds that borders its famous waterways. Conservationists regard such wetlands as an internationally important habitat, home to rare plants and animals. Conservation of these areas is dependent upon periodic cutting of the reed and sedge. This has traditionally been harvested commercially to provide raw materials for thatching, thus ensuring a link between the area's built heritage and its natural environment.

Despite modernisation, the Broads' reed and sedge industry has been in severe difficulty, caused in part by imports and consequent low prices. Existing reed and sedge cutters have been unable to replace essential machinery whilst the industry has failed to attract newcomers to replace those who retire. A 2002 study identified no more than 20 commercial cutters, with very few of these under 30 years of age and several approaching (or beyond) retirement age. Morale was low, with several cutters mistrusting conservation organisations for seemingly favouring reed bed management by volunteers.



Leader+ funding provided training and is restoring new areas of neglected reed bed. This creates opportunities for new businesses whilst increasing the efficiency and income of existing ones, for example by providing new machinery, but also by improving LAG members' earning potential outside the reed and sedge cutting seasons. There have been less tangible benefits, such as the formation of an association that has made it easier for conservation organisations and others to seek the views of reed and sedge cutting businesses as a group on issues such as the targeting of reed bed restoration and design of flood alleviation works.

A first project succeeded in halting the decline of the local reed and sedge cutting industry and greatly increased confidence and optimism. A second project addresses the longer term needs of the industry by attracting and supporting new entrants, raising the efficiency and incomes of existing businesses and improving the promotion of the Broads' reed and sedge.

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(c) Safe future with due respect for the past

Region, district:	South Kymi
Name of the LAG:	Sepra
Total project cost:	EUR 59 436
EU-funded element:	EUR 22 968
Other public funds:	EUR 22 968
Private funds:	EUR 13 500

Sepra (meaning friend in Finnish) is a registered association operating in the rural areas of southern Kymi's eight municipalities, promoting independent activity among the local people. The association has drawn up a development programme for this area, for which Leader+ development funding for the years 2000–06 is applied. The development programme supports small development projects which are based on the ideas of inhabitants themselves. The budget is approximately EUR 1.2 million per year, 30 % of which comes from the EU, 18 % from the Finnish

state, 12 % from the eight municipalities, and 40 % from the inhabitants of the area.

There are approximately 57 000 inhabitants in the Sepra area. The population has decreased steadily over the past 30 years. Rural districts, housing estates and towns overlap. The majority of the population depends on industry or public services — smaller businesses have developed only slowly. The leading principle of the programme is to further the development of a pleasant and safe environment which can also provide a livelihood for local people. All actions in the programme are based on respect for the area's history, nature and local people. The programme has two major themes: utilising natural and cultural resources, and increasing interaction between rural and urban areas.

The programme aims to reach key goals by:

- improving internal functions in the villages and other communities;
- developing tourist and other services;
- promoting, marketing and developing new or existing local products;
- supporting new small businesses;
- using the close proximity of Russia and Estonia, as well as developing other international connections;
- organising functions where country people and townspeople can meet.

The development programme focuses on information technology, environmental protection, and especially young people.

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(d) Transnational education for cultural guiding and management of regional museums: three alpine regions collaborate to provide a new perspective

Member States: Austria and Germany
Regions, districts: *Land Tirol* (Austria), *Regierungsbezirke Schwaben and Oberbayern* (Germany)
Name of the LAGs: Außerfern (Austria), Auerbergland (Germany), Ostallgäu (Germany)



Total project cost: EUR 30 000
EU-funded element: EUR 15 000
Private funds: EUR 15 000

The regions of Außerfern (Austria), Auerbergland (Germany) and Ostallgäu (Germany) have established a transnational training project, involving 104 participants, 25 lecturers and 47 workshops covering 20 different modules. The project seeks to exploit the related culture and history of these three areas, which are all located in the Bavarian–Austrian alpine region.

The LAGs began with an ‘exchange of ideas meeting’ between the regions’ managing directors. They concluded that the development strategies of the three neighbouring LAGs had many common objectives and would provide many possibilities for future cooperation. Since transnational cooperation projects are more complex and have greater risks than local ones, the three Leader+ managers looked for a strong basis for cooperation. They already knew that the basis for success of a transnational project is a strong belief that the project will be of benefit for the three LAGs. After a critical and comprehensive project evaluation, they decided to base their cooperation on improving the link of history and culture with tourism and employment. By linking tourism and culture, the project aims to create new employment, in particular for women, in order to strengthen the tie between the homeland and its history for young people.

To obtain some ideas about best practice, the three LAG managers got in contact with the Italian LAG, Val Venosta, in South Tyrol which had implemented a similar project under Leader.

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