



European Leader Association  
for Rural Development  
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EUROPEAN LEADAR ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

EUROPEAN RURAL PARLIAMENT - SPARCE PROJECT  
THEME REPORT

**INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADER/CLLD**

2017 Brussels



Co-funded by the  
Europe for Citizens Programme  
of the European Union



*Under the auspices of  
the Secretary General of  
the Council of Europe,  
Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland*



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## 1. Background

The European Rural Parliament seeks to express the voice of rural Europe; to articulate the concerns of rural people; and to promote self-help and action by the rural people, in partnership with civil society and governments. This work forms part of the Third Phase of the European Rural Parliament and is one of the themes that emerged from the European Rural Manifesto. The work was funded by the Europe for Citizens Fund.

Relative to this theme “Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD” The European Rural Manifesto states:

*“We believe that effective rural development demands an open-minded and innovative partnership between people and governments, side by side as equals. We call upon rural stakeholders to work positively with governments; and upon governments, international institutions and appropriate agencies to establish meaningful systems of consultation and collaborative decision making, to enable rural stakeholders to participate in shaping and implementing policies and to lay a strong foundation for fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and governments at all levels.*

*We strongly advocate a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development, pursued in a bottom-up and place-based spirit. We wish to see the widespread application of the LEADER principle, and its extension into Community Led Local Development, both within and beyond the EU. “*

*“The European and national networks which have led this European Rural Parliament campaign are rooted in local action and participative democracy. Their membership includes thousands of village-level action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures, which run essential services and promote cooperation among rural actors. We call upon governments and the European institutions to respect the independence of NGOs and their networks and to support their activities.”*

And relative to this theme we can also quote from the **Cork Declaration – Point 8: Enhancing Rural Governance:**

*“The administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments and community-based groups must be enhanced, where necessary, through the provision of technical assistance, training, cooperation and networking. Building on the success of LEADER and the European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture, bottom-up and locally led initiatives should be rolled out to mobilise rural potentials. “*

The process for this theme work is defined in the ‘**SPARCE**’ **application to the European Commission, Europe for Citizens** from which we have secured funding:

*“This workshop, to be led by ELARD, will have strong focus on the LEADER methodology and Community-Led Local Development. It will include virtual*

*exchanges between rural citizens from many partner countries, conducted by e-mail, Facebook and other social media and involving more than 250 participants. Up to 50 citizens, drawn from at least 6 countries, will take part in a 'lifeshop', traveling workshop or other format of meeting which provides a strong 'reality check' of rural conditions and success stories, and an active multi-national exchange of ideas"*

### **Definition**

In our understanding "Integrated Rural Development" is an ongoing process involving local stakeholders and outside professional and financial support; aiming to improve the lives of people living in rural areas and to sustain and improve rural values.

### **Purpose of the work with this theme was:**

- To clarify to what degree development of rural areas is done as an integrated process between stakeholders and central, regional and local authorities;
- To identify case studies to show the differences between top down and integrated development;
- To identify difficulties and obstacles in the present administration of the LEADER and CLLD methodologies, and suggest resolutions to some of these difficulties and obstacles;
- To identify case studies to show:
  1. The advantages of using LEADER and/or CLLD in rural development, as administered today;
  2. The disadvantages of using LEADER and/or CLLD in rural development, as administered today;
- To conclude and declare suggestions to how LEADER/CLLD or other methodologies can improve the development of rural areas by involving the stakeholders, and let them share the responsibility for their own future.

## **2. Theme activities**

### **Scope and timing of action within this theme work**

1. **August-September 2016.** LEADER/CLLD questionnaire. Gathering information regarding the state of play, main bottlenecks and potential in the field of rural development and LEADER/CLLD implementation in member states.
2. **October-November 2016.** Preparing for the Tartu event by gathering information to ensure basis knowledge on needs for improvements of rural development and to the administration of the LEADER/CLLD methodologies.
3. **21.-23rd November 2016.** Organise the Tartu event, inviting stakeholders from all over Europe to a two days participative event establishing visions and improvements of rural development and to the administration of the LEADER/CLLD methodologies.

4. **December 2016 to February 2017.** Using the inputs from the Tartu event to draft a Tartu Declaration, and in dialogue with partners from all over Europe to improve the afore mentioned draft and produce the final Tartu Declaration.
5. **January to May 2017.** Establish the list of partner Countries/organisations wish to be involved in working with Integrated Rural Development, and in the process, ensure that not only LEADER partners will be involved.
6. **January to September 2017.** Present the LEADER Tartu Declaration to decision makers at regional, national and European level.
7. **January to September 2017.** Undertake action research to clarify the nature/methodology of the rural development in different countries/regions, specifically regarding involvement of local stakeholders and the possible dependency of regional, national and European campaigns/ funds. This research will involve at least 250 people; either virtual or face to face. This research will be coordinated by ELARD, and will be initiated by the partner's participation in developing a questionnaire to be sent to the partners for them to disseminate the questionnaire for discussions and replies. This part of the work is expected to be carried out using a broad range of methods – such as qualitative as well and quantitative questions in the questionnaire, establishing and supporting discussions in FB-groups and focus group interviews.
8. **May to June 2017.** Arrange a face to face international meeting(s)/travelling workshop(s) involving at least 6 countries and at least 50 people, in accordance with the conditions attached to the EfC funding. The meeting(s) will provide a chance for multi-national exchange of ideas, and to present the result of the research to regional, national and European authorities/decisions makers. The funding may allow participants from some countries to receive some reimbursements of travel costs.
9. **October 2017.** Collate reports and case studies received from partner organisations and prepare a report summarising the information collected, including case studies, that fulfils the purpose of the theme. The completed report should be submitted by 10th of October 2017, to feed into the preparations for the 3rd European Rural Parliament in October 2017.
10. **October 2017.** Presentation of findings at the 3rd European Rural Parliament at Venhorst, the Netherlands.

### 3. Conclusions of theme activities

#### Main conclusions from the Survey “Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD”:

According to the analysis of the LEADER/CLLD questionnaire there is a need to pay more attention to the following areas and needs:

### **1. Improving CLLD and multifund approach implementation:**

- 1.1. Cohesion of different funds. This is to create real synergy between different funds and avoid the multi-funded trap, where previously financed activities from EAFRD are not financed anymore from EAFRD and also not included in the other funds (ESF, ERDF);
- 1.2. Simplification of procedures. Additionally to SCO methods there is a need to simplify the procedures (LAGs and authorities). There has been a lack of attention to simplifying procedures but these are very time consuming;
- 1.3. Clarification and wider promotion of SCO methods. Experience exchange between different programmes that already has knowledge and practice of SCO methods' implementation. Clearer descriptions of SCO mechanisms;
- 1.4. Increasing the budget of CLLD for viable and further developed CLLD;
- 1.5. Capacity building of authorities and LAGs to implement CLLD;
- 1.6. Support services' (legal advisory, trainings, etc) quality and further development for LAGs;
- 1.7. Mentoring programs for EU pre-accession countries to provide support to establish LAGs and start LEADER/CLLD implementation.

### **2. Strengthening national policies and rising co-operation capability between authorities:**

- 2.1. Effective and transparent coordination between different authorities and ministries at national level;
- 2.2. Definition of roles of different LEADER bodies and authorities;
- 2.3. Clear instruments and guidelines to achieve cohesion of rural and urban areas;
- 2.4. Simplification and harmonization of national regulations and rules;
- 2.5. National targets for evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Defining also impact and result indicators at national level;
- 2.6. Ensuring the continuity between program periods and smooth implementation in order to guarantee the sustainable functioning of LAGs.

### **3. Innovative and flexible implementation of local development strategies (LDS):**

- 3.1. Giving importance and promotion of LAGs' animation activities. Defining indicators to measure the impact of animation;
- 3.2. Creation of attractive and viable jobs;
- 3.3. Innovation of strategies' implementation and regional development processes (Smart strategies, new technologies, involvement methods, new forms of management and co-operation, regional clusters, etc);
- 3.4. Clear and simple evaluation and monitoring models of LDS, the results of which are also available for communities. Evaluation is a part of a community's learning process;
- 3.5. Increasing LAGs' independence and decision making rights (incl. TNC projects);
- 3.6. Support systems to simplify LEADER/CLLD implementation processes. F.g. flexible IT platforms for projects treatment, selection and evaluation;
- 3.7. To achieve the balance between administrative procedures and development/animation activities. Time resources have been spent in reasonable proportion – 70% on development activities and



30% on administrative activities.

#### **4. Transnational and inter-territorial co-operation**

- 4.1. Simplification and harmonization of national regulations, drawing up guidelines;
- 4.2. Harmonization of regulations and rules of co-operation measure in Europe;
- 4.3. Drawing up co-operation regulations and guidelines at national level for co-operation with EU pre-accession and other third countries;
- 4.4. Guaranteeing the sustainability and effectiveness of co-operation;
- 4.5. Enable LAGs to implement umbrella projects. Simplification of models of umbrella projects and their implementation;
- 4.6. Promotion and simplification of inter-territorial co-operation, regional co-operation clusters, cooperation across sectors.

#### **5. Renewal of the 25-year-old LEADER method for 2020+ period.**

- 5.1. Keeping LEADER/CLLD in accordance and adaptive with changing living and working environment in rural areas (social cohesion, migration, regional clusters, green economy, climate change, smart solutions, technology, etc);
- 5.2. Revolution of new technologies and IT creates new opportunities, which should be integrated into the LEADER/CLLD methodology;
- 5.3. Territorial cohesion creates synergy and helps use new resources and opportunities.

#### **Main messages of Tartu Declaration:**

Main outcome of Conference “Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+ Celebrating 25 years of LEADER in Europe!” and messages of the LEADER/CLLD declaration:

1. **Bigger role of communities and bottom-up approach** in rural development. LEADER/CLLD needs wider platform and in addition to rural development policy it has to be integrated to all relevant EU and national policies;
2. **Better and closer dialogue with Commission and MAs** and more efficient solutions to improve the quality of LEADER/CLLD. Trust the experience of LAGs that they have received throughout 25 years. Representative networks of LAGs must be accepted as full partners by MAs and Commission;
3. **Empowerment of communities as main purpose of LEADER** must come back into focus. Leader principles have to be re-asserted and treated with full respect;
4. **Balanced legal framework:** Correct application of the LEADER method in Member States on the one hand and a significant decrease in the bureaucratic burden that lies on LAGs on the other hand;
5. **Truly bottom-up implementation of LDS:** the flexibility of wide range of development actions has to be assured to LAGs. Good practices where LAGs design their own measures have to be promoted more widely. Selection and approval of TNC projects has to be done by LAGs;

6. **Animation activities and capacity building of LAGs and other LEADER actors.** We need to use this potential better and create conditions that allow LAGs to concentrate their role of animating their area. Common understanding among LEADER actors about the value of animation and TNC;

7. **Simple and harmonized rules:** timely definition of simple rules, guidelines, evaluation and IT systems aiming at maximum harmonization between the ESI Funds. All stakeholders are involved. Flexible and open platforms for IT.;

8. **3in1 CLLD in Members States:** creating one CLLD source of funding using different ESI Funds resources, coordination under one MA followed by one unique set of rules at the EU level;

9. **Collegial spirit has to be strengthened:** LAGs and authorities need to be well-trained and made aware of each others realities (study tours, trainings, staff exchange, etc).

#### **Main conclusions from the Survey “Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD”:**

1. Integrated rural development practices influence wide spectrum of activities, but have **significantly bigger impact to local entrepreneurship**. More than 70% of practices were related to activating entrepreneurship, 50% contributed to tourism and 50% to local resource management, more than 30% business innovation;

2. Support of development organizations/agencies is needed to provoke integrated rural development. Local action groups (LAGs) in EU countries and civil society organization in non-EU countries were actively involved or initiated most of the practices. In 22 practices out of 24 local action groups or similar bodies were involved. LEADER/CLLD methodology was leading working method for most of the practices. **LAGs have capacity to work across sectors and bring together different stakeholders;**

3. All submitted integrated rural development practices are **sustainable** because they have a **long-term impact or influence to new developments at local and regional level;**

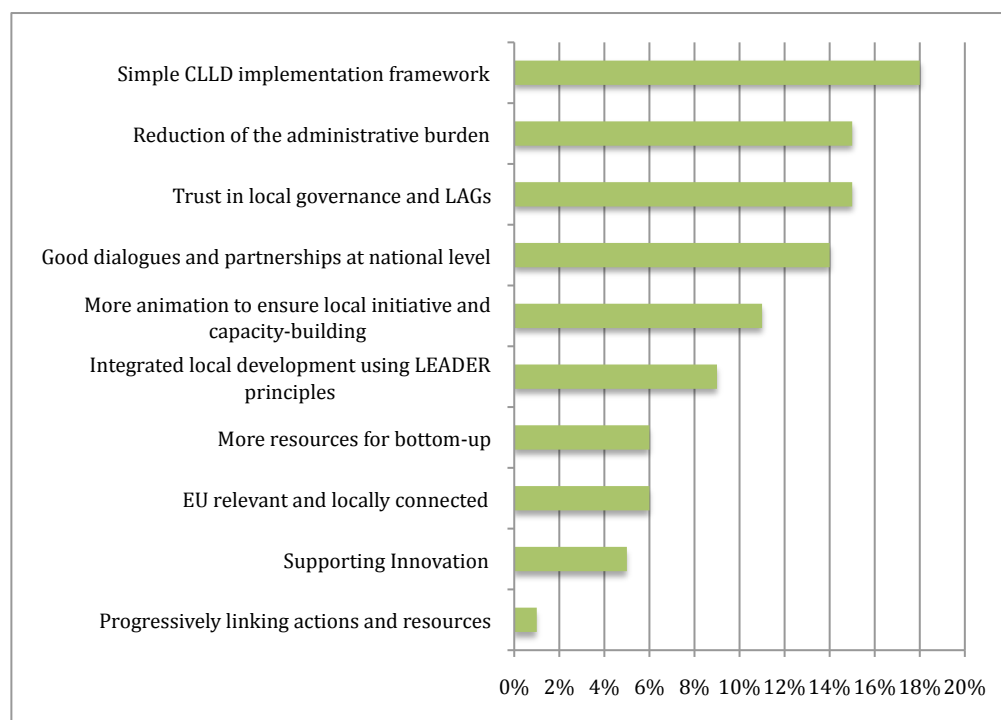
4. The biggest challenges at local level while implementing these practices were related to stakeholders and all different target groups' continuous involvement;

5. Most of practices brought forward the **difficulties with bureaucratic burden and complicated rules of different funding schemes.**



## Mentimeter outcome of priority issues from the LEADER/CLLD Gathering “Role of bottom-up approach renewing ESI Funds for 2021-2027”:

**Diagram 1.** What will do most to strengthen bottom-up participation?

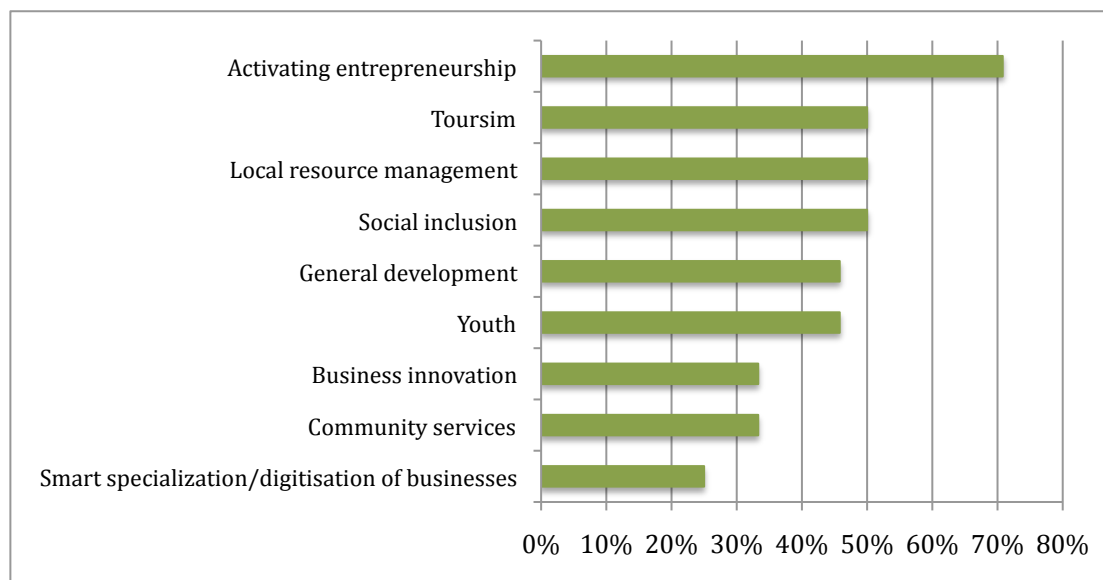


## Main conclusions from the Survey “Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD”:

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3. All submitted integrated rural development practices are **sustainable** because they have a **long-term impact or influence to new developments at local and regional level**;
4. The biggest challenges at local level while implementing these practices were related to stakeholders and all different target groups’ continuous involvement;

5. Most of practices brought forward the **difficulties with bureaucratic burden and complicated rules of different funding schemes**.

**Diagram 2.** Theme of the action/project selected by survey participants



## 4. Vision of LEADER/CLLD in 2027 and recommendations

### Vision of LEADER/CLLD in 2027 – developed by 140 participants from 25 European countries

*“LEADER in 2027 is an independent, trusted, creative, well-known, solution-oriented movement based on community ownership with a goal of having smart, vibrant rural communities oriented to the needs of their members. LEADER is more visible and works from people to people. Local Action Groups (LAGs) are the basis of regional development, using the LEADER approach, having support, respect, flexibility and trust at the regional, national and European level. The mutual understanding of the LEADER principles interconnects all levels and actors. Local development strategies are based on rural people's real needs and implemented by truly autonomous LAGs. There is a strong trust between stakeholders throughout the delivery chain. LAGs have the capacity to involve the passive actors within their territories and measure the added value of their work both in terms of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Member States/regions are able to design a single CLLD source of funding from the various European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) and implement it under one coordinating body (Managing Authority) following one unique set of rules at the EU level. LAGs have a multi-funded, harmonised approach to transnational cooperation throughout Europe and with third countries as an effective tool for rural development.”*

## Recommendations

Main recommendations arising from conclusions and vision above are:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: designing different EU and national policies there is a need to give more space to real bottom up development.** Bigger role of communities and bottom-up approach in local development is needed. Empowerment of communities as main purpose of LEADER program must come back into focus. Leader principles have to be re-asserted and treated with full respect. LEADER/CLLD needs wider platform and in addition to rural development policy it has to be integrated to all relevant EU and national policies.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: integrated rural development practices influence wide spectrum of activities, but have significantly bigger impact to local entrepreneurship.** LEADER/CLLD methodology plays an important role to provoke integrated rural development that supports local economies and jobs creation. Local action groups have capacity to work across sectors and bring together different stakeholders therefore they are good source for enhancing cross-sectoral coherence and partnerships. The potential of local action groups has to be used more effectively in this respect.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: better and closer dialogue at national level has to be guaranteed.** While implementing policies and improving rules and regulations there is a need for much wider involvement of local level than it is done by now. Close dialogue between all LEADER actors is needed while implementing and improving LEADER/CLLD. Practitioners experience has to be taken seriously and with trust at national and EU level. European Commission should find possibilities also to communicate directly with local action groups in order to know real situations and bottlenecks.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: balanced legal framework has to be assured.** Simple and harmonized rules: timely definition of simple rules, guidelines, evaluation and IT systems aiming at maximum harmonization between the ESI Funds. All stakeholders have to be involved. Flexible and open platforms for IT. **Integrated rural development** practices are sustainable because **they have a long-term impact** and influence to new developments at local and regional level, but excessive bureaucracy and complicated implementation framework of different ESI Funds hinder to realize its' real potential. LEADER/CLLD implementation framework for 2021-2027 has to be more supportive and flexible to bottom up integrated development solutions.

## 5. Methodology

As our theme work included several activities then we used different methods for each activity to reach to the biggest possible substantive involvement. Mostly used methods:

- **Focus Group meetings** once a month to determine bottlenecks and work with theme issues and survey questionnaires;
- **Google and Mentimeter Surveys** – we organized 2 Google and 1 Mentimeter Survey during the theme work period. Questionnaires were composed and analyzed by Focus Group who discussed them several times. Regular analysis methods were used;
- **Participatory group work methods** were used at Conference “Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+; Celebrating 25 years of LEADER in Europe!”. More precise description of used methodology is available in appendices;
- **Dissemination via networking** - additionally to different face-to-face meetings at EU and Member States level we used several e-mail lists and Facebook channels (ELARD Aisbl FB and Friends of LEADER approach) to reach to the biggest possible number of participants and involvement.

Our participatory approach based on network involvement. Thanks to the LEADER and rural development networks we involved about 2000 local action groups from 24 European countries who actively contributed to theme work.

## 6. Involvement

In order to carry out activities under the theme “Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD” ELARD involved European Rural Parliament network (40 countries) and National LEADER and National Rural Development networks from 24 European countries including pre-accessing countries. ELARD sent information to national networks and national networks disseminated this information in their country in public and specific information among their members and cooperation partners. Following summary shows participation and direct contacts into concrete activities. Overview about involvement and direct contacts is available in Appendix 1.

## 7. Financial report

European Rural Parliament 2016-17 Theme: Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD Budget implementation		
Heading of expenditure	Project Funds from Europe for Citizens	ELARD and National Funds
	All amounts in €	
Project lead: ELARD staff time including liaison with project partners in development of project plan, production of questionnaire, collation of national answers and Completion of final report. Contract liaison with HSSL.	2,400	3,000

Calculated at € 300 per day A. 10 days offered in kind by ELARD to cover project management B. 8 days November 2016 to June 2017		
Compiling of case studies. Preparation of final report.	2,800	
Part of cost for organising workshops at the face to face event in November 2016, Tartu LEADER event.	3,000	20,000
Cost of face to face events i.e. venue hire, materials, food and accommodation – possibly including travel costs of participants.	1,800	2,000
<b>Totals for each Fund:</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>25,000</b>
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>35,000</b>	

## Appendices:

### 1. Involvement report;

### 2. LEADER/CLLD Survey;

### 3. Material related to Tartu Conference

- 3.1. Tartu Declaration on LEADER/CLLD for 2021-2027,
- 3.2. Program of Conference “Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+; Celebrating 25 years of LEADER in Europe!”,
- 3.3. Methodology of the Conference;
- 3.4. Participants list of the Conference.

### 4. Material related to LEADER/CLLD Gathering in Brussels

- 4.1. Program of the Gathering “Role of bottom-up approach renewing ESI Funds for 2021-2027”;
- 4.2. Participants list of ELARD members meeting;
- 4.3. Participants list of Gathering;
- 4.4. Outcome of Mentimeter Survey

### 5. Integrated Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD best practices Survey