

Quarterly journal of the LEADER II European programme

LEADER II magazine

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Special issue: LEADER Symposium

Towards a new Initiative
for rural development

800 leaders give their views



DAROCA - CALAMOCHA



Country: Spain

Action carried out: recording of "Concierto para Grullas, Grallas y Grillos" on CD and cassette

Cost: ECU 11 540

EU: ECU 900

Other public funds: ECU 1 025

Private: ECU 9 615

"Our LEADER programme places great emphasis on taking advantage of the local natural and cultural resources. That is why we co-financed the production of a compact disc and a cassette tape for the Lahiez group, which composed a concerto inspired by the fauna and flora of the Gallocanta lagoon located in our area. This work, which is a harmonious mix of music and sound effects, is also used to accompany a slide show on migratory birds, in particular the European crane - some 60 000 of these birds winter in Gallocanta. Through this production, we are seeking to make the local population and the people living outside the area aware of the international importance of this natural space."

Joaquín Lorenzo Alquezar,
LEADER official

HAUTS DE LA REUNION



Country: France

Action carried out: training of heritage and environment guides

Cost: ECU 215 000

EU: ECU 150 500

Other public funds: ECU 64 500

"Tourists on Reunion Island today are no longer satisfied with holidays on the beach or hikes in the mountains; they also want to discover the island's cultural, natural and economic heritage, as seen through the eyes of its inhabitants. On the basis of this conclusion and our experience in providing training and organising activities for rural people, we set up a training programme for heritage and environmental guides in 1995 and 1996. The 1500 hours of training of young rural people in a weak economic situation gave them the necessary skills to work as professional guides and to create tours to discover the special features of Reunion's small rural regions: lifestyle, past and recent history, oral traditions, natural environment, local economy, etc. Of the 27 trainees awarded a degree, 10 are already working and 5 are about to begin."

Bernadette Robert,
manager of the action

DÃO, LAFÕES E ALTO PAIVA



Country: Portugal

Action carried out: Paper eco-museum

Cost: ECU 36 159

EU: ECU 19 887

Private: ECU 16 272

"Unique in Portugal, Moinho da Carvalha Gorda ('Big Oak Mill') is a small enterprise that uses soft technology to manufacture a whole range of products (cases, kits, briefcases, envelopes, etc.) out of cotton, flax and hemp paper. Our local action group is helping create, next door to the business, a "Paper Eco-Museum" that explains all the steps and techniques of paper production and in so doing serves to promote the Lafões region."

Rosa Maria Lopes Marques,
LEADER official

BAD DOBERAN



Country: Germany

Action carried out: "Finland Week"

Cost: ECU 6 000

EU and other public funds: ECU 3 000

Private: ECU 3 000

"This year our group organised 'Finland Week' in collaboration with the two Finnish LAGs, North Satakunta and South-West Finland Riverside. Over 3 500 visitors were able to discover a part of rural Finland, particularly through an exhibition of local products. In addition to helping arrange a German-Finnish cooperation project on tourism and local products, the event was also an opportunity for local people to become better acquainted with LEADER and our own action."

Walter Reuter,
LEADER coordinator



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The symposium was an opportunity for Commissioner Franz Fischler to announce his plan of proposing a new Community Initiative for rural development strengthening the main principles of LEADER.

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The European summary of the written contributions received shortly before the symposium carries a strong message for the Commission and the European Union in general.

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A unique opportunity to meet in person some 800 LEADER beneficiaries, the symposium was a genuine opportunity to launch the transnational cooperation dimension of the Initiative.

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Heino von Meyer summed up the 6 workshops of the symposium and concluded with a text which was equivalent to a declaration.

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Closing speech by Mr Franz Fischler, Member of the European Commission, responsible for agriculture and rural development.

In a word...

**Yves Champetier, Director,
LEADER European Observatory**

This sixteenth issue of LEADER Magazine constitutes in a way the "proceedings of the LEADER II Symposium", a major event which, one year to the day after the Cork Conference on rural development, brought together over 1200 people, including some 800 heads of LEADER local action groups and other collective bodies.

Entitled "Towards a new Initiative for rural development: 800 leaders give their views", this symposium convened by Commissioner Franz Fischler had three objectives: to bring together for the first time all the beneficiaries of LEADER II, to reflect on a new Community Initiative for rural development and to stimulate exchanges and transnational cooperation between rural areas.

The first objective was already achieved well before the opening of the symposium since most of the current beneficiaries of LEADER II, including many new LAGs, said that they would attend as soon as the meeting was announced.

In the case of transnational cooperation, the symposium was, as the title of an article in this issue says, truly an opportunity "to move into high gear": in concrete terms, the "Cooperation Area", which throughout these three days enabled the LEADER beneficiaries to identify and meet in person potential partners, could already lead to over 100 cooperation projects. This new dimension of LEADER is therefore now firmly established.

The reflection on the new Community Initiative was the source of exciting debates whose main points were largely taken into account by Commissioner Fischler in his closing speech at the symposium: the future Initiative, which could be extended to all the rural areas of the Union, should reinforce and deepen the principles of LEADER, this "laboratory of rural innovations", while benefiting from simplified procedures of implementation.

This symposium is therefore a major success and I would like to put "in a word" to thank all the people who participated and spoke there, contributing to the success of this undertaking. Like Commissioner Fischler, I would like to thank in particular the 300 or so "LEADERS", local action groups, LAG administrations and associations, which, prior to the symposium, sent us their views on LEADER and their proposals for the future. In addition to this success, however, this symposium must especially mark a new phase that will enable increased mobilisation of the various partners of the Initiative - from the local level to the European network -, a deepening of the work begun seven years ago, generalisation of this approach to all the areas of the Union and, gradually, to the countries concerned by enlargement.

Lastly, this symposium is an encouragement for all those who on the ground, in often difficult conditions, innovate by creating new jobs, new activities, inventing a new future for rural Europe. <

Rural development for the period The symposium confirms t

In addition to the numerous exchanges and beginnings of cooperation that it made possible, the symposium in Brussels was devoted to the role played by LEADER in the development of rural Europe. Initiator of the meeting, Commissioner Franz Fischler announced that he would propose for the programming period 2000-2006 a new Community Initiative for rural development based on the deepening of the main principles of LEADER.



Mr Franz Fischler,
European Commissioner
responsible
for Agriculture
and Rural Development

nt d 2000-2006 he role of LEADER

***"I believe this symposium** is clear evidence that the LEADER Initiative truly is mobilising people in rural communities."* It was with these words that Commissioner Franz Fischler introduced the debates of the first plenary session of the symposium in Brussels in front of over 1200 "rural developers" from 27 countries.

This mobilisation was already clear the day before on Sunday 9 November, since over 1000 people had participated in the "Meeting Points", "Forums", "Cooperation Area", "Exhibition", etc. organised on this first day to "break the ice" and discover in a convivial way the context and projects of the 800 or so LEADER officials present (see article on "An interactive symposium").

But it was on Monday 10 November that the real debates on the future Community initiative got under way. After a review of the objectives of the meeting (bring together for the first time all the LEADER beneficiaries, encourage transnational cooperation between rural areas and reflect on the future Community Initiative for rural development) by the President of the symposium, José Manuel Silva Rodriguez, Deputy General Director of DG VI, Commissioner Fischler introduced the debates by first recalling the success of LEADER I and the more ambitious dimensions of LEADER II (821 beneficiaries on record in November 1997): *"LEADER II is moving up a gear to a new level. What was a project-based approach is turning into something more like a programme-based one. LEADER has come of age and so its etiquette is changing too."* The Commissioner did not, however, forget to mention the difficulties of starting up the Initiative: *"but more formalised procedures, as well as bringing advantages, can also mean a heavier administrative burden and a slower rate of progress. We are very familiar with these kinds of difficulty, and we should all be doing our best to learn from them for next time. Yet I think we can still say that the engine is running now, despite a few teething problems."*

Referring in particular to the 1996 Cohesion Report, the Commissioner then recalled the persistent state of economic weakness of most rural areas (decline in population, higher unemployment, per capita GDP and income 8% to 30% less than national averages), even those located in more dynamic regions. This led him to say that *"no rural area should be excluded per se from the opportunity to change and develop. If we want the countryside to remain a model for society at large, we have to activate all its economic and social functions."*

Franz Fischler then placed the symposium in the context of Agenda 2000 (see boxed text): *"The Commission has set out its ideas on how we can cope with the future challenges facing Europe in its document 'Agenda 2000', focusing on enlargement strategy and deepening existing Community policies in order to strengthen the Union as a whole. The main issues involved in this deepening are the future shape of the Structural Funds and how to tackle the further reform of agricultural and rural development policies. The Community Initiatives too, will need reforming. The Commission is proposing a cut in the number of Initiatives from the present thirteen to three from 2000 onwards. [...] One of the three new Initiatives is to be aimed at developing rural areas. In future a 5% slice of Structural Funds spending is to be made available for these three Initiatives."*

This opening address by the Commissioner was followed by the presentation by Yves Champetier and Gilda Farrell (LEADER European Observatory) of the European summary of written contributions on the definition of the future Community Initiative (see corresponding article). This summary then gave way to a debate between Commissioner Fischler and six heads of LEADER groups (see boxed text).

From LEADER I to LEADER II

The second part of this first plenary session was devoted to a review of LEADER. Laurent Van Depoele, Director of Rural Development at DG VI, painted a "picture of LEADER's implementation" based particularly on the initial results of the ex-post evaluation of LEADER I by a group of independent experts whose final report will be published shortly. LEADER I is seen as a success story despite the fact that of the 217 programmes, a lot have resulted in insufficiently diverse actions (*"a number of LAGs overdetermined tourism and underestimated support for small businesses"*).

LEADER I revealed high participation by women in the rural development process, a very large presence of voluntary associations (*"one third of the LEADER I groups were part of the voluntary sector"*), concrete expression of the "bottom-up" approach to development, the establishment of enlarged local partnerships and numerous rural networks. In terms of employment, it is estimated that about 30 000 jobs were created or consolidated by LEADER I, of which 1 500 within the local action groups.

After the presentation of the European Observatory and the activities of the LEADER Network by Yves Champetier, John Bryden, professor of rural development at the University of Aberdeen and head of the "Future Prospects" thematic group of the LEADER European Observatory, summed up the major challenges facing rural Europe, placing particular emphasis on the need to adapt the instruments of support for rural development

in order to: ensure the transition between a market-based agricultural policy and a rural development policy; give concrete expression on the ground to the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development and not only to the environmental dimension; develop a long-term "rural perspective"; coordinate new forms of intervention for rural areas; define the new respective roles of the Union, Member States, Regions and local authorities; find flexible answers corresponding to the different contexts in an enlarged Union; lastly, draw the lessons from LEADER for each of these challenges.

Michael Mernagh of the Wexford LAG (Ireland) compared these prospects to the expectations of the newly created European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD): to develop a new outlook and new model for European rural society from the grass-roots level; to develop and consolidate the LEADER programme dimension (LEADER is not only a source of funding); to promote the integrated approach to rural development; to improve the networking of LAGs; to promote greater flexibility within LEADER to favour more innovative and more integrated actions at the local level.

This first plenary session ended with a period of questions from the room which primarily concerned ways to cut red tape, to ensure the LAGs genuine autonomy and to better take into account the environmental dimension of the actions carried out. There were also questions about the possible impact of Agenda 2000 on rural development and LEADER: reduction of the number of Structural Objectives and the areas concerned, sources and amount of funding, LEADER eligibility for all rural



areas or only those areas of the future Objectives 1 and 2.

From LEADER II to LEADER III

After Heino von Meyer's summary of the workshops (see corresponding article), Guy Legras, Director General of DG VI, recognised that LEADER was *"one of the too few European policies which give a positive image of Europe at the local level."*

This observation was implicitly or explicitly confirmed in the 6 success stories that followed:

Giuliano Vecchi of the Antico Frignano LAG (Italy) particularly underlined the contribution of cooperatives to the economy and to the development of rural areas, particularly in terms of providing know-how relating to technology, the collective organisation of producers and the marketing of products.

Giving three examples of environment-related development projects, Leopold Sjöström of the Inlandslaget LAG (Sweden) insisted on the need for closer cooperation between local communities and the institutions concerned by the projects, a crucial challenge in this area of Lapland which has less than one inhabitant per km²: *"there have to be stronger links between the authorities responsible for environmental protection who are sometimes far from the ground and the local people who are aware that nature has to be protected but feel excluded from decision-making and think that their needs are not taken into account."*

Brigitte Buhse of the Knüllgebiet LAG (Germany) emphasized the relationship between elective democracy and participatory democracy: partnerships must certainly include elected officials but also and especially representatives of the "living strength" of the area.

Eric Andrieu of the Pays Cathare LAG (France) called for a rediscovery of the identity of areas and "innovation in procedures" so that this identity is given concrete expression in development projects.

Mateo Andres Huesa showed how the Maestrazgo LAG intervening in a very depopulated area of Spain succeeded in mobilising the population around collective projects in different sectors, in particular the development of heritage and cultural tourism.

Finally, Filipa Ramos of the Pinhal Interior Sul LAG (Portugal) explained how LEADER had given impetus to the area's forestry and craft enterprises by providing technical assistance in the elaboration and design of new products but also enabled the creation of an international cooperation dynamic: *"cooperation always leads to an opening up and this opening up always leads to betterment; that is what we have seen happen locally by cooperating with the LAG of Sierra Morena Cordobesa in Spain and also with the region of Rzeszow in Poland."*

After these success stories, Commissioner Fischler closed the symposium (see the unabridged text of his speech, p. 36), listing the points that he planned to discuss with his colleagues of the European Commission and the Council:

- > a new Community Initiative for rural development needs to be launched;



■ Success story of the **Antico Frignano** LEADER group (Italy)

- > this Initiative should include and continue the essential elements of LEADER (local partnerships, bottom-up approach, emphasis on innovation, etc.), retain its experimental nature ("laboratory"), open its European network to the local groups of the candidate countries seeking membership in the Union and facilitate transnational cooperation between rural areas;
- > by benefiting from simpler and more transparent procedures, the implementation of this Initiative will obey the principle of subsidiarity between all the levels of responsibility concerned. The Commissioner is also encouraging the generalisation of the system of advance to the LAGs ("the Community Initiative could be a good test for this organisational innovation");
- > all the Union's rural areas should benefit from the LEADER approach;
- > the new Community Initiative should retain the "laboratory" nature in order to ensure that everywhere there is "the possibility to test new ideas, to exchange experiences";
- > certain LEADER principles must be deepened: eligible groups must be chosen according to strict criteria in order to guarantee a sufficient financial base for the projects selected; the issue of employment must be of greater concern together with the improvement of the quality of life and the environment. <

One symposium, one context

Agenda 2000, new perspectives for rural



The President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, presented the Members of the European Parliament the "Agenda 2000" Communication which examines three major themes: reinforcement of the Union's policies, future enlargement, and the new financial framework for the period 2000-2006. These proposals, which often served as a reference framework for the debates of the LEADER symposium in November, will have a major impact on the future European policy for rural development.

The Commission's "Agenda 2000" Communication opens up new perspectives for European rural development policy, primarily around three themes: reaffirming of the political priority of economic and social cohesion, deepening of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy begun in 1992 and enlargement of the Union.

Continuing the cohesion effort:

three Objectives, three Community Initiatives

The effort for economic and social cohesion is maintained in financial terms: financial solidarity remains at its current level of 0.46% of the Union's GNP, which for the period 2000-2006 corresponds to a budget of ECU 275 billion, or ECU 210 billion for the Structural Funds per se for their intervention in the 15 Member States. Greater efficiency of Community structural actions is also being sought.

A reduction of the number of Objectives to three is being proposed, with high priority being given to Objective 1:

- > regions eligible under Objective 1 will be those having the most serious difficulties with employment, the productive system and infrastructures and whose per capita GDP is less than 75% of the Community average. About two thirds of the Structural Funds would be allocated to this Objective. Special procedures are envisaged for the current Objective 1 regions whose per capita GDP exceeds 75% of the European Union average. Ultra-peripheral regions will be specifically included in Objective 1. In addition, the sparsely populated northern regions, currently eligible under Objective 6, will benefit from special arrangements;
- > a new Objective 2, devoted to economic and social reconversion, will cover the action in favour of the other regions with structural difficulties. These are areas undergoing economic change, declining rural areas, areas in crisis dependent on fishing or urban neighbourhoods in difficulty. The percentage of the population of the EU's regions eligible under Objectives 1 and 2 should be reduced from 51% to a figure between 35% and 40%;
- > a new Objective 3 will be created to cover regions outside Objectives 1 and 2 in order to help the Member States adapt their educational, training and employment systems.

The Commission also proposes reducing the number of Community Initiatives to three fields where the value added to the Community appears most obvious:

- > cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation aimed at stimulating harmonious and balanced regional planning;
- > human resources in a context of equal opportunity;
- > rural development.

5% of the resources of the Structural Funds would be allocated to the Community Initiatives.

The Commission proposes that the Cohesion Fund be maintained in its current form; Member States whose per capita GNP is less than 90% of the Community average and which are part of the third phase of Economic and Monetary Union remain eligible for assistance from the Fund. This Fund, which will have to have an annual budget of about ECU 3 billion, will continue to be used to carry out projects in the field of the environment and transport infrastructure projects for trans-European networks.

development in Europe

Rural policy for all the regions of Europe

As far as agriculture is concerned, the Commission proposes deepening and extending the reform of 1992, substituting more direct aid for price support measures and introducing a coherent rural policy for this process. The reforms will be undertaken or continued in most of the European organisations of the market (major crops, beef, milk, olive oil and wine) with a view to strengthening the competitiveness of Community agriculture, the respect and protection of the environment and consumer safety.

It is a stronger and renewed rural policy that the Commission is proposing, with greater importance given to agri-environmental instruments to contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas:

- > the accompanying measures currently financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section, complemented by the scheme for disadvantaged regions, will be applied horizontally and implemented in a decentralised manner;
- > the current approach of the integrated development programmes will be maintained in the regions eligible under Objective 1;
- > in the rural areas eligible under the new Objective 2, the measures (former Objectives 5a and 5b) will be financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section as accompanying measures. These measures will apply, together with those financed by the ERDF, the ESF and any measures of the FIFG in the same programme, at the level of the region eligible under Objective 2;
- > in all the rural areas not covered by the new Objectives 1 and 2, rural development measures to accompany market policies and complement them will be co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section. They will encompass all the types of measures to support structural adaptation and rural development currently co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section. They will apply horizontally and will be implemented in a decentralised manner at the appropriate level according to the Member State.

Enlargement

Finally, as far as enlargement is concerned, the Commission recommends that the Council begin membership negotiations with Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. These negotiations will be wrapped up with a specific candidate country when the country has made the additional efforts requested of it in the related notice. Of the ECU 275 billion (1997 prices) earmarked for the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, the European Commission proposes allocating ECU 45 billion to the new Member States. Pre-accession aid, to be taken from this budget, would be available from the year 2000 at a steady rate of ECU 1 billion a year. For all these countries, rural problems will clearly be a major focus of the Community intervention. <



272 contributions: a for the future of rural d

The European synthesis of the 272 contributions received before the symposium by the LEADER European Observatory transmit a clear message to the Commission and to the European Union in general.



*Yves Champetier and Gilda Farrell
(LEADER European Observatory) presenting
the summary of the contributions to the symposium*

In the course of preparation for the Symposium, Commissioner Fischler invited LEADER beneficiaries (local action groups and other collective bodies) together with the regional and national administrations responsible for implementation of the LEADER programme to contribute to the deliberations on a future Community Initiative for rural development by responding to these three questions:

- > *based on your actual experience, what are the most significant benefits of LEADER both in terms of your particular area of intervention and in terms of the policies supporting rural development?*
- > *what were the principal difficulties encountered both in implementation at local level and with institutional and administrative aspects of the programme?*
- > *what lessons have you drawn from the experience and what are your proposals for the future?*

By the end of October 1997, the LEADER European Observatory had received 272 responses, representing 244 local action groups (LAGs) or other collective bodies - approximately 30% of the beneficiaries under LEADER II. Twenty four contributions from public administrations directly involved in the Initiative and from national or regional associations of LEADER groups were also included.

The LEADER European Observatory made a European synthesis of these contributions, which was presented and distributed at the symposium.

In general, although the responses varied slightly from country to country according to the context and the nature of the problems encountered, there were no significant contradictions between the countries or between the responses. The overall consonance was surprising and allowed the compilation, from the responses of 15 different Member States, of a comprehensive synthesis reflecting the richness of ideas and making a strong statement about the future of rural development in Europe.

LEADER, a pioneering, decentralised programme for rural development

Virtually unanimous agreement was found both among the contributions and among the Member States in judging the essential attributes of LEADER to include:

- > the decentralised, integrated, "bottom-up" approach;
- > mobilisation of local populations;
- > networking of local actors at a territorial level;
- > the opportunity to realise latent ideas, an opportunity which had not been available prior to LEADER ("LEADER has achieved what many local actors wished for but did not have the means to achieve - tackling problems by using an integrated approach, bringing together various types of actors, problems, needs, resources and expectations", says the Italian LAG Maiella Verde).

It is nevertheless possible to detect clear country-specific characteristics:

- > throughout Spain there is emphasis on the change in mentality which LEADER brought about;
- > in France most contributions made reference to the fact that LEADER facilitated the bringing together of local actors from a given territory. ("By sharing their experiences, their methodologies and their field of activity,

A strong statement development in Europe

participants see their differences in non-competitive terms and discover complementarities,” considers the French LAG Espace Cévennes);

- > in Sweden the interaction with other rural territories, the transfer of experiences, and to a lesser extent, the new forms of democracy which local partnerships cultivated, were cited by the majority of groups (*“LEADER is an exercise in co-operation, in partnership and in democracy. However, democracy is not guaranteed unless it is energetically supported and put into practice daily,” insists the Swedish LAG Stad och Land Hand i Hand*).

The 272 contributions confirm that through the integrated, “bottom-up” approach which it introduced, LEADER has not only proved to be an effective means of ensuring the social and economic revitalisation of rural areas but it has also offered solutions to some of the fundamental problems which beset the entire European construct.

The LEADER method permits:

- > the creation of links, increased citizen participation and the fostering of participatory democracy through the establishment of local action groups;
- > the achievement of a balance between autonomy of action and the unavoidable management constraints without allowing the latter to stifle local initiatives;
- > the adaptation of the functions of the various tiers (local, regional, national and European);
- > the marrying of diversity (of culture, of activities, etc.) with solidarity (common outlook, vibrant networks for the exchange of experiences);
- > the overturning of traditional methods of development, by demonstrating among other innovations, the vital role of intangible investment;
- > a long-term approach to tackling unemployment through the adoption of a territorial approach and the emphasis on partnerships.

Complexity

Through the radical changes it has brought about in the relationship between the public and private sectors and between the local level and higher levels, LEADER finds itself operating in an institutional, administrative, financial and legislative context which is ill-prepared for such an approach. At local level there are difficulties associated with the characteristics of rural areas (the intractable mentality and insufficient readiness among development actors, the sometimes negative role of local institutions, the lack of resources among beneficiaries, many structural deficiencies - low population density, absence of young people, lack of

basic structures).

Some difficulties were associated with the characteristics of the LEADER Programme itself: insufficient resources, lack of technical expertise within LAGs, difficulties with the legal jurisdiction of LAGs, difficulties in understanding the concept of innovation.

Some were associated with the institutional positioning of the LEADER Programme: problems of co-ordination with other “competing” programmes; in several countries, problems in integrating the intangible interventions managed by LAGs and the tangible interventions managed by local or regional institutions, lack of confidence between actors.

If the LEADER approach has succeeded in winning over the many institutional partners and has been duplicated in other development policies and programmes, it has also been exposed, in certain countries, to skepticism and has encountered institutional difficulties and inflexible administrators who have diminished its impact.

The contributions identify difficulties due to the contradiction between the decentralised and multisectoral approach introduced by LEADER and the pre-existing approaches, most of them “top-down” and *sectoral*: *“It requires great patience and diplomacy to incorporate administrations which are structured along sectoral lines into integrated, multisectoral projects”*, says the LAG Vogelsberg (Germany).

A gap can be seen between the way in which the national and/or regional authorities operate and the local dynamic, a gap sometimes widened by the administrative division of territories which does not correspond to the limits of the LEADER areas. Several noted the discrepancy between national and European legislation and procedures.

Bureaucracy has been the main difficulty of LEADER II. People in all countries deplore the rigid hierarchy of authority, too much complexity (attributed at European level to the coexistence of the three Structural Funds), a lack of flexibility and clarity.

Six LEADERs debate with Commissioner Fischler

The autonomy of LAGs, the transfer of LEADER principles to other programmes, the financing of the future Community Initiative were just some of the topics covered at the plenary session on Monday 10 November by six heads of LEADER groups who had the opportunity to put questions to Commissioner Fischler on these different points. Highlights from this meeting are provided below.

On the autonomy of LAGs and the responsibilities of local partnerships (question from Carmel Fox, LAG Ballyhoura, Ireland):

Franz Fischler: "The partnership is in my view a fundamental part of LEADER and the future Community Initiative for rural development (...). The projects must be elaborated locally and not anywhere else (...). The principle of partnership must not only be maintained but also reinforced."

On the mechanisms to support diversification (question from Malaquías Jiménez, LAG La Manchuela, Castille-La Mancha, Spain):

F.F.: "The implementation of the major principles of LEADER - partnership, LAG autonomy, involvement of local people - depends on a model of management that can be sustained by outside experiences but must be adapted to the politico-administrative context of each region (...). LEADER is a kind of laboratory which must also innovate in this field (...). This laboratory has to come up with new management procedures."

On the amount of financial support for LAGs (question from Sharon O'Hara, Developing Rural Enterprise, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom):

F.F.: "Agenda 2000 provides for a geographical concentration of the Structural Funds as well as certain thematic guidelines (the three Community Initiatives) (...). As far as LEADER is concerned, I believe that local programmes must be of a certain size in order to reach the critical mass necessary for their success (...). The experimental nature of LEADER must be maintained (...). We must be aware

that LEADER anticipates principles that could be implemented in the context of broader development policies (...). To parody the expression 'small is beautiful', I would say that 'small is beautiful but it should also be powerful'."

On the transfer of LEADER principles to other Community programmes (question from Georges Amanatidis, LAG Kozani, Western Macedonia, Greece):

F.F.: "A model can never be entirely and automatically transferred (...). LEADER must be a 'supermarket of ideas, experiences, models, procedures' where the national and regional authorities should do their shopping often' (...). It is important that the administrative and government officials know what is happening in their own laboratory (...). The LEADER experiences must not be confined to the circle of people directly concerned but must also be known by the general public and be the subject of a broad debate (...). I am convinced that certain aspects (of the LEADER experience) could be applied to other areas of policy for the period 2000-2006".

On the possibility for the EAGGF-Guarantee Section to finance investments in all the sectors of the rural economy, outside the agricultural, agri-environmental and agri-food sectors (question from Pierre Desrozier, LAG Millevaches, Limousin, France):

F.F.: "The agricultural organisations are afraid that there are no longer enough financial resources for agriculture if the EAGGF-Guarantee Section is used to fund rural development (...) but I assure you that financing is not a problem (...). By keeping the method of calculating the agricultural guideline, it will be possible to provide ECU 1.9 to ECU 2 billion a year to finance new rural development measures during the period (...). Everyone agrees that agricultural policy must be accompanied by a rural development policy (...). We must therefore provide the means to carry out this policy."

On the future rural development policy and LEADER accessibility for all the rural areas in the Union (question from Helmut Pinggera, LAG Vinschgau/Val Venosta, Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy):

F.F.: "For reasons of simplification and an efficient allocation of resources, we would like in future for each region in the Union a single 'Programme for rural development' instead of today's multiple programmes for agriculture and rural development (...). This Programme should be elaborated by the regions themselves, with each having a single representative at the European level (...). The other question that arises is what areas will have access to LEADER? Only the areas of the new Objectives 1 and 2 or all the rural areas? At the risk of seeming impolite, I leave it to you to debate this issue during this symposium (...). Between now and tomorrow, we must weigh the pros and cons of any enlargement of LEADER." <

From left to right: Sharon O'Hara, Peter Zimmer, Franz Fischler, Jose Manuel Silva, Georges Amanatidis, Pierre Desrozier and Helmut Pinggera



Often, government agencies have difficulty accepting the LEADER approach. There are great differences in interpretation of the rules and methods between the regions because the intermediate officials are poorly informed of the procedures.

In the case of financial rules, the beneficiaries regretted the lack of advances, criteria for the eligibility of expenditure that are too restrictive, difficulties in having voluntary work recognised as matching funds.

All these difficulties have resulted in a considerable amount of delay and a loss of efficiency in the implementation of the Initiative. Many of the coordinators believe that they spend too much time managing administrative procedures and relations with the higher levels to the detriment of work on the ground.

Generalising, simplifying, deepening

Most of the proposals reiterated the principles of LEADER (bottom-up approach, creation of local partnerships, global grant managed locally, integrated development, intangible investment, transfer of experience) and urged the extension of these principles to other levels.

Cohesion and complementarity between the proposals were observed and this ensures that the synthesis of proposals forwarded to European level will elucidate the hopes and expectations regarding a future Community Initiative for rural development.

For all contributions it is essential that the LEADER approach be affirmed, ratified and refined.

- > Affirmation: most contributions asserted that LEADER must continue, whether in the form of a LEADER III or an Initiative adopting a similar integrated "bottom-up" approach. There was a broad consensus in support of principles such as local partnership, autonomy of LAGs and the global financing of a territorial action plan. *"If the programme ends in 1999, a well launched dynamic will be ended and the local populations will feel betrayed,"* insists the LAG Oulujärvi (Finland).
- > Ratification: in order to bear abundant fruit the "bottom-up" approach must be also be adopted by higher levels of authority. Some of the contributions from regional administrations suggest that the current Objective 1, 5b and 6 areas and the future Objective 2 areas constitute a local development axis which will adopt the spirit and approach of LEADER in order to assure real coherence and complementarity between LEADER and the other programmes.

Carmel Fox and Malaquias Jiménez



Close-up of the "LEADERs"

A significant number of the contributions sought to:

- minimise the number of intermediate tiers particularly in the sphere of management. With this in mind many LEADER groups would like to see a reinforcement of the role of the European Commission;
 - review the procedures on the basis of three key principles - simplification, flexibility and transparency ("Participation of intermediary organisations in the management phase must be reduced as much as possible, but the negotiation and evaluation phases of the programme must result in a firm commitment to co-financing by the national administration," suggests the Association of Spanish LEADER Groups);
 - redefine some European legal principles which conflict with the needs of integrated rural development, especially in Objective 1 regions;
 - strengthen the role of the Commission in the implementation of the Initiative.
- > Refinement: drawing on the lessons from LEADER I and LEADER II many improvements were suggested:
- to revise the schedule so as to allow more time for preparation of programmes;
 - to avoid a time-lag between LEADER II and the new Initiative;
 - to extend the duration of the programme;
 - to differentiate the resource allocation according to the level of advancement of the areas and to allow the areas selected to implement model programmes which are adequately funded;
 - to reinforce the role of intangible investment, by providing more and better training both for local actors and those charged with supervision of local development activities by fostering co-operation between the territories and the development networks. *"LEADER has a greater role to play by directly influencing the future strategies. It is both a facilitator and a stimulator,"* says the LAG Antur Teifi (Wales, United Kingdom). <

(*) available in English and in French at the LEADER European Observatory.

Stands, “Meeting Points”, “Forums”, “ ... An interactive sy

In addition to the plenary sessions and workshops, the LEADER Symposium included a large number of activities reflecting a vibrant, enterprising and convivial rural Europe.



■ *The “chef” of the Italian LEADER stand*

Still in large numbers on this long November weekend, the tourists on their way to the Grand Place in Brussels who were passing through the gardens of the Palais des Congrès where an unobtrusive “LEADER” banner was flying certainly had no idea that the lower levels of the immense and austere building had been turned into a genuine “Aladdin’s cave”. To parody another tourist attraction of the Belgian capital, the Palais des Congrès was a kind of “Mini-rural Europe” for the period of a symposium, with each of the Union’s fifteen countries having set up for the occasion a stand overflowing with local products from its “LEADER soil”.

A stroll through the exhibition halls was a little like travelling through rural Europe. And the trip was even quite fun since, for promotional reasons, each stand tended to magnify the characteristics, if not the stereotype image of the country represented: thus, Italy’s stand cleverly combined gastronomic products and socio-economic brochures, Greece’s stand resembled an oriental bazaar, Portugal’s also brought together an impressive variety of food and craft products, France recreated a “country bistro”, Austria presented a wide range of ecological products, Germany had a deliciously innovative “apple beer” for tasting...

The LEADER exhibition clearly reflected an essential preoccupation of a number of the participants at the symposium: to communicate one’s development action through a product, a service, an actual achievement. Thus on the first day of the symposium (Sunday, 9 November), 33 “Meeting Points” were held; in small groups of twenty or so people, LAG officials were able to present, usually with an object, an action that in their view exemplified their approach.

During this same day, six “Forums” were also organised. These were a series of mini-conferences presenting the specific features of LEADER in the different Member States and the action of several Directorates-General of the European Commission to promote rural development. The aim was to better acquaint the participants with the socio-economic, institutional context of LEADER and the procedures to implement it in each of the countries of the Union and to provide a better understanding of the various Community policies concerning rural development.

Because one of the major objectives of the symposium was to facilitate the setting up of transnational cooperation operations between LEADER areas (see corresponding articles), a whole section of the Palais des Congrès was reserved for a “Cooperation Area”. Over 300 LEADER II beneficiaries were thus able to meet potential

■ *Presentation of the **Bayerwald** LAG (Germany) at the LEADER European Observatory stand*



Rural Cyberspace”... Symposium



partners and to explain their cooperation project. As for the handful of tourists, less in a hurry and more curious than the others, who dared open the door of the Palais des Congrès, it was impossible for them not to see the “Rural Cyberspace” in the centre of the entrance hall which throughout the symposium drew crowds of visitors: 7 computers were there for participants wishing to present their Web site, consult databases, send mes-

sages or simply “surf on the Web” from the “Rural Europe” site [*]. Jean-Charles Nadé, computer specialist in charge of the Cyberspace, estimates that about 600 people took advantage of this service during the symposium.

[*] Address: <http://www.rural-europe.aeidl.be>



*Tasting ham from Spain
at the Spanish LEADER stand*

Transnational cooperation Moving into high

A unique opportunity to meet some 800 LEADER beneficiaries in person, the symposium was a genuine launching pad for the transnational cooperation dimension of the Initiative.



Transnational cooperation was one of the three major objectives of the symposium. Nothing could be more logical, since the implementation of LEADER is generally well under way, and a number of beneficiaries have reached the stage where it can be useful to turn to the transnational level to solve certain particular problems or better take advantage of certain specific local resources. As Commissioner Fischler indicated in his opening speech: *“often enough, this kind of cooperation is needed for a project to reach the right critical mass. It is not an added luxury but a key factor in the success of LEADER projects.”*

“Cooperation Area”

A special - and very convivial - area was set up to help groups define the cooperation needs of their area, to find suitable partners and to devise the actions to be carried out. Set up as a “one-stop shop” for transnational cooperation, the “Cooperation Area” offered some of the following services:

- > individual meetings in seven languages with resource persons who helped define the cooperation needs of the

- individual concerned;
- > identification of possible partners through different databases, including the “Partner” base containing all the requests received by the LEADER European Observatory prior to the symposium.

Thirty three “discussion tables” bringing together heads of LEADER groups interested in specific cooperation themes were also organised in such fields as crafts, tourism with horse-riding or cooking, the utilisation of rivers or the promotion of chestnuts. In total, over 140 people took part in these discussion tables.

A few specifics

The morning of 11 November was entirely devoted to transnational cooperation. This plenary session was an opportunity to provide quite a few specifics to help ensure that the cooperation projects run as smoothly as possible. Laurent Van Depoele of DG VI thus clarified the way in which LEADER’s Measure C was going to be implemented and the possible fields of cooperation: exchanges of good practice, transfer of know-how and elaboration of joint projects, adding that *“the services of the European Commission are prepared to propose a standard document that can be used in all Member States to present the transnational cooperation action.”* Additional details were also given regarding the technical assistance provided by the LEADER European Observatory, and the new methodological guide “Transnational cooperation between rural areas” was commented and distributed to all those who attended the symposium.

Examples

The six case studies presented during this plenary session showed the great variety of cooperation projects that could be carried out under LEADER: Seamus O’Reilly from the University of Cork in Ireland presented the “European Commercialisation Antennas” where five LEADER groups together are trying to market regional products in several major European cities. Gilberte Brémont from the LAG of Préalpes Drômoises (Rhône-Alpes, France) presented the strategy of “Via Méditerranée”, a network of 10 Mediterranean areas

gear



Laurent Van Depoele,
Director of Rural Development (DG VI)

which together have sought to design and promote rural tourism products.

David Haworth (LAG Argyll & the Islands, Scotland, United Kingdom) presented "The Saint's Trail" project: his group and an Irish LAG are working to set up a tourist itinerary based on the historic links existing between the two areas, notably two abbeys founded by Saint Colomba.

Antonio João Nunes-Realinho (LAG Raia Centro-Sul, Portugal) described the "A Raia / La Raia" network: five neighbouring Spanish and Portuguese development associations are implementing a series of joint cross-border actions.

Alva Carrasco Lera (LAG Montaña Palentina, Castille-Leon, Spain) described the course of action of three LEADER groups from Spain, Germany and France which are seeking to introduce in their respective areas the "cyclorail", a device that enables bicycles to ride on abandoned or underutilised railways.

Christian Ries of the LAG Clervaux-Vianden (Luxembourg) wrapped up this series of concrete examples with the presentation of the "Tool IT" project: three LEADER groups from Sweden, Scotland and Luxembourg want to develop a joint offer of teleworking services.

Initial assessment

Over 300 people took advantage of the Cooperation Area. There were 183 individual meetings, and 144 people participated in one thematic discussion table or another. All of this made it possible to formalise 210 requests for cooperation, of which 125 were processed on the spot by the LEADER European Observatory.

Over half of these requests concern the transfer of know-how between LEADER beneficiaries, 47 the joint elaboration of products, 32 the joint implementation of common heritage. Nine involve the pooling of human and/or material resources and 22 concern different types of projects.

Among the most frequent projects are the joint marketing of agri-food products (e.g. creation of common labels), the utilisation of waste from forestry, tourism on waterways, angling, the recycling of old railways, Medieval heritage, telematics and the development of multimedia tools. It is worth noting that Spain, Italy and France are the three countries that presented the largest number of projects.

Judging from the success of the "Cooperation Area", the Brussels symposium is probably going to enable this essential dimension of LEADER (a total of over ECU 100 million are earmarked for this under measure C) to move into high gear. <

One of the 33 thematic tables devoted to cooperation



Employment, quality of life, local democracy, su The LEADER method

Each of the six thematic workshops of the symposium showed that the LEADER method, even if it sometimes “disrupted” certain institutional practices, was a rather adequate response to the major challenges of rural society

The six workshops which were held in parallel during the afternoon of 10 November were without a doubt a highlight of the symposium. Six themes were identified, each corresponding to a challenge facing rural society and LEADER:

- > employment (*workshop 1*), a major problem for Europe given the continuing high level of unemployment;
- > quality of life, the environment and landscapes (*workshop 2*), essential components of sustainable development which seeks to reconcile well-being and economic viability;
- > local democracy, participation and equal opportunity (*workshop 3*), major challenges - and achievements - for a programme like LEADER which is based on the bottom-up and partnership approach to development;
- > innovation (*workshop 4*), a fundamental dimension of LEADER, the “underpinning” of the competitiveness of rural areas;
- > subsidiarity and the sharing of responsibilities of implementation (*workshop 5*), decisive challenges for the success of LEADER II and the future Community Initiative;
- > rural solidarity, opening up, cooperation and networks (*workshop 6*), key elements of the “LEADER philosophy”, which is based on the transfer of experiences, know-how and good practices between rural areas.

Objectives

For each theme and on the basis of the experience of the LEADER groups, each workshop had:

- > to come up with proposals that could facilitate the search for and implementation of new ways in the context of Agenda 2000;
 - > to identify new challenges that a new Initiative for rural development will have to face;
 - > to define the types of support, procedures, work settings, etc. needed to better manage at the local level the problem concerned.
- In addition to these general objectives, each workshop specifically had:
- > to identify the new stakes and challenges for the theme concerned;
 - > to examine the specific methods and procedures for implementing LEADER;
 - > to analyse and assess the results of the LEADER method.

A common language

The texts that follow aim to give a rendering of the content of each of the workshops. These are always summaries: indeed it is impossible to convey the entire richness of the debates and exchanges that involved numerous people (about 200 participants per workshop) for several hours.

In addition to the highlights mentioned in the article



subsidiarity, innovation, networking...

d from A to Z



corresponding to each workshop, it is worth noting certain aspects that emerged from the six working groups and which shed additional light on the reflections of the LEADER symposium (some were expressed by Heino von Meyer when he presented his summary of the workshops at the plenary session):

- > the diversity of rural areas is so great that it is sometimes disconcerting;
- > to meet each challenge, the links between the different rural areas have to be strengthened;
- > the challenges of rural Europe are also the challenges of urban Europe. Rural development is not only the business of rural dwellers: the quality of life, of the environment, of landscapes, the need for recreational spaces, for example, also correspond to an urban demand. It is important that city-dwellers become aware of the contribution of the rural world to society as a whole;
- > LEADER has helped create a new vision of rural Europe;
- > LEADER has helped impose a shared language and overcome the isolation of each group taken individually;
- > LEADER "popularises Europe", enhances the image of the Union at the local level;
- > the LEADER method is often disrupting and "LAGs are strange animals", to repeat the metaphor used by two participants;
- > LEADER corresponds to a "bottom-up" approach to rural development, but it must not be forgotten that it is the "top" that encouraged it and will have to continue encouraging it in the future;
- > LEADER is an extremely modern policy because it has virtually no money, a "homeopathic policy". That is why being innovative is important, even if it is only to make up for the lack of means.

Employment: an indirect impact

At a time when the European Union has over 18 million unemployed people, employment is a key issue on which the future of the rural world obviously depends. The workshop entitled “Employment and rural development: the LEADER method” sought to assess the impact of LEADER in terms of the creation or consolidation of jobs and activities and then to arrive at recommendations for the new Community Initiative.

New sources of employment

Today, the solutions to the problem of employment in rural areas no longer depend solely on the structures traditionally concerned by the problem, i.e. enterprises and the public authorities: for enterprises, productivity and competitiveness are making it harder to hire; in the public sector, budget cuts are resulting everywhere in a reduction of jobs. On the other hand, new needs are appearing, opening up new prospects of employment. But for these new sources of employment to emerge, a new approach is necessary that is based on strategies taking into account local human resources and the assets (natural resources, amenities, etc.) and constraints specific to each area.

Carola Bell, head of the Scottish LAG of Western Isles, Skye & Lochalsh, showed how LEADER had helped set up a teleworking centre which has so far created some one hundred quality jobs in publishing: *“new rural jobs do not necessarily have to look to the past but to the future; they must be modern jobs that meet the area’s needs and the expectations of those living there.”*

■ *The traditional sectors can also create jobs: processing olive oil (Préalpes Drômoises, France)*



The primary objective of LEADER is not the direct creation of jobs, but by making partnership and the integrated approach the main focus of implementation, LEADER has opened up prospects for new solutions to the problem of work: support for local initiatives, consultation between partners have become in the LEADER areas the preferred ways to create and support new activities, gradually enabling existing jobs to be consolidated and new sources of income and occupation to be created for people in rural areas.

Micro-enterprises

LEADER has therefore had an indirect effect on employment, and this in the framework of projects often not covered by conventional programmes. *"The project holders who we support,"* Tommaso Marsano of the LAG Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (Italy) said, *"are above all enthusiastic people driven by the spirit of enterprise who until then had never had access to Community funding."*

LEADER is centred on micro-enterprises and micro-activities which, by combining various ways of organising work (self-employment, part-time work, seasonal work), can ensure a more diverse and more stable income for rural people: it should be recalled that people who have more than one activity account for nearly half of the Union's farmers.

The job of the LEADER partners is to identify and make use of resources until now unexplored, e.g. in terms of identity and amenities. This involves organising the supply and demand of new products and services and encouraging in this way the creation of economically viable activities translating into jobs and a better quality of life for the local population. Training obviously plays a determining role in this course of action. Yet, here too, the traditional approaches have often shown their limits and new ways of training-learning must be invented, especially since, Michel Laine of DG V insisted, *"there can be a gap between existing skills and those that are truly needed, between today's skills and those that will be necessary in ten years time."*

Links

The LEADER experience shows that the creation of jobs in rural areas is a long-term endeavour whose results only appear gradually. Job creation does not depend solely on financial support: those concerned have to be informed, mobilised, specific local assets have to be discovered, the emergence of new ideas has to be encouraged, there is the networking of entrepreneurs, new consultation between public and private sectors, etc. Referring to the example of the Territorial Employment Pacts, Michel Laine notes that *"the success of entrepreneurship does not depend so much on the content of the measures but on the implementing procedures proposed. (...) More than anything else the indispensable links between the different groups of people have to be created to arrive at a level of social cohesion that will help solve the problems of employment."*

There are other arguments in favour of involving the different segments of population: e.g. the diversification of rural activities offers new prospects for women. Traditionally, activities related to agricultural production tend to be carried out by the farmer but as soon as the farm diversifies and branches out into rural tourism or the marketing of farmhouse products, for example, the role of the spouse becomes much more important. Problems relating to equal opportunity, the professional integration of young people, etc. must be specifically dealt with. For this, LEADER provides support and assistance services adapted to individual cases, creates links between the actors and sectors, facilitates cooperation.

The workshop's participants concluded from this that it was necessary:

- > to keep LEADER's indirect approach to employment, encouraging entrepreneurship;
- > to retain the multisectoral approach which is essential to the diversification of activities;
- > to continue promoting intangible investments and "soft" financial assistance which are complementary to the other investments and often have more multiplying effects than heavy investments. <

Quality of life, environment, landscapes: reconciling protection and development



Quality of life in the countryside: finding profitable ways to use space, heritage and scenery is essential

The workshop devoted to the environment, quality of life and landscapes covered a whole range of challenges, since, as Ritva Partanen from the LAG RaJuPussu (Finland) clearly demonstrated when she presented the development process under way in this remote and sparsely populated area: *“the quality of life is not only dependent on quality air, water, landscapes but also on services that meet people’s needs.”*

Four elements are essential in improving the quality of life in rural areas, however diverse they may be:

- > stronger social links;
- > the utilisation of space, heritage, landscapes;
- > access to information, training and employment;
- > accessible local services.

Sustainable development

What matters most, however, is the economic viability of rural areas, because *“even if the region is beautiful, people leave it when there are not enough economic activities,”* a participant pointed out.

The ultimate challenge is sustainable development. Going well beyond the simple preoccupation of environmental protection, sustainability is a concept that encompasses a dynamic process of economic efficiency, social cohesion and respect of the integrity of the environment, biodiversity and landscapes.

Reconciling all these elements is not simple. More often than not it is a question of seeking a balance between two apparently contradictory poles: *“we are forced to sell natural resources to protect them,”* says in short Reinhard Lechner of the LAG Bregenzerwald (Austria).

The participants in the working group insisted on the importance of environmental awareness and training actions: *“environmental protection is still too often considered by many to be a threat to economic activities,”* noted Jacqui Cuff of Birdlife International, speaking from experience.

The environment as lever

Many LEADER groups have nonetheless helped turn existing or potential conflicts into positive synergies. The most obvious examples concern local action groups that intervene in protected areas, be they national or regional nature reserves or biosphere reserves. These LAGs are successful in making environmental protection and restoration of heritage an asset and even a lever for the development of the area concerned, involving this area in the processing of farmhouse or artisanal products, in tourism, etc., even creating highly skilled jobs related to environmental research and assessment. These are all possible ways of *“putting economic activities at the service of people and limiting the brain drain from the rural world,”* said an official from the Aragon LAG (Spain).

Since 1992, the global approach of LEADER has made it possible not only to improve the management of resources and the quality of landscapes but the training and qualification of the local actors concerned, leading to very professional development plans. For Christian Anz of DG VI, *“LEADER has made rural areas multifunctional and the LEADER philosophy should be transferred to other Community programmes.”*

Services

On a more general level, LEADER is participating in the maintenance of sustainable rural communities, enhancing local identities and cultures, fighting against exclusion and also ensuring a balance between the know-how, opportunities and needs of all the categories of population.

As far as these needs are concerned, a key problem for the workshop’s participants concerns the offer of public and private services and the efficient use of new technologies. *“In isolated areas, modern communication technologies are fundamental to reduce isolation and keep people in the area,”* noted the representative of the South West Limerick group (Ireland). However, according to the workshop’s participants, it is a sector where LEADER has perhaps not been sufficiently present. In this field, there should be a review of strategies and the eligibility criteria of the programme in order to obtain maximum benefit from a sector that has major job possibilities.

Focusing on the vitality of rural areas, on the strengthening of synergies and complementarities between local actors means a rigorous selection of the actions to be backed. Another balance has to be found between the necessary consideration of the specific features of each area and the necessarily general nature of global policies which have repercussions at the local level.

Quality

The LEADER rural innovation programmes have provided certain solutions in terms of adjustment and diversification in the use of space, scenery and natural resources. It is nonetheless essential that the relationship between development policies and environmental policies be deepened and that the notion of space in activities supported by the LEADER Initiative be better integrated.

The workshop also proposed that the experimental nature of LEADER be retained: the programme’s pilot approach allows for considerable flexibility when intervening to achieve an objective - sustainable development - that is both complex and ambitious.

Another conclusion, which concerns the LEADER method as a whole, has to do with quality: *“the high criteria of quality that are set in the case of the environment must be extended to our entire development action,”* stated a participant: *“quality of the animation, quality of the partnership, quality of the projects, quality of innovations, etc.”* <

Local democracy, participation and equal opportunity

Contrary to the two previous workshops, this workshop was more concerned with the means to be implemented - democracy, local participation, equal opportunity - than the objectives to be attained - employment, quality of life, sustainable development.

The involvement of local people, social and economic cohesion are in fact key elements for development that is balanced and sustainable in the long term. For Joan Asby of the South Pembrokeshire LAG (United Kingdom), *“a development process only involving the local institutional and economic actors would be sterile. The conditions must be created so that as many people possible, young and old, men and women, are mobilised and this at every stage of the process.”*

New attitudes

LEADER funding and voluntary work: building a multi-purpose centre in Tollebeek (Flevoland, Netherlands)

By making the largest partnership possible a requirement for devising a common strategy for area-based development, LEADER has had a decisive influence on the behaviour of rural actors, be they institutional or private. Moreover, the emphasis on the role of animation has opened up concrete areas of participation by the different local actors and been an incentive for the organisation at local level of a series of information and training activities whose effect has been increased prospects of development through the diversity of ideas, points of view and aspirations of the different local actors.

It is difficult to quantify in the short term LEADER's contribution here. While technical and financial assistance can be measured, the degree of involvement of the local people, new partnership practices, the renewed perception of “social rifts” in the areas concerned are difficult to measure.

All these elements have nonetheless been instruments specifically used to help increase local democracy and improve equal opportunity at the local level.

The European Union's rural areas greatly differ from one



another in terms of how their social fabric is organised and the spaces where ideas and relationships are expressed between institutions and citizens. Noting these differences, the workshop's participants also wondered *"what the ideal size of an area was for democracy to work as best as possible"* (Thomas Schaumberg, LAG Vogelsberg, Germany).

This diversity, which is one of the most precious features of rural areas, requires flexible strategies and can lead to certain difficulties when applying European policies and implementing programmes like LEADER. Thus, for some areas, the development process has had to be launched using totally elementary methods of animation given the level of deterioration of the socio-economic fabric; elsewhere, animation has been a way to make a qualitative leap in already existing activities. Similarly, in some areas, the new practices introduced have rather easily created common working habits whereas in others, "sectoral" ways of thinking still dominate.

New practices

Often, the LEADER partnership has had a positive impact in ordinary institutional practices: thus, consultation of the various parties concerned, consultation between partners have been gradually incorporated in the "normal" management of the projects. Several LEADER groups would currently like to have greater autonomy in the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies and would like to have better control over the external decisions affecting their area. These processes call for new methods of consultation and collaboration between local actors. Recounting the experience of the LAG Ouest-Aveyron (Midi-Pyrénées, France) and conveying the thoughts of the French network "Sol et Civilisation", Raymond Lacombe sees four dimensions to the renewal of local practices: *"renewal of the organisation of areas (reactivation of the notion of 'land', 'region'), new partnership and networking practices (creation of working groups comprising a diversity of actors), adapted decision-making processes (involving the coordinating team, financial backers and LAG) and rehabilitation of the system of 'contracts' between government agencies and the area's actors (...). The relationship is no longer one of hierarchy or that of beggar and donator, but one of equality. Here too we find the democratic challenge."*

Democracy, participation and equal opportunity imply in particular greater consideration of new forms of exclusion, shortcomings in terms of access to resources and opportunities. The LEADER programmes have helped start the return to a balanced situation at the area level or in the case of disadvantaged groups of people. It is essential, however, that this relationship between development policies and enhanced democratic practices be deepened while at the same time incorporating the notion of equal opportunity in the participation in the activities supported by the LEADER Initiative.

The workshop concluded that LEADER had triggered a new way of looking at everything "rural". The Initiative generated real dynamism in the organisation of actions and mobilised human strengths, including people or groups of people who had given up any involvement in development, no longer even recognising the existence of opportunities in their area.

LEADER has helped create new relationships between the different categories of the local population, between the public, private and voluntary sectors, and between the different government agencies.

One-stop shop

As far as the future Community Initiative is concerned, it is imperative that flexibility be ensured and maintained in order to optimise the participation of all, men and women alike, at the local level. Here, the workshop advocates the granting of a global grant, even if the method sometimes poses problems of application. It is important to clarify this mechanism, to check that it is compatible with national and in particular regional administrative rules and procedures, because in some regions what was supposed to make LEADER's implementation simpler instead complicated it.

A lot of the participants also called for the "one-stop shop" system which, by channelling the different financial flows to the local level, only imposes one set of rules and ensures that the local groups do not have to negotiate with three different European Funds, to write up three reports as a result, etc. <

Subsidiarity and responsibility. Coordinating the different levels.

This workshop, which was attended by a number of representatives of national and regional institutions and administrations, focused on subsidiarity and the “vertical partnership”.

The aim was to discuss the adequate level of responsibility - local, regional, national, European - to maximise the “LEADER effect”.

Powers

The first observation made was that everything depends on the way in which power is shared and on the administrative tradition of the different countries, not to mention the often very big differences between the terminologies and concepts used. This explains the difficulty encountered in reaching definitive conclusions at the end of the workshop.

Sometimes considered a threat by the authorities higher up, LEADER has been confronted with institutional rigidity and shortcomings. *“The local development approach is poorly perceived by the financial backers and government agencies. LEADER loses credibility because of its administrative management,”* deplores a French LAG official.

There have often been delays: the Carrefour of Lower Saxony notes that it can take up to three years for an application to be processed. However, *“in the meantime, the project’s objectives will have evolved and the initial financial application may very well no longer correspond to this change”.*

Similarly, the right balance has to be found between the imperatives of implementing projects at the local level and the constraints inherent in any management of public funds at the regional, national and/or European levels. The LEADER groups often have to face the incoherencies between these different levels. If it is already difficult at the European level, for example, to coordinate the intervention of the three Structural Funds, how

can local groups be expected to do so? Each level therefore needs to improve its management practices. *“People know what they want. It is up to us to identify the synergies between the different public funds,”* said Anthony Leddy of the Cavan-Monaghan LAG (Ireland) with regard to the responsibilities of the local level.

Model

“Disrupting” for some institutions, the LEADER method has not, however, only met with indifference or opposition. On the contrary, it has sometimes been copied: José Emilio Guerrero, representative of Andalusia, emphasized the fact that LEADER had considerable potential in terms of social coordination. Drawing inspiration from the LEADER method, Andalusia is currently elaborating “territorial strategic plans” based on community mobilisation. Meanwhile, Mikael Lindau from the Swedish Rural Development Agency (GBV) insisted on the reforming nature of the Initiative at national level: in Sweden, a reform is currently being discussed that could eventually apply the multisectoral approach to all public interventions in favour of development and regional planning.

For Michel Cadot from the French rural planning agency, DATAR, LEADER is first and foremost an “important method”. He suggests certain directions for the future: *“strengthen the bottom-up approach through employment ‘territorialisation’ actions in particular and by simplifying administrative constraints (...) favour rural development in the context of regional planning (...) retain the pilot nature of LEADER.”*

Coherence

For Jean-Charles Leygues of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Cohesion (DG XVI), everything local is not the panacea. In his view, there has to be a clearer division of responsibilities and a more coherent working method based on the relevant territorial level. It is also important to place LEADER within an integrated approach to the territory, which raises the question of the relationship between the countryside and the city. Similarly, the complementarities with the programming must be better identified: *“what influence does LEADER have on programming tools and vice versa?”* In this regard, Jean-Charles Leygues indicated that DG XVI was busy examining new procedures based on the principle of reimbursement rather than on the principle of advances.

Wim van Gelder of the Committee of the Regions indicated that rural policies should be extended to all rural areas, beyond the typology of the Structural Funds: *“it should thus be possible to implement the laboratory of experiences comprising LEADER in all the regions of Europe.”*

Simplification

For Laurent Van Depoele (DG VI), three key words should inspire the elaboration of the future Community Initiative, “clearness”, “simplification”, “flexibility”.

The question of subsidiarity cannot be delegated to the local level alone. The most appropriate level must be identified according to the tasks to be accomplished: planning must be done at the lowest level, the closest to the ground. *“As for planning, the course of action must be clarified,”* he said; *“once a ‘picture’ of the area has been painted, objectives and a strategy must be defined. The Commission’s role is not to create programming ex nihilo, but to ensure that this programming is coherent throughout the Union.”* According to Laurent Van Depoele, the levels of intervention must, moreover, be simplified. As far as the involvement of actors is concerned, LEADER means shared responsibility: the partnerships must therefore be clarified, which raises the question of the sharing of powers. *“The major question raised by Agenda 2000 for the future concerns the convergence between multisectoral agriculture and rural development.”*

The workshop ended with several recommendations. It is important to share responsibilities in a way which:

- > ensures local participation;
- > improves the coherence and complementarity between LEADER and the major structural financing policies;
- > implements an area-based strategy of development of a new kind which goes beyond the conflicts between local and regional levels, between rural life and agriculture (*“LEADER has aroused a lot of suspicion among the traditional actors of the rural world, particularly farmers,”* complained a participant from Extremadura). All sides must recognise the mutual benefits that they can derive from LEADER. None are opposed in the absolute: “rural” does not mean anti-urban or anti-agricultural. The future solutions will depend on a just balance between sometimes divergent interests and the continuation of common objectives in favour of development. The quality charters, the Chartes de Pays (“Regional Charters”) in France and other schemes of this kind are already examples of this approach. <

Laurent Van Depoele (European Commission), Anthony Leddy (LEADER Cavan-Monaghan, Ireland), Mikael Lindau (Swedish Rural Development Agency) and José Emilio Guerrero (Government of Andalusia, Spain)



Narrowing the gap between technological innovation and territorial innovation

“LEADER is highly concentrated fertilizer.”

Josef Mayerhofer of the Austrian development agency Waldviertel

Management used a long agricultural metaphor to describe the importance of organising and coordinating actions, of taking into account duration and the step-by-step approach in the development process.

From the start, the workshop devoted to “differentiated strategies of innovation” insisted on the fact that rural innovation is first of all a process, from the need to be able to count on a “group with a project and a vision” (Fritz Wittemann, LAG Oberes Altmühltal-Mittelfranken, Germany), to the “harvest” and marketing of innovative products and services.

Global dimension

Taking the example of the exploitation of river salmon in his area of Haut-Allier (France), Jean-Marc Schlick underlined the global dimension of innovation in rural areas: *“the innovation already appears in the project’s objectives. It is the global nature of the project, all the transversal actions that help bring it about that will be innovative, even if individually the actions are not in themselves novel.”*

*A technological innovation for recreational use: the “cyclorail” developed in the **Montaña Palentina** LEADER area (Spain)*



Like others who spoke, he also pointed out that innovation was a source of difficulties (e.g. corporatism was a hurdle), that risks had to be taken and the actors made responsible in all the phases of the process.

Often, innovation also has a ratchet effect in areas that seem to be removed from the primary object: *"an innovative action can be an excellent way to 'popularise Europe'; our transnational project, 'Ecorail' (the use of old railways as cycling trails), carried out with Spanish and German partners, has in the villages led to a whole series of cultural and festive projects between the three countries."*

RTD and LEADER

After analysing innovation as a process, the workshop's participants discussed the links and apparent contradictions that existed or could exist between territorial innovation and enterprise innovation. Philippe Galiay of DG XII ("Scientific Research") compared in particular the approach of the "First Plan for Innovation in Europe" published by the European Commission and the LEADER approach: *"for the Plan, the source of innovation is the market whereas for LEADER it is the individual, the local actor... In the first case, the methods of analysis are econometric, in the second case they are sociological. The solutions being sought are also different: for the Plan, they are macro-economic, for LEADER they are 'micro', at the human level."*

But the two approaches are only contradictory in appearance: to be competitive and still be able to combine them with local know-how, rural areas must also resort to research and technological development (RTD). There therefore exist strong de facto complementarities between territorial innovation and technological research which can even be combined in terms of financial support. As several of the speakers underlined, it would be a good idea if European research funds could be added to the LEADER fund more often.

The debate between RTD and territorial innovation was fuelled by the head of the LAG Sierra de Béjar y Sierra de Francia, Angel de Prado Herrera, who showed how in this very disadvantaged area of Spain the problem of processing waste from olive oil was solved with the collaboration of the LEADER group and the University of Valladolid: *"we rapidly settled a problem that major multinational companies had not yet managed to solve. We now even have a world patent for a system to purify and utilise the waste."*

This success story enabled Jacques Burtin of the Research Unit of DG VI to point out that *"rural areas are perfectly capable of innovating, including the most disadvantaged areas."* He added: *"innovation in rural areas is a social, organisational, partnership innovation. It is the area as a whole that is going to bring about the innovation and development. Rural innovation and 'conventional', technological... innovation should not be prevented. But we should not 'innovate for the sake of innovating'; whatever the innovation it must be finalised, aim at a specific goal."*

According to Jacques Burtin, the questions that should be asked are indeed: *"how should the technological innovative mechanism be tied in with the LEADER mechanism? How can the next Community Initiative be improved to facilitate rural innovation? How can risk-taking be better taken into account in the instruments of support for innovation, which is LEADER's 'calling card', its essential added value?"*

"A delicatessen for innovation"

"Innovation stems from the combination between the local genius and codified know-how," concluded the rapporteur, Gilda Farrell, of the LEADER European Observatory. *"How can RTD be brought closer to the ground, in particular in the most disadvantaged areas? We see that local producers rapidly find solutions there where RTD structures are close to the rural environment, like in Northern Italy, for example... Similarly, couldn't certain transversal technical problems be handled at a level higher than the local level in order to avoid the dispersal of funds? I know for example that several LEADER groups are separately doing research on olive oil..."*

The new Community Initiative should therefore enable "pools of expertise" to be created at the service of several areas to solve the transversal and/or specific problems of the local context while increasing the added value of the available resources.

However, Eric Andrieu of the LAG Pays Cathare (France) had the last word. Also calling for "innovation in the support procedures," he said: *"This morning, Commissioner Fischler spoke about LEADER, a supermarket for innovation', I would say instead that what we should try to do is create a 'delicatessen for innovation.'" <*

Rural solidarity, opening up and cooperation: strengthening the LEADER network(s) and enl

In addition to the local and integrated approach, solidarity between rural areas and the active participation in local, regional, national and transnational networks of rural development are all dimensions that have made LEADER a pioneering programme.

With the tools that it makes available (publications, electronic network, seminars, etc.), LEADER has enabled rural actors to consolidate practices of openness and cooperation, and this tremendous movement to transfer know-how, often informal and little visible, has largely contributed to the success of the Community Initiative for rural development.

Cooperation

A genuine antidote to localism, to “parochialism”, cooperation enables the LEADER groups to discover the interest of their diversity, while creating common references and a common language for themselves, which in turn generate new links of solidarity. It is a major asset for sustainable rural development. Cooperation also makes it possible to achieve relevant levels for each development problem. It often leads as well to a harmonisation of strategies

between neighbouring areas. It is at the basis of the organisation of networks, making it possible to enlarge the product ranges, to reach new markets, to coordinate complementary know-how, to facilitate transfers of technologies and to introduce complementarities between different development approaches. It weaves links between actors from different areas, confronted with similar problems.

The workshop nonetheless noted certain difficulties. The lack of experience in networking is one: Carmen Furelos Gateiro (Portodemouros, Spain) showed how, through a local network built with the help of the Poverty programme, this LAG opened up to other projects but had difficulty in managing an excessive number of actors. She suggested creating at national level a “network of project coordinators”.

The closeness of the LEADER areas can paradoxically be a source of difficulties: for Paolo Tola, of the training institute FORMEZ (Sardinia, Italy), *“cooperation projects at the regional level are essential, but a balance has to be found between solidarity, cooperation... and competition between LAGs.”*

Another Italian speaker, Nerino Galerani, of the LAG Antico Frignano, regretted the lack of contractual procedures and legal instruments to formalise transnational cooperation (*“what legal value do our letters of intent have?”*) and indicated that in this regard, the European Commission could make a substantial contribution.

■ A network is also an opportunity to socialise and exchange ideas



arguing it (them) to Eastern Europe

It was also noted that in some countries informal associations of LAGs coexist alongside national coordinating units of the LEADER network. *"There exist in fact different types of networks - institutional, voluntary, informal - with different functions,"* explained Maurizio Giannini, President of Assoleader, the association of Italian LAGs and coordinator of the workshop. *"These networks are usually complementary. There is in particular considerable complementarity between the informal associations of local action groups and the national coordinating units of the LEADER network."*

Enlargement

Solidarity with other areas is also opening up prospects of extending the local and integrated approach to rural development to areas outside the European Union. Thus, LEADER is certainly a tool to be promoted for the transitional phase of integration of the countries concerned by the Union's enlargement. The Initiative in fact involves essential aspects put forward in Agenda 2000: citizens' rights, democracy, respect of minorities, reconstruction of a social fabric, creation of areas of consultation (partnerships), search for relevant levels to manage development, economic competitiveness of rural areas through the diversification of activities and integration between sectors.

Wojciedch Magnowski presented the training programme that the Region of Rzeszow in Poland put together with the LEADER groups of Rota do Guadiana (Portugal) and Pays Cathare (France) as part of the ECOS-OUVERTURE programme: a certain number of Polish trainees took theoretical and practical training courses in rural development for five months. Among the results of the programme was the elaboration of a local action plan with the participation of the inhabitants of Rzeszow. *"The LEADER method is well suited to our needs and we apply it as well in the training centre that we have set up with Slovak and Hungarian partners,"* noted Wojciedch Magnowski. David Machado, of the Rota do Guadiana LAG, said that, reciprocally, the experience had had an energising effect for the Portuguese area. Paulette Salles (LAG Pays Cathare) recognised as well the positive aspects of the project but noted that *"the collaboration with the countries of Eastern Europe poses specific problems, particularly in terms of preparation, coordination and follow-up, which supposes a suitable methodology."*

Matthiew Wyatt, of DG I, sees in LEADER complementarities with the PHARE programme: the strategy for accession has to be strengthened by creating "accession partnerships", that is to say cooperation between the local groups of the Union and non-EU countries, which would give a boost to national programmes of accession (assistance in setting up institutions, assistance for enterprises and key infrastructures). *"There is no 'rural PHARE' per se,"* said Matthiew Wyatt, *"but assistance focused on fulfilment of the conditions of accession: the bringing up to European standards of slaughterhouses, dairy farms and other rural enterprises concerned."* The presence of a programme like LEADER would therefore be entirely appropriate.

Mediation

If the LEADER approach is in itself a vehicle of cooperation and solidarity between areas, experience proves that the implementation of cooperation links does not occur spontaneously: it is the result of a clear desire, often involving years of effort and access to adequate financial instruments. This poses the problem of mediation (information, networking, technical assistance), essential in maximising the fruit of the cooperation approach. *"The assessment of LEADER I highlights the necessity of the network, which enables LAGs to learn from one another, and the great interest of a coordinating structure,"* said Doriane Givord of DG VI.

While underlining the need for rules of the game and clearer contractual methods in cooperation matters, the workshop reached the following conclusions:

- > an operational framework needs to be defined so that "LEADER can be transferred to Eastern Europe" (Samuel Thirion, INDE agency, Portugal);
- > a structure for network coordination and mediation, such as the LEADER European Observatory, is very important to facilitate cooperation between rural areas;
- > the future Community Initiative should provide for the financial means to support the informal associations of LEADER beneficiaries, which like consumer associations, also play a mediating role;
- > the LEADER network has to be strengthened to satisfy even better the needs of LAGs and government agencies (improved possibilities for the transfer of know-how, rural development training, technical assistance; assistance with cooperation actions between LAGs, etc.);
- > enrich the LEADER Initiative by combining it, when necessary, with other European programmes. <

800 LEADERs give

After summing up the six workshops of the symposium at the final plenary session on 11 November 1997, Heino von Meyer ended his presentation with a text which was equivalent to a declaration.



BY HEINO VON MEYER

Director of Pro Rural Europe, an agency specialised in development and the rural environment, Heino von Meyer is expert at the LEADER European Observatory

Given the diversity of rural Europe, it is impossible to sum up and capture all the richness of the debates that took place during this symposium whose subtitle was "800 leaders give their views". I believe that it is possible, however, to list six essential elements that should be taken into account in the new rural development Initiative. The LEADER programme must:

- > be continued and strengthened,
- > cover all of rural Europe,
- > focus on quality,
- > favour the multisectoral approach,
- > benefit from simple and flexible procedures,
- > concentrate in particular on networking and capacity building.

These elements, which over the years have given the LEADER approach its added value, should also be incorporated in the mainstream of European rural policy. This seems particularly important at a time when the Union is preparing for its enlargement. Taking the LEADER approach as example, rural development and cohesion policies in general should be seen as ways to strengthen local democracy and European integration.

1 - The LEADER Initiative must be continued and strengthened

Coming from the participants in this symposium, this is hardly a surprise! On a more serious level, it is not a question of continuing LEADER because that suits the LEADER groups but of continuing this Initiative quite simply because it is a success.

Why should a European programme that benefits from a very positive image be ended when other European measures, the Common Agricultural Policy or certain interventions of the Structural Funds for example, are often rightly or wrongly criticised or even unpopular? Why should a European programme that has implanted the European idea at the local level, made people feel more and more European be ended? Let us not forget that LEADER I concerned 11 million rural people and that today LEADER II concerns 40 million.

Continuity is a crucial factor. Without it, Europe would lose its credibility and the confidence of its citizens. There would be widespread discouragement of local actors, many having just embarked on European procedures. LEADER aims to bring about a change in mentalities. That takes time, not only five or six years.

their views

With LEADER, the European Union has set into motion a long-term process, and if it were ended, the consequences would be disastrous.

A lot of national programmes and European networks would not recover from this. Stopping the LEADER Initiative would in a way amount to destroying a newly built infrastructure, a new motorway or a new bridge built with the contribution of the Structural Funds.

Ensuring a smooth transition between LEADER II and the new Community Initiative for the period 2000-2006 is also crucial. This new Initiative must be designed according to the fundamental principles of LEADER, that is to say a local, bottom-up approach that is integrated, multisectoral, area-based, participatory, involving partnership and geared towards innovation.

However, it is not enough to simply continue LEADER. LEADER is a success that must be strengthened. LEADER must work better. More financing must be allocated to local rural development projects, new fields of intervention must be opened. Why should a Community Initiative for rural development only receive one third of the 5% of the budget of the Structural Funds currently envisaged for the three new Initiatives?



2 - The LEADER Initiative must cover all of rural Europe

The new rural development policy will cover the entire Union. And LEADER will have to follow this direction. This point, which was the focus of the symposium, was debated at length in the workshops.

I do not think I am wrong in saying that the participants at the symposium approve the approach advocated by the Cork Conference in November 1996 and which is not in contradiction with the essential need of strengthening cohesion between the regions of Europe. The Cork declaration clearly stated that rural development policy *"must apply to all rural areas in the Union, respecting the concentration principle through the differentiation of co-financing for those areas which are more in need."*

LEADER, with its modest financial resources, is unable to balance regional differences through the redistribution of funds. LEADER is not a compensation programme but aims to stimulate the efficient, innovative use of rural potential. If rural development initiatives from the areas covered by the current Objective 5b programmes are no longer able to participate in LEADER, the European Network for Rural Development risks collapsing. Exchange of information and experience, the transfer of knowledge and capacity building would be hampered, not facilitated.

*"Cooperation":
transnational projects in the pipeline*



Let us be very clear: extending LEADER to all the Union's rural areas does not mean "sprinkling" money over the entire rural territory of the Union. We are not against a concentration of funds. Like in the past, co-financing rates should continue to be modulated as a function of need, keeping in mind that there are still many other ways to achieve concentration where desired.

3 - The LEADER Initiative must focus on quality

The new Community Initiative for rural development should more than ever before focus on incorporating the highest quality standards: quality of the business plan (e.g. in terms of integration and innovation), quality of the partnership, etc.

Quality must also be ensured with regard to the environment. Priority could, for example, be given to groups or projects in areas of high nature value, such as those designated for the Natura 2000 network under the EU Habitat Directive.

Obviously, standards cannot always be EU-wide quality standards: the local context, the starting conditions of the different groups must be taken into account. We have to keep the door open for newcomers. We should avoid creating a "LEADER oligarchy".

I personally would propose that a European award be created for "The LEADER of the Year". The jury for such a competition should be composed mainly of representatives of the LAGs themselves. Such a process would launch a debate about what defines the excellence of LEADER groups and activities, a first step towards a self-evaluation of the LEADER network.

4 - The LEADER Initiative must promote the multi-sectoral approach

The multi-sectoral approach is fundamental to the LEADER Initiative. Integration across sectors is indispensable for rural development to become truly sustainable. It goes without saying that the new Community Initiative should concern and reconcile the economic, social and environmental dimensions of all rural activities. This is absolutely essential, but I am afraid that the new rural policy - in particular outside Objective 1 areas - might be governed by budget rules that hamper integration, rather than by rural development considerations. It is budgets that should follow policy priorities, not the other way around.



5 - The LEADER Initiative must have simple and flexible procedures

Simplification and greater flexibility are key concerns for most local action groups today. Improvements are required even now under LEADER II. The lessons learned from LEADER I and II need to feed into LEADER III. The global allowance mechanism was initially introduced as a means to allow for greater flexibility. This has not always been the case. The global allowances for local groups must be made operational, and multi-annual budgeting should be facilitated.

We need to establish “one-stop shops”, so that the support of local groups flows from a single source. Similarly, there should be one administrative counterpart for the groups, one set of rules and procedures for LAGs.

6 - The LEADER Initiative must put emphasis on networking and capacity building

It is the network that makes the LEADER programme truly European. It is central to creating an identity of Rural Europe in its diversity. Networks help overcome localism, they ensure and strengthen openness and solidarity.

The LEADER Network - not only the virtual web-site on the Internet - gives rural Europe global visibility. It has a “snowball” effect by creating links that can become the bases for a constantly improved exchange of information.

Under a new Community Initiative, the possibilities for the transfer of knowledge and experience, for support in capacity building to actors and administrations should be improved. More attention should be devoted to establishing and accompanying cooperation actions between LAGs. This requires also that the necessary funds be allocated at the European level.

The creation of a pool of expertise and a task force for technical and organisational assistance appear to be of great importance, especially if we are to take into account the need of the countries concerned by the enlargement of the European Union.

Evaluation and monitoring are also of crucial importance for the new Initiative: traditional methods of external evaluation from the top are not necessarily the most suitable for the LEADER approach. Through the network, mechanisms of self-evaluation could be established. The network of LEADER groups should have a strong self-interest to guarantee the quality. Thought should even be given to the possibility of more active involvement by the existing groups in the screening and selection process for new groups.

Opening the laboratory

Commissioner Fischler rightly considers LEADER to be a laboratory for rural development innovations. The future Community Initiative will have to continue exploring new ways and encourage innovations. But I think that it is also time to leave the laboratory. Success elements of the LEADER experience should become integral parts of the mainstream of rural and Structural Funds policy. LEADER should help us to become more courageous in promoting rural development in Europe. Also in the mainstream we need more local animation and participation, local analysis and modern planning, an integrated and multi-sectoral approach, global allowances to groups, emphasis on soft infrastructures, more networking of experiences.

In short, we have to advance from the laboratory to the supermarket, or would it not be more appropriate for LEADER: from the laboratory to the delicatessen shop! I hope I marked the right milestones for our next steps towards an enlarged, prospering Rural Europe. <

A new Community Initiative for the development of rural areas

Closing speech by Mr Franz Fischler, Member of the European Commission in charge of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now approaching the end of our three-day LEADER symposium. These have been days spent getting to know each other and making new discoveries. They have been days of intensive discussion and concentrated work, days of summing up and looking towards the future. I regret very much that I was unable to spend the whole time with you and derive full benefit from the expertise gathered here. I believe, however, that we have every reason to be proud of the rich array of ideas and initiatives which have emerged. 800 LEADER groups have put forward their points of view. It is no easy thing to summarise the wide range of experience and proposals. Just the same, allow me to draw some preliminary conclusions from the symposium. For me three essential messages have emerged:

1. We need a new Community Initiative for rural development;
2. We must step up efficacy and transparency by simplifying procedures;
3. When establishing the new Community Initiative we must follow existing LEADER approaches in greater depth.

1 - We need a new Community Initiative for rural development

The analysis presented in the working report on rural development and the conclusions of the European Cohesion Forum and in particular the Cork Conference stress

the need for an effective and lasting rural development policy. Agenda 2000 has set the first signposts towards a new approach of this kind.

A strengthened rural development policy not only involves efficient regional programmes, but also the possibility within the framework of a new Community Initiative, of giving additional impetus to the development process. The first and most important conclusion from the Symposium in my view is that we need a Community Initiative for rural development, including after 1999.

From my point of view it is unimportant what the new Community Initiative is called; the packaging does not matter, it is the content which is important and this conference has given us many important pointers towards what that content should be. The new Community Initiative should take up the central features of LEADER I and LEADER II and carry them on.

We can only achieve lasting development of rural areas if we succeed in mobilising the population on the ground. **It is precisely in this area that the new Community Initiative must take its stand and as before support local groups.** Use of local resources, participation of the local population, encouragement of private initiatives and strengthening of local partnerships are for me the conditions needed to ensure success.

At the same time there is no easy way to organize this



ive rural areas

'bottom-up' approach. Every Member State and every region has its own experience which can be used as the basis for developing the best possible approach. Nevertheless the effect must be the same in all regions. The local partnerships and the 'bottom-up' approach strengthens democracy at local level.

LEADER has shown that we are not concerned with presenting citizens with Europe as a standardised product, but are rather concerned to identify and develop salient regional features and specialities. If a European Initiative helps people identify with their local area then we are also helping them to identify with Europe.

Precisely because we are working towards a new kind of policy in the future for rural areas we also need to be able to experiment and try out new ideas for rural development. **The new Community Initiative must retain the laboratory character of previous Initiatives.** This means that the actors involved must achieve the proper chemistry. We must be ready to take a chance on establishing new links and it must be possible for one or other experiment to go wrong on occasion. At the same time we must organize our laboratory in such a way that we do not repeat the same experiment again and again in different places.

The new Community Initiative must continue to encourage genuine innovation.

It must have as one of its aims the implementation of projects which cannot yet be financed via either the structural programmes or rural development policy. Accordingly, "soft" investments should be given preference over traditional "hard" investments.

To enable rural areas to be inspired by the ideas, the innovating potential and the enthusiasm of other rural areas, we continue to need a network of local action groups. My hope is that the exchange of experience, mutual willingness to learn from each other and the possibility of cooperation will not fail as a result of linguistic and national frontiers or boundaries between assistance areas. **For this purpose we will continue in the future to need a vital European network for local groups.** Just how important this network is for solidarity between the rural areas we realize this morning when faced with the call for support for victims of the Italian earthquake. I should like to support this appeal and express my solidarity with the victims of natural catastrophes in Italy and Portugal.

The LEADER principle is finally of particular importance for the accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Mobilisation of the rural population and the practice of democratic decision-making processes at local level will help consolidate the process of political and economic transformation. The report to Working Group 6 on a joint project by two LEADER groups and a Polish group was therefore a most welcome development. Again and again we are encountering great interest in the LEADER philosophy in the Central and Eastern European countries. We must take this interest seriously and open our networks for local groups in these countries.

Cross-border cooperation demonstrates the possibilities for the development of rural Europe. It not only serves the purpose of planning and carrying out joint projects, but also enables us to further the process of bringing Europe together at local level. We also need to incorporate this element into the new Community Initiative.

2 - We must step up efficacy and transparency by simplifying procedures.

LEADER is now coming of age. The new dimensions we are entering bring the challenge of new difficulties. We should see these experiences as part of the learning process embodied by LEADER.

In view of the great variety of rural areas in the Union and the great differences in starting conditions it is a matter of course that a policy for the development of rural areas must be based on the principle of subsidiarity. This also applies to the new Community Initiative. For it to succeed, people at all relevant levels will have to play their part. Someone said yesterday in Working Group 5 that it is not necessary for everyone to do everything. Subsidiarity means that the tasks must be clearly defined and that people at all levels must be prepared to assume their responsibilities. I am convinced that the Member States will find ways of sharing responsibility within their constitutions and legal systems.

Simplification of administrative procedures is for me a subject which is crucial to the motivation of our citizens and the success of our rural development policy. In the past few days we have had many indications of how the transparency and efficacy of assistance can be improved. Not all the proposals can be put into practice just like that, but we are taking them all seriously and we will also use the reform of the Structural Funds and the Common Agricultural Policy to make Union policy easier to understand. We need clear rules that should be drawn up by the beginning of the next programming period.

— In connection with the reform of the Structural Funds, it has been proposed that the financial implementation of the programmes could be improved by introducing a system of advance payments followed by reimbursement of expenditure. During the symposium a number of participants suggested that a system of advance payments could be incorporated in the new Community Initiative. I think this is a good idea, which would facilitate and speed up implementation. The Community Initiative might also be a good testing ground for an organisational innovation of this kind.

3 - When we implement the new Community Initiative, we must deepen the LEADER approach adopted so far.

The reform of rural development policy proposed in Agenda 2000 would mean that in future no rural area would be excluded from it. All rural areas would have the opportunity of building up their own development strategy. We hope that our proposals offer the best way of encouraging both the adjustment of agricultural structures and sustainable rural development, since a competitive farming industry needs a competitive environment, i.e. it needs living rural areas.

At the beginning of this meeting you expressed the wish that the LEADER idea be introduced into all rural areas. I cannot but support you in this. It is of course clear that the new Community Initiative should be implemented in the future Objective 1 and 2 areas. It does however make sense, for the very reason that we want to have a Union-wide rural development policy, to support the possibility of trying out new ideas and exchanging experience, even outside the eligible areas. Why shouldn't all rural areas be enabled to take up the LEADER idea through the new Community Initiative? I will talk to my colleagues in the Commission and the Council of Ministers about offering these possibilities to all rural areas in the Union in future.

This is of course not to say that the new Community Initiative should be spread so thinly over Europe that it does not have its full effect anywhere. This would be of no benefit to anyone. The new Community Initiative must be much more targeted in order to enable the new seedlings in the soil of rural development to put down their roots.

When it comes to implementing the new Community Initiative on the development of rural areas we must bear three aspects in mind:

Firstly, **strict criteria must be used to select which groups are to receive funding in order to guarantee adequate financial support for the chosen initiatives.** Secondly, **we also have to think about strategic funding priorities.** A number of interesting ideas have been generated by conference participants. For instance, Working Group 1 emphasised that LEADER has made an important contribution to improving employment in rural areas. We have to consider how a new Community Initiative might be able to further this objective. The third point has to be **improving the quality of life and of the environment in rural areas.**

The quality of life in rural areas is increasingly defined by access to services. Working Group 2 showed that it will be difficult to persuade people to remain in the countryside unless we provide adequate services. As we have already seen regarding the use of financial resources available to the LEADER Initiative, we must strive to maintain the essential critical mass of rural services.

These are just a few examples of priority areas in which a new Community Initiative could offer added value over and above that provided by the standard programmes.

At the close of the LEADER symposium I would like to thank you all for having taken the time to discuss your experiences with us and help elaborate a basic outline for a new Community Initiative for rural development. I hope you have all benefited from the abundant opportunities provided by this conference to make new contacts and build on existing ties.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks not only to the Chairs and speakers of the plenary events and the various working groups, but also to everyone else who took an active part in the working groups, discussions and exhibitions, and to the local action groups who had already submitted their opinions before the symposium. You have all helped ensure the success of this conference. I would particularly like to thank those who have worked behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of this conference, which has been truly impressive in scale. The symposium could not have taken place without the help of staff from the European Observatory and the European Commission and, last but not least, the aid of the interpreters.

I would like to wish you all continued success in your work, and hope to see you again once we launch a new Community Initiative for rural development.

Brussels, November 11, 1997

LEADER Seminars [REMINDER]

The LEADER European Observatory is organising a series of seminars between now and April 1998. Each of these meetings will take place in an area whose LAG has relevant experience in the theme covered. The definitive programme, languages and venue are available two months before the activity is held. (Contact: LEADER European Observatory, "Organisation" Unit).

- > "Developing tourist products around recreational trails"
Dates: 25-29 March 1998. Languages: Italian/German/English. Venue: Appenino Piacentino LAG, Parma (Emilia-Romagna, Italy).
- > "Indicators to monitor and assess the LEADER programme"
Dates: 4-8 March 1998. Languages: English/French/Spanish. Venue: Galashiels, Scottish Borders (Scotland, United Kingdom).
N.B.: this seminar is primarily intended for officials of national and regional government agencies.

New LEADER publications

- > "Transnational Cooperation between Rural Areas"
Designed as an "itinerary" and presented in the form of factsheets, this methodological guide helps the user elaborate, implement and assess a transnational cooperation project under LEADER II. (Price: BEF 300 inclusive of tax / about ECU 7.5).
- > "Innovation and Rural Development"
The primary aim of this document is to put into perspective, if not to "demystify", the concept of "innovation" as it applies to rural areas and then analyse the conditions in which an innovative development action emerges, progresses and the various characteristics of this kind of action. (Price: BEF 300 inclusive of tax / about ECU 7.5).

LEADER II publications [REMINDER]

- > "European Union action programmes and rural development" Directory (Price: BEF 1 800 inclusive of tax / about ECU 45).
- > "Innovative actions of rural development" Directory (Price: BEF 1 800 inclusive of tax / about ECU 45).
- > "Evaluating a territory's touristic potential" (methodological guide). (Price: BEF 300 inclusive of tax / about ECU 7.5).
- > "The collective organisation of a sector for the local valorisation of agricultural resources: the example of

- cheese processing" [Innovation in rural areas" - Notebook no. 1].
(Price: BEF 300 inclusive of tax / about ECU 7.5).
- > "Organising local partnerships" ["Innovation in Rural Areas" - Notebook no. 2]. (Price: BEF 300 inclusive of tax / about ECU 7.5).
- > LEADER II poster (Price: BEF 700 inclusive of tax / about ECU 18; additional poster to the same address: BEF 200 inclusive of tax / about ECU 5).

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Breakdown of LEADER II beneficiaries [DECEMBER 1997] [1]

MEMBER STATE	LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAG)	OTHER COLLECTIVE BODIES	LEADER II BENEFICIARIES (10/1997)
Belgium ^[2]	-	-	-
Austria	31	9	40
Denmark	12	-	12
Germany	123	18	141
Spain	135	-	135
Finland	22	-	22
France ^[3]	136	-	136
Greece	40	1	41
Ireland	34	2	36
Italy ^[3]	119	7	126
Luxembourg	2	-	2
Netherlands	4	-	4
Portugal	44	-	44
Sweden	12	-	12
United Kingdom	61	9	70
TOTAL	775	46	821

"Rural Europe": LEADER on line in 6 languages
The publications (LEADER Magazine, INFO-LEADER, technical dossiers, etc.), the programme of activities, the updated list of all approved LEADER beneficiaries as well as various databases can be consulted on line in 6 languages (French, English, German, Spanish, Italian and Portugal) on the Internet. Several forums are also open.

[1] Figures based on information in the possession of the LEADER European Observatory as at 15/12/1997
[2] Selection in progress
[3] Selection of local beneficiaries not yet completed

Name: LEADER

("Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy")

Programme type: Community Initiative

Target areas: Objective 1 regions (development lag), Objective 5b areas (fragile rural areas) and Objective 6 areas (Nordic areas of very low population density) of the European Union. However, up to 10% of the allocations in Objective 5b areas can be granted to non-eligible contiguous areas.

Objectives: providing continuity with LEADER I (1991-1994), LEADER II is intended to:

- > encourage model local rural development initiatives;
- > support innovative, demonstrative and transferable measures which illustrate the new directions that rural development can take;
- > increase exchanges of experiences and transfers of know-how;
- > support transnational development projects proposed by those active at local level in rural areas and which express their solidarity.

Recipients: LEADER II can assist two categories of final beneficiaries:

- > principally, "Local Action Groups", i.e. a combination of public and private partners jointly devising a strategy and innovative measures for the development of a rural area on the scale of a local community (less than 100 000 inhabitants);
- > other rural collective bodies, public or private, (for example, chambers of agriculture, industry, commerce or crafts, cooperatives, business groups, local authorities, non-profit-making organisations), provided that their more specific activities relate to a plan for the rural development of a local area.

Types of measures: acquisition of skills in rural development, rural innovation programmes (vocational training, rural tourism, support for small firms, increasing commercial value locally and marketing of agricultural, forestry and fisheries products; improvement of the environment and living conditions, etc.), transnational cooperation.

The various elements of LEADER II are organised around a "European Rural Development Network", permitting wide dissemination (through seminars, meetings and publications) of innovative measures implemented for the benefit of rural areas and fostering transnational cooperation. The network is coordinated by the "LEADER European Observatory".

Duration of the programme: 6 years (1994-1999)

Community grant: around 1 755 million ECU, of which over 1 000 million ECU are for Objective 1 regions, financed by the three Structural Funds.



**LEADER
European Observatory**



**European Commission
DG VI Agriculture**

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