



Research, transfer and acquisition of knowledge in aid of rural development



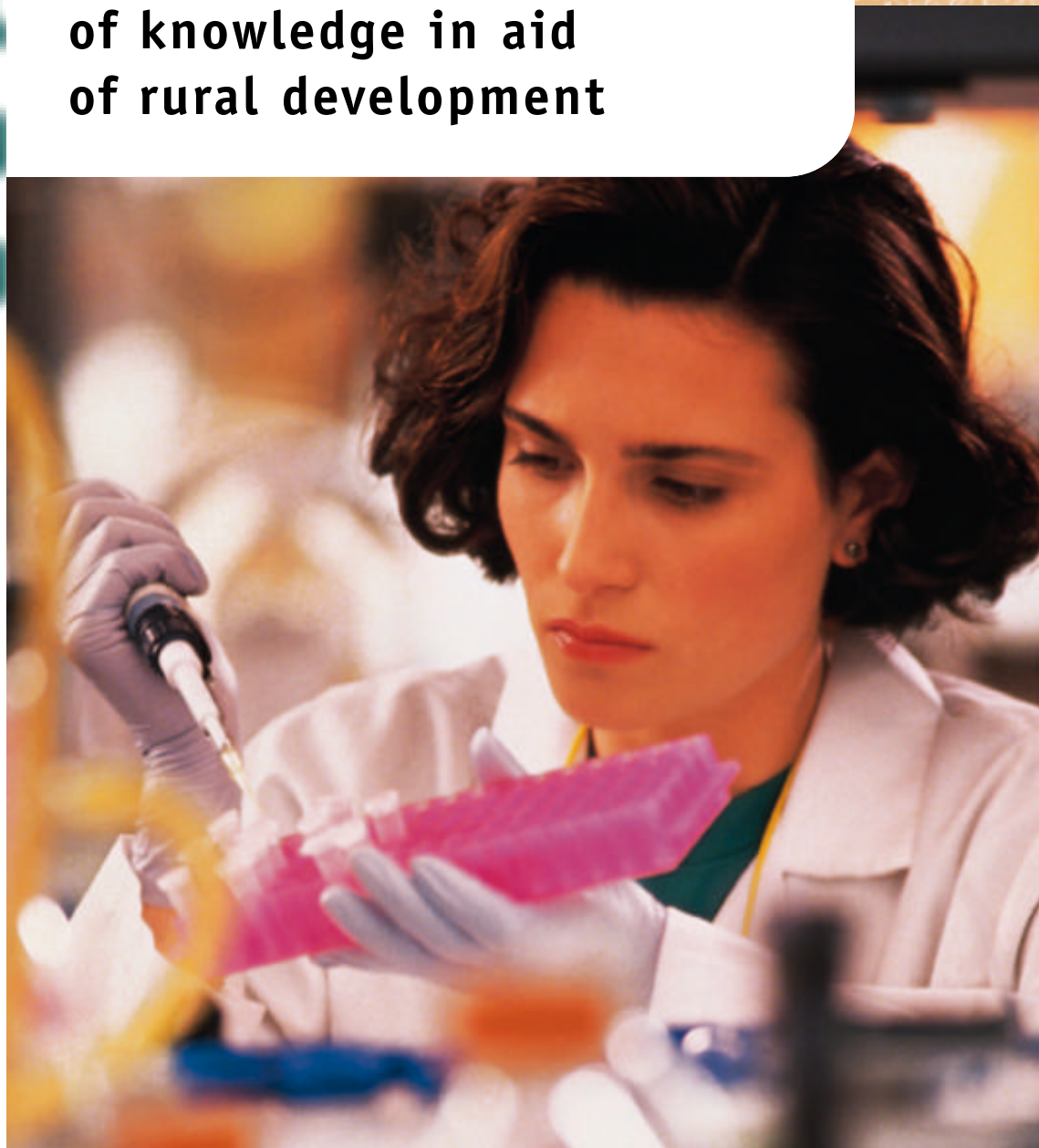
LIAISON ENTRE ACTIONS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
DE L'ÉCONOMIE RURALE

LINKS BETWEEN ACTIONS
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE RURAL ECONOMY



COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE
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**Research, transfer
and acquisition
of knowledge in aid
of rural development**

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Introduction

Rural areas, which for many years have faced the crises associated with agricultural modernisation (declining numbers of farm workers and the marginalisation of many rural areas), coupled with the recent impact of new technology, new consumer demand and globalisation, now need to find new development avenues and to reposition themselves in the markets.

To satisfy this need, since its creation in 1990, the LEADER programme has served as a “laboratory” to help identify the potential of the special resources of rural areas, an approach that was reaffirmed with the launch of LEADER+ (2000-2006).

LEADER measures must therefore include processes of research/experimentation and learning/transfer. These two processes are involved not only in the launch of new activities, but also in the development of measures based on a territorial, participatory, integrated approach, organised along the lines of a consensual partnership and networking.

Today, after ten years of practical experience with the LEADER programme, what assessment can we make of this process? What lessons can be drawn? How has the existence of LEADER influenced research and transfer methods? What important achievements can be highlighted? What future challenges must be met in order to ensure that LEADER+ can fully play the “guiding” role it was assigned, by supporting processes for appropriating new knowledge?

Take research for example. Prior to LEADER, there was a certain tradition of research into ways of differentiating rural areas. Its aim was to highlight disparities, for example in terms of resources for developing agriculture or to study its geo-climatic characteristics (low-land farming, mountain farming, etc). The emphasis was placed on agricultural research and very little attention was paid to the other aspects of rural development. Indeed, a purely sectoral research approach was adopted.

The advent of LEADER led to the emergence of the “rurality” concept, representing an area where a multitude of different activities and distinctive elements coexist^[1]. Agriculture does not necessarily play a key role in rural areas. This new concept and new approach create new requirements for research and knowledge transfer. It becomes necessary to clarify the links between the different fields of activity and the different types of interdependence between demographic, economic, social and cultural factors. This is leading to a review of intervention strategies and policies in the light of each area’s specific characteristics.

There is now a proliferation of analyses to examine the growing phenomenon of territorial marginality. Their results now clearly show that sectoral approaches are incapable of coping with this development or of proposing more appropriate strategies for resolving it^[2].

The implementation of LEADER programmes since 1991 has boosted demand for research to support the development of integrated strategies and projects, whilst at the same time opening up new insights into the theoretical framework underpinning development work in rural areas.

The aim of this dossier is to suggest a number of ideas for further reflection and some initial responses to these needs.

In Chapter One we start by exploring the current status of knowledge acquisition, from the standpoint of integrated approaches and the need for rural areas to be competitive. In this first Chapter, we show that today, within a conceptual framework of “local”,

[1] Formerly, the policy for mountain areas was based mainly on research into Alpine mountain areas, extending the spatial approach to areas other than agriculture. See, for example, the works of Elena Saraceno: “Il problema della montagna”, Franco Angeli, Milan 1993; “Vecchi e nuovi problemi della montagna” in Fuà G. (ed), “Orientamenti per la politica del territorio”, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1991; “La différenciation des zones de montagne en Italie comme réponse aux économies locales”, in Bazin G., Roux B., “Les zones défavorisées Méditerranéennes dans la CEE”, 2 volumes, INRA, CEMAGREF, JAMM, Paris 1981.

[2] See, for example, the papers presented at the OECD conference: “Remote Rural Areas: Developing through Natural and Cultural Assets”, Albarracín, Spain, 5-6 November 1998.

“endogenous” development and a context of “globalisation” and decentralisation, it is real-life, “in situ” experimentation and networking that tend to dominate the process of transferring existing knowledge and producing new knowledge.

In Chapter Two we go on to examine **learning processes** in rural areas. By analysing “**learning cycles**” we are able to identify the different methods whereby a “**learning local community**” can establish itself.

In Chapter Three we analyse the gaps between the development needs of rural areas and the research provided by the academic world, by supplying concrete examples to show what measures LEADER has taken to close these gaps and help forge new links between academics, researchers and local actors.

Chapter Four discusses LEADER’s role in learning processes, as well as the challenges awaiting LEADER+ during the period 2000-2006.

Finally, the Postscript raises questions at three levels: questions about the conceptual framework that underpins research provision for rural development; questions about the need to progress from local “renewal” to a political framework conducive to the future development of rural areas; and questions about the possible means for coping with specific research needs and for guaranteeing the future competitiveness of rural areas.

Chapter 1

Satisfying knowledge needs for the purpose of rural development

Satisfying knowledge needs for the purpose of rural development

In the rural development field, learning and knowledge acquisition processes are in evidence everywhere. They take a variety of forms, ranging from exploiting local knowledge to experimentation and research, as well as knowledge transfer. These diverse, now interdependent, forms are difficult to separate or to distinguish from development processes per se.

In the past, priority was given chiefly to learning by training and popularisation – two “top down” methods of knowledge transmission – since they had become associated with the somewhat standardised development of rural areas around agricultural modernisation, within a conceptual framework dominated by sectoral development and a highly centralised system of institutional management^[3].

In today’s conceptual framework of “local”, “endogenous” development and in a world context of “globalisation” and decentralisation, it is forms of learning based on “in situ” experimentation in a real-life situation – an innovative combination of resources and networking – that dominate the process of transferring existing knowledge and producing new knowledge. In this new context, research in aid of development comes to adopt a different role: its mission is now not so much to produce results that can be generally applied to support centralised initiatives, but to bring to light special local features as inspiration for differentiated territorial strategies.

1.1 Changes in knowledge needs and in forms of learning for rural development

a) Three possible sources of knowledge for development

All development processes include various phases for devising and implementing projects of varying size and duration, ranging from “small-scale” individualised projects run by a family, farm or enterprise, to broader action plans developed for an entire area.

However, irrespective of their size, all such projects call for diverse types of knowledge that:

- > have either already been acquired and mastered by the actor(s) concerned and handed down from generation to generation;
- > or do not exist in situ and are transferred from elsewhere;
- > or do not exist at all and are “tailor-made” as part of the project itself, using endogenous resources.

In actual fact, these three categories (**prior knowledge, transferred knowledge and tailor-made knowledge**) are never quite so clear-cut. No matter how much a project has been copied, there are always unknown factors, even though these can always be tackled, at least partially, based on prior experience elsewhere. The knowledge needed to devise and implement a project is always partly acquired already, partly transferred from elsewhere and partly produced during the project itself. For instance, a farmer who is planning to convert to organic production, for example, will use his prior knowledge (the specific characteristics of his own farm in terms of land, water resources, etc.), coupled with transferred knowledge (organic farming techniques)

[3] See on this subject: “Social and Economic Research on Rural Development in Western Europe, Final report on the REAPER concerted action”, The Arkleton Centre for Rural Development Research, University of Aberdeen, February 1997.

and the specific knowledge needed for devising and implementing his project, because he will have to adapt imported techniques to suit the peculiarities of his own farm and to find special solutions to guarantee the organic quality of his products.

b) Predominance of prior knowledge: traditional systems of social organisation

The knowledge already acquired in a rural area as a whole represents what might be termed the area's **"knowledge capital"**. This includes all of the knowledge mastered by local actors and passed down and gradually improved from generation to generation: knowledge of the environment, command of traditional techniques, useful contacts in the field of services, access to markets, etc.

For a very long time, virtually until the early 20th century, the knowledge capital of rural areas was sufficient in itself and did not evolve much, or if so, very slowly. So, with the exception of a few troubled periods in history (wars, famines, etc.), the use of traditional practices and techniques handed down from generation to generation was generally enough to secure the survival of local families and communities. Furthermore, virtually no sources of knowledge existed that could significantly influence the development of the local knowledge capital (apart from a few skills that people acquired and brought back during their seasonal migrations, which sometimes resulted in the introduction of innovations). It is therefore safe to say that ***an area's knowledge capital was well matched to its knowledge needs*** and that the predominant form of learning was **learning by intergenerational exchanges^[4]**.

The few rural areas that have evolved since the early 20th century are those that could no longer live from farming alone. This includes the Cadore region (province of Belluno, Venetia, Italy), a mountain area with no flat land, where livestock production no longer sufficed to guarantee the survival of a fast-growing population. Inspired by their seasonal migrations into France and, having acquired special know-how there, a number of local actors had the idea of going into the hand-made spectacle business by creating a firm to manufacture the frames. Since then, this area has not ceased to enrich its knowledge capital in the sector, so much so that today it controls nearly 60% of the world spectacle trade.

c) Predominance of "standardised" transferred knowledge: the case of agricultural modernisation

From the early 20th century onwards, the situation began to change, especially in the wake of the Second World War. As agricultural markets developed, competition became fiercer and farming prices steadily fell. Traditional techniques proved less and less suitable. In parallel, modern processes were introduced (farm mechanisation, chemical inputs, improved seeds, etc.), which rapidly spread throughout the farming world by a number of different means: popularisation, information distribution, equipment supplies, credit facilities, etc. These new techniques and production methods, which enabled growers and livestock producers to achieve significantly higher productivity, created new needs in rural areas, which in most cases were still very heavily dependent on the farming sector.

This signalled the start of a new phase, where the response to knowledge requirements for territorial development no longer relied on passing down the local knowledge capital from generation to generation, but on mass transfers of knowledge from outside the area. Most of the time, this type of knowledge transfer was not based on practical experiences conducted elsewhere, but essentially on transmitting the results of research driven by a centralised and deliberately agricultural "modernist" policy. The new techniques, developed in specialised centres (laboratories, agricultural experimental centres, etc.) and applied uniformly throughout all rural areas, were literally "injected" into rural society in a heavily "top-down" manner.

[4] In all language versions of this dossier we have chosen to use a number of accepted English expressions that aptly describe different forms of learning. The reader may associate them with other commonly used training terms, such as "learning by training", "training by doing", etc.

The predominant forms of learning thus became **learning by training and learning by standardised training**. More often than not, learning was also transmitted via the instructions for the use of machinery and inputs in the production chain^[5].

This form of learning, which is very common in farming, was to characterise development policies for decades and to a large extent still does today. As a result, “pre-packaged” knowledge transfer (“technical packages”, “turnkey projects”, etc.), which is not led by demand from a particular area or social group, is found in numerous development/support instruments and policies, particularly those for less “advanced” areas or social groups. It means that this “package”, or global formula, which it is sought to promote, is not simply the product of research, but in most cases also a “development model” that is presented as a ready-made solution.

d) Growing popularity of tailor-made knowledge, based on endogenous resources

Learning by training and learning by standardised training, which predominated in rural areas, particularly in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, started to come up against its limitations in the 1980s. This happened firstly in the farming sector itself. Initially, the wide-scale application of standardised “technology packages” made it possible to achieve sharp increases in yield and work production. However, above a certain productivity threshold, producers and agricultural technical services came up against the limitations of this system and there was a need to progress to “tailor-made” solutions, to be applied on a case-by-case basis. The emergence of surpluses and environmental problems were two of the factors that led to the development of “customised” rather than standardised solutions, which called for specific research.

This led to the former “vertical”, hierarchical agricultural popularisation systems gradually becoming more partnership-oriented. Unlike in the case of “conventional” agricultural research, which is geared to a general policy of agricultural modernisation, support and research/development structures were set up, in many cases under the control of the farmers themselves, to meet their specific needs. In other words, there was a shift from the rationale of supply-led demand for knowledge to one of demand-led supply of knowledge. However, we cannot conclude from this that research/development

has supplanted conventional agricultural research, but rather the two types of approach are now complementary.

Another factor in the development of learning systems has been the need for rural areas to find development avenues other than farming, as this latter profession is employing fewer and fewer workers, if not on the verge of disappearing altogether, particularly in marginal areas (areas with poor land, mountain areas, arid areas, etc.). Furthermore, new technologies, new demand from urban consumers – who now represent the great majority in markets – together with trade globalisation, are yet more factors, yet more challenges for rural areas, which call for new solutions and new knowledge to be applied.

Against such a background, it is no longer possible to apply the same standardised solutions across the board. “Tailor-made” solutions suited to each particular context must be found. This leads us into the realm of endogenous development, based on implementing differentiated territorial strategies in which learning and the integration of new knowledge form an integral part of projects that are designed and run locally. According to this scheme of things, learning is based on discovering the potential of local resources and no longer solely on the provision of knowledge that already exists in the market or in research organisations. It also takes the form of direct experimentation, “learning by doing” and “learning by trial and error”. In cases where such forms of learning call for external collaboration, the term is “learning by fruitful collaboration”, as in the following example.

[5] This is what in English is termed “embodied transfer”: knowledge is “supplied” along with the machine and “integrated” into the product sold on the market.

Entrepreneurs from the Anhalt-Zerbst (Saxe-Anhalt, Germany) and Laa an der Thaya (Lower-Austria) LEADER areas are jointly conducting a project to find new uses for straw. The aim is to create new jobs, whilst at the same time making use of the least fertile land by growing non-food crops. In the German area, the collaboration between farmers and researchers culminated in the development of processes for producing acoustic and thermal insulation material from straw grown on formerly disused land. An identical type of collaboration developed between farmers and research institutes in the Austrian area has led to the production of ecological packaging destined mainly for the chemical sector, as well as insulation materials. In both cases, it is straw, a hitherto little-exploited endogenous resource, which was responsible for this transfer of knowledge, for the development of new products and for new economic opportu-

nities. The cooperation between German and Austrian producers sprang from the need to optimise this new know-how and to achieve an appropriate scale for carrying out the research needed to improve the quality of the products already developed in each of the two areas.

In terms of objectives, this new form of learning also breaks away from the rationale of learning by training and of disseminating standardised solutions. Whereas according to the standardised formula, the knowledge to be acquired or integrated is based on the dominant models which it is sought to reproduce, in the case of a locally-devised project, the knowledge to be acquired is based on endogenous resources and on putting these resources into perspective in a bid to differentiate them.

The two types of learning can be distinguished as follows:

Learning by standardised training (based on existing provision)			Learning via a locally-devised project (based on endogenous demand)		
A —————> B			A —————> A'		
(current situation)	transfer of a pre-designed package X	(situation that one seeks to imitate)	(current situation)	development of locally-devised project Y	(evolution of situation A to A')
$A + X = B$			$A + Y = A'$		

In the case of learning by standardised training, the learning purpose (X) is a preconceived solution that has already been applied in the context that one is seeking to reproduce (e.g. the situation of a favoured region). The solution is therefore generally codified and applied wholesale. This leads to some areas seeking to introduce practices that have proved their worth elsewhere, without first making sure that such practices are suited to the local context.

In the case of learning based on a locally devised project, it is devising the local project which drives the process and the local actors who are the “drivers”. The learning purpose (Y) is not known in advance, but is developed in line with the local project. The processes currently under way within the LEADER framework illustrate this type of approach. So, right from the outset and also during the process of implementing the local action plan (business plan), the actors identify the area’s learning and knowledge appropriation requirements.

e) Towards an integrated learning model

LEADER provides a framework that is particularly conducive to the emergence of endogenous solutions in rural areas. Two characteristics of the approach proposed by the Rural Development Initiative particularly favour the learning process:

- > **Its local nature** – the LEADER programme provides local actors with the opportunity to personally devise a development project, to implement it, to guide and support it, to draw lessons from it and to gradually improve it;
- > **Its participatory nature** – the local LEADER partnership makes it possible to integrate a broad spectrum of private and public actors, not just the local authorities. It involves collective learning processes that allow the expression of a “territorial intelligence”, leading to the development of knowledge and common references.

In Chapter 3 we explore further LEADER's "added value" and the limitations of the approach in terms of learning processes and knowledge acquisition. Here we merely single out a few key elements that have emerged from the LEADER experience.

The LEADER experience has shown that **learning based on a locally devised project does not necessarily mean rejecting other forms of learning. On the contrary, it means judiciously linking together all the different formulae within an integrated strategy of knowledge acquisition:**

- > LEADER local action groups (LAGs) have worked to redevelop learning by recovering traditional know-how or know-how that is dying out ("**learning by recycling the background experience**");
- > A further special concern of LEADER LAGs has been to transfer sectoral research results ("**learning by transferring standardised knowledge**"), especially relating to the acquisition of new technology, whilst constantly aiming to preserve the local identity by allying modernity with tradition;
- > Another of LEADER's principal activities has been to exchange and transfer the experiences of others, entailing "**learning by imitation**" and "**learning by adaptation**", in particular by means of visits, cooperation projects, etc. Transnational cooperation has played an essential role in this;
- > LEADER has provided a field for research and the production of new knowledge for innovation, through processes of "**learning by doing**" and "**learning by trial & error**", as well as by carrying out various types of basic or applied research;

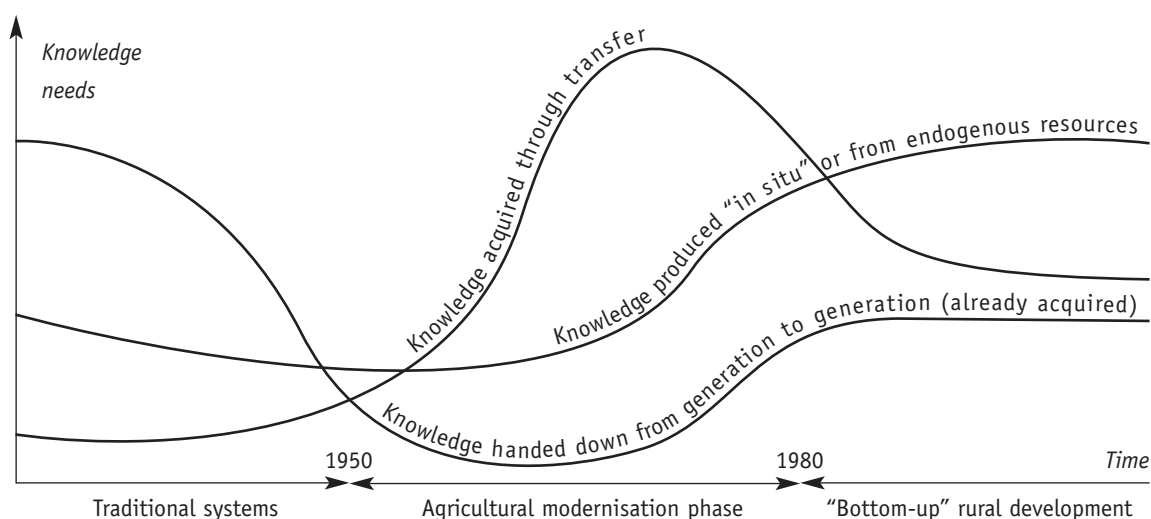
- > Finally, all of these learning forms have been linked to previously implemented, concerted strategies that have been regularly monitored and evaluated in order to draw lessons from them, leading to new, more refined strategies, etc. ("**learning by monitoring and evaluation**").

A project that is devised and implemented locally therefore becomes a "common thread" linking together all the different forms of learning. In other words, where the actors concerned successfully devise and implement projects themselves, it guarantees that they are fully exploited in terms of knowledge acquisition.

This system of linking and integrating several forms of learning encapsulates the expression of a "**learning**" **local community** – a local community that has acquired the ability to systematically integrate learning into the project and for the project, and so take control of its own development. In the next chapter we discuss the conditions for the emergence and affirmation of learning local communities in rural areas.

f) Conclusion

The era of traditional rural societies, dominated by the system of handing knowledge down from generation to generation, was followed by a period of agricultural modernisation, where it was knowledge acquired by transfer that predominated. However, today, particularly with LEADER, we are beginning to see diversified and integrated forms of learning. These changing needs for, and sources of, knowledge in rural areas may be represented graphically as follows:



1.2 Relationship with external sources of knowledge

Through learning based on locally-devised projects and more diversified learning forms, the relationship between development actors and external sources of knowledge comes to form part of a much more proactive approach.

This applies first and foremost to knowledge transfer. Whereas in the past knowledge was transferred on the basis of research results and specialist services, the fact of devising projects locally now leads to seeking transfer sources not only from among available research results, but also, and most importantly, from among the experiences of other areas, even if those areas are dissimilar. In this case, **“learning by networking”** becomes paramount.

The relationship with research also differs radically. Whereas in the past, especially during the agricultural modernisation phase, research activities in aid of development essentially obeyed the principles of general development policies, by devising development projects locally, local actors themselves become “demanders” of research.

This leads to a new relationship being established between research and development. Whereas in the past it was research provision that led demand in accordance with a top-down approach, we are now seeing the emergence of a new type of research in which it is demand that leads supply. This ties back in with the conventional concept of research & development, in which the participation of the actors directly concerned is paramount. This means that research must be carried out in a real-life situation, based on endogenous resources, and no longer in the laboratory alone.

Local demand for research may therefore take three forms:

- > Demand for experimental research;
- > Demand for applied research;
- > Demand for forward-planning research.

a) Demand for experimental research

The aim of experimental research is to produce new knowledge based on experiments. It may include technical tests, as well as test marketing, marketing studies, etc. This type of research may result in the development of new products, improvements in the quality of existing products, etc.

Where experimental research is in response to general research and development policies, it is conducted mainly in research laboratories or centres. Its results are not targeted at a specific project but are made available to businesses or project promoters that have requested general experimental results. Its purpose might, for instance, be to put a product, prototype or new technology on the market after first having carried out all of the necessary tests.

Where experimental research responds to demand from a specific area, it is often carried out in a real-life situation. The aim might, for example, be to test a new technology under the local conditions of an area or a specific business.

b) Demand for applied research

The aim of applied research is to find out more about certain products or fields.

Where it responds to general research and development policies, the purpose of applied research is to provide standardised responses in the form of technologies, prototypes, etc. It is positioned upstream of experimental research (for example, to produce transgenic species with the aim of testing them for cultivation). Applied research is also conducted primarily in specialised research centres, laboratories, etc.

Where it responds to specific demand, research is often carried out in a real-life situation. This might involve physical, chemical and micro-biological analyses of a product's elements, soil analyses, etc., or else complex studies, including social, environmental and other types of impact assessment, or studies of a project's relevance and coherence.

Rural areas are increasingly turning to this type of research as part of their quality certification procedures, in order to characterise a product as fully as possible. LEADER groups may use it to evaluate their own programme or to analyse the impact of a particular project.

c) Demand for forward-planning research

Whereas the above types of research concern a particular application, whether it be for a general application, such as developing a new technology and/or prototype (new variety, machine, etc.) or for a specific project, forward-planning research covers areas that require more in-depth knowledge in order to highlight possible new directions or opportunities.

Where it forms part of general policies, **the purpose of forward-planning research is to influence the actual direction of development policies.** The aim of this type of research is to incorporate the lessons learned from the pilot measures into the general policies (“mainstreaming”).

Where it responds to specific demand, forward-planning research is aimed at exploring areas that seem promising but about which more needs to be discovered in order to draw potential new applications from them. In the case of rural development, **the objective of forward-planning research is to reveal the potential of an area’s special features.** This includes research into identities and into historical, heritage, cultural and environmental resources, of which local actors either know little or are perhaps even totally unaware, but which can sometimes be important to an area’s future. Where this type of research is conducted with the aid of local actors, it becomes a powerful tool for appropriating local potential.

The six LEADER groups of the Burgenland area (Austria) called on the assistance of researchers from a number of universities and institutes – mainly from Vienna – in order to find out more about the local natural and cultural heritage and to identify potential new centres of interest. Prospective research work was carried out with the support of ethnologists, ecologists, experts in local and regional management, etc. and led to the development of original measures to support local development. These included the “UNI-Mobil” (mobile university) project, to list and evaluate the rich natural and cultural heritage in support of planning and regional development and to help develop the villages in line with a development strategy chosen by the various Burgenland LEADER areas. This involves networking based on a tripartite relationship between LAGs/universities/local authorities, which helps to make research results immediately available to the local and regional levels.

d) Basic research

Unlike experimental, applied and forward-planning research, basic research is never intended for direct application, nor is it for a particular project. The purpose of basic research is to achieve progress in a scientific discipline. However, it may at the same time produce knowledge that can be made available later. In the case of rural development, knowledge stemming from basic research may, for example, be transferred to the fields of geology, ecology, archaeology, history, etc., where they are useful for developing new strategic development measures. In order to benefit from basic research contributions, it is vital to have scientific “interlocutors” present in the local area, who are concerned for the area’s future and monitor knowledge developments as sources to inspire and guide development.

The knowledge gleaned from archaeological research by the national scientific research centre (CNRS) in the Haute Valley de la Loire et du Mézenc LEADER area (Auvergne, France) over the past 25 years and more, has resulted in applications that have been useful to the area’s economic diversification, in particular through implementing the LEADER programme. Originally, investment was made in research because there were many ancient vestiges of human activity in the area, dating back more than 900,000 years, that had been well preserved thanks to the volcanoes that characterise the region. These vestiges are of special scientific interest, since they may provide fundamental new insights into certain areas of man’s evolution about which little is as yet known.

Rural development makes use of several types of research that are interdependent, as the following table shows.

RESEARCH IN AID OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT: SUMMARY TABLE

Motivation	Types of research	Examples of research for the purposes of:	
		a) Development or research policies (supply leading demand)	b) Project needs (supply led by demand)
Research conducted to meet the needs of a specific activity	Experimental research	> Technical laboratory tests for developing prototypes	> Technical tests for application in the field > Test-marketing > Experimental research into coordination methods
	Applied research	> Development of new technology, equipment, varieties, etc.	> Analyses of raw materials or products > Market analyses > Evaluation assessments > Audits of projects or enterprises
Research conducted to learn more about a field that might enhance development	Forward-planning research	> Research into integrated rural development	> Research into resources that are little known or dying out, or into cultural and identity values
Research conducted for scientific purposes	Basic research	> Specialised research into the natural heritage (geology, palaeontology, ecology, etc.) or historical heritage (archaeological, recent history) of rural areas	

The following example illustrates the inter-relationship between the different types of research:

The Murgia Degli Svevi LEADER group (province of Bari, Puglia, Italy) chose olive trees and organic olive oil as their strategic priority, to foster development and new economic activities. Its area of intervention includes around 17,000 hectares of olive trees and 78 small processing units grouped into five cooperatives producing 6,000 tons of oil per year, most of which has been sold in bulk up to now. The LEADER group's principal objective has become to renew knowledge in order to retain added value in the local area and gain greater control over the production chain.

- > First of all, **experimental research** was carried out in order to identify the most suitable cultivation methods for organic olive farming: this involved testing 14 olive varieties and fertilisers.
- > In parallel, **applied research** was carried out with the University of Bari, in order to define quality standards

for the different stages of the production chain (chemical, physical and sensory analyses).

- > Another type of **applied research** consisted of carrying out environmental audits in processing enterprises.
- > The project was also concerned with the olive groves as part of the natural and landscape heritage. **Forward-planning research** was launched, which led to the definition of strategic guidelines for land use, creating hiking paths, etc.

Finally, the knowledge-appropriation process was speeded up as a result of synergies between the local project and transnational cooperation (the Italian Murgia Degli Svevi group (Puglia) is a partner in the cooperation project coordinated by the Spanish Macizo de Cazorla LAG (Valencia) for developing organic olive oil). A core group of researchers, technicians and entrepreneurs from the sector was set up in the partner areas. A name ("Terra Mediterranea") and a logo symbolise this network-learning project.

This example demonstrates the benefit of an “integrational” project as the starting point for structuring an area’s demand for research/transfer and learning processes by ensuring the gradual capitalisation of knowledge. It shows how the knowledge gleaned from different approaches and learning processes can be linked together as part of a thematic intervention strategy. However, the issue of the critical mass needed to gain access to certain types of knowledge – which is analysed later in this dossier – still remains to be resolved. In the Murgia Degli Svevi example, networking has been used to resolve this problem, thereby facilitating the acquisition of complementary knowledge at no extra cost.

1.3 Summary

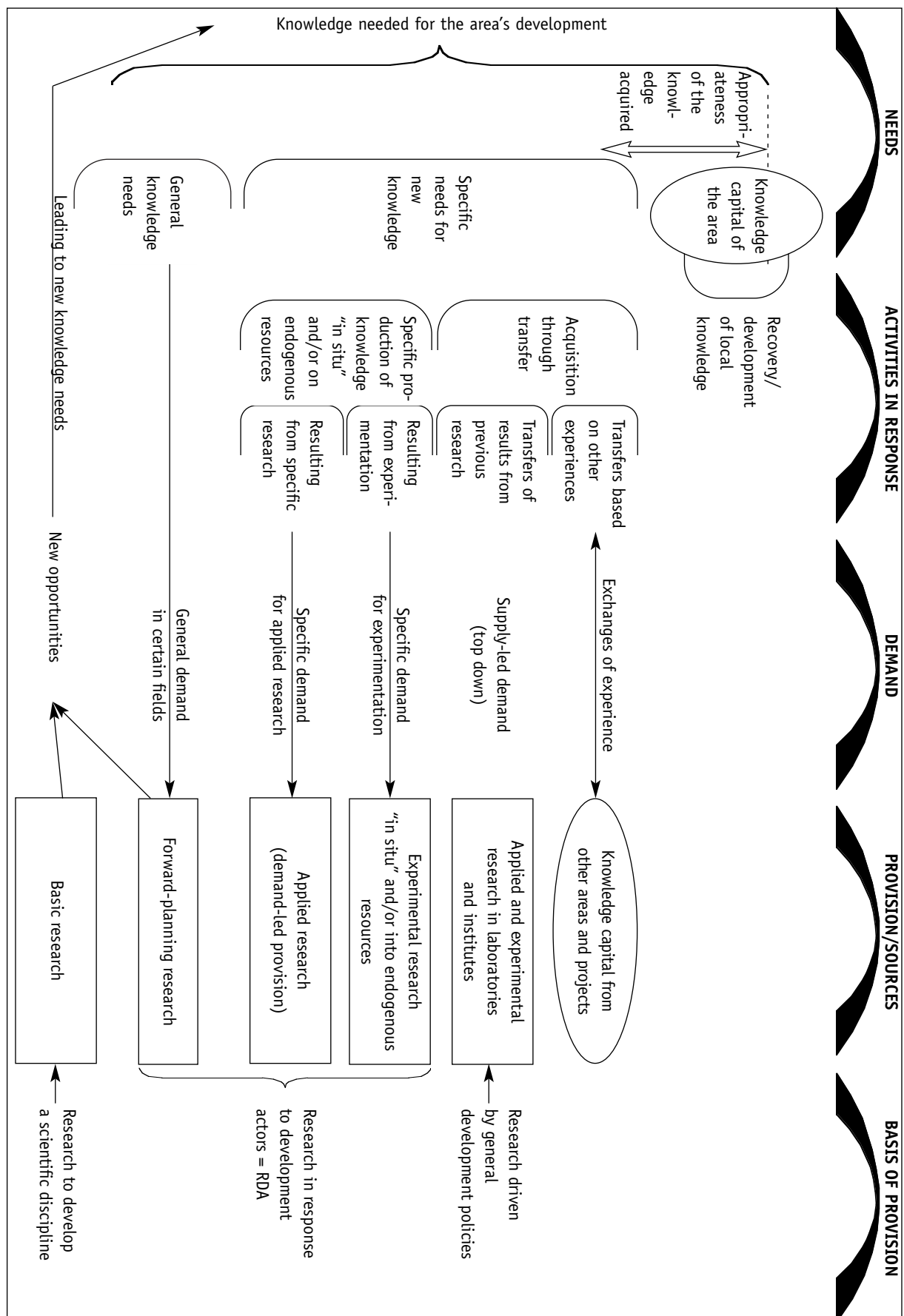
We have seen how knowledge requirements for rural development are expressed, as well as the different forms of learning that this entails and the different possible relationships with external sources of knowledge. This leads us to consider the diverse types of research that can be useful to rural development, as well as the diverse motivations for conducting research, by distinguishing between the types of research supply that lead demand and the types of supply led by demand.

We have also seen that today’s rural communities are evolving towards more diversified forms of learning and relations with external sources, two concepts that will develop further and merge within a learning local community.

To help understand this complex relationship, overleaf is a summary diagram highlighting the different links that are possible in a rural area, in particular between:

- > **The knowledge needed** for an area’s development;
- > **The activities required to meet these needs**, by distinguishing between the three forms of knowledge acquisition described at the start of this chapter: recovery/development of local knowledge; acquisition of knowledge through transfer; and the specific production of knowledge (all three having sub-categories, depending on the sources they use);
- > **External demand for knowledge**;
- > The ways demand are articulated between **various types of knowledge provision and sources of knowledge**, based on the above-mentioned categories
- > Finally, the purposes, the **basis of provision** for each of these sources of knowledge.

This summary diagram describes the general framework within which the knowledge needed for rural development and the different means for satisfying those needs, are expressed. In the next chapter we examine how learning and knowledge-production processes operate within this general framework.



Chapter 2

Learning processes in rural areas

Learning processes in rural areas

Acquiring knowledge to aid the development of a rural area is a process that is neither simple nor spontaneous. Since numerous obstacles must be overcome, it takes special efforts on several levels to put this process into operation. By analysing the learning processes and cycles, it is possible to identify the different levels of intervention that allow a learning local community to establish itself.

Whatever the origin of the knowledge acquired (recovery/development of local knowledge, acquisition by transferring existing knowledge from outside the area, or the specific production of new knowledge), the scenario stays the same, especially in the case of LEADER intervention areas. It always includes the following six phases:

- 1. Animation** as a starting point – Animation is everything that facilitates the development processes from which knowledge needs will emerge. Animation makes it possible to exploit existing links or to create new links in order to “compare” the present situation of the area concerned with other similar or different situations (in production, environmental, institutional and other terms).
- 2. Identifying knowledge needs** calls for exercises to exchange, recognise and analyse the knowledge and skills available in the area.
- 3. Pinpointing the diverse sources for obtaining this knowledge** requires research and the exploitation of existing networks and of family, commercial, institutional and other links, in order to arrive at the best choice. At the same time, this makes it possible to define internal needs more clearly.
- 4. Linking up with sources** calls for common objectives to be agreed on what constitutes desirable knowledge. This means bringing together knowledge-requesters, on the one hand, with “solution-providers”, on the other.

5. The actual acquisition/production of knowledge can take a variety of forms. It may, for example, require the creation of collective learning mechanisms involving all of the actors concerned.

6. Application of the knowledge acquired is the final phase in the cycle, having an impact on development processes and integrating new knowledge into the area’s know-how heritage.

The preceding six phases constitute a cycle, since the application of knowledge culminates in a new coordination situation that leads to the emergence of new needs, etc. It is therefore appropriate to speak of “**learning cycles**” that are linked with development processes, taking place either in succession (series of cycles) or simultaneously (parallel cycles). The various ways in which they can be linked are defined later in this dossier, based on concrete examples.

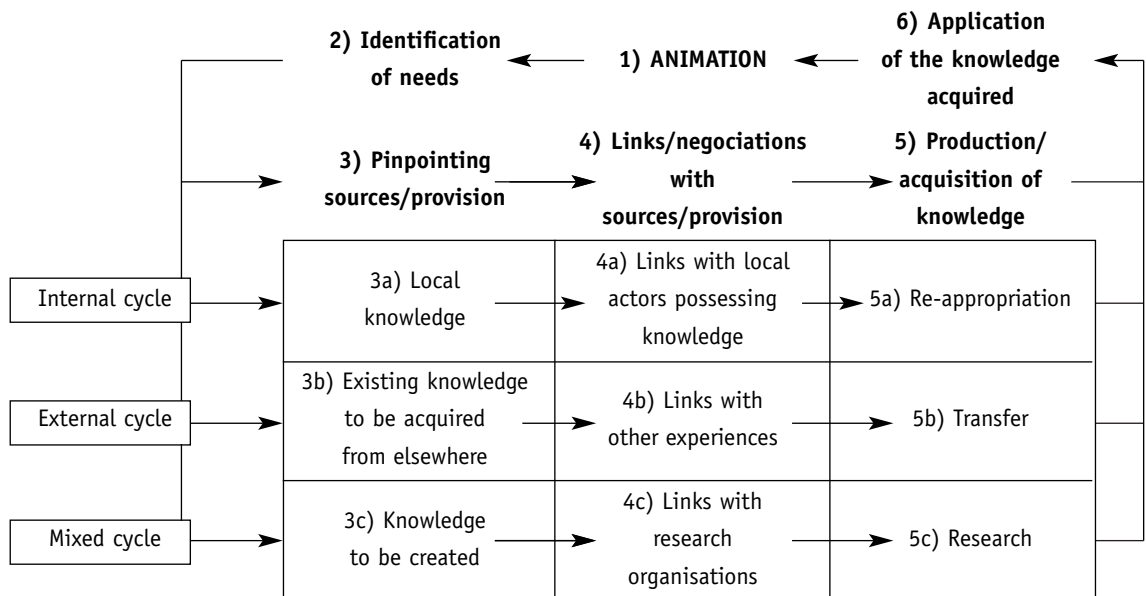
We find a learning cycle in each of the three knowledge-production scenarios:

1. If the origin of the knowledge is internal, that is to say, if it involves the recovery/development of local knowledge, we refer to it as an “**internal cycle**”, because it takes place within the area itself.
2. If it involves a transfer of existing knowledge from outside the area, we refer to it as an “**external cycle**”, because key phases of the cycle take place through a link external to the area.
3. If it involves the specific production of new knowledge, we refer to a “**mixed cycle**”, since this knowledge production may in part take place locally but also requires external support, in particular from specialist research organisations.

These three scenarios differ in the manner in which phases 3, 4 and 5 (pinpointing sources, links with sources and knowledge production/acquisition) occur, with the other three phases being similar.

By taking these differences and similarities into account, the learning cycle can be generally represented as follows:

LEARNING CYCLE: GENERAL REPRESENTATION



Analysing the learning processes in a rural area means identifying not only the different phases, but also the area's specific difficulties and advantages in each of these phases.

In order to complete the general picture of learning cycles, we examine how the cycle fits into the general scheme of knowledge needs, demand and provision depicted at the end of the previous chapter.

2.1 Forms and links between learning cycles in a rural area

Now that we have a basic theoretical framework, we can attempt to ascertain how the diverse learning processes in a rural area are linked. The Valle del Jerte LEADER area (Extremadura, Spain)^[6] is a very good illustration of a series of learning cycles that have been ongoing in the valley over the past 20 years and more.

In Valle del Jerte, half of the population lives off farming and most of these 5,000 or so families are totally dependent upon growing a single crop – cherries – on

small farms organised into cooperatives. In this context, basic and applied research has played an important role in exploiting the principal resource of "Cherry Valley" more effectively. However, it has been necessary to spread this process over a twenty-year period. During this interval, learning phases or cycles were consolidated, leading to qualitative leaps in the analytical skills of local actors with regard to acquiring knowledge.

In 1980, local producers were looking at the possibility of seeking solutions, with the support of research organisations, to an immediate problem that affected them directly: cherry-tree disease. At the same time, producers realised that it was no longer possible to conduct a development strategy based solely on production volumes and cost cutting. They then approached the National Research Institute to analyse the cherry sector. The ensuing exchanges with researchers led the actors to consider developing a processed product: kirsch.

[6] Case presented by **Paul Soto** (Spain), at the LEADER "Research and rural development" seminar.

By 1986, the basic research on microbiology and special fertilisers was complete. Between them, the producers arranged the use of a chemistry laboratory in situ. A quality food production centre was set up in 1989. When the mayors got involved it led to a wide array of other actors joining the project.

By the end of the decade, the valley's kirsch was starting to become nationally renowned. When local farmers saw their business being talked about in the press, it considerably increased their confidence in the project. In 1990, they decided to go a step further by adopting an integrated development strategy. The approach that had hitherto been applied to a single sector – cherries – was then applied to the entire area, to cover all of the fresh products harvested in the valley. The research results were widely disseminated throughout the area. New skills and entrepreneurial abilities were created, culminating in a number of pilot projects supported by LEADER I. Research into preserving fruit at controlled temperatures, as well as into tourism development, extended the area's scope for action. The area grew in stature, with the valley now supplying supermarket chains in both Spain and Europe. It might be said that between 1997 and 1999 enough critical mass was achieved to sustain the positive impact of the strategies that had been introduced.

This concrete example allows us to draw a number of conclusions concerning knowledge appropriation in a context where local actors recognise the viability of an area's heritage:

1. Learning cycles are **long-term** processes. In the case of Valle del Jerte, several learning cycles may be said to have occurred, each lasting **an average of five to ten years**. The first cycle covered the period from 1980 to 1989, until the kirsch-production complex was up and running: the microbiological research took a long time (three years) and the remaining time was needed for the community to appropriate the results.
2. During this process, 50% of the initial objectives were put into practice. This meant that the results differed from the original needs. The five phases of the cycles did not succeed one another in any linear or mechanical fashion: there were continual **shifts forward and back**. For instance, the needs identified at the outset were sometimes re-evaluated as the cycle progressed.
3. Learning cycles are not comprised of a single type (internal, external or mixed), but more often than not of **a combination of several sources of knowledge**. In the case of Valle del Jerte, the knowledge generated by research into the local heritage was needed in order to revive the value of that heritage, as well as for the organisation and dissemination of formalised knowledge.
4. In any long-term learning process there is a **driving force** that ensures the continuity of the process. In the case of Valle del Jerte, it was **the sector** (cherries) that acted as the driving force in the knowledge-renewal strategy, by pooling the different research results and learning processes, and even their appropriation by the actors concerned. This combination of different types of research and learning processes has yielded good results because it has led to a cumulative process of knowledge in a single sector.
5. Gaining people's **confidence** is a key factor of success. This refers not only to trust between the actors, but also confidence in the actual benefit of research and collective learning. In fact, this leads to a knock-on effect, a "virtuous circle", where the confidence created by the successful application of acquired knowledge later helps to encourage the expression of new needs and a search for new types of knowledge which, in their turn, come to enrich the assets already acquired.

2.2 Role of social relations in learning processes

The example of Valle del Jerte is certainly not typical of all Europe's rural areas. In many cases, learning processes are developed differently, do not happen at all, or remain very limited. In Valle del Jerte, a certain number of conditions were fulfilled to make these processes possible, at least during the twenty-year period in question. They included:

- > The strong social structure around the predominant cherry sector: a structure of family-run farms and inter-generational relations involved in cherry production; farms were grouped into processing, packaging and marketing cooperatives, which in turn formed part of a cooperative union;

- > The strong social cohesion that existed around the sector: active participation of farmers in the cooperatives, great confidence in the management of the cooperative union and cohesion between the cooperative management and the LEADER group;
- > The existence of a tightly-knit multidisciplinary technical team in the LEADER group, working directly with the cooperative management and the local authorities;
- > The receptiveness of local actors, both public and private, to innovation and diversification.

Generally speaking, a learning local community relies on the existence of a system of relations: social, economic and family relations, relations of solidarity, etc. These relations may be informal or formal/contractual, bilateral or multilateral, and so on. They call into play:

- > Organisational relations;
- > Relations of recognition and confidence between different types of actors, either inside or outside the area. It is the local community's ability to recognise individual skills and limitations and to identify the necessary complementarities that makes it possible to fully exploit human and institutional resources both inside and outside the area in order to consolidate learning processes;
- > Relations of recognition of common references: defending a product or sector, shared values and knowledge, etc.;
- > Relations of identity and a sense of belonging to a social group or particular area.

More than the sheer number of social relations, it is the quality and, most important, the way in which the different types of relations are organised, that determine a local community's capacity to learn. Even more than the relations themselves, it is the area's ability to renew these relations that will enable it to rise to the new challenges which lie ahead. For instance, in the past the relations created by passing down knowledge through intergenerational exchanges were very strong and have had a profound impact on rural communities. However, nowadays those isolated areas that have failed to renew these relations are no longer able to offer the right incentives to keep their young people in the area and the process of learning by intergenerational exchanges has simply disappeared.

Common references and concerns are also fundamental in uniting actors within a learning process. These references and concerns frequently spring from an exoge-

nous element. In the case of Valle del Jerte, it was cherry-tree disease that united producers and induced them to try to resolve the problem by using research. Following the success of this venture, the use of research has become a positive common reference in the area. However, conflict situations may emerge at a later stage, destroying the relations of recognition and trust that underpinned the learning process, and interrupting this process.

The situation therefore varies depending on the specific territorial context and the point in time:

- > In cases where social relations are sufficiently strong and well organised, learning processes work more easily, **through endogenous emulation**. First these processes are integrated into the family dynamics, as well as into business dynamics, where different forms of interdependency exist between firms. In areas like this "with rich social relations", it is possible to identify knowledge needs and needs for transferring knowledge from outside that include a margin for error. Endogenous emulation and social support for risk-taking are strong enough to facilitate innovative combinations of resources and cushion any failure;
- > In cases where the social relations for learning either do not exist or have disappeared, the socially tolerated margin for innovation and failure is narrower and exogenous support becomes vital. Here learning cycles are highly experimental and subject to a much greater degree of risk. In order to escape from this situation of vulnerability, new solutions must be found for reconstructing relations and bridging the gaps, so as to provide shared interests and common references on which to base new learning processes. The introduction of cross-sectoral or unifying themes (*see the earlier examples of cherries and olive oil*), which are able to forge links around a renewed idea of proximity between structures and actors, even where the latter are heterogeneous, leads to the emergence of new learning cycles: **"learning by an unusual combination of factors and resources"** and **"learning by subscribing to a common project"**.

The demographic deficit of rural areas is certainly not a factor conducive to the creation of social relations. Consequently, low population densities and uneven housing distribution can handicap the renewal of knowledge. However, this is not always the case and solutions exist to offset these deficits in demography and social relations. For instance, social relations can be developed through using new communication technologies. This approach, promoted in the LEADER Initiative by means of transnational cooperation, has led to the development of “**learning by networking**”.

“BIORED” and “CLUB BIORED” are the labels of a telematic network which groups together five Spanish LEADER areas (including one in the Balearic Islands and one in the Canary Islands), two Portuguese areas (one of which is in Madeira) and one German area. The aim of the network is to prompt producers in each partner area to adopt and respect quality standards. Internally within each individual area, the network supports the introduction of communication technologies and the creation of a forum for exchanges between those subscribing to the approach. Externally, the provision of products and services has been united into a single Internet site, which facilitates interactions and information exchanges.

2.3 Conclusion: to create or renew links for learning

Even if an area appears to have developed enough social relations over the years to ensure a long-term learning process, there is always the danger of a sudden deterioration in the learning process. This may be due to the demise or isolation of key people or institutions, or else to a failure in a field where energies had been focused for many years.

Several areas must therefore rebuild links and become “learning communities” once again, based on “contextual” knowledge that has gradually ceased to be renewed or to represent any economic benefit. More than anything, this rather complex procedure calls for rebuilding the actors’ confidence in their area. Where relations and learning cycles rely on accumulated knowledge, perceived as a source of dynamism and profitability, the actors’ confidence and capacity for risk can be great enough to eventually launch a learning process once again.

In the Carnica Rosental LEADER area (Carinthia, Austria), the attempt to centre renewed knowledge and learning cycles on an extinct traditional breed of bees (“Carnica” bee), failed. It took time and targeted measures to rebuild confidence in a new development theme: a breed of sheep (“Brillenschaf”, “bespectacled sheep”) that was dying out. This time, the presence of a strong symbol, the involvement of enthusiastic actors and the collaboration of a research institute led to the launch of a new research/learning process.

Whether the aim is to create the conditions for a learning community in a “weak” area or to rebuild it following a failure in a “strong” area, in both cases it involves the creation or renewal of social relations for learning: organisational relations, relations of recognising each individual’s skills, relations of confidence, relations of mutual recognition of common references, etc.

This process of creating or renewing relations for learning calls for specific measures. The LEADER programme, one of whose basic features is precisely to help create and renew relations between actors, between initiatives and between areas, can play a key role in this process. LEADER is therefore able to intervene in the different phases of learning cycles in order to create/recreate the right conditions for a learning community.

To do this, the programme relies on both endogenous and exogenous resources. It is essential to create and maintain relations with external sources of knowledge in order to relaunch learning processes. These exogenous relations may be found through cooperation and networking between areas, as well as by liaising with the research world.

This is why, prior to examining LEADER’s possible role in creating relations for learning and setting up a learning local community, in Chapter 4, we analyse relations with external sources of knowledge, in particular with the research world. Indeed it remains to be seen whether the research world is prepared to meet this essential need of rural areas and also how relations can be established between research and rural development. This is the aim of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Development needs and research provision

Development needs and research provision

Knowledge for developing rural areas is supplied either by the academic sector (universities and research centres) or by other intermediary institutions, usually in response to ad hoc technical needs. In general, this knowledge is barely accessible to local actors and ill suited to the development needs of rural areas, with academia remaining little involved in development practices. These inconsistencies are glaringly obvious today, since we are witnessing a reawakening of rural areas, which, having developed their own strategies, are now seeking specific research. Fortunately, closer relations are being forged between academics, researchers and rural development actors and a wide array of human, institutional and conceptual tools are being created to encourage closer relations between them.

In the first two chapters we have seen how the development of rural areas and the trend for them to adopt a local development strategy require new types of knowledge and lead to demand for different types of research and knowledge sources in response to these needs.

We now examine the reverse side of the problem, by analysing knowledge provision in the sectors, as well as special local features, leaving to one side for the moment research into rural trends and prospects, the primary objective of which is to renew policies.

So, which sources of knowledge are likely to be useful in developing rural areas and how do they operate? The first answer that springs to mind is universities and research centres, specialist institutes, etc. In fact, the range of knowledge production sources of use to rural development is much wider:

> Firstly, there are those organisations aimed at developing knowledge of direct relevance to “conventional” rural issues. This includes all sectoral research organisations, especially in the farming and agri-food field (agronomic research institutes, organisations specialised by sector, etc.), in rural tourism, craftworking, etc.;

- > Secondly, there are organisations developing knowledge and techniques (e.g. national basic research organisations), not specifically in response to rural needs, but of potential interest to rural actors;
- > Also technical colleges and other specialised organisations that are close to the “grass roots” or are experimental in nature;
- > Design offices, etc.

How can knowledge provision be characterised? Does it match the current needs of rural areas? Does it take into consideration desired trends and future challenges for rural areas? What gaps exist at this level and how can they be plugged?

3.1 Principal characteristics of knowledge provided by academic research

Despite their diversity, academic research practices obey certain general principles related to the type of scientific approach:

- > Firstly, the scientific vocation of research leads researchers to focus on a particular objective and to confine themselves to it, which results in the introduction of ever-greater specialisation, as well as a certain compartmentalisation between disciplines. In science this has meant that the rural issue is highly segmented: studies on land use, on agriculture, on the ethnological heritage, etc. The frame of reference for each specific segment is established in specialised journals and the material that can be published in them is governed by criteria of scientific quality rather than by local development needs;
- > Researchers must obey certain rules of professional progress governing their activities, especially with respect to publishing their work;
- > Scientific research is carried out in institutions, which in many cases operate according to their own rationale, without any real connection with the outside world.

These characteristics vary depending on the type of research involved:

- > There is no doubt that these characteristics are most marked in the case of basic research. Here, it is the scientific rationale of developing knowledge within a discipline that takes precedence and development objectives are rarely taken into account;
- > By contrast, in the case of applied research, we are seeing the development of closer relations between researchers and “developers”, especially where the latter are research requesters. However, major differences exist, depending on whether the research is geared towards general applications not necessarily related to rural development (such as sectoral applications: energy sector, water sector, etc.), or on whether the applications are directly related to rural development, e.g., where applied research is directly linked with the activities of local firms.

Apart from these characteristics intrinsic to each type of research, to a large extent the financial rationale influences the form that knowledge production takes:

- > Cost considerations make it necessary to limit research activities to the scientifically most interesting and promising fields (basic research) or to potential direct applications (applied research). This means, for instance, that applied research is concerned first and foremost with large enterprises, major sectors, etc., tending to ignore small businesses, unusual products, etc. This obliges the actors concerned to group together to enable them to benefit.
- > The need for finance imposes certain constraints that differ depending on the source: for example, a public funding agency will be able to give high priority to scientific production, whereas a private financier will be more insistent on concrete short-term applications.

3.2 Inconsistencies between supply and demand

The characteristics of research lead to a number of inconsistencies between the supply of knowledge produced and demand from rural areas. These inconsistencies have become increasingly apparent since the trend has emerged for rural areas to adopt a project and development strategy whose implementation calls for new and pertinent knowledge input. Three types of inconsistency can be said to exist:

a) Inconsistencies stemming from the very nature of scientific research and research institutions

Certain inconsistencies are due to the very nature of research and of the institutions responsible for it. They include:

- > Inconsistencies in terms of **distance** – First and foremost this means the physical distance between research institutions and rural areas (especially in the technology field). Added to physical distance is the issue of the profile desired by researchers and financiers, who know little about the rural environment. However, rural needs for research are often for projects that are considered either too small or “unfashionable”. Since such projects are low profile, research providers are not interested in them;
- > Inconsistencies in terms of **time** – For researchers, especially those in academic and basic research, the time spent on research depends on how long it takes to study the issue, verify hypotheses, etc. In many cases the procedure lasts several years, whereas knowledge requirements for development are generally short-term and often linked to the time span of support programmes and policies;
- > Inconsistencies in **defining the research objective** – This definition is often divided into specialisms (areas of specialisation in technology, social science, history, sociology, economics, etc.). For researchers, the research objective may be divorced from any overall vision of the area or considerations of immediate functionality. In their view the research objective is circumscribed, limited and partial, whereas increasingly development agents see it as part of an overall territorial strategy, one aimed at achieving differentiation in order to capitalise on local resources, which in many cases have no consolidated market;

- > Inconsistencies in terms of **approach**, in that the research conducted by academic institutions is traditionally “product-oriented”, rather than “process-oriented”. However, most of the time, product-oriented research ignores those very institutional or other contextual aspects that prove so essential to business creation or to instigating change in an area;
- > Inconsistencies in terms of **interest** – Researchers are expected to publish regularly in the scientific press, which obliges them to produce a certain type of knowledge that is often incompatible with what is needed “in the field”;
- > Lastly, inconsistencies in terms of **communication**, due to the relative difficulty in translating research results into practical applications for development actors (development agents, entrepreneurs, elected representatives, association leaders, etc.). This raises the issue of the suitability and dissemination of research results at the various levels where they can be used (development agents, producers, policy-makers, etc.), as well as in the academic world itself.

b) Inconsistencies in terms of practices

The nature of scientific research and the concerns of researchers result in practices that sometimes conflict with rural development needs and territorial approaches.

Indeed, today much more than in the past, for development agents, specifying the “research need” comes from involving the actors concerned. It therefore forms an integral part of a process of animation in which the need for change and innovation is identified on the basis of local potential. However, for researchers, it is perfectly feasible to define the “research need” without involving the rural population at all.

Likewise, for development agents, “disseminating results” involves expanding the skills and knowledge of the populations concerned, whereas researchers are content to disseminate their results simply by publishing them.

Indeed, the preoccupation of researchers, scientific institutions and national research policies, with amassing scientific knowledge can sometimes lead to knowledge being concentrated in the towns, even at the cost of divesting rural areas of a part of their heritage essential to their development. It is only by devising its own territorial strategy that a rural area is able to retain/profit from research results.

In the Els Ports LEADER area (Community of Valencia, Spain), the district of Morella has a wealth of palaeontological remains from the Lower Cretaceous age. However, the research carried out since the early nineteenth century had led to some of these remains being concentrated in the Natural Science Museum of Madrid. When field research resumed in 1970, it revealed one of Europe’s most important fossil collections and led to the publication of the first monograph on dinosaurs in Spain by the Institute of Palaeontology of Sabadell. This research work and the collections then fell into oblivion for twenty years. It was not until 1994, when a new territorial development approach was adopted, that the Morella district council created the “Museum of the Dinosaur Age” and the heritage became a thematic development policy (“Els Ports, Land of Dinosaurs”). At the initiative of the LEADER group, the Morella district council, the association of “Friends of Palaeontology of Morella”, the Environmental Protection Foundation of Ports-Maestrat, the Autonomous University of Madrid, the Institute of Palaeontology of Sabadell and the Museum of Palaeontology of Valencia became partners in a fully-fledged territorial development project.

c) Inconsistencies associated with financial problems and costs

In general, very few financial resources are earmarked specifically for research to aid rural development. The knowledge that may be useful to rural areas is often the product of research carried out for other purposes. This includes:

- > Sectoral applied research, especially in agriculture. However, this type of research is aimed first and foremost at the leading sectors;
- > Basic research conducted in rural areas due to the presence of elements of special scientific interest;
- > Research by academic chairs specialising in rural development.

3.3 A trend towards closing the gaps

So, inconsistencies can be found between research and knowledge requirements for rural development at many levels. However, this gap is slowly narrowing due to a number of factors:

- > Applied research is gradually supplanting basic research. This is particularly evident at the financing level, where reduced public funding is prompting researchers to seek funds from the private sector, which is more demanding in terms of results with a short-term application. In addition, pure academic research is losing its prestige and greater value is being placed on research with a concrete aim. More research results are also being disseminated to the general public;
- > Over the past thirty years, higher education has also evolved significantly in this direction. Universities now seek contacts, and tend to forge closer links, with “the grass roots”. In Europe, there is a proliferation of specialist rural development studies with a highly practical content;
- > These changes have also come about because researchers today are much more in demand by civil society. Researchers are no longer isolated: they can find interlocutors in the local community. The Morella example shows how palaeontologists, who for years worked in isolation, now receive requests, and sometimes even strong appeals, from local actors wanting them to devote their research efforts to territorial development.

However, these trends vary widely depending on the regional and national context.

3.4 Linking supply with demand

Nowadays, the general context and the fact that rural areas are adopting their own development strategies help to forge links between researchers and territorial development processes.

Existing experiences have revealed a number of possible solutions and instruments (conceptual, institutional, financial, etc.) that can be complemented and inter-linked in a variety of ways, making it possible to respond more effectively to each specific situation. Below are a few examples of such solutions and instruments^[7].

3.4.1 Plugging gaps in terms of “distance”

a) Creating “critical mass”

The greatest obstacle to closer relations between researchers and development actors is the problem of distance in its broader sense, i.e. not only physical distance but also the lack of visibility and the mutual lack of interest in forging these relations – as well as the shortfalls in cost terms (costs out of proportion to the expected benefits).

In most cases, the basic solution is to group demand together so as to build sufficient “critical mass” to increase visibility, attract the interest of researchers and achieve acceptable unit costs.

The problem is particularly acute in rural areas because, apart from the physical distance, the resources to be researched are often unexploited, abandoned or under threat of extinction due to their lack of immediate profitability. The creation of critical mass therefore allows access to structures capable of pinpointing that knowledge which is essential to the development of viable alternative solutions.

[7] Most of the examples presented in this section have been drawn from seven case studies presented at the Franeker seminar (Netherlands).

Exploiting the wool from native breeds of sheep (which is too coarse for “normal” industrial use) is the concern of two Italian LEADER groups, the Valle Elvo group in the Piemonte region and the Anglona-Monte Acuto group in Sardinia, as well as the Spanish groups, Montana del Teleno and Valladolid Norte in the region of Castile-Leon. Since they all faced investment costs to pay for experimental research into the qualities of this wool and into marketing products made from this material (insulation panels, wall coverings, etc.), the four areas joined forces and shared out the tasks in line with each group’s ease of access to research organisations. For instance, since the Valle Elvo LAG is situated in a textile-producing area (Biella), it linked up with research organisations and business firms specialised in this field, in particular the “Oreste Rivetti” National Research Centre – for the qualitative and technological analysis of the wool (yields, length of the fibres, resistance, whiteness, etc.) – and the company “Lanificio Fratelli Piacenza” – for the development of an original range of products from the different wools available.

The need for critical mass to gain access to research organisations did not prevent each area from preserving its own individuality: the conception and design of the products are inspired by the particular traditions and environment of each area.

b) Creating appropriate institutional structures, specific projects and formalised networks

However, in many cases, grouping actors together is not enough to create the critical mass capable of establishing and maintaining links with research. This makes it necessary to complement and reinforce the group using complementary means, such as **institutional instruments**.

France’s chestnut sector is a marginal one that was formerly of no interest to applied research organisations or to national research policies, which were geared first and foremost to the leading sectors (cereals, meat, milk, etc.), for which government-aided sectoral technical centres, “Centres Techniques Interprofessionnels”, had been created. According to national policy, in the smaller sectors it was up to producers and their trade organisations to request researchers to set up specific programmes, endowed with ad hoc funding. Under these circumstances and, in view of the chestnut’s key role in maintaining the identity of the Cévennes region (southern Massif Central), the region’s chambers of agriculture joined forces

to create a structure to liaise with the research sector, the mountain farming and livestock production service, SIME (Service Interchambres d’Agriculture de Montagne Elevage), which grouped producers into a special trade association.

In other cases, in order to build sufficient critical mass to create links with researchers it is necessary to establish a **specific project**.

In the Noord West Friesland LEADER area (Friesland, Netherlands), the sound health of SMEs is key to keeping alive rural areas that are experiencing a heavy decline in the number of agricultural jobs. This calls for good innovation abilities. However, research & development for business is geared primarily to large enterprises. Rural SMEs are not big enough and are too isolated to attract researchers and no national policy exists for them. However, the University of Twente had a model for a project to stimulate innovation in SMEs. So, two LAGs joined forces with the university to mount a joint project, “LEANOVA”, in which the two LAGs and the university jointly provide the interface between local businesses and researchers (scientists and specialised consultants). The project involves the selection of interested firms by a steering committee; conducting an audit of each chosen firm; examining an innovation project; and arranging contacts with researchers.

In yet other cases, in order to build sufficient critical mass to create links with researchers it is necessary to create a **formal network**, as in the UNI-Mobil example cited earlier.

c) Creating conceptual instruments

Another way of raising the profile of, and attracting interest in, abandoned resources scattered throughout an area is to adopt as the basis a concept that integrates these resources into an innovative idea which both local actors and researchers find attractive.

In the Maestrazgo area (Aragon, Spain), starting with LEADER I, the local action group turned links with universities and research centres into one of the priority aims of its strategy, in the knowledge that everything had to be rebuilt from scratch in this depopulated marginal area (with fewer than four inhab./km²), which nevertheless had considerable natural and heritage resources. One means of attracting the interest of researchers from nearby universities (Zaragoza and Valencia) was to create a “Culture Park” in the area, based on a whole raft of natural, geological, palaeontological, archaeological,

historical and other resources. The group asked academic researchers to help draw up a systematic inventory of existing resources and ensure their development within the Park. This initiative not only allowed closer links to be forged with researchers, but also channelled research practices more towards communication and to links with local actors. At the same time it led to collaboration between academic departments, which hitherto had worked together little, if at all.

Emboldened by this positive experience, the LEADER group went on to launch the concept of "Fluvial Park" around a drainage basin, involving other researchers specialised in water and energy resources, culminating in the launch of new activities. Subsequently, these diverse collaboration ventures were systematised in a formal agreement between the University of Zaragoza and the LAG.

Adopting a concept ties in with the idea of a "unifying theme". More often than not, the unifying theme is considered as a means for grouping actors together and creating a collective interest throughout an area. The Maestrazgo example shows that the unifying theme can also serve to attract researchers, to create permanent links between them and to transform their practices to ones closer to the needs of local actors.

3.4.2 Closing gaps in terms of practices

In certain cases, the problem of distance (in the broad sense) does not arise because researchers are either already on the spot or are sufficiently motivated to remain in direct contact with development actors. However, differences in practices can hinder the emergence of common interests and so be detrimental to a collaborative venture of potential interest to the area. This changes the nature of the problem in terms of the relationship between researchers and development actors, and calls for solutions and instruments capable of modifying intervention methods and everyday practices.

a) Creating forums for communication and knowledge transfer

Asking researchers to participate in an activity different to their own research activity, but complementary and enriching, can serve to establish links with them and to modify their practices to bring them closer to development actors and encourage them to share their concerns.

Communicating research results and transferring knowledge marries perfectly with this objective. It prompts researchers to change their focus from producing scientific knowledge as an end in itself to transmitting that knowledge to both local actors and external visitors.

However, it is not enough to merely propose that researchers participate in such an activity. It is also necessary to negotiate a project framework of interest to them and to release special resources for this purpose.

The LEADER area of Haute Vallée de la Loire et du Mézenc (France) has an exceptional archaeological heritage, which is why archaeological research has taken place there since 1973, as part of the national research policy (see example provided in Chapter 1). However, for nearly 25 years now, researchers and development actors have been living shoulder to shoulder with one another in the same area, each ignoring the other's existence. However, in the nineties, national policies changed and it became increasingly important to disseminate research results to the general public. As a result, the researchers/archaeologists saw the need to share their research results with the wider public. They created an association with local actors to this end, although its primary purpose was in fact to aid their own research (contacts, financing possibilities, etc.). It was the LEADER programme that changed things. The association became a member of the LEADER partnership and discussions were initiated with the area's various private and public actors, aimed at jointly devising development alternatives for this crisis farming region. These consultations culminated in the creation of a rural centre responsible for a range of different activities: research, heritage conservation, transfer of knowledge to the local population and tourists, as well as scientific events.

b) Changing research methods

In some cases it is researchers themselves who press for direct contacts with development actors, but the methods they propose have no added value to contribute to the latter's aims. In such cases it is necessary to focus the negotiations on the research methods themselves, so as to devise and implement approaches of interest to researchers and development actors alike.

This is particularly applicable where research concerns rural development, or even the practices of the LAG itself.

In Scotland (United Kingdom), a number of researchers associated with the University of Aberdeen, who specialised in rural development and were already supporting several LAGs in the region as part of the LEADER I programme, requested contacts with the LAGs. When LEADER II was launched, the Inverness & Nairn LEADER group contacted these researchers to secure their research support for community development and their help with analysis and monitoring/evaluation. The research method was then discussed by the two parties (researchers and LAGs) to ensure that the method would be of interest to both partners. A basic survey was carried out, leading to the establishment of local agents in each community. The university's researchers prepared and processed the survey. Constant contacts were maintained with the researchers in order to gradually refine the rural development strategies. The survey itself was carried out by the local agents, backed by a team of external consultants, enabling them to be directly involved in the procedure and in the ensuing strategic debate.

c) Integrating researchers into a multidisciplinary team

It has to be acknowledged that nowadays, due to the state of the art in all fields, researchers must be specialised. The global response to problems is to bring together different skills as part of a multidisciplinary approach, which is widely promoted today in both national and Community research policies (see box below). This same approach should be adopted whenever a rural area's problems need to be resolved via research-based measures.

Integrating researchers into a multidisciplinary team comprised of field practitioners, local authorities and research actors can prove a powerful means of smoothing out "cultural misunderstandings" and enabling researchers to fully grasp the research objective. In their turn, researchers are able to shed new light on existing issues and to help define the research objective more clearly.

The Valle Imagna LEADER group (Lombardy, Italy) is working to create a "European Information Service for Romanesque Art". The aim of this initiative, organised in partnership with other groups (Canal de Castilla and Mancomunidad Cabo Penas, in Spain, Anglona-Monte Acuto in Sardinia, and Terres Romanes and Lot-et-Garonne in France), is to coordinate the partner areas and to strengthen their identity by promoting their historical and architectural Romanesque heritage. The project includes developing a wide range of activities that combine research and transfer, research/coordination, research/new job creation, research/new skill development, transfer/development of innovative proposals, research/debate and cultural exchanges, etc. Each research or transfer activity therefore has a specific objective, which is incorporated into the territorial strategy. By combining local measures, transnational measures and educational dissemination of the results, the main aim of the project is to:

- a) create a "ready-made" cultural product – a travelling exhibition of Romanesque art in the partner areas, highlighting the elements of "cultural continuity" that are rooted in the diverse local identities;*
- b) meet the "disseminators" during an annual seminar to discuss the importance of cultural roots in promoting the local identity as a catalyst of new economic dynamics;*
- c) set up information and interpretation services on a number of sites to facilitate visits of the monuments.*

Maintaining the monuments, with all of the economic opportunities that this entails, is also on the agenda.

Throughout the entire process, discussions were held on how to establish relations with research entities (including technological ones) and how to transform the results into development instruments. A scientific team was set up, comprising researchers, representatives of local and provincial authorities, practitioners from the LEADER group, hotel and restaurant-owners and others, to serve as a continual point of support and reference for making choices.

RESEARCH AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Drawn from the European Commission Research Programme “Quality of life and management of living resources” – Work Programme (December 1999)

5.5 New tools and models for integrated and sustainable development of rural and other relevant areas

Research and technological development (RTD) will address rural and other relevant areas, encompassing mountain and coastal areas.

5.5.1. Analysing rural situations, changes and trends, require for each type of rural areas, multi-sectoral analyses; identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as the development of scenarios and the analysis of rural-urban interrelationships and typologies of areas, to identify meaningful spatial entities for development analyses. Actions being undertaken in endogenous and exogenous rural development approaches will be investigated with a view to establish models of effective practice and their transferability across regions of the EU. Issues such as the management and enhancement of sites hosting important ecosystems, habitats, cultural heritage and recreational activities will be addressed as well as the current situation and prospects of multifunctional agriculture, together with new indicators and parameters for assessing the relative importance of agriculture and forestry. Tools and methods to assess the contribution of aquaculture and fisheries to the development of coastal areas and their socio-economic interactions with other competing sectors will be developed.

5.5.2. Conceptualising integrated development of rural and other relevant areas, implies understanding the potential of new information and communications technologies for the development of rural economies; the impacts of infrastructure and public services; the role of rural amenities, cultural and natural heritage; the emergence of entrepreneurship in rural areas; the rates of new enterprise formation and survival, especially micro-enterprises; restructuring in the global economy and its impact on rural areas; market reorganisation and its impact on production and marketing in disadvantaged rural regions. Options and strategies for integrated resource utilisation in different rural regions will be developed, as well as methods to obtain the involvement of the community and local actors in rural development processes, and strategies and tools for the transfer of experience, innovation and knowledge are needed.

5.5.3. Assessing rural and coastal development performance and policies, implies improvement of specific tools for baseline description, forecasting, monitoring and evaluation of projects, measures, programmes and policies, including for those related to the improvement of agricultural structures; comparative efficiency analyses of institutional structures and procedures in order to define the appropriate levels of intervention and patterns of partnerships; changes perceptions and attitudes concerning rural development issues; the role of social capital, territorial identity and image, local participation and empowerment as preconditions for rural development strategies; synergetic effects and improved methods for measuring positive and negative externalities of rural development; development and application of tools and methods to assess regional or local impacts exerted by structural aids to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

d) Facilitating the transfer of research results to field workers

The cultural divide between researchers and actors in the field (e.g. entrepreneurs) often makes it difficult to transfer research results. Researchers, for their part, are interested in the fundamental aspects of research (verifying scientific hypotheses), whereas business firms, for example, are looking for immediate results. One way of bridging this divide can be to create an interface between actors in the field and researchers.

This interface may take the form of a network of the actors concerned, which allows substantial exchanges of information to take place at certain key times. Or else it may take the form of institutional changes, e.g. by creating a permanent reference point within an existing structure, with its own team, personnel, a new department, etc. responsible for following up and developing research results in the field.

The Livradois-Forez LEADER group (Auvergne, France) took their inspiration from the research of historian, Pierre-Roger Gaussin, who had drawn up an inventory of the sites of old “casa dei”^[8] abbeys in France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland when the group devised its project to develop the abbeys as a testimony to the shared history that united them for several centuries. The districts of La Chaise-Dieu (Livradois-Forez), Frassinoro (Antico Frignano LEADER area, Emilia Romagna, Italy) and Burgos (Castille-Leon, Spain) put together a cooperation project as part of the LEADER and RAPHAEL^[9] programmes. They undertook joint historical research into the relationship between the different sites, with a view to creating a “Federation of casa dei sites”. The researchers were supported by the development professionals, who helped to draft a joint document presenting the history of the casa dei dependencies.

In the case of La Chaise-Dieu, the local organisers decided to centre the development issue on culture. The district appointed a person to carry out certain complementary research and to monitor the project.

3.4.3 Finding alternative financing solutions

A wide range of alternative solutions exists to offset the paucity of funding generally available for research in aid of rural development^[10]. Below are a few examples that have been implemented under LEADER.

- > A first solution is to **reduce costs** to the minimum. This might involve employing the services of students, for example. It is what the UNI-Mobil network, presented earlier, systematically does. In this case, outside firms examine the students’ work in order to ensure a certain degree of quality.
- > A second solution might be to **harness research funds** already earmarked for national policies. A good case in point is the Haute-Loire region, where a large portion of the research is funded by France’s national scientific research centre, the CNRS, as part of a programme implemented by this government institute for the past 25 years.
- > It is also possible to **appeal to the producers themselves**, especially when it involves applied research for business. This is the case of the Dutch LEANOVA project, presented earlier, where the beneficiary firms fund 40% of the costs of research done on their behalf.
- > Another frequent solution is to **use public authority funding** (districts, provinces, regions, etc.). This can be a long-term solution, after the benefits of research to local development have been clearly demonstrated and have been recognised by the public authorities.
- > Finally, in some cases it may also be possible to harness certain **special funds**. In the Maestrazgo region (Aragon, Spain), for example, the most expensive elements of the research were paid for by a national fund especially created to redevelop former mining areas.

In view of the difficulties in financing research, it is often advisable to combine several funding methods by focusing on co-financing and leverage effects between possible financing sources.

[8] Associated with La Chaise-Dieu, an abbey which, in the Middle Ages, enjoyed certain pontifical powers and privileges.

[9] Community action programme in the field of cultural heritage.

[10] On the subject of financing alternatives, see the dossier “Local financing in rural areas”, LEADER European Observatory, 2000.

Locating alternative forms of finance also makes it possible to offer researchers extra resources for them to adapt their work to local needs. Indeed, researchers are often in search of funds in order to complete their work or improve the quality of their results. Offering to top up their existing funding may tend to negotiations on the possibility of adapting their results to suit local requirements.

3.5 Elements for a global strategy to forge links with research

An examination of a few potential solutions and instruments to link the supply of research for rural areas to demand reveals a wide variety of possible ways forward. However, it remains to be seen how these can be linked into an overall strategy. Below are a few ideas that may help local groups in their discussions on the subject.

a) Linking together several solutions and instruments

Each particular situation calls for devising and implementing a specific solution using one or more instruments. If the issue is one of distance, visibility or cost, the aim will be to establish sufficient critical mass and to find the right instruments for doing so. Nonetheless, this does not mean that divergent practices will not be a problem and so solutions will need to be devised for modifying researchers' practices. Financial solutions are worthwhile considering as a lever for effecting the desired changes.

b) Identifying and harnessing suitable human resources

Whatever the chosen solution, its success will to a large extent depend on the human resources used to implement it. Anybody who is familiar with both the research and rural development worlds will usually be a key resource person and will guarantee the successful creation of links between the two worlds.

In the example of the Inverness & Nairn LEADER group (Scotland, United Kingdom) presented earlier, the fact that the coordinator recruited for the project was himself a former community development researcher helped to consolidate the partnership with the university. The story behind other successful initiatives for linking research with development has often been similar.

In order to escape from their isolation or to gain a better grasp of an area's knowledge needs, researchers need key persons in the field who, whilst bringing new ideas and raising questions, also speak the same language as researchers do or, at least, are capable of understanding it and of providing an interface with local actors.

A researcher's personal links with an area may also be a facilitating factor. Often it is researchers from the area concerned who set up the first initiatives or who prove to be the most open to collaboration. It is therefore very much in the interests of the local action group to identify such researchers at the outset, as the Maestrazgo and Burgenland LEADER groups did.

c) Taking into account knock-on effects and gearing the objectives accordingly

Whatever the chosen solution, it always has a certain knock-on effect. For example, launching a collaborative venture between researchers and development actors often has the result of modifying the motivations, interests and practices of both researchers and local actors, and in the process, eliminating obstacles that might at first have seemed insurmountable. Personal relationships are also created, which helps to perpetuate collaborative ventures. In practice, what happens is that the links between the worlds of research and development come to be mutually reinforced through being put into practice. So, with the support of the community, field practitioners are themselves able to integrate certain research approaches into their activities in support of external resources.

Being aware of such knock-on effects and taking them into consideration in the evaluations makes it possible to establish a strategy that will continue into the long term, to identify complementary solutions for reinforcing and systematising these effects, and to adopt more ambitious objectives.

In the Maestrazgo region's collaboration with the university (Aragon, Spain), the LEADER group set itself the complementary objective of attracting "brains" to the area. It therefore systematically evaluated all of its actions in relation to this goal, learning lessons from successes and failures in this specific area. This objective, which was fundamental to the LAG, formed part of a strategy to revitalise the area by repopulating it with potential innovators and business creators.

In fact, many projects to link universities with research centres result in former student trainees or researchers settling in the area, either because they originally hail from the region or because they have decided to come and live there.

d) Focusing on local partnerships

The local partnership can be a key factor in strengthening links between researchers and development actors in a rural area. In fact it provides a particularly interesting forum for comparing thoughts, ideas and views in order to define objectives and a common strategy for an area.

The participation in the local partnership of researchers or research institutions that are closely associated with the area can create motivation and facilitate dialogue. Researchers often seek out this type of relationship and generally help to raise the quality of the local action group's strategic discussions.

In the Vinschgau/Val Venosta LEADER area (Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy), a teacher/researcher from the University of Innsbruck participates in the local partnership. This person plays a supporting role in the group's strategic discussions and provides an element of critical external evaluation, which enables the LAG to make positive progress with its territorial strategies.

Furthermore, the participation of researchers or academics in the local partnership can lead to concrete collaboration projects, as in the example of the LEADER group of the Haute Valley de la Loire et du Mézenc (France), presented earlier. Since the local partnership is one of LEADER's specific features, it often provides the means for the Community rural development Initiative to add value and to open up prospects for researchers to participate in local development, which in the past was unthinkable.

e) Networking

Networking between rural areas is another of LEADER's specific features, bringing definite added value through the creation of links between the research and development worlds. There are numerous examples in this chapter that illustrate this, especially for achieving sufficient critical mass to link up with universities and research.

Networking also makes it possible to imitate good practices. It is not always essential to create an ad hoc research project for an area, since "good practices" can be transferred from elsewhere at lower cost and with more likelihood of success. For example, the LEANOVA project in the Netherlands for innovating in small businesses was devised and applied in two LEADER areas, based on an experiment in the same field conducted by the University of Drenthe as part of a project called "INNOVA".

Chapter 4

LEADER's potential role, present role and added value in learning processes

LEADER's potential role, present role and added value in learning processes

By intervening at local level, in close proximity to local actors and their activities, and by focusing its efforts on creating links between them, LEADER is a key tool for establishing and renewing a learning local community. Experience of LEADER I and LEADER II fully confirms this. However, there are limits to the local actors' ability to consider all the elements involved in learning processes and to capitalise on all the available assets. Enlarging the local partnership and networking are two essential means for overcoming these limitations.

4.1 LEADER and research

The preceding chapter highlighted the principal obstacles to, and suggested some possible solutions/instruments for, linking knowledge needs for rural development with research provision. We have examined LEADER's role based on concrete examples. The main conclusions that can be drawn are as follows:

- > LEADER intervenes primarily by creating links: links between researchers and rural areas, inducing them to take an interest in rural areas, to rediscover/develop old attachments, or even to settle down in the area; links between researchers and local actors (entrepreneurs, farmers, etc.); links between local actors and their area's resources (new knowledge about these resources); links between funding sources, etc.
- > LEADER also intervenes in other fields, in particular by developing methods and practices.
- > By focusing on links, LEADER has probably got to the root of the problem of linking research needs with research provision and therefore has a considerable leverage effect. As a result, LEADER groups that have turned links with research centres and universities into a strategic priority, are today reaping the rewards of their endeavour, having created the right conditions for the active and enriching participation of these institutions in local learning processes – processes

which, in time, become self-perpetuating. The impact in terms of developing local resources and improving the quality of interventions is significant.

- > Nevertheless, the examples presented in this dossier are not representative of all LEADER groups in this specific field of intervention. Indeed, while it is not possible to make a precise assessment at European level, it emerges quite clearly that only a minority of LEADER groups have sought to establish good relationships with research organisations and universities and have succeeded in doing so.
- > The gap between the relevance of this field of LEADER intervention and the actual practices of LEADER groups, in quantitative terms (number of groups concerned), should be seen in relation to the obstacles that exist in linking the research and rural development worlds (inter alia, the remoteness of universities and research centres from rural areas), as well as to differences in approach, practices, language and methods of intervention.
- > A number of specific LEADER features, especially local partnerships and networking, are helpful in overcoming this difficulty. The examples presented earlier show local partnerships to be an ideal forum for comparing the interests and practices of researchers and local actors. Networking makes it possible to conquer problems of distance and to achieve the critical mass required.

4.2 Proposed approach for analysing the role of LEADER in other phases of the learning cycle

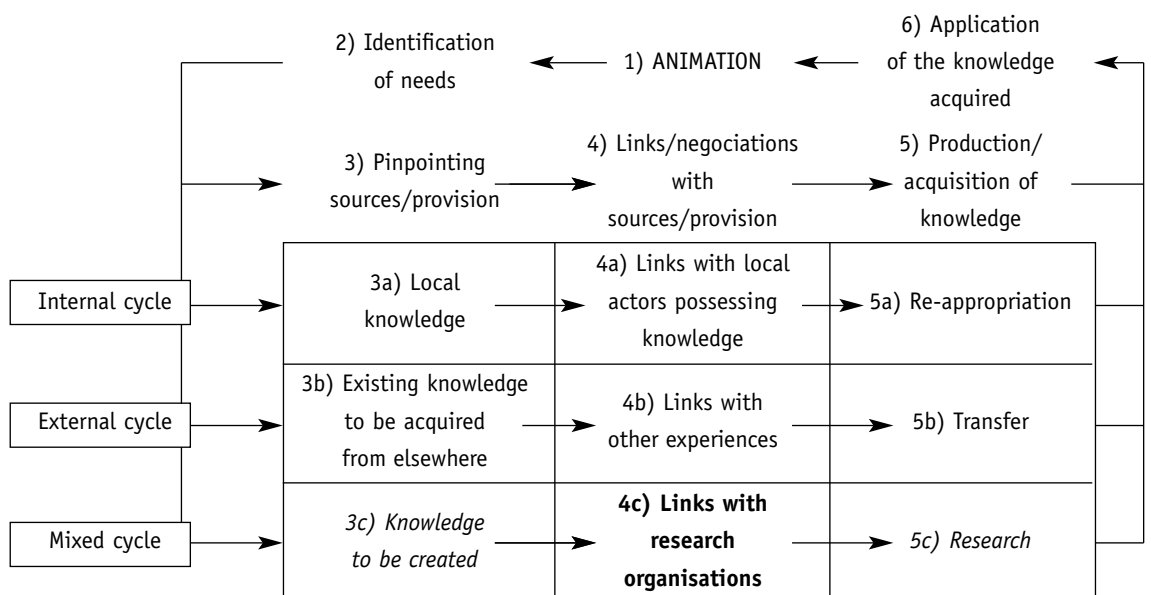
There is a total of 12 possible phases, corresponding to each of the three types of cycle identified, phases that complement one another in integrated learning processes.

Each of these phases constitutes a particular field relating to a specific issue, on the basis of which it is possible to identify each area's specific strengths and weaknesses and the obstacles to be surmounted. Each of these phases therefore represents a potential field of specific LEADER intervention that plays a specific role in all the learning processes.

It is not feasible for this dossier to make an in-depth analysis of each of these phases/fields of intervention. Instead, this chapter confines itself to examining LEADER's intervention by providing general answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the specific needs for intervention at each phase, so as to ensure that the intervention is able to develop under the best conditions, to allow full expression of the learning cycles and to help consolidate a learning community?
- 2) What role has LEADER played, and can it play, in relation to these intervention needs?
- 3) What was LEADER's effective intervention in each phase? What were LEADER's shortcomings or "defects" and why?
- 4) What are the challenges for the future and how can they be tackled?

THE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE LEARNING CYCLE



Key:

- > **Bold characters:** role of LEADER discussed in the preceding chapter
- > *Italics:* role of LEADER touched upon in the preceding chapter
- > Ordinary characters: role of LEADER to be discussed in this chapter

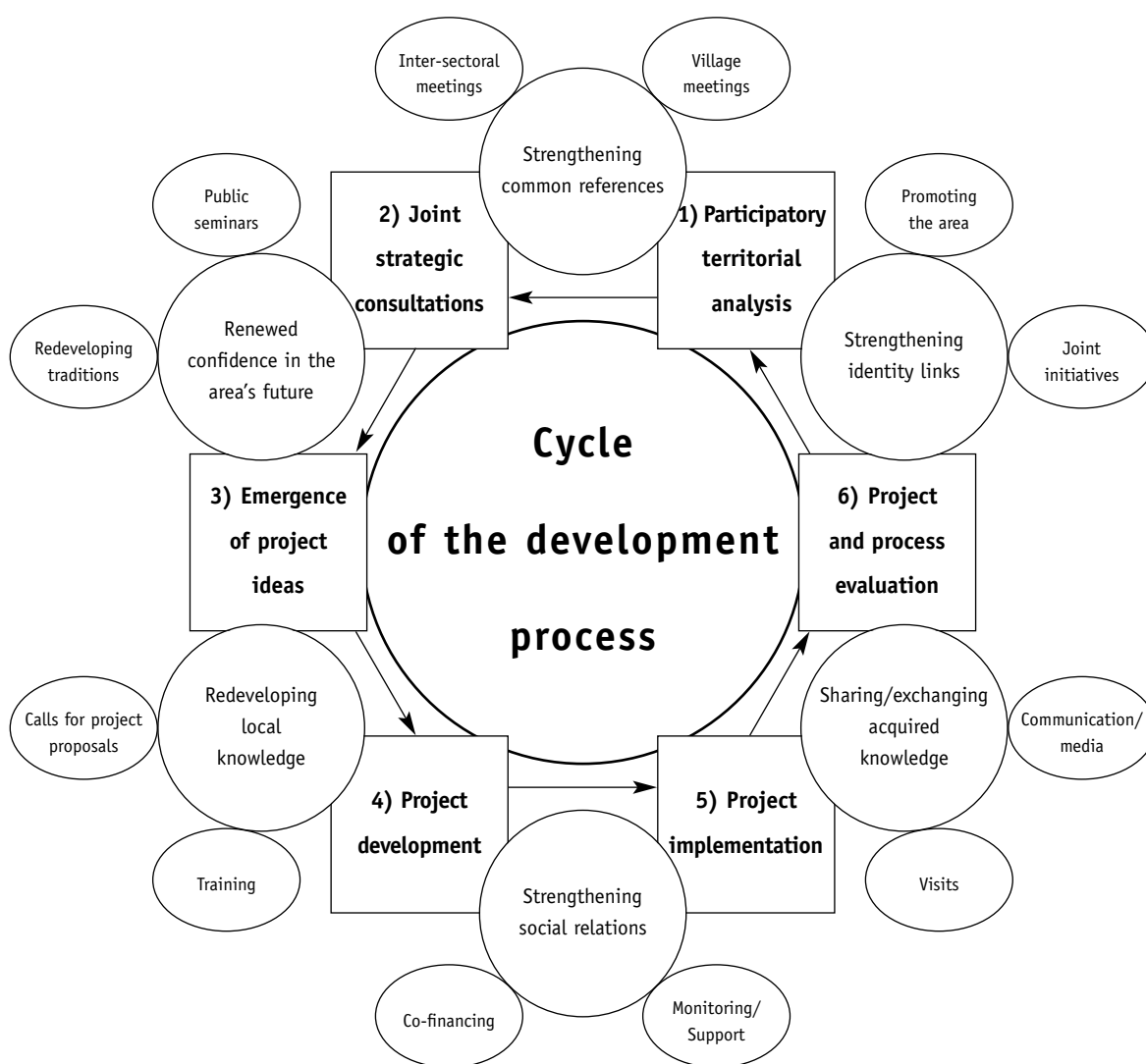
4.2.1 Animation

a) Specific needs for intervention

Animation is the starting point for learning cycles. It involves all those elements that facilitate the processes of reflection and action upstream of identifying knowledge needs. This includes analysing the local situation and strategic discussions, as well as project design, implementation and evaluation.

Next we consider the first cycle of the development process, for which several types of intervention are required in order to maximise the impact on local development. Below is a summary diagram of the different phases of such a cycle, the possible animation tasks/objectives between each phase and a few examples of animation tools for each of these phases.

ANIMATING THE LEARNING CYCLE: POSSIBLE MEASURES FOR DEVELOPING A RURAL AREA



Key:

- > **Squares:** principal phases of a development process
- > **Circles:** examples of animation tasks/objectives between each phase
- > **Ovals:** examples of possible animation tools for achieving these objectives

b) Possible role of LEADER

By virtue of its proximity to project promoters, LEADER can play a key role in the different phases of the project animation cycle. A bottom-up, integrated territorial approach, local partnerships and local financing methods are all prerequisites for fully implementing the tasks of animating local development processes.

LEADER is an instrument well suited to these tasks. Below are a few examples of possible LEADER intervention at this level.

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE PHASE OF ANIMATING A LEARNING CYCLE^[11]

- > Gathering ideas from the area
- > Creating an overview of the area
- > Putting into contact actors who have never collaborated in the past or who have ceased collaborating
- > Instigating new activities
- > Implementing mechanisms for recognising and rediscovering the local identity
- > Channelling energies into collective approaches
- > Multiplying the internal synergies between projects
- > Recreating/reviving cohesion and solidarity by gradually raising awareness of collective projects

c) LEADER's effective intervention

In view of its primary vocation of animation at local level, it is here that LEADER's intervention has been most marked.

LEADER's intervention has been considerable in initiating or reactivating a development cycle in areas that are in decline, in a state of abandonment or where the local actors have become despondent at the crisis in farming and traditional activities, the exodus of young people, etc. In such areas with "weak" social learning relations, most of the effort has therefore been focused on rebuilding the development cycle. (Re)learning how to share acquired knowledge and how to engage in a collective debate have been other important LEADER contributions, particularly in areas where the actors were no longer communicating or even at loggerheads.

d) Challenges for the future

In spite of the remarkable added value that LEADER has contributed in terms of animating development processes, its area of intervention has reached certain limitations, i.e.:

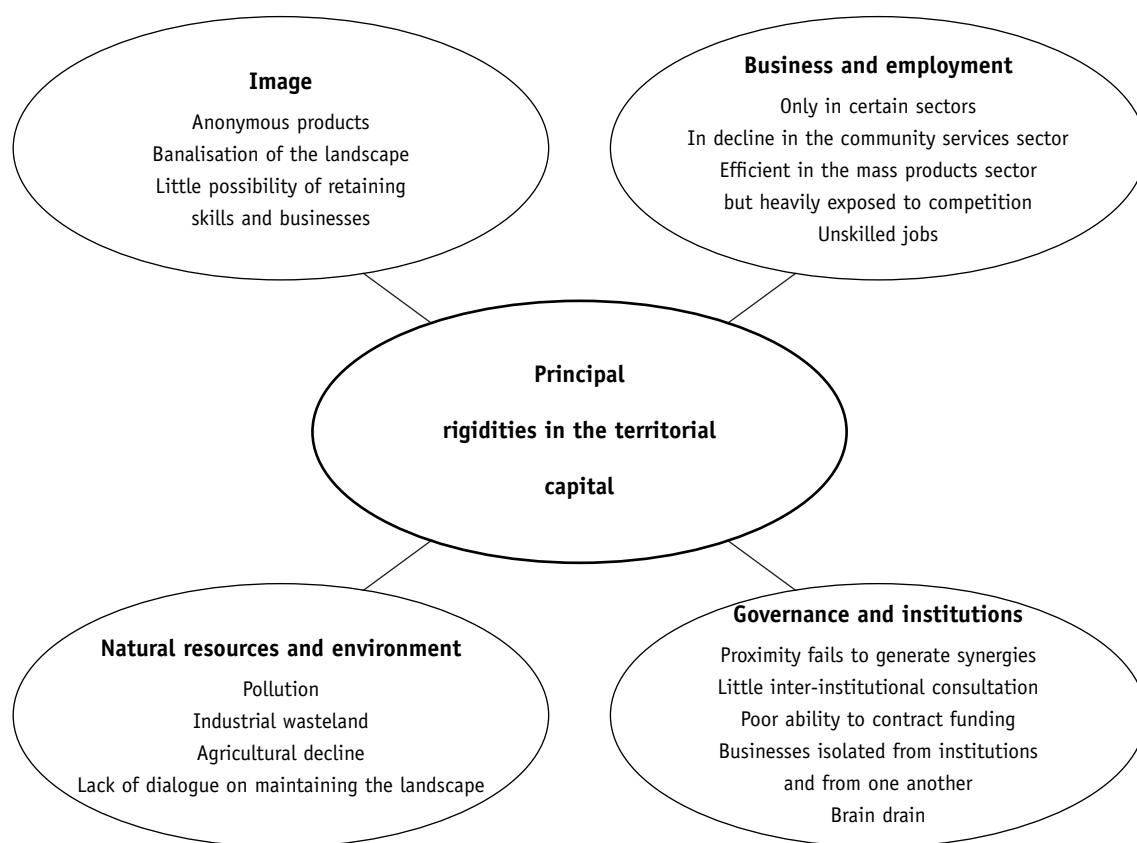
- > Limited number of project promoters concerned, associated with the limited funding available;
- > Limited understanding of the area's difficulties;
- > More generally, limited creation of social processes to facilitate the acceptance of new concepts and new approaches other than via LEADER interventions.

One way of systematising animation might be to analyse not only the area's capital^[12] and its knowledge capital, but also what one might term the area's "shortcomings" or "losses". Any rural area has such shortcomings, rigidities or losses that hamper its ability to build a future for itself. These weaknesses can sometimes have a powerful influence on learning and experimentation cycles, since they tend to incur a loss of confidence in the area's future. They also influence the search for external knowledge, as well as internal abilities to adapt and integrate. It is therefore necessary to **consolidate animation as a tool for creating social processes to make it easier to identify shortcomings in terms of resources and local knowledge.**

[11] The different roles presented in this table, as well as in the following tables, have been identified by the LEADER groups that participated in the seminar "How to transfer innovation", Pieve di Cadore (Venetia, Italy).

[12] See the definition of an area's "capital" and the use of this concept in the five-part dossier on the competitiveness of rural areas: "Creating a territorial development strategy in light of the LEADER experience", LEADER European Observatory, 2000.

EXAMPLES OF A RURAL AREA'S "SHORTCOMINGS OR LOSSES" FOR SOME OF THESE COMPONENTS



4.3 Identifying knowledge acquisition needs

a) Specific interventions

Knowledge acquisition needs emerge during the different phases of a rural area's development cycle:

- > During strategic discussions;
- > During the emergence of project ideas;
- > During the transition from ideas to projects;
- > During project implementation;
- > During the evaluation period.

However, in many cases, knowledge needs fail to emerge for a variety of reasons:

- > Local actors are unaware of their limited know-how and of the need to acquire further knowledge;
- > They assume that the knowledge they will need is in any case inaccessible;
- > They have lost confidence.

This occurs chiefly in situations where there is no contact with the outside world and where actors are isolated, particularly marginal areas or areas with weak social links. In such areas, their action tends to focus

on initiating the development process, whilst paying less heed to the identification of knowledge needs.

However, it is precisely areas like these that have the greatest need for knowledge. Indeed, rural areas that are undergoing far-reaching change need to question how "valid" their heritage of contextual knowledge will be in coping with the challenges of the future. In many cases, this contextual knowledge has become (or is becoming) obsolete, due to fast and unassimilated change (e.g. agricultural knowledge in areas where agriculture no longer plays an essential economic role). Hence the need to create new competitive advantages calls for the creation of a new "niche" or knowledge heritage completely from scratch.

By contrast, in areas with useful contextual knowledge, the issue is to identify what type of knowledge needs to be created or appropriated in order to give value to this existing heritage. This is a long-term approach that is highly social in nature, since it entails changing practices that have already become consolidated and entrenched in the local culture. The identification of research and transfer needs therefore requires an input

of knowledge, for which the local actors themselves must recognise the need. First of all these needs have to be formalised and made intelligible to the actors themselves, so as to be able to delegate the search for solutions. Moreover, tensions may emerge due to the difference between the external pace of change and the pace of change of internal knowledge.

In any case, the process of integrating new knowledge calls for a solid base of confidence, induced by economic or social success. This means enhancing the actor's ability to tackle their own problems and build sustainable communities.

Where internal knowledge is in decline (due to changes in market conditions, to the disappearance of the holders of such knowledge, etc.), to create a new knowledge heritage it is first necessary to conduct basic research into the local heritage, so as to develop new references for development.

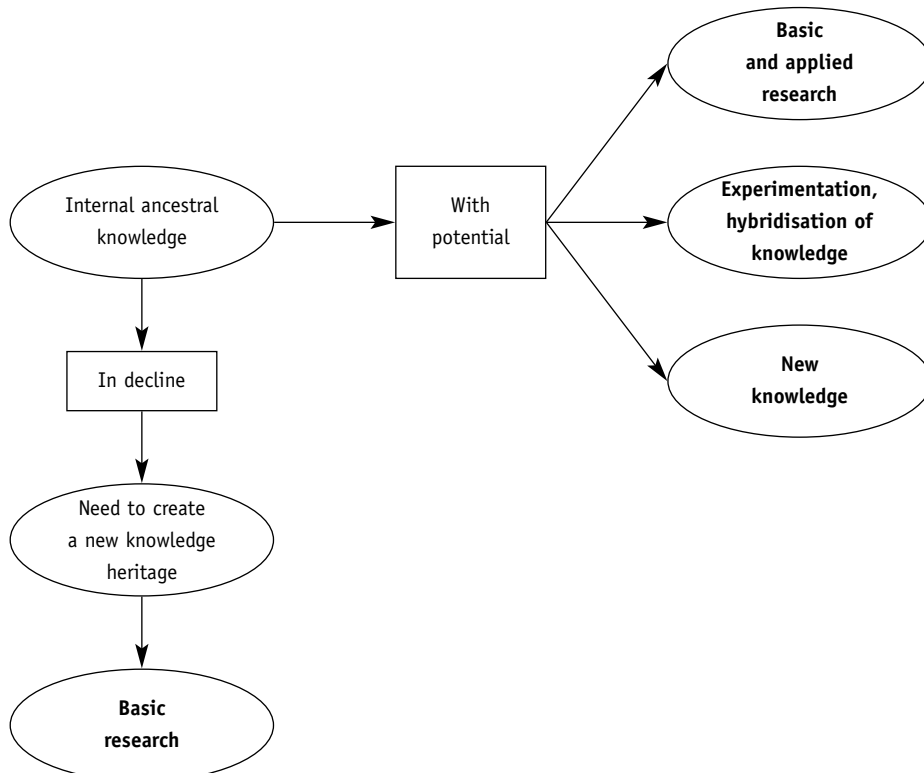
b) Possible role of LEADER

By intervening at local level, LEADER also plays an essential role in identifying knowledge needs. Below are a few examples of LEADER's possible role.

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE PHASE OF IDENTIFYING KNOWLEDGE NEEDS

- > Organising visits and exchanges
- > Initiating the process of identifying weaknesses and possible solutions
- > Identifying as yet unexploited opportunities
- > Creating links between local initiatives
- > Expanding the debate to include actors from areas with "similar" problems or needs
- > Identifying the extra added value that could be contributed by existing initiatives

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS IN RELATION TO THE STATUS OF INTERNAL ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE



c) LEADER's effective intervention

For the reasons mentioned earlier, LEADER groups have concentrated much less effort on the emergence of knowledge needs than on animating the project cycle itself. This is largely due to:

- > Lack of contacts with the outside world that would have the effect of exposing the limitations of internal actions;
- > Difficulties in defining the knowledge needed to make projects viable.

d) Challenges for the future

A more systematic analysis of a rural area's knowledge needs often involves confronting local actors with external experiences. The proliferation and diversification of exchanges of information and experiences are key elements to be taken into account in the future.

In many cases, an internal effort to **overcome resistance to change** is also needed. One way of achieving this is to integrate this process into the territorial renewal prerequisite, by creating the right conditions to encourage local actors to take risks. It is easier to control these processes collectively than it is individually.

4.4 Identifying/pinpointing sources

a) Need for specific interventions

Once knowledge needs have been identified, the next problem is to identify knowledge sources. However, these two phases do not necessarily follow in this order. For instance, in many cases it is the identification of sources that leads to the emergence of needs and hence requires a return to animation in order to launch the project.

Once the knowledge acquisition needs for a specific initiative have been identified, it is worthwhile drawing up an inventory of:

- > Knowledge that already exists in the area and can be recovered/redeveloped;
- > Knowledge that exists elsewhere and can be transferred;
- > Knowledge that is not available and must therefore be generated through research.

The innovation of Luxembourg's Cloth Museum project has therefore chiefly been "at the fringes", based on consolidated experiences. In this case the knowledge sources were mainly local, later augmented by external sources from which to transfer knowledge and by specific research, as the following table illustrates.

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE INTO A PROJECT TO CREATE A MUSEUM
FOR PROMOTING OLD TEXTILE TECHNOLOGIES: THE CASE OF THE CLOTH MUSEUM (LUXEMBOURG)**

Field concerned in relation to the area's capital	Minimum results expected on the basis of internally available knowledge	Anticipated results: initiatives requiring new knowledge	New knowledge and tools to be created through animation and research/ transfer	Knock-on effects and new points of departure
Environment	Creation of a protected area Renewal of the architectural heritage	Development of tourism based on maintaining the natural environment Promotion of an old technology	<i>Concept requiring new practices: animation</i> <i>Substance of the approach and potential opportunities: research</i>	Increase in "green" and cultural tourism
Business and jobs	Creation of a "Maison du Parc", a support and information centre for tourist activities Creation of local jobs			Introduction of direct selling of local products Introduction of environmentally-friendly products (medicinal plants)
Social cohesion		Integration of the long term unemployed Consultation between districts	<i>Knowledge transfer: training</i> <i>Substance of the agreements: animation</i>	Creation of a management partnership

The intervention needs for identifying sources therefore rely chiefly on a systematic effort to pinpoint and manage the relevant information.

b) LEADER's possible role and effective intervention

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE PHASE OF PINPOINTING KNOWLEDGE SOURCES/PROVISION

- > Making comparisons with similar areas
- > Expanding horizons by providing information and analysing markets
- > Expanding knowledge frontiers and contacts

By acting locally, LEADER has been instrumental in identifying local sources of knowledge, making it possible to pinpoint, for example, resource persons with local know-how that is dying out. LEADER has done a great deal to recover this knowledge ("internal" cycle).

Networking has also enabled LEADER groups to become familiar with other areas and rural development experiences and hence to identify external sources of knowledge for transfer ("external" cycle).

By contrast, as explained earlier, LEADER groups have generally had the most difficulty in identifying the sources of knowledge available in universities and research centres to carry out work in response to local needs.

c) Challenges for the future

In the future, no appreciable qualitative leap forward in the ability to identify university and research centre sources will be possible without involving these sources more extensively in local processes. One way of doing this is to include researchers in territorial development processes or to encourage the establishment of networks of researchers working on key rural development issues. The “universal nature” of research is a factor that can help bridge territorial divides and invisible cultural barriers. This makes it easier for researchers to make the knowledge transferable and to support the transmission of concepts and practices. Researchers are also a substantial source for expanding contacts.

So, in the future it should be possible for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation to ***be based on networks of researchers/practitioners in order to build longer-term relationships between rural areas, universities and research centres in a bid to identify the most suitable sources for extending knowledge.***

4.5 Links/negotiation with sources of knowledge

a) Need for specific interventions

The preceding chapter described the various obstacles to establishing links between development actors, universities and research organisations, as well as some possible ways to overcome existing difficulties. There is a similar problem in establishing links/negotiations with public institutions, which produce knowledge that is also compartmentalised according to specialisations. Furthermore, negotiations with private organisations (industrial research) call for prior work on “critical mass” and institutional support to be carried out first, as in the case of the Anglona-Monte Acuto LEADER group (Sardinia) presented earlier.

However, sometimes the main obstacle is adopting a short-term view of the need to be satisfied. Indeed this prevents existing or potential links between local actors and knowledge sources from being exploited more fully. A search for immediate solutions means that demand cannot be “conditioned”. How many costly studies have simply been filed away in a drawer simply because they turned out to be too inappropriate for implementing tailor-made initiatives for a specific area, within the available means and within an acceptable timeframe?

b) LEADER’s possible role and effective intervention

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE PHASE OF LINKS/NEGOTIATION WITH KNOWLEDGE SOURCES/PROVISION

- > Recognising the bases on which they can be mobilised
- > Attracting “brains” to the area
- > Intensifying contacts with institutions in order to foster collaboration
- > Creating critical mass around an idea or a person with an idea
- > Maximising the network effect

During this phase, too, LEADER groups have worked much more on links with local sources than with sources external to the area. In the latter case, links have tended to be established first with other LEADER areas in the first place, usually within the framework of transnational cooperation.

As for links with research, LEADER groups have progressed to different stages in their ability to grasp the benefit of initiating negotiations and creating such links. Some groups even take a negative attitude to concepts like innovation, experimentation and knowledge creation. Sometimes groups have found more “immediate” solutions by hiring consultants who are already known, without attempting to prospect further afield for alternative, more appropriate or less costly, possibilities.

c) Challenges for the future

Faced with the difficulties in communicating with researchers and other sources of knowledge, how is it possible to learn, to build the “language” needed for formulating proposals, and to identify knowledge creation needs? This calls for a measure of humility on the part of LEADER groups, enabling them to analyse their own methods of intervention by asking themselves questions like: How far have we come in terms of implementing a rural development model? What has been our contribution to knowledge concepts and creation?

What is more, LEADER groups must not necessarily be content to act as an interface, especially since other such structures sometimes already exist in the area. It is in the interests of LEADER practitioners to get involved in the research process in order to understand the “language” of researchers and other knowledge sources. Liaison/negotiation with sources therefore calls for a certain ***“professionalisation” of the role of LEADER groups.***

4.6 Knowledge production/acquisition

a) Need for specific interventions

Acquiring knowledge means integrating it into local learning processes. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, by exchanging experiences between LEADER groups it is possible to identify which elements are at the “heart” of collective learning processes in rural areas. These same mechanisms can be used to make research results available to other areas, thus avoiding duplication and instead working towards complementarity.

In spite of past efforts, however, research and transfer organisations still lack adaptability. The same can be said of the applicability in the field of the knowledge supplied. Rural areas need experimentation centres in close proximity to small-scale producers, which are capable of supporting the promotion and renewal of local know-how.

b) LEADER's possible role and effective intervention

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER IN THE PRODUCTION/ KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION PHASE

- > Ensuring that knowledge is increased by involving the largest possible proportion of the people concerned
- > Exploiting previous research
- > Soliciting transfers of experience and not transfers of “ready-made formulas”
- > Offering researchers from different fields the opportunity to work in the rural area, whilst at the same time coordinating the different types of research
- > Defending the local actors' choice of innovations

In terms of production/knowledge acquisition, LEADER's interventions have chiefly focused on:

- > Training: vocational training, training for development agents, etc. In many cases, training has been used as a tool not only for transmitting knowledge, but also for animation and reflection, for identifying needs and for producing new knowledge.

In the Vinschgau/Val Venosta region (Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy), vocational training has been used as a research/action tool for launching projects and creating professional groups around these projects.

- > Producing knowledge within the local partnership itself, based on internal evaluations.

However, in the LEADER programme, knowledge production and acquisition has, in general, fallen short of both their potential and needs. Due to the LEADER groups' lack of experience of comparable processes, their intervention has also sometimes failed to sufficiently anticipate the difficulties and pace of such processes.

c) Challenges for the future

It would certainly be desirable in the future for local action groups to be provided with the tools to anticipate needs more accurately and to systematise knowledge production/acquisition processes. The various projects currently under way in a number of European countries to produce self-evaluation tools are a step in this direction.

4.7 Applying the knowledge acquired

a) Need for specific interventions

The application of acquired knowledge is the phase linking learning processes with the translation of these processes into change and development. However, the mere fact of acquiring knowledge does not mean that it will necessarily be applied. This can be thwarted by multiple forms of resistance to change.

For instance, the main obstacle might be inertia among organisations, enterprises or systems of actors, which has grown from routine (actions or methods acquired over a long time). Such routines may persist even if they no longer yield any results. That fact that routines have already been codified in social relations and in the organisational culture make them almost inescapable, even where the actors concerned, especially those in charge, are well aware that they are outmoded. Lasting change is possible only by creating a new secure framework that allows the actors concerned to change their behaviour without calling into question the values on which their identity and role in the local organisation are based.

Another obstacle to applying knowledge may be that the knowledge acquired is insufficient. The introduction of a new technology, new production methods, greater participation, etc. do not automatically have an impact on an area, and parallel measures are sometimes needed. Mechanisms required to accompany the application of new knowledge include the analysis of a sector both upstream and downstream and the establishment of institutional consensus. Rather than focusing solely on immediate results, it is necessary to consider what environment will ensure a multiplier effect of the knowledge transferred.

b) LEADER's possible role and specific intervention

POSSIBLE ROLE OF LEADER

IN THE KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION PHASE

- > Breaking down "invisible barriers"
- > Relying on institutional channels and means
- > Acquiring information and dissemination capabilities that make it possible to reach the greatest number of beneficiaries
- > Coordinating training instruments throughout the area

Due to its special characteristics and the funding instruments at its disposal, LEADER has played a very important role in applying the knowledge acquired via concrete projects.

Generally speaking, the difficulties encountered by LEADER have had more to do with adapting available and acquired knowledge than with its application per se.

c) Challenges for the future

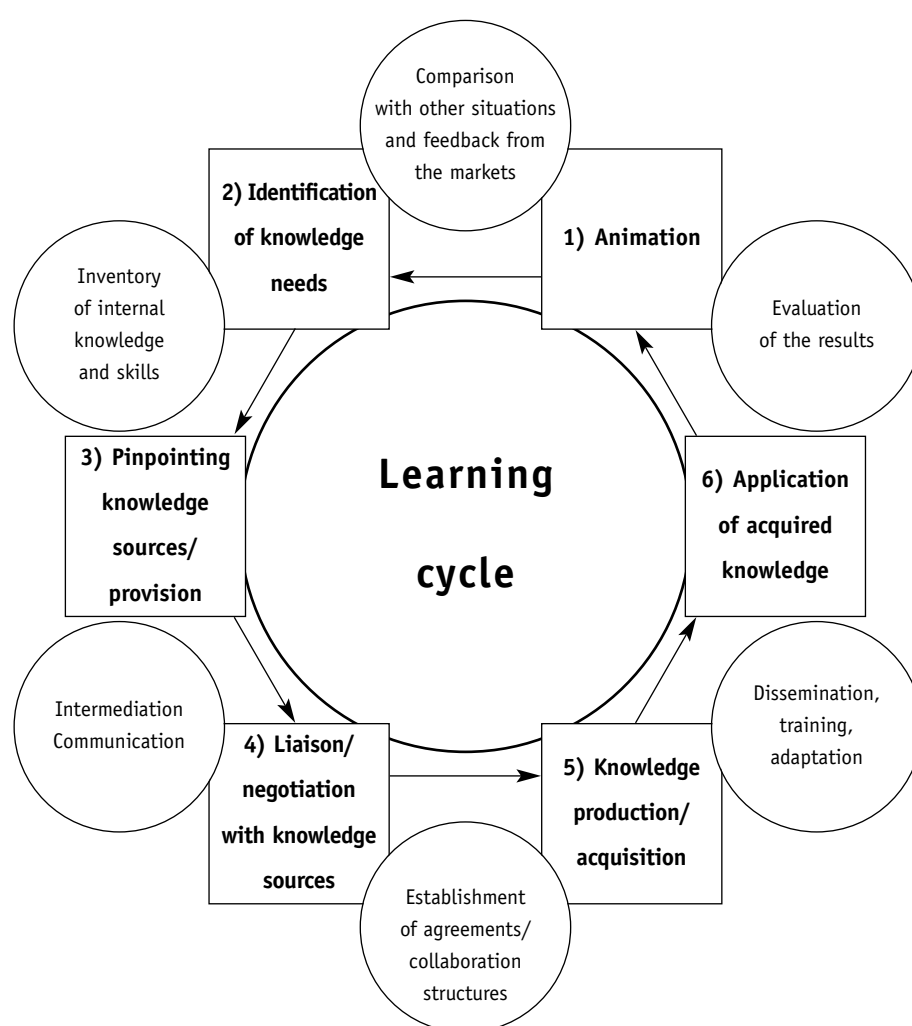
Once again, one of the major challenges for the future is to use research results for the purposes of education, to improve links between knowledge production/transmission activities and actual knowledge application. To achieve this, it is necessary to first create the right conditions for local actors to get into a habit of working with researchers and for researchers to get into a habit of working with the community. This also calls for closer links between LEADER groups and knowledge/application and dissemination services.

4.8 Summary

a) Specific needs for intervention

Specific needs for intervention during the different phases of the learning process may be summarised by highlighting the types of intervention that are required from one phase to the next. The transition from one phase to the next involves completing certain tasks, represented graphically as follows:

TASKS TO BE COMPLETED IN ORDER TO MOVE FROM ONE PHASE OF THE LEARNING CYCLE TO THE NEXT



The six phases of a learning cycle are depicted inside the squares and the specific intervention needs inside the circles.

b) Possible role of LEADER

One of the LEADER groups' main functions has been to strengthen social relations as tools for learning and innovation. This is inherently rather difficult, since there are always gaps between the expression of a need to acquire new knowledge, the establishment of contacts in order to secure this knowledge, the mechanisms for communicating it and the definition of joint objectives by those with the need and those with the potential responses. This applies to all fields of learning that depend on the creation of links between research and development.

However, the role of LEADER groups varies according to the local context. In areas "with rich social relations", the LEADER group's role will be more to catalyse existing local energies through: animation; comparisons; putting core groups of local actors into contact with sources of knowledge; facilitating appropriation mechanisms; etc.

In the case of areas "with poor social relations", LEADER groups will need to adopt methods that allow new experimental cycles to be initiated locally, prior to seeking sources for the production/transfer of new knowledge. The group's role in this case will be one of

animation, in order to re-establish the internal capability to develop ideas, to give local actors renewed confidence in their own abilities, to formulate and implement small-scale experimental projects and to procure appropriate support, prior to seeking knowledge and solutions outside the area. In this instance, the phase of restoring confidence and individual capacity for initiative will necessarily be drawn out, and only then will it be possible to move on to proposals requiring collective support.

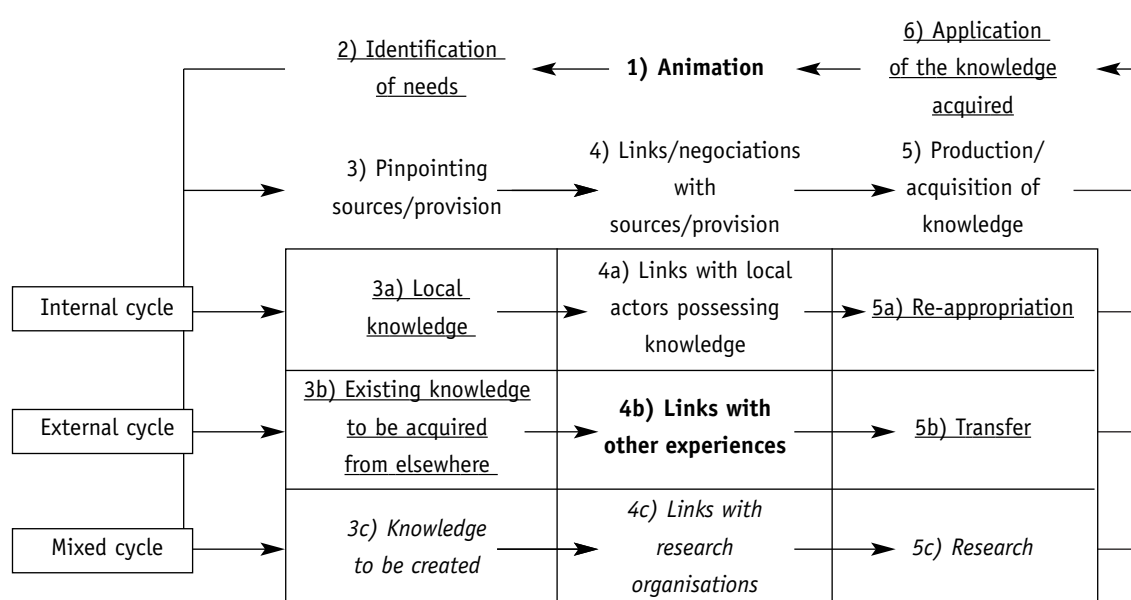
c) LEADER's effective intervention

The analysis of LEADER's intervention in the six phases of the learning process has revealed important differences:

- > In certain phases, especially the animation phase, LEADER has intervened almost systematically;
- > In other phases, its intervention has also been widespread but only in a minority of LEADER groups
- > In yet other phases, LEADER's intervention has been more ad hoc and has concerned only a few groups.

The following diagram summarises these differences, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses or shortcomings of LEADER interventions.

LEVEL OF LEADER INTERVENTION IN THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE LEARNING CYCLE



Key:

- > **Bold characters:** widespread, rather general intervention from LEADER
- > Underlined characters: widespread but minority intervention
- > *Italics:* ad hoc intervention

d) Challenges for the future

Generally speaking, LEADER appears to have been very much involved in everything to do with local animation, recovering local know-how and establishing links with other experiences.

The problem lies more in forging links with other sources of knowledge that do not form part of the “LEADER family” and are not directly associated with rural areas and rural development, but which could nevertheless provide an appropriate response to local knowledge needs. This includes research centres and universities that work in complementary fields, but frequently have other concerns and do not speak the same language.

To a large extent, the solution to this problem entails developing two of LEADER’s specific features by:

- > Opening up local partnerships to other partners, especially partners in the field of knowledge production and dissemination;
- > Networking, opening up cooperation and networks to partners with no direct links to rural development.

Chapter 5

Postscript

Postscript

The main aim of this dossier has been to analyse learning processes and ways to strengthen and adapt them to the needs of rural areas. However, rural development is not solely a local learning process. At the regional, national and European levels, too, there is the problem of learning “good” support methods and “good” policies based on results achieved in the field. The LEADER programme is a laboratory not only for testing new rural development avenues, but also for applying/testing new policies at the different intervention levels, which in its turn fuels the learning process at these levels. However, here the problem is to establish links with research.

The following three questions should attract the attention of researchers and institutions in the future:

- a) How can the conceptual framework underpinning research provision for rural development be defined more clearly?
- b) How can the transition be made from local “renewal” to a political framework conducive to the future development of rural areas?
- c) How is it possible to cater to the specific research needs of rural areas, in order to ensure their future competitiveness?

5.1 A conceptual framework conducive to research in aid of rural development

The conceptual framework underpinning research provision for rural development is indistinct, in some cases contradictory and often depends to a large degree on immediate national considerations. This leads to a number of conceptual problems:

- > Viewing the rural environment as a whole.
- > Is the role of agriculture in rural areas pivotal or marginal?
- > Is rural development an issue of marginal areas?
- > Is rural development an integral part of regional development or a case apart?

> **Viewing the rural environment as a whole.** What science refers to as “rural” is in fact highly segmented: studies on land use, the environment, culture etc. Each specific field has its own frame of reference in the specialised press. The result has been a pronounced segmentation of knowledge.

> **Is the role of agriculture in rural areas always pivotal?** According to certain schools of thought, research in aid of rural development must always retain a key role for agriculture. The main argument behind this theory is that farmers’ income is under threat. According to this theory, the mission of research is to support changes in agriculture that preserve income and to create alternatives aimed at reducing costs.^[13] However, this theory cannot easily be applied to areas with a low population density, where agriculture has ceased to play a significant role. Even if we accept the hypothesis that heterogeneous models of farming exist, nowadays it is impossible for some rural areas to make farming a core structural principle of their development strategies. The challenge for research is therefore to “rethink” agriculture and to work, not on perpetuating its conventional function, but on diversifying the avenues that rural development could take in the future.

> Following on from the previous point, **does “rural” development apply solely to marginal areas?**

In the past, the rural development principle has traditionally been to seek to make viable again remote, highly inaccessible areas suffering from various forms of marginality. In Austria^[14], for example, research into the possibilities of developing multiple jobholding, tourist provision coupled with landscape conservation, etc. was launched in line with political concerns about the viability of mountain areas. Is this vision valid for the future?

[13] Presentation by Professor Van der Ploeg (University of Wageningen, Netherlands) at the seminar “Research and rural development”. In a context of intensive farming and a very high population density, the scenarios for the future of Dutch rural areas are in fact based on integrating agriculture, the environment and leisure activities.

[14] The Arkleton Centre, “Final report on the REAPER concerted action”, op. cit. pp. 22-23.

Is rural development an integral part of regional development or a case apart? Research into rural areas has often been associated with a regional development approach. It was not until the eighties that certain regions began to implement policies to create a specific frame of reference for rural areas^[15]. What is the future for this concept?

The complexity of defining and outlining a new political framework: “integrated” and “endogenous” rural development

The structural changes taking place at European level call for new conceptual and political instruments, supported by new models that make it possible to maintain the competitiveness, and ensure the social cohesion, of rural areas. Whilst conventional approaches have failed to reduce development disparities between areas, approaches focusing on integrated, endogenous development have gained ground over the past ten years, due in particular to LEADER, and are now beginning to bear fruit.

Nevertheless, it still remains to decide what the “substance” of the concept of integrated, endogenous development should be. Should all sectors be included (economic, social, cultural, etc.)? Should it refer solely to poor areas with no lead sector? Must it be the subject of separate policies? What is more, the integrated rural development concept implies a notion of a “territory” within which to apply an integrated approach. What is this territory? Does it coincide with administrative boundaries? Who can ensure coherence and integration within this territory?

5.2 Progressing from local “renewal” to a political framework conducive to the future development of rural areas

Globalisation brings with it a series of new political challenges for rural areas:

- > Finding innovative solutions to act as levers for integrated rural development, since traditional sectoral methods of intervention like farm price support are open to criticism during international negotiations.
- > Helping to modernise the state by supporting civic participation processes through various forms of decentralisation.

Even though the debate around these issues is becoming increasingly important, all the signs appear to indicate that, with the exception of LEADER+ and a number of limited national policies, the integrated approach to rural development will continue to maintain a high profile, but it will receive only a small portion of national and Community funding between now and the year 2006.

Accordingly, what are the limitations that narrow the possibilities for extending the integrated approaches to general (mainstream) policies? Is there a problem of scale? What types of integrated models might be useful to political decision-makers? The issue on the agenda today is therefore how local and regional authorities and local actors can ensure that general policies take into account the principles of integrated development. **Research activities should therefore focus on the factors of success and failure of integrated approaches**, so as to provide political decision-makers with elements which they can take into consideration.

[15] Idem pp.23-26. This is the case with the Walloon region of Belgium, which in 1980 decided to adopt a rural development approach based on four elements: precedence of the district councils [communes]; community consultation and participation; an integrated policy to include all sectors having an impact on the quality of life and are conducive to the development of local resources. In 1991, after testing the new approach by implementing pilot operations, the Walloon government issued a decree establishing the Rural Commission of Wallonia [Commission Rurale de Wallonie] as the institutional guarantor for an integrated local approach in rural areas.

In the light of LEADER's experience of integrated development, the transition from local renewal to its integration into mainstream policy calls for research and analyses to answer the following questions:

1. Can integrated development experiences, confined to certain territories, survive in the long term without including the integrated approach into mainstream policies? In other words, how and to what extent must the results of pilot experiments be introduced into general policies?
2. What social processes must be initiated in order to encourage the inclusion of the integrated approach into mainstream measures? If the approach is not integrated into general policy, is it not in danger of becoming even more marginal?
3. Can rural "territories" benefiting from an integrated and endogenous approach exist independently of functional links and links of solidarity with urban areas? In other words, what dimension or size must territories attain in order to guarantee their development?
4. How can rural development more clearly demonstrate the contribution of the countryside to society as a whole, including to residents of towns and cities?

The development of new spatial planning concepts at European level^[16] poses challenges to the "rural" environment, no longer solely in terms of whether or not agriculture plays a central role, but also in terms of its position in relation to the towns. Here the concept of "multiple forms of interdependency between rural and urban areas" is gaining ground, even to the point where an integrated vision of town/country as a functional spatial unit is being mooted^[17]. Three different types of "rural" area can be distinguished, each calling for a different political and development approach:

- > A rural area under the metropolitan influence.
- > A balanced rural area, supported by the presence of, or proximity to, towns/centres (polycentric urban structure),
- > A structurally weak rural area.

Each of these "rural" areas raises the issue of what type of economic positioning they should adopt and what inter-relationship should be forged with the outside world, and of the consequences of dominant policies. According to this analytical framework, only rural areas based predominantly on the polycentric urban structure are singled out as having the right conditions to guarantee the success of an integrated, endogenous approach to development. But is this strictly true? This is a question that requires further research. Is integrated rural development feasible in areas dominated by large towns? What about areas with a low population density? How should rural areas be treated in policies to ensure their sustainability: as a specific territorial entity or an entity that forms part of a wider territorial unit determined by urban structures? Can the integrated rural development model be applied to all areas, irrespective of the type of urban influence?

5.3 Catering to the specific research needs of rural areas in order to ensure their future competitiveness

In this dossier we have explored at length the gaps that exist between the various forms of knowledge provided by research and the specific needs of rural areas. We have focused on the diverse means and tools that LEADER groups can use to narrow these gaps and to create the links they need to ensure their area's long-term competitiveness. Nonetheless, these tools and methods will not be very effective unless parallel work is carried out at the more general level of national and European policies, so as to channel research in a direction conducive to rural development.

A number of indicators show the current trend to be in this direction. Defining the conceptual framework of rural development more clearly and progressing from local "renewal" to a political framework that is more conducive to the future development of rural areas are prerequisites for reinforcing and systematising this trend.

[16] ESDP (European Spatial Development Perspective), "Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the EU", approved by the Informal Council of Ministers for Regional Planning at Postdam, May 1999, European Commission, 1999.

[17] *Idem*, page 26.

Leader II est une Initiative communautaire lancée par la Commission européenne et coordonnée par la Direction générale de l'Agriculture (Unité VI-F.II.3).

Le contenu de ce dossier ne reflète pas nécessairement les opinions de l'Union européenne.

***Leader II** is a Community Initiative launched by the European Commission and coordinated by its Directorate-General for Agriculture (Unit VI-F.II.3).*

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