



## Report from ELARDS EWRC-session on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2020: “Co-creating the restart of Europe at the local level – How to use Community Led Local Development in the recovery work and building resilience”

**ELARD** with members in cooperation with COTER of CoR was giving this workshop on how CLLD allows citizens to co-create European policy in multilevel governance. The workshop had more than 50 participants, who eagerly contributed to the group discussions within the session.

Introductory speeches on the strengths and possibilities of community-led local development (CLLD) in shaping resilient communities and contributing to recovery work, were given by Marion Eckardt, president of ELARD and Radim Sršeň, Member of the Committee of the Regions – Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER).

**Marion Eckardt** spoke about the results of the two surveys conducted by ELARD in 2020. The main conclusions from the first survey, *CLLD in times of Corona* (March-April 2020) were that the most common role of (F)LAGs were to be a local information-hub and service provider during the crisis, and that (F)LAGs are flexible, quick and target-oriented in adapting to the new conditions locally. The main conclusions from the second survey, *Which future do you want in rural areas?* (June-August 2020) were that rural citizens ask for basic services like health care, education and connectivity and for employment-opportunities. They also believe the vital importance of rural territories to society as a whole must be recognized. The vast majority of the rural citizens are also very positive towards LEADER and believe in using the LEADER-method as the multi-level governance tool it is.

**Radim Sršeň** spoke of the CoR's contribution to the renewed Territorial Agenda with special emphasis on Community-Led Local Development. Aspects to be addressed in the territorial agenda are amongst others the potential role of multilevel governance and engagement of European civil society as a tool for boosting the legitimacy of the EU and the importance of rural-urban linkages, functional regions, integrated approach and endogenous local development.

After these introductions, the participants were divided into four groups according to their own interest, *Green Deal*, *Smart Villages*, *Urban CLLD* and *Youth*. Each group session was started with an introductory speech on the theme, followed by group discussions.

**Hartmut Berndt**, chair of BAG-LAG, Germany, spoke in the *Green Deal* group on the theme **A greener Europe through engaged citizens**. The experience in Germany is that many people in rural areas want to play an active role in designing a sustainable future of their habitat and are willing to work voluntary for this goal. There is a great potential of creativity and ideas to work on solving current challenges in relation to climate change or the conservation of biodiversity. Engaged people are successful if they are supported with instruments which empower the implementation of their own ideas. Hence, it pays to support creative people and ideas with financial and administrative help. It was discussed that LEADER areas are the right territorial level to deal with environmental and climate issues. The Green Deal offers new opportunities and is also warning sign that action must be taken. Member States must seize the opportunities and then the LAGs must undertake the necessary adaptation to become an important vehicle to tackle environmental issues. For the preparation of the next LDS it is hoped that the environmental challenges on LAG territory level will become part of the process everywhere.





**Kristiina Tammets**, member of the Estonian LEADER Union – Estii LEADER Liit, Estonia spoke in the *Smart Villages* group on the theme **Co-creating to support smart villages**. In Estonia a national Smart Villages training program will be run as a LEADER cooperation project, starting in the beginning of 2021. It will be based on the needs and expectations of the 13 Estonian villages that participated in the European Commission Smart Rural 21 Call. Expected results of the program are that each participating village/community will draft their own Smart Village strategy and each village/community will implement a pilot action in the frame of the Smart Village strategy. A National Smart Villages Network will be established and linked with international Smart Rural 21 network. The project will also result in LEADER LAGs gaining experience on how to implement the concept of Smart Villages at the local level and can, if necessary, plan follow-up activities into their local development strategies for the new programming period 2021-2027.

It was discussed that networking between different stakeholders and common work on a national concept of Smart villages is a great way to involve everybody from the beginning, like in the Estonian project. Since Smart Villages is only about one village/community and the LEADER area is bigger, LAGs could help villages to see a wider picture, to help in the process of strategic planning. The approaches Smart Villages and LEADER/CLLD should be combined and it is a good idea to find linkages/team up between Smart cities and Smart villages. Funding guidelines with information on possible finance resources should be prepared for Smart villages.

**Marjo Tolvanen**, board member of the SYTY- Finnish Village Movement Association, Finland spoke in the *Urban CLLD* group on the theme *CLLD and co-creating in urban areas*. A case study of Kotka, the second biggest city in Finland, where Urban LEADER, CLLD was introduced in 2014. CLLD has helped develop the city using cross-sectorial cooperation and it has resulted in a lot of new local activities and revived communality in the city.

It was discussed that LAGs can transfer knowledge on community initiatives to help urban areas to improve communication and integration. CLLD should be upgraded with additional Cohesion/RD tools like ITI, Smart villages/cities etc., to avoid confusion on the local level. CLLD enable participation of all stakeholders which can help urban-rural linkages for mutual better recovery and resilience. CLLD should be improved as participatory democracy development tool and LAGs should work for implementation of the CLLD approach in urban/peri-urban areas. CLLD needs to be more promoted as a tool for Integrated Territorial Development and as a universal tool/method for inclusive strategic development, rather than just for rural development.

**Felicia Edholm**, member of Lokal Utveckling Sverige, Sweden spoke in the *Youth* group on the theme *Empowering youth with CLLD*. In a project called TALKO online courses are being held on how to engage youth in CLLD and videos are produced, showing youth in rural areas. Involving young people in CLLD is important because using young people's knowledge, energy and ideas improves the quality of CLLD. Participation in civil society is a school of democracy and gives young people meaning, social inclusion and thereby wellbeing and belief in yourself and the future. Creating conditions for youth participation demands resources (capacity for participation), motivation (willingness to participate) and a recruitment network (being asked to participate).

It was discussed how important it is to **ask** young people to participate and to not take no for an answer, but to ask again and again. It is also very important to actually listen to what is important to young people and what they want to do. It is also important to keep the young people, who go away to study or work in bigger cities, related to their home community while away, to create a relationship to the community and a reason for them to return in the weekends. They are the future residents of the rural areas.





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Some **conclusions** were that LAGs are important actors of local democracy. The EU has made it possible to work with Community Led Local Development, also in the recovery work. CLLD is especially strong in including youth, working smart, and in supporting the green deal on a local level, both in rural and urban areas. From ELARDs surveys can also be concluded that CLLD is a well-loved method, and it is needed to keep working together to make CLLD work also on a national level.

With more than 25 years of experience, LEADER has now also showed its strengths in adapting to a crisis situation. The LEADER method is a multilevel governance tool that reaches the citizens, and the LEADER system has adapted to the new situation in a flexible, fast, efficient and target-oriented way.

