



Position paper

Europe needs LEADER

The European Union promotes the development of our regions with many different strategies and approaches, yet skepticism towards the EU is widespread among large parts of the population, especially in the rural areas of the EU Member States. The UK's exit from the EU and the political success of EU critical movements in many countries are alarming signs of this development. At the same time, the European agricultural funding becomes increasingly questioned. In order to change this, the public benefits of the European fundings have to be pointed out. With the LEADER approach, the European Union developed 25 years ago a new philosophy of funding and dared to implement a bottom-up approach for rural areas: Since then, countless local actors throughout Europe took the chance to participate in the development of their own regions and communities and, in doing so, actively lived the European democratic principles. The multi-sectoral approach and the high value of cooperation in LEADER are also important aspects in promoting the exchange of knowledge and experience throughout Europe.

The success of the LEADER programme becomes clear when taking a look at its development: In the current funding period, 2.600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) across Europe operate in regions with around 28 million inhabitants; just in Germany there are already 321 LAGs. Thousands of projects have been implemented since LEADER began. Nowhere else does the European Union get closer to its citizens than through LEADER. The important contribution of LEADER enhancing understanding among local actors in a region and between different countries is more important than ever in times of increasing nationalist movements. LEADER is strongly connected to the European idea and has been adopted and developed with great commitment by EU citizens. We see great potential in LEADER and in the capabilities of the LAGs to counteract the global challenges of our time with site-specific solutions developed by the local actors themselves - for a strengthened and livable Europe.

However, this potential of the LEADER approach is increasingly challenged by extreme burdens and bureaucracy in the application process, billing and control procedures. Many of the actors from voluntary organizations and associations - who are particularly important to the LEADER process – capitulate abandon their projects due to bureaucratic hurdles and incalculable risks. Especially creative and innovative ideas are particularly affected. Overall, the effort is not appropriate to the size of the projects and their funding. As national working group representing German LAGs and therefore also the people in our villages and rural areas, we ask the European Commission to improve and strengthen the LEADER approach. We want an unbureaucratic LEADER programme designed for the people.



This means:

- A mandatory continuation of the LEADER programme for the member states
- A joint and binding EU fund with simple rules for the implementation of community-led local development (CLLD)
- Reliable and easily understandable rules and administrative procedures that help local actors to implement their creative ideas for the sustainable development of their regions
- Trust in the competence of LAGs and in the local administrative bodies by applying the single audit principle instead of a small-scale control system based on mistrust with disproportionate threats of sanction
- The control of success should rely exclusively on the implementation of the LEADER method

The courage of the European Union to hand over responsibility to the regions with the bottom-up approach and to trust the LAGs must not be contrasted with an excessive bureaucracy in order to be recognised again by the local people. Together with politicians and administration, the BAG LAG wants to contribute updating the European success story LEADER and is ready to work intensively on the future design of LEADER – making thereby an important contribution to a positive image of the European Union in rural areas.

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BAG LAG Länderrat (Council of states)