

Report from ELARD Fringe-workshop 25th of March 09:00-09:45

Theme: Resilient rural communities for a viable Europe

A viable Europe through local democracy and participatory approaches in all rural areas and beyond.

The workshop had 45 participants, less than half of the 100 people that had signed up for the workshop. This was a shame considering that more than 50 people did not get to attend due to the maximum number of participants being 100.

The aims of the workshop were the following:

- Showcase good practices from LEADER/CLLD that have contributed to improved social capital, improved governance and better results in the fields of Green Deal, Demographic Change and Innovation
- Reflect on the responsibility and possibility of all actors to make the framework for resilient communities in order to make LTVRA a reality
- Create a movement

The pandemic has shown the importance of vital, resilient local communities in a global world. In order to create resilience, we need creative and engaged people that live and take responsibility in their respective areas. How can this be created in multi-level governance? Are there any tools in place? Yes, there are!

The session started with Mrs Marion Eckardt, president of ELARD introducing the topic and the speakers and also encouraging all participants to use the Padlet tool, contributing their own answers to the question “How will you support/create resilient rural communities for a viable Europe in the coming year?”

Then a film was shown, picturing the *Villjuercas - Ibores - Jara Unesco Geopark* developed and run by the Spanish LAG Aprodervi since more than 10 years. Mr Javier López Caballero, LAG manager and Geopark deputy director further explained the *bottom-up approach* used both in developing and continuously running the Geopark and the impact it has had on the local rural development.

<https://www.geoparquevilluercas.es/>

<http://www.aprodervi.com/>

After the Spanish example Marion Eckardt interviewed Mr Achim Kistner, the Manager of LAG Hunsrück (Rheinland-Pfalz) on the economic development in that Leader area. LAG Hunsrück has been active since 1996. Something that has developed over the years is that Leader has become younger and more feminine, to the benefit of all. Mr Kistner stated that the most important lesson learned over the years is that it is the *Leader method*, the bottom-up approach and the *working together* towards common goals that is the most important, even more important than the actual results of the various projects. Mr Kistner stressed the importance of people representing the different sectors in society coming together, getting to know each other and building trust in one another. This cooperation and mutual trust create long term sustainable development, improved social capital, improved governance and more resilient communities. Mr Kistner also stressed the fact that Leader and LAG is considered a *partner* by the local businesses and other stakeholders, something that simplifies cooperation and development as opposed to being an “extra layer” of authority.





Mr Kistner is concerned that the emphasis on project results in the next period may inhibit the method. Leader must be allowed to be an experimental workshop, there needs to be space for trial and even failure.

Another good practice example is LAG Leader Höga Kusten in Sweden. A film on the Smart Village of Nora at Höga Kusten (the High Coast) was shown.

<https://vimeo.com/358999692>

LAG Höga Kusten works very successfully with *cooperation* and *communication* and is a very good example and a role model for many LAGs, both in Sweden and throughout Europe. LAG Höga Kusten has successfully worked with CLLD and regrets the fact that the Swedish authorities have decided not to use CLLD in the next program period, but only work with LEADER in the Rural fund. They believe that and that synergies and opportunities of CLLD unfortunately will be lost in the next period.

After the various good examples from different LAGs Marion spoke to Ms Maria Gafo from DG AGRI. She was very impressed with the different LEADER examples from Europe and with how they contribute to the resilience of their areas. Marion asked her view on who is responsible for making the LTVRA reality and she stated it is the common responsibility of all of us, the idea is that the LTVRA will make us all “pull in the same direction”.

Next Ms Wallis Goelen-Vanderbrock described the concrete “plan of attack” from DG REGIO in order to make LTVRA a reality. She stressed the fact that DG Regio is massively investing in rural areas and will continue doing so within the Cohesion policy. She also stressed the fact that rural development is depending not only on farming and agriculture but on diversified businesses in rural areas. She also spoke of the five policy objectives of the regional development, a Smarter Europe, a Greener Europe, a more Connected Europe, a more Social Europe and a Europe Closer to citizens and stated that the objective a Europe Closer to citizens is all about local development.

At the end of the session Mr Radim Srsen, vice chair in the NAT-committee, spoke of the opportunity for LAGs to use the Recovery fund. He also stressed that the Multifund CLLD is a great tool in the recovery from the Covid 19 crisis.

Marion Eckardt and Mr Niedermoser finished the session by stressing that resilient rural areas are made of engaged actors in a bottom-up approach - and that LEADER/CLLD is a well used method with 30 years of experience, we are ready to contribute to the LTVRA!

