

***Definition of a bottom-up rural development model as a governance instrument through the analysis of the rural development political strategies in the United Kingdom and in Italy.***

***The cases of four Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Scotland, England, Emilia-Romagna region and Puglia region***

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the comparative evolution of rural development policies and Local Action Groups (LAGs) in UK and in Italy in a multi-level governance framework. It highlights the increasing importance of a bottom-up development approach. In the last few years, it has become widely accepted that there is a need to promote diversified and integral rural development with a strong emphasis on local solutions for local problems. National institutions cannot solve rural development problems alone. To this end, development policies for rural areas support the building of 'local capacity' and cooperation in partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors with the aim to contribute to the implementation of rural development policies at various levels, supplementing decisions taken by national parliaments and local elected councils. In this context, LAGs and in particular their public-private local partnerships have become common practice in the governance of rural areas. This governance operates within the European Union LEADER approach (*Liaison entre action de développement de l'économie rurale - Links between actions for the development of the rural economy*) as a tool designed to generate the development of rural areas at local level. They operate within a structure and are responsible for devising and implementing rural development strategies for their areas by implying consensus, openness and an invitation to participate.

The thesis draws on the experience of four EU LEADER LAGs/public private partnerships in order to understand the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder their development and their workings. This thesis, using the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) approach, asks what are the conditions that facilitate the LAG approach, which flows from the bottom-up and utilises partnership approaches. In order to establish the implications of the LAG practices for rural development through a case study approach, the following main objectives for this research have been established: 1) to explore the utility of EU strategies for rural development; 2) to explain how LAGs structure, institutional arrangements and working are positioned in the layers of MLG framework when managing rural development; 3) to carry out a comparative evaluation of the LAGs working in the different nations and their subnational contexts. More specifically, the thesis conducts a focused case study comparison of four LAGs, operating in the United Kingdom (Argyll and the Islands LAG – Scotland and Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways LAG – England) and in Italy (Delta 2000 LAG – Emilia Romagna Region and Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG –

Puglia Region). Each LAG has its own history, actors and specific ways to approach local partnerships. This comparison involves key elements (such as the reasons, influences and factors attributed to the initiation of the partnership, the involvement of the partners, and the difficulties and constraints found in the partnerships' operations), as well as the common points and key differences of the politics at European, national and local level that shape each LAG.

The empirical findings for each case study are based on fieldwork involving open-ended, qualitative interviews with local actors as well as documentation gathering. The main concerns of this institutional analysis of each case study are the process, the mechanism and condition of development, and the links between different elements such as policies and the role of actors.

Some significant findings from the case studies are summarized in relation to these themes: the key characteristics and the outcomes associated with the LAG working mechanisms and what do we draw about the emergence, operation and performance of local partnerships.

The core argument of the thesis is that the partnership approach inherent in the LAG approach has given the rural development actors a governance platform to help increase beneficial interactions and economic activity in each of these LAGs, but it is the bottom-up leadership of key local actors, seizing opportunities provided by the EU funding, which have been the most important factors for the LAG successes.

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## Foreword

*...Europe – and particularly rural Europe – is still a continent of incalculable variety and richness in places and in human cultures, and still full of distinct and self-aware local communities. But this diversity, this localness, took a terrible battering.*

*In the 20th century, because of two world wars, the growth of totalitarian or centralist regimes, the forced or spontaneous movement of peoples, and then the rise of a global culture purveyed through the mass media and increasingly powerful global commerce. In the face of these forces, many rural communities have suffered grievous weakening of their services, of their economies, of their population (as young people move away) and hence of their morale and their pride. Other communities fell into apathy because of centralist or communist government, and became dependent, expecting action to come from government rather than from themselves. Others again lost their 'roots' because of forced movement of population, so that people arrived in places which carried no collective memory for them.*

*Such weakness, such apathy, such disconnection do not offer fertile ground for efforts to strengthen rural societies and communities, which is what rural development aims to do. If all the action lies with government, that action will be guided by what government thinks the people need or want and that may be way off the mark. More important, the results of that work will not be truly 'owned' by the people.*

*Over the last 25 years, there has been a growing realisation that rural development will only truly work if it is done, not to the people but by the people for the people. Government alone cannot make it work. The people must be involved, not simply as receivers of government action, but as prime movers of their own development...<sup>1</sup>*

*Prof. Dr Michael Dower<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dower, M. (2011) Extract of the Foreword 'Let us take our future into our own hands' in Šoster, G. and Halhead, V. (eds.) *Rural Parliaments: emerging participative democracy*. Brussels; Ljutomer: PREPARE Network – Partnership for Rural Europe, page 6.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Dr. Michael Dower is one of the most visible personalities in the European civil society, initiator of the Prepare Network and promoter of the fair dialogue between governments and nongovernmental organisations striving for integrated rural development.



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# Chapter 1. Overview of research, theory and methodology

## 1.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the importance of promoting integrated rural development in Europe, with a strong emphasis on local solutions for local problems, has been widely acknowledged.

National institutions cannot solve rural development problems alone. This has led to the formation of partnerships that see cooperation between the public and private sectors so they can contribute to the implementation of rural development policies at various levels, supplementing decisions taken by national parliaments and local elected councils.

The impetus for working in partnership has been given at European Union and national level as a participative strategy to create and implement local development strategies to which financial resources are allocated. The objective behind these partnerships is that, by bringing together in a particular rural area resources and a range of relevant actors drawn from the various level of sectors and facilitating cooperation and consensus, the complex process of development at social, cultural and economic level could be better promoted than it would have been by individual agencies working alone.<sup>3</sup> Through this governance framework centred around the local partnership process, the rural development issues (such as the agricultural industry, economic diversity, land-use practices and social inclusion) are considered in a more effective manner when compared to that offered through the coordination of direct government.<sup>4</sup>

The present research explores the comparative evolution of rural development policies in the UK and Italy using a multi-level governance framework. It highlights the increasing importance of a bottom-up development approach and allows us to explore governance issues of how this process can benefit both the policy-making and the rural development outcomes. More specifically, the thesis draws on the experience of four public private partnerships in order to understand the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder their development and their workings, and the thesis

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<sup>3</sup> Cavazzani, A. and Moseley, M. (2001) *The Practice of Rural Development Partnerships in Europe, 24 Case Studies in Six European Countries. PRIDE Research Report*. Cosenza: Rubbettino Editore Srl.

<sup>4</sup> Evans, N., Morris, C. and Winter, M. (2002) 'Conceptualizing agriculture: a critique of post-productivism as the new orthodoxy', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 26(3), pp. 313-332.

evaluates the added value that flows from the bottom-up approach to local development process of the areas they serve compared to the more conventional way.

The main assumption is that rural support measures become more effective if decision-making and implementation are locally embedded. Therefore, when correctly applied, the bottom-up approach can lead to added value because of a better identification of local needs and solutions, more commitment of stakeholders and a greater scope of innovation which manifests itself in:

- *improved social and human capital* which includes features of social organisations such a build-up of the local identity, motivation, establishment of new networks, increased level of trust among actors, development of new skills and capacities that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit and make the community more resilient and adaptive to changes;
- *improved local and multi-level governance* in the implementation of the strategy which comprises participatory decision-making, processes and involvement mechanisms through which public, economic and civil society stakeholders as well as local people, articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences in order to manage public affairs at all levels in a collaborative manner;
- *additional results and impacts* of the rural development strategy implementation such as more suitable and innovative businesses and jobs, better tailored infrastructure to meet local needs, as compared to the implementation without the partnership and to address complex economic and social issues.

Nevertheless, the assumed added value of the bottom-up approach has not been convincingly demonstrated so far as well as challenges and examples of added value are not only strictly connected to one individual form. The diverse and scattered evidence might partly be due to the context dependence of implementation and success of rural development policies at local level.<sup>5</sup>

Despite their inherent diversity, the local partnership actors work together within a common governance framework for rural development. Their role is to implement rural development

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<sup>5</sup> Berriet-Sollicec, M., Laidin, C., Lépicier, D., Pham, H. V., Pollermann, K., Raue, P. and Schnaut, G. (2015) 'The LEADER process as a European policy for local development: A comparison of the implementation in three European member states', paper presented at the '55th European Regional Science Association (ERSA) Congress'. Lisbon, 25-28 August 2015.

policy with approaches and techniques promoted by governments and through funding programmes at European and national level. The interaction of these actors in such partnerships generates a policy subsystem (defined as the group of interested stakeholders focused on a particular policy area who may operate across various levels of government),<sup>6</sup> which creates the definition of problems, the policy values and priorities, and the actual practice used to achieve the policy priorities.

In this context, the European Union's LEADER approach (*Liaison entre action de développement de l'économie rurale - Links between actions for the development of the rural economy*) is a tool designed to generate the development of rural areas at local level. The approach does this through Local Action Groups (LAGs) and in particular their local partnerships '*who are assumed to share a common degree of commitment to specific policy objectives at a strategic level to specific policy objectives, at a strategic or delivery level*'.<sup>7</sup> Three types of members from the various sectors are defined by the EU policy: the public sector is represented by the local authorities' representatives having a mandate from local elections, the private sector is represented by the agriculture, handicraft, tourism and enterprises trade associations and the third sector which is represented by the associations working in the field of rural development and community regeneration. They operate within a structure and are responsible for devising and implementing development strategies for their areas by gathering consensus, openness and local people invitation to participate. Although the focus is on local level partnerships, this LEADER governance system is also partly a result of a 'top-down' process where EU and member states' institutions impose the partnership model as a mandatory requirement for funding the local development projects.<sup>8</sup> The concept of participation is connected to partnership working, which is presented by academics, politicians, policy-makers and practitioners as inherent and imperative to the preparation and implementation of EU rural development policies. However, there still exists a limited understanding and knowledge about how the partnerships work in practice, the perceived benefits and project planning. Despite the generation of many studies on rural

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<sup>6</sup> Sabatier, P. A. (1988) 'An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein', *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 21(2), pp. 129-168.

<sup>7</sup> Shortall, S. and Shucksmith, M. (1998a) 'Integrated rural development issues arising from the Scottish experience', *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 6(1), page 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ward, N. (2002) 'Partnership in Rural Regeneration', *Local Economy*, Vol. 17(3), pp. 256-259.

partnerships, relatively few have focused on their processes as the impact of rural policies depends not only on the local context of a rural area (including its economic, social and environmental conditions) but also on the logic of how the partnership works.<sup>9</sup>

*'Such studies are highly needed because the impact of rural policies will not only depend on the economic, social and environmental characteristics of a particular rural area but will also be highly dependent on the logic of partnership working at the local level'*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the formal assessments of the funding programme implementation do not refer to those wider governance dynamics arising from the application of these approaches as the assessments continue to focus on examining the financial management system and measuring project outputs.

According to Lowden and Sullivan,<sup>11</sup> for example, partnership can be a 'means' for seeking the view of citizens on particular topics while participation can be an 'outcome' for the mobilization of the communities and an 'ingredient' of the partnership working. These dynamics can occur because the stakeholders, organizations and citizens including communities and elected councillors are the key partners that work together on a range of issues.

*'By sharing information and building consensus, it is intended that better decisions will be made, leading to the better use of local resources, the smoother implementation of policies or service developments, and a greater sense of shared ownership among all stakeholders – including local people'*.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the local actors' involvement can be considered not only as a part of the partnership working, but also as a key indicator of its performance in terms of: developing new skills and confidence within the communities to which they belong; the level of activity and engagement of these communities; and of the trust and local knowledge necessary to build community capacity.

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<sup>9</sup> McAreavey, R. (2006) 'Getting close to the action the micro-politics of rural development', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 46(2), pp. 85-103.

<sup>10</sup> Derkzen, P. and Bock, B. (2009) 'Partnership and role perception, three case studies on the meaning of being a representative in rural partnerships', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, Vol. 27(1), page 76.

<sup>11</sup> Lowden, V. and Sullivan, H. (2004) 'Like a horse and a carriage or a fish on a bicycle: how well do local partnerships and public participation go together!', *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 30(1), pp. 51-73.

<sup>12</sup> Lowden, V. and Sullivan, H. (2004), page 58.

Important questions arise about who participates and how the partnership works as a governance instrument at the interface of state and society. *'Participation, then, necessarily takes place through representation and the possibilities for empowerment and getting one's voice heard are then dependent on the quality of representation. Therefore, participation and representation are interconnected notions that are both relevant to the study of partnerships'*.<sup>13</sup>

## **1.2 Overview of the research**

### *Aims*

The thesis, using the Multi-Level Governance framework (MLG), conducts a comparative analysis of the experience of four EU LEADER LAGs/public private partnerships operating in UK (Argyll and the Islands LAG – Scotland and Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways LAG – England) and in Italy (Delta 2000 LAG – Emilia Romagna Region and Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG – Puglia Region) in order to understand the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate the development of the partnerships and their operation in the 2007-2013 programming period. This thesis therefore has the following primary research question. Using the MLG approach, what are the conditions that facilitate the LAG approach, which flows from the bottom-up and utilises partnership approaches? The core argument is that the partnership approach inherent in the LAG approach has given the rural development actors a governance platform to help increase beneficial interactions and economic activity in each of these LAGs, but it is the bottom-up leadership of key local actors, seizing opportunities provided the EU funding which have been the most important factors.

Although the existence of EU guidance on rural partnerships creation means that the LAGs exhibit many similar characteristics, each LAG has its own history and specific way to approach local partnership working. This is due to the national and local context, particularly in relation to the political and the local management structures and the power distribution within the local government.<sup>14</sup> The ability of the actors to affect the policy-making processes

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<sup>13</sup> Derkzen, P. and Bock, B. (2009), page 77.

<sup>14</sup> Derkzen, P. (2010) 'Rural partnerships in Europe - A differentiated view from a country perspective: the Netherlands and Wales', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 17(1), pp. 17-30.



varies as a consequence of factors, such as the existing cultural values, institutionalized policy practices, ideas and finally the regulations to be implemented. Even if local actors involvement was designed to enhance democracy, and although a number of countries have decentralized authority to a lower tier, the empirical findings suggest that, in some member states, the central institutions continue to preserve their influence and shape outcomes.<sup>15</sup> LAGs governance can be considered as the pooling of resources in terms of local interest to face economic and social challenges within the rural area. The LEADER approach is intended to serve as an effective regulatory framework process. It is first established at EU level to ensure an integrated and cooperative approach and then it passes to the member states that receive guidelines for its implementation in line with the EU legislation. The LAG formation process at the local level is guided by each individual member state albeit under the observance of the European Commission. This ensures that the state has a position to be able to shape the policy process of the partnership despite the discourses emphasizing the potential principles of participation and great optimism. The relationship between the state and the LAG will be analysed more closely using my empirical data.

Although researchers have carried out studies of these partnerships in EU states, there have been no detailed empirical and comparative studies of their specific nature and context since 2001. As this was an under-researched area, I position my thesis to fill in this research gap in the literature, to provide some original empirical research and to aim to update the comparative analysis and outputs of the PRIDE Research Project (*Partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe*).<sup>16</sup> This Project was carried out during the period 1999-2001 and brought together researchers to establish what was known about rural development partnerships in eight EU countries (United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg) in order to identify the key aspects of their emergence,

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<sup>15</sup> Kull, M. (2014) *European integration and rural development. Actors, institutions and power*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

<sup>16</sup> 1) Esparcia, J., Moseley, M. and Noguera, J. (2000) *Exploring rural development partnerships in Europe. An analysis of 330 partnerships across eight EU countries*. Valencia: UDERVAL. 2) Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999) *Local partnerships and rural development in Europe: a literature review of practice and theory*. Cheltenham: Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Countryside and Community Research Unit. 3) Cavazzani, A. and Moseley, M. (2001) *The Practice of Rural Development Partnerships in Europe. 24 Case Studies in Six European Countries. PRIDE Research Report*. Cosenza: Rubbettino Srl.

organization, management and performance. The study represents a pioneering attempt to evaluate the role of partnerships. The research findings provided evidence of the European and national policies' role in establishing partnerships for rural development and highlights similarities and differences of the political-economic and institutional contexts between the eight countries. However, according to Larner, *'(t)he weakness of the PRIDE research programme ... is the apparent lack of theoretical framework that would generate more rigorous analysis of the empirical research findings ...The PRIDE research programme clearly has the potential to make a major contribution to the rapidly growing academic and policy literature on partnerships, however the analytical work required to distil and highlight this research contribution has not yet been done'*.<sup>17</sup> According to Bristow, *'there is no reference to the concept of governance...in terms of capturing the systemic interconnectedness among government, civil society and the modes of political and economic coordination'*.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, I decided that, given the limited knowledge about local partnerships working in rural development and the characteristics of local partnership practice and capability to deliver rural development, this research has the aim to fill this gap through a comparative analysis, providing a detailed exploratory study focusing on the longitudinal observation of case studies.

#### *Objectives and research questions*

In order to establish the implications of the LAG practices for rural development through a case study approach, the following main objectives for this research have been established:

1) to explore the utility of EU strategies for rural development; 2) to explain how the LAG structure and the institutional arrangements are positioned in the layers of Multi-Level Governance framework when managing rural development; 3) to carry out a comparative evaluation of the LAGs working in the different nations and their subnational contexts.

With respect to my research, I have identified four key secondary questions to help me achieve these aims and answer the primary research question. These are as follows:

1. What conclusions do we draw about the emergence and the composition of local partnerships?

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<sup>17</sup> Larner, W. (2004) 'Book reviews', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 20(3), page 377.

<sup>18</sup> Bristow, G. (2001) 'Book reviews', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 8(1), page 88.

2. What are the key characteristics of the LAGs' working mechanisms employed to address rural development?
3. What considerations do we draw about the outcomes and performance deriving from the LAGs working in rural development?
4. What is the added value of the LAGs that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach to local development process of the areas they serve compared to the more conventional governance approaches?

To assist in the development of a response to these questions, the thesis takes the following main actions:

- to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for assessing rural development policies across countries and regions;
- to examine what is a LAG and what are its arrangements currently employed to deliver rural development;
- to establish what are the implications of the LAG practice in the rural development through a case study approach.

The empirical research is concerned first with exploring the mechanisms employed and the processes involved in the practice of local partnership working.

The mechanisms and processes characterizing the partnership are deduced from the literature review, an examination of documents, the use of semi-structured open-ended interviews with a variety of key actors, and attendance at LAG meetings. Relying essentially on individual perceptions and written sources, and given the issues that characterise the investigation of partnership practice (including for example such issues as 'motivation', 'representation', 'mobilisation' and 'interaction'), the analysis of the material collected is predominantly of a qualitative nature.

In adopting this perspective, particular attention was given to a variety of issues including the context within which the practice is taking place, and the reasons, influences and factors that contributed to the initiation of the practice of local partnerships. The thesis particularly considers these issues:

- the organisation, structuring, and management of the local partnership practice;
- the partners, their motivations, involvement, role and actions;
- the place and scale of the local partnership practice as well as the difficulties and constraints of this practice.

In addition, the empirical research is concerned with examining and describing the outcomes of the practice of local partnership, both expected and resultant, reflecting the views and attitudes of the partners involved. It was expected that:

- the cases will allow a 'bottom-up exploration', meaning the exploration of the different processes involved in the local partnership practice engaging with the local community;
- the practice of local partnership lay in the preparation and supervision of a strategy for the development of a locally defined rural area;
- the practice of local partnership is characterized by a coalition of interests from the public, private and voluntary sector and from more than one level of government.

Since the multi-level governance academic literature has very little focus on these types of rural partnerships, I will provide empirical data that will serve as the basis for my analysis of the LAGs governance and creating my own narrative.

### **1.3 The research design**

#### **1.3.1 *The documentary research***

The first step of the study was undertaken through a documentary research designed to establish and appraise the existing knowledge regarding: the rural development theories, the local partnerships practice, and the EU LEADER approach and regulatory system. This enabled me to clarify the conceptual governance framework, what was already known and what had still to be investigated, and the key questions and hypotheses for the subsequent research. A review of the relevant documents and existing literature helped to articulate the theories of those authors who worked on these issues in the past and to identify where my work is original and constitutes an improvement in this broader context. More specifically, the review raised a number of concerns about the partnerships phenomenon and confirmed that little rigorous study had been undertaken to assess what value added their operation provides. As will be explained in Chapter 3, this gap relates to the funding-driven nature of many partnerships, the fact that few of them are locally grown and the difficult questions of their legitimacy and accountability.

As I am looking at changes over time, I used my analytical perspective to study the evolution of the LEADER approach. Further research involving the collection of official documents and scientific publications introduced me to the institutional framework of the implementation

process and to the identification of the perceived outcomes of the partnership practice. As the policy processes are dynamic in nature, the results presented here reflect only the situation occurring at the time of the data collection. The official and non-official documents on the LEADER approach and LAGs were fundamental to my research, framing and supporting the narratives in my case studies. The focus on the LEADER approach enabled me to get to its core principles and to establish what was important to rural governance. The prime focus within this analysis was the 'bottom-up' principle and what it means in terms of rural development governance. I also used the data information of the previous LEADER programming periods in order to identify how its principles were founded. These issues were found through the academic literature by which I can understand the governance framework, how it came to be and the reasons it may have emerged. This is further discussed in Chapter 4.

### **1.3.2 The case studies approach**

#### **1.3.2.1 *Country case selection***

The thesis has selected two states, the United Kingdom and Italy, which recent decades have both witnessed a wide application of local partnership models for addressing rural development. The UK and Italy provide interesting, contrasting case studies because of their different institutional structures at sub-national level, their different traditions in relation to national policy-making in the sphere of rural development, and their different approaches to and interactions with the EU policy-making framework. These clear divergences make Italy and the UK valuable case studies for the purposes of analysing the practice of partnerships and how and why these succeed or fail in different institutional settings. Whilst evolving in two different environments due to their respective national context, interesting parallels can be drawn from the practice of partnership. Such a comparative examination is chosen as a means of establishing some general principles of local partnership practice within the context of rural development.

In choosing to incorporate a UK-Italy comparison in my research, I took into consideration the role and importance of the national, political institutional and cultural framework of each case country in the context of rural development and the way partnerships emerge,

develop and are ruled as they '*seem to reflect deep rooted traditions and cultures in the business of government and different histories of state formation*'.<sup>19</sup>

Rural policies in both states are negotiated and delivered at a more decentralized level through partnerships that have some power over domestic and European funding for rural development management.

We can see that in the UK '*there was a national rural policy, with the recognition of the need to better integrate the evolving regional and local dimension into rural policy and exploit the linkages between the environment and social economic activity*'.<sup>20</sup> This signified a series of important policy implications which were considered less in sectoral terms and more in socio-economic activities, a concern for people and communities in rural areas, an acknowledgement of the diversity of rural areas which reflects differing pressures and circumstances as well as distinct political and governmental structures. These implications are confirmed by a large number of studies on integrated rural development and on the impact or evaluation of partnerships as a form of governance which has moved away from national and local government administration across many policy communities and programme areas, and has incorporated a diverse range of quasi-government bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They have a long history, driven by longstanding frustrations with the fragmentation of rural government, notably the well-known division between land-use planning and resource planning.

In Italy there is not a national rural development policy as it only derives from the EU agricultural policy and regional development framework. Previously, the problem of the development of disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban, characterized by the deep gap between the North, rich and industrialized, and the South, poor and rural, was addressed at the central level with a substantially uniform and a partially participatory approach for the definition of intervention priorities and the resource allocation. The approach operated without taking into account the diversity of the various territorial contexts.

Italy does not have a solid tradition of partnership because until the late 1990s the policies for economic development were influenced by theories inspired by a top-down conception

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<sup>19</sup> Newman, P. and Verpraet, G. (1999) 'The Impacts of partnership on Urban Governance: Conclusions from Recent European Research', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 33(5), page 487.

<sup>20</sup> Pearce, G., Ayres, S. and Tricker, M. (2005) 'Decentralisation and devolution to the English regions: Assessing the implications for rural policy and delivery', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 21(2), page 199.

of governing. It was only with the diffusion of local development and the bottom-up approach that the practice of partnership became a feature of governance at local level. Therefore, Italy has a strong tradition of research into territorial development due to the presence of socio-economic differences between an industrialized North and a mainly agrarian South. But there is not a specific tradition of studies on rural development and no systematic academic studies have been carried out on the implementation of the EU rural development policy with a focus on LEADER approach apart from the internal implementation and evaluation reports conducted by regional and national institutions. Research and its theoretical elaboration on this issue has been developed only recently as a consequence of an increased interest following the reform of the EU rural development policies. By analysing some publications on the topic, certain observations can be made about the Italian experience within LEADER and the working of its LAGs. Anyway, according to Osti *'it is not possible yet to generalize about the experience of development processes at local level...as...there is an indeterminacy in the models used to analyse LEADER and a slowness to elaborate new ones'*.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the political and administrative organization and the decentralization of power, the two counties show significant national similarities and differences.

In terms of similarities, they integrated government department by bringing together agriculture, environment and rural affairs and set arrangements to help rural stakeholders develop policy with central government.

In terms of differences, in both countries there are National Strategic Plans (NSPs) which guide rural development policy. The UK NSP provides the basis for the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The Italian NSP provides the basis for the regional Rural Development Programmes. But, even if the rural development policy implementation apparently does not differ, the lack of regions in Scotland and in England means that their relative rural policies are highly centralized compared to Italy.

In Scotland, although devolution granted a high autonomy in designing its rural policy, rural affairs are a matter overseen by the Scottish Parliament. *'The problem is the integration of policies at local level, finding how they mutually reinforce each other or are in conflict... that*

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<sup>21</sup> Osti, G. (2000) 'LEADER and Partnerships: The case of Italy', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40(2), page 174.

*can also give feedback to the centre on possible improvements and new needs, adapt policy packages to local conditions*'.<sup>22</sup> This approach also makes it difficult to reconstruct after the fact of the rural policy's overall vision, in terms of budget expenditure and actions implemented in rural areas. The same thing is true in England where, due to the disappearance of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Rural Development Programme of England is now delivered by DEFRA since 2011. Thus, the return to a national programme causes the removal of the former regional flexibilities that helped deliver approaches attuned to regional circumstances.

In the case of Italy, even if the policy priorities are formulated at national level, the regions are responsible for the planning and implementation of the rural development programmes and the state, and its Agriculture Ministry has no constitutional legitimacy to take action in regional policy priorities. Regions implement rural development policies through a bottom-up development model that embraces the aspect of rurality in terms of territorial concentration, integration and concertation with partnership at local level based on the cooperation between the different local government levels (municipalities, provinces, parks, regions).

But, while there are key differences in the British and Italian national and subnational institutional structures which mediate EU agricultural policies, at the level of the LAGs there are many similarities despite the different institutional, political and cultural contexts in which they emerge. This indicates that EU policies such as LEADER can help shape local governance structures.

As each geographic area has its own history, the numerous parties involved may be drawn from various institutional and policy frameworks. They may have specific ways of approaching local partnership processes in terms of relationships and interactions; only an observer grounded in the local situation can make sense of the different mechanisms and processes involved and the complex links.

The implementation of rural policies at local level both in UK and in Italy is indeed carried out toward an integrated bottom-up development model that embraces the broader aspect of rurality in terms of territorial concentration, integration and concertation with partnership at local level based on a horizontal cooperation between the different local

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<sup>22</sup> OECD (2008a) *OECD Rural Policy Reviews. Scotland, UK*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 92.



government levels and socioeconomic actors and at vertical level between central government and institutions.

The rural development partnerships share common issues and similar trajectories of development but the context, rural issues, developmental challenges and institutional structures clearly differ. Although there are many differences particularly in relation to the political and local management culture and the local structures and the distribution of power within the local government, both experiences share similar issues, arguments and expectations.

Consequently, while it is important to consider the national political and institutional context in relation to partnerships, it is also necessary to go beyond contrasts and parallels and to concentrate on their internal dynamics. The empirical investigation therefore consists of LAG case studies.

### **1.3.2.2 LAG case study rationale**

The general argument for using case studies is that this approach provides access to the detailed internal dynamics allowing an understanding of the overall process. This provides insight into the historical evolution and the complexities involved in the forming, developing and sustaining of partnerships.<sup>23</sup>

Case studies are ideally suited to research questions that require in-depth descriptions, pose 'how' or 'why' questions about the complex working of local partnerships (their contexts, processes, outputs, outcomes and explanations) and enable us to explain the roles of actors and the critical incidents. This approach typically focuses on a very small number of cases and employs multiple sources in order to investigate a real-life context focusing on concrete people and events.<sup>24</sup>

The literature confirms that a small number of case studies can still give insights and understanding without pretending to be the basis for wide ranging generalization.<sup>25</sup>

According to Denzin and Lincoln, the '*case study can usefully be seen as a small step toward*

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<sup>23</sup> Moseley, M. (2003) *Rural Development: Principles and Practice*. First edition. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>24</sup> Yin, R. (2014) *Case Study research, Design and Methods*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

<sup>25</sup> Robson, C. (1993) *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

*grand generalization, but generalization should not always be emphasized in all research' as 'damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or create history runs so strong that the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself'.<sup>26</sup>*

The empirical findings for each case study are based on fieldwork through data collection and appropriate analysis (interpretation and reporting techniques that are not available from any other source), as well as involving open-ended, qualitative interviews with local officials and other potentially important actors, observation at partnership meetings and document collection (administrative documents, feasibility reports, progress and evaluation reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, newspaper/magazine articles). Carrying out qualitative data collection methods requires us to understand the reasons behind each local development strategy, given the freedom of each LAG to make its strategic choices within the framework of the EU Programme rules.

The four case studies represent some of the diversity of the LEADER implementation through public-private partnerships, but they are not representative of all LAGs operating in the countries/regions to which they belong. As the practice of Local Action Groups concerns a wide variety of local areas involved in rural development action, I decided to identify two representative LAGs (one LAG in a marginal region and one LAG in a more prosperous one) in each country according to the official data of their Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013.<sup>27</sup>

The selection of the LAG case studies used the following criteria: the examples had to present an active history of public and private initiatives, were well established partnerships and involved clear evidence of action on the area they serve. They are examples that are promoted by their residents and the local authorities as best practice at European, national and local level.

Hence, in a search for a case study in UK and following the abovementioned criteria, I selected as a case study a prosperous region: the Yorkshire area and the practice of the

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<sup>26</sup> Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1998) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. London: Sage Publications, page 91.

<sup>27</sup> See the territorial analysis section of the Rural Development Programmes for England, for Scotland, for Emilia Romagna region and for Puglia region 2007-2013.

Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways (CWWW) LAG.<sup>28</sup> I chose as a case study in a marginal region the south-west of Scotland and the practice of the Argyll and the Islands LAG.<sup>29</sup> They both showed evidence of an active history of rural development initiatives and partnership working experiences.

Concerning Italy, the Emilia-Romagna region is considered to be one of the most prosperous region in Italy, its Local Action Groups are judged by the Italian National Rural Network to be those ones with the most political and functional autonomy as they were given the faculty to choose the eligible areas in which to intervene as well as the socio-economic fields for their development initiatives. Furthermore, the capacity to combine the political and functional autonomy gives these LAGs an institutional prestige because they are considered as competent by both the regional administration and local stakeholders.

As the second Italian case study, the marginal area of Puglia region distinguishes itself by being one of the most advanced southern Italian regions in implementing a bottom-up development model that embraces the broader aspect of rurality in terms of concertation with the different local government levels, the socioeconomic actors and government and institutions.

In these different contexts, the Delta 2000 LAG in Emilia-Romagna and Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG in Puglia represent successful implementation experiences of the LEADER approach because they succeeded in stimulating self-governance processes by involving the local population, the private operators and the local authorities along with higher institutional levels.

In adopting the case study approach, particular attention was given to a variety of issues including: the reasons and factors attributed to the initiation of the partnership, the organization and management of the local partnership practice, the partners and their motivation and involvement, the difficulties and constraints, their workings and the added value to the development of the rural areas they serve. The cases allowed a focused comparison of the rural areas in terms of similarities and differences and involve isolating

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<sup>28</sup> Ekosgen (2010a) 'National Impact Assessment of LEADER. The Story of LEADER in England', report commissioned by DEFRA. Sheffield: Ekosgen.

<sup>29</sup> Ekosgen (2010b) 'National Impact Assessment of LEADER. The LEADER Approach in the Devolved Nations', report commissioned by DEFRA. Sheffield: Ekosgen.

key elements, common points and differences, as well as the evaluation of the European, national and local level politics.

The first part of the empirical work was a desk-based review of the differing policy contexts of the last 20 years; the material found helped to explain the differences in the asset-based tools and the approaches used in the UK and in Italy. The second part of the empirical effort consisted of fieldwork involving interviews, observation at meetings and documentary analysis. This investigation allowed the identification of various explanations for the recent increase in the practice of local partnership in rural development, which are mainly associated with the local context of the rural development process in terms of opportunities, the issues to be addressed, and the mobilization of local actors.

Some significant findings from the case studies are summarized in relation to these themes: the outcomes, achievements and benefits that could be attributed to the local partnerships working in rural development and what constitutes the limits to the local partnership practice to achieve the objectives of their local development strategies. In addition, as the fieldwork concerns the examination and description of the outcomes of the local partnerships practice, the intention is to throw further light on the key issues of their formation and operation in rural development.

### **1.3.2.3 *The desk-based review***

To understand the framework of policies, official documents from the EU, national institutions, local authorities, and public agencies were collected and analysed. As these official documents are usually the final versions of policies or programmes, the process of transformation through which initial ideas were adapted is often unpublished. To find this missing information before and after the official documents were published, internal reports and minutes of meetings were gathered during the fieldwork.

As the two UK case studies were less familiar to me, I had two preliminary meetings with a representative of DEFRA - Rural Communities Policy Unit in London and with a representative of the Rural Communities & Rural Policy Team of the Scottish Government in Edinburgh. The two meetings were very precious for understanding the different contexts involved in the national/devolved regional management of the English and Scottish rural development policies.

In May 2012, I made contacts with the key local representatives in both UK and Italy. As a result, initial contacts through email and informal meetings were organized with the Project managers of the four LAGs; these meetings allowed me to confirm the suitability of the case studies. All the representatives welcomed this research and assured me of their support in helping my access to contacts, documents and partnership meetings, the main sources of evidence that have been retained for this research.

I conducted a review of documents available for each case study. The documentary analysis consisted of official documents from the national, regional and local levels, local development strategies of the four LAGs, governance framework, brochures, annual and final implementing reports, mid-term evaluation reports and final independent evaluation reports in relation to the studied cases. The purpose of this written material was: to provide evidence on the origins and historical evolution of the LAGs through different phases of formation and operation; to become familiar with titles and names, spelling and the partnership practice before carrying out the interviews; and to identify the participants who played any particular role in the partnership.

The exploration of the documents helped me to gain a broad understanding of the main processes that were involved in the development of each local partnership and to identify the initial aim and objectives of the partnership. It also provided unexpected material (e.g. correspondence, minutes of meetings, press cuttings), which presented the view of the rural area and an indication of the partners at the time of the partnership formation and operation. It also gave indications of the interactions taking place.

The documentary analysis covered all four regions of the case studies and provided a historical context for the case studies in a rapidly changing policy environment and insight for discovering future plans. Whilst the wider analysis revealed some variation between regions, there were also many similarities. The same patterns of events, group of actors and types of documents existed in each region, suggesting that there would be diminishing returns to add further regions in the case selection. The documentary analysis had an explicit function in the data collection and was useful in terms of verification of the spellings of organization that might have been mentioned during an interview. Secondary data sources were useful in providing context for the case study work. I used secondary data when writing the interview prompt sheets. Some documents were also helpful in indicating potential areas of discussion that might prove contentious. I also prepared in a similar way before

undertaking participant observation so I was aware of at least some of the activities and operations of the organization.

#### **1.3.2.4 The interviews**

Interviews form the cornerstone of my research. Face to face, open-ended interviews were more suitable than a questionnaire approach as they allowed me to investigate the interviewees' experience and opinion in depth. *'Many important research questions in politics can be answered only if we can learn how certain individuals or types of individuals think and act...Answering these types of questions requires elite interviewing rather than surveys of the general population'*.<sup>30</sup>

In order to identify the key individuals within the LAG, I used the preliminary information, the documentation already collected and the early contacts with the LAG project managers. Then I proceeded to identify the main people involved in each partnership and also the possible external actors that are referred to as an elite whose knowledge and opinions that could help answer my research questions.

I selected the key interviewees on the basis that they represented a sector or a group in the rural policy field and on the varying roles and responsibilities they had in the LAG. I used a snowballing method,<sup>31</sup> in which a few appropriate individuals are asked to recommend other people who would be useful to speak to; they may even help to make contact, which was one way of overcoming issues of gaining access to key interviewees. As access was the start of building trust and ensuring that the interviewees speak openly and freely, I gave careful consideration to the most appropriate ways of making the first contact.

I asked them to name the key actors they thought were influential or whose behaviour they viewed as striking. Interviewing key actors allowed me to investigate the findings from different sources, for instance whether what people or organization claimed to do in a document or an interview was what I observed them doing in practice. Representatives from the different organisations that were taking an active part in each local partnership practice were therefore selected. Such people were identified among the partners themselves, staff members, employed persons in local associations, trade unions and in the local

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<sup>30</sup> Babb, J. (2012) *Empirical Political Analysis*. Harlow: Pearson Education, page 301.

<sup>31</sup> Oppenheim, A. N. (2000) *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. New Edition. London: Continuum.

administration, local entrepreneurs involved as beneficiaries of the partnerships' activities, other possible privileged witnesses and responsible persons involved in the partnership policies definition and implementation.

I elaborated an operational plan for the interviews after early contacts with the responsible persons whose support proved to be invaluable. I also devised a brief sheet describing the project, which I gave to people before agreeing to or in preparation for an interview.

I conducted at least six face-to-face interviews in each case study, beginning with those who were directly involved in the partnership initiation and workings.

The interviews took place in UK (Argyll and the Islands LAG and CWWW LAG) in December 2013 and in Italy (Delta 2000 LAG and Capo S. M. di Leuca LAG) in July 2014 at the time when the LEADER approach 2007-2013 programming period and its activities were about to end and the new 2014-2020 programming period was about to begin. The interviews were held at various locations that were selected by the interviewees: in their place of work, at their own houses, at a pub and sometimes on the sites of their projects (e.g. in a farm) with which they were dealing.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way by using a list of topics and key questions suitable for use both in UK and in Italy to provide a basic list of common topics and designed to explore a wide range of relevant issues. I used interview prompt sheets to act as a guide and ensure key themes were covered, in order to aid comparison. To this end, the choice of the questions reflected the objectives of the research, the findings of the literature review and the data included in the preliminary explorations of the documents and related to the following key issues affecting the case study:

- *Emergence of the partnership.* This reconstruction was important to establish when and why the partnership was initiated, and what were the expectations and perceptions underpinning the partnership. This enabled me to establish the pathways, as well as the anxieties and resistance the partnership faced as it emerged from a specific context, and how the features of that context consequently influenced events.
- *Partnership composition, organization and operation.* The aim would be to explore the partnership as a complex structure in terms of internal organization, responsibilities attribution, the decision-making processes, the means of resolving

conflicts, as well as where the different wills and interests intersected in an attempt to reach agreement and to express a common will.

- *Main objectives, activities and achievements of the partnership.* This would involve the reconstruction of the steps taken for the identification of objectives and the model of development pursued, the establishment of the actions carried out or planned in order to elaborate and approve the rural development programme as well as the activities and policies used to deliver this programme.
- *Assessment/reflections, general conclusions and confidential information.* This would involve assessing the main key strengths, opportunities and weaknesses of the partnerships (and which of them contributed to its success or failure), the outcomes associated in terms of business supported, jobs created, service provided, the opinion of the interviewee about how well the partnership was working, the level of representation expected and achieved, and the role expected and played by partners.

The decision to use semi-structured interviews allowed me to trace the LAG interaction. It was also more appropriate given the wide difference in the knowledge level of the LAG members. Even if the list provided some structure to ensure that all relevant areas were covered, I had the flexibility to adapt the flow and the style of the interview. Therefore, I tended to change some questions when they were not applicable to some of the interviewees, especially those ones concerning the emergence of the partnership when the interviewee was a new member. This gave me the advantage of facilitating comparison, and interviewees were able to emphasize issues they felt to be of particular importance. I also asked numerous unstructured questions with the aim of getting interesting responses to my initial questions. The interviews dealt with the interviewee perceptions of their roles, their responsibility and roles as partnership members and their participation in the decision-making processes. This enabled me to tailor the interview by including the experiences with which they were directly involved. Finally, the list of topics was designed to elicit a description of 'what led to what' and their assessments/reflections.

The interviews gathered information in relation to the interviewee's personal background, their previous experience; their general opinion on the local partnership approach for rural development; their personal motivation and expectations in working partnership and their views on the outcomes/achievements/benefits that they attributed to functioning of the



local partnership. None of the interviewees seemed reticent, and all were very willing to describe their experiences and share their knowledge.

All of the interviews, which lasted between one and two hours each, were taped in full and transcribed into written texts. Some parts of the transcripts that contained little relevant information were condensed and summarized. The verbatim recording was particularly useful for my qualitative analysis as the language was examined closely. If the respondents had any misgivings, the assurance of confidentiality was sufficient as all the interviewees agreed to be recorded. The interviewees were also aware that they could refuse to answer any of my questions. At no point did any of the participants ask me to switch the tape off or to terminate the discussions prematurely, suggesting that their responses were not significantly affected by being recorded.

When reporting my findings, I represented accurately what I observed or I was told during the interviews. In addition to taping the interviews, I also took notes on the context of the interview, how I felt about the research process and ideas for the development of future interviews and analysis. This provided a backup to the tape recorder and also allowed me to note other aspects of the interview which could not be taped or would not be captured on tape. Examples of this include visual actions such as facial expressions and some of the nuances of the speech that were not picked up by the tape recorder or when the pauses, stutters in speech and laughter as well as the intonation of the voice.

#### **1.3.2.5 *Observation at meetings***

Personal interviews were not the only method used to acquire information. I also attended a series of informal partnership meetings where I collected further documents. I introduced myself to the delegates as an academic researcher and a practitioner. My attendance at the meetings was accepted by all participants.

The participant observation provided complementary research material in that I was able to observe the processes of policy-making as well as to read the draft and final texts of the minutes and other documents. The objective in attending the partnership meetings was to observe aspects of local partnership operation, particularly the interaction between

partners, partners' roles and the decision-making processes and implementation of policies, strategies and projects.<sup>32</sup>

I expected to attend a large number of meetings; however, only one meeting per LAG occurred at the time of the fieldwork in either case study. The meetings I attended were the last ones because the 2007-2013 programming period was drawing to close. Nevertheless, the observation of the last meetings still gave me an insight into the decision-making process and how individual actors and organisations interrelated within the partnership.

The main observation categories were: levels of representation; levels of communication; levels of interaction; decision-making mechanisms; and the role played by the participants during the meeting. I witnessed policy-making processes, interactions between individuals and organisations, how decisions were made, the role of partnership members at different levels of hierarchies and how the decision and policies affected the activities of others.

Participant observation also allowed me to gather information from informal discussion and I had access to confidential documents. I was also careful not to divulge confidential information, particularly to other research colleagues and to the people of the case studies. Unlike the interviews, I did not tape meetings, and I took notes only when I returned to the hotel. I took this approach as I did not want the partnership members to feel uncomfortable by my presence.

Besides the meetings I observed in, the exploration of the various minutes from meetings that I did not attend has provided evidence to support the views.

Partnership meetings varied in their nature, form and focus and were represented as a core instrument for informing, balancing different views, to share problems, to find some common solutions and to provide partners with the possibility to present their expectations and projects to be heard and understood. The meetings felt entirely familiar because of my frequent attendance at very similar events as a practitioner, even though most of the attendees were unknown to me.

This research has also suggested that meetings between partners could be the place for personal attacks and unproductive debates, particularly for example when discussions concerned a project which was considered as benefiting some partners more than others or that was not in keeping with their vision of development in the rural area.

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<sup>32</sup> Yin, R. (1994).

The variety of questions discussed during meetings and the general attitude of those involved provided a true willingness of partners to understand and to contribute at their own level, to discussions and decisions and to consider their action as a beneficial approach and mode of functioning. It was observed that, despite the divergence of ideas and existence of conflicts, interaction between partners resulted in a number of decisions and the definition of initiatives that received explicit common agreement and support.

A document collection (administrative documents, financial statements, feasibility, progress and evaluation reports, agenda and minutes of meetings) was carried out systematically during the meetings. Furthermore, I collected not only any useful documents produced by the partnership, but also any other document issued by other actors in the area, whether they were beneficiaries, institutions or individual partners. I also collected any official text relating to the organization and working of the partnership in question such as newspaper and magazine articles. I was also added to the electronic mailing lists, so I received papers for meetings, minutes, newsletters and other correspondence.

#### ***1.3.2.6 Analysis and interpretation of the fieldwork***

After the transcription of my interviews and the notes I took after the observation at meetings, I began the process of elaborating the narratives. I identified the themes and sub-themes that corresponded with my research key questions. In this case, histories relating to partnership organization and operation, the main objectives and achievements of their local development strategy, participation, governability, accountability and legitimacy were all related to these questions and were used to construct the case study narrative.

It was also possible to establish a direct link between the partnership practice and the outputs in terms of job creation, increase in tourism etc. This required an identification of the nature of the outcomes/benefits attributed to the local partnership practice and also an examination of the extent to which the aims of partnership working are attained, both aims that were specific to the partnership studied and also the expected ones as described in the academic and applied literature. Information was reported in the form of a narrative description and the data collected, whether written or oral, were all treated as written material and analysed.

The analysis resulted in the identification of a set of mechanisms, processes and issues that were seen to characterize the working of local partnership in rural development. Four

thematic areas were inductively identified as the fieldwork progressed and for each a set of analytical paragraphs was elaborated to aid the writing up. They were:

- Description of the LAG area and its rural development strategy;
- Origin and composition of the partnership;
- Organization, operation and involvement;
- Objectives, outcomes, achievements of the local partnership practice.

The starting point in the analysis and interpretation of the fieldwork was provided by the local context which was essential to avoid a simplistic interpretation of the partnership working based on an evaluation of the organizational structures and on the ability of the partners to cooperate to pursue the objectives of their local development strategy.

Beginning with the analysis of the local context allowed me to better understand the reasons for the partnership composition, the cooperation among the partners and their conception of development. Then, I moved on to analyse the partnership operation, by concentrating the attention on their decision-making processes in relation to the actions implemented and outcomes.

The analysis concluded by considering some questions about the validity of the partnerships as a governance instrument for rural areas development at local level and by evaluating the forms of partnerships developed, and the degree to which they added value to the local development process in a way that exceeded the conventional governance approach to rural development.

After this assessment, I wrote a synthesis summarizing the main findings at national level for the UK and for Italy and finally a European overview of the whole body of evidence.

#### **1.4 The Multi-Level Governance framework**

Empirical studies of sub-national political system at European level advanced the concept of policy-making across levels of governments which has become one of the central elements in territorial development and was widely applied within academic studies and public discourses in the field of EU integration.<sup>33</sup>

Multi-Level Governance (MLG) is one of the few theoretical approaches to analyse the EU integration processes that can be considered as appropriate for understanding the LEADER

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<sup>33</sup> Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (1999) *Multi-level Governance*. Oxford: University Press.

approach; the other integration theories tend to not to emphasize the relevance of the sub-national and the local level.<sup>34</sup> Initially intended to analyse the multiple levels and actor interactions within the EU Regional Policy, research on MLG has been extended to study a great number of additional fields such as economic, environmental and mainly rural development, the latter being largely absent from the debates in the context of European integration studies.

The MLG analysis claims that the EU is a polity where authority moves beyond the formal state institutions and policy-making processes; it emphasizes the power sharing between multiple layers of government including the European, national and subnational levels as well as more horizontal interactions among actors.<sup>35</sup>

This concept was formed within the debate between Neofunctionalists<sup>36</sup> on one side, and Intergovernmentalists<sup>37</sup> on the other. The approach also reflected real changes in European integration such as restructured forms of EU participation, especially after the ratification of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 where the EU expanded its activities to cover policy fields (e.g. EU regional Policy) and sub-national levels have been empowered.<sup>38</sup> MLG poses a challenge to the other European integration theories, whether it does not reject all of their assumptions.

Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism explain the nature of European integration, but at the same time *'they both neglect to include the sub-national and local level actors in their analytical framework'*.<sup>39</sup> Neofunctionalism argues that states are losing control and

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<sup>34</sup> Kull, M. (2007) 'Empowering the Local? Multi-Level Governance and the EU's Community Initiative LEADER + in Finland and Germany', paper presented at the 'Conference New Approaches to European Studies: Social Capital. European Elites. Constructivism'. Copenhagen, 27-28 April 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Hooghe, L. (1996) *Cohesion Policy and European integration: Building Multi-Level Governance*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>36</sup> Schmitter, P. C. (2004) 'Neo-functionalism' in Wiener A. and Diez T. (eds.) *European Integration Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>37</sup> Nugent, N. (2006) *The Government and Politics of the European Union*. Sixth edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, page 482.

<sup>38</sup> Marks, G. (1993) 'Structural policy and multi-level governance in the European Community', in Cafruny, A. W. and Rosenthal, G. G. (eds.) *The state of the European Community: Maastricht debates and beyond*. Harlow: Longman, pp. 391-410.

<sup>39</sup> Kull, M. and Kettunen, P. (2013b) 'Theme Issue: Local Governance, decentralization and Participation - Meta Governance Perspectives', *Halduskultuur – Administrative Culture*, Vol. 14(1), pp. 4-10.

supranational actors are shaping the direction of integration while Intergovernmentalism highlights the central role of national governments. In 1993, Gary Marks, who was one of the 'pioneers' in conceptualizing multilevel governance within the EU and on Structural Funds implementation, demonstrated that a variety of levels are involved and that there is no uniformity among the states as to the involvement of these subnational actors in European integration.<sup>40</sup>

*'Although not a theory of integration, Marks' conception of multi-level governance shared with neofunctionalism the view that supranational actors and interest groups were significant in shaping EC decisions. In addition, Marks argued, subnational actors were increasingly influential in decision-making, so EC decision-making could be described as multi-level whereas previously only two territorial levels – national and supranational – had been deemed worthy of serious analysis in the debate between neofunctionalists and intergovernmentalists'.*<sup>41</sup> Thus, the debates concerning European integration understanding missed the increasing importance of sub-national levels in the decision-making process and their connections with other levels.

Marks puts forward his theory of multilevel governance *'as a system of continuous negotiating among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, local – as a result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local regional level'.*<sup>42</sup>

These tiers interact with each other *'at different administrative and territorial levels: (i) across different ministries and/or public agencies at the central government level (upper horizontally), (ii) between different layers of government at local, regional, national and supranational levels (vertically) and (iii) across different actors at subnational level (lower horizontally)'.*<sup>43</sup>

The point of departure is the following: the presence of overlapping competencies, the interaction of political actors among multiple levels of governments and the member state

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<sup>40</sup> Marks, G. (1993).

<sup>41</sup> Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (1999), page 3.

<sup>42</sup> Marks, G. (1993), page 392.

<sup>43</sup> Charbit, C. (2011) 'Governance of Public Policies in Decentralised Contexts: The Multi-level Approach', *OECD Regional development Working Papers*, 2011/04. Paris: OECD Publishing.

not acting as the exclusive link between domestic politics and EU level.<sup>44</sup> Marks argued that EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion policy of the 1980s and 1990s provided evidence that central governments were losing control to the European Commission which played a fundamental role in designing and implementing the funds and to the regional and local governments of each member state which were granted a partnership role.<sup>45</sup>

Decentralisation made regional and local governments more powerful by increasing their capacity to manage their own development policies and allowing them a bigger say in the setting and implementing of national policy measures. The devolved administrations and local authorities engage directly with the European Commission limiting central's government authority between the supranational and sub-national tiers of government. Such empowerment has involved, for instance, increased institutional representation in Brussels in the Committee of Regions or in liaisons offices representing regions or municipalities, their inclusion in implementing EU regional policies. As a result, sub-national political players no longer necessarily channel their interests via the state level.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, it is not just member states involved in implementing EU regulations but also local administrations operating under the influence of the EU. Neglecting the inclusion of the local level in the framework of European integration theories means excluding an important and vital level of governance within the European Union.

Local authorities have responsibilities in implementing programmes, and in several member states they act as managing authorities of the funds. Decentralization of power to sub-national and local levels in implementing the Structural Funds improves the resource management of the community participation as it has the advantage that local actors know the local needs much better than others for the development of their local areas.<sup>47</sup> This means that decisions are made by institutions that are close to local residents and '*Regional, national and supranational authorities profit from the fact that local peculiarities might be*

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<sup>44</sup> Marks, G., Nielsen F., Ray L. and Salk, J. (1996) 'Competencies, Cracks and Conflicts: Regional Mobilization in the European Union' in Marks G., Scharp F., Schmitter P. and Streeck W. (eds.) *Governance in the European Union*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 40-63.

<sup>45</sup> Wallace, H., Wallace, W. and Pollack, M. A. (2005) *Policy-Making in the European Union*. Fifth Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>46</sup> Kull, M. (2014).

<sup>47</sup> Muhammad, S. A., Noraini Bt., A. T. (2011) 'Decentralization and participatory Rural development: A literature Review', *Contemporary Economic*, Vol. 5(4), pp. 58-67.

*taken into consideration more effectively and they can rely on endogenous knowledge...Thus, Structural policy is not only meant to distribute funds but support structural cohesion'.<sup>48</sup>*

In addition, governance at this level involves not only public administration but also representatives from the private sector such as economic and social representatives. These actors come from different backgrounds, originate from different levels, share competencies, are dependent on each other and are organized or try to exert influence on three levels of administration: supranational, national and sub-national.

Moreover, being the lowest level of the EU, it is the closest to the local residents and enables them to have access to and to participate in policy-making processes and interact with governmental institutions at all levels and has also the potential to make the EU visible at to the local level and to the local residents that have access to policy-making. *'People at the local level put pressures on the outcome of policy delivery and require that publicly funded programmes have a real and positive impact on their lives. And finally, the main objective of regional policy is moving away from redistribution and toward growth enhancement'.<sup>49</sup>*

Understanding these processes is particularly relevant as part of the new governance. These processes are adapted by people as they are influenced by the cultures and traditions in which they live and are dominated by market relations and policy-makers seeking to alleviate the resulting social and economic inequalities.

According to Lee Miles,<sup>50</sup> if, on one side, the multi-level governance theory highlights the importance of interaction of sub-national actors across levels, on the other side the influence of supranational actors, such as the EU institutions, should also not be underestimated.<sup>51</sup> Member states remain key actors in EU policy-making but they do not monopolise the decision-making process because the EU institutions have the legislative and regulatory authority in vital areas such as rural economic and agricultural matters.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kull, M. (2014), page 52.

<sup>49</sup> OECD (2005b) *Building Competitive Regions: Strategies and Governance*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 68.

<sup>50</sup> Miles, L. (2004) 'Theoretical Considerations', in Nugent N., (ed.) *European Union Enlargement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, page 259.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, R. (2001) *The Politics and Economics of the European Union: An Introductory Text*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, page 49.

<sup>52</sup> Garnett, M. and Lynch, P. (2009) *Exploring British politics*. Second edition. Essex: Pearson Education, pp. 242 – 243.



Hooghe and Marks argue that understanding of the dynamics of decision-making is necessary to consider how different jurisdictions interact with each other.<sup>53</sup> Such an analysis is essential for explaining what characterizes these relationships in terms of hierarchy, interdependence, or relative independence and if they are general-purpose or specialized, mutually exclusive or overlapping. They theorized that the ‘unravelling of the state’<sup>54</sup> and the emergence of a new pattern of relations between different government levels that were traditionally hierarchically ordered and are now challenging these established relations.<sup>55</sup> In addition to the classical multi-level structure of legitimized institutions situated at EU, national and local level, ‘*new forms of governance that is, formal and informal networks or functional units of cooperation have been set up to foster efficiency and democracy*’.<sup>56</sup> In sum, whilst the EU institution at supranational level, the member state at national level and all sub-national levels are comprised of stable forms of governance, the EU is also characterized by an increase in functional structures created to solve specific policy problems.

More specifically, in an attempt to define the theoretical space within which the inter-governmental relations emerge in the EU cohesion policy, Hooghe and Marks label two types of MLG: Type-I MLG and Type-II MLG.<sup>57</sup> Type-I MLG regards general-purpose jurisdictions – international, national, regional, local - between a limited number of government levels over a given territory or a set of issues. Under this type, the jurisdictions are divided into units, each with separate and independent powers and policy responsibilities. The structure is divided into an executive, an elected legislature with representative institutions and a judiciary with a court system. This idea is especially strong in Europe where local government usually ‘*exercises a wide spread of functions, reflecting the concept of general-*

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<sup>53</sup> Marks, G. and Hooghe, L. (2004) ‘Contrasting visions of multi-level governance’, in Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (eds.) *Multi-level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15-30.

<sup>54</sup> Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003) ‘Unravelling the Central State, but How? Types of Multi-level Governance’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97(2), pp. 233–43.

<sup>55</sup> Piattoni, S. (2009) ‘Multi-Level governance in the EU. Does it work?’, paper presented at the ‘Sub-national Governance Workshop’. Konstanz, 26 June 2009, pp. 1-46.

<sup>56</sup> Kull, M. (2009) ‘EU Multi-level Governance in the Making - The Community Initiative LEADER+ in Finland and Germany’, paper presented at the ‘EUSA Eleventh Biennial International Conference’. Los Angeles, 23-25 April 2009, page 2.

<sup>57</sup> Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003).

*purpose local authorities exercising comprehensive care for their communities'*.<sup>58</sup> In this form of governance, there is only one relevant jurisdiction, which is intended to be stable for periods of several decades. To exemplify general-purpose jurisdiction in Type-I MLG, one might look at the stable structures of the municipalities, which are responsible for a variety of different tasks, such as social policy, local planning or environmental protection.

Type-II MLG is distinctly different. The jurisdictions are task specific and are intended to be flexible to respond to changing functional requirements rather than durable ones.<sup>59</sup>

Jurisdictions are fragmented into functionally specific units and provide particular public services at local level, such as police, fire protection, welfare and health and transportation. Each public service has a jurisdiction which internalizes its benefits and costs. In this type, there is no predominant class of actors but a wide variety of public and private actors sharing the same geographical space and a common need to take collective decisions or to solve coordination problems. Individuals relate to jurisdictions such as professionals, farmers, homeowners, nature lovers, shoppers and so forth. Jurisdictions may be created, adjusted or deleted when these jurisdictions no longer serve the stakeholders' needs, through inter-jurisdictional competition for citizens' participation or dues.

A prime example of a task-specific jurisdiction in Type-II MLG would be the LAGs engaged in LEADER approach at the local level to deal with particular policy tasks and to receive EU funds. *'These groups include a variety of public, private and social actors and membership is open. In contrast, a municipality stretches over a certain geographical area and is non-intersecting as regards other levels of governance. Another important difference is the constitutional structure. In contrast to Type-I MLG, Type-II has neither a legislative nor a judicative body'*.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, Type-I jurisdictions bundle decision-making at a few levels as they are at the heart of democratic elections, legislatures and executives, and they support a class of professional politicians that mediate citizen preferences into law. In contrast, Type-II jurisdictions are set up to solve policy problems, such as managing a common pool resource,

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<sup>58</sup> Norton, A. (1991) 'Western European Local Government in Comparative Perspective', in Batley R. and Stoker, G. (eds.) *Local Government in Europe: Trends and Developments*. London: Macmillan, pp. 21–40.

<sup>59</sup> Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003).

<sup>60</sup> Kull, M. (2014), page 29.

and setting a technical standard.<sup>61</sup> A Type-II MLG can be economically more effective with problem solving taking place at the very level of concern; it is also more adaptive in response to changing preferences and open to innovation and it is closer to people and, at least theoretically, offers space for them to participate.

According to Bache et al.,<sup>62</sup> in Type-I jurisdictions there are some deficits that have negative effects on legitimacy and democracy in terms of incomplete information, coordination among decision-making jurisdictions and networks, policy formulation and decision blocking by higher level administrations. For instance, concerning information, not all actors such as municipalities in EU regional policy, who should have the same starting position, are equally informed in order to be able to participate. This is not only due to information deficits, but also due to their lack of financial and human resources.

Indeed, Bache et al. hypothesise that, although local actors from different levels are expected to participate in policy-making in Type-II jurisdictions, not all of them are included in the process of decision-making. The inclusion of individuals at the local level however can take place during the input phase of policy-making that is the formulation about the local strategies and even more during the implementation phase when the concrete realization of certain projects by functional units such as LAGs are open to individuals' participation. Thus, in case of EU funded programmes and more specifically in case of LEADER approach implementation, this means that EU can be more easily and directly experienced by its citizens. This is not only in terms of participatory forms of democracy but also, and probably more importantly, in terms of legitimizing the functions of EU institutions and public-private interaction which brought concrete results to the local level.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, Type-II MLG jurisdictions borrow some of the legitimacy, consensus and accountability mechanisms from Type-I jurisdictions: they also attempt to create mechanisms of their own. Type-I MLG jurisdictions legitimacy derives from the procedures by which they are regulated such as roles and norms while the legitimacy of Type-II MLG

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<sup>61</sup> Kull, M. (2014).

<sup>62</sup> Bache, I., Bartle, I. and Flinders, M. (2012) 'Unravelling Multi-Level Governance: Beyond the Binary Divide', paper prepared for delivery at the workshop 'Governance and Participation Research'. Sheffield, 6 June 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Lorvi, K. (2014) 'Unpacking Administrative Capacity for the Management of Structural Funds in Small and Large Municipalities: The Estonian Case', *Administrative Culture*, Vol. 14(1), pp. 98-124.

jurisdictions depends on their effectiveness and the competences of their management. According to Pierre and Peters, these two types of governance are in a 'negotiated order' where the institutional level, in this case the European Union, tries to get these newer forms of governance inserted into a context, which is still dominated by existing institutions.<sup>64</sup>

### **1.5 Criticism and weakness of the Multi-Level Governance approach**

The concept of MLG has been criticized for being too descriptive and overestimating the empowerment of local level.<sup>65</sup> Gualini argues that MLG tends to exaggerate the importance of subnational actors and to neglect the policy-making implementation in which national governments have an important role.<sup>66</sup> According to Bache, national governments continue to play a policy-making role in 'gatekeeping' and in the policy sectors, whereas supranational and subnational levels actors are not decision-makers but merely participants.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, theorists see MLG as a governance model that disregards institutions and concentrates on processes and outcomes by giving priority to the objective of problem-solving.

While the MLG is the first EU integration theory approach which analyses the position of actors at local level, another approach, Structural Constructivism, has been more sensitive to some of these issues as it helps to explain the EU mechanisms and players framework in the daily interaction and the potential power of actors in the construction of the political space.<sup>68</sup> Although this thesis does not use Structural Constructivism in the analysis, the approach does provide some useful warnings about the limitations of MLG that this thesis acknowledges.

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<sup>64</sup> Pierre, J. and Peters, B. (2000) *Governance, Politics and the State*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>65</sup> Kull, M. (2009).

<sup>66</sup> Gualini, E. (2003) 'Challenges to multi-level governance: contradictions and conflicts in the Europeanization of Italian regional policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 10(4), pp. 616 – 636.

<sup>67</sup> Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (1999).

<sup>68</sup> Kauppi, N. (2005) *Democracy, Social Resources and Political Power in the European Union*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Structural Constructivists see the EU as a multi-levelled, polycentric (i.e. multiple centres of influence that tend not to be hierarchically ordered) and emerging political field;<sup>69</sup> they focus on the power relations within and between the various layers to try and answer the fundamental question for the analysis of EU policy-making, such as *'who gets what, when and how?'* and questions for the analysis of the rural policy fields such as *'who gets to define what a problem is?'* and *'only officials get to influence the policy process?'*<sup>70</sup>

For reflecting on how individuals perceive and interpret their position in a given field, Structural Constructivists collect data, engage in qualitative analyses of biographies, interviews and participant observation.

At this level, while MLG is appropriate in analysing the polity structure of the EU, member states and sub-national levels, Structural Constructivism makes a contribution by focusing on those structures in order to provide a better understanding of how they are constructed and by whom and where power is situated.<sup>71</sup>

For Structural Constructivists, *'European integration is a process which is driven and propelled by agents who are constrained by material and symbolic structures and who struggle to accumulate social resources'*.<sup>72</sup> This ontology is based on their interest not only in general characteristics but also in the bodies the agents are engaged in the constructing and reconstruction of institutions and policy-making structures. MLG, in turn, has been blamed for being too vague, too technocratic in its selection and coverage of policy fields and for doing no more than describing recent developments. This can be readily understood when MLG presents EU as a *'multi-level, non-hierarchical, deliberative and apolitical'*, being realized in a *'complex web of public/private networks and quasi-autonomous executive agencies'*.<sup>73</sup> Structural Constructivism is not restricted to analyses of the EU multi-level

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<sup>69</sup> Kauppi, N. (2002) 'Elements for a Structural Constructivist Theory of Politics and of European Integration', Center for European Studies working paper series, no. 104. Cambridge (MA): Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University.

<sup>70</sup> Mèrand, F. (2011) 'EU Policies', in Favell, A. and Guiraudon, V. (eds.) *Sociology of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, page.172.

<sup>71</sup> Kauppi, N. (2002).

<sup>72</sup> Kauppi, N. (2003) 'Bourdieu's Political Sociology and the Politics of European Integration', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 32(5), page 777.

<sup>73</sup> Hix, S. (1998) 'The Study of the European Union II: the new governance agenda and its rival', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 5(1), page 39.

structure or to analyses of supranational and intergovernmental actors and forms of policy-making, nor is it limited to specific policies or national context.<sup>74</sup>

With the thesis providing new empirical evidence from these policy fields, the picture the reader will receive on the position of sub-national actors in the multi-level EU polity is rather ambivalent. Even if the European Union has developed in a multi-level system of governance, there are actors that did and do benefit from the dynamic process of integration and new opportunities to participate. For others, the situation is often unsatisfactory. In that sense, studies on MLG could benefit from the application of the Structural Constructivism methodology as *'it is an additional and careful focus on individuals, on their feel for the game, their networks and strategies to utilize opportunities and their perception of their place in the institutional (multi-levelled) structures of governance all of which are key elements in the shaping of policy'*.<sup>75</sup>

The critique of Social Constructivism has been useful for conducting my empirical research and informing my analysis which relies on the MLG approach. Through the application in my research of qualitative techniques such as interviews and observation at meetings, I will use some of the warnings found in the Structural Constructivist concerns to help me to better understand the decision-making structures in the field of rural policy and to query where power lies.

It is possible to see why different approaches to policy implementation occur in different EU member states, even within policy fields such as rural development, which are under the label of the 'Community Method'.<sup>76</sup> To highlight and to analyse these different and specific contexts, I make a strong effort in the case study chapters (5 and 6) to study the relative institutional framework and mechanisms that determine the distribution of the decision-making, with the aim of addressing the gap left by the MLG framework and the other approaches interested in the study of the European integration and more specifically in the field of rural development at local level.

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<sup>74</sup> Kauppi, N. (2011), page 158.

<sup>75</sup> Kull, M. (2014), page 79.

<sup>76</sup> Wallace, H., Wallace, W. and Pollack, M. A. (2005).

## **1.6 My position in the fieldwork**

My practitioner identity was present long before the start of my research. Employment as a rural policy free-lance for technical assistance activities to support Italian national and regional governments within EU rural development programmes from 2001 to 2015 and as a researcher since 2016 with the National Institute of Agricultural Economics meant that I have been part of the story through events, documents and relations with other actors. This experience gives me an awareness of the different political interests, complexity and ambiguity in policy processes, the skills of negotiations and of managing the micro-politics of everyday situations.

My supporting activities to central and regional governments mean that I am particularly aware of regionalization and that regionalism is responsible for changes to rural development policies. I have helped to formulate the responses to those changes.

This experience gave me a series of contacts at European, national and local level from key organizations across the public and the private sectors and so I was able to either contact them directly and ask them to find out the most relevant contact for a particular issue.

Before the fieldwork, I knew two representatives of the Delta 2000 and Capo S. Maria di Leuca LAGs who introduced me into the structure, which helped facilitate my requests for interviews. Concerning the UK case studies, due to my contacts at European level, I already knew the two representatives of DEFRA and of the Scottish Government who helped deepen my knowledge of the national/devolved regional management of the English and Scottish rural development policies. I did not know any representative of the two UK LAGs.

In order to ensure that my position and experience did not bias my interactions and analysis of the data, I made heavy use of primary documentation, such as the implementation and independent evaluation reports drafted at national and regional level (and which follow mandatory guidelines and regulations of the European Commission) to support and check my findings.

Moreover, through the selection of different interviewees, I looked at the different voices of the Local Action Groups and different perspectives to ensure that I did not rely on one 'official' perspective. In the interviews, I followed a careful strategy to avoid influencing the interviewees by keeping the questions neutral. I was treated primarily as I presented myself – an academic researcher who was also a rural development practitioner. My dual academic-practitioner status was a helpful strategy which gave me legitimacy to achieve rapport, but

more importantly it was a choice to be open with the interviewee that considered me as a fellow insider. They were willing to be frank with me about their personal thoughts and motivations.

### **1.7 Outline of the thesis**

This section summarises the content of the thesis chapter by chapter.

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 provide a literature review and the background context for understanding rural development policy in order to help in setting out a policy framework for analysing the emerging themes of the research and the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

More specifically, Chapter 2 examines the different interpretations associated with the 'rural' and the notion of 'development'. It discusses how policy-makers realize the necessity for rural development policy because rural areas are facing significant changes that undermine territorial cohesion and have an economic potential that could contribute to the well-being of rural people and to the overall regional and national development. Thus, the new policy strategies contribute to important cultural changes because their area-based approach has helped foster public-private partnerships and integrate into the development process a culture of cooperation within central and local governments.

Chapter 3 investigates the EU rationale for the construction of new local policy spaces where the European Union sent signals about what would be appropriate for funding and shaped the definitions of the boundaries of rural areas, the types of organization and the styles of projects. The chapter seeks to illustrate and analyse the evolution, diversity and the added value of the LEADER approach for the development of rural areas in the years and to explore its merits of a more systematic use in empowering rural communities to face challenges and the potential to apply it more widely in future. The LEADER strategy was written at a time when there was the negotiating phase about the future of rural development policy for the 2014-2020 programming period and when all EU countries faced an extremely difficult economic crisis. In addition to the available academic literature, the analysis of this chapter is based on implementation and independent evaluation reports drafted at national and regional level about the impacts of the 2007-2013 rural development programmes throughout Europe.

Chapter 4 examines the notion and practice of local partnerships, drawing on both the academic and applied literature. In the context of rural development, the chapter illustrates



their working and the related implications and outcomes. In doing so, the chapter sets out a framework for analysing the specific examples of application in the following case study chapters.

Chapters 5 and 6 follow the same structure for investigating the LAGs and the wider context in the UK and Italy respectively. Each chapter provides first an analysis of the unfolding history and the reshaping of the administrative policy with respect to the rural development policies in UK and in Italy. Then the two chapters report the empirical evidence for the public-private partnerships (LAGs) in order to understand the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder their development and their effectiveness. The chapters also explore the divergence between the LAGs, and the reasons for this divergence, and discuss the research findings.

Chapter 7 concludes about the comparative findings, focusing specifically in terms of the similarities and differences between the cases. It offers an analysis of the added value of the rural partnerships to local development in different forms such as new processes, the adoption of an integrated approach and local democracy. The chapter then considers the broader implication of the findings for both theory and policy, before making some policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2. The general framework of rural development policies and the role of the actors

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and review the key development concepts, approaches and theories associated with rural development that provide the context of the case studies analysed in Chapters 5 and 6. In the light of the profound changes affecting rural areas, this chapter begins with an examination of the different interpretations associated with the 'rural' as well as the notion of 'rural development'.

Rural development appears today as a complex reality and notion, which makes it rather difficult to grasp. It is no longer simply analogous to agriculture, but it is heterogeneous and subject to on-going change, and which is itself difficult to define as it is recognised as a multi-dimensional, and multi – actors process.<sup>77</sup> It requires a global and integrated vision of their economy and society in order to accommodate the heterogeneous nature and function of rural areas and their local specificities.<sup>78</sup>

In the past, the agricultural sector represented the main economic activity in rural areas, the predominant source of their income and the clients were almost entirely farmers. Rural and agricultural issues were considered synonymous and their objectives were pursued through a single set of policies. Today, *'that situation has changed, principally because agriculture is no longer the main sector in rural regions. Currently, less than 10% of the rural workforce is employed in agriculture and in the EU-27, while 96% of rural land use is agricultural, only approximately 13% of employment is in agriculture, producing only 6% of gross value added in rural regions'*.<sup>79</sup>

Although farming is still important, employment opportunities in agriculture are declining due to the modern production of commodities which includes few farms producers to minimize the managing costs and lead to the concentration in relatively few rural areas. Out-

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<sup>77</sup> Van der Ploeg, J. D., Renting, H., Brunori, G., Knickel, K., Mannion, J., Marsden, T., De Roest, K., Sevilla-Guzmán, E., Ventura, F. (2000) 'Rural Development: From Practices and Policies towards Theory', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40(4), pp. 391-408.

<sup>78</sup> Bryden, J. (1998) *Rural Renewal in Europe: Global tendencies, local responses*. Brussels: AEIDL.

<sup>79</sup> OECD (2006) *OECD Rural Policy Review. The New Rural Paradigm Policies and Governance*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 13.

migration of young people caused by the decline of employment opportunities along with immigration of retirees led to a significant ageing of population.

But despite these declining factors, agriculture continues to have an important role in the rural economy. In some ways it is complementary to other activities and in others it is more competitive. The increasing recourse of farm families to other forms of income<sup>80</sup> means that they are interested in diversification of the rural economy into new sectors where culture and landscapes are utilized in other economic activities such as tourism and recreation.<sup>81</sup> Thus, farm businesses will be able to reach a level of productivity that makes them more competitive playing an important role in rural economies and the interaction between agriculture and other economic activities.

In this context, new directions in rural development have revealed the need for comprehensive and integrated strategies and the importance of 'locally driven' and 'actor-oriented' approaches.<sup>82</sup> Such approaches bring all levels of government and a wide range of cross-sectoral interests into innovative forms of cooperative relationships and arrangements. These arrangements are referred to today as 'partnerships' which are seen to have the potential to offer a mechanism for bringing together the variety of interests necessary to implement integrated actions and therefore to accommodate the increasing diversity of rural socio-economic conditions.<sup>83</sup> They represent the interest of single individuals and groups drawn from the public sector, the private sector, the voluntary and community sectors.

## 2.2 The definition of rural

A first challenge that this study has to face is the search for a clear and indisputable definition of the 'rural' which has been a central preoccupation of research, for years, within

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<sup>80</sup> OECD (2003b) *Farm Household Income: Issues and Policy Responses*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>81</sup> Kilkenny, M. (2005) 'The Relationship between the Agro-food Sector and the Rural Economy', keynote address to the OECD conference 'The Coherence of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies'. Bratislava, 24 October 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Teisserenc, P. (1994) 'Les politiques de développement Local: Approche sociologique', *Collection, Collectivités territoriales*. Paris: Économica, Centre national de la fonction publique territoriale.

<sup>83</sup> Mannion, J. (1996) 'Partnership, Participation and Capacity Building', *Leader Journal*, Vol. 96(12), pp. 7-10.

a variety of academic disciplines, and has been the subject of continuing debate and disagreement. As a result, numerous interpretations appear within the literature.<sup>84</sup> According to Wiggins and Proctor<sup>85</sup> there is no exact definition of the term 'rural' but rural areas are 'clearly recognisable' as they constitute the space where people usually live in farmsteads or settlement of 5-10,000 people and infrastructure occupy only a small part of the landscape, most of which is dominated by forest, water, mountain and fields of pastures; with high prevalence of poverty where most people spend most of their working time on farms. Rural areas are also places with relative low cost of the lands and with high transaction costs due to long distances from cities and poor infrastructures.<sup>86</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined rural areas according to their relative position to urban centres and the level of economic and infrastructure integration.<sup>87</sup> The definition is based on the assessment that rural regions have low population densities, with a relative remoteness from the major urban centre which gave rise to a range of problems in terms of economic activity and individual well-being.<sup>88</sup>

According to OECD data, about one-third of the world population live in rural communities and about one-quarter of them live in predominantly rural regions. But there are also certain countries having a more rural character than others. By taking account of these differences, the OECD has established a typology of rural areas according to which they have been classified using the following criteria:

- *predominantly urban areas* (less than 15% of the total population living in rural areas);

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<sup>84</sup> Pohl, B. (2001) 'Decision-Making Support for Rural Development Strategies: Latvia Case Study', *Berliner Schriften zur Agrar- und Umweltökonomik*. Berlin: Humboldt-University, Thesis (doctoral).

<sup>85</sup> Wiggins, S. and Proctor, S. (2001) 'How Special Are Rural Areas? The Economic Implications of Location for Rural Development', *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 19(4), pp. 427-436.

<sup>86</sup> Ashley, C. and Maxwell, S. (2001) 'Rethinking rural development', *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 19(4), pp. 395-425.

<sup>87</sup> OECD (1996) *Better Policies for Rural Development*. Paris: OECD Publications.

<sup>88</sup> Bollman, R. D. (2005) 'The Demographic Overlap of Agriculture and Rural: Implications for the Coherence of Agricultural and Rural Policies', paper prepared for presentation to the OECD workshop on 'The Coherence of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies'. Bratislava, 24-26 October 2005.

- *significantly rural areas (between 15% and 50% of the total population living in rural areas);*
- *predominantly rural areas (more than 50% of the population living in rural areas).*

The OECD typology of rural areas appears also within regions:

- *dynamic remote rural regions:* these regions possess sufficient natural resources and transport links to attract tourists, new residents and enterprises;
- *dynamic intermediate regions:* they have strong links with metropolitan centres, services and specialized enterprises (e.g. SME's clusters);
- *lagging remote rural regions:* they represent the more rural areas in decline with dramatic difficulties;
- *lagging intermediate regions:* they are in the process of restructuring their economic base after being industrial or State enterprise dependent.

Another distinction that adds to the complexity and heterogeneity of rural areas is represented by *mountain areas* which are rich repositories of natural and cultural public goods threatened by market failures. They are also traditionally providers of human, recreational, food resources and with an important potential in the various sector of the economy.<sup>89</sup>

Rural regions face problems of *out-migration and ageing* as they have negative natural balances and continue to lose population, particularly young people that attend school up to secondary level education and then they have to leave their home region for tertiary education and to find employment. A lower GDP per capita is due to a lower added value sectors (e.g. agriculture versus industry), low educated workforce, a higher percentage of unemployment rate, a greater percentage of older persons.<sup>90</sup>

The different economic potentials and challenges of rural regions and the presence of new factors highlight the need for a new rural policy approach which takes into account the diversity of rural regions.

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<sup>89</sup> Crosta, N., Diakosawas, D. (2005) 'Evolution of Agricultural Policies and Rural Development Policy in OECD Countries', background paper for the OECD workshop on 'The Coherence of Agricultural and Rural Development Policy in OECD Countries'. Bratislava, 24-26 October 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Crosta, N., Diakosawas, D. (2005).

But, while some rural areas face some common challenges, there is also a large number of successful rural regions that have been able to valorise public goods such as a natural and cultural heritage, attractive landscapes, improved transport links.<sup>91</sup> In this context, the development of rural areas is influenced by economic conditions (volume of investments, economic level, industrial and social infrastructures), social conditions (distribution of population, demographic situation, social situation) and opportunities range from developing green tourism packaging by promoting local products and attracting temporary (secondary homes) or permanent (active or retired) residents to the area.<sup>92</sup> These conditions are intertwined with each other and can be cause and effect of one another.

### **2.3 Rural development**

There is not a universally acceptable term of 'rural development' as it is used in different ways and in vastly different contexts. It is a multidimensional concept and concerns the development of agriculture and related activities (e.g. villages, socio-economic infrastructure, community services,) and interactions between various factors at economic, social and institutional level in rural areas to improve the quality of life. In the words of Robert Chambers '*Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of rural development. The group includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless*'.<sup>93</sup>

Rapid changes in the international economy such as globalization, improved communications and a reduction of the transportation costs and the increasing of non-farm activities, have confronted rural regions with some challenges but also with significant opportunities for rural policy by a re-examination of objectives and instruments.

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<sup>91</sup> OECD (2005e) 'Trends in Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in OECD Countries' background paper by the OECD Secretariat for the conference 'The Coherence of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies'. Bratislava, 24-26 October 2005.

<sup>92</sup> OECD (2005d) *Regions at a Glance*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>93</sup> Chambers, R. (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. London; New York: Longman, page 147.

More specifically, technical progress (e.g. mechanization, better seed, breeding qualities, better resource management) drove the orientation towards higher efficiency rates to produce more food with less production resources in terms of labour, land, capital with the effect of a continuous rural-urban migration and less farmers were able to supply more food for the growing number of urban consumers.<sup>94</sup> During the 1960-1998 period, the number of full time farmers decreased just one fourth of the 1960 number (from 2,4 to 0,6 mill.) while the average farm size tripled (from 9,3 to 33,4 ha) and the consumers supplied by each farmer increased seven times (from 17 to 124).<sup>95</sup>

In addition, from the socio-economic stand point production structures were not adapted to global markets and there was a slow rural job growth along with higher unemployment. This led to a reduced rural population growth causing persistent lags of human resources development.<sup>96</sup>

The structural changes brought to the emergence of small and medium sized manufacturing and service enterprises owned and operated by rural entrepreneurs and serving local, regional, national and international markets; to the recognition that rural areas have an important value in terms of natural resources of environmental importance which contributed to the growth of services for tourism and resettlement of retired families in rural areas.<sup>97</sup>

Further features on rural areas are structural changes in agriculture like regional disparities, migration and unemployment resulting from restructuring happening in the context of the global economic change, new patterns of employment, change of technologies and composition of markets.

Agricultural policy had to look beyond the traditional aspects of commodity production. Farmers were encouraged to pursue their activity in the framework of 'multifunctionality' which recognizes additional values to this sector beyond food production in terms of food

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<sup>94</sup> BMELF (2000) *Land-und Forstwirtschaft in Deutschland: Daten und Fakten*. Bonn: Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten.

<sup>95</sup> BMELF (2000), page 20.

<sup>96</sup> OECD (1988) *New Trends in Rural Policy Making*. Paris: OECD Publications, page 15.

<sup>97</sup> OECD (1988), page 18.

security and quality, animal welfare, cultural and historical heritage values, environmental quality, landscape and biodiversity.<sup>98</sup>

In this context, rural development could be recognized as a multi-level development process rooted in historical traditions.<sup>99</sup>

The first level concerns *global interrelations between agriculture and society*. Agriculture produces also 'public goods' (e.g. beautiful landscapes, natural resources) and gives an important contribution to those areas that lag behind in development terms.

The second level concerns a *new development model for the agriculture sector*. Until the early 1990s, intensification, specialization, industrialization strongly limited development in agricultural sector with a decline of the farm numbers and employment opportunities. Many rural development experiences were seen as the search for a new agricultural development model creating synergy and cohesion between activities at farm level but also with other rural activities. While modernization fostered the specialization of the agricultural production and also its segregation from other rural activities, the synergy between activities appears strategic and desirable in rural development. Particularly important are synergies to favour specific farm styles, goods and services, between local and regional authorities.<sup>100</sup>

In the third level, *individual farm household*, rural development concerns the redefinition of identities, strategies, interrelations and networks which are historically and culturally rooted. Even here the coordination between agricultural and non-agricultural activities is an important source of synergy.

At the fourth level of the *countryside and its economic actors*, the rural is no longer the monopoly of farmers. New forms of rural development activities for different actors must be developed for access to opportunities and resources in new arenas (e.g. rural tourism, nature and landscape conservation).

The fifth level concerns the variation in the *rural development policies, programmes and institutions in the different countries*. There are three aspects to be dealt such as the

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<sup>98</sup> Cahill, C. (2001) 'The Multi-Functionality of Agriculture: What does it mean?', *EuroChoices*, Vol.1(1), pp. 36-41.

<sup>99</sup> Van der Ploeg, J. D., Renting, H., Brunori, G., Knickel, K., Mannion, J., Marsden, T., De Roest, K., Sevilla-Guzmán, E., Ventura, F. (2000).

<sup>100</sup> Guzmán Casado, G., González de Molina, M. and Sevilla Guzmán, E. (2000) *Introducción a la agroecología como desarrollo rural sostenible*. Madrid, Barcelona, Mexico: Ediciones Mundi-Prensa.



coherence between different policies and programmes, their synergy and the effects on rural development institutional settings for the production and marketing of agricultural goods. Some of these settings may be fundamental to rural development while others may be irrelevant.<sup>101</sup> The institutional setting of rural development, the *multi actor process*, drives towards a decentralized rural policy approach where the relations between the local and the central strengthen the process.

The last level concerns the *multi-faceted quality of the rural development* such as the preservation of nature values and landscape management, agritourism, organic farming and local products. Other activities adopted by family farms are direct marketing, the development of care activities, innovative forms of cost-reduction. In this context, farm units which are considered 'superfluous' in the modernization process acquire new roles and new interrelation not only with other farms but also with the urban population.<sup>102</sup>

All of these changes in the structure and the importance of rural economy have consequences for the policy-makers that need to consider agriculture as continuously playing a defining role in rural landscapes and being a vector of great public support for rural areas. They have to reckon with these new challenges as the economic character of the rural areas is no longer synonymous with agriculture and a distinction must be made between the diversification of agriculture and the development of rural areas as well as between farming and non-farming interests. Given these trends, agriculture needs to be incorporated into a comprehensive rural development strategy.

## **2.4 The rural development strategy**

Generally, rural development needs to be considered at cross-sectoral level by considering the 'connectedness' of rural residents to many economic sectors with efforts more on people where the building of a participatory approach and transparent institutions are the cornerstone of the development strategy.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Banks, J. and Marsden, T. (2000) 'Integrating agri-environment policy, farming systems and rural development: Tir Cymen in Wales', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40(4), pp. 438-466.

<sup>102</sup> Knickel, K. and Renting, H. (2000) 'Methodological and Conceptual Issues in the Study of Multifunctionality and Rural Development', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40(4), pp. 512-28.

<sup>103</sup> World Bank (2000) *Rural, Environmental and Social Development for the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications.

The regional differences (e.g. the importance of agriculture in the economy of a country, the share of the rural population of the total population, the agroecological zone) require different specific rural strategies by supporting development in both traditional agricultural activities and in off-farm rural activities.

The World Bank in its *'From Vision to Action'* sees agriculture as pivotal for the achievement of the stated objectives (e.g. poverty reduction, widely shared growth, food security and sustainable resource management). In each country activities should therefore secure a cohesion between strategy and policy for rural growth, employment and natural resource management by supporting the institutions so that they can have the capacity to manage their own development and setting target programmes for rural areas to reduce poverty and to preserve natural resources.<sup>104</sup>

In its *'The New Rural Paradigm'*,<sup>105</sup> the OECD identified a vicious circle in the economic situation of many rural regions of its countries. The main elements of this circle include a low population density, *'which leads to a lack of critical mass for services and infrastructure, which in turn implies lower rates of business creation. Fewer business result in fewer jobs, which induces out-migration and ageing, which again lowers the population density of a rural area, so that the circle is closed'*.<sup>106</sup> With the aim to break this circle, the Organization advocates a strategy in which the agricultural sector policies are replaced by territorial rural policies. Thus, in the *'New rural paradigm'* which focus on places rather than sectors and on investments rather than subsidies, regional policy goes from a top-down strategy to reduce disparities at regional level into a group of policies for improving regional competitiveness. This new approach is characterized by a development strategy much oriented to a greater focus on endogenous development and less on exogenous investments so creating developing opportunities for the growth of new businesses; a governance approach which involves national, regional and local government. In this context, each country has to

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<sup>104</sup> McCalla, A. F. and Ayres, W. S. (1997) *'Rural Development: From Vision to Action'*, *Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Studies and monographs series*, no. 12. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications, page 2.

<sup>105</sup> OECD (2006).

<sup>106</sup> Petrick, M. (2010) *'Halting the rural race to the bottom: an evolutionary model of rural development to analyse neo-endogenous policies in the EU'*, paper prepared for presentation at the 118<sup>th</sup> seminar of the EAAE (European Association of Agricultural Economics), *'Rural development. Governance, policy design and delivery'*. Ljubljana: 25-27 August 2010, page 121.

develop its own public policies for rural zones so they will not only reflect the peculiarities of each country but also the diversity of each rural areas in terms of economic, social and environmental perspective. Some important elements have been identified by rural policy experts:

- *governance*, devolving responsibilities to local levels to increase the role of the local partnership among the public, private and voluntary sectors and responsibilities in the formulation and implementation of horizontal, multi-sectoral and collaborative policy strategies with a territorial approach focusing especially on local specificities as a means of generating new competitive advantages such as amenities or local products, even if central governments continue to play a key role as they have the capacity to compensate the disparities in resources among rural communities;
- *economic diversification*, stimulating the growth of new established sectors through a variety of tools, including private sector initiatives, by creating employment opportunities, developing business and realizing the potential of the cultural and environmental heritage of the rural areas and where *agriculture* needs to be recognized as being one component to be incorporated into a rural development strategy with a defining role in rural landscapes and as a vector of great public support for rural areas.

As a result of these major elements countries are seeking to develop a place based and multi-sectoral policy-making approach that aims to identify the development potential of rural areas.

*'But why should rural development be pursued principally at the local level? Why do rural programmes and plans and the projects that they fund need to relate not just to rural area in general but to this or that specific area? Why should machinery be put in place at the local level for determining and implementing rural development policies, programmes and projects? In short, why and how far should there be both 'decentralisation' (a shift of decision-making to lower levels) and 'territorialisation' (a shift of focus from sectors such as education, transport and manufacturing to areas)?'*<sup>107</sup>

Setting aside the population size and geographical extent, there seem to be some main elements for specifically local development.

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<sup>107</sup> Moseley, M. (2003) page 4.

The first main element concerns the *local diversity* of rural areas across Europe which have much in common but they are not identical.<sup>108</sup> Some have economies mainly dominated by agriculture, some others have economies based on tourism and manufacturing industry. Some suffer for being too close to metropolitan areas, some others suffer for their remoteness.

The most effective way *to solve rural areas problems* may be at intermediate level, between the nation or the region on hand and the village on the other. At this level, top-down priorities and bottom-up needs are best reconciled. *Local people* (e.g. individuals and organisations) are indeed key resources in rural development in terms of information, ideas, enterprise and any contribution they make produces beneficial change and *added value to local resources* by providing a more and sustainable future for economic development. This implies a greater and more respectful understanding of local resources and of their development potential for the creation of new business opportunities. Finally, the *defence against globalization* which arises from the development of modern information and communication technologies, the liberalization of international trade is the developing and marketing of local identity, quality products and services linked to them.<sup>109</sup>

Among these different definitions, we can therefore define rural development as a process of developing and utilizing natural and human resources, technologies and infrastructural facilities, government policies and programmes to encourage the economic growth in rural areas, to provide employments and to improve the quality of life in rural areas.<sup>110</sup>

In this context, promoting integrated rural development requires a stronger coordination across various levels of governments, between public and private actors, an emphasis on investments rather than subsidies, a focus on places rather than sectors and an emphasis on investments rather than subsidies. The interests of most rural people seem a development strategy based on investments to realize village renewal, to ensure conservation of rural heritage and to promote craft facilities and tourism.

Discussions on policy objectives and instruments for policies in rural regions should address the following issues: enhancing 'competitiveness' of rural regions by targeting local

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<sup>108</sup> Moseley, M. (2003), page 5.

<sup>109</sup> Bryden, J. (1998).

<sup>110</sup> Singh, K. (2009) *Rural Development, Principles, Policies and Management*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.

collective goods in order to develop new business activities and to diversify the local economy; promoting framework conditions in fields such as logistics, business and information and communication technologies in order to support or attract enterprises; developing vocational training activities with an important emphasis on entrepreneurial skills ideas and competencies of local people and capacity building for policy actors at local levels.<sup>111</sup>

## 2.5 The policy-making process

Rural policies vary between different countries, depending on the institutional structure, the political ideology and the actors involved. Moreover, since a State is not able to support all regions and all problems in all areas simultaneously, priorities need to be set concerning the selection of alternatives in terms of 'which' and 'how much' to achieve an objective formulated.

In all cases the process of decision-making involves negotiation between the state institution responsible for formulating the policy at supranational, national and regional level and the implementing agencies and the pressure groups at local level.<sup>112</sup> *'The nature of the relationship between these various actors may be close-knit or loose, stable or unstable, consensual or conflictual, as it is described by a number of different models of policy-making'*.<sup>113</sup>

Political analysts distinguished two models of policy-making: *pluralist* and *corporatist*. In the pluralist model government has a passive role, it allocates resources and makes policy according to the influence of pressure groups responsive to grassroots members. In the corporatist model, the state plays an active role in driving policy in close relationship with a limited number of interest groups which are fully involved in policy-making and implementation.<sup>114</sup>

In contrast to these models, Smith and others promoted the *policy networks model* which provides a structure for the relationships between the government and the interest groups

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<sup>111</sup> OECD (2005b).

<sup>112</sup> Pohl, B. (2001).

<sup>113</sup> Woods, M. (2005), *Rural Geography. Processes, Responses and Experiences in Rural Restructuring*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, page 132.

<sup>114</sup> Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R. A. W. (1992) *Policy networks in British government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

by defining their roles, deciding which issues have to be included in the policy agenda and which are excluded. For example, government can provide financial resources but may be dependent on interest groups to supply the cooperation of workers and have different degrees of influence and access to government policy-makers.<sup>115</sup> It can be observed that the more complex a decision is, the more difficult it is for human beings to organize all the factors needed and to determine from their interactions the most likely outcome. However, to enlarge the options for successful decisions, and particularly to account for the high degree of complexity of rural development policy, the policy-making process can be structured in four steps.<sup>116</sup>

The *first step* provides a clear understanding of a problem and stimulates the formulation of objectives and criteria to evaluate the alternatives.

The *second step* concerns the assessment of possible impacts of alternatives and the possible consequences and the probabilities of each of them.

The preferences of decision-makers are determined during the *third step* where taking individual risk into account is of particular relevance.

In the *fourth step*, the decision-making process is concluded with the evaluation and comparison of alternatives based on the magnitude and the associated likelihoods of the consequences determined. In this context, sensitivity analysis is an important part of the process of decision-making. It checks the sensitivity of the outcome to changes of variables and might make necessary to refine the definition of objectives or add others not included before.

## **2.6 Approaches to rural development**

The prevalent formulation of rural development in post war Europe was a top-down approach where urban centres were considered as growth poles for the economic development of regions while rural localities were perceived as marginal, economic and culturally distant from the main centres of activity. From this perspective, most European

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<sup>115</sup> Marsh, D. and Smith, M. (2000) 'Understanding Policy Networks: towards a Dialectical Approach', *Political Studies*, Vol. 48(1), pp. 4-21.

<sup>116</sup> Pohl, B. (2001), page 225.

countries adopted a top-down approach to their rural areas with the aim to improve the agricultural production while encouraging labour and capital to leave.<sup>117</sup>

By the late 1970s there was a growing evidence the top-down approach had not worked as diversity among rural places and makes it very difficult to design and implement a rural policy at national level because it cannot take into account local needs at the same time.

*'Top-down development was criticized as dependent development, reliant on continued subsidies and the policy decisions of distant agencies or boardrooms. It was seen as 'distorted development' which boosted single sectors, selected settlements and certain types of business (e.g. progressive farmers) but left others behind and neglected the non-economic aspects of rural life... It was a ...destructive development, which erased the cultural and environmental differences of rural areas and was unresponsive to the local knowledge held within these localities, and dictated development devised by experts and planners from outside local rural areas'.*<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, governance has to take into consideration the role of the sub-national governments while the central governments must ensure an overall coherence and coordination across sectors to encourage the various systems at institutional and managerial level which formulate and implement rural policy and to ensure that local policies converge in a coherent strategy. This implies a political effort to overcome sectoral tendencies and the roles of different ministries or agencies in the field of rural development.

In this context, high level 'special units' have been created in several countries with an explicit jurisdiction over rural development issues. National and central authorities in the United Kingdom and Italy represent examples of institutional innovation in this field.<sup>119</sup> In the United Kingdom, the central authority of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has wider responsibilities over a broader set of areas including the environment, food and rural affairs. In Italy, a special inter-ministerial committee has been set up with the aim to coordinate several ministries in the field of agricultural policies, environment, infrastructures, economy, health and social security.

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<sup>117</sup> Shucksmith, M. (2012) *Future directions in Rural Development?* Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust.

<sup>118</sup> Shucksmith, M. (2012), page 11.

<sup>119</sup> OECD (2003c) *The Future of Rural Policy. From sectoral to place-based policies in rural areas*. Paris: OECD Publications.

Countries have also devolved public responsibilities to sub-national government levels with the assumption that such transfers produce more efficiency at management level and create better conditions for economic development. These transfers respond to new expectations of citizens to participate more closely in the democratic decision-making processes.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, rural development should adopt a bottom-up approach ('driven from within' or called 'endogenous') which transfers the responsibility of rural areas development from the central and regional government to the local authorities and the communities. *'This approach is based on the assumptions that the specific resources of an area – natural, human and cultural – hold the key to its development'*.<sup>121</sup> Whereas top-down approach sees the rural development through the promotion of the technical skills and the modernization of infrastructures (such as transport, communication facilities and industrial site) by overcoming the differences and the distinctiveness of rural areas, the bottom-up approach sees the development through the mobilization of the local resources and territorial assets sees the development as well as the nurturing of locally distinctive human and environmental capacities with the objective of retaining as much as possible of the benefit of the rural areas. *'In contrast to the state-led management of top-down strategies, bottom-up rural development is led by the local communities themselves. Communities are encouraged to assess the problems that they face, to identify appropriate solutions, and to design and implement regeneration projects. They usually have to apply to draw down public funds for projects, often as part of a competition'*.<sup>122</sup>

By involving local governments in a bottom-up approach, the central government can exploit the area knowledge when defining policies, by encouraging transparency in choosing priorities and financial costs.<sup>123</sup>

In this context, public and private actors join local territorial partnerships and pool knowledge and resources and assume responsibility for the design and implementation of development strategies and rural areas are no longer seen as playing as passive but are able

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<sup>120</sup> Bryden, J. (1999) *Policymaking for Predominately Rural Regions: Concept and Issues*. Paris: OECD Publications.

<sup>121</sup> Shucksmith, M. (2012), page 11.

<sup>122</sup> Woods, M. (2005), page 149.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, B. (1998) 'Charting the discourse of community action: perspectives from practice in rural Wales', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 14(1), pp. 63–77.



to generate innovative processes and shape future development.<sup>124</sup> A rural development strategy is therefore developed around a shared vision of the territory where different and often conflicting actions for the development of the whole territory converge.

The public actors comprise local and regional authorities and give political support to local initiatives and provide necessary administrative competences and skills. The private actors include enterprises, community and voluntary organization, trade unions and cooperatives and ensure the necessary financial support to the project development. Here, regions are involved to identify and exploit the territorial potential of rural areas through the communication between actors and institutions and help to inform and transform policies and processes at higher levels.

There is also a number of potential obstacles to effective partnerships, such as the complexity and the rigidity of national and supranational policies with predefined objectives which do not always correspond to local needs. Other problems include the fact that planning does not always have a partnership for implementation.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, within vertical relations between the supra-nationals and local levels, an important role is played by the regions, in terms of programme formulation and implementation, resources allocation among local communities, monitoring and evaluating of local projects, competence and resource negotiations of resources with supra-regional institutions.

## **2.7 Conclusions**

This chapter has examined the key concepts of the rural development in terms of theories and approaches associated. More specifically, in the first part, through the support of the existing literature I examined what it is that defines rural and what it is that defines the rural development and how it can be promoted through an integrated strategy. In the second part I examined the theories associated to the policy-making process with a focus on the shift from the top-down to the bottom-up approach which transfers the responsibility of rural areas development from the central and regional government to the local authorities and the communities.

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<sup>124</sup> OECD (1990) *Partnerships for Rural Development*. Paris: OECD Publications.

<sup>125</sup> Bryden, J. (2005) 'Horizontal Coordination at Local and Regional Levels', paper presented at the Mexican Ministry of Social Development and OECD International Conference 'Designing and Implementing Rural Development Policy'. Oaxaca, 7-8 April 2005.

What emerged is that rural regions face significant challenges in comparison to metropolitan and even other regions. The decreasing economic importance of agriculture in terms of employment and production led to a general shift for the agricultural policies where 'multi-functionality' is recalled as objective for the redefinition of the sector. In other words, with these new challenges, rural policies should not be framed from an agrarian point of view only but a distinction must be made between the diversification of agriculture and the development of rural areas by considering objectives and a variety of alternatives and be more integrative and composed of a number and coordinated horizontal measures. In particular, these changes are represented by the creation of small and medium sized enterprises in the manufacturing and service sector owned and operated by rural entrepreneurs, the growth of leisure industry providing services for tourism and resettlement for retired families with the recognition that rural areas have a value as repositories of long-term natural resources importance.

Problems are particularly evident in terms of employment opportunities in sectors that were once crucial components of rural economies: agriculture and the public sector. The increase of agricultural productivity over the last few decades now means that the commodity production includes relatively few farm producers and the concentration of production in few rural areas. However, despite these important challenges, rural regions are not necessarily synonymous with decline.

In this context, policy-makers realize that a policy for rural development is needed mainly because rural areas faces significant changes that undermine territorial cohesion and have an economic potential that could contribute to the well-being of rural people and to the overall regional and national development.

Finally, these new policy strategies contribute to important cultural changes because their place-based approach at the local level as has helped foster public-private partnerships and integrate into the development process and develop a culture of cooperation within central and local governments. The key elements of these shifts have been:

- decentralization of policy administration to those levels;
- increased use of public-private partnerships in the development and implementation of local and regional policies;

- coordination and communication mechanisms both at the central level and among local actors as well as across different tiers of government.<sup>126</sup>

But while there is a growing interest among policy-makers in the place-based rural development policies, there is a lack of research documenting including their results and the successes and failures. This is due to the difficulties in evaluating such policies especially in quantitative terms and to the difficulty of bringing together the variety of approaches that need to be considered within the integrated rural development policy because it includes regional economists, geographers, rural sociologists, statisticians, political scientists and researcher from other disciplines.

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<sup>126</sup> Barca, F. (2005) 'Conclusions to Designing and Implementing Rural Development Policies', Mexican Ministry of Social Development and OECD International Conference 'Designing and Implementing Rural Development Policy'. Oaxaca, 7-8 April, 2005.

## Chapter 3. The European Union rural development policy

### 3.1 Introduction

Having discussed in Chapter 2 the main concepts of rural development and the associated theories and policy approaches, this chapter has the aim to illustrate its implementation in the framework of the European Union policies with main focus on the evolution of the LEADER approach in the years trying to advocate its merits of a more systematic use in empowering rural communities to face challenges and its potential to be applied more widely in future. It was written at a time when there was the negotiating phase about the future of rural development policy for the 2014-2020 programming period and when all EU countries faced an extremely difficult economic crisis. Thus, beyond the available literature, the analysis of this chapter is based on implementation and independent evaluation reports drafted at national and regional level about the impacts of the 2007-2013 rural development programmes throughout Europe.

The European Union sees a rural policy as having an important role to play in its territorial, economic and social cohesion policies. The process towards a stronger integration of rural aspects in agricultural policy was initiated by Buckwell with the study 'Towards a Common Agricultural and Rural Policy for Europe' elaborated on behalf of the European Commission.<sup>127</sup>

The diversity of rural areas and their characteristics make it very difficult to design rural development policies at a central level (either European or national) which, as reported in Chapter 2, should take into account locally specific needs based on interactions between different areas, cooperation between communities and the partnerships, public and private actors. In this context, the EU rural development policy aims to put in place a consistent framework with the aim to guarantee the future of rural areas and promoting the maintenance and creation of employment. The EU strategic approach is moving away from traditional agricultural policies to avoid disruptions in markets to a policy enhancing rural development. This new policy includes: the principles of multifunctionality, multisectoral and

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<sup>127</sup> Buckwell, A. (1998) 'Towards a Common Agricultural and Rural Policy for Europe', *European Economy, Reports and Studies*, no. 5. Brussels: European Commission - Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs.

integrated approach to the rural economy, subsidiarity, decentralization and transparency in the drawing up and management of the rural development plans.<sup>128</sup>

It is this approach that establishes development activities within a territorial framework where the territory is smaller than the country level by valorising and exploiting local resources, by focusing on the capacities of local people and by emphasizing the local participation principle.

To ensure the necessary consensus and to strengthen effective participation in decision-making, the implementation at different levels of governments (European, national, regional and local) is necessary by pursuing decentralization and devolution toward region and localities in order to better meet needs and conditions in the rural areas.

### **3.2 The evolution of the European Union rural development policy in the framework of the territorial and social cohesion**

One of the fundamental objectives of the European Community is to construct a competitive economy with the aim *'to promote throughout the Community a harmonious development of economic activities a continuous and balanced expansion, an increase in stability, an accelerated raising of the standard of living and closer relations between the States belonging to it (Article 2 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome)'*. In this context, various strategies, such as the Single Market which abolished barriers to trade between Member States, European Monetary Union, and a number of policies were intended to promote the above objectives and to improve the capacity of regions and social groups to compete effectively within the Union by developing their economic processes and reducing disparities between them.

These policies are financed by the following Structural Funds: the ERDF - European Regional Development Fund, the ESF – European Social Fund, the EARDF - European Agricultural Rural development Fund and the EIFF - European Instrument for Fisheries Fund (established in 1993).

At this context, European rural policy was equated with agricultural policy and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) represented the most important political and budgetary measure of

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<sup>128</sup> Shucksmith, M., Thomson, K. J. and Roberts, D. (2005) *The CAP and the Regions. The territorial impact of the Common Agricultural Policy*. Cambridge: CABI Publishing, page 150.

support for rural areas.<sup>129</sup> The original objectives of the CAP were laid down in Article 39 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome as following: increasing agricultural productivity; ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers; stabilizing for farmers; ensuring reasonable prices for consumers.

When experts discuss about EU agricultural and rural affairs, it is common to use the term 'integration' concerning the approach adopted in the implementation of measures directed at the development of rural areas.<sup>130</sup> The term 'integration' was introduced into the 1981 European Community policy for the implementation of the Integrated development Programmes (IDPs) involving specific areas of Scotland, France and Belgium. In 1985, such programmes were also implemented in the Mediterranean areas of Greece, south of France and central and southern Italy, the so-called Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs).<sup>131</sup>

These programmes, with a top-down approach, were aimed to combine agricultural development measures with development projects in favour of other important activities in rural areas. These activities include food production, craft, tourism and leisure activities over a multi-year programming.<sup>132</sup> The arrival of EC food surpluses shifted the political emphasis from increasing food production to curbing it. There were also some concerns about the preservation of the rural environment from the excesses of intensive agricultural activities. It was in this context that the European Commission had to re-examine the policies for rural areas. In 1988, the Commission published a Communication entitled 'The Future of the Rural Society', where it emphasized the diversity of circumstances in rural Europe, the need for an approach that would stimulate rural development by taking account of local resources with a closer integration between agricultural and non-agricultural policies to promote economic and social development in the countryside. The Communication argued that '*External*

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<sup>129</sup> Ritson, C. and Harvey, D. (1997) *The Common Agricultural Policy*. Second edition. New York: CAB International.

<sup>130</sup> Thomson, K. J. and Psaltopoulos, D. (2004) 'Integrated Rural Development Policy in the EU: Rhetoric and Reality', Aberdeen discussion paper series, no. 2004-2. Aberdeen: Socio-Economic Research Programme, The Macaulay Institute.

<sup>131</sup> Delgado, M. and Ramos, E. (2002) 'Understanding the Institutional Evolution of the European Rural Policy: A Methodological Approach', paper presented at the 10th Congress of the European Association of Agricultural Economists. Zaragoza, 28-31 August 2002.

<sup>132</sup> Fennell, R. (1997) *The Common Agricultural Policy: Continuity and Change*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

*intervention has little prospect of success without the support of local communities. Moreover, the involvement of local and regional authorities and other social, local and regional economic interest groups in the identification of problems and the quest for solutions limit the number of errors of diagnosis that are all too common when planning is carried out from the outside*.<sup>133</sup>

Along with the 1986 Single European Act (SEA) and especially articles 130a which introduced the concept of 'economic and social cohesion'<sup>134</sup> and 130b which specified the instruments to use for this purpose,<sup>135</sup> it emerged the need to diversify agricultural activities from uncompetitive farming and to coordinate and rationalize EC structural policy more effectively, that would include the targeting of particular rural regions with the most need for policy support. More specifically, with the term 'cohesion', the Community aimed to introduce policy measures *'to compensate for any negative effects of restructuring which may result from the pursuit of neo-liberal growth policies'*<sup>136</sup> and acquired an additional framework to cultivate Europeanisation through the promotion of pan-European networks between the poorer regions.

The Community aimed at reducing disparities between the development levels of the various regions. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) which promoted *'the upward harmonization of living and working conditions'* and *'the promotion of a social dialogue between management and labour at the EU level'* completed article 130a of the former SEA with the words *'including rural areas'*. These words were added at the end, underlining the specific case represented by most rural areas in terms of infrastructure, service and maintenance of their competitiveness.

The wording of EU Treaty legislation provided the impetus for the development of a coherent regional policy and for the formulation of a European rural policy. With the reform,

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<sup>133</sup> European Commission (1988) 'The Future of Rural Society', Commission Communication transmitted to the Council and to the European Parliament on 29 July 1988, Com (88) 501, 28 July 1988. *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 4/88. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, page 62.

<sup>134</sup> Article 130a says: *'In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Community shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic and social cohesion'*.

<sup>135</sup> Article 130b says: *'Community shall support the achievement of these objectives by the action it takes through the Structural Funds'*.

<sup>136</sup> Tomaney, J. and Amin, A. (1995) *Beyond the Myth of the European Union – Prospects for Cohesion*. London: Routledge, page 11.

the measures were targeted in a more spatially and thematically focused manner and were more carefully directed towards specific problems and specific areas. A set of seven 'Objectives' were formulated for the 1989-1993 programming period to guide the distribution of funds as follows:

- Objective 1: structural adjustment and development of less developed regions;
- Objective 2: conversion of regions severely affected by industrial decline;
- Objective 3: combating long term unemployment and facilitating the occupational integration of young people and persons excluded from the labour market;
- Objective 4: assistance for workers in employment to adapt to industrial change and new production systems through retraining;
- Objective 5a: speeding up the adjustment of agricultural and fisheries structures;
- Objective 5b: facilitating development of rural areas;
- Objective 6: promotion of development in regions with exceptionally low population density.<sup>137</sup>

Of these objectives, no. 1, 2, 5b and 6 were spatially restricted while no. 3, 4 and 5a were horizontal. The Objective 5b was intended to target specific problems in areas with a below level of economic development and where the main employment activity was represented by the agricultural sector with poor levels of incomes and depopulation. Here, actors and organisations were to be given the opportunity to make an input into the design of a rural development plan which *'does not mean merely working along existing lines. It means making the most of all the advantages that a particular local area has: space and landscape beauty, high-quality agricultural and forestry products specific to the area, gastronomic specialities, cultural and craft traditions, architectural and artistic heritage, innovatory ideas, availability of labour, industries and services already existing, all to be exploited with regional capital and human resources, with what is lacking in the way of capital and coordination, consultancy and planning services brought in from outside'*.<sup>138</sup>

Following this, a second programming period began from 1994 to 1999. The Structural Funds were administered through a 'programming approach' in which the European Commission, the member State and sub-national actors together produce an analysis of the problems and

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<sup>137</sup> Bachtler, J. and Michie, R. (1995) 'A new era in EU regional policy evaluation? The appraisal of the Structural Funds', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 29(8), pp. 745-751.

<sup>138</sup> European Commission (1988), page 48.



potential of the area and set the priorities in the form of a programming document which would be funded by the Structural Fund. Then there are the principles that govern the approach: 1) partnership which aims to promote coordination between actors at different levels and across different sectors; 2) additionality, meaning that Structural Funds must not be used as an alternative to national funding of regional policy, but as an extra input of funds; and 3) monitoring and evaluation of the operations.

In addition, the approach required a partnerships development with a strong coordination between different group of actors, including local governments, business interests, rural development agencies and voluntary groups. The partnership had the role to administer the programme and make decisions about the allocation of resources to specific projects. Rather than the former style in which the EC defined precisely the types of measures and the details of funding, the new approach made the process flexible and sensitive to local conditions. The EC transferred the funding management to the regional organization managing the development plans<sup>139</sup> exerting a control on the objectives and principles of structural policy while the local level contributed to the design of local programmes. In this context, regions would raise their socio-economic well-being to the EU average by basing their activity on the local traditions, images and capital to achieve the pursuit of the EU goals of convergence and cohesion within the Single Market.<sup>140</sup> Above all, this approach introduced a new relationship between the local region (sub-state) and the EC (supra-state). The EC reinforced its influence on regional development policy through its authority by establishing the eligibility criteria for the approval of the development plans. The local level gained a role into the policy process by establishing a direct channel with the EC with the involvement of the local partners, local and regional authorities.<sup>141</sup> Finally, on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1997, the European Commission published the Agenda 2000 Communication reforms.<sup>142</sup> In a single

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<sup>139</sup> Laffan, B. (1992) *Integration and Cooperation in Europe*. London: Routledge.

<sup>140</sup> Robertson, J. (1986) 'The Economics of Local recovery', paper presented at the conference 'The Other Economic Summit'. Chelsey, 17-18 April 1986.

<sup>141</sup> Allen, D. (1996) 'Cohesion and Structural Adjustment', in Wallace, H. and Wallace, W. (eds.) *Policy Making in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>142</sup> European Commission (1997) 'Agenda 2000. For a Stronger and Wider Europe', document drawn up on the basis of COM (97) 2000 final, 15 July 1997. *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 5/97. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

framework, this Communication set out the future development of the EU and its policies beyond the turn of the twenty-first century, including the reform of the Structural Funds. Agenda 2000 reform provided also new framework for rural development policy including the following four principles: 1) the multi-functionality of agriculture which implies the recognition of the services provided by farmers and the role of agriculture in preserving and improving Europe's natural heritage; 2) a multi - sectoral and integrated approach of the rural economy in order to diversify the activities, create employment and protect the rural heritage; 3) a decentralization and consultation at the regional and local level; 4) transparency in elaborating and implementing development programmes, based on simplified procedures and targeted to the specific needs.<sup>143</sup> This reform provided the addition to the existing CAP Pillar 1 (direct payments to farmers and market management measures) of the Pillar 2 focusing on improving the structural and environmental performance of agriculture and promoting rural development at local level through the implementation of rural development programmes. In this framework, each member state was required to draw up a seven-year consistent and lasting development programme for guaranteeing the future of rural areas and promoting the maintenance of employment.<sup>144</sup> For the 2000-2006 programming period, the number of priority objectives was reduced from seven to three, with none specifically devoted to rural areas as follows:

- Objective 1: regions whose per capita GDP falls below 75% of the EU average;
- Objective 2: regions in structural crisis, (e.g. industrial or service sectors subject to restructuring, decline in traditional activities in rural areas, problem in urban areas, etcetera) assisting them into growth and jobs;
- Objective 3: regions needing support for education, training and jobs, helping people to adapt and prepare for change.

For the 2007-2013 programming period, the strategic objectives of the European Union development policy were foreseen in a new Structural funds legislative framework:

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<sup>143</sup> Shucksmith, M., Thomson, K. J. and Roberts, D. (2005), page 150.

<sup>144</sup> Lowe, P. (2006) 'European agricultural and rural development policies for the 21st century', in Midgley, J. (ed.) *A new Rural agenda*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: IPPR North, pp. 29-45.

- the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*<sup>145</sup> which aims at promoting economic and social cohesion by helping to reduce regional inequalities throughout the Union. Its financial assistance is mainly targeted at supporting SMEs, promoting productive investments, improving infrastructure, local development and to create jobs by fostering competitive and sustainable development;
- the *European Social Fund (ESF)*<sup>146</sup> which aims at contributing to the reinforcement of economic and social cohesion. It provides financial assistance for vocational training and job creation and is targeted particularly to unemployed youth, long-term unemployed, socially disadvantaged groups and women;
- the *European Fisheries Fund (EFF)*<sup>147</sup> which contributes to ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. The Fund provides financial support aimed at ensuring the long-term future of fishing activities and the sustainable use of fishery resources; fostering the protection of the marine environment;
- the *European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)*<sup>148</sup> which aims at strengthening the EU's rural development policy. The Fund contributes to improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry through measures aimed at promoting the establishment of young farmers and early retirement for farmers, the modernisation of agricultural and forestry holdings, improving the quality of production and products; at improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; at the implementation of local development strategies through public-private partnerships called 'LAGs (Local Action Groups) in the mainstream of the LEADER approach.

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<sup>145</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1783/1999, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 210, 31.7.2006, pp. 1–11.

<sup>146</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 210, 31.7.2006, pp. 12–18.

<sup>147</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 of 27 July 2006 on the European Fisheries Fund, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 223, 15.8.2006, pp. 1–44.

<sup>148</sup> The EAFRD is, along with the EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund), one of the two financial instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) established by Regulation (EC) No 1290/2005, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 209, 11.8.2005, pp. 1–25. From 1 January 2007, these two funds replace the EAGGF Guidance section and the EAGGF Guarantee section respectively.

All these funds are currently under revision to better respond to the challenges for rural areas emerging (e.g. globalization of the world trade, quality of the products, enlargement of the EU) in the context of the future 2014-2020 programming period.<sup>149</sup>

### 3.3 The LEADER initiative

The EU LEADER approach targets particular rural areas that have seen its population decline over time, its cultural identity and social vibrancy undermined and its economy become vulnerable to extra-local forces.

In this context, many rural areas need the support of the EU institutional framework when the local circumstances do not provide the necessary conditions for communities to give the response to these challenges. A capacity building process has to be promoted by the bodies that have the technical support and the institutional credibility to do so. *'Capacity building may not be a sufficient condition but it will be a necessary one if endogenous development is to occur'*.<sup>150</sup>

Within this context, the European Commission promoted the partnerships in the early 1990 as a relevant tool to promote integrated rural development with the growing realization that it should accord more respect to the diversity of the rural areas, and give local actors more responsibility for devising and managing them. This tool developed into the European Community Initiative 'LEADER' (*Liaison entre action de développement de l'économie rurale- Links between actions for the development of the rural economy*) designed to generate the development of rural areas at local level. As its name suggests, it is an approach of delivering rural development in local communities. It must be implemented and delivered by LAGs made up by representatives of both the public and private sectors that are responsible for elaborating and implementing rural development strategies for their areas.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> For further information see the section of the European Commission website 'European Structural and Investment Funds Regulations 2014-2020' available at: [ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations) (Last access: 26 November 2018).

<sup>150</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999) *Local Partnerships and Rural Development in Europe, A literature Review of Practice and Theory*. Cheltenham: Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, page 187.

<sup>151</sup> European Commission (2006) *The LEADER approach: a basic guide*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

The spirit of LEADER was not only a policy instrument at the local level, but also based on local participation in the policy formation process and in the animation of the development activity. However, behind the participatory principles, a primary objective of LEADER was *'to find innovative solutions which will serve as a model for all rural areas'*.<sup>152</sup> The goal was to derive some concepts and techniques of rural development throughout the different rural areas enabling comparisons of method, strategies and the identification of model approaches. This means the utilisation of the capabilities of local people and the development of local people's confidence in their own ability to create solutions to problems in their areas.

At the beginning, LEADER was to run for three years from 1991 to 1994 and *'represented a refinement of the local rural development approach introduced in The Future of Rural Society'*.<sup>153</sup> LEADER I was an innovative and a relatively experimental small programme and piloted in very fragile rural areas aimed to animate endogenous, rural development at the local level. It lasted for three years and in many aspects led to a *'reconsideration of traditional delivery systems for rural development support'*<sup>154</sup> at the national and regional level. Then, having proved its worth, it was superseded at the end of 1994 by the five-year LEADER II programme (1994-1999). LEADER II involved some relatively minor changes, enabling not just the extremely deprived areas to be eligible. It also had a focus on promotion of opportunities for economic, environmental and social development. From LEADER I to LEADER II, this approach experienced a considerable expansion: the number of programmes, the amount of funding, the territory and the population involved an increase of five times compared to the first period.<sup>155</sup>

In 1996, the principles that guide the LEADER were articulated in the Cork Declaration issued at the European Conference on Rural development in the Irish Republic. It provided a pivotal

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<sup>152</sup> European Commission (1992) *LEADER (brochure)*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, page 3.

<sup>153</sup> Ray, C. (1996) 'The dialectic of local development: the case of the EU LEADER I rural development programme', Centre for Rural Economy working paper series, no. 23. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, page 10.

<sup>154</sup> Bontron, J. C., Dethier, J. L., Lasnier, N., Roussel, S., Saraceno, E. and von Meyer, H. (1999) *Ex – Post Evaluation of the LEADER I Community Initiative 1989-1993. General report*. Brussels: CEMAC, page 179.

<sup>155</sup> European Commission (2006).

moment in terms of policy development by identifying the importance of a shift from a sectoral to an integrated approach. The Cork Declaration laid out a set of principles inherently dependent on reform of the CAP to inform future rural policy. The principle included the desire of some actors to encourage participation in the formulation and delivery of rural policy and for a more integrated development strategy. More specifically, it says that '*...Policies should promote rural development which sustains the quality and amenity of Europe's rural landscape (natural resources, biodiversity and cultural identity), so that their use by today's generation does not prejudice the options for future generations...given the diversity of the Union's rural areas, rural development policy must follow the principle of subsidiarity. It must be as decentralized as possible and based on partnership and cooperation between all levels concerned (local, regional, national and European). The emphasis must be on participation and a 'bottom-up' approach, which harnesses the creativity and solidarity of rural communities. Rural development policy must be multi-disciplinary in concept, and multi-sectoral in application, with a clear territorial dimension. It must apply to all rural areas in the Union, respecting the concentration principle through the differentiation of co-financing for those areas which are more in need'*'.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, the main characteristics of LEADER can be summarized on the following seven major aspects:

1. An *area – based approach* based on rural areas of small dimension, homogeneous, a low population density with no more than 100,000 inhabitants, social cohesive territory, often characterized by common traditions, a local identity and a critical mass in terms of human, financial and economic resources;
2. A *bottom-up approach* where the local actors are from economic and social interest groups; public and private institutions (e.g. people, communities, SMEs, voluntary associations and local authorities) are consulted and involved in elaborating the local development strategy programme for the area. All these groups have an active participating role in decision-making to identify the strengths and the weakness of

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<sup>156</sup> Extract from 'The Cork Declaration: A living Countryside', issued by the European Conference on Rural Development, November 1996. Available at: [http://www.aughty.org/pdf/cork\\_declar.pdf](http://www.aughty.org/pdf/cork_declar.pdf) .(Last access: 26 November 2018).

the area, to draw a local development strategy and the selection of the priorities to be pursued;

3. A *public-private partnership* where LAGs are the expression of a group of development players constituted in various forms and active in local initiatives. These will include individual persons and unions representing farmers, professionals and SMEs, trade associations, citizens, local political representatives, environmental and cultural associations, women and young people. These groups should be capable of devising and managing the local LEADER programmes to bed their work in local needs and resources. It should be well balanced and representative from the different socioeconomic sectors. At the decision-making level the private partners must make up at least 50%.
4. *Innovation*, where the LEADER programme can play a role in stimulating innovative approaches to the development of rural areas by allowing LAGs margins of freedom and flexibility in making decisions about the actions to support which can mean the introduction of a new product, a new process, a new market or finding new solutions to persistent rural problems;
5. A *multi-sectoral approach*, where the actions contained in local strategies should be linked and coordinated with respect to a common vision (e.g. actions conducted in a single sector, links between the different economic, social, cultural, environmental sectors involved);
6. *Decentralized management and financial support* through a system of global grants, financial engineering, guarantee funds, risk capital funds and the transfer of the budget to project beneficiaries according to rules set by national or regional programme administration;
7. *Networking and cooperation* which includes the exchange of experiences and know-how between LAGs, rural areas, administrations and organisations involved in rural development as an important source for a common understanding of rural Europe. This activity is a tool of transferring good practice and building from the lessons learned. Cooperation enables further networking by involving a LAG in the participation in a joint project with another LAG in another region, member state of

third country with the aim to resolve certain problems or give added value to local resources.<sup>157</sup>

All these elements were conceived in order to achieve the following main objectives:

- *use of new know-how and new technologies* in order to increase the competitiveness of the products and the services of the territories in issue;
- *improvement of the quality of life* in the rural areas;
- *valorisations of the local products*, in particular facilitating, through a collective, the access to the markets for the small productive structures;
- *valorisations of the cultural and natural resources*.

A second European Conference, which was held in Salzburg (November 2003) and organized by the European Commission, was no less remarkable.<sup>158</sup> Here emerged the need to devolve decision-making to rural areas and the simplification of funding processes with a consensus around the following three objectives:

- *a competitive farming sector* through diversification, innovation and value-added products;
- *managing the land for future generations* by preserving and enhancing the natural landscape and Europe's cultural heritage;
- *a living countryside* by promoting sustainable growth and creating new employment opportunities to increase the attractiveness of rural areas.

The Conference also concluded that the rural development policy contributes to the cohesion of the rural areas and be more than just a sectoral approach linked to agriculture having an important territorial dimension.

With the creation of the Agenda 2000, this Initiative, although keeping the name LEADER, was not designated LEADER III but LEADER+ (2000-2006). This was an attempt to break with the LEADER I and LEADER II continuity,<sup>159</sup> making the policy horizontal and potentially

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<sup>157</sup> Mantino, F. (2008) *Lo sviluppo rurale in Europa. Politiche, istituzioni e attori locali dagli anni '70 ad oggi*. Milano: Edizioni agricole de Il Sole 24 ore, page 149.

<sup>158</sup> See the European Commission – Agricultural and rural development website available at : [ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/events/2003/salzburg](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/events/2003/salzburg) (Last access: 16 October 2014).

<sup>159</sup> Van der Ploeg, J. D., Renting, H., Brunori, G., Knickel, K., Mannion, J., Marsden, T., De Roest, K., Sevilla-Guzmán, E., Ventura, F. (2000).



applicable in all rural areas of the Community that demonstrate their capacity to experiment with new forms of territorial development.<sup>160</sup>

It continued the role as a 'laboratory' for testing new development methods, by integrating an endogenous rural development approach with cooperation and networking and focusing on the valorisation of the local products and the natural and cultural resources.

In this context, Ray describes the LEADER programme as a tool where each LAG is intended '*to search for innovative ideas that not only would assist socio-economic viability in the locality but also serve a demonstrative function for other participating territories*'.<sup>161</sup> It also ensures maximum integration between measures supporting rural areas and the various sectoral measures.

In this sense, LEADER has been crucial not just in mobilizing local human and financial capital in rural areas, but also in encouraging participation and community involvement processes. In political terms it is very important for local political actors to stop thinking that the rural areas have been left to their own devices.

Some authors started to look at LEADER as a form of creating new territories and new forms of governance and as a new chance to provide local people with structures that will allow them to better express and satisfy their needs.<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, the approach turned the attention to enhancing local partnerships and focusing on endogenous local development. In some regions LAGs have a pivotal role in the implementation of local area-based approaches to rural development. In other regions, where LAGs have ceased their activities, the importance of local partnerships is still tangible as they contributed to the diversification and dynamism of rural territories. LEADER thus has provided an important phase of institution building for the regions.<sup>163</sup> LEADER has also

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<sup>160</sup> European Commission (1999) 'The Community Initiatives 2000-2006: Working Document for the Commission Services', Commission Work Program no. 97/020. Brussels: Commission of the European Community.

<sup>161</sup> Ray, C. (2000) 'The EU LEADER Programme: Rural Development Laboratory', *Sociologia ruralis*, Vol.40(2), page 166.

<sup>162</sup> Ray, C. (1998) 'New places and space for rural development in the European Union: an analysis of the UK LEADER II programme', Centre for Rural Economy working paper, no. 34. Newcastle upon Tyne: Centre for Rural Economy, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

<sup>163</sup> Koutsouris, A. (2003) Innovative Structures for the Sustainable Development of mountainous Areas, paper presented at the 'ISDEMA Conference'. Thessaloniki, 8-9 November 2002.

sought to promote cooperation among the different actors of rural areas by encouraging the constitution or consolidation of associations, cooperatives and foundations working for the social and economic development of the local area. It also contributed to the consolidation of local partnerships by introducing new ways of thinking about rural problems and the development of existing potentialities among the rural population and territory. Finally, top-down elements are nevertheless still maintained when designing the programme, while it is kept the need to encourage partnership between the central government, regional and local bodies and the private sector as a tool for the achievement of rural policy objectives.

### **3.4 The role of Local Action Groups as fundamental partnership to initiate and manage LEADER**

Partnerships, when launching LEADER, were not a common practice for rural development in the most European member states. The European Commission<sup>164</sup> intended that the major element in the delivery of the readjustment of activities and the maintenance of a sufficiently diversified socio economic structure was the LSGs which were envisaged as a tool for the decentralised development where *'all local partners share a common aim which is rooted in the geography, culture, local society...drawing directly on aspirations and projects born at local level'*.<sup>165</sup> According to this vision, LAGs could be constituted by a balanced and representative membership of leading figures in the local economy and society coming from the public sector, private sector and third sector organisations. The aim of the LAGs is to facilitate a feeling of ownership and commitment and to instigate local participation in the design of a development plan, to encourage the 'bottom-up' approach at the very local level and to manage the subsequent implementation phase. It is meant not just as a structure but as a process of working. Its values lie in the local legitimacy, participation and coordination to encourage the dynamic for development.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, LEADER is very unusual in insisting

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<sup>164</sup> European Commission (1991) *Guide to the Community Initiatives*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

<sup>165</sup> MacSharry, R. (1992) 'Introduction', *LEADER Magazine*, no. 1. Brussels: European Commission, page 2.

<sup>166</sup> Moseley, M. (1996) *The LEADER Programme 1992-1994 an Interim assessment of a European Area Based Rural Development Programme*. Cheltenham: Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Countryside and Community Research Unit.

that *'at the decision-making level the economic and social partners, as well as other organisations representing the civil society, such as farmers, rural women and young people's organisations, must make up at least 50% of the local partnerships'*.<sup>167</sup> This avoids the problem of groups being dominated by one type of partner. This socio-economic composition requirement mandates the building of a LAG Board consisting of between 12 and 20 members and including local authorities, farmers, Chamber of Commerce, social and community organisations.

LAGs could already exist or be created for the purpose, approved as a competent body by the state government and be able to submit a local development plan which is a product of local consultation and implemented through a principle of participation. A few partnerships already existed when the Programme was announced and in these cases the LEADER represented an additional funding.<sup>168</sup>

The organization of LAGs was highlighted by several member states. For example, in Sweden most Groups recognised that *'local partnerships build bridges between the official institutions and the activist organisations'* and that they are a true innovation and not a traditional approach. For the Federation of French LAGs, *'(T)he local partnership brings together the institutions, the professionals and the organisations. It is this togetherness which confers legitimacy and effectiveness'*.<sup>169</sup>

However, difficulties were also identified within the states. For example, Spanish LAGs mentioned the sometimes negative role of local institutions: they believed that the excessive weight of public institutions undermines democracy within the LAG. Some Italian LAGs mentioned that LEADER could be understood by local entities as an additional source of finance *'underestimating the capacity of LEADER to encourage partnerships in order to create consensus and co-operation among different partners in the area'*.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> European Commission (2006).

<sup>168</sup> Midmore, P., Ray, C. and Tregear, A. E. (1994) 'An Evaluation of the South Pembrokeshire LEADER Project', report prepared for SPARC. Aberystwyth: Welsh Institute of Rural Studies, University of Wales.

<sup>169</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997c) 'Towards a new Community Initiative for rural development initiative: 800 leaders give their views', *LEADER Magazine*, no. 16: Special LEADER Symposium, Winter 1997-1998. Brussels: AEIDL.

<sup>170</sup> Esparcia J., Noguera J. & Buciega A. (1999), page 190.

Another difficulty could be questions over (1) what proportion and how the members are represented within the LAG; and (2) if some of them could take the leading role within the group with decision-making problems (e.g. decisions on which projects to approve). Furthermore, the LAGs are not elected bodies. They are self-appointed and this raises the issues of legitimacy and accountability of LEADER action. The issue of legitimacy and democratic participation is expressed through the territories that have been reinforced through the Programme. This may be because of a realization that *'the LEADER territory does not always lead local people to engage in cooperative activity and that attention might sometimes be more successfully focused onto smaller, more organic levels of socio-economic organization. But at the same time, new territories, however 'constructed in nature', often have the potential to raise the profile of the very 'resources' on which the opportunistic construction was based'*.<sup>171</sup>

### **3.5 The mainstream of the LEADER approach**

On 20 September 2005, the Council approved a new regulation for rural development which concluded that LEADER has reached a level of maturity that enables areas to implement it more widely in mainstream rural development programming.<sup>172</sup> Thus, from 2007, the LEADER Initiative Programme was replaced by the LEADER approach, becoming an implementation method.

Instead of being financed as a 'Community initiative', it became part of the overall EU rural development policy (mainstreaming). Financially, it was supported by the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).<sup>173</sup>

A minimum of 5% of EU funding for each programme should be reserved for LEADER approach. The integration of the LEADER approach into the rural development programming as outlined in the Third Cohesion Report<sup>174</sup> had severe implications on the administration and contents. It was a very effective instrument in creating new links between local actors and stakeholders and local areas even if it was achieved only by the more advanced groups

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<sup>171</sup> Ray, C. (1998).

<sup>172</sup> Council regulation (EC) no. 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), *Official Journal of the European Union* L 277, 21.10.2005, pp. 1–40.

<sup>173</sup> European Commission (2006).

<sup>174</sup> European Commission (2004).

due to certain preconditions and external influences (e.g. a favourable administrative context, a diversified local economy, a dynamic representative partnership).

In this context, ÖIR analysed the issues of LEADER features and the application of its method in the rural development programmes,<sup>175</sup> and concluded that the application varies considerably between the programmes and between the Member States. Positive comments concerned the participation of different groups of actors or an efficient decentralized management and financing due to the interplay of authorities and institutions at various levels. There was also the production of synergies with other regional development programmes and the feasibility of the LEADER method itself. Negative comments noted problems with the following: the political and institutional framework of the Member States, the administrative barriers related to the routines of a sectoral perspective, the payment operations and problems related to the local actors that need time to build the strategic and operational capacities necessary to design and implement local development strategies.

### 3.6 Conclusions

This chapter provided a rationale of the LEADER approach for the construction of new local policy spaces where the EC sent signals that would be appropriate for funding and influencing the nature of the initiatives such as the definitions of the boundaries of rural areas, types of organization and styles of projects. Here the Programme takes place in a defined area, managed by a public-private partnership with the power to take decision and where an action plan is drawn up taking in account the economic, social and environmental priorities. As OECD reported *'The LEADER method has had success and generated a lot of enthusiasm in many rural areas across the EU...even though often difficult to quantify... LEADER has demonstrated ... the benefits that a bottom-up, integrated approach to rural development can bring with relatively little resource and its success stands in contradiction to and highlights the limits of the sectoral approach to rural areas which is still dominant in terms of financing throughout the EU and in several OECD countries'*.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> ÖIR GmbH (2004) 'Methods for and Success of Mainstreaming LEADER Innovations and Approach into Rural Development Programmes'. Final report commissioned by European Commission, DG Agriculture, Unit G4. Vienna: Österreichisches Institut für Raumplanung (Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning).

<sup>176</sup> OECD (2006), page 91.

Information from evaluations and rural stakeholders have been fundamental during this research as they indicate that the LEADER approach works well in quite different situations and different socio-economic contexts, linking public and private institutions, as well as different interests of local actors.

It emerged that the LEADER approach has some specific features, which may lead to specific outcomes and effects such as smaller scale projects which provide a wide range of beneficiaries, especially female entrepreneurs and non-profit sector. It is about farming, but also natural and cultural heritage, tourism, SMEs services, training, and employment in different sectors.

Moreover, it cannot be considered as an instrument to change local economic structures but rather it stimulates processes by the improvements of intangible factors, raising awareness, strengthening cooperation and building the basis for the provision of better services and more competitive products. LEADER has also the potential to make a real difference to the lives of rural people and becoming a sort of laboratory for building capabilities and for finding new ways to satisfy the needs of rural communities.

For this context, the bottom-up approach allows the local community to express their views and plans to help to define the development strategy of their area. It is implemented by LAGs that are organized on the partnerships to facilitate linkages between different actors and sectors of activity so the rural development programmes can be more coherent and innovative.<sup>177</sup> They can be seen as operating on three inter-related spatial level: within the area of their strategic activity where the individuals, communities, groups are the direct target of animation, between their area and the wider institutional environment and finally with other local development initiatives.

Even if these and many other positive assessments reveal the potential of the LEADER approach, however many other evaluations reveal the limits of the participation of the local actors, the difficulties of cooperation at local and regional levels and the still limited experiences on exchanges within and between rural territories.

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<sup>177</sup> Van Depoele, L. (2003) 'From Sectorial to Territorial-Based policies: The Case of LEADER', in OECD (ed.) *The Future of Rural Policy. From sectoral to place-based policies in rural areas*. Paris: OECD Publications, pp. 79-87.

Despite its limitations, the EU decided to mainstream the LEADER approach into the rural development policy for the 2007-2013 programming period with the aim to address more directly and effectively the diversification potential of farmers and rural regions in Europe. Anyway, its application varies considerably between the programmes and the Member States due to different groups of actors or due to the interplay of authorities and institutions at various levels in terms of management and financing. This is what will be analysed in the case study chapters concerning the experience of four LAGs working in UK and in Italy in order to understand the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder the development and their workings.

## Chapter 4. Theories of local partnerships for rural development

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the notion and practice of local partnership, drawing on both the academic and applied literature with the aim to set out a framework for analysing the specific examples of application in the case study chapters. The present chapter seeks to make a step that starts by exploring the existing knowledge in the academic and applied literature relating to the notion of the local partnership, their position in the implementation of the European rural development policy and the implications and outcomes deriving from their practice.

According to Westholm et al., the partnership approach has become an answer to various economic and political challenges and an established tool to implement rural planning in most countries in terms of regeneration, sustainable development, social exclusion, tourism, agriculture and conservation.<sup>178</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, this has also been attributed to the influence of European Union policies which emphasize the importance of partnerships in policy implementation.

In the rural development context, the local partnerships approach has been highly promoted in the implementation of rural development and is recognized by both academics and practitioners *'by creating links between factions in conflict, mobilizing the initiatives or finding alternative forms of organization'* and by *'bringing together a certain number of local actors to resolve a problem affecting the whole area concerned'*.<sup>179</sup>

This approach, after the identification of rural development actions, considers not only the aims of the relative local projects through which they can be most implemented and delivered in the local area as well the dynamism created by the involvement of a large number of people.<sup>180</sup> It brings new resources, competencies and democratic involvement to public economic and social policies and involves *'the formation of a network of relationship and solidarity at the level of an area whose aim is to better develop the area's potential and enrich the sectoral actions with a transverse, inter-sectoral debate. More than joint economic*

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<sup>178</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999).

<sup>179</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b) 'Organising local partnerships', *Innovation in rural areas*, Notebook no. 2. Brussels: AEIDL, page 21.

<sup>180</sup> Bryden, J. (1998).



*action, local partnership represents a will to build or rebuild a social link or even a search for identity*'.<sup>181</sup>

By implementing development programmes, partnerships help bring synergies between different local actors and a level of coordination between policies that was not achieved if designed at the national level. Indeed, development programmes generally do not have the flexibility to adjust to different local conditions or to react quickly when they change.<sup>182</sup>

The growth of partnership working has been supported not only by politicians and government officials but also by practitioners in economic and community development; they emphasize the benefits for capacity building at local level in terms of helping the local community in developing actions appropriate to their needs<sup>183</sup> and developing initiatives which can succeed in the long-term than 'top-down' approaches.<sup>184</sup>

However, little continues to be known about partnership work in practice; large questions remain about their organization, form and working, their funding and staffing, accountability and representation, their success in achieving their objectives and obstacles to their effective working.<sup>185</sup>

#### **4.2 The notion of partnership and the rise of its approach**

The word 'partnership' commonly means an association of persons have a joint interest '*which deliberately draws together the resources of specified partners in order to create a capacity to act with regard to a defined objective or set of objectives*'.<sup>186</sup> This definition includes three important elements: 1) they are established for a specific purpose; 2) they draw together the resources (e.g. financial, practical, material or symbolic) of a number of different partners; 3) in order to achieve a desired outcome.

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<sup>181</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b), page 7.

<sup>182</sup> OECD (2001a) 'Best Practices in Local Development', *Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED)*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>183</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997) *Making Partnership Work: a practical guide for the public, private, voluntary and community sectors*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>184</sup> Greenlees, A. (1998) *Building communities: A guide for local governments working with community-led initiatives*. Caerphilly: Welsh Council for Voluntary Action.

<sup>185</sup> Edwards, B. (2000) *Partnership working in rural regeneration: governance and empowerment?* Bristol: Policy Press.

<sup>186</sup> Edwards, B. (2000), page 2.

There is no universally agreed definition of partnership and researchers have commonly resorted to elaborating their own working definition providing a wide range of notions of partnership which rely strongly on the context, focus and perspectives of the research undertaken.

Throughout the years, the notion and practice of the approach has evolved significantly with profound changes and various manipulations. Partnership has been a key term in the field of urban regeneration, local economic development and political administration for some time. In the field of urban generation, partnership has been seen as a useful approach to face the multidimensional problems and issue of urban dereliction and decay;<sup>187</sup> in the field of economic development, partnership is viewed in the context of the wide variety who take part in the development process<sup>188</sup> and finally, in the field of political administration, partnership has been considered as a partial solution to resource constraints and a way to cope with the fragmentation of the institutional environment.<sup>189</sup>

This partnership process '*took the form of imbuing the public sector with the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, or removing power from the public sector and placing it in the hands of new institutional forms such as quangos*'.<sup>190</sup>

In recent years, even if local partnership is referred to cooperation between local authorities of the same or different levels, to the inter-relationship between big firms or SMEs, there has been a growing argument that development is today tied to the different links established between the local actors from the public, private or voluntary sector. Hence, the study of partnership in relation to regeneration and development may have a focus on community participation, consensus, capacity and strategy building as well as territorial and structural organization.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Lawless, P. (1991) 'Public-Private Partnership in the United Kingdom', Center for Regional Economic and Social Research working paper, no. 16. Sheffield: Sheffield City Polytechnic.

<sup>188</sup> Bennett, R. and Krebs, G. (1991) *Local Economic Development: public-private partnership initiatives in Britain and Germany*. London: Belhaven Press.

<sup>189</sup> Hambleton, R., Essex, S., Mills, L. and Razzaque, K. (1995) *The Collaborative Council, a Study of Inter-Agency Working in Practice (Future & Local Government)*. London: LGC Information.

<sup>190</sup> Jones, O. and Little, J. (2000) 'Rural Challenge(s): partnership and new rural governance', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol.16(2), page 173.

<sup>191</sup> Fordham, G., Hutchinson, J. and Foley P. (1999) 'Strategic Approaches to Local Regeneration: The Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 33(2), pp. 131-141.

A common view across these different fields is that partnership working is used to solve multi-dimensional problems unmanageable for one single organization and that it is able to bring together separate groups from the public, private, voluntary and community sector.<sup>192</sup> Today it is a well-established instrument for public policy formulation and implementation in most European countries and developed economies.<sup>193</sup>

Another distinction has to be made between the principle of 'partnership working' and 'partnership organisation'. Partnership working is core to the idea of governance and seeks to encourage integration and the sharing of responsibility in the governance process. It means that organizations hold liaison meetings or are involved in consultative forums, that there is co-funding of an initiative and that they are working on a project. At the most concrete level is the partnership organization referring to a formal body with an identifiable financial and administrative structure which has been created as a condition for funding and established to manage or implement a specific project.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, partnership helps to foster added value and synergy by '*pooling expertise and resources in a complementary rather purely competitive fashion can increase the total impact of a project, the whole being greater than the sum of the parts*'.<sup>195</sup>

Waddock argues that the rise of partnership must be considered against the backdrop of profound multidimensional changes and restructurings that have been occurring in most developed economies as the globalization of economy and society, the need to reduce environmental instabilities and complexities, the growing recognition and role of networks and finally the decreasing role of the nation-state and of government at central and local level, the fragmentation of public sector and the expansion of the stakeholder society.<sup>196</sup> These different processes contributed to a profound transformation of the nation-state

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<sup>192</sup> Hutchinson, J. (1994) 'The Practice of Partnership in Local economic Development', *Local government studies*, Vol. 20(3), pp. 335-344.

<sup>193</sup> Jones, O. and Little, J. (2000).

<sup>194</sup> Edwards, B. (2000).

<sup>195</sup> Haughton, K. and Whitney, D. (1989) 'Equal Urban Partners?', *The Planner*, Vol. 75(34), page 10.

<sup>196</sup> Waddock, S. A. (1986) 'Public – Private partnership as Social products and Process', in Post, J. E. (ed.) *Research in corporate social performance and policy*, Vol. 8, pp. 273-300. Greenwich (CT): JAI Press.

which took a new role, that of a regulator following the principle of collective interest but also an instigator and a negotiator.<sup>197</sup>

Within this context, it is possible to witness the emergence of a 'new governance' which is characterized by new mechanisms of coordination and negotiation to organize the increasing interactions between the state, the market and the civil society in order to establish consensus or obtain a common agreement to execute programmes of action and where the various stakeholders, individual or group, have the opportunity to be considered as part of their structures and processes, and be drawn into the economic, political, social, environmental decision-making processes.<sup>198</sup>

Hence, partnership is generally depicted as '*a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible*'<sup>199</sup> involving an '*arrangement among otherwise independent organisations*'<sup>200</sup> that mobilises a coalition of interests around shared objectives as means to respond to a shared issue too complex to be resolved by unilateral organizational action or to realize specific outcomes.

Forrester argues that partnership cannot be considered as just any form of joint-working relationships or arrangements but it must rest strongly on the common recognition of collective needs and interests leading to close and sustained relationships with a certain degree of formalization with a focus, a nature of motivation, membership and boundaries. He also refers that, whatever the level of formalization of the partnerships, the coalition of interests is drawn from more than one sector by combining the private, public and the voluntary sector who agree to collaborate at the implementation of a coherent strategy to integrate the less privileged groups within the area. More specifically, the main parties to be considered may include single businesses, business bodies (e.g. Chamber of Commerce),

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<sup>197</sup> Reigner, H. (2001) 'Multi-level Governance and Co-administration? Transformation and Continuity in French Local Government', *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 29(2), pp. 181-192.

<sup>198</sup> Kooiman, J. (1993) *Modern Governance: New Government-Society Interactions*, London: Sage Publication.

<sup>199</sup> Gray, B. (1989) 'Negotiations: Arenas for reconstructing meanings', unpublished working paper. Pennsylvania State University (PA): Centre for Research in Conflict and negotiations, University Park, page 18.

<sup>200</sup> Waddock, S. A. (1989) 'Understanding Social Partnership, an evolutionary Model of Partnership Organisations', *Administration and Society*, Vol. 21(1), page 79.

voluntary groups of business interests, co-operatives, trade unions, central, regional and local government authorities and agencies.<sup>201</sup>

Following this perspective, Bennet and Krebs suggest that *'partnership can range from agreement between actors to work together towards a common end, to agreements which form a legal contract which specific targets for performance are defined by the contracting parties'*.<sup>202</sup> In pursuit of this purpose, the stakeholders will use *'shared rules, norms and structures, to act or decide'*<sup>203</sup> but they can still keep their independent decision-making powers. There may be some variation and some stakeholders may give up some of their autonomy, but this means that the loss of their complete autonomy will then characterize a different form of inter-organisational relationship that cannot come under the term partnership. Hence, partnership is therefore presented in the literature as a collaborative effort between distinct and separate groups in some form of inter-organisational arrangement in order to address some shared problem.

Bailey *et al.* explain that *'partnerships are normally created through a catalytic process of either a top-down or bottom-up nature'*. 'Top-down' partnerships are established as a response to policy initiatives by central government, they follow national guidance in fixing the membership, the funding and the partnership's remit. 'Bottom-up' partnerships are more flexible and depend on local circumstances and the views of key players, involved in establishing the partnership.<sup>204</sup>

Conroy argues that the notion of partnership was inspired by the ideas of the European Commission referring to the relationships between the member states and the Community institutions as well as at sub-regional level between government bodies and public administration, business, trade unions and non – governmental organisations: *'It was a political solution to a double problem. The first problem was a coherent and consistent expenditure of larger Structural Funds to achieve cohesion between regions at a time when disparities in standards of living were widening and a response to the protectionism of some*

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<sup>201</sup> Forrester, S. (1990) *Business and Environmental Groups – a natural partnership?* London: Directory of Social Change Publication.

<sup>202</sup> Bennet, R. and Krebs, G. (1991), page 82.

<sup>203</sup> Gray, B. and Wood, D. J. (1991a) 'Collaborative alliances: Moving from Practice to Theory', *Journal of Applied Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 27(1), page 146.

<sup>204</sup> Bailey, N., Barker, A. and MacDonald, K. (1995) *Partnership Agencies in British Urban Policy*. London: UCL Press, page 27.

*member states politically and economically vis-à-vis each other and the community itself. In this sense partnership was a large scale and articulated response to relations at a moment of time'.<sup>205</sup>*

The notion of partnership in rural development has been largely inspired by these different conceptions and its working, whether organically grown, promoted or imposed by the requirements of applications for national or Community funding, has become a widespread practice and an important model of development in the European Union. Today, within the cohesion policy framework the partnership serves the idea that local, regional, national, public, private and voluntary actors must come together and get organized to face the socio-economic pressures of global competition through European integration.<sup>206</sup>

#### **4.3 The partnerships in the Structural Funds and the European rural development policy**

During the 1990s the partnership approach has become a key feature of the EU's mainstream development policies and programmes in the framework of the cohesion policy. It was included as a principle within the 1988 reform of the Structural Funds and was reinforced by the Maastricht Treaty with the principle of subsidiarity in the context of decentralization where the relevant authorities and the social partners are involved in the pursuit of agreed objectives and the sharing of responsibilities for decision-making.<sup>207</sup>

Walsh argues that local development is '*more than a scaling down of interventions previously organized from the top by centralized policy-making units...it is a radical response that seeks to achieve new objects in relation to the development process by focusing on such concepts as multi-dimensionality, integration, coordination, subsidiarity and sustainability*'.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Conroy, P. (1996) 'The Role of Partnership in Europe: A European Framework', in Community Workers Co-operative (ed.) *Partnership in Action: The role of Community Development and Partnership in Ireland*. Galway: Community Workers Co-operative, page 32.

<sup>206</sup> Esparcia, J., Moseley, M. and Noguera, J. (2000).

<sup>207</sup> European Commission (1996) *First report on Economic and Social Cohesion 1996*. Luxembourg: Office for Official publications of the European Communities.

<sup>208</sup> Walsh, J. (1995) 'Local development theory and practice: recent experience in Ireland', in Alden, J. and Boland, P. (eds.) *Regional Development Strategies. A European Perspective*. London: Routledge, page 1.

The reason for this extension has been driven by financial, operational and development factors: 1) many of the EU programmes depend upon the co-financing of the member states; 2) partnership is an approach of recognizing the different stakeholders for the implementation of the development programmes; 3) partnership enables local actors to cooperate with other partners in innovative projects, creating networks and exchanging experience between them and across the member states.

This new emphasis gained significance for rural development. It positioned the European Union as a major source for rural development funding projects, and it established partnerships as a mandatory pre-requisite for accessing such funding.

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, in the late of 1980s, the EU and the member states expressed their concerns regarding the future of their rural areas.<sup>209</sup> These concerns arose from the decrease of the agricultural activity and the need to provide long-term secure employment and adequate incomes for all of those engaged, with social and cultural consequences in terms of unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, breakup of local service and caring communities. But concerns were also linked to the intensification of agricultural practices and the pressures of an urban population with environmental consequences and '*the frequent inadequacy of existing political and administrative machinery to resolve such issues in a way that reflects their interrelatedness and the need to involve all relevant actors*'.<sup>210</sup>

Many of these issues are common problems of national or international provenance but many of them have a typical rural dimension arising from the land based economies, the low population density, the geographical remoteness from the main centres of employment and population, a cultural conservatism found in many rural societies, etc.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Cork Declaration stated that rural policy must be as decentralized as possible and based on partnership and cooperation between all levels concerned. It highlighted the need to integrate rural development policy with a clear territorial dimension, the respect of the principle of subsidiarity in terms of the decision-making decentralisation and improved mechanism for planning, managing and funding rural development at local level through the promotion of local development partnerships which seek to combine public sector support with efforts in the private and voluntary sector. One

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<sup>209</sup> European Commission (1988).

<sup>210</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b) *Local partnerships for Rural development. The European experience*. Wallingford, Oxon: CABI Publishing, page 1.

of the most important changes was a gradual shift from top-down to promoting bottom-up development strategies based on perspectives and endogenous processes.

In this context, decentralisation *'can be seen as part of a process that divides powers and responsibilities and allows governments at different levels to be independent but coordinated within an overall framework...In some cases local and regional authorities have been given responsibilities for raising their own funds and have genuine local accountability. In other cases they simply have autonomy in the allocation of budgets'*.<sup>211</sup>

*'Thus local partnerships can be said to have a vertical dimension (both up to central governments and down to actors at the very local level), a diagonal dimension, across to the agencies that typically deliver government services in a sectoral manner, and a horizontal dimension, bringing together a range of public, private and voluntary organizations whose operation are broadly confined to the area in question'*.<sup>212</sup>

They have been expected to facilitate the following:

1. Facing multidimensional problems that are too complex to be managed by one organization;
2. Building consensus among divergent actors and integrated policies and programmes of actions;
3. Sharing financial, human and physical resources and ensuring a more efficient and targeted use of them;
4. Implementation of a more coordinated and synergic action and programme delivery by the actors at institutional and local level;
5. Ensuring an enhanced role for the voluntary and community sector;
6. Strengthening of the local identity and competitiveness;
7. Encouragement of innovation in stimulating new approaches to the development of rural areas.

Thus, *'they are more than mere tools of collaboration or coordination but generators of a true partnership effect that can spur development and is therefore worth cultivating and exploiting'*<sup>213</sup> and where the development of rural areas depends on the ability to combine local resources in a way to increase their competitiveness.

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<sup>211</sup> OECD (2001a), page 28

<sup>212</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b), page 5.

<sup>213</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b), page 6.



In this context, when the decision-making process becomes more and more complex and where it needs to pay attention to local as well as global processes, public bodies like ministries, regional administrations and municipalities have to base their decisions on a more critical attitude by consultation and by collaboration, leading to consensus among the different actors.<sup>214</sup> They seek new ways of operating and new solutions both on political organs and in public administration. They may continue to finance and take responsibility but with less control<sup>215</sup> and must be more open for cooperation, negotiations and discussions of a wide range of options and approaches for the resolution of problems. Partnerships may be a way of organizing these processes.

#### **4.4 The local partnership practice in the rural development**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the local partnerships have a key role within the LEADER approach as they are called 'Local Action Groups (LAGs)' which gather local institutional, economic and voluntary partners. They are a local team which is given a global grant in order to prepare and implement an integrated development strategy for a defined area, to promote negotiations and dialogue between the various actors and also to promote the exchange of good practice and information. Even if the potential of the LAGs is widely advocated, there only exists a limited understanding and knowledge about their real potential working for delivering rural development. Much of the existing literature on local partnerships in rural development has concentrated on this approach and their political consequences rather than how they work and what they potentially achieve in practice. Therefore, a lot remains to be known about the practice, the circumstances of their creation, the process of their development, the constraints and difficulties of their working, the achievements of this practice.

The available knowledge on their working emerges from good practice guidelines<sup>216</sup> and from the practice of local rural development partnerships including, for example the 'PRIDE

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<sup>214</sup> Beck, U. (1994) 'The reinvention of politics: towards a theory of reflexive modernization', in Beck, U., Giddens, A. and Lash, S. (eds.), *Reflexive Modernization – Politics, traditions and Aesthetics in the Modern social order*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>215</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999).

<sup>216</sup> Slee, B. and Snowdon, P. (1997) *Good Practice in Rural Development: effective Partnership Working*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Office; Wilcox, D. (1994) *An A to Z of Partnerships*. Brighton: Delta Press.

Research Project' which ran from February 1999 to January 2001.<sup>217</sup> It was concerned with partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe focusing on rural development experience of eight EU countries (United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg). This research collects much of the existing written academic literature on partnerships and the analysis of their workings in each of the above countries. It confirms the great variety of local partnerships that currently exists in the context of the rural development process which is evolving in the same direction within each of the countries studied and generally within the European Union.

In the search for further understanding of the process of local partnership working in rural development, the current literature<sup>218</sup> suggests that there is a need for a close examination of a variety of issues. For example, one can scrutinise the context and the reasons at the origin of partnership; the process through which they develop; their working organization; the origin and role of partners and the resources. Notwithstanding the diversity that characterizes local partnership arrangements in rural development, the majority of observed LAGs:

- may find their origin in endogenous initiatives, though they are often introduced by top-down policy and programmes;<sup>219</sup>
- their arrangements draw partners from different interests including the public, private, voluntary and community sectors;<sup>220</sup>
- have a strategic and integrated approach for the development of the local area;
- are strongly dependent on external funding and policy support;<sup>221</sup>
- their structures generally comprise a management board and sub-groups;
- are under the leading role of the public sector.<sup>222</sup>

Sometimes the partnerships represent a tactical response to getting additional funding from various resources and many of them may disappear with the funding itself.

The LEADER Observatory asserts that the formation of a local partnership depends '*on the nature and numbers of partners; the context in which the partnership has been created, the*

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<sup>217</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b).

<sup>218</sup> Slee, B. and Snowdon, P. (1997).

<sup>219</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999).

<sup>220</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b).

<sup>221</sup> Slee, B. and Snowdon, P. (1997).

<sup>222</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b).

*natural or legal persons who are behind it, the objectives that has been set and on the socio-economic culture of the area concerned (legal administrative system, regulations in force, role of public authorities, institutional practice, exercise of citizenship etc.)'.<sup>223</sup>*

Gray and Wood, drawing on the findings of a series of investigations on the context, stress the importance of 'stakeholder motivations' and 'structural conditions' in the rise of collaborative alliances and identify the following factors: high stake and high interdependence; a shared purpose to achieve a common end; the need to protect common resources and need for governance rules; the need to maximize efficiency and reduce transaction costs; the need to achieve a shared understanding of problems amongst the stakeholders and the need for a collective response; the gaining of a strategic advantage and the degree of organization. Therefore, the context has an important role in the way a partnership comes about and should be given particular attention.<sup>224</sup>

Further issues are participation, representation, democracy, power and time and finally the issue of rural development governance at local level which helps to take initiatives and the corresponding notion of local development as a participatory process becomes more widespread. More specifically, time needs to be allowed for partnerships to develop strong leadership and direction, to devise a suitable set of aims and objectives and for the allocation of duties, responsibilities and role to each partner.<sup>225</sup>

The OECD suggests that the rural development partnership's aims, representation, organization, management structure and processes should be politically feasible where the analysis of who the actors are, their value, beliefs and motivations and their resources will help delineate which of them are supportive, which are not and how the resources will be used and in respect to the actors' willingness to cooperate, to negotiate, to share responsibility.<sup>226</sup>

A local partnership must be organized with the main purpose to offer local actors, equal representation between the various local interests and with a key role in the development of

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<sup>223</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b), page 7.

<sup>224</sup> Gray, B. and Wood, D.J. (1991b), 'Towards a comprehensive Theory of collaboration', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 27(2), pp. 139-162.

<sup>225</sup> Esparcia, J., Moseley, M. and Noguera, J. (2000).

<sup>226</sup> OECD (1990).

their area with the opportunity to have a say and present their views, particularly the most disadvantaged.<sup>227</sup>

It emerges from the literature that central to the practice of partnership are the different individuals and organisations that act as representative of a sector or activity or a specific interest and that have a stake in the issue for which the partnership arrangement is being established. In this context, the mobilization of actors is presented in the literature as essential to the identification of all the relevant interests that may be drawn into a partnership.<sup>228</sup>

This is in order to reflect the different issues and to develop the potential strategy to help the creation of a partnership. The representatives of all the sectors and organisations that may have an interest in the partnership issue may first be consulted in order to be made aware of the initiative.<sup>229</sup> The establishment of facilities for participation and of networks of people are also suggested as useful methods of mobilization. The purpose of these techniques therefore is to allow information, clarification and cohesion between representatives with the aim to develop participation, interaction and of building awareness of the opportunities of the local development strategy amongst the population.

Hutchinson adds that, among the wide range of actors, the representatives must be legitimate and must present appropriate interests, qualifications and experience and thereby, depending on the partnership's aim and objectives, the configuration of partners should comprise:

- those most interested in working in partnership to solve a problem;
- those most powerful and influential;
- those who seek a solution, whatever their power;
- individual for their personal skills and expertise;
- the majority of stakeholders.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Warburton, D. (1998) *Community and Sustainable Development, Participation in the Future*. London: Earthscan Publications Limited.

<sup>228</sup> Selsky, J. W. (1991) 'Lessons in Community Development: An activist Approach to stimulating Inter-organizational Collaboration', *Journal of Applied Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 27(1), pp. 91-115.

<sup>229</sup> Wilcox, D. (1994).

<sup>230</sup> Hutchinson, J. (1994).

Another central issue to participation is that any partnerships arrangements should be clear in terms of organization, roles, responsibilities and balance of power between partners. *'One of the most important factors in making partnership work is to identify the right partners and establish clear roles for them. They should be based around a limited set of core partners whose strategic involvement is essential and who offer major or strategically significant resources. Through appropriate and linked forums they are able to bring in other partners when they can contribute a particular resource or skill or when their support is desirable'*.<sup>231</sup>

Policy-makers indirectly create the framework within which partnerships operate by setting criteria for funding, by determining the timeframes for bidding, by defining the duration of programmes and by regulating the resources available.

Bennet and Krebs argue that a partnership that is working does not necessarily imply that all actors are equal partners.<sup>232</sup> The balance of power between partners must be seen as a *'reflection of the membership, the benefits, and access to resources and influences that each stakeholder brings, and the interaction between the membership'*.<sup>233</sup> Within these limits, the practitioners play the fundamental role in determining the constitution, and the scope for effective partnership working.

Furthermore, to have an effective and operative function, such organization requires the establishment of a structure to implement activities and functions necessary to achieve clear and mutually accepted aims and objectives of the partnership. The creation of a functional structure will help to establish an identity and visibility for the local development initiative. It could have the role of communicating between partners and interest groups, of drawing up the local strategy and of supporting to access finance for the implementation of projects. This structure should comprise at least a management board, a chairperson and a project manager and to have the ability to react to particular circumstances.<sup>234</sup> They must be accompanied by a trained management staff and a team of *'on the ground workers'* that help to mobilise the population and organization to develop and support local initiatives, build partnership and networks and monitor and evaluate the performance.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> OECD (2001a), page 32.

<sup>232</sup> Bennett, R. and Krebs, G. (1991).

<sup>233</sup> Bailey, N., Barker, A. and MacDonald, K. (1995).

<sup>234</sup> Slee, B. and Snowdon, P. (1997), page 28.

<sup>235</sup> OECD, (2001a).

Sometimes it is possible to find that partnership has opted for some sort of legal status, providing governing rules for the organization, or has started up a trust. Wilson and Charlton argue that although partnership structures vary significantly, the most common organizational structure should comprise a governance function with an executive body of the partnership, a management function to implement the partnership's activities and a consultative function where the various committees, report to the executive body.<sup>236</sup> Finally, the mechanism should allow the partnership to review membership and evaluate progress in achieving objectives and assessing outcomes.<sup>237</sup>

#### **4.5 The implications and outcomes of partnership practice**

One of the fundamental questions for researchers and policy planners concerns the real potential of the partnership approach for addressing a given issue and how it can be assessed. More specifically, the questions could be the following:

- What are the expected outcomes of a partnership?
- Are there some special results impossible to achieve without partnership?
- What constitutes a success or the failure of the partnership working?<sup>238</sup>
- What are the factors that contribute to the successful management of partnership?<sup>239</sup>
- How far does the partnership bring additional benefits and how far they could have been achieved through traditional means?<sup>240</sup>

Much of the literature on rural development partnerships relates to the expected benefits from their working. Rural development partnerships are seen to provide the means for the preparation and implementation of development strategies by drawing on the necessary resources, both financial and human, including skills, expertise and understanding.<sup>241</sup>

Slee and Snowdon add that local partnership working can offer a variety of other benefits such as the development of a shared vision, a synergy through the actions and the pooling of

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<sup>236</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997), page 39.

<sup>237</sup> LEADER European Observatory (1997b).

<sup>238</sup> Gray, B. and Wood, D. J. (1991b).

<sup>239</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K., (1997).

<sup>240</sup> Bailey, N., Barker, A. and MacDonald, K. (1995).

<sup>241</sup> Shortall, S. and Shucksmith, M. (1998a).

resources and have the potential to introduce specific forms of 'basic' democracy by the involvement of the all socio-economic actors in the local area.<sup>242</sup> They also argue that when assessing partnership working, it is necessary to base the analysis on a number of performance indicators as markers to determine whether the aim and objectives have been reached. The performance indicators they propose include the number of projects implemented and their economic outcomes such as the number of jobs created, the amount of funding mobilized, the feedback from the local community.

The LEADER Observatory suggests the assessment of the quality of partnership action as an instrument to rally the stakeholders, of dialogue and decision sharing and to implement local development on the basis of the legitimacy and ability of partnership action in the area. But the increasing practice of partnership has often raised some concerns about its implications for democracy and accountability.

Hutchinson argued that the reduction of power of public sector and the growing influence of private and community sectors have a potential to affect the democratic balance of an area, raising concerns about the nature and operation of partnership in terms of structure, decision-making processes and legitimacy.<sup>243</sup>

Concerning the accountability towards the public which means 'knowing who is answerable to whom' at political and financial level, this may be difficult in a partnership where representatives come from various origins and the decisions and implementation depend on a multitude of working groups. Indeed, they are seldom locally grown but arise from the public sector's initiative.<sup>244</sup>

They may become advisory groups where the individual members constantly report to the organisations they represent: *'...they appear to allow private and non-governmental sectors to take what are really political decisions regarding resource allocation. Furthermore, partnership can give increased power to local elites, at the expenses of disadvantaged and excluded groups, for whom locally accountable, elected authorities have traditionally provided some sort of representation and protection. Therefore, issues of transparency and visibility are critical'*.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Slee, B. and Snowdon, P. (1997).

<sup>243</sup> Hutchinson, J. (1994).

<sup>244</sup> Wilcox, D. (1994).

<sup>245</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b), page 31.

Yet, even if partnership building is a lengthy process to compromise with each other's agendas and methods of working and to establish whether there are grounds upon to agree or disagree, it often needs to achieve results quickly because of structural factors in terms of financial and deadlines but also to give credit to its practice.<sup>246</sup>

Therefore, from the review of the literature emerges that there is not yet a consistent agreement over what should be considered or measured when looking at partnership outcomes, when it may constitute a success and that the investigation of outcomes should not uniquely focus on tangible outputs and thereby dismiss the importance of their process. But the investigation should consider the highly context-dependent where a description and discussion of the views and attitudes of those involved would provide an indicator on how to benchmark local partnership working as well as their success in rural development.<sup>247</sup>

*'For some, the sole criterion of a successful partnership operation is one that meets its stated objectives and delivers beneficial outcomes to its 'target audience'. For others, however this measure must be tempered by a consideration of the processes by which the aims of the partnership are met'*.<sup>248</sup> The true question therefore is whether the potential of partnership working should be approached in terms of outputs or processes but, in the light of the criteria used to assess partnerships, such a distinction does not seem to be made in the literature.

Focusing essentially on partnership as a process, Mackintosh suggests that the evaluation of partnerships should be considered on the basis of three criteria: 1) synergy to describe the creation of additional profits and an associated negotiations process to increase the returns to private stakeholders and to serve social ends; 2) transformation to describe the process whereby partner seeks to change or challenge the aims and operating cultures of other partners; 3) budget enlargement when most partnerships are very strongly held together by a financial contribution from a third party.<sup>249</sup>

Edwards acknowledges that measuring the achievements of partnership working in terms of economic development is highly difficult to achieve *'given the tangled matrices of governance within which partnership operate, the uncontrollable influence of external*

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<sup>246</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997).

<sup>247</sup> Edwards, B. (2000).

<sup>248</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997), page 52.

<sup>249</sup> Mackintosh, M. (1992) 'Partnership Issues of Policy and Negotiation', *Local economy*, Vol. 7(3), pp. 210-224.



*factors, and the lack of comparative data relating to a hypothetical non-partnership alternative' ... They claim that ... 'effective partnership working might be where communities are fully engaged in identifying problems and solutions, where there is a pooling of resources, where replication of activities is avoided, where consensual decision-making processes are instituted, and so on'.<sup>250</sup> Moseley argues that an assessment of partnership working may consist of an investigation of the 'net difference that the partnership approach makes compared to the conventional development approach'.<sup>251</sup>*

On the basis of the research of the working partnership, Wilson and Charlton suggest that, when attempting to measure the partnership performance, it is important to distinguish three elements: 1) Inputs – resources in terms of money, people, structures; 2) Outputs - the tangible products or services provided; 3) Outcomes – the more abstract achievements of the partnership in term of improvement of employment prospects.<sup>252</sup>

They report however that it is becoming '*progressively more difficult to assess each of these elements as one moves from simple input measures to the broader impact of the work of the partnership*'<sup>253</sup> and that, while it is possible to measure short terms inputs and outputs, very little is known about long term outcomes. Finally, another important issue relevant to the understanding of partnership practice is that to describe those general results of plans and actions, both expected and resultant.<sup>254</sup>

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

In the last 20 years, bottom-up participative approaches, promoted by a wide range of policies at European, national and local levels, have become common practice in the preparation and implementation of rural development actions at local level with the aim of completing and reinforcing economic, territorial and integrated strategies. This has been attributed to the influence of European Union policies which emphasize the importance of partnerships in policy implementation.

Previously, partnerships were established mainly as a key term in the field of urban regeneration, local economic development and political administration for some time.

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<sup>250</sup> Edwards, B. (2000), page 2.

<sup>251</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b).

<sup>252</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997).

<sup>253</sup> Wilson, A. and Charlton, K. (1997), page 55.

<sup>254</sup> Wilcox, D. (1994).

Today, local actors wish to participate more actively in the design of strategies for their area as a reaction to the poor results attained by national policies only weakly linked to local conditions.

A review of the literature on partnership and how they work in practice indicated that no comprehensive theory and no universally accepted framework exist. Much of the existing literature on local partnerships in rural development has concentrated on this approach and their political consequences rather than how they work and what they potentially achieve in practice. Furthermore, it emerges that the term partnership does not have a consistent definition and that no truly typical partnership can be defined as it varies in terms of form, type, objective and scope.

Even if there is no a universally accepted definition of 'local partnership', in order to delimit the scope of the present research, I propose the following definition drawn from various definitions put in the literature: 'a formal or informal arrangement which mobilises a coalition of diverse interests and resources and the commitment of a wide range of individuals and organization, to act as partners around shared objectives and a common agenda as a means to respond to a an issue or to realize specific outcomes'.

*'Partnerships are sometimes compared to a 'black box': input and outputs are visible, but the mechanism enabling the transformation from input to output are not. Inputs to the black box include the local actors who accept to participate in the exercise: the public programmes which partnerships can use to various degrees, and the government funding made available for operations and possibly projects. The outputs or the 'value added' or partnerships, consists of the numbers of jobs created, people referred to job vacancies, business start-ups, and people going back to school'.<sup>255</sup>*

Relating the outputs to inputs is quite difficult. Parameters as the degree of utilization of the various sources, the distribution of responsibility and the role of the various local actors in the implementation of the development strategies are unknown as the external factors which may influence the outcome of the partnerships. Therefore, it is also difficult to assess their efficiency and to draw comparisons with other government instruments.

An examination of the origins, the context, the mechanisms and processes involved in the practice of local partnership as well as the outcomes expected emerge from the review of

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<sup>255</sup> OECD (2001b) *Local Partnerships for Better Governance*. Paris: OECD Publications, page 18.

the literature to be relevant to the understanding of the practice of partnership. These include the examination of the economy and society, the decreasing role of the nation-state and traditional machineries of government at central and local level, the fragmentation of public action and the growing of the stakeholder society. Any investigation concerned with understanding how partnerships work is likely to draw upon a variety of issues in terms of mobilization, participation, role, organization and resources, as well as issue of time and power.

While the tendency may be to emphasise the outputs and the strategic aims to reach them it is the process, which sets out why a partnership has been initiated and which identifies the hoped benefits which will be achieved by working together. The identification of inappropriate or unrealistic outputs may lead to a failure of the partnership if these cannot be delivered.

The main characteristics of the governance context that help to identify the need to work in partnership are decentralisation, the role of local authorities and the distribution of power. In order to embrace the complexity of partnership working, one way of examining the practice of partnership is to explore its development process divided between its formation and practice.

The literature review undertaken indicated that evaluations and studies of partnerships have primarily been focused on their organizational and administrative aspects.

Finally, although the existence of European Union guidance might imply that rural partnerships across member states will exhibit many similar characteristics, their structure and functioning are framed by different national contexts.<sup>256</sup>

Some of the following considerations seem to be important issues and concern for the fieldwork research:

1. Local partnerships are sometimes a response to the need to getting additional funding from various sources;
2. Local partnerships are seldom locally grown but arise from the public sector. They are essentially advisory groups which individual members constantly report to the organization they represent;

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<sup>256</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999).

3. Local partnerships are generally set by organisations that are traditionally strong in the region. As a result, they tend to be conservative and slow and to support safe rather than adventurous initiatives;
4. Most partners deliver isolated projects rather than integrated programmes.<sup>257</sup>

Concerning the impact of partnerships, most of the reviews emphasise the partnerships' development process rather than the projects that they carried out. Even if there is a rich evidence that new firms and jobs have been established, the causal connections were often unclear. Instead, the development processes that have been brought about via the introduction of bottom-up perspectives, the endogenous character and the involving of actors from different sectors to get engaged the local community seem in the literature reviewed a more visible and a more significant issue in terms of partnership approach. Thus, due to the nature of the subject studied, which is context-dependent and pragmatic, I made the decision to study the field following a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach and to use case studies to have at the light of the issues raised in the previous chapters. Going on from these key issues arising from the literature review and recalling the research aims set out in Chapter 1 we may now state the four following fundamental questions at the basis of the fieldwork research of this dissertation:

1. What conclusions do we draw about the emergence and the composition of local partnerships?
2. What are the key characteristics of the LAGs' working mechanisms employed to address rural development?
3. What considerations do we draw about the outcomes and performance deriving from the LAGs working in rural development?
4. What is the added value of the LAGs that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach to local development process of the areas they serve compared to the more conventional governance approaches?

The exploration of those questions and some tentative answers to them will provide the substance of the present thesis. The methodology which has been selected and the empirical investigation to collect and investigate the evidence derived from the case studies

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<sup>257</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999).

focusing on the process of local partnership in rural development is examined and discussed in the following chapters.

## Chapter 5. Rural development governance in the UK.

### The cases studies of two LEADER Local Action Groups in Scotland and in England

#### 5.1 Introduction

As we saw in Chapter 3, since 1996 the European Commission has committed itself to '*revitalising rural economies through the adoption of policies designed to promote the development of rural areas taking account of the changing aspirations and priorities of their citizens*'.<sup>258</sup> Shortall and Shucksmith argue that issues relating to the development of rural communities are arising in the EU member states where each state has its own approach.<sup>259</sup> This chapter examines the rural development approach in the UK as one of the two key case studies for this thesis.

Understanding the EU rural development policy implementation in the United Kingdom context requires us to analyse the evolution of UK governance and its financial mechanisms in terms of institutional frameworks as well as the role of the stakeholders.

For much of the twentieth century, the UK was one of the most centralized of liberal democratic states in Western Europe where there was no tier of government between the centre and the local government.<sup>260</sup> In recent years, its administrative policy has been reshaped by a range of initiatives and great efforts in terms of governance reorganization, planning and policy assessment through decentralization of the central government to the regional and local level. The rising importance of the European Union institutions, especially of the Commission and its policy-making, has also been an issue in the development of multi-level governance in the UK: '*there is almost nothing done by way of policy-making and implementation that does not take account of an EU dimension*'.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Preamble to the Cork Conference, November 1996.

<sup>259</sup> Shortall, S. and Shucksmith, M. (1998a) '*Rural development in practice: issues arising from the Scottish experience*', *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 6(1), pp.73-88.

<sup>260</sup> Rhodes, R. A. W. (1997) *Understanding governance: policy networks, governance, reflexivity and accountability*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, page 43.

<sup>261</sup> Moran, M. (2005) *Politics and Governance in the UK*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, page 421.

UK developments have involved a further institutional recognition of the distinctiveness of the nations that make up the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, but, rather than enforcing a coherent blueprint, the nations are each governed in different ways. England has no formal intermediary government layers between national and local level (if we consider the recent developments in urban powers as a locally focused arena). The devolution settlement implemented by the Blair government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland added a new tier of government which changed the traditional constitution requiring new procedures between the nations and the central government.<sup>262</sup> The legislation creating devolved institutions established a formal division of powers between central government and the devolved institutions. Separate from the devolution process, local councils have no power of general competencies; they have only discretionary powers specified by law to set their priorities and adopt different policies to deliver services with responsibility for education, housing, social care, policing, *etc.* In both sets of relationships, Westminster remains sovereign as it limits these powers and can abolish them or accept a position of non-intervention in devolved matters.<sup>263</sup>

*'This marked a new territorial configuration within the UK. From one perspective, it is a sea change, a bringing of Britain into the European regional mainstream, a new post-sovereigntist constitutional order in which older national conflicts are no longer relevant. From another perspective it is little more than a refashioning of the traditional British mode of territorial management which allows the older conflicts to be pursued in the new institutional arena'.*<sup>264</sup>

In this chapter I discuss the process of reshaping the administrative policy and its devolution to UK nations with a focus on the implementation of the EU rural development policies in Scotland and England. To advance this understanding, this case study chapter draws on the experience of two practical examples of LAGs, operating in Scotland (Argyll and the Islands LAG) and in England (Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways LAG) in order to understand (a) the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder the development and effective working of LAGs; and (b) the divergence between the two LAGs

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<sup>262</sup> Bogdanor, V. (2001) *Devolution in the United Kingdom*. Oxford: Opus.

<sup>263</sup> Garnett, M. and Lynch, P. (2009).

<sup>264</sup> Todd, J. (2003) 'The British state since devolution: reconfigurations and continuities', in Ruane, J., Todd, J. and Mandeville, A. (eds.) *Europe's Old States in The New World Order*. Dublin: UCD Press, page 62.

and the reasons for this divergence. It looks at how these and other institutions function and interact in the processes by which rural development policy is made and administered. The mode of and the reasons for the selection of the case studies are discussed in Chapter 1.

## 5.2 The administrative profile of the United Kingdom

The UK is an organic entity with no consolidated written constitution setting out principles and institutions with the consequence of the system containing a set of apparent anomalies held together by a series of unwritten conventions. Rhodes stressed as false the conventional view of the UK as a '*unitary state with a single parliament, government and civil service, deciding on policy for the whole country and applying it through the national territory*'.<sup>265</sup> Even if the Parliament at Westminster may have the power, it is difficult to imagine the central institutions operating without bodies at local level.

An alternative view sees the UK as a union state where its component nations come together in different ways and which does not deny the importance of Parliament but acknowledges the importance of other institutions emerging, changing and disappearing over time and that take account of the state's territorial identity.<sup>266</sup>

Even if the role of the state and its institutions have often changed, national identities have persisted within the UK, which can be considered as a multinational state made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its government institutions operate at different levels and the structure, powers and responsibilities of the local government differ in each UK nation. '*The fact that the UK is a multinational state with people having a sense of Scottish, Welsh and other national identities has been important in how the state has been organized*'.<sup>267</sup> According to Richard Rose, '*No one speaks of the Ukes*', and a sense of UK national identity does not exist.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Rhodes, R. A. W. (1985) 'Intergovernmental relations in the United Kingdom', in Mény, Y. and Wright, V. (eds.) *Centre-Periphery Relations in Western Europe*. London: George Allen and Unwin, page 33.

<sup>266</sup> Rokkan, S. and Urwin, D. (1982) *The Politics of Territorial Identity: studies in European regionalism*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

<sup>267</sup> Mitchell, J. (1999) 'Devolution' in Jones, B. (ed.) *Political issues in Britain today*. Fifth edition. Manchester: Manchester University press, page 106.

<sup>268</sup> Rose, R. (1982) *Understanding the United Kingdom: Territorial Dimension in Government*. London: Longman, pp. 37-39.



In this context, the EU rural development model adds to this UK governance complexity and perhaps even complexity of identity.

### **5.2.1 The evolution of the local government structure in UK**

With the election victory of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government on 1 May 1997, the UK underwent a process of devolution of some of the authority of the central state in 1999. It meant the transferring of powers from Westminster and Whitehall to the devolved bodies and administrative offices across its territory.

According to Jennifer Todd, the type of devolution in Britain corresponds to a model she calls 'state realism' where the state has adapted its power and sovereignty taking account of changing political realities. The centre allowed a certain practical autonomy on local issues while retaining control over high politics. In this model, nations, such as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are able to interact directly with the European Union without going through Westminster in order to determine their European regional development policy.<sup>269</sup>

This was accomplished also through the creation of a Parliament in Scotland and Assemblies in Northern Ireland and Wales but with no formal regional governments in England.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have remained administered by respective government departments that are responsible for the policies and programme implementation in the respective nation.

In Scotland, there is a long history of administrative decentralization to the Scottish Office, and we can distinguish two stages in this process. In 1975, after recommendations<sup>270</sup> of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland, usually called the 'Wealthley Committee', the UK government created a two tier system for most of the country: the first tier was represented by 9 regions with the functions of education and policing, and the second tier was represented by 53 District councils with the functions of social services and care of the elderly. The Island regions could not be split in the same way and so they were Unitary Authorities with most functions of both tiers. A further tier was represented by the Community Councils, which were given the options of setting up their own councils for self-

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<sup>269</sup> Jones, B. and Norton, P. (2010) *Politics UK*. Seventh edition. Essex: Pearson.

<sup>270</sup> Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. London: Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/65/contents> (Last access: 26 November 2018).

government on a very small scale (e.g. village) with a very few, minor responsibilities such as local traffic management.<sup>271</sup>

The second stage took place in the 1990s and was implemented in 1996. This created a uniform, nationwide system: 32 Unitary Authorities, designated as 'council areas', replaced the former two tier system, but the old Community Councils were retained. The authorities provide all normal local government services, while joint boards deal with strategic functions such as policing, fire services and water supply and tourism.<sup>272</sup> At the local level there are civil parishes with



Map 1: Regions of Scotland. Source: Government Regional offices. Available at: [http://future.wikia.com/wiki/File:Provinces\\_of\\_Scotland.gif](http://future.wikia.com/wiki/File:Provinces_of_Scotland.gif) (Last access: 26 November 2018).

no administrative role as they continue to be used only for statistical purposes such as the census and to administer schemes for the Common Agricultural Policy. Finally, a system of 'communities' was created to act for consultation exercises as a channel for the local community opinions, and to be involved in local infrastructure projects such as footpaths and parks. They provide all normal local government services, while joint boards deal with strategic functions such as policing, fire services and water supply and tourism.

Concerning England, it is the largest nation of the UK and represents an anomaly in the devolution process. Scottish and Welsh members of the Parliament at Westminster continue to vote on English domestic affairs while these matters are devolved in Scotland and Wales. Dicey argued that even if devolution is a '*plan for revolutionizing the constitution of the*

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<sup>271</sup> McNaughton, N. (1998) *Local and regional government in Britain*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

<sup>272</sup> Goldsmith, M. and Sperling, E. (1997) 'Local Governments and the EU: The British Experience', in Goldsmith, M. and Klausen, K. (eds.) *European Integration and Local Government*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

*whole United Kingdom*,<sup>273</sup> he was concerned about the implications for parliamentary sovereignty which could be undermined and that the asymmetrical anomalies would lead to the break-up of the state. One alternative is to give England a Parliament of its own and to create a federal system of government in which each nation of the UK has its own domestic parliament. In 2006, Hazell claimed that *'The English seem relaxed about devolution to Scotland and Wales but they do not seem to want devolution for themselves, and they do not seem to mind centralization in the government of England. They do not want an English parliament, and they are not going to get English votes on English laws. But it is a dynamic and fluid situation, in which the most likely outcome is further development of regionalism in England'*.<sup>274</sup> Hazell turns his attention to the strengthening of sub-national government through an elected level of regional government with strong powers and based on regional interests and identities. Recent events such as the Scottish referendum debate seems to have altered that, but the ultimate direction of this discussion is unclear at the time of writing.

Fenwick et al. *'are not convinced that answers lie at the regional level, not least because there is no tradition of regional governance and little evidence that there is public identification with or support for regional enhancement; surveys have shown a growing support for an English Parliament. The English regions are fundamentally different from the constituent nations or provinces of the UK'*.<sup>275</sup> Parks and Elcock also turn toward the local level, from where building governance might generate a new identity for both England and its regions.<sup>276</sup>

In thinking about English governance, regions may offer a strengthened administration layer but as there is no likely political prospect of their governance in England, and so we too

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<sup>273</sup> Dicey, A. V. (1886) *England's Case Against Home Rule*. Richmond, Surrey: Richmond Publishing Co. Ltd.

<sup>274</sup> Hazell, R. (2006) 'The English questions', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 36(1), page 53.

<sup>275</sup> Fenwick, J., McMillan, J. and Elcock, H. (2009) 'Local Government and the Problem of English Governance', *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 35(1), page 9.

<sup>276</sup> Parks, J. and Elcock, H. (2000) 'Why do regions demand autonomy?', *Regional and Federal Studies*, Vol. 10(3), pp. 87-106.

focus on the local level.<sup>277</sup> We can distinguish the following four principal stages in the evolution of local government reorganization in England.

First, in 1965 the Greater London Council (GLC) was set up as an expansion of the smaller London County Council (LCC) to the home counties of Essex, Kent, Middlesex and Surrey. It was divided into 32 boroughs plus the City of London Corporation which provided strategic services such as large-scale planning, public transport, support of the arts, emergency services, refuse disposal and a variety of projects were controlled by an authority governing the whole capital. The boroughs controlled smaller services such as minor planning, local road maintenance, social services, libraries, parks, gardens, and care of elderly. In 1966, the Labour government set up the Redcliffe-Maud Committee. It had the aim to modernize the structure of local government in England and in Wales and to bring Britain into the modern world with changes in the civil services, trade unions, higher education and technological development. The Committee recommended a system of 58 single tier, unitary authorities for most of the country and three city regions in Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester. Most of these proposals were accepted by the government, but action could be not taken because Labour lost power in the election of 1970. The new Conservative government accepted the general idea of the city regions but rejected the principle of unitary authorities.<sup>278</sup>

After much debate, the Local Government Act (1972) came into effect in 1974.<sup>279</sup>

It introduced a two-tier system in which the local authorities were divided between two local government levels. The GLC concept of city regions was extended to 6 other areas (metropolitan counties): Greater Manchester, Merseyside (Liverpool), South Yorkshire (Sheffield), West Yorkshire (Leeds), Tyne and Wear (Newcastle) and West Midlands (Birmingham). They were strategic bodies with responsibility for transport, policy and strategic planning. There was a rationalization of the inefficient and the smallest non-metropolitan counties and new large counties such as Avon and Humberside were created. In rural areas, 47 County Councils - with minor functions but less than the London boroughs (32) or Metropolitan boroughs (36) - were responsible for education and social services in

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<sup>277</sup> Jones, B. and Kavanagh, D. (1998) *British politics today*. Sixth edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 209-231.

<sup>278</sup> McNaughton, N. (1998).

<sup>279</sup> Kavanagh, D. (2000) *British Politics. Continuities and Change*. Fourth edition. Oxford: University Press, pp. 321-323.

addition to policing and transporting. The number of local authorities was greatly reduced with the creation of 333 County Districts replacing more than a thousand bodies. These districts were responsible for housing, leisure and other services. Finally, a lower tier of parish councils was created with functions in the field of village halls, allotments and cemeteries.

First Tier	Second Tier	Third Tier
<i>Greater London Council (1)</i>	<i>London Boroughs (32)</i>	<i>Parishes</i>
<i>Metropolitan Counties (6)</i>	<i>Metropolitan Boroughs (36)</i>	<i>Parishes</i>
<i>County Councils (47)</i>	<i>County Districts (333)</i>	<i>Parishes</i>

This reform was intended to create a system with a priority given to most efficiently achieving economic objectives and where the *'Local sentiment and democratic considerations were of secondary importance'*.<sup>280</sup> It *'reflected the political weakness of English local government and expert opinion... by creating organization that were even more bureaucratic and out of touch with local communities than before. These large authorities, which seemed so appropriate to the needs of a technocratic era, are one of the sources of the problems of English local government as it relates to local communities.'*<sup>281</sup>

In 1986, the GLC and the metropolitan counties, all under Labour party control, were abolished by the Conservative Prime Minister Thatcher whose government sought to exert control over local autonomy and, in particular, local government spending.<sup>282</sup> She considered them as being over-sized and unable to control their spending level, with unresponsive bureaucracies. Their functions were mostly transferred down to the second tier authorities. Some strategic services (e.g. emergency services, refuse disposal) which need large scale planning, were transferred to new joint boards and others were transferred to central government. Even if the GLC had a short life, it was a first attempt to create a regional tier of government incorporating the large metropolitan areas and focusing on coordinated economic development.

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<sup>280</sup> McNaughton, N. (1998) page 22.

<sup>281</sup> Cole, A. and John, P. (2001) *Local Governance in England and France*. New York: Routledge, page 27.

<sup>282</sup> McNaughton, N. (1998).

In 1992, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, explored the possibility of moving to a single tier system by eliminating a whole level of bureaucracy and to make the local government functions easier for the English people to understand. The Conservative government set up the Local Government Commission to organize the changes under the chairmanship of Sir John Banham. After a series of problems in the relations between the government and the Commission, the chairman insisted that the reform, where local feeling was strong enough, should retain two tier authorities. As a result of the minister's disagreement, Banham was replaced by Sir David Cooksey. Most of the work of the Commission was completed in 1996 when 46 new unitary and county authorities were created while the rest of the country was divided into two tier authorities.

Apart from London and the metropolitan areas, England is governed by 34 Counties and 239 District Councils or 27 Unitary Authorities which are mixed structures, at sub-regional level. Counties provide education and social services, strategic land use, economic development and transport. They are subdivided into District Councils, which provide services such as environment, health, housing, local land use and waste disposal. Where counties and districts are superseded, the unitary authorities provide both functions. In the other nations there are unitary councils which are responsible for all services: Scotland has 32, Wales has 22 and Northern Ireland has 26.<sup>283</sup>

At the lower tier of democracy, the third, there are over 10,000 Parish Councils and Town Councils in England and their equivalent, the Community Councils, in Scotland (around 1,000) and in Wales (730).<sup>284</sup> They are very small authorities which exist in many areas but rarely in the cities. They have very limited responsibilities, but are important for the discussion of local issues such as the provision of local recreation facilities and physical development such as planning, promoting tourism, housing, street lighting, the management of the local environment and have relatively few direct powers for initiating and promoting

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<sup>283</sup> Garnett, M. and Lynch, P. (2009).

<sup>284</sup> Yarwood, R. (2002) 'Parish councils, partnership and governance: the development of exceptions housing in the Malvern Hills District, England', *Journal of Rural Studies* Vol. 18(3), page 277.

rural development activities. They are composed of elected members of the public and enthusiastic local residents.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, there are the rural agencies - Rural Community Councils - that play at county level a role in strengthening rural communities by supporting local people to develop local solutions, coordinate voluntary work and provide advice and support to provide support to Parish Councils.<sup>286</sup>

Despite these changes, there was nothing new in the UK having different levels of government: the distinction between central and local government is such an arrangement which already operated in the past. Instead of operating at the margins of a centralized system, it continues to be a defining feature of how policy is made and executed and is something more than the simple hierarchy of central and local government and subsequent devolution to particular parts of the UK.<sup>287</sup> Thus, the whole of Britain is divided into administrative areas. The largest area can be described as the 'first tier'. Each of these units can be further split into smaller ones, the 'second tier' authorities. In some parts of the country there is also a small unit, the 'third tier' which is largely confined to rural areas. Finally, there is a fourth tier when the regional government level is introduced. With this new multi-level governance system, policy is a matter of negotiation and coordination between the levels which are not independent of each other but share authority and '*make decisions in the knowledge that decisions made at one level of government can produce effects through the rest of the system*'.<sup>288</sup>

Having spelt out the evolution the local government structure, it nevertheless remains the case that local governance in UK cannot be reduced to a set of reforms made by the central government. There have also been profound changes at local level such as greater economic and political competition between localities, new funding regimes from the European Union and the development programmes controlled by the central government. Given these realities, many local authorities have recognized the importance of securing funding from

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<sup>285</sup> Woodward, R. and Halfacree, K. (2002) 'Influences on Leadership and Local Power in Rural Britain' in Halfacree K., Kovách I., Woodward R. (eds.) *Leadership and Local Power in European Rural Development*. Aldershot: Ashgate, page 68.

<sup>286</sup> Rogers, A. (1987) 'Voluntarism, self-help and rural community development: some current approaches', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 3(4), pp. 353-360.

<sup>287</sup> McNaughton, N. (1998).

<sup>288</sup> Moran, M. (2005), page 423.

the EU and contributing to the EU policy-making process. To this extent, many UK local councils employ specialist staff to deal with European matters. The influence of the European Union has also encouraged local authorities to lobby for funds, to enter networks of national and European policy-makers, to employ European liaison officers and to open offices in Brussels where they could disseminate information and establish links with the EU and other European national or sub-national governments.

Although the UK government was keen to retain a single position on all EU issues, the devolved bodies were allowed to have access to the UK's EU policy-making mechanisms. Scotland as well as Northern Ireland had access to primary legislative competence over many of those areas of responsibility that had been devolved and that were affected by EU policy. Wales, lacking the primary legislative powers, got this same responsibility in 2011.<sup>289</sup> In this context, they were allowed to manage also Structural Funds development programmes even if the representation of the EU policy-making remains a matter of UK government.<sup>290</sup>

The relationships between the Westminster government and the three devolved bodies were developed through a memorandum of understanding in 2001 allowing them full integration into the EU policy process provided that the respect of the confidentiality of the EU policy process is kept.<sup>291</sup> They are also able to interpret EU policies according to their own criteria and approach to setting the rules.

In England, the government set up Government Regional Offices (GROs) and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) as the first step towards the regionalization of the English state and the main official connection between local bodies and ministers. Instead of elected regional government with policy-making and delivery powers, ten GROs responsible for regional, urban and rural development were created in each region to coordinate the delivery of the government department policies as they *'were engaged in the preparation and/or approval of a range of economic, regeneration, environmental and European strategic documents, so that regional priorities were already established in most of the key*

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<sup>289</sup> Jones, B. and Norton, P. (2010).

<sup>290</sup> Keating, M. and Stevenson, L. (2006) 'Rural Policy in Scotland after Devolution', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 40(3), pp. 397-407.

<sup>291</sup> McGrath, F. (2015) *Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations*. Short briefing. Edinburgh: SPICe, The Information Centre.



*policy areas'*.<sup>292</sup> Local authorities lost their role in drafting development plans and gained the administrative task to support local groups as regulated through the EU and national government. The designation of rural territories, their development policy and governance were managed through regional and national plans. *'This restructuring was in part a response to the increasing belief that EU Structural Funds should be administered through more integrated structures at the regional level ... However, it would be a mistake to see the GROs as representing a British version of the strong forms of regional government found elsewhere in the EU. The GROs were designed to be no more than an arm of central government, created to execute central government policies at the regional level. Regional policy and the administration of EU programmes in Scotland and Wales have continued to be the responsibility of the Scottish and Welsh Offices'*.<sup>293</sup>

The appointment of eight (nine with the addition of one for London in the following year) RDAs<sup>294</sup> for England were given the responsibility for implementing regional development strategies for coordinated economic development, social and physical regeneration, sustainable development and for the planning and implementation of rural development policies.<sup>295</sup> These agencies were created to ensure that decisions about regeneration and regional policy were made within regions with the focus to integrate the economic development of the English regions within the European Union and its region. These are unelected agents with limited budgets and charged by central government to follow targets set by ministers. Both GROs and RDAs, while they were not formally a new level of government, had an operational autonomy as they worked with the regional level to

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<sup>292</sup> Mawson, J. and Spencer, K. (1997) 'The origins and operation of the Government Offices for the English', in Bradbury, J., Mawson, J. and Tomaney, J. (eds.) *British Regionalism and Devolution: The Challenge of State Reform and European Integration*. London: Jessica Kingsley, page 172.

<sup>293</sup> McNicholas, K. and Ward, N. (1997) 'The European Union's Objective 5b Programmes and the UK', Centre for Rural Economy working paper series, no. 28. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing.

<sup>294</sup> North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands, Eastern, South West, South East, London.

<sup>295</sup> Ward, N., Lowe, P. and Bridges, T. (2003) 'Rural and regional development level: the role of the regional development agencies in England', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 37(2), pp. 201 – 214.

develop strategies and assist in the more effective implementation of national and regional policies and programmes.<sup>296</sup>

Finally, during the Gordon

Brown government, nine

regional premiers or

ministers were appointed

for each of the English

regions with the

responsibility to oversee

regional matters and to

administer the delivery of

national policies. With the

Localism Act 2011, the

Coalition Government

abolished the RDAs and

passed devolving

responsibilities to sub-regional partners such as county and district councils alongside the private sector-led Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) with a much smaller budget at their disposal than those ones allocated to the RDAs.<sup>297</sup>

There was no direct replacement for the RDAs as LEPs do not receive any funds from central government and local councils do not receive an equivalent income as they have been called to make savings and implement similar initiatives.

In its foreword, the Minister of State for Decentralization Greg Clark writes: *'For too long, central government has hoarded and concentrated power. Trying to improve people's lives by imposing decisions, setting targets and demanding inspections from Whitehall simply doesn't work. It creates bureaucracy. It leaves no room for adaptation to reflect local circumstances or innovation to deliver services more effectively and at lower cost. And it leaves people feeling 'done to' and imposed upon - the very opposite of the sense of*



Map 2: Regions of England. Source: Map redrawn from the Government Offices for the English Regions website available at: <http://www.gos.gov.uk/> (Last access: 26 November 2018).

<sup>296</sup> Tomaney, J. (2002) 'The Evolution of Regionalism in England', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 36(7), pp. 721-731.

<sup>297</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2011) *A plain English guide to the Localism Act*. London: DCLG Publications.

*participation and involvement on which a healthy democracy thrives. We think that the best means of strengthening society is not for central government to try and seize all the power and responsibility for itself. It is to help people and their locally elected representatives to achieve their own ambition’.*<sup>298</sup>

Within this framework, regional strategies were replaced and local authorities were given a greater say over development in their towns or villages through various new rights as directly elected mayors, a challenge and a veto to excessive council tax and various measures relating to planning and housing. Some people viewed these reforms positively as an empowerment of the communities by reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency. Others viewed these *‘as central government seeking to evade responsibility for cuts to local services (passing the blame on to local government), and as the state’s abdication of its responsibilities to its citizen’.*<sup>299</sup> The GROs were also abolished through the Coalition Government’s Spending Review.<sup>300</sup> The Government *‘stated that existing regional government arrangements lacked democratic accountability, created burdens and bureaucracy for local councils and imposed arbitrary administrative boundaries over real communities’.*<sup>301</sup> Functions undertaken by the GROs are now in the process of being wound down.

This recounting of the evolution of subnational policy-making and responsibility in the UK context, emphasizes the inherent uncertainty and instability of these structures. In this situation where a settled governance approach is lacking, there is a governance vacuum for the LAGs to have potentially a substantial governance role for rural communities and developments. We now turn the analysis to the more explicit rural governance dimensions.

### **5.3 Rural policy in Britain**

Since 1945 rural policy in Britain was synonymous with agricultural policy while policies concerning social and economic development in rural areas came onto the UK policy agenda in the 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the reform of the CAP where the *‘EU, along with*

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<sup>298</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2011), page 4.

<sup>299</sup> Shucksmith, M. (2012), page 17.

<sup>300</sup> HM Treasury (2010) ‘Spending Review 2010’, presented to Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer by Command of Her Majesty. London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>301</sup> Mellows-Facer, A. (2010) *Government Offices for the Regions*. London: House of Commons Library.

*national governments, is now trying to broaden the focus of farming beyond the farm gate, towards diversification and rural development generally*'.<sup>302</sup>

Rural development policy gradually shifted *'away from a prescriptive, top-down approach based on agriculture to one that incorporates a stronger territorial dimension, acknowledges rural diversity and encompasses the economic, social and environmental needs of rural areas. There has also been growing recognition of the need to better integrate the evolving regional and local dimension into rural policy and exploit the linkages between the environment and social economic activity*'.<sup>303</sup>

Another major change occurred as a result of the UK model of intensive industrialized agriculture being dramatically undermined by the outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis, commonly known 'Mad cow disease', in the 1990s and the 'Foot and mouth disease' in 2001. These crises prompted a new agenda for rural policy by redefining agriculture in more multifunctional terms such as diversification of rural economies, the preservation of the natural environment connected to the development of rural people as the natural custodians of landscapes.<sup>304</sup>

A third dynamic has been the question of the responsibility for rural development policy within the process of political devolution. The Westminster government, with specific responsibilities administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has the overall responsibility but it covers only England at the territorial level. Concerning the devolved administrations, they carry out a policy role and there is an involvement at the regional level.<sup>305</sup> Pressures from Southern England to seek reform of the CAP for the release of rural land and a *'dominant discourse for protecting a threatened countryside emerged as a host of policy contradiction came to light in the rural sphere and increasingly calls were made for a new strategy for the countryside*'.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Keating, M. and Stevenson, L. (2006), page 398.

<sup>303</sup> Pearce, G., Ayres, S. and Tricker, M. (2005), page 198.

<sup>304</sup> Marsden, T. and Sonnino, R. (2008) 'Rural development and the regional state: Denying multifunctional agriculture in the UK', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 24(4), pp. 422- 431.

<sup>305</sup> Ward, N., Lowe, P. and Bridges, T. (2003).

<sup>306</sup> Ward, N. and McNicholas, K. (1997) 'Reconfiguring rural development in the UK: Objective 5b and the new rural governance', Centre for Rural Economy working paper series, no. 24. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, page 6.

The Conservative Government responded to these concerns with the publication between October 1995 and March 1996 of Rural White Papers for England,<sup>307</sup> Scotland<sup>308</sup> and Wales.<sup>309</sup> The Rural White Papers provided an account of how the government saw the social, economic and community development possibilities for rural areas and set out the government's rural affairs agenda for the first time, based around the sustainable development principles that should guide the future of the policy development and implementation. This represented an opportunity not only to review the existing policies but to examine the problems and to reformulate the motivations and objectives for state intervention in rural areas. The White Papers also accepted that not only were the rural areas changing, but also the demands placed on the areas by their residents and their wider society were changing too, as the areas of agriculture, planning, environment, tourism and regional policy increased in importance. Allanson et al. '*suggest that the following should be the key objectives: - to overcome the specific disadvantages of rural living; - to safeguard the public interest in the countryside, particularly those public goods which cannot be left to market forces or civil society to protect or supply; - to help ensure the competitiveness of rural economies*'.<sup>310</sup>

The White Papers were very similar, shared identical paragraphs, although there were some differences. Common to all three documents is the vision of active rural communities: these communities take the initiative to solve their problems themselves, continue to prosper drawing on local skills and resources and taking their strength from the independent and strongly expressed views of their people and fired by a vital spirit of enterprise. However, each of the three documents puts forward a range of specific initiatives and measures. Some of these specific features reflect and build upon separate administrative procedures (for example in environmental incentive schemes for farmers and in the land use planning systems), the relative priorities of economic or community development and environmental

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<sup>307</sup> Department of the Environment /Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1995) *Rural England: a nation committed to a living countryside*. London: HMSO, pp. 16-17.

<sup>308</sup> Bryden, J. and Mather, A. (1996) 'The rural White Paper – Rural Scotland: people, prosperity and partnership, *Scottish Geographical magazine*, Vol. 112(2), pp. 114-116.

<sup>309</sup> Welsh Office (1996) *A Working Countryside for Wales*. London: HMSO.

<sup>310</sup> Allanson P., Harvey D., Lowe P., Murdoch J., Ward, N. and Whitby, M. (1995) 'The CRE's comments for the White Paper on rural areas', Centre for Rural Economy working paper series, no. 14. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, page 3.

protection due to different governmental structures and political expressions. The Rural England White Paper focuses on specific preoccupations with landscape and wildlife and on small individual initiatives rather than providing a more thorough analysis of the underlying forces for rural change or stasis. The Scotland White Paper, in contrast, has less to say about planning issues and adopts a more strategic and liberal approach, in terms of simplification and de-regulation of non-statutory conservation designations.<sup>311</sup> In both of these papers there was an emphasis on the involvement of local citizens and institutions in the development process, by assuming the responsibility of the governing of their communities through the identification of their own needs.<sup>312</sup>

The Rural England White paper, for example, states that *'Self-help and independence are traditional strengths of rural communities. People in the countryside have always needed to take responsibility for looking after themselves and each other. They do not expect the Government to solve all their problems for them and they know that it is they who are generally best placed to identify their own needs and the solutions to them. In any case local decision-making is likely to be more responsive to local circumstances than uniform plans. Improving quality of life in the countryside starts with local people and local initiative'*.<sup>313</sup>

The England White Paper proposes an *'active role for parish councils in the management of local affairs, both through the delegation of some responsibilities from district and county councils and taking on new responsibilities'*.<sup>314</sup> At the same time, the role of the Government is seen as listening *'to what people in the countryside have to say'*<sup>315</sup> and *'to work in partnership with local people rather than imposing top-down solutions'*.<sup>316</sup> Accordingly, much of the emphasis is on encouraging rural community development by means of voluntary work and active citizenship.

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<sup>311</sup> Lowe, P. (1996) 'The British Rural White Papers', Centre for Rural Economy working paper series, no. 21. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing.

<sup>312</sup> Murdoch, J. (1997) 'The Shifting Territory of Government: Some Insights from the Rural White Paper', *Area*, Vol. 29(2), pp. 109-18.

<sup>313</sup> Department of the Environment /Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1995), page 16.

<sup>314</sup> Ward, N. and McNicholas, K. (1997), page 29.

<sup>315</sup> Department of the Environment /Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1995), page 10.

<sup>316</sup> Department of the Environment /Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1995), page 16.

The Scotland paper discusses about '*extending the role and deepening the reach of the consultative and partnership arrangements surrounding rural policy and the delivery of rural services*'.<sup>317</sup> In short, it contained two key features: a statement of the overall aims of rural policy in Scotland and the setting up of a new machinery to encourage a more widely-based partnership approach to the tackling of problems throughout rural Scotland. The machinery was the creation of local rural partnerships to formalize a mechanism that brought together around a single table representatives of the key government departments and agencies, along with the local communities to discuss priorities and devise strategy for future development in each local area.<sup>318</sup> In devising this strategy, the partnership had to consider how services in the area could be provided more effectively, and to seek ways to involve local communities in decision-making, encouraging them to develop their own projects and advising them on funding options.

Therefore, the concept of an integrated rural partnership development in the white papers sees the government role to work in partnership with local people rather than imposing top-down solutions and this has also been increasingly influenced by EU programmes such as LEADER. Even if this concept has a long history in the UK driven by a longstanding frustration due to a fragmentation of rural government networking, partnerships have evolved in order to develop and implement effective policies. This included government support for capacity building to implement social and economic development programmes and to seek ways to engage more effectively with local actors through partnership approaches in response to criticisms of remoteness and insensitivity.<sup>319</sup> Both papers appear consistent with the European Commission's approach to rural development as they proclaim the bottom-up rural development models with the aim to define their own needs and identify development strategies and projects. In this context, decentralization offers rural communities the opportunity to overcome what has been described as the 'remoteness'<sup>320</sup> of local councils which, in drawing up their schemes of decentralization, are required to consult community

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<sup>317</sup> Lowe, P. (1996), page 8.

<sup>318</sup> Randall, J. (1997) 'The Rural white paper in Scotland', *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, Vol. 40(3), pp.385-389.

<sup>319</sup> Ball, J. (1995) 'Community governance – the Arun experience', *Local Government Policy making*, Vol. 22(3), pp. 13-21.

<sup>320</sup> The Scottish Office (1995) *Rural Scotland. People, Prosperity and Partnership*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

councils in their area. Despite the differences in local government structures, community empowerment and partnership are common to England and Scotland.

Under the Labour Government, two further discussion papers were issued in 2000 in England (*Our Countryside. The Future. A Fair deal for Rural England*)<sup>321</sup> and in Scotland (*Rural Scotland. A new Approach*).<sup>322</sup> The Rural England paper was preceded by the Performance and Innovation Unit's *Report on Rural Economies* concerning a more sweeping and comprehensive review of rural policies.<sup>323</sup> The Report suggested devolving more responsibilities especially at the regional level. *'It marked an important state in the evolution of the policy framework for rural England, containing 261 commitments to improve rural services, transport, the rural economy, the countryside, rural towns and village, and the way the government handled rural policy'*.<sup>324</sup>

The Rural England paper is lengthy and focuses on the need for planning and emphasizes the role of towns and villages. The paper aimed to create a vibrant countryside and emphasized a discourse of fairness, community responsibility, citizenship and social inclusion. Based on the rationale that local people are best able to identify and deliver their needs, the Labour Government established that *'we will empower local communities, so that the decisions are taken with their active participation and ownership'* (page 11), *'rural communities could play a much bigger part in running their own affairs, influencing and shaping their future development'* (page 145) and promised to *'help all rural communities develop town, village or parish plans to indicate how they would like to see their own town or village to develop, to identify key facilities or services, to set out the problems that need to be tackled'* (page 146). It emphasized developing partnerships between public, private and voluntary bodies and other organizations that are considered vital for devoting time and resources to develop effectively governance in rural areas. The government also specified that each RDA would design rural development programmes by identifying the target rural areas and problems and report how to tackle them. The primary aim for rural areas of each RDA *'is to ensure a*

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<sup>321</sup>Department of Environment, Transport and the Region and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (2000) *Our Countryside: The Future. A fair Deal for Rural England*. London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>322</sup> Scottish Executive (2000) *Rural Scotland. A new approach*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

<sup>323</sup> Performance and Innovation Unit (1999) *Rural economies*. London: Cabinet Office.

<sup>324</sup> OECD (2011) *OECD Rural Policy Reviews. England, United Kingdom*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 21.



*dynamic local economy and vibrant communities able to respond to changes in traditional industries such as agriculture and mining and to contribute positively to the regional and national economy'* (page 82). The paper details a number of responsibilities, such as helping rural businesses and encouraging sustainable development. *'The White paper also helped to pave the way for the creation of DEFRA as a department with specific responsibility for rural affairs as well as a cabinet Committee on Rural Renewal'*.<sup>325</sup>

The Rural Scotland paper is shorter and addresses the issue of how to deal with rural problems at social and economic level. *'There is a stronger emphasis on social inclusion than in the English paper, as well as an insistence on the importance of rural areas for Scottish national identity'*<sup>326</sup> and on economic development focusing on diversifying, increasing rural business and delivering services. This can be also found in the policy document *'Rural Scotland: Better Still Naturally'*,<sup>327</sup> which outlines a strategy to achieve sustainable rural development in terms of strengthening the rural economy, protecting natural and cultural resources, improving the quality of services in the rural areas for people and business, promoting social and economic inclusion, and improving stakeholder engagement. *'Scottish rural policy currently relies on a fairly centralized approach balanced by consultation with stakeholders at national level and a sector-by sector rather than a territorial focus. This approach has brought substantial advantages, in particular the wider attention paid by policy-makers to all aspects of rural life, beyond agriculture'*.<sup>328</sup>

Despite important innovations offered in these reports, rural policies of both England and Scotland showed limitations and need for reform. There are critical issues such as a weak integration within regional and local policy design, a complex implementation mechanism at both national and local levels, a modest participation and adaptation of the rural development programmes at local level. As a result, rural policy is seen as a subsidiary policy with its own objectives and priorities and often with visions and designs that are at odds with national policy.

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<sup>325</sup> DEFRA (2004) *Review of the Rural White Paper. Our countryside: The future*. London: HMSO, page 10.

<sup>326</sup> Keating, M. and Stevenson, L. (2006) page 402.

<sup>327</sup> Scottish Executive (2007) *Rural Scotland: Better Still Naturally*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

<sup>328</sup> OECD (2008a), page 16.

#### **5.4 The implementation of EU rural development policy in Scotland and in England**

*In UK, 'prior to devolution, regions and local areas were able to articulate their own strategies and the mix of policies that best fit their strengths and weaknesses as well as negotiate the necessary funding within the Structural Funds. Devolution coupled with the framework created by Agenda 2000, significantly changed the governance of rural policy. The transparency of the planning process increased with devolution since the consultation of individual stakeholders was extended considerably'.<sup>329</sup>*

Decisions about policy design remained at central level. In 2001, the central government created the first Department of for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) with agricultural, fisheries, rural and environmental responsibilities.<sup>330</sup>

In Scotland, with devolution, rural affairs became a matter overseen by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (SRDP) could be viewed as the delivery plan for Scotland's rural policy which remained highly centralized with little sub-regional delivery infrastructure. Thus, decisions about policy design remained at national level where together with DEFRA, Scottish issues are represented. More specifically, the Scottish Executive Department works with DEFRA to ensure that Scottish issues are represented and the Ministerial Committee on Rural Development has contributed to the coordination of rural policies while 32 Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) were introduced at local level in 2003 to promote complementary approaches and delivery of services. In addition, for the preparation of the SRDP it was created the Scottish Rural Development Programme Stakeholder Group which is a network of specific stakeholder rural groups such as LAGs, Unions, Rural Estates and Council Voluntary Organisations. The OECD<sup>331</sup> reported that even if Scotland's rural policy was innovative and rapidly evolving, it needs to recognize the differences between rural areas in terms of approaches at sectoral and territorial level and through the development of linkages between farmers and the wider rural economy. In this system there is a loss of empowerment by the local and regional level. Local actors, without a recognition of their multiplicity, adapt to top-down strategies to get resources even if that does not correspond to the needs of their territory.

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<sup>329</sup> OECD (2008a), page 19.

<sup>330</sup> OECD (2008a).

<sup>331</sup> OECD (2008a).

Therefore, Scottish rural policy is considered to be too centralized and that, although devolution granted Scotland a high autonomy in designing its rural policy, the Scottish Government needs to look at the development of some kind of regional body to improve the devolution of policy delivery and to involve a set of stakeholders in policy design and implementation.

*'The problem is not only the effective delivery, or joining up agencies for a better efficiency, the problem is the integration of policies at local level, finding how they mutually reinforce each other or are in conflict, decentralize decision-making not reproducing new top-down agencies but that can also give feed back to the centre on possible improvements and new needs, adapt policy packages to local conditions'*.<sup>332</sup> This approach also makes the reconstruction difficult after the fact of the rural policy's overall vision, in terms of budget expenditure and actions implemented in rural areas. In England, in response to finding that rural delivery structures were bureaucratic and too centralized to meet new challenge, DEFRA developed the Rural Strategy 2004.<sup>333</sup> The Strategy confirmed the merit of decentralization. Government offices should coordinate rural partnership processes and monitor rural delivery, while RDAs were given the responsibility for managing the funding of rural programmes.<sup>334</sup>

Devolution of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) funds to the RDAs resulted into a significant shift, which enabled the EU and national plans to be interpreted differently in each region. During 2005/2006 the RDAs began to prepare regional plans showing how they would implement the socio-economic measures of the national rural development programmes, and creating the administrative bureaucracy. According to Ward and Lowe, even though the role of the Regional Development Agencies in rural development was a key element, the regionalization of rurality had, prior to the abolition of the RDAs, not achieved a real development in England.<sup>335</sup> This was due to the lack of tradition of regional administrative decentralization and the devolution which raised the need for the agricultural ministry of England to consolidate the new devolved executives. Moreover, there was a

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<sup>332</sup> OECD (2008a), page 92.

<sup>333</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2004) *Rural Strategy 2004*. London: DEFRA Publications.

<sup>334</sup> Pearce, G., Ayres S. and Tricker, M. (2005).

<sup>335</sup> Ward, N. and Lowe, P. (2004) 'Europeanizing rural development? Implementing the CAP's second pillar in England', *International Planning Studies*, Vol. 9(2-3), pp. 121-137.

considerable mismatch between the role of the top-down decision-making level RDAs and the LEADER approach of the bottom-up decision-making LAGs. On one hand, the LAGs are the application of small amount of financial resources to projects with an integrated impact on rural areas. *'The RDAs, on the other hand, speak in terms of transformational projects (which usually equate to 'very big') and in some places there is a mantra of fewer better projects'*.<sup>336</sup>

RDAs needed to understand the local problems to get relevant information on socio-economic trends in order to shape their own strategies and to appreciate the added value of their own interventions such as farm diversification activities. According to Ward and Bridges, *'the national and European framing of problems and data may also not assist the regional and sub-regional targeting of interventions and the formulation of suitable indicators for problem diagnosis and performance monitoring. Ideally, local problems should be understood as much as possible in their context ... [and]...to be assessed in aggregation or comparatively, in order to set broader priorities and tackle general causes'*.<sup>337</sup>

The OECD reported that its multi-sectoral approach to rural policy needs to be improved in terms of impact at the policy design stage as well as delivery, for the remote rural areas as it did for those closer to cities. *'The importance of decentralization in England is reflected in the vast landscape of stakeholders and partnerships guiding local development. However, one of the necessary aspects of devolution is moving responsibility and accountability for funding down to the level where decisions must be made. And in England, there remains a sizeable gap between the newly empowered local government that the government believes it has established in principle and the actual impact as witnessed at the local level'*.<sup>338</sup> The impression is that the centre remains solely responsible for designing policies and the creation of a bottom-up development approach could be difficult in the absence of strong efforts to invest in local actors and to provide them with adequate means to implement a long term strategy. Moreover, the ability of local communities to act independently is constrained by national planning directives and mainly by the absence of a tradition of strong local government. It is difficult to agree on rural development strategies in a context

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<sup>336</sup> Brown, G. (2010) *Rural Development and the LEADER Approach in the UK and Ireland*, Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust, page 14.

<sup>337</sup> Ward, N., Lowe P. and Bridges, T. (2003), page 209.

<sup>338</sup> OECD (2011), page 186.

of different central and local government levels and a challenge to identify and establish priorities to intervene where the institutional agenda prevails and where the interaction among different levels of authority is poorly developed.

#### **5.4.1 The history of the LEADER approach**

As discussed in Chapter 3, part of the implementation of the EU rural development policy is also the LEADER approach which in the UK, as in the rest of the EU, included four programming periods: LEADER I (1991-1993) an innovative and relatively small programme of short duration with minimal funds; the LEADER II (1994-1999) which provided sustainable pilot projects; LEADER + (2000-2006) and LEADER approach (2007-2013).

LEADER I targeted deprived areas - with the aim of improving their development potential on local initiative, promoting the acquisition of know-how and disseminating it to other rural areas. The programme was confined to all UK rural areas with GDP at 75% or less of EU average. These areas included the whole of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and only Cornwall in England. The original intention of LEADER I was to help rural communities by engaging local partners in shaping the development of their area. It introduced the concept of local partnership with strong community representation alongside government, business and other stakeholders and was very much a pilot programme, which followed the same policy emphasis as the rest of the EU. Both in Scotland and England *'LEADER I marked the start of a new approach to rural development policy which was area based, integrated and participative. It was seen as an innovative tool for rural development given its ability to respond to old and new rural problems acting as a laboratory for building local capabilities and testing out new ways of meeting the social, economic and environmental needs of rural communities via a bottom-up' approach*'.<sup>339</sup>

LEADER II supported the principles of LEADER I and was designated to disseminate the successful approaches developed under the pilot programme more widely and to stimulate greater innovation and cooperation as stronger features in a more substantial programme of activity. New areas became eligible as it operated not just in deprived areas but also in rural areas with the status of Objective 5b as the greater South West, Lincolnshire and other parts of eastern England, Northern Uplands in England and North & West Grampian, Upland

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<sup>339</sup> Ekosgen (2010a), page 7.

Tayside, Rural Stirling, Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland. The approach was based on local capacity building with a focus on the opportunities for economic, environmental and social development and drawn from a menu of activities such as training, support for SMEs, rural tourism and basic services.

Although it built upon the two preceding programmes, the phase of LEADER + was available not just in the more deprived areas but in all rural areas and the LAGs were required to choose one or two topics to implement their local development strategies from a list of four: new technologies and new know-how; making best use of natural and cultural resources; adding value to local products; improving the quality of life in rural areas.<sup>340</sup>

With respect to the former programming period, within LEADER +, the number of LAGs increased from 20 to 26 in England and decreased from 15 to 13 in Scotland.<sup>341</sup> LAGs were required by the EU to be a partnership of local community, business, government, local organizations and stakeholder representatives of the area. In the decision-making, LAG membership was to be balanced and to be able to represent effectively the interests of the different community and economic sectors in the local area, locally based where partners had a significant work interest in the LAG area and to reflect their personal strengths and ability to represent their organization and community's interests. Local authorities could play a role to demonstrate that the plan and its implementation brings an empowerment of the local community.

When the LEADER Programme was replaced by the LEADER approach (as part of the EU 2007-2013 rural development programming period), the LAGs have changed in terms of geography across the regions and significantly increased in number to 65 in England and 20 in Scotland.<sup>342</sup> Some areas had operated a LAG during the previous programming periods. This was advantageous because the areas already had a managing structure and the know-how experience. However, there were also *'new groups which started at ground zero in terms of their knowledge of LEADER and their initial capacity to deliver'*.<sup>343</sup>

The key difference with the previous programmes is that the 2007-2013 LEADER approach is no longer a separate programme. It has now been 'mainstreamed' as a delivery mechanism

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<sup>340</sup> Brown, G. (2010), page 4.

<sup>341</sup> Ekosgen (2010a).

<sup>342</sup> Scottish LEADER Coordinators (2011) Scottish LEADER Programme 2007-2013. New Abbey: Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Programme.

<sup>343</sup> Brown, G. (2010), page 6.

for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP). DEFRA manages LEADER in England and is the managing authority of the RDPE, which has the role to ensure the respect of the requirements specified in the relevant EU regulations. Since the beginning of the 2007-2013 programming period, DEFRA paid particular attention to local circumstances and priorities. In the first instance, this attention was exerted through the RDAs in order to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their region in terms of LEADER expenditure, the size of the eligible areas, partnership arrangements with local authorities and others, and how LEADER contributes to meeting RDPE priorities at regional level to bring the regional spending and strategic priorities together with local communities. At local level, the agenda is expressed through the local development strategies of the LAGs which articulate the aims and objectives of the community and prioritise the types of project activities required in that area. Regional partners are encouraged to work with the LAGs to help build their capacity as well as to encourage strategies that address environmental as well as socio-economic objectives.<sup>344</sup> Concerning the LEADER management in Scotland, there is a direct link between the governing administration and the LAGs, as there is in all the other devolved nations. This is in contrast to England in which the RDAs had an intermediary management role between DEFRA at the top and the LAGs at the bottom in their regions. Evidence indicated that devolved governments are not too prescriptive.<sup>345</sup> They take a relatively hands-off approach to engaging with LAGs; this approach just focuses on the requirement of official monitoring processes rather than influencing strategic priorities.<sup>346</sup> LEADER stakeholders stressed that the local spirit of LEADER should not be overwhelmed by government direction, but LAGs when implementing development projects should have freedom to consult locally, respond to issues at economic, social and environmental level. The real value of LEADER is that LAGs have the ability to set priorities locally in an autonomous way. These priorities are flexible to changes in local need, enabling LAGs to

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<sup>344</sup> Rural Development Company Ltd (2014) *Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme for England*. Final Report. RDPE Network. London: DEFRA.

<sup>345</sup> Ekosgen (2010b).

<sup>346</sup> Rural Development Company Ltd (2010) *Mid Term Evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

pilot new development approaches. It is also argued that LEADER's strength is in building capacity and networking among local actors.<sup>347</sup>

Having laid out the declared benefits of the various versions of the LEADER programmes and approaches, we now examine what happens in practice.

## **5.5 The case study of the Argyll and the Islands LAG in Scotland**

### **5.5.1 General context**

Argyll and the Islands is one of the 20 LAGs operating in Scotland; this LAG has its focus on a complex rural area which reaches from the Hebridean island of Tiree in the Atlantic west to the suburbs of Helensburgh in the east and from Appin in the north to the to the Island of Arran in the south. It has a land area of approximately 2,852 square miles and a population of more than 83,000 people. Within 31 inhabited islands, the area presents significant challenges in terms of accessibility, integration and territorial development. Travel time is high, compared to other parts of the UK, due to coastlines, mountains, islands, single track roads and few transport links. Concerning the economy, even if the public sector is a major employer, the main activities are tourism, agriculture, forestry, fishing and aquaculture. For the 2007-2013 LEADER programming period, the LAG has a budget of £21.8 million, including public and private sector matching funding. More specifically, convergence ERDF funding of £15.8 million adds to LEADER funding of £5.9 million.<sup>348</sup>

The LAG strongly emphasizes community-led development alongside growing and supporting social enterprises and key sector-based enterprises, including agriculture and tourism. It is the responsibility of the LAG to develop and implement the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and thereafter to undertake its review strategically *'ensuring that their organisations' regional strategies are reflected in the original LDS and through its subsequent implementation.*<sup>349</sup>

The overall aim of the LDS is to support sustainable community- based development of rural communities within the area. This is achieved by funding projects which contribute to

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<sup>347</sup> Brown, G. (2010).

<sup>348</sup> Ekosgen (2013) 'Evaluation of the Argyll & Islands. LEADER Programme 2007-2013. Final Report', report commissioned by the Argyll & Islands LAG. Sheffield: Ekosgen.

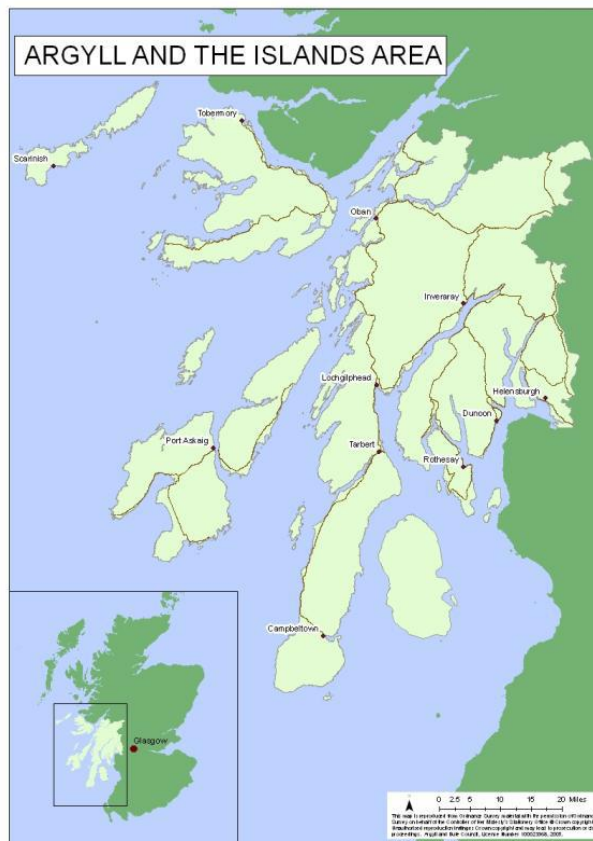
<sup>349</sup> Ekosgen (2013), page 16.



the delivery of the two following themes:<sup>350</sup>

- Theme 1- Revitalising communities:

- Improving accessibility services for those living in the rural areas as there are only three roads into the area and most of the area does not have easy access to rail;
- Supporting voluntary activity for innovative and development projects and to encourage cooperation



*Map 3. The area of the Argyll and the Islands Local Action Group. Source: Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group (2009), Local Development Strategy & Business Plan 2007-2013. Oban: Argyll and the Islands LAG.*

between the voluntary and the public sectors with the aim to improve

communication in such a geographically disparate area and joint working;

- Enhancing the quality of life in rural areas by supporting projects for older and young people and families which face challenges such as more limited education opportunities, lack of employment opportunities, inadequate provision of public services;
- Enhancing rural environment to support community-based initiatives in order to help maintain, improve and sustain the important areas of natural, cultural and archaeological heritage (ancient monument sites and buildings mountains, forest, sea and freshwater lochs, rivers, beaches, etc.) which underpin the tourism industry and where many groups are actively involved with small projects.

- Theme 2 - Progressive Rural Economy:

<sup>350</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group (2009a) *Local Development Strategy & Business Plan 2007-2013*. Oban: Argyll and the Islands LAG, pp. 18-33.

- Strengthening the rural economy of the area by supporting projects for active people to reduce their outmigration, providing opportunities for economic growth, increased prosperity and productivity;
- Improving collaboration to support initiatives to encourage cooperation between the agricultural sector and other rural business sectors, with the aim to increase the availability of local products and maximum benefit;
- Building capacity and training to support activities that will generate increased skills in the key sectors of the area such as the social economy which contribute to sustainable economic outputs and allow rural communities to undertake projects which facilitate the sustainability of the sector and increase prosperity in the rural community;
- Encouraging research and development to improve the economic performance of sectors with the potential for maximizing growth (e.g. tourism, forestry, fishing, aquaculture and agriculture, renewable energy) and deliver the use of research in project development as an innovative tool to help rural communities decision-making and businesses (e.g. feasibility studies, market research, transfer knowledge).

The LDS states that these themes will be delivered through a variety of project activities that focus on key sectors such as tourism and agriculture. In this context, the LAG identifies *'the challenge and merits of community-led planning and supporting the community to deliver more project activity and the desire to bring forward larger and more strategic projects as the most effective way to deliver impacts'*<sup>351</sup> and makes decisions on application (whether to approve a project, refer it for further work or to reject applications).

### **5.5.2 Origin and composition of the partnership**

The LAG Argyll and the Islands was initiated just prior to the start of the 2007-2013 rural development programming period. *'The partnership already existed so there was already an understanding amongst communities in this region that this aspect of European funding could be tapped'*.<sup>352</sup> During LEADER+ 2000-2006 programming period, the LAG was called WHELK - West Highland Environment Link Kist. It was called this because it linked two regions through delivering mostly environmental projects. The two regions were Argyll and

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<sup>351</sup> Ekosgen (2013), page 70.

<sup>352</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1. Oban, 17 December 2013.

the Islands and Lochaber (the region neighbouring Argyll to the north). *'When we developed the current LEADER programme, the Scottish government said: if you want to access money, you need to demonstrate that you have got the community backing. So, part of the development of the local development strategy was to go out and actively seek the views and desires of the wider local community. There were meetings about the LEADER project, and we got feedback, we invited certain sectors to come and visit us and tell what they wanted. And that was what initiated it'*.<sup>353</sup> The role of the Scottish government appeared therefore to be particularly important in the development of the partnership. However key individuals also played a major part, indicating the significance of local circumstances and personalities. It is important to note that not everyone readily embraced this LAG approach. For instance, agricultural land use sectors felt they would not be eligible for LEADER because they are traditionally funded by other rural development measures. *'They believed that LEADER was not for them, so there was a common misunderstanding amongst farmers that the LEADER money was actually their money. And that through modulations, it had been taken off them and put into the rural development budget'*.<sup>354</sup>

The LAG members have the responsibility for delivering the LDS and making decisions on implementing LEADER, recognizing that the LAG has an important role for the communities of the area. The LAG has the responsibility for awarding funding to successful applicants; its lead partner, the Argyll and Bute Council, is responsible for employing staff and managing the budget.

The LAG has 25 partner representatives from a wide range of public, private and community sector organisations where 49% of members are from the public sector and 51% from communities.

*'I think if the LAG got any bigger than 25 members then it would be harder to have such a coherent group. Because you start to lose interest in the periphery of the region, or you have holes in who is representing. Too many people with their own opinions. I think it works well with 20 – 25 members of a LAG in a region of this size'*.<sup>355</sup>

*'Personally, I think that public bodies should be here just to guarantee transparency and not that the private part should be 51%, because we're talking about conflict of interest. I think*

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<sup>353</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>354</sup> Argyll and Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>355</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

*the public would be very suspicious and it might not appear to be open and transparent if it was done at a government level. I know that there are pros and cons with everything but I think because we have got local community involvement with various community organisations that we have that transparent process there with a balance of community and professionals’.*<sup>356</sup>

The Scottish government was not involved in the partnership during the previous 1994-1999 and 2000-2006 LEADER programmes. *‘Now, when the new SRDP came on in 2007 there was a Community element of our programme that was being delivered by the Scottish government rural payments inspection directorate along with the Agri-environmental payments and the SRDP money for developing agricultural businesses. So, one of the reasons that we were invited on was because we were also delivering Community money. Our SRDP budget was for individuals developing rural businesses and so the other part of my skills coming across would have been in delivery of schemes through Scottish government payments in terms of being able to contribute to good governance at a LAG level’.*<sup>357</sup>

The membership very much stems from the priorities in the LDS. As there have been common threads in the LDS between the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 programmes and the future 2014-2020 programming period, then there have been common LAG partners. The local authority has elected representatives from all the public agencies that operate in the area and sit on the partnership.

For example, the environment, community development and social enterprise have been common themes throughout successive programmes and *‘so our LAG partnership has reflected this. Latterly, social enterprise has been a growing theme and more and more partners are representing this sector’.*<sup>358</sup>

There is a strong business community representation, including the Federation of Small business, the Argyll and Bute Agricultural Forum as well as the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Argyll and Bute Social Enterprise Network (ABSEN) which helps to ensure that the LAG is able to bring the economic, innovative and business impact to the programme and where the private sector (e.g. SMEs) may be beneficial.

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<sup>356</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Partnership representative no. 1. Oban, 16 December 2013.

<sup>357</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Civil servant no.1. Oban, 17 December 2013.

<sup>358</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

There are also representations and organizations that represent their local communities, such as the biodiversity sector that is represented by the Argyll and Bute Local Biodiversity Partnership. The partnership's motivation for participation was the recognition that it *'didn't have enough project skill to actually deliver to get more money from Europe so LEADER became the obvious track. The amazing thing about the partnership was that you come from your own little small area and you're meeting people from enterprises and people from communities who are actually active doing community work coming on the LAG in their own time and coming in with lots of knowledge, so it's the sharing of knowledge around the LEADER LAG. We don't just go to work and go home and sit with our families, we do other things in the community as well, because as professionals we don't like sitting around. But it is quite nice to be able to share that skill and also provide that support to community projects that otherwise mightn't think of you'*.<sup>359</sup>

The farming and forestry sector is represented by the agricultural forum, which is a meeting of all the agencies and individuals representing farming. The third sector is represented by the Argyll Voluntary Action and Arran Council for Voluntary Services while tourism, environmental and cultural organisations are represented by North Ayrshire and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National. These sectors have been a key element in the creation of the local development strategy and play an active role in its management and delivery with a bottom-up approach and involvement of all partners which could help to select the most appropriate development themes.

*'Most of the partnership are previous beneficiaries so they understand what the direct benefits are of participating. So, they put their expertise into the partnership for the benefits of others. It mostly extended to coming along to meetings to decide on who gets what funding'*.<sup>360</sup>

The people representing the private sector are not acting as individuals but rather representatives of their organisations and are also not politically elected members of other organisations on rural development bodies but they have been selected for fundamental services or whatever *'and what LEADER does is bringing in people from the private sectors*

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<sup>359</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Partnership representative no. 1.

<sup>360</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

*who are only interested in rural development and furthering beyond what is normal public life'.<sup>361</sup>*

To ensure the partnership from all the different regions and sectors, the LAG has got a geographic difficulty in trying to cover the sectors and geography of the 26 islands inhabited by people as well as the lakes and mountains separating communities.

### **5.5.3 Organization, operation and involvement**

Having representatives from different sectors all speaking and working together in one group allows for sharing of good information, knowledge and seeing integration. Within the voluntary, the private and the local government sectors there are key individuals who understand how the LAG works and they are there to provide expertise and experience of the sector they represent and an overview of how rural development should work in the area and steer decisions which the LAG makes. *'They are also there to ensure good governance, that the lead partner, who is administering the funds, is doing it fairly and responsibly'.<sup>362</sup>*

The contributions which individual members make to their partnership divide between general functions shared by many partners such as to be an animator, to advise applicants, and identify gaps in rural development implementation, strategic planning, community representation. More specifically, the LEADER strategy defines the term 'animators' as any person responsible for building of good partnerships and ensuring the effectiveness of these partnerships, and so they are a vital part of the governance dynamic in the LAG. In terms of responsibilities and roles within the rural areas, it is worth mentioning that quite a few of them have community development trusts. These trusts do an assessment of what they would like to see in the area of what needs to be upgraded, what they have and also done a fair bit of consultation with the local community and they will help support projects 'on the ground' backed by action plans, dissemination of information, network and involving the local community. Consequently, it is not just the LAG and then the community projects: there are various organisations in between that are there to assist in terms of community

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<sup>361</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>362</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

development.<sup>363</sup> This profile of membership appears therefore to be a long-standing feature of the rural governance rather than any significant development in the time period assessed for this case.

The LAG does not directly employ people. There are partnership agreements with the local authorities (e.g. the local council), which are delegated the responsibility and decisions to manage the contracts of the applicants. Up to a certain management threshold, the staff can make decisions about money within the project; beyond this, they refer decisions back to the LAG. More specifically, the Argyll and the Islands LEADER LAG is built on the administrative structure developed during the former LEADER+ Programme. Argyll and Bute Council, which has the presidency, undertakes the overall responsibility for the programme management.<sup>364</sup> With the employment of two LEADER project co-ordinators, the Council delivers and promotes the programme at local level by providing support and assistance in project development, making sure that community groups that are claiming money for work done know what they are claiming. The latter is particularly true for new groups that are applying to LEADER for the first time, to ensure that they are meeting the terms of their agreement and that everything is signed off accordingly.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, there are commissions, contracts and consultants to review the performance of the LEADER approach in the LAG. The review tends to use interviews of local people and statistical analysis.<sup>366</sup> The LAG has roughly four decision meetings a year, once a quarter with one additional meeting for disposal of strategic business.<sup>367</sup> The LAG reports to the partnership what they are funding and how it relates to the local development strategy and the community and makes sure that the priorities meet the priorities of the locally elected members.<sup>368</sup> *‘There is always a good turnout at the LAG meetings and there has been a relative consistency of attendance as well, but what really works is getting all the assessment done prior to the*

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<sup>363</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER 2007-2013 Local Action Group (2012) *Annual report 2010-2011*. Oban: Argyll and the Islands LAG.

<sup>364</sup> Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (2009) *The Argyll and Bute Community Plan 2009-2013*, issue no. 1 – Autumn, Winter. Oban: Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership.

<sup>365</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER 2007-2013 Local Action Group (2014) *Annual report 2012/2013*. Oban: Argyll and the Islands LAG.

<sup>366</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group (2009a), pp. 44-45.

<sup>367</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group (2009b) *Rules of procedure*. Oban: Argyll and the Islands LAG.

<sup>368</sup> Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group (2009b).

*meeting. Nobody has come in cold as they know exactly what we are about! We spend a lot of time getting consensus over the direction and priority, aims and objectives. When the time comes to decide on money, there is a good consensus about our priorities. We discuss gaps, challenges and future projects before the meeting. We don't have much dissent. We have scored and assessed our proposals before we come to the meetings. There are people challenging and asking specific questions about a project, but a consensus is usually kept. There is rarely a case where we have to have a vote'.<sup>369</sup> Moreover, 'we have a very clear traffic light (red, amber and green) expression or conflict of interest form. So, if you bring in a project and you have been very heavily involved in assisting with that community project, its maybe part of your daily work then you have to leave the room when it's being discussed and the decision is made whether they get LEADER money or not. If somebody has just had some dealings with the project but they are not involved on a day to day basis, they could stay in the room and take part in the discussion on the application of the project but can't vote to decide it. And, if there is no conflict of interest at all then you can take part in the discussion and as a LAG member you vote'.<sup>370</sup>*

The LAG gives out no more than 50% (25% LEADER + 25% Scottish funding) awards to a project. The applicant has to find the other 50% from a wide range of sources. The UK National Lottery is one such source although it is not administered by the government, but rather operates as a public fund and is available for anyone in the UK. *'They apply to us for LEADER money and demonstrate that they have got the other 50% funding before we fund them. So, it is not our responsibility to fund it. They could come to my organisation if they are doing an environmental project and get 50% from LEADER, and 50% from Scottish natural heritage. We also fund quite a bit of feasibility studies and new ideas. We don't necessarily fund the final outcome, the project on the ground. But what we do is get people to communities and groups to the point where they have tested an idea to show that it will work. And maybe another scheme will follow from the actual project'.<sup>371</sup>*

Concerning the involvement of the people in the partnership, the LAG disseminates information about the types of activities that they have funded so that the public can see. The public can get involved by applying to LEADER and getting direct feedback about their

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<sup>369</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>370</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 2. Oban, 17 December 2013.

<sup>371</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.



project. *'We don't generally invite the public to our meetings. If someone in the public wanted to witness, they could come along and observe'*.<sup>372</sup>

Community involvement and mobilization have been quite important for a lot of projects when they were initially thinking about them and also just deciding on the best type of structure or construction, whether this project can go ahead or not and with that level of support, to go not only with LEADER funding to build and to implement the project, but also to engage with other funders as well in match funding.

#### **5.5.4 Outcomes, achievements and added value of the local partnership practice**

In terms of outcomes reflecting the diverse nature of integrated rural development projects, a significantly raised awareness of local issues and an increased level of community involvement are at the top of the list.

The interviewees recounted that the biggest outcome of the LAG activity is a developing coherent regional scale to key economic sectors in terms of creating jobs, funding new social enterprise, put in capital and infrastructure projects such as significant village halls and community buildings improvements such as social and sporting facilities. These buildings are very much multipurpose use and they are designed to be not just an area for people to gather; there are various facilities for activities such as sport, meeting rooms, lecture rooms, day and evening classes, adult learning, clubs for the younger people and lunch or afternoon tea clubs for the older people. *'They become multifunctional, because they are sort of, in terms of getting best value for the money spent, that it wasn't just a building with an entrance'*.<sup>373</sup> A lot of them have their own kitchens as they are able to facilitate parties and weddings, funerals as well as stage productions. The LAG approach is to induce people to use these facilities as a community centre rather than a private village hall and where a lot of people are getting paid in terms of providing services.

A further successful example was the Healthy Initiatives project concerning a provision of support through LEADER to employ additional staff for primary health care for unfit people and with health problems. *'I think that's something that they've shown that works and that will be incorporated into the NHS budget as a success story within LEADER that will be*

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<sup>372</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>373</sup> Biodiversity Partnership representative no. 1. Oban, 16 December 2013.

*resourced through the central health provision in the area'.<sup>374</sup> 'Maybe some of the employment will only be for the duration of the project but that can generate other activity and that's the whole idea, you get money for this project, potentially the project could grow or we have ideas for future projects and the community become self-sustaining as well'.<sup>375</sup>*

Another successful type of project was that of providing training for young people that would otherwise have found it very difficult to find employment and to give them skills in rural areas and maybe develop their own businesses from that start that was given to them under LEADER.

The tourism sector did not have a representative body before the LEADER programme to develop the tourism economy; this was equally the case with agriculture and land management where the actors did not have a land management body to focus on local needs.<sup>376</sup> Over recent years there has been a push towards marketing Argyll food. Before, quantities of food from Argyll were being sold, without a label, and were being moved from one side of the country to the other and then being relabelled. These foodstuffs would include things like Tyree lamb, beef products, as well as cheese. *'Now, there is a lot there that can be marketed as food from Argyll and there is a group of various producers they have been going to various festivals around the country and being part of a food hub, supplying food to the great and the good'.<sup>377</sup>* Moreover, local restaurants and even in the local schools, thanks to a LAG pilot initiative to supply local meat products and vegetables, are actually getting these, reducing the food miles of what they consume.

Concerning the third sector, *'If the LAG was not here it would still be there, it would be much less sustainable. It would be more broken up. It would not be as integrated or coherent. It would not have as much weight when it goes to seek funding and political support when it goes to the Scottish government. And what LEADER has helped to do is add that weight behind it to be more self-sustainable as a sector, and have more capacity to take on more, and have more of an impact. That is what LEADER does. We funded the development of rural*

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<sup>374</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Partnership representative no. 1.

<sup>375</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 2.

<sup>376</sup> Scottish LEADER Coordinators (2011).

<sup>377</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Partnership representative no. 1.

*development trusts ...we have achieved stable development ...we have provided the glue that keeps together rural development activities that the public agencies are unable to reach'.<sup>378</sup>*

In terms of added value, the LAG works as a means to bring not only LEADER but also transitional funding such as European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Fisheries Funding (EFF) into Argyll. A further overarching success is that it still operates as a co-operative and effective partnership, and that it is the norm rather than the exception for delivering development objectives at social, economic and environmental level in the rural areas. The meetings are enjoyable and people participate. The LAG implements governance that allows appropriate spending of European money in the area which could have been misspent. *'If we didn't have the LAG in the area, we would have still had LEADER, and European money into the region, but it would have been decided upon by a larger and bigger area. And it would not have necessarily have been aligned to projects which worked in this area or under European priorities'.<sup>379</sup>*

In terms of what could be improved with the partnership in the future, *'You can never do enough going out and translating what LEADER can do for people to the individual on the street. There is a phrase we use in the UK called 'does the man on the Clapham bus know about this?' You can test how good your policy is or anything you want to do by asking the man sitting on the bus in Clapham, a place in London. A normal street, like any street anywhere else in Britain. If you ask a man on a bus there, and if he knows LEADER, then success. Because he is an ordinary man sitting on a bus. If he says no, then we have failed. But, if people know what LEADER can do then that means they would try something, collaborate with other people, come to us with an application, try something new, and we would have furthered on some better understanding and knowledge and capacity to do stuff. I suppose that the more applications we get for projects, the more successful we are being even if half of those projects don't succeed'.<sup>380</sup>* With this assertion it emerges that what counts for the development of rural areas is the need for local community support not just to legitimise the partnership working but also to provide a valuable local knowledge, skills and commitments. The interviewees claimed that there will always be a need for constant engagement and outreach to local communities because there will be some communities in

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<sup>378</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>379</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>380</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

Argyll that will be untouched and that need to develop themselves. For these communities, if they do not have funds in place, the idea would not even come off the drawing board: it gives *'you stimulus to take things forwards knowing that potential money is there'*.<sup>381</sup>

Funding is indeed an important issue both for the LAG working and for its successful continuation. However, funding mechanisms can also create severe difficulties due to inflexibility and excessive bureaucracy which is perceived by the project applicants because they have a lot of compliance monitoring and paper work to do and the LAG administrative structures are expending a lot of effort on this in their spare time as they do have not a full time job as LAG administrators. Even if the area is large and the sectors are different, they are driven by audit and it is very hard to take risks. *'I worked in West Africa before, 20 years ago in rural development. The process is exactly the same in Europe. In terms of how communities work, who has the power, who the entrepreneurs are, who can make things happen, they are all the same people. There is always a chief in the village. Someone who makes decisions. And you generally find that you only need small amounts of money to lead to small things which make large things happen. But you could actually fund ten projects and if one works, and grows, then that is a success. Whereas the culture we have under LEADER and the way it works, and the audit process, you cannot afford a project to fail, because it is seen as a fault of the system. So, what I am saying is that the way rural development agencies work in rural Africa, any developing country, the aid culture that the western countries adopt in Africa, South America or in Asia, it is the same thing. They try to make sure that every project succeeds. But if you look at business investment, and if an entrepreneur invests in ten businesses projects, they don't expect them all to succeed. And when one looks as if it won't succeed, they might take their money out. If you really want to progress rural development, new ideas, you have to fail, you have to try things out before you get the right one. And that is what LEADER should be doing. That is why we fund feasibility studies and research which say that this is not going to work, or they need to do this to make it work'*.<sup>382</sup>

Here there is a real dichotomy between LEADER being about innovation and rural development on the one hand, and, on the other hand, every decision being scrutinised by an audit because it looks as if it might fail and dampen the willingness to take risks. It does mean that people limit their actions to some extent on the ground because they are

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<sup>381</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Partnership representative no. 1.

<sup>382</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

frightened of trying something it might be deemed ineligible and that might mean that they could have their money taken off through the auditing process. Despite this limitation, the LAG gives the opportunity to be more creative with the way they fund projects by spending more time in developing ideas and testing solutions before they fund an activity. And the opportunity is there to think more long term, in the 5 to 6 years of the programme. The reason why the LAG has some really active communities on the Islands for instance is because they funded them and their capacity building over the course of two LEADER programming periods. That investment is now being reaped because those communities have better capacity and understand what it is to manage a project. *'And they are coming in with bigger and better projects now because we funded those 10 to 15 years ago'*.<sup>383</sup>

## **5.6 The case study of the Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways LAG in England**

### **5.6.1 General context**

Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways (CWWW) is one of the 65 LAGs operating across England and is one of 6 LAGs which have their focus in Yorkshire and Humberside. The area covers approximately 880 square miles. The CWWW population of more than 150,000 people, puts the LAG at the very top end of scale nationally, considering that most LAGs cover a population of around 100,000 people.<sup>384</sup> It includes 155 parishes and encompasses much of the East Riding of Yorkshire Council, excluding the towns of Bridlington and Goole as well as Beverly and its surrounding rural areas.

In North Yorkshire, it includes the contiguous parts of Ryedale and Scarborough districts. The East Riding of Yorkshire, the Yorkshire Wolds and coastal strip in North Yorkshire is a predominantly rural area and is amongst the most sparsely populated in England. Most of the land is of agricultural use. The area encompasses several different settlements, a range of economic and social characteristics and a variety of natural features. For the 2007-2013 programming period, CWWW had a budget of over £2.8 million which increased to over £7 million through other sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (funded through the UK National Lottery) and private donations.

The overall rationale for its development strategy is to link geographical areas of

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<sup>383</sup> Argyll and the Islands LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>384</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b) *LEADER Local Action Group Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways - Local Development Strategy*. Driffield: CWWW LAG.

socio-economic deprivation with a broad contiguous area of environmental and socio-economic opportunity through a programme focused upon place-based rural development activity and to promote partnership working by bringing together organisations and individuals. *'I suppose the key issue was addressing the fact that the area's*

*natural heritage is, largely speaking, unexplored in many respects, quite hidden.*

*It's not an area that people naturally look at and think 'my goodness there's lots of wonderful heritage attractions that I could go and look at or get involved with there'. The area has a huge archaeological heritage which is second only to the Wiltshire Downs but most of it is not very visible. As an example, it has seabird colonies that are probably some of the finest in Europe up at Bempton but there wasn't when partnership came together. There is a heritage coastline which is quite spectacular in parts. The local communities themselves are not necessarily actively engaged in promoting that heritage or working with it. One of the key issues, I think, was to get a better understanding of the area's heritage from local communities and then translate that into heritage activity projects which would be beneficial to the area's rural economy'.<sup>385</sup>*

The LAG had a series of community consultation workshops throughout the area to all of the key partnerships and as a result of all of that they put together the local development strategy which identified key strands they needed to address and to develop. The related programme of activities was really about integrated sustainable rural development, but they focused largely on cultural heritage and tourism, *'because in our area those were the things*



Map 3. The area of the CWWW Local Action Group. Source: The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009) *LEADER Local Action Group Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways Local Development Strategy*. Pocklington: CWWW LAG.

<sup>385</sup> CWWW LAG Civil servant no. 1. Driffield, 19 December 2013.

*that were identified as needing investment to bring them up to an acceptable level and to have the greatest chance of giving economic development to the area'.<sup>386</sup>*

The broad needs and opportunities relating to the environment, heritage and culture are summarized under each of the four underpinning themes:

- *Coast*: it stretches for over 60 miles – from Cayton in the north to Spurn in the south. It is of international importance for its biodiversity to its wildlife colonies and breeding grounds and there is a strong heritage linked to the sea and fishing industry, military history sites and off-shore industries. Many villages are still linked to farming activities and the coastal strip is peripheral and suffers from problems of access and exclusion and low levels of civic engagement. These assets are seen as a significant opportunity to develop enterprise and create wealth by enhancing the environment and developing the cultural heritage;
- *Wolds*: they are important chalk and grassland upland areas dissected by narrow steeply incised valleys. The market towns of Driffield, Market Weighton and Pocklington have seen their traditional economic base eroded by a combination of social and economic change in the surrounding agricultural areas and this has impacted on employment, low wages, social housing and access to services. The Wolds are rich in opportunities linked to heritage around the landscape, agriculture, churches, country houses, medieval villages, archaeology and local traditions;
- *Wetlands*: they are within flood plains and low-lying land and are most prominent in Howdenshire and the Lower Derwent valley/Humberhead Levels, around the Humber Estuary/River Ouse and at Hornsea Mere and Cayton Carr. Biodiversity is an important element particularly in respect of small and wetland mammals and wading and migratory birds. Some wetland areas were severely affected by recent floods. Activity relating to the management of watercourses, flood storage, renewable energy even through education and training are likely to bring benefits;
- *Waterways*: the Rivers Derwent, Ouse, Aire and Hull, the Pocklington, Driffield and Aire and Calder canals, Beverly Beck, Hedon Haven and Gypsy Race are an important part of the natural and cultural heritage of the area. They have a rich environmental and economic potential in terms of biodiversity, water management, economic and

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<sup>386</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1. Driffield, 20 December 2013.

social history, transport heritage and local traditions and customs. Some of the market towns and villages are located along the waterways and their history development and culture is closely linked. There are currently a number of voluntary organisations involved with their development including their capacity to reach groups which could benefit from using the waterways.<sup>387</sup>

The objectives set up to implement the geographic priorities listed above are achieved by funding projects that contribute to the delivery of the five following themes:

- Theme 1 – To maximise business opportunities throughout the development of new and existing local enterprises;
- Theme 2 – To build capacity, train and empower rural communities in relation to project development – communication, business planning, environmental impact, assessment, forecasting, outputs, and monitoring;
- Theme 3 – To stimulate the growth of the cultural and creative sectors through the development of creative space for exhibitions, festivals, and events, art week, art in the garden and other ‘open studio’ type events, including local music festivals, sculpture and culture trails, audience development and participation;
- Theme 4 – Building on the potential of the area’s natural heritage opportunities, as management of water quality, protection of biodiversity, mapping of ancient woodland, trees and orchards, development of hedgerows and naturalised field margins in co-operation with the farming community, improving the visitor/educational experience;
- Theme 5 – Develop facilities and networks of activity that create a focus and enable understanding and connectivity to local heritage and landscape as customs and traditions, support for the rural heritage sector (churches, country houses), improving opportunities for cycling, walking and horse riding, development of local tourism partnerships, of a local food forum to bring stakeholders together and sustainable development of fisheries communities.<sup>388</sup>

There were some key projects that the LAG identified, and then, by reviewing each year what has been done, the LAG looked to see what the gaps were and targeted specific things to ensure that the projects achieved the key aims and objectives of the local development

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<sup>387</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

<sup>388</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).



strategy. There was also a managed approach in terms of calls for projects; this involved articulating specific themes for the wider community to then apply for money to achieve.

### **5.6.2 Origin and composition of the partnership**

CWWW follows on from the previous LEADER+ Programme which operated exclusively across some parts of the East Riding Local Authority area. This former partnership was the direct result of the fact that East Riding of Yorkshire council had a rural strategy and policy. The decision to expand the area was taken for the 2007-2013 programming period in order to give a better functional landscape coherence to the LAG area and to introduce working across administrative boundaries for the benefit of the rural population living and working in the Yorkshire Wolds. *'The influence of local context was relatively strong primarily because of the extension of the area. Working across local authority boundaries is never easy, especially when you are working across boundaries that have a different local government structure. North Yorkshire is a two-tier authority, it has a county council and district councils that sit underneath it and we were working with the districts effectively, or boroughs. Whereas East Riding Council is a unitary authority, it doesn't have districts and boroughs, it has all the powers in one place so, inevitably, that meant that from our council's perspective we had a lot more capacity than the districts and that single-tier, I think had quite an influence on the way the partnership developed in its early days'*.<sup>389</sup>

When the partnership was formed in 2007 to apply for LEADER funding, its members were drawn from a very broad range of the business community and statutory bodies to help deliver the local development strategy. *'We recognised that bringing together such a broad range of people who had never worked together before to deliver a large European funding programme would require some training. We had a series of training workshops specifically for LAG members during the first year so that they could understand their roles and responsibilities and what was going to be achieved with the funding, the legal structure, the operating systems, the decision making process so that everybody was involved from day one, so there weren't really any kind of preconditions, the LAG decided themselves how they wished to operate and developed a governance structure for our LAG'*.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> CWWW LAG Civil servant no. 1.

<sup>390</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

There was a specific fear on the part of partners from the new areas in North Yorkshire that they would not, in a sense, get 'a fair crack of the whip' or that they would be left behind in some way because they did not have the same degree of LEADER experience of the East Riding. Thus, it took a while for people to get over that and realise that this fear was not what was going to happen. *'Of course we've always had good engagement from the farming community in this area, from the voluntary sector and from business so I wouldn't, I couldn't put my finger on a particular group who resisted the idea'*.<sup>391</sup>

The LAG is composed of members having the strategic delivery experience and skills as outlined in the LAG job outlines. A job description for them was also done so that they understood that every partner would be equal and it would not be dominated by any one particular sector. They all signed a commitment form so that they could raise awareness of the LAG and what it was trying to do.<sup>392</sup>

The membership includes representatives from public bodies (no more than 49% including Parish and Town Councils), private organisations and voluntary and community sectors. The membership ensures that members live or have significant related interest in the area, especially given that the area crosses administrative boundaries, and that they are able to represent the different social, environmental and economic interests. An inclusive approach was taken in the formation of the LAG, with the membership steered by appropriateness of the partnership in terms of private/public split, broad representation across social, environmental and economic interests relating the themes of the LDS and the capacity of members.<sup>393</sup>

Basically, the LAG group has about 30 members from various different sectors, such as the National Farmers Union and the Driffield Agricultural Society that are the productive side of the rural economy, then archaeological groups and social groups. *'You have got a mixture, a system of people interested in heritage, people interested in archaeology, people interested in just the social stuff, arts groups, churches and mixed with them you have got small businesses who are economic and agricultural businesses. So, we have got a wide range of*

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<sup>391</sup> CWWW LAG Civil servant no. 1.

<sup>392</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009a) *LEADER Local Action Group Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways Local Action Group – Governance framework*. Driffield: CWWW LAG.

<sup>393</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

*opinion and you have got local authorities, of course, because they are involved in the planning and messing about'.<sup>394</sup>*

There is a generalized feeling about the need for enhancing and preserving the environment and the cultural heritage on which they highly depend. Curiously, the partnership is not necessarily linked to the creation of employment with the promotion and development of local business but there may also be another important element such as the employment consolidation through grants to existing enterprises. This shows that the partnership has concentrated on development activities other than agriculture and has left this policy area to the agriculture departments and associative structures dealing specifically with it.<sup>395</sup>

### **5.6.3 Organisation, operation and involvement**

The overall structure of the LAG consists of three main groups: the Local Action Group team (the main governing body), the Wider Local Action Group (the wider partnership, which information is communicated to), and the Decision Making Board (a team of LAG members who specifically make decision about the funding). There are also task groups to address specific issues if required.<sup>396</sup>

The LAG team delivers support and guidance to potential applicants and beneficiaries to raise awareness of the themes of the programme, to build capacity to enable applicants to access funding, to develop control procedures in line with the funder and audit requirements, to develop and support community-based delivery partnerships, to regularly produce management information of progress towards the milestones and outputs of the programme.

*'We try to identify, get people to identify to us, where they have new ideas, innovative ideas, and we try to help them, try to put them into some sort of strategic, better business related concept because some things are a bit woolly. So you try to establish where they want to go and then you try and help them get there, and as I say, a short example of that would be building, or helping people to build, the cycle paths where you facilitate where that cycle*

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<sup>394</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 2. Driffield, 20 December 2013.

<sup>395</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2014) *LEADER Local Action Group Coast, Wolds, Wetlands & Waterways Local Action Group – Evaluation report*. Driffield: CWWW LAG.

<sup>396</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

*path can go, what might be on it and what the attractions on it might be'.<sup>397</sup>*

In order of the LAG to be successful and perform to the highest of standards, the attendance and participation of members in various meetings, presentation and events is important. As the members of the LAG are voluntary, it is understandable that they have other work and family commitments that prevent them from attending the meetings. Thus, as it is not possible for all LAG members to attend every show, event, meeting, presentation, a monthly briefing note is circulated around the members, providing a summary of information on the progress and activity within the programme.

The team attends many events and functions on behalf of the LAG throughout the region as well as locally. *'We attend agricultural shows which get 25,000 visitors, and also international events where we make sure that as many LAG members as possible can meet and interact and can be involved as much as they want to and ensuring that partners across Europe can come to the area and share knowledge and information, share success stories'.<sup>398</sup>*

The concept of a Wider LAG (WLAG) was developed because a number of people requested to be informed of the progress of the Programme but did not want to attend meetings regularly. The WLAG members shall have a membership of interested parties from across the area or having a definable interest. There is an amount of preparation for each member prior to a meeting. They receive briefing notes, at least every quarter and meet annually to review programme progress and to ensure strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified. It works as a forum for discussion of major issues affecting rural development and regeneration across the area, to support the wider communications infrastructure of the LAG with reference to the communication strategy.<sup>399</sup>

The Decision Making Board (DMB) whose memberships consists of a maximum of twelve members of which no more than five are from public sector bodies is responsible for approving applications for funding, commissioning projects to help develop opportunities for real economic growth and significant environmental enhancements, monitoring the progress of projects in terms of outputs and expenditure and to function as a discussion group to implement the LDS. They are selected by the LAG at the Annual General Meeting. The DMB meets on an annual schedule and all meetings are formal and not open to the public.

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<sup>397</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 2.

<sup>398</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>399</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

From time to time members could take part in discussions on issues and projects in which they have a direct or indirect interest or organizational link. In this case, they must declare their interest and take no part in the discussion and not be entitled to vote and so will be asked to leave the room during discussions and decision-making.

LAG staff may not vote on funded activity, but they may be called on to contribute to discussions. They also may make recommendations for the clauses and conditions to be included in funding agreements.<sup>400</sup>

The opportunity to involve the wider local community not only in the process of drawing up the LDS but also in the implementation of the funded activities has been promoted by disseminating information in the press, the organization of public events which explain the role of the LAG, the aims of the strategy and where the involvement with the LAG at other levels was encouraged. There have been numerous meetings, events and road shows throughout the area to ensure that the widest possible opportunities for input and involvement were made available to local communities. The consultation was carried out in order to gather the views of the community, and all the information collected have been used and progressed to include in both the LAG membership and the LDS activities.<sup>401</sup>

*'A lot of the time, a lot of energy, a lot of talk, a lot of attempting to convince vaguely apathetic communities that you know what you're talking about and that you are somebody that they would find it worthwhile to work with. People came to the LAG with a variety of different ideas and views about how it would work. Quite a lot were absolutely new to working on LEADER projects at all, so they perhaps came with an open mind. There would be, perhaps, a slight majority that were keen on involving the local community, others would be motivated by 'Is this a source of local funds?'.<sup>402</sup>*

As a result of the awareness raising and consultation activity, other organisations made their contribution by proposing actions, as well as providing baseline data and the evidence of both the necessity and the benefit of work undertaken with village committees and community led plans.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009a).

<sup>401</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

<sup>402</sup> CWWW LAG Independent community volunteer no. 1. Driffield, 19 December 2013.

<sup>403</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

#### **5.6.4 Outcomes, achievements and added value of the local partnership practice**

The implementation of the CWWW LDS contributed to the region utilizing the unrealized potential of the area heritage, to improve its economic performance and social sustainability and therefore contribute positively to rural development. *'One of the successes of this development strategy has been, I believe, to raise awareness of the local community about what LEADER is and what European funding can do and our LAG now understands that what we have delivered is a carpet of projects that links things together and so that they can feed off each other and you get a much better added value from what we are doing. People don't just come and listen, they have to go away and communicate and bring back ideas from their particular area of interest or influence. We produce a lot of information that does get sent to them, so even if they don't manage to come to meetings, they are fully aware and can be involved at whatever level is appropriate to them'*.<sup>404</sup>

The key strengths are that the LAG is, as much as is possible, in contact with local communities. It is part of these communities and tries to keep in touch with the needs of the businesses and community organisations. This enables the LAG to help these organisations achieve some of their objectives, such as talking to people and trying to match up their aspirations with other people's aspirations and then build in some help, facilities and government or European funding, to enable that to happen. *'Top-down stuff is easy. Bottom-up stuff is difficult, and the whole point of these sort of programme we're involved is to try and ensure that bottom-up voice is heard before you start spending money and deciding what you're going to do'*.<sup>405</sup>

In terms of key outputs, they were not focused on jobs explicitly, but certainly did create employment opportunities. The LAG did a lot for the environment, lots on cultural heritage projects that were commissioned by the LAG; they helped to promote local products, local economic diversification, and skills training. There have been a lot of opportunities for LAG members to go outside their comfort zones and participate in wider rural development. In summary, there was a lot of capacity building for the LAG throughout.<sup>406</sup>

The large geographical reach and high population threshold compared to many other LEADER areas in England has enabled the LAG to develop a wide and diverse range of

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<sup>404</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>405</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 2.

<sup>406</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

interventions within the culture and heritage area.<sup>407</sup> It has created a new understanding of the value of wildlife tourism in the local economy and has encouraged the formation of new partnerships such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Yorkshire Water to promote and coordinate development together. The LDS has also given support and advice to business, created new employment and encouraged capital investments in wildlife reserves and accommodation and has raised the profile of Yorkshire in a European context, as a leading exponent of nature tourism.<sup>408</sup>

*'Most of the projects have managed to increase community involvement and locality is proud of something that has happened. So, for example, the cycle tourism that we have done, bed and breakfasts got increased business as they are now full of cyclists coming to the area. The same with horse riding and, with nature tourism. Whilst we didn't directly fund the businesses, what we were trying to do was built the infrastructure that enabled businesses to either start up, flourish or diversify. A lot of people didn't know that we have the most fantastic nature tourism and wildlife opportunities in our area because they live and see it every day and they don't realise that people come here and think, 'wow this is fantastic'. If I walked around Beverley and said 'what do you know about our own rural heritage project here in the Pocklington district?' I guess the answer would be 'nothing' but if I asked them about their town trail using the work of a local artist then a lot of the local Beverley people would know about that, so they tend to be aware of what has happened locally, there would be a limit to how far they were able to generalise from that'.<sup>409</sup>*

Another example of output concerns the eight churches of the LAG area that now cooperate together and they have an audio-guide which tells you about the church and who's there and some of its history. *'If you don't do something with those churches they would just die and all their history would die with them, so you need to maintain them for historic reasons and all the cultural things to do with those churches but you can't do that just as churches. In a church we put in toilets and there are some ladies from the village who give refreshments on certain afternoons so they have teas and stuff as a community. You change the purpose of the church from just being a building and you make it into a social centre with a meeting room both for tourists and for some of the community. So, you don't build a new building,*

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<sup>407</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).

<sup>408</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>409</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

*you put it in an old building and that adds value to that building and to that cultural heritage that is there in that building’.*<sup>410</sup>

Therefore, in terms of achievements, the operation of the LDS has brought an awareness of valuable local resources, increased awareness of sources of funding and generated the recognition that key people, who are prepared to take an initiative, are the only that do something when there is a reasonably general agreement about it through decision-making processes.

*‘The LAG as a whole has made a big social impact, and a massive cultural and environmental impact. I think they have made some added value in the economic and some added value in the political sense of convincing, particularly the upper-scale local authorities like East Riding, that there is a value in having a Local Action Group’.*<sup>411</sup>

In terms of the capacity that has been built in some of the rural communities, heritage can be considered a very powerful tool in a sense that it is quite a dynamic mechanism for getting people involved in a community development context. There has been a major impact in bringing many more people together across the partnership area who have now learned skills in project management, project development and cooperative action.<sup>412</sup> This has enabled the LDS to have a major ‘narrow and deep’ impact in the area and the focus on heritage and culture has limited the effects of deadweight and displacement and has therefore delivered significant added value. There is also evidence to demonstrate that CWWW has delivered jobs and benefits to the environment and the communities in an effective, economic and efficient way. It has also begun the process of mapping the broader social return on investment of its activities.<sup>413</sup>

*‘I wouldn't use the word ‘failure’ but I would like to see far more engagement with the private sector although we have been reasonably successful. New members that have been recruited from the business sector have joined because they have seen the impacts. A bed and breakfast lady has decided to join because her bed and breakfast is now full and so, because the private sector has seen the benefits and the impact locally of what we have been*

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<sup>410</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 2.

<sup>411</sup> CWWW LAG Independent community volunteer no. 1.

<sup>412</sup> Duggleby, N., Butterworth, N. (2013) *Rural capacity Building Project – Evaluation Report*. Driffield: CWWW LAG.

<sup>413</sup> The Rural Development & Programmes Team (2009b).



*doing, they are more willing to join and I think there is a different way of engaging with the business sector in the future rather than the voluntary and community sector'.<sup>414</sup>*

By commissioning small feasibility work, the LAG has managed to triple that money by leveraging in a significant amount of other funding into the area. Where here they may have kick-started something small by providing some development money, they have been able to go on and lever in a lot of money from other places. Consequently a £ 2.8 million programme has ended up as a programme of currently £7 million.<sup>415</sup>

The networking activity has helped to ensure the working of the LAG more widely embedded with other activities of the area. *'I think we have developed a really good partnership where any fear of working together, fear of one particular sector dominating another one hopefully has been eradicated'.<sup>416</sup>*

A more mixed judgment exists for the implementation of funding programme. This is due to the bureaucratic difficulties in the ensuring financial compliance and the business of good government. Also the difficulty of making an application and the discomfort caused by rejections for both the applications and the decision-makers. *'The excessive bureaucratic bit certainly would be a weakness. It worries people. They would be pleased where there was successful implementation but just a bit sceptical about how easy it was to do. They feel very exposed by it and it makes them feel very inadequate. People would think: 'the funding only lasts one year or two years what is going to happen then?' There would be anxieties about that if they could find a way of continuing. It is astonishing how much time goes quickly passed and you think 'we're not really up to scratch, we haven't done enough of this, we're really in a hurry to catch up and deliver so time constraints is certainly something'.<sup>417</sup>*

The interviewees also view the LAG as a very small body in the overall scheme of England. *'We used to have rural regional development but we don't have them anymore because we've gone off them, and then we have local authorities which are traditionally based in their local constituency. So local authorities in England are all competing with each other to be the best. It is much better to have Scotland and the old regions, but our present government doesn't believe in regions which is a bit disastrous from the point of view of trying to*

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<sup>414</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>415</sup> Duggleby, N., Butterworth, N. (2013).

<sup>416</sup> CWWW LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>417</sup> CWWW LAG Independent community volunteer no. 1.

*administer things. Don't forget all the concentration of government is on cities. Cities grow, cities have deprivation, cities have all the things, cities have lots of people, cities have lots of people who vote. The countryside is very sparse, spread about, it has difficulties in communicating because it is separated. So, when you try to look at rural you have to try to think how rural is not different or how it is similar to cities but how it is different so that you can ensure that resources directed to rural from central government. You have to create some reason why people want to live where they want to live. It is not just about beautiful bits of trees, culture, meeting people. It is about the whole sense of living and we are just one small part as a LEADER rural activity group that helps to try and build that sense of place and that ownership. And you do that by various things like economic development, like the tourist stuff we've been doing, through local food which creates a sense of belonging'.<sup>418</sup>*

There seems to be a frustration regarding the LAG's capacity to innovate as it is curtailed by traditional structures and attitudes making often difficult to secure access to members and also the nature of the local area in terms of geography and economy and therefore making it hard to provide the support services they need.

Most interviewers expressed several fears relating to the continuity of funding beyond the end of the LEADER 2007-2013 programming period in order to be coupled with a desire for a long term objectives as the LAG has a too short period to bring about real change. There is also a desire for greater devolved authorities and a wish for more involvement of the national and local authorities.<sup>419</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the reality of such concerns, the real challenge for the CWWW LAG is to carry forward the lessons derived from working together to find solutions for local problems into a new era in which European Union funding could become a thing of the past.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the emergence, organization and performance of two LAGs operating in the United Kingdom (Argyll and the Islands LAG – Scotland and Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways LAG – England). In order to better understand their operation, I first analysed the governance framework within the process of reshaping the administrative

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<sup>418</sup> CWWW LAG Independent community volunteer no. 1.

<sup>419</sup> Duggleby, N., Butterworth, N. (2013).

policy and its devolution to UK nations with a focus on the implementation of the EU rural development policies in Scotland and England.

I examined how regionalization has been enacted through gathering details of the tasks, activities and views of those involved in Scotland and in England.

Decisions about policy design remained at central level.

Both countries integrated the government department by bringing together agriculture, environment and rural affairs and have arrangements for the engagement with rural stakeholders to help develop policy with central government.

In Scotland although devolution granted Scotland a high autonomy in designing its rural policy, rural affairs are a matter overseen by the Scottish Parliament with little sub-regional delivery infrastructure. Decisions about policy design remain at national level where the Scottish Executive Department works with DEFRA to ensure that Scottish issues are represented. *'The problem is the integration of policies at local level, finding how they mutually reinforce each other or are in conflict... that can also give feedback to the centre on possible improvements and new needs, adapt policy packages to local conditions'*.<sup>420</sup>

In England there are no formal intermediary government layers between national and local level representing an important issue for the delivery of rural development policy. In recent years, policy has been reshaped by a range of initiatives and has made great efforts in terms of reorganization of the governance, planning and policy assessment. From 1990, in response to the European Union policy which promoted a more integrated approach, regions through a more extensive, cross sectoral and administrative governance began to administer rural development programmes. The Rural White Papers and the Rural Strategy 2004 represented an attempt to coordinate policy along an important dimension in terms of aims and procedural changes.<sup>421</sup>

These documents signified a series of important shifts from an agricultural to a rural focus with policy implications in socio-economic activities, from a concern for resource management and planning to a concern for people and communities in rural areas, from seeing the countryside as a unitary space to an acknowledgement of the diversity of rural

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<sup>420</sup> OECD (2008a), page 92.

<sup>421</sup> Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) 'Political power beyond the state: problematics of government', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43(2), pp. 173-205.

areas which reflects differing pressures and circumstances as well as distinct governmental and political structures.

In this context, RDAs, set up in 1999, played a central role in the delivery of rural policy and Government Offices as the representative of Whitehall in the regions, had the role to coordinating and influencing policy delivery and helping to join the centre with localities.

In 2001, with the creation of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) which replaced the old Ministry of Agriculture, the central government adopted a coordinated and more centralized approach for the delivery of rural affairs across government departments. This was followed by the publication of the Rural Strategy 2004 which envisioned devolved RDAs having specific responsibility for delivering the socio-economic agenda in rural areas and Government Offices being given the role of coordinating and influencing policy delivery and to join up the centre with localities.

Therefore, the regionalization of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 for England meant that applications for LEADER funds were made to the RDAs as responsible bodies for negotiating with applicants and making decisions and becoming mature institutions with their own identity, experience of regeneration activity and autonomy to manage their resources.

However, the economic crisis of 2008 and the change of government in 2010 has changed the context for rural development where regional institutions have been dismantled. With the disappearance of RDAs, the socio-economic elements of the Rural Development Programme of England (RDPE) are now delivered by DEFRA, which has the responsibility for the delivering of greater competitiveness in the agricultural sector and for investments in rural areas. The return to a national programme causes the removal of the former regional flexibilities to deliver approaches attuned to regional circumstances.

Within this framework, where regional local strategies are due to disappear, local communities will have a say over developments in their towns or villages while central governments retain control over major infrastructure projects.

The two case studies analysed suggest that, even if in different contexts, they are characterized by an economic disadvantage due to remoteness and poor transport access, population sparsity and a decline in agriculture. These factors together result in low working activities and wages and a rate of unemployment higher than the national average levels.

The two LAGs follow on from the previous LEADER + programme. The initiation of both partnerships was characterized by the availability of funding opportunity at European level. The categories of the actors in the partnerships are the local authorities which are highly motivated through a sense of ownership and responsibility, key public agencies (national and local government bodies), NGOs with community and environmental interests. Then there are representatives from the private sector such as trade associations and interest groups (e.g. farmers and landowners).

The role of the lead partners of the two LAGs (the Argyll and Bute Council in Scotland and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council in England) has been very fundamental in achieving a number of successes within the implementation of the LDS. They encouraged a wider ownership of the partnership and as local authorities they have a relative independence from political and administrative control which helped them to operate in a more innovative and flexible way and thereby they gained local credibility.

The partnerships are managed by an effective organization structure which is characterized by a main decision-making board. Similarly, the two partnerships are well supported by administrative and technical staff with the aim to assure a smooth management and implementation of the activities. They are able to offer an independent service to applicants, including the coordination of programme procedures. In both cases, a series of working groups and commissions have been formed to make recommendations to the board on specific topic area.

However, evidence emerged that decision processes are hampered by the excessive bureaucracy of the funding programme in terms of requirements for information and inflexible bidding procedures and this brought considerable frustration for staff and applicants.

The implementation of a funding programme such as LEADER within such a short time period created particular policy risks: namely, that the main outcomes of the LAGs would be an array of specific projects across different sectors rather than an integrated rural development strategy which brings about a real change and is necessary to build on earlier achievements.

Concerning the added value that flows from the working of the two LAGS, both partnerships reveal a strong traditional community identity in terms of activities and resistance to change. They have been aware of the need to involve local communities to bring local knowledge

and to strengthen their local credibility. The role of the local authorities was responsive and proactive as they wanted to draft a strategy based on a real recognition of local problems in order to be a convincing bid for getting LEADER resources.

In these circumstances, the level of the community involvement was enhanced within the whole rural development process as there has been much enthusiasm, energy and skills. Local authorities played a key role in this process by displaying their capacities which shifted in the recent years from only a provision of services to a more strategic role. This role put the partnerships in a good position in terms of credibility and public accountability and allowed to bring together a wide range of public, private and community and voluntary organizations.

Both the partnerships are committed to the concept of integrated rural development and the pursuit of living and working in the countryside. The need to preserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage and local territorial identity and the creation and maintenance of employment are also considered key objectives. In this context, the LAGs are generally effective in promoting and supporting the locally based endogenous development at economic and social level by funding new social enterprises, infrastructure projects such as community buildings for multipurpose use designed for the local people, project for the valorisation of the environment and cultural heritage with the aim to create a new understanding of the value of tourism in the local economy and of the local history to give a sense of place to the community people.

Nonetheless, the real challenge for the two LAGs is to carry forward the lessons derived from working together to find solutions for local problems into a new era in which European Union funding could become a thing of the past. The key factors that helped the partnerships to deliver the development of their territories are strictly linked to the local knowledge from the partners, the committed staff with flexible skills, and effective management of the funding mechanism. This process also provided partners a strong sense of achievement of the LDS results and doing something worthwhile. Therefore, the working of the two LAGs has brought an awareness of the valuable local resources and the recognition that the key people are prepared to take an initiative at local level. These are the actors who do something where there is a general agreement about it through the decision-making processes.

In accordance with MLG theories there should be a reorganization of the power between the government tiers and a strengthening of the networks that connect regional actors.<sup>422</sup> In this framework, the policy-making role of the regional institutions have to adapt to the presence of EU and national rural policies in terms of targets, delivery mechanisms, regulations, monitoring. Moreover, the involvement of rural partnerships is fundamental to enhance problem-solving capacity and policy outcomes. Furthermore, what should be emphasized is that with the LEADER programmes, the European Union has decided to abandon the old centralist concept of development policies to bring the recipients of the interventions, planning and decision-making capacities closer to the territories. Although this is a move away from top-down, centralising steering of regional development, it nevertheless suggests the continued importance of the vertical dimension of multi-level governance, in which the EU programmes and strategic thinking were taken up by local communities as well as the wider regions.

Finally, although central government may stress the need to increase the regional 'ownership' to implement rural policies, the presence of bureaucratic boundaries in the governance structures, often with different aims and incentives,<sup>423</sup> may make '*integration at the regional level on some occasions difficult, on other occasions impossible*'.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Pearce, G., Ayres, S. and Tricker, M. (2005), page 199.

<sup>423</sup> Flinders, M. (2002) 'Governance in Whitehall', *Public administration*, Vol. 80(1), pp. 51-75.

<sup>424</sup> Cabinet Office (2009) *Reaching Out: The role of central Government at the Regional and Local Level*. London: The Stationery Office, page 43.

## **Chapter 6. Rural development governance in Italy.**

### **The case studies of two LEADER Local Action Groups in the Emilia-Romagna region and in Puglia region**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 5, I investigated the institutional framework of the United Kingdom with a focus on Scotland and England and the case studies of the Scottish Argyll and the Islands LAG and the English CWWW LAG. I looked at how these LAGs and institutions function and interact in the processes that make and administer rural development policy.

Italy is another country where regions play a major role in social, political and economic life, and there is massive regional diversity in terms of regional cultures, economies, and political traditions and affiliations.

Some studies have tried to evaluate the institutional performance of the Italian regions.

Putnam argues that the efficiency of the region and regional government are linked to the historical legacy of its civic traditions.<sup>425</sup>

Although the Italian regions have been characterized by some degree of autonomy since the 1950s, full regional government was only instituted throughout Italy in 1970 and it was only during the 1990s that a series of reforms materialized. Furthermore, it was only in the second half of 1990s that these reforms were implemented from an administrative and legislative standpoint and devolution. The partial retreat of the nation-state provided regional and local authorities with increased autonomy. In the meantime, the EU reform of the Structural Funds in 1988 imposed an institutional reorganization on Italy reframing the role of the regions. Europe was generally seen as the force that would enable the country to leave behind the traditional Italian state and move towards a rapid modernization process. In a word, there was a widespread view that Italy was being 'saved by Europe'.<sup>426</sup>

With the accelerating Europeanisation of development policy, regional economies formally became the natural recipients of development funds. In Italy '(m)ost studies of European

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<sup>425</sup> Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R. and Nanetti, R. Y. (1994) *Making Democracy Work, Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>426</sup> Ferrera, M. and Gulamini, E. (1999) *Salvati dall'Europa?* Bologna: Il Mulino.



*regional policy focus on the descending phase of the policy, how development programmes are drafted, funds are spent, results are evaluated’.*<sup>427</sup>

In this case study, I focus on the ascending phase, with the aim of analysing how Italian national and subnational levels have shaped the application of the EU regulations and if their effectiveness has changed over time.

Like the previous case study chapter, in this chapter my analysis starts with the exploration of the administrative profile of Italy and the evolution of the local government structure. Then I will look at the rural development policy implementation at local level through the analysis of the working of two case studies, one in the northern Emilia – Romagna region (Delta 2000 LAG) and the other one in the southern Puglia region (Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG).

## **6.2 The administrative profile of Italy**

The Italian system of local government originated in the nineteenth century and is based on a tradition of centralization dating from the Napoleonic model after unification of the many states under the Kingdom of Italy. During fascism, typical features of that model continued to dominate in terms of centralization and Prefects who exercised control over local government which played a marginal role in the management of public policies. The Prefects were Rome appointees whose sweeping powers enabled them, in conjunction with mayors, to ensure the return of government candidates at each general election and that local government remained in the hands of dominant elites.<sup>428</sup>

In 1926, all mayors were replaced together with their councils by the ‘*Podestà*’, who were appointed and could be dismissed at any time by the Prefect. The Prefect usually chose the *Podestà* among elderly conservative gentlemen finding that retired colonels were ideal as they had plenty of time and needed no pay.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Brunazzo, M. and Piattoni, S. (2008) ‘Italy and Regional Policy’, in Fabbrini, S. and Piattoni, S. (eds.) *Italy in the European Union. Redefining National Interest in a Compound Polity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., page 160.

<sup>428</sup> Bobbio, L. (2005) ‘Italy: after the storm’, in Denters, B. and Rose, L. E. (eds.) *Comparing local governance, Trends and developments, Government Beyond the Centre*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 29-46.

<sup>429</sup> Clark, M. (1996) *Modern Italy 1871-1995*. Second edition. London and New York: Longman.

The liberal and Fascist regimes were able to intervene with impunity in local government since the latter had no constitutional recognition.

With the establishment of the republican Constitution in 1948, local governments were recognized elements in the national governmental system and they could appeal to the courts if the central government took action that was corrosive to their constitutional status. Nevertheless, the central authorities can change the Constitution to which the sub-national units are subject and can do so against their wishes.<sup>430</sup>

The Constitution specifies four tiers of government below national level: regions (20), metropolitan cities (10), provinces (103), and municipalities (8,103). They are organized like a Chinese box, where each of the municipalities is part of a province which in turn is part of a region.<sup>431</sup> The regions range from some 128,000 inhabitants in Valle d'Aosta to some 10,000,000 in Lombardy. Provinces and municipalities differ in terms of their geographical extent and functions. Provinces, with populations ranging from fewer than 100,000 inhabitants in l'Ogliastra up to 4,000,000 in Rome, are contained within the boundaries of the region. Municipalities, with populations ranging from fewer than 100 inhabitants in some mountain areas to more than 2,800,000 in Rome are contained within the boundaries of the provinces. They do not cross each other's boundaries nor the boundaries of the regions. While municipalities and provinces have a long history, the regions, although their creation was proposed in the 1948 Constitution, were introduced in 1970. *'Their purpose was the reform and modernization of the administrative system, the diversion of social and political pressures on the central government, the development of the welfare system in order to strengthen the control of politicians over administration'*.<sup>432</sup>

There are two types of region: 15 ordinary regions and 5 special statute regions.

The ordinary regions are artificial constructions as their boundaries were determined on the basis of statistical data and cultural and territorial diversities as social economic systems were believed to be less important.

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<sup>430</sup> Norton, A. (1994) *International handbook of Local and Regional Government: A Comparative Analysis of Advanced Democracies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, page 9.

<sup>431</sup> Ercole, E. (1992) 'Yes, in Theory. And Perhaps in the Future: European Integration and Local Government in Italy', in Goldsmith, M. J. F. and Klausen, K. K. (eds.) *European Integration and Local Government*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 189-204.

<sup>432</sup> Newell, J. L. (2010) *The Politics of Italy. Governance in a Normal country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, page 82.

#### Ordinary regions:

- Abruzzo
- Basilicata
- Calabria
- Campania
- Emilia Romagna
- Lazio
- Liguria
- Lombardy
- Marche
- Molise
- Piedmont
- Puglia
- Tuscany
- Umbria
- Veneto



#### Special statute regions:

- Aosta Valley
- Friuli Venezia Giulia
- Sardinia
- Sicily
- Trentino Alto Adige

Map no. 4: Regional map of Italy. Source available at

<https://www.pinterest.it/pin/94153448429879256/?lp=true> (Last access: 26 November 2018)

The special statute regions are characterized by specific ethnic and cultural differences or isolation in disadvantaged areas or in islands. They have significant powers in a wider range of areas, exclusive powers and financial autonomy unlike the ordinary regions. These areas have been threatened by separatism and ethnic problems and thus they were established early in order to defuse such threats. They are located on Italy's borders (Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and on the two islands (Sardinia and Sicily). Four of them were established by 1949 while Friuli-Venezia Giulia did not happen until the resolution of the Trieste dispute with Yugoslavia, being established in 1963. In 1972, after a negotiation between Italy and Austria, the two provinces of Trentino Alto Adige region (Bolzano and Trento), were granted a degree of self-government in order to allow a special status for the German community of Bolzano. The other 15 ordinary regions had to wait until 1970 before the legislation giving life to them could be passed.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Newell, J. L. (2010).

Regions, provinces and municipalities have quite a similar governance structure, consisting of the *Council* with legislative power, the *Giunta (Board)* with executive power and its *president* or the *mayor* in the municipalities with the responsibility for leading the *Giunta*. Presidents and mayors are elected by universal direct suffrage and, together with their bodies, they have five-year terms.<sup>434</sup>

*'Regarding the laws, the Constitution enumerates the areas in which the State has exclusive jurisdiction and those where there is concurrent jurisdiction between the State (within the limits of basic principles) and the regions. All of the areas not included in the two lists are reserved to the regions. There are two main criteria for determining the areas of exclusive state competence: one criterion assigns exclusive State competence for areas in which the basic functions of the State are implicated (like for example, foreign affairs, defence, public security, citizenship, currency, etc.); the other criteria assigns this exclusive competence over areas that are otherwise subjected to regional competence (for example, the determination of the basic levels of civil right protection and social services that ought to be guaranteed throughout the land, antitrust, the protection of the cultural heritage, general educational norms, etc.)'*<sup>435</sup> The concurring competence between the state and the regions includes infrastructure project planning, job protection, public finance, food safety, and health protection.

The residual regional competence power extends to the economic sectors (industry, commerce, agriculture), social policies (social assistance, training, employment), transportation, roads and urban planning. Finally, the State and the regions grant the administrative tasks that are exercised by the municipalities and provinces. Regions also have legislative powers, but only within limits stated in the Constitution; where the powers are not granted explicitly, the competence goes to the national government.

To deal with EU institutions on matters for which they have jurisdiction, the regions have a consultative role such as commenting on draft regulations and directives, which the Italian Government will then carry into the EU decision-making process. *'For many years, the regions' main worry was how to handle disputes with central government over their*

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<sup>434</sup> Newell, J. L. (2010).

<sup>435</sup> Vesperini, G. (2009) *Regional and Local government in Italy: an overview*. Viterbo: Università degli studi della Tuscia, page 3.

*respective responsibilities. Central government for its part treated Community matters as a branch of international relations, an area in which it has exclusive competence*'.<sup>436</sup>

Concerning metropolitan cities, provinces and municipalities governments, although these are all 'sub-regional' tiers, the Constitution reserves their electoral system, their internal institutions and functions to national law.<sup>437</sup> They are supervised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs through representatives in each province (the Prefects). The Minister has also the power to dissolve municipal councils (if they are unable to function) and to call new elections. Decisions made by the municipal governments are subject to legal review by regional governments.

In terms of their administrative responsibilities, the provinces and other subnational bodies issue regulations which must be consistent both with regional and national legislation. Provincial functions range from roads to environmental protection, cultural and natural heritage, hunting and fishing, water and energy sources, waste disposal. The principal functions of the municipal governments may be divided into three areas: environment and territory through drawing up of development plans subject to subsequent approval by regional governments, social services for their residents and economic development. In the field of education, local governments are responsible for school-building and maintenance. Teachers are state employees and school programmes are drawn up at national level. Health services are provided by specialized autonomous authorities. The nation state acts in peripheral areas through its own decentralized units in sectors such as school, work, national heritage protection, vehicle licensing, social security and the labour market through a network of employment offices. In addition, welfare and social security services (pensions, unemployment benefit, etc.) are dispensed by a state agency.

The metropolitan cities were first provided for by law no. 142 of 1990 and in the Constitution with the reform of 2001. They include a core city and the surrounding towns that are related to them for economic activities, public services, cultural and territorial relations. They '*were conceived to allow local authorities to respond more effectively to the social and economic development of the post-war decades by coming together to offer a*

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<sup>436</sup> Desideri, C. (1995) 'Italian Regions in the European Community', in Jones, B. and Keating, M. (eds.) *The European Union and the Regions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, page 74.

<sup>437</sup> Single text on the framework of local authorities established in August 2000 by the Italian Legislative Decree no. 267.

*specific coordinated delivery of services through bodies of the same name ...The idea is that, having the functions of both provinces and municipalities, such structures should be in a position to meet the strategic and coordination needs not always adequately met by existing divisions of competence between the two'.<sup>438</sup>*

### **6.2.1 The evolution of the local government structure in Italy**

During the 1950s Italy went through a dramatic economic transformation which did not eliminate territorial disparities between the industrial north and the less developed south. The latter was characterized by an economy based on agriculture and traditional tertiary activities, with low per capita income and where public employment played an important role in combating high levels of unemployment. Industry based on large production units was concentrated in the north-west which was already economically advanced. A new model of economic development emerged. It was based on an urbanized industrial society, mass production and consumption with integrated social groups. This model can be seen in cities such as Turin which absorbed a large number of workers coming from the south which resulted in a very polarized social structure with a very politicized and militant working class on the one hand and on the other one a large industrial and financial bourgeoisie.<sup>439</sup>

In Southern Italy (*Mezzogiorno*), which appeared to be an assisted economy characterized by large agricultural and public service sectors, the industrial sector remained less developed, less productive and was dependent on the north.<sup>440</sup> There were few skilled industrial workers and an entrepreneurial class did not develop. There was also a massive layer of underpaid, precarious part-time workers. *'Everywhere witnessed the decrease of agricultural wages, the stabilization of a stratum of small farmers, the reorganization of small-scale producers and traders around the mafia and political clientelism, and finally, most importantly, there was a sharp increase in the stratum of public sector employees highly dependent on the political sphere'*<sup>441</sup> and the whole local system was riddled with family ties, local connections and political links. This context was particularly conducive to a lack of confidence in institutions by the population; this in turn allowed the economy to develop on

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<sup>438</sup> Newell, J. L. (2010), page 86.

<sup>439</sup> Bagnasco, A. (1986) *Torino. Un profilo sociologico*. Torino: Einaudi.

<sup>440</sup> Le Galès, P. and Lequesne, C. (1998) *Regions in Europe*. London: Routledge.

<sup>441</sup> Le Galès, P. and Lequesne, C. (1998), page 153.

an illegal terrain where the mafia was often present, notably in the regions of Campania, Calabria and Sicily.

In this context, the regional policy *'which aimed to reduce the economic dualism between the north and the south of the country'*,<sup>442</sup> was firmly based on the reduction of the disparities between the north and the south through public interventions aimed at industrializing the south carried out by the central government; these interventions mostly aimed at industrializing the south (*'Intervento Straordinario del Mezzogiorno' - Extraordinary Intervention for Southern Italy*).

Thus, the *'Cassa per il Mezzogiorno'* (Fund for the South), was set up to provide special resources to regions for development programmes in Southern Italy. A *'planned industrialization was to be achieved through a series of incentives offered to private firms to invest in the south, and a compulsory (substantially high) investment quota for the so-called state holdings companies such as IRI ... ('Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale' - Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) ... and ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi' - National Hydrocarbons Authority)'*.<sup>443</sup>

By the summer of 1977, an agreement was reached at national level that transferred the responsibility to the regions for control over territorial and economic planning such as agriculture, housing, construction, public transportation, etc.

*'It was only from this moment that the Italian regions started fulfilling two specific functions with regard to local authorities: the control function and the policy function. The control function concerns activities of supervision over the administrative procedure and the budgetary process of local authorities'*<sup>444</sup> in a variety of policy areas such as industry and trade, labour market and education, through regional laws and Regional Development Programmes. The local governments also experienced significant changes where the central state kept control of financing and functions of local administrations and local administrators acted more as intermediaries and less as local policy-makers.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Bull, M. and Baudner, J. (2004) 'Europeanization and Italian policy for the Mezzogiorno', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11(6), pp. 1058-1076.

<sup>443</sup> Bull, M. and Baudner, J. (2004), page 1060.

<sup>444</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998) 'European Integration and the Relationship between the State and Regions in Italy: The Interplay between National and Common Agricultural Policies', *Regional & Federal Studies*, Vol. 8(2), page 22.

<sup>445</sup> Ercole, E. (1992).

During the 1980s, northern and central regions became the most dynamic and productive regions due to the role played by subnational governments and the viewpoint that development depended less on the amount of aid than on the effective capacities of subnational government to utilize the aid.<sup>446</sup>

*'The influence of local development studies has been instrumental to the renewal of alternative approaches based on traditional economic variables'...* which favour the identification of a highly differentiated situation which will contain ... *'a more respectful attitude towards local resources and their valorisation, tendencies and potential emerging from the socio-economic fabric'*.<sup>447</sup> The direction was that of an endogenous model of development based on local entrepreneurship and on the valorisation of history and natural resources linked to the specificity of local territories.<sup>448</sup> This period was marked by a new policy framework according to the definition of objective region within the European structural policy. The territorial rationale was no more exclusively linked to the regions of the Mezzogiorno but to less developed areas of the national territory which were defined according the framework of the objectives of the EU regional policy.<sup>449</sup>

During the 1980s there was the law reforming local authorities which concerned the transfer of powers from the centre to the periphery, the enhancement of the powers of the municipalities' mayors and provincial presidents and the introduction of their direct election by the citizens, measures to modernize the administration and a vast process of decentralization.<sup>450</sup> These transformations are not very different from the other European countries even if the *'engine driving the changes lies in the political crisis that struck Italy*

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<sup>446</sup> Nanetti, R. (1988) *Growth and Territorial Politics. The Italian Model of Social Capitalism*. London: Pinter.

<sup>447</sup> Gualini, E. (2000) 'New Programming and the Influence of Transnational Discourses in the Reform of Regional Policy in Italy', *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 9(6), page 756.

<sup>448</sup> Trigilia, C. and Diamanti, I. (1992) *Il mosaico del Mezzogiorno*. Torino: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli.

<sup>449</sup> Levy, C. (1996) *Italian Regionalism. History, Identity and Politics*. Oxford: Berg.

<sup>450</sup> Until 1993, the internal organization of local governments was based on the national parliamentary model. Citizens elected the council which in turn elected the president and the mayor and their Giunta comprising the majority of the council representatives. The council was elected every five years from party lists using a system of proportional representation.



*during those years, and this may explain why the change has been more intense (and perhaps also more confused) than elsewhere'.<sup>451</sup>*

Italian regions were characterized by differences in institutional performances and by limited competencies. Most of the southern regions, which paradoxically need most intervention, did not succeed in implementing Community policies and, as a result, risked losing funds. Those regions were recipients of funds from the central level but often proved incapable of using them effectively and did not show any willingness to acquire more responsibilities to implement policies effectively.

*'The problem was caused by the lack of properly trained staff or efficient offices. Political factors, such as political interference in administrative questions and interruption of activities following a political crisis of the regional government, also contributed. In addition, as some regions entrusted the elaboration of programmes to external consultants... they were not thoroughly discussed within regional offices and when it came to implementing them, regional officials had to deal with things with which they were totally unfamiliar'.<sup>452</sup>*

However, the failings also were related to problems in central government. *'The government was subject to several requests by the Commission to adopt concrete measures in order to spend up the use of Structural funds by the southern regions, but its own method (of trying to grant a consultative role to the regions while retaining overall control) was clearly inadequate'.<sup>453</sup>* This was due to the low organizational capacity of the central institutions and coordination among those ones dealing with the EU since the only Italian institution to which *'all European-level decisions turned, was the Ministry for Foreign Affairs which, at that point, did not even have a proper Department for European Affairs'.<sup>454</sup>* The personnel in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had diplomatic training but did not have the technical expertise to follow European structural policy.<sup>455</sup> In the 1980s a Department for the Coordination of European Community Policies was created at the premises of the Prime Minister's cabinet and a Committee for European Affairs within the Parliament. Regions still remained out of European policy making as it was considered to reside under the domain of foreign affairs

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<sup>451</sup> Bobbio, L. (2005), page 35.

<sup>452</sup> Desideri, C. (1995), page 81.

<sup>453</sup> Bull, M. and Baudner, J. (2004), page 1066.

<sup>454</sup> Brunazzo, M. and Piattoni, S. (2004), page 163.

<sup>455</sup> Brunazzo, M. and Piattoni, S. (2004).

and thus the central government.<sup>456</sup> This situation was made worse when in 1992 the Extraordinary intervention for Southern Italy was abolished and the competences were allocated among the regional offices.<sup>457</sup> Central and regional offices lacked the technical expertise to plan, implement and monitor European development policy and showed little evidence of an inclination to learn the new procedures. The pressure of the regions to gain a more effective involvement in European Union policies became successful with the entry in force of the State law no. 86/1989, which establishes that the regions can implement European policies autonomously.<sup>458</sup> With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, Italy faced difficulties in meeting the criteria for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the high cost of the national government's interventionist southern policy was considered at odds with the liberal, market-oriented economic philosophy of the EU from the mid- 1980s onwards.<sup>459</sup> The need to contain public expenditure made it difficult for national government to continue the aid policy known as 'extraordinary intervention' through which central government gave conspicuous financial sums to the southern regions with the aim of generating economic development, and therefore this aid policy came to an end.<sup>460</sup>

This process resulted in a shift of responsibilities from the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno to the national ministries, regions, provinces and municipalities. This was a further stage of the Italian public policy-making which was characterized by a negotiated and partnership-based policy-making approach within a European perspective of concerted development policies.<sup>461</sup> Under the impulse of the Maastricht Treaty, the function of the so called 'Conferenza Stato-Regioni' (State-Regions Conference) established in 1988 - which brings together representatives of the Government and the regions in an authoritative forum for negotiation on all aspects of government policy impinging on regional competences (e.g. public expenditure and the annual budget) – changed.

Therefore, during the European integration 1990s process, the regions faced two challenges. The first one concerned the attempt of the subnational authorities 'to gain power and

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<sup>456</sup> Brunazzo, M. and Piattoni, S. (2008).

<sup>457</sup> Calamai, L. (2009) 'The link between devolution and regional disparities: evidence from the Italian regions', *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 41(5), pp. 1129-1151.

<sup>458</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998).

<sup>459</sup> Bull, M. and Baudner, J. (2004).

<sup>460</sup> Calamai, L. (2009).

<sup>461</sup> Giuliani, M. (2009) 'Europeanization and Italy: A bottom-up Process', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 5(2), pp. 47-72.

*control over resources in order to by-pass the 'old' national centres (the central governments of the member states) and to establish direct links with the 'new' supranational centre (the EU institutions). The other tension is centripetal and concerns the process of institution building of the new supranational centre which, on the one hand, reduces the political power of the old national centres but, on the other hand, is still dependent on them for the extraction and distribution of resources'*.<sup>462</sup>

This general policy provided the framework for the *Mezzogiorno Development Plan* (MDP) which was drafted for the 2000-2006 programming period and negotiated between the central government, regional and local governments, social and economic actors. The MDP marked a clear shift from the old policy for the south and was based on financial incentives and sectoral allocation to one involving public investment policies for an endogenous development of territorial resources. Regions were given more responsibilities for managing the Plan and its total resources and also used regional policy instruments to boost administrative reforms and linked to Structural Funds EU regulations.<sup>463</sup>

During the negotiations between the European Commission and the member states about the budgetary allocation and the implementation and control by the national authorities over the 2000-2006 programming phase, Italy adapted its structures and created new ones. Within the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, the DPS - *Dipartimento per le Politiche di Sviluppo e di Coesione* (Department of Development and Cohesion) was created with competence on territorial policy and EU Structural Funds and to provide technical assistance to local administrations. The DPS was acknowledged as the direct interlocutor with the European Commission during all phases of the European development policy-making process. The regions also managed to create a common position at regional and national level to Brussels with the European institutions.<sup>464</sup>

The early 1990s witnessed dramatic changes to the political landscape in Italy and the end of the post-war political dominance of the Christian Democrats and their coalition allies. The first political shock was the rapid and unexpected success of the Northern League, a separatist movement which became the second party in northern Italy with 17 per cent of

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<sup>462</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998), page 29.

<sup>463</sup> Graziano, P. R. (2010) 'From Local Partnerships to Regional Spaces for Politics? Europeanization and EU Cohesion Policy in Southern Italy', *Regional and Federal studies*, Vol. 20(3), pp. 315-333.

<sup>464</sup> Brunazzo, M. and Piattoni, S. (2004).

the vote in the general election of 1992 and in numerous mayor-ships in northern Italian municipalities, including Milan in 1993. *'The success of the Northern League has its roots in the protest of entrepreneurs and workers in the richest areas of the country against the historic inefficiency of the central state and against forced solidarity, imposed from above, with the poorer southern areas viewing them as a support of clientelism and a restraint on the dynamism of the north'*.<sup>465</sup>

The second political shock came from the judicial investigations 'Tangentopoli' (*Bribesville*) during the years 1992-1993 where numerous politicians were arrested or prosecuted *'and none of the historic parties succeeded in surviving the storm'*.<sup>466</sup>

*'Many regions found themselves politically decapitated due to the number of elected members incriminated. This resulted in the formation of anomalous majorities by groupings of individual councillors. In contrast with the large local authorities, the judicial earthquake did not cause the dissolution of regional legislatures and new elections; and, in contrast with central government, it proved impossible to create governments composed of technical experts or formed from a 'reserve team' of political leaders'*.<sup>467</sup>

These two political shocks brought to light the deep crisis of Italian government which also affected local government and the need to put the administrative reform onto the political agenda. This step was facilitated by the rise of new political leaders who had weak links to the traditional parties, and who were determined to modernize the institutions.

At administrative level, relations between the centre and the regions have been at the heart of public debate since the beginning of the 1990s with an array of proposals to create decentralized governmental structures, including some proposals for the creation of a federal state. *The 'federalists sought to give the regional governments a dominant role and aimed to bring local governments within an exclusively regional orbit. But this perspective was met with solid opposition from the municipal and provincial government, who have shown themselves to be more afraid of regional centralism than of state centralism and have loudly demanded that they maintain dual link (with the state and with regional governments) ... Thanks to the strength of municipal traditions and to the rather murkier characteristics of*

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<sup>465</sup> Bobbio, L. (2005), page 35

<sup>466</sup> Bobbio, L. (2005), page 35.

<sup>467</sup> Dente, B. (2007) 'Sub-national governments in the long Italian transition', *West European Politics*, Vol. 20(1), page 180.

*regional governments, local governments have obtained some undoubted successes in this regard*'.<sup>468</sup>

With the 'Bassanini reform' – after the name of its promoter - in 1997, the administrative functions concerning the most important public policies (e.g. transport, work, social services, environment) were transferred from the state to regional and local governments. The reform pursued a design concerning a unitary administration model based on decentralization and reorganization of the public administration and the civil service, where only some specific areas remained of national responsibility while all remaining others are devolved to the regions.

*'The reform was designed around the principle of subsidiarity, according to which decision-making should occur as close as possible to citizens, and central government should only have a subsidiary function, limited to those services which cannot be provided at a more local level*'.<sup>469</sup>

The reform identified regional and local governments as primary actors to implement policies for the territorial development. This implied the devolution of policy-making to local authorities, to intervene using institutional tools provided for by legislation and to introduce new tools. This process contributed to the strengthening of the effectiveness of the development action and to defining a model of relations between public administrations and private actors, insisting on a shared control and coordination interaction, rather than on the direct intervention of public actors.<sup>470</sup>

The autonomy of the municipal governments has been extended. Since 1990 they have been allowed to write their municipal charters and are not subject to approval of any form of higher authorities, checks on the legitimacy of individual acts have been almost completely abolished and with the introduction of a municipal property tax, municipal governments have regained fiscal capability. A significant aspect related to these transformations is the introduction of a series of legislative initiatives which reframed the relationship between local executives and councils. These initiatives provided further means for modernizing and

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<sup>468</sup> Bobbio, L. (2005), page 37.

<sup>469</sup> Catalano, S. L., Graziano, P. R. and Bassoli, M. (2015) 'Devolution and Local Cohesion Policy: Bureaucratic Obstacles to Policy Integration in Italy', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 44(4), page 753.

<sup>470</sup> Gualini, E. (2004) *Multi-level Governance and Institutional Change: The Europeanisation of Regional Policy in Italy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

improving the effectiveness of municipal action such as the introduction of local partnerships, local development corporations and ad hoc agencies. *'These innovations, along with the progressive devolution of taxing powers and the increase in local resource autonomy as well as dependency, contributed significantly to promoting a more managerial attitude and provided incentives for more strategically oriented political aptitudes'*.<sup>471</sup>

Legislative decree no. 112 of 1998 pursuant the provisions for administrative decentralization contained in the Bassanini law established that the regions were to identify the most appropriate levels for the exercise of the functions to be devolved. They were to assist local authorities to find ways of exercising the functions on their own. Where the local authorities failed to come up with the required solutions, the regions were empowered to impose solutions. These provisions provided for the creation of the following inter-municipal structures: the *Consortia* to enable the participation of municipalities to provide one or more services, the *Unions* for the provision of a plurality of services and the *Mountain communities* (which hold a wide variety of functions designated to deal with the particular difficulties created by geographical characteristics of areas where municipal fragmentation is traditionally very high).

*'The decentralization process culminated in the 2001 constitutional reform that augmented the powers attributed to the regions, rendering the structure of the Italian republic more similar to that of a federal state'*.<sup>472</sup>

Indeed, the Constitutional Law 3/2001 concerning the reform of Title V of the Constitution approved the devolution giving all subnational administrations the capacity to raise and manage their own financial resources independently with the aim of expanding the promotion of local economic development. As reported by the OECD: *'by the end of the decade, many of the central government's powers and functions were conferred on regions and local authorities, while their revenue-raising capacity was substantially strengthened...In the meantime, several tools for bottom-up planning ... were introduced and implemented'*.<sup>473</sup>

Therefore, with the constitutional reform the state no longer has any administrative law-making competence but powers are expressly indicated and the general regulatory and

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<sup>471</sup> Gualini, E. (2004), page 178.

<sup>472</sup> OECD (2007) *Linking Regions and Central Governments. Contracts for regional development*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 93.

<sup>473</sup> OECD (2001c) *OECD Territorial reviews: Italy*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 74.

administrative powers are now attributed to regions according to the principles of subsidiarity.

More specifically, as amended by the reform of 2001, article 117 of the Constitution establishes legislative competence in matters reserved exclusively to the State such as foreign policy, defence and environmental protection, a longer list of matters where the regions and the state enjoy concurrent powers (transport, energy, foreign trade, research and development) and the reality that the regions have residual legislative competence in all remaining areas (e.g., local development in the industrial, commerce, handicraft and tourist sectors).<sup>474</sup>

*'The Constitution introduces new provisions to regulate the possibility for the central government to act in the place of Regions and local authorities in case of non-compliance with international rules, treaties and Community law, serious danger to public safety and integrity or to safeguard legal and/or economic unity with particular regard to the essential levels of civil and social rights'*.<sup>475</sup> Moreover, the 2001 amendments gave the regions powers to entertain relations and stipulate agreements with foreign and EU bodies with regard to matters in which they have legitimate competence.<sup>476</sup>

It is important to stress that the allocation of competences between the state and the regions posed several problems of interpretation. *'Thought apparently simple, this division masks considerable ambiguity and complexity concerning the division of powers. Not surprisingly, therefore, it has given rise to a considerable volume of litigation before the Constitutional Court...For example the Court has established that environmental protection is not a matter in the strict sense but rather a function that thus allows the state to take measures touching on matters otherwise subject to the legislative competence of the regions'*.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Zuffada, E. and Caperchione, E. (2003) 'The interrelated roles of the regional and local government in developing local partnerships in Italy', SDA Bocconi working paper. Milano: SDA Bocconi, Divisione ricerche.

<sup>475</sup> Marchetti, G. (2005), 'I poteri sostitutivi nel quadro del nuovo assetto dei rapporti tra Stato, Regioni ed enti locali', *Rassegna parlamentare*, Ottavo quaderno. Roma: Istituto per la Documentazione e gli Studi Legislativi, page 233.

<sup>476</sup> John, P. (2001) *Local Governance in Western Europe*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 83-92.

<sup>477</sup> Newell, J. L. (2010), page 83.

Finally, the central government has legislative powers in areas of a transversal nature such as competition policy, environment, and the allocation of financial resources.<sup>478</sup>

### 6.3 Rural policy in Italy

In Italy rural development policy derives directly from the EU agricultural policy and regional development framework. There are no state-funded programmes explicitly oriented to the development of rural areas. As we saw in the previous paragraphs, the only nationally funded programmes were implemented in the areas, both rural and urban, of economic crisis. Such policies were dropped in 1993 and replaced by new state policies.

Particular emphasis was placed upon the agricultural sector through the State Law no. 386/1976 relating to the creation of Regional Boards for Agricultural Development (ERSA - *Enti Regionali per lo Sviluppo Agricolo*) having the roles of coordinating the state and regional interventions, the management of the resources and the planning and implementation of programmes. Later, a financial support system was introduced to reinforce the creation of local producer associations which were to be involved in policy-making.<sup>479</sup>

*'As a consequence of the introduction of control and participation from the bottom, agricultural policy-making in Italy has undergone an important transformation with the aim of a concrete decentralization and 'democratization' of the agricultural policy-making process. The regions now occupy a key position in the new policy-making process thanks to their filter role between the central administration, local authorities and producer associations'.*<sup>480</sup>

The decentralization of the agricultural policy from the state to the regions created some conflicts concerning the management of the priorities, the targets and the allocation of the resources to the national agricultural programmes between the northern and the southern regions and the increasing impact of the CAP on the agricultural sector. There were also

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<sup>478</sup> Fedele, P. and Ongaro, E. (2010) 'A Common Trend, Different Houses: devolution in Italy, Spain and the UK', *Public Money & Management*, Vol. 28(2), pp. 85-92.

<sup>479</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998), page 23.

<sup>480</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998), page 23.



conflicts between the regions, local authorities and the producers as the regions played the function of controller that was given by the central state and failed to fulfil it.<sup>481</sup>

In 1980s there were also other national policy instruments which accompanied the EU co-funded rural development policy. They can be grouped as the following:

- agricultural programmes and policies directly implemented by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies in the field of environmental preservation, national irrigation, land improvement and forestry plans;
- state aid for the development of entrepreneurial activities and more specifically addressed to women and young people;
- Incentives for the improvement and promotion of the quality of food products, research, renovation and restoration caused by catastrophic events.<sup>482</sup>

A large share of rural development resources was allocated to agricultural modernization where public funds were invested in projects with high spending capacity and efficiency. The Italian rural development policy has changed according to EU normative thinking in terms of the division of competences at EU, national, regional and local level, its functions priorities and objectives to be pursued, strategies, territorial areas of intervention, procedures and the instruments to be adopted. However, this approach '*undervalues the importance of learning from monitoring and evaluation about the long-term impacts of policy investment, as policy-makers always look forward, rather than back. In addition, the dependency of Italy's rural policy framework upon the wider EU frameworks renders it vulnerable to uncertainties about future EU funding*'.<sup>483</sup>

As a result, '*it lacks a distinct, integrated vision that embraces other aspects of rurality including health, education and rural quality of life*'.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Ieraci, G. (1998).

<sup>482</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Tarangioli, S. (2008) 'Country profiles on rural characteristics: Italy', *Assessing the Impact of Rural Development Policies (RuDI) project* (Work package 1: Priorities in rural development policies; Deliverable D 1.1.), funded by the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development of the European Commission. Roma: INEA.

<sup>483</sup> OECD (2007), page 130.

<sup>484</sup> OECD (2009) *OECD Rural Policy Reviews. Italy*. Paris: OECD Publishing, page 82.

#### 6.4 The implementation of EU rural development policy in Italy

Particularly important milestones in the evolution of the Italian rural policy have been the Structural Funds programming periods.

The first programming period (1989-1993) introduced the principles of the concentration of resources on specific priorities implemented through a territorial approach based on synergies and partnership at local level, coordination and integration of the interventions. *'In the framework of the programming process, the wider diffusion of participatory methods and particularly of the bottom-up approach encouraged the involvement of the rural communities in the rural development policies at national, regional and local level and in the several phases of the programmes from their definition to their implementation and management'*.<sup>485</sup>

*'Italy was technically and institutionally unprepared to adopt the new 'EU intervention philosophy'... and most of the administrative responsibility shifted from national level to regional level. The introduction of regional governments brought new cleavages between the Centre-North and the Southern Regions... 'While the ability to spend resources was a challenge across Italy as a whole, fundamental experience was lacking particularly in the South'*<sup>486</sup> concerning the planning and the implementation of multi-year programmes at inter-sectorial level. This lack of experience was generally due to a rigid administrative arrangement of the regions which were organized by sections often with uncoordinated departments and offices.<sup>487</sup>

During the second programming period (1994-1999), the rural administrative structure for the implementation of regional programmes was strengthened. New bodies and policy instruments were created at regional level in line with EU cohesion policies and the importance of the public-private bottom-up approach was reinforced. *'With local and private actors as the 'animators', a stronger participatory framework and closer attention to rural areas was assured, as these actors brokered agreements by forcing the necessary relationships, identifying economic problems and designing intervention plans'*.<sup>488</sup> They

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<sup>485</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Tarangioli, S. (2008), page 26.

<sup>486</sup> OECD (2009), page 86.

<sup>487</sup> OECD (2008b) *Rural Policy Review: Italy. Questionnaire for the integration of the background report*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>488</sup> OECD (2009), page 89.

strengthened the links between primary production and agro-industrial structures to increase productivity levels.

The reform of the Structural Funds introduced within Agenda 2000 for the 2000-2006 programming period played a key role in raising the objective of more effective involvement of the Italian government in EU policy-making in terms of planning modalities and intervention, the principle of subsidiary and operational decentralization.<sup>489</sup> During this programming period, the southern regions allocated more resources to rural infrastructure and to social capital while the governance framework at central and local levels continued to be improved because of the introduction of new monitoring and evaluation methods.

Concerning the 2007-2013 programming period, two documents guided the rural development policy. The first is the National Strategy Plan (NSP) produced by the Ministry of Agriculture; it covers the 20 regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) funded by the EAFRD. The second document is the National Strategic Framework (NSF) issued by the Ministry of Economic Development covering the regional operational programmes funded by the Structural Funds ERDF and ESF. The two documents are strictly coordinated and are a first attempt to achieve an institutional dynamic with strong relationships at the central level.<sup>490</sup>

The NSP defines the rural development strategy through the three main targets of EU policy: 1) to improve the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sector; 2) to valorize the environment and countryside through the management of the environment and 3) to improve the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of economic activities.<sup>491</sup>

The NSF, in turn, defines the regional development strategy, both urban and rural, through two main objectives: 1) to improve the conditions to facilitate the development of agri-business activities and other economic activities; 2) to improve the attractiveness of rural areas through the diversification of the economy and the improvement in quality of life.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Ministero del Tesoro, Bilancio e Programmazione Economica (1999) *Il percorso di riforma dei Fondi Strutturali 2000-2006*. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.

<sup>490</sup> OECD (2009).

<sup>491</sup> Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali (2010) *Piano strategico Nazionale 2007-2013*. Roma: MiPAAF.

<sup>492</sup> Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, Dipartimento per le Politiche di Sviluppo e Coesione (2007) *Quadro Strategico Nazionale per la politica regionale di sviluppo 2007-2013*. Roma: MiSE.

From an analysis of the programmes, it emerges that the rural development policy framework in Italy 'remains predominantly *primary sector in focus; it tends to favour capacity to spend over 'programming effectiveness' and it lacks a 'distinct, strategic integrated rural vision' embracing all aspects of rural policy beyond the EU funded programmes'*.<sup>493</sup>

The high priority assigned to the agricultural sector is due to the fact that rural development programmes are planned and implemented through regional agricultural departments. The socioeconomic partnership that participates in the defining the programme content is characterized by the presence of the agricultural associations which aim at maintaining the status quo and at resisting diversification of agricultural activities.

The reality is also confirmed by the fact that Italy allocates low levels of funding to economic and social policies for rural areas for supporting the diversification of the economy and the enhancement of quality of life within the regional development programmes. Moreover, regional fund allocations appear to be influenced by '*elected politicians ... that ... play a key role in determining resource use at regional level as well as the appropriate division of nationally-gathered public resources between regions'*.<sup>494</sup>

Finally, the separation of rural roles at national and regional levels needed to reorganize them at local level through a variety of intermediary agents and institutions such as the LAGs, the provinces, the municipalities. Their joining function is fundamental and they need to be cross-sectoral by including the public and the private sectors as key facilitators with a capacity for innovation.<sup>495</sup>

#### **6.4.1 The history of the LEADER approach**

The first characteristic of the Italian LEADER partnerships is the collapse of the agricultural administration at central level and the territoriality of development bodies. Before LEADER, Italy had an institutional structure made up of public bodies engaged in social and economic development such as municipalities, provinces, mountain communities, development

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<sup>493</sup> OECD (2009), page 91.

<sup>494</sup> Viaggi, D. (2011) 'The future role of Agriculture in Multifunctional Rural Development: The case of Italy', *Applied Studies In Agribusiness and Commerce*, Vol. 5(1-2), pp. 15 – 22.

<sup>495</sup> OECD (2009), page 105.

agencies, and national parks. With the arrival of LEADER, a new layer of administration was not created, but each LAG did establish individual relationships with its related authorities. Quantitatively, after the significant growth in the number registered in Italy from LEADER I to LEADER II (29 to over 200), the number of LAGs decreased to 131 in LEADER+ and then further increased to 194 in the 2007-2013 period. In terms of quality, however, special attention should be paid to the changes that have occurred in the nature and functions of local partnerships, especially in the most recent period. As regards to their nature, local partnerships have gone, on the one hand, in the direction of a greater balance between the public and private side and on the other, to a wider representation of different local interests, with a growing involvement of more people coming from outside the agricultural sector and resulting in a diversification of the internal composition. Concerning the functions of the LAGs in the local context, it should be noted that they, as the managers of the funds at local level, have become, in many cases, real development agencies with objectives and strategies that are certainly governing the use of funds allocated by LEADER.<sup>496</sup>

The motivation for carrying out a case study of the politics and rural development in Emilia Romagna is based on the evidence produced by more than thirty years of research on Italian regions which shows that the region remains at the forefront of institutional performance and innovation at national and European level. Emilia Romagna is *'among the richest Regions in Italy and represents the so-called 'third Italy', whose economic development is based on the interlinking of small agricultural and industrial enterprises...with a fully decentralized system of governance in which the Provinces have a more significant role in the different stages of policy design and implementation'*.<sup>497</sup> The region has a history of cooperative movements which are at the base of the so-called 'Modello Emilia' (Emilia Model) a model of 'endogenous development' and 'local development', with industrial districts characterized by small, networked, craft industries.<sup>498</sup> This model reflects a strong multi-level governance system with devolution of planning and implementation activities to provinces according to the regional law no. 15/97.

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<sup>496</sup> Mantino, F. (2009) 'L'anomalia nella PAC: eterogeneità e dinamiche del LEADER in Italia', *Rete Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Rurale*. Roma: INEA.

<sup>497</sup> OECD (2009), page 108.

<sup>498</sup> Hadjimichalis, C. (2006) 'The end of Third Italy. As We Know it?', *Antipode*, Vol. 38(1), pp. 82-106.

One of the hypotheses put forward to explain the performance of Emilia-Romagna is that of rich social solidarity expressed in mass organization such as trade unions, co-operatives and mutual aid societies and the support of mass political organizations such as the Communist party. This is the Putnam hypothesis.<sup>499</sup>

Moreover, Emilia-Romagna is considered by the EU Commission as the 'textbook case-study' for LEADER, regarding innovation and involvement of private actors, pursuing in its policies both objectives of development and social cohesion.<sup>500</sup>

In this context, local institutions are very active in the constitution of Local Action Groups which resulted in an increase from no LAGs during LEADER I, to 4 LAGs during LEADER II and to 5 LAGs both during LEADER+ and the 2007-2013 programming period.<sup>501</sup> They promote the constitutions of local partnerships with the private sector in order to create cooperation of territorial programming and governance and to diversify the local economy in tourism activities, valorisation of historical and cultural heritage, the preservation of natural resources and landscapes, and the enhancement of the quality of life in rural areas.<sup>502</sup> The Local Action Groups in this region are considered by the Rete Rurale Nazionale (National Rural Network) to be those with the most political and functional autonomy as they were given the capacity to choose either the eligible municipalities where to intervene as the socio-economic fields of intervention. Furthermore, the capacity to combine the political and functional autonomy gives LAGs an institutional prestige because they are considered as competent by the regional administration and by local stakeholders.<sup>503</sup>

Concerning southern Italy, Puglia region distinguishes itself by being one of the most advanced southern regions in implementing a bottom-up approach that considers the aspect of rurality in terms of territorial concentration, with partnerships at local level, between the different levels of local government and socio-economic actors and at vertical level between government and institutions.<sup>504</sup> The integrated planning represents a change from the top-

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<sup>499</sup> Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R. and Nanetti, R. Y. (1994).

<sup>500</sup> Fargion, V., Morlino, L., Profeti, S. and Roux, C. (2006) 'Européanisation et représentation territoriales en Italie', *Pole Sud*, Vol. 24(1), pp. 99-120.

<sup>501</sup> Rete Rurale Nazionale 2007-2013.

<sup>502</sup> Granberg, L., Andersson, K. and Kovách, I. (2015) *Evaluating the European approach to rural development. Grass-roots Experiences of the LEADER Programme. Perspectives on rural policy and planning*. Surrey: Ashgate.

<sup>503</sup> Mantino, F. (2009).

<sup>504</sup> OECD (2007).

down approach to rural development policies; the planning responds not only to economic objectives but it is also a change in the direction of more participation and cooperation among local public and private actors. In this context, the LEADER approach has emerged as one of the programmes which looks at the development of the territory and what best represents the new course of rural policies. The number of LEADER groups increased from 2 LAGs during LEADER I to 17 LAGs during LEADER II, decreased to 9 LAGs during LEADER + and increased to 25 LAGs during the 2007-2013 period.<sup>505</sup> More specifically, the LEADER in Puglia is an example of a development within micro-territorial systems although it was initially ignored by a region where actors were used to a large influx of public funds. *'However, thanks to the lack of political pressure on fund allocation, small rural communities were free to promote the creation of LAGs and to use them to achieve a shared vision for local development. In this context, many LAGs worked as promoters of new initiatives and coordinators of initiatives already diffused in the territory, managing to amplify their positive effects and consequences'*.<sup>506</sup>

We now turn our attention to a detailed analysis of how these cases have operated the LAG approach in practice.

## **6.5 The case of Delta 2000 LAG in Emilia-Romagna Region**

### **6.5.1 General context**

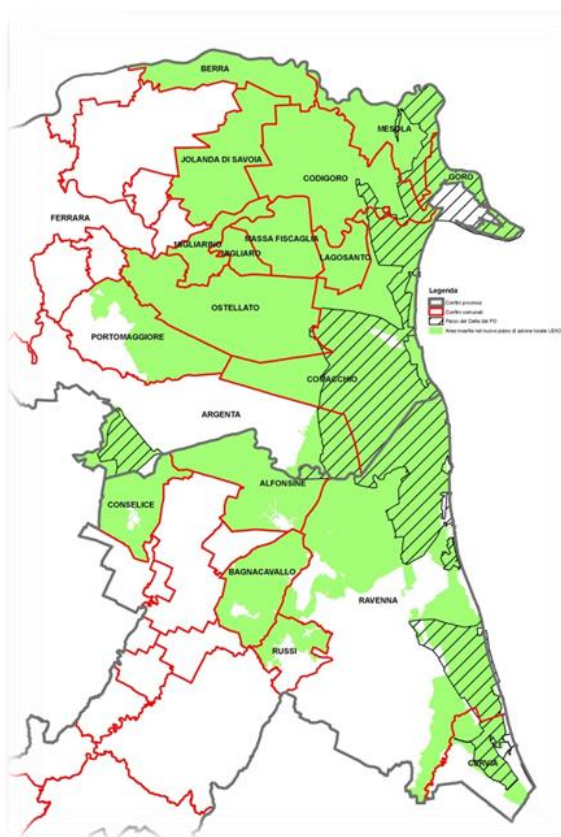
The territory of the Delta 2000 LAG is located in a wetland between the provinces of Ferrara and Ravenna along the delta of the river Po. The area of approximately 717 square miles with a population of more than 100,000 people and includes 19 municipalities (13 municipalities in the province of Ferrara and 6 in the province of Ravenna) that are partly or entirely within the Po Delta Regional Park area of the Emilia-Romagna region. This is one of the most interesting environmental areas in Europe, situated in a valley where the river Po runs. It is a natural ecosystem, which is one of the richest and most attractive in the national territory in terms of agricultural production and rural tourism. It hosts the biggest wetlands area in Italy, made of canals, rivers and navigable lagoons, biodiversity, historical and architectural heritage. Besides the Po Delta regional park, the area includes many Sites of Community Importance and Special Protection Areas, as well as regional and national

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<sup>505</sup> Rete Rurale Nazionale 2007-2013.

<sup>506</sup> OECD (2007), page 117.

natural reserves. In the past, these environmental assets and local specificities were not adequately valorised since the residents had the perception of living in a marginal area with a limited awareness of the potential of the wetland, of the environmental and cultural assets of the park and of some traditional local products. The economy is more oriented to agriculture, fishery and tourism which offer occasional jobs and with high rates of unemployment for young people and women. Moreover, the area has been characterized by a high decline in the population and a growing ageing population with a low level income if



Map no. 5. The area of the Delta 2000 Local Action Group. Source: Delta 2000 Gruppo di Azione locale (2008), Piano di azione locale per il Delta Emiliano-Romagnolo 2007-2013.

compared to the rest of the regional population.<sup>507</sup> *'This was a territory that was considered among the most underdeveloped territories of the Emilia Romagna region. It was the last territory of northern Italy, it had triple unemployment rate if compared to what was the regional average and so if we consider Emilia Romagna one of the five or six richest regions in Europe, imagine that here we had a very remarkable gap'*.<sup>508</sup>

Since 1988, with the establishment of the Po Delta Regional Park, a policy of protecting and enhancing one of the richest and most interesting natural environments across the country has been pursued. In this context, LEADER has been an opportunity to complement such policies with the qualification and promotion of initiatives, implementing a strategy that is based on more qualitative, sustainable and responsible growth, favouring controlled

<sup>507</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2008) *Piano di azione locale per il Delta Emiliano-Romagnolo 2007-2013*. Ostellato: GAL Delta 2000.

<sup>508</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Local political representative no 1. Ferrara, 16 July 2014.



development that enhances typical aspects related to an environmental context, enhancing local character and peculiarities.

*'The interprovincial character of the LAG represented a political choice aimed at implementing development policies on territories characterized by common resources in terms of environmental assets and local production'.<sup>509</sup>*

For the 2007-2013 LEADER programming period, the LAG is one of 5 in the Emilia-Romagna region with a total budget of €20.3 million, including public and private sector matched funding.

The mission of the LAG is to implement a local development process based on self-determination of local communities aimed at recovering local environmental, social and cultural resources. By identifying local needs and resources, the LAG implements the necessary projects in order to support economic growth and to create new development opportunities.<sup>510</sup>

Considering the environmental vocation of the territorial area, the criticalities and potentials analysed, the local development strategy (LDS) has been developed from the evaluation of its elements of distinctiveness such as the presence of the Po Delta Regional Park and, in general, of an ecosystem of environmental and landscape value, the richness of its historical and cultural heritage, the strong agricultural tradition and the presence of typical local quality products. Therefore, the strategic plan developed by the LAG derives from the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the needs arising from the territorial analysis and during the consultation phase which saw a strong involvement of local actors and led to the organization of several meetings with the aim to collect various project proposals from public subjects and economic operators within the territory.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino F. and Zanetti, B. (2008) 'The use of LEADER approach in designing and implementing biodiversity and water resources management (cluster 6)', *Assessing the Impact of Rural Development Policies (RuDI) project (Work package 8: Delta 2000 case study)* funded by the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development of the European Commission. Roma: INEA.

<sup>510</sup> Gigante, R. and Fava, A. (2012) *Il Programma LEADER 2007-2013, Stato di attuazione dell'approccio LEADER e percorsi intrapresi dai GAL in Emilia-Romagna*. Bologna: Regione Emilia-Romagna.

<sup>511</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2015) *Il PAL LEADER Asse 4 del Delta Emiliano-Romagnolo. PSR 2007—2013. Quaderno Finale. I risultati raggiunti*. Ostellato: GAL Delta 2000.

Since the population residing in the rural areas plays a central role, the overall aim of the LDS is to improve the competitiveness of the territory, its distinctive features and its quality by reinforcing its identity through the involvement of the local population.

The interventions focus on the prevailing economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism, the qualification and promotion of wetlands, specialized and high-income farming, and marketing of local products. This is achieved by funding projects which contribute to the delivery of the following interventions:

- Supporting local development strategies through local partnerships, bottom-up planning, multi-sectoral integration and cooperation between rural areas with the aim to raise public awareness of the natural heritage of the area. This strategic orientation is transversal to the LDS actions and is realized through animation and awareness raising activities, the establishment of permanent participatory organizations with a programmatic and operational coordination role, sharing of problems and choices in order to develop a project system;
- Improving competitiveness of the Emilia Romagna Delta area with the aim of strengthening the traditional productions linked to the specificities and traditions of the territory, through multi-sectoral integration between the agricultural producers and those in the field crafts, catering and receptivity, and to promote them and their territories on a national and European level;
- Valuing the environment and landscape to improve biodiversity in order to make the Delta area more attractive at national and international level. This strategy is geared towards the development of an integrated and systematic planning aimed at the definition and implementation of natural resource management plans, the enhancement of environmental awareness of the local population, as well as through interventions to valorise eco-tourism activities such as birdwatching, cycle-tourism, river tourism, hiking and equestrian tourism;
- Networking of environmental, social and cultural heritage in order to enhance the added value of production, to support the protection and quality of the local environment and landscape, to improve the quality of life, diversify economic activities and enhance the multi-functional role of the farmer. This strategy is intended to support actions and projects aimed at networking the cultural and environmental heritage of the

area, by linking public interventions with the development and organization of services by local entrepreneurship.<sup>512</sup>

The LDS is implemented through local partnership instruments, by creating synergies between public and private, developing the organization of services and management of the territorial offer and through the definition of territorial marketing programmes of the area, focusing on the excellence of environmental, natural, cultural and productive resources with the aim of promoting the Delta area as a tourist destination.

The strategy expressed by the partnership was able to express itself without external constraints, and instead operating based on the direct derivation of the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats all the time engaging in constant and continuous dialogue with the provinces. There is in fact coherence between the socio - economic analysis and needs expressed, an economic approach versus strategic needs and a demand to give continuity to initiatives appreciated but no longer sustainable by local authorities.<sup>513</sup>

#### **6.5.2 Origin and composition of the partnership**

Delta 2000 was founded in 1994 as a non-profit association to implement the will of some local governments and act as a reference agency for public entities, associations and private economic operators of the Province of Ferrara, made up of the 7 common beneficiaries of Objective 5B funds (Berra, Cordigoro, Comacchio, Goro, Lagosanto, Mesola, Ostellato). Delta 2000 had the aim of informing, raising awareness and assisting the public and private operators on the development of the area. In this area, there was the opportunity to develop a special strategy for accessing European funds with priority given to intervention, and *'it was a period in which talking about a participative approach was so desperate, because it was difficult to put two mayors of neighbouring towns around a table, since each one thought only of his own territory'*.<sup>514</sup>

In 1996, the LAG became a limited liability consortium by consolidating its role as a development agency, this involved the LAG taking the management of various financing programmes and managing the Community Initiative LEADER II for the period 1996-2000.

*'The LAG was formed because in my capacity as mayor of Codigoro together with the mayor*

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<sup>512</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2008).

<sup>513</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2015).

<sup>514</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 1. Ostellato, 17 July 2014.

*of Ostellato we were the first ones together with a regional councillor who were interested in Community funds so much that if I were to have written a book at the time, all the others would laughed behind our backs, telling us 'What are you doing?' We began to study what the tools could be, because we were the revolutionaries of our territories, we realized that they could have a function that brought together the public and private sectors, and above all they taught us to be promoters of local development, because at that time the institutions were not used to being promoters of their own development. Therefore, the fact of being promoters of their own development planning meant putting together 10-12 municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, trade associations, some enterprises that twenty years ago in this territory were all separate bodies. In this case, however, we created with this instrument a great cohesion in which everyone has started talking, planning and spending the economic resources directly on the territory directly'.<sup>515</sup>*

During 2000, as the LAG assumed the management of the LEADER + programme, the area was extended to the province of Ravenna with the entry of the Province and the Chamber of Commerce of Ravenna, three municipalities, the trade associations, as well as the Consortium of the Regional Park of the Po Delta and the private operators of the provinces of Ferrara and Ravenna. Currently, the LAG partnership consists of 93 Members; out of these 93, 27 partners are from the public sector and it expresses in a balanced way the local partnership, representing the main institutional components, economic and social territory.<sup>516</sup>

The reasons for the LAG initiation and the actions that have been made are bound to the Delta Park. The Delta Park is situated in an extremely urbanized area and is where the emergence of an environmental protection tool to support the population also needed incentives, for its success, the protection tool needed to appear immediately as a factor of development rather than conservation. The LAG and its ability to move not only in technical terms but also in terms of animation helped farmers understand that the park is an opportunity and not necessarily an obstacle to their productive activity. It also persuaded another part of the population that the park and therefore the LAG could be a driving force for a new phase of growth, development and integration between the so-called seaside

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<sup>515</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Local political representative no. 1. Ostellato, 17 July 2014.

<sup>516</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2008).

tourism and a new, softer rural tourism which could affect large areas of the territory, in other periods of the year and not just the summer.<sup>517</sup>

*'At the beginning there was a time in which the various subjects realized, took into account what the opportunities could be and somehow opened the debate on what the LAG was supposed to be, namely how the LAG would configure itself. In particular some association with categories more linked to the agricultural sector, started throwing signals of the kind, 'Yes, the LAG could be a subject we control', then, when they saw that the LAG is a representative subject of the whole territory, the attention was shifted on the theme: 'What is our involvement?'. We have tried to apply the LEADER approach by seeking immediate direct relationship with local actors starting from companies, associations that have always been very involved in the LAG, with important roles within decision-making bodies'.*<sup>518</sup>

In this context, the LEADER approach has allowed territories and different economic and institutional entities to use this tool, for the exploitation of locally typical products, the focus on quality farming, and for the recovery of urban and rural villages. The LAG then found in LEADER programming the opportunity to assess the territory, to identify the aspects that could be improved and valued and to create opportunities for businesses. Consequently, from this point of view, the LEADER approach has allowed public and private actions to combine in a vision that is to grow the whole territory and to fully grasp its resources.

### **6.5.3 Organization, operation and involvement**

The Delta 2000 LAG represents a successful implementation experience within the LEADER approach; it has stimulated participatory processes by the involving of the territorial population together with local bodies and economic operators along with the regional institutions.<sup>519</sup>

The experience gained in these years and the results achieved allowed the LAG to refine the methods and tools to apply an innovative approach and methodology to a territory that involved institutions not only at the political but also technical level, as well as local economic operators, social partners and the spontaneous aggregations of young people and women. They were involved during the planning and implementation of the local

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<sup>517</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Zanetti, B. (2008).

<sup>518</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 2. Ostellato, 17 July 2014.

<sup>519</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Zanetti, B. (2008).

development strategy and the LAG carried out a considerable animation activity by giving particular attention to the territorial aspects. The LAG's means included the organization of meetings and workshops with local representatives, monitoring the implementation of local projects and information activities with the aim of making the territory aware of the importance of the LEADER approach.

These means are mainly geared for the sector operators, but also serve as a tool for the associations to disseminating initiatives and activities. There is a double strand of involvement through constant information via e-mail and computer, on the one hand, and direct involvement in the different activities associated with the various programs, on the other.

The participatory methodology has been realized through the setting up of several bodies that have accompanied the LAG in the definition and articulation of the integrated design and system proposals and in the selection of the projects that can be funded. The methodology also ensures a high level of involvement by the territorial subjects.

The function of these bodies is to involve a variety of stakeholders engaged daily in the planning of the territory, assisting their work with experts and local community actors in order to create real participatory working groups with the aim of integrating and correlating public and private planning.<sup>520</sup>

The Shareholders Assembly and the Board of Directors are the decision-making bodies of the LAG: *'We have the Shareholders Assembly which meets at least once a year for the budget approval and when there are important things to discuss about strategies, guidelines, and the issues dictated by legislation. Then we have the Board of Directors consisting of 5 members, there are 2 publicly appointed and 3 on private nomination, out of which one representative nominated from the agriculture sector, one representative from the tourism sector and the other one from the sector of cooperatives. The Board of Directors meets on average once a month and it is informed on all activities of the LAG, such as on the approval and opening of call for tenders, the mandate to open a public notice contest, and is informed about the state of the implementation of activities'*.<sup>521</sup>

The main structure is the 'Interprovincial Coordination Committee' (ICC) which includes the Po Delta Regional Park, the Provinces and their Chambers of Commerce. This Committee has

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<sup>520</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2015).

<sup>521</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 1

a strategic role as it is in charge of programming and implementing the LDS. The Committee establishes the programming guidelines of the concerted actions, in connection with the programming tools present in the territory, and also has the task of sharing and validating the identified strategic problems and choices for implementation the LDS.<sup>522</sup>

Participating Working Groups (PWGs) are also set up, coordinated by the LAG and formed by local technical experts appointed by the ICC. They proceed with the defining the territorial level integrated projects and plans, which are individually identified, based on specific assessment methods. Pilot and demonstration interventions deemed to be priority areas of territorial importance are identified in conjunction with the IIC and local authorities concerned and approved by the Board of Directors.

Another structure is the Steering Committee (SC) which includes institutional representatives and officials operating in the two Provinces and in the Chambers of Commerce, in the Park and in the municipalities. The SC has a more operational functional role concerning the coordination and the integration among the local actors and also has a consultative role for the definition of the funding calls and for the promotional material. Moreover, the SC is responsible for the appointment of local thematic working groups (e.g. food, birdwatching, equestrian-tourism, cycle-tourism), formed by members of the SC and accompanied by one or more experts in tourism planning and marketing. These groups work on generating commercial programs (which are broadly shared) responding to the real needs of the operators and trying to concentrate and optimize the public and private resources that can be activated in the territory.

The eligibility and qualitative assessment of applications is carried out by two committees: the 'Technical and Scientific Committee' (TSC) and the 'Technical evaluation Committee' (TEC). The TSC is composed of professionals in the fields of environment, tourism, handicraft and carries out the assessment of the projects which are directly implemented by the LAG. The TEC is composed of external experts that are in charge of the evaluation of the applications submitted by potential beneficiaries.

The LAG decision-making structure is equipped with a flexible technical structure organized with employees and professional technical associates who have been in a stable and

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<sup>522</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2008).

continuous relationship with the company and thematic experts actively based on the company's design needs.<sup>523</sup>

#### **6.5.4 Outcomes, achievements and added value of the local partnership practice**

Since its foundation, the main objective of the LAG has been to value and integrate the resources and economic activities present in the territory in an integrated and organized way, in order to trigger a local development process based on the self-representativeness of the rural communities. By identifying, designing and implementing actions aimed at the growth and support of the local economy, significant opportunities have been created for the development of the area, focusing attention and commitment not only on the resource system and on local potential, but also of the critical system of the area.

Through LEADER, the LAG identified, adopted and developed a participatory approach at all levels that enabled the development of an integrated system design and integrated in terms of territorial, sectoral, and programming dimensions.

The participatory procedure has allowed the direct involvement of public and private actors in the executive planning of initiatives. The purpose of this procedure was to maintain the bottom-up approach, initiated during the consultation phase, even during the implementation and management period of the programme itself.<sup>524</sup>

The LAG working made the valorisation and the transformation of territorial resources possible with the aim of contributing to the economic growth of the area in terms of employment and services and also to the preservation of the natural and cultural resources. With the LAG's intervention, Delta Po Park became an eco-tourist destination for bird-watching with relevance at international level thanks to the presence of rare species of birds. This makes it particularly interesting not only for researchers and naturalists but also for those who want to discover and experience nature and its resources. The development of sustainable forms for the enjoyment of these areas represents a great opportunity not only to valorise and promote the area but also to foster the strengthening of the link between economic operators and the population to the territory.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2008).

<sup>524</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino F. and Zanetti, B. (2008).

<sup>525</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Delta 2000 (2015).



*'Starting from such an area when we started, we did not talk about environmental tourism as the Delta was just an area where there were mosquitoes and it was a little unlucky because it was very marginal, so the critical mass on which we worked was that of making the area a tourist destination, working on resources, the environment, tourism and agriculture, therefore on the qualification of typical productions'.<sup>526</sup>*

With the aim of contributing to the increased awareness of the region's unique avifauna, the LAG carried out some relevant interventions aimed at strengthening the bird watching activity. It also created a market by attracting experts and presenting the region as a destination for outdoor activities such as guided tours, workshops and didactic activities for schools.

*'The increase of visitors' presence in the Autumn and Spring time for bird-watching represents the success of the idea and gives the opportunity to promote new kinds of eco-compatible tourism (fishing, bicycle tourism, river tourism, etc..). Young graduates have set societies, cooperatives of environmental education guides and whose laboratories are focused on 80% of birdwatching on the entire park territory. Among other things, in the valleys of Argenta, we funded the construction of huts for wildlife photography, in which professional and non-professional photographers pay €70 per day to stay there'.<sup>527</sup>*

The development of sustainable forms for the enjoyment of these areas represents a great opportunity not only to valorise and promote an area but also to foster the strengthening of the link between economic operators and the local population.

These are the main motivations that led the LAG to initiate a series of initiatives to consolidate and structure the Delta's environmental heritage, qualify, organize and create a network of the environmental, cultural and landscape resources, supporting the diversification and qualification of tourism at territorial level and the agri-food production.

*'The fundamental objectives were to fully exploit the territory. We are children of a tourism conception that saw the centre of the world on the beach, on the coast, we had tour operators who until many years ago did not know that there were the valleys of Comacchio where they could go along tour paths. There was really only a vision of beach-centred tourism, and the value of LEADER was to also grow in the culture of our entrepreneurs the valorisation of those parts of the territory, of those peculiarities that were previously not*

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<sup>526</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>527</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Zanetti, B. (2008), page 10-11.

*valued. It was also thanks to these initiatives like organizing educational tours in the valley with the local operators, aimed at informing the operators and entrepreneurs that the richness of this territory has a much wider wealth potential than that which can be derived from the beach and the coast because we do not have a splendid sea that arouses emotion'.<sup>528</sup>*

The main intervention concerned the strengthening and improving of the Park accessibility, as well as the creation of an integrated tourist service (overnight stays, restaurants, the selling of local products and tourist products focused on natural resources).

*'Before the birth of the LAG, nowhere or perhaps only in some parts of the area could you visit the Park. Today you can visit all the wet areas by boat or by hiking or biking from Goro-Gorino to the valleys of Comacchio and this is possible thanks to the working of the public and also private operators. There are also a dozen specialized centres that offer not just information, but are also small, featured museums, each with its own characteristics and there is a trend of + 10% visitors per year'.<sup>529</sup>*

The LAG implemented other initiatives by integrating the funds of LEADER with other European, national and regional funds and policy instruments.

Some examples of this are the interventions funded by the ERDF and EAFRD and implemented by the two Provinces. These involved the renewal of villages and ancient buildings, small scale infrastructure, the creation of bicycle paths and natural trails and the complementary action carried out by the LAG in organizing animation and training activities for professionals in the field of eco-tourism. The LAG also carried out many projects to encourage the integration between the public and private actors with a relevant impact on the valorisation of territory'.<sup>530</sup>

*'We can say that we are now the first to talk about environmental tourism, because the first environmental tourism report that we presented to the Province of Ferrara as a development opportunity within the LEADER I was rejected and we were told: 'No, for us, tourism is that of the coast because there are numbers. Environmental tourism is not interesting for us because it does not bring any presences'. We now see the trends of coastal tourism are declining while the environmental tourism is on the rise. There has been a change, so surely the LAG*

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<sup>528</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Partnership representative no. 1. Ferrara, 18 July 2014.

<sup>529</sup> Delta 2000 Civil servant no. 1. Ravenna, 17 July 2014.

<sup>530</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino, F. and Zanetti, B. (2008), page 11.

*with the projects has contributed to the government's rationale on these issues also involving the bodies'.<sup>531</sup>*

In pursuing this objective, the LAG implemented a governance system at the local level with the creation of networks of actors and the establishment of relationships at European level between the territory and those with similar wetland conditions where other LAGs work. The interprovincial character of the LAG promoted territorial integration by valorising the natural and local resources of both provinces and strengthened the cooperation between local institutions and economic operators by raising the awareness of the territorial potential. It also fostered the competitiveness among the farms of Ferrara which were less competitive and dynamic compared to the farms in Ravenna.

*'We funded the display cases for typical products within the areas that are used for tourist accommodation. When the tourists arrive, they eat the food from the territory they have visited and there is also the benefit of the farmer who brings rice, wine and jams and the agriculture itself because then it is a direct sales flywheel. The LAG also greatly helps the municipal administration, by doing projects on bike paths, renovating old buildings such as the old theatre, the old market in Goro, the old elementary school in Mesola which has now become a part of tourist receptivity and a part of the library. I think that if there had not been the LAG, they would not have seen all the splendours of old renovated buildings, cycle routes, events, direct sales, receptivity, assistance and an approach to the world of farm life to the world of receptivity.'<sup>532</sup>*

Beside its role as Local Action Group, Delta 2000 is also a development agency as it offers technical assistance to local institutions, associations and stakeholders in drawing up, implementing, coordinating and managing actions and projects in the framework of economic and territorial programmes. *'The LAG has become a reference body for the territory where we can find opportunities not only suited to LEADER but also to put projects and to find technical assistance funds, for example we work with the province of Ravenna where we provide technical assistance for the management of European programmes. This helps us to make further budgets'.<sup>533</sup>*

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<sup>531</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 1.

<sup>532</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Partnership representative no. 1.

<sup>533</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no. 1.

Finally, the organization of the LAG based on a wide partnership had a strong cultural impact, both in terms of the methodology used in the implementation of the projects and human capital thus becoming a new working model through the exchange of information and skills.

*'Now, after 20 years of leading programming we can say that there is a self-representation of the territory and which is at the basis of a territorial strategy now shared and consolidated. We have always had a very strong relationship with the provinces and the region, and the advantage was certainly to make local actors much more aware of the opportunities they had and of the things they did and of the opportunities they could develop by linking them with the others. To talk with private operators, to dialogue with institutions, to be able to let institutions communicate with private operators, the LAG becomes a sort of reference point for developing consistent and shared strategies, but consistent with what has actually been developed, of what has been the evolution of the territory'.<sup>534</sup>*

Therefore, the experience gained in these years and the results achieved allowed the LAG to refine the methods and tools for applying an innovative approach and methodology to the area that is of utmost importance. Here, the bottom-up approach, to be effective and to ensure a community-based design that integrates and is complementary to existing programming tools, requires constant fieldwork. This means going 'beyond' the negotiations and consultations by involving the institutions, not only at the political but also at the technical level, as well as the economic operators of the territory, the social partners and the spontaneous forms of aggregation of young people, women, etc.

## **6.6 The case of Capo S. Maria di Leuca LAG in Puglia Region**

### **6.6.1 General Context**

The area of the Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG is located in the south eastern region of the Puglia Salento peninsula and is surrounded by the sea on three sides. It has a land area of approximately 167,52 square miles and a population of more than 112,500 people. The territory is a flat surface with a small line of hills called Serre Salentine which is mainly rocky. The coast extends for about 30 miles and appears, particularly on the eastern side, in the form of medium-high cliffs, with numerous coves and caves, while on the western side there

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<sup>534</sup> Delta 2000 LAG Official operator no 2.

are wide sandy beaches. The 18 municipalities that are part of the area are mostly small but only a few miles apart and quite integrated with each other. This territory sums up the whole set of orographic, soil and the human settlement of the peninsula: the various types of coastline, the reliefs of the Salentine ranges, the plains with a varying degree of cultivation and fertility, the range of various size municipalities, all located closely to one another and united by a dense network of minor roads. Equally homogeneous is the type of production, both agricultural and manufacturing.



Map 4. The area of the Capo Santa Maria di Leuca Local Action Group. Source: Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010), *Piano di Sviluppo Locale 'Capo di Leuca 2015'*. Tricase: GAL Capo C. S. M. di Leuca.

The agricultural sector is characterized by small sized farms and low levels of production with a dominance of olives and cereals. In the area there are also crafts and small businesses in the clothes and furniture sectors which are dependent on orders, from larger companies from the centre and north of Italy. The strong dependence on third parties did not allow the local system to be present on the market with its own brands and identities, due to the fact it was linked to choices outside the area.<sup>535</sup>

*'In this peninsula there were two large categories or inhabitants: the lucky and the unlucky. The lucky were the ones who lived on the coast, the unlucky ones were those who were inland. For obvious reasons, however, the coast had an added value derived from seaside tourism, but it stopped at 2 miles from the coast and did not go further. Therefore, the main objective we set ourselves was that of the balance between the inland and the coast, in*

<sup>535</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010) *Piano di Sviluppo Locale 'Capo di Leuca 2015'*. Tricase: GAL C. S. M. di Leuca.

*favour of the inland areas of course. In the non-coastal towns there was no accommodation, today there are around four to five hundred of which many were funded under LEADER*.<sup>536</sup>

Today, the area of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca is a strong tourist destination not only because of the sea, but also for important historical, cultural and environmental resources. There are many castles and towers located along the coastline. There is a network of fortifications dating back to the period between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, built on one side as the watch towers against Turkish invasions and pirates, and on the other by the castles that defended the villages and towns. In the fifteenth century, in order to avoid a depopulation of the countryside, architecture changed and countless fortified homes arose. The 'masseria' (ancient farm) represents the characterizing element of the Salento agricultural landscape. Cultivation and farming, social relations and security have influenced the establishment and evolution of this type of farm. Despite the interest and fascination that these dwellings have, it is only in the last twenty years that their value, even from a tourist point of view, has been rediscovered. The great opportunities that agritourism could have for the preservation of the environment were underestimated as well as for the promotion of tourism and for the valorisation of ancient rural buildings. The same economic operators and the general population in general encountered a big limitation. On the one hand, young people did not have an entrepreneurial mindset and were not accustomed to creating debt, and, on the other, there was the mistrust of the owners, in general, lawyers, doctors and professionals, who argued that being a territory with many difficulties in its infrastructure profile, tourist activity took place only in the summer.<sup>537</sup>

In summary, if the area, on the one hand, has the typical backward characteristics of southern Italy, with a high unemployment rate compared to the national average, on the other hand it has an interesting development potential in the field of craftsmanship, small businesses and tourism.

Culture and landscape, both rural and urban, represent the all-encompassing value of this territory and constitute the catalyst for defining a development policy. They should not only be viewed as historical and natural assets, but also as services for knowledge and enjoyment, as well as for protecting the well-being of the inhabitants' traditions and way of life.

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<sup>536</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Official Operator no. 1. Tricase, 15 July 2014.

<sup>537</sup> Sivini, S. (2003) *Nuovi percorsi di sviluppo locale. Il Programma LEADER e la sua applicazione in due aree del Mezzogiorno*. Soveria Mannelli (Catanzaro): Rubettino Editore.

For the programming period 2007-2013, the LAG is one of 25 in the Puglia region with a total of €18.5 million including public and private sector funding. The overall objective of recovering the identity of rural areas is the key to the interpretation of Local Development Strategy (LDS) and objectives. The activities to support and implement this objective are therefore those that have the capacity to enhance the values of local identity such as handicrafts and foodstuffs that are representative of the local way of life, rural tourism in its various declinations such as recovery of an architectural heritage and a system of services for knowledge of the territory and its productions. For this effort, the LDS implementation is appropriately articulated in the following directions:

- Improving local governance capacity, which is assigned the task of acting on the territorial scale by transcending the municipal or sectoral dimension. The territory of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca represents a historically homogeneous territorial sphere, also due to its clearly peninsular nature. The coastal territories are currently beginning to suffer as a whole a disproportionate anthropogenic pressure and the emergence of 'crowd effects', with the risk of the onset of degradation factors. The ability to rely on large territories of internal areas and to dilute large tourist flows into a widespread and less invasive offer is an opportunity for fundamental development to reinvigorate positive impacts and tourism economies in agricultural areas;
- To valorise the territory and to contribute to the construction of an integrated offering within this geographic space, thus encompassing all the resources in it. An important resource is represented by the system of cultural and historical heritage. The construction of cultural and landscaping itineraries is not only a useful activity for potential users, but also connects areas, sectors and experiences (agri-food, quality manufacturing through its outlets) through paths that complement different cultural and landscape riches. The LDS organizes these resources according to different interpretative circuits such as the 'countries of typicality', 'flowered countries', 'routes of flavours', putting in place the ability to use elements and intangible assets to connect real geographic systems;
- To build the sustainability of long-term development that secures the creation and maintenance of new employment opportunities and new sources of income in a stable manner. This is a development policy based on the local identity of the territory that has to build its sustainability on a number of elements related to economic activities such as

catering, trade, receptivity, services and the attractiveness of tourist flows, capable of translating into a source of economic revenue for the entire territory.<sup>538</sup>

The interventions identified in the LDS are therefore the result of a profound analysis of the needs of the area identified by the strategy planners and with the collaboration of the partners. In summary, the analysis of the promoted initiatives shows a consistent continuation with what had already been initiated in the previous programming periods. In addition, the local identity and the set of interventions within the LDS are not seen in an abstract way but are combined with the concrete objectives of the local development process.

### **6.6.2 Origin and composition of the partnership**

The LAG was constituted in 1991, in the form of Limited Liability Company. The corporate structure, despite the initial efforts directed at the involvement of the various local actors, consisted of eight members.

The establishment of partnership was mainly due to a group of people who, although not joining the LAG shareholders, have been active in the drafting of the LDS and the promotion of the initiative in the area, becoming animators of the LAG. These subjects around the trade union 'CISL – Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori' (Italian Confederation of the Workers Unions) were linked by friendship and their engagement was mainly on this basis. Each one of them had his own skills, so there was someone who had an in-depth knowledge of the area, a sociologist, an accountant, and ultimately the main creator who played a key role not only at the time of the establishment of the LAG but also throughout the LDS implementation during the various programming periods.<sup>539</sup>

*'The first programming period we made was during LEADER I. At that time, if you went around telling the local administrators we were going to make the LAG, they laughed. It was still a time of the 'Extraordinary intervention' where things were measured at tens of billions of lire. The true measure of the needs of the territory was not the partnership of the LAG but the relationship with the beneficiaries because you had an audience of 60-70 to 80 economic operators with whom you could identify real needs. The institutional partnership of the LAG did little, so the first element was that of a direct relationship between the LAG and the*

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<sup>538</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010).

<sup>539</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).



*territories, through the beneficiaries and somewhat with the local administrations and the second element was the ability to make a proper analysis of the needs that led to the identification of the objectives'.<sup>540</sup>*

At first it was not clear what it meant to really create partnerships and the territory was somewhat distrustful of a new organizational form that involved the ability to work together. The promoters managed to involve a group of statutory auditors and some operators. More specifically, the then President of the Consortium of the Municipalities of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca proved to be interested in the initiative and became fully engaged to make the project successful.

*'This territory is very closed to itself, in the sense that before it moves, it is expected that somebody will make the first step. So, you have to find skilled people, a little crazy, who believe in poetries like that of the LAG, because the LAG is a poetry. People who did not look to the personal interest but to the area of the land, who have not come as protagonists of this experience, have found themselves and therefore have placed the territory as the protagonist of this experience. With 50 thousand euros, you recover an ancient crypt. Who did you believe? Let's do this for people who believe that they carry these ideas forward. At that time, the president of the LAG also committed financially by signing bonds as a guarantee to receive EU funds'.<sup>541</sup>*

Subsequently, the experiences and competences accumulated over the years, trust in public institutions, the local population and the economic system, as well as the successes reported, pushed others to join the LAG. It was a process of trust that was slowly acquired by the LAG and which involves not only the local population but also the same administrations that, if at first they were particularly reluctant to participate in this initiative, they are now asking and inquiring about the possibilities the LAG offers to implement some interventions.

Nor should it be underestimated that the theme of rural development, was not immediately understood; the widespread understanding viewed such as a focus as synonymous with backwardness, something linked exclusively to agriculture and hence to be rejected. The widespread mentality considered in negative terms all that was related to agriculture. Listening to rural talk implied, necessarily, something that had to do with farming and was

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<sup>540</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Official Operator no. 1.

<sup>541</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Official operator no. 2. Poggiardo, 15 July 2014.

rejected and not considered. It was thought that development was only industrial. There was a widespread culture that had tried to eradicate the agricultural tradition of the area due to the many problems that afflicted the sector to turn almost exclusively to industrial promotion.<sup>542</sup> It was not easy to tell farmers what it meant to shift from agricultural land production to service farms. Earlier, the incentives of the former European Economic Community were being made to produce more because the goal was to feed the people of Europe and so they were all directed to the greater production of food. The biggest difficulty was to make it clear to farmers themselves and therefore to the agricultural world what the completion of these other services would mean. *'That is why in those years the function of the LAG was to educate, communicate and train this new profile of the farmer, which was required by the establishment of funds for Community Agricultural Policy, and we had a great role in this going home by home, church by church, shop by shop, farm by farm, municipality by municipality to make it understood that the very strategic approach of agricultural-environmental development was changing, namely the famous sustainable development, which the European Economic Community had sanctioned through the regulations. It was not easy to say to a farmer, 'Look, if you add to your main agricultural activity services, hospitality, direct sales, product transformation, valorisation, environmental commitment, you can make a new territory'. So it was about giving him a new job'*.<sup>543</sup> There were many formal and informal meetings with the potential beneficiaries to give extensive information on what the LEADER approach was and the objectives of the LAG's strategy which was simply summarized with *'look around, see the beauties that you have and make them emerge'*.<sup>544</sup> Local operators did not believe they could get public contributions simply by submitting good projects. Usually it was considered essential to have the intervention of a friend or a politician. The time for granting and funding was very long and often the costs one had to bear for receiving the contribution were considerable. Only later, when they actually got the funding grant and its disbursement, have the doubts of the local operators receded. All this has enabled local institutions to be more aware of the problems of the area and to understand the need to play an active role in the territorial development through the implementation of joint actions. In addition, local authorities played an important role in the

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<sup>542</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).

<sup>543</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Partnership representative no. 1. Tricase, 15 July 2014.

<sup>544</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).

dissemination of the initiatives organised and in the publication of the calls launched by the LAG. At their local authority offices, there are special desks in which all information about LEADER and the individual actions activated are displayed.

The LAG had a strategy envisaging the implementation of a large number of interventions with the consequent involvement of a number of subjects. This choice stems from the fact that the local reality was characterized by the presence of small municipalities and small companies unable to invest large sums. This situation has therefore required extensive work of engagement and mobilisation of the territory. Many beneficiaries were directly contacted by the LAG animators who personally visited the potential beneficiaries, explained the LEADER spirit and tried to convince them of the opportunity offered. The trade associations in the partnership contributed to the dissemination of information and activities of the LDS and, when drafting the LDS, they provided suggestions on the actions to be taken.

Currently, the LAG partnership consists of 120 Members and it expresses in a balanced way the local partnership, representing the main institutional components, economic and social territory. More specifically, 29 partners are from the public sector (Province of Lecce, Intermunicipal consortium of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca, Land reclamation authority of 'Ugento e Li Foggi', municipalities of the area, University of Salento, Plants genetic Research Institute) and 91 partners are from the private sector (associations of the agriculture, culture, craft, trade and enterprises sectors, cooperatives working in the sector of development and promotion of the rural territory, and private operators interested in the development of the territory). There are also two banking institutions and schools with which the LAG often works for with regard to training initiatives.<sup>545</sup>

Each partner participates in different ways within the LDS, also depending on their role, sharing their strategy and pledging to strengthen the image and presence of the LAG in the territory.<sup>546</sup>

*'We don't need a solo representation partnership, which is called only at the time of signing a memorandum of understanding, a document. But an active, concrete partnership that takes part, which has as its point of reference the understanding of community development. It is crucial to have within the partnership the voice of the public, the voice of the private, women, young people, cultural associations, and therefore with the awareness of doing.'*

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<sup>545</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).

<sup>546</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010).

*Determined for local development and a community is to take an attitude of listening to others, an attitude that is not easy. Being together can determine the changes, it can determine wealth'.<sup>547</sup>*

### **6.6.3 Organization, operation and involvement**

With regard to the LAG management organization, there is no rigid division of roles between staff, but, on the contrary, there is a wide range of people available to collaborate. The operating structure is therefore very flexible and, despite the considerable amount of work, it is quite efficient. It should be emphasized that staff works a lot of overtime without any remuneration, showing a real interest in the business.

The administrative bodies are the Shareholders' Meeting, the Board of Directors and the Management while the technical and organizational structure is composed of a Technical Committee, an Animation Structure, and an Administrative Secretariat.<sup>548</sup>

The Shareholders' Meeting has the duties of appointing members of the Board of Directors to approve the annual and multiannual financial statements.

The Board of Directors has the task of managing and implementing activities falling within the scope of the corporate subject. It is elected every three years and is chaired by the LAG president, who has legal representation in the company.

In addition to the steering bodies, the construction and implementation of a process described in the preceding paragraphs require a continuous involvement of public and private actors involved in LDS dynamics. To this end, two arenas of participation and leadership are set up in the LDS implementation process: the Technical Partnership Committee (TPC) and the Permanent Forum of Integrated Projects (PFIP).

The TPC is composed of 15 members appointed by the Board of Directors. Members of the Committee are made up from a representative of the University of Salento, a representative of the Provincial Administration, two representatives of the municipalities in the area, representatives of agricultural associations, crafts, cooperatives, social associations and a member of the Board of Directors. A Co-ordinator of the Committee, who collaborates with

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<sup>547</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Partnership representative no.1.

<sup>548</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010).

the President of the Board of Directors in the representation functions in the implementation of the LEADER Program, is mentioned among the members.<sup>549</sup>

The TPC expresses its views on the strategic guidelines for the implementation of the LDS, proposes initiatives to be funded within other Community, national or regional instruments, publishes calls for proposals, assesses the territorial promotion plan, and carries out delegated functions as directed by the Board of Directors when appropriate.

The PFIP is set up with the mission of gathering around a single table all the people in the area who have implemented the LDS. The Forum is responsible for coordinating the projects implemented under the LDS, identifying forms of functional and managerial integration between the various interventions, proposing initiatives and programs for the promotion of routes and paths within the territorial offer promoted by the LAG.

A representative for each of the LDS funded projects is part of the Forum. The Forum uses technical assistance from the Director of the LAG and for its reinstatement activities of the LAGs themselves. Alongside the two above-mentioned participation bodies, the contribution from the different categories of members is assured. With regard to Higher Education Institutes and the University, they play an important role in orientating students who are potentially interested. Having to choose a personal path to gain access to the labour market, the students are able to come into contact with the LDS objectives and measures in order to be able to assess the possibility of creating new businesses within the LEADER approach. In addition, these institutes have an active role in the quality monitoring phases of the LDS, in order to provide adequate support in the event of technical and methodological corrections to the action taken by the LAG on the territory.

The success of this LDS is also determined by the degree of participation and involvement of the population. Public bodies are actively involved in the presentation phases to the local population; they also help develop the economic subjects of the LDS and the measures to be taken when publishing the calls for proposals and disseminating the results that will be achieved. In order to foster a widespread dissemination of the opportunities contained in the LDS and to give all potential beneficiaries the opportunity to take part in the initiatives, the LAG favours the use of informative and awareness-raising meetings (with potentially interested local actors), the distribution of information materials and posters in the

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<sup>549</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010).

municipal area, and the creation of sections of the institutional websites dedicated to the LEADER approach.<sup>550</sup>

*'By editing a newsletter, I was able to get 4200 e-mail addresses, and thanks to this I can communicate to the Municipalities, technical offices for professionals, and to ordinary people, because then, sometimes, I say, maybe if that person is not interested, it could be of interest for his brother, sister, friend, and maybe he forwards the newsletter. A lot of people I do not know often come to ask for information, people who ask me to be added to the mail-list'.<sup>551</sup>*

Finally, private companies and other participants in the LAG represent the most significant part of the partnership. They are the first witnesses to the local development strategy of the LAG. These private companies are asked to transfer their experience to the new beneficiary companies, including and above all through the specific actions to be put in place by the LAG during the implementation of the strategy.<sup>552</sup>

#### **6.6.4 Outcomes, achievements and added value of the local partnership practice**

The LAG has set up its activity focusing on a micro-projects strategy and the involvement of a large number of public and private entities. All of this was done to increase the sense of belonging by the local population for the area and to create the perception of being the main actors in the development of the territory.<sup>553</sup>

Despite the great difficulties the LAG encountered, it has succeeded in moving forward with much determination and with the enthusiasm of public and political actors who have believed in the 'bottom-up' development that has allowed them to use underused resources and capabilities.

As the territory has a long heritage of not appropriately valuing the endogenous resources, ranging from the region's environment and history to its tradition and culture, the LAG has identified and sought to bring these things to light with the tools described above and with

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<sup>550</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca (2010).

<sup>551</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca Partnership representative no. 1.

<sup>552</sup> Ecosfera S.p.a. (2005) *Rapporto di valutazione intermedia indipendente del Programma Operativo LEADER + Puglia 2000-2006*. Roma: Ecosfera S.p.a.

<sup>553</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale del Capo di Santa Maria di Leuca (2009) *LEADER +. Risultati e interventi. Rapporto finale sull'attuazione del programma nella Terra dei Due Mari*. Tricase: GAL C.S.M. di Leuca.

the most appropriate modalities. The promotion of rural tourism has been the focal point of the LAG for which it has decided to allocate about 40% of its available resources. Bringing the consumers into this space and making them part of the production and training processes, tourism is able to become the best and most profitable form for marketing and promoting local products. For rural tourism to take off and have positive implications for the economy of the territory, it was necessary to create the optimal conditions such as better organization of services, greater capacity of the local system to respond to the market and to offer higher quality products.<sup>554</sup>

In twenty-five years of activity, the LAG has been promoting and managing vocational training and upgrading courses for young agricultural entrepreneurs and young unemployed people involved in the creation of farm businesses, providing advice and technical assistance services to local authorities and private companies, informing young people about business opportunities and financing their entrepreneurial ideas, and organizing promotional events in Italy and abroad. What is important, therefore, is the intense activity of mobilization and engagement carried out in the area and efforts to allow for stable relationships between the various actors.

The LAG's strategies to ensure active rural development have been targeted not only on the involvement of the population and the training of jobseekers but also to disseminate news of the benefits that LEADER could provide from local rural development.

The activity was based on the coordination of several synergistic actions between the productive sectors, the local population, the associations, the public bodies and the activities of a small but strong territory, capable of inducing an integrated and homogeneous development of its rural areas. The ability to listen, observe local communities and be proactive, the spirit of research, and the constant attention to discovering new opportunities for intervention on the ground, all have been the winning cards that the LAG has been able to play in order to develop substantial entrepreneurial ability within the area.

Since the municipalities base their economy on agriculture, the LAG is one of the important components that characterizes the economic and social reality and it is one that more than anything else can guarantee a real and balanced development in the area.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).

<sup>555</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale del Capo di Santa Maria di Leuca (2009).

Today, the LAG represents a reference point for the entrepreneurial system and for the public administrations of southern Salento, realizing a multifunctional centre, within which a series of services are provided for the territory, with a permanent exhibition of typical products from the area, the iconographic and multimedia repertoire of the historical-architectural and environmental heritage, the tourist information point and receptive offer of the territory.

As the LAG's area is characterized by historical and natural resources of great interest, the LDS has sought to enhance and improve the offering tourist, not only from an environmental and cultural point of view but also in terms of receptivity. An innovative initiative is that of the 'Village Hotel' created in the historic centre of the municipality of Specchia and then extended, given the positive results achieved, to two other municipalities.

The experience of building the Village hotel has gained weight and recognition as the LAG spent itself with its human resources in order to implement it, outside what was the condition of the LEADER approach. The action consists in the restoration of ancient uninhabited houses, to be used as a hotel in the summer months. The management and leasing activity are carried out by the LAG. Thus, the recovery and revitalization of historic centres have been initiated.

With this project, a very innovative intervention model has been developed both in terms of the recovery of the abandoned old town, aimed at tourists and in terms of rural tourism. The ancient hamlet of Specchia was chosen, as it is one of the best examples of a preserved historical centre in Puglia and is particularly important for its historical significance with regard to the sixteenth century peasant society.

Another important intervention has been aimed at the recovery, preservation and enhancement of four forests of the Mediterranean scrub: the woods of Cardigliano and Specchia, the Park of Querce (Oaks) in Castro, the woods of the Vallonee in Tricase, and the Park of the Baronale (Baronial) Palace in Tiggiano. Through these interventions, the spaces were made available, educational boards, billboards and benches were installed, and guided tours were organized. On these sites today, you can see typical species of the Mediterranean flora and some of the most unique arboreal specimens within Western Europe.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Gruppo di Azione Locale del Capo di Santa Maria di Leuca (2009).



*'One of the dreams we had was to retrieve the historic centres not for tourists, but for people who could become residents of this area. One day we discovered that an author had come to Specchia in low season for a month to write a book. After two days he left because there was no internet. As we walked around the historic centre we said: 'but can you imagine if these historic centres were to be inhabited each day, as they would be beautiful, but to live here you have to bring people to live and work. We do not have the capability to bring 1000 American tourists, so the ability to recover a cultural asset is not to recover it, inaugurate it and the following day we do not know what to do. And then if you imagine investing in historic centres you have to provide them with very high-capacity services like fast internet, because if one has to live here you have to understand what advanced innovative services they need, and those are the challenges'.<sup>557</sup>*

In view of the organizational shortcomings affecting the tourism sector, tourist packages were set up which were promoted through participation in national trade fairs, workshops and meetings with tour operators, associations, and organizations.

Another goal identified was the valorisation of craftsmanship through the creation of an exhibition and sale point of the products from the area. This way, the creation of a network of local operators was attempted to enhance the typical handicrafts such as the processing of olive wood and the typical stone-cutting of Lecce. Another very important aspect on which the LAG has worked was to initiate cooperative practices between the local people. Introducing the typology of agritourism on the territory for the first time, a network of information exchange between the various tour operators was also created. In addition, collaborations have been developed between farmhouses, artisans and traders of typical products. The use of typical ceramics and wood processing have become part of the agritourism furnishings, along with exhibitions of local artisan products. In the agricultural sector, small-scale production was also encouraged, by solving the old problem of the lack of transformation of local products such as olive oil, wine, preserves and the other by linking manufacturers with transformers.

All this was possible not only because some people have become a vanguard group in design, but because they have been personally engaged, and operate with a strong initiative spirit.

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<sup>557</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Official operator no. 2.

*'I say that it takes an element, a fundamental ingredient, passion, because we need to be local development operators, or someone says animators always, we have to play this role twenty-four hours a day, you do not have to do a Monday to Friday office job here, you also have to take part in the festivals on Saturdays and Sundays, take part in events that will allow you to know the territory better, to bring you some light that can serve to promote and enhance the territory better.'*<sup>558</sup>

Finally, the LAG has set itself the objective of becoming a self-supporting development agency, so that it can continue to operate at the end of the LEADER Programme. With the aim of providing real services to local businesses and institutions, the LAG provides technical assistance and consulting services on various financing opportunities for the development of the area.<sup>559</sup>

## **6.7 Conclusions**

This chapter has analysed the emergence, organization and performance of two LAGs in the northern Emilia – Romagna region (Delta 2000 LAG) and in the southern Puglia Region (Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG). In order to better understand their operation, I first analysed the governance framework within the process of reshaping the administrative policy and its devolution to the Italian regions with a focus on the implementation of the EU rural development policies in Emilia – Romagna and in Puglia.

What has emerged is that Italy does not have a solid tradition of partnership because until the late 1990s the policies for economic development were influenced by theories inspired by a top-down conception of governing. It was only with the diffusion of local development and the bottom-up approach that the concept of partnership has been initiated.

The only funded programmes based on the principle of partnership were implemented in the southern regions areas and designed to promote local development through a series of actions in different economic sectors. *To animate a territory and to encourage its development is not simply a matter of transmitting information and knowledge, but also of developing innovative methodologies for re-organising the territory. Such methodologies must be able to remove the obstacles to development through a good use of all the*

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<sup>558</sup> Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG Operator no. 3. Tricase, 15 July 2014.

<sup>559</sup> Sivini, S. (2003).

*opportunities offered by development policies at the regional, state or EU levels*'.<sup>560</sup> Thus partnerships become a means with a managerial and entrepreneurial capacity to orientate the local population. The case studies reveal an effort to re-imagine the territory that the LAGs cover in the eyes not just of potential outsiders but the inhabitants themselves. Although the Italian regions have been characterized by some degree of autonomy since the 1950s, it was only during the 1990s that a series of administrative and legislative reforms which provided regional and local authorities with an increased autonomy. With the accelerating Europeanisation of rural, development policy devolution favoured the Southern periphery in its entirety and local administration reached a higher accountability level which promoted a more effective use of EU cohesion and development funds.<sup>561</sup> There was a widespread critique aimed at the regions for an excess of bureaucracy, slowness of procedures and inefficiency at different levels (European, national, regional), sometimes in contradiction with each other.

Traditionally, public bureaucracy in Italy has not been well equipped to plan and implement development programmes and projects and this reduced its ability to apply for EU funds. Even if awareness of the relevance of EU matters are raised in political debates in a very ideological way by elected officials, it is difficult to translate them into a visible agenda. The elected officials *'are interested in activities which can be rapidly implemented and have an immediate effect so that they can be seen to be delivering their electoral mandate*'.<sup>562</sup>

The rural development partnerships have spread across Italy only in recent years thanks to the LEADER programming. The two case studies analysed, even if in different local contexts show that the bottom-up initiation is considered a crucial element in the process of local development. It does not simply mean 'from the grassroots', as opposed to the vertical and potentially undemocratic features of the 'top-down' approach; rather, here the accent seems to be placed on the necessity that the collective and horizontal process must come from within the local area, that strategic decisions must be decided and implemented in a decisive relationship with the local dimension.

The LAG areas share an economic disadvantage characterized by a high unemployment rate if compared to the level of their wider regions, a declining agriculture, rural depopulation,

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<sup>560</sup> Westholm, E., Moseley, M. and Stenlås, N. (1999), page 86.

<sup>561</sup> Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R. and Nanetti, R. Y. (1994).

<sup>562</sup> Ercole, E. (1992), page 202.

low level of innovation and a weak productive structure. While Delta 2000 LAG benefits from the proximity to a rich dynamic area, Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG, suffers from the weakness of the surrounding area.

From the experiences analysed in the chapter, it emerged that the LEADER partnership formalization involving negotiations of agreements and the adoption of innovative participative methods has not been an easy process. This is particularly true in those areas with different social and institutional contexts and where there is a weak tradition of dialogue, cooperation and associations, have at times hindered progress.

In the area of the Delta 2000 and more generally in the Emilia-Romagna region, there is a longstanding traditional presence of cooperative actions as well as an efficient public administration in promoting and supporting the partnership.

In Puglia, the experience of association and cooperation was particularly scarce. In the case of the area of the Capo Santa Maria di Leuca, the presence of the trade union 'CISL' was mainly oriented towards the defence of the workers' rights and the activity in the partnership was motivated mainly for the reason of solving their financial difficulties.

While Delta 2000 followed a way already marked out, Capo Santa Maria di Leuca had to invent a new form of participation which relied mainly on the existing networks of the trade union.

At the behest of some of the local governments, Delta 2000 was founded in 1994 as a non-profit association to act as a reference agency for public entities, associations and private economic operators. In 1996, the LAG started to be involved in LEADER, enlarging its perspective from the implementation of single specific actions to an integrated plan of development of a large area. The initiative for the creation of the partnership came from the local public institutions that have always played a pre-eminent role and influenced all its developments. With the involvement in LEADER, the shareholders membership was increased with the entrance of new public partners.

By comparison, the public authorities were not crucial for the creation of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca which was formally constituted in 1991 for participating in LEADER I.

What emerges from the data of foundation of both LAGs is that their birth was influenced by the opportunity made available by the presence of EU LEADER granting funds to form a partnership and decide to work for local development. The year of foundation which correspond to the programme timing, the acquisition of a legal status which is the condition

to be eligible to receive funds are all indicators that the partnerships are dependent on public funds. Maybe they would never have thought of getting together to work for local development without that strategic element. However, it cannot be denied that such a presence of rural development programmes was probably the strongest factor that pushed local actors to form a partnership.

It can be highlighted that in both case studies a crucial role was played by key people followed by local institutions and private sector organisations who had the capacity to put together different subjects focussing on the specific advantages on the basis of personal contacts and the pre-existence of networks, and previous experience of activities for common development objectives among the promoting actors and that the LEADER funding opportunity was determinant. This speaks to a different dimension of multi-level governance, namely the more horizontal building of relationship and the inclusion of a range of different voices to build a common vision. Two important dynamics in this mode of governing feature for both LAGS. The categories of actors most represented in the two partnerships are public institutions which also include the Chambers of Commerce, the park authorities and public institutes of research and the private actors such as the trade associations and businesses, while there is a smaller presence of the most vulnerable sectors of the local society (women, young people, the elderly, and the disabled). Encouraging their involvement in the appropriate forms would help to define, in a more in-depth and coherent fashion, the objectives of the partnership with the idea of integrated and participatory development.

The motivations of the various actors to join the partnership move from taking advantage of the programme funding to resolving the problems in the area. In addition, certain actors have decided to become part of the partnership by virtue of a specific interest. This is the case of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG where the private subjects are clearly getting more opportunities as beneficiaries than the public authorities. The participation of the trade associations in both partnerships is instead due to the fact they see in these experiences new opportunities to benefit they represent. Therefore, there should not be any surprise if local actors mobilize themselves with the aim to take advantage of such policies as this is coherent with the desire of promoting local integrated development.

Concerning the level of involvement of the partners, there are some common elements as well as significant differences. Both partnerships being active within the LEADER approach,

share the common objective of rural integrated development and consequently promoted coherent actions. The general objective was to introduce a territorial development strategy focusing on the valorisation of the endogenous resources through the realization of interventions oriented towards the development of alternative agricultural activities, supporting the diffusion of local products, promoting tourism in the internal area, and funding projects in the cultural, environmental and economic fields. The strategies of interventions are oriented to professional training and creating employment in the field of rural tourism, SME, crafting and agri-food, improving the supply of services, promoting opportunities in the innovative production for generating new incomes, increasing participation from local people and the association of local authorities in the development processes, valorising the identity of the area at the cultural and environmental level and in terms of quality of life.

The longer experience through the various LEADER programming periods facilitated a coherent implementation of what proved to be appropriate for the development of the areas. Since the two LAGs are formally constituted organisations as required by the national laws for the LEADER programmes, their organizational structure is similar and it includes an assembly of members where all the partners are represented for the approval of the budget and the programme activities. The Board of Directors, which is nominated by the Assembly, is responsible for the main decisions and the president is the legal representative of the society and chairs the Board of Directors. An operational structure in charge of the implementation and management of the activities is rather small; in both LAGs the staff is well motivated and there is a good collaborative attitude.

The eligibility and qualitative assessment of applications is carried out by technical committees composed of professionals in the fields of tourism, environment, and handicraft. They also express their views for the LDSs implementation, propose initiatives to be funded, publish calls for proposals and assess the territorial promotion plan.

The involvement of the local community activity is generally achieved through the organization of public meetings that imply a large participation even if it happens through the direct participation of the project beneficiaries.

Concerning the added value which derives from the working of the two LAGs, they gave both communities an emphasis of flexibility in trying to bring in new people and new ideas to

seize new opportunities. Another important dynamic was the building of trust across a diverse set of local institutions and peoples who were not used to working with each other. These effects can be measured in terms of the new ideas, methods and technologies as well as the discovery of the value of local resources that have been reached by the partners, the beneficiaries such as local farmers, local administrations, the population of the whole area and its visitors. This is demonstrated in more detail in the case of the Delta Po Park which became an eco-tourist destination for bird-watching with relevance at international level and the Village Hotel in the historic centre of the municipality of Specchia. The latter innovation was then extended, given the positive results achieved, to two other municipalities.

These development initiatives are followed by other specific business-oriented issues such as the promotion of local products, diversification of the agricultural activities, rural tourism and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Competences and knowledge are shared and pooled as a basic resource supporting the action for development as a whole. The respondents are aware of the fact that the partnership must operate free from obstacles and with a capacity of adapting its action to the reality of the local context, and by no means should it ever become a bureaucratic organization. In this process, the key people once again play a fundamental role as they are essential not only in the stage of the birth of the partnership, but also in the subsequent operational phases. Such key people have a great capacity for inventing suitable solutions and, above all, the ability to create connections with different actors throughout the territory, with the ultimate aim of establishing new stable networks. This is a further sign of an absolutely non-bureaucratic process, where individuals with direct contacts with the territory where they operate should somehow count more than the structures they belong to. An overall excess of bureaucracy slows down the activity of the LAGs which in the Italian case means essentially a lack of coordination in the circuit between the local, the regional and the national levels.

Moving the analysis to a national focus, the first thing that must be observed is the substantial lack of preparation of the Italian institutional system in the face of a bottom-up participatory development. This has created many difficulties for the concrete initiatives in the territories.

In Italy, the institutions responsible for implementing the LEADER approach are the regions. Rural partnerships are often held in low esteem by the regional authorities probably because

they manage relatively modest resources and, in any case, rural partnerships are underestimated for their innovative action through participation, decisions taken jointly, attention to local specificities. This inadequacy has resulted in the creation of a bureaucratic model that manifests itself in the rigidity of the institutional instruments, in the frequent under-sizing of regional staff responsible for the management of development programmes, and in the lack of adequate competence. This results in the long procedures for the disbursement of the funds and for the carrying out of the controls which, besides slowing down the activity of the LAGs, it obscures the image in the eyes of the beneficiaries.

One of the more interesting findings in this comparative analysis is that Emilia-Romagna region was not particularly stronger than Puglia region in terms of providing support for their respective LAGs. This reality suggests that the Putnam thesis may not explain all patterns of Italian regional behaviour, at least not in terms of rural development. The reality is that the relative success found in both case studies reflects the strengths of the LEADER governance approach and the ability of the local actors to make use of this approach.

This leads to the final point: local knowledge, know-how and identity, the economic potential of the area, and the commitment of the local population are considered the relevant elements of the partnership. Partnerships and therefore the LAGs are perceived in their areas as the main strategic tools to operate in the local context and to perform a role at least as important as that of the public fund. These financial resources must be the basic point of departure for a bottom-up development activity.

No successful action can be projected or implemented moving from a superficial understanding of the local characteristics, problems and needs. As a matter of fact, one of the greatest efforts carried out by the partnerships was that of putting together as much information and experiences as possible, often carrying out ad hoc studies on which the elaboration of the local action plans was based.

The LAGs have the *'capacity to transform individual interests into more unitary projects usually based on economic development of land-based goods (food, wine, environment, landscape, local heritage, etc.)*. A single company or economic sector is unable to produce locally-based products ... they are also unable to aggregate firms in the task of controlling free riders'.<sup>563</sup> Hence the capacity to combine the political and the technical autonomy gives

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<sup>563</sup> Granberg, L., Andersson, K. and Kovách, I. (2015), page 154



the LAGs an institutional prestige which is recognized by both the regional administration and the local level. Therefore, the Italian case studies confirm that the bottom-up idea introduced by the LEADER approach has offered new and even unexpected opportunities for the development of areas which are mainly characterized by an economic and social disadvantage.

## Chapter 7. Conclusions

### 7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the presentation of the case studies and the evidence which emerged from them in an attempt to respond to the key questions underlying the research. The chapter discusses the main findings and contributions to theory before making recommendations.

In Chapter 1, I set the foundation of this research which explored the comparative evolution of rural development policies in UK and in Italy in a Multi-Level Governance (MLG) framework. The aim was to highlight the increasing importance of a bottom-up development approach and to explore governance issues of how this process can benefit both the policy-making and the rural development outcomes.

More specifically, the thesis drew on the experience of four EU LEADER LAGs/public-private partnerships operating in the UK (Argyll and the Islands LAG – Scotland and Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways LAG – England) and in Italy (Delta 2000 LAG – Emilia Romagna Region and Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG – Puglia Region). The aim was to analyse the conditions, including political arrangements and actors, that facilitate or hinder the development of the partnerships and their workings for formulating and implementing rural development strategies for their areas. In addition, the research assessed the added value that flows from the bottom-up approach to local development processes.

The use of the case study approach in this research has proved to be very useful as it has provided the means for an exploration of the overall process of local partnership operation *in situ* and to establish the link between the various mechanisms and processes involved in the practice.

While the MLG served as a basis for the policy studies and has been helpful in mapping the general framework of the structures implementing LEADER in UK and in Italy, the case studies approach was very helpful for providing information about the distribution of power and enabled me to analyse the mechanism adopted to reproduce and transform the European rural development policy implementation and to focus how those decision-making structures function in both countries.

In this context, the adoption of a qualitative analysis has been essential in allowing a close, detailed observation of local partnership operation and an understanding of the logics that underlie the local development actors in terms of interactions, conversations, and exchange of opinions.

Amongst the techniques used to collect information such as the literature review and the documentary research, observation at meetings and semi-structured interviews, it is the latter technique that has proved to be the most revealing and useful. The interviews allowed issues to be discussed in depth for better understanding of some of the mechanisms and processes that were not clear from the available documents.

In all the case studies, the majority of the persons that have been interviewed responded positively and were very willing to devote time and effort responding to questions in a considered and detailed manner. In contrast, documentary research, whilst useful in providing some information concerning the origins, the historical evolution and general working of the partnership, said very little on the key governance questions and provided only a formulaic perspective on the reality.

Throughout my research, I focused on a number of LAG case studies whose aims were very similar to further understand the process of partnership operation in rural development and to support the emerging findings of the present research. Triangulation was the main method for crosschecking data from different sources and provided a better understanding of the complexity and variety of the different existing interpretation in the social and political world.

Within this framework, I took similarities and differences in opinions and interpretations into consideration and I examined further primary and secondary documentation when substantial differences between sources were found.

In this final chapter I summarize the main findings that have emerged my research. In Chapter 1, I identified the following four questions:

1. What conclusions do we draw about the emergence and the composition of local partnerships?
2. What are the key characteristics of the LAGs' working mechanisms employed to address rural development?

3. What considerations do we draw about the outcomes and performance deriving from the LAGs working in rural development?
4. What is the added value of the LAGs that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach to local development process of the areas they serve compared to the more conventional governance approaches?

These four questions are addressed in this chapter under two sections. The first section answers, in a transnational perspective by comparing the UK and the Italian case studies, the first three questions and has been elaborated on the rationale for local partnership processes and the evidence regarding their set-up and working mechanisms.

The second section answers question four and reflects on how a LEADER LAG and its public-private partnership can be considered as a governance instrument which gives an added value for the development of rural areas compared to a conventional governance approach. In the final section I make some policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## **7.2 Summary of main findings**

The analysis of the rural development literature suggested that the practice of the local partnerships has emerged from a set of factors related to the local countryside context. Such factors include a socio-economic change of the rural areas, a political and administrative restructuring and the concept of a partnership approach as an effective development tool. This approach gives back the control to rural areas so that their development activity is closer to local needs and is therefore preferable to a conventional top-down approach. In this context, currently and throughout the preceding thirty years, rural areas are witnessing economic diversification, where rural areas are no longer exclusively tied to agricultural activities and where development policies and approaches are undergoing considerable revaluation. Rural development is no longer exclusively concerned with the production of goods but has become a locally-dependent, multi sectorial and shared challenge in which international, national and local authorities, economic and social actors as well as local people are all influential and play a collaborative role. All four case studies have demonstrated this movement towards the diversification of the economic approach and social activity, despite the initial resistance in both the Italian cases.

In this conjunction rural authorities have promoted an integrated and participatory approach as a prerequisite for addressing issues and challenges for the development of rural areas at local level. This approach can be considered as a new government form including the institutions and actors drawn from local government and beyond. This new governance approach reflects the promotion of greater interaction between the public and the private sector and the encouragement of more popular and democratic participation within local and regional governance.<sup>564</sup>

In this framework, the introduction of the LEADER approach *'is said to mark the beginning of a new stage for the development of rural areas'*.<sup>565</sup> In the rationale behind LEADER, the European Commission places great emphasis on local action groups (LAGs) as a component of a vertical MLG setting in the following manner: *'The main concept behind the LEADER approach is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice'*.<sup>566</sup>

LEADER approach is giving some similarity in the approach to governance and therefore is building in MLG with respect to EU integration (at least in the area of rural development). As we have seen in the previous chapters, LEADER is an approach which has been running for over 25 years and that it is important not only within rural development but also for its governance role that has been debated by policy-makers and theorists over the last years. They described LEADER as a shift from government to governance aimed to decentralize central level to stakeholder platforms at local level. In contrast to the hierarchical bureaucracy of the traditional models of rural development LEADER aims to build capacity among the local population *'to create public goods that will help to overcome the instances of market failure which characterize rural economies'*.<sup>567</sup>

This method is based on two principles: *'decisions should be taken by bodies located as close as possible to the areas of intervention and the decision-making should involve all bodies on equal footing, be the fruit of long-standing reflection on development processes and based*

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<sup>564</sup> Jones, O. and Little, J. (2000).

<sup>565</sup> Osti, G. (2000), page 174.

<sup>566</sup> European Commission (2006), page 8.

<sup>567</sup> Kearney, B., Boyle, G. E. and Walsh, J. (1994), *EU LEADER I Initiative in Ireland: Evaluation and Recommendations*. Dublin: Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

*on the enhancement of local cultural identities'*.<sup>568</sup> Local Action Groups (LAGs) can be seen as the local expressions of the shift from government to governance within EU rural development policy with the objective of enhancing their delivery at local level.

Even if the bottom-up approach is heavily emphasized in the literature, there is also the top-down component of the government in funding, planning and setting the rules at European and national level. From a comparison between the top-down and bottom-up development theories, it is clear that while in the former the subjects are institutional and the interests are exogenous, in the second the subjects are local and the interest are endogenous whereby the LAGs are dealing with their Local Development Strategies and make decisions about projects that are implemented by the beneficiaries. The case studies research showed that the rural development partnerships in both the UK and in Italy share common issues and similar trajectories of development but the context, rural issues, developmental challenges and institutional structures clearly differ.

As we saw, in the framework of the UK national rural policy, the Rural White Papers signified a series of important shifts from an agricultural to a rural focus with policy implications considered less in sectoral terms and more in socio-economic activities, from a concern for resource management and planning to a concern for people and communities in rural areas, from seeing the countryside as a unitary national space to an acknowledgement of the diversity of rural areas which reflects differing pressures and circumstances as well as distinct governmental structures and political constellations.

In Italy there are no state funded programmes explicitly oriented to the development of rural areas. The only funded programmes based on the principle of partnership were implemented in the southern regions areas of economic crisis, including both rural and urban territories, and designed to promote local development through a series of actions in different economic sectors.

Concerning the implementing modalities of the EU rural development policy, both in UK and in Italy, there are National Strategic Plans (NSPs) which guide rural development policy. The UK NSP provides the basis for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP). The Italian NSP provides the Emilia

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<sup>568</sup> Osti, G. (2000).

Romagna region Rural Development Programme and the Puglia region Rural Development Programme.

In Scotland, although devolution granted significant autonomy in designing its national rural policy, rural affairs are a matter overseen by the Scottish Parliament with little sub-regional delivery infrastructure. Decisions about policy design remain at national level where the Scottish Executive Department works with DEFRA to ensure that Scottish issues are represented. In England, with the disappearance of RDAs the socio-economic elements of the RDPE are now delivered by DEFRA.

In the case of Italy, even if the policy priorities are formulated at national level, Emilia-Romagna and Puglia regions implement rural development policies by promoting the coordination with regional policies.

But, while there are key differences in the British and Italian national and subnational institutional structures which mediate EU agricultural policies, the implementation of rural policies at local level both are indeed carried out toward an integrated bottom-up development model that embraces the broader aspect of rurality in terms of territorial concentration, integration and concertation with partnership at local level based.

A further important finding from the comparative case studies concerns the concept and the origin of partnerships.

In the UK there is a great variety of partnerships reflecting an emerging form of governance which has moved away from national and local government administration and has incorporated a diverse range of quasi-government bodies.

In Italy, it was only with the diffusion of local development and the bottom-up approach that the practice of partnership became a feature of governance at local level in Italy.

The consideration of the case studies from two different countries has been very useful in showing that partnership operation raises similar issues and challenges. It was interesting to observe that the attitudes, motivations and also the frustrations and sense of resignation about the practice of local partnership were almost identical.

To answer the first question, the process of local partnership building emerged as a key and iterative process with a strong influence of the local context where local conceptions, values, attitudes and mentalities have to be accommodated because they reflect rooted local traditions.

The evidence derived from the case studies indicates that the process of local partnership building relies on the mobilization of a wide range of interests, of a flexible local space, of local resources, ideas and projects as well as of existing structures, organizations and civic traditions. The empirical evidence also emphasizes that essential to local partnership building is the involvement of local actors, the formulation of a clear strategy and the setting-up of effective structures.

An important role was played by the local authorities but the efforts made by key people with energy and local contacts were also crucial.

In UK, the role of the lead partners of the two LAGs (the Argyll and Bute Council in Scotland and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council in England) has been very fundamental in achieving a number of successes within the implementation of the LDS. They encouraged a wider ownership of the partnership and as local authorities they have a relative independence from political and administrative control which helped them to operate in a more innovative and flexible way and thereby they gained local credibility.

In Italy, the area of Delta 2000 and more generally in the Emilia-Romagna region, there is a longstanding traditional presence of cooperative actions as well as an efficient public administration in promoting and supporting the partnership. The initiative for the creation of the partnership came from the local public institutions that have always played a pre-eminent role and influenced all its developments. Delta 2000 was therefore created as a non-profit association to implement the will of some local governments and act as a reference agency for public entities, associations and private economic operators.

In Puglia, the experience of association and cooperation was particularly scarce. In the case of the area of the Capo Santa Maria di Leuca, the public authorities were not crucial for the creation of the partnership which was instead mainly due to a group of people who were active in the promotion of the initiative in the area.

Concerning the partnership composition, the case studies showed that representation is a key issue, in particular one of the main challenges is to allow sufficient representation without making partnerships too big and unmanageable. Evidence from the case studies indicates that the level of representation varies in a balanced way reflecting the key institutional and sectoral interests of the territory.

The composition of the LAG Argyll and the Islands is very much led by local authorities where Argyll and Bute local authority acts as secretariat providing leadership. Today, the LAG has



25 partner representatives from a range of public, private and community sectors. There is a strong business community which helps to ensure that the LAG is able to bring the economic, innovative and business impact to the Programme and where the private sector may be beneficial. There are also community representations and organization as the biodiversity sector which is represented by the Argyll and Bute Local Biodiversity Partnership.

Also the CWWW LAG membership includes representatives from public, private and voluntary and community sectors. The LAG partnership has about 30 members from various different organisations such as the National Farmers Union and the Driffield Agricultural Society, which are the productive side of the rural economy, and then various interested parties such as archaeological groups and social groups.

In Italy, the partnership of Delta 2000 LAG has 93 partners representing the main economic and social stakeholders at local level such as trade unions, the confederation of tourism, the crafts federation and the Italian industrial federation.

The partnership of Capo Santa Maria di Leuca LAG has 120 partners from the socio-economic field (including farmers, crafts, traders, tourism and services associations, and SMEs), and public bodies.

It emerges that the public sector is strongly represented in all the partnerships due to its political and financial means and in accordance with art 62.1(b) of the EC Regulation 1698/2005 (*...At the decision-making level the economic and social partners, as well as other representatives of the civil society, such as farmers, rural women, young people and their associations, must make up at least 50 % of the local partnership...*).<sup>569</sup> In many cases local authorities provided the necessary drive and leadership and a measure of political legitimacy that would otherwise be lacking.

Representation of the private and voluntary sectors in the local partnership practice is not a problematic issue. The people representing the private sector are not acting as individuals but rather representatives of their organisations and are not also politically elected members of other organisations on rural development. They are organized into groups or

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<sup>569</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), *Official Journal of the European Union* L 286 M, 4.11.2010, p. 26–65.

organizations and their involvement is seen as active local players willing to commit their time.

To answer the second question, the research findings showed that local partnership operation requires time to mobilize partners, to conciliate and coordinate the differences, to develop communication and agreement to establish a new mode of functioning and a new culture between actors.

Among the interviewees, there seems to be a consensus that the whole point of partnership operation is to bring together a variety of powers, expertise and roles. Instead of talking about the 'sharing of responsibility and power' we should talk about an 'association of responsibility and power' where local actors take responsibility and play an active part in rural development and this action does not imply that all partners are playing the same role. These fundamental characteristics have made possible several crucial activities for the endogenous development such as the coordination of diverse actors, the integration of interests at top-down and bottom-up levels, and the pooling of resources.

*'The impact of European rural policies will therefore not only depend on the economic, social and environmental characteristics of a particular rural area but also be highly dependent on the logic that determines who is allowed to be involved as stakeholders at the local level. The varying ways in which rural partnership are institutionalized at present will play a crucial role in constraining or enabling innovative and broad-based rural development'.<sup>570</sup>*

Intrinsic to local activism is the sense of civic responsibility, the sense of being committed to and getting involved in the local area. For some interviewees this commitment rested on their personal inclination to bring time, experience and support to the area in which they are called to work. For other it is a means of showing a willingness to become part of a community in which they have chosen to live and to take action.

Whilst there is a recognition that rural development requires a collective action, local partnership operation is the result of a long, slow and laborious process. Rural development emerges as a long-term, progressive, comprehensive and pragmatic process that is organized over time. Its existence and longevity depend on the local context, a set of opportunities, on the issues to be addressed, on a broad mobilization of local actors and in

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<sup>570</sup> Derkzen, P. (2010) page 29.

particular it is a process which depends on people, their views and reasoning, expectations and vision for the development of their area.

Partnerships benefit from an effective two tier structure involving fairly infrequent meetings of an assembly of all the partners and more frequent meetings of a board where real power normally resides and which is supported by small committees composed of professionals in the fields of environment, tourism and crafts. These committees carry out the assessment of the project proposals submitted and express their views for the implementation of the LDSs. The Delta 2000 LAG, for example, created not only a Shareholders Assembly and a Board of Directors, but also technical and steering committees, working groups and a participatory strategy for the wider community to have an input into the policy-making, including via public meetings. The involvement of the local people is considered an essential element in the rural development process. In this context, public meetings appear to remain an essential method to address their views, to present their projects and are also the occasion when decision are taken and projects to be implemented.

They are all supported by an operational structure in charge of the functions of implementation and management of the LAG activities. Abilities like planning projects and providing technical support to beneficiaries as well as listening to local people and connecting projects and institutions are of vital importance for the successful working of the LAG. In many cases, the staff felt a personal responsibility to the project by providing special support during the planning and implementation phase.

In terms of legitimation of the partnerships, the case studies showed that it derives mostly from the direct involvement of public authorities and less so from involving local people. Further legitimacy is given by the transparent decision-making process and also by the funding supervision and monitoring assured by the LAGs as a mandatory requirement from the European Commission. In addition, because the partnerships rely very much on their coordinators, their reliability and credibility are an important element of the partnership's overall legitimation.

One problem identified in the research findings is the impact of bureaucracy on the success or otherwise of the operation of the partnership. The constraints of deadlines and the need to operate quickly to bring forward projects, strategies and to secure funding are often onerous and cumbersome. For the LAG Argyll and the Islands, bureaucracy is perceived by the project applicants as a lot of compliance monitoring and paperwork to do and the LAG

administrative structures are expending a lot of effort on this in their spare time as they do not have a fulltime job as LAG administrators. In Italy, an overall excess of bureaucracy slows down the activity of the LAGs which means essentially a lack of coordination in the circuit between the local, the regional and the national levels. This inadequacy has resulted in the creation of a bureaucratic model that manifests itself in the rigidity of the institutional instruments. This results in the long procedures for the disbursement of the funds and for the carrying out of the controls which, besides slowing down the activity of the LAGs, it obscures the image in the eyes of the beneficiaries.

Other negative factors are the short time perspective of the programming periods and the limited financial resources available for the projects. Thus, even if they are project-oriented in the sense they see their main function as the delivery of their LDS, they have the objective of becoming a real development agency, so that they can continue to operate at the end of the LEADER programming period with the aim of providing real technical assistance and consulting services to local businesses and institutions on various financing opportunities for the development of the area.

To answer the third question, studying the outcomes of the local partnership practice is considered in the literature as an important way of understanding partnership working.<sup>571</sup>

When the decision was made to explore the outcomes, the intention was to throw some light on their practice and role in rural development rather than carry out an impact study or any other form of evaluation. The evidence from the case studies shows a number of positive outcomes. First, the successful implementation of rural development projects. Second, the partnerships clearly enhance cooperation between the various sectoral actors and engage and mobilize the community. Finally, there is the creation and maintenance of employment, the creation and modernization of SMEs in an innovative way, the development of rural tourism and the promotion of local products.

In the UK, for instance, in the case of the LAG Argyll and the Islands, the interviewees claimed that the most important outcomes were job creation, the funding of new social enterprises, and infrastructure projects such as the investment in village halls and community buildings improvements. These buildings are very much multipurpose use and they are designed to be not just an area for people to gather but also for other activities

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<sup>571</sup> Gray, B. and Wood, D. J. (1991).

such as sport, meeting rooms, lecture rooms, day and evening classes, adult learning, clubs for the younger people and lunch or afternoon tea clubs for the older people.

The large geographical area has enabled the CWWW LAG to develop a wide and diverse range of interventions within the culture and heritage area. It has created a new understanding of the value of wildlife tourism in the local economy and has encouraged the formation of new partnerships such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Yorkshire Water to promote and coordinate development together. The LDS has also given support and advice to business, created new employment and encouraged capital investments in wildlife reserves and accommodation.

This is also demonstrated in the case of the Delta Po Park which became an eco-tourist destination for bird-watching with relevance at international level and in the case of the Village Hotel in the historic centre of the municipality of Specchia within the area of the LAG capo Santa Maria di Leuca. With the Delta 2000 LAG 's intervention the links between economic operators and the population to the territory were strengthened. The village hotel project of the LAG Capo Santa Maria di Leuca represented an innovative intervention model both in terms of the recovery of the abandoned old town, aimed at tourists and in terms of rural tourism.

These development initiatives are followed by other specific business-oriented issues such as the promotion of local products, diversification of the agricultural activities, rural tourism and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Competences and knowledge are shared and pooled as a basic resource supporting the action for development as a whole. In this context, the partnership contributes to the resolution of a number of problems and issues that were seen to represent real obstacles to development in each area such as individualism, the inadequacy of top-down views, and the lack of an integrated vision of development. By allowing the development of a broad vision of problems and issues the partnership facilitates the definition of commonly agreed actions which are adapted to local needs and increases local capacity and interaction between actors and the development of alliances at sector and territorial level.

Moreover, the operation of the LAGs has brought an awareness of valuable local resources, increased awareness of sources of funding and generated the recognition of key people who are prepared to take an initiative if local decision-making processes are adequate for the task.

Concerning social exclusion issues, the analysis has confirmed that although it is a common problem in all the case studies, little attention has been paid toward reaching the most vulnerable sectors of local society (women, young people, the elderly, and the disabled) both from their presence in the partnerships and the funding of projects in this field. Encouraging their involvement in the appropriate forums would help to define the objectives of the partnership more comprehensively and would be more in line with the idea of integrated and participatory development.

The observed outcomes emphasize and confirm the need for a partnership operation at local level which has to be as open and flexible as possible and ready to take an active and useful part in the preparation and implementation of development actions.

In terms of delivering rural development, the case studies have shown that the partnership operation:

- helps in the preparation and determination of the local development strategy;
- enhances the capacity to obtain funding;
- develops an opening of the rural development responsibility to a greater range of actors and encourages local actors to become involved.

Therefore, partnership operation for the development of rural area can be considered as following:

- it is an acknowledged approach by rural development actors;
- it supports and integrates existing organizational and institutional structures in rural areas;
- it acknowledges the variety in culture and competence between rural development actors;
- it allows flexibility in the involvement of actors such that the appropriate actors are mobilized for each specific issue.

But its operation may be challenged by:

- the slowness of the process in producing local rural development outcomes;
- bureaucracy, deadlines and insufficient funding within the local rural area;

Finally, in terms of building a capacity to act in partnership, the case studies have revealed that the process of local partnership operation in rural areas develops:

- local coalitions;

- a broader vision of local needs and issues;
- a collective commitment towards the development of the local area;
- a greater credibility of local action from both within the local area and also from the outside;
- greater trust among actors;
- new impetus for action in the local area.

Furthermore, through the involvement of a wide range of local interests, they inject a certain dynamism to get ideas off the ground and make them happen and can be considered as a platform for the sharing of know-how and skills among the partners and endow local actors with a stronger capacity building at local level.

To conclude, the interview findings indicate that the local partnership approach has provided those initial expected benefits of wider participation, greater reciprocity between rural development actors, and an increase in local capacity for development actions. In addition, the present research has also revealed that the local partnership practice is a useful means of providing a diagnosis of local activism and a stimulus to the participation of new and supporting actors.

### **7.3 Empirical and theoretical contribution and implications of the findings**

The success of LEADER LAGs in the implementation of their LDSs largely depends on their ability to produce an added value that extends far beyond what may be expected from the arithmetic sum of their outcomes in term of results achieved and funds that have been spent. The vast literature on this subject clearly illustrates how there has been a genuine added value in the process of local endogenous development as partnership are recognized as an effective instrument for introducing new positive orientations and self-confidence among local actors.

Even the most recent Guidelines on LEADER issued by the European Commission provides a consistent definition of this: *'The assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD refers to the benefits that are obtained as a result of the proper application of the LEADER method, compared to those benefits, which would have been obtained without applying this*

*method*'.<sup>572</sup> The quality with which this approach is applied therefore determines the intensity of added value that can be produced. Moreover, the European Court of Auditors in its special report claims that '*The potential added value of the Leader approach is not solely in the results and impacts of the physical outputs (the projects implemented with the Leader grants). The community involvement achieved through the bottom-up approach can also lead to less tangible impacts, such as 'capacity-building' and 'empowering the local population*'.<sup>573</sup>

Several methodological guidelines explain the evaluation of the added value of LEADER approach breaking the method in many parts, corresponding to each of the seven key principles of the LEADER approach:

- 1) Area-based local development strategies;
- 2) Bottom-up approach;
- 3) Public-private partnership – LAG;
- 4) Innovative character of actions;
- 5) Linkage between actions (integrated and multi-sectoral approach);
- 6) Decentralized management and financial support
- 7) Networking and cooperation at local, regional, national and European level.

Analysing the application of the LEADER approach from the perspective of all the seven key principles will provide the full picture of how it has been applied.<sup>574</sup>

Through the *area-based approach* which fosters an integrated rural development through an efficient use of local resources, the programme becomes more accessible and flexible at local level, by enhancing its identity. Here local people and firms have the opportunity to improve their welfare as well as the valorisation of the local natural and cultural resources. LAGs have to transform their needs into local targets when elaborating and implementing their LDSs. The application of the area-based principle in the LEADER approach relies on a local partnership which includes individuals and organisations with a great knowledge of the

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<sup>572</sup> The European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2017) *Guidelines. Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD*. Brussels: European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit C.4, page 16

<sup>573</sup> European Court of Auditors (2010) 'Implementation of the Leader approach for rural development', *Special report*, no. 5. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, page 50.

<sup>574</sup> The European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2017).



area. This is further supported by the working of the LAG animators and initiators within the communities which is essentially vital. The presence of sufficient numbers of these individuals makes the bottom-up LAG dynamic work. This arrangement gives significant advantage to the partnership over the local authorities working alone in the same territory. *'This advantage relates to the partnership's ability to coordinate, to foster cooperation rather than conflicts, to pool resources, to operate informally through local networks, to experiment and innovate, to attract other sources of funds'*.<sup>575</sup>

The *bottom – up* principle reaches more people and fosters activities and resources for animation and capacity building for the development activities at local level.

The main benefits of LAGs working consist of taking and widening the range of project implementation and beneficiaries and ensuring funding for project ideas. LAGs are reported to have mobilised small actors and projects and strengthened the civil society in the area from a broader range of economic and social interest groups to increase enthusiasm and commitment, capacity building and social capital creation.

Participation may take at the elaboration and during the LDS implementation as well at its conclusions and can be assured directly or through representatives of collective interests. Adopting the bottom-up approach implies empowerment at the local level and can bring flexibility and a higher consensus at local level.

Concerning the added value of *public-private partnerships (e.g. LAGs) working*, it has to be assessed in terms of how they can help to identify local needs and to harmonise different interests. In the most dynamic rural context in which different development processes have already been initiated, the rural partnerships tend to reinforce the institutional context as they contribute to the development of local democracy. The LAG performance both in terms of efficacy and democratically will determine their ability to provide results in the MLG system.

The analysis of the case studies in two different countries confirms that rural partnerships contribute to local development in different forms such as new processes diffused at local level for the reconstruction of the social fabric, the adoption of an integrated approach and the development of local democracy. They represent a new base for involving the local people and for the establishment of new form of cooperation between the public and the

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<sup>575</sup> Moseley, M. J. (2002b), page 166.

private actors. The shift to a rural development strategy at territorial level brought to a new development model based on the assumption that people working at the local level know better how to face the problems within their areas and the endogenous potential they have.<sup>576</sup> This procedure concerns also the consolidation of the relationships between the regional administration and that one of the local bodies and it also improves the ability of various actors to fit policies to local specificities and to allocate financial resources on specific projects.

The role of the rural partnership is therefore based on the assumptions they are a key instrument for decentralized development programmes such as LEADER and that local institutions are encouraged to play a more proactive role in the management of the opportunities offered by public policies.

*'The understanding is that people in LEADER territories should participate in the design of development activity with themselves as beneficiaries...LEADER creates new spaces for rural development. LEADER territories are newly inscribed and do not conform to local authority boundaries which in the conventional view of representative democracy, are the legitimate areas for representing the aspirations of people and in which to spend public money to address those aspirations'.*<sup>577</sup>

In the contexts of the case studies which are characterized by a poor performance of the economic sectors and an isolation from the external processes, the role of the rural partnership appeared to be as an effective instrument for introducing the *Innovative character of the actions* as new positive orientation and new forms of integration among the local actors and for supporting the valorisation of local resources. The evidence is given by the implementation of innovative projects in traditional sectors, the mobilization of external funds and the professional competence for rural development. LEADER can create new spaces for rural development to enable social groups to take part in local development initiatives at economic and social level and open up opportunities for different voices to be heard.

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<sup>576</sup> Schucksmith, M. (2010) 'Disintegrated rural development? Neo-endogenous rural development, planning and place – shaping in diffused power context', *Sociologia Ruralis* Vol. 50(1), pp. 1-14.

<sup>577</sup> Halfacree, K., Kovách I. and Woodward, R. (2002) *Leadership and Local Power in European Rural Development*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, page 71.

Concerning the *Linkage between actions (integrated and multi-sectoral approach)*, the added value can be assessed in better coordination within and between administrations as well as important sources and results.

The main objective is to coordinate the different approaches, which are predominant in rural development policies to ensure they are not implemented in opposition to one another. Innovative activities can be packaged in local development strategies (e.g. rural tourism, manufacture, ICT). Some effects of the rural partnership operation are visible at the local level in terms of direct social and economic benefits. The sectors concern the valorisation and protection of the natural environment and the cultural heritage which are often not recognized as a common resource as well as different forms of economic and social support initiatives for the rural population with the aim to increase local incomes and create or maintain job opportunities by introducing new forms of economic activities to decrease the outmigration of young people and to improve the services available to the rural population for rural areas.

In terms of *Decentralised management and financing*, the national and regional programmes makers allow the adaptation of activities to the needs of the area. In some countries, the LEADER approach played a particular role in this respect under strong influence of the opportunities provided by the EU Structural Funds. Delegating part of the decision-making and management of the funds to the LAGs, gives them the autonomy for allocating financial resources to activities in accordance with local needs and the opportunity to adapt their LDSs to changing needs.

In terms of *networking and cooperation* the local partnership working develops coalitions at local levels, a broader vision of local needs and issues, a collective commitment for the development of the rural area, a greater credibility from both within the local area and from the outside, a great sense of trust between actors and an integrated strategy to be implemented. Trust means also a friendly atmosphere between local actors and administrators which enables to maintain interaction networks at informal level in the addition to the formal and administrative relationships. Here, the partnerships get the resources required to operate within their LEADER approach to implement their local development strategies and the local actors have the competence and the experience of working through a fluid policy of interactions.

Therefore, it can be said that LEADER is a territorial approach *'by and for the local population and a means to design and implement strategies and actions in rural areas from a bottom-up perspective. It also stimulates the decision-making processes in local socio-economic development which were previously controlled almost exclusively by public actors'*.<sup>578</sup> In this context, LAGs, through their partnerships, may play a strategic role for the success of the development strategies since through their competences they are more able to identify solutions to the various problems of the rural areas. In theory, they are open to citizens allowing them to participate in contributing to the diagnosis of problems and needs and in the design of the relevant development strategy.

The LEADER approach also gives the local actors the opportunity to elaborate joint strategies for their territories and for their economic activities. It improves their capacity to negotiate common interests and it brings recognition to local partnership that are able to manage development strategies at local level. This highlights the added value of the LAGs that flows from the bottom-up and partnership approach to the local development process of the areas they serve than in the conventional way in terms of enhanced local participation and ownership of the development activities.

*'In this sense, LEADER, with its devolution of decision-making, represents significant progress in the centralist facilitation of endogenous processes, perhaps because it enables alignment of the interests of sub-national territories and the European Commission. In terms of design and delivery at least, LEADER has a good claim to being a case of integrated rural development'*.<sup>579</sup>

In conclusion, this research has analysed the impact that the LAG level has in terms of local development improvements in the form of leverage, democratization and decision-making with a bottom-up approach. It has been shown that it would not be possible to implement local projects co-financed by the European Union and to achieve these results if the system were managed only at the national level. Rather, the LAGs and the national level such as the ministries have to be considered interdependent where the types of added value that the

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<sup>578</sup> Esparcia, J., Ecribano, J. and Serrano J. (2015) 'From development to power relations and territorial governance: Increasing the leadership role of LEADER local action Groups in Spain', *Journal of rural studies*, Vol. 42(1), page 30.

<sup>579</sup> High, C. and Nemes, G. (2007) 'Social learning in LEADER: Exogenous, Endogenous and Hybrid Evaluation in Rural Development', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 47(2), page 103.

LEADER approach provides at the LAG level could not have been provided by the ministries.<sup>580</sup>

This is also confirmed by Hooghe and Marks who state that the advantage of MLG is scale flexibility where every governance level engages in the activities that are optimally suited to its skills.<sup>581</sup> The reduced distance costs between project holders and the central level which derives from the inclusion of the LAGs can be considered as the shorter workflow that the MLG system provides to the beneficiaries of the projects.

Therefore, the MLG theory can be considered appropriate as it incorporates the supra-national, national and sub-national levels and LEADER presents a governance arrangement which also includes the European, national and local level.

In this thesis, the policy area has been focused in the rural development policy and more precisely in the LEADER approach in order to provide an in-depth investigation of the UK and Italian governance arrangements to which LEADER is embedded.

To find an answer to the main research questions, I first analysed the intention of the European level when devising the rural development policy, then at the actual implementation in the UK and in Italy. With the help of the documentary research, I found that the EU level intention when formulating the rural development policy was to identify an approach to be able to take account of the local solutions for local problems.

MLG was the first concept to thoroughly examine the position of the LAGs in the EU polity. LAGs can be considered as new functional units that have been set up to deal with specific policy tasks and offer new opportunities to participate in EU development policies in order to receive additional resources. In these units it is not just the public administrations that are involved but also economic and social partners and local residents. *'To neglect the inclusion of the local level, as some of the 'grand theories' of European integration do, leads to the exclusion of the most important level of governance within the EU. The local level is vital for the EU for several reasons. And not just because local public administrations implement EU legislation and policies. Being the lowest functional level of the EU, it is the closest to the people and has the potential to make the EU visible to the people. It is at local level that local*

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<sup>580</sup> Thuesen, A. and Nielsen, N. (2014) 'Territorial perspective on EU's LEADER approach in Denmark: the added value of community-led local development of rural and coastal areas in a multi-level governance settings', *European Countryside*, Vol. 6(4), page 322.

<sup>581</sup> Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003).

*residents have, to some extent, access to and participate in policy-making*'.<sup>582</sup> In this context, local partnerships tend to supplement and not duplicate the work of the local authorities with whom they should be encouraged to have a good working relationship. Their working is important in the implementation of EU policies as the bottom-up approach has allowed local level authorities some policy space to innovate and develop new partnerships across sectors and institutional boundaries.

The case studies experiences with LEADER implementation have shown that given the diversity of rural areas, LDSs are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at the local level. Therefore, added value is seen in the LEADER implementation as it leads to improved governance.

LEADER can create a series of tensions both in a horizontal sense, between territories and political and local administrative structures and in a vertical sense, between local and extra-local forces, be they regional, national or European.<sup>583</sup> In the context of the rural development processes, MLG can influence the style of interaction between different levels of institutions, the degree of autonomy of the local partnership and the administrative procedures to be applied.<sup>584</sup>

In theory, under MLG, the role of the state shifts from one of control to one of coordination, using new mechanism to guide a plurality of network actors.<sup>585</sup>

*'The central administrative system is characterised in terms of formal institutions: written rules, established procedures and formally derived and explicitly stated aims with an underlying logic that is modernist and technocratic and is expressed through bureaucratic control*'.<sup>586</sup> The local system is more likely connected on bottom-up processes. Its elements comprise local economic, political and social actors and social networks. They are embedded

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<sup>582</sup> Kull, M. (2009), page 9.

<sup>583</sup> Buller, H. (2000) 'Re-creating rural territories: LEADER in France', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40(2), pp. 190-199.

<sup>584</sup> Grieve, J., Lukesch, R., Weinspach, U., Fernandes, P., Brakalova, M., Cristiano, S., Geissendorfer, M., Nemes, G., O'Gready, S., Sepúlveda, R., Pfefferkorn, W., Pollermann, K., Pylkkänen, P., Ricci, C. and Slee, B. (2011), 'Capturing impacts of leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas', paper prepared for the 122nd EAAE seminar 'Evidence-based agricultural and rural policy making: methodological and empirical challenges of policy evaluation'. Ancona, 17-18 February 2011.

<sup>585</sup> Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (1999).

<sup>586</sup> High, C. and Nemes, G. (2007).

and oriented towards keeping the processes and benefits of development under local control.

According to Yang et al.,<sup>587</sup> central government remains influential as it dominates in the policy process design and the procedural enforcements and checks. This influence is perceived as largely negative with increasing bureaucracy which can also influence the behaviour of LAGs and beneficiaries, including their motivation to participate from fear of potential financial repercussions. Moreover, local actors feel that despite the fact that the regulative role of the national level may come to guarantee accountability and transparency, at the same time they run against the wider EU level intention of bottom-up approach and the spirit of LEADER. Therefore, what initially was intended as something to guarantee democracy and participatory decision-making could become a hindrance to the normal everyday operation of LAGs.

*'The future of rural policy in general and LEADER-type activities in particular must also in the future continue to be built on responsible people who have the know-how and the (local) knowledge to implement development projects, people that make LEADER already a success in the past'.<sup>588</sup>*

Future programmes must take into consideration that the empowerment of the partnership and the capacity-building needs a long-term process and that sustainable benefits are gradually achieved after many years. Due to this limit, very few partnerships emerge from the grassroots. Most of them are initiated often by the public sector in response to competitive funding programmes. Here, the public sector acts as a lead funder and organizer by setting the rules of the game and determining the type of partners, the working and the evaluation procedures and providing the office space and administrative support.

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<sup>587</sup> Yang, A., Rounsevell, M., Haggett, C. and Wilson, R. (2015) 'Recentralisation through regionalism in the implementation of Rural Development Policy in Scotland', *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, Vol. 58(9), pp. 1666-1689.

<sup>588</sup> Kull, M. (2013a) 'Community Led Local Development Solutions to changing Socio-economic realities in rural Europe', paper delivered at the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture. Tallinn, 3 May 2013.

#### 7.4 Some policy recommendations and suggestions for future research

The policy recommendations that emerge from the previous analysis deal with the ways to promote the coordination of policies and funds at the local level. *'These levels of coordination seem to be much more important than the EU or the national levels and seem to work even in presence of strong difficulties at EU or national level'*.<sup>589</sup> So, for the future, an important issue for reflection should deal with the capacity to foster learning processes at the local level with the aim to coordinate the design of integrated development strategies with public policies through support provided by highly specialized expertise and which goes beyond the menu of EU eligible interventions.

In terms of outcomes they should be also evaluated according to new forms of relationships among the institutional and socio-economic actors and the combination of policy instruments. Therefore, the evaluation of the LEADER approach interventions in terms of time spent to implement the LDS, the capacity of spending funds and the number of funded projects is not sufficient. In this case the evaluation analysis should be carried out relating to the LEADER approach specificities, and the results and impacts deriving from the implementation of the funded interventions. More specifically, the processes such as the participation and the structural changes of the socio-economic improvement of the intervention area, can be evaluated by using different tools such as measuring the relationships and flow between the actors, face-to face interviews, focus groups and case studies that will allow a contextualisation of the implementation of the development strategy.

Concerning the recommendations for future research, the key focus should be on how partnerships work and how they might generate added value in rural development:

1. Since local partnership operation in rural development is mainly dominated by the public sector, future research could be directed to the role of the private sector within local partnership and more specifically how it could be more involved and take greater responsibility in the rural development process. With the exception of the LAG Capo Santa Maria di Leuca, I found that only rarely does the private sector play a major role in the operation of the partnership as distinct from its role as project applicant and beneficiary;

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<sup>589</sup> Bolli, M., Mantino F. and Zanetti B. (2008), page 13.



2. Since the analysis has confirmed that the issues of social exclusion are the themes directly addressed in the LDSs as territorial problems (ageing population, youth unemployment) and it emerged that little attention has been paid toward reaching the most vulnerable sectors of local society (women, young people, the elderly, and the disabled), future research could be directed on how local partnership might more fully involve socially excluded people both in the elaboration and implementation of the local development strategy and as project beneficiaries;
3. Research on the experience of other spontaneous bottom-up partnerships would be useful with the aim to understand if they are as capable as the LAG partnerships that have been established in response to the LEADER initiative.

The rural focus of my research also poses questions on how the research findings may differ if it were conducted in urban or fisheries areas where the LEADER approach has been extended under the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in the EU 2014-2020 programming period.<sup>590</sup>

Finally, following the decision of the UK to leave the EU (BREXIT) through the referendum held in June 2016, the Common Agricultural Policy will no longer apply and EU rural development funding and also the LEADER approach will disappear. In this context, a key question for future research is how the needs of UK rural communities could be supported in order to give them the opportunity to preserve and build on the benefits of the LEADER initiatives. The LEADER approach may indeed not be replaced by national measures and there could be also less support overall the rural economy. *'Some rural communities already have the skills, assets, networks and institutional capacity to compete strongly. At the same time, without the necessary resources of support, rural communities that have not yet developed these capacities and networks may become impoverished, losing services and infrastructure, and so become less able to reach their full potential'*.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the ERDF, the ESF, the CF, the EARFD and the EMFF and laying down general provisions on the ERDF, the ESF, the CF and the EMFF and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 320–469.

<sup>591</sup> Garrod G., Liddon A., Phillipson J., Rowe F., Shortall, S. and Shucksmith, M. (2017) *After Brexit: 10 Key questions for rural policy*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Center for Rural economy.

## Appendix

### Survey questionnaire for LAGs/partnerships

#### A. Emergence of the LAG/partnership

*The initiation of the partnerships might have been inspired by a local understanding of local development – ‘bottom-up initiation – or be imposed from above, perhaps just to take advantage of public funding – top down initiation.*

**1. When was the partnership formed?**

**2. Why was the partnership initiated?**

- *To strengthen existing cooperation networks*
- *To involve local community*
- *To make new links*
- *To pool resources*
- *To secure access to funding*
- *To address common needs and problems*
- *To jointly implement projects*
- *Other (please specify)*

**3. Which were the expectations and perceptions on partnership working at the time of the initiation?**

**4. At the beginning, for how long was the partnership intended to operate?**

**5. Which were the key influences on the emergence and development of the partnership?**

- *Key individuals*
- *Local community*
- *Voluntary-sector organizations*
- *Private-sector organizations*
- *Local government*
- *Regional policies*
- *National policies*
- *European policies*
- *Other (please specify)*

**6. Which was the influence of local context and early origins of the partnership?**

**7. What kind of fears and resistance the idea of partnership and a group of promoters had emerged from a specific context, and how the features of that context subsequently influenced events?**

#### B. Partners

**8. Who are the members of the partnership?**

*Please list the partners, indicate the type of organization (e.g. local government unit, sub-regional government unit, private sectors, NGOs, private individuals) and give the dates of the start/finish of their membership.*

**9. The Organization structure of the partnership and the decision-making processes.**

*A detailed reconstruction of the internal organization of the partnerships would provide insight into partnership decisions and suggest what kind of organization is best suited for pursuing specific goals.*

**10. What are the main roles and contributions of the individual partners?**

- *Representation of local community*
- *Information/expertise*
- *Strategic planning*
- *Implementation*
- *Administrative support*
- *Office equipment*
- *Staffing*
- *Funding*
- *Other (please specify)*

**11. Duration of partnerships**

*The partners should have been operating for a sufficient time to have undertaken several development actions and to have achieved some results.*

**C. Objectives of the rural development strategy**

**12. What are the main objectives of the partnership?**

- *To promote rural integrated and sustainable development*
- *To create or maintain employment opportunities*
- *To improve welfare in the area*
- *To preserve or enhance the environment*
- *To preserve or enhance cultural heritage*
- *To initiate and implement development initiatives/projects*
- *Reinforcement of local co-operation links*
- *To tackle common problems*
- *To promote community involvement/participation*
- *To promote/consolidate cultural/territorial identity of the area*
- *To promote cooperation and association*
- *To tackle social exclusion*
- *To promote local products*
- *To promote local economic diversification*
- *To provide training and education*
- *To participate in rural development networks*
- *To improve local know-how and competence*
- *To promote rural tourism*
- *To promote and develop local business*
- *To improve the quality of life in the area*

**13. What spatial area is the partnership relating to?**

**14. Which were the steps in defining the rural development aims and objectives in partnership?**

**15. Which was the strategy used for implementing the objectives and projects?**

## 16. Advantage and limits of the methods used

### D. Organization

17. How many people are currently working for the partnership?

18. What responsibilities and decisions are delegated to the employees of the partnership?

19. What is the approximate budget of the partnership?

20. How is the partnership organized in terms of meeting, boards, committees, etc.?

21. What are the main funding sources of the partnership? (*e.g. donation, grant, fees, ...*)

### E. Operation

22. What are the main activities of the partnerships?

- *Dissemination of information*
- *Mobilizing the local community*
- *Exchange/coordination between local partners*
- *Lobbying*
- *Providing funding for activities /projects*
- *Implementation of projects*
- *Delivery of service*
- *Other (please specify)*

23. How does the local population get involved in the partnership?

- *Special community events*
- *Information gathering surveys/questionnaires*
- *Consultation exercises*
- *Public meetings*
- *Planning workshops*
- *Implementation of project/measures*
- *Evaluations/evaluative surveys*
- *Through locally elected political representatives*
- *Through other key individuals*
- *Through community groups*
- *Other*

24. How does the partnership in rural areas relate to local democratic institutions, other organizations (state, private and voluntary and local groups in terms of influence and accountability?)

### F. Achievements

25. What are the key outputs of the partnership to date?

- *Establishment of information networks*
- *Reinforcement of cooperation links*
- *Community involvement/mobilization*
- *Initiation of development projects*
- *Other process output*
- *Employment creation and consolidation*
- *Business creation or modernization*

- *Infrastructure and facility provision*
- *Development of rural tourism*
- *Too early to say*

**26. Which of the objectives of the partnership have been most successfully achieved?**

- *To promote rural integrated and sustainable development*
- *To maintain population*
- *To create or maintain employment opportunities*
- *To improve welfare in the area*
- *To preserve or enhance the environment*
- *To preserve or enhance cultural heritage*
- *To initiate and implement development initiatives/projects*
- *To constitute information sites at the local level*
- *Reinforcement of local co-operation links*
- *To tackle common problems*
- *To promote community involvement/participation*
- *To promote/consolidate cultural/territorial identity of the area*
- *To promote cooperation and association*
- *To tackle social exclusion*
- *To promote local products*
- *To promote local economic diversification*
- *To provide training and education*
- *To participate in rural development networks*
- *To improve local know-how and competence*
- *To promote rural tourism*
- *To promote and develop local business*
- *To improve the quality of life in the area*

**27. What types of impact the partnerships are delivering in the various economic, environmental, political and sociocultural contexts and on rural development in general?**

**28. Has the partnership brought about any broader changes within its local area or within the partnership?**

**G. Assessments/reflections**

**29. What are the main key strengths opportunities of your partnership?**

- *Responsive, proactive local authorities willing and able to initiate and lead new partnerships in their area*
- *Community involvement and commitment*
- *Valuable local resources, local know-how, tradition, identity (economic potential of the area)*
- *Existing associative structures*
- *Other favourable contextual aspects*
- *Presence of key people (leaders, managers) strongly motivated and action-oriented, with a particular tendency toward cooperation and networking*
- *Availability of funding resources from external programmes (European, national, regional)*
- *Public-private initiative willing to invest*
- *Composition and characteristic of management team*
- *Consensus within the partnership (decision reached by agreement)*
- *Transparency of decision-making processes*

- *Successful implementation of funding programmes via specific projects*

### **30. What are the main key weaknesses of your partnership?**

- *Varying degrees of clarity regarding the specific purposes and direction of the partnership*
- *Varying degrees of trust and commitment by and between partners*
- *Limited community involvement in the partnerships themselves*
- *Excessively bureaucrat funding processes, leading to delays and frustration*
- *Limited strategic, interacted planning and development*
- *Short-term funding programmes leading to uncertainty over the future of the partnership's work*
- *Lack of motivation among local people for becoming involved*
- *Local political conflicts*
- *Lack of skilled human resources*
- *External constraints*
- *Time constraints*
- *Other input difficulties*
- *Lack of agreement (regarding objectives, strategies, projects to fund) between partner*
- *Inadequate planning/strategies develop by the partnership to meet the needs of the area*
- *Other procedural difficulties*

### **31. What are the main strengths and opportunities which contributes to the success of the partnership?**

- *Less bureaucracy*
- *More autonomy and responsibility at the local level*
- *More community involvement*
- *Availability and continuity of funds*
- *More time to implement programmes*
- *To include new partners within the partnership*
- *Better coordination with local and regional bodies*
- *Better information and monitoring systems*
- *Better dissemination of information to the community*
- *More technical support and training*
- *No changes are needed*

### **32. Effects at local level**

### **33. Elements of success and failure**

### **34. What are, in practice, the processes involved in and the outcomes associated with your partnership in terms of job created, business supported, service provided, etc.?**

## **H. General conclusions**

### **35. What key conclusions do we draw about the emergence, operation and performance of local partnerships?**

### **36. How and how well do local partnerships add value to the economic, social, cultural, political and environmental development of the areas that they serve?**

- *Promotion of the preconditions for rural development (e.g. diffusion of new ideas, increased confidence of the local community, etc.)*
- *Introduction of an integrated approach to rural development (e.g. implementation of innovative projects in traditional sectors, mobilization of external resources for local development, etc.)*
- *Reinforcement of the institutional context (constitution of a new independent base for involving; the local community, introduction of new forms of cooperation between public and private actors, initiatives for community capacity building and development of local democracy)*
- *Social and economic benefits (protecting the natural environment, maintaining the rural population, improving the services available to the rural population, introducing new forms of economic activities, creating new job opportunities)*

### **37. Confidentially:**

- *Your level of representation expected and achieved.*
- *Your role expected and played as partner.*
- *Your opinion on local partnership working after few years of practice*

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