

Introduction

What is LEADER?

'LEADER' is a European Union initiative for assisting rural communities to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in their local area. LEADER is now part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), which is administered by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In the regions, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have the responsibility for delivering the RDPE, and therefore the LEADER initiative.

Since its launch in 1991 LEADER¹ has provided rural communities in the EU with the resources to play an active role in shaping their own future. Information gained from evaluations and rural stakeholders indicates that the LEADER approach worked well in quite different situations and types of areas.

Through LEADER EU rural policy-making has adapted well to the extreme diversity of rural areas' needs in Europe. For these reasons, it has now become an integral part of European rural development policy. For the 2007-13 programming period LEADER will no longer be a separate programme but will be integrated ('mainstreamed') in to all national/regional Rural Development Programmes. New possibilities have been opened for the LEADER approach to be applied on a far wider scale and across a much broader range of rural development activities than before.

LEADER has proven an effective tool to regenerate European rural areas through:

- Engaging communities in developing their own plans for the future
- Generating a bottom-up, participative approach to solving local issues and for developing new business and social opportunities
- Improving local capacity and governance

The EU Commission's proposed roles for the LEADER 2007-2013 programming period are:

- Endogenous local development – This is also a key role in the England Programme.
- Tapping into local resources for the benefit of rural development; local groups will have better knowledge of the requirements and they will have a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the projects.
- Improving governance – It may be the case that many Local Action Groups are built on existing governance arrangements, but in new areas with no appropriate existing partnerships/governance in place, this will be a key initial priority.
- Encouraging innovation –Some previously selected LEADER areas could have long standing problems which other policies have failed to adequately address and therefore require innovative approaches (perhaps taking best practice from elsewhere). Innovation will be about finding new solutions to an area's needs and may include a range of activities, some business led and some public service led.

¹ LEADER stands for "Liaison Entre Actions pour le Développement de l'Economie Rural" (« Linkages between rural economic actions and activities)

LEADER is a locally based bottom-up approach that provides opportunities for local communities to identify their needs and provide funding for projects that contribute towards:

- Making agriculture and forestry more competitive and sustainable
- Enhancing the environment and countryside
- Enhancing opportunity in rural areas

The LEADER approach reinforces the value of partnership working by bringing together in one forum, organisations and individuals who have an interest in encouraging and supporting economic development.

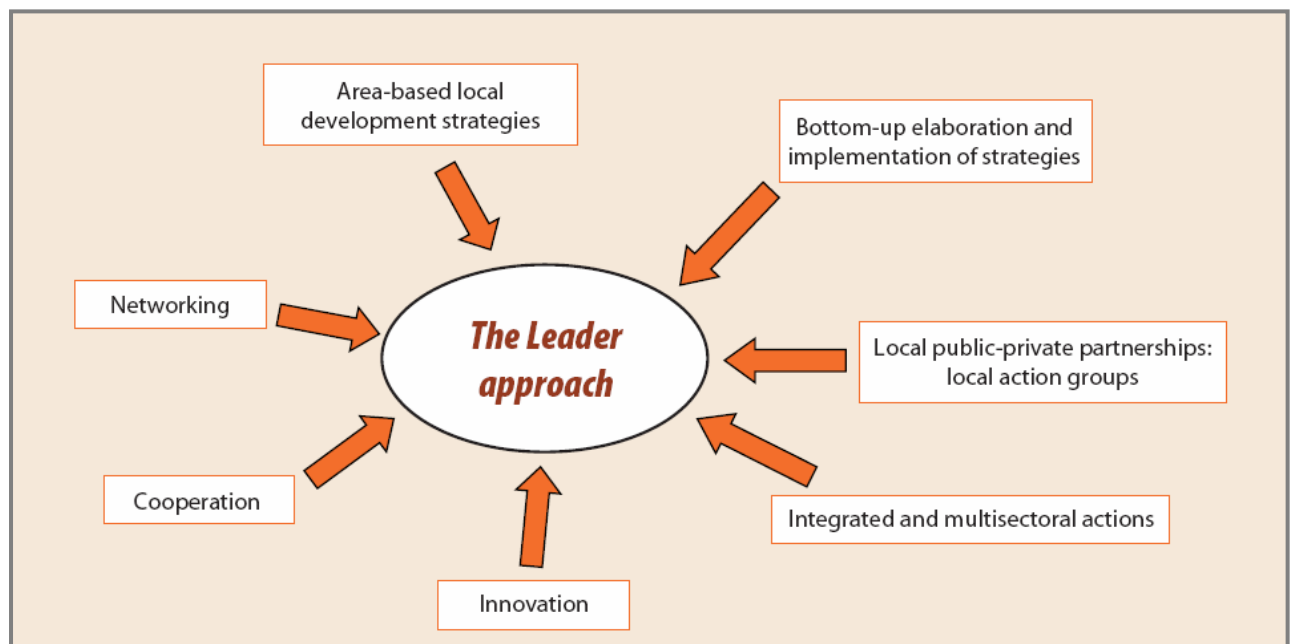


Figure 1 Illustrates the wider EU :LEADER approach for 2007-2013

Source: EU Commission "The Leader Approach 2006"

To understand more about the LEADER approach used in the Local Development Strategy, there is a useful European Commission document called "The LEADER approach - A Basic Guide", which is available to download at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/pdf/factsheet_en.pdf

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