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This book is the outcome of reflection on past observations, previous and ongoing studies, discussion with scholars and international experts. It provides a critical picture of the LEADER approach, with special attention to the local level and to the characteristics in which the transition from a territorial to a visionary approach clearly emerges. A logical framework is proposed, summing up and comparing different and opposing approaches to LEADER emerging from the scientific debate, relevant European cases and field research.

The study reconstructs the main features, taking into account the style and planning approach, the aims of a local project, the interpretation of innovation, of local resources, and the role of local actors. These characteristics can reveal the approach adopted at the local level and can therefore be seen as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices. Our assumption is that the LEADER method should move in the direction of the visionary approach in order to achieve full implementation especially on a local scale.

PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT 5

Marilena Labianca

Towards a Visionary Approach for rural areas. From the key features to planning the future of LEADER

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by
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UNIVERSITÀ DEL SALENTO

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Contents

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Introduction

In the latest programming cycles, rural development policy has undergone an important shift, moving from a purely sectorial and productivist approach to an integrated, territorial one. Rural development policy under the common agricultural policy (CAP) is acquiring particular importance and effectiveness in all European territories with the task of rediscovering the potential and capacity of the rural territories, in particular, more recently, of the inner peripheries.[1] As expressly argued by the original guide (EC, 2006) and widely recognized by the literature, LEADER has been indicated as a highly innovative approach within European rural development policy. As its name suggests, it should create, promote and support "Links between actions of rural development" basing its specific action especially on the human and social capital present in the territories. In fact it has been described as a sort of "laboratory for building local capabilities and for testing out new ways of meeting the needs of rural communities" (EC, 2006, p. 5).

Since its launch in 1991, LEADER in concomitance with CAP has evolved over time, together with the growing complexity of the agricultural sector. Its innovative strength, combined with the recognition of the diversity of European territories, has made it such an integral part of rural development policy that it has become a programme no longer separate but integrated ('mainstreamed') in particular during the recent

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[1] See The National Strategy for Inner Areas, Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico (2014).

programming cycle 2007-2013 in all national/regional rural development programmes. As indicated by the programme guide (EC, 2006) its action should not be limited to economic and sectoral aspects, but should broaden the social objectives (such as ageing population, service provision, or a lack of employment opportunities…) to include the improvement of the quality of life, by encouraging "rural territories to explore new ways to become or to remain competitive, to make the most of their assets and to overcome the challenges they may face" (EC, 2006, p. 5). From this point of view, recognizing the inevitable evolution of the role of agriculture, LEADER adopts a new conception of innovation. In this context, as Dargan and Shucksmith (2008, p. 275) argue, "innovations have moved from a linear view"of knowledge and solutions "towards a model in which innovation is conceived as a co-evolutionary learning process occurring in the social networks of an array of actors". In this sense the territorial context plays a central, strategic role within LEADER, and the social factors take on a crucial importance, so it becomes fundamental to understand the context in which innovation takes place. This includes internal potentiality, structures and dynamics of government and governance rather than exclusively standardized externalities and factors.

Therefore, as can be deduced from Dargan and Shucksmith (2008), innovation is no longer to be considered an extraordinary, external event disconnected from the territory, but should become daily practice intimately linked to the community from which it originates, due precisely to the role played by LEADER. In this sense and as extensively discussed in previous research (Labianca, 2016; Belliggiano et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2018a; Labianca et al., 2020), innovation cannot simply be based on mere technical and technological factors but should focus on the context in a broader sense, to avoid the risk of ineffectiveness of development projects.

By adopting this conception, the LEADER approach therefore looks at the territory in its complexity and uniqueness, focusing attention mainly on intangible components (Belliggiano et al., 2018; Labianca at al., 2020). In this perspective the territory isn't "simply a geographical extension of land or space within which a certain set of rules apply, or even as a

technical support base for productive activities" but rather "a space not only for production but also for social reproduction", in which the objectives must necessarily be defined starting from the bottom through a participatory, integrated (Labianca et al., 2020, p. 115), inclusionary and visionary approach. The intent of the shift from a sectoral to a more territorial approach of the LEADER approach is now widely recognized (among others Gkartzios and Scott, 2014; Cejudo and Labianca, 2017; Ray, 2001; Cejudo and Navarro, 2020; Dax, 2015).

In this book, based on the research experience conducted over these years, the criticalities and limits of this change are progressively addressed and discussed. The innovative character of LEADER needed to be better defined, because it could not simply concern processes, tools and modalities but had to foresee a more significant paradigm shift, to assume a visionary and strategic character. Regarding these last aspects, in this study it is believed that they can be directly mediated by the most recent planning practices and debates.

This monograph, which is the outcome of reflection on past observations, previous and current studies, discussion with scholars and international experts, seeks to provide a critical picture, both normative and constructive, of LEADER, with special attention to the local level, in view of the future programming, in order to better understand the LEADER approach through the examination of its main characteristics in which the transition from a territorial to a visionary approach clearly emerges. The assumption that guides this work, explained in the course of the different sections, it is based on a misunderstanding created especially on an operational level.

As will be discussed below in greater depth, in order to get a better understanding of the crucial and often contradictory aspects in the practice of LEADER, we will rely on various sources of information and inspiration: firstly, we will use the findings of previous research studies conducted with international collaboration (see Cejudo and Labianca, 2017; De Rubertis et al., 2015; 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2020; Labianca 2016; Labianca et al., 2016; 2020; Labianca and Navarro, 2019); secondly, we will select and reformulate results from significant studies carried out

in the international network by researchers working for years on this topic; thirdly, we will take as a reference point one of the best-known works by Healey (1997) and combine, integrate it by current and ongoing research and applications. In the end we will obtain a sort of litmus test to use on an operational and regulatory level for a possible interpretation of the rural development practices (Sections 5 and 6). On the basis of the considerations emerged, an attempt will be made to formulate a logical framework that allows to compare different and opposite approaches.

Two approaches of LEADER will be compared, the main characteristics that distinguish the two approaches: sectoral/traditional and visionary will be explained and can be taken as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale (Section 6).

A careful and critical analysis of the characteristics of the LEADER from a programmatic point of view (Sections 1 and 2) will lead to some significant experiences, first in the European context (Section 3) and then at local level (Section 4). This last section is both an application and the normative part regarding possible policy recommendations, here a regional case will be examined, which in the activity conducted, is both representative and significant at a national level. According to our argument, the litmus tests are the process and the style of planning adopted in the territories. Infact, this case, which has already been studied in previous research, will now be subjected to a critical rethinking using the interpretative tools developed in the present analysis, in order to formulate new policy suggestions.

On the other hand, in the course of this work, our review of the spatial planning literature has shown that the research by Healey (1997) is crucial to our study since it offers conceptual and methodological tools that at a certain point made us envisage a change of approach in LEADER, following a visionary approach.

Infact, as Healey (1997) argues, the impulse for the elaboration of a spatial strategy usually arises from particular institutional situations both internal and external. In our case LEADER generates a mobilization as well as a social and political incentive to do something about the issue. A

situation of change arises when one goes beyond the feeling that "something must be done" to obtain support for an organizational effort.

In particular there must be a situation of contradiction and conflict, which encourages people to recognize that they need collaborative planning processes in which to reflect on what they are doing and recognize the need to work with different people. All this makes processes and territories evolve (Ibid., p. 269). One of the critical resources at this stage is the ability to read the "cracks" through which new ideas can seep, to see the opportunities to do things differently, and be able to enlarge a "crack" into a real potential for change. And it is precisely in these circumstances that specific actors have the ability to recognize moments of opportunity and mobilize networks around the idea of involvement in the strategy process.

These actors are the LAGs under the LEADER approach. They are recognized as "activators", because they can play a crucial role in planning processes. They can arise from all kinds of institutional contexts and relationships, and their ability lies in being able to see and articulate possible strategies anchored to the territory. But they should have "the capacity for an acute sense of the relation between the structural dynamics of local economic, social and political relations and how these are manifest in what particular people in a place are bothered about". Inside the arenas of discussion "the initiators have to mobilise interest and engagement. This means thinking about who to get involved, where to meet and how to conduct discussion. These choices are critical, both in terms of the likely future support for, and ownership of, whatever emerges, and for whether the resultant mobilisation effort is of a corporatist or inclusionary nature" (Ibid., p. 270). Only a few actors carry responsibility for initial moves and actually are real activators, especially under the neo-endogenous approach.

In Healey's work, which is the result of a complex review of the planning literature, important aspects emerge that we have selected because we believe they can be applicable in rural development policies. In particular two different approaches must be distinguished, that is, one

characterized by potential democratic inclusion and the other that can strengthen the domination of a few powerful people.

The first refers to an "inductive ethics", in which the issue is to understand who the members of the community of stakeholders are and how they should obtain access to the arena so that their "points of view" can be appreciated and listened to, participating fully in the process.

The second idea recognizes a change in the "where" of the strategic discussion, providing for different arenas and times, in which case the discussion passes from a discursive "opening" to consolidation around consequent ideas, actions and values, generating the danger of a discursive closure towards the positions and problems raised earlier. Therefore what differentiates the quality of an inclusive approach is that the style and ethics of the context of the discussion enable stakeholder awareness to be promoted and supported throughout the process by focusing attention on all the requests raised by interested parties.

Regarding vision and consensus building, it is important to underline the shift from a rationalist, technological perspective to a social-constructivist one. The former was pervasive in planning and political practice and although it contains many ideas and principles, it is limited by its assumptions of instrumental rationality and objective science; the latter operates in the context of socially produced knowledge.

In the interactive perspective, strategies and policies are not the result of objective and technical processes, but are actively produced in social contexts. Interactive approaches that have slowly developed in the discussion of decision making, do however concern coordination mechanisms, social construction and articulation of strategies (Ibidem).

In the following paragraphs we will try to critically examine these assumptions more in depth, through an analysis of the most relevant literature, focusing on the basic elements of the LEADER approach.

This study therefore intends to make a critical review of the LEADER approach in the aftermath of the 2007-2013 programming cycle. The crucial role of this cycle made it such an integral part of rural development policy that it has become a programme that is no longer separate but integrated ('mainstream') in all national/regional rural development

programmes. Based on previous and current research, the key assumption of this study is that it is now over-simplistic to talk about the change from a sectoral productivist approach to a territorial one and that instead the LEADER method needs to undergo a visionary rethinking through a paradigm shift in planning and governance practices and styles.

According to our assumption, which will be explained in the course of the monograph, a misunderstanding has been created especially on an operational level, around the key features of the LEADER method, which has ended up in an over-simplification of processes and practices, making them ineffective on a local level and producing, re-producing rethoric about development.

This pressing invitation comes from Healey's work and reflections emerged on the field, which we re-propose since it is fully compatible with planning in a rural context, and which will provide valuable recommendations and tools for interpretation of processes above all on a local scale. As we will see later, this local scale is absolutely crucial from the operative point of view in LEADER.

Therefore, starting from the central idea of a change in approach, three stages will be outlined, each serving for the formulation of the following stage. This step-by-step process starts from a presentation and analysis of LEADER's main features and leads to the formulation of operational instruments and policy recommendations applicable above all on a local level. In fact, despite the clear specification on the programmatic level of the basic characteristics and principles of LEADER, contained in the main guides regularly published by the European Commission (which are also an important historical memory of its actual functioning, role, objectives and evolution over time), unfortunately, as we will show, they are only partly implemented or indeed assume a merely rhetorical value in terms of their application in the local context.

In the first part we will therefore try to present LEADER based largely on prior research, making a rapid survey of its development over time and identifying the key concepts revolving around the approach which often suffer oversimplification, especially that of innovation. We will then try to provide a critical reading of LEADER, through our review of the

literature, the previous research and the programmatic documents focusing on the key features in order to get a better understanding of the potentialities, limits and critical issues in the different practices, and will lastly devise a logical framework for a reading of practices and for self-assessment. In these stages and the subsequent ones, Healey's research will serve as a thread of continuity that will accompany us in the gradual development of our idea on the evolution of the LEADER approach, bringing out the main features and the styles of different planning approaches.

The critical reading of LEADER's key features will be conducted firstly from the programmatic point of view and then through the analysis of practices. An analysis will be made of international practices, trying to show their limits and critical aspects. A rapid survey will be made of some of the comparative international research by leading scholars who have made a major contribution in analysis and assessment of the practices during the 2007-2013 programming cycle (such as Dax et al., 2016; Belliggiano et al., 2020; Lacquement and Chevalier, 2016; Pylkkänen et al., 2015; Navarro et al., 2020), a pivotal cycle for the role assigned to Leader. These studies have significant features in common, essentially related to the difficulties of adapting and implementing LEADER on a local level.

While from the programmatic point of view the interpretation of the key features is clear, it is on the local level that problems emerge. There are persistent critical aspects in the style and processes of governance and planning adopted. What emerges is a traditional productivist approach which has revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale and which seem to be entrenched in traditional forms of institutionalized planning and participation, all of which poses limits on the construction of alternative scenarios for development.

By contrast, when the approach reflects the style of governance and planning of a pro-visionary kind (as will emerge for Finland in the discussion of the International cases) leading to a situation closer to the LEADER method, significant results emerge (Section 3). Therefore, since the local level is the strategic one for the action and at the same time is a testing ground for the effectiveness of LEADER, the next step will be to

make an in-depth analysis of the experiences that are most significant and representative in a national perspective, namely the situation of the Puglia region. This region, under the convergence objective, has made a considerable investment in innovation in governance and planning in recent years, with a larger investment in LEADER in the 2007-2013 cycle, and more than any other represents a testing ground for LEADER at a national level. The regional case will be examined with reference to previous research but mainly through internal evaluation reports and programming documents which reveal a return to a more central positioning of LEADER in the 2014-2020 programming cycle but also the persistence of historical problems and criticalities (Section 4).

However, the reconstruction of the strategies adopted in the European countries and the emblematic case of the Puglia region will highlight some limits and critical issues that confirm the need to rethink the approach and above all highlight the need to find ways to interpret the processes and provide recommendations for self-assessment and policy suggestions.

In the last part of the study therefore we will try to reflect on planning styles, strategies and approaches in order to devise a logical interpretative framework for self-assessment and future policy suggestions. The main approaches to rural development will be summed up, along with the main features emerging during our study. These premises are considered important in establishing the perspective within which we move if we need to explore planning strategies suited to the rural context, following the line established in Healey's work (1997).

Finally, by reconstructing the two main perspectives to planning, rationalist technological to a social-constructivist one, we will try to underline the crucial aspects which previously emerged, compatible with the strategies adopted in the LEADER method. We will thus obtain, on the regulatory level, a logical framework, believed to be useful and that could enable insiders to interpret their practices critically and open an important debate with greater awareness about the major critical issues of their interpretation and adaptation of the LEADER method in their local context (Section 5).

This conception will be further developed in the last part of this study, where on the basis of the results obtained we try to explain the factors behind the idea that the LEADER method is probably moving in the direction of the visionary approach in order to achieve full implementation especially on a local scale.

An attempt will be made to formulate a logical framework that sums up and compares different and opposing approaches to LEADER (sectoral/traditional and visionary) which we try to develop in this monograph. The study reconstructs the main features emerged and that distinguish the two approaches, taking into account the style and planning approach, the aims of a local project, the interpretation of innovation and of local resources, and the role of local actors. According to our assumption, these characteristics can reveal the approach adopted at the local level and can therefore be seen as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale (Section 6).

These frameworks can be considered as typical cases we might expect to find in spatial strategies and plans based on a particular set of intellectual traditions and conceptualizations. These elements lead us to believe that there is an absolutely urgent need for a rethinking of the LEADER approach in a visionary perspective. As this study shows, it will certainly not be necessary to intervene on the basic characteristics but on their interpretation and formulation on a local scale. This will certainly require a different approach to planning than the traditional one and a marked cultural change in the attitude to local immaterial resources, above all human and social capital, towards a greater reflexive capacity and a new ethics in the style of discussion and planning.

1.   LEADER approach: a starting point for review

In the latest programming cycles, rural development policy has undergone an important shift, moving from a purely sectorial and productivist approach to an integrated, territorial one (Labianca, 2016; Cejudo and Labianca, 2017; Gkartzios and Scott, 2014; Ray, 2001; Dax, 2015). Rural development under the common agricultural policy (CAP) is acquiring particular importance and effectiveness in all European territories with the great task of rediscovering the potential and capacity of rural territories, in particular, more recently, of the inner peripheries, in many cases representing for them an opportunity to solve problems of isolation, emigration and aging of the population (Labianca and Navarro, 2019).

The risk of peripheralization and aging of the European countries is, moreover, a question currently widely debated (Espon, 2014; 2017; 2020) and it is particularly evident that these phenomena, together with low growth, cover a large part of the European territory and will worsen in the coming years especially in the regions lagging behind (Figure 1). But in order to have a more comprehensive picture of the situation in Europe it is necessary to understand the main facets of the phenomenon.

Regarding mapping, it is necessary to take into consideration various aspects of peripheralization (Espon, 2017), which is considerably worse in rural areas. Limited access to the centers of economic activity produces disadvantages in terms of economic activity, though the effects on human and social capital may be less significant. A greater direct impact on the human and social capital cycle emerges from the disadvantages that derive from aspects of geographical distance and availability of infrastructure. The lack of "organizational proximity" involves not simply

the geographical characteristics in physical terms but above all the presence of a weakness of interaction and a lack of connection between the interested parties and the wider networks (Ibidem).

These disadvantages can be greatly exacerbated and produce negative effects in rural areas since they are less likely to innovate. The development of human capital and the propensity for innovation in such areas are severely hampered by the phenomenon of depopulation, which especially involves younger and more educated people.

Effective political interventions to reverse the processes of peripheralization and aging are based on a multilevel political approach. It is argued that path changes in the development trajectory, in particular in these areas, are rare, so there is an urgent need for a concerted political action to interrupt these descending cycles (Espon, 2017). Therefore the policies that can be used to support the strategies for peripheral and marginal areas will be those that are particularly attentive to the territorial needs. This is a clear reference to the range of rural development policies tried out in the last decade, in particular during the two programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 in the context of the CAP.

But these programmes have some limits as regards the territorial approach, since they lack a coherent vision of the needs of the different territories and a coordinated action between the different funding sources. In fact it has often been found that public support tends to be concentrated in areas that are already economically developed rather than attempting to rebalance the social and economic disparities existing between sub-regional territories (Espon, 2017).[2]

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[2] In this regard we also refer to the publication edited by M. Prezioso with the results of the Prin 2015 about the application of STEMA in the analysis of programming documents (see Prezioso, 2020).

Figure 1. Combination of the four delineation approaches to define Inner Peripheries.

Overlay of results of the four individual delineations:
Number of IP assignments

non-IP area
IP area in just one delineation
IP area in two delineations
IP area in three delineations
IP area in all four delineations
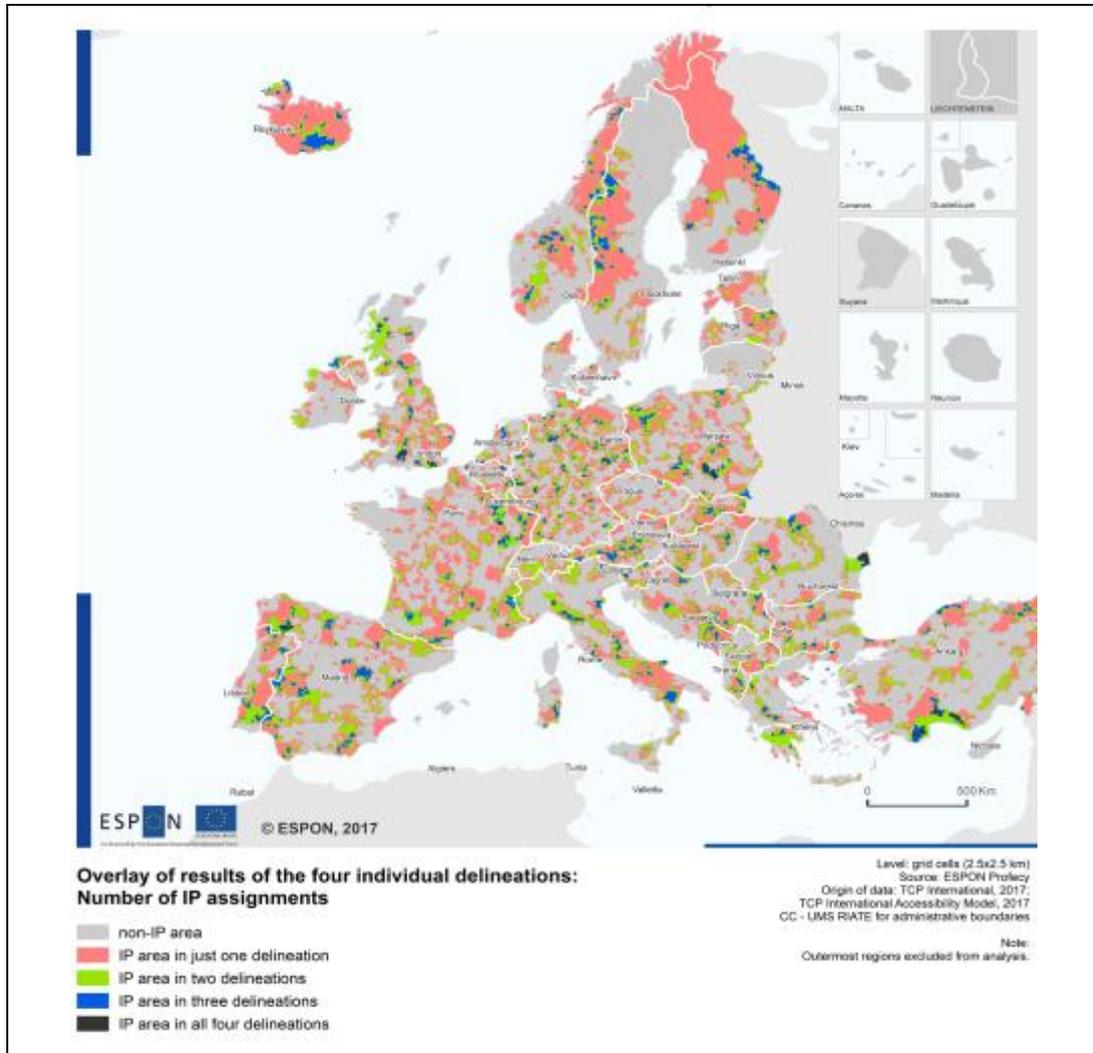
The map represents the areas that have been identified as inner peripheries at the grid level, most of them with multiple characteristics of peripherality (almost 70%). They are classified according to the number of times an area is identified as an inner periphery based on belonging to one or more conceptual delineations adopted in the research (delineation 1: higher travel time to regional centres; delineation 2: economic potential interstitial areas; delineation 3: areas of poor access to services of general interest; delineation 4: depleting areas). Source: Espon Profecy, 2017.

In this context, the LEADER approach, from a programmatic point of view, has been specifically designed for rural areas to reduce territorial inequalities and solve the related problems such as population aging and depopulation (Labianca and Navarro, 2019). As expressly argued by the European Commission's original guide (2006) and widely recognized by the literature (among others, Dargan and Schucksmith, 2008; Dax and Oedl-Wieser, 2016; Woods, 2005; Ray, 2000; Cejudo and Navarro, 2020; Cejudo and Labianca, 2017; Chevalier, 2014; Shucksmith, 2000), LEADER has been described as a highly innovative approach within European rural development policy. Its innovative character is not indicated in a generic sense but essentially concerns territorially embedded social aspects. As its name suggests, it should create, promote and support "Links between actions of rural development", through the work of local partnerships, LAGs, basing its action specifically on the human and social capital present in the territories. In fact, LEADER can be considered a sort of "laboratory for building local capabilities and for testing out new ways of meeting the needs of rural communities" (EC, 2006, p. 5) .

Since its launch in 1991, LEADER and contextually the CAP have evolved over time, together with the greater complexity of the agricultural sector. LEADER's innovative strength, along with the recognition of the diversity of European territories, has made it such an integral part of rural development policy that it has become a programme that is no longer separate but integrated ('mainstream') especially during the recent programming cycle 2007-2013 in all national/regional rural development programmes.

Important basic characteristics and principles of LEADER are contained in the main guides regularly published by the European Commission which are also an important historical memory of its actual functioning, role, objectives and evolution over time. Unfortunately, as will be discussed in more detail later, these guides are taken into consideration only to a limited extent, especially on an operational and local level. Among them, the 2006 European Commission programme guide is significant because it heralded the increasingly incisive role of LEADER in the imminent 2007-2013 programming cycle. It highlighted the fact that

LEADER action was not limited to economic and sectoral aspects, but extended to broader social objectives (such as ageing population, service provision, or the lack of employment opportunities...) and included the improvement of the quality of life. This was to be done by encouraging innovation in a broad sense, in fact rural territories can explore "new ways to become or to remain competitive, to make the most of their assets and to overcome the challenges they may face" (EC, 2006, p. 5). From this point of view, by recognizing the inevitable evolution of the role of agriculture, LEADER adopts a new conception of innovation, in particular social innovation (among others De Rubertis et al., 2015; Labianca, 2016; Labianca at al., 2016; 2020; Dax et al., 2016; Kovacs et al., 2016; Belliggiano et al., 2018).

In this context, as Dargan and Shucksmith (2008, p. 275) argue, "innovations have moved from a linear view"of knowledge and solutions "towards a model in which innovation is conceived as a co-evolutionary learning process occurring in the social networks of an array of actors". The territorial context plays a central, strategic role, within LEADER, and social factors take on a crucial importance, so it becomes fundamental to understand the context in which innovation takes place. Aspects such as internal potentiality, structures and dynamics of government and governance must be considered, rather than exclusively standardized externalities and material factors. Therefore, as can be deduced from the authors, innovation should no longer be considered an extraordinary, external event disconnected from the territory, but it becomes a daily practice intimately linked to the community from which it originates, due precisely to the role played by LEADER. In this sense and as widely discussed in previous research, innovation cannot simply be based on mere technical and technological aspects but should focus on the context in a broader sense. Otherwise, local development projects risk being ineffective.

By adopting this conception, the LEADER approach therefore looks at the territory in its complexity and uniqueness, focusing attention mainly on intangible components of the territorial capital (Belliggiano et al., 2018; Labianca at al., 2020,). In this perspective the territory isn't "simply a

geographical extension of land or space within which a certain set of rules apply, or even as a technical support base for productive activities" but rather "a space not only for production but also for social reproduction", in which the objectives must necessarily be defined starting from the bottom through a participatory, integrated approach (Labianca et al., 2020, p. 115). In this sense, on the basis of what is indicated from a programmatic point of view and as is explained more clearly later, it could be thought that the original orientation of LEADER is even more innovative, so much so that the approach is clearly visionary. This misunderstanding, especially on an operational level, probably made the process of change that the LEADER approach should have generated in local territories less effective. In fact, the visionary approach extends the conception of territory (territory reductively interpreted by policy makers as a passive support) but introduces innovative elements into planning and governance practices and styles.

These last aspects can be directly mediated by the most recent planning practices and international debates. Here, the planning designed for territorial development and its theories are re-proposed in a rural context in consideration of the ever reduced differences between rural and urban in the majority of rural areas in Europe and due to the policy innovations introduced especially in the last few decades. In fact, we assume that this can be useful to better understand some crucial aspects of the LEADER approach that are usually overshadowed especially at the operational level.

This analysis takes the well-known study on collaborative planning by Healey (1997) as one of its starting points. In particular, in local territories the first decisive phase is the impulse for the elaboration of a spatial strategy which usually arises from particular institutional situations both internal and external. In our case LEADER generates a local mobilization and a social and political impulse to do something about the issue. According to Healey, a situation of change arises when one goes beyond the feeling that "something must be done" to obtaining support for an organizational effort. In particular there must be a "moment of opportunity", generating changes in power relationships, a situation of

contradiction and conflict, which encourages people to recognize that they need collaborative planning processes, to reflect on what they are doing and recognize the need to work with different people. All this makes processes and territories evolve (Ibid., p. 269).

One of the critical resources at this stage is the ability to read the "cracks", through which new ideas can seep, to see the opportunities to do things differently, and be able to enlarge a "crack" into a real potential for change. And it is precisely in these circumstances that specific actors have the ability to recognize moments of opportunity and mobilize networks around the idea of making an effort in the strategy process. In our case, under LEADER, these actors are the LAGs and the change generated, the new way of doing things, can under specific conditions be called, social innovations. In fact according to our previous research (Belliggiano et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2018a; Labianca et al., 2020) based on Neumeier's definition (2017, p. 35) these changes, if really incisive, produce organizational changes (collaborative modes of action or new governance structures at community or regional level) (Belliggiano et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2018a; Labianca et al., 2020).

Social innovation can be considered a "fuzzy" concept widely used and also abused in recent policies because it has not been clarified enough both in the literature and in practice (Neumeier, 2017; Moulaert et al., 2005; Cloutier, 2003; Lacquement and Quèva, 2016; Moulaert and Mehmood, 2011). A critical review of the literature, according to our visionary approach, can help us to grasp the most significant elements of the concept (see Cloutier, 2013; Neumeier, 2017).

According to Moulaert and Mehmood (2011, p. 214), it is a complex and socially embedded concept, infact "social innovation to be effective to the development of a community should therefore be path-dependent, spatially embedded and socially re (produced)". It has a key role for local and regional development because it is able to stress "the use and organization of space as a new opportunity-set for change initiatives, by democratizing territorial governance dynamics and by linking local and regional bottom-up development agendas to the multi-scalar social relations that should enhance them" (Ibid., p. 221).

For Cloutier (2013), a social innovation is defined by its innovative or non-standard nature and by the general objective to promote the well-being of individuals and communities, therefore it has no particular form (procedural, organizational, institutional) and if we consider the territory, it derives from the cooperation between a variety of actors. From this perspective, social innovation can be seen as a collective process of learning and creating knowledge. Therefore it is a source of social change and can contribute to the emergence of a new model of development. Neumeier (2017, p. 35) introduces further elements for its identification, including the procedural steps defining it as «changes of attitudes, behaviour or perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that, in relation to the group's horizon of experiences, lead to new and improved ways of collaborative action within the group and beyond».

In the following table presented during the international Summer School held in Baeza[3], the main characteristics were summarized in a table which shows some of the variables identified as relevant, such as the nature of the innovation, the process, the goals and the outcomes. The main characteristics allow us to identify social innovation and distinguish it from the routine kind. In fact, it is clearly relative because it is necessarily different and varies according to each context, so it is not generalizable, but every single territory must be considered in order to be adequately assessed. Moreover, it is out of the ordinary in view of the context, the user and the application so there is an inevitable comparison with the previous situation. It also produces substantial changes in the components underpinning the system such as values, beliefs, representations, tools / know-how and rules. It is capable of producing or enhancing social capital and another key element is the focus on local needs and capacity building.

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[3] International Summer School "Desarrollo y Cambio Rural en la Unión Europea. LEADER 2007-2013" - CSO2014-56223-P, International University Sede Antonio Machado – Baeza, Dirección Proff. Eugenio Cejudo García (University of Granada) and Francisco Antonio Navarro Valverde (University of Granada) (August, 2018).

Table 1. Social innovation: main characteristics.

What?	Nature/area	Innovative character	Process/ requirements	Goals	Outcome
A collective process of learning and creating knowledge for community wellbeing, new development model**.** Change in the attitudes, behaviour, perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that leads the group to new and improved ways of collaborative actions and beyond	Not a specific form Organizational Procedural Practices Processes Services Tangible product Multisectoral	Relative and extraordinary (user, context, application) Modification of the components on which the system is based (values, beliefs, representations, tools/know-how, rules) Producing or enhancing social capital Deep changes Focusing on needs but especially on asset building	Integral part of the process Learning and knowledge Empowerment and learning *Requirements* Diversity participation cooperation of actors (multiactors, strategic multidisciplinary, flexible positions…)	Community and individual wellbeing Better quality of life Resolution of current problems/ prevention of future problems/local aspirations	Responds to needs more effectively than preexisting alternative Quality/long term solution New and improved means of collaborative action New governance dynamics/structures Empowerment and learning New asset building

Source: Our elaboration based on Neumeier, 2017 and Cloutier, 2013.

Therefore, it certainly starts from a common social problem but takes on a broader connotation, managing to achieve objectives linked to the quality and well-being of the entire community. It acts on the dynamics of governance, modifying roles and intervening in processes. As will be explained more clearly in relation to processes, it is an integral part of the process and it acts by substantially modifying the processes of learning and knowledge. It triggers local empowerment because it is based on essential conditions such as the real, proactive cooperation between actors coming from different multidisciplinary networks, from positions that cannot be rigid and hierarchical but, in our visionary interpretation, must necessarily be flexible.

In our comparative research, about the interpretation of innovation, a fundamental aspect emerging was that "the success of social innovation seems to be closely related to the quality of a set of physical-environmental and socio-cultural elements that authoritative literature calls territorial capital" (Belliggiano et al., 2018, p. 631). These innovations therefore require particular internal contextual conditions which cannot be ignored and which depend on the quality of the human, social and cultural capital present in the territories, in other words they are based on the creative and pro-active capacity of the actors.

In this regard Healey (1997), in discussing planning strategies, describes the actors capable of triggering these changes and recognizes that the "activators" have a crucial role in planning processes. They can arise from all types of institutional contexts and relationships, not necessarily formal, and their ability lies in being able to see and express possible territorially anchored strategies. They have "the capacity for an acute sense of the relation between the structural dynamics of local economic, social and political relations and how these are manifest in what particular people in a place are bothered about". In the arenas of discussion "the initiators have to mobilise interest and engagement. This means thinking about who to get involved, where to meet and how to conduct discussion. These choices are critical, both in terms of the likely future support for, and ownership of, whatever emerges, and for whether the resultant

mobilisation effort is of a corporatist or inclusionary nature". Some people bear the responsibility for "initial moves" (Ibid., p. 270).

Therefore, two different approaches must be distinguished, that is, one characterized by democratic potential inclusion and the other which can strengthen the domination of a few powerful people. The first refers to an "inductive ethics", in which the question is to understand who the members of the community of stakeholders are and how they should obtain access to the arena so that their "points of view" can be appreciated and listened to, participating fully in the process. The second idea recognizes a change in the "where" of the strategic discussion, providing for different arenas and times, in which case the discussion passes from discursive "opening" to consolidation around consequent ideas, actions and values, generating the danger of a discursive closure toward the positions and problems raised earlier. Therefore what distinguishes the quality of an inclusive approach is the "style and ethics of the context" of the discussion enabling stakeholder awareness to be promoted and supported throughout the process, while focusing on all the requests raised by interested parties (Ibidem).

Moving on to visions and consensus building, it is inevitable to underline the shift from a rationalist technological perspective to a social-constructivist one, which broadly summarizes the main approaches to the analysis of planning policy. The rationalist approach was previously pervasive in planning and political practice and although it contains many ideas and principles, it is limited by "its assumptions of instrumental rationality and objective science" whose main failures were to re-propose visions of the future while maintaining the "status quo". The future was simply extrapolated from the past and little attention was paid to social issues (Ibidem).

By contrast, the social constructivist approach operates largely in the context of socially produced knowledge. In the interactive perspective, strategies and policies are not the result of objective technical processes, but are actively produced in social contexts. The cognitive style progressively prevails over the technical-scientific one, the planner himself is a "facilitator of the debate" rather than a "substantial expert", while the

process maintains an "open argument". The interactive approaches that have developed in this direction have shifted attention from questions concerning coordination mechanisms towards a greater "emphasis on the social construction of appreciation of problems and articulation of strategies". The interactive approaches that thus slowly developed in the discussion of decision making, however, concern coordination mechanisms, social construction and articulation of strategies (Ibid., pp. 248-254). Therefore, in the shift to a social constructivist position the production of knowledge and understanding "through social interactive processes decisively shifts the understanding of strategy-making work from analytical and managerial technologies to social ones" (Ibid., p. 258).

Starting from these reflections, in the following paragraphs, focusing on the basic elements of the LEADER approach, we will try to develop these points critically in more depth, through an examination of the most relevant literature and programmatic documents.

2. LEADER: basic features for a territorial approach

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union was launched in 1962. It was created in consideration of the major role of agriculture in terms of affordable food and at the same time the need to sustain the survival of the sector by trying to solve farmers' problems, mainly related to economic support and agricultural productivity. Its contribution extends to issues closely interconnected with the agricultural world such as climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources and rural landscapes.

The CAP has undergone important reforms over time, strongly influenced by the evolution of the European context, moving from the sectoral and mainly productivist economic approach of the first decades to a territorial and developmental one (in particular under the European agricultural fund for rural development - EAFRD). The Treaty on the functioning of the European Union represents the legal basis of the Common agricultural policy. It regulates every aspect from direct payments to farmers through to the one most directly connected with this book, the support for rural development (see EU regulation 1305/2013).

Specifically, in the context of integrated territorial planning, one of the most innovative tools is certainly LEADER.[4] Introduced as part of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy as a pilot initiative in 1991 in favour of rural areas, in consideration of the significant results obtained in all European territories, it has been progressively extended and re-

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[4] On the different development programmes and their evolution in particular in Southern Italy see De Rubertis, 2013, which contains an exhaustive discussion of the various development programs over time, highliting their limits, potentialies and critical issues.

proposed in the following decades, so as to expand its scope and become an integrated and ordinary tool for the development of rural areas in the 2007-2013 programming cycle. At the same time it has become a method and tool for social innovation, especially in marginal and peripheral areas (Labianca, 2016; Labianca et al., 2016; 2020; Cejudo and Labianca, 2017).

LEADER is part of this European policy, its acronym *Liaisons entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale* seems to highlight the strong role of actors and the links between actors and actions for the development of the rural economy made stronger in the 2007-2013 programming cycle. In fact, during this cycle, rural development policy saw a major change. It focused on three main areas: the economy of agri-food production, the environment and the rural economy, and the population in rural areas. This generation of strategies included four axes: axis 1: improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and forestry; axis 2: improvement of the environment and rural areas; axis 3: quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; axis 4: LEADER.

Reading the Community strategic guidelines (2006) of this programming cycle a strong common element in all the measures emerges, namely the centrality of human capital and its role for innovation in rural areas. In particular, for axes 1, 3 and 4 in fact it states:

> "Under axis 1, a range of measures will target human and physical capital in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors (promoting knowledge transfer and innovation) and quality production […]. Axis 3 helps to develop local infrastructure and human capital in rural areas to improve the conditions for growth and job creation in all sectors and the diversification of economic activities. Axis 4, based on the LEADER experience, introduces possibilities for innovative governance through locally based, bottom-up approaches to rural development".

Therefore, the role of human capital seems to be recognized with greater force when axis 4 is called on to act transversely to achieve the priorities of axes 1 and 2 and especially of axis 3. In fact, in a horizontal

sense it should work through the "improvement of governance and for the mobilization of the endogenous development potential of rural areas" (EC, 2006).

The Community guidelines indicate some key actions for achieving these priorities in even more detail. They focus on strengthening local partnerships, on animation and the acquisition of skills to mobilize local potential, the promotion of public-private partnership and the leading role of LEADER as a driving force in eliciting innovative approaches for rural development and in encouraging collaboration between the public and private sector as well as promoting cooperation and innovation (EC, 2006).

In short, the strong role of innovation heavily stressed in the 2014-2020 programming cycle (EC, 2013; 2014a; 2014b) is already clearly defined with its close connection with LEADER in the 2007-2013 programming cycle. Infact, the LEADER approach is recognized as having a leading role through the ability to trigger new approaches, to favour the comparison between ideas and new approaches, to stimulate innovation in terms of new knowledge, new products and services, and innovation in terms of governance, in particular soliciting new approaches to link agriculture, forestry and the local economy, contributing to the diversification of economic activity and strengthening the socio-economic context of the rural areas.

Underlying the LEADER approach is an awareness of the territorial diversity and the need to implement locally defined strategies. In order to better understand LEADER's basic features, the European Guide (2006) indicates and explains the seven key aspects (see Figure 2), to be considered in an integrated manner with the others, representing an important new element compared to the traditional rural policy measures.

These features go far beyond the physical and material characteristics of the context. In fact, they leverage the tangible and intangible components thus affecting methods, approach and style of strategy. Territories and actors take on an active role here and are no longer merely passive.

Figure 2. LEADER approach: the seven key features.
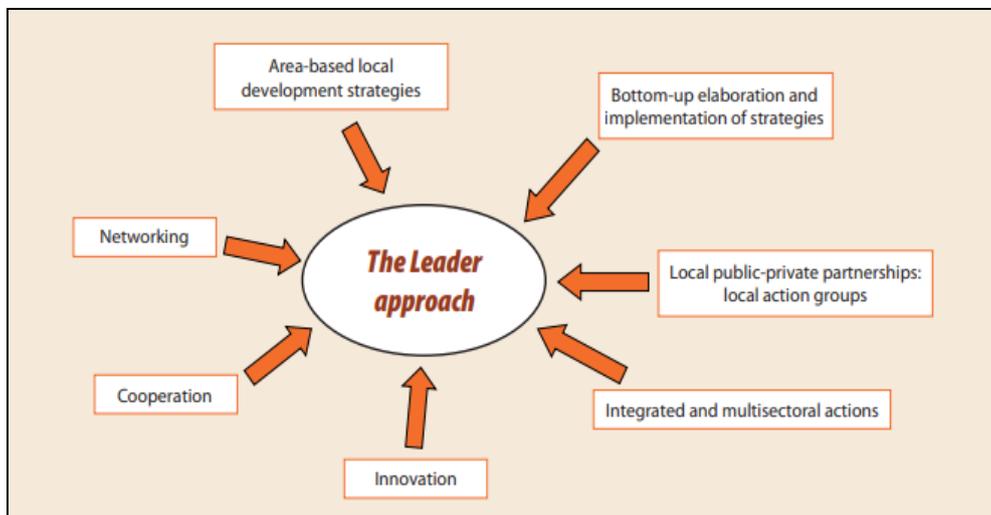
In fact, an important change takes place in the conception of the territory, no longer considered an abstract and passive space but as Governa (2005, p. 41) argues "an active actor", decisive in the development processes, representing a reference point on which it is possible to build, and evaluate, policies and actions. The reference to territorial specificities and local actors is explicit in the EU guide. Although the attention to local resources and specificities is clear, less emphasisis is placed on local actors and it is not sufficiently pointed out that they should be at the heart of the strategy as fundamental keys for change.

The LEADER approach in fact is considered an "innovation laboratory": it promotes collective action, drawing on "knowledge resources that link old and new, past and future, one social group with another, and endogenous with exogenous structures"; it strengthens communities by fostering people's trust, knowledge and skills and their ability to cooperate and create networks. All of this should have taken place in a renewed context, as argued by Dargan and Schucksmith (2008, pp. 278-279) through the transition from agro-centric sectoral policies to multi-sectoral approaches, from hierarchical and limited governance structures to more

flexible and dynamic structures based on broader partnerships. This, in fact, falls within the innovative nature of LEADER which does not focus on economic and short-term objectives but on "building economic, social, cultural and institutional capacities as a basis for longer-term sustainable rural development". The adoption of the bottom-up approach, encourages wider participation to bring out different visions among the actors, supports collaboration and communication, and the development of shared and integrated strategies in the territories.

According to Woods (2005) the paradigm shift from the top-down to bottom-up approach has resulted in a significant change in the management system for development, as can be seen in the types of activities designed to change and promote development initiatives. In other words, there is a contrast between centralized management (led by the state) and the bottom-up rural development led by local communities themselves. In fact communities are encouraged to evaluate the problem, identify appropriate solutions, design and implement the projects.

In this case, there is a competition for the allocation of funds, also requiring the need to mix resources from different sources. Therefore the role of the state (and of other central institutions) changes from supplier to facilitator for rural areas. Likewise, the focus and modalities of development change too. In most cases, the emphasis is no longer on attracting external investments but on improving and exploiting local endogenous resources. Therefore the focus of a project is no longer immediate economic development (or merely competitiveness) but a "community development" which aims to build the community's capacity also to regenerate its own economy. For this purpose, community development is seen as a necessary component of rural development and the actors in fact must not create social polarization within rural localities (Ibidem).

Significantly, the bottom-up approach also receives support from specific rural development professionals and neoliberal politicians seeking to restructure the state. For the former, the bottom-up approach means empowerment of local communities through development strategies in tune with local needs and the local environment. For the second group,

the bottom-up approach involves shifting development responsibilities from the state to its citizens, "in line with the broader-scale 'rolling back of the state' from areas of activity, and [so] that the state can reduce its expenditure on rural development" (Ibid., p. 14).

In order to promote, nurture and conduct these bottom-up actions there are actors, or local partnerships, known as Local Action Groups (LAGs), which represent an important original feature of this approach that leverages the diversity of rural areas. These are actors that initiate the first steps, with the task of connecting and making demands from below, interacting with those from above, then embodying so-called multilevel governance. Another significant aspect is that though the LAG has many complex tasks, it is nevertheless facilitated by an in-depth knowledge of the context, thus representing a strong point in the elaboration of the local strategy.

Infact, as espressly indicated by the EC (2006) the LAG has the task of identifying and implementing a local development strategy, managing resources with the ability to bring together and harmonize the human and financial resources available, promoting a network of local actors, collective projects and multi-sectoral actions to improve economic competitiveness, strengthening dialogue and cooperation between different rural actors, reducing the potential conflict, facilitating the processes of adaptation and change in the agricultural sector, along with the diversification of the rural economy and the quality of life of the communities living there.

Two central elements concerning stakeholders specified in the same document EC (2006) are the representativeness and balance of local interest groups. They can be set up as part of the the process or, as often happens, build on existing partnerships. The European experiences on the one hand highlight the increased maturity and the acquisition of skills of LAGs over time but also the different degrees of autonomy in establishing the local strategy, depending on national and above all regional governance styles, thereby highlighting constraints or limits (see De Rubertis, 2013; Cejudo and Labianca, 2017; Dax and Oedl-Weiser, 2016; Dax et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2016; Cejudo and Navarro, 2020).

The bottom-up approach contains the most interesting and innovative elements. In fact, according to Dax and Oedl-Weiser (2016) it explicitly relies on social capital to build and strengthen (social) innovation in rural areas. Therefore, a new style of development planning is taking shape, establishing new methods of discussion and comparison at all levels and scales, favouring multilevel governance styles, supporting intermediation between different demands, and basing its strategies on internal knowledge of the territory and of its demands.

But, on a local scale, it is complex to implement practical ideas and tools to encourage real change as desired by the LEADER. In fact, LAGs are required to carry out important and unprecedented tasks of coordination and preparation of a local plan, all inevitably affected by the climate and the degree of innovation of the context within they operate.

On the other hand the experience accumulated over the years in the development processes promoted in rural regions is fundamental in order to understand the ways in which these small laboratories of socio-economic dynamization can work. An exercise of great value and which adds a practical reason and new operating methods (García et al., 2015).

As it is expressly indicated in a research by García et al., 2015, which analyzes the Spanish experience in the context of the Leader, the keystone is the reinterpretation of the previous one in a proactive way, focusing on the opportunities created rather than the criticalities emerged.

In the final part, the study presents a diagnostic and territorial planning methodology in which theoretical concepts are applied, the use of development tools, specifying methods, the type of leadership and the responsibilities assumed by the different socio-economic actors in the planning process.

These are operationally laborious processes because they affect the traditional way of doing things and involve introducing changes in local structures and balances of power, in the way institutions themselves are understood. In this case it is possible to speak of participatory planning, which is however a structured process in which it is necessary involving different actors to urge them to express their priorities, to propose concrete solutions.

As the authors discuss, this is a different way from the traditional one characterized by the certainty of the result. Development interventions should not be in fact seen as simple executions of externally planned activities, but as "spaces in which different socio-economic actors, institutions and individuals interact, negotiate, enter into conflict or even resist" (Ibid., p. 148).

In addition to the different phases described in great detail in the work, it is important to focus on the reasons that the authors consider to be fundamental to justify the adoption of the participatory approach in rural contexts. In particular, they can be summarised as follows:

• decide from inside - the citizens are in fact the best connoisseurs of their territory and for this reason they should be involved in all stages of the process, also by virtue of a constitutionally recognized right;

• strengthen the sense of community - joint work and planning strengthen the sense of community and belonging;

• knowledge makes processes more effective – be aware of real needs makes the solutions and interventions more effective, knowledge of internal priorities and needs makes it highly likely that government actions will adapt and respond to them;

• collaboration and benefits - collaborating between different actors is of mutual benefit, the close collaboration between citizens and technicians is of mutual interest, in fact it allows them to get to know the community they serve better, thus developing proposals that better suit their needs or strengths;

• knowledge of limitations makes more concrete - being aware of the actual limitations of public administration allows citizens to be more realistic, a more realistic vision of resources and destination of them, thanks to a direct comparison in which citizens can know the limits that administrations must face, therefore they have a more realistic vision of what can and cannot be expected from their government, and therefore understand better decisions made by authorities and / or technicians (Ibidem).

From this broader and renewed perspective, a series of recommendations emerge to be taken into consideration in participatory planning processes.

In particular, the need to establish limits because no planning process can solve all the problems existing in a territory, however it can allow the overcoming of some specific problems and the start of a change in the negative dynamics of a territory; involve key people who are genuinely interested in decisions, avoiding wasting time and resources in not very conclusive participatory processes; prefer the diversity of actors over quantity, trying to involve people of different ages, with different social and cultural profiles with different perspectives on any topic; guarantee effective communication and transparency throughout the process in order not to frustrate the efforts made; improve local capacities, as already highlighted in the study, infact the sustainability of an area's socio-economic improvements depends on whether these are based on both capacities human resources of its inhabitants, as in the generated social capital; favor flexibility because as is known the planning processes must adapt to changing circumstances; assess activities and provide frequent updates of the different stages of the planning process, to avoid the great frustration among those who believed in change and finally build with confidence, in fact one of the biggest obstacles to participation is the lack of trust and / or low credibility of those who lead the process (Ibidem).

Furthermore, the contribution of specialists to local knowledge is important. In fact, the local experience must be accompanied by the contribution of experts on the various planning issues, this balance between local knowledge and experts allows to connect the reality of the territory with trends and opportunities offered from the outside, as well as providing new knowledge from innovations may emerge. Finally, due to the role it plays, the participation process should be assigned adequate resources and this in consideration of the influence and future impact that the planned actions should have (Ibidem).

As argued by the authors, as planning is complex, a specific methodology for the preparation of participatory development plans can be elaborated and involves three main phases. The first phase entitled

"Discovery Open and analyse", focuses on updating the knowledge available on the reality of the people living in the territory, institutions and resources. This is the stage of diagnosis that precedes any phase, but in this case it emphasizes the critical review of the development actions undertaken previously, as well as exposing the problems and opportunities of the region.

The second phase "Imagine and Build Confidence", it is about tracing the challenges of the territory starting from the information and analysis carried out with the participation of local actors.

The last phase called "Designing and Innovating" specifies the activities, resources, responsibilities and controls that make up the territorial development plan.

With these premises it is inevitable that the sectoral and rational approach would come to be considered inadequate, leaving space for renewed strategies that look at the territory in a different way and opening the path for neo-endogenous ones.

3. Reading LEADER through the key features: European cases compared

In the previous sections we have tried to frame the LEADER approach on a conceptual and above all programmatic level. As has emerged from the examination of the LEADER literature and documents, it should produce a paradigm shift in rural areas, especially for marginal ones. According to the assumptions made in this study, such a change is already inherent in the key features indicated by the European Commission in view of the 2007-2013 programming cycle which was designed to lay the groundwork for this shift, increasing the potential of the LEADER approach.

On the other hand, support for this process has grown in the academic debate developing in recent years, thanks to the personal involvement in two distinct, significant international projects (Ruralwin and Ruralinnovador)[5], that saw the participation of the main researchers on this theme from all over Europe, at this point it is possible to outline some significant experiences. These researchers have documented the regional cases with particular care, very often by using a shared comparative research method. With reference to the same programming cycle, we will now look at the research of those who have directly and indirectly made a significant contribution to the debate on LEADER and how it can be improved.

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[5] Ruralinnovador – Development programmes and rural change in the European Union: governance and lessons to share 2007-13; Ruralwin – Successes and falures in the practice of neo-endogenous rural development in the European Union (1991-2014). These projects come under two calls of Excellence from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, coordinated by University of Granada, Proff. E. Cejudo and F. Navarro. They involved researchers from different regions from Europe, LAGs and regional governments.

The first research compatible with the approach we are taking and also emblematic of other experiences is by Dax et al. (2016). The research is based on two case studies, Austria and Ireland, and aims to go beyond intrinsically reductionist approaches to the evaluation of rural policy. Rather than focusing on assessing impacts and outcomes, it seeks to examine and learn from the policy process itself, considering key areas of the process: governance, operational issues (conception of tools and operating modes); delivery (mode of transaction and control); and evaluation (timing, procedures, etc.) of policies affecting rural areas. These phases are fundamental because they influence the policy making that extends beyond the RDPs (of which LEADER is part).

In order to evaluate the effects of mainstreaming, this research considers Austria and Ireland, historically dynamic territories, applying a multistage qualitative method, proceeding from the initial design of LEADER to the actual implementation involving the influential actors in the process including the LAGs themselves. The research highlights the changes produced in the delivery of the programme due to the requirement of "mainstreaming" and the effects produced on the capacity of the actors to carry out innovative actions. On the basis of the analysis carried out in several phases, an evaluation is made of LEADER in the RDPs (rural development plan) of Austria and Ireland, focusing in particular on the possibilities offered in terms of social innovations in the context of neo-endogenous development.

From an institutional point of view in Austria, the provinces are responsible for LEADER, while in Ireland it is handled exclusively by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht (DCEGA). In Austria, the coordination role lies with the Federal Ministry of agriculture, forestry, environment and water management nationwide, while the provinces have the main task of managing the implementation of LEADER. In addition to being the service institutions, they are therefore responsible for evaluating LEADER and for allocating funds. An interesting aspect of the Austrian case is the diversity in the implementation procedures in the different provinces: in some cases there is a direct link to the regional entity, in other cases they themselves operate as regional managers

coordinating other funds. On the other hand the LAGs are responsible for the design of the local development strategy, monitoring and self-assessment.

In the implementation of policies and governance there is a substantial difference between Ireland and Austria. In Ireland there is a centralized political organization with the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA) as the main managing authority. Although the institutional and administrative structure is different, the case studies reveal many common elements regarding the effects of LEADER mainstreaming. The study highlights the major challenges facing local managers, growing concerns in programme delivery versus the preconditions for mainstreaming, showing a gap between the potential of rural activities and the support of innovative ideas, in the concrete capacity to implement the potential under the current regulatory system.

The operating rules established at national and provincial level on the basis of EU regulations have produced greater administrative complexity, with the increase in the levels of bureaucracy and extra auditing both at national and provincial level generating a series of negative effects, not only in terms of delivery times for results and the actual starting of the process, as well as in terms of less time and resources dedicated to community development. An important element regarding the Austrian case is that, compared to the previous period, the strategies corresponded less to the original guidelines of the LEADER approach. The evidence showed a large shortfall in continuing support for local development. In particular, where RDPs are mainly governed by the agricultural sector, the projects focused on standard measures, resulting in less concentration on innovative cooperation projects, thus highlighting the fact that LEADER has tended to lose its bearings in terms of multisectoral support and public assistance.

For both Austria and Ireland, with regard to the innovative character of the LEADER method, there is a sort of trivialization of projects, making standardized low-risk projects grow at the expense of more creative high-risk projects. Another important element concerns the decision-making process. Although the LEADER method should have been based on a

bottom-up approach, in reality the increase in regulations and constraints established upstream have crushed the autonomy of the LAGs, reducing their capacity. LEADER's mainstreaming has therefore made it more difficult for local actors to work with the flexibility required by the approach and the ability to respond to local needs, also limiting innovative potential, in this case negating the original ethic of the LEADER approach.

The more complete integration of LEADER into the RDPs has moved the programme towards the center of influence of rural policy, with reduced effects on rural society. Another important aspect concerns the application and effects of the LEADER method, which in fact depends on the authorities responsible for its implementation both at national and provincial level.

The implications of mainstreaming the LEADER method also concern local innovation. In particular, the bottom-up approach, support for social innovations and local actions are all threatened, bringing into question the original aim of a territorial rather than sectoral orientation. In practice in both case studies there was a tendency towards centralization which created difficulties for innovative mechanisms of coordination and cooperation. Rigid coordination, hierarchical structures and mentalities, as well as rigorous mechanisms of control and auditing have reduced the innovative character of the local intervention.

The second evalutation research is by Belliggiano et al., 2020 and discusses the mainstreaming of LEADER and the opportunity to integrate the participative, bottom-up approach into the European programmes. The comparative study involving Spain and Italy reveals interesting aspects: the subordination of rural development policy to agricultural policy is believed to have generated a lack of autonomy of local and regional rural development authorities with respect to Community procedures; excessive bureaucracy and incomplete CAP reforms have bolstered the influence of traditional centres of power, slowing down the innovation process in rural areas.

The research analyzes the role attributed to agriculture in Spain and Italy, in order to verify whether actual change has taken place, in

particular whether the objectives pursued were of mere economic performance or were designed to give a different role to agriculture taking into account the complex dynamics of rural areas. The analysis of the expenditure commitments for the single measures and actions indicate the persistence of a traditional approach mainly based on economic goals and production.

Confirmation of this can be found in the measures linked to innovation, where the reference is essentially to modernization within traditional trajectories of linear growth, while at the same time diminishing the role of multifunctionality and participation. The research also highlighted a trend in all regions of both countries in the role attributed to structural measures, which can guarantee greater volumes of expenditure, are easy to implement and offer tangible, visible results to satisfy the policy framework.

There are underestimated or neglected measures in particular concerning training and technical assistance, of fundamental importance in preparing the actors to initiate meaningful changes. This has also generated an underestimation of the bottom-up approach, in fact in many Italian regions the approach was predominantly technocratic and normative. The asymmetries regarding the allocation of resources between the various axes can also be attributed to the national coordination. Centralizing the processes is seen to have produced little attention to practices from the bottom, also opening up conflicts on the local scale. Although more horizontal measures were established in the Spanish case, unfortunately they lack integration and their implementation is incomplete. The sectoral approach would seem to have maintained its predominance in rural development policy and this is confirmed by the direction in which some axes and measures have drifted.

These trends can also be explained as being due to the strong representation and the weight attributed to some actors, such as agricultural organizations within the steering and monitoring committees. Finally, rural development policy is not yet fully innovative on the social level, being anchored to traditional and hierarchical practices, thus negating the original nature of the LEADER method.

The third research study conducted by Lacquement and Chevalier (2016) for Central Europe analyses the ways in which the LEADER programme represents an institutional novelty in the former socialist countries, as it is intended to contribute to innovating the modes of governance on a local scale. In this way, the diffusion of innovation can be understood as the ability of local actors to establish new partnerships, support and promote cooperation networks, define areas of intervention and action as interpreted in the perspective of the LEADER approach. It is precisely thanks to these processes that strategies are devised and implemented through concrete projects.

LEADER's action takes place along two dimensions: spatial and social. From a spatial point of view it involves the network of LEADER regions that constitute the areas of application of the development strategies, whose perimeters are defined by the LAGs. The latter also have a fundamental role from a social point of view as they are responsible for the devising and implementation of development strategies. According to the authors, considering LEADER as a process of social innovation means focusing on the new modes of governance of local territories in Europe and on their learning, particularly in post-socialist countries, starting specifically from the prerogatives of the bottom-up approach.

In fact, the full and effective involvement of local actors in cooperation networks is essential in order to design and implement development projects, generating new territorial management practices that should therefore take the monopoly on management away from central institutions and administrations.

The application of the LEADER programme in post-communist countries is therefore interesting because it allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of territorial reforms launched since the collapse of the 1990s. In these territories the application of the LEADER programme is of great importance as an instrument for transformation of local governance. This study, using a comparative approach, aims to understand the spatial dimensions of innovation, trying to explain the favourable conditions for the genesis of local action. The territories considered are Hungary and the new German Länder (the eastern part of federal Germany following the

1990 process, consisting of the five eastern Länder, considered in their contemporary context), in order to explore the possible effects of the context on the application of the LEADER programme as a social process of innovation. Using the analytical tools of structural sociology, cooperation networks are analysed and an interpretation is sought especially in the way in which they relate to the local territory.

It is assumed that the spread of this form of innovation derives from a transfer of public policies into the framework of the process of Europeanization. As regards the implementation, the intervention perimeters have been mapped and the different logics of programme application analysed. From the comparative approach it emerges that innovation practices are differentiated and that learning the LEADER approach is part of a territorialized process. As regards the first aspect, the LEADER intervention concerns the modality of public action within the EU and its territorial structuring in which multiple actors on different scales are involved, often generating complex negotiations and articulations. The diffusion of the LEADER approach is essentially based on the contractualisation of the three levels of EU, national state and LAGs that frame the transfer process.

Regarding this aspect, the national rural development plans were analysed in the research, in particular in the application part of LEADER, as they influence the decision-making processes and the planning of strategies on a local scale. It is interesting to see the analysis conducted on the most relevant LEADER Axis measures in each State from which four dominant national models of rural development design emerge (Figure 3).

As shown in figure 3, in most European countries the priority measures are aimed at improving the rural economy, and in particular at supporting the development of non-agricultural activities and competitiveness oriented towards tourism enhancement. In post-socialist countries in Central Europe, the priorities seem very different as they are aimed at improving the quality of life. This is a strategic choice which may be due to the poor endowments of rural municipalities for which financial investments are in this case more necessary than elsewhere and to a still very agro-centered concept of rural development for which LEADER

intervenes to support the national government. Considering the constraints on the area of intervention, a homogeneous distribution can be observed, largely falling within pre-existing cooperation networks, especially in Hungary. The study shows that although the transfer of public policies from the EU offers Member States a fair margin of maneuver that allows them to adapt the LEADER instrument to the logic of action, their institutional structures, actors and cultural factors condition the modalities of reception and application of European policies, producing different patterns and degrees of adaptive action, leading to a distinction between a logic of support and a logic of intervention.

In Germany, the implementation of the LEADER program was delegated to the Länder in accordance with a decentralized procedure. This has also meant a form of restoration of local self-government through the mobilization of new forms of skills, which has entailed a reorganization of services and personnel, completely changing the way of conceiving the management of local space.

In Hungary, the implementation of the program is instead managed by a state agency dependent on the Ministry of Agriculture. The coverage of LEADER in this case follows the administrative network, therefore the form taken by LEADER here assumes a centralistic and controlling character at a micro-regional level, which becomes the level of management of public services and equipment.

As regards the logic of support and intervention, these aspects are expressed in the way the LAGs are constituted. Therefore the composition of the partnerships and their method of structuring affect local development action. The analysis carried out on specific case studies reveals two different situations. The first is in one of the five new German Länder. The method of composing the partnership clearly reflects the concern for institutional and territorial balance, with privileged roles for certain political actors and figures from the corporate world. The second case concerns a LAG in Hungary. In this case, the training of the LAGs was characterized by a long, complex procedure which was piloted by the managing authority. The two situations are very different as regards the decentralization and transfer of functions.

*Figure 3. Priority objectives of the LEADER program (2007-2013) in the European Union.*

Source: Lacquement and Chevalier, 2016, p. 71.

However, in both cases the rigid question of representativeness has often led to the participation becoming merely ostensible. In fact, the presence of token representatives of the three sectors does not always lead to actual involvement. In fact, the analysis of the links between the actors

within the cooperation network is fundamental in understanding the actual structuring of the local system. The adoption of the structuralist postulate, according to which the functioning of social networks does not depend on the sum of the relationships that are established between individuals but on the nature of these relationships, highlights the importance of forming a matrix of social resources that represents added value for action and share capital.

In the German LAG, a greater density and connection of interpersonal relationships is observed, and the network of relationships is weakly hierarchical, although there are subjects who polarize the system of mutual knowledge more than others. In the Hungarian LAG, the integration between the network members is rather weak due to the lack of knowledge between the actors. Some figures, who thanks to this mutual knowledge become a polarizing force, are well trained in rural development, and constitute a very small local elite who therefore seem to be the only ones to master the LEADER system.

The network of relations therefore appears polarized around some central actors. However, much depends on the ability of these actors and here the example of the German LAG is emblematic. In fact, the central actors in this case are small farmers located in a mountainous and peripheral area. Paradoxically, therefore, the initiative and involvement do not come from the center to the periphery but from the periphery to the center. This is an interesting situation because it involves a dynamic local company within which there are a range of figures, from the managers of the development missions to the promoters of the business incubator.

The territorial reform has also given them greater autonomy in the area of inter-municipal cooperation structures. This network of pioneers is therefore the core around which a series of operations have been structured including the spatial distribution of development projects. Although also in this case the participatory approach appears polarized, nevertheless the density of interpersonal ties around the central actors has allowed the expression of a proactive planning force for the benefit of the entire territory. The situation of the Hungarian LAG is different. In this case, a strong polarization emerges around a network dominated by

members of the local elite. In fact, confirmation comes from the municipal distribution of the projects which is asymmetrical, reflecting the demographic and economic imbalances between the two regions. In this case, the participatory approach is also limited, being practically in the hands of the central actors, and the fragmentation of interpersonal ties within the network brings benefits only for some municipalities.

These entities, taking as intermediaries the associations placed under their protection, are responsible for defining and in some cases reinventing the local cultural identity starting from a museographic approach to local resources. This way of proceeding greatly inhibits civic learning. In addition, the involvement of other actors within the LAG is quite low, and the same situation is found in collective actions and projects where inevitably the level of participation is very low, usually reduced to information or communication, producing very strong social marginalization effects. Only some actors therefore have the possibility of mobilizing their know-how and their relationships to access information and be included in the processes.

This study on Central Europe highlights the presence of a causal link between the relative involvement of individuals in the collective process and the configuration of spatial structures. The functioning of LAGs is highly dependent on the effects of the place. The implementation of LEADER seems to depend on the geographical context, since spatial factors influence social interplay, with the strategies developed by the social actors depending on specific properties of the places and the organization of space. In the long term, the methods of applying territorial reforms and the transfer of prerogatives to local levels certainly affect coordination and local action and therefore the local process.

The last research examines Finland and makes a comparative study with Spain on a crucial measure in the context of neo-endogenous development, Transnational cooperation. In order to have a comprehensive picture of the situation in Finland we have looked at two research studies. The first is the report commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry during the programming period of the European Union 2007-2014 and focuses on Finland (Pylkkänen et al., 2015), the

second study is a comparison between Finland and Spain (Navarro et al., 2020).

Cooperation, as we have said, is one of the key features of the LEADER approach. Indeed, it should generate new knowledge and ideas and promote reciprocal learning between different territories. The report on Finland examined in particular detail the implementation, results and impacts of the TNC activities, as well as examples of good practices and expectations. Comparisons were also made with the previous programming cycle through interviews with managers, project materials and various documents.

At the programmatic level, cooperation is included in the LEADER 421 action: Interregional and transnational cooperation. The projects are thus divided into two groups: regional Inter-territorial cooperation and Transnational cooperation (TNC). In particular, the analysis considers only the second type, of wider and more impactful projects.

These are complex co-planning activities that require skills but also a mutual financial commitment. The first distinctive feature in Finland is the presence of a preliminary feasibility study that envisages the finding of potential partners, planning the project and preparing the next phases. Very often this is in fact linked at the local level to undertake targeted actions. The LAG is generally better prepared and more qualified to support external TNC projects, if it also has its own long-term international cooperation and the know-how accumulated and a strong social base.

More specifically, 94 operative TNC projects and 86 preparatory projects were accounted for in the last programming period. The first interesting aspect to emerge is that the projects are focused on development issues in general, especially on young people, tourism and culture rather than economic entities. A deeper analysis then reveals that the typical candidates were associations and non-profit organizations. In 2007-2013, young people proved to be a key target group in almost one out of three projects, the main themes were culture, tourism and, in general, local development issues. As far as the partners are concerned, the situation has changed to some extent. During the LEADER + period,

project partners were most often found in Italy, Ireland and Scotland, for the next period 2007-2013 most of the project partners were found in Estonia, Sweden and France probably due to the economic crisis.

Overall, Finland is considered one of the most active Member States in Europe in particular in the field of TNC cooperation and indeed it experienced significant growth between the two programming periods.

On a European scale, the international cooperation activity of Finnish action groups is high compared to other Member States. Indeed, the Finnish LEADER Action Groups play a leading role as the main partner of TNC projects with significant impacts. This marked dynamism and international openness are due to various factors connected in particular to the role of the promoters, their ideas and the strength of the networks.

The most common starting point for projects was the presence of existing ideas and strong networks among the promoters. The role of the LAG has become central due to several factors thanks to the presence of specific figures (the TNC coordinator or the qualified correspondent) with in-depth knowledge, generating a clear positive impact on the level and continuation of TNC activities. In fact, these features made it possible to overcome the major problems encountered in other European countries (as in the case of Spain) in particular legal and linguistic skills and versatile training courses and activities to support networking.

The role of the LAG becomes significant through the presence of many components, including an adequate development strategy, previous relevant project activities, the involvement of the LAG in international projects or in events where cooperation with European "twin groups" has been established and deepened, the presence of an organization in the background, and the presence of relevant contacts and cooperation networks, the latter being fundamental for starting cooperation projects. The availability of adequate technical support has also represented an important added value of the Finnish LAGs. Another fundamental element in their success is that they start from the enhancement of consolidated networks but also expand them in search of new partners.

The projects have produced a significant baggage of experience for their beneficiaries and promoted many types of mutual learning. Based on the

analysis carried out, the projects have produced important impacts, enabling learning, promoting enthusiasm and often the transfer of ideas or models from one location to another, also affecting long-term local skills and practices.

One of the main problems was planning, particularly in relation to the different timing of research opportunities in the different Member States. Another aspect in which Finland differs from the other states is the greater flexibility and decision-making autonomy of Finnish LAGs. In fact, compared to the others, they decide on the financing of TNC projects and also on the choice of partners. The application process is in fact much simpler, and there is continuous assistance to support the international project process, with the Executive Director and the staff of the LAG very often providing significant local support in their area.

If we consider the assessment of impacts, although there are no adequate indicators to assess intangible ones, based on the information gathered in the study the Finnish projects provided a significant amount of results and experience, as well as promoting a wide range of learning. Cooperation projects have had a significant impact in terms of knowledge, new ideas and the transfer of operating models for the development of the local area to other areas. Such projects have often had significant economic impacts that could not be foreseen from the start. The cooperation created in the projects has usually led to further projects, some of which are currently underway, or has involved the same partners in new project initiatives. An important element of these international projects is the anchoring to the local strategy, in fact the international project favors openness, amplifies the results and creates new opportunities at the local level.

Certainly, international project processes require supranational regulation of varying complexity from country to country. In fact, in the comparison with Spain, for example, problems emerge that concern shortcomings of the context that cannot easily be changed in the short term such as lack of experience, know-how, skills, coordination skills, and the presence of relevant actors and local networks familiar with international cooperation. Finnish rural areas are generally prosperous,

with high levels of productivity, employment and are marked by high participation. In fact rural policy has achieved excellent results in coherence with sectoral policies targeting rural areas. The main strengths of this rural policy are: the participation of civil society and universities in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of projects, the intelligent use of EU funds to build its rural policy by adopting the LEADER approach (this country being considered a model in its implementation), the highly successful application of the pre-existing network of volunteers in the municipalities, integration of LEADER with other national and EU funds, an extensive participation in LAGs, as well as their considerable autonomy (Navarro et al., 2020).

Although the impacts have been different and obviously more evident in Finland than in Spain due to the factors we have mentioned, it has been found that most of the effects obtained after the implementation of the TNC are intangible and, in many cases subjective. Examples are the creating of "contacts and networks" between LAGs, various local actors, entrepreneurs and young people in different fields; the increase of experience, skills, knowledge, group skills and training; contacts between institutions and local inhabitants; new ways of doing and thinking not previously contemplated; greater experience and ability to act in collaboration; the acquisition of skills through "learning by doing", "learning by building" and mutual learning; relations with other cultures, institutional and collective learning through a better understanding of common problems and the development of ideas, concepts and systems; the emancipation of local inhabitants and their involvement in the processes of decision making; building new partnerships, associations and relationships; resolving social conflicts and generating debate on the issue. Other more economic effects concern the ability to generate new business opportunities, projects and initiatives, and the creation of jobs (Navarro et al., 2020).

Table 2. Key features of LEADER through main issues in EU cases.

Key features	Main issues or assets (2007-2013)			
	Austria Ireland	**Italy Spain**	**Hungary Germany**	**Finland Spain**
Area-based local development strategies	Reduced involvement of rural community Process technicalization (administrative and bureaucratic complexity) caused by low community development	Low level of participation Process technicalization (administrative and bureaucratic complexity)	Low level of participation and token representation Participatory approach polarized (much more in Hungary) Low participation produces asymmetrical imbalances More leeway for strategies, increasing marginalization Museographic approach to local resources	High level of participation of civil society and universities Continuity with previous experiences
Bottom-up approach	Mainly centralized approach Rigid coordination, Hierarchical structures Regulations and constraints Rigid regulatory system	Centralized power of a few actors Hierarchical structures Traditional approach mainly based on production Regulations and constraints Rigid regulatory system Technocratic, top-down normative approach Centralized processes	Institutional structures, actors and cultural factors condition reception and application of European policies Decentralized procedure promotes new forms of skills, and management of local space (Germany). Centralized procedure: LEADER has a centralistic and control character at micro - regional level (Hungary)	Mainly decentralized Autonomy, involvement of different actors, mainly bottom-up processes

Local actions groups	Low autonomy Reduced capacity and autonomy Low flexibility Reduced ability to respond to local needs	Low investment in education and training Reduced capacity and autonomy	Pioneers' ability and dynamism essential influence on strategies and projects Density of interpersonal relationships influences proactive planning power for the benefit of the entire territory. LEADER implementation depends on geographical context	Responsible for initiating cooperation projects Choosing partners and managing the procedural steps High skills Previous experience Local support skills Confidence/personal relationships Trust between LAGs
Cooperation and networking	Low coordination and cooperation	Low coordination and cooperation	Networks sensitive to the effects of places and contexts Quality of relationships important in social networks Knowledge and trust between actors (social capital) important for density of long term relationships, strategies and implementation (quality, inclusiveness) Spatial factors influence social interplay and strategies	Strong network of actors and relationships on a local and international scale Dynamic and open networks Creation of "contacts and multidisciplinary networks" (various fields) Equal position in power

Innovation	Limited innovative potential Trivialization of projects, standardized, low-risk projects	Technical, traditional innovation Limited innovative potential Standardized low-risk projects	Innovation seen in local actors' ability to organize partnerships, cooperation networks and to establish areas of intervention Development projects of common interest, few commercial ones	Innovation is understood in a broader sense Projects focus on intangible resources and broad themes such as local development
Integrated and multisectoral approach	Sectoral connotation Standard measures Low innovative cooperation projects Low multisectoral approach	Sectoral connotation Standard measures Low innovative cooperation projects Low multisectoral approach Standardized results and measures	Involvement of individuals in the collective process directly related to configuration of space	International projects built with particular attention International projects strongly attached to enhancing the local resources and actors Integrated, relational, open strategies

Our elaboration based on Dax et al., 2016; Belliggiano et al., 2020; Lacquement and Chevalier, 2016; Pylkkänen et al., 2015; Navarro et al., 2020.

4. Reading LEADER through the key features: the regional case of Puglia

The international cases have revelead significant features in common, essentially related to the difficulties of adapting and implementing LEADER on a local level. While from the programmatic point of view the interpretation of the key features is clear, it is on the local level that problems emerge. There are persistent critical aspects in the style and processes of governance and planning adopted. What emerges is a traditional, productivist approach which has revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale. Therefore, in order to explore what happens locally and to conclude the analysis we will now focus on a regional case.

Within the European regulatory framework, each Managing Authority, following the general guidelines set out in the national strategic plan, was able to structure the LEADER approach at its discretion, in relation to the general guidelines of its programme. In Italy this situation has led to a rather heterogeneous interpretation of the LEADER method. In this context, Puglia, a representative regional case during the 2007-2013 programming cycle, is analysed for the implementation of LEADER. The region is located in the South of Italy and belongs to the convergence objective regions of the 2007-2013 cycle (Figure 4).

In this predominantly marginal region in Southern Italy, which can be seen in figure 5, the LEADER axis played a leading role in 2007-2013 development planning. The amount of resources allocated was well above not only the percentage indicated by the EU (about 5%) but was also the

highest on a national scale (Figures 6-7), affecting the entire regional territory with the involvement of 25 LAGs, in this case higher than the national average (De Rubertis, 2013; De Rubertis et al., 2015; Labianca, 2016).

In national terms the region is characterized by a high rate of experimentation especially in recent years (Espon, 2013; De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; Labianca, 2014b; 2016; Profeti, 2006; Fighera, 2014), due to a capacity for cooperation and dynamism over time particularly concentrated in specific areas (MIPAAF, 2010; De Rubertis, 2013; De Rubertis et al., 2014; Labianca, 2014a; 2014c) and the strategic role assigned to Axis 4. It thus became a sort of emblematic pilot experience.

In 2005 the region initiated strategic planning experiences that would have a particularly innovative impact on the territory due to a long, significant experience in LEADER, and the role that this has assumed especially in the 2007-2013 programming cycle (among others see De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; Labianca, 2014b; 2016).

While on the one hand the latest reform of the CAP considerably simplified the programming of rural development policy from a financial point of view, on the other hand it introduced various elements of complexity through the LEADER method. From being a pilot scheme, the community initiative program has been brought back within the RDP, constituting Axis 4, thereby requiring new implementation procedures which, as we have said, have been greatly affected not only by the political, institutional and economic context but in particular by the social setting. As a predominantly rural region, the area has been progressively involved in the implementation of rural development policy since the 1990s, and in the 2007-2013 cycle it reached a high number of LAGs, covering the entire regional territory with the exception of the urban poles (De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; De Rubertis et al., 2014; Labianca, 2016) (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Italy: regional classification under 2007-2013 programming cycle.
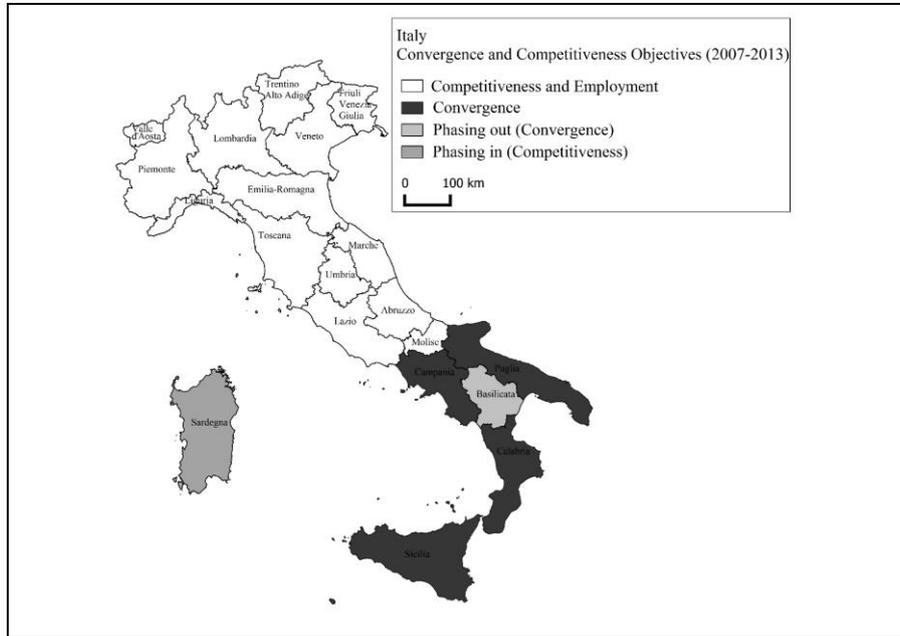
Source: Labianca, 2016.

Fig. 5. Puglia: rural areas classification.
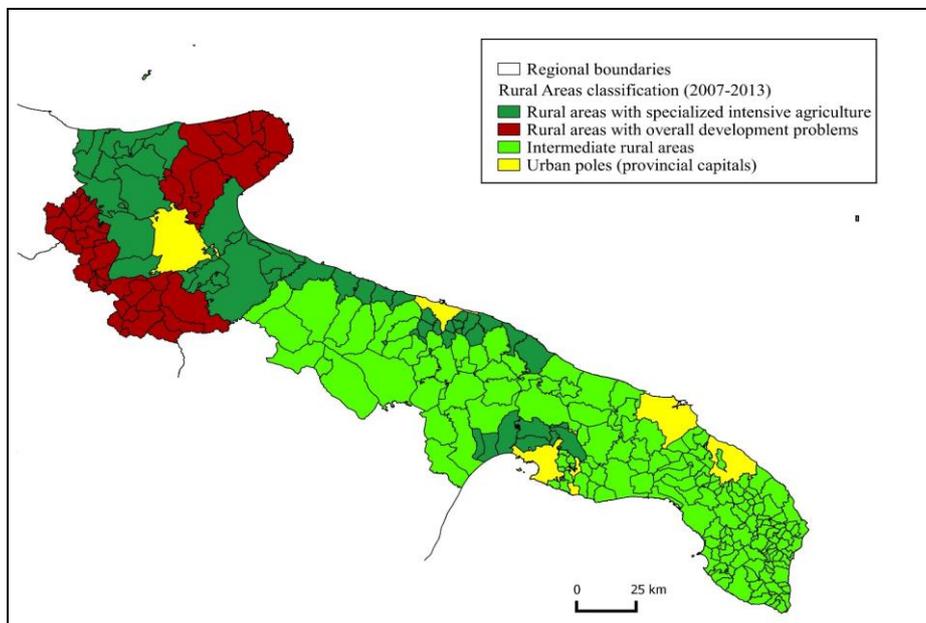
Source: Our elaboration.

Figure 6. Financial resources for Axis 3-4.   *Figure 7. Financial resources for Axis 4.*
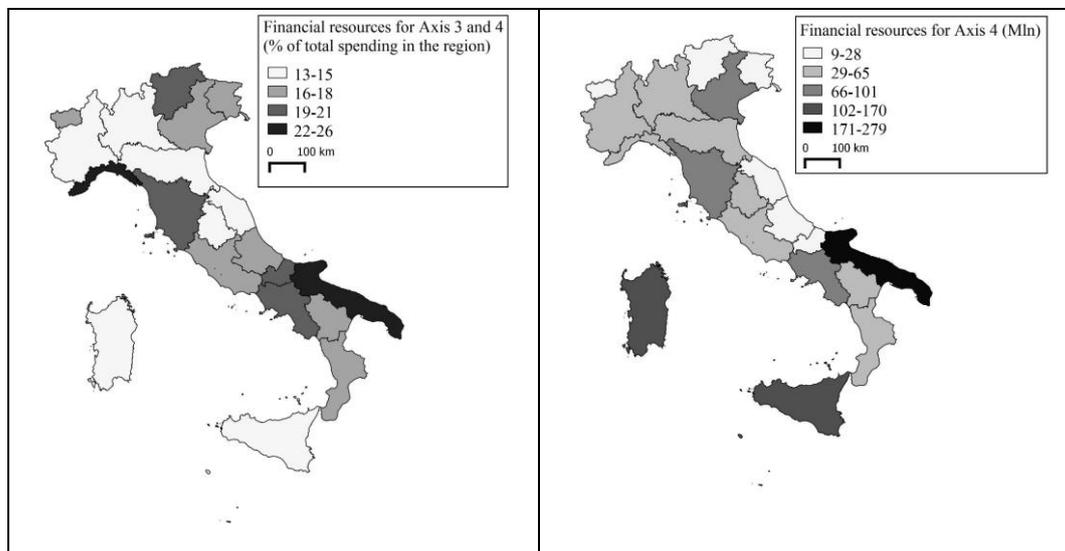
Source: Labianca, 2016.

In the cycle in question, 25 LAGs were set up to cover the entire regional territory, with some cases where previous experiences were enhanced (such as the Territorial Pacts, ITPs and SIPs). In fact, it was only in some of these cases (such as the area of the Monti Dauni) that the actors involved maintained stability and continuity over time) (De Rubertis, 2013). The analysis conducted in recent studies has made it possible to detect objectives and elements of innovation compared to the past but also the criticalities and shortcomings of the experience. The LEADER initiative has assumed a key role in the Puglia region during the recent programming cycles. The region, in fact, in the first edition of the LEADER managed to complete only two initiatives, but tried to increase and extend the adoption of the instrument in the following years to include all municipalities except for provincial capitals (urban poles) (De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; De Rubertis et al., 2014; 2015; Labianca, 2016).

In the 2007-2013 programming cycle, the region, which was included in the Convergence objective, placed great trust in the approach to a greater extent than the other Italian regions. In fact, it has invested more resources in Axes 3 and 4, thus giving the territories a leading role in the

development of local strategies. Axis 3, aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversifying the rural economy, integrated with Axis 4 (LEADER) absorbed over 20% of Community funding (Ibidem) (see Figures 6-7). Moreover, investing in axes 3 and 4 had an important significance in terms of strategy. In fact, it meant giving a precise orientation through two strongly interconnected axes related to the territory in its fundamental aspects of local development and the improvement of local governance (Labianca, 2016).

Starting from these basic premises, in this phase of our study, we will try to evaluate LEADER following the key features and their manifestation, by referring to previous research and reports by the Region, in order to orient our reflections and analysis about the ongoing programming cycle, of great significance for the region.

One element concerns the bottom-up approach and the development strategy elaborated by the territories. The regulatory re-introduction of a hierarchical structure for programming activity, based on the imposition of Community Guidelines, conditioned both national and regional programming. The National Plans of the various European States in fact, instead of deriving from local needs and therefore being an expression of the various regional programmes, have been defined in a hierarchical and top-down manner, significantly reducing the innovative scope of the various urban and rural development programming tools introduced precisely in the aforementioned cycle. To this is added the conservative system of the CAP for the involvement of specific actors (Belliggiano and Labianca, 2018).

In fact, as has been argued above, although according to the LEADER approach the local strategy should have been developed using a bottom-up approach, in fact it was under the strong constraints of objectives and requirements defined upstream by the regional government. As discussed in previous research (among others De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; Labianca, 2016) this in fact has limited the action of the LAGs and greatly reduced the innovative potential of the approach, in many cases producing strategies that are inconsistent with the actual needs of the territories. In this situation, while on the one hand the LAGs were recipients of

63

interventions that encouraged their respective territories to carry out accounting and administrative tasks, on the other hand they enjoyed little autonomy for the launch and implementation of innovative actions and projects.

The analysis carried out on the planning documents for the period 2007-2013 also confirmed the weak role and poor integration with other planning tools in progress (such as the planning experience of the vast area). This is probably due to the marked dependence of the local strategy on national and community guidelines, thus pushing the territories to develop projects that comply with established criteria required in other settings, with the effect of reducing their innovative potential (De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; Labianca et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2018). In fact, innovation mainly concerned the technical and production aspects, focusing to a lesser extent on improving the context from a cultural, social and institutional point of view (De Rubertis et al., 2015; Labianca, 2016; Labianca et al., 2016).

The adoption of a rather traditional productivist approach has also revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale. The entrenched nature of traditional governance models has limited the effective capacity for sectoral and territorial integration, as instead intended, thus preventing the actors from triggering real processes of change on a local scale (Labianca, 2016; Navarro et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2015). Compared to traditional forms of institutionalized planning and participation, as we will see below, community visioning is characterized by more ambitious objectives regarding the development of the territory, addressing complex problems, managing the construction of alternative scenarios (the shared vision of development more anchored to the values of the entire community), through innovative and extensive consultation and concertation processes.

In this case, participation cannot be reduced to mere information, communication and consultation. Participatory processes can be understood in various ways by local authorities and the methods and procedures activated may be different, however, as emerged in the LEADER experiences analysed, it can be argued that there is a common

difficulty in sufficiently involving communities and actors. The heterogeneity of the different actors does not always contribute to raising the quality of the path undertaken, especially if they are not adequately involved and informed, or if there is no mutual knowledge and trust between them (see the Hungarian case, discussed in the previous section). On the other hand, participatory practices are very often reduced to mere information and communication activities and do not envisage effective involvement and empowerment of citizens in all phases of the process.

As discussed in some research studies (among others Belliggiano and Salento, 2014; De Rubertis, 2013; Labianca and Belliggiano, 2018; Labianca et al., 2016) particular areas of criticality emerge regarding the poor activation of participatory paths that have produced a marked standardization with opportunistic interventions and behaviours. This is accompanied by a low activation on a local scale due to reduced room for maneuver on the part of the LAGs as well as the lack of experience in the field, due to the respect of evaluation criteria inspired by technocratic practices and established at the top levels (see the international cases analysed in the previous section).

As observed (Belliggiano and Labianca, 2018), the perception of the exercise of participation is rather contradictory: on the one hand the administrators and planners of the LAGs emphasize their own participatory results in a self-referential way, simply measuring them in terms of attendance at information or orientation events in preparation for the strategy; on the other, the various economic components interested or involved, measure participation exclusively on the reception given to their own requests or at the most on the degree of sensitivity expressed by the representatives of the LAGs towards the interests they represent. It is evident that both in the first category of actors and in the second, participation is considered only in contingent terms, thus allowing for impromptu initiatives that are often "piloted" (and not facilitated) by professionals.

Among the main territorial actors there is also a widespread awareness of the scarce effectiveness of participatory processes, caused by a substantially heterodirected approach (regional programme constraints),

which reduces the practice of participation to identifying the best form of available measures, rather than creating it themselves. It is therefore a question of a partial, perhaps ostensible, preliminary participation in the process, devoid of developments and aimed solely at achieving the awards given for the presentation of final reports (Ibidem).

The scarce focus on the role of participation practices at the regional level, the lack of codified procedures and experiences represent limitations of the LAGs themselves, who unfortunately continue to perceive participation more as an imposition, than a requirement, thus not feeling the need to generate internally the skills necessary to participate constructively. The study of the interpretation of innovation on a regional scale highlights the contradiction of the Apulian experience, the original desire for change actually seems not to have been adequately supported by a real need and culture of innovation (Belliggiano and Labianca, 2018; Labianca, 2016; Labianca et al., 2016).

In addition to the low level of participation on the part of the target community of the interventions, there is little continuity with previous experiences and a weak integration/coordination with the other programming tools that exist in the same territory (De Rubertis et al., 2014; De Rubertis and Labianca, 2017; Belliggiano and Labianca, 2018; Belliggiano and Salento, 2014).

The strategies developed reflect the lack of attention to the qualitative dimension of social phenomena. In this context, it is not surprising to have found weak continuity and coherence between objectives and strategies and inadequate coordination and integration mechanisms between instruments: often the results and experiences of previous projects are canceled out by the new ones or are in evident conflict with concurrent projects or competitors. Each project identifies different territorial systems, attributes standardized identities and objectives, rarely shared with the local community (De Rubertis and Labianca, 2017). Added to this, the integrated programming experiences have been marked by high partnership turnover , fueling discontinuity and making any coordination attempt even more problematic (De Rubertis, 2010; 2013; De Rubertis and Labianca, 2017; Belliggiano and Labianca, 2018).

This perspective has led to a sectoral and predominantly productivist approach in the other Italian regions that have invested more in axis I (where resources were mainly destined to the modernization of farms and the enhancement of agricultural production), but also paradoxically in the Puglia region which instead should have avoided this pitfall due to the greater role attributed to the LEADER method. As revealed by some field studies (Belliggiano and Salento, 2014), within the LAGs the territorial coalitions often manifest horizontal and vertical imbalances and asymmetries, with difficulties in programme management that often involve the use of exogenous specialized skills, with sub-optimal results. This situation affects the participation, commitment and motivation of the endogenous components.

At the same time, the involvement of a variety of local development stakeholders and their different functional interests remain vital for the processes and outcomes of governance in rural development. As noted by Furmankiewicz and Macken-Walsh (2016) the role and functioning of partnerships depend not only on membership thresholds, which are often defined on the basis of regulations, but also on existing social environments, relationships and networks. This can be exacerbated by the use of partnership funds to promote the interests of stronger partners, as well as the low representation of the traditional local community. In this regard, in such situations of imbalance of the interests represented, the authors consider essential to support and actively strengthen the third and private sector in rural areas, not only in order to challenge established positions of power, but so that they can be recognised as legitimate representatives and contribute to greater diversity in the results of rural development. All this leads us to reflect more deeply on the dynamics of local governance, often little considered, on the qualitative thickness of the relationships rather than on the quantity of them.

In order to have further elements of evaluation we will look at some regional reports. As established by the Community Regulations (1698/2005, art. 80 ff.), the Member States are obliged to establish an annual evaluation system for their Rural Development Programme, entrusted to experts external to the administration. An interesting aspect

regards compliance with the recommendations in the common monitoring and evaluation framework based on the Community guidelines. The internal evaluation reports are an important element that both highlights the regional government's capacity for critical self-assessment with a view to improving subsequent programming, and adds useful information for the analysis of the regional case.

An interesting element emerging from the European cases analysed concerns the governance approach and the modalities of shaping the objectives established at a higher level in the programme framework which, as we have stated, inevitably conditions the implementation on a local scale. Where LAGs are allowed greater decision-making and strategic autonomy, the result is an approach closer to the LEADER method, indicated by the greater capacity for community involvement and a more extensive participation, and strategies closer to the needs of the community, capable of acting at different levels, as occurs in Finland. Contributing to this assessment of the regional case is the Report drawn up in 2012 on the degree of "Leaderability" in Puglia.

This evaluation report, commissioned by the Region (Regione Puglia, 2012), examines the positioning of the Apulian LAGs under the Regulatory Framework (QR).[6] According to this analysis, LAGs enjoy a degree of decision-making autonomy in the formulation stage of the LEADER approach mainly in identifying partnerships, setting up and preparing the LDPs and identifying tools, actions and beneficiaries. At the implementation level they mainly focus on the exercise of delegated functions. On the basis of these variables, the "Leaderability index" was developed through a qualitative methodology, which represents the synthesis between the two dimensions of decision-making autonomy and functional autonomy.

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[6] The Puglia Region for the implementation of the LEADER approach produced a series of programming acts (the RDP, the selection criteria of the Measures, etc.) and implementation (the call for selection of DSTs and PSLs, the calls for measures, the funding, guidelines and procedures manuals, etc.) (Regione Puglia, 2012).

Scores were assigned for the two dimensions considered. For decision-making autonomy in the formulation stage, three orders of fundamental analysis factors were considered, representing over 80% of the score available for the matrix, in terms of absolute value, namely: territory, partnership and strategy. For the implementation phase, represented by a lower weight (equal to less than 20%), the following were considered: selection criteria and room for maneuver of the LAGs (degree of flexibility).

The dimension of functional autonomy is related to the attribution of tasks and activities to be carried out and the ability to implement and manage the local development strategy. In the formulation stage, therefore, two variables are considered, representing about 30% of the score available for the matrix in terms of absolute value: critical mass of the territory, administrative, managerial and financial capacity. Over 70% of the score is based on decentralization of tasks and functions, performed in the implementation stage. The two dimensions and the related variables are shown in the following table 3.

Without dwelling too much on the method and interpretation of the various variables, which are certainly affected by the Community guidelines and albeit with these interpretative limits, it is nevertheless interesting that the regional self-assessment is rather critical and confirms our analysis by adding further food for thought especially for the future.

Table 3. Region Puglia: dimensions to evaluate "Leaderability".

Dimension	Criteria	Phase
Decision-making autonomy	Homogeneity of the territory Composition of the partnership Strategic capacity Autonomy of strategic elaboration Potential for integration Potential for innovation Potential for cooperation Potential for networking	Formulation stage
	Autonomy for project selection Degree of flexibility	Implementation stage

	Critical mass of the territory Administrative, management and financial capacity	Formulation stage
Functional autonomy	Definition and completeness of the procedural and financial framework Animation, involvement and support for potential beneficiaries Preparation, publication of the public calls Evaluation of applications (admissibility and priority evaluation) Check of admissibility of payment applications Monitoring	Implementation stage

Source: Our rielaboration based on Regione Puglia, 2012, pp. 60 – 64.

By combining the two dimensions (decision-making and functional autonomy) in their positive and negative scores, four ideal types of "Leaderability" are obtained (Figure 8). This classification is useful as it also allows a self-assessment of practices according to constraints and procedures within a regulatory framework. In fact the different typologies of LEADER are the following:

LEADER light: the regulatory frameworks allow LAGs very limited decision-making power and they perform few tasks in the Axis 4 multilevel governance system. In these situations, the role of the LAGs is limited to deciding intervention strategies within a limited range of predefined measures (more often than Axis 3), with reduced space for original interventions relating to the local strategy. The LAG can therefore be compared to a "territorial information and animation desk of the RDP".

LEADER LEADER: on the opposite quadrant are those contexts in which, as indicated by the EU legislator, the LAGs have full capacity and decision-making autonomy in the formulation and implementation of local development strategies. Thanks to the skills acquired, they receive administrative and control functions. This is a higher stage of development, being considered a local development agency.

Implementing Agencies: this is an intermediate situation in which the LAGs are considered reliable in terms of administrative procedures and in

acting as a stimulus for the "demand for policies" that emerges at the local level. They have a limited autonomy for which essentially administrative tasks are entrusted to bureaucrats with little or no strategic responsibilities.

Strategic Competence Centers: these are cases in which the Central Authority allows LAGs a certain leeway in formulating and implementing innovative strategies and experimental initiatives. The LAG is therefore entrusted with the functions of formulating development strategies, defining actions and measures and criteria without being able to act on the implementation level, in fact the preliminary and control tasks are the responsibility of the central authority (Regione Puglia, 2012).

As emerges from the matrix, the Rural development plan for Puglia is located in the "Implementing agencies" quadrant showing negative scores for decision-making autonomy and positive ones for functional autonomy. This is important because the distorting effects of the regulatory framework are explicitly recognized and as previously stated, they have significant repercussions on the implementation of the LEADER method and therefore on the action of the LAGs. In terms of decision-making and strategic autonomy with regard to the choice of the reference area and the partnership, the LAGs were able to establish the area covered and the actors to involve with a certain autonomy.

On the local participatory decision-making level, although on the one hand there is a greater sensitivity in seeking shared formulas and methods of intervention, on the other hand, the forms of incentives that emerge are very weak. Furthermore, there is little autonomy to develop innovative local solutions and/or experimental proposals compared to the provisions of the RDP Measures. As regards the margins of maneuver for the Apulian LAGs, there is little possibility of participating in setting the calls and selection criteria for the beneficiaries, since they are indicated by the central authority. Another critical aspect that emerged is the obligation to link Axis 4 of the Puglia RDP with the actions of Axis 3, effectively limiting different and original solutions and the optimization of intersectoral connections that can be established between different actions and corresponding to different territorial needs (Ibidem).

Figure 8. The Ideal types of "Leaderability".
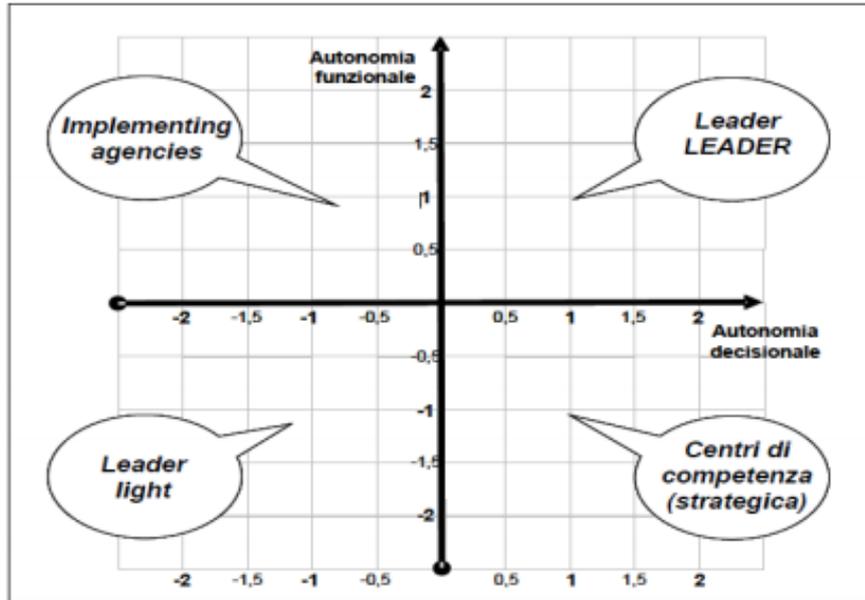
The figure describes how the regulatory frameworks recognizes varying levels of decision-making and strategic autonomy to the LAGs. Four types emerge: Implementing Agencies is an intermediate situation with a limited autonomy and little or no strategic responsibilities; LEADER LEADER, on the opposite quadrant, full capacity and decision-making autonomy in the formulation and implementation of local development strategies; LEADER light with very limited decision-making power and the strategies are elaborated within a limited range of predefined measures; Strategic Competence Centers: leeway in formulating and implementing innovative strategies and experimental initiatives without being able to act on the implementation level. Source: Regione Puglia, 2012, p. 66.

Regarding functional autonomy, the delegation of tasks to LAGs is relatively broad in relation to both to the administrative and control functions, however the following shortcomings have emerged: the scarce possibility of adapting the calls and selection criteria to regional measures and although no strict limits are set for the territorial critical mass, there are no elements that favour the identification of an adequate territorial dimension sufficient to support the local development strategy (Regione Puglia, 2012). An important aspect that also emerges from European cases and in particular the Finnish case is the importance of the institutional, human and social context. Briefly reviewing the experience of the Finnish

LAGs (see also Table 2), although the functional and strategic autonomy allowed to local actors is important, it is also true that the continuous training, the experience gained and consolidated, the presence of expertise, the openness to involvement and comparison internationally and between actors in a dynamic and multidisciplinary environment, the support for the creation of open and international multi-actor networks, the presence of relationships of trust and a dynamic social, economic and institutional context are the key variables for the success of the implementation of LEADER on a local scale.

Regarding the Apulian case, although there are limits deriving from the regulatory and evaluation system that have determined a reduced strategic and decision-making autonomy of the LAGs, on the other hand the latter should have been a reference point for comparison on the level of practices, thus contributing to a constructive dialogue with the regional government.

In fact, in multilevel governance each actor should interact at different levels contributing cognitive input, experiences and abilities, thus making it possible to implement change in a visionary perspective. Given the community guidelines to which all the actors should contribute for the definition, it is important that they take a form appropriate to the territories. They should not be conceived as rigidly prescriptive, otherwise, although programmes constantly refer to a new approach to planning, the actual aim will evidently be the consolidation of traditional practices, with token adherence to the rhetoric of social innovation, participation and the bottom-up approach.

The analysis carried out on the planning documents for the period 2007-2013 confirms the weak implementation of the LEADER method on a local scale due to the restrictions and constraints on the regulatory and prescriptive level. However it is important to reiterate the role of the intermediary actors who, thanks to their experience, skills and competences, should represent the needs of the territories and activate changes especially in terms of governance.

The adoption of a rather traditional productivist approach has also revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale. The entrenched nature of traditional governance models has limited the effective capacity for the desired sectoral and territorial integration thus preventing the actors from triggering real processes of change on a local scale.

In the current 2014-2020 programming cycle as indicated by the European Community (EU, 2013), the rural development policy pays particular attention to innovation and knowledge, indicating among the strategic objectives the promotion of competitiveness in agriculture and forms of sustainable management of natural resources and, for the climate, the achievement of balanced territorial development that takes into account rural communities, including the creation and maintenance of employment.

As we have discussed, in recent years rural development policy has undergone important changes, passing from a productivist approach to a distinctly territorial approach with evident criticalities in the adaptation and implementation on a local scale. The approach aimed at territorial and sectoral coordination should be guaranteed by integration with the Europe 2020 strategy, from which wider objectives are derived and articulated in 6 intervention priorities: transfer of knowledge and innovation, vitality and competitiveness of agricultural companies, organization of food chain and risk management, restoration, conservation and improvement of ecosystems, resource efficient and climate resilient economy, social inclusion and economic development.

Priority 6, for which most European countries have allocated around 11-20% of total planned public spending, aims to have a greater impact on social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas focusing on specific areas of intervention: a) facilitating the diversification, creation and development of small businesses, as well as the creation of jobs (Focus Area 6A); b) promoting local development in rural areas (Focus Area 6B); c) improving the accessibility, use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas (Focus Area 6C). For this priority, the resources aim to provide basic

services and encourage the renewal of villages, the application of the LEADER approach for local development (Labianca and Navarro, 2019).

For the current programming cycle 2014-2020, Puglia has decided to implement the LEADER within the EAFRD in rural areas with development problems, intermediate rural areas, in some protected areas of high natural value, in intensive and specialized rural areas previously involved in the 2007-2013 LEADER programming (Figure 9). An important element is the possibility of intervening in areas with overall development problems, selected within the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) through additional funding from the ERDF and ESF (European Social Fund) in order to favour the coordination of two strategies: one national and the other regional, certainly complementary and strategic.

Local development strategies may be single-fund (supported only by EAFRD) or multi-fund (also supported by other Community funds ERDF, ESF and/or the EMFF). In each case, at least 5% of each Rural Development programme is allocated to measure 19 - participatory Local Development LEADER. In order to favour a more integrated approach from a strategic point of view, the Puglia region has opted for a multi-fund approach. Measure 19 contributes to Priority 6 "Striving for social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas", in relation to Focus Area 6b "Stimulating local development in rural areas".

At the same time, the measure assumes a transversal character and will also contribute to the pursuit of other Focus Areas according to the different local development strategies proposed by the LAGs (Rete Rurale Nazionale, 2016).

In the current Rural Development Plan of the region the measure indicated is n. 19 addressed to the support for local development LEADER (SLTP - community-based local development) (article 35 of EU regulation no. 1303/2013). As usual, the RDP contains explanatory sections of the interventions, in particular in the statement of the objectives:

- guarantee the social and economic development of the territories by supporting economic and social activities (integration of immigrants used

in agriculture) and services, linked to production, environment, landscape, culture, tourism and social supply chains of the individual territories;

- increase employment and development opportunities for new businesses, promote the permanence of the population, improve the profitability of companies, assure local populations an adequate quality of life;

- establish and strengthen local partnerships, capable of implementing integrated socio-economic and territorial development plans and projects and encouraging the participation of local actors (Regione Puglia, 2019).

Figure 9. LEADER areas during 2014-2020 programming cycle.
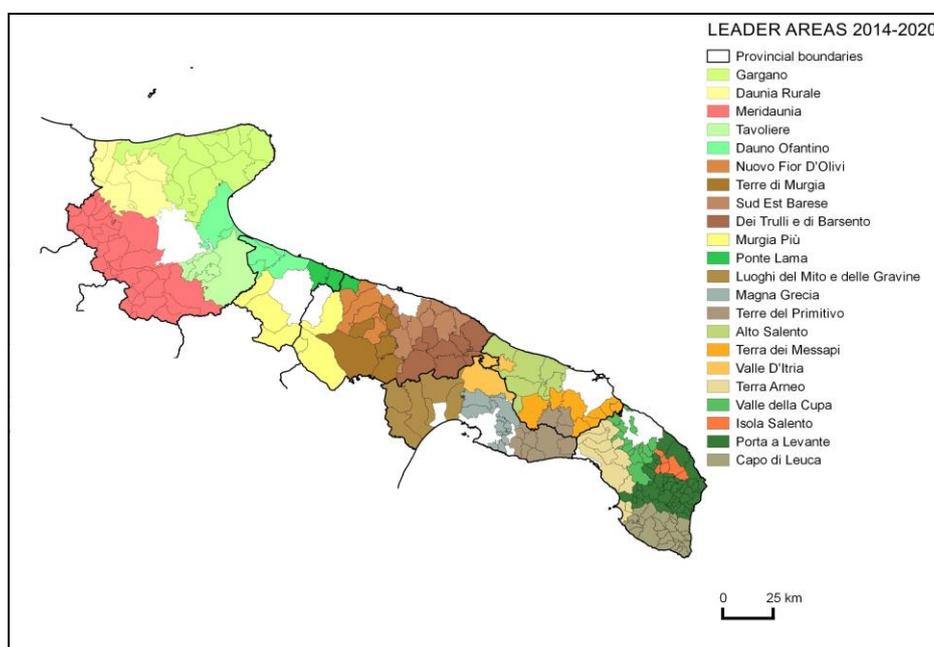
Source: Our elaboration based on Regione Puglia, 2019.

In particular, in the current cycle, the LAGs are recognized as having an important role in promoting innovation, the integration and coordination of policies in the territories, also in relation to the important interventions envisaged in the National Strategy of Inner Areas. From a programmatic and procedural point of view, the greater selectivity of the territories involved and the local development plans entrusted to the LAGs, focuses

attention on the strengthening of local partnerships and on the greater participation and involvement of the various actors in initiatives and persistent projects on the same territory.

The logic that promotes the implementation of LEADER is expressly described with a clear reference to the underlying type of planning. It is aimed at supporting:

> "A higher quality of local planning, also in terms of defining expected results and clear, responsive and measurable objectives, as well as the consequent measurement and evaluation of the related effects and impacts; economic and social actors in the local area for the promotion of diversification processes of agricultural activities capable of combining the economic sustainability of new investment initiatives with opportunities for socio-working integration and social innovation designed to develop the resources of rural areas and promote a higher quality of life, including through integration with sector policies in social, health and active labor policies; innovative local development strategy, aiming at job creation locally and the enhancement of local resources, encouraging sustainable production activities from an environmental and economic-social point of view, services for the population and social inclusion in particular through the use of the tools referred to in art. 20 of EU Regulation 1305/2013; a concentration and rationalization of the governance tools and roles envisaged at local level; planning inspired by transparency, efficiency and the general sustainability of its action and simplification of governance tools and procedures for access to European funding; planning inspired by the active, mature and conscious participation of the partners, public and private, including from a financial point of view, in order to ensure effective, concrete representativeness" (Regione Puglia, 2019, pp. 974-975).

In the document the concern to satisfy the respect for the community directives is evident, although there is a lack of more precise indications of intervention. In the context of integrated and multi-sectoral local development strategies, LEADER interventions should contribute to all three of the following crosscutting objectives:

-    "for the environment, through the possible activation of measures that incentivize investments for the safeguarding and enhancement of the natural environment and forests, landscape protection, responding to specific local needs;

-    for climate change, through the possible activation of measures that incentivize investments in renewable energy and energy saving, as well as for the protection of the natural heritage in general and forestry in particular;

-    for innovation, through the animation activity that it is hoped will be carried out by the LAGs to promote the establishment of local partnerships that carry out cooperation projects for the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies as well as for the diversification of agricultural activities into related activities such as health care, social integration, society-supported agriculture and environmental education and food, using the support provided for by measure 16 (Article 35 of Reg. (EU) No. 1305/13)" (Regione Puglia, 2019, p. 976).

The measure is divided into sub-measures: 19.1 Preparatory support; 19.2 Implementation of interventions under the CLLD (Community Led Local Development) strategy; 19.3 LEADER cooperation activities; 19.4 Management and animation costs. Clearer operational recommendations can be found in the description of the sub-measures. In particular, the first about the preparatory support deals with the preparation and formulation of the local development strategy under a participatory approach.

This preliminary, time-limited phase should improve the quality of the partnership setting-up phase and the planning of the local development strategy. The sub-measure provides support for the specificities in order to improve the capacities of local public and non-public actors in carrying out their role in LEADER, such as training, animation and networking.

The animation is expressly indicated as essential to "encourage community members to participate in the local development process through the analysis of the local situation, of the relative needs and of the possible improvement proposals" (Regione Puglia, 2019, p. 977).

An essential point for the implementation of the LEADER method is that "one of the first and most important tasks of local partnerships is to assess the capacity-building needs of the community and integrate them into the strategy". The partnership should therefore provide indications on the capabilities of the community and the activities needed for improvement. These skills concern: information sessions, support to promote the aggregation and organization of the community, project development advice and support, as well as training.

The explicit provision of these activities in the RDP is an important innovation because it clarifies the interventions despite closely following community recommendations. However, given the rather short time frames allocated to these complex activities which differ greatly according to the context, the time limits on their definition and development (in fact these activities require professionality and adequate times that cannot be reduced to a few months) would inevitably affect the quality of the activities themselves, undermining their effects and credibility in particular with the local community.

Sub-measure 19.2 provides for the implementation of the local integrated territorial development operations described in the strategy drawn up by the LAG and on the basis of the results of the animation activity conducted on its territory. This sub-measure also contributes to satisfying the requirements of the participatory and systemic approach, with a "demonstrative and innovative character", serving to raise quality of life also through the improvement of services to the population and the city-countryside relationship (Ibidem).

The requirements of the strategy include, in addition to the indication of the territory covered by the intervention, an analysis of the development needs and potential of the territory, including an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; a description of the strategy and its objectives; an illustration of the integrated features, strategy and a hierarchy of objectives, with the setting of measurable targets for the achievements and results.

Another aspect concerns the description of the local community association process. The formulation of strategy clearly requires an

operational action plan, as well as demonstration of the LAG's management, monitoring and evaluation capabilities.

The LAGs indicate objectives aimed at specific thematic areas, (no more than three) consistent with the emerging needs, the opportunities identified, with the skills and experiences gained by the subjects belonging to the LAG, in order to strengthen the quality of the design and implementation of interventions. This last point is important because there is a clear reference to the enhancement not only of material but also intangible resources such as knowledge and professionalism within the LAG. Another important aspect is that the local strategy must contain a strong interconnection and integration between the thematic areas selected.

However, there is little reference to innovation. In fact, the objective must be that of creating local employment and enhancing local resources, encouraging sustainable production activities from an environmental and socio-economic point of view, promoting services for the population and social inclusion. Emblematic is the interpretation of innovation as "an action that generates a change for the economic and social development of a specific territory. The degree of innovation is determined by the specific context of the territory. A practice developed in other contexts can represent an innovation in the LAG territory, where this practice has never been introduced" (Regione Puglia, 2019, p. 985).

In this regard, while on the one hand the role of innovation is recognized not simply as being of a productivist nature but closer to the concept of social innovation, and the specificity of the contexts is supported, on the other hand it is simply reduced to re-proposing innovative experiences conducted in other contexts, again denying the proper character of social innovation and the existing link with local territorial capital.

On the other hand, once again the Region establishes specific themes within which to formulate the local plan. They primarily concern the economy and production systems including local renewable energy chains, tourism, care and protection of the landscape, land use and biodiversity (animal and plant), enhancement and management of

environmental and natural resources, cultural and artistic heritage linked to the territory, access to essential public services, social inclusion of specific disadvantaged and/or marginal groups, promotion of legality in areas of high social exclusion, urban requalification with the creation of inclusive services and spaces for the community, smart grids and communities, economic and social diversification linked to changes in the fisheries sector.

At the same time, however, the value of small-scale projects that are integrated, innovative, experimental and cooperative is recognized. And again it is specified that innovation does not exclusively concern research and development activities, nor new technologies "but is closely connected to what the LAG wants to change" (Regione Puglia, 2019, pp. 985-987).

This highlights the greater attention paid to the role of innovation and above all to the significance it assumes on a local scale. It is an important element that allows the LAG an unusual strategic autonomy. In fact, being an expert on the local context, the LAG can establish the need for innovation, an important opportunity that nevertheless requires intense preparation and awareness on a local scale. Such skills require knowledge of competing policies at different levels that must necessarily be integrated into a strategic vision as we will see in the next paragraphs.

In order to implement these interventions according to a participatory approach, measure 19.4 concerns management and animation costs. This is a strategic but often underestimated measure. In fact, from our point of view, it represents the heart of the functioning of the LAG. From its description, it concerns the operational management of all the phases and procedures required for the implementation of the initiative, with a widespread animation operation throughout the territory to encourage the active participation of local operators. It is a matter of acquiring resources for effective and efficient management of the local development strategy.

For this reason and for what has emerged so far in this study, these measures cannot be reduced to the mere administrative and accounting management of projects. In this case, in fact, a very traditional model of

planning would be proposed, since the actors are responsible for the implementation of the local strategy.

In the context of the application of LEADER, it is a sub-measure that assumes a strategic and not marginal role as has happened in the past. Although from a programmatic point of view there is a greater awareness of change and of the ways to initiate it, in operational terms the lack of clear references could re-create situations and criticalities of the past, reducing the LAG to a mere implementation agency. In fact, this measure should, among other activities, contribute to raising internal skills and professionalism, developing new competences and ways of working, through open debate with the local community.

In short, it is no longer sufficient to change or innovate individual pieces composing strategy, but rather a different, more drastic approach is required, capable of triggering changes of a distinctly cultural nature.

5. Reading LEADER through processes, styles and approaches for planning

The reconstruction of the strategies adopted in the European countries and the emblematic case of the Puglia region have highlighted some limits and critical issues that therefore require a profound rethinking and above all highlight the need to find ways to interpret the processes and provide recommendations for self-assessment and policy suggestions. Therefore, with all these elements in mind, we will try to reflect on planning styles, strategies and approaches in order to devise a final, logical interpretative framework for self-assessment and future policy suggestions.

The current debate on rural development practices focuses on the neo-endogenous approach in European rural areas, trying to identify its modalities, actors, strategies and relationships, and recognizing that the LEADER method, albeit with its limits and critical issues, has a leading role in stimulating the territories especially those affected by development and peripheral delays (Cejudo and Navarro, 2020).

The literature review presented by Gkartzios and Scott (2014) enables the main characteristics of the different models of rural development to be identified. According to the authors, the first "modernist" model which developed after the Second World War in Europe viewed rural areas as highly dependent on external input from a technical, cultural and economic point of view. This model was therefore compatible both with objectives of economic growth on a productivist mold, and with a top-down approach. The exogenous approach to development showed its shortcomings linked to the strong dependence on external input in both the political and economic sense, and the distortions caused by the focus on single sectors, activities or locations. It was considered destructive

because it eliminated the cultural and environmental variety of rural areas and was imposed by others who were mainly external experts.

These criticisms have sparked such debate on a European scale that they have led to a significant change especially in the last two decades through the transition from sectoral to integrated and territorial approaches (Ibidem). In fact, this contributed to the emergence of endogenous development approaches as early as the '90s, exemplified in Europe by the LEADER programme. The essential elements of this approach were: a territorial and integrated focus, the use of local resources and the local contextualization of the interventions through active public participation. The development-focused objectives leverage the concepts of multidimensionality, integration, coordination, subsidiarity and sustainability (Ibidem).

In this case, too, the following characteristics emerged: territorial (non-sectoral) approach to development; local scale interventions; economic development interventions aimed at obtaining the maximum benefit through the enhancement of local resources; development focusing on the needs, capabilities and perspectives of the local community.

This emblematic change inevitably goes hand in hand with the downward transfer of powers enabling the transition from a top-down to a participatory bottom-up approach to take place (Ibidem). However, here too there was no lack of criticism of the endogenous approach. As shown by the authors, the main limitations highlighted in studies on the subject concern problems of participation and elitism. Moreover, the idea that the local rural areas can pursue socio-economic development independently from external influences is rather an idealization and does not reflect the practice in contemporary Europe since any rural location will include a mix of exogenous and endogenous forces, with the local level interacting with the extra-local.

Instead, it is crucial to understand the ways to improve the capacity of rural areas to carry out these processes, actions and resources to their advantage (Ibidem). In view of the rarity of a purely endogenous model, a hybrid model between the exogenous and endogenous model is more realistic, capable of focusing on the dynamic interactions between local

areas and the wider political and institutional, commercial and natural environment. This model, defined by Ray (2001) as neo-endogenous, therefore describes a strongly rooted approach to rural development but at the same time open to external solicitations. This approach requires a rethinking of development, focusing on local resources and local participation that act on different levels of interaction in an innovative, dynamic and creative way:

> "The use of the term 'territorial' is also meant to concentrate attention onto the issues facing the vast majority of people as they are acted upon, and seek to engage with, globalisation/Europeanisation in that the term encapsulates the innate tension between the local and the extralocal. Increasingly, the spaces within which action (whether emanating from the 'bottom up' or from the 'top down') is being organised are being formed and re-formed as a function of creative tensions between local context and extralocal forces. It is through the medium of these dynamic tensions that the forces of modernity are materialising; just as it has been argued that '(rural) development' takes place at, and is defined by, the interface between the agents of planned intervention and the actors in localities, so territories themselves are being moulded and created by the local–extralocal tensions of globalisation and reflexive modernity. Thus, the use of the term territory (or 'place') signals the intention to formulate some of the options for action available to people in territories to which they feel a sense of belonging and in which the forces described above are manifesting themselves" (Ray, 2001, p. 8).

The definition of neo-endogenous development has been explored in depth in our previous research too, along with some specific case studies (Belliggiano et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2018a; Labianca et al., 2020). The neo-endogenous approach introduces an "ethical dimension" of development focusing on people's needs, abilities and expectations, in an inclusive and participatory context. In particular it introduces "new sensitivities", which go beyond the exogenous and endogenous modes. Instead of focusing on the outside (external investments and agricultural

modernization objectives), it focuses on the inside (local actors and resources), going beyond the theory of growth and recognizing the importance of supra-regional contexts and the strong effect of international flows on local processes (De Rubertis, 2020, p. 7). In previous work (Belliggiano et al., 2018) we have examined the most prominent literature (among others Neumeier, 2017; Bock, 2016; Dax et al., 2016; Butkeviciene, 2009), demonstrating that social innovation is at the heart of the process. It produces an "increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension)" (Butkeviciene, 2009, p. 81). Therefore, in the following table, the attempt is to synthesize and make clearer the main features of the approaches to rural development.

Table 4. Main features of the different approaches to rural development.

Main features	Exogenous	Endogenous	Neo-endogenous
Policies	Top-down approach Sectoral	Bottom-up approach Partecipative Territorial Integrated	Bottom-up approach focusing on flows and participation Holistic
Participation	Information/ communication (passive role)	Active participation of local community	Empowerment
Resources	External (technological, cultural, economic)	Local resources	Mixed resources
Objectives	Economic Productivity	Development (local needs, capacities, perspectives)	Development as a continuous rethinking of resources and local capital (selective and reactive community)

Source: Our elaboration.

These premises are important in establishing the perspective within which we move if we need to explore planning strategies, in this case extended to the rural context. As anticipated in the introduction, an interesting distinction regarding planning strategies is made in Healey's

work (1997). In fact, based on the literature, the author very effectively reconstructs two main approaches: strategy-making as politics and technique and strategy-making through inclusionary deliberation. In our study, it is assumed that this distinction and reconstruction is useful in getting a better understanding of the strategies adopted and of the main critical issues that emerge in the LEADER programme with the application of the concept of neo-endogenous development.

In fact in Healey's work (1997, p. 243) it is assumed that the institutional design, the forms of governance, the planning style, and the organizational methods are part of a "dynamic endeavour which evolves in interaction with local contingencies and external forces, in order to address the agendas of those with the power to shape the design". The distinction between the approaches allows us to understand the assumptions, the operating modalities, and their limitations within this context.

In the first approach, strategy as policy and technique, which flourished during the 1960s throughout Europe, the formulation of plans is based on the translation of strategies into operational principles and regulatory rules to guide development, mainly linked to economic and physical planning. Although it contains many ideas and principles that provide valuable ideas for the construction of strategy, it is however limited by its assumptions of "instrumental rationality" and "objective science". In this case, rational techniques are used for the achievement of objectives, while analysis and evaluation serve for the selection of "better" or "more satisfying" alternatives among a series of possible strategies. On the other hand, strategies are primarily based on problems and quickly translated into performance criteria and objectives. On an entrepreneurial level, the process concerns achieving coordination and a marketing vision (Ibid., pp. 242-248).

The planning process, based on scientific technology for the elaboration of strategies in complex and interconnected contexts, assumes that strategies could derive from analytical routines based on empirical investigation and deductive logic. The objectives therefore express the purpose of the strategies. The resulting process model sought to

distinguish the discussion of objective "facts" from the discussion of values. For planning, the necessary elements focused mainly on achieving goals, steering the action to achieve the desired results, and comprehensiveness.

It is interesting to notice the major criticisms of this approach. They include: the recognition of the limits of knowledge, the impossibility of an agreement on the objectives in a pluralist policy, the tendency to imagine futures through incremental methods starting simplistically from the existing, the underestimation of the variability of contexts, the essential conservatism of methodology, the difficulty of grasping the dynamics of complex and contradictory changes, the complex interconnections with politics, the effectiveness of the policy-making activity rather than the focus on the process, and problems concerning identity and ways to knowledge (Ibid., pp. 250-252).

In this context, the "space of action" is defined in the field of technical work, analysis and evaluation carried out by technicians in their offices, through to the formulation of ideas and tools used to manage the environment externally. This usually produces plans containing a mere collection and instrumental manipulation of the data (Ibid., pp. 252-253).

The most recent shift towards the interactive perspective on strategy-setting states that strategies and policies cannot be the result of objective and technical processes, but must be actively produced in social contexts. This vein has developed slowly and has followed different directions including the "consensus method" in which the planner is a "debate facilitator" rather than a "substantial expert" within open debates.

In the evolution of planning thought, this area included a technocratic managerial technology widespread in Europe in the 70s for the construction of networks. The main criticalities in the process were linked to the lack of attention towards power relations and to the ethical issues of network construction (Ibidem). In this field there are two dimensions for this kind of learning activity: the first, single cycle learning, focuses on how to best perform the tasks within certain parameters; the second concerns knowing the parameters and then modifying the conditions under which the activities are performed.

Double-cycle learning can take place through dialogue, thanks to which people can collectively explore and learn about issues through group dialogues. In this case knowledge and understanding are produced through social interactivity and if we understand the strategy we are pushed to move from analytical managerial technologies to social ones. However, this is still a limited approach in the context of "an individualistic" and "objectivist conception" of the external world. Developing strategies through inclusive deliberation occurs within a socially constructed reality in which knowledge and understanding are produced through the collaborative social learning processes, not through abstract techniques (Healey, 1997).

The approach makes some important assumptions. In the first place, the sharing of power takes place through multiculturality, in the social relationships in which individuals build their identities through networks of potentially multiple relationships. Social learning processes are based on the creation of trust to create new relationships of collaboration and confidence and encourage the shift of the power bases. This involves real changes, with the removal of hegemonic communication and power distortions.

Secondly, the approach stresses the importance of practical awareness, and local, scientific and technical knowledge. Local knowledge has specific reasoning processes, solutions, values and people's concerns will emerge in a variety of forms in collaborative contexts.[7]

Third, the emergence of needs, problems, policies and modalities to be followed must be actively created through the fractures of the social relations of those involved, thus encouraging the participation of all interested parties. Consensus building can indeed generate trust, understanding and new power relationships between participants, producing social, intellectual and political capital (Ibidem).

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[7] These local resources indicated by Healey in the form of social relations, social capital, cognitive capital, human capital and its variety can be traced back to our definition of territorial capital (see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2020) on which local development paths and visions depend. These aspects will be explained more clearly below.

Fourth, this process creates an institutional capacity that affects not only the participants, but also the participants' social networks. Consensus building can therefore create new cultural communities capable of transforming themselves. The result not only affects new ways of accessing knowledge, but also new ways of acting and new political discourses. In this sense, consensus building and practices have transformative social potential (Ibidem).

There are no limits on strategies as they can be developed in many different institutional contexts. Successful strategy-making creates strategies and policies that convince stakeholders of the value of taking a new direction and all it implies by creating a new discourse or story out of a series of problems. Such discourses break new ground and have the potential to change the structuring of social relationships. The involvement of different voices and the cultural diversity prompts reflection on "visions of the world" from the different contexts through which a policy-making exercise passes.

The strategy-making activity that "makes the difference" and brings transformation therefore involves social processes which generate new shared beliefs. This implies reviewing and reflecting on existing ideas, generating new routines and forms of organization and ideas that can be incorporated into local knowledge. Strategy is therefore a delicate balancing act, between what is and what could be. At the two extremes, if it is modified in a limited way, the effort may simply produce the state quo, or it can produce problems of political and social acceptability (Ibidem).

An important aspect to consider is that there is no a priori model: it is produced locally, through reflection on methods, organization and consensus (Ibid., pp. 265-268). In this review, we also find the key elements of the two main planning approaches that allow us to get a better understanding of the critical aspects of the LEADER approach, in particular in its form and application at the local level.

Healey argues that since there are profound differences in the two main approaches to planning, it is essential first of all to make a critical review of the arenas of confrontation, of the styles of governance and

communication, of the processes and of the ways of constructing the strategy.

In the institutional design of processes for collaborative and inclusive strategy activities, the arenas in which the debate takes place must be critically re-evaluated. In particular, formal political structures, although often guarantors in terms of ethical conduct, can however be a marked limitation since these arenas are so dominated by particular ways of thinking and organizing that they inhibit the voices of the stakeholders and limit the development of new ideas and approaches.

The impulse to change can come from within or from outside, but the role of the activators is fundamental. The latter are those who have a key role in recognizing moments of opportunity and mobilizing networks around the common idea. They are capable of formulating the strategy and have an acute sense of dynamic social and economic relationships, as well as being capable of mobilizing interests and commitment by focusing on who to involve and on the methods. The relevant actors must be able to interpret the potential opportunities, and to elicit critical reflection by the community about the direction to take (Ibidem).

In this context and in order to initiate a decisive change that allows the community to follow the path of strategic planning, as opposed to the rational style, according to Healey, a communicative and inclusive "ethical challenge" is needed. This will open up to the real democratic discussion, where the actors are actively and genuinely involved in all stages of the process, participating in the debate with their peers and making their voices heard. As for the process, it must be easily reconstructed, the analysis must be conducted analytically and so as to include minority positions, it must allow the collective imagination to conceive of possible paths, freeing itself from previous practices and seeing problems in a new way.

The quality of the approach is that of the style and ethics of the discussion context. This allows the attention of those involved to be maintained throughout the process and also keeps the focus on the requests of the interested parties. The strategy must be flexible, evolve

dynamically, critically and reflexively, guaranteeing periodic review and allowing the creation of a renewed cultural community.

In this way, social, intellectual and political capital is developed among the interested parties, thus generating an institutional openness towards the networks established, affecting both daily life and cultural coexistence, creating trust and understanding through which knowledge can flow and act as a resource for subsequent collaboration. It is an approach that involves profound rethinking regarding style, modalities, processes, also in terms of reflexivity and discourse, as we have tried to show through a personal re-elaboration, based on previous and ongoing research, as well as current applications as shown in Table 5.

From our critical review of the LEADER method and the approaches to planning, it emerges that, at least from a programmatic point of view, the traditional measures and policies explicitly aiming at objectives of economic growth and competitiveness are the product of the rational approach while the measures and policies aimed at neo-endogenous development of the territories are related to the 'visionary' approach.

Here, it is clear how the two approaches are distinct, with the methods adopted and the communication styles specific to one or the other. In this re-elaboration we have tried to underline the crucial aspects which previously emerged, compatibly with the strategies adopted in the LEADER method. By reading the variables observed it is possible to understand which approach has been consciously or unconsciously adopted. On the regulatory level this logical framework could allow insiders to be able to interpret their practices critically and open an important debate with greater awareness about the major critical issues of their interpretation and adaptation of the LEADER method in their local context.

This self-assessment, especially at a local level, regarding methods, styles of government and governance and approaches to strategy can be considered fundamental in the light of European experiences and the major problems emerging (as shown in the previous paragraphs). We think that it should be an almost obligatory step to understand in a subsequent phase of control and monitoring (therefore avoiding mere

compliance with indicators mainly of economic results and return on investments), identifying which elements worked and which weaknesses were revealed in the path implemented in order to intervene by adopting the appropriate corrective measures.

In order to complete the logical framework, in the last row of the proposed table we have tried to summarize the main critical points highlighted in Healey's work. They concern many aspects, each associated to one of the two main approaches considered. They range from the problems of knowledge of the context and knowledge production, up to the methods and principles which govern the processes.

The standardization of practices, the inability to elaborate visions for the future, the persistence of the status quo even after several attempts at change and investment (as very often happens in the context of community funding and not just for LEADER), the lack of awareness and reflexivity on the path taken by the actors involved, are all attributable to the more traditional planning approach largely outdated in scientific and political debates (examples are the programme guidelines of development programmes in different fields at all levels) but probably not completely overcome in practice (as revealed in the previous paragraphs).

Possible reasons may be related to the significant efforts that neo-endogenous approach requires on a human, social, institutional and political level. In fact it requires substantial renewal efforts and work on the intangible local components that are difficult to quantify and to date underestimated in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the community programmes. These intangibles regard fundamental components of the so called territorial capital, mainly human, social and cultural[8], whose quality affects the possibility of imagining alternatives and visions, profoundly changing ways of acting, rebuilding and redefining power relations inside the territories in which they are active.

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[8] The reference is to the concept of territorial capital developed under the PRIN 2015 entitled "Territorial Impact Assessment della coesione territoriale delle regioni italiane. Modello, su base place evidence, per la valutazione di policy rivolte allo sviluppo della green economy in aree interne e periferie metropolitane" (Coord. M. Prezioso) and present in our research, in particular see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b, 2020.

As Healey (2007, p. 180) argues in a more recent work, strategies are complex social constructions. Therefore they require complex institutional work in bringing together actors and their relational networks, to create new communities and political networks that can act as carriers of strategic ideas through the evolution of governance over time. In the following paragraph these aspects will be examined more deeply and connected to the LEADER practices.

Table 5. Main features of planning and practices.

Variable	Rational planning	Spatial planning
Type of Strategy	Strategy-making as politics and technique	Strategy-making through inclusionary deliberation
Approach	Top-down	Bottom-up
Relevant Context	Institutional, political	Social, cultural system
Participation	Information, communication, passivity of the actors Limited to some stages of the process	Active participation / empowerment Open and guaranteed at all stages of the process
Style	Argument focused on objectives Adoption of technical / formal language Inclusion of relevant stakeholders or of some selected minorities	Argument active inclusive Adoption of common and shared language (communicative ethics) Minority inclusiveness (inclusive ethics)
Process	Mostly formal / institutionalized Standardized, limited to change Analysis, technical and abstract process	Formal / informal Open/dialogic / flexible / relational Analytical and shared Collective imagination of possible paths Path reflexivity and evolution
Strategy	Focused on goals, maximizing preferences Formal, technical Coherent, rational, scientifically justified Limited review Goal monitoring and their achievement	Focused on problems, community needs Mixed formal / informal Flexible / in evolution / reviewed Critical and reflexive Reviewed Openness to different evaluations and alternatives Continuous monitoring in a dynamic context

Knowledge	Abstract techniques Mostly from the outside, external experts	Collaborative learning processes Dialogical, reflexive
Territorial context (description)	Complete census (exhaustiveness principle) Visible and material elements (principle of evidence) Each element as a distinct component (reduction principle) Linear and neutral knowledge Information layers (principle of causality) Territorial homogeneity	Attempt to understand reality and its complexity Role of intangible, social and human characters Circular relationship between subject-object of knowledge Specific and subjective knowledge Territorial diversity
Main Criticisms	Limited knowledge Poor agreement on objectives Little awareness of the real opportunities, problems Adoption of incremental methods to imagine the future Reproduction of the status quo Underestimation of the variability of the contexts Conservatism, simplification Excessive attention to techniques, procedures Poor reflexivity Excessive priority to results Standardized description of the context, mainly from the outside Standardized objectives and plans	Idealistic approach Difficulty starting process Processes not always controllable Presence of an adequate institutional and political context for the challenges Difficulty in accepting new ideas and changes

Source: Our elaboration based on reflections by Healey (1997), previous and current research and ongoing applications.[9]

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[9] It is the result of research in the field during these years, its application has been tested during the "Organizzazione e pianificazione del Territorio" and "Sistemi Informativi Geografici" courses held at the University of Salento too.

6.   Towards a visionary approach to LEADER?

The idea of planning has been discussed for a long time, it has evolved with different styles and basic logic that have inevitably conditioned the results and impacts on the territories. Such practices have evolved, bringing to light disputes about the role, legitimacy and even usefulness of the most recent practices defined as idealistic. These circumstances are even more acute in rural areas, areas with complex and contingent problems, for which planning activity has often led to the planning and imposition of problematic plans and policies, both in technical, political and social terms as societies become more diversified, informed and fluid.

The integration between different plans and policies at various levels, the need for vertical and horizontal integration, bring out new challenges for planners and planning policy. As discussed, for a long time, planning has been seen as a rationalistic process guided by utilitarian logic with obvious problems in terms of results, especially at local level, competing claims and consistency between objectives and practices.

At this stage of the study we will try to return to our initial aim, that is to better understand the LEADER approach through the examination of its main characteristics in which the transition from a traditional to a visionary approach clearly emerges. According to our assumption, explained in the course of this work, a misunderstanding has been created especially on an operational level, around the key features of the LEADER method, which has ended up in an over-simplification of processes and practices, making them ineffective on a local level. In the previous sections

we have highlighted some critical issues considering the different European experiences.

These practices have significant features in common, essentially related to the difficulties of adapting and implementing LEADER on a local level, therefore to better explore this field of investigation, we have examined a regional case, a representive and testing ground for LEADER at a national level, through the lens of these key features. While from the programmatic point of view the interpretation of the key features is clear, it is on the local level that problems emerge. There are persistent critical aspects in the style and processes of governance and planning adopted. What emerges is a traditional productivist approach which has revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale and which seem to be entrenched in traditional forms of institutionalized planning and participation, all of which poses limits on the construction of alternative scenarios for development.

In actual fact, from what has emerged in the course of this study it is clear that there is a substantial difference between what is indicated from a programmatic point of view and what occurs in practice. Another situation which may arise mainly in the most recent experiences and which has emerged in those examined (especially in the case of Apulia for several reasons such as inexperience, conflicts between constraints and objectives at different scales, the prevalence of a traditional and rational approach etc...) is the overlap and coexistence between different approaches to planning, making the failure of any experience and initiative inevitable. In other words, while from a programmatic point of view the approach would tend especially (in the last programming cycles) towards a territorial, visionary type, from an operational point of view, on a local scale, it would seem strongly traditional and sectoral.

On the basis of these considerations, an attempt has been made to formulate a logical framework that sums up and compares different and opposing approaches to LEADER (sectoral/traditional and visionary) which we have tried to develop in this monograph. The study reconstructs the main features that distinguish the two approaches, taking into account the style and planning approach, the aims of a local project, the

interpretation of innovation and of local resources, and the role of local actors. According to our assumption, these characteristics can reveal the approach and style adopted at the local level and can therefore be seen as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale.

The reflections, the common criticalities and the territorial differences that have emerged are connected to issues and differentiations in the modalities and style of planning that emerged in Healey's work. Our assumption is that the LEADER method should move in the direction of the visionary approach in order to achieve full implementation especially on a local scale. These elements lead us to believe that there is an absolutely urgent need both for a rethinking of the LEADER approach in a visionary perspective and for finding ways to interpret the processes and provide recommendations for self-assessment and policy suggestions.

At this point it is clear that it is necessary to better define this approach and the characteristics that distinguish it from the traditional one, in order to avoid rhetoric and mere trivialization practices on a local scale.

The crucial aspect at this point concerns how do visions and strategies come about? It is clear that emerging strategies require substantial changes and revisions of planning systems. As Healey (2007) argues, the formation of the strategy in these circumstances does not proceed in an orderly way through specific technical and bureaucratic procedures, it must be understood as a messy process, back and forth with multiple levels of contestation and struggle. In this case the strategies emerging from these processes are socially constructed structures or discourses. Moreover, the formulation of the strategy is not limited to the articulation of strategic ideas but is conceived as persuasion and ability to inspire various actors in different positions, where specific ideas bring power, generating and regulating new ideas for projects.

Strategies, according to this assumption, are emerging social products in a complex governance; they are fluid, neither standardized nor imposed from above. For Healey (2007), strategy, interpreted in this way, is really transformative. It is not easy to define, like "vision" or the production of some kind of image. It is found in the generative, coordinative and

justifying style in governance contexts. Such a conception of strategy arises from a relational and interpretative perspective, which emphasizes two dimensions of relationships, or connections, for the creation of an effective strategy:

- the first is the way the "strategic frame" imagines links between phenomena, highlighting critical issues and interventions;
- the second concerns the "nexus of relations" within which a force is built up behind a strategic framework, sufficient not only to achieve some priority for attention in governance, but also to resist and flow to influence the critical arenas in which action is formed.

In these processes of building intellectual capital and socio-political force, the strategy can be continually reimagined, with shifted meanings and priorities. In fact:

> "In these processes of constructing intellectual capital and socio-political force, a strategy may be continually re-imagined, with meanings and priorities shifted. A powerful strategy is one that has interpretive flexibility but which retains and focuses on key parameters as it travels among governance arenas through time […]. In such conditions, social-learning processes become more important than bureaucratic procedure, rationalist scientific management or pluralist politics as modes of strategy formation (Christensen 1999). In summary […] strategies are selective constructions, 'sense-making' devices, created from a mass of material. Their formation occurs through time, but not necessarily in defined stages and steps" (Healey, 2007, pp. 184-185).

As emerged in this work so far, therefore the construction of a vision requires a paradigm shift. In fact only persuasive strategies are able to "orient and inspire activity, through motivating people with future hopes and through giving some actors an idea of what other actors may be up to". In this case intellectual and social resources are mobilized "to create the power to carry a strategic frame forwards, just as they may also mobilise resistances" (Ibidem).

For Healey (2007), then, strategies are efforts in the creation of collective meaning. If they gain strength through mobilization and persuasive processes they allow the flows of resources to be modeled, norms and normative topics to be structured and inspire the invention of new projects and practices. An important element to consider is the presence and mobilization of actors from different fields who, thanks to their knowledge and resources, make it possible to develop the strategy.

Therefore, these are processes that not only create knowledge but allow the reordering of values. Through feed-back, new networks and communities of practice are generated around a new strategic discourse. In this way, the elaboration of the strategy and the emerging vision is the result of a dynamic emerging social construction able to "contribute to stabilising and ordering" (Ibid., p. 186). In this sense, the LEADER method with the bottom-up approach and a participatory style, places strategic actors and the local community at the center of the process, radically changing the process itself.

The attempt to bring together the elements that emerged in the previous paragraphs makes it clear that there is a substantial difference between what is indicated from a programmatic point of view and what derives from the practices. In other words, there is a contrast between the approach from a programmatic point of view (it would tend especially in the last programming cycles towards a territorial, visionary type) and from an operational point of view, in particular on a local scale (it would seem strongly traditional and sectoral).

In fact, as emerges from the case studies analyzed, the objectives are mainly standardized, easily controllable, with a low degree of risk and mainly related to economic objectives or competitiveness. Innovation itself is interpreted in a technical, technological and productive sense, as an external, codified and linear process that is easily adaptable to different contexts, easily measurable through standard indicators, in contrast to what we discussed previously.

According to our argument, the litmus tests are the process and the style of planning adopted. In fact, as we have previously discussed, a rational and deterministic logic prevails, in which the results are at the

heart of institutional and political concerns and the community represents the vehicle through which to achieve the objectives. The community is involved in the processes to a limited extent, participation is usually nominal, limited to some initial and significant actors and steps and not influential in defining the local strategy. As regards the local strategy, it is often inconsistent with the resources and the perception of resources by the community, having been developed without community input and therefore without an internal knowledge and awareness of the territory.

By contrast, the visionary approach leverages the imagined future of the community and therefore cannot ignore the community itself which is at the center of the process, present in all phases in a dynamic, interactive process, in an active, responsible way. In this case the participation is at the highest levels, not mere rhetoric but direct activation of the various actors involved from the beginning. They also undertake to collaborate for the realization of single pieces of the local strategy.

In this important phase it is not possible to conceive the actors, even institutional ones, in their traditional roles but they become facilitators of the process. The choice of activating these processes is usually made by these institutional actors starting from the allocation of resources which certainly cannot be standardized but will have to take into account the different contexts, preparing them for change, acting mainly on the human and social capital. And it is precisely on this important point that the concept of territorial capital needs to be examined.

At this point, although the concept of territorial capital is often referred to in current strategies, we can argue that there is little awareness of its deep meaning and operational methods of intervention especially on a local scale. The references to territorial capital usually concern single components and although there is some emphasis on the intangible aspects (in particular the quality of human and social capital) as drivers of economic development, in reality the use of the concept as initially defined in our research (De Rubertis et al., 2018b), only makes full sense if it actually enters into programming, linking resources and modes of use based on the expectations of the community. In fact, the review of the literature has led to a definition of the concept of territorial capital and

also its attempted measurement (see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2019a; 2019b). In particular, the immaterial component is of great importance according to our assumptions of planning as a vision and strategy as a social construction.

Indeed according to De Rubertis et al., (2018a, pp. 157-158) territorial capital can be defined "as a set of immaterial socio-cultural, material and physical-environmental socio-cultural elements, moreover, it is identified and organized by the reference community on the basis of the development objectives that it could pursue or actually pursues. Territorial capital and its components therefore have relevance in relation to the value that individuals and communities attribute to it" (Ibidem). Therefore immaterial components of human, cultural and social capital influence other components of territorial capital. In fact, "interpersonal relationships, local institutions, widespread knowledge and skills, the tangible and intangible heritage settled over time are obviously affected by the common cultural matrix.

Moreover, the way in which it relates to its physical-environmental context also depends on the social and cultural qualities of the population: expectations, projects, strategies, actions result from the individual and collective representations of their respective living environments. From this perspective, the concept of "social capital", as a regulator of individual behaviour in a community, seems to play a pivotal role in the definition of the concept of territorial capital" (Ibidem).

In this examination based on the suggestions from planning practices and the literature, important clarifications made in previous research (Labianca et al., 2020) take on even more importance, that is:

1. recognition of territorial capital: the capacity of recognizing the territorial capital – or creating it cognitively - the local actors should have a reflexive capacity, that is, it is necessary that the essential preconditions for the creation of knowledge and sharing between the actors exist;

2. attribution of value to territorial capital: in consideration of the different values and sensitivities within a context, it becomes necessary to build consensus around the recognition of the territorial capital. Trust and social capital are fundamental in this step (Ibid., p. 116).

These assumptions about territorial capital, are certainly compatible with the visionary planning approach, while the more traditional interpretation linked simplistically to a set of resources as instruments of mere enhancement and not of development, is a feature of rational planning and in particular of the sectoral, traditional approach of LEADER.

On the basis of these considerations, an attempt has been made to formulate a logical framework that also in this case allows to compare different and opposite approaches (see Table 6). The considerations that emerged in the previous paragraphs are brought together and two approaches to LEADER, which we have tried to develop in this work, are compared. We have little by little identified the main characteristics that distinguish the two approaches: sectoral and visionary. These characteristics can be taken as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale.

Certainly the visionary approach contains important elements which, although already present in the LEADER programmatic guidelines, as previously discussed, have remained at least in operational terms poorly applied. The LEADER of the future will have to reconsider and reflect on this approach and try to put it into practice in European rural areas, paiying particular attention to the local.

More urgent reflections concern the 'who' and 'how' of the processes. This is especially true for the territories lagging behind, at risk of progressive impoverishment, of among other resources, their human capital, the real creator of the processes of change. Reflecting on the 'who', certainly involves the allocation of resources, which must therefore be aimed at fostering the creation of skills and knowledge in the territory. Reflecting on the 'how' seeks to make this idealistic approach more operational.

The role of the LAGs will certainly be fundamental since they are the privileged "activators", and have a genuine, in-depth knowledge of the territory. They must be actively involved in a process of real multilevel governance, of mutual comparison and self-assessment, offering concrete,

strategic suggestions and recommendations, with their decision-making autonomy and centrality in the process being fully recognized.

Table 6. LEADER: key features of the approaches.

Key features	LEADER approach	
	Traditional	*Visionary*
Objectives	Economic goals Competitiveness	Creation of 'imaginaries' and alternatives for development
Planning approach	Rational	Spatial
Strategies	Sectoral	Relational
Development approach	Predominantly exogenous	Neo-endogenous
Innovation	Standardized, codified Exogenous, technical	Social innovation
Territorial capital	A set of distinct and unrelated tangible and intangible resources Strong prevalence of tangible and quantifiable resources Knowledge and recognition quantified from the outside	A set of strongly linked material and intangible resources Strong attention to intangible resources, especially relational ones (they represent the connecting element between them) Strong role of human, cultural and social capital Knowledge and recognition from inside
LAG's role and features	Implementation agency Low strategic and functional autonomy Low skills and knowledge Subject to and conditioned by formal external evauation	Active actor High strategic and functional autonomy High professionalism, expertise, knowledge Reflexive and self-evaluation ability

Source: Our elaboration.

Infact, as Healey (2007, p. 192) argues, strategies should be "culturally peculiar", to "have effects are not just abstract concepts, floating in the ether of design and planning discourses. They gather force because they resonate with the values, perceptions and particular needs of key actors. They develop energy as they are positioned in critical governance arenas. They answer to the sense that some kind of strategic orientation is needed to give meaning, justification and legitimacy to a stream of activity".

Obviously this will have to take due account of the local context. It will probably be necessary to consider that deep processes of social and institutional change will take longer, because according to Healey (2007, pp. 194-198) they need to accumulate the power of mobilization, to learn what it means to "see" the issues that concern them in a completely new way. The creation of strategies in a relational sense implies the connection of knowledge resources (intellectual and social capital) to generate a mobilization force (political capital). These resources (in our meaning the territorial capital) develop internal and external mobilization, becoming nodes and networks through which a strategic discourse is spread. The dynamics of mobilization, with the knowledge and internal relational resources, must therefore move towards central arenas both in terms of resources and to gain influence in a dynamic and complex context, to have sufficient legitimacy to survive in the governance context where power is widespread and positions shift continuously (Ibidem).

In the future, the LEADER must therefore reiterate the key points of the approach and clearly share with the local actors the methods for concrete application on a local scale, through a necessarily visionary and dynamic approach that starts from social innovation. In view of our discussion, a rethinking of the LEADER approach in a visionary perspective becomes urgent. As has emerged, it will certainly not be necessary to intervene on the basic characteristics but on their interpretation and formulation on a local scale. This will certainly require a different approach to planning than the traditional one. Therefore, a greater awareness on the part of the LAGs and the local community of their strategic role, a greater reflexive capacity and a new ethics in the style of discussion and planning are urgently required at numerous levels.

Significant efforts on a human, social, institutional and political level are required. In fact it is necessary substantial renewal efforts and work on the intangible local components that are difficult to quantify and to date underestimated in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the community programmes. These intangibles regard fundamental components of the so called territorial capital, mainly human, social and cultural, whose quality affects the possibility of imagining alternatives and visions, profoundly changing ways of acting, rebuilding and redefining power relations inside the territories in which they are active.

Since strategies are complex social constructions, a complex institutional work is necessary in recognizing the role of actors and their relational networks, to create new communities and political networks that can elaborate and carry out strategic ideas through the necessary and contextual evolution of style of governance and processes.

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PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

N. 5