

A TERRITORIAL PERSPECTIVE ON EU'S LEADER APPROACH IN DENMARK: THE ADDED VALUE OF COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AND COASTAL AREAS IN A MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE SETTINGS

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Abstract: This paper investigates the added value of the territorial governance approach LEADER in the multi-level governance setting of rural and coastal development. Using focus group interviews in five Danish rural and fisheries local action groups (LAGs) from the 2007-2013 programming period, the paper demonstrates that pursuing the LEADER method at the LAG level enhances rural development in the form of leverage, democratisation and bottom-up decision making that none of the other levels in the multi-level governance setup of LEADER would be able to provide. However, some of the method's seven concepts are not fully used. Maintaining a focus on all of the method's concepts could allow for even greater rural development.

Keywords: Rural and coastal development, territorial governance, community-led local development (CLLD), local action groups (LAGs and FLAGS), LEADER, multi-level governance (MLG).

Resumé: Denne artikel undersøger merværdien, som den områdebaserede selvstyremetode LEADER spiller ind med i flerniveaustyring af landdistrikter og kystområder. Ved brug af fokusgruppeinterview i fem danske lokale aktionsgrupper (LAG) dækkende både landdistrikts- og fiskeriudviklingsområder fra programmeringsperioden 2007-2013, viser artiklen, at forfølgelsen af LEADER-metoden på LAG-niveau øger udviklingen i form af gearing, demokratisering og bottum-up beslutningstagning, som ingen af de andre administrative niveauer i flerniveaustyringen af LEADER ville være i stand til at levere. Men nogle af metodens syv begreber udnyttes ikke fuldt ud. Et styrket fokus på alle metodens begreber kunne give mulighed for endnu større udvikling af landdistrikterne.

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Nøgleord: Landdistrikts- og kystområdeudvikling, områdebaseret selvstyring, lokaludvikling styret af lokalsamfundet (CLLD), lokale aktionsgrupper (LAG'er og FLAG'er), LEADER, flerniveaustyring.

1. Introduction

As a method for rural development, LEADER³ⁱ has been studied from various angles since its introduction as a community initiative in 1991. Some authors have considered the innovative feature of LEADER (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Dax et al., 2013; Neumeier, 2011). Others have reflected on the bottom-up approach (see for example Thuesen, 2010). Still others have approached the element of cross-sectoral cooperation (Scott, 2002) etc. In 2014, a new programme period begins with LEADER as a tool for territorial development in the form of multi-funded, community-led local development (CEC, 2012). Few studies to date (see, for example EENRD, 2010; and to some extent Lošťák and Hudečková, 2010, p. 253 and Furmankiewicz, 2012, p. 266) have attempted to consider all of the LEADER approach's seven key concepts at the same time as a point of departure to capture the overall added value of the entire approach. The present article fills this gap by addressing the research question of what added value the territorial local governance approach LEADER contributes in the EU multi-level governance (MLG) setting of rural and coastal development, where governance is dispersed across various actors. We use the term 'added value' to identify the additional value that the LEADER approach provides and to demonstrate in which ways a territorial governance model like LEADER is competitive with more centralized implementing methods of delivering rural development. This article provides examples of this added value by discussing the results of Denmark's implementation of the LEADER component of the EU Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Fisheries Programme (FP) for 2007-2013. The article does not employ economic calculations of added value but rather uses a qualitative approach with focus group interviews to reveal the ways in which the LEADER approach adds value. It is thus a study based on local community opinions, which can be considered as what High and Nemes (2007) denote an endogenous investigation. It focuses on results that arise from within and which includes a learning potential that could importantly feed into and supplement more traditional external evaluations to make them more hybrid (High and Nemes, 2007, p. 105).

1.1 The structure of the article

Section 2 is a background section on the effectiveness and efficiency of LEADER and on MLG. Here, we also explain our understanding of MLG. Section 3 will determine the framework of what is officially considered to be LEADER's added value through a review of scientific articles and policy documents. Section 4 is a methods section. In Section 5, the empirical results are presented. Section 6 discusses the findings. Finally, Section 7 provides conclusions on the Danish case regarding what value added the LEADER approach provides in the MLG setting.

2. Background on LEADER added value and MLG

2.1 Do we know what the LEADER system creates?

The commission presents the rationale behind LEADER in the following manner: 'the main concept behind the Leader approach is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice' (CEC, 2006a, p. 8). Thus, the commission places great emphasis on local action

³ The EU LEADER approach consists of seven features: 1) area-based local development strategies, 2) partnerships in the form of local action groups, 3) bottom-up strategy, 4) implementation of innovative strategies, 5) implementation of cooperative projects, 6) cross-sectoral approach and 7) networking of local partnerships (CEC, 2005, Art. 61).

groups (LAGs) established as a component of a vertical MLG setting. This article describes and discusses the types of effectiveness and efficiency that the LEADER approach creates. This topic is especially important, given recurring discussions of whether LEADER produces results. A recent special report by the European Court of Auditors stated that the commission has not yet succeeded in demonstrating the added value of LEADER (ECA, 2010) compared to conventional rural development measures, although the approach has been used for approximately 20 years and the same weaknesses were highlighted by the court's last review (ECA, 2001). LEADER has undergone thorough evaluations over the years and is currently subject to the common monitoring and evaluation framework (CMEF), but clear results have yet to be demonstrated (DGARD, 2006).

2.2 MLG and LEADER

We understand MLG as devolution of authority to and negotiation between many nested levels of governance (Marks, 1993, p. 392; Hooghe, 1996) and our focus is on the local governance level, where the LAG operates. The study thus deals with what Hooghe and Marks (2003) nominate type 1 governance, where the entities at each level are nested within those at other levels. In addition, we are inspired by the EU White Paper on Governance (2001), which specifies that 'each governance level should contribute in line with its capabilities to the success of the overall governance'. We do, however, acknowledge the possible constant fragmentation between the views of EU/national formal institutions 'and the needs and established ways of doing things' (High and Nemes, 2007, p. 104) in local areas. There are thus different perspectives on the value of devolving authority to the local level and affected socio-economic actors, as is the case with LEADER. A general perspective advanced by Marks and Hooghe (2004, p. 2) is that MLG is frequently introduced because it:

- can internalize externalities
- can better reflect heterogeneity of preferences among citizens
- can facilitate credible policy commitments
- allows for jurisdictional competition
- facilitates innovation and experimentation

A study by Kull directly addressed the topic of devolving authority to LAGs and stated that although the introduction of LAGs has the potential to activate, attract and motivate local residents and to strengthen the relationship between the EU and its citizens; national ministries remain the most important decision makers in the EU MLG system of LEADER (2009, pp. 8-10).

Considered in its entirety, implementation of the LEADER approach is a complex task, and differences among countries and localities will naturally appear. There is substantial distance between the official EU documents, which determine the content of the LEADER approach, and the member states and local governance networks (the LAGs) that are key nested players for implementing the approach. Moreover, even greater distance exists between the official documents and the project managers, who can apply for project grants if the projects conform to the LAGs' overall LEADER strategies. The MLG system of LEADER as part of the Danish RDP and FP is illustrated in Table 1. The table seeks to describe what an actor at a given level in the first column is doing with respect to the levels listed in the top row and thus emphasizes the embedment of the LAG into the other governance levels. As noted, this article investigates the added value of the LEADER approach – mainly to be implemented at the LAG level – for the remainder of the system. The table excludes Danish municipal and regional levels of governance because they are to a certain degree bypassed by the other governance levels.⁴ The organization of the municipal and regional levels of governance differs between the EU member states and, if included, the MLG system would appear less homogenous.

⁴ For information on the horizontal relationships between these governance levels and the LAGs in the Danish RDP and FP 2007 - 2013, see ZZ (2013).

Actor: In relation to	Project holder	LAG	Ministry (Network Unit and Payments)	EU
Project holder	Formulates and implements the project as applied for	Seeks approval for the project, inspiration and guidance	Waits for approval and receives payments	Seeks information
LAG	Recommends financial support, provides guidance and creates networks	Formulates and implements development strategy	Picks up inspiration and coordinates administrative procedures.	Participates in networks and fosters cooperation between projects
Ministry (Network Unit and Payments)	Approves and pays as well as tracks economic and project statistics	Adds national frames, informs, supports and guides	Implements a politically determined RDP/FP	Collects inspiration, coordinates administrative procedures and evaluations
EU	Calculate the overall statistics, controls and evaluates	Adds frames and offers information and networks	Provides frames, offers information and networks, and evaluates	Implements the CAP, Pillar 2/the FP

Tab 1. Nested levels of governance in the MLG system of LEADER in Denmark.

3. What is LEADER?

LEADER is an acronym representing the following French phrase: 'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale' ('Links between actions for the development of the rural economy'). The LEADER approach is operationalised through the adoption of seven key concepts. One could consider the seven LEADER elements to function as pieces of a figurative puzzle, and the task of the LAG is thus to assemble the pieces to complete the local rural development scene (XX, 2006). Therefore, the positive effects of an approach such as LEADER are likely to be found at the local territorial level, where the LAG operates as a supplement to the vertical governance system. The review of the LEADER approach is structured to consider all of the seven key features in an effort to maintain focus on the actual content of the approach.⁵

3.1 Area-based local development strategies

This first concept concerns a LAG's definition and implementation of a development strategy based on the LAG area's specific strengths and weaknesses. The new rural paradigm (OECD, 2006) emphasises that rural development strategies benefit from an increased focus on amenities. The ability of people and firms to improve their welfare endogenously as well as the marketing and commercialisation of site-specific natural and cultural resources are central components. Furmankiewicz (2012) states that communication is favored and willingness to act collectively is improved when areas smaller than the state or region is taken as point of departure. The focus on the ability of rural areas to exploit the areas' own resources (e.g., environmental facilities, heritage, traditional food) and the availability of markets for products based on these resources in which they can be sold profitably (OECD, p. 142) are essential and consistent with concepts generated in the scientific literature such as Bryden and Munro's commercialisation of immobile resources (2000), Ray's culture economy (1998) and Terluin's

⁵ The seven features sometimes appear in different ways. For example in the 'LEADER II Teaching Guide' (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leader2/dossier_p/en/contents.htm), the features networking and cooperation are presented together as one feature and there is a feature, which deals with local financing and management. That is why we have taken as point of departure the official legal document's listing of the seven features. Our listing thus corresponds with the RDP 2007-2013, Article 61 of the Council Regulation 1698/2005 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32005R1698&from=DA>). Also the publication 'The LEADER approach – a basic guide' presents the seven key features as we do (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/leader/2006_en.pdf).

local milieu development models (Terluin, 2003). LAGs must translate their needs and opportunities into local targets and focus on meeting these targets when implementing their strategies (ECA, 2010, p. 21). This very specific process of problem structuring and area-based strategy making in relation to LAGs involving local learning is described by Vidal (2009). The preparation of the LAG strategy does, however, not take place in a bubble with no outside influence. It is precisely one of the areas where LAGs - from their local characteristics and strengths – play into the framework set by the national RDP's and FP's, which in turn plays into predefined measures in the European RDP and FP's. So this feature of the LEADER approach exemplifies the LAG's embeddedness in the multi-level governance setting.

3.2 Partnerships in the form of LAGs

This element refers to the establishment of LAG partnerships and thereby the introduction of self-governance in horizontal partnerships between the private, public and voluntary sector at the local level of the vertical MLG system. It is thus one of the more important features of LEADER, without which the others would not give meaning. The LAG partnership's performance both in terms of efficacy and democratically will determine the LAG's ability to provide results to the MLG system. LAG partnerships are believed to create social capital (Shucksmith, 2000; Nardone et al., 2010). A broader theoretical concept useful in relation to partnerships is institutional capacity. This concept was developed by Healey et al. in connection with urban development (Healey, de Magalhaes and Mandipour, 1999) but can also be applied to LAG partnerships for rural development (Scott, 2004; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010). It is interesting how a LAG partnership builds knowledge resources (intellectual capital), relational resources (social capital) and mobilisation capacity (political capital). More generally, partnerships can lead to synergy (Hardis, 2003, 2004), win-win situations (Googins and Rochlin, 2000) or collaborative advantages (Huxham and Vangen, 2004).

3.3 Bottom-up strategy

This LEADER feature contrasts traditional top-down implementation approaches in which national or regional authorities define project selection criteria, consider project proposals and award grants (ECA, 2010, p. 10; ENRD, 2010a). The benefits of the bottom-up feature are that it should mobilize local potential on both the LAG (YY, 2010) and project levels. The idea is that local groups are optimally situated to identify integrated and innovative solutions to local problems and are more able to act responsively. Furmankiewicz (2012) states that also from a rational choice perspective this can hold true for the reason that inhabitants of a territory are best informed about how the local system works and because local networks enables people to express preferences in a more continuous way than through elected representatives. A bottom-up approach that involves local communities may also have less tangible effects at the project level, such as increased enthusiasm, increased commitment, capacity building (ECA, 2010, p. 10) and social capital creation (Teilmann, 2012), or the development of what Brennan et al. (2008) termed a local community field important for community development. The bottom-up feature relates specifically to MLG by virtue of its importance for increased local involvement in rural development and the anchoring of decisions.

3.4 Implementation of innovative strategies

The concept of innovation is often coupled with exogenous expert knowledge, private companies, product development, technology and entrepreneurship. In addition to this, LEADER actors also understand innovation as social innovation, the creation of local connections and a shared learning culture and cultural innovation (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008, p. 274; ENRD, 2010b). Neumeier offered the following argument in relation to various self-governance-based rural development initiatives: 'a change in the attitudes, behavior or perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that, in relation to the group's horizon of experiences, leads to new and improved ways of collaborative action in the group and beyond' (Neumeier, 2011, p. 65). The innovations that are generated through LEADER are thus often collaborative (Galamba, 2011) and are habitually found in new links among agriculture, tourism and service (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008, p. 274) or in relation to

whether institutional capacity has increased (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008, p. 287; Healey, the Magalhaes and Mandipour, 1999). The concept of innovation is important in relation to the entire MLG system's ability to deliver the desired results since knowledge transfer and innovation are pivotal horizontal objectives of the RDP and FP.

3.5 Implementation of cooperative projects

Ray (2001) described how rural areas should not only focus on local development but also act strategically on a more European level. The implementation of cooperative projects through LEADER can be either inter-territorial or transnational (ENRD, 2011, p. 5). Collaborative projects produce added value by 1) achieving critical mass and synergies; 2) improving competitiveness through new business partnerships and markets; 3) promoting innovation through new skills and expanded horizons; and 4) developing territorial identity and raising awareness (ENRD, 2011, pp. 7 - 8, ENRD, 2010c, p. 1). The direct importance of this feature to MLG is less significant than for the former described features. Its symbolic importance in relation to EU integration should, however, not be underestimated, as cooperation leads to a wider understanding between LAG board members and project holders in the EU.

3.6 Cross-sectoral approach

OECD's new rural paradigm (OECD, 2006) is centred on the cross-sectoral or integrated feature, underscoring that future rural development should be conceptualised across sectors, as opposed to the previous sector-based focus on, for instance, agriculture. According to OECD (2006, page 15), attention should be devoted to place within or around which the LAGs can strive for integrated collaboration between different sectors (e.g., rural tourism, manufacture, ICT, retail). The OECD report states as follows: 'There is recognition that policies for rural areas require a multi-sectoral approach as no one sector is sufficient to bring about rural development' (OECD, 2006, p. 102). This feature mainly operates at the territorial level of the MLG setting, so the importance for MLG is not significant even though the cross-sectoral approach supports creation of results at the local level, which will feed into the overall system.

3.7 Networking of local partnerships

The networking of local partnerships aims for the exchange of experiences and the transfer of best practices. Such networking occurs in forms that may include local, national and EU publications, conferences/seminars and databases of best practices via LAGs, the national network centres and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) (ECA, 2010, p. 29). Networking is not cooperation, as the latter requires a common action (ENRD, 2011, p. 6; CEC, 2006b, Article 39.3, p. 29). The task of the national network centres and ENRD is to support networking across all RDP and FP activities (with a special focus on LEADER) and the LAGs are expected to be active and participate in this (Marquardt, 2011). One can say that the network concept helps to lubricate the MLG system to make it work more smoothly and to facilitate learning.

Table 2 presents only positive forms of added value. Of course, the LEADER approach also has potential negative consequences. For example, partnerships may suffer from identity and legitimacy problems (Hardis, 2003, 2004), bottom-up approaches may remain in some sense elitist (YY, 2010) just as participation of local residents does not come by itself when introducing partnership based solutions (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). LAG partnerships are also in some countries dominated by public authorities (Perez, 2000; ECA, 2010; Furmankiewicz, 2012) and there is a risk that the innovative element is neglected (ECA, 2010; Dax et al., 2013). In relation to innovation, Dax et al. (2013) write that it has become harder to work innovatively in the 2007-2013 program period as LEADER has been mainstreamed into the RDP and FP and through this change has lost some of its possibilities for innovative work. In relation to the cross-sectoral feature, Scott (2002) states that it should be emphasized more in the strategy making phase in order to provide results.

Key concept	Forms of added value	Literature
Area-based local development strategies	The development strategy respects the unique situation in the area as well as its strengths and weaknesses and thus creates income and/or identity. The revenue base is diversified through the marketing and commercialisation of site-specific natural and cultural resources. Communication is favored and willingness to act collectively is improved when areas smaller than the state or region is taken as point of departure in strategy making. The strategy making increases local learning.	ECA, 2010; OECD, 2006; Bryden and Munro, 2000; Ray, 1998; Terluin, 2003; Furmakiewicz, 2012, Vidal, 2009.
Partnerships in the form of LAGs	Opportunities that would not otherwise have been found are discovered. Knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capacities (institutional capacities) are developed and used. Synergy, win-win situations and collaborative advantages emerge.	Healey et al., 1999; Scott, 2004; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2000, Shucksmith 2010; Hardis, 2003, 2004; Googins and Rochlin, 2000; Huxham and Vangen, 2004; Nardone et al., 2010.
Bottom-up strategy	Integrative and creative local solutions to local problems are discovered. Social capital is created. People are mobilized and local knowledge is used. The ability to act responsively is improved. Greater enthusiasm and engagement are obtained. Local community fields arise.	ECA, 2010; Teilmann, 2012; YY, 2010; Brennan, 2008; ENRD, 2010a, Furmankiewicz, 2012.
Innovative strategies	A change in attitudes occurs. Social innovation develops. Institutional capacity is built. Collaborative innovation emerges.	Neumeier, 2011; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Healey et al., 1999; Galamba, 2011; ENRD, 2010b.
Cooperation projects	The regional identity is developed and diffused to actors in larger areas. Critical mass and complementarity are achieved. The individual LAG produces results that it would not otherwise have produced.	Ray, 2001; ENRD, 2011; ENRD, 2010c.
Cross-sectoral approach	Collaboration across trades and borders between businesses, the public sector and the civic sector/NGOs results in new products and ideas.	OECD, 2006.
Networking of local partnerships	Ideas are generated. Experiences are exchanged.	ECA, 2010; ENRD, 2011; Marquardt, 2011; CEC, 2006b.

Tab 2. Forms of added value produced by the LEADER approach based on the literature.

4. Methods and context description

The added value of LEADER in Denmark was investigated through five focus groups (Edmunds, 1999; Halkier, 2009) during October and November 2011. Two interviewers attended the focus group meetings, each of which lasted approximately two hours. All focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and coded. In total, 25 board members and coordinators from five LAGs from different parts of the country participated. The following LAGs were involved: LAG-Vendsyssel (rural LAG), LAG-Ringkøbing-Skjern (rural LAG), LAG-Tønder (both a rural and fisheries LAG), Fisheries-LAG Fyn (fisheries LAG) and LAG-Development Northwest (both a rural and fisheries LAG).

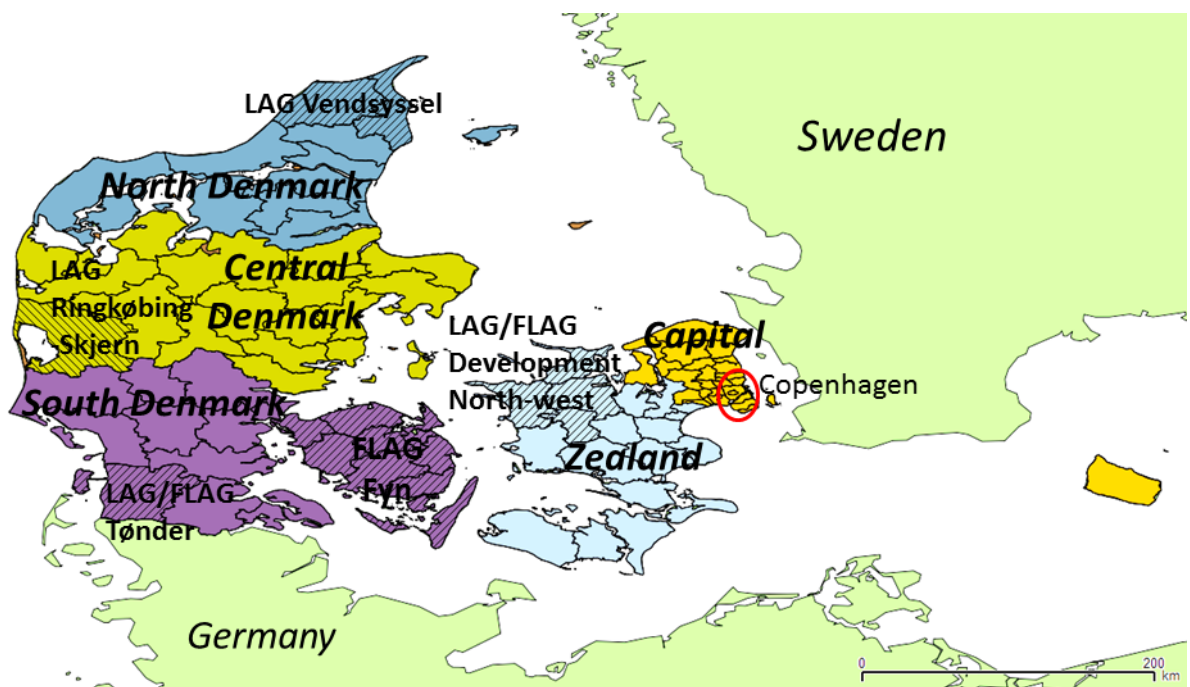


Fig 1. The five LAGs in the study of which two LAGs only consists of one municipality and three LAGs consist of more municipalities.

There are a total of 57 Danish LAGs in the 2007-2013 programming period, of which 39 are rural LAGs, 12 are integrated LAGs (belonging to both the RDP and the FP) and six are fisheries LAGs (or FLAGs). Their concrete tasks are to promote local development through cooperation with volunteers, local and regional actors, and organisations, including recommending projects for funding; to demonstrate active participation in the overall development in the area; and to undertake independent initiatives for projects and processes (MFAF 2007a, Appendix 2, MFAF 2007b, Appendix 2). Rural LAGs manage funding with the aim of establishing a diversified rural economy and quality of life in rural areas. FLAGs work towards the sustainable development of coastal areas.

The focus groups were structured as discussions of specific issues related to the added value of LEADER in the current LAG. In an initial exercise, the participants were first asked to list their best projects. This exercise was followed by a general question: in your opinion, what is the added value of the LEADER approach? As a final exercise, the participants were asked to suggest concrete tools that are suitable for capturing the added value of LEADER. The data analysed for this article stem from the second question on added value. Throughout the focus groups, each participant wrote notes on paper and subsequently explained his/her positions; thus, the views of all participants were heard.

The respondents received a brief introduction to the LEADER approach at the beginning of the focus groups, which could be a potential source of bias. The respondents asked what the alternative was to our question about the added value of the LEADER approach. Some participants suggested or were told that a potential alternative was the selection of projects by a central authority. A chairman of a LAG board posed the following question: 'Is it the added value compared to a situation where the project holders would have sent an application to the Directorate in Copenhagen?' Another potential alternative is that there would simply not be any support given, but this possibility was not discussed in the focus groups.

The qualitative method that was used produced descriptions of the added value rather than quantitative assessments. Thus, the focus group method can be viewed as a step in the direction of completeness, as noted by Nardone et al. (2010) after performing a study of LAGs using a quantitative methodological approach. The focus group method allowed us to obtain a certain degree of 'depth' in the responses, to uncover the factors underlying these responses and to ensure that our impressions of the attitudes of the respondents towards LEADER and 'added value' were correct. Generally, the focus group method is useful for

unveiling group processes, but this was not the aim of this study. However, the method can also imply that personal views are lost, as the expression of certain views requires more courage than the expression of others, and it is possible that only politically correct views will be expressed. Nevertheless, this possibility was not generally considered to be a limitation in this study. Such problems were reduced because the interviewees were asked to write their initial thoughts regarding the added value of LEADER on paper notes, which we collected and which they subsequently explained. The analysis of the data that follows in Section 4 is organised to ensure that actors in the field are able to speak for themselves to the greatest extent possible to enable us to gain insights into the perceptions of added value in their purest form. Figuratively, one could claim that we are in a MLG laboratory and examine the results of experiments at the LAG level. In the Results Section, we display the respondent's responses to the general question of the added value of the LEADER approach, which can then be compared to the general framework set up in Section 2. It should be kept in mind when assessing the results that there is a risk of bias when asking the people involved about the value added of the system they administrate. However, these people know what is at stake at the territorial governance level and their knowledge is therefore important to communicate for the improvement of the remainder of the system. Nevertheless, the Results Section will show that mainly positive things are addressed by the focus group participants. This relates naturally to the fact that they were asked about the value added of the approach.

5. Results: LAG representatives' perceptions of added value

5.1 LAG-Vendsyssel

The participants from LAG-Vendsyssel noted that individuals who engage in projects experience greater unity as a form of added value. According to one board member, 'it is the method that allows the ones that make some projects to be much more unified where they live'. Another participant cited the local knowledge of the boards as an aspect of the added value of the LEADER approach: 'Well, some of the added value is that the board is very diversified, and we cover the whole area; that is, we have local knowledge. And I also think it's incredibly easy to pick up the phone and call the coordinator or talk to one of us because we are known in the community'. Aspects such as ownership, anchorage and low levels of bureaucracy are also highlighted as ways in which the approach adds value: 'Ownership, anchorage and then bureaucracy because there is no bureaucracy in it. We do not have to ask a lot of officials. They receive the answer the day after we have our board meeting (...) that really gives great satisfaction'. Additionally, the establishment of networks was highlighted. On this subject, a LAG board member explained as follows: 'It's the networks that are formed based on this work, both internally on the board and among the local board members and local project managers as well as internally within projects. I really believe that it is the networks. The network part is very important, to me at least'. Similarly, another board member stated that the establishment of networks is '...easier when it is done locally, that there are some people, you know, you can turn to, and then there will be a network when you have to just talk about getting it up and running. And then afterwards, the network is there to do further work. And ownership, yes...'. The president of LAG-Vendsyssel emphasised that the approach causes the LAG to receive more applications from ordinary people. He also mentioned the additional synergies that arise because the board has a broad perspective and can jointly pursue initiatives: 'I just think that we get more applications from what I have called the man on the street, and it is different from having various consultants around. It's a little more manageable to try to send the application, and you can just go up and talk to the coordinator (...). We have a wider audience (...). The strength lies in the fact that we can follow up on projects and create synergies between the different projects'.

5.2 LAG-Ringkøbing-Skjern

On the question of added value, a Ringkøbing-Skjern LAG representative noted that economic value has been created: 'We have used is it not 12 million, or 10. And then projects have emerged for 80 million. It is palpable. We could actually prove it; it is such added economic value...'. Another board member explained that even more economic value can be created by

allowing LAGs to manage the money rather than assigning this responsibility to an agency in Copenhagen: 'Because when we see that out of 80 applications, we have not had a single no, then we actually think that we might as well get the money (...) but that's just not the way it works; I know that very well'. It was also noted that the LAGs are able to administer projects at a low cost, which leads to additional value. One board member stated as follows: 'Here you get, firstly, free work from some people, plus you get networking and knowledge sharing and development downwards ... if you want bottom-up. So, it's a little genius: how do we get this administered cheaply? Okay, we're handing it out to them, and then we get it done relatively cheaply, plus the side benefit is that you get even more development, you get more networks, and you get more knowledge sharing'.

Another person cited the LAG's understanding of the areas in which support is required. Moreover, the participants from this LAG also focused on the local commitment aspect of added value: 'Each project creates between 20 and 100 committed people'. According to another participant, 'local involvement has increased. We could issue a press release every week, if that was what we wanted'. The coordinator of LAG-Ringkøbing-Skjern mentioned not only the local commitment but also the importance of the coordinator role: 'Sometimes they can easily solve problems on their own... but other times we can help them, so that they do not give up halfway'. A board member also noted that the coordinator role generates added value, in conjunction with various elements of the bottom-up process: 'It is networking, knowledge sharing, innovation and development, as the first part of added value, that is what is happening down in the bottom-up part. The second part is the guidance about leverage, advice and fundraising that comes from the LAG coordinator. (...) And many times, it is perhaps the first time they have something to do with fundraising, so it may be as valuable as gold to them'.

Finally, some of the interview participants mentioned the value of collaborative projects: 'We are supposed to do collaborative projects. And you can say that the parish association would not start something like... we think maybe more, I don't know, we think a little more regionally'.

5.3 LAG-Tønder

A participant from LAG-Tønder described one of the added values of the LEADER method in relation to democracy: 'in the LAG group here, there is a motley mix of people coming from everywhere. I think there is an interesting discussion when community members and not just professionals are making the decision. You get the applications read, and you get them rated through many different lenses. And I think that it also matters in the long term that people know... I think part of the LAG method's success is that people know that there are local people sitting at the table here and... There is a dialogue about what is going on ... And in that way, I think the project supports democracy. I've also written that the LAG is much better known than many other funds. It obviously has something to do with it having been around for so long. But it also has something to do with local anchorage... local decision making'. Another participant argued that the programme deepens democracy in the following manner: 'We can say that a different approach to saying that it strengthens democracy is precisely that (...) we come from almost everywhere. There are not many of us who come from [the big towns]. We come from all of the small communities'. Local decision making and debate were also mentioned by a board member: 'I also believe that the LAG's success and hopefully future successes is precisely local decision making but also that you can get a hold of a local coordinator, so it's not someone who sits in Odense or Copenhagen or Brussels. (...) So, it's not all done by mail or by phone. We can pull them in if we have doubts about whether giving subsidies is justified'.

In addition, value added is believed to be related to cooperation, as exemplified both by an inter-municipal project and by a project that creates networks between two parishes that were separated by municipal mergers. Regarding the latter, one participant explained as follows: 'All of a sudden, what happens is that through LAG-Haderslev and LAG-Tønder, a path is created; two bridges were built over the river that divides the parishes. And this has certainly resulted in the creation of networks between the two parishes. So, now you have some sense of community again. Because they used to be quite separated on where they wanted to go'. Another participant added that as many as 400 people were present at the opening of the bridge. A more general opinion on how to create value by encouraging project holders is

reflected in the following quote, in which parishes are also encouraged to cooperate: 'There've been several times where we have had to say to people "Do you want improved living conditions...?" The people in the neighboring municipality want the same thing, so before we give money to anything, you have to first make sure that you do not duplicate efforts on the two sides of the river. You might as well do something that helps both of you'.

5.4 Fisheries LAG-Fyn

As an introduction to the debate on added value in Fisheries LAG-Fyn, a board member stated as follows: 'We are a cheap organisation. We only receive a mileage allowance'. Another interviewee stated that the added value is found in the improved functioning of the projects: 'Better communication during the process. Since we enter the actual process pretty early and see what they have applied for, we can immediately have a chat about (...) whether there are any problems. So, from when the job starts until it's finished (...), the LAG gives us a shorter work cycle and perhaps an easier workflow'. The improved workflow is in part justified by the coordinator and the local implementation of decision making, which was explained by one participant as follows: 'If you were applying directly to them [the ministry], they would not be able to see all those strange, small synergies in all the projects that I think we can. And an important advantage is that the coordinators, of course... we are much more outgoing and extroverted than someone (...) inside any agency, who certainly has the money and can take decisions, but they do not themselves go out and ask. They wait for the applications to arrive'. Another person added that 'they are using our networks'.

A board member who represents the municipality also noted that the added value lies in 'increased responsibility (...) There's a responsibility for the economy and the implementation of the project. And it's something related to the self-effort in financial or volunteer work, related to the public sector, that means that people are apparently willing to give a bit more'.

The coordinator for Fisheries LAG-Fyn cited added value in the form of the creation of new interlocking collaborative relationships in areas in which collaboration did not exist previously. She offered the following comment: 'I do not know how the board experience it, but, well, I feel it is a bit like starting from scratch, a zero point where you can say, well, amateur fishermen have worked together, sport fishermen have worked together, commercial fishermen have only worked together to a small extent. And I think that here we try to unify it all'.

The participants also expressed the conviction that local knowledge and the ability to distinguish good projects from bad projects is an added value of the LEADER method: 'Our strong point is that we can go into local projects. We're often almost better than consultants, and we can decide whether we think that the money is well spent. And I think all the money we have distributed has been well spent because we had one project that was not so good (...), but otherwise the rest were good...' Another participant emphasised the following aspect: 'We do not work for the perfect project; we are working for the best project. And that's a real difference (...) what we are instead trying to do is to create content in the projects'.

5.5 LAG-Development Northwest

The chairman of LAG-Development Northwest ascribed the added value of LEADER to the non-bureaucratic nature of the method: 'We have no bureaucratic workflow; we can quickly say, if it is something we want to work on.... who does the person need to work with (...), try and create a network around it. (...) And that is not possible if an office in Copenhagen is responsible; then you would have to run a formal process, and project holders would have no opportunity to communicate other than the written word... and many of the project holders are of course not academics who can (...) write an application; we have to recognise that this is the reality out here. So, this is at least a clear advantage of having local LAGs; otherwise, it would be some big agricultural offices and the like who would decide on all the applications, just as you normally see with the Danish AgriFish Agency'.

The coordinator of LAG-Development Northwest also believes that LEADER's added value is to be found in local decision making through the use of local knowledge: 'Decisions are made locally using concrete knowledge about the area's qualities and resources. Well, it's a huge,

huge strength'. The coordinator also mentioned the opportunity to support projects: 'That there is closeness... that there is support for the developers of ideas right away... That, I think, is incredible... a huge force that cannot be praised highly enough'. She also emphasised that the added value lies in greater ownership and responsibility for funding: 'Well, there is such a common identity (...) and there is an ownership of projects. And I think certainly that I have experienced much more responsibility from project owners (...). Because they have talked to me (...), and they have talked perhaps with the board (...), and they have met someone on the street who has inquired about it. And when they must make a report, then it's us they're talking to again. It's embarrassing; you do not cheat! Well, unfortunately, it is inside... the system... that there are some who think people are cheating... (but) people do not cheat, because they actually know us...'

A LAG board member also offered the following explanation: 'I have used the word local as a keyword (...) there is local anchorage (...) because you know each other to some extent... You know, at least, about each other (...) and then you become more committed (...), and above all, I believe that it is absolutely true that you do not cheat because it's embarrassing. Because there is also something about local identity, to see what we can do here in our place. So, you're boasting about some of it, right? And that's fine; it's bravado in a good way'. Another board member emphasised that local knowledge and networks are part of the surplus value: 'Once we have made the appropriation or before we make the appropriation, we can use the network, and when we have given the appropriation, we can again use the network'. The coordinator also emphasised the use of networks and explained how she can make connections between people who could benefit from speaking with one another and who could inspire one another.

LAG-Development Northwest is also focused on creating press coverage for their initiatives to create ownership and obtain a local understanding of the EU: 'We work with a journalist; we communicate that we are part of this [project] and that the EU and the Danish AgriFish Agency contribute money; this gives us visibility, and people feel that they get something for their EU money... That's a very important part of this, the visibility; it helps people get a much better sense of ownership'.

Summing up, an overview of the types of added value mentioned by the interviewees in Section 5.1 to 5.5, which primarily relate to leverage, democratisation and bottom-up processes, is displayed in a condensed way in Table 3. The table displays the interviewees' views on the added value of the LEADER approach in a value chain-like manner, focusing on the added value before project applications are made, before projects are approved and during and after project implementation.

Time →	Added value before project application	Added value before project approval	Added value during and after project implementation
Key emphasis ↓ The LAG partnership and the hired coordinator as facilitators	Projects are approved using the general knowledge of board members and coordinators, local knowledge and networks.	The board's insights into those areas in which support is needed, the ability to distinguish good projects from bad projects and the board's concrete knowledge of the area's resources.	The LAG's visibility.
	The board can take the initiative to create synergies between the different projects.	The board's ability to ensure that efforts are not redundant.	The board's networks and local knowledge. Knowledge sharing.
	A project can receive support, and ideas can be generated for the creation of new projects through training and experience exchanges via development workshops organised by the LAG.	The coordinator's advisory and facilitating role (leverage, fundraising, completion of application forms, project formulation and collaborations between projects). People can easily reach the coordinator.	Better functioning projects because of improved communication throughout the process, shorter work cycle and easier workflow.
	The board can help to create project content.	The outgoing and extroverted coordinator and board.	The board can follow up on projects.
The LAG partnership and the hired coordinator as democratising	Project holders have access to networks that they would not have had otherwise.	Projects are evaluated through multiple lenses.	A democracy-supporting initiative. Local decision making.
		Projects are evaluated by local people.	Increased economic responsibility. No cheating because it would be embarrassing.
			Establishment of networks between board members and project holders and internally in the projects.
			Greater local unity. Increased local commitment, local ownership and local anchorage.
Bottom-up approach	More applications from the 'man on the street'.	Low level of bureaucracy, exemplified by the easy access to assistance from the board, which facilitates contact.	Development downwards.
	Immediate support for the developers of ideas.		
Regional and cross-sectoral cooperation	The board is aware of the need for additional regional initiatives.		The creation of new and interlocking collaborative relationships.
	The board can take the initiative to foster and encourage cooperation.		Promotion of cooperation.
Economic gains	The LAG is a low-budget organisation; thus, it administers projects at a low cost.		
	Economic value. Many projects attract additional funding and effort.		
Area-based development			Creation of common identity.
			Boasting about local results.
			Press coverage to create ownership and a local understanding of the EU.
Innovation		Innovation	

Tab 3. Temporal and content-based division of added value as emphasised by the interviewees.

6. Discussion

6.1 Are some key concepts more vital than others?

The LEADER method's basic characteristics did not receive equal attention during the focus groups, which explains why Tables 2 and 3 are not identical. When asked about the added value of the LEADER method, the focus group participants placed the greatest emphasis on aspects that related to the LAG partnership and the hired coordinator as facilitators, as shown in Table 3. The second and third most emphasised aspects (also from Table 3) concerned the LAG partnership and the hired coordinator as democratising and a bottom-up approach. Also emphasised (but to a much smaller extent) was the value related to regional and cross-sectoral cooperation (which the focus group participants often mixed together), economic gains, area-based development and innovation. Of LEADER's seven key concepts, the second key concept (from Table 2) 'Partnerships in the form of LAGs' and the third key concept (from Table 2) 'Bottom-up strategy' thus received the greatest attention. Therefore, the focus group participants perceived the added value of the LEADER method to be centred on the implementation model itself rather than on what is specifically implemented, such as the implementation of an area-based development plan (first concept from Table 2) through the use of a focused, cross-sectoral and innovative approach (fourth and sixth concepts from Table 2, respectively).

These results show that the value of the method in Denmark is primarily – according to the focus group participants – related to empowering self-governing networks in a vertical MLG setting. One may ask whether this empowerment concerns the manner in which the programme has been implemented in Denmark. The ministries did not place a great deal of emphasis or storytelling (Sørensen 2006) on the LEADER approach overall; rather, they focused on the LAG, bottom-up processes and local democracy. This emphasis is also clear in the midterm evaluation, which stated that the most frequently mentioned concept regarding LEADER is its bottom-up approach (MFAF, 2010). The midterm evaluation stated that only a small group of enthusiasts is likely to pursue all aspects of the LEADER approach, which could hinder the achievement of the full potential of LEADER, which contains content apart from the LAG implementation model. Not all variations of rural development using a LAG can be said to follow the LEADER approach, as rural development should be area based and innovative to some extent as well as cross-sectoral/integrated if it is to comprehensively follow the LEADER approach.

The Danish case presented in this article offers examples of rural local territorial governance seen from the perspective of a high trust country with long traditions for voluntary work. Traditionally, Danish rural areas have been known for their rich civic life originating from the cooperative movements that occurred more than 100 years ago (Clemmensen, 1987; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2004) and still today Denmark is considered a high trust country and is among the highest ranking countries in the World Values Survey (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006). Subsequently, implementation of the LEADER approach in Denmark will be different from the implementation in more low trust countries that are also subject to the LEADER initiative. This is for example obvious in relation to the dominance of public authorities on the LAG boards in different countries explained by Furmankiewicz (2012) and Perez (2000).

6.2 The LEADER approach and MLG

The added value of LEADER, as perceived by the focus group participants, relates to improved governance and improved results at the project level. The statements on MLG by Marks and Hooghe (2004, p. 2) in Section 2 emphasised several advantages of MLG. The advantage related to the internalisation of externalities can be observed in the analysis, in that several interviewees noted the lack of cheating in the method. The reduced distance costs between project holders and the ministry/EU that were generated by including LAGs in the MLG setting can also be considered as an internalisation of an externality, as can the shorter workflows that the system provides end users at the project level. The diversity of the citizens is better reflected in LEADER through the area-based approach that focuses on valorising specific local assets. However, there are limits to the level of heterogeneity in approaches, as all LAGs must

provide funding from the same measures relating to the diversification of the rural economy and the quality of life in rural areas. Significant jurisdictional competition is not possible because of the limited competencies of the LAGs. Nevertheless, the boosting of results, as cited by one of the interviewees, could be an example of horizontal competition. Moreover, by marketing positive results, newcomers may eventually wish to move to one LAG area as opposed to another. Introducing LEADER competitions similar to the Swedish contest 'LEADER of the year' would be another strategy for enhancing competition. Performance could also be assessed relative to other entities, such as local municipalities. Although the LAG budget is small relative to the budget of a Danish municipality, the LAGs have more available funding than municipalities, for which funds are strictly allocated as a result of the economic crisis.

With regard to the emphasis that many jurisdictions can enable trustworthy policy commitments; the analysis shows that this is applicable at the LAG level, as all of the respondents exhibited a sincere commitment to the goal of improving local rural development. Thus, there is a higher level of commitment than if the programme had been implemented at the national level. Finally, the facilitation of innovation and experimentation is also one of LEADER's contributions to MLG although the focus on innovation in Denmark has been modest. The introduction of the intermediate LAG level itself, by providing discretion for 57 different self-governing units at the local level in Denmark, has resulted in local commitment. Thus, the governance component of the LEADER approach appears to have motivated local citizens to engage in the development, as Kull advocated in the quotation presented in the introduction. The interviewees perceived a clear distinction between what the LAGs can provide and what the national agencies that are responsible for administering the programmes should do, which corresponds well with the EU White Paper (CEC, 2001) MLG approach specifying that each governance level should contribute in line with its differing capabilities. At the time of the data collection, there were, in contrast with Kull's recommendations, no clear indications that the national ministries are the most important decision makers in the LEADER MLG system. Rather, the LAGs and the ministries were presented as interdependent, and the types of value that the method provides at the LAG level could not have been provided by the ministries. This observation corresponds to findings of Hooghe and Marks (2003, p. 239), who state that the advantage of MLG is scale flexibility in that every governance level engages in the activities that are optimally suited to its skills. Furthermore, Hooghe and Marks explain the costs of MLG as transaction costs stemming from coordination. The MLG system that was created in response to the LEADER element of the RDP and FP, with the LAGs as self-governing networks, will naturally imply some degree of coordination because of the numerous governance levels that are involved.

Greater emphasis on the area-based development approach, the innovative approach and the cross-sectoral and integrated approach in the initial phase when the LAG is formulating the development plan could broaden the value of LEADER beyond governance alone. This finding corresponds with the findings of Scott (2002) mentioned at the end of Section 3. Further research on the potential effects of devoting attention to the other elements of the LEADER approach would be relevant to develop a better understanding of the added value beyond contributing to MLG, leverage, facilitation and social capital creation, such as aspects related to more tangible development, job creation and quality of life. Focusing on all of the method's concepts, such as the implementation of transnational projects, has the potential to create more openness, experimentation and innovation and to develop additional links between activities as the LEADER approach prescribes.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the added value the LEADER approach provides in the EU MLG framework for rural and coastal development. The article considered the outcome of the downward delegation of authority in a vertical governance system. Table 1 provided an overview of the roles of the different units in the LEADER MLG setting. This study has demonstrated that the LAG level makes improvements to local development in the form of leverage, democratisation and bottom-up decision making, which none of the other levels would be able to provide with the same level of efficiency or effectiveness. If the political will to

implement local projects co-financed by the European Union and the national ministries persists, it would not be possible to achieve these results if the system were managed only at the national level. EU commissioner Ciolos expressed such a willingness at a European LAG workshop in January 2011 in the following manner: 'I would therefore say that, within the framework of the common agricultural policy after 2013, Leader-type local initiatives will remain at the heart of rural development policy (...) our objective is not only to strengthen this type of initiative but also to expand it...' (Ciolos, 2011). This study has provided a sense of the added value of self-governance by LAGs. The results can be used in drafting guidance documents detailing what the LAGs should work to establish in the 2014-2020 programming period in collaboration with the other governance levels (EU and national administrations). Obviously, it is also important to deal with the negative aspects and problem areas that arise in the implementation of LEADER. Here, the focus has been, however, on analyzing what the actors in the field consider to be the added value, that is, the positive attributes of the program.

Other studies have attempted to calculate the economic value of the LAG effort in Denmark by evaluating the number of jobs created. In fact, a recent impact evaluation by the Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs has shown that the effort of the LAGs 'is working and creates private investments and jobs in rural areas' (MBBL, 2013). The evaluation also emphasised the multiplier effect of the LAGs. Previous quantitative research has described the socio-economic characteristics of the LAG board members and coordinators – for example, that they are very well educated (YY, 2010) and thus do not mirror the residents in the areas and the general Danish population. As an additional test of the validity of this qualitative study, it would therefore be important to investigate who the LAG board members and the coordinators interact with to determine how broad their networks really are. Consequently, social network analysis (Marquardt, 2013; Provan et al., 2005) represents a means of confirming and further investigating the scope of the conclusions offered in this article.

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