

THE LEADER ADDED VALUE

HOW LOCAL ACTION
GROUPS STRENGTHEN
EUROPE'S RURAL AREAS

LEADER is the EU's citizen-oriented development instrument for rural areas, which (re)connects and strengthens people, businesses and communities.



LEADER

Development led by local communities



LEADER forum
Österreich



MAJOR CHALLENGES:

A complex world: On the one hand, new technologies and digitalisation are opening up unexpected opportunities. On the other hand, the world is increasingly perceived as complex. Energy and resource markets are globally interconnected – we all depend on one another. This becomes particularly visible in times of crisis.

Different visions of the future: For many people, urgent questions are emerging about what the future may look like. How can we maintain our accustomed standard of living? Not without adaptation: a willingness to change is required.

The need to act: We need to rely once again on our own resources – and increasingly on renewable resources – while improving our ability to act. Democracy, prosperity and peace are not fixed social achievements. We need to act.

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION:

THE REGIONS:

Europe's diverse rural areas are in a strong position when it comes to resources – whether in relation to energy, food, or people's willingness to take action. We need to build on this.

GETTING INVOLVED:

Every form of contributing ideas and taking part counts – with the aim of helping to shape our environment, our living world and our future.

THE LEADER NETWORK:

LEADER is place-based, quick to act and especially close to the people. With their local offices, LEADER regions support projects that promote resilience and innovation.

THE LEADER METHOD

BUILDS ON THE STRUCTURE AND
PROCESS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

THE GROUP

Heterogeneous



**Shared
problem definition**

WHO? / WHAT?

THE PROCESS

in three phases



**Generation
of ideas**

CREATIVITY

Testing

IMPROVISATION

Scaling

STORYTELLING

HOW? / WHEN?

WHAT LEADER IS ...

1 LEADER AS A **REGIONAL HUB**

LEADER works across many areas of society and builds connections.

LEADER offices provide advice on funding. At the same time, the Local Action Groups act as networkers and bridge-builders between municipalities, businesses and civil society. This combination of roles is unique: no other organisation connects the local, regional, national and European levels so directly.

2 LEADER AS THE **EU CLOSE TO ITS CITIZENS**

Through LEADER, the EU becomes visible in rural areas.

European and overarching issues have an impact in every village and every small town. The Local Action Groups of LEADER regions bring together mayors, entrepreneurs and many volunteers from associations and civil society. Together, they develop local solutions to major challenges.

3 LEADER AS A **DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE**

Participation and co-creation as lived democracy

Through the Local Action Groups, LEADER offers direct participation and involvement. Groups that rarely take part in decision-making processes are especially invited to experience democracy in this way.

4 LEADER AS A **PARTNER FOR MUNICIPALITIES, BUSINESSES AND ASSOCIATIONS**

Pragmatic solutions for new challenges

LEADER supports municipalities in developing and implementing EU-funded projects. In agriculture, the focus is mainly on opening up diverse sources of income. In business, LEADER helps develop cooperation models and supports start-ups. For associations, the focus is on improving their organisational capacity.

5 LEADER AS A **DRIVER OF INNOVATION**

LEADER is the regional “innovation agency”

LEADER focuses on promoting innovation in rural areas. Especially in times of comprehensive change, new approaches are needed. LEADER therefore supports technological and social innovations — from idea generation and testing to scaling regional improvements.

6 LEADER AS A **NETWORK OF REGIONS**

LEADER promotes transnational projects and European cooperation.

European cooperation projects are important as “windows to the outside world”, because they strengthen the innovative capacity of regions. LEADER is therefore not only about “local development”; it is also a European network of regions, made up of around 2,700 rural LEADER regions across the EU.

WHAT LEADER IMPROVES ...

A LEADER IS **PRAGMATIC AND INNOVATIVE** **Future viability through innovation with a clear practical focus**

The focus is on practice-oriented projects for municipalities with potential for wider application. Topics include local supply, services of general interest, digitalisation, community life, town-centre development and intermunicipal cooperation. LEADER also supports innovative projects for private-sector businesses and civil-society initiatives.

B LEADER PROMOTES **BUSINESS AND SOCIETY** **It is time to act.**

LEADER regions need room to shape their own development. This makes it possible to support place-based innovation processes. The four Ts of economic development should be considered as strategic levers: technology, talent, tolerance and territorial characteristics.

C LEADER STRENGTHENS **INTERNAL STABILITY** **LEADER contributes to the new priorities of “security” and “defence”.**

LEADER understands “security” as: a) Security of supply: Projects for regional local supply, energy autonomy and related areas b) Crisis preparedness: Strengthening local networks and similar structures. c) Social balance: Preventing polarisation and strengthening social cohesion.

LEADER understands “defence” as: a) Democratic resilience: Strengthening democratic participation and trust. b) Civil-society initiatives: Initiatives that give regional identity a positive meaning. c) Digital defence: Promoting media literacy and related skills.

HOW LEADER WORKS ...

LEADER AS A **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

LEADER is firmly rooted locally and acts as a hub between municipalities, businesses and civil society. LEADER connects research with practical application. This requires the ability to translate between different languages and systems. In LEADER offices, many administrative levels come together. As a result, developments at EU, member state, federal state and regional levels can be considered at the same time.

LEADER AS A **HUB FOR NEW CONNECTIONS**

The Local Action Groups restore and strengthen economic and personal connections. Their objectives are: a) Social balance: Reducing unequal opportunities at regional level, for example in relation to gender, education and age. b) Understanding new technologies: Improving the understanding and application of innovations such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence. c) Involving underrepresented groups: Improving acceptance of necessary innovations.

LEADER **APPROACH**

Specialised innovation support requires skills derived from social innovation. This method requires know-how in regional and local problem analysis, knowledge of how to form working groups, and the ability to guide the phases of the innovation process: from idea generation and testing to scaling.



LEADER: DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC ECOLOGICAL EUROPEAN



Every form of **contributing ideas and taking part** counts — with the aim of helping to shape our environment and our future.