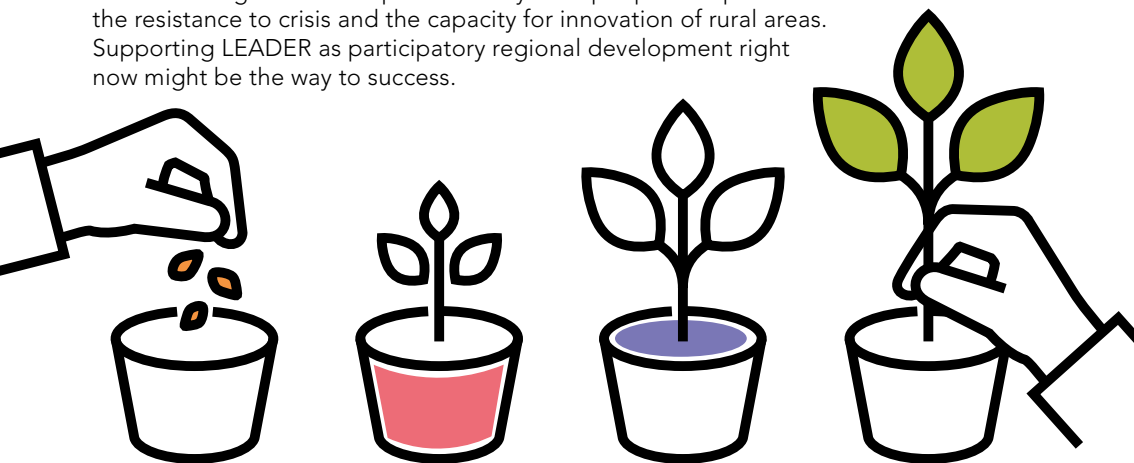


# STRENGTHENING LEADER AND THE RURAL AREAS. ESPECIALLY NOW!

Revitalisation  
of the rural  
economies &  
societies with  
LEADER action  
groups

LEADER is regional development run by local people and promotes the resistance to crisis and the capacity for innovation of rural areas. Supporting LEADER as participatory regional development right now might be the way to success.



Supported by the Austrian federal and state governments and the European Union

 Bundesministerium  
Landwirtschaft, Regionen  
und Tourismus

  
**LE 14-20**  
Entwicklung für den Ländlichen Raum



Europäischer  
Landwirtschaftsfonds für  
die Entwicklung des  
ländlichen Raums:  
Hier investiert Europa in  
die ländlichen Gebiete.



# THE CURRENT SITUATION

**How do we as a society deal with unexpected crises without abandoning our previously set sustainability goals? The regional structure of LEADER offers various opportunities for crisis management and crisis transformation.**

Transformation is based on problem-solving that requires civil participation and commitment by the local population.

The LEADER principles of self-organisation, personal responsibility and the commitment of those affected are criteria for the resistance to crisis of a rural area. However, using our own problem-solving resources should not prevent us from understanding the overarching contexts.

The functions presented here show the capacities of LEADER/ CLLD for economic and social development even in challenging situations.

# THE LEADER UNIQUE SERVICE PROPOSITION

LEADER is participative regional development serving rural communities, the private sector and civil society. Participation in it involves not only co-creation but also co-financing.

A Local Action Group (LAG) is the public-private partnership in the area and plays several roles as a citizen participation forum: funding advice, networking units and innovation-oriented enterprise.

LEADER gives the greatest thematic leeway in the realm of regional development, as the project choices are made by the LAG. This form of self-determination only exists at LEADER.

For LEADER/CLLD the EU has allocated a multi-fund financing (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF) including national co-financing and a wide range of funding options.



---

## I. THE METHOD: INTEGRATIVE & PRACTICE-ORIENTED

Based on a tried and tested participation model, LEADER equally fosters all three areas of the regional society: municipalities, the private sector and the civil society. LEADER is ideal when ideas need to be found at the grassroots level and when self-organisation and self-problem-solving skills can help.

Independent regional development emerged from coping with a crisis: The key event was the first oil price crisis in 1973.

As a consequence, the importance of regional resources was rediscovered. LEADER is innovation-oriented: Further development is achieved by trying out the unconventional.



The LEADER method has 7 principles: bottom-up projects, local development strategies, local action groups, networking, innovation, cooperation and multi-sectoral actions.

---

## II. THE ORGANISATION: NETWORK OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

**LEADER/CLLD requires a public-private partnership: Every Local Action Group (LAG) has an office in the region and is the central management unit that can react rapidly and location-specific – especially in crisis situations. A LAG also advises on funding issues, networks players and can act entrepreneurially.**

The organisational form of a LAG reflects the basic democratic stance: Decision and public funds are handed over to a self-organised group that is responsible for the local strategy and its implementation. Civil society representatives are represented by the majority in each group. Through the principle of autonomy, which means self-determination with personal responsibility, an activating effect of the population to solve their own problems is achieved.

---

### **III. FUNDING: PARTICIPATION THROUGH CO-FINANCING**

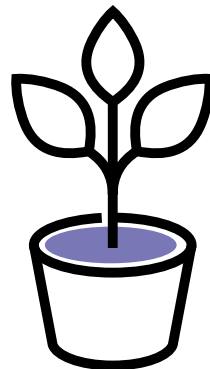
**Primarily financed by EU public funds as well as national co-financing, LEADER provides financial support for ideas and projects for the development of rural areas. But LEADER is much more than only funding: It is a concrete form of participation through the co-financing of regional and often also private actors.**

LEADER in Austria is currently being implemented with a minimum financial share of 5% of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Each project fund consists of an EU share of 80% and a federal and state contribution of at least 20%. However, in the variety of projects LEADER often represents the entire field of rural development.

Implementing the principle of co-financing by regional public- and private-sector actors, a volume of investment representing a multiple of public funds is reached in the region.

# THE 5 LEADER/ CLLD-FUNCTIONS WITH THEIR AREAS OF INTERVENTION AND IMPACT

**LEADER can fulfil functions and services for the society of rural areas, which in this combination are unique. LEADER also generates a high degree of crisis resistance and innovative power in rural areas. Today, these effects are more relevant than ever.**



# 1.

## FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF EDUCATION AND DEMOCRATIC POLICY

**Democratisation:** Groups affected by problems work out their own solutions to improve their environments and their living spaces. The LAG helps to generate ideas and to implement new solutions, using the experience of those involved – participatory democracy through regional citizen participation.

**Promotion of identity:** Working in a LAG is carried out on a voluntary basis and forges a strong bond between its members. This form of identity is not tied to boundaries of administrative policy, but promotes a culture of cooperation.

**Knowledge transfer:** LEADER integrates people who embody regional knowledge: e.g. farmers and craftsmen, who have gained a profound knowledge through experience that is particularly valuable in application-oriented innovation processes.

## Transnational Educational Project

# HERE AND THERE – Learning in a Supra-Regional/International Network

With the transnational LEADER project “Here and There” the locations of the future and the Bavarian partner region Miesbach district join their forces to promote supra-regional and international exchange. They also aim at further expanding the intermunicipal education network, encouraging innovations and strengthening rural municipalities in the long term.

Sample project of the **LAGs Vorderland-Walgau-Bludenz • Mittelburgenland Plus • Fumo Regionalentwicklung Fuschlseeregion – Mondseeland • Kärnten: Mitte • Lebens.Wert.Pongau • Oberinnviertel-Mattigtal • Nationalparkoö. Kalkalpen • Eisenstraße Niederösterreich • RM Osttirol** and 1 German LAG



## 2.

## LABOUR MARKET & SOCIO-POLITICAL FUNCTIONS

**Job creation and promotion:** New sales markets, new opportunities for tourism – most LEADER activities create jobs. Not to forget: There are about 200 people working in LAG managements in Austria. Furthermore, there are over 1500 project staff members. Together with businesses, LEADER works to create future opportunities for skilled and handicraft trades.

**Social affairs:** Aiming at an improvement of the work-family balance is an example of the activities LEADER promotes. LEADER creates demand-based social offers that support, for example, disadvantaged young people or elderly people in need of care.

**Representation of underrepresented groups:** As a non-partisan forum, a LAG has the task of actively including groups of people who usually do not take part in decision-making processes. This applies to adolescents, older people, migrants, newcomers in a region etc.

Transnational Family Project

# IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION TO RURAL AREAS

**As part of a transnational LEADER project with several Finnish, German, Swedish, Upper Austrian and 6 Tyrolean LEADER regions, the different approaches to integration are to be examined using best practice examples.**

Sample project of the **LAGs regio3 Pillerseetal-Leukental-Leogang • Kufstein Und Umgebung, Untere Schranne-Kaiserwinkl • Regionalentwicklungsverein Zukunft Linz-Land • Regionalmanagement Bezirk Imst • Kitzbüheler Alpen • Regionalmanagement Wipptal** and **LAGs from Finland and Sweden**



# 3.

## ECONOMIC POLICY FUNCTION

**Promotion of the circular economy:** LEADER promotes regional value chains, site development, and innovations in tourism in proposal preparation – in any case, the focus lies on creating an ecologically effective economy as an alternative model to the “throwaway society”.

**Regional production methods:** In the LEADER context, regional production is characterised by (re)establishing contact between producers and consumers as trustworthy relationship. Consequently, economic capital is multiplied through social capital.

**Promotion of innovation:** One of the main tasks of LEADER is the promotion of technological innovations as a means of ecological modernisation and the promotion of social innovations as “reforms by the people concerned”. LEADER is seen as a laboratory for innovations with the goal of diversifying the rural economy.

## Transnational E-Mobility Project

# E-BIKE PARADISE IN THE SÜDBURGENLAND REGION

**E-bikes make exploring a region much easier and give guests the opportunity to get to know the country and its people, local businesses, tourist activities and regional specialties on special e-bike routes. Seven LEADER regions pool and exchange their experiences and know-how, using their synergies and carrying out targeted marketing.**

Sample project of the **LAG Südburgenland Plus** and 7 **German LAGs**



# 4.

## FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE POLICY

**Ecological modernisation:** In agriculture, LEADER pursues modernisation by means of digital methods in order to increase resource efficiency. Also relevant to LEADER are the Smart Villages initiative as well as the consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Adaptation to climate change:** Municipalities and regions view the strategies for dealing with climate change as implementation levels. Their effectiveness shows at the regional level. LEADER supports climate-relevant projects to reduce negative consequences and to use the side effects as opportunities.

**Crisis and transformation management:** A LAG trains its members to deal with the unexpected and uncertainty. This strategy broadens their self-organisation and rapid, location-specific problem-solving skills in order to enable them to react to global challenges. Crises create opportunities for further development without failed adaptations.

Transnational Ecological Design Project

## ECOLOGICAL CARE AND DESIGN OF PUBLIC GREEN SPACES

Together with three LEADER regions in Saxony-Anhalt, 26 municipalities around the garden city Tulln in Lower Austria found forward-looking answers to questions on the ecological design and maintenance of their public green spaces. As a result, they became an ecologically well-kept region. Innovative, climate-adapted shaping is the topic of numerous public showpiece areas that set an example for the population and inform it.

Sample project: **LAG Donau NÖ-Mitte** and 3 **German LAGs**



# 5.

## FUNCTIONS IN MATTERS OF EUROPEAN POLICY

**Networking competency of the regions:** LEADER is a part of the Europe of the Regions. Thus, the principle of self-determination also involves EU integration and solidarity. LEADER regions work together in an established network (ENRD: European network of rural development) of 3,300 action groups in Europe.

**European understanding at the local level:** Improved communication of the political-economic objectives of the EU is critical. This involves an equal fostering of the European and regional identity. Therefore, LEADER conveys a Europe that is close to the people.

**Transnational cooperation:** The goal is an economic and cultural opening – vitality as a result of local business formations and international contacts of the people who train their skills through intercultural exchange (e.g. foreign language skills and ways of life).

Transnational Tourism Project

## EUROPEAN SLOW TRIPS

Tourism for once unusual and curious. Slow Trips don't show sights from glossy brochures. Taking part and getting to know people in different parts of Europe in their everyday lives are the goals. The 9 partner regions are located in Luxembourg, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Lithuania and Austria.

Sample project of the **LAG Oststeirisches Kernland** (Styria) & **Urfahr West** (Upper Austria) and **8 European LAGs**



---

## The 3 Roles of Local Action Groups:

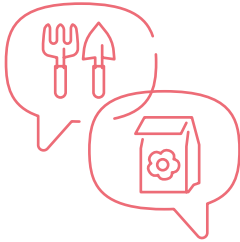


# FUNDING ADVISORY CENTRE

The tasks include giving funding advice, offering project support and quickly evaluating the ideas and projects submitted by regional actors in accordance with the local development strategy. I.e., approved projects are supported in their implementation and accounting processes.

The self-determination of the LAG means, in its simplest form, the selection of LEADER-relevant projects. A professional LAG management with an office in the region is staffed by at least two people.

## The 3 Roles of Local Action Groups:



# NET- WORK UNIT

The LAG is destined to foster the establishment of a regional and transnational network of economic and personal relations. This means that social capital promotes economic capital. In the decision-making and working groups of the LAG “key players” are represented. Through their abilities or positions they can exert a positive influence on the importance or the dissemination of LEADER projects.

The LAG actively represents regional projects to the outside world and takes on the roles of an innovation broker and a local network unit for information on strategic topics at the EU, federal and state level. A LAG offers a wide range of services: methodical consulting, organisational support such as initiating cooperation and negotiating of public funds for project implementations.

---

## The 3 Roles of Local Action Groups:



# SOCIAL INNOVATION BUSINESS

A LAG can also become a non-profit entrepreneur itself, especially if no project applicants can be found in strategically relevant subject areas. The LAG is characterised by numerous innovation-oriented LAG projects and transnational cooperation projects in the European network. In this case its role is entrepreneurial, as the projects are pre-financed, financially and content managed and co-financiers are sought and the responsibility is taken for them.

In addition to the LAG management, the human resource management also concerns the innovation and participation processes including communication, creativity and mediation techniques. In this respect, regional problem-solving and transformation processes are central.

## FROM LEADER TO CLLD

**LEADER (liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale)** was propagated by the European Commission as community approach and implemented from 1991 onwards. LEADER started as a revitalisation programme for the rural economy and developed into a programme of active participation for the local population (**CLLD: community-led local development**).

The success of LEADER throughout Europe resulted in the application of the method and its organisational form in the European structural and investment funds (in the area of rural, maritime and regional development and in the area of social services).

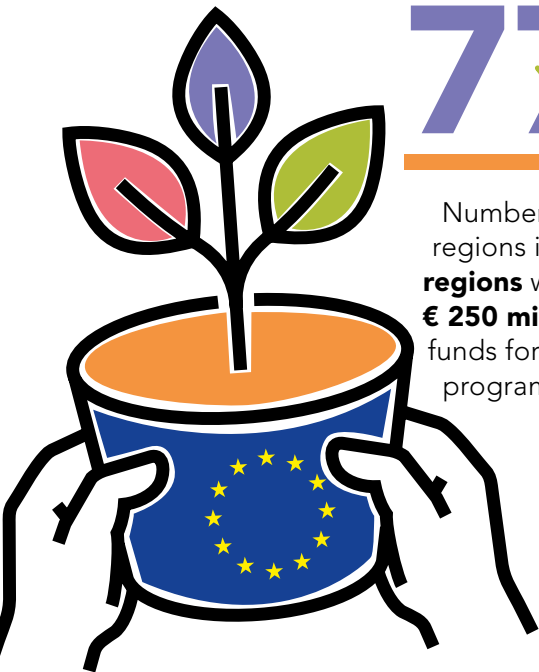
**LEADER can do a lot more:** Using a multi-fund concept, LEADER/CLLD explores new topics such as urban and rural development and new beneficiaries such as social and business enterprises. Therefore, CLLD with a multi-fund financing represents the future prospects of LEADER as participatory regional development. This strategy can further boost the population's existing potential to achieve joint regional goals, and for the LAG it involves a better planning of funding (European Committee of the Regions).



# LEADER WORKS:



0.000m



77 250

Number of LEADER regions in Austria: **77 regions** will dispose of **€ 250 million** in public funds for a seven-year programme period.

Local action groups (LAG) control the implementation of strategies in the LEADER regions and have a management team of 2 to 5 employees. Over **3,000 volunteers** are involved in the 77 action groups.

  
**3.300**

Number of **LEADER regions in the EU:**  
**3,300** local action groups implement LEADER / CLLD.

  
**5.000**

Participation through co-financing: in Austria, the around **5,000 LEADER projects** are undertaken within one programme period, and are jointly financed and managed by municipalities, private and private-sector actors.



LEADER/CLLD is mainly financed by **EU funds provided by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** and co-financed by federal and state funds.

---

**LEADER:  
ESPECIALLY NOW!  
DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE  
ECONOMICAL  
ECOLOGICAL  
EUROPEAN**