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# The LEADER process as a European policy for local development: A comparison of the implementation in three European member states

**Marielle Berriet-Sollic**

**Catherine Laidin**

**Denis Lépicier**

**Hai Vu Pham**

**Kim Pollermann**

**Petra Raue**

**Gitta Schnaut**

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Towards **Rural Synergies** and **Trade-offs** between  
Economic Development and Ecosystem Services

## **The LEADER process as a European policy for local development: A comparison of the implementation in three European member states**

Paper contribution for 55th European Regional Science Association (ERSA) Congress, 25.-28. August 2015 in Lisbon

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Marielle Berriet-Sollicec<sup>(1)</sup>, Catherine Laidin<sup>(2)</sup>, Denis Lépiciér<sup>(1)</sup>, Hai Vu Pham<sup>(1)</sup>, Kim Pollermann<sup>(3)</sup>, Petra Raue<sup>(3)</sup>, Gitta Schnaut<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Université Bourgogne Franche-Comté, UMR1041 CESAER, INRA, AgroSup Dijon, F-21000 Dijon (France)

<sup>(2)</sup> AGROCAMPUS OUEST, UMR6590 ESO, F-35042 Rennes, France and PhD student Université de Rennes1, UMR6051 CRAPE, IEP, Rennes and Université Bourgogne Franche-Comté, UMR1041 CESAER, INRA, AgroSup Dijo (France)

<sup>(3)</sup> Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Brunswick (Germany)

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## **Abstract**

New governance structures, meant to empower local decision makers, are supported by some policies introduced by the European Commission. LEADER, from rural development policy, is among these approaches. Nevertheless, these new policies are implemented in very different multi-level governance contexts in the European nation states. We question in how far the institutional differences on the different levels affect the implementation of LEADER on the local level. We thereby hope to contribute to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of differences in the impacts and effectiveness of the LEADER approach as has been documented thus far by research analyses.

In our TRUSTEE research project we concentrate on ten cases in France, Germany and Italy. We describe the three different administration systems and the different types of RDP-implementation. Based on analyses of documents and interviews with stakeholders, we then analyze the possible relation of these institutional differences to the LEADER implementation at a local level.

**Key words:** rural development, multi-level governance, European policy, decentralization

Jel code : H11, R58

# 1. Heterogeneity of LEADER implementations and effects

## The situation

European public policies in the field of regional and rural development and territorial cohesion play a large role in the member states. Regional and rural development policies are designed taking into account the principles of subsidiarity, partnership and additionality. According to these principles, the European Union defines general guidelines and the member states or their sub-national levels develop their specific strategy and way of implementation in their Rural Development Program (RDP) within this frame (Bullmann, 1996).

LEADER<sup>1</sup>, as one part of Rural Development Policy, aims to support the development of strategies at a sub-regional level to meet specific challenges of the territory (Chevalier and Dedeire, 2014) and foster cooperation in rural areas (Pollermann, 2014). Therefore, a bottom-up approach is implemented in a so-called Local Action Group (LAG) composed of stakeholders from local government, civil society and economy which steer the implementation of their local development strategy *inter alia* by deciding about funding of projects (Bruckmeier, 2002, Pollermann et al., 2013, Navarro et al., 2015).

## The problem

The main assumption of the LEADER approach is that rural support measures become more effective if decision-making and implementation are locally embedded. Nevertheless, this assumed added value of the LEADER approach has not been convincingly demonstrated so far. The

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1 LEADER is an acronym derived from the French: Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale = links between actions for the development of the rural economy. The LEADER approach was devised as one possibility to bring forward rural development. LEADER started in 1991 (reissued five times up to now). Firstly it was seen as an experimental "pilot" scheme under LEADER I (in the first period 1991-94). LEADER II in the following period (1995-1999) focused the "laboratory" aspect, making use of the momentum to engage innovative, inexperienced pathways, but was still mainly limited to disadvantaged rural areas. During the period 2000-2006, it was extended to a wide range of rural regions as LEADER+. In the last funding period there was a "mainstreaming" of LEADER: it has been integrated to the Rural Development Programs (RDP) and builds a horizontal priority "axis" under which all RDP measures should be eligible (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2010, Pollermann et al., 2013). In 2014-2020 there is again a new edition of LEADER (further remarks for this funding period: Copus et al. 2011) and is now also offered to the structural funds as Community Led Local development (CLLD).

diverse and scattered evidence might partly be due to the context dependence of implementation and success of LEADER at local level.

### **Research aim**

In order to better understand this context-dependence and heterogeneity and consider it, for example, in evaluation studies, it is necessary to identify the influences that explain it. In the current paper we ask in how far the administrative environment affects the implementation of LEADER. In the context of European rural development support, different levels and areas of administration are affected and the specific relations between EU, nation state, subnational level (region/Land) and community are of relevance. We ask in how far (1) national differences in the multi-level-governance system, (2) differences in the rural development implementation processes, and (3) differences in the local administrative environment affect the implementation of LEADER and its organization.

### **Research approach**

Our research is part of the TRUSTEE<sup>2</sup> program. The research approach is based on the theory of multi-level governance (Bache and Flinders, 2004, Pollermann et al., 2014a) - understood as a mode of coordination - involving different spheres of actors and forms of regulation of various kinds (Jessop, 2002). We developed a concept that helps with an integrated assessment of governance arrangements at the local level as well as regulations at the European and national levels.

These factors, according to our assumptions, relate to the style of interaction between (and within) different levels and institutions of the development system, the degree of autonomy of the local level, the administrative procedures applied, and the autonomy of local partnership in general (Grieve et al., 2010, 24). The most immediate influences within this framework are from the funding conditions set for LEADER at European level and put into practice at the national and subnational level on the one hand and the public administrative system on the other hand, setting the frame for the room-for-manoeuvre of local public entities. We analyze how far the administrative and rural development framework influences LEADER implementation based on the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.trustee-project.eu/>

comparative analysis of the implementation modalities of the LEADER program at the national, regional and local levels in Germany, France and Italy.

The analysis is based on a literature review<sup>3</sup>, the examination of program and guidance documents, and on first results of case studies. We conduct ten case studies in LEADER-regions in nine European regions (Nuts 2) : Veneto and Emilia-Romagna in Italy, Aquitaine, Bretagne, Rhône-Alpes and Champagne-Ardenne in France and Hesse, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany (see Table 1). Regions were selected with four main criteria related to the problematic: the national institutional organization, spatial and regional socio-economic characteristics, regional orientations privileged for rural development, local organization implementing the LAG.

The further elaborations are structured in four parts, including this first part that presents our approach. In a second part we present the main challenges of rural regions in Italy, France and Germany and the importance of LEADER in each country. In a third part we highlight the institutional framework in these three countries and we then analyze in a fourth part how this context influences LEADER implementation at a local level.

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<sup>3</sup> Overview about literature is presented in Pollermann et al., 2014a

**Table 1: LAG case studies at a glance**

LAG's	Region/Land	State	LEADER since ...	RDP Focus at regional/Land-level
LAG Venezia orientale	Veneto	Italy	LEADER II	Competitiveness of agriculture and the protection of the environment and landscape
LAG Delta 2000	Emilia-Romagna	Italy	LEADER II	Quality of local product and environmental issues
LAG Antico Frignano	Emilia-Romagna	Italy	LEADER II	Quality of local product and environmental issues
LAG ouest Cornouaille	Brittany	France	LEADER II	Performance of the agricultural sector and environment
LAG Arcachon Val de l'Eyre	Aquitaine	France	Only part of the territory since LEADER I	Competitiveness of agriculture and forest sectors and challenge for mountain farming
LAG des Monts d'Ardèche	Rhone-Alpes	France	LEADER II	Local food chains and agri-environment
LAG Pays de Langres	Champagne-Ardennes	France	LEADER II	Local Infrastructures and cultural heritage
LAG Kellerwald-Edersee	Hesse	Germany	LEADER I	Assistance for farmers
LAG Stettiner-Haff	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Germany	LEADER II	Rural development
LAG Südliches Paderborner Land	North Rhine-Westphalia	Germany	LEADER +	Agri-environment

## 2. Main challenges facing rural regions in Italy, Germany and France

Of course, it could appear quite ambitious (and rather false) to present in general the main challenges facing rural regions in Italy, Germany and France, as each region has its own specificities. Here our objective is not to detail all these challenges and the underlying models. Nevertheless we try to present rough components of each country and to keep in mind the influence of historical and institutional data as path dependence factors for each case study.

In France, rural regions have faced agricultural challenges for a long time. French rural strategies have long been characterized by agricultural issues encouraged by powerful farm lobbies. Although these historical trends continue, they are strongly challenged by new issues (Trouvé et al., 2013). Since 1990, the development issues are indeed mostly to maintain services in rural territories and organize relations between cities and the countryside (Lécole et al., 2014). France also faces hard financial constraints locally (Chevalier and Dedeire, 2014). However it is important to specify the precise challenges in each region that we obtained as case studies.

- Brittany is an agricultural region with a powerful agro-food sector based on intensive production. There are now important sectorial challenges to face sustainable development issues (water quality, animal welfare, extensification, ...). Residential activities are quite important because of the settlement of new populations and tourism.
- Rhône-Alpes is an area combining an extensive urban network and mountain areas with many national and regional parks, a region with population growth and strong economic dynamics in the high tech industry, tourism, agriculture and food processing, geared towards quality products.
- Champagne-Ardennes is a rural area with a low population density (half of the national average) with remote areas that are losing residents. Economic activity

- is productive but poorly diversified. The agriculture and forestry represent a significant share of employment.
- In Aquitaine, the region is quite diverse and shows two main socio-economic models: the first is a production-focused model with industrial agriculture and forestry, and the second is a combination of residential and natural zones in coastal areas or mountains, where agriculture is declining.

Italy is characterized by large territorial disparities. For a long time, Italy was seen as a country divided in two parts, the North, rich and industrialized, and the South, poor and rural. But Bagnasco in 1977 highlights the third Italy (Cotta, 2011, 193) in the northeast of the country, with industrial districts characterized by small, networked, craft industries. All around Europe, the third Italy became a model of “endogenous development” and “local development” (Hadjimichalis, 2006). For Veneto and Emilia Romagna their RDPs are focused on the competitiveness of agriculture. Both regions are well-developed regions, among the richest Italian regions.

- Veneto, is undergoing a process of peri-urbanization, and it is considered as a “diffused city”, challenged by serious environmental problems, in particular water quality and land pollution and by a strong demand of decentralization of the rural policy’s governance coming from territories (OECD, 2009, p. 123-124).
- Emilia Romagna is home to a diversified economic base in which agro-food, manufacturing and tourism activities are strongly developed<sup>4</sup>; but Emilia Romagna faces a process of counter-urbanization with problems of sustainability, similar to Veneto’s diffused city. It poses problems related to congestion and pollution due to intense commuting and pressure on natural resources.

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4 Firms and farms are quite small but strongly integrated along supply-chains, with some important agro-food districts. It is the number one region for production of EU brands (14 protected designation of origin, and 11 Guarantee of origin for foods, such as Parmesan cheese, balsamic vinegar of Modena, Parma ham...). The tourism sector has shown a remarkable increase for the last decade.

In Germany challenges in rural areas differ between regions. One main issue is the demographic change. Some areas grow while most have losses of population and an aging society. In rural areas in eastern Germany (parts of the former German Democratic Republic, GDR), there are on-going societal transformations connected to the post-socialist transition with an often weaker economic structure than in western Germany (Pollermann et al. 2014b). The challenges faced in the case-studies of the three different Länder are quite different:

- In Hesse: South-north divide (better in the south) in terms of economic performance, population density and development, small scale agriculture with a high share of part-time farms
- In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (part of former GDR): low population density, population decline, weak economic structure, especially in coastal areas high importance of tourism,
- In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW): Most populated federal state in Germany, economic problems in former industrialised regions like the Ruhr district, small scale agriculture in the south and intensive agriculture with some environmental problems in the north.

After describing the main challenges in Italian, German and French rural areas, the question is how the administrative and political structures manage to take into account these specificities? More precisely we analyze the implementation of the European Rural Development Regulation (RDR) and especially the case of the LEADER programs, often considered as “textbook case” for subsidiarity in Europe.

### **3. Institutional framework in France, Germany and Italy**

To understand to what extent the administrative and rural development framework influences LEADER, we analyze the administration systems in Italy, Germany and France (3.1) and the implementation of the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) in each country (3.2).

#### **3.1 Three different administration systems**

The three countries show significant national level differences in terms of political and administrative organization and the decentralization of power. Some convergence can be observed in Italy, Germany and France, as they are three “old” Member states of the European Union and are concerned with similar concepts, ideas and discourse on administrative reforms. But the concrete decisions and practical implementations tend to follow country-specific peculiarities and path dependencies (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014, p. 265, p. 268). So the public administration systems of France, Germany and Italy have similarities as well as differences. All three are shaped by the traditional Continental European model of “rule of law” as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon “public interest culture”. But if we consider the underlying principle of the organisational model, their internal organization is quite different. Italy and France have a Napoleonic administrative system, characterized by a strong centralized government and a powerful centralized bureaucracy, which is organized from the central to the local level.

A crucial difference between Germany and the other two countries is the prevalent principle of territorial organization with a high importance of subnational decentralized levels and the principle of subsidiarity. Besides the federal structure, Germany is characterized by a strong position of local government and the territory-related form of organization leading to multi-purpose administrative units (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014, p. 17). Local self-government and local administration units below the “Länder”-

level are the municipalities (Gemeinde) and the districts (Landkreis)<sup>5</sup>, together referred to as communes (Kommunen). The communes have a double nature:

- as local self-government with elected councils and directly elected mayors/head of district as head of the administration
- as part of the administration of the upper levels (state, Länder) executing tasks delegated by the upper levels.

In the 1970s there was a “wave” of territorial reforms in West Germany to create viable administrative units at the local level. This was enforced by law in some Länder like NRW and Hesse with a substantial decrease in number and an increase in the size of communes, voluntary in others. In Lower-Saxony there was at this time nearly no change, then voluntary administrative units for joint administration were introduced. After reunification, a similar process of territorial reforms took place in East Germany. As it was also to a great extent voluntary e. g. in MV the small municipalities persisted leading to the establishment of supra local intercommunal cooperations for administration.

The process of decentralization in France and Italy is more recent. Historically, the two countries have a Napoleonic administrative system: a strong centralized government and a powerful centralized bureaucracy, which is organized from the central to the local level. Nevertheless, despite this centralized system, France has for 50 years (and reinforced in the 90’s) a narrow territorial network at the local level (intra-departmental) composed, for example, by “pays” and Natural Parks.

In the last decades both countries made substantial administrative reforms, for example, to more decentralized structures or to a shift of responsibilities and tasks from the national state to subnational levels. As a result of the decentralization processes, the role of local governments has gradually been strengthened, but there are strong differences between France and Italy.

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5 and the so called district free cities (bigger cities) which assume at the same time the functions/role of municipalities and districts

Since the adoption of the Bassanini laws in the 1990's, Italy has developed into a quasi-federal state with 4 levels (state, region, "*provincia*" and municipality). Italian regions received a lot of jurisdictions from the state and particularly were given legislative power (Rivières, 2004). Each region has its own organization and could decide which jurisdictions "Provinces" and municipalities can take over, in addition to the existing national set of laws. The Italian state has just kept regal power, such as foreign policies and military affairs. Italy has fewer municipalities than France but they are still numerous, and their number has been increasing during the last years. Inter-municipalities exist but they are neither compulsory nor well-developed.

France has four levels of administrative organization: the national level (State) and three regional/local levels (Region, "*Département*" and Municipality) without hierarchy and authority one to another. If there is a distribution of competences between each territorial government, each one has a partial autonomy to decide its policy commitments ("*clause de compétence générale*"). Thereby French Regions must contend with an increasing transfer of tasks and competences from the State, even if this latter doesn't share its legislative power. The State has its own administration at the departmental and regional levels: so-called "*services déconcentrés de l'Etat*". The process of representation of the State at a territorial level is called "*déconcentration*", as a counterpart to "decentralization", meaning that all state responsibilities had to be performed locally by the state field services (*services déconcentrés*)<sup>6</sup> under the authority of the "*préfet*". "*Services decentralizes*" mean local public services in the responsibility of the local authorities (*collectivités territoriales: Communes, Départements, Régions*). For example each Region has its own organization and could have a "*Direction de l'agriculture et du Développement Rural*" (Rhône-alpes) or a "*Direction de l'aménagement des Territoires*" (Aquitaine) that manage both rural and urban territories. So there are two kinds of public services that have to work together in each Department and Region, and to negotiate together for local funding and projects. Since

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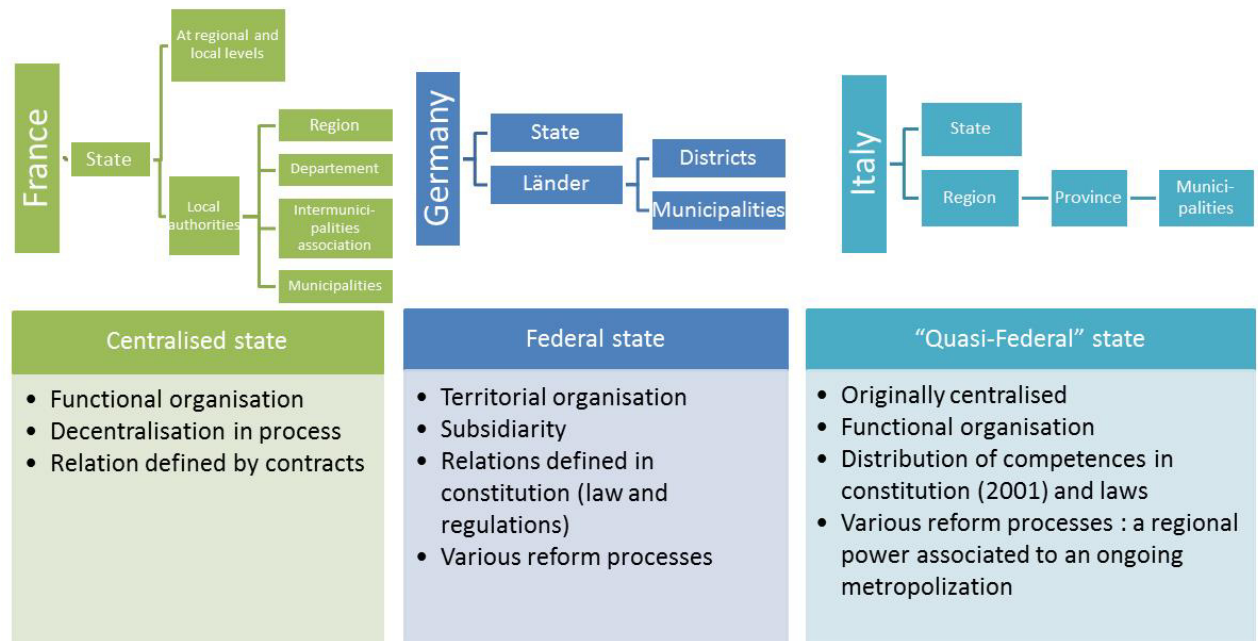
<sup>6</sup> These are local state public services, for example, DDDT (Direction Départementale des Territoires) or DRAAF (Direction Régionale pour l'Alimentation, l'agriculture et la Forêt).

the first French laws of decentralization (1982-83), this negotiation is formalized in specific contracts (*Contrat de Projet Etat-Region*, CPER) between the State (*Préfecture*, deconcentrated unit of the state) and each Region (decentralised unit) with precise regional responsibilities at each level to ensure consistency between regional and national interventions.

In France there is a multitude of small municipalities and the many attempts to reduce them failed. As an alternative strategy, the government tried to stimulate intercommunal cooperation. This led to a big variety of co-operations ("*syndicats*") with overlapping and doubling of functions and a manifold subnational network of actors. In the 1990s, a new kind of intercommunal cooperation was introduced by law, trying to reduce the organizational proliferation. Three different types of intercommunal cooperative institutions (*Établissements publics de coopération intercommunale*, EPCI) were established, having the right to raise their own tax. Important tasks are spatial planning and promoting economic development.

Figure 1 summarises the different administrative structures and territorial levels of the three states.

**Figure 1 : Overview of the basic structure of public administration in France, Germany and Italy**



Source: own composition

With regard to rural development policy implementation in general, and especially for LEADER, the following aspects are especially relevant: The relationship between the State and subnational level (*Länder*, regions) as well as the relationship between the subnational and local level are defined by constitution in Germany and Italy, whereas this is regulated by contracts in France.

The analysis of the administrative organization in these three countries highlights that in the multi-level governance setting the state has given up some of its control functions in favor of a greater co-ordination role (Bache and Flinders, 2004, Buller, 2000, Mantino et al., 2009) or "gouvernance à distance" (Epstein, 2005). This process can be illustrated by the implementation of rural development programs.

### 3.2 RDR Implementation in the nine selected regions of the three countries

First we analyze the implementation at the national level and then at the sub-national level.

#### a) At national level

In Germany, the Länder have the responsibilities for agriculture and rural development as well as for regional economic development. The “*Bund*” (national level) basically has a co-ordinating role (between the Länder and between Länder and EU). As a national instrument, there are so called « joint tasks » (“*Gemeinschaftsaufgaben*”):

- for agricultural structure and coastal protection (GAK, managed by the National Ministry of Agriculture)
- for regional economic structure (GRW, managed by the National Ministry of Economy)

The financial contribution is shared by the national and the Länder-level (60%, 40%). The guidelines (as basic funding rules) are up-dated regularly in joint agreements. The Role of the GAK has more and more turned into an instrument securing national co-financing for RDP-measures, which means that GAK-guidelines try to follow the measure portfolio offered by the EAFRD. To facilitate program planning and approval, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture has also elaborated a so-called National Framework Regulation, summarizing the guidelines of the GAK and basic rules of other measures, included in all the RDPs. Concerning EAFRD, only the National Rural Network has been implemented by the “*Bund*” based on an own programme. The national strategic plan required by the EU for 2007-2013 was basically elaborated by the national ministry summarizing the contents of the Länder-Programs. It had no strategic relevance.

Besides that, the federal ministry has been executing so-called pilot schemes, quite similar to the LEADER approach. One was called “*RegionAktiv*” (2000 until 2007), where 18 Regions selected nationwide received funding for their development strategies. Some of them were identical to LEADER-Regions. The subsequent pilot scheme was

“LandZukunft”, focussing more on marginalised districts, started in 2011. Out of 17 districts invited to apply, four were selected and funded, three of them more or less covered the same area as the respective LEADER-regions.

At least in Germany in the funding period 2007 – 2013, LEADER was linked to a certain extent to the mainstream measures. For example in Hesse the LEADER-LAGs could only fund the measures 311 (diversification), 312 (small enterprises), 313 (rural tourism), 321 (basic services), 323 (cultural heritage) and 331 (training) with LEADER-money whereas in North Rhine-Westphalia the LEADER-money could only be used for innovative projects and projects fundable under mainstream measures had to apply for that measure. This somehow created restrictions for the LAGs in following their local development strategy.

In France, initially there was a single National Rural Development Program (PDRN) for the mainland in the funding periods before 2007<sup>7</sup>. For the 2007 – 2013 period, there is still a national program (called Hexagonal Program of Rural Development PDRH) but it is composed of two parts. A national part (“*Socle national*”) concerns certain measures of Axes 1 and 2 and corresponds to main national issues (young farmers, compensatory allowance for permanent natural handicaps, some agri-environmental measures and forestry measures). It represents 62% of EU funds. A regional part (38% of EU funds) is elaborated by each Region with all or part of all other measures. So the PDRH is completed by 26 regional rural development documents (DRDR) elaborated by Regions and mobilizing all measures from Axes 3 and 4, but also some of measures of Axes 1 and 2 that can be adapted to the regional context and the specific local challenges. The importance of the national part of PDRH has been negotiated at the national level between agricultural organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Committee of Regions (a representation of the 26 French Regions). The most important argument in

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7 For Overseas-territories there were separate programs.

this negotiation was that funding came from CAP and was intended for the agricultural sector and not for rural development.

For RDP 2007-2013, the state is still the main managing authority for Brussels for the RDR program (including regional part of French RDR<sup>8</sup>), knowing that 62% of EU funds are allocated to measures of the “*socle national*”.

The European LEADER program LEADER was seen as a tool to implement the national policies of “*pays*” develop in 1999 by the French government. “*Pays*” are subregional areas regrouping some intercommunality associations, based on existing interactions at the local level and to traditional or historical links among the population, propinquity areas (“*bassins de vie*”) and this the aim to define a territorial development strategy. In this context, LEADER became a tool of territorial policies managed at regional level and implemented at the level of the “*Pays*” (80% of French LEADER program are led by Pays).

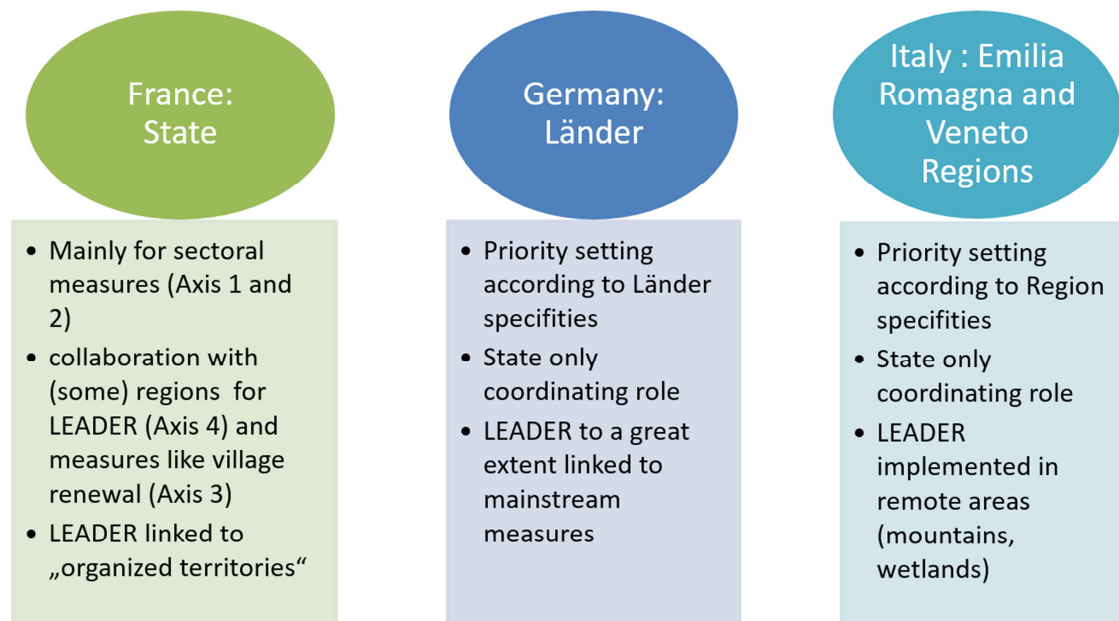
In Italy, like in Germany, the regions are responsible for the planning and implementation of RDPs and the State, and its agricultural ministry, has no constitutional legitimacy to take action in Regional policy orientations (Cobacho et al., 2011). This led to basic differences in programs, for example, concerning the criteria for the definition of rural areas, thus generating disparities between regions and potential beneficiaries in earlier funding periods. As for the funding period 2007-2013 member states had to elaborate a national strategic plan, the Agriculture Ministry worked with the Regional State Consultation, called “*Conferenza Stato Regioni*” to elaborate this plan and to harmonize the implementation of the rural development planning, notably the definition of rural areas. The design of RDP is quite diverse according to the Regions, some with European funding under competitiveness and employment objective (Northern Italy), others with European funding under convergence objective (Southern Italy). Here we focus on two regions, Emilia Romagna and Veneto, in North-East Italy.

Figure 2 summarises the differences regarding RDP organisation in the three states.

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<sup>8</sup> Except one region – Alsace - that experienced the decentralization of RDR management in the period 2007-2013

**Figure 2 : Responsibility for RDP planning and implementation in France, Germany and Italy**

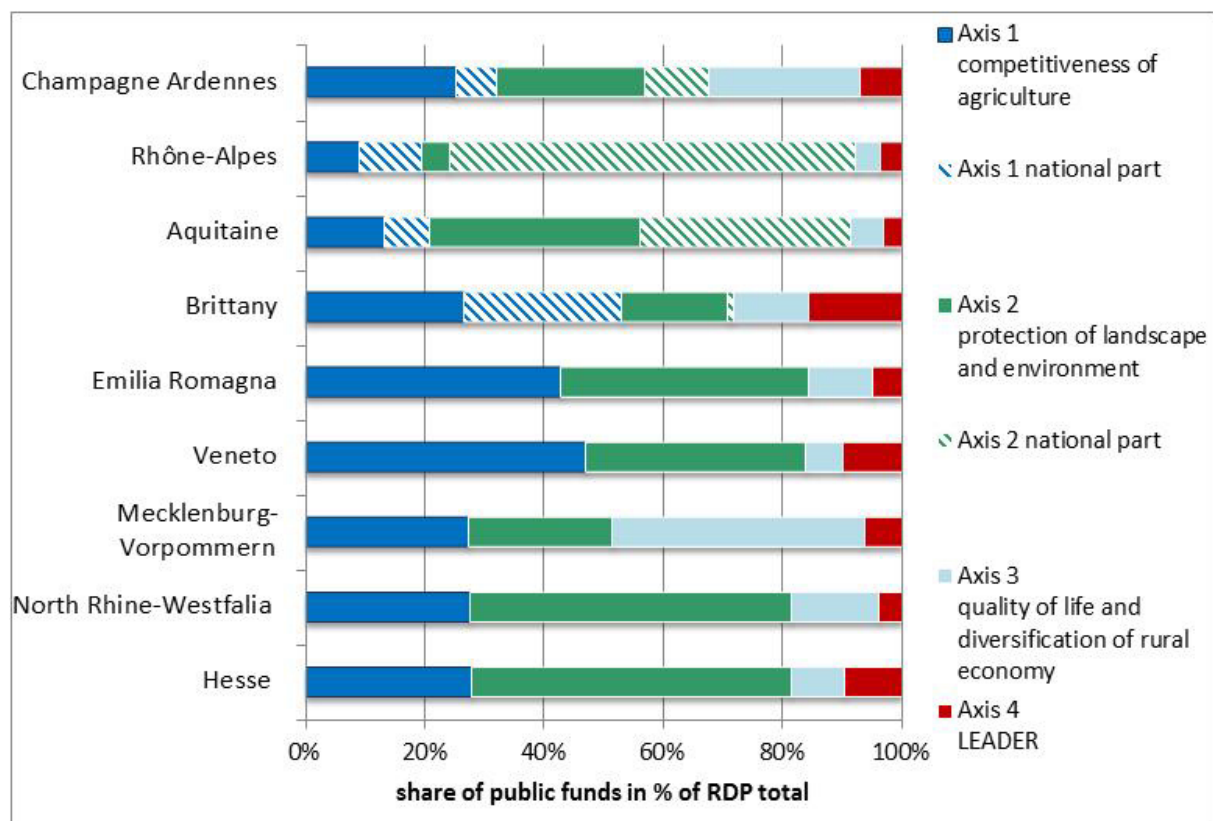


Source: own composition

### **b) Rural development policy at the sub national level (Länder/ Regions)**

The differences in the structure of RDPs can be shown looking at the **financial distribution** between priorities. Figure 3 gives an example for some of the RDPs concerned in this study.

Figure 3 : Financial RDP distribution per axis (2007-13)<sup>9</sup>



Source: RDPs and annual implementation reports, see <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/country>.

Fig. 3 shows an emphasis on sectoral measures benefiting farmers (Axis 1) in both Italian regions as well as in agricultural French region, such as Brittany. In the German programs, in Hesse and NRW Axis 2 is very important due to the relevance of agri-environmental measures in NRW and the less-favored areas subsidies in Hesse. In both French regions, Rhône-Alpes and Aquitaine with important mountain areas, Axis 2 is very important as well, because of payments for farmers in mountains areas. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the program reflects the need to develop the rural infrastructure and economy in general, allocating the biggest share to Axis 3. There are also clear differences in the weight the regions/Länder give to the LEADER axis (with

<sup>9</sup> In France, RDP budget contain two parts, one national part in axis 1 and 2 (crosshatched in the figure) and one regional part for axis 3 and 4 and some additional measures in axis 1 and 2.

21% of public funds in Brittany and only about 5% in North Rhine-Westfalia and Emilia Romagna).

Another distinguishing feature can be the kind of projects which are eligible for LEADER. In France, Regions are free to define relevant territories and strategic priorities for LEADER, mobilizing all measures included in the respective regional programs<sup>10</sup>. Under these conditions, we observed that LEADER is more oriented to measures of Axis 3 and measures of axes 1 and 2 are used only rarely and less intensively. The relative homogeneity of regional strategies for the LEADER program is explained by the definition, at national level, certain principles for the implementation such as the definition of LEADER territories in reference to organized territories and the indication of the size of the project in terms financial amount.

In Italy the Regions offer different measures to LEADER. Some use only the Axis 3, others combine Axis 3, with Axes 2 or 1 and others use all three axes (Di Rienzo and al., 2012, 18). Emilia Romagna and Veneto have chosen the latter.

In Germany this varies in general between the Länder and also the three Länder concerned in this study have chosen different ways: while in Hesse only the standard Axis 3 measures are possible and in NRW all projects have to be so-called innovative measures, in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern all measures from Axes 1, 2 and 3 have been fundable through LEADER. Because this restriction leads to too narrow conditions, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern already widened the possibilities during the funding period with an option called LEADERalternative, which made it easier to fund innovative projects, which sometimes do not fit in the standard measure funding conditions.

Regarding the history of **LEADER-implementation in France**, there have for a long time been tensions between the will of the state to maintain equity and national consistency between territories and regional claims to control their own development path. These tensions are illustrated by Méasson (2007) who speaks about the “recentralisation” of

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<sup>10</sup> In accordance with RDR agreement, project leader can also mobilize measures available in national program and not selected in a regional program.

LEADER+ compared with LEADER II which was more decentralized. Nevertheless we can underline some specificity in each Region under study:

- In Brittany, even if the regional program is focused on the agricultural competitiveness (LEADER Axis 4 represents 14% of the Breton DRDR in 2007-13, whereas Axis 1 represents 37%), there has nevertheless been a long tradition of local development based on “*Pays*” since the 1960’s. LEADER 2007-13, focused on quality of life and landscapes, is still closely linked to “*Pays*”. The Region even wanted to recognize all the 22 “*Pays*” as LEADER-areas. Regional services of State did not accepted this non-selective strategy and only 15 LAGs were selected without the support of Regional council.
- In Aquitaine there has been a good cooperation between the state and the region since LEADER I. The Aquitaine Region has a specific urban and rural policy (Pays et Quartiers d’Aquitaine) that is closely linked to LEADER programs and is, as such, a major source of co-funding of LEADER.
- Rhône-Alpes is an economically powerful region that has for a long time recognized Natural Parks and “*Pays*” as LEADER-areas and implement LEADER with its own development areas called “*Contrats de Développement Rhône-Alpes*” CDRA and later CDDRA meaning “*Contrats de Développement Durable Rhône-Alpes*”. So LEADER is used as a political lever to implement and promote the region’s own development strategy.
- Champagne-Ardennes failed to get LEADER I funding. That’s why local actors, convinced that LEADER could be a great opportunity to help the Region to fight unemployment and regional social difficulties, received a specific training to design LEADER. In this context, the Haute-Marne Department (the poorest department in Champagne-Ardennes) was successful in obtaining LEADER II support for its LAG designed by civil

society and local economic and public actors. This LAG even became emblematic of LEADER programs in Champagne-Ardennes.

Regarding the history of **LEADER-implementation in Italy**, we can highlight some differences between Emilia-Romagna and Veneto:

- In Veneto, even if the 2007—2013 RDP was focused on competitiveness of agriculture (Axis 1 represents 57%, Axis 4 11%) which was the same in 2000-2006 for the place and importance of LEADER+, there is a long rural tradition of local development. Since LEADER+, the LEADER Program in Veneto is focused on measures including improving the quality of life.
- Emilia-Romagna, one of the richest regions in Italy, is considered by the EU Commission as the “textbook case-study” for LEADER, regarding innovations and involvement of private actors (Fargion et al., 2006) It was recognized as an “excellence-region-system”, pursuing in its policies both objectives of development and social cohesion. The LAGs Antico-Frignano and Delta 2000 illustrate the two dimensions of the regional LEADER strategy : first one with a strong agricultural part, represented in Antico-Frignano by the place of agricultural cooperatives in LEADER design and management, and second with a strong part dedicated to environmental issues, represented in Delta 2000 by the Po Delta classified as a Natura 2000 and UNESCO area. This LAG wants to become a European reference for slow tourism and bird watching.

Regarding the history of **LEADER-implementation in Germany** there are some differences in the three Länder:

- In Hesse: The promotion of endogenous rural development was already firmly rooted in Hessian rural development policy before LEADER I and an association for autonomous regional development was already set up in 1984 with the first rural regional program. This led to a certain openness to decentralised and regional approaches among political authorities when the LEADER I program was

introduced (Thelen, 1999). In LEADER I, two LAGs (which are still LEADER groups) evolved. Based on the LEADER I experience, a Hessian state program for rural regional development was set up in 1993 and also spread the LEADER-principles outside the 5b-area. So by the end of LEADER II ten so-called regional development groups existed, six of them being LEADER II-LAGs. In LEADER+ the number of LAGs increased to eight, complemented by three non-LEADER-regional development groups and in 2007-2013 there were 20 LAGs and five non-LEADER-regional development groups

- In North Rhine-Westphalia: The relevance of LEADER has quite increased through mainstreaming as the number of LAGs has quadrupled from three to twelve. In former funding periods NRW was one of the federal states not that open to LEADER. In LEADER II there were two funding areas, one in the southwest (parts of three districts) and one in the east (one and a half district). The “district business development agencies” of these regions were established as collective bodies coordinating project funding. The first LEADER-LAGs were only established with LEADER +, where three out of five LEADER-applications were selected. Overall one can conclude that continuity of Local Action groups did not exist in NRW before mainstreaming.
- Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as a newly formed Bundesland, did not participate in LEADER I, but then for LEADER II 12 areas were approved (the delimitation of the LEADER regions was equal to districts and all districts in MV participated). In LEADER+, the shape of the LAG-region was reviewed. While again 12 LAGs were selected, the delimitations changed and differed from district borders in most cases. For 2007-2013 again the whole surface of rural areas is covered with LAGs (mainly oriented on district borders, there were 13 LAGs because part of two districts merged to an additional LAG in connection with a biosphere reserve).

So one aspect to be taken into account for further elaborations is: while the Länder in Germany and the regions in Italy accumulated experience in handling EU-funded Rural Development programs over several funding periods, the regions in France only recently

(since 2007) got part of responsibilities for the planning and implementation of RDPs. In 2007-2013, national part of RDP is quite important, especially in mountains areas.

It is also important to keep in mind that communes are multipurpose administrations in Germany executing a vast range of tasks, whereas communes in France and Italy are overall self-government units and other administrative tasks are organized sectorally. With regard to LEADER, communes in Germany might have more resources and technical capacities for project planning and implementation. Intermunicipality associations in France have probably more power to support their interests against the upper levels of the state.

#### **4 Comparative Analysis: LEADER Implementation at a local level and its relation to the institutional environment**

Our first findings highlight the diversity of administrative structures and the relative importance of territorial levels to implement rural programs. What are the consequences on the implementation of LEADER?

In Germany, as LEADER-territories were relatively free in deciding on their delimitations, they do not always go together with administrative or other existing units. Relevant units are (as members, supporting structure or base of delimitation) inter alia Municipalities, districts, nature parks or former districts. LAG members from the public sector are usually local mayors or from the administration of municipalities and districts, but not from higher state levels. In some Länder it is obligatory that representatives of the government authorities, which are responsible for the eligibility check, are consulting members in every LAG.

In France, territorial structures relevant for LEADER are "*Territoires organisés*". These are not new local government levels, but other types of defined territories between municipalities without regard to existing administrative borders. Most common

territorial structures are “*Pays*” or Regional natural Parks (PNR) <sup>11</sup>. LAG members from the public sector are elected representatives of the municipalities, intermunicipality associations<sup>12</sup>, other public structures as Pays or natural parks, or public professional structures as chambers of agriculture, commerce or crafts.

In Italy, the LEADER territories are defined according to specific national criteria. But in each Region the LAGs have a legal status that gives them independence. However, each LAG has to respect regional RDP priorities. For example, in Veneto, there is a traditional rural governance model and LAGs in LEADER focused on matters of Axis 3: local services and rural tourism, quality of life and landscapes. Main actors vary according to the local development strategy. In Emilia-Romagna, in the LAG Antico-Frignano, the priority is the development of local products supported by Axis 1, which is also illustrated by the bigger share of Axis 1 measures in the LEADER budget (Fig. 2). In that case, the main actors here are agricultural cooperatives and private agri-food enterprises. In contrast, in LAG Delta 2000, with a local development strategy based on the enhancement of local products and wetlands, agricultural trade unions and tourism actors are well represented. In both case, LAG members from the public sector are the municipalities, and when present, actors from parks and “*Unione di comuni*” (association of municipalities).

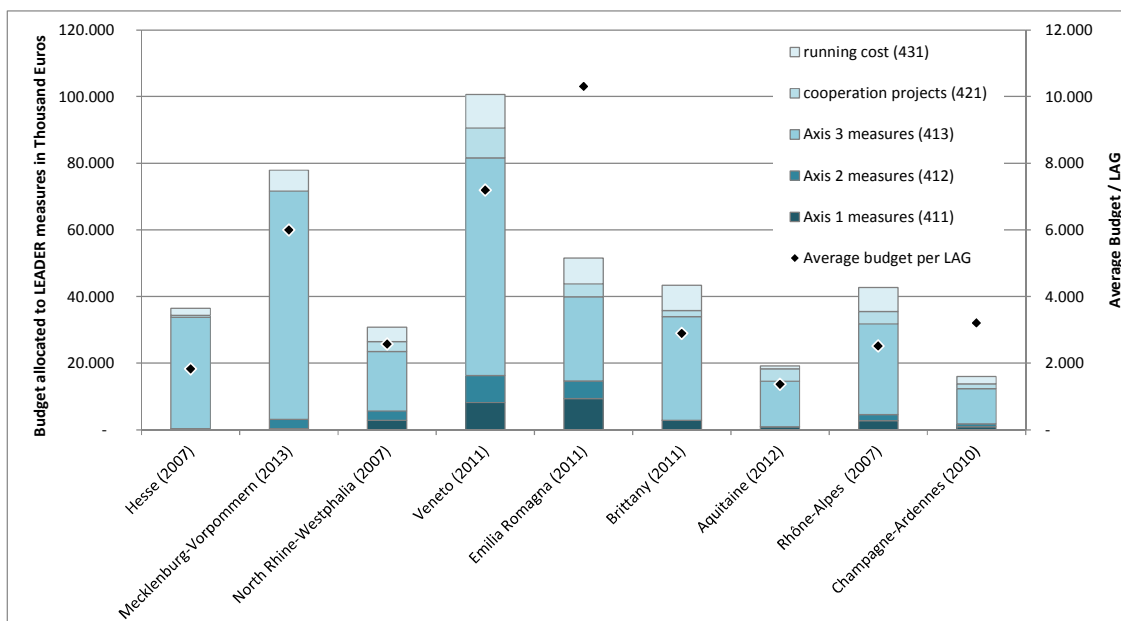
As Fig. 4 shows, the financial importance of LEADER varies significantly between the regions/Länder concerned and, what is more important, there are strong differences in the budget of public funds available for each LAG. The highest budget is available to LAGs in the economically well-off Italian regions and the more lagging behind east-German Bundesland, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The differences between the other French regions and German Bundesländer are smaller, showing the highest budget/LAG in this group in an economically poor region (Champagne-Ardeche).

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<sup>11</sup> Natural regional parks have been constituted in France to combine the setting up of sustainable local development in the area and the protection of the scenery and heritage.

<sup>12</sup> When LAG’s are « Pays », public members are intermunicipality associations and not municipalities.

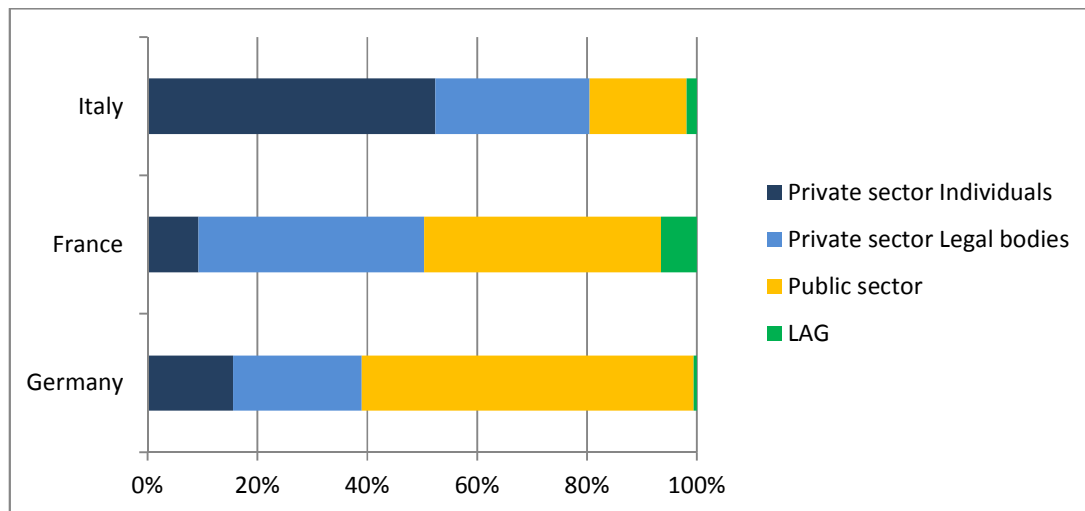
**Figure 4 : Budget (public funds) allocated to LEADER measures by Region/Land**



Source: RDPs and annual implementation reports, see <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/country>.

Regarding the type of beneficiaries there are some obvious differences between the three states which reflect to a certain extent the differences identified in the comparative analysis (s. Fig. 5). The high share of public sector as project operators in Germany follows higher capacities and the strong role of municipalities in LEADER processes, whereas the high share of private sector individuals in Italy shows, that it is probably not only Emilia Romagna where economic actors, agricultural cooperatives and trade-unions, agri-food enterprises or tourism enterprises play an important role.

**Figure 5 : Public funds spent for LEADER projects by type of beneficiary**



Source: Output Indicators: realised 2007-2012 (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/>)

To give a first impression about the LEADER implementation at the local level in our case-studies we can highlight the following results (with empirical evidence from the interviews with local actors):

- **Impacts from administrative framework on LAG-composition:**<sup>13</sup> especially if there are deteriorations in funding conditions some groups become dissatisfied and don't engage anymore (Examples: Some stakeholders from forestry in Paderborner Land left the processes as a result of changes in funding rules from LEADER+ to mainstreamed LEADER 2007-2013, but came back for 2014+ because they expect improvements in funding conditions; in the Stettiner Haff new actors will be integrated 2014+ because of demands from the Land to include topics like energy/climate protection. In Brittany, the Region disagreed with the state-dominated 2007-2013 LEADER selection process and left the state and its

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<sup>13</sup> Navarro et al. (2015) present an international comparison about the extent and impact of participation over the different LEADER-periods in Wales and Spain. Teilmann and Thusen (2014) analyse types of LAG–municipality interactions in Denmark.

*“services déconcentrés”* to manage the program. As in 2014-20 the Region become the managing authority, all “Pays” are now involved in LEADER.

- **Changes of LAG-delimitations in connection with administrative borders:** To meet the needs of local stakeholders, it is important that the size of the region is not too large (Example: In the funding period 2007-2013 Stettiner Haff switched back to the smaller area, it already covered in LEADER II. This change clearly supported the need of local stakeholders to act in the region they really know well). The opposite example was found in Rhône-Alpes with the LAG of Ardèche: for reasons of local political balance, the area proposed in 2014-2020 is enlarged to correspond to the whole Department with the risk of getting away from the local actors.
- **Impacts of the LAG status on the private actors’ participation in LEADER:** the participation of private actors evolves quite differently in our case studies according to the LAG status and the independence from the administrative structures. For example in Delta 2000 or Ardèche the LAG is closely linked to a Natural Park. In Ardèche, the LEADER strategy is quite similar to the Park’s strategy and private actors have difficulties becoming involved in the LAG. In contrast, in Delta 2000, created to give a local development strategy to the natural regional park, private actors are numerous and concerned environmental educational actors, sustainable tourism enterprises, local food enterprises. In this case, LEADER contributes to reinforce the partnerships between public and private actors and the cohesion of local actors.
- **Impacts of territorial engineering on local actors involved in LEADER:** Engineering provided by institutional structures (Land, State, Region, territorial development institutions ...) could have an impact on local actors in terms of social learning and empowerment. For example, in the remote area “pays de Langres”, LEADER II local actors were trained to improve their practices in terms of project management or information dissemination. LEADER created an area of *“publicisation”* of local issues and brought a relevant lever for a local

development that includes weakest actors in a common project and an active citizenship. In Langres, LEADER II highlight the famous Denis Diderot (who is a native of the region) to design a LEADER program based on cultural heritage: the objective is to develop the pride and self-confidence of local actors.

First assumptions are that especially in France, but sometimes in Germany as well, the importance of territorial control games by national authorities tends to reproduce a territorial order where public policy is taking shape in confined spaces defined a priori. In these situations, the defence of institutional territory (Pays, Parks, regional project territory, districts ...) becomes the dominant logic of action and may inhibit local initiatives. In Italy, the same situation could be observed but played by regional authorities.

Nevertheless, in the nine regions under study and in remote areas in particular, LEADER, as a rural development tool, participates in reinforcing local empowerment thanks to territorial engineering.

## **5 Conclusions**

Our findings highlight the diversity of LEADER implementations in the three countries under study and the influence of institutional factors. Each program reflects specific socio-economic structures and different conceptions of local and/or rural development. The design of the programs influence, for example, via the setting of funding conditions or demands on institutional settings at the local level, the extent to which local actors from different spheres get involved in local development via LEADER. Further analysis of our case studies is required to trace the path between these differences induced by the framework and the effect LEADER has on local governance and development.

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Corresponding authors:

Marielle Berriet-Sollic

berriet(a)dijon.inra.fr

Petra Raue

petra.raue(a)ti.bund.de