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Regional Studies Association

Annual Conference 2017: The Great Regional Awakening: New Directions

4th – 7th June 2017, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Theme: “B. Governance, Institutions & Civil Society”

Input for and output of local governance in rural development

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1. Introduction

Support for balanced regional development with participatory approaches has a long tradition in EU funding programmes for rural development. LEADER started 25 years ago and now has 2600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) and is now usable for different EU-funds named as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). To describe the characteristics of LEADER there is a set of LEADER-principles: Territorial approach, Bottom-up, public-private partnership, cooperation with other regions, networking, innovation, integrated and multi-sectoral (EU-Com 2006; Pollermann 2016).

Within LEADER different stakeholders come together in a Local Action Group (LAG) as a type of a public-private partnership. Those groups collaborate on the basis of an integrated local development strategy (LDS) and administer own budgets to support projects. One objective of LEADER is to bring public, private and civil organisations together to cooperate (Kull 2014, 7; Birolo et al., 2012).

A general assumption of LEADER is that there is added value because of better identification with local needs and solutions and an increased capacity for innovation. Further benefits include the pooling of local resources, networking to allow mutual learning and an integrated approach to address complex economic and social issues (High & Nemes, 2007).

Another main assumption of the LEADER approach is that rural support measures become more effective if decision-making and implementation are locally embedded. But there also doubt about this and the diverse and scattered evidence might partly be due to the context dependence of implementation and success of LEADER at local level (Berriet-Sollicet et al. 2015). Altogether, LEADER effects are very different between regions and countries as well as between funding periods. So generalisations are not possible. "As reflected in the large and growing literature, LEADER effects are so different between regions and countries that any transnational or trans-regional generalization is likely to be unreliable" (Papadopoulou et al. 2011, 672).

2. Methods & material

The research topic of this paper is the contribution of the LEADER-implementation to the improvement of local governance in Germany. Local governance in this context can be seen as a cooperation of public, private and civil organizations to bring forward rural development in the LEADER-region.

To examine the contributions of LEADER to local governance, we can present results from the ex-post-evaluation of Rural Development Programs (2007-2013) in six federal states in Germany. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods has been used. There is material from four surveys (written questionnaires) members of the LAG's decision making bodies (2009 and 2013), LAG managers (2010) and project beneficiaries (2012) as well as annual surveys on LAG-structures (Pollermann et al. 2013). In addition first evaluation results are shown for the 2014-2020 funding period, especially from a survey about LAG-structures of 115 LAGs in four German federal states.

To examine governance matters for this conference: we look at the type and structure of participation on the *input-side* while on the *output-side* we focus on contributions to rural development and better cooperation.

3. Results

Regarding the implementation it can be summarized that putting LEADER-principles into practice was mainly successful.

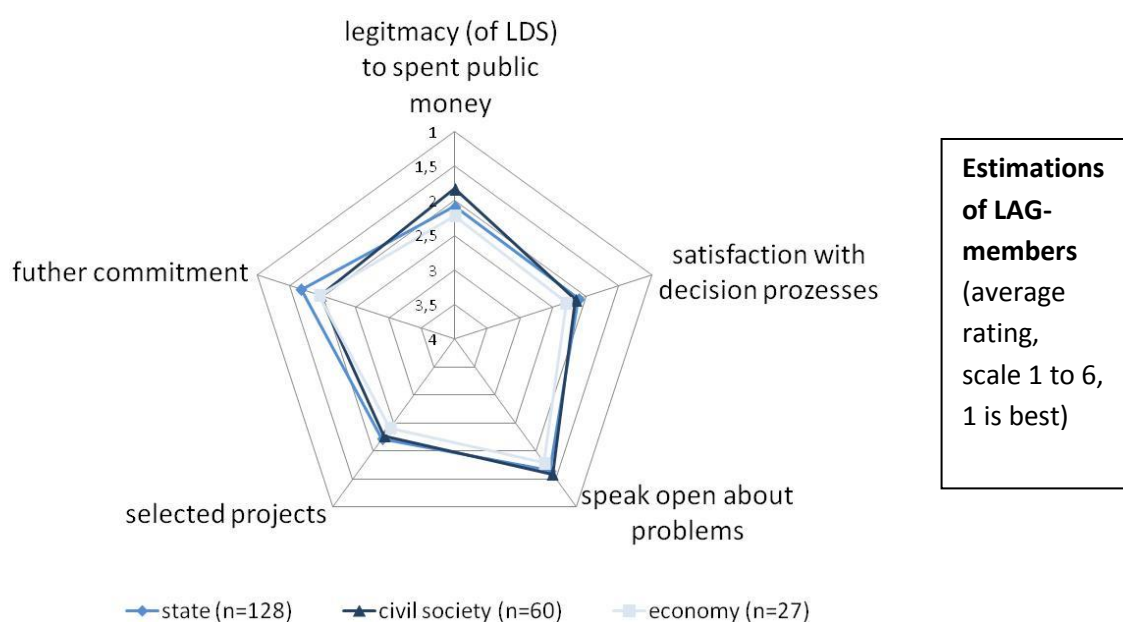
- The local development strategies include different sectors, and have a good acceptance (in the view of LAG members),
- The LAG-management important support structure also for private actors (who are not so familiar with funding rules),
- There is a wide participation of local stakeholders (although clear dominance of the “usual suspects” of participation in such processes: male, academic, over 40) – so the LAG-compositions show a lack of underprivileged groups and noteworthy shortfalls in gender representation (see table 1) (see also Thuesen (2010) for results from Denmark),
- Inadequate funding conditions for private actors set limitations for their involvement in project implementation.

Table 1: Overview about gender representation in LAGs

Federal state	Share of females 2007+	2014+	Settings for application 2014+
NI	28%	29%	there should be an equal representation
SH	21%	24%	there should be an equal representation
HE	19%	22%	there should be an equal representation
NRW	20%	40%	there was a new 30% minimum quorum for all LAGs

Source: own data, (annual survey of LAG-structures 2012 & 2017)

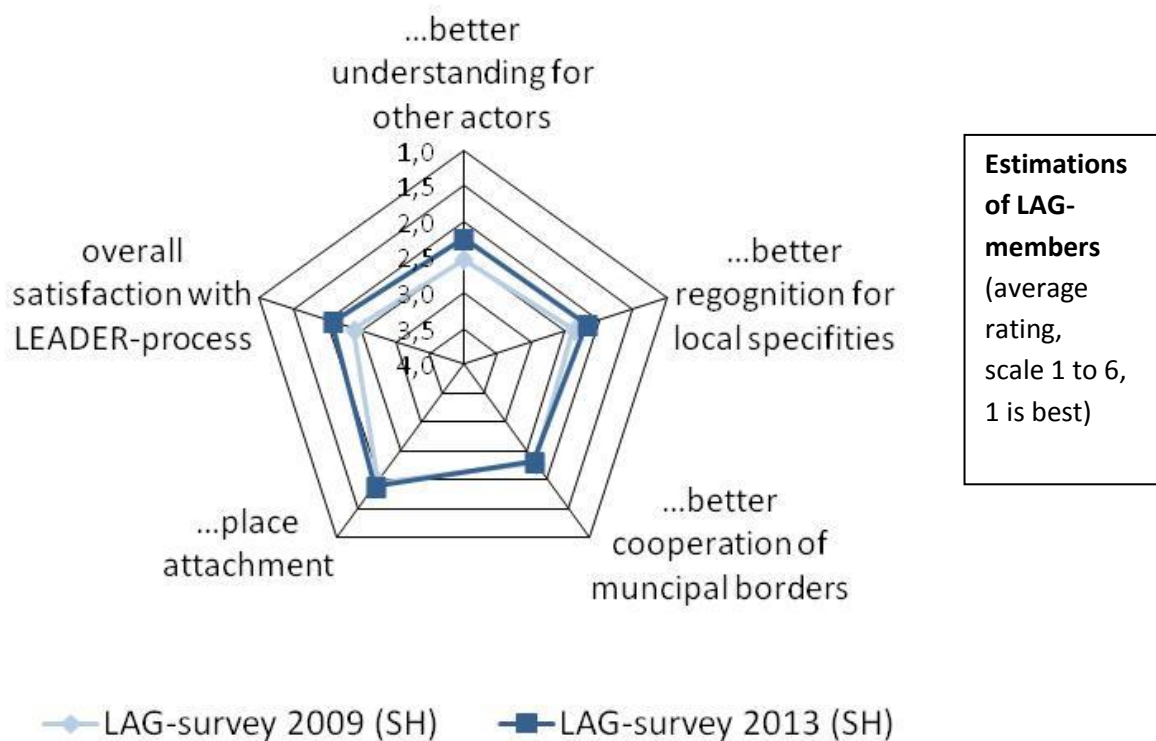
Looking at key indicators for the functionality of governance arrangements, LEADER-arrangements have been rated quite well from the different groups of actors (see figure 1). Thus on the input-side of governance the involvement of civil society and economy actors creates a contribution to local governance, but with some deficits.

Figure 1: Ratings about functionality of governance arrangements

Source: own data, LAG-survey 2013 (federal state: SH)

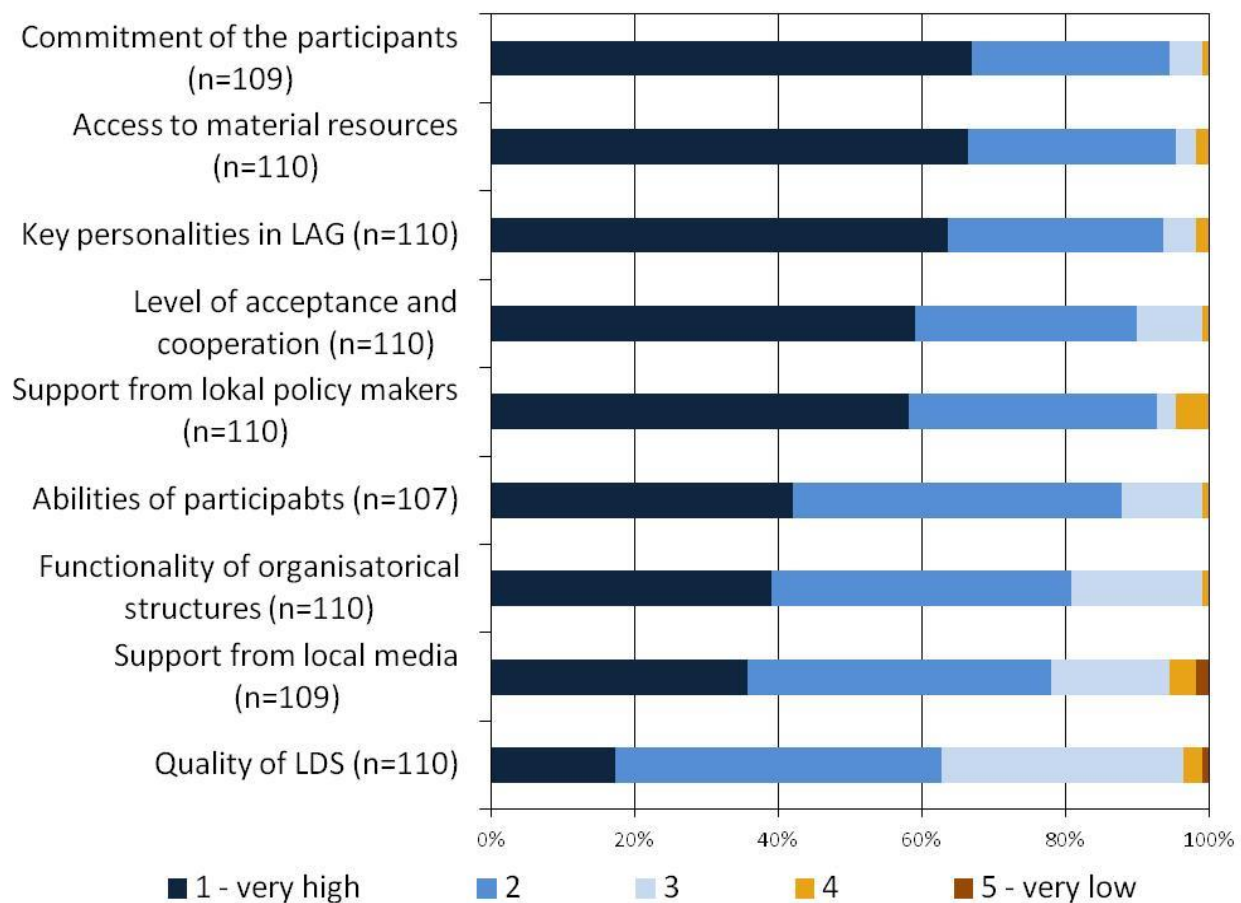
Regarding the output-side some estimations about key indicators for a better cooperation within the LEADER-Regions are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Ratings about output of governance arrangements (indicators for better cooperation)



Source: own data, LAG-survey 2009, LAG-survey 2013 (federal state: SH), n=325

Looking at the factors favoring the success of governance arrangements like LEADER, the estimations of LAG-managers show that the most important factors are: commitment, financial/material resources, involvement of key-personalities as driving forces, level of acceptance/cooperation and support from local/regional political actors (s. figure 3). Remarkably, the quality of the local development strategies was rated less important but still relevant.

Figure 3: Importance of different aspects for LEADER-success – estimatons from LAG-managers

source: own, data, LAG-manager survey 2010 (all federal states)

4. Conclusions

Following the analysis of the empiric data some conclusions can be drawn:

- In general the governance arrangements working quite well, but there are some weaknesses at input-side (f.e. female participation) as well at the output-side (f.e. low support of local economy was created).
- There have been some deficits in 2007+ LEADER- framework (related to these weaknesses), which are only partly have been “repaired” in new funding period.
- Estimations on important aspects for success highlight the importance of engagement, thus a suitable framework for this needs further improvements (cofinancing problems are solved is most federal states, bureaucracy is still a severe problem in all federal states), to become more attractive for private actors (=> added value).

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