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Regional Studies Association:

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Labour Mobility, Capital and Knowledge in an Age of Global Reversal and Regional Revival.

H. Regional development policy- (presentation on 05/06/2018)

Participants in participative processes – who they are and what they think about participation

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1. Introduction

One well established instrument of regional development policy for rural areas is the LEADER-approach, which was started more than 25 years ago (Pollermann 2016). Today it is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD 2014-2020). A main characteristic of this funding instrument is the central role of a Local Action Group (LAG), which disposes it's own budgets (~3 Mio. €) to support projects. Thus LEADER is a participative approach to bring together public, private and civil society organisations (European Commission 2006), which aims at reinforcing local and participatory democracy (Chevalier et al. 2017) and foster "Neo-endogenous rural development" (Bosworth et al. 2016). LEADER is also viewed in the context of regional identities to foster a common "sense of place" and the related mobilisation and the commitment of local actors.

Participation shall be an instrument to get better results as well as more legitimacy in contrary to top down politics. Different challenges of participation in the context of LEADER are known from the literature: problems like dominance of the public sector or a biased representation in relation to gender, age or education appear especially frequently. These problems are different in varying member states across EU (Pollermann et al. 2014, Thuesen 2010). Whereby the representation is often discussed, in evaluations/research projects the participants themselves are less often asked than LAG-managers / Chairpersons. However, different points of view from different types of actors could give insights about the functionality and results of this participative approach.

2. Methods & material

The question for the presentation is: who are the participants (related to gender and age) and what do they think about participation.

The empirical basis for identifying evident findings is the examination of the evaluation of Rural Development Programs (RDPs) in four federal states in Germany, with 115 LEADER-regions. The main source for the presentation is a survey of LAG-members (more precisely, the decision-making bodies of the LAGs) with more than 2000 answers (reply rate ~70%), conducted in 2017 and 2018 using written questionnaires. But in the context of the evaluation further different surveys (written questionnaires) took place: compared to 2017/2018 the members of the LAG's decision making bodies have been asked twice (2009, 2013 (Pollermann et al. 2013)), and in addition LAG managers (2010, 2018) and project beneficiaries (2012, 2018) have been surveyed.

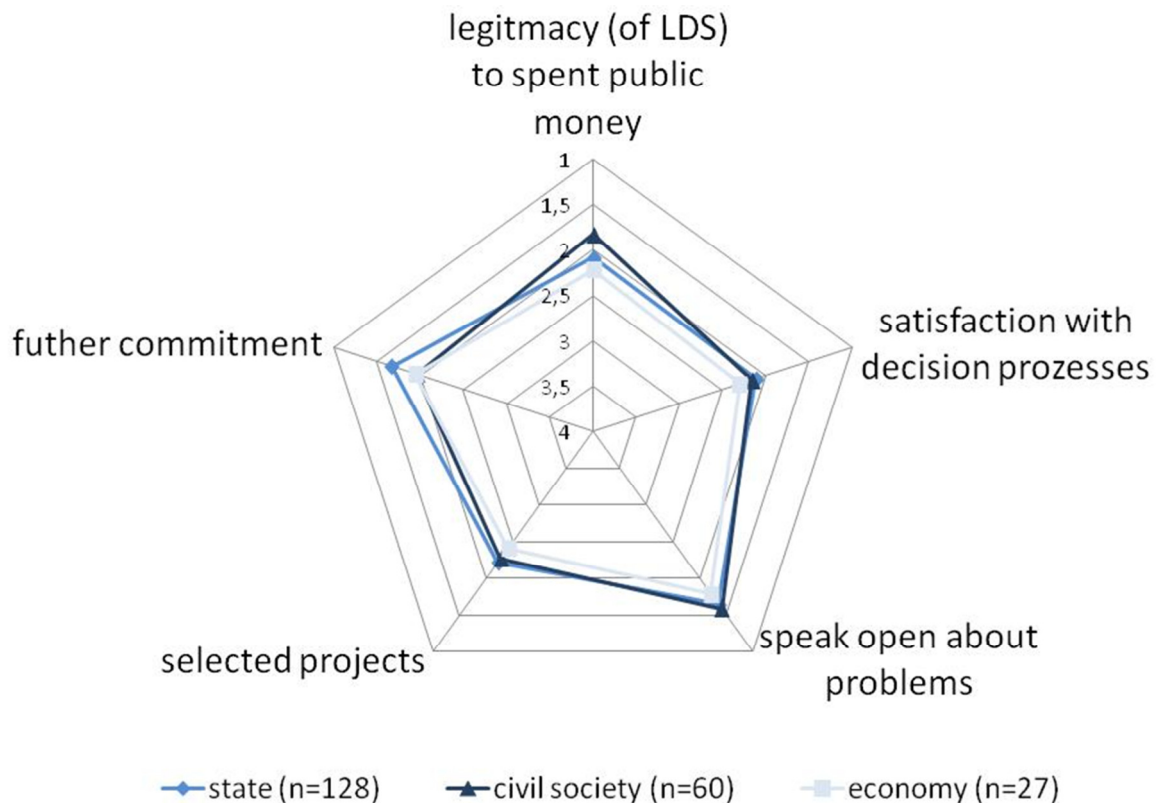
Furthermore, the basic data about participants have been collected from the 115 LAG-managers for the year 2016.

3. Results

Regarding gender representation the results in the four federal states have been different. The share of women in decision-making bodies is quite low (like in general political representation in rural areas, Shortall 2008)- In 2016 the overall share in the single federal states was 22%, 24% and 29%, but in one federal state (North-Rhine Westfalia) it was significantly higher: 40% (basic data 2016) because in the current funding period there was a new 30% minimum quorum for all LAGs as a framework setting in this federal state (no quorum in old funding period and a share of women of 20%).

Regarding the age of participants it can be pointed out that the average age is quite high: 54 years (example from one federal state, 2017, n=806), and the age group below 25 was very rarely involved in the decision making bodies of LAGs (quartile values: Q1/2= 48, Q2/3= 55, Q3/4= 61, so 75% of the members are older than 48 years). But in fact there is a growing interest to make special participations for youth (because it is not so easy to integrate teenagers in a LAG decision making body, which acts quite formal).

A look to estimations about the functionality of the processes shows positive estimations from the different groups (state, civil society, economy, see **figure 1**).



Average on Likert-scale 1=best, 6=worst, source: survey LAG-members (2013) one federal state

Figure 1: Estimations about participation (example one federal state)

Also the results for another estimation show positive ratings. **Figure 2** shows estimations about how the participants judge the legitimacy of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) as a basis to spend public money (which is a core principle of LEADER with the bottom-up decision making in contrary to decision-making at federal state level). It is especially remarkable that even the employees of federal level itself (see values for federal state authorities) have a great acceptance for the important role of the LDS, which are specifically designed for each LEADER-region.

The sizes of the decision-making bodies (in number of members) can be very different, normally this varies from 10 to 30 members. The estimations whether their own board is too big or too small are shown in **figure 3**.

Estimations: "Legitimacy of Local Development Strategy to spent public money"

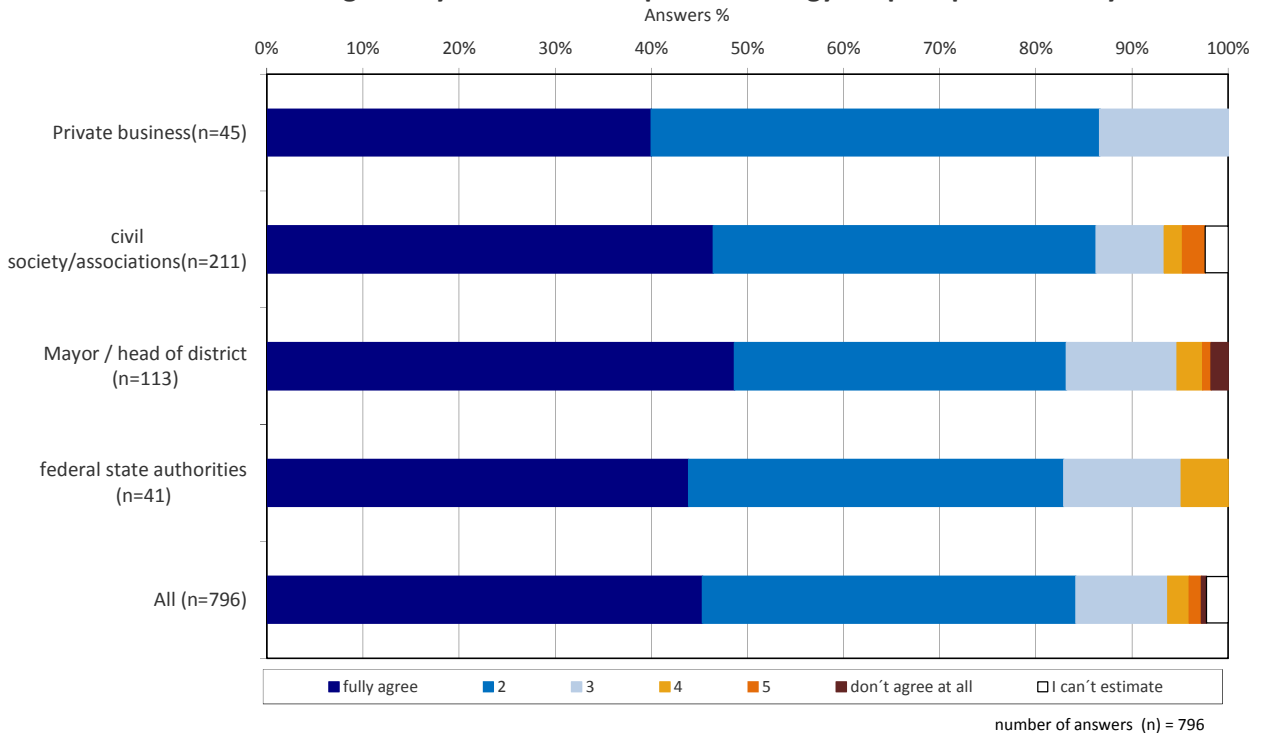


Figure 2: Estimations about legitimacy of LDS from different groups (one federal state 2017)

How do you judge the size of your LAG /decision making body ?

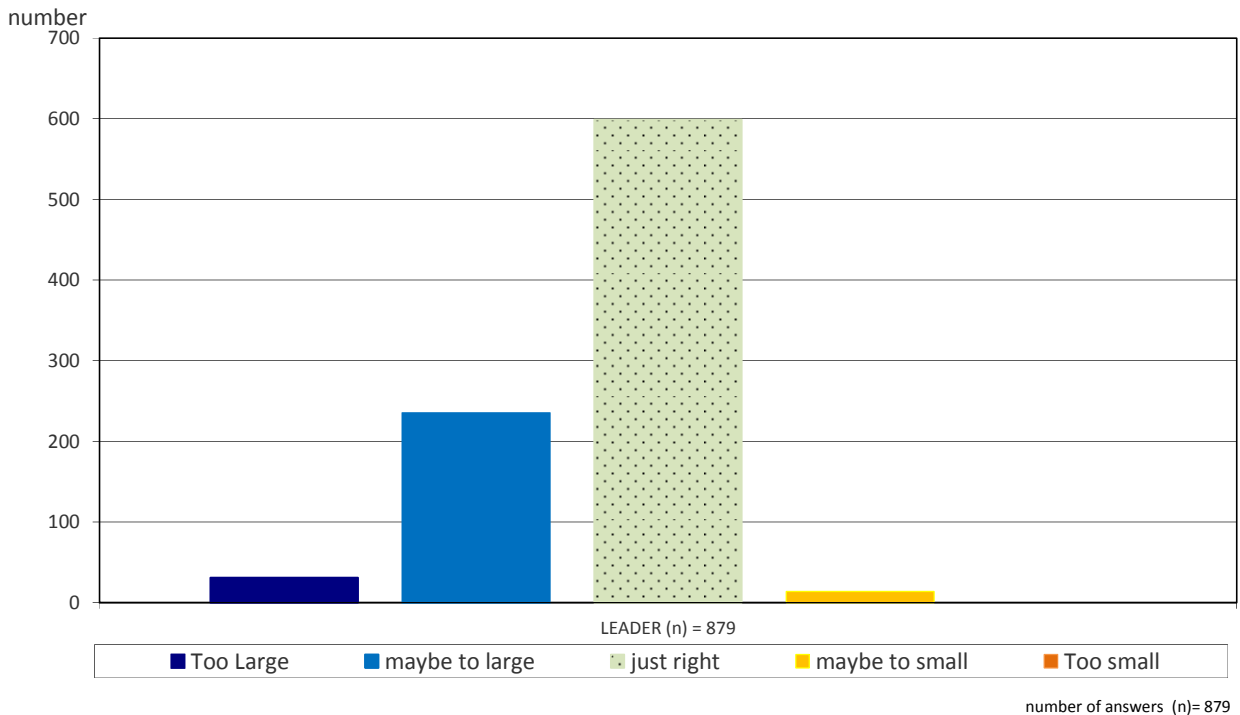


Figure 3: Estimations about LAG-size (one federal state 2017)

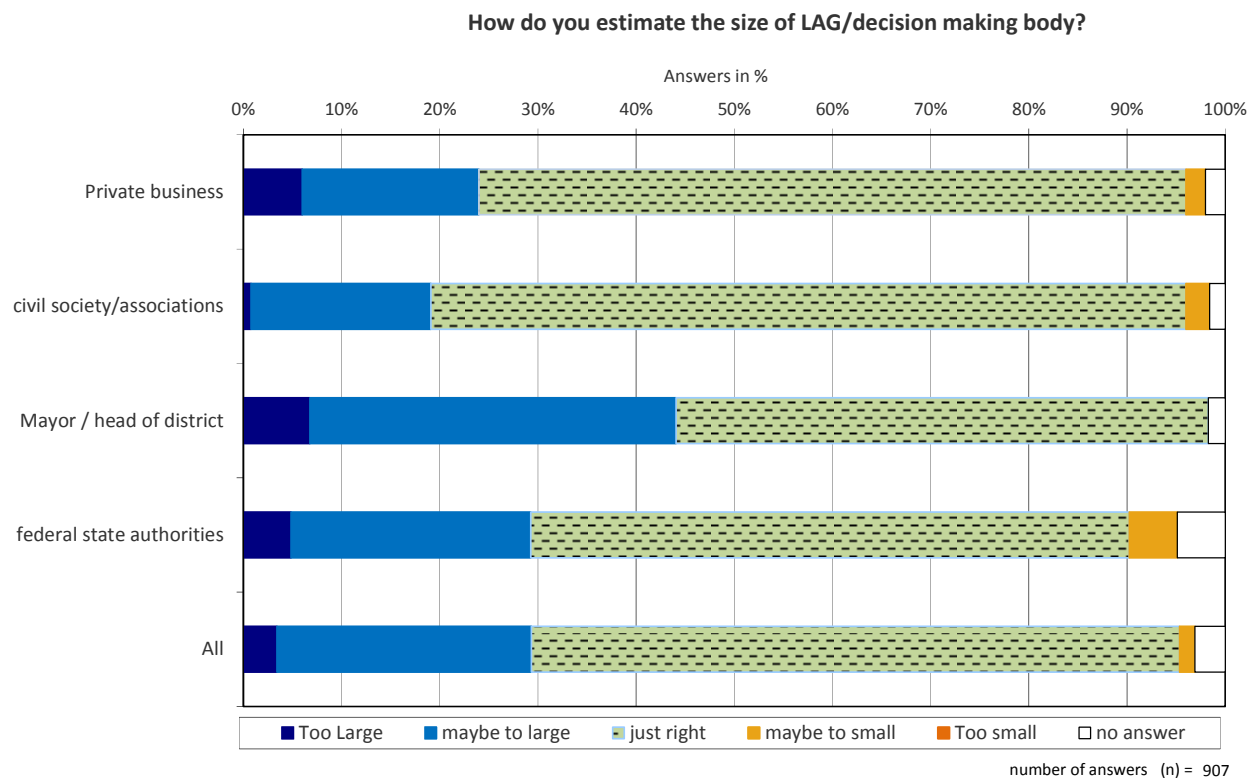


Figure 4: Estimations about LAG-size from different groups (one federal state 2017)

Looking at **figure 4** some differences between the different groups are visible: civil society rarely estimate the boards as too big. The reason could be that they like to include a lot of people, even though a large group increases the effort of decision making. In contrast the actors from private businesses and especially the mayors are more likely to keep the board smaller.

4. Conclusions

- LEADER has a long tradition of participation with an own decision-making power, although of course there are many more driving factors for rural development. LEADER has more than a consulting role because of “delegated power/money” to decide about projects, but in comparison to overall development it is “small money”.
- Representation of women and vulnerable groups is low; but it is an open question: Who should actually take place in such participation? And in which way: mobilisation of “normal” population or professional stakeholders.
- In general the participation in LEADER is working quite well, so functionality and commitment are estimated positively by participants.
- Often differences between different groups are low, which is a good sign (but this needs further statistical analyses), however, in some fields differences are quite typical.

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