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**NEW PLACES AND SPACE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE UK LEADER II PROGRAMME**

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## **Abstract**

The adoption by the European Union of a territorial approach to rural development has acquired a new dimension with the introduction of the LEADER II programme. LEADER provides funds for Local Action Groups to animate small-scale development projects in their respective localities. This paper analyses the experience of LEADER in the UK and argues that the programme is, potentially, much more significant than its modest funds would have led one to believe. The programme has acted as a catalyst to create a great many *new* territories within which rural development players can operate. LEADER also encourages linkages between these new territories. This suggests that LEADER has the potential to democratise rural development. LEADER has to be understood in a political framework in which various forms of 'the local' and interacting, dialectically, with the 'extra-local' level.

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## 1. Introduction

With the publication of the document Agenda 2000 (Commission, 1997), the European Union (EU) is once again reflecting on its strategic options. These deliberations concern the on-going project to re-design the Structural Funds so as to improve their capacity to pursue the grand goals of the EU, chief among which is the reduction of socio-economic divergence within the EU in order to achieve the integrated politico-economic space of the single market.

Since 1988, there has been a move towards the use of the Structural Funds in programmes which target specific territories whose development is thought to be lagging behind the EU average. Rural development programmes are of particular interest in this context in that they graphically illustrate the dynamics of this policy style. The commitment by the European Commission to the closer targeting of rural development onto territories of particular need was firmly established at the Cork Conference (Commission, 1996). The Cork Declaration included the statement that:

"Rural development policy must be multi-disciplinary in concept and multi-sectoral in application, *with a clear territorial dimension*" (p. 2, emphasis added),

and that

"Given the diversity of the Union's rural areas, rural development policy must follow the principle of subsidiarity. It must be as decentralised as possible and based on a partnership and co-operation between all levels concerned (local, regional, national and European). The emphasis must be on participation and a 'bottom-up' approach which harnesses the creativity and solidarity of rural communities. Rural

development must be local and community-driven within a coherent European framework" (p. 3)

This paper will explore some of the issues raised by this shift of EU rural development policy towards a territorial and participative approach and it will do this using the case of the EU's LEADER programme (Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale). Using the framework of a 'dialectic' theory of rural development (Ray, 1997), it will present an analysis of empirical material in order to highlight some of the emerging politics of EU rural development policy.

## **2. The LEADER programme**

In 1988, the debate over the most appropriate style of Structural Policy intervention for the EU resulted in the adoption of a territorial, endogenous model for rural development. Responding to budgetary pressures, environmental and equity arguments to reform the Common Agricultural Policy, and the apparent failure of Structural Policy to bring about convergence between the regions of Europe, the EU announced a shift in the use of the Structural Funds away from the sectoral approach and towards programmes that targeted territories of particular socio-economic disadvantage. The document published by the Commission — the Future of Rural Society (Commission, 1988) — established the principles underlying the new approach. Rural areas could apply to be designated either as Objective 1 ('lagging' regions with a per capita GDP of 75% or less of the EU average) or Objective 5b (fragile rural economies dominated by agriculture and in need of rural development assistance). Subsequently, a further type of rural area, Objective 6 (northern parts of Finland and Sweden), was added.

At the same time, the European Commission acquired for itself the power to introduce its own mini-programmes — called Community Initiatives — and the rationale that ushered in Objectives 1 and 5b manifested itself further in the Community Initiative for rural development: the LEADER programme. LEADER was introduced in 1991 as a three year programme and was extended in 1996 by an expanded, five-year LEADER II. Its aim is to stimulate innovative approaches to rural development at the local level, generally in territories of less than 100,000 population. It is confined to Objective 1, 5b and 6 areas.

A key feature of the LEADER approach to the animation of development is that it focuses policy and action onto local territories. A rural area that has seen its population decline over time, its cultural identity and social vibrancy undermined and its economy become increasingly vulnerable to extra-local forces such as mobile capital and to changes in political support of primary agriculture, is encouraged to identify and valorise its own resources. The rhetoric of this approach talks in terms of giving control back to local areas so that development activity more closely serves local aspirations (better than the more conventional 'top-down' form of intervention) whilst at the same time enabling the extra-local policy level to pursue its objectives more effectively. At the core of LEADER is the participative approach to rural development: the involvement of communities, small businesses, voluntary associations and local representatives of public sector organisations in devising and implementing projects and strategies for local development. Underpinning this is the notion that the future well-being of people in many rural areas of the EU depends upon the identification and mobilisation of resources — cultural and environmental — that are



specific to the locality. Local Action Groups (LAGs) whose membership was to be made up of "leading figures in the local economy and society" (Commission, 1992, p.4) were to design and then implement development plans for their area. Development action was to be essentially small scale, either in the form of individual projects or through area-wide strategies.

LEADER, then, seemed to represent a new approach to EU rural development policy; an approach that created the potential for local areas to take control of development by reorienting development around local resources and by setting up structures and processes that would enable the local area to perpetuate the local development momentum. The key to securing the socio-economic vibrancy of rural areas was to be found *within* their own boundaries, a principle expounded in the literature on 'bottom-up' development (see, e.g., Chambers, 1983; Verkelst, 1990; Bauzon, 1992; Holmén & Jirström, 1994).

However, although the experience of LEADER I (1991-1994) led some officials in Brussels to refer to the programme as "the anarchic approach", there were, and are, important ways in which the EU, through DGVI (the Directorate of the European Commission responsible for agriculture and rural development), retained a high degree of control. LEADER had been devised by DGVI specifically as a tool in the reformed Structural Fund approach. For DGVI, LEADER was a "rural laboratory", using territorial stations throughout the EU to explore innovative ways to animate rural development. The 'results' generated by these local 'experiments' were to be disseminated throughout the EU as examples of good practice; the objective was as much to do with the

pursuit of overall EU convergence goals as it was the devolution of control to local areas.

From the start, then, LEADER was about a dialogue — or a creative tension — between local endogenous rural development action and the extra-local agendas of the EU. This could be seen in the process whereby LEADER groups and their territories were brought into being. This was essentially a process of negotiation between the prospective LEADER group and DGVI, mediated through the state. The local groups, responding to the general guidelines of the programme, would propose local development plans based on their perception of local problems and resources. These documents thus encompassed the local but also the extra-local in that they are generally acknowledged to have been written formulaically. It was DGVI that made the final decision as to the appropriateness of each proposed area and development plan and, in one sense, this can be seen as DGVI being in control. However, the process also signified the building of bridges between DGVI and local areas (see section 5). Even though the negotiation process and the subsequent management of the flow of Structural Funds was to be mediated by national/regional administrations, sub-regional local areas and the EU had created a dialogue between themselves. DGVI was beginning to reflect upon the specificities of localities and had, at the same time, established a presence in these localities. This potential to leapfrog nation-states may explain the bureaucratic stranglehold that some national and regional administrations have subsequently tried to impose on LEADER II.

LEADER has attracted a certain amount of academic attention. A number of analyses of LEADER I have been produced that focus on the extent to which local initiatives were 'successfully implemented' and that also offer prescriptions on how things might be done better in the future. Barke and Newton (1997) demonstrated the crucial impact on the implementation of two LEADER programmes in Andalusia of, on the one hand, the local-regional-national politico-administrative structures and, on the other, the initial (mis)understanding of the true nature of the LEADER approach. Shortall and Shucksmith (1998), using primarily material from Scotland, identified a set of key concepts which, they suggest, transcend local specificity and allow the authors to offer prescriptions as how better to operationalise future 'integrated rural development' programmes. One of their concepts is the legitimacy and dynamics of the participatory and co-operative structures that LEADER can assist in creating and this has also been investigated by Midmore *et al* (1994) in relation to a single case study in Wales and by Storey (1997) in relation to LEADER II in Eire. Kearney *et al* (1994) have also produced an all-Eire study of LEADER I, again with the objective of offering prescriptive knowledge. Ray (1996) and Remmers (1998), on the other hand and in their separate ways, offered interpretations of the actions, structures and philosophy of LEADER I initiatives. The former used discourse analysis to uncover meanings of development within the superficial records of project action in Scotland and France while Remmers investigated an Andalusian initiative through the prism of the theory of endogenous development.

Little analytical work, however, has yet been done on the current LEADER II programme and this paper seeks to redress that shortfall.

More particularly, it will explore some of the geopolitical issues that have been emerging through the LEADER programme. This paper is less concerned with local specificity and more with a general theorisation of LEADER and in that sense is more analytical than prescriptive in its style. It will draw primarily on empirical material from the UK.

### 3. Indications of LEADER's significance

If one looks at the amount of Structural Funds money going into LEADER II, then one would be tempted to dismiss it as of no great significance for rural development, even though LEADER II is a major expansion on the scale of LEADER I. Figure 1a shows that LEADER accounts for only 1.7% of the total money going into rural development in the EU (2.3% for the UK - figure 1b).

**Figure 1a: LEADER and the Structural Funds, 1994-1999: EU**  
(in million ECUs)

	(a) Objective 1 & 6 areas	(b) Objective 5b areas	Total (a) + (b)	(c) Objective 5a	Total (a) + (b) + (c)
All Structural Funds	94,688	6,877	101,565	5,438	107,003
LEADER	1,081	674	1,755		

**Figure 1b: LEADER and the Structural Funds, 1994-1999: UK**  
(in million ECUs)<sup>1</sup>

	Objective 1 areas	Objective 5b areas	$\Sigma$ iii	Objective 5a	$\Sigma$
All Structural Funds	2,360	817	3,177	361	3,538
LEADER	27	45	72		

source: Commission (1997), p. 70 & LEADER groups

<sup>1</sup> Exchange rate used throughout this paper: 1 ecu = £0.692

LEADER is therefore, as was noted during an event staged by DGVI, "a very modern programme .... a programme virtually without money" (van Meyer, 1997). The position is even more striking at the national level. Figure 2a expresses the total value of Structural Funds committed to LEADER II (1994-1999) as a ratio of the population in eligible areas in the UK. Over the five year period LEADER will have made available for development projects an average of £14 per person, although at the local group level the figure varies between £3 (Canal Corridor, NI) and £60 (Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh). (The budgets for each LEADER group are listed in appendix A). These are very small sums when compared with the per capita figures for the total Structural Funds flowing into the UK (figure 2b) which overwhelm the LEADER element by a factor of 14 (objective 5b) and 36 (objective 1).

**Figure 2a: Total LEADER Funding in UK, 1994-1999**  
(Structural Funds Component only)

	£	Population	£ per cap
All UK LEADER	49,526,000	3,424,130	14.46
Total LEADER in Obj. 1	18,565,000	1,376,000	13.49
Total LEADER in Obj. 5b	30,961,000	2,048,130	15.12

source: LEADER groups

**Figure 2b: Total Structural Funds in UK, 1994-1999**

	mECUs	£ m	Population	£ per cap
Total Objective 1	2,360	1,633	3,300,000	495
Total Objective 5b	817	565	2,800,000	201

source: after Commission (1997, p. 70)

The situation is slightly ameliorated by the requirement that LEADER groups must match Structural Fund money with national public, private or voluntary sources. At the individual LEADER group level, the amount of money made available for projects is therefore at least double these amounts.

However, we need to look beyond these figures to glimpse the significance of LEADER. The significance lies in the potentially radical style of policy formation and implementation that LEADER represents. The aim of this paper is to reflect on whether LEADER has set in progress trajectories that could transcend the programme itself.

The scale of LEADER can be viewed in another way. In all, 217 local area initiatives were funded through LEADER I, accounting in total for some 11 million people (Fischler, 1997). LEADER II did not get off the ground until 1996 but by the following year it was clear that a new dynamic was in operation. The scale of the programme had increased dramatically so that by late 1997 the number of LEADER groups had grown to 820. Together, these LEADER areas covered some 40 million people (van Meyer, 1997). Some 125.2 million people live in Objective 1, 5b and 6 areas combined which means that LEADER II is potentially reaching 32% of 'rural (disadvantaged) Europe'. It is not for nothing that the LEADER style of policy has been characterised as the use of Structural Funds money in "almost homeopathic doses"; can we solve rural development problems that have to date seemed somewhat intransigent with such modest financial means?

Moreover, the debate about the next reform of the Structural Funds suggests that LEADER will continue in some form or other after 1999. The proposal is for the present number of Community Initiative programmes to be reduced from thirteen to three while maintaining more or less the total budget for the Initiatives at current levels, meaning that each of the three new Initiatives should receive a much greater share of the budget. LEADER seems to have built such general support that it is widely predicted that the Community Initiative for rural development will be formed by a LEADER-type programme and furthermore that it will be made available for all rural areas, i.e. not confined to Objectives 1, 5b and 6 (Agra Focus, Dec. 1997, p.17).

The aim of this paper is to argue that this insignificantly-funded development programme may have within it a far greater significance than might at first appear. This significance relates to a changing cartography of the EU and to the political nature of this approach to rural development policy and action. This paper suggests that the way in which certain rural development trajectories are working themselves out has the potential to restructure the policy, and even political, space of the Union. It is political because, although the raw material upon which this paper is constructed comes from the specific field of rural development policy and action, the issues involved touch upon notions of participative democracy and territorial identity within the New Europe. It is about LEADER as a democratising force, the territorial scales at which 'the local' manifests itself, the relations between the state and its component areas, and the way that new policy spaces are being created that offer opportunities for other strategic organisations (state agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, interest groups, etc.).

#### 4. The creation of new territories

The LEADER programme has led to the creation of new territories for the organisation of rural development policies and action. A few LEADER groups were already in existence when the programme was announced and in these cases LEADER represented an additional input of funds into the group (see, e.g. Midmore *et al* 1994; Venus, 1994), but, in most cases, it was the DGVI's announcement of LEADER that directly initiated local activity leading to the formation of a territorial initiative for the first time (Ray, 1996; 1997). The emergence of these rural development territories was thus, in the first instance, a product of European Commission action.

There were also local factors that enabled a locality to respond to DGVI's invitation and which further worked to influence the nature of the local LEADER initiative. This section explores this interaction between extra-local and local factors that led to the designation of LEADER areas. Informing this analysis of LEADER is the dialectic theory of local rural development (Ray, 1997). This theory states that an understanding of local endogenous development activity must take into account local *and extra-local* factors and, furthermore, that the extra-local (manifested as institutions, individuals, agendas, policies, etc.) is implicated, explicitly or implicitly, in the local perspective and *vice versa*.

The LEADER process begins with local actors deciding to respond with a bid to be a LEADER group which requires them to write a business (development) plan. This document has to present a case for the particular area to be a beneficiary of the programme and to set out the



types of development action that would be pursued. However, given that in most cases rural development was not already being organised at the local level, the writing of a business plan was in essence an exercise in identity construction. DGVI had indicated the general principles of the programme and local actors had then to devise a strategy that responded to, or interpreted, the principles.

In constructing a LEADER territorial identity, UK local groups selected from a range of rationales. One approach was to re-discover a cultural/historical territory. A LEADER group in the North West of Scotland (Ray 1996;1998), for example, constructed an identity using the ethnic category of the Gaelic culture with the equally 'ethnic' category of the crofter. The rhetoric argued that the state and modernity had historically compromised the identity and territorial boundary of the Gael and thus set in train a process of social, economic and cultural decline. Similarly, a group in Brittany argued that its historical decline was a direct outcome of a division (*découpage*) by the newly-formed French state of 'Celtic' Brittany into *départements* that cut across cultural territories of belonging (Ray, 1996). By re-focusing the territory of social and economic action away from the state and its regions and onto these historical, cultural entities — so the rhetoric went — the innate capacity of local people to define and animate 'development' could be enabled (Bryden, 1991).

When this sort of rhetoric is adopted, the embryonic development initiative can utilise the 'resources' of cultural groups, such as minority language revival organisations and regionalists, that may have been cultivating arguments for such territorial identities. It should be noted,

however, that this cultural territory approach was also encouraged by DGVI which, when designing the rules for LEADER, stipulated that endogenous development should include the identification of local cultural identity in order to generate place-specific resources for social and economic development. LEADER was a signal for territorial-cultural issues to come to the fore and was therefore an invitation for cultural areas to emerge as frameworks for rural development.

Another type of rationale used by embryonic LEADER groups was to co-opt an area which had previously been given an environmental designation. The announcement of LEADER included a strong environmental component arguing that a protected natural environment could be not only an end of, but also a resource for, socio-economic development (Pepper, 1997). This elicited proposed territories based upon environmental quality such as the Countryside Commission's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Heritage Coasts. This approach differs markedly from the cultural model in that whereas the latter implied a relationship between the territory and an innate sense of belonging in the local population, such claims of 'authenticity' or popular identification could rarely if ever be made in relation to AONBs and Heritage Coasts. Not only did such designations appeal to landscape criteria largely imposed from outwith the area, but they had also deliberately not been incorporated in strategic marketing campaigns and so the designations had never been transformed into (intangible) resources available for local development. However, in a utilitarian sense, these designations lent themselves to be co-opted by local actors — Local Authority officers, for example — for the purposes of

presenting to DGVI an apparently coherent territory as a LEADER candidate based on an environmental quality rationale.

A third type of rationale occurred where the opportunity presented by LEADER coincided with regional or national restructuring trajectories. In Scotland, for example, the agency responsible for social and economic development in the Highlands and Islands had just restructured itself. The division of the region into rural development territories each with its own newly-established development body (the Local Enterprise Companies) provided a template that largely co-opted LEADER and dictated its geographical expression. Another example occurred in France where the process of *décentralisation* and *intercommunalité* was allowing groups of neighbouring communes to undertake collaborative strategic development and lobbying action. Again, this provided a ready-made rationale for LEADER initiatives.

A fourth approach was simply to mark off the poorer, rural parts of an existing Local Authority area. In this case, the rationale was constructed essentially on the grounds of relative socio-economic disadvantage.

In LEADER I and II, therefore, a great many *new* areas of development policy/action were brought into being over the catalyst of the announcement and style of the LEADER programme. At the local level, the territories were 'designed' either by an individual (such as a Local Authority officer) or synthesised from various agendas within and outwith the area. But in writing the plan and constructing the area rationale, the authors were looking not only to the locality but also to the

European Commission; the plans were written formulaically so as to correspond to the requirements of DGVI.

DGVI's influence on the nature of the emerging territories was evident during the early contact with the local initiative (often also mediated by the state or its regional agencies). There were cases in the LEADER I programme where DGVI required a local group to reduce the financial scale of their proposal (Ray, 1996; Conway & Shucksmith, 1997). There is also anecdotal evidence from LEADER II that individuals in DGVI 'recommended' that proposals should be so designed as to cross over existing Local Authority administrative boundaries (Ray, forthcoming).

Appendix B shows just how significant the LEADER presence has become in the UK. There are now 66 LEADER II territories in the UK: 20 in England, 8 in Wales, 14 in Scotland and 24 in Northern Ireland. LEADER in England accounts for nearly 60% of the population of the 'disadvantaged rural areas' (i.e. Objective 5b), and in two Objective 5b areas, East Anglia and the Midlands Uplands, more than 80% of the population has access to a LEADER initiative. In the Welsh Objective 5b area, the LEADER programme covers some 80% of the population, whereas in Scotland, practically the whole of Objective 1 and 5b is covered by LEADER. Northern Ireland is a little more complex in that 9 Irish groups have a remit to use LEADER money throughout the province. However, the remaining groups which conform to the usual territorial approach of LEADER together account for more than two-thirds of the Objective 1 population. Overall, then, LEADER is, potentially, in a position to involve in its particular approach to rural

development about 70% of the disadvantaged rural areas of the UK (i.e. Objective 1 and 5b areas combined).

LEADER subscribes to the endogenous approach by seeking to identify and exploit resources particular to each local territory. The argument is that in the absence of such approaches, these territories have been socially and economically marginalised — or at least made vulnerable — and that the endogenous approach will enable the people of these territories to participate in the design and implementation of development activity to their own material benefit.

Endogenous development is, therefore, about the devolution of power to the local level so that such territories can take control over the nature of socio-economic development activity and to retain more of the benefits within the territory. The 'local level' as expressed in the new LEADER territories generally exhibits a non-conformity with Local Authority boundaries (figures 3a to d). Moreover, the ethos of the programme was explicitly that this should be so. Of the 20 LEADER territories in England, two represent *parts* of single Districts or Boroughs. Another nine territories consist of groupings of adjoining Districts/Borough areas; they are each within the boundaries of their respective Counties but the groupings themselves represent units of socio-economic organisation not formally legitimised as democratic structures. This is even more so with the eight territories whose boundaries each take in parts of two or more neighbouring Counties. Similarly, only two of the eight Welsh territories have boundaries that replicate their respective Unitary Authorities although the disconformity in Wales concerns the fragmentation of Local Authority space rather than any transcending of their mutual boundaries.

In Northern Ireland, while five territories replicate the boundaries of the respective Districts or Boroughs, four are combinations of adjoining Districts, one combines whole adjoining Districts, and two are formed from just a part of their District.

**Figure 3a: English LEADER II Territories**

LEADER area	Within only one district or borough	Covering more than one district; part of a county	Covering parts of 2 counties	Covering parts of 3 counties	Other complementary rationale
Caradon	*				
Torridge	*				
St. Austel (China Clay Villages)	*				*
Central Norfolk		*			
Rural East Suffolk		*			
West Cornwall		*			
Lincolnshire		*			
South Devon		*			
Oswestry Hills		*			
Teme Valley		*			
Herefordshire Hills		*			
Forest of Bowland		*			*
Peak Dales			*		
Fens			*		
Greater Exmoor			*		
North Tamar			*		
Cumbria Fells and Yorkshire Dales			*		
Clun Valley			*		
North of England Coastal Zone			*		*
North Pennines				*	*

source: LEADER groups

**Figure 3b: Northern Irish LEADER II Territories**

LEADER area	Part of a single borough/district	Whole borough/district	More than one borough/district (whole)	More than one borough/district (parts of)	All Northern Ireland
Armagh		*			
Canal Corridor				*	
Coleraine			*		
Cookstown		*			
Craigavon	*				
Derry		*			
Fermanagh		*			
Lower Bann				*	
Magherafelt		*			
North Antrim				*	
Roe Valley	<b>n/a</b>				
Rural Down	<b>n/a</b>				
South Down & South Armagh	*				
South Tyrone	<b>n/a</b>				
West Tyrone				*	

(n/a: information not available)

source: LEADER groups

**Figure 3c: Welsh LEADER II Territories**

LEADER area	part of Unitary Authority	whole of Unitary Authority
Cymad	*	
SPARC	*	
Antur Cwm Taf	*	
Cadwyn	*	
Menter Preseli	*	
Menter Môn	*	
Menter Powys		*
Antur Teifi		*

source: LEADER groups

**Figure 3d: Scottish LEADER II Territories**

LEADER area	Part of a LEC area	Whole LEC area	Two LEC areas	Part of Unitary Authority	Whole of Unitary Authority	Parts of two or more Local Authorities
Dumfries & Galloway		*			*	
North & West Grampian		*				*
Scottish Borders		*			*	
Rural Stirling	*			*		
Upland Tayside		*				*
Argyle & the Islands	*	*		*		
Caithness & Sutherland		*		*		
Lochaber		*		*		
Western Isles, Skye & Lochalsh			*			*
Shetland	*	*			*	
Orkney	*	*			*	
Ross & Cromarty		*			*	
Rural Inverness & Nairn	*			*		
Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey	*					*

source: LEADER groups

At this point, however, it should be noted that the territorial boundaries constructed at the start of the LEADER programme are not necessarily set in stone. Some of the dynamics can be illustrated by looking at Northern England (Ray, forthcoming). Two areas — The North of England Coastal Zone, and The Cumbria Fells and Yorkshire Dales — from the outset have each operated as two quasi-autonomous projects.



The Northern Pennines LEADER — with the largest physical area of all English LEADERS (appendix B) — also divided its territory into three operational zones although this step was not taken until two years into LEADER. The Northern Pennines cited its physical size as a factor that hindered the animation of 'bottom-up' development although there were also problems arising from the fact that the LEADER area included parts of three County Councils, co-operation between which proved somewhat problematical.

In part, these changes were pragmatic decisions that recognised the difficulties of operating a project that took in parts of adjoining County Council areas, although in case of the Coastal Zone, the area is physically fragmented into two distinct areas. There have also been a number of instances in which LEADER groups have elected to expand beyond their original boundaries but when this happens it is rarely, if ever, driven by considerations of greater participation or integrity of cultural/historical identity; rather it tends to be driven by opportunism. For example, an extension to two LEADER territories in the Northern region of England came about through the opportunity of an increased regional LEADER budget rather than an expression of local socio-cultural identity. So, in the operation of LEADER initiatives, the territorial rationales can occasionally seem less than robust. However, although a single territory for budgetary purposes may actually be operating as two or more smaller territories, this does not undermine the essential argument of this section because these sub-areas are still *new* territories of rural development. Furthermore, the potential remains for the larger territorial identity to re-emerge at a later date.

## 5. Emerging rural solidarities?

From the beginning, LEADER was cast by DGVI in the role of a 'rural laboratory' to seek out innovative approaches to rural development in local areas. In other words, local LEADER groups were not only to animate development in their own area but also to make their experiences available to the wider audience of rural Europe. Consequently, a Brussels-based organisation (AEIDL) was given the remit to animate a network of information exchange between LEADER groups. Throughout LEADER I and II, this organisation hosted thematic seminars in which local groups have participated, on a voluntary basis. Information dissemination was also assisted by the production of a quarterly LEADER magazine which featured examples of 'good practice'.

Together, these activities have been able to generate an embryonic solidarity between local LEADER areas. Local practitioners were speaking to their counterparts throughout the EU, sharing experiences and contrasting their *modi operandi* and institutional contexts. Locality was beginning to speak to locality. By the time that LEADER II was up and running, AEIDL had created its own "Rural Europe" web site which included an electronic forum that local groups could use to contact each other and to communicate with Brussels.

LEADER II introduced a new dimension to this dynamic of inter-locality dialogue. Each group was required to allocate a (small) part of its budget towards the cultivation of Transnational Co-operation Projects. These were to involve LEADER groups from two or more member states designing and implementing a collaborative rural development project.

The ability to pursue such projects tended to vary between local groups according to: the resources that were available to a local group (financial and therefore staff time to develop ideas); the priority that could be given to transnational projects (often a new LEADER group felt that, given their starting point, effort could not be diverted from local action); and the difficulty of finding potential partners with complementary ideas. Despite this, Transnational Co-operation has begun to happen. Figure 4 gives the results of a survey of UK LEADER groups undertaken in January/February 1998. Just over half of all UK groups had either implemented such projects or were in negotiations with prospective partners. One-third of these contacts were with Eire and some 40% with France, Germany or Sweden combined. Welsh groups have been particularly active, recording 28 contacts (Eire being again the most frequently recorded partner). The English groups recorded the highest number of contacts in the survey, two-thirds of which were with Eire, Germany or France.

At the European level, an impression of the scale of activity can be gained from a document produced by AEIDL (AEIDL, 1998) which lists local groups seeking partners for transnational projects. From a total of 821 local groups, there were some 272 proposals of which two-thirds came from Italian, French and Spanish groups (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Transnational projects by UK LEADER groups - Jan/Feb 1998**

partner-countries	Ir	Fr	Ge	Sw	Sp	Fi	Ne	Au	It	Po	Gr	Total projects	Total groups
England	8	7	7	4	3	1	0	2	1	0	0	33	11
Wales	11	4	2	1	5	0	1	0	1	3	0	28	5
Scotland	5	5	1	6	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	23	10
N.Ireland	10	1	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	17	11
Total	34	17	13	12	8	4	3	3	3	3	1	101	37

**Figure 5: Proposed transnational projects: August 1997**

Country	Total groups	Tourism	Diversif	Env't	Cult	Services	Empt	Other	Total
Italy	126	27	15	7	6	5	3	4	67
France	133	26	3	5	7	5	6	5	57
Spain	125	13	14	8	4	2	1	4	46
UK	66	6	6	2	4	2	2	7	29
Ireland	36	7	2	2	0	4	0	2	17
German	141	2	4	6	3	1	1	0	17
Portugal	47	6	6	1	1	0	0	2	16
Greece	41	3	3	1	1	0	1	0	9
Sweden	12	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	6
Austria	40	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
others		0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
TOTAL	821	93	56	34	26	21	17	25	272

There is, therefore, a lot of actual or potential transnational activity happening. Some of it, it has to be said, is driven primarily by the requirement placed on local groups to spend some of their budget on this type of activity. Most activity, however, reflects a rural development argument; by linking up with other territories, a local group can increase the scale of activity and so begin to overcome any diseconomies of small scale. Moreover, joint marketing initiatives may enable each locality to overcome some of the problems of peripheral location by cultivating a symbiotic relationship with partners similarly 'afflicted'. For example, a LEADER group that is marketing local produce with a local 'artisan' identity (Tregear, 1998) can have the product incorporated in the parallel marketing strategy of another LEADER group, where the identity becomes 'local artisan produce from another locality'.

But underlying this transnational contact there may be embryonic forms of rural solidarity. Although the players involved might not talk in such terms, the contacts being fostered through transnational projects and the information exchange network mentioned above are raising a dialogue in

which local practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of the commonality of concerns. Solidarity is also occurring in more solid forms. There are examples of regional mutual support networks. The co-ordinators of the LEADER groups in Northern England, for example, meet frequently as an informal, self-help group to exchange experiences and to organise joint training seminars. Although informal, this network nonetheless functions to promote a sense of shared purpose between its members, even if the separate *modi operandi* differ. Across the EU, regional/national LEADER co-ordinating networks are being set up to act as interfaces between the local groups and AEIDL/DGVI. There has even been a proposal (Mernagh, 1997) to create an organisation to represent all LEADER groups across Europe.

Thus, there are three levels at which local LEADER initiatives can express their solidarity with others. This solidarity has so far been a matter of exchanging experiences with others in a similar position. However, there is a feeling that these networks may take an increasingly proactive/lobbying function by engaging with the EU in debates over the future of rural policy and rural development programmes.

The phenomenon of Transnational Co-operation Projects and information exchange networks is significant in another way in that it provides insights both into the rise of a strong rural development ethos in the philosophy of DGVI and into the agenda-driven strategies of the EU. This became all too clear when DGVI organised a LEADER Symposium in Brussels towards the end of 1997. The stated aims of the symposium were: to promote transnational co-operation between LEADER local groups; to put on display the diversity of development

activity generated by LEADER throughout the EU; and to open a discussion on the prospect of a LEADER-type Community Initiative in the context of the Agenda 2000 debate. The event was important not only because of its scale (some 1300 people attended during the three days, including representatives from a majority of LEADER groups) but also because it represented the European Commission, in the form of DGVI, attempting to reinforce the local/extra-local dialogue between itself and the sub-regional territorial level (both as localities and as making up a 'rural Europe' constituency). This was facilitated simply by having LEADER practitioners and institutional representatives from all over Europe together in one place in a high profile event talking to each other. It was reinforced in plenary sessions and thematic workshops. In these sessions, pan-European local development was celebrated as having "allowed LEADER groups to learn from their diversity while creating a shared vision and a common language, thereby promoting solidarity"<sup>2</sup>. Reference was also made, repeatedly, to how the LEADER approach was promoting 'positive presence' for the EU in local rural areas. On the one hand, the symposium was assisting the local level to pursue its interests and inviting them to reflect on the potential of rural solidarity and, on the other hand, the European Commission/DGVI was cultivating its embryonic, direct relationship with the local level, promoting itself as the ally of rural areas.

## **6. Political dimensions of LEADER**

This final section reflects on some of the implications of the LEADER programme at a political level. The first of these arises from the

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<sup>2</sup> Text taken from Symposium workshop handout.

observation that LEADER territories are generally new areas of socio-economic development organisation. In the great majority of cases the areas in which LEADER action is occurring, and in which EU money is being made available, do not conform to the boundaries of Local Authorities (or Parliamentary constituencies) which, in the conventional view of representative democracy, are the legitimate areas for representing the aspirations of people and in which to spend public money to address those aspirations.

This is not to say that the representative democratic element is entirely absent from LEADER because there is always a Local Authority presence in the structure of local groups. However, the status of these groups is to enable action *for the LEADER area* and this, as has been shown above, is usually different from the area for which Local Authority officers and councillors have formal democratic remit. What is more, the local groups are not themselves elected bodies; they are invariably self-appointed and this raises the issues of legitimacy and accountability of LEADER action. Reservations about this by Local Authorities has sometimes hindered LEADER as they seek to re-establish their legitimate territories of public activity within LEADER areas (Ray, forthcoming).

However, if LEADER has the potential at least partially to usurp, or rather to stand to one side of, representative democracy it has an even greater potential to enable *participative* democracy. At one level, this is what underpins the endogenous-territorial approach; marginalised rural economies are enabled to restructure themselves so as either to participate more effectively in national/European/global economies or to

resist largely extra-local forces that have produced local vulnerability and decline. By re-drawing the boundaries of policy intervention and by thus valorising local resources, local control of, and participation in, social and economic development can theoretically be enabled. This can be so whether one conceptualises the territory as a unit whose resources are to be employed in *strategic economic action* for the general good of the territory or whether one sees the creation of a territorial identity as a means to re-orientate policy and action towards the protection of a local socio-cultural system.

Participative democracy can be assisted by LEADER at another level. The creation of new territories can be the catalyst to enable social groups within them to participate more fully as players in the local society and economy. These social groups can include village communities (or parts thereof) which through community development techniques rekindle a sense of identity. They can also include, for example, social exclusion categories such as 'the local unemployed' or women's' groups who organise their own training initiatives. By localising development policy onto these territories, local pockets of social exclusion become more visible and are then enabled to help themselves.

The issue of legitimacy and democratic participation is in the first instance expressed through the territories that have been created or reinforced through the LEADER programme. However, it has been shown above that this does not have to mean that these areas always, or even at all, function as a strategic single unit. Having established the territory, many LEADER groups animate rural development at smaller geographical scales. This may be a function of a belief by the local



group in the primacy of the community-led approach or it may be because of a realisation that the 'artificial' nature of the LEADER territory does not always lead local people to engage in co-operative activity and that, if popular participation is to be activated, attention might sometimes be more successfully focused onto smaller, more organic levels of socio-economic organisation. But at the same time, new territories, however 'constructed' in nature, often have the potential to raise the profile of the very 'resources' on which the opportunistic construction was based. In a Breton case, a constructed territorial area began to acquire a reality of its own by demonstrating to local people that it was raising the visibility of the area in extra-local policy circles; its utility was feeding back to legitimise the territorial identity (Ray, 1996; 1998).

Section 5 introduced the possibility that the territorial approach could acquire a further dynamic. This referred to the prospect of LEADER enabling multiple forms of solidarity. This is beginning to occur as groups of localities across the EU are being formed on the basis of thematic rationales (collaborations between LEADER in Celtic countries, for example), regional and national co-ordinating networks and a 'rural Europe' constituency. All of these have the potential to feed-back to the local level, legitimising and valorising local development activity.

Another dimension of the democratic politics of LEADER concerns the presence of extra-local and/or what might be called 'quasi-local' bodies. It was an explicit objective of the LEADER programme to create spaces of collaborative rural development involving players whose remit was territorial or sectoral, local or extra-local. These players could influence

a LEADER initiative by being members of a Local Action Group, as sources of funds to match the Structural Funds, or as originators of local development projects. In the UK, the membership of LEADER groups tends to be restricted to local organisations (such as Local Authorities, TECs, etc.) although regional committees exist to monitor the programme and the regional offices of the national government also play a role in project appraisal and financial accountability. Some LAGs also include 'community' organisations whose territorial brief transcends the locality; for example, non-governmental organisations representing crofters and Gaelic culture were present on the Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh LEADER group and the Country Landowners Association was invited onto the Forest of Bowland group. In France, the extra-local component of group membership is frequently extended to include bodies such as representatives of the *Région* and the *Chambres Consulaires*.

Development programmes localised onto LEADER-type areas can therefore be prisms through which all sorts of agendas with a rural dimension can ground themselves in localities. Environmental organisations (government agencies as well as the voluntary sector), in particular, are keen to explore localist strategies in the pursuit of their agendas and LEADER, with its requirement that EU money must be matched by money from national/local sources, and its strong environmental tone, presents an ideal opportunity.

In this, we can see the 'dialectic' of rural development in operation as local development issues and needs engage with extra-local agendas, with each feeding off the other. Increasingly, development agencies,

environmental agencies and others may target LEADER-type initiatives in order to pursue their own agendas through a localist approach. Conversely, a LEADER initiative may recruit — or implicate — extra-local agendas into its territorial rationale and strategy. This may occur, explicitly or implicitly, when the prospective LEADER group constructs its territorial rationale in order to convince its national organisation and DGVI of its *bona fides* as a rural development area. Examples of this would include a local rationale that recruits the EU agenda of supporting minority cultures into its rationale, or the generation of rural development projects that exploit the demand for environmental tourism and food products produced in an environmentally-friendly manner (Ray, 1997). A specific case of where a LEADER initiative engaged with extra-local forces to its own, territorial benefit comes from Brittany (Ray, 1996). Here, a LEADER group explored with the training and employment agencies of the state ways in which the geography of policy design and delivery could be restructured away from that of the *départements* and onto the LEADER area. By engaging with extra-local bodies, this LEADER group began to establish itself as the *interlocuteur* for the territory in other state and regional policy negotiations; raising the visibility of the territory and, by demonstrating the utility of the LEADER territorial identity, reinforcing its validity in the eyes of local organisations.

## **7. Conclusion — after 1999**

The analysis in this paper has been framed by the dialectic theory of rural development which enables an understanding of rural development outcomes to allow for local and extra-local players with their separate,

but also symbiotic, agendas and actions. It has attempted to show that LEADER has a significance for DGVI/EU beyond, or perhaps because of, its minimal funding. Particularly important in this respect are the linkages being cultivated between the Commission and the sub-regional level, the emergence of a rhetoric of 'rural solidarity' operating at a number of levels, and the use of LEADER to demonstrate the possibilities of a new style of low-cost rural policy.

Finally but briefly, we must consider the implications for the analysis presented above when the present LEADER programme comes to an end in 1999. Although it seems fairly certain that a LEADER III-type programme will be introduced, the Agenda 2000 debate suggests that there will be a radical revision of the area receiving Structural Funds assistance, partly to allow for the next Eastwards expansion of the EU. If this happens, will the new territories and their inter-locality networks survive?

The answer to this can only be interim and partial at this stage. However, two aspects seem to be particularly important. First, the future of existing LEADER groups will be a function of the nature of the local institutional partnerships around which they presently function. In the UK, some institutional partners regard LEADER as, primarily, just another minor source of grant funding; once LEADER stops, so will their incentive to participate in a territorial initiative. The future of any local LEADER initiative will depend on where the effective ownership lies. If the initiative has created a structure that has some autonomy from its institutional members, then this may provide the mechanism for continuing the territorial development momentum. In other words,

LEADER as a manifestation of participative politics will need to have established appropriate political structures in order for the momentum it has created to be able to be sustained. This might be in the form of a LEADER group or in some other form of co-operative activity such as a territorial marketing body. Alternatively, the structures might be at a smaller scale, and those LEADER initiatives that have put a lot of effort into the animation of 'community development' have been particularly aware of the importance of creating self-sustaining activity on the ground.

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**Appendix A: The budgets for each LEADER group (£000)**

<b>SCOTLAND</b>			
<i>- in Objective 5b areas</i>		<i>- in Objective 1 areas</i>	
Dumfries & Galloway	2,115	Argyle & the Islands	1,400
North & West Grampian	1755	Caithness & Sutherland	400
Scottish Borders	1,351	Lochaber	1,000
Rural Stirling	272	Western Isles, Skye & Lochalsh	2,500
Upland Tayside	853	Shetland	800
		Orkney	700
		Ross & Cromarty	1,000
		Rural Inverness & Nairn	400
		Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey	510
<b>WALES</b>			
<i>- in Objective 5b areas</i>			
Menter Powys	1260		
Antur Teifi	1387		
Cymad	1722		
SPARC	483		
ACT	na		
Cadwyn	480		
Menter Preseli	500		
Menter Mon	1140		

**Appendix A: The budgets for each LEADER group (£000)**  
**(continued)**

<b>ENGLAND -</b>	
<i>in Objective 5b areas</i>	
Peak Dales & Moorlands	581
Lincolnshire	1861
Fens	1200
Central Norfolk	857
Rural East Suffolk	438
Great Exmoor	900
North Tamar	
West Cornwall	2000
South Devon & Dartmoor	1793
St Austel China Clay Villages	724
Caradon	698
Torr ridge	498
North of England Coastal Zone	1434
North Pennines	1489
Forest of Bowland	510
Cumbrian Fells and Yorkshire Dales	1390
Oswestry Hills	384
Clun Valley	440
Teme Valley	86
Herefordshire Hills	360

**Appendix A: The budgets for each LEADER group (£000)**  
**(continued)**

<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>	
<i>- in Objective 1 areas</i>	
Armagh	800
Canal Corridor	250
Coleraine	799
Cookstown	650
Craigavon	390
Derry	519
Fermanagh	553
Lower Bann	650
Magherafelt	800
North Antrim	800
Roe Valley	na
Rural Down	na
South Down & South Armagh	650
South Tyrone	na
West Tyrone	738
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>7599</b>
<i>- all Northern Ireland (except for major urban areas)-</i>	
Developing Rural Enterprise	650
Family Farm Development	900
Horse Board Co- operative	56
Project Information Management	na
Queen's Uni Research	na
Rural Cottage Holidays	600
Rural Development Council	na
Rural Development Services	na
Ulster Beekeepers Assoc	50

<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>2256</b>
<b>N IRELAND TOTAL</b>	<b>9855</b>

**Appendix B1: LEADER territories sorted by physical size (km<sup>2</sup>)**

<b>SCOTLAND</b>		<b>ENGLAND</b>		<b>N. IRELAND</b>	
Rural Inverness & Nairn	320	Oswestry Hills	225	Coleraine	310
Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey	350	St Austel China Clay Villages	350	Craigavon	375
Orkney	976	North of England Coastal Zone	350	Derry	388
Shetland	1,468	North Tamar	558	Magherafelt	562
Rural Stirling	1,850	Rural East Suffolk	562	Cookstown	622
Lochaber	3,200	Teme Valley	625	Lower Bann	733
North & West Grampian	4,193	West Cornwall	724	South Down & South Armagh	840
Scottish Borders	4,714	Clun Valley	724	North Antrim	1244
Upland Tayside	5,000	Fens	763	Fermanagh	1877
Ross & Cromarty	5,000	Peak Dales & Moorlands	800	West Tyrone	1999
Western Isles, Skye & Lochalsh	5,999	Forest of Bowland	805	Armagh	2222
Dumfries & Galloway	6,400	Herefordshire Hills	834	Canal Corridor	na
Argyle & the Islands	7,156	Central Norfolk	1,065	Roe Valley	na
Caithness & Sutherland	7,650	Great Exmoor	1184	Rural Down	na
		South Devon & Dartmoor	1,675	South Tyrone	na
<b>WALES</b>		Lincolnshire	1,702		
Antur Teifi	300	North Pennines	2,120		
SPARC	400	Cumbrian Fells and Yorkshire Dales	na		
Menter Mon	690	Torridge	na		
Menter Preseli	1,080	Caradon	na		
ACT	1,630				
Cadwyn	2,033				

Cymad	2,544				
Menter Powys	3,000				

## Appendix B2: LEADER groups - areas and population

<b>SCOTLAND</b>		
	<b>area km2</b>	<b>popn</b>
<i>in Obj. 5b Areas</i>		
Rural Stirling	1,850	20,000
Upland Tayside	5,000	54,000
Scottish Borders	4,714	106,200
Dumfries & Galloway	6,400	148,000
North & West Grampian	4,193	149,000
Sub Total	22,157	477,200
<i>in Obj. 1 Areas</i>		
Lochaber	3,200	20,000
Orkney	976	20,000
Shetland	1,468	23,000
Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey	350	31,000
Caithness & Sutherland	7,650	40,000
Western Isles, Skye & Lochalsh	5,999	41,000
Ross & Cromarty	5,000	50,000
Argyle & the Islands	7,156	75,000
Rural Inverness & Nairn	320	76,000
Sub Total	32,119	376,000
<b>SCOTLAND LEADER</b>	<b>54,276</b>	<b>853,200</b>

<b>WALES</b>	<b>area km2</b>	<b>popn</b>
SPARC	400	25,000

ACT	1,630	40,000
Menter Preseli	1,080	40,120
Menter Mon	690	57,000
Cadwyn	2,033	65,825
Antur Teifi	300	90,000
Cymad	2,544	104,000
Menter Powys	3,000	110,000
WALES LEADER	11,677	531,945
<i>Rural Wales 5b</i>	<i>14,271</i>	<i>623,828</i>



**Appendix B2: LEADER groups - areas and population (continued)**

<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>area km2</b>	<b>popn</b>	<b>Corresponding Objective 5b area</b>					
Peak Dales & Moorlands	800	37,000	<i>Midlands Uplands</i>	1,000	41,305			
Lincolnshire	1,702	99,700	<i>Lincolnshire</i>	3,094	190,878			
Rural East Suffolk	562	34,000						
Central Norfolk	1,065	63,580						
Fens	763	92,245						
sub total	2,390	189,825				<i>East Anglia</i>	2,410	230,770
North Tamar	558	22,500						
Great Exmoor	1184	36,768						
Torridge	na	42,103						
St Austel China Clay Villages	350	61,847						
Caradon		76,600						
West Cornwall	724	89,165						
South Devon & Dartmoor	1,675	106,630						
sub total	(5145)	435,613				<i>SW England</i>	7,350	775,304
Forest of Bowland	805	13,500						
Cumbrian Fells and Yorkshire Dales	na	52,000						
North of England Coastal Zone	350	61,461						
North Pennines	2,120	66,912						
sub total	(7857)	193,873	<i>Northern Uplands</i>	14,286	374,000			
Clun Valley	724	16,450						
Oswestry Hills	225	18,000						

Herefordshire Hills	834	23,276			
Teme Valley	625	25,248			
sub total	2,408	82,974	<i>English Marches</i>	3,200	148,000
ENGLAND	(20002)	1,038,985	<i>All England</i>	31,340	1,760,257

**Appendix B2: LEADER groups - areas and population (continued)**

<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>		
	<b>area km2</b>	<b>popn</b>
Armagh	2222	54000
Canal Corridor		80000
Coleraine	310	54000
Cookstown	622	31082
Craigavon	375	74986
Derry	388	25000
Fermanagh	1877	54033
Lower Bann	733	41441
Magherafelt	562	30396
North Antrim	1244	56000
Roe Valley	na	na
Rural Down	na	na
South Down & South Armagh	840	61310
South Tyrone	na	na
West Tyrone	1999	75000
sub total	11172	637248