

## **II. GEOGRAPHICAL REPORTS**

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## II.1 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT AUSTRIA

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## **1. General introduction**

The Team for the evaluation of the Austrian LEADER II Programme consisted of :

- Richard Hummelbrunner (geographical expert): responsible for overall delivery, collection of information of LAGs (Q 202), interviews at programme level in Tirol (Q 34), focus groups (F30), transnational co-operation (TNC)
- Bernhard Schausberger (geographical expert) supported by Theodor Quendler (ÖIR staff member): responsible for the compilation of information for OP 102 and L1002, interviews at programme level in Niederösterreich and Burgenland (Q34) and at national level
- Perditta Simschitz (assistant of R. Hummelbrunner): assisted in the finalisation of questionnaires (Q34 and Q 202) as well as codification of responses.

Brief overview of the **work process**:

- At the start information for all OPs and LAGs were collected (OP 102 and L1002), first problems in compiling information from the INTERREG authorities at Länder level already emerged at this stage, because only part of the information required for the ex-post evaluation was available from the Final Reports. Thus this work took much longer than originally anticipated (report in mid-April).
- Next interviews at programme level were carried out for Niederösterreich and Burgenland, plus initial contacts at national level (LEADER coordinators in Ministries, evaluation team, national network). The interviews for Tirol were only held early June.
- A first screening of the proposed sample of 9 LAGs (via telephone) revealed that some changes had to be made due to non-availability of interlocutors. 2 changes took place at LAG level (Ötztal instead of Virgental, Kamptal instead of Schneeberg) and 1 for the CB (Wieseninitiative instead of ).
- Subsequently Q202 questionnaires were distributed and filled out by the LAGs, but some questions were dealt with over the telephone. Considerable support and encouragement by the geographical expert was required as the questionnaires were much too long and extensive for LAGs to handle by themselves. Another problem was to identify suitable persons who had an overview of the entire implementing period (in some cases 3 people had to collaborate to be able to obtain a complete picture for a given LAG). Again, this process took much longer than anticipated and some questionnaires were only handed in at the last reporting deadline, but in the end all LAGs in the sample have completed Q202.
- The decision on Focus Groups and the trans-national co-operation project was taken in April, but some time elapsed before the meetings could actually be held (see below).
- The reports on Q202 were delivered on June 10<sup>th</sup> and for Q34 on June 13<sup>th</sup>.

## **2. Report on Focus Groups**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Although the LAGs for the focus group meetings have already been identified early in April, some time was required before they were actually held and substantial changes took place as to the composition of the groups.

The meeting in Retz was originally scheduled for end of May, but due to some unanticipated events had to be advanced and was organised in an ad-hoc manner. It took place **on May 16<sup>th</sup>** at the premises of the LAG, but because of the change in date three persons could not attend. In the end only the LAG Manager (H. Weitschacher) and the president of the association (Mr. C. Blei) were present.

The meeting in Ötztal had to be postponed twice, due to problems in finding suitable dates and participants. Contrary to earlier declarations and expectations by the LAG Manager, members of the group showed very little interest in participating in such a meeting. It was finally held on **June 3** at the office of Tele Ötztal (Umhausen), and because last-minute attempts to gather additional people failed, only the LAG Manager (W. Kräutler) took part.

The results of the meetings were feed-back and verified by the interlocuteurs at Retzer Land (German summary produced) and Ötztal (English summary), and the findings were verified and considered to be valid.

### **2.2 Description of partnership and activities**

#### **Retzer Land**

The LAG has been established by 6 municipalities and key representatives of the local economy. The LAG association has concluded a contract with the "Retzer Land Vermarktungs GmbH" to implement the LEADER activities. This company has appointed a LEADER manager and operates a small secretariat. The projects are prepared and implemented with the active participation of thematic working groups, and a Steering Group of LAG members meets several times a year to discuss and select the projects.

The strategy is focused on the promotion of wine, cycling tourism, national park and local SMEs/farms. These various domains should be linked through a regional trademark "Retzer Land" and used for new positioning on markets. Particular attention is also paid to the promotion of new local products (e.g. pumpkin) and increased local processing of products.

Key activities of the LAG include:

- Regional promotion leaflet and catalogues: to jointly promote the local offer and activities in the various domains (wine, cycling, events, nature)
- Cross-border cycling trails: To continue the already dense network of cycling trails across the Czech border, complete with map and information booklet.
- Retzer Land newspaper: bimonthly periodical to inform the local population about major developments, in order to strengthen local identity and commitment.
- TeleOffice Retzer Land: to offer teleworking opportunities and make use of ICT especially for local tourism marketing

### **Ötztal**

The LAG has 20 regular and approx. 150 associated members. The regular members are primarily individuals, acknowledged key figures of the valley. A LEADER manager has been appointed and a small secretariat installed. The projects are prepared by the manager and discussed in board meetings of the LAG. Proposals for projects come either from members or – which turned out to be more frequent – from the LAG's manager.

The original strategy has been to reinforce the links between tourism and agriculture, notably via organised marketing of farming products to local hotels and restaurants. Another important pillar was to increase the value-added of local farming through intensified local processing of raw materials (wool, milk, meat). Later on, the strategy was modified to tap the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and to diversify local tourism products.

Key activities of the LAG include:

- TeleCentre Ötztal: to prepare the valley's population and businesses for the opportunities of ICT. Includes training programmes for adults (notably women from farms), promotion of teleworking and use of ICT for direct marketing.
- Direct marketing hub: to install a virtual marketplace for local farming products, where requests from local businesses and tourists and the offer from farmers can be matched.
- Wool washing plant: Located in the municipality of Umhausen, this large wool washing plant (capacity for 300 tons per year) is equipped with lead-edge technology and will permit to treat the wool of many decentralised wool producers without „hard“ detergents.
- Thematic hiking trails: Based on the attraction of „Ötzi“, a series of ancient trails between the Inn valley and Val Venosta in Italy will be investigated and newly installed.

## **Hypotheses and conclusions on main issues concerning implementation of LEADER II**

Due to reduced participation (see above), it was not feasible to follow the methodology outline in the F30 Manual. The meeting was only facilitated by one evaluator (geographical expert). However, all the issues of the Manual were covered, but instead of a group session the meetings had the character of Focus Dialogues. Thus explanations given and hypotheses formulated were closely interwoven in an in-depth interview style.

### **Retzer Land**

The context conditions at the start of the implementing period can be summarised as follows:

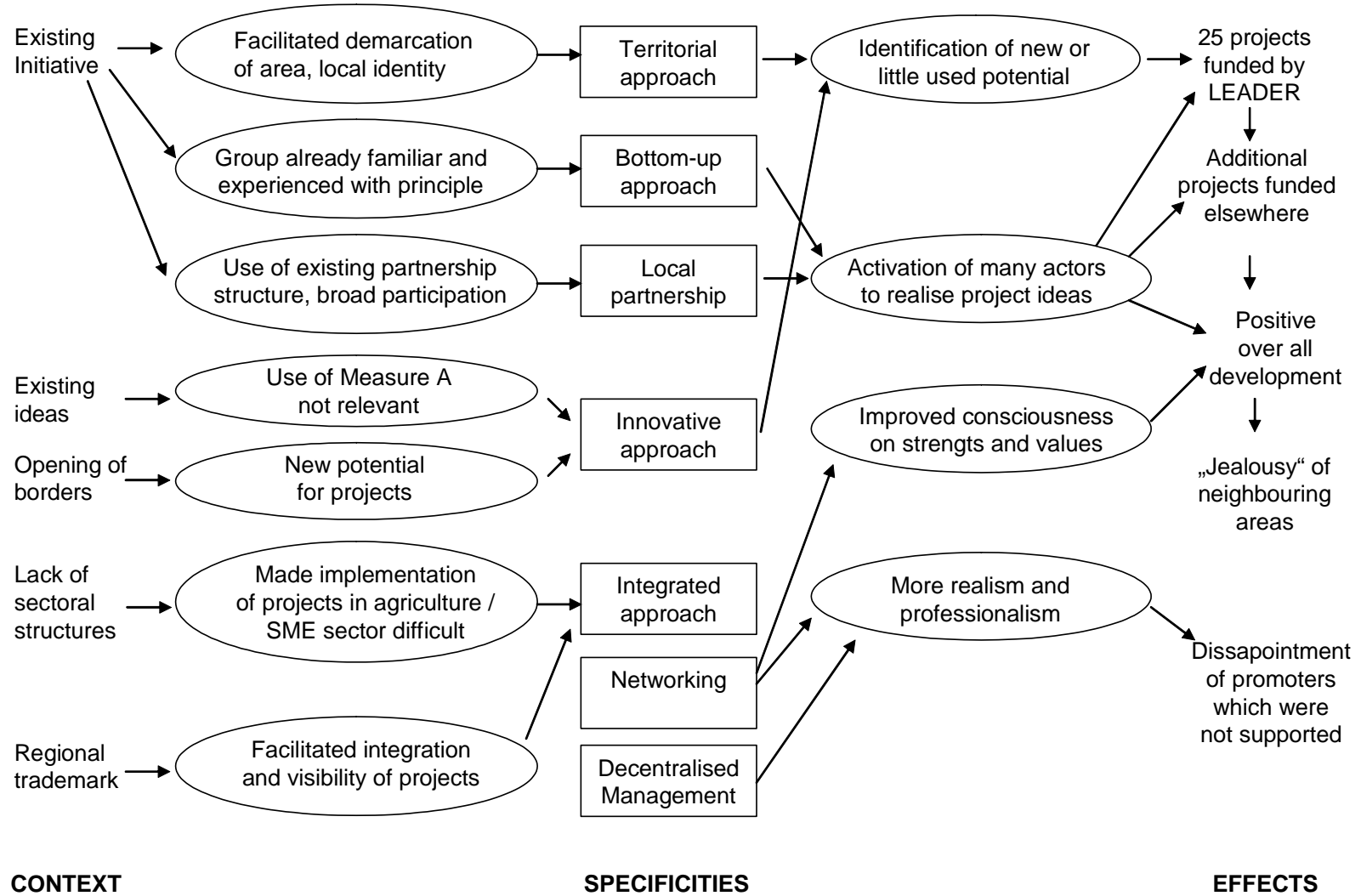
- Existing development initiative: in the early nineties a group (Initiative Retzer Region) was established and successfully implemented two major impulse projects
- Existing project ideas: encouraged by the success of these first projects, several other ideas have already been developed in various areas
- Opening of borders: Retz is located right at the former “Iron Curtain”, and the gradual opening of the borders from 1989 onwards coincided with the local development process
- Regional trademark: “Retzer Land” has already been established as a common brand for a range of projects and for the co-ordinated use of various funding opportunities
- Lack of sectoral structures: In the areas of agriculture and local businesses development structures were missing or too weak, there was also a lack of critical mass of businesses

The hypotheses which were jointly developed are outlined in the map on the following page (mainly behavioural changes linking LEADER specificities with context conditions on one side and effects on the other side). The main material effects obtained were the number of projects obtained (both with and without LEADER funding) and a remarkable overall development of the area (e.g. drastic increase in overnight stays during the 90s, effective reversal of former outmigration). This success story has also led to considerable jealousy among neighbouring areas which were not included in the LAG. At their request, the territory for LEADER + was substantially increased (from 6 to 45 municipalities).

Conclusions and recommendations for future rural development programmes include:

- desirable changes at local level:
  - more detailed investigations are needed before the start of a programme, notably to test the feasibility and plausibility of project ideas
  - topics should be more focused, restriction to some core issues is advantageous
  - intended raising of own funds/local co-finance could be considered as criterion for the seriousness of a project
  - the size of the territory should be treated in a flexible manner, as it is to be viewed in close connection with the specific topic.
  
- desirable changes at the level of administration and networks:
  - administrative procedures should possibly be simplified, not made for complicated and bureaucratic
  - the liberty which existed under LEADER II to develop new ideas and try new approaches should be preserved (“laboratory” for rural development)
  - LEADER funding should essentially be regarded as risk funding for innovations in rural areas, and thus must also allow for failures and be sufficiently open for non-foreseeable developments
  - the existing national LEADER network is considered satisfactory (demand-oriented approach), additional networks at regional level for joint reflection and learning are considered advantageous.

**Key hypotheses LAG „Retzer Land“**



## **Ötztal**

The context conditions at the start of the implementing period can be summarised as follows:

- Relative prosperity: The Ötztal region is marked by intense (winter) tourism and thus comparatively rich and prosperous, even in the non-tourism sectors
- Traditional culture: The social structure is dominated by men and conservative values, people tend to close themselves off towards external influence and outsiders
- Political monopolism: political structures in the entire valley are dominated by one (conservative) party, there is hardly any opposition (allowed)
- Agrarian structure: There are very few large farmers, and the small farmers produce comparatively little and have good access to non-farming income from tourism
- Other funding possibilities: similar projects could also be funded through Obj. 5b programme or national/regional sources, often without ambitions at integrating actions

Once again , the hypotheses which were jointly developed are outlined in the map on the following page. It must be stressed that the initial idea for the LAG was soon considered non-implementable, as it was developed by a single individual and would have agreed a high degree of collaboration among the sectors of agriculture and tourism, which was unrealistic given the context conditions. Thus a major shift in focus towards Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was initiated by the LAG manager, who also identified and implemented most of the projects himself (only few people were active alongside him).

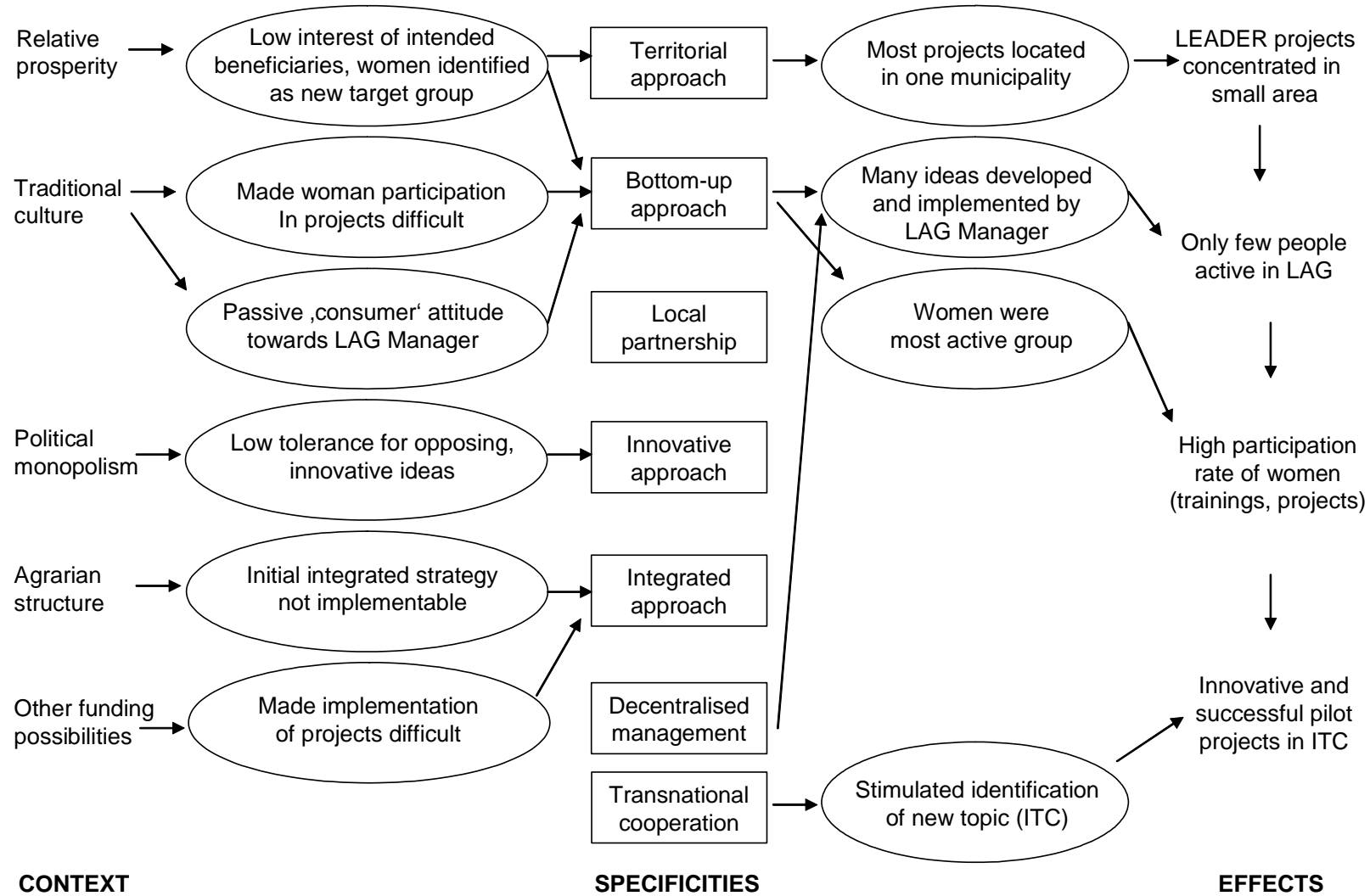
The main material effects obtained were the projects carried out with LEADER funding which were concentrated in a small area (essentially the municipality of Umhausen). The low participation rate was somehow compensated by the high participation rate of women in the newly identified ICT projects, which marked the major behavioural change triggered by LEADERII in the area. Highly innovative and successful pilot projects were established in this field which continue to date and have also lead to increasing transnational co-operation (see separate TNC study).

Conclusions and recommendations for future rural development programmes include:

- desirable changes at local level:
  - opposing opinions should be well represented in programmes like LEADER in order to assume a role as innovator
  - a territory should first of all become aware of its historical heritage and own resources before identifying suitable development projects

- an appropriate division of labour among LEADER and regional development structures needs to be established (under LEADER II these two structures were functioning in parallel and independently of each other)
- desirable changes at the level of administration and networks:
  - Need to co-operate should be introduced as funding criteria in most of the regional programmes and collaboration at larger scale encouraged (especially in tourism)
  - Willingness and capacity to raise/invest own funds should be regarded as an indicator for the maturity of a project proposals and be used as a selection criterion.

**Key hypotheses LAG „Ötztal“**



### **3. Report on national and regional programme evaluations**

#### **3.1 Overview and synthetic description of all evaluations carried out**

##### **National level**

The interim and ex-post evaluation was carried out in conjunction with the Objective 5b Programmes. One evaluation team was contracted for the entire work, the LEADER evaluation part (7 programmes) was essentially carried out by Regional Consulting, Vienna.

The evaluation of the Burgenland region (Objective 1 area) was carried out separately. The mid-term evaluation was done in conjunction with the mid-term evaluation of the Objective 1 Programme, and by the same team that carried out this evaluation. The ex-post evaluation was carried out in the beginning of 2003 and by the team which was in charge of the national LEADER evaluation.

The national LEADER evaluation was published by the ÖROK (Schriftenreihe Nr. 161/II) and thus made available for a wider public.

Although the national evaluation of LEADER was carried together with the Objective 5b programmes, care was taken to assess the specific characteristics of the Community Initiative. In particular, the suggestions of the European Seminar on Nov. 23/24 2000 in Brussels were taken into account and led to an increased bottom-up approach in the evaluation. Also the questionnaires which have been elaborated by the European observatory after this seminar were sent out to all Austrian LEADER groups and the assessment of the LAG's perception on the LEADER specificities were contained in a separate chapter in the Final Report.

A major problem faced in the evaluation was the inadequacy of the monitoring system. The indicators contained therein were not sufficient for an in-depth assessment of the implementation of the LEADER II Programme. In addition the evaluators considered that the LEADER specificities can only be adequately be dealt with at the level of the individual LAGs and require a large amount of qualitative information, which is not contained in the monitoring system.

Thus the evaluators carried out their work predominantly at the level of LAGs and individual projects via interviews and questionnaires and got a good bottom-up perception of the programme's implementation. However, the return rate of the Observatory questionnaire was only around 50% and this voluminous questionnaire (27 pages) was apparently too difficult to handle for many LAGs. Last but not least, some LAGs had no information on the financial situation, as this was dealt with at the level of the programme's administration.

### **Regional level**

The only regional level evaluation (besides the one for Burgenland mentioned above) was carried out within the LEADER II programme in Lower Austria. This was carried out as joint self-evaluation among the six LEADER groups, supported by an external consultant (A. Kofler, OSB). This evaluation was conceived as an accompanying consultation process which was designed by the participants to the greatest extent possible. The entire evaluation process spanned a period of three years (from 1997 to 1999).

The process has been extensively documented and summarised in a separate publication "Die Kunst der Balance in komplexen Projekten", EcoPlus, March 2000, incl. English summary.

The main findings and recommendations of the self-evaluation in Lower Austria are:

- Everything which is not completed at the start phase of complex projects will be all the more difficult to implement later
- Those LAGs which developed minimum strategy elements early on were more successful
- A Regional Association is normally not in a position to implement a LEADER strategy, but requires a larger partnership
- LEADER managers are subject to diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations
- Project orientation and project management must be learned
- Efficient LEADER projects require efficient contact and funding structures

### **3.2 Overall assessment**

Both the mid-term and ex-post evaluations were considered rather useful by the programme administrators (as confirmed in the interviews). Although some have mentioned that institutional learning from these evaluations could have been better and that the potential for learning has not been fully captured. But it must be taken into account that this was the first time that a programme evaluation of this size and complexity was carried out for a rural policy programme in Austria, thus this was an important learning process by itself.

The self-evaluation process in the region of Lower Austria and was very much appreciated by the participating LAGs ( a similar concept is also pursued under LEADER+). It was also considered very useful by programme management and has lead to a noticeable increase in the quality of the programme's implementation.

The national LEADER evaluation can be considered very relevant. The final report contains an excellent description of the implementing process, both at regional and LAG level. And despite a standardised treatment, the evaluators have acquired a good understanding of the different implementing contexts.

The specific aspects of LEADER II were treated with care and well differentiated. Because the results of this national evaluation can be considered much more representative than the rather fragmented assessment possible in the framework of the European ex-post evaluation, the grid in the following chapter has been completed by summarising its findings.

The key recommendations on future evaluations can be summarised as follows:

- Install an on-going self-assessment process for each programme
- Take due account of the integrated and cross-sectoral aspects of the programme
- Make more use of qualitative methods to capture the specific aspects of LEADER
- Use precise and standardised nomenclature in the monitoring system, to allow for swift data processing and cross-reference analysis
- Adapt questionnaires to the handling capacity of the LAGs (shorter, more focused)

### **3.3 Relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the evaluation reports**

The grid on the following page has been filled out with information contained in the final report of the national LEADER ex-post evaluation.

**SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE NATIONAL EVALUATION REPORT AUSTRIA**

	<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>
<b>Area-based approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Usually the entire territory benefited from the implemented measures</li> <li>▪ The proportion of LEADER funding which was spent outside the LAG territory varies between 0 and 30%</li> <li>▪ Crucial aspects were identification of the population with the territory and strong collaboration among actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ turned out to be the most important factor for the success of a local programme</li> <li>▪ critical mass with respect to population and economic activity was regarded less important</li> <li>▪ pre-existence of development structure not very relevant</li> </ul>
<b>Bottom-up approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Farmers, politicians, employees and youth were involved most intensively in LAG activities</li> <li>▪ Environmental groups, women organisations and non-employed were less involved</li> <li>▪ Project structures and procedures were essential for active participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The major achievement of the bottom-up approach was improved organisation of actors and the model role for other programmes</li> <li>▪ Bureaucratic procedures, to little incentives from support programmes and short implementing period were considered to be the major obstacles</li> </ul>
<b>The local group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LAGs were mainly organised as associations, and half of them were founded at the start of the programme</li> <li>▪ Almost all LAGs had a manager and were staffed by 1- 3 people</li> <li>▪ Women participation in LAGs was around 50%</li> <li>▪ More than 60% of LAGs were responsible both for management and use of financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Motivated employees were not a bottleneck</li> <li>▪ For the composition of the LAG much attention was paid to include members of the younger generation</li> <li>▪ Annual administrative budgets of LAGs were rather modest (on average 0,08 Mio. Euro/LAG/year)</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For most LAGs innovation has been an important aspect in their business plans</li> <li>▪ 75% of all innovative projects could not have been carried out with other support programmes</li> <li>▪ the major difficulties for innovation were problems in obtaining co-finance and delays in funding, convincing actors to become more innovative has rarely been a problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovative actions have mainly contributed to improve the LAG's profile and competitiveness, they have also helped to stimulate transfer of experience to other areas</li> <li>▪ Innovations have stimulated other local initiatives and have contributed to raise awareness and local identity</li> </ul>
<b>Multisectoral integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nearly all LAGs have chosen an integrative theme for their activities</li> <li>▪ Cross-sectoral actions were mainly collaboration among businesses or links between tourism, agriculture and/ or SMEs</li> <li>▪ Delays in implementation and individualism of actors were the major factors working against multisectoral integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved synergies and new marketing or income opportunities were the major effects</li> <li>▪ Tourism and agriculture were the sectors which benefited most from multisectoral integration</li> </ul>

	<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>
<b>Networking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 50% of LAGs have used services of the European Observatory, nearly all have provided information for the Observatory</li> <li>▪ 50% of LAGs were members in other networks (national, regional, European or thematic)</li> <li>▪ Nearly all LAGs have carried out cross-border projects</li> <li>▪ On average each LAG has been visited by 14 groups and has visited 9 others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relative isolation of areas has been reduced by networking</li> <li>▪ Additional effects of networking were improved local knowledge, increasing exchange with actors outside the area and stimulation of local innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Trans-national cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nearly all LAGs have participated in transnational projects</li> <li>▪ LAG managers were the driving force behind these projects, similar interests were the most important criterion for choosing partners</li> <li>▪ Difficult application procedures, lack of time and communication problems were considered to be the major obstacles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The main effects were the stimulation of innovative actions and projects, which would have otherwise not have been carried out</li> <li>▪ Transnational co-operation was most beneficial for agriculture, tourism, use of ICT and training activities</li> </ul>
<b>Decentralised management and financing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The LAG's largest degree of autonomy was in selecting projects and in transnational co-operation</li> <li>▪ LAGs were rather restricted in the delimitation of the area and financial reallocations</li> <li>▪ Programme administration was considered most helpful for the establishment of the LAG and providing assistance for applications</li> <li>▪ EAGFL was considered to be the Fund which posed the least problems, followed by ERDF and ESF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Delays in financial transactions were the major negative effect of decentralised management</li> <li>▪ These delays have often resulted in financial difficulties for the promoters and have increasingly discouraged them from submitting projects</li> <li>▪ In 30% of all cases other co-funders have advanced funds of other sources (mainly EU)</li> </ul>
<b>Other important issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 80% of LAGs have produced a brochure, 50% a videofilm and 40% a CD-Rom</li> <li>▪ All LAGs have their own website, nearly 50% have installed an information system or a databank</li> <li>▪ All LAGs have carried out activities to involve the population more actively (events, fairs, shows etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overall, local partnership was considered to be the most important specificity of LEADER, followed by area-based approach and decentralised management.</li> <li>▪ Transnational co-operation was considered to be the least important of the seven specificities</li> </ul>

## **4. General appreciation from the perspective of the geographical evaluator**

### **4.1 General appreciation of the implementation and the effects of the LEADER II initiative**

The national evaluation of the LEADER II Programme concluded that its implementation can be considered a success. 1260 individual projects were supported through a total of 50,2 Mio. in public Funds (of which 48% came from EU Structural Funds).

34% of the public funds were dedicated to tourism, followed by marketing of regional agricultural products with 15% and training or consulting projects with 14%. Public funds for infrastructure projects amounted to 29%.

In relation to the four sub-programs (defined at national level), several aspects were highlighted:

- Subprograms 1 & 2: Skills acquisition and innovation in rural areas:  
Targeted training of regional key actors proved to be highly important: success or failure of programmes depended on individual persons. The LEADER II Programme was a particular success in regions with already existing and functional regional co-operation structures. Particularly important was the co-operation between public institutions (municipalities), private initiatives and project promoters. The majority of LEADER II projects met the standards set by the LEADER II Programme.
- Subprogram 3: Transnational co-operation:  
Only a few LEADER regions were prepared for transnational co-operation in the programming period 1005 – 99. Most groups were primarily occupied with themselves. In international regions with similar problems and existing prior contacts (e.g. national parks), co-operation could be intensified.
- Subprogram 4: Monitoring and Evaluation:  
The implementation of LEADER II had in some regions considerably diverged from the initially planned priorities and goals. Assumptions and expectations in the OPs were partly unrealistic, the targets of sub-goals were set too high most of the times. However, concerned LAGs together with responsible administrators changed course and were able to develop many successful projects. Both mid-term and ex-post evaluation showed that the indicators in the monitoring system were inadequate, the specific features of LEADER require for (qualitative) data to be collected at LAG level.

A series of recommendations has been produced for the implementation of LEADER+, but both the evaluators and the interviewed LAGs have expressed their concern that these learnings from LEADER II have not been fully captured.

Concerning the present implementing period of **LEADER+**, LAGs were particularly worried about increasing bureaucratic procedures and cumbersome project preparation. On one hand LAG staff is taken up excessively by administrative work and fulfilling bureaucratic requirements and has much less time for development work. On the other hand, the dominance of a spirit of ex-ante control results in a remarkable degradation of the innovative aspects of the LEADER Programme. Innovations do carry a certain extent of risk, and by trying to eliminate riskier actions beforehand the character of LEADER as laboratory for the future of rural areas is very much endangered.

## **4.2 Critical reflection of the evaluation process**

The design of the ex-post evaluation as described in the Offer and the various manuals was highly innovative and suited to the task. Background material and formats for compiling and reporting information were very useful and of good quality. Also the support and guidance provided by the core team was excellent.

However, the ambitious concept was difficult to implement, because some of the original assumptions turned out to be wrong (at least for Austria):

- Data was not readily available for the “black questions” in the questionnaires: The requirements of the questionnaires did not correspond with the monitoring and reporting procedures installed at regional and local level in Austria. The Länder authorities have essentially structured and aggregated their data according to measures (and not LAGs), and their data banks were organised along individual projects. And for the LAGs there were hardly any Business-Plans established beforehand (at least in the chosen sample) and their operation and thinking were focused on the projects which they have implemented. This mismatch was not sufficiently checked at the beginning and there were hardly any corrections possible once the evaluation had started.
- Little interest for learning at LAG level: For these desired learning effects the evaluation simply came much too late, and in some instances the actors of LEADER II were not available any more as interlocutors (or very difficult to find). Most actors approached had great difficulties to relate to the previous period, which for most of them was already 3-4 years back and they could hardly be convinced to also benefits for them in the ex-post evaluation exercise.

As a consequence, the evaluation was a quite cumbersome compilation of (financial) data from programme administrators and LAGs with little or no added value for them. And even though most interlocutors had a positive attitude when first addressed, they rapidly considered the ex-post evaluation as a basically useless bureaucratic exercise.

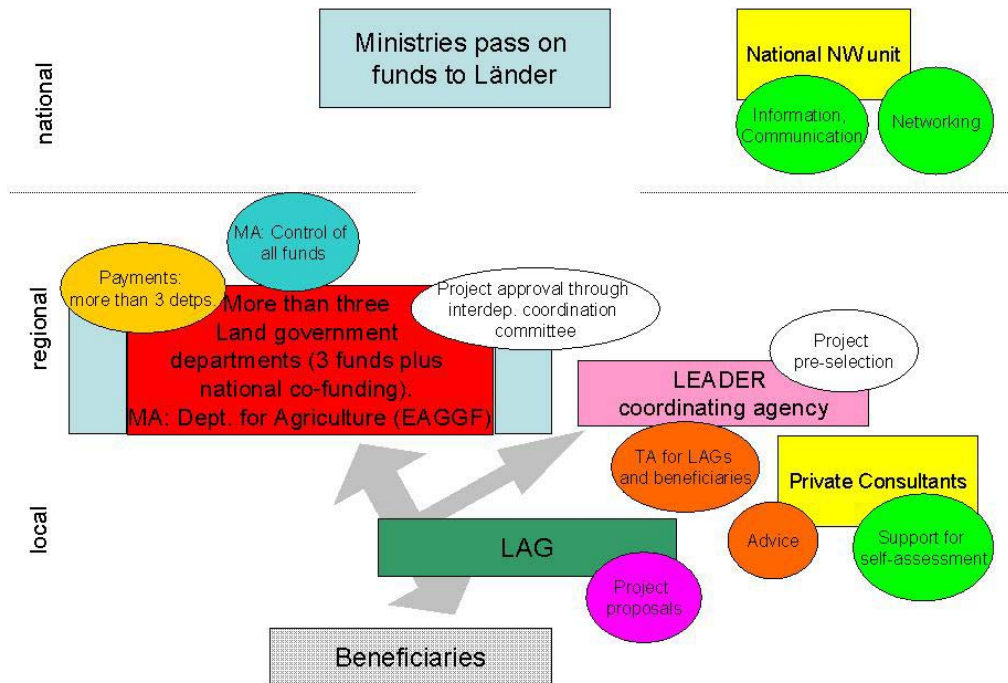
It was a particular pity, that due to the (necessarily standardised) procedure for data collection the findings of the national ex-post evaluation concerning LEADER specificities could hardly be captured (they were only incorporated in the present country report). Thus the EU ex-post evaluation did not at all capture the potential to build on a national evaluation, which has made exemplary use of previous recommendations and material produced by the EU Commission and the EU Observatory.

Proposal for future ex-post evaluations:

- It is recommended to dissociate learning and impact analysis as much as possible. Learning should be aimed at close to the end of the implementing period. Thus actors can better relate to their experience and still have a vivid memory. Perhaps this is better to be integrated in ex-post evaluations at programme/national level (as in the case of Austria), with few additional questions posed by the EU-Commission on crucial policy issues.
- Impact analysis should be done 2-3 years after the end of the implementing period. This could be the focus of the ex-post evaluation at EU-level, based on existing reports and evaluations at programme level. The local level should only be approached to collect information for some selected projects or impact chains.

**Models of implementation**

**Austria – Burgenland**



**Austria – Niederösterreich**

