

## **II.2 GEOGRAPHICAL REPORT FOR FLANDERS (BELGIUM) AND THE NETHERLANDS**

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## 1. General introduction

The total number of OP for this evaluation report is 6 (4 Dutch and 2 Flemish OP) and for every OP there was only 1 LAG, so the data collection was handled by one person (GE, contractor of OIR). The following data were collected and the following studies were carried out:

- OP102&L1000; OP34; Q34 and Q202 questionnaires
- 2 focus groups (Westhoek (BE) and Flevoland(NL))
- 1 cost-effectiveness study (Flevoland, Bed&Breakfast of Leader-II and Objective1) )

To collect the data for the OP102&L1000 questionnaire the following information was used:

- OP of the 6 Leader-areas
- Regional ex-post evaluation of the 6 Leader-areas
- National Dutch ex-post evaluation and the Dutch network evaluation
- AEIDL questionnaires of 4 Dutch Leader-areas
- Final reports of the 6 Leader-areas
- Flemish Final reports per Fund and Leader-areas
- Internet research on the European Observatory site and the respective Leader2 sites.

The partly completed questionnaires were send to the 6 Leader2-coordinators, asking them kindly to fill up the lacking data. In general financial data was missing, especially the co-financing caused big trouble. In most cases it was solved by some telephone calls, explaining what was missing and stressing the importance of it in this evaluation. In Flanders, the management of financial data divided by Structural Fund and not by Programme at the relevant Ministry, was creating absurd situations, especially for Meetjesland, but finally the problem was solved.

After this first contact with the L-II coordinators and this first data collection, I informed everybody on the following steps of this evaluation, asked the selected LAGs Westhoek (BE) and Lauwersland (Groningen, NL) if they were willing to get on board of this evaluation-train. The respondent of Lauwersland explained me that the original L-II area was split up in different L-+ areas which had the consequence that L-II LAG members also split up in the new L-+ LAGs and that after a first check, only one person, beside the respondent self, was willing to cooperate. At the same time, the actors of Flevoland (OP and LAG, inside the objective 1 area) were available and willing to cooperate. The change from Lauwersland to Flevoland was accepted by the Core Team and the Commission. Westhoek, although it is not included in the L-+ Programme, accepted to go on.

The partly completed OP34 questionnaires were sent to the respective respondents and the appointments were made for the first 2-days personal visit.

As every OP was corresponding with one LAG, and there was no separate LAP designed, lots of the black factual questions of the Q202 and Q34 questionnaires were overlapping. But these questionnaires still seemed very discouraging the actors of both areas, and helping them personally was changing the boring task in something more interesting, although the final numbers of actors which completed the red and green questions was disappointing. The personal visit did have a positive effect, for the GE it gave the opportunity to know the respondents and the area, for the local respondents, the idea that "evaluation = control" disappeared and finally both showed a high interest to participate in a Focus Group. Flevoland also proposed the comparative study between two bed & breakfasts, funded by L-II and Obj)1 respectively. Both focus groups and the comparative study were accepted by the Core Team.

Both respondents invited the necessary actors for the Focus Group, a date was fixed and a second personal visit was organised. In Flevoland, it was combined with a visit of both beneficiaries of the B&B, and a national workshop on rural development and networking, where I participated in the B&B group.

In the Netherlands (Flevoland) the role of animator in the focus group was played by an employee of ETC ecoculture, the consulting bureau which realised the regional and national ex-post evaluations of the Dutch Programmes and network. In Belgium (Westhoek) the role of animator was played by a provincial employee.

## 2. Report on focus groups

### 2.1 Flevoland (NL)

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

##### 2.1.1.1 Name of LAG and interlocutors, participants; dates

**LAG:** Stuurgroep (Flevoland)

**Interlocutor:** Geert Gielen (Project co-ordinator Leader-II Flevoland)

Participants

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> May 03

Total number: 9

Place: Tarpania's Hoeve (L-II project), Tarpanweg 3, Swifterbant

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Ab and Karin de Lange	Beneficiaries (Tarpania's Hoeve: rural accommodation for long-term ill children )
Cees and Margriet v. Woerden	Beneficiaries (organic vegetables enterprise)
Geert Gielen	Co-ordinator Leader-II
Jan Hermsen	Chairman LAG Leader+ Flevoland
Marga de Jong	Role 1 evaluator (employee of the consulting bureau ETC Ecoculture, which carried out the regional and national ex-post evaluations)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> May 03

Total number: 7

Place: Museum Schokland (L-II project), Schokland

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Marinus van Dam	Beneficiary ("de Boerderij", Care Farm
Gerard Ruiters	Beneficiary (Kuinderbos en RONOP)
Mireille Korterik	Co-ordinator Leader+
Geert Gielen	Co-ordinator Leader-II
Jan Hermsen	Chairman LAG Leader+ Flevoland
Marga de Jong	Role 1 evaluator (employee of the consulting bureau ETC Ecoculture, which carried out the regional and national ex-post evaluations)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

### **2.1.1.2 Description of the process from the first contact until taking leave**

On 10-11 April I was in Flevoland for a personal visit, organised by the Leader-II Co-ordinator (Geert Gielen). The aim of the visit was the following:

- solving the black factual questions of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires;
- meeting with the LAG members of Leader-II (and Leader+)
- knowing better the Flevoland Leader area.

Together with the LAG members we passed through the red questions of Q202 translating them, most of them just filled them in. Together we discussed the possibility for being a Focus Group, and the modalities to do it. They choose to participate and to organise it as a two days session, located in two different L-II projects. Miss Anouk Van Gils, from the directorate of Agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Fishery) was invited at the meeting and afterwards we visited Flevoland together. During the visit, we participated at a presentation of the annual Leader+ award, given to a children's farm where also mental disabled people work.

### **2.1.2 Formulations, justifications and reactions**

*What hypotheses did the evaluators formulate, how did they justify them and how did the local actors react when they were confronted to them?*

The Q202 questionnaire was studied and highlights of every Leader characteristic were used to lead the discussion of the first session. In this way it was possible to discover some more details of "curious" results of the Q202, and to fill up gaps where the questionnaire was not giving a clear response or if opinions between the different LAG members were varying a lot.

#### **2.1.2.1 Area-based approach**

The Provincial Administration of Flevoland decided how to define the L-II area, mainly based on the population density. The homogeneity of Flevoland is exceptional, so only urban areas with a high population density were left out.

- Lelystad and Almeren were not included, but rural areas of Lelystad were;
- Urk, a small village living of fishery was not included, but was included in the PESCA Programme;
- Zeewolde, not included in L-II, is now included in L-+: this was the only village where meanings were differing.

A sheriff of the town council, was representing the rural area of Lelystad in the LAG. His low “rural-feeling” often was the source for intense discussions in the LAG, but put in evidence that the rural areas need their towns to survive and to develop.

The local actors did not have a specific point of view about it.

#### **2.1.2.2 Bottom-up**

The writing of the OP was immediately decentralised from the relevant Ministry towards the Provincial administrations.

The beneficiaries did not have the intention, but finally they did. Often, they just realised it after realising their project. The idea of the project was born by the beneficiaries, when needed, they got support to convert it from idea to concept. The main difficulties were:

- discover the existence of L-II
- respect the guidelines and procedures of L-II
- understanding the role of the LAG

Sometimes the way was long and expensive before getting in contact with the LAG and L-II:

Knocking first at the Ministry’ door (Agriculture, Environment and Fishery) they got in contact with the “top-down” approach: they had to pay a consulting bureau for writing their project demand, it was not approved for some totally unrealistic reasons, mostly the innovative idea behind it was considered to risky. It was their “entrepreneur-spirit”, typical for these *pioneers of the seabed*, which pushed them not to give up. Surprisingly is the fact that most of them, would have realised their project also without funding. Interaction with the LAG, improved the quality of their project, helped them to express their ideas.

The LAG did not seek potential beneficiaries, they just tried to spread out the L-II concept and waited for reactions by the local population. This made that at the beginning of the implementation period, very few projects were proposed, and the number of projects increased exponentially towards the end.

The role of the LAG was initially not known by the population, some of them even did not know of the existence of it. The lack of experience of the LAG members was expressed in a very cautious approach, which resulted in lower funding of the projects at the beginning and higher funding at the end (what could be subsidised and what not, how many projects will be realised during the entire period, what if we finish our funding resources and other projects (maybe better ones) are proposed?).

Beneficiaries sometimes had difficulties to write their project proposal and demand, most of them, having farmer-roots, were afraid of administrative procedures. The open spirit of the project-coordinator of the LAG, helped them to overcome this modesty towards bureaucracy. Lots of times the coordinator visited the local actors, drinking a cup of tea with them in their kitchen (and not in the Province Office) was experienced as a non political, man to man approach.

### **2.1.2.3 Partnership**

LAG:

Initially; lots of local actors did not know the role of the LAG. They did not have direct contact with them (beside the project coordinator) and just waited if their proposal was accepted or not. They were considered as a jury, which applied some rules and decided what to fund and what not...When the L-II concept was better known, newspapers publicised about L-II projects etc... the role of the LAG became more clear for local actors *and* LAG members. Beneficiaries expressed the idea to give the opportunity to know the LAG as a group, organising an open meeting or something similar.

To find out whether a project could be funded or not, 2 LAG members had to study the project demand. They were not chosen by typology of the project, so several times they had to study, widen their horizons in other sectors. There were no LAG experts for tourism projects, farmers projects etc...The idea behind it was stimulating the multi-sectoral approach, without obliging it.

New partnerships:

While cooperation between different sectors often is a requirement in the top-down approach, in the bottom-up approach it was most of the time a logical consequence. It was enough to have the firms of the partners in the project demand, without having official cooperation contracts. These low-level criteria of L-II, resulted black-on-white, in the possibility to fund a certain number of projects which would not have been (or were not) approved by the Ministry handling the top-down approach. It is almost impossible to stipulate an official contract between different partners, when high responsibilities are expected (ex: medical centres, hospitals...).

In the Netherlands, and particularly in Flevoland, the foundation creating mentality of the population is a fact, when people discover the goodness, the positive effect on the society of a certain project, it starts "raining" donations, mouth-to-mouth publicity spreads out the idea of the project, volunteers offer their devotion. The result of this mentality is the explosion of new partnerships AFTER the project's implementation. These effects, sometimes can be forecasted, but never can be contracted BEFORE the project's implementation.

#### **2.1.2.4 Innovation**

The LAG members were not evaluating the project demands only on their innovative character: sometimes innovation was totally absent, sometimes it was only partly included in the project. Funding the infrastructure of a stock-house for organic crops may be not innovative, but the cooperation of 5 organic farmers in the distribution centre was. The surplus value of the project was innovative, while the funding sources were used for “classical” infrastructure. The innovative part of the project could be realised having only firms of the other farmers on the project’s demand.

For the local actors the way of financing of L-II was experienced as innovative: it was possible to receive a funding advance. Furthermore, for the local actors the rules for expenses-evidences were considered clear and logical so the fear to loose funds caused by errors, comparing with former funding programmes, was much less.

#### **2.1.2.5 Multi-sectoral approach**

The LAG members were not evaluating the project demands only on their multi-sectoral character: it was the first time for Flevoland to get in contact with Leader, and the region was not ready for the multi-sectoral approach because of its small experience in rural development programmes. It was a conscious choice of the LAG to neglect the multi-sectoriality at the beginning, neither they had the experience to create it.

During the mid-term evaluation, it was stressed that in Flevoland there were realised a lot of small scaled disjointed projects. “They created the pearls, now they had to create the necklace”. During the second half of the Programme Implementation, thanks to the experience of the first half and the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation, the LAG members tried to introduce the multi-sectoriality in some projects by informing the local actors of the possibility of it.

Now in Leader+, multi-sectoriality became more important than innovation.

#### **2.1.2.6 TNC & Networking**

At the beginning of the Programme, TNC was not so important in Flevoland. The region was working on its first rural development experiences and time was lacking for international exchange. This was mainly due to the difficult communication between countries. It seemed that the effort was bigger then the results that could be obtained. In the second half of the Programme’s implementation, some TNC cooperations were developed. Low requirements were expected, to give any kind of TNC an opportunity. This had a positive effect: without forcing it, a grow in TNC interest was obtained. As it was all very small scaled, Leader2 funding

(Technical assistance) was used to avoid the more complicated administrative procedures of AEIDL. (funds promoting the design of the co-operation projects).

At the beginning of the Programme, it was difficult to circulate the existence of LEADER and its concept. Newspapers were hardly interested to publish about Leader projects, and when they did, often they forgot to mention the name LEADER, but talked about "European Funding Programme", "European Money" etc... The Leader-signboards, hanged up in every project, did not have a meaning for the local people. Inviting public persons, like Urbanus (belgian entertainer) and the Queen's sister at project openings or other public meetings, was a way to attract local and national press. Later, when the name and the concept of Leader was better known, people recognised the Leader-symbol on the signboards and realised that a lot of initiatives were born thanks to Leader, and they started to think about new project ideas. Once Leader was known in the area, the way to find the LAG was very short. This had also negative effects: while at the beginning the sequence of developing a project was making a concept, then see if there was the possibility to get financing, sometimes getting financing was becoming the first aim, and creating a project around it to get it Leader-compatible the second step. Fortunately, the experience of the LAG members had grown enough to filter out the project demands based on "there is the Leader money-box, what shall we propose to get some money of it?"

Networking between the 4 Dutch LAGs was initially difficult, but improved when the informal network was formalised. During L-II, international networking was more stimulated, while now during L+, networking between the L+-areas has become more important.

#### **2.1.2.7 Financing**

The way of financing was seen as very positive: once the LAG approved a project, the Province agreed for European funding. Co-financing caused some troubles as Municipalities were asked to foresee the co-financing for the projects on their territory but they did not foresee a Leader budget in their yearly estimate or did not agree with the innovative character of the project.

#### **2.1.28 Conclusion of the First Session**

##### ***How are these significant issues related to the operational principles of LEADER?***

The Bottom-up approach and the local partnership were considered the most important issues in Flevoland. In the area they were not brought as a requirement "a priori", but they were developed parallel with the diffusion of the Leader concept. The area and its population had the time to let these issues grow, bottom-up and partnership "bubbled up" slowly at the beginning of Leader II and knew an exponential growth towards the end of the Programme

***What behavioural change can be observed? How do we assess this change?***

The LAG, being a mix of private & public, functioned without any political influence and without prejudices. It was the first time that local actors got involved in the process from idea to concept, in which they took also their responsibility. Consulting bureau's, specialised in public administration support, were left out while the local population, it did not matter which education or background they had, were stimulated to express their ideas, making up the project demand etc... It was possible to motivate the local actors to do so, because the LAG and the Provincial Administration handled with an open mind, invested time in visiting the beneficiaries at home etc... The distance between Local actors and LAG (Provincial Administration) disappeared, and the consciousness that working together gives amazing results (1 plus 1 is more than 2) for the area and its population, caused a change in mentality for both sides.

***What behavioural change did not take place (although it was expected)? How do we assess this non-change?***

The mentality of mutual dependency (local population needs public administration and vice versa) did not take place at municipality level and in other public administrations (administration for building licences, regional planning, district water board, etc...). Only the public administrations involved in the LAG (so Provincial), were able to open their mind in the bottom-up approach, the new partnerships and area based approach. The other administrations, not prepared for the Leader approach, did not have confidence in the small-scaled and innovative projects. At municipality level, often it was difficult to get co-financing. Although they were informed about Leader-II at the beginning of the implementation period, they did not foresee a budget in their yearly estimate. It proves that there must be invested in education and support for a "fan" of public administrations and not only the ones which are directly involved with LEADER.

***In which way can the behavioural change related with material effects in the area?***

Leader 2 has become a concept for the local actors, and the Leader sign boards hanging up by the projects are noticed by the local population. Leader has caused a dynamism which continues to work on the image of the rural area. (like the Project coordinator said: if the next European Programme, after L+, will get another name then Leader, we'll have to start all over again...)

**2.1.2.9 Hypothesis**

Thanks to the Leader approach, there is also invested in people, and not only in the projects. The extreme homogeneity of the area and the clear identity of the local actors, created space for small scaled and innovative projects, which wouldn't have been realised with the "classic" top-down approach.

The LAG did not push the Leader approaches, but let bubble up initiatives from the inside of the area and its population. This had a very positive effect: Leader was growing slowly but it matured together with the local actors and administrations. The bottom-up approach was seen as the most important, although beneficiaries expressed also the danger of it: public administrations should always be involved in the procedures to stress the importance in the local context and to avoid personal profit. Projects should not only improve family quality or income, should add a surplus value in the local context. Local actors did not know if their project was making part of a certain local area strategy.

The particular administrative context, namely 1 person which is Provincial employee and in the same time also L-II project coordinator, had a very positive effect. In paragraph 2.1.3.2, where this issue was discussed by means of a causal loop diagram, the possible negative effects were searched, although in the case of Flevoland they did not verify.

Leader-II can be seen as a complementary Programme for Objective 1, without overlapping it.

The lack of means and services in the area, together with the enthusiastic population, seems a good cocktail to stimulate Leader-like projects.

Its success in Flevoland is partly due to the “entrepreneurs-spirit” of the population and its demographic growth.

### **2.1.3 Causal Loop Diagrams**

#### **2.1.3.1 The horizontal partnership influenced the Programme implementation**

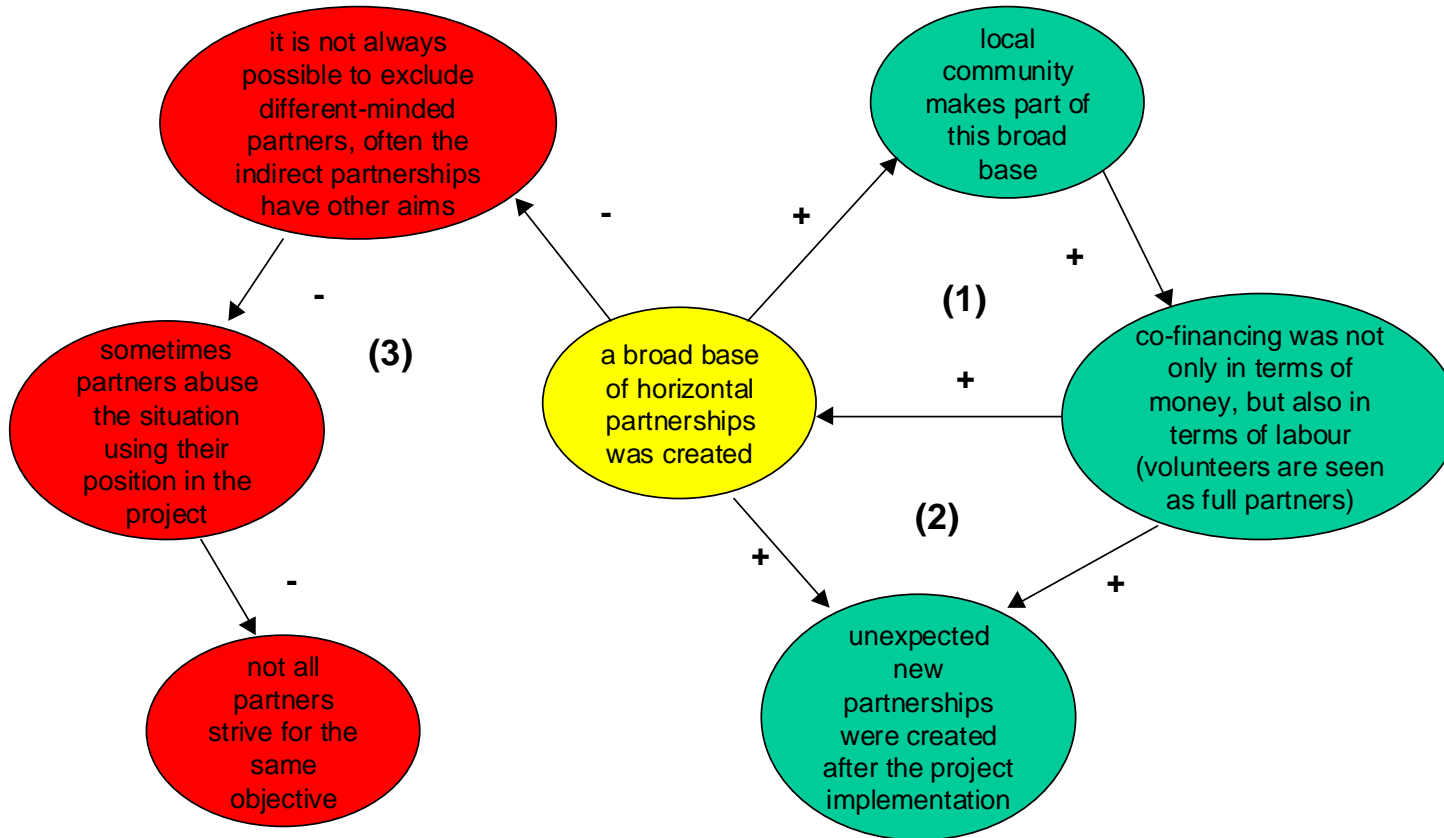
See Figure 1

#### **2.1.3.2 The management authority and the LAG coordinator are one and the same person of the managing authority (Provincial Administration)**

During this causal loop diagram this issue was chosen because of its highly positive effect in Flevoland. The members of this session were asked to brainstorm about the possible negative effects this kind of situation could bring, although they did not verify. See Figure 2

**Figure 1**

**Flevoland 1st Causal Loop Diagram: How the horizontal partnership influenced the Programme implementation**



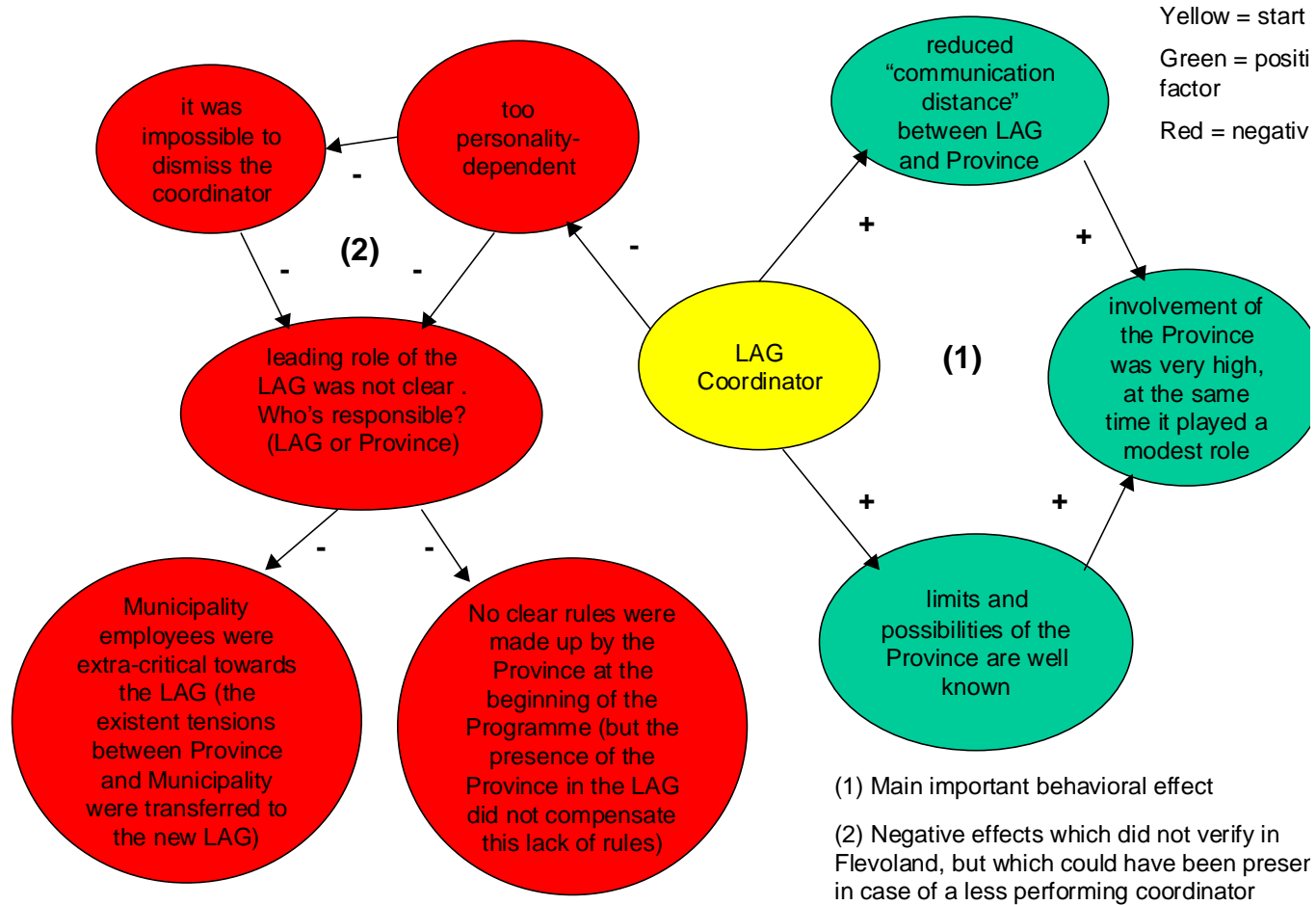
(3) Negative effect without concrete negative feedback

Yellow = start point  
Green = positive factor  
Red = negative factor

(1) 1<sup>st</sup> basic positive feedback  
(2) Main important behavioral effect

**Figure 2**

**Flevoland 2nd Causal Loop Diagram: The management authority and the LAG coordinator are one and the same person of the Managing Authority**



#### **2.1.4 Conclusions and recommendations**

*Conclusions and recommendations according to the four questions/answers produced during the second session.*

***What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operational principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?***

See paragraph *Formulations, justifications and reactions*

***What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?***

- the LAG and its function were not well known at the beginning of the Programme: clear rules should be defined (for LAG members, local administrations and local actors)
- co-financing sometimes works contra-productive: local authorities and LAG sometimes do not agree on the importance of a project. Months of project preparation, study, actor's motivation etc.... risk to be lost by negative advice from the Municipality
- The double role of the Provincial Administrations should be well defined: refusal for co-financing is not always motivated
- A framework or local area strategy in which projects should make part can avoid the effect of disjointed projects

***What should be changed at the level of programme administrations and official networks (regional, national) in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?***

- ALL public administrations should be involved in the Programme (contractual), firms and formal agreements could prevent opposition and delays
- Co-financing should be foreseen in the budget of all involved Administrations
- Mentality change should be stimulated in other relevant public administrations
- Maybe other relevant public administrations should participate in the LAG, problem is that the total number of LAG members could become too high (private partners should be well represented as well).

**What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?**

- open mind of ALL public administrations towards rural development
- clear “identity” of rural development in the local context
- somebody of the town council should be present in the LAG, to support the interaction between rural and urban areas
- programme’s implementation period should be long enough, no “hap-snap”, possibility for mainstreaming
- Objectives of Administrations and Leader objectives should be tuned
- Project evolutions in the future should be evaluated: will small-scaled projects survive in the future, will they satisfy the local actor in the future? What about regulations, won't they oblige the beneficiary to new investments which could bring the cost-benefit balance in danger? Will enlarging the scale of a project still fit within the rural context?

**2.1.5 Personal impression**

*Personal impression of the whole process, feedback for the core team (on the method, on the instructions).*

The two sessions were organised in two days and in different places (2 Leader projects). During these sessions the beneficiaries were not the same. The rules of the guidelines were *personalised* because it was not possible to start the second session with the hypothesis of the first session.

During the first session, two families with farmer roots participated. They realised small scaled projects involving partners from private sectors and setting up formal cooperations with medical institutions. During the second session, other beneficiaries with manager backgrounds participated. They were able to handle with the more “technical’ build-up of the session. During both sessions different types of positive and negative experiences came up to the surface. Ones the train got in movement, it was hardly to stop it. Lots of impressions, results and experiences should never been obtained by means of a questionnaire. More sessions would have resulted in even more results, we had the maximum result with maximum effort, but did not reach the bottom yet.

All participants of the focus group were quite well informed about the Leader characteristics (except the beneficiaries), probably due to the AEIDL questionnaires and the Q202 questionnaire. Although it was sometimes very difficult to guide the discussion for every Leader characteristic separately as their boundaries are not so clear (see paragraphs from 2.2.2.1 to

2.2.2.7). It was preferred to try to not disturb the discussion, to let emerge the different opinions without forcing them in every feature. But I do confirm that these Leader characteristics are an extremely useful instrument for analysing the local situation, and that this methodological approach is underlining the added value of LEADER respect to the more « traditional » programmes.

## **2.2 Westhoek (BE)**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

#### **2.2.1.1 Name of LAG and interlocutors, participants; dates**

**LAG:** Leader-II team (LAG Westhoek)

**Interlocutor:** Sabine Derck

Participants

Date: 23<sup>th</sup> May 03

Total number: 10

Place: Provincial Administration, Esenkasteel, Diksmuide (B)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role/ Function</i>
Stefaan Gheysen (*)	Co-ordinator Tourist projects in LAG (head Tourist Product Development)
Lieven Louwagie	Co-ordinator Agricultural projects in LAG (employee Province)
Sabine Derck	secretary of LAG (employee Province)
Els Soenen	financial coordinator for projects funded by EAGGF (employee Flemish Administrations, agri- and horticulture)
Brigitte de Wulf	Beneficiary (Store and art gallery managed by mentally disabled persons)
Geert Vandewalle	Beneficiary (sale of organic products by mentally disabled persons)
Christine Delefortrie (**)	Beneficiary (horse tours and herb garden)
Patrick Braem (**)	Beneficiary (care farm receiving disabled persons)
Filip Boury	Role 1 evaluator (employee Province, area and environment coordinator Westhoek)
Margot v. Soetendael	Role 2 evaluator

(\*) only present during first session

(\*\*) only present during second session

### **2.2.1.2 Description of the process from the first contact until taking leave**

On 2,3 and 4 April I was in Westhoek (Provincial Administrations) for a personal visit, organized by the Leader-II secretary (Sabine Derck). The aim of the visit was the following:

- solving the black factual questions of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires;
- talking about the possibility of being a Focus Group

We solved the black factual questions of Q34 and Q202, and together with Filip Boury, we discussed the possibility for being a Focus Group, and the modalities to do it. They choose to participate and to organize it as a one day session, located in the Provincial Administration itself. Unfortunately, our agenda was rather plenty in these days, and no time was left to go for a ride in the area to visit some L-II projects.

### **2.2.2 Formulations, justifications and reactions**

*What hypotheses did the evaluators formulate, how did they justify them and how did the local actors react when they were confronted to them?*

The Q202 questionnaire was studied and highlights of every Leader characteristic were used to lead the discussion of the first session. In this way it was possible to discover some more details of “curious” results of the Q202, and to fill up gaps where the questionnaire was not giving a clear response or if opinions between the different LAG members were varying a lot.

#### **2.2.2.1 Area-based approach**

The indispensable connection with the 5b area-delimitation was too restrictive. Westhoek is already a good delineated area with its own identity, the very capricious (too small) delimitation of the L-II area by the relevant Flemish Ministry, caused a lot of trouble “in situ”:

- a lot of leader-like ideas were born in non 5b municipalities and they felt injured because they also did not have had 5b possibilities (although they have a low population density, but were left out of the 5b-area).
- The delimitation was made using administrative boundaries of *fractions* of municipalities, sometimes the left and right side of the street just defined who was in Leader and non-Leader zones.

To overcome the problem, sometimes project ideas were funded by INTERREG, one local actor moved into the Leader-area to get L-II funding!

The 10% clause was applied in a way to obtain as much as possible funding possibilities: less L-II funding and more co-financing was given, and finally almost 27% of the total budget was invested outside the Leader-II area.

#### **2.2.2.2 Bottom-up**

The experience of Leader I did not cause a “break through” of the bottom-up approach: the OP was kept on Flemish level, because they considered the Provincial Administrations not ready to do it. Also the co-financing was playing a role in it (see Financing).

To get the local actors in contact with L-II, a large information campaign was set up, 10 of the 12 municipalities were visited, the press publicized about L-II, the 5b-magazine, already known by a big number of farmers in the area, preserved space for L-II.

Although the local actors got in contact with L-II and started to develop ideas, the Provincial Administration and the LAG preferred to apply some “top-down” in the “bottom-up”: all projects had to fit in the “local-area-strategy”, developed by different local administrations. This combination of top-down and bottom-up was seen as very positive by the local actors as the administrations, the first had the idea to contribute to the image of the area, to realize a project which had some benefit also for the community, the second had a clear idea of the aim of the Programme and could guide the local actors in it. Another reason of this approach was the short implementation period of L-II in the area, there was no time to let “bubble up” the ideas as in 2 years all projects had to be approved.

#### **2.2.2.3 Partnership**

A particular partnership was developed: while the LAG was advising and supporting the local actors in the process from project idea to proposal, a Management Committee (MaC) was the deciding organ to approve the project proposals and to credit the European funding. The LAG members presented the projects in the MaC, who decided by consensus. Sometimes this was experienced as frustrating by the local actors, especially by negative advice (they could not present their proposal personally). On the other hand, the LAG members were appreciating a lot this way of working, do not having the “moral responsibility” of the decision, they did not have difficulties to go on working with the same actors by negative advice.

In the LAG the members were divided in tourism, agricultural, etc... responsables. This was seen as very positive by the local actors (high professional support) and accelerated a lot the decision to propose the project in the MaC (no extra study) as the implementation period was very short. A negative effect was the low multi-sectoral approach, it was difficult to break off the “walls” around every single sector.

This sectoral separation, starting already at the Flemish level where the structural funds are managed by different persons (one for EAGGF, one for ERDF, etc....and not one person for one Programme), led to a different financial management of tourism and agricultural projects: after approval by the MaC, two ways existed to foresee in co-financing. The tourism projects passed directly to the Provincial Administrations for co-financing, while the agricultural projects passed by the "Agricultural Advising Group" before arriving at the Provincial Administrations.

#### **2.2.2.4 Innovation**

Having the possibility to give support to the local actors (main task of LAG) was experienced as very innovative: the first time there was communication between public and private, there was time foreseen to spend with the local actors in order to help them.

Innovation was seen as very important, projects could be absolute innovative, innovative for Flanders or innovative for Westhoek: sometimes by means of multi-sectorality (disabled persons sell organic products), by means of networking (different institutions and associations exchange information on how to organize jobs for disabled persons), by means of the originality of the project (adventure holidays, new farm techniques, etc....).

Some projects did not make it, the innovation is sometimes a risk (ex. Taxi-bicycles). Sometimes the projects were realized, although the "innovation touch" did not make it (ex. Bed & breakfast realized, surplus value not). Sometimes innovation techniques in agriculture were technically seen as highly innovative, but had a negative influence on the landscape (particular plastic greenhouses).

Sometimes the innovation condition put the LAG in difficulties: a children's farm, not approved although it could be considered innovative in the area, was realized without funding and became very successful, another very innovative project did not make it because of a incompetence of the local actor.

#### **2.2.2.5 Multi-sectoral approach**

The way of working of the Flemish Administrations, the Provincial Administrations and the LAG was not stimulating the multi-sectoral approach as responsibilities were inserted for every SF/sector. The LAG tried to introduce the multi-sectorality in some projects, but did not have the time to introduce it integrally in all project proposals. Although the local actors had multi-sectoral ideas, as project proposals sometimes covered two or three different sectors.

#### **2.2.2.6 TNC & Networking**

The implementation period was too short to invest in TNC. Some small initiatives were taken, but they ended together with the end of the Programme.

Thanks to L-II, networking in Westhoek knew an important local development (local farm products, visit farms, etc) Sometimes it was enough to give occasion to networking while now the network is surviving on its own, in some cases the Provincial Administration continue to finance them, as they understood the importance of networking and the continue support in professional advice.

Local actors asked advice to other L-II beneficiaries, before proposing new projects.

At regional and national level, networking was a real disaster, very few experiences were exchanged although the importance of it was considered very high (the short implementation period was considered the main cause)

#### **2.2.2.7 Financing**

The Flemish Ministry thought: "if we have to foresee the co-financing, we'll decide about the OP". The result was that the OP was developed without any link towards the Leader-area. It was kept very large for interpretations, in this way the Provincial Authorities could fill it up in a "personal" way, but this had the consequence that juridically it was very weak. No co-financing from municipality-level was foreseen.

The heavy administrative procedures were seen as the most important hindrance for the local actors. Some realized their project without L-II funding, although they knew about it. The Flemish Administration replied that these procedures are required from the EC, and therefore couldn't be simplified locally.

#### **2.2.2.8 Conclusion of the First Session**

##### ***How are these significant issues related to the operational principles of LEADER?***

Innovation was considered the most important issue in Westhoek. Small scaled projects were evaluated on their innovation to fill up the white spots left by Objective 5b) in the local area strategy.

##### ***What behavioural change can be observed? How do we assess this change?***

The cooperation between LAG and the beneficiaries opened the consciousness of the last of their capacities to open their spirit and realize their initiatives. Beneficiaries became active

actors, and the feeling that they personally contributed to the image and the liveability of the area was new for them.

Thanks to L-II, some the Flemish Regulations for agriculture have been revised and became more Leader-minded, which opens the door for mainstreaming.

***What behavioural change did not take place (although it was expected)? How do we assess this non-change?***

Leader has become a concept for the beneficiaries, but not for all local actors. It did not cause a big mentality change, the mainstreaming from L-I to L-II to L-+ did not take place as Leader is still seen as a means to obtain certain objectives, but not as a concept.

While the Flemish Agricultural Regulations were revised, the regulations for Tourism did not at all. There is still no decree for trial projects as they are seen as personal private initiatives, and therefore wouldn't need any public aid...

Important L-II projects which had survival problems (most of the time "growing projects" in the care sector) could not count on further financing by the Flemish Ministry and just died after Leader-II. The Provincial Administration tried to furnish some co-financing but could not satisfy the demand.

***In which way can the behavioural change related with material effects in the area?***

Local actors are working in a active way on the image of the area. New networks were created, sometimes supported administratively by the Province.

**2.2.2.9 Hypothesis**

Thanks to a clear local-area-strategy, made up by the local public administrations, and the initiatives of the local actors, it was possible to create a lot of small-scaled projects. The combination of bottom-up in a fixed frame (top-down) was seen as highly productive in the very short implementation period of the Programme.

The Leader-area was very homogeneous but too small, this was caused by the already unsatisfactory 5b-delimitation. Leader-II can be seen more than a complementary Programme for Objective 5, by means of the area-choice (4 municipalities excluded from 5b were included in L-II) and by means of the content (L-II concept and scale).

Although Westhoek is relatively "rich" and developed (obj5 and not obj1), the main objective is not yet reached: L-II was an impulse to create a certain dynamism, but still has to be stimulated in the future.

L-II improved the image of the area, weaknesses became strengths, “rural’ does not mean ‘under developed” anymore.

L-II did not achieve to promote the revision of certain Flemish regulations for environment, landscape and recreation: the message was not “strong” enough to be taken into account in higher administrative levels.

Local actors were very satisfied by the high professional support of the LAG. LAG members were divided by typology of projects (responsible for tourism, agriculture, art and handicraft), although it was limiting the multi-sectorial approach. The LAG did not have the decisional responsibility of the projects, an intermediate organ (Management Committee) was installed to decide which projects could be approved.

### **2.2.3 Causal Loop Diagrams**

#### **2.2.3.1 The interaction between the Management Committee, the LAG and the local actors**

See Figure 3

#### **2.2.3.2 The relation between the area strategy and innovation, and their effects on the image of Westhoek**

This issue probably was too complicated, as “the image of Westhoek” was not an easy subject and caused some trouble by the participants to reflect on. Some positive and negative effects were pronounced, although the information is not enough to design a causal loop diagram.

Positive effects:

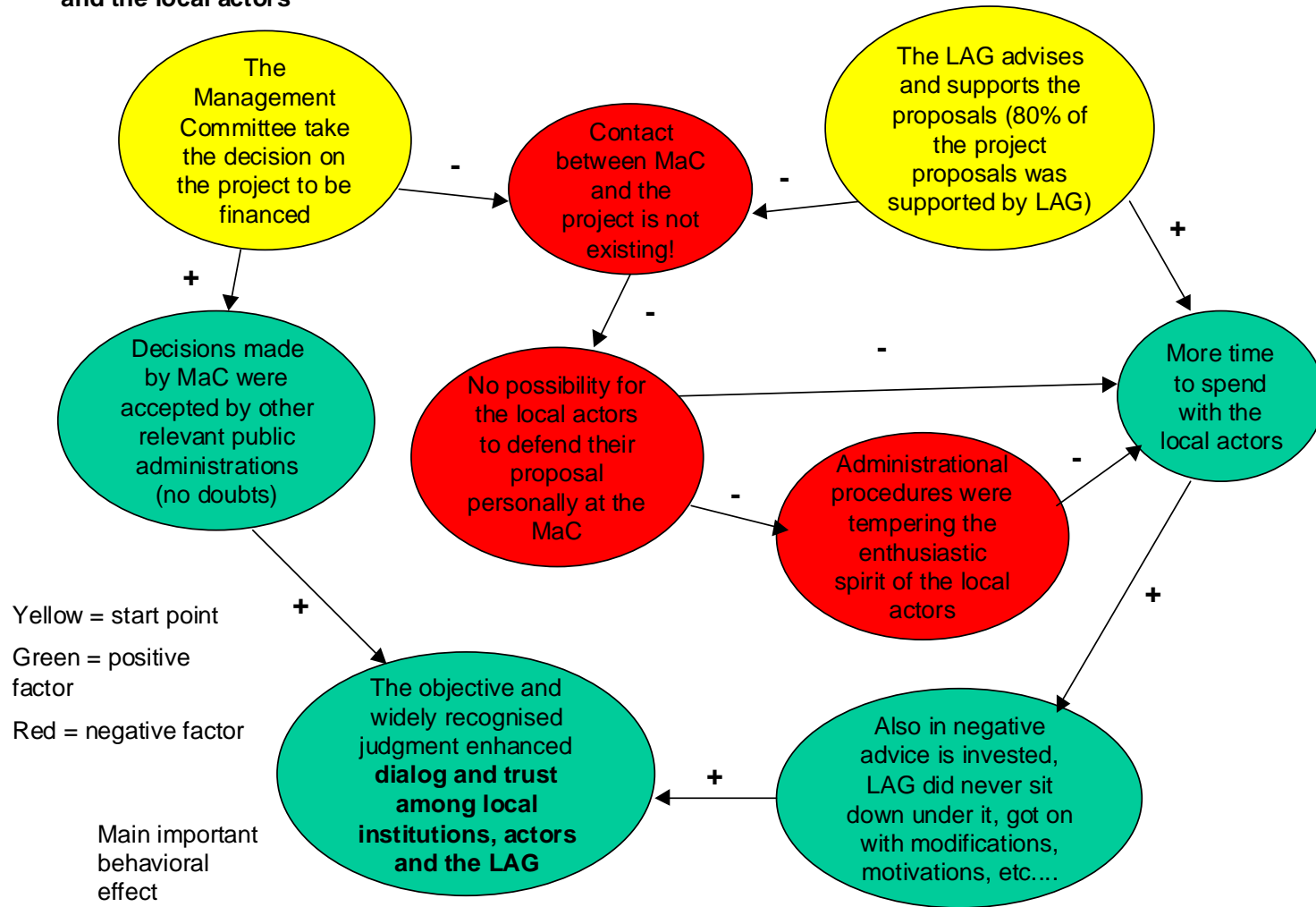
- Vast knowledge of the area is used to make up a specific strategy where innovation can be accentuated
- Continuity: the strategy is building on the existing image, and tries to reinforce it, improve it.
- Name “Westhoek” is overall present (and not Leader)
- All interested parties know each other

Negative effects:

- Also the Provincial Administration is one of the parties, with its own limitations as public administration
- The local area strategy can also hamper innovation

**Figure 3**

**Westhoek 1<sup>st</sup> Causal Loop Diagram: The interaction between the Management Committee, the LAG and the local actors**



#### **2.2.4 Conclusions and recommendations**

*Conclusions and recommendations according to the four questions/answers produced during the second session.*

***What are the mechanisms, the driving or inhibiting forces which influence the effective implementation of which operational principle? In which specific way does it express itself in the local context?***

See paragraph *Formulations, justifications and reactions*

***What should be changed locally in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?***

- The composition of the LAG should be larger, to avoid a too “public administration” approach
- The implementation period should be longer
- The experiences of Leader II should be transmitted to other local public administrations

***What should be changed at the level of programme administrations and official networks (regional, national) in order to improve the effectiveness of programmes such as LEADER II?***

- The Flemish Ministry should be replaced by the Province as Managing Authority for the OP
- Some Flemish regulations are negatively affecting the implementation of the Leader Programme
- If the administrative procedures are obligatory, explain WHY, communicate and try to make disappear the prejudices towards the public administrations.
- Administrative procedures should be proportioned with the scale of the project (request from EC to foresee the same documents for small-scaled projects is not realizable)
- The positive effects of the L-II approach should be stimulated in other relevant public administrations
- “growing projects” should have the opportunity to change during the implementation period, what could not be used in the first year, should be easily transferred into the second year, also AFTER the implementation period (prediction is very difficult). A more flexible regulation from the EC should be recommendable. (During the discussion

emerged this rigidity of the EC regulations, but it was not clear if in fact these regulations were rigid or if the local authorities interpreted them in this way)

- Coordination from the EC towards the Ministries should be more transparent to prevent the “snowball effect” of unclear rules transmitted to all other levels of administrations. (also here it was not clear if there was a communication problem between EC and the Flemish Ministry, or between Ministry and local administrative levels)

***What are the key criteria for a rural development programme to take positive effect on the specific territorial context?***

- At least 4 years of effective implementation period, after the running-in period
- a local area strategy is indispensable, and should be flexible enough to promote innovation
- guarantee the continuity of “growing projects” (foresee in further financing and support)
- ex-ante evaluation is completely senseless, while mid-term and ex-post are highly recommendable
- transparent communication is important (between public institutes, private-public etc...if the higher administrative levels can send clear messages to the lower levels, the LAG does not need to have the financial responsibility of the Programme, which is the case now in L+, the negative effect of it is that now LAG members should specialize in European, National and Regional regulations, while before it was enough to know the local regulations)
- certainty of co-financing: the EU and National (State, Province) financing should be decided in one step (like now in L+)

**2.2.5 Personal impression**

The L-II Programme has been implemented with a rather “public” minded approach, which I do not consider as negative: the very short implementation period did not give the opportunity to experiment. I did notice that on Flemish level, the need to keep a check on the lower administrative levels was felt as very important (afraid to lose control), while I noticed that the Provincial Administration would be able to deal with the new tasks.

While the first session was going very well, the second was troubling a little: maybe working on the hypothesis and the causal loop diagrams was experienced as too “technical” while during the first session everybody felt free to speak. (maybe 2 sessions in 1 day is also asking too much energy)

The roles of the ex-ante and ex-post evaluations were not fully understood. The ex-ante evaluation remains a difficult exercise, may be it is not yet effective enough. In general the decision taken by the Commission to call “ex-post evaluation” which was indeed a “Final evaluation” (see COM guidelines) was criticized. Furthermore, a final evaluation is indispensable to avoid losing the available information at local level (LAG members who leave the LAG, or other relevant stakeholders) but is, in fact different from an ex-post evaluation. For Westhoek, the ex-post evaluation was carried out by the University of Gent but does not take into consideration the features and the implementing processes (see paragraph 2.3.2).

## **2.3 Report on national and description of all evaluations carried out at national and regional level**

*Complete overview per member state and per OP*

*What evaluation was done at programme level (statutory evaluation reports, specific studies, data collection, taking account of specific features etc.)? What problems and constraints, if any, were encountered?*

*How were evaluations processed at national level (Summaries, transmissions to the Commission etc.)?*

The roles of the ex-ante and ex-post evaluations were not fully understood. The ex-ante evaluation remains a difficult exercise, may be it is not yet effective enough. The Commission made a mistake calling “ex-post evaluation” which was indeed a “Final evaluation” (see COM guidelines). A final evaluation is indispensable to avoid losing the available information at local level (LAG members who leave the LAG, or other relevant stakeholders).

### **2.3.1 Ex-ante**

Only for Lauwersland (Groningen, NL) an ex-ante evaluation was carried out.

### **2.3.2 Mid-term**

The 4 Dutch Leader-areas carried out a mid-term evaluation mid 1997. It was effectuated by MHP (Valkenburg) and the reports had the aim to describe the following for every area:

- actualising the setting of the programme
- analysing the progress of the programme, and
- effects of the programme

In Flevoland the importance of the monitoring of the Leader-initiative was stressed, “to measure = to know”, and the application of project-related indicators was suggested for both quality control and the final programme results. The working of the LAG was considered adequate, but the importance of networking and TNC was underlined to update continuously the programme marketing. Moreover, the need to have more eye for cohesion was mentioned (multi-sectoriality). Periodical and critical self-evaluations were suggested to further personalise the realisation of the programme.

In Drenthe the monitoring resulted worked out reasonably well, and therefore it was able to get a clear picture of the progress of the programme and the projects involved. Although external expertise (on call) and an upgrade of the current monitoring system are suggested to improve still the effectiveness.

### **2.3.3 Ex-post**

In Both nations (Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands) the physical information (output and result indicators) were not collected during the Programme implementation. The relevant institutions blame the absence of a clear reference for the monitoring and evaluation at the beginning of the Leader Programme. Therefore, the systematic collection of output and result indicators was not effectuated, furthermore the reference to Leader in the relevant STAR document for the period 1994-1999, seemed too much based on objective 5b).

In the Dutch ex-post evaluations, this lack of indicators is mentioned and therefore the report is a qualitative evaluation and no quantitative evaluation. For each area, every Leader characteristic is described by its implementation and its effect and eventually some recommendations are formulated. In the national ex-post evaluation, the four Leader areas were compared, differences were focussed and different results were discussed.

The Dutch ex-post evaluations (national and regional, and networking) were carried out by the same consulting bureau (ETC Ecoculture). The homogeneous and clear structure of each regional report simplified the interpretation of it, in the national report, the same contents were presented in another way, which gave the opportunity to confront the different areas between them, to formulate new conclusions.

For the summary of the 4 Dutch ex-post evaluations, see ANNEX I

In the Flemish ex-post evaluations, it is not so clear if they considered their report qualitative or quantitative, as they selected a certain number of projects (20% of total number) for which a certain number of indicators (which?) and information were collected in situ and at the LAG by the evaluators. A summary for each project is reported, and conclusions and recommendations were formulated. None of the Leader characteristics was described, so it was not possible to

understand how the LAG and local administrations applied the Leader characteristics, and what their effects were in every Leader area.

All evaluations reported in tables I and II were transmitted to the Commission.

Table I

**List of evaluation reports for the Netherlands**

<b>OP</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>
National	National Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
National	Evaluation Leader Network Netherlands	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Lauwersland	Regional Leader ex-ante evaluation		
Lauwersland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Lauwersland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Lauwersland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
Friesland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Friesland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Friesland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
South-West Drenthe	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
South-West Drenthe	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
South-West Drenthe	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	
Flevoland	Regional Leader interim evaluation	MHP (Valkenburg)	mid 1997
Flevoland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	ETC Ecoculture	January 2002
Flevoland	Questionnaire AEIDL	LAG	

Table II

**List of evaluations reports for Flandres (Belgium)**

<b>OP</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>
Westhoek	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	University Gent	June 2001
Meetjesland	Regional Leader ex-post evaluation	University Gent	June 2001

## **2.4 Overall assessment**

*Usefulness and relevance of the evaluations for learning at local and institutional levels according to the opinion of the geographical evaluators*

### **2.4.1 The Netherlands**

The Leader characteristics were considered, their implementation, their effects and eventual recommendations were formulated. The questionnaires of AEIDL contributed to create a general view of the programme implementation

Conclusions and recommendations were specified for every Leader characteristic.

Every evaluation has a summary in English (see ANNEX I for the summaries of the Dutch ex-post evaluations).

In general it can be said that the Dutch reports have a high quality, as conclusions and recommendations were useful for both the local administrations, LAG and the GE. Also during the focus group, Flevoland expressed a positive advice on the learning of the mid-term and ex-post evaluations.

The evaluation activities can be seen as a continuous and positive exercise, Continuous because beside the interim evaluation also informal self-evaluations took place, positive because it was based on the Leader approach and its implementation. The AEIDL questionnaires probably helped to involve the LAG in the evaluation process.

The only fact which remains a demand is the lack of the physical indicator collection: in the mid-term evaluations their importance was underlined and also in the AEIDL questionnaires it is clear that the European Observatory considers these indicators as very important (these parts of the questionnaires were left open). If it is true that a clear reference from the Commission was lacking, the local authorities should have understood and should have taken initiative for a better monitoring of the programme.

### **2.4.2 Flanders (Belgium)**

The ex-post evaluation carried out by the University of Gent mentions the EC guidelines for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II but in fact does not take them into consideration. The LEADER global and specific objectives and features are not assessed and the report does not provide any assessment on the immediate and final impacts.

Also having a look to the applied methodology it seems that it was focussed on the traditional methodology foreseen for the Objective 5b) programs. Indeed it was

Indeed the LEADER approach was completely missing in these evaluations.

The evaluators expressed a general positive judgement but the provided conclusions and remarks seem weak and they are not basically justified.

The late approval of the OP (dec 1997) is just mentioned, but is not considered as a problem and the related evaluator conclusion is “the procedures should be simplified focussing on the financial absorption capacity.

The final actors are considered the most important factor for the Programme success (their innovative spirit and personality) while nothing is said about the working of the LAG (excluding that it supported them). It seems that the evaluators did not involve the LAG and the Provincial Administrations in the evaluation process. The description of the data collection describes the study of the relevant documentation (with support from the Province when necessary) and the data collection of the selected projects in situ. Although the task of the LAG was described and its importance was underlined, nothing was said about its programme strategy and working process.

Indeed the evaluator did not analyse the process and the impact, he just limited his attention on the projects but also without assessing their singular impacts.

For the GE the evaluation report was of low value, and also the LAG and Province were unsatisfied about it. The LAG could not learn anything from it, for the GE it was impossible to get a general overview of the Programme implementation.

In Flanders, evaluation activities during the implementation period were completely missing, so there was no continuity at all. Probably the main cause is once more the very late Programme approval (Dec 1997).

#### **2.4.3 Key recommendations on future evaluations (LEADER+, rural development programmes, structural funds)**

The presence from the beginning of a clear reference for monitoring and evaluation activities is the “sinae qua non” condition for obtaining a complete data collection from local to central level. The vertical partnership in this case is of extreme importance: a clear constant dialogue between levels of what has to be measured and followed up can lead to a satisfactory monitoring. A good monitoring is the source for a good evaluation.

In the evaluation process ALL stakeholders should be involved, and especially who is involved with the programme implementation. Evaluation processes should be continuous, and should develop both the evaluation-culture and the actors who are evaluated.

The mid-term evaluation should be considered as essential. It is very difficult to carry out a high quality ex-post evaluation (read: Final evaluation at the programme level) based on a “evaluation desert”. The ex-post evaluation should complete the evaluation process of the programme period, and should not be a “snap-shot’ action realised because of legal obligation.

The recipe of the focus group could function not only in the ex-post period but also and especially during the implementation period. It could be an extremely useful instrument of self-assessment for the LAG and the local administration.

The role and importance of the ex-ante evaluation is not fully understood. It would be recommendable to improve the information towards the relevant administrations about it, as ex-ante evaluations could become the framework of the entire evaluation process (if we have a good start, the successive evaluations probably will be of good quality too).

The evaluation instruments for Leader+ have improved a lot respect to Leader2 and besides they were also made available ever since the beginning of the programme. This should be an advantage, but we should not forget that these instruments have to be distributed, explained and discussed by the different stakeholders to obtain a satisfactory use of it. The networks could play an indispensable role in it.

In the case of regional Leader programmes, it should be obligatory to carry out also a national evaluation (or at least a comparative study between the different regional evaluations).

## **2.5 Capitalisation on relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the national and regional evaluation reports of the 34 selected programmes (use the corresponding grid)**

*Brief summary on:*

- *Implementation, effects and recommendations on the specific features*
- *Other important issues, general conclusions and recommendations*

## SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

### Operational Programme: Flevoland (NL)

	<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Area-based approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ complete rural area of Flevoland without urban zones with high population density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ development of local identity</li> <li>▪ better use of human resources</li> <li>▪ better use of local economical/financial resources</li> <li>▪ better use of cultural-historic sites</li> </ul>	
<b>Bottom-up approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LAG considered innovation and transferability as important in projects, but the active participation of the local actors was the most important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ local authorities accept local initiatives</li> <li>▪ regional actors learned to organise themselves</li> <li>▪ better identification of local problems and needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ coordination between local initiatives and local public administration deserves more attention</li> <li>▪ knowledge of financial rules at local level should improve</li> </ul>
<b>The local group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ project leader of LAG was Provincial employee</li> <li>▪ LAG proposals were always endorsed by “Gedeputeerde Staten”)</li> <li>▪ All sectoral interests were represented in the LAG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ local actors consider themselves able to take more responsibility</li> <li>▪ decentralisation of decision responsibility improved cooperation within the LAG</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ new LAG members should be prepared by the experiences of experienced LAG members</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ emphasized in the agricultural sector</li> <li>▪ at the beginning accent on innovative techniques, later accent on combining agriculture with other sectors (care, tourism)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flevoland has highest percentage of organic farming in the Netherlands (4%)</li> <li>▪ Better solutions for social problems</li> <li>▪ Diversification of the local economy</li> <li>▪ Improved position on the market</li> <li>▪ Local regulations hamper innovation</li> </ul>	

	<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Multisectoral integration</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ better feasibility of the projects</li> <li>▪ the still dominating sectoral organisation of interests still remains a limiting factor</li> <li>▪ co-financing caused problems</li> </ul>	
<b>Networking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ local networking is still in development</li> <li>▪ participation by coordinator at European Observatory</li> <li>▪ participation by coordinator at national Leader-II network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ exchange of know-how and best practices between rural areas, organisations and actors</li> <li>▪ improvement of the access to information</li> <li>▪ new contacts between actors of different regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ better structuring is required to improve effectiveness</li> <li>▪ monitoring and evaluation of exchange activities (what was the effect for the visiting group, what was the effect for the receiving group?)</li> <li>▪ thematic files are useful, but should include also failure stories and not only success</li> </ul>
<b>Trans-national cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 transnational visits</li> <li>▪ 10 visits from other countries to Flevoland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ high cost of TNC limits participation</li> <li>▪ communication problems (language)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ - engage an expert for TNC, specialised to search foreign projects</li> </ul>
<b>Decentralised management and financing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ short administrative lines, and fast payments</li> <li>▪ LAG ha large degree of autonomy</li> <li>▪ Volunteers were allowed to consider voluntary working hours as a local part of co-financing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LAG did not follow-up the projects, so no evaluation, and little monitoring</li> <li>▪ Generally procedures for funding are mentioned to be more effective than other area-programs: with shorter administrative lines and with faster payments</li> <li>▪ <b>GOOD MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS SELF-EVALUATION WAS NOT EMPHASISED IN LEADER-II UNTIL THIS EVALUATION, WHEN THE MANY QUESTIONS FOR LEARNING BECAME CLEAR</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ develop clear rules for the beneficiaries for administration and monitoring</li> <li>▪ Invest attention in the creation of co-financing at municipality level</li> </ul>

<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Other important issues:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ exchange of experiences / technical support</li> <li>▪ dissemination of information</li> <li>▪ impact on rural policy making</li> <li>▪ the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of 5 from other public funds and private sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ overlaps should be reduced. Joint product development and more active collaboration with knowledge centres and other programmes is required</li> <li>▪ the mandate of the national LEADER network should be extended to all rural areas in the Netherlands</li> <li>▪ information regarding area specific rural development deserves wider dissemination. Learning points from rural renewal are relevant to policy makers. A national platform with the Ministry of Agriculture would serve this purpose</li> <li>▪ mainstreaming at national level with the Ministry of Agriculture would require additional budget</li> <li>▪ more technical assistance should be provided, especially in new areas</li> <li>▪ more emphasis on reaching critical mass for activities to take off</li> </ul>

## SUMMARY APPRECIATION FROM THE REGIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

### Operational Programme: Westhoek (BE)

<b>Implementation (methods, practices, limits, obstacles)</b>	<b>Intended or unintended effects</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Other important issues</b>	The ex-post evaluation carried out by the University of Gent mentions the EC guidelines for the ex-post evaluation of LEADER II but in fact it does not take in into consideration. The LEADER global and specific objectives and features are not assessed.	The report does not provide any assessment on the immediate and final impacts.
		The evaluators expressed a general positive judgement but the provided conclusions and remarks seem weak and it are not basically justified.

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

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

*Synthesis of the main outcomes and learnings from the LEADER II initiative in the area covered by the geographical evaluator*

Although this evaluation is not meant to compare nations, the differences between the Netherlands and Belgium were extremely clear, while differences between OPs of the same country were not so relevant, although their respective typology of areas were. Probably it is due to the management of the public administration who got directly in touch with the Commission. Therefore it can be said that the effect on the LEADER implementation is highly depending on a few initial steps *on the top of the pyramid*:

- **degree of decentralisation of the OP management, and the structure of this managing authority;**
- **administrational level of the source for public co-financing.**

When the OP management remains at regional level, the LAG composition is mainly public, and the approach is similar to a “classic” Programme. When the OP is decentralised to the provincial level, non-public associations were represented in the LAG, and the approach becomes more “bottom-up”. At the same time if the structure of the managing authority is divided in offices per sector, the multi-sectoral approach get in trouble (who will be the responsible office?), if the managing authority of the Programme is installed in one office (one group of employees), the multi-sectoral approach is more stimulated, or at least is not inhibited.

When co-financing is foreseen at higher administrational level, automatically the approach will remain some more “top-down”. The need to keep control over what will be done with “their” money will oblige the lower administrational levels to respect certain rules imposed by the co-financing partner. Co-financing from lower level (municipality, Province) stimulates better the bottom-up approach, but has to be organised before the start of the implementation period. As often not all municipalities of the Leader-area are not (or cannot) be involved in the LAG, these administrations should be informed from the very beginning of the Programme (OP), and should have the opportunity to express their doubts and opinion.

In general can be said that the local population is very positive about the Programme. It was the first time they were involved as active actors in a cooperation with the public authorities. Farmers experienced the different approach from former classic funding programmes, for them it was the first time they could think about agriculture in a larger way, combining it with other

sectors, obtaining a new way of creating income. For the non-farmers, most of the time it was the first time they got in touch with a funding programme. For them, the public administration is not more synonym of the institute which asks you to pay taxes, which plants flowers and trees in your street and thinks about collecting your house refuse. Now the public administration has got a face, is close to the area and its actors, and is working together with these actors on the liveability of the territory.

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

*Recapitulation of problems and difficulties encountered, of solutions found; comments on methods; proposals for improvement*

The recommendation letter was not giving the right message, the respondents considered this evaluation in the first place as another control of the Commission, not as an evaluation seen in the European context which could provide the Commission some indispensable information for the future. I think it would have been more encouraging for the local respondents, receiving the demand to cooperate at the evaluation a few months before our start in January 2003, directly from the Commission. In this way, they would have had some more time to refresh minds and collect data of L-II. The deadline of the first questionnaire was felt as unreasonable, as data was stored in back-ups, former L-II employees had changed office, etc...

Also the start of the GE with "empty hands" was seen as very unprofessional. Why didn't we receive all the documents from the Commission, which obligatory had to be send to the EC during the implementation period of L-II?

Besides, in January, several respondents were struggling with some additional demands of the Commission on L-II, which they felt as very unreasonable. They said that the rules of the game could not be changed after playing it. I think it was a clear message of communication problems between EC and the different administration levels, it was certainly not clear which physical indicators were required in the Leader2 Programme.

The length of the Q34 and Q202 questionnaires was discouraging a lot. The black factual questions, which served as context description for the red and green questions, were blowing up the volume of the questionnaire, and especially for the LAG members (Q202), this task was seen as very boring. I think that the lack of feedback for the respondents was the main cause of the low interest to co-operate.

The focus group has been a very positive experience for all participants. The success of the more "technical" second session (working on the hypothesis, causal loop diagrams) was depending too much on the personal capacities of the participants, but in general, everybody was very satisfied. The clear feedback for every single member of the group, was motivating the

energy of this exercise. Especially the beneficiaries felt honoured to be involved in the process, for them it was the first time they could express their experience towards the Commission. My personal impression is that a two-days workshop is highly recommendable, the one-day workshop in Belgium was rather heavy.

Important was the fact that initially, none of the two respondents was interested to participate as a focus group when I informed them by mail about the working method and the aim. It was the personal visit which made them change idea. It confirms that still nowadays, with all the modern types of communication, some face-to-face communication is required.

The surplus value of information for this evaluation obtained by a focus group, compensate abundantly the effort of it. The energy spend by the GE to try to motivate actors to respond on the green questions in Q202 and Q34, and the frustration because successively they did not, is telling me that it was better doing some more focus groups. Besides, the preparation of the focus group initially seems difficult, but yet the second time you can count on the former experience etc...

My proposal for the future is:

- use one and the same professional data-base system for the data collection AND questionnaires (MS ACCES, or something similar) to avoid errors and useless work.
- Prepare detailed questionnaires only with black and red type questions AND make them so that they can be easily changed in two versions (one for experts, one for normal)
- Try to organise more focus groups in general, and especially try to discover the influence of the higher administrative levels on the effects of the implementation of the programme locally as the vertical partnership remains a key issue.

## **ANNEX I: Summaries for Flevoland, Lauwersland (Groningen), Drenthe and Friesland carried out by ETC Ecoculture (June 2001, regional ex-post evaluations)**

### **Flevoland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary**

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Flevoland. The EC had made available Euro 2.9 million for Flevoland.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in the region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

In Flevoland an active Local Action Group was functioning, with members from public administration at provincial and community level and from various groups of the society. This Group aimed at a good liaison and a good understanding with the communities. Procedures of decision-making were well organised. The co-financing of the projects was well thought through. Although the formal authority for financial and administrative matters was at the level of the provincial management board, the LAG was given a high degree of delegated responsibility.

The original outline of the LEADER program in Flevoland evolved in dialogue with various organisations for development such as: provincial departments, municipal councils, a centre for organic farming, the forum for agriculture and environment, farmers organisations, the Flevoland centre for innovation, and local community organisations. The main characteristics of the program are: strengthening the rural areas, promotion of recreation & tourism and raising the quality of life with low priority for funding of infra-structural works and productive activities.

Innovative and exemplary projects, the replicability and – last but not least – the involvement of local people in planning and implementation, determined the outline of the programme and resulted in the selection of projects. These broad guidelines allowed an equally broad range of initiatives and resulted in a total number of 80 projects. Quantity and diversity was emphasised in early years. At a later stage the integration between individual projects received more attention. During the last years of LEADER – II, the LAG favoured projects with a wider institutional objective: innovative forms of partnership were supported, such as the support platform for agro-environmental management group and the Organic Producers European Network.

LAG Flevoland spent little funds on intermediary organisations or advisors: there is always a direct link between the LAG and the project initiators. The initiators are solely responsible for implementation without intermediaries or project offices being involved.

The **area-approach** has strengthened the feeling of local identity. It has resulted in Flevoland in a better use of human resources. Especially the rather high educational background of the agricultural community and the high rate of social organisation in the area, added to the success of LEADER – II.

The **bottom-up approach** has gained recognition in Flevoland. It increased the development of new and exemplary ideas, it assisted regional actors to organise themselves and it also made project decisions better accepted by local authorities. In some areas a specific regional fund for local initiative clearly has strengthened the commitment of the population. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves quite some attention. Increasing the insight knowledge at the local level in the financial rules may help improve the effectiveness of bottom up.

The effects of the **local public-private partnership** are positive in Flevoland. Although public administration was strongly supporting the functioning of the LAG, a reasonable degree of (delegated) autonomous decision-making was possible (LAG proposals were always endorsed by "Gedeputeerde Staten"). The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. Local partners consider themselves able to take more responsibility, including for co-financing.

**Innovative activities** were emphasised in the agricultural sector. In the first year, agricultural projects of LEADER had a technically innovative character. Initially, small-scale, transferable initiatives regarding sustainable and ecological farming were granted. Later on the experiences from the field like combining Agriculture and Care and/or Tourism for example, were recognised. More innovative projects based on farmers' ideas with delegated responsibility for implementation, were funded. Supra-regional initiatives and institutional implications got more attention in projects.

In Flevoland, being a newly reclaimed polder, the **multi-sectoral and integrated approach** has been favoured. It suited the character of the region. The approach led to a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves. As constraints people mention basically the increased number of administrative sectoral procedures to be followed. Furthermore the still dominating sectoral organisation of interests and their tendency not to include other sectoral interests in their weighing. In such situations, better funding regulations and better professional guidance in processes of beginning co-operation could be helpful.

**Networking and trans-national cooperation** is in Flevoland still in development. It is expected that (international) networks will be developed further in LEADER+. Organising networks and exchanges more effectively in future will require better structuring.

**Local funding mechanisms** and program management. Generally procedures for funding are mentioned to be more effective than other area-programs: with shorter administrative lines and with faster payments. The LAG had a reasonably large degree of autonomy for their own management, mainly in selecting projects and in initiating cooperation. This autonomy counts less for decisions about re-allocation of funds.

The LAG Flevoland has promoted regional funds, in which municipalities ("gemeenten") do participate from the very beginning. In Flevoland volunteers were allowed to consider voluntary working hours as a local part of co-financing.

Good monitoring and continuous self-evaluation was not emphasised in LEADER-II until this evaluation, when the many questions for learning became clear.

The availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of 5 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of Private and Public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER program. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

### **Lauwersland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary**

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Lauwersland. The EC had made available Euro 3.2 million for Lauwersland.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in the region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

Four municipalities in Friesland and three in the province of Groningen together form the region Lauwersland. In the sparsely populated region, farming is important, unemployment rates are rather high, and – consequently – people are moving out. Tourism has a lot of potential, but is underdeveloped. In short: the rural area requires some push. A whole range of projects that

`improve the quality of rural life`, which has become the slogan of all involved, was funded under LEADER – II.

LAG Lauwersland aimed at the integration of the efforts of different actors in rural renewal. The LAG is composed of representatives of both provinces and the seven municipalities. In addition, the various sectors in society are represented: rural tourism, agriculture, entrepreneurs, and local community organisations. Although the formal responsibility is with the Province, the LAG – which is chaired by the provincial representative – is actually responsible. The Lauwersland project office serves as a resource centre. The programme manager oversees the project office in the day-to-day operations.

The main idea of the LEADER-II programme has been formulated as 1) improving the quality of life for the present population, and 2) attract people and business. The LAG worked this out in a strategy with projects in the following sectors: economic development, small and medium sized enterprises, agriculture, cultural heritage, rural tourism and improving local skills & capacity. Over time, projects were added or existing ones omitted. To qualify for LEADER subsidy, initiatives have to be small scale, innovative and need to have the consent of the local population.

Unique for LEADER-II in Lauwersland is the project office. Project LEADERS and coordinators of LEADER-II and other development programmes use the office. Ideally, initiators of projects can consult the project office regarding subsidies. The office is well accessible to local initiative groups and individuals.

The LAG also designed a communication plan with the local population regarding rural development, including a plan to improve communication with the authorities (link to box: improving local skills and capacity). New forms of partnerships of entrepreneurs in tourism, agriculture and small and medium sized enterprises have emerged over time. These partnerships evolved without any statal interference; they are well rooted in society and manage their own organisation.

The organisation in LEADER in Lauwersland differs from the one in other regions as each project has its own implementing agency and project LEADER.

From the early days of LEADER – II the area approach was of utmost important in Lauwersland. It helped strengthening the feeling of regional identity. The binding factor is the Lauwerslake and the characteristic landscape and cultural history. These factors are used in a more integrated development of the region. The provincial authorities indeed have recognised through experiences with LEADER the value of a more integrated area approach in Lauwersland and the need to continue this approach in the future.

The main outline of the programme in Lauwersland as well as the co-funding, was decided upon in the early stages of LEADER – II. There was little room left for own initiative. Commitment of the population has to be gained later on. This was felt as top down rather than **bottom up** development. It was only later in the programme that the LAG started to recognise the importance of community participation and participatory methodologies. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves a lot of attention.

The LAG-Lauwersland aimed at integrating various actors in one local group. As a result, the LAG became a unique blend of provinces, co-funding and various private and public actors. Such a broad, target oriented collaboration or **partnership** between various programmes had a positive impact. The LAG Lauwersland is the most innovative partnership in LEADER – II. The merger of different development organisations, even beyond rigid provincial boundaries, is unique for this part of the country.

Another LEADER **innovation** is related to funding. A representative example is the cultural heritage lodging “Borch”. As several institutions got together to implement this project, they succeeded in tapping new sources of funding.

Good examples of **integrated approaches** are found in the activities to develop tourism in Lauwersland: Tourism was integrated in nature in the ‘Natuurgericht Maatregelenplan Lauwersmeer’, and combined with culture in the projects ‘Cultuurhistorisch Erfgoed en Cultuurtoerisme’. In other examples, farming is combined with tourism and selling regional products. This favourite combination is found in the earlier mentioned project ‘Pronkkamers’ and in the ‘Stichting Waddenproducten’.

**Networking and transnational** cooperation is in development. Also local collaboration has grown between village councils, entrepreneurial groups and other social organisations. Between areas regional networks have emerged, specifically between Northwest Fryslan and Lauwersland. Added value of international cooperation was born from joining forces in the Netherlands with Portugal and Italy in the network "Villages of Tradition". First steps were made towards international broadening of the regional "Waddenproducts" towards Germany and Denmark. It is expected that both international networks will be developed further in LEADER+ and will generate higher economic value. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

The LAG Lauwersland played a crucial role in managing the programme, but not so much in allocating or relocating funds. Much emphasis was paid to enlighten municipalities in how to obtain co-funding. Public authorities supported the implementation and organisation of the programme wherever possible. **Management procedures** could improve by more bottom-up

involvement and delegation of responsibilities. Initiating special co-financing funds at municipal level was recognised as important, it deserves attention in future programmes as well.

In Lauwersland, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 10 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private en public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

### **Drenthe's regional ex-post evaluation Summary**

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Drenthe. The EC had made available Euro 2.6 million for Drenthe.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

An active Local Action Group was running the LEADER program in Drenthe. The LAG was composed of representatives of various organisations in order to maximise the involvement of the various actors in the LEADER programme. Business, tourism, farmer's organisations, the agricultural council, the network of small villages, environmental organisations, municipal and provincial authorities, are all represented. Because of its broad composition, the LAG functions as a think tank. The provincial management board member ("Gedeputeerde") chairs the LAG and the province also provides financial and administrative support, but the LAG decides independently on the allocation of funds.

The first activity of the LAG was drafting a strategy for the area, based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Most prominent strengths were the clear image of the area, an attractive living environment and the importance of environment and tourism. In particular the integration of tourism, environment and farming were recognised as opportunities. Hence, the LAG preferred integrated projects contributing to the natural image of Drenthe and to improving the environment. A summary of the strategy is as follows:

- To develop innovative projects in the rural area focusing on sustainability, agricultural technology and conservation of nature.

- To optimise tourism
- To strengthen small-scale business.

In total 50 projects have been supported by LEADER funds, with a total investment of 7.6 million Euro. LEADER funds were preferably spent directly on projects and not on overhead costs.

The **area approach** was successful in Southwest Drenthe. Several factors contributed to success. Binding factors like landscape characteristics and cultural history do feed the willingness to cooperate towards a more integrated development. The cohesion of the actors and the strong identification of the people with the area added to the success as well. This cohesion is based indeed on a collective cultural history and tradition. Furthermore the attitude of the public authorities played an important role in the success of the programme: an informal and open attitude goes hand in hand with the LEADER approach.

After the **bottom-up approach** gained recognition in Drenthe, it became an important reason for selection. It increased the development of new and exemplary ideas, it assisted regional actors to organise themselves and it also made project decisions better accepted by local authorities. Active involvement of entrepreneurs and/or villagers through brainstorming sessions was encouraged in developing projects. An example of such a bottom-up approach is the project "Improving local skills & capacity" in which STAMM consultants played an important role.

The effects of the **local public-private partnership** are positive in Drenthe. Although public administration was strongly supporting the functioning of the LAG, a reasonable degree of (delegated) autonomous decision-making was possible (LAG proposals were always endorsed by the provincial management board "Gedeputeerde Staten"). The participation of 'locals' offered a fresh view on new local possibilities and a flexible attitude towards renewal. The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. Local partners consider themselves able to take more responsibility, including for co-financing.

**Innovation** was an important selection criteria for project proposals. The LAG granted many innovative initiatives. Positive examples are the new cooperation in the Village of Lubbinge and the Land Exchange Bank in the village of Wapserveen. Others failed, which was accepted as an inherent risk to supporting innovative initiatives. Documenting successes and failures and spreading the learning experience was not sufficiently done, but is considered very important.

Good examples of **integrated approaches** are found in the activities to develop agriculture in relation with recreation and tourism and in agriculture and care. Another example of a **multi-**

**sectoral** project is Drenths Goed, where farming is combined with tourism and selling regional products.

Actors often state a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves. As constraints people mention basically the increased number of administrative sectoral procedures to be followed. Furthermore the still dominant sectoral organisation of interests and their tendency not to include other sectoral interests in their weighing. In such situations, better funding regulations and better professional guidance in processes of beginning co-operation could be helpful.

**Networking and trans-national cooperation** is in Drenthe still in development. The most promising examples of networking in Drenthe is found with the Network of producers of regional products "Drents Goed" and the Network of Villages of Tradition. It is expected that (international) networks will be developed further in LEADER+. Organising networks and exchanges more effectively in future will require better structuring. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

In Drenthe, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 6 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private en public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

The LAG Drenthe played a crucial role in managing the programme, but not so much in allocating or relocating funds. Much emphasis was paid to enlighten municipalities in how to obtain co-funding. Public authorities supported the implementation and organisation of the programme wherever possible. **Management procedures** could improve by more bottom-up involvement and delegation of responsibilities. Initiating special co-financing funds at municipal level was recognised as important, it deserves attention in future programmes as well.

In Drenthe very little attention was given to setting quantitative indicators for success, nor to serious documenting of processes and results. Hence, this is a weak basis for analysis and exchange of experience. Nevertheless, interesting results have been achieved. This evaluation cannot specifically track these exclusively to one or two LEADER-characteristics, most results can be contributed to the set of 7 LEADER-characteristics.

## **Friesland's regional ex-post evaluation Summary**

This LEADER evaluation deals with the LEADER –II period from 1995-1999 in Northwest Fryslân. The EC had made available Euro 3.8 million for NW Fryslân.

The evaluation is realised by ETC Ecoculture at the request of the national LEADER Network. Conclusions in the report are largely built on sub-evaluations with stakeholders in region and on (guided) self-evaluation of the Local Action Group. The evaluation roughly follows the approach recommended by the LEADER-Observatory (AEIDL in Brussels). It is largely of a qualitative nature as monitoring of hard data has hardly taken place in LEADER-II. This summary indicates the most relevant results of the 7 LEADER-characteristics.

NW Friesland was the only LEADER – I region in the Netherlands from 1991 – 1994. Many lessons have been learned during this period: small-scale projects can have tremendous impact, an integrated approach pays off, and the necessity to involve the local population in implementation. The LAG NW Friesland has used these experiences in orchestrating the LEADER – II programme.

The overall objective of the LEADER – II programme in NW Friesland is to break the downward trend in rural areas and to improve the quality of life by rural renewal and development.

The LAG consists of representatives of local en regional authorities, village interest groups, agriculture, small and medium sized enterprises, recreation & tourism. The formal responsibility of the LEADER programme is with the Province, whereas the LAG is responsible for preparing, detailing and implementing the programme, for financial administration and project management and for maintaining contacts with the authorities.

NW Fryslân has a special project office, just like in Lauwersland. Special teams and task forces work out particular project clusters and facilitate and advise on participatory implementation. Smaller local projects are implemented by societies or municipal councils. Project implementers meet to exchange experiences twice a year.

The `pronkkamer` project (see: <http://www.pronkkamer.nl/uk/index.html>) is illustrative for the organisational approach of LEADER NW Friesland: the project LEADER identifies entrepreneurs, who form a foundation to independently manage the projects. An interesting initiative is the touristic network TUON.W: a special platform in the tourism sector to exchange information, and to coordinate project planning and implementation.

The funds are mainly used for stimulation of economic industry including agricultural diversification, promotion of tourism and recreation, and some other measures, such as the fund for liveability in the villages.

The **area-approach** has strengthened the feeling of regional identity in Northwest Fryslân. Binding factors like landscape characteristics and cultural history do feed the willingness to cooperate towards a more integrated development of the region. The provincial authorities in Fryslân have recognised -amongst others through experiences with LEADER- the value of a more integrated area approach as compared to sectoral programs.

**Bottom up:** The main outline of the programme in Northwest Fryslân was decided upon in the early stages of LEADER – II. There was little room left for own initiative. Only after the success of a specific regional fund for local initiatives which clearly strengthened the commitment of the population, the LAG started to recognise the importance of community participation. However, improving the coordination of local initiatives and local public administration still deserves quite some attention.

**Local public-private partnership** in the LAG has had some positive effects. The participation of 'locals' offered a fresh view on new local possibilities and a flexible attitude towards renewal. The effectiveness of the cooperation among local actors and between public-private partners can improve substantially, though. The LAG in Northwest Fryslân was still too much dominated by public administration. It is certainly an area for improvement in the future.

The LEADER-II programme in NW Friesland and Lauwersland opted for the purpose: nurture entrepreneurship, including diversification and sustaining agriculture. This had also been the purpose of the LEADER-I programme. Strengthening the economic function of rural areas was explored by developing a second or even third occupation, and by the introduction of new crops. Furthermore, it has been considered to integrate environmental management, recreation and tourism in agriculture.

Innovative activities were emphasised in the agricultural sector. Within the cluster of 'pure' agriculture projects, innovation was aimed at by encouraging the cultivation of flower bulbs under an incentive scheme, and the processing of wastewater on dairy farms by using special filters. Initiatives like trickle irrigation in seed potato production, composting manure and vegetable waste, and planning energy management in dairy farms, were supported as well.

However, LEADER projects integrating agriculture, recreation, tourism and regional rejuvenation, i.e. 'Pronkkamer' and the 'Waddengroep' were most innovative and successful in both NW Friesland and Lauwersland. The 'Pronkkamer' foundation offers boarding and lodging facilities in (traditionally the best rooms of) farmhouses with an interesting cultural history. The 'Waddengroup' foundation is involved in producing, promoting and marketing local products. The success of both projects determined the image of LEADER in the region

In various innovative projects it was found that intensive professional guidance was not sufficiently available, and that a rigid attitude of public bureaucracies was hampering innovation.

In reflective interviews with regional actors it was suggested that co-operation and co-financing could contribute both to decrease the risk of failure itself and to spread the financial risks inherent in innovation.

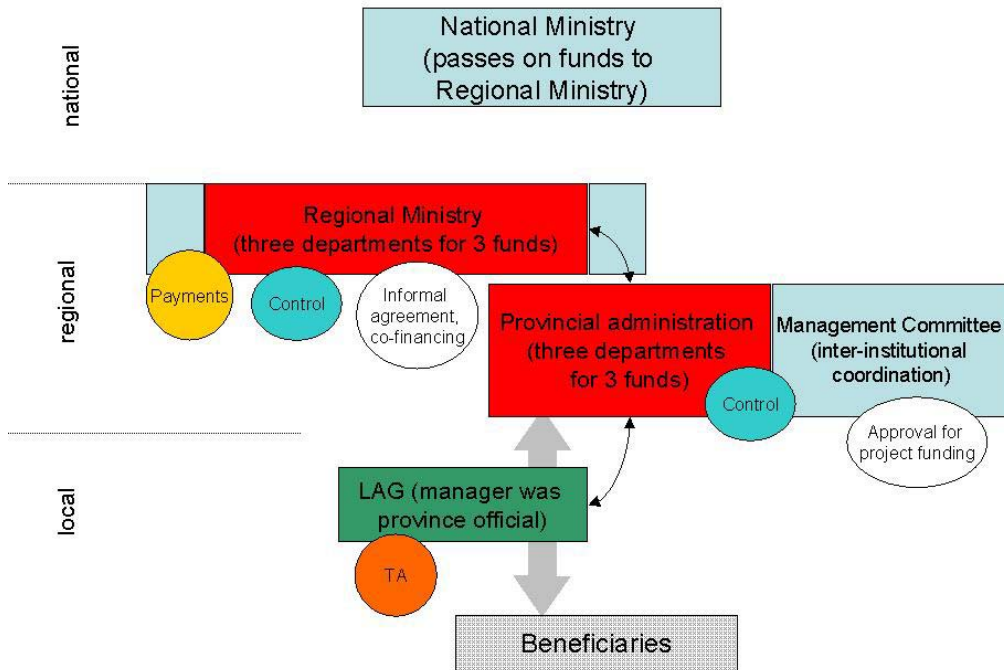
Northwest Fryslân has various examples of projects with a **multi-sectoral and integrated approach**. Sometimes liveability was the binding theme, sometimes inter-sectoral collaboration was actively encouraged between actors in agriculture, in nature and in recreation. Actors often state a better feasibility of projects as a result of a broader constituency, and because of strengthened connections between actors themselves.

**Networking and transnational cooperation** is in development. Also local collaboration has grown between village councils, entrepreneurial groups and other social organisations. Between areas regional networks have emerged, specifically between Northwest Fryslân and Lauwersland. Added value of international cooperation was born from joining forces in the Netherlands with Portugal and Italy in the network "Villages of Tradition". First steps were made towards international broadening of the regional "Waddenproducts" towards Germany and Denmark. It is expected that both international networks will be developed further in LEADER+ and will generate higher economic value. Participants suggest the quality of communication between international partners as a point of future attention, for instance by appointing good project-guides.

In Northwest Fryslân, the availability of LEADER's area-focused fund as 'seed-money' has created an interesting multiplier of more than 10 from other public funds and private sources. In addition to LEADER funds a large sum of private and public money has been used. This is the result of the strong role of the public authorities in the LAG and the responsibility felt for the LEADER programme. Through this cooperation in the LAG the public authorities and the social partners do better know each other and people show confidence that such public-private collaboration can be strengthened further.

## Model of implementation

### Belgium – Vlaanderen



### Netherlands

