



Leader+ Observatory Seminar
'The Legacy of Leader+ at local level: Building
the future of rural areas'
24-26 April 2007
Cap Corse, Nebbiù è Custerà, Corse, FRANCE



Jean-Pierre Dichter: Closing Plenary Session, Network building, cooperation
(Comprehensive Report)

It will be rather difficult to summarize in a comprehensive report what was discussed in more than ten hours with at least 270 participants, therefore I want to apologise already if I could not be as complete as possible.

First of all, networking is a seed for a new garden.

New garden ok, you know under Leader+ we had already to create new gardens and when Leader will be mainstreamed in the actual planning period, we will find another new garden. It is important now to think at the new period that was beginning in fact already on the 1st January of this year.

The objectives of networking where largely discussed and we could find out that it would be possible to learn from each others, and so we have established mechanisms of exchange through Internet, newsletters and all sorts of possibilities. But the most important is grouping people. I think this was a very nice experience that we could see during these three days that nearly 300 people were grouped and that they had the chance to speak together and to have contacts between each others.

The other question was: Why this networking?

You know that networking was not always on the top of the LAG's preoccupations and even not of the managing authorities, because first of all, the LAGs were forced to do their homework, which was in the strategy for their region, because people were looking at them. The decision making bodies had to ask the questions: have we done something for the farmers, have we worked for the local authorities and have we worked for the target groups, like the rural women and the young people.

Until now networking was not on top of the agenda and I must agree that networking is very necessary for the publicity of the Leader approach. When the Leader approach should be present in the overall rural development policy and in the next phase, so we crucially need this publicity.



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I'm especially interested to see that television just came in, together with our visitors, so you see at least this was a very positive point for publicity.

It is central for LEADER and rural development; networking is a link to innovation. Those who remember LEADER II know that every project had to be innovative. At that time we had about 1.000 LAGs and every LAG supported about 30 innovative projects, tell me now which new projects, after 30.000 of them, can be innovative in the future.

But networking is a link to innovation. If a project was experienced in one region, it could be transferred to another place.

But networking can also bring coherence in the programme. Meetings like this seminar, meetings in Brussels with the LAGs and the Managing authorities and national network units brought certain coherence in the whole programme. In this way **networking could set up, what we call, a rural lobby**. Rural development has not yet a real European lobby, and not worldwide, like other stakeholders in the rural area.

Coming to cooperation, it must be **more than a simple exchange of information** and that is something that we understood already. I was attending one of these plenary sessions where one of the participants came up with a very broad definition on what is a common project, but at the same time going far beyond information exchange.

So the objective of cooperation is first: **creating a critical mass, and secondly looking for complementarities**. At the end cooperation has political and operational objectives.

The challenges of cooperation are very big.

First of all there was of course a **difference in culture and in language**, when we think at a trans-national cooperation.

There can also be an **unequal involvement**. It can be that in one LAG, you have very strong members, just thinking at cooperation, and others, where you don't even find a single member in the LAG who is thinking at cooperation.



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There can also be a **programme difference**. One programme can be very strong in that axis, and the other one can be very weak. This can be seen for example in the programmes' budgets.

At the end there can be also a certain **tension between the local and the trans-national interests**. It's clear that the skin is closer to us as the shirt. So we can understand that many partners are looking first for their own skin. But then, cooperation needs a lot of coordination. As we are far away from each other, hundreds and thousands of km sometimes.

So it's very important to face these challenges.

We can face them first of all by a **careful planning**. The preparation phase is very important, and I remember in LEADER II for example there was a special budget allocated at the European level to facilitate this first contact which is essential in every cooperation project. This applies not only for LEADER, but also if you meet other people. You know, psychologists say that in the first 5 seconds you take the decision if you want to "flirt" with someone or not. It is very important, this visual contact, and you cannot replace it by a simple telephone-call or by internet or by mail, or by any other way of communication. If you know each other already, and if you took a clear decision how you want to work together, then you can communicate by other means of course.

The **budgeting must be transparent**. Every body must know what he has to pay, and there must be **at least one specific action**. If there is no action, there is no cooperation. It's very clear that common actions need a very strong lead-partner. We hope you are all strong lead-partners, because some of your LAGs will be a lead-partner in the future. But also the **allocation of the tasks inside the partnership** of cooperation projects is important. It is not enough to say to the lead-partner: Now you have it on your shoulder, please go ahead. If all the others in the procession behind the lead-partner are lagging, nothing will happen. All the partners must help to create a **natural information flow**. So this flow must be done always with a strong sign of the bell, but we have to agree where the right places to do this are. The benefit of the information projects we can find them in the brochure of the seminar, they were concrete and intangible. You know what it means. But it is very important to **speak about the outputs**.

If we have to convince a LAG or the president of a decision making committee, we have to show up that cooperation brings added value to all the projects. It makes a better understanding, not only of the Leader-approach, but of the rural area.



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The common project is very important, it must first of all be a real project and it must be tangible. It is very important that we can follow the project after the LEADER period. Therefore we must look for a lead-partner who is able to go on with the project, even after the planning period.

The **project must be real, it must fit into the local development strategy**, but not only in one, it must also fit into the strategy of other partners involved in the project. At the end the common project must be a need. If that is not the case, excuse me, there will be no real project. Simply doing a cooperation project, because it seems to be beautiful and nice and looking well, you will not create a strong partnership.

Some words about human resources, because there was a special workshop under this title. So a good network needs full engagement of partners. I cannot stress enough on that. We are not all the same, and that is ok, because otherwise the world would not be very interesting. **There must be a high commitment** of all the people engaged in the common projects. There must be above all a will for change and life long learning.

I come back to the will for change. Human beings are not so eager to change their habits, because in a certain way we are very comfortable in our conservative behaviour. Changing things makes for many people the biggest trouble. I met people in ministries, at the beginning of the rural development policy. I was alone for at least ten years to make them understand what rural development is. I'm even not sure if they have before I left.

Network frames of mind are:

Who else is interested in the information I got?

Who else can help me to do my job?

But you can also ask yourself: who else will help me to do this common job?

And at the end: who else needs my expertise?

About this I want to close my presentation wish you good co operations for the future.