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2 LEADER, from Initiative to Method

2.1 Introduction

The introduction to the LEADER teaching kit set the context in terms of the experience to date and how the material is structured as follows.

Since LEADER I was launched in 1991, much work has been done in the rural areas involved in this Community Initiative programme, not only in the “field” in terms of implementing development projects, but also on methodology.

“How shall we go about it?” and “What are others doing?” are two key questions that have been exhaustively discussed within the LEADER network through seminars, publications, personal contacts, etc.

Between June and September 2000, the LEADER European Observatory organised three European seminars on the theme of “Sharing the lessons of the LEADER Initiative”. The European Commission wanted these seminars to culminate in a teaching tool that would “model” the lessons learned from the programme, enabling rural players from Europe and elsewhere to reap the benefits of the LEADER experience.

A working group has endeavoured to convey the methodological inputs from this LEADER “rural development laboratory” in an educational and accessible way.

The result is this “teaching kit”, a modelling exercise and “animation” tool designed to present the LEADER approach to a variety of audiences.

Why this teaching guide?

- To provide a communication tool to people (LAG members, teachers, trainers, consultants, civil servants) who are called upon to explain LEADER to a variety of audiences.
- To guide local groups in creating their development strategy.
- To foster a debate on the complementarities between the LEADER approach and other programmes.

Who is the target audience?

- Local players (political representatives, rural development administrations, associations, leaders of collective projects, development agents, etc.)
- Regional, national, European and international networks involved in local development.
- Universities, training institutes and information centres (rural information and “animation” Carrefours, etc.)
- Institutions and local and regional authorities from outside the European Union wishing to learn about LEADER and draw inspiration from it.

LEADER, from Initiative to Method

Using the guide

The guide contains a set of 119 slides (PDF format), the contents of which are explained in detail in nine accompanying booklets. “LEADER - from Initiative to Method” was designed as an “animation” tool to be used by people who already have a general understanding of the LEADER Initiative. It is intended to provide them with an “animation” aid to support their presentation of the LEADER approach.

The guide starts with an introductory chapter (“Birth of a European rural development policy”) presenting the historical and political background behind the emergence of the Initiative. The following eight chapters set out the methodological approach and the inputs of LEADER itself.

In order to qualify the aim and foster debate, each chapter ends with the section “Looking ahead” which puts forward a number of questions that need to be considered in a future development programme.

There are two levels of presentation of varying depths:

- Level I is a summary presentation of the LEADER approach. In practice, this level provides an overview of the subject.
- Level II is a detailed presentation of each LEADER characteristic exploring a specific facet of the LEADER approach in more depth.

There are a small number of examples provided, but please note that some of the examples referred to in the booklets are no longer available.