



Local development needs

LEADER case study Delivering effective evidence to inform local action

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The local development strategy of LEADER Meetjesland in East Flanders (Belgium) aims at improving the quality of life and liveability across its five rural municipalities. When the not-for-profit Regional Youth Service (Meetjesman) applied for LEADER funding in 2017 to undertake an extensive survey of young people, the Local Action Group (LAG) approved the proposal.

The aim of the study was to capture the views of 15 and 16 year-olds just at a time when they were likely to consider their future in terms of staying or moving away from the area. The research also included vulnerable young people and those who were less engaged with out-of-school activities.

The survey covered a comprehensive range of topics including leisure (sports, culture, games and recreation), mobility and traffic, quality of life, perceived safety, and the living environment from the perspective of young people.

The main reason for undertaking the research was to raise awareness of the needs of young people and to effectively **inform the development of a new youth policy**. Importantly, the applicant organisation was also interested in fostering **better cooperation** between the Municipalities and between their various services across the LEADER area on youth topics and the study was an effective means to do this. A small number of pipeline projects (such as a planned Youth House) by the project promoter also benefited from the research at the time.

The survey reached a total of 1 496 young people (a response rate of 37 % of all 15-16 year olds in the LEADER area). The research was initially envisaged only as an online survey to be disseminated in schools, but the project promoter soon recognised that a more intensive contact with the target group was necessary in order to achieve higher participation rates in the survey. Consequently, the study team started to engage directly with the young people, explained what the survey was for and why they should participate. Through this **face-to-face contact with the target group** the researchers achieved a much higher take up of the survey and gained contextual information that added value to their study.

The final report presents a comprehensive data set across a wide range of topics. The report was particularly **appreciated for its clarity** in presenting its findings. It is well structured and very readable whereby each of the Municipalities could find information relevant to their specific area. The report showed specific evidence of the needs of young people that encouraged the local authorities to act strategically.



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Further success factors included the **stimulating and positive** manner in which the survey findings were presented to the LAG. This created real interest and engagement with the survey and made its findings memorable. It is particularly interesting to see that LAG members continue to refer back to the survey findings long after its completion and even in other thematic contexts.

The survey findings has already informed two new community-based LEADER projects. The evidence presented by the survey focused their project design and also strengthened their chances of being approved by the LAG. One project deals with the improvement of the situation for vulnerable young people in their local communities and the other seeks to involve young people in a community event involving artists and local trades.

Finally, the survey findings will also be used in the preparation of the new local development strategy post-2020.

Further information

Study (in Dutch): <http://www.meetjesman.be/#overlay=pagina/gemeente-en-regiorapporten>

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