

Inside and outside views of participation opportunities for civil society

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„We are the village“

„Nous sommes le village“

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Congress**

Crises and the futures of rural areas

**WG 6:
Civil society engagement in rural areas
in troubled times**

**Rennes
3rd – 7th July, 2023**

Background: participation & civil society

- Commitment of civil society plays a crucial role in governance processes for rural development
- Common observation for participation: prevalence of persons of a certain demographic (usually males, 40+, high education level)
- Research topics:
 - How open are “open” participation opportunities?
 - How can civil society contribute to local development (knowledge for decision-making, voluntary work) ?

LEADER

- LEADER is a place-based, participatory approach
- Development in rural communities through local projects
- Local action groups (LAGs) as the main decision-making body
 - Dispose of an own budget
 - between 3-10 million € for six years
 - origin: EU and federal states
 - Select projects
 - Approx. 10-30 members
 - Cross-sectoral interactions (public, private/business, civil society)
 - Framework condition: max. 50% from the public sector

Question / Focus of presentation

Known challenges of participation in the context of LEADER:

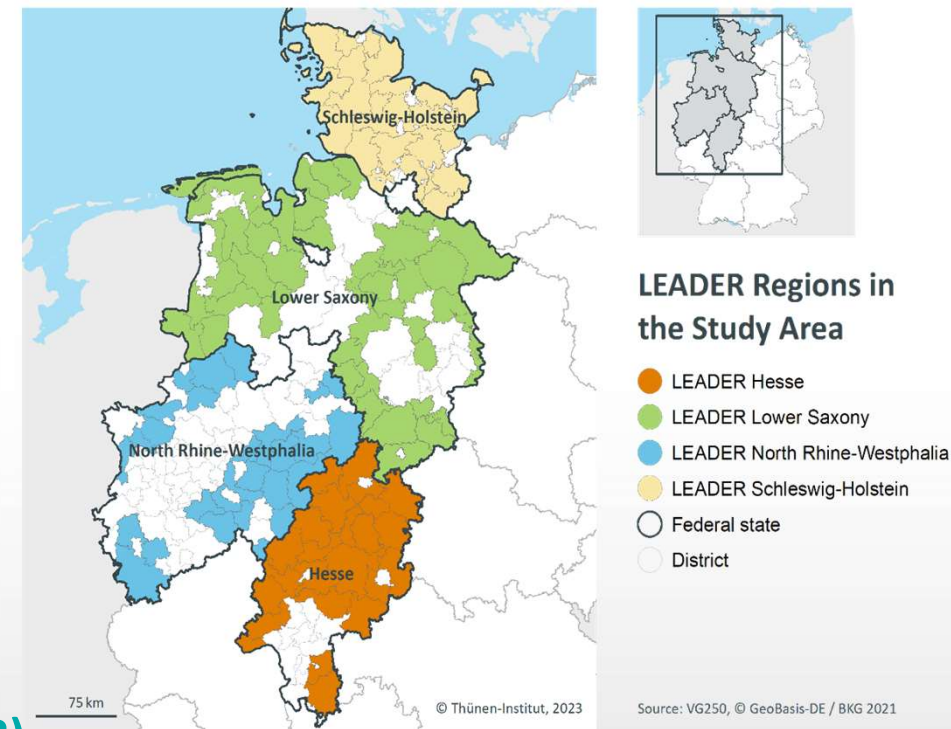
- Dominance of the public sector within LEADER (Falkowski 2013, Pollermann et al. 2014, Müller et al. 2020).
- Biased representation concerning gender, age or education
 - Closed shop? (Pollermann 2019)
 - “Old boys network”? (Jørgensen et al. 2021)
- Various studies show differences across member states → further research needed
- Sources of information: surveys of LEADER participants (LAG managers, LAG chairpersons)
- Also interesting: survey of the non-participants to include outside views?



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Study areas & research approach

- Four german federal states: 98 LAGs (2007-2013), 115 (2014-2022)
- Mixed methods approach
 - Document analyses, Annual funding data, structural data from LAGs
 - Interviews with various stakeholders
 - (Online) surveys
 - members of the LAG's decision making bodies
 - LAG managers
 - project beneficiaries
 - **New: external views of “outsiders” (2019/2022)**



Survey of LAG managers: „Activation“ of special target groups in the LEADER region

Are there specific activations for special target groups ?			
	Yes, specific participation offers/events	yes, targeted invitation to general participation offers	No
children/youth (to 18)	31%	27%	46%
young adults (to 25)	22%	30%	52%
seniors	8%	23%	69%
women	7%	11%	81%
enterprises	31%	23%	50%
agriculture/forestry	23%	31%	46%
migrants	8%	19%	73%
people with handicaps	4%	8%	92%

New approach: Survey of „non-participants“/outside views

Why?

- To bring into focus how non-participants perceive possibilities for participation in LEADER
- To analyse legitimacy of decision-making within LEADER processes from an external perspective

How to investigate external views?

- How do we define non-participants?
- Where we will find them?
- Do non-participants have enough knowledge about LEADER to have an opinion?
 - This would be beneficial to enable a direct comparison with LEADER participants !

Empirical step: online survey

- Study areas: eight LEADER regions in four German federal states
- “Outsiders”/ Non-participants = persons who are neither members of the decision-making body nor beneficiaries of the LEADER projects
 - Mainly municipalities and members of civil associations
- Mode of data collection: online survey
- Email addresses were obtained from the LAG managers (for outer circle) or via an online search (google)
- About 50 – 200 non-participants (per region) were contacted (e-mail invitation)

State of work First insights/lessons learned

- Survey participants (all 8 regions), n= 520 (out of 1079)
- Reply rate: 48,2 % (expectation: 30 to 50%)
- Filtering within survey is important, since the kind of knowledge of respondents is very different
 - Online surveys are much more suitable than surveys „on paper“ !
- Important: open questions to gain insight on reasons for (non-) participation
 - E.g.: „Have you ever thought to develop/implement a LEADER project (i.e. to apply for funding)? Why/Why not ?“

Results

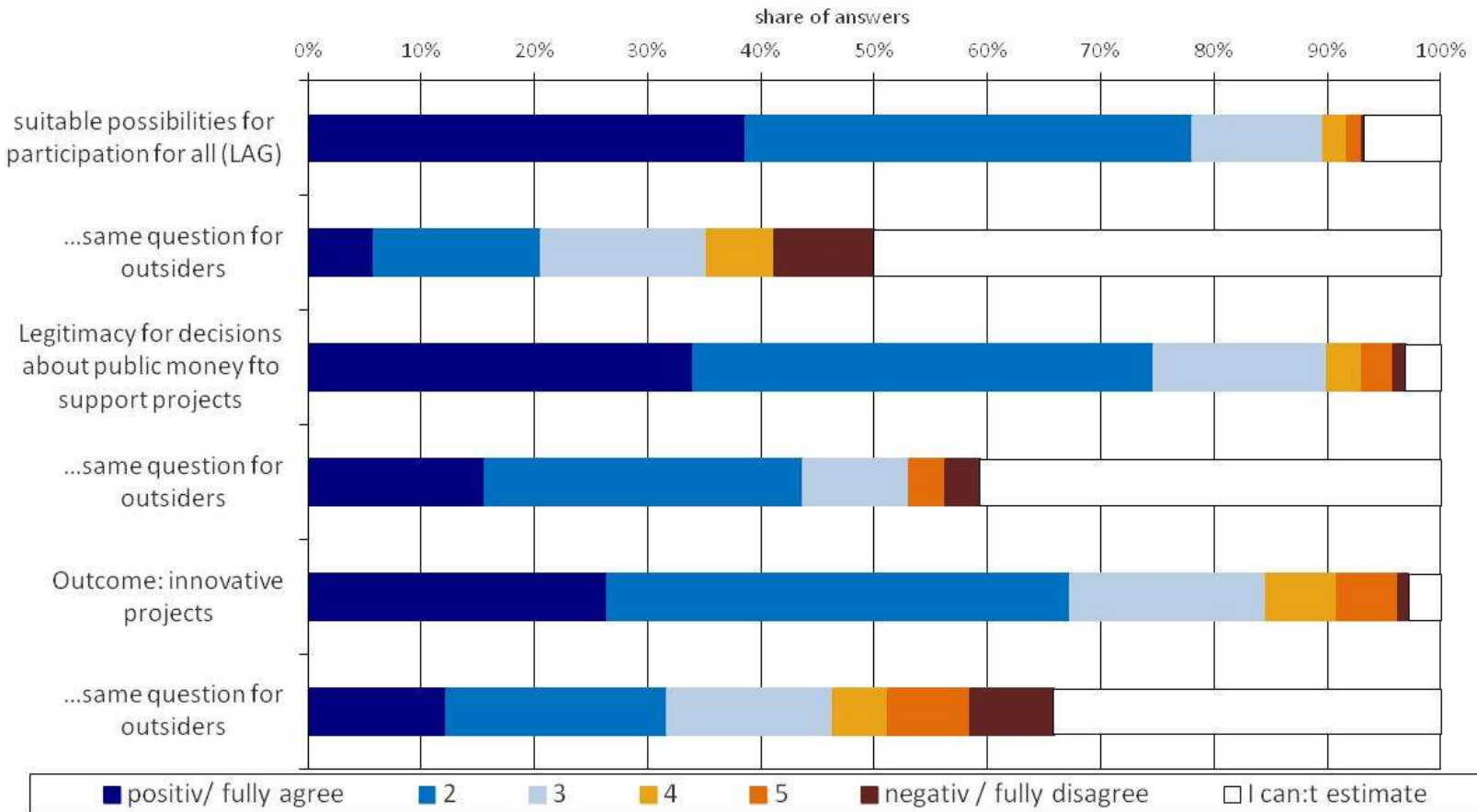
Who should decide about the selection of projects in LEADER (for financial support) (n=105)

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the LAG in the region	67%	20%	10%	1%	2%	the federal state

How do you estimate the relationship between public and non-public actors in the decision-making ? (n=62)

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the public actors have a greater influence	32%	29%	31%	5%	3%	the non-public actors have a greater influence

Comparison: LAG members / outsiders



Conclusions

- **Method of investigation seems suitable**
 - Reply rate: better than expected
 - „I can't estimate“ rate: not worse than expected
- **Based on the results**
 - LEADER is not a „closed shop“
 - ... however: participation opportunities within LEADER are sometimes a „hidden shop“ in a side street – the door is open, but if you don't know it exists, you will not find the shop
 - And there are „hidden hurdles“ in the form of informal/bureaucratic barriers
 - There is already an informed outer circle of „outsiders“, nonetheless further efforts are needed for activation

Sources:

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Thank you for your attention!

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