

Added value through participation in rural development – insights from LEADER projects for young people in Germany

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*„We are the village“
„Nous sommes le village“*

Theme: Developing Rural, Peripheral,
Remote & Marginal Regions

LEADER

- LEADER is a place-based, participatory approach (started 1991)
- Development in rural communities through local projects
- Local action groups (LAGs) as the main decision-making body
 - Approx. 10-30 members
 - Framework condition: max. 50% from the public sector
 - Dispose of an own budget
 - between 3-10 million € for six years for projects & LAG-management
 - origin: EU and federal states
 - Selected projects (very different topics, youth small part, often tourism/basic services)

LEADER principles and added value

LEADER principles



Bottom-up approach



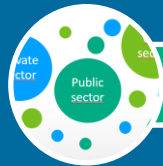
Area-based strategies

= Local development strategies LDS



Local partnerships

→ Local action groups (LAGs)



Multi-sectoral action



Innovation



Networking



Cooperation



LAG management

Implementation as precondition

>> added value in comparison without LEADER method >



To evaluate „added value“ >> improvement of
(a)governance/
(b)social capital and
(c)better projects

Background: participation & projects

- Commitment of civil society plays a crucial role in governance processes for rural development
- Common observation for participation within LEADER: prevalence of persons of a certain demographic (usually males, 40+, high education level) < > local population
- LEADER-Projects for young people (youth room, skatepark) or for all and youngster can use it at well (mobility, village infrastructure, public spaces)
- Young people: in decision-making / in project design

Challenges of participation / Focus of presentation

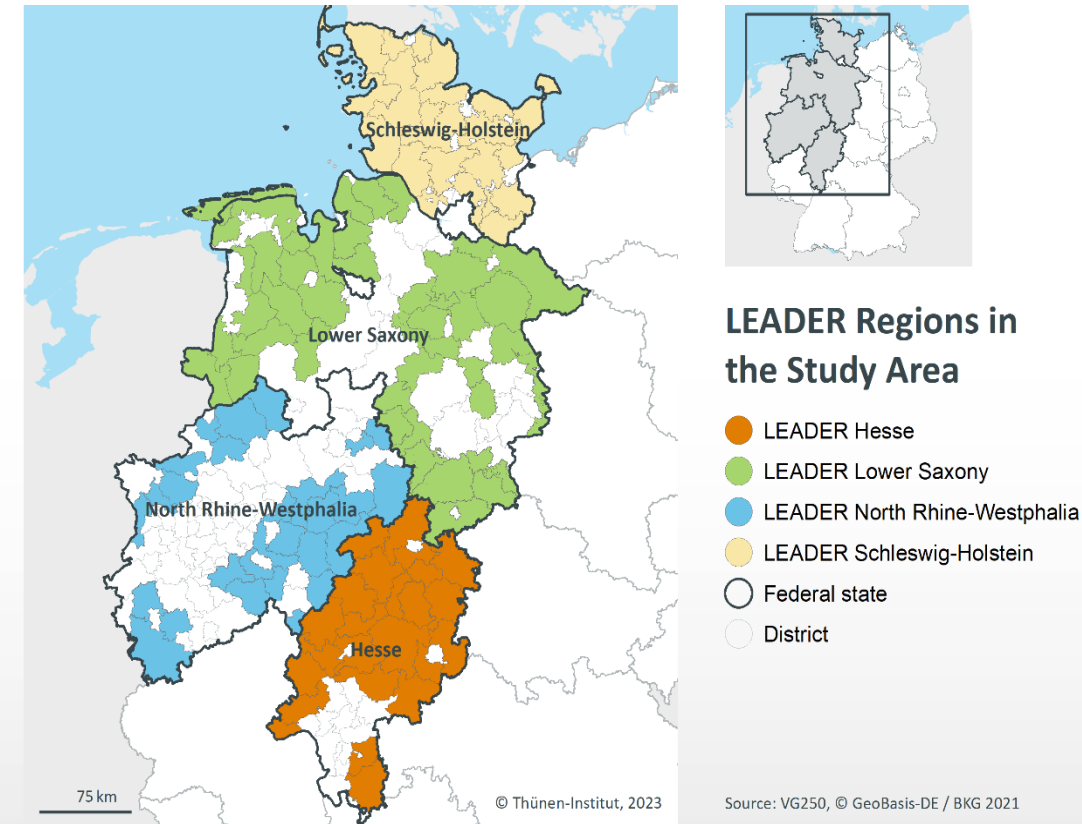
Known challenges of participation in the context of LEADER:

- 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
- **Focus:** What about representation and projects for young people?



Study areas & research approach

- Evaluation: 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
 - **Case Studies !**



Results LAG structure: Female representation

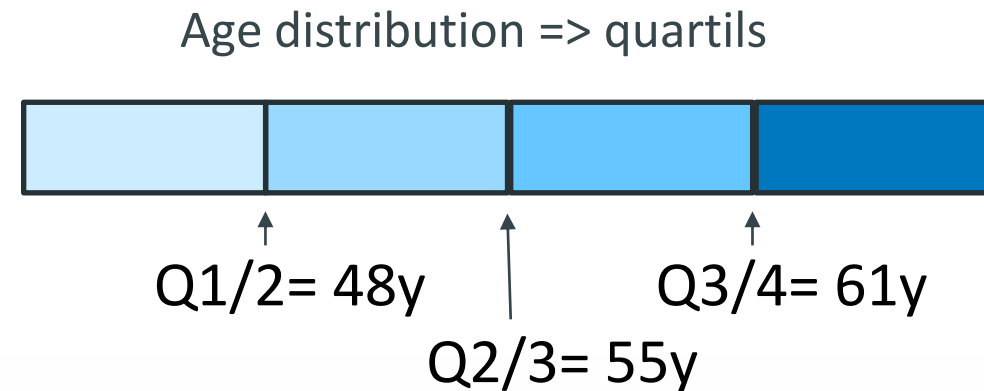
Federal state	Av. share of females (2013)	Requirements for 2014-2022 funding period	Av. share of females (2020)
Hesse	19%	„Target groups should be represented“	26%
Lower Saxony	28%	„Regions should strive for gender balance“	31%
North Rhine-Westphalia	20%	Fixed quota (33% females) introduced with the start of the funding period	42% → target exceeded
Schleswig-Holstein	21%	„Regions should strive for gender balance“	27%

- Without top-down targets, achieving equal representation would be a lengthy process
- Setting minimum quota helps to increase awareness and maximise efforts towards reaching equal representation of women in LAGs

Representation: age of LAG-members

EU funding period 2014-2020 (example one federal state (NI) n= 806):

Age average in LAG = 54 years



... growing interest to make special participations for youth (not so easy to integrate teenagers in a decision-making body of LAG...)

>> but for 2023-2027: EU-wide a minimum of ONE youngster (<25 / <30) HAVE to be in LAG decision-making body

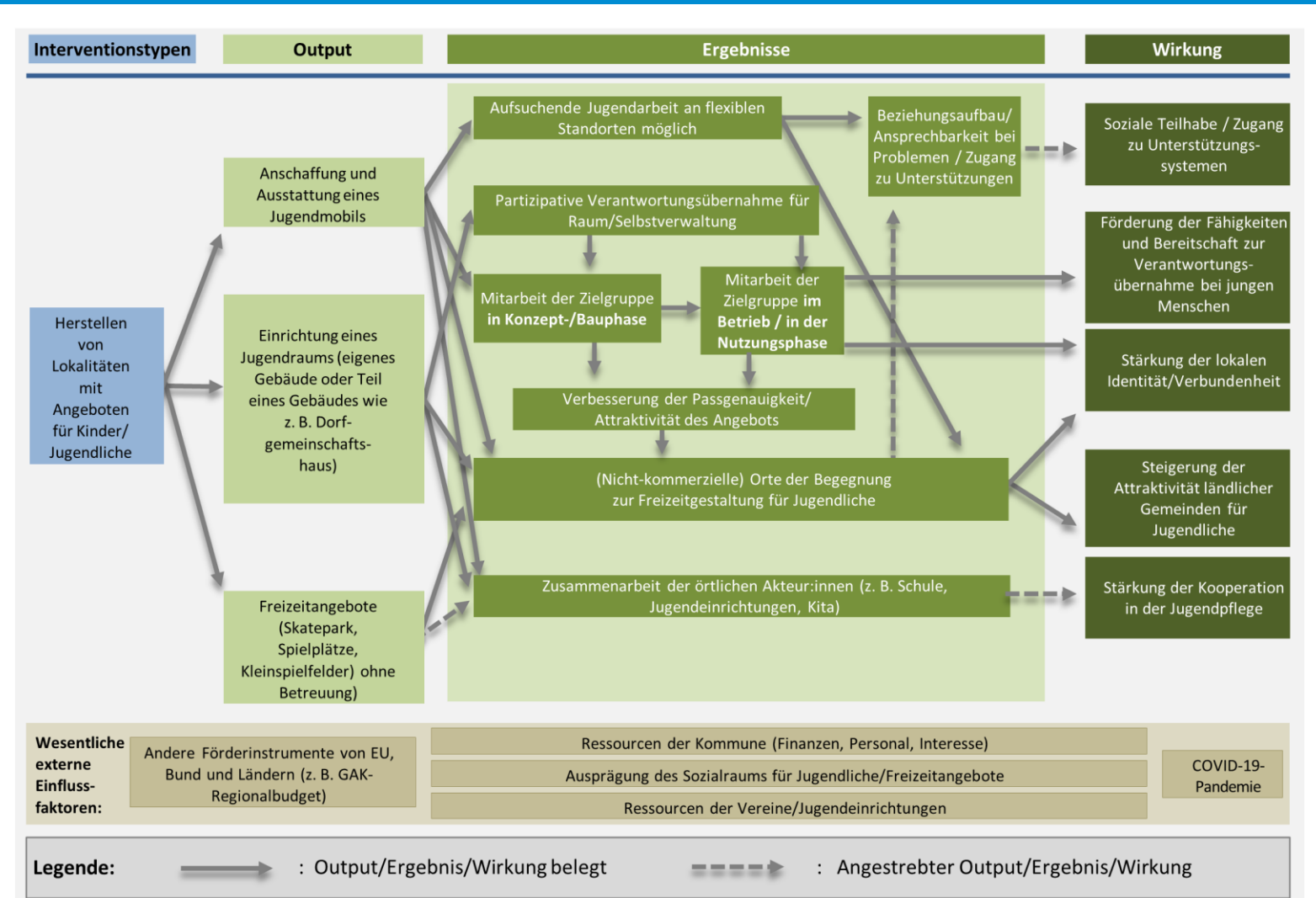
What about projects? Discussion of impacts in case studies

Connection from

➤ output >>

➤ results >>

➤ impacts



Case studies: example I



For example, **mobile services of streetwork** (important because there are otherwise hardly any dedicated rooms for youngsters in small towns, especially for free use), relationship building: *"to have contact, to establish relationships and thus also to offer help. Also to offer individual help [...].* >> support: no one left behind >> added value: alternative approaches

>> participation within the project to make a target-group tailored service: items & design

Case studies: example II



Room for youth in a community house: *[we have] tied them to the village a little bit, but also let them grow into responsibility. Because everyone who works there will later take on leading positions in [our village organisations] they learn to take on responsibility and then get involved in the community [...]. And if there are sometimes a few different opinions about cleanliness or [...] about [noise]volume, there have been those too. But that's the integration of the next generation“.*

Conclusions

- **Method of investigation seems suitable**
 - Case studies show benefits/added value
 - But only „story telling“ base => further questions in questionnaire June 2024 =>
- **First 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 => young people need opportunities to participate => some LAG address this well
 - Added value of participation: project level & decision-making
 - young people crucial for rural development >> include their views and activities

Thank you for your attention!

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