European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

European Commission

Annexes

Showing the Added Value of LEADER/CLLD through evaluation

Good Practice Workshop,
Helsinki 17-18 May 2018

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Recommended citation:

EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit C.4 (2018): Showing the Added Value of LEADER/CLLD Through Evaluation. Annex to the report of Good Practice Workshop Helsinki 17-18 May, 2018. Brussels.

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The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit C.4 'Evaluation and studies' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building, and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development is available on the Internet through the Europa server (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu).

ANNEXES

SHOWING THE ADDED VALUE OF LEADER/CLLD THROUGH EVALUATION

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP,
HELSINKI 17-18 MAY 2018

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1. GROUP WORK "HOW IS THE ADDED VALUE OBSERVED IN LEADER/CLLD"

Figure 1. Transcription of the examples and challenges of the added value of LEADER/CLLD proposed by the participants of the Good Practice Workshop and related to improved social capital

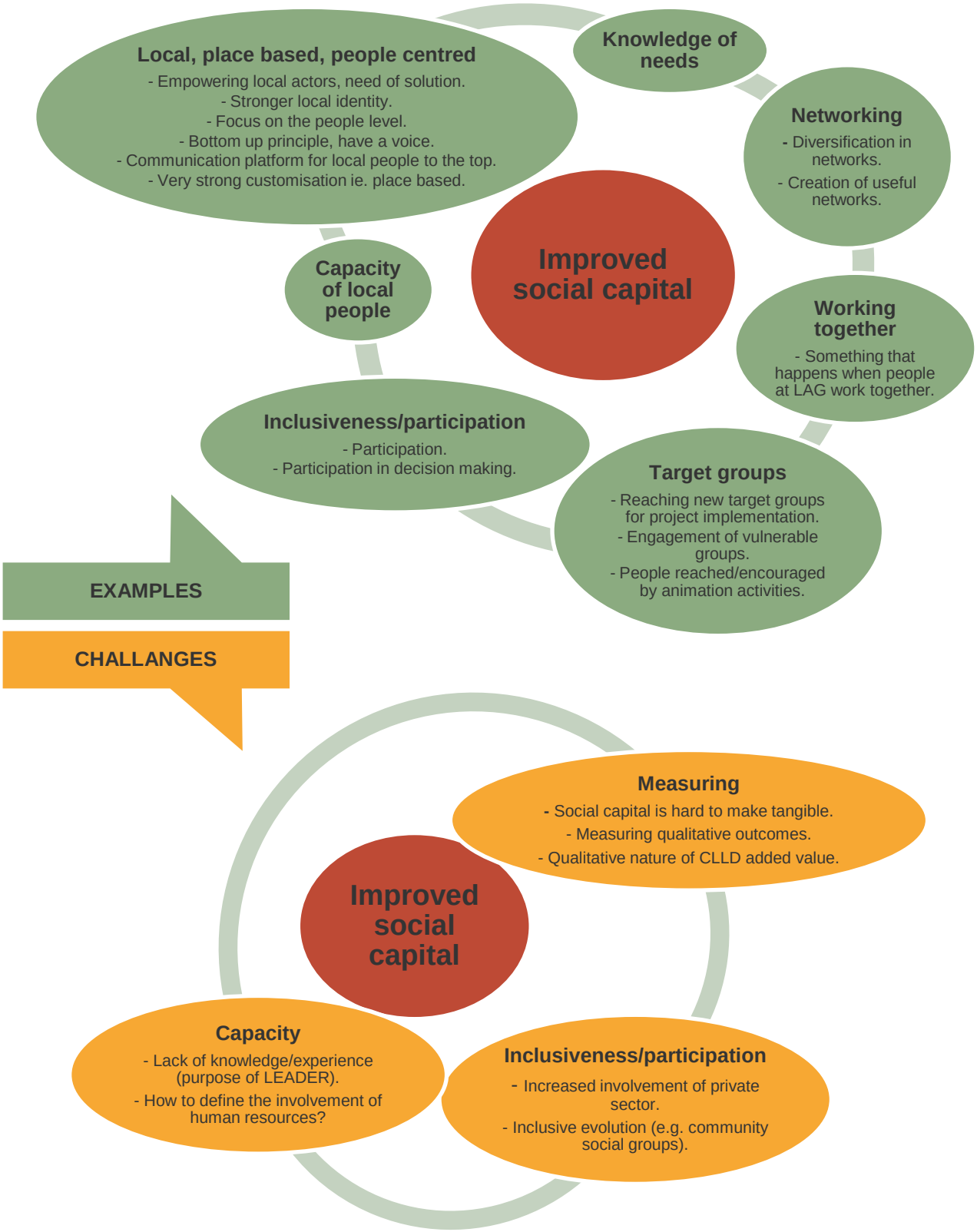


Figure 2. Transcription of the examples and challenges of the added value of LEADER/CLLD proposed by the participants of the Good Practice Workshop and related to improved governance

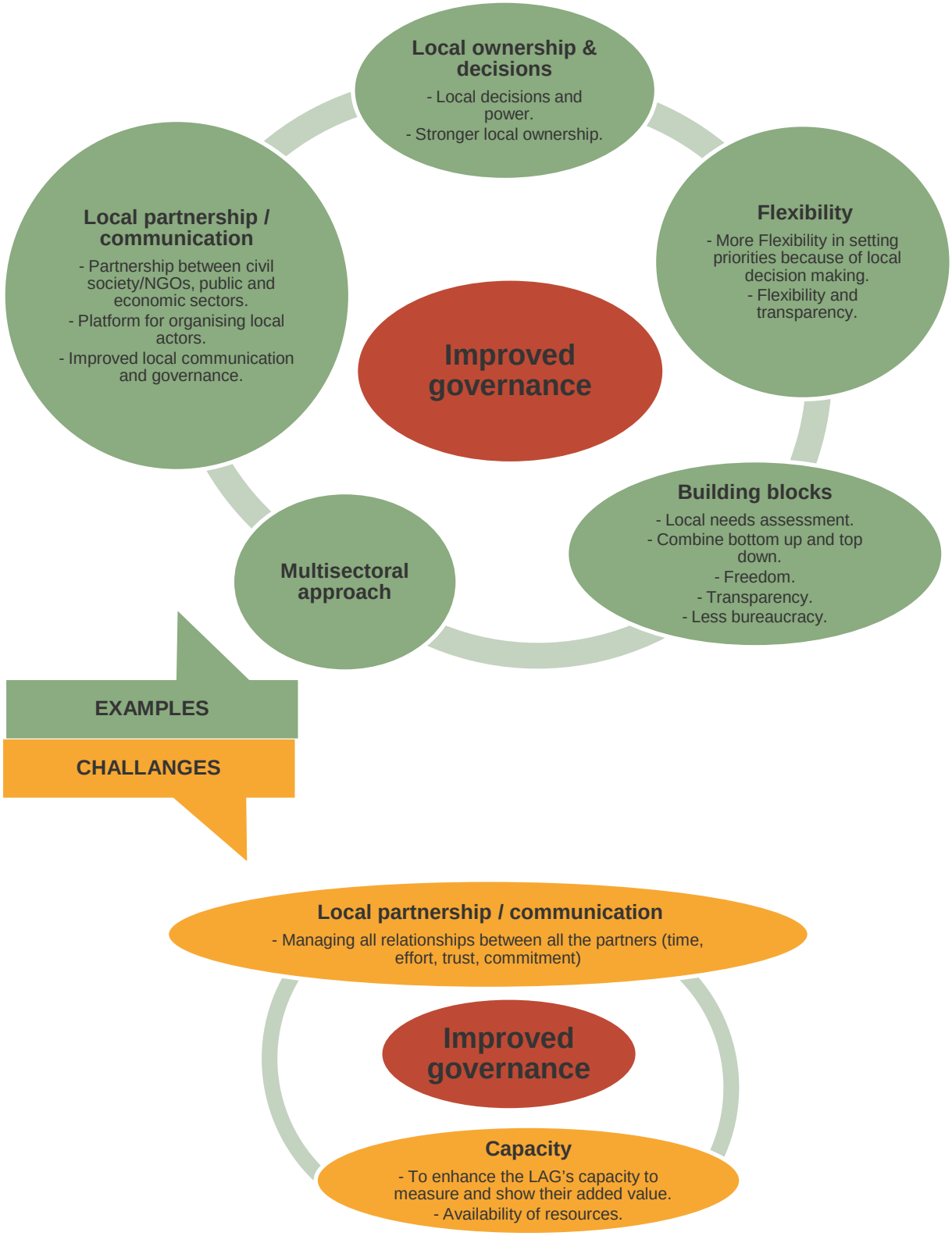
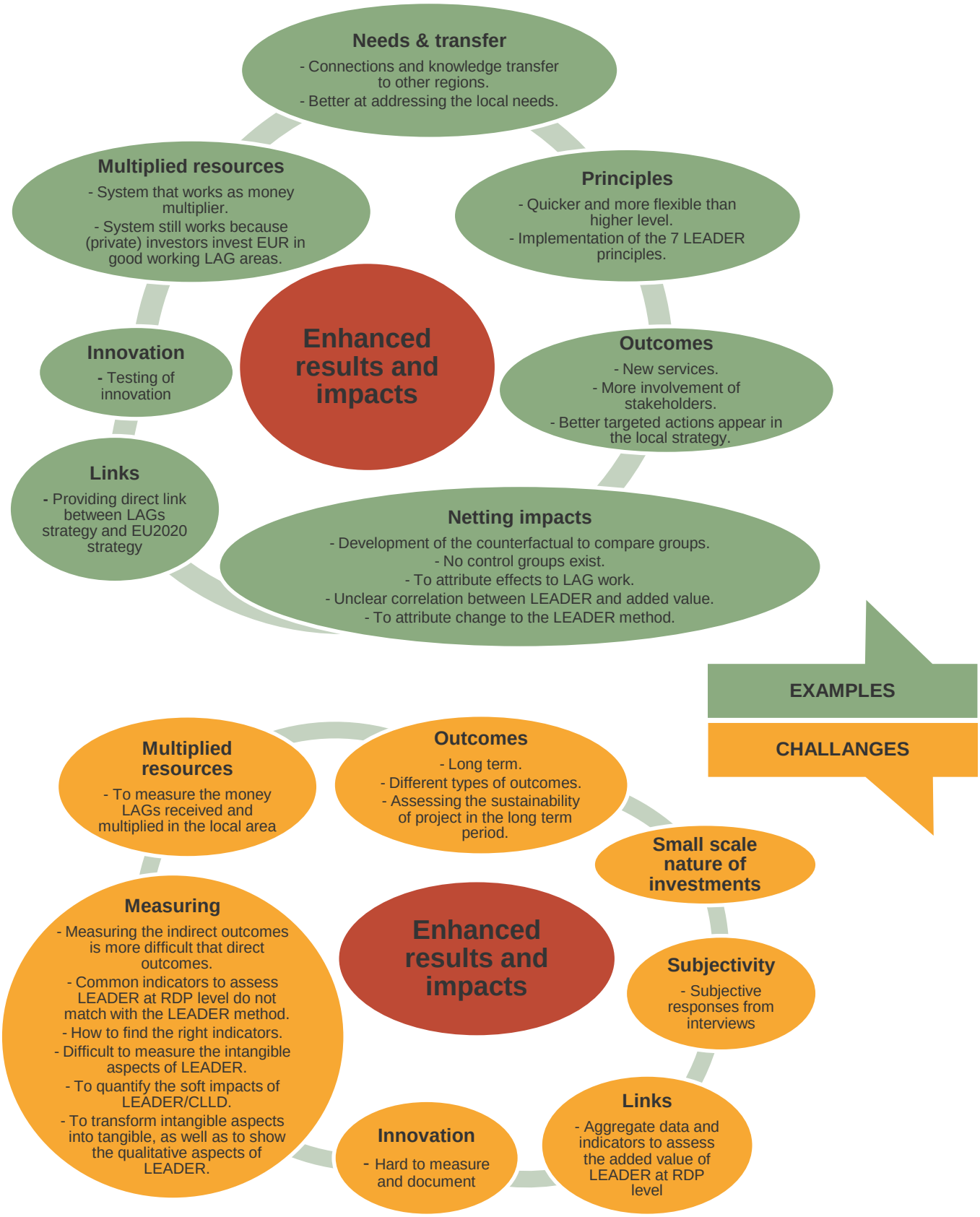


Figure 3. Transcription of the examples and challenges of the added value of LEADER/CLLD proposed by the participants of the Good Practice Workshop and related to enhanced results and impacts



2. SHARING EXPERIENCES ON THE ASSESSMENT OF ADDED VALUE OF LEADER/CLLD

Table 1. Transcription of the Question & Answer session after the presentation of the network approach applied in the LAG Prealpi & Dolomiti to assess the LEADER/CLLD's Social Capital

Questions/Comments from participants	Answers from speaker
This example is a very good practice because it involves the LAG manager into the evaluation process. How did you involve the LAG manager?	*It was an emerging process from the previous programming period. There is a historical link between the University of Padova and the LAGs around it. Many scholars from our University attend training activities and internships in the LAGs. However, the most critical factor that convinced the LAG manager to apply this network approach was its final utility. The results obtained can provide insights in the everyday management of the LEADER/CLLD strategy.*
The final value of the social capital is the average of the multiple indicators collected from the LAG manager, LAG members, and LAG beneficiaries. Do you give a different weight these different stakeholders?	*LAG members, LAG manager, or beneficiaries respond to a different typology of indicators. In some cases, they respond to the same indicators. In so far, all these indicators have the same weight among the different respondents. However, the methods can also be easily adapted to the LAG needs, and if necessary, LAGs can associate a different weight for each specific respondent/stakeholder.*
How much does it cost for the LAGs to prepare and apply this methodology?	*All information on the costs of this methodology are published. The main costs are related to data collection. We have structured the questions and indicators within an Excel file (available also in English). The LAG has not paid for it because the costs have been covered by the Italian Public Research system.*
Is the list of indicators used available?	*Yes, all indicators are described in the published book (see the PPT presentation).*
Could you explain how do you move from the conceptual framework of the social capital to the evaluation elements?	*The concept of social capital has been split into multiple components or dimensions. The dimension of social capital can be translated into evaluation questions, which can be answered through judgment criteria, and indicators. Only if one scrutinises social capital and its multiple components it is possible to understand the dynamics and to take follow-up actions.*

Table 2. Transcriptions of the indicators discussed by the participants for the assessment of the LEADER/CLLD' social capital

Possible Indicators to assess the LEADER/CLLD's Social Capital	**Reflections from participants**
Number of volunteers who participated in LEADER/CLLD activities and projects.	• Number of meetings attended cannot be considered as a good indicator of social capital because the simple attendance does not necessarily mean active participation. • RDP Managing Authority and evaluators can develop, together with the LAGs, a common set of Additional Indicators. This would allow one to compare the results between LAGs from the same RDPs.
Number of meetings conducted with the participation of beneficiaries.	
Involvement/participation of vulnerable groups in LEADER/CLLD activities and projects.	
Number of new networks created within the programming period.	
Number of networks which have been recovered or created by merging previously established networks.	
Number of actors from civil society involved in project application.	
Number of funded projects which are in line with all seven LEADER principles.	
Number of projects or number of participants participating in LEADER/CLLD projects without asking for money.	

Table 3. Transcriptions of the methods discussed by the participants for the assessment of the LEADER/CLLD' social capital

Possible Methods & Tools to assess the LEADER/CLLD's Social Capital	***Reflections from participants***
Social Network Analysis.	• Mapping the interactions between the LAGs and NRNs helps to identify who was involved and who was isolated. • It helps make visible the network gaps in the implementation of the CLLD strategy.
Social Return of Investment.	• The quantitative findings expressed in monetary terms might not be strictly related to social capital. • This method is not appropriate as stand-alone method and needs to be complemented with qualitative methods and indicators.
Focus groups and face-to-face interviews.	• These qualitative methods are based on opinion and might collect biased answers. • It is hard to involve the relevant and most influential actors in group discussions. • It is essential to have an external actor/evaluator who guides the focus groups or collects information through face-to-face interviews. • These tools have already been used in some Member States (e.g. Estonia[1]) to assess the application of the LEADER principles throughout the delivery mechanism.
Questionnaire or surveys.	• Very practical tools to collect information from all LAGs and measure the social capital at RDP level. • Especially if designed to collect anonymous information, respondents can give less biased results on social capital.

[1] *Mõtte* M., et al (2017) LEADER approach in Estonia: seven key elements in the local development strategies and in the implementation of LEADER. Retrieved from: http://conf.rd.asu.lt/index.php/rd/article/view/533

Table 4. Transcription of the evaluation elements discussed by participants for the assessment of improved local governance through LEADER/CLLD

Evaluation Topic	Evaluation Question	Judgment Criteria	Indicator	Data and methods
Improved local decision-making process	To what extent are different stakeholder groups involved in local decision-making processes?	• The diversity of actors/networks/groups which are involved in the LAG's activities and projects has increased.	• Number of actors, networks, and groups participating in LAG's activities and projects divided by typology (age, gender, employment, geographical location, sector).	• SNA. • Survey. • Documentation.
Local ownership/decision making	To what extent has LEADER/CLLD contributed to improving local ownership and decision making?	• New actors/groups are involved in decision making. • The knowledge about the CLLD strategy has increased in the community. • The participation of the community in developing the CLLD strategy has increased. • The LAG board is gender balanced.	• Number of new actors/groups registered to attend LAG meetings. • Percentage of a representative community sample who is aware of the CLLD strategy. • Number of people involved in developing the CLLD strategies. • Proportion of different gender identities represented in the LAG board.	• Survey. • Documentation. • Participatory video. • Monitoring web analytics.
Local partnership	To what extent does the LEADER approach enable a better engagement between sectors?	• Number of different stakeholders have increased. • Quality of the interaction between partners have improved.	• Number of different stakeholders involved. • Percentage of different stakeholders. • Level of perceived trust among different actors.	• Lists of participants. • Survey. • LAG database. • Reports. • Webpage. • Meeting.
Multi-sectorial approach	To what extent is the LAG able to integrate different actors?	• New combination of actors involved in projects have been created. • The number of projects with multiple typology of actors has increased.	• Number of representatives and represented partnerships/agencies. • Average number of sectors represented in projects. • Number of different actors (different: public, economic, civic). • Number of projects with more than other 3 different actors.	• LAG operation database. • Survey.

Evaluation Topic	Evaluation Question	Judgment Criteria	Indicator	Data and methods
Flexibility	To what extent does the flexibility with selection criteria help to achieve the outcomes of LEADER projects?	• The selection criteria are effective in achieving the CLLD strategy' objectives. • Selection criteria are reviewed during the implementation of the CLLD strategy.	/	/
Cooperation between public/private (civic) sectors in creation of jobs	To what extent has the cooperation between public/private (civic) actors increased the number of jobs in the LAG territory (enterprises)?	• Civic sector creates more jobs by applying the LEADER method. • More projects addressing job creation are developed jointly by public/private/civic partners. • Innovative jobs are created.	• Number of projects including partners from public/private/civic sector. • Number of new jobs created. • Number of new enterprises. • Quality of cooperation between actors/partners in projects. • Number of innovative job creating support tools/services.	• Monitoring data. • Desk research. • Interviews and survey on satisfaction.
Bureaucracy	Is the LAG delivery mechanism simpler than in the previous program period without the multi-fund CLLD?	• National and regional rules are harmonised. • Time consumption for management is decreased (payment, reimbursement claims). • Time efficiency for the project selection has improved.	• Number of attached application forms. • Number of staff involved in the selection process. • Number of steps in the selection process. • Number of reimbursement claims for one project. • Perception of staff regarding harmonised rules. • Number of conflicting articles in different regulations. • Number of monitoring systems requested for different funds.	/
Transparency	To what extent is the LAGs delivery mechanism transparent?	• The decisions and information about the LAG are open to the public audience.	• Turnover in beneficiaries/LAG members. • Webpage is established where the latest decisions are updated online. • Planning of meetings and protocols are accessible to the public audience.	/

Table 5. Transcription of the Question & Answer session after the presentation of the Danish experience for the assessment of enhanced results achieved through LEADER/CLLD

Questions/Comments from Participants	Answers from speaker
On what are the findings you have presented based on?	*The findings displayed consist of a structured interpretation of the evaluator, agreed with the LAG managers involved in the focus groups. The values presented to answer the evaluation questions (i.e. low, medium, high level) are based on the analysis of the documents, data, case-study, and interviews, mixed with the evaluator experience.*
Are you happy about the quality of data in PROMIS?	*Yes, but we had some problems with the robustness and reliability of the data collected in PROMIS due to some misunderstanding in filling the LAG operation database.*
To what extent have you involved the LAG in the design of the LAG operation database?	*They have been involved from the very beginning. For example, LAG managers have decided to design the PROMIS's selection criteria based on the LEADER principles.*
The selection of the case-study was suggested by the LAG managers. Do you think that this approach can lead to biased results?	*Yes. We could have analysed the projects selected randomly by the PROMIS database. However, we decided with the RDP Managing Authority that this selection would have not brought any additional knowledge than that that we got through this approach.*

Table 6. Transcription of the evaluation elements discussed by participants for the assessment of the enhanced results and impacts

Evaluation Question	Judgment Criteria	Indicator
To what extent does LEADER/CLLD create new ways of problem solving?	• Participation of the local population/sector has increased. • New local actors taking part in local projects.	• Number + type of participants in LEADER actions. • Number of thematic exchanges with actors from other regions.
To what extent does LEADER/CLLD contribute to reducing outgoing rural migration?	• Access to services has increased and living conditions have improved.	• Quality of community action plans. • Number of jobs and businesses created. • Number of projects supported by rural transport. • Number and meetings between the LAG and the community. • Percentage of broadband coverage within a territory. • Number of social housing services produced.
To what extend has LEADER/CLLD contributed to promote innovation in the local area?	• New practices have been implemented. • Social innovation has increased among enterprises. • Product innovation has increased.	• Number of start-ups joining the partnership. • Number of new products and services. • Number of new tools used.
To what extent does the decentralisation of LEADER/CLLD's decision making at local level contribute to activating new project beneficiaries?	• The number of new project beneficiaries has increased. • Project selection criteria favour new applicants.	• Number of new applicants. • Number of new project beneficiaries. • Number or proportion of villages with a project for the first time. • Number of beneficiaries that would not have received funding with favourable criteria.
To what extent has LEADER/CLLD contributed to start new enterprises in the area?	• The animation activities are able to start-up new business ideas.	• Number of new enterprises supported after animation activities. • Number of advisory meeting provided to local business enterprises. • Percentage of supported businesses still in business. • Percentage of business expanding.
To what extent has the LEADER method contributed to the establishment of community enterprises (e.g. NGOs which dedicate 50% of the profit to the communities) in the LAG area?	• Number of community enterprises has increased. • Number of enterprises set up in a partnership between NGO/public/private sector has increased. • The generated profit is used for further community development. • Community enterprise has been set up based on the needs of the local community.	• Number of actors from the local community who are satisfied with the community enterprises. • Level of average satisfaction of local population in terms of the product and services provided by the community enterprises.

3. GROUP WORK "WHAT IS NEEDED TO ASSESS THE ADDED VALUE OF LEADER/CLLD?"

Table 7. Transcriptions of the milestones, roadblocks and success factors discussed by the participants for the assessment of the LEADER/CLLD

Stakeholders	Milestones	Roadblocks	Success factors
LAGs	• Common understanding of the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. • Planning the evaluation process (self-evaluation/ selection of external evaluator, ongoing evaluation, setting up monitoring system). • Data collection. • Participatory validation of findings. • Capacity building for LAG board members, staff and beneficiaries.	• Bureaucracy can make the job difficult. • Tight timelines. • Lack of time of the LAG personnel. • Lack of skilled evaluators. • Budget, linked also to the capacity to attract skilled evaluators. • Quality of system. • Inadequate IT systems for monitoring and evaluation. • Availability of data. • Understandable data. • Motivation and ownership.	• Common framework to demonstrate the effects of LEADER/CLLD and agreed set of goals. • Stakeholders are committed to the evaluation process. • Support from MA and NRNs. • Good IT systems to collect data. • Develop ToR for selection of the evaluator. • Develop evaluation as an ongoing process (continuous improvement of the quality of system). • Foster common understanding of data needed for evaluation. • Stakeholders engagement. • Develop evaluation capacity inside the LAG.
Managing Authorities (MAs) /Paying Agencies (PAs) *LEADER…ship, open to everybody*	• Partnership-based dialogue between MA, LAG, evaluators. • Early collaboration with LAGs: definition of indicators, required data, setting up systems for data collection and evaluation etc. • Capacity building and guidance (e.g. supporting documents) to LAGs.	• Conflicting objectives among different layer of the governance. • Lack of data. • Robustness of data. • Missing data collection systems. • Limited resources in general (incl. money, knowledge, skills (internal) etc.). • Relevance and timing of the guidelines, trainings.	• Constructive relationships between LAGs, MAs and also with evaluators. • Involve external actors/evaluators in the process. • Develop good/smart/simplified IT system for data collection. • Provide guidance, training to LAGs, ensure they have enough resources. • Provide consultancy on capacity development. • Develop handbooks to show how to do evaluation (step by step). • Foster sharing knowledge in LEADER/CLLD good practice workshops, among LAGs etc. • Provide incentives.

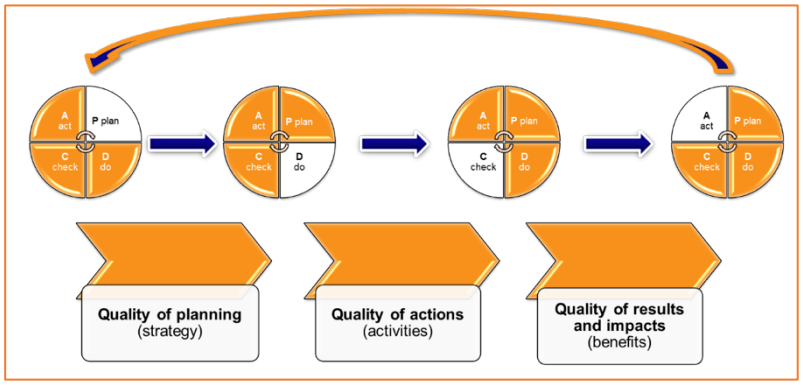
Stakeholders	Milestones	Roadblocks	Success factors
MAs / PAs	• Analysis of data. • Dissemination of findings. • Follow up of conclusions and recommendations from evaluation.	• Time and timing. • Knowledge and capacity of MAs, evaluators, etc. • Finding good evaluators. • Difficult public procurement rules. • Acceptance of conclusions and recommendations. • Target to the right people. • Politics can be a roadblock.	• Readiness, openness to learning. • Voluntary work. • Enthusiasm.
Evaluators/ research *… cannot do the job alone …* *need jointly coordinate with MA and LAGs*	• Early planning of the Evaluation Plan. • Early set up the plan for AIR 2019. • Define evaluation framework through participatory efforts. • Capacity building of the evaluation stakeholders. • Good ToR and rules for tendering evaluation.	• Measuring the "unmeasurable". • View on impacts not possible yet. • Influence of other impacts. • Political battles and debates. • Low priority, more interest in other evaluation topics on RDP level. • Different interests and expectations among stakeholders. • Lack of sufficient resources and timing. • Availability and quality of data. • Access to data. • Low level of implementation (not enough projects).	• DG AGRI should help stakeholders with clear requirements, guidelines, suggestions. • Clear logical framework of objectives, criteria, and indicators set up. • Political pressure to legitimate funding. • Stakeholder debates that keep the level of trust high, alongside the level of compliance. • Need to develop a common understanding around the evaluation topics and frameworks, to avoid waste of resources and improve the quality. • Develop understanding the aim of an evaluation, how to do it. To explain the value of evaluation: to learn and not to judge. • A learning process for the actors, devote time to learning. • Create a common vision and ethos. • Participatory efforts to keep improving the evaluation framework. • Rules for tendering evaluation set in cooperation with MAs. • Not only the statistical data bases but also workshops/focus groups with different stakeholders for interpretation. • Workshops and focus groups with stakeholders for interpretation of results.

Stakeholders	Milestones	Roadblocks	Success factors
National Rural Networks (NRNs) *…smoothing the way for other actors*	• Understand evaluation needs of LAGs. • Clarity of roles supporting LAGs in evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. • Delegation of tasks.	• Resources at all levels for supporting and conducting evaluation. • Lack of clarity of roles of the ENRD, NRNs in providing support to assessment of LEADER/CLLD. • Information flow (ENRD - MA – NRN – LAGs).	• Facilitating dialogue between the LAGs and the MA. • Training on evaluation for the evaluator and the LAGs. • Transmission of case studies via newsletters. • Clarify roles between ENRD Contact Point and Helpdesk, identify “grey areas”. • Ensure good communication, regular meetings. • Discussions with MAs, IBs & others (e.g. informal networks). • Good accessibility to information (e.g. online).

4. QUALITY OF LEADER WORK – BUILDING A QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS FOR LEADER IN FINLAND

On the occasion of the Good Practice Workshop Finnish Rural Network and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry organised a morning session dealing with LEADER quality management work. The session was composed of several presentations by the Finnish Rural Network Support Unit, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and LAG "Leader Sepra". The Finnish LEADER work aims to adopt a model of ongoing development. The impact of LEADER work should be enhanced by improving the quality of the activities at all stages of the development process and in all parts of the LEADER chain. The frame of reference used for this is Deming's continuous quality improvement model (Deming Wheel or Cycle, 1994; Figure 4).

Figure 4. Deming's continuous quality improvement model



Quality of plans

Quality of plans is the quality of the local development strategies (LDS) and their drafting process. The quality of the local development strategies is a key element in selecting the LEADER groups and establishing the indicative financial frameworks for the programming period. The selection committee uses the following criteria to evaluate the LDS:

- The strategy has been prepared in an open process and following the bottom-up principle.
- The focus of the strategy is on a local approach to the development of one's own home region. It creates the conditions and new operational models for development. The LDS objectives are linked to the EAFRD priorities and common objectives set for LEADER work in the RDP for Mainland Finland 2014–2020.
- The strategy is based on a description of the current situation and SWOT analysis from which the objectives of the strategy, priorities of the activities and measures are derived.
- The strategy sets down the development priorities and measures selected by the LEADER group and defines clear and measurable output and result indicators for these.
- To promote equality and non-discrimination, the LDS describes actions targeting women, men and the young (under 35 years of age) and any other specific population groups and the objectives for these. The objectives and measures of the strategy comply with the principles of sustainable development. In addition, the strategy promotes the common horizontal objectives of the programme: innovation, climate change adaptation and mitigation and the environment.
- The action plan included in the strategy describes how the objectives of the priorities are turned into concrete measures. The strategy describes an open and non-discriminatory selection procedure. The local LEADER group must use the publicly available criteria in the selection of all projects and measures. The selection criteria ensure that the measures are placed in order of priority according to how well they promote the achievement of the strategy objectives and whether they are of high quality and suited to local development work.
- The strategy or its annexes must include a clear description of cooperation, consistency and complementarity with other local actors and programmes.
- The strategy or its annexes describe the estimated total need for public funding and the estimated amount of private financing. The need for private financing for the programming period is 35% of the total funding, including contributions in kind and private money. The strategy presents an estimate of the allocation of funding among the priorities selected by the LEADER group. The municipalities in the region commit to contributing 20% of the public funding for the group during the whole programming period.

The application procedure for the LEADER groups and LDS has two stages. Through this procedure the groups were encouraged to prepare strategies of a high quality. The feedback from LEADER groups concerning the procedure has been positive. The maximum length of the strategy was set at 20 pages.

The process:

- The MAF launched an unofficial open application process in summer 2013.
- The applications were evaluated by the selection committee and an external evaluator. The applicants received common and group-specific feedback in autumn 2013.
- The MAF opened the official application concerning the LEADER groups and local development strategies in spring 2014, immediately after the RDP 2014–2020 had been submitted to the Commission. The application period ended in summer 2014.
- The MAF invited statements from the local authorities concerning the applications submitted in their territories.
- The MAF approved the proposal concerning the LEADER groups to be selected and indicative funding in December 2014.

Quality of actions

The quality of action of the LEADER groups in the sense of the quality of the implementation of the LDS. Quality work has encouraged and helped the LEADER groups to achieve a good quality in what they are doing: the activity is strategy-based and everyday routines are well in control. LEADER work always entails a measure of bureaucracy. Quality work has helped the LEADER groups to deal with the bureaucracy involved as smoothly as possible so that it does not take too much time. This enables the LEADER groups to maximise the time available for activation and network leadership.

Process of quality work

The quality work of LEADER groups was started about 10 years ago by a few pioneer groups that got interested in quality work. These LEADER groups had faced some kind of crisis in their activities, usually caused by a sudden change of staff. The groups wanted to have a risk management tool as a systematic method for managing and developing the group’s work. The pioneer groups compiled the actions they had taken into a single quality manual. The other groups were interested in the positive example they had shown. Due to wishes of the LEADER groups a process was carried out to boost LEADER work in 2013–2014. The Rural Network funded a development effort where all Finnish LEADER group got help to construct a basic quality system. The work was supported and coordinated by a group of experts, chosen by the Rural Network Services through competitive tendering.

The objective of the process was that:

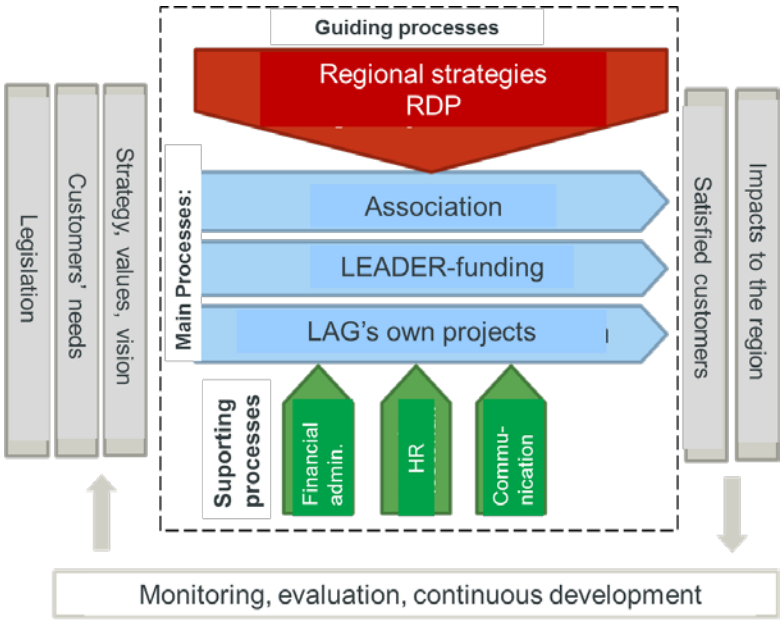
- LEADER groups prepare a basic quality and leadership manual, i.e. a description of their activities
- The vision of the LEADER group has been identified and recorded
- The processes of LEADER groups have been identified and described, including a description of the decision-making procedure
- The staff have established job descriptions
- The interface between the LEADER group and administration has been dealt with

The national model was used to construct the quality manuals. Almost all LEADER groups use the same kind of table of contents for their quality manual as presented below. The basic processes of the activity of LEADER groups are: activities as an association, LEADER activities (project funding) and local development (incl. the group’s own development projects). The cross-cutting development processes are financial and human resources management and communications processes. The LEADER groups have used methods such as flow charts to describe the stages in processing project applications by the LAG for each process and who is responsible for each stage.

Figure 5. Content of the quality manual

1. Leadership 1.1. Mission, vision, strategy 1.2. Value 1.3. Operating policy, operating principles, rules of the game and by-laws of the association in activities as an association and LEADER activities **2. Activities and processes** 2.1. Customers and management of customer relations 2.2. Key processes *2.2.1 Activities as an association* *- Impact* *- Activation* *- Membership: retaining old members and recruiting new ones* *2.2.2 Leader activities* *- Communication on project and enterprise support* *- Activation*	*- Advice* *- Decisions on funding* *- Administration and monitoring* *2.2.3 Own regional development activities* 2.3. Administration and decision-making process *2.3.1 Document management and data security issues* 2.4. Communication process 2.5. Finances/financial management **3. Staff** 3.1. Staff and job descriptions 3.2. Competence and expertise 3.3. Staff induction 3.4. Occupational health and welfare 3.5. Occupational safety	**4. Partnership and resources** 4.1. Partnerships in support of the strategy 4.2. Management of partnerships 4.3. Impact *4.3.1 International* *4.3.2 National* *4.3.3 Regional* **5. Quality work model** 5.1. Review of the management (the same for all) 5.2. Dealing with anomalies and risk management 5.3. Audits 5.4. Method for continuous improvement (Self-evaluation) **6. Results** 6.1. Development of the results 6.2. Result indicators

Figure 6. Process chart of LEADER groups



Auditing is also an important element of quality work. An audit is conducted by an external party to check whether the group acts in accordance with the recorded processes, the quality manual has been updated and progress is made in the quality work. In autumn 2017 the LEADER groups decided to start peer auditing. Peer auditing comprises external evaluation (cf. self-evaluation), development and learning. In practice peer auditing means that one LEADER group audits the work of another group and vice versa. The first auditing round was conducted in winter 2017–2018. It was concerned with the overall situation in terms of the quality manual and one key process. The comments from the LEADER groups were encouraging. All LAG wanted to continue the peer auditing.

LAGs raised the following issues in the answers to the question: How did you benefit from the auditing?

- boosts to the development work!
- risk of becoming blind to one's own work in everyday life and routines
- auditing helps to recognise good things in one's own work/action that needs to be developed
    - points of reference for one's own doing
    - other (potential) opportunities for cooperation
- many elements in the activities where joint action by the groups would save everybody's scarce resources (both time and money)

Changing and rooting new practices takes time. The quality process was started five years ago and the journey continues. Changing the operating culture takes 5–15 years. This is where we stand right now. Each year the Rural

Network Services have organised various kinds of events to boost quality work. Support has been provided to LAGs where the basic quality work is still incomplete, e.g. the quality manual is not ready or it has not been updated.

Guidance visits by the administration

The Finnish Agency for Rural Affairs guides the LEADER groups in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme. The guidance includes a visit to each LEADER group once during the programming period. The aim is to improve the quality of the work done by the LAGs from the perspective of the implementation of the RDP.

Quality of results and impacts

The quality of the results and impacts mean the concrete results and impacts achieved by the LEADER work. Jobs, enterprises, better services, new leisure activities, empowerment of the people, improved state of the environment, etc. The impacts are seen as enhanced vitality of local communities and wellbeing.

Annual reporting

The LAGs report on the progress of the LDS annually to the relevant stakeholders and administrative authorities. A common framework has been prepared for the annual report and its maximum length has been set at 10 pages.

Adjustments of the financial frameworks

Of the public funding reserved for LEADER in the RDP for Mainland Finland 9%, EUR 27 million, was not yet allocated to the LEADER groups in the indicative financial frameworks for the programming period. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will allocate the funds in this reserve to the LEADER groups on the basis of the quality of their work and impact of the results. These adjustments to the financial frameworks are made in 2017 and 2019. This approach was adopted to introduce an element of performance guidance to LEADER work, but in a way that the level of each individual LEADER group is used as the baseline. The aim is to encourage the LEADER groups both to improve the quality of their work and to pay attention to the results and impacts of their activities.

Evaluations

The LEADER groups evaluate the results and impacts of their activities and implementation of the LDS through self-evaluations and by commissioning external evaluations. The administrative authority evaluates the results and impacts of LEADER work as part of the ongoing evaluation of the RDP. Projects funded under LEADER are also included in the evaluation of the impacts on regional economies started in 2018. Separate evaluations will be launched in 2018 concerning the functioning and added value of the LEADER principles and administrative model.

Extending the model of continuous development to the whole LEADER chain

The activities of the administrative authorities and Paying Agency influence the quality of LEADER work a great deal. The administration is a key player in creating the framework where the LEADER groups act. In Finland the MAF and Finnish Agency for Rural Affairs (FARA) function as the Managing Authority and Paying Agency on the national level and the 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (in future the 19 counties) on the regional level.

The aim is to extend the model of continuous development to the whole LEADER chain. In practice this means that the LEADER processes will be examined from the perspective of the MAF, FARA and Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The processes include legislative preparation, instructions for the implementation of project and enterprise support, granting and payment of project and enterprise support and granting and payment of operational funds. The key question is how well the LEADER principles have been taken into account in these processes. Quality work also ensures that the necessary forums and clear practices are in place for dialogue between the administration and LAGs and the partnership principle is being implemented.

5. PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK - SUMMARY

Response rate: 63%

Figure 7. Overall assessment (Average score: 4 – very good; 3 – good; 2 – fair; 1 – poor):

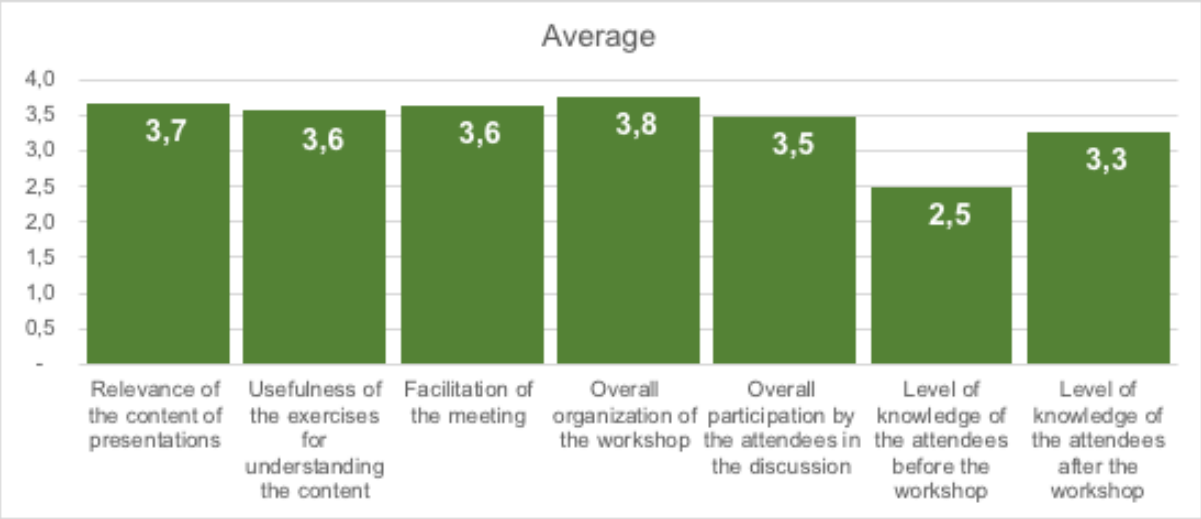
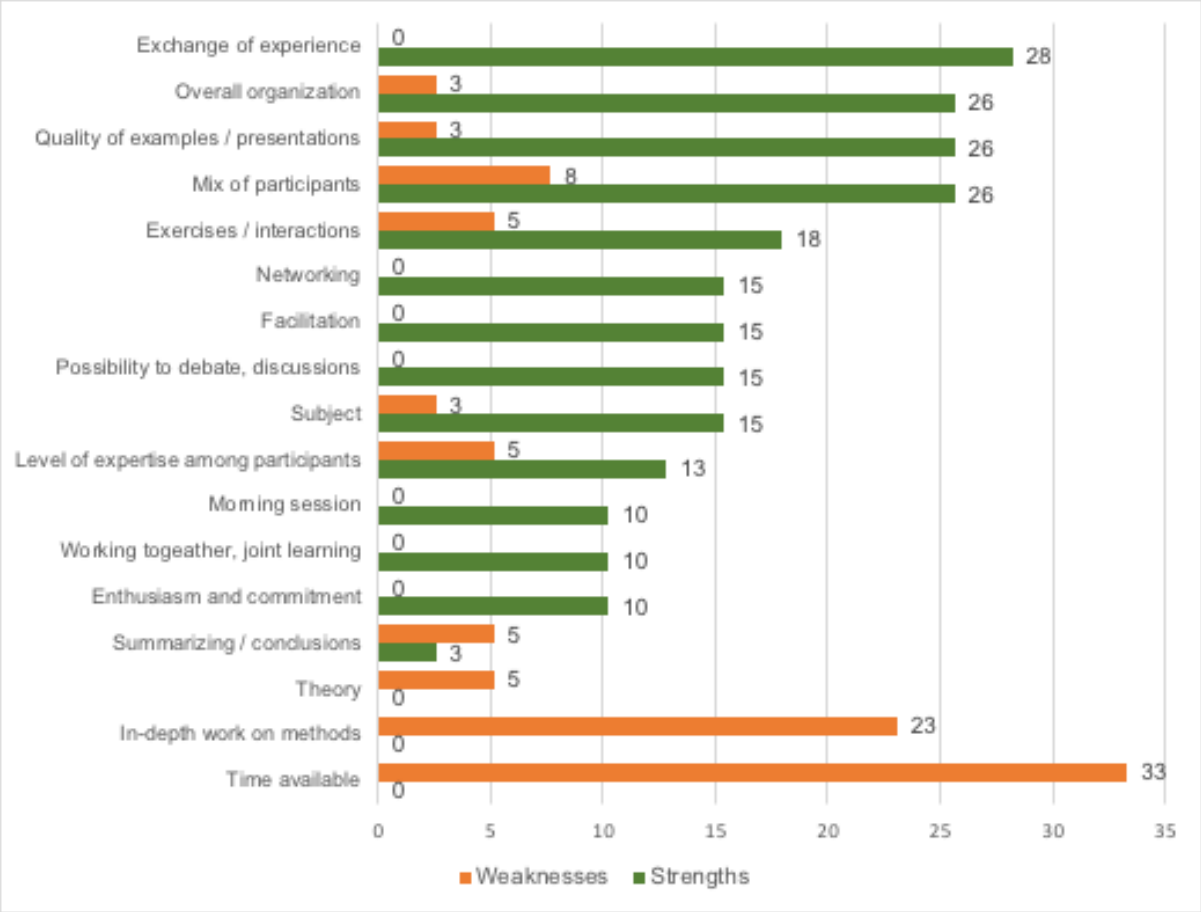


Figure 8. Strengths and weaknesses (% out of submitted feedback):



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