

Innovative solutions to rural challenges: Insights from case studies in German LEADER regions

Lynn-Livia Fynn & Kim Pollermann

Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Brunswick, Germany

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Innovation and Regional Development

Chair: Stefan Rehak

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14:30 – 16:15

Outline

1. **Research context**
2. **The LEADER approach**
3. **Innovation: the LEADER perspective**
4. **Research interest**
5. **Data and methods**
6. **Research findings**
7. **Conclusion**

Research context




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Home

Project

5-Länder-Evaluation: What are the effects of financing rural development on agriculture, on environment and well-being in rural areas?

Lead Institute  Institute of Rural Studies

Involved Institutes  Institute of Farm Economics  Institute of Forestry



Institution: Thünen Institute – Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries / Institute of Rural Studies

Project: 5-Länder Evaluation

Object of evaluation: Rural development programmes of 5 German federal states

Duration: 2015-2026

Aim: Policy recommendations for the design and implementation of different funding measures/RDPs

*Länder = Bundesländer = federal states in Germany

The LEADER Approach



LEADER = [translated from French] „Links between actions for the development of the rural economy”

- Since the early 1990’s
- Part of the EU’s rural development policy → CAP

Role of LAG management: coordination of LEADER implementation and consultation for beneficiaries



Innovation in rural development: The LEADER perspective

*“Innovation is often described as a **new idea** that proves **successful in practice**. Innovation may be **technological, but also non-technological, organisational or social**. Innovation may be based on **new but also on traditional practices in a new geographical or environmental context**. The new idea can be a **new product, practice, service, production process or a new way of organising things, etc**. Such a new idea turns into an innovation only if it is **widely adopted** and proves its **usefulness in practice**.”*

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2014)

Research interest

- **Characteristics of innovative LEADER projects**
- **Factors that foster the implementation of innovative projects in the LEADER approach**
- **Potentials of LEADER in promoting innovations in rural communities/regions**

Survey of beneficiaries in four German federal states (2018)

- All LEADER regions
 - Number of persons contacted = 1267
 - Number of responses = 1079 (response rate = 85%)
- Regression analysis with different LEADER-related conditions → potential factors promoting innovative projects

Data and methods: Case studies

- 8 LEADER regions in four federal states
- Focus on project implementation and impacts
- Analysis of different rural funding measures: LEADER, ILE (village development, basic services, tourism)
- Qualitativ analysis: 63 interviews (representatives of municipalities, private and civic organisations and regional managers)
- Selection of projects: implementation status, funding volume, project design

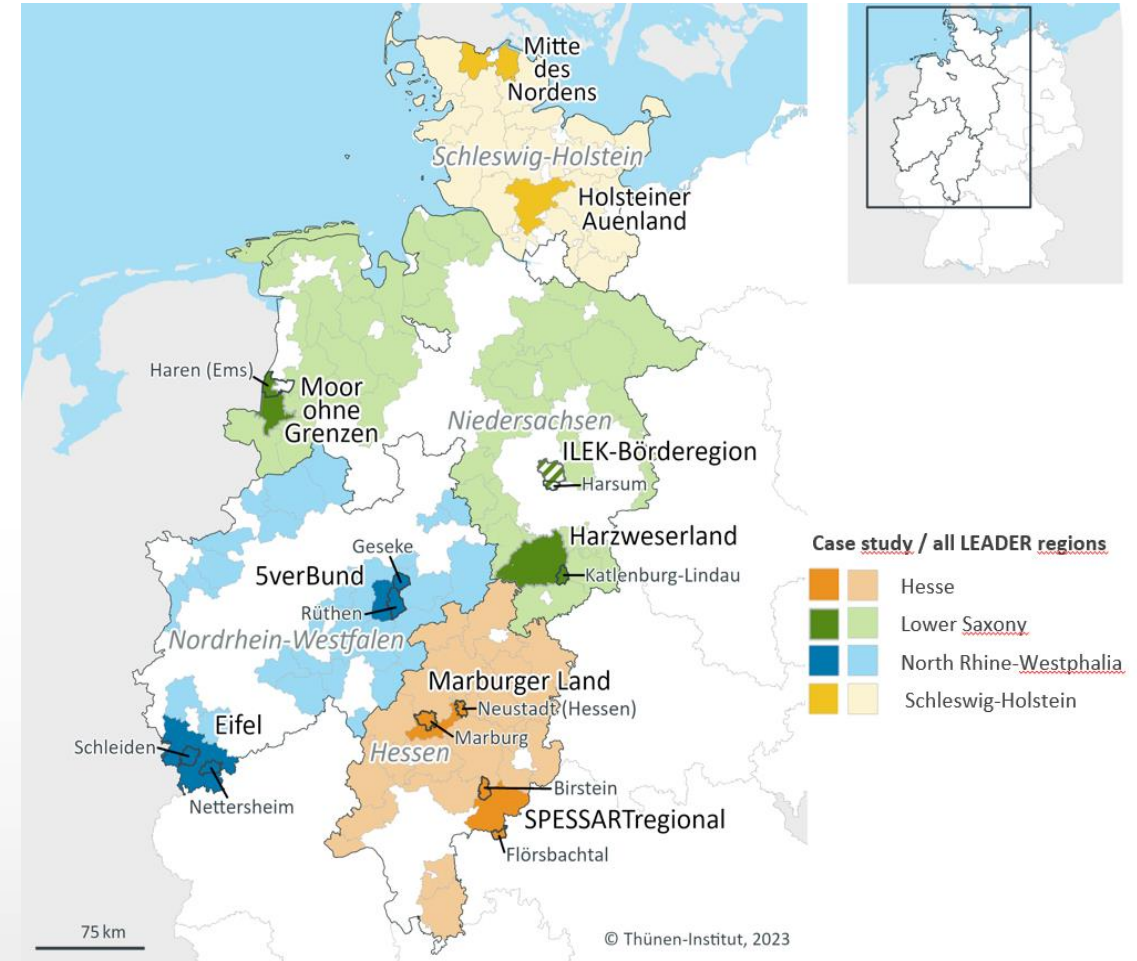


Figure 2: LEADER case study regions

Findings: Survey of beneficiaries (2018)

Incidence of innovative projects:

- **56 % of the beneficiaries** classified their own project as innovative („ideas/approaches to action, that are new to the region“)

Type of innovation*:



*Overlaps between innovation types occur.

Findings: Survey of beneficiaries (2018): Favourable conditions for innovative projects

- Origin of the project: pre-existing ideas (from an **individual (own idea)** or as a result of discussions in a **working group**) rather than originating due to the funding opportunity
- **Non-public actors** are more likely to design and implement innovative projects than public actors
- The occurrence of innovative projects correlates directly with the **staff capacity of LAG managements**



Example 1: Youth service bus and participation activities

- Mobile leisure offers in **areas without (functioning) youth services**
- Involvement of youth in design and implementation
- Beneficiary: county

Example 2: Consultant position, publicity measures

- Coordination and **support of business succession activities** in the hotel and catering industry
- Various services; e.g. free consultation, networking activities, brochures
- Beneficiary: municipality



Example 3: New technology: roof tiles with integrated solar panels

- Sustainable energy production
- Dissemination of knowledge of self-generated electricity management
- Beneficiary: non-profit limited liability company

Example 4: Regional micrologistics concept incl. potential analysis

- Logistics concept for the transportation of small quantities of goods to **small-scale businesses** (e.g. village shops)
- Implementation in a pilot project with an app
- Beneficiary: LAG (association)

Example 5: Electric car, charging station

- New local car sharing service incl. chauffeur service for the elderly
- **Elderly as a new target** group with significance for securing the car sharing service
- Beneficiary: local association

Example 6: Prototype for a **mobility app for immigrants**

- Easy to operate with different language options
- Information on bus and train schedules, events, leisure activities etc.
- Aims to facilitate the **integration of immigrants** in the region
- Beneficiary: university (in cooperation with a county)

Example 7: Coordinator position

- **Volunteer network** for the documentation of flora and fauna in a nature park
- Approx. 40 volunteers
- Data base for long-term monitoring → nature conservation and education
- Beneficiary: county (cooperation with a local museum)

Example 8: „Taste tank“ and other forms of cooperation between farmers, gastronomers and other actors

- design of new culinary products
- creation of regional value added chains
- Beneficiaries: LAG, tourism enterprise

Conclusion

- **LEADER contributes both directly and indirectly to innovations in rural regions**
- **LEADER innovations often address societal challenges in rural areas → social innovations**
- **Social capital and technical expertise are often essential in successfully pursuing innovative ideas**
- **The right funding design can help to promote innovation → minimum staff capacity of LAG managements, conducive funding conditions (less bureaucracy), stimulation of networking activities**

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Thank you for your attention!

Contact:

lynn.fynn@thuenen.de

kim.pollermann@thuenen.de

Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Brunswick, Germany

Further information:

www.eler-evaluierung.de

www.thuenen.de