

The Tartu Declaration

Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+

(Draft document 07.12.2016, sent to the members of ELARD
and the participants of the conference for consultation)

Based on the resolutions developed by 140 delegates from 24 European countries attending the **ELARD conference "Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2020+ - Celebrating 25 years of LEADER in Europe!" held 22 to 23 November 2016 at Tartu, Estonia**, and the contributions of several LEADER Local Action Groups Networks **the following declaration**, directed at the European institutions and the Member States, has been adopted.

1. We, representatives of LEADER Local Action Groups from the whole of Europe, believe that the current political developments in Europe make the **25 years old LEADER/CLLD approach more important than ever before**. It is a European-rooted bottom-up development approach that can help to counterbalance anti-European tendencies in local communities, by contributing to social inclusion and sustainable economic development in the territories where it is applied.
2. But in order to achieve that, we believe **it is vital to improve the efficiency of LEADER/CLLD**. The efforts currently undertaken by the European Commission and the Member States are not sufficient to give the boost which is needed to significantly improve the quality of its results. Preparation for the programme period 2021-2027 provides a crucial opportunity to decide on the changes which are needed in implementing this longstanding approach.
3. Since it was mainstreamed in the rural development programmes, the CLLD/LEADER method has never been able to achieve the purpose for which it was created, namely to **empower local communities to shape their destiny**.
4. **This crucial purpose – to empower rural communities - must come back into focus** when designing the new implementation framework. The long-standing principles which underlie the LEADER method should be re-asserted. Objectives related to funding and to specific policies should play a secondary role, because LEADER is not a playing-field for sectorial interests. Moreover, CLLD/LEADER should not be forced to focus too much on innovation and 'smart' development.
5. Indeed, we believe that CLLD/LEADER should be recognised as a development approach in its own right, implemented through integrated local development strategies which call upon all relevant parts of European and national funding. It should not continue merely as an appendix of the European Rural Development Policy, especially if this policy becomes less and less oriented on balanced territorial development. If the European Commission and the Member States are really proud of the success of the LEADER method and want to value it, then they must offer the authentic version. **The content must correspond to the label**.
6. For these reasons, we believe that **more power and responsibilities should be given to Local Action Groups, in a context of a clear framework for the implementation of CLLD**. Member States should not be given the power to dilute the comprehensive multi-sectoral approach which is integral to the CLLD idea. The current definitions in the Common Provisions Regulation have proved unable to protect the integrity of the integrated approach which is at the heart of LEADER/CLLD.

7. To achieve efficiency in the future implementation of multi-funded CLLD, of which LEADER is part, we call for the following conditions to be met before the start of the 2021-2027 programme period.
- a. A timely definition of simple rules, guidelines and IT systems aiming at maximum harmonisation between the ESI Funds. Not just simplification, but **deregulation** is the keyword. The new political and economic context should be used for a reset, to throw bureaucratic burdens over board and to create a simple framework, focused on opportunities and on trust, not on restrictions and mistrust.
 - b. The rules, guidelines and IT systems must be elaborated with the real participation of all stakeholders. The application of the CLLD/LEADER method already begins here!
 - c. The only way to ensure an efficient implementation of multi-funded CLLD is to handle the management by a single coordinating body at Member State or regional level. At EU level, a CLLD committee should be set up as a subgroup of the EGESIF to monitor and guide the implementation in the Member States.
 - d. The implementation of CLLD/LEADER is bound to fail if it is dominated by the threat of sanctions at local level. Those who advocate innovation must accept the risk of failure.
 - e. The collegial spirit has to be strengthened. All stakeholders involved in the process, LAGs and authorities, need to be well trained and made aware of the specificities of the CLLD/LEADER implementation. This can only be achieved if authorities and LAGs are enabled to get to know each other's realities.
 - f. The national LEADER LAG organisations must be accepted as full partners of the managing authorities in ensuring a smooth implementation. They must be involved from the outset in the design of administrative procedures and IT tools in the Member States. The European Commission should insist upon this.
 - g. This demand for full involvement of national LAG organisations applies especially to the procedures for interterritorial and transnational cooperation among Local Action Groups, which have to be designed on the basis of good practice. The harmonisation of rules for such cooperation is crucial, and should therefore be fixed at EU level.
8. We urge the European Commission, other European Institutions and Member States to engage all their efforts in a renewal of the framework for CLLD/LEADER, when reforming the framework for the ESI Funds for the programming period 2021-2027.

Additional information about this declaration:

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