
Local Action Group as a public-private partnership for rural development: insights from the Local Action Group Maiella Verde

Community ownership and public-private partnerships are fundamental to develop integrated bottom-up strategies in rural areas, where there is a need to respond to territorial challenges and boost processes for sustainable human development by encouraging the discovery and development of untapped potential within rural communities and territories themselves.

In this regard, potential insights can be drawn from the experience of the **Local Action Group “Maiella Verde”**, which has been operating since 1992 in the rural areas of Chieti Province in Abruzzo Region (Italy). This initiative is exemplary of the application of the **LEADER / “Community-Led Local Development” (CLLD) approach** in Italy. This approach aims at mobilising and involving rural communities and organisations to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering territorial cohesion and reaching specific sustainable development objectives. Indeed, LEADER / CLLD relies on Local Action Groups as political and technical bodies that are able to tie the local partnership of actors with the managers and technical team in charge of designing and implementing a local strategy for rural development.



The Experience

The Local Action Group (LAG) “Maiella Verde” is a **limited liability consortium owned by a large public-private partnership**, which has been operating since 1992 in a mountainous and hilly area in Abruzzo Region. “Maiella Verde” covers the area of 84 municipalities in an area with a population of 147.640 inhabitants in around 2.000 km². The area – especially its inner and rural parts – suffers long-lasting socio-economic problems, such as depopulation, crisis of farming (due to ageing of farmers and loss of value of raw materials), crisis of local production due to competition in the global market, low youth and female employment, among others.

The long experience of “Maiella Verde”, being active in the area since 1992, has led to important results in terms of systemic change. For instance, the theme of food and wine identity was not particularly relevant at the very beginning of the LAG’s activities in 1992, but over the years it has gained importance and become central to territorial development strategies. The long period of activity made it possible to experiment a collective and collaborative approach (as resulted in the “Project Communities” initiatives), nurturing social cohesion and enhancing sustainable development.

The LAG includes a large number of different types of actors both in its consortium and project activities, from public local entities and institutions, private sector, third sector organization to community and collaborative economy initiatives. “Maiella Verde” currently consists of 157 members representatives of local public and private socio-economic interests. The active participation of these actors guarantees the presence and activation of multi-actor dynamics. “Maiella Verde” plays a liaison role with the institutional actors involved at local level, thus representing a formal political and technical body in charge of designing and implementing a local strategy for rural development.

“Maiella Verde” created a vast network of actors in the area who pooled their knowledge, ideas and efforts to tackle the main challenges faced by the rural communities in the area. By providing technical support, resources and know-how to local communities, the LAG enables them to act and plan autonomously and support the local community in acquiring social and transformative resilience.

The LAG “Maiella Verde”, and in general the LEADER / CLLD approach, aim at promoting inclusive and sustainable local development in rural areas and contribute to the localization of Agenda 2030 pursuing and catalysing the following Sustainable Development Goals:



ROADMAP

Organizations interested in this model can rely on the following insights and recommendations concerning key phases, actors, resources and actions.

PHASE 0. TRIGGERING FACTORS

Willingness to enhance the valorisation of local products, as well as natural and cultural resources. In the early '90s local productions were mainly focused on unprocessed raw materials, with a decline in market value caused by international competition. The price at which commodities were sold was no longer sufficient to cover production costs and ensure producers' livelihoods. Therefore, there was a shared need and desire to create processes to enhance the value added of typical local products, improving production processes and investing in processing and marketing.

PHASE 1. SET-UP OF THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP

- Identify a group of public and private actors able to motivate and mobilise the local community and all possible stakeholders.
- Establish a clear internal organization, governance structures and elaborate a statute.
- Identify financing sources at different levels.
- Leverage on local social capital as a resource to commit private and public local actors to actively participate and cooperate.
- Build an inclusive local partnership, ensuring a primary role to private actors from different sectors especially representing small producers and communities.

PHASE 2. DESIGN OF THE LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Envisage the active involvement of local communities in the elaboration of development strategies, through participatory processes open to both private individuals and organisations.
- Involve local actors with different backgrounds and rural development networks.
- Identify financial resources to cover costs related to territorial diagnostic and design of the strategy.
- Allow for peer learning and networking with similar initiatives and actors in other areas.
- Define the target area and population covered by Local Development Strategy.
- Analyse the development needs and potential of the area, including a SWOT analysis.
- Collect project ideas, actively encouraging and supporting community actors to submit projects which drive forward the strategy.
- Provide the strategy with a description of the management and monitoring & evaluation arrangements.
- Promote linkages with other local development actions implemented in the area.

PHASE 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY AND LOCAL ACTION GROUP MANAGEMENT

- Enable local communities in being protagonists of the implementation of project activities.
- Ensure members and staff have the appropriate competencies, skills and financial

- resources to generate and manage development processes on a local level.
- Identify key activities that ensure the implementation of the local development strategy.
 - Identify how to finance the projects, the requisites needed, and who will implement the activities.
 - Ensure technical assistance to the actors involved.
 - Ensure that the selected projects are instrumental in achieving the objective set out in the local development strategy.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Involve local actors actively during the development process, adopting a bottom-up approach in the development of the strategy.
- Maintain a strong attachment to the target area.
- Create opportunities for collaboration and networking with other similar initiatives.
- Set up a monitoring and evaluation system to verify the results achieved.

KEY DETERMINANTS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND REPLICABILITY

<i>Actors and institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a public-private partnership able to act both as a political and technical body. • Representative role by LAG members of the whole target area and of all the sectors interested in contributing to rural development.
<i>Social capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to initiate and support a rural development process by the private and public actors involved in the LAG, with the shared awareness that the time needed to achieve results could be long. • Local communities prone to be protagonists in the process of design and implementation of the strategy.
<i>Human capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of technical skills for the design and implementation of local development strategies; managerial skills to manage the resources; skills related to territorial animation, knowledge pooling and participatory processes involving local communities. • Capacity to listen, to analyse local needs, to identify available potential and to define concrete achievable results. • Balance between embeddedness within the local community and autonomy / impartiality from specific private interests.
<i>Governance framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear governance, by identifying leadership, roles and responsibilities of each actor and internal relationships to facilitate the management of activities.
<i>Institutional and legal framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal setting as a limited liability consortium which include relevant public and private actors in both the shareholder structure and the board of directors.
<i>Economic resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of financial resources from different levels and sources to support both the design and implementation of the strategy process.
<i>Services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance to local actors and territorial animation both during the design and the implementation of the local development strategy's objectives.

Value-added as a driver for sustainable human development and SDG localization

The creation of Local Action Group as a public-private partnership to guide rural development can represent a fundamental driving force for sustainable human development and SDG localization. Its value-added lies in the capacity to combine a professional administrative and bureaucratic management with making a collective and collaborative approach truly operational for the (re)activation and (re)generation of local communities in rural areas. LAGs enable the active involvement of local actors and their formal participation in the decision-making process for the identification of intervention priorities and the implementation of rural development strategies. Such structured public-private partnerships ensure full community ownership (and responsibility) and nurture social cohesion.

“Maiella Verde” is illustrative of a gradual approach to value added creation and enhancement within rural communities based on sequencing of phases: 1) assistance to small enterprises concerning production and processing; 2) creation of communities for the valorisation of typical local products; 3) enhancement of value added not only in typical products, but also in tourist promotion and regeneration of villages.

The role played by LAGs in rural areas across Europe could be crucial in similar areas in several emerging countries. Indeed, the issues addressed, such as the lack of services and economic opportunities, are also experienced in rural areas in many other countries. The initiative “Project Communities” by LAG “Maiella Verde” – namely the organisation of communities which take action on issues such as the production of traditional products and sustainable development – is particularly relevant and it may be adapted to many emerging countries.

Nevertheless, in line with a place-based perspective, the process can be pursued by prioritising and sequencing different steps and actions and by acting on different levers in different places, or in different times for the same place, according its contextual and conjunctural conditions, the presence of key determinants and collective political willingness.



Setting up a Community Foundation for a sustainable local development:
Insights from the Messina Community Foundation in Italy

**Local Action Group as a public-private partnership for rural development:
Insights from the Local Action Group Maiella Verde in Italy**

Setting up a Work Integration Social Enterprise:
Insights from QUID Social Enterprise in Italy

Setting up a Consortium of Social Cooperatives:
Insights from the Consortium Sale della Terra in Italy

Institutional support to community regeneration:
Insights from the SIBaTer project in Italy

Local development strategies for inner and fragile areas:
Insights from the Milk Mountain strategy for the Emilian Apennines

Contacts

ARCO
Action Research for CO-development

Piazza Ciardi, 25 - 59100 Prato, Italy
Phone. +39 0574 602561
Mail. info@arcolab.org

WWW.ARCOLAB.ORG

Funded by

Elaborated by

