

**The Democratic Capabilities of and Rhetoric on LEADER LAGs in the EU  
The Danish Case**  
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## **The democratic capabilities of and rhetoric on LEADER LAGs in EU – The Danish case**

### **1. Introduction**

This paper assesses the contributions of partnership organising in Danish LEADER<sup>1</sup> local action groups (LAGs) to democracy from the viewpoint of aggregative and integrative democratic theory. The most important players in the LEADER programmes over the years have been the LAG board members. Thus, the core of the LEADER method is the establishment of a LAG partnership consisting of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The LAG partnership holds decision-making power, creates a development plan and provides project grants to project holders; it can also initiate its own projects. In addition to the partnership concept, the LEADER method consists of six other key concepts: bottom-up approaches, area-based strategies, cross-sector/integrated approach, innovation, cooperation, and networking. The LEADER method for rural development has been the backbone of what has come to be known as the New Rural Paradigm (OECD, 2006), in which the focus is on area-based/territorial rural development rather than sector-based rural development.

Through the LEADER programmes, the EU has supported the transfer of decision-making authority to LAGs. The EU's support can be viewed as an expression of the need to introduce new players into the rural development scene. States cannot secure rural development alone, and the initiative has been transferred to other players, including actors from the private and voluntary sectors. These new players are important for the proper implementation of the decisions made by central authorities. The role of partnerships is central because partnerships function as governance networks developed from a steering philosophy based on political power functioning as form of empowerment through enabling, rather than coercing, people to participate (Bang 2005).

The structure of LEADER in EU has changed from LEADER being a Community Initiative during LEADER I (1991–1993), LEADER II (1994–1999) and LEADER+ (2000–2006) to being mainstreamed into the rural development program (RDP) and fisheries program (FP) of 2007–2013 (CEC 2006). As a Community Initiative, LEADER functioned as a laboratory for investigating new solutions for rural development. As part of the RDP and FP in Denmark, LEADER currently utilises a methodological approach to rural and fisheries development in areas of the RDP and FP in which also more sector-specific aims related to agriculture, forestry and environmental conservation are pursued (CEC 2005; CEC 2006a).

The paper proceeds in the following manner: after this short introduction (Section 1), Section 2 presents the theoretical framework by which the democratic capabilities of Danish LAGs is analysed. Section 3 presents the methods. Section 4 first analyses the EU rhetoric regarding LEADER and then analyses the empirical data on LEADER in Denmark during the LEADER+ and RDP and FP 2007–2013 periods. Finally, Section 5 offers concluding remarks.

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<sup>1</sup> Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy (LEADER; in French: 'Liaisons Entre Action de Developpement de l'Economie Rurale').

## 2. Theoretical background

### *New institutionalism*

This paper views LAGs as rather formalised governance networks, or institutions, in a wider system of governance, in which they participate in the allocation of the resources of a society. The new institutionalist approach provides a suitable framework by which to understand these processes.

Normative institutionalism (founded by March and Olsen) assigns a central role to norms and values within organisations and believes that individuals are influenced at all times by their full range of institutional attachments. Institutions mould their participants and supply systems of meaning (Peters 1999, p. 26). Thus, institutions are not necessarily a formal structure, because a collection of norms, rules, understandings and routines plays just as important an institutional role (Peters 1999, p. 28; March and Olsen 1989). The central term of the normative institutionalism is the ‘logic of appropriateness’, which influences individual behaviour (March and Olsen 1989, pp. 160-162). Peters posits the following regarding organisational norms: “...if an institution is effective in influencing the behavior of its members, those members will think more about whether an action conforms to the norms of the organization than about what the consequences will be for him- or herself” (Peters 1999, p. 29). The ‘logic of consequentiality’ is thus less important in the behaviour of organisational members, and the basis of institutions is therefore normative rather than coercive (Peters 1999, p. 41).

Examining LAGs from the perspective of normative institutionalism provides a good understanding of the formation of the identities of LAG board members through their participation on a LAG board. “The identities of the network actors are shaped and reshaped through socialization, education, reflection, action and interaction which is conditioned by the logic of appropriateness that has been developed within the governance network,” Sørensen and Torfing write (2007b, p. 37). The logic of appropriateness will differ between different LAG boards. The logic of consequentiality will increasingly fade into the background as the willingness of board members to contribute to the work on the board increases.

Rational choice institutionalism, however, is based on the classical assumption that individuals make utility-maximising decisions. Thus, it contrasts with March and Olsen’s approach. Rational choice institutionalism attaches importance to institutions as mechanisms for channelling and constraining individual behaviour (Smed 1998, p. 121) because institutions are viewed as a precondition for the interaction of utility-maximising individuals. In this respect, individuals *can* make rational decisions to be constrained by memberships in institutions (Peters 1999, p. 44). Without the presence of institutions (often in the form of rules), rational individual actions might generate collective irrationality. The rational choice approach is concerned with the design of institutions based on the assumption that the behavioural element of individual maximisation will lead individuals to shirk their responsibilities (Ostrom 1990, p. 27; Peters 1999, p. 45). Institutions can easily be created with different costs and benefits (incentive structures) that are not the consequences of historical and norm-based processes. Instead, game-like situations occur, as expressed by the governability theoretician Scharpf (1997).

Assessing LAGs from a rational choice institutionalist perspective places emphasis on rational actors depending on each other to achieve common policy goals. If each actor cannot achieve a goal individually and the benefits of cooperation are higher than the costs, it is rational to join networks. This approach also draws attention to the importance of establishing rules, incentive structures and games as political instruments to encourage trust between the parties. Sørensen and Torfing write,

*“...the preferred games are those that emphasize the positive interdependence of the actors and increase the costs of non-cooperation”* (2007b, p. 34). Rational choice institutionalism emphasises the fact that each LAG board member has his/her individual reasons for joining the LAG board.

#### *Aggregative and integrative democracy*

March and Olsen’s (1989) two approaches to democracy—the aggregative and the integrative approaches—can be viewed as the continuation of rational choice institutionalism and normative institutionalism (Bogason 2004, p. 3). The theory outlined by March and Olsen is based on the belief that the organisation of political life in the form of institutions is important. It goes beyond the rational choice perspective of individual decision-making because March and Olsen take the normative institutionalist approach:

*“...political actors are driven by institutional duties and roles as well as, or instead of, by calculated self-interest; politics is organized around the construction and interpretation of meaning as well as, or instead of, the making of choices; routines, rules, and forms evolve through history-dependent processes that do not reliably and quickly reach unique equilibria; the institutions of politics are not simple echoes of social forces; and the polity is something different from, or more than, an arena for competition among rival interests”* (March and Olsen 1989, p. 159).

Political institutions as instruments of democracy will be evaluated differently from the perspectives of aggregative and integrative democracy. March and Olsen acknowledge the integrative democratic stance in their assumption that the identities and capabilities of individuals are closely related to their membership and position within a community (March and Olsen 1989, p. 161). They write,

*“In a broad sense, we have been urging that a perspective of politics as organized around the interaction of a collection of individual actors or events may be supplemented with (or replaced by) a perspective that sees the polity as a community of rules, norms, and institutions”* (March and Olsen, p. 171).

The aggregative democratic version is based on the traditional institutions of representative democracy, wherein representatives are elected to address the interests of individual voters. Between elections, the voters are not to participate in the discussions among the representatives. Instead, the representatives’ performance will be judged on election day. Society is viewed as a collection of individuals with individual and atomised preferences that must be protected. Negative liberty, as asserted by Berlin (1958), is therefore central to the aggregative democratic standpoint.

The integrative democratic version is built on the idea of deliberation towards an identification of the common good. From this stance, the role of representatives is to promote deliberation, which makes citizen participation crucial. Through participation and deliberation in the civil society and in the political institutions, individuals will be educated and transformed into citizens (Bogason 2004, pp. 5-6; Sørensen and Torfing 2007c, pp. 234-235). Contrary to the aggregative version, democracy is not viewed as a power struggle between different individuals or factions but rather as a forum for deliberations regarding the common good. Liberty is thus defined positively (Berlin 1958). March and Olsen’s integrative position is evident in the following quote:

*“Even in situations in which there is ex ante disagreement about values, there are processes of public discussion and private thought that arrive at better ex post social solutions than does bargaining, exchange, or coalition formation in the service of prior preferences”* (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 127)

### *Examples of aggregative and integrative democratic theoreticians*

A democratic theoretician who takes the aggregative stance as a point of departure is Schumpeter (1994). Schumpeter is a proponent of elite democracy. He finds that it is unrealistic and inappropriate for citizens to directly participate, as democracy should instead consist of elites competing for votes. When defining democracy, Schumpeter states, "*the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote*" (Schumpeter 1994, p. 269). According to this definition, what is left for voters to decide is the question of accepting or rejecting the chosen representatives who, according to Schumpeter, should be professional politicians. Democracy is a method for the selection of leaders, and the role of citizens is reduced. Schumpeter believes that he has created a realistic model because citizens do not ultimately achieve any real influence, nor should they have any influence because they do not have the expertise and capability to deal with political problems.

A democratic theoretician who departs from the integrative position is Pateman (1970). She seeks to broaden the scope of citizens' contributions to decision-making and thereby expand the role of citizens beyond casting votes. Pateman is concerned with the role of participation in modern democracies. She asserts that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from each other (Pateman 1970, p. 42). Participation is necessary both at the local level and in industry to obtain a democratic polity. The main functions of participation are educational, including the psychological aspect and the acquisition of practical democratic skills. She characterises the participatory democratic model as "*one where maximum input (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is 'feedback' from output to input*" (Pateman 1970, p. 43). According to Pateman, participation has an integrative effect and therefore aids in the public acceptance of collective decisions.

In the Danish context, the aggregative and integrative versions of democracy have been exemplified in the writings of Ross (1967), who defines democracy as a type of allocative structure similar to representative democracy, and Koch (1945), who defines democracy as a way of life. Ross and Koch differ in their view of the capacity of citizens to participate in politics. Ross does not find that ordinary people have these capacities for the following reasons:

*"The immediate public decision is unreliable, not only because people often due to ignorance, instability and short-sightedness will fail in their assessment of what serves it well, but also because often the majority will be determined by ominous special interests at the expense of a reasonable account of the minority"* (Ross 1967, p. 220).

By contrast, Koch finds that people are capable of learning to participate in democracy, as he asserts that democracy

*"...is a mindset, a lifestyle that cannot be acquired 'til you live through it in a very narrow private life in relation to family and neighbors, and then outwardly in relation to larger circles, in the relationship to fellow countrymen, and finally in relation to other nations ..."* (Koch 1945, pp. 12-13).

According to Ross, the task of the people in a democracy is therefore not to govern directly but rather to choose representatives in the form of elite bureaucrats and leaders who will be better able to govern (Ross 1967, p. 220). Koch is more in favour of direct citizen participation in political decision-making because this approach serves an important educational purpose.

The aggregative stance and the integrative stance, the stance of Schumpeter and Pateman and the position of Ross and Koch, respectively, are summarised below to demonstrate the adversarial horizontal relationships between the three vertically congruent positions.

**Table 1: Aggregative and integrative democracy (top level), democracy according to Schumpeter and Pateman (middle level) and according to Ross and Koch (bottom level), respectively.**

<b>Aggregative</b>	<b>Integrative</b>
<i>"Political systems are similar to economic systems built around competitive markets and prices".</i>	<i>"Human rights are seen as inviolate and inalienable symbols of the integration of a political culture, as well as of the identities and commitments of citizens".</i>
<i>"The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote".</i>	<i>"The participatory model as one where maximum input (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is 'feedback' from output to input".</i>
<i>"...people need leaders. The thought about the individual's self-governance and responsibility should be connected to the thought about leadership in trust." "...idea about leadership in acknowledgement of and trust in other's larger insight and capacities".</i>	<i>"Democracy cannot be confined in a formula. It is not a system or doctrine. It is a way of life. It is the conversation (the dialogue) and the mutual understanding and respect that are the nature of democracy".</i>

### 3. Methods

Before presenting and discussing the empirical data, a brief methodological overview is needed. The empirical portion of this paper is divided into three sub-sections based on differing data collection methods. Sub-section 1 presents a brief analysis of the overall EU LEADER rhetoric, which forms some of the foundation upon which LEADER in Denmark has been built. Sub-section 2 is a review of the overall institutional design of the governance system of LAGs in the Danish LEADER+ 2000–2006 and RDP/FP 2007–2013 context. Here, the empirical data were obtained from document studies of policy documents as well as knowledge collected through research projects. Sub-section 3 presents qualitative interview data related to LEADER's contribution to democracy. This sub-section is based on a recent qualitative analysis (Thuesen and Nielsen, 2012) of LAG board members and coordinators' view on the benefit of the LEADER method, which included democracy as a theme. Focus group interviews were conducted in five LAGs in the period from October 4 to November 1, 2011, and 4–7 persons were interviewed at each focus group meeting. The data were transcribed and subsequently analysed.

### 4. The empirical LEADER situation: EU and Denmark

#### *Assessment of the EU LEADER rhetoric*

According to March and Olsen, concrete institutions can be judged from the perspective of aggregative and integrative democracy because institutions embrace specific conceptions regarding the goal of political processes. Bearing this fact in mind, it is possible to assess the extent to which the LEADER approach in the formal presentation of the program at the EU level builds upon the aggregative stance or the integrative stance. Such an assessment can be made by examining the fact

sheet ‘The LEADER approach – A basic guide’ (CEC, 2006b). In this publication, the European Commission mentions the integrative aspects of LEADER numerous times, as demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Assessment of the aggregative and integrative aspects of LEADER at the EU level**

Aggregative or integrative judgment	Quotations from ‘The LEADER approach–A basic guide’ (CEC, 2006b)
Integrative	“...the LEADER approach can provide an opportunity for them to take the initiative and to participate actively, in rural development programmes in their local area...”.
Integrative	“By encouraging local participation in the drawing up and implementation of sustainable development strategies, the LEADER approach may prove to be a precious resource for future rural policy”.
Integrative	“It uses a holistic approach to address rural problems”.
Integrative	“LEADER encourages socioeconomic players to work together, to produce goods and services that generate maximum added value in their local area”.
Integrative	“An area-based approach takes a small, homogenous, socially cohesive territory, often characterised by common traditions, a local identity, a sense of belonging or common needs and expectations, as the target area for policy implementation”.
Integrative	“Local actors participate in decision-making about the strategy and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local area”.
Integrative/aggregative	“The involvement of local actors includes the population at large, economic and social interest groups and representative public and private institutions. Capacity building is an essential component of the bottom-up approach...”.
Integrative	“LAGs (...) strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between different rural actors, who often have little experience in working together, by reducing potential conflict and facilitating negotiated solutions through consultation and discussion...”.
Integrative	“Putting these principles into practice means real people designing local strategies and participating in activities”.

The table shows how the active participation of citizens is clearly encouraged at the EU level. The fact sheet mentions that the LEADER program uses a holistic approach to rural development—holism being the opposite of atomistic—which stands in opposition to the aggregative stance. Moreover, capacity building is highlighted as a central component of the LEADER approach, along with strengthened dialogue and cooperation between different socioeconomic players. Aggregation of interests is mentioned only in the context of LAG partnerships that must be representative of the existing local interest groups drawn from different socioeconomic sectors in the area (CEC 2006b). The overall LEADER rhetoric thus appears to be integrative.

#### *Assessment of the institutional design of Danish LAGs*

Concerning the institutional design of LAGs in Denmark, the situation is more diverse. In contrast to the 12 Danish LAGs in the LEADER+ period of 2000–2006, 57 LAGs have been established as part of the current RDP and FP 2007–2013 in Denmark. This statistic means that more than 700 persons are active on the LAG boards (Thuesen, 2010; Thuesen and Sørensen, 2008). In total, 39, 12 and 6 LAGs work strictly within the RDP, within both the RDP and FP and strictly within the FP,

respectively. Together with an increase in the number of LAGs, a reform of the organisational arrangement has occurred from LEADER+ until RDP and FP 2007–2013. During the LEADER+ period, the members of the LAGs were appointed rather than elected. Thus, it could be difficult for an outsider to gain entrance to or influence decision-making processes in the LAG partnerships. During the LEADER+ period, LAG board members were called LAG members because in most places, there were no additional members of the LAG aside from the board itself. Today, during the programming period 2007–2013, the formal institutional design established by the Ministry prescribes that it is obligatory for Danish LAGs to be organised as associations with free and open membership. People who live in the LAG area and are more than 15 years can become members of the LAG association and participate in the annual election of the board. The board members, who must be at least 18 years old, are elected for 2-year terms at annual general assembly meetings held in the spring. The board members are to represent four groups: 1) local citizens, 2) local enterprises and trade organisations, 3) local nature, environment, culture, citizen, and leisure associations, and 4) public authorities (DFIA 2007a; DFIA 2007b). The situation prior to 2007 was not democratic in either the aggregative or the integrative manner. Input legitimacy was simply too low due to the appointment structure.

**Table 2: Overview of the Danish LAG organisation from 2000 to 2006 and from 2007 to 2013**

	<b>LEADER+ 2000–2006</b>	<b>RDP and FP 2007–2013</b>
<b>Number of LAGs</b>	12	57
<b>Number of board members</b>	Approximately 184	Approximately 700
<b>Entry standards to LAG boards</b>	Appointment	Election of people over 18 years old, elected for 2-year terms at annual general assembly meetings
<b>Additional LAG members</b>	No	Yes, free and open membership for people who live in the area and are more than 15 years old

The establishment of a higher number of LAGs has given more citizens the opportunity to influence local decision-making. The fact that LEADER covers nearly the entire country (with the exception of several large cities) has resulted in a much greater awareness of the work LAGs perform within the wider rural population, as well as greater media attention.

To strengthen democracy in relation to LAGs, clear access procedures are necessary, such that all citizens have the opportunity to influence decision-making. Such was not the case in the Danish LAGs during the LEADER+ period. The situation has changed with the introduction of LAGs as membership-based associations. Nonetheless, in relation to participation in the decision-making of LAGs, LEADER in Denmark is still a ‘democracy of the active’. Only those individuals who join the association and attend the general assembly meetings can influence the composition of the board. As demonstrated by Thuesen (2010), Danish LAG board members in the RDP and FP 2007–2013 are extremely well educated, which means that they could be deemed sub-elites (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993). They have the expertise and capability to address political problems, contrary to what Schumpeter (1994) and Ross (1967) believe is true for the general population. Elections improve accountability structures and formal representation. This aspect points towards an increased concern regarding the aggregative aspects of democracy. From a ministerial viewpoint, such concerns might be founded upon the expectation of increased public awareness due to the greater amount of money distributed through the LAGs in the period of 2007–2013. Drawing upon Schumpeter’s argument, the competitive struggle for the people’s vote has been introduced and enhanced with the increased media attention and greater public awareness. However, participation patterns continue to prove uneven. According



to Pateman and Koch, these patterns are problematic due to the organisations' inability to fulfil the educational function of participation (Pateman, 1970; Koch, 1945). Authority has been transferred to an organisation that citizens are to actively research through newspaper articles, advertisements and websites. From the perspective of the aggregative democratic theories, this process is not necessarily problematic because the central focus is on the election of representatives who are best equipped to make decisions. From the perspective of the integrative democratic theorists, however, this process is problematic due to the lack of involvement of new citizens. Thus, it does not fulfil the educative or capacity-building functions of LAGs. For LAGs to be organised as associations also requires the involvement of more people through the membership structure. This arrangement can be viewed as an opening towards an integrative democratic position through various types of involvement. In this respect, the Danish context reveals LAGs to be useful democratic supplements to existing political structures. Overall, it can be said that elections have improved the accountability structures of Danish LAGs, pointing towards the aggregate version of democracy, and the new membership model and the greater awareness of the program among the media and the general populace hold the potential for the development of the integrative democratic stance, as well.

#### *Assessment of the work accomplished through the LAG boards*

The establishment of LAGs and the discussions within the LAG boards are described as unique and special by many LAG board members. To borrow Pateman's concept, the boards engage in a process where there is feedback from output to input. One board member states, *"What I think is great about the whole thing here, the years I have been in the LAG system [is] that it brings people together across dividing lines. That is, you bring business people together with people like us (...) together with some politicians, and they are therefore forced ... you have to sit down around a table and discuss it, and say what we want with the development. I think you have no other forum in Denmark, where (...) it can be done. Otherwise the professional organisations sit and say, 'No, this is my money, I'll make sure of that.' And then the nature organisations say that here it should just be nature all together. And then there are some politicians who say, 'Ah, we cannot even afford it'. Here, they are obliged to talk to everyone, and that is what I think is the most amazing thing about the LEADER approach. You bring some people together who would normally never get to meet in that way. And even that one can develop things and use some money too. I think that's the genius of this system"*. One could say that the fact that both the Ministry and the EU provide money if the local partners create a development plan together helps to emphasise the interdependence between the players and increases the costs of not co-operating, as described in the section on rational choice institutionalism. The local players may 'lose face' locally, and they can also lose money if they fail to reach an agreement on the development plan. The Ministry and the EU have set up a game structure as a political instrument to build trust between the socio-economic actors. However, this approach only appears to prevail during the initial phase of the board's work. A board member for another LAG explains how agreeing on the strategy led to some serious discussions, during which the aggregation of interests dominated initially but was replaced by an understanding of the importance of achieving a common outcome through dialogue and collaboration rather than through competition. *"It was exciting and it was good that we got further into it. Because there was a time when we thought, now we all go home, and now nothing more will happen here ... where we all went in and gave what we had to it ... we could see the point in continuing with it because we had a common interest in seeing that it got up and running"*, the board member states. A representative of the same LAG Board elaborates on the topic: *"It is also a strength that...there are different people in such a group that ... Yes, it could well be that one could sit and hoe his own potatoes... but it's no use in a community [like the LAG]"*. Again, the norms appear to be well established and more important than individual self-interests. Thus, there is a clear expression of collaboration rather than competition in the concrete

work of the LAG boards. A LAG board member also describes the importance of discussions between board members when making decisions as follows: *"I think it's exciting, it's always exciting to read the projects before you've talked with anyone about them, and come only with one's own prejudices, or try to identify them or what to even think about anything, and then to evaluate them by what is being said. Therefore, I think that a discussion on the board is incredibly important because we have such a different approach to the projects"*. Another board member discusses the same subject as well as what motivates him to continue working with the LAG as follows: *"After I have participated on the LAG board meetings, I think an additional motivating factor is the diversity of the people who are present. And even though we do not always have an equal amount of time to read all the projects, it does not really matter because we have each understood our part of it. And all together, I think that when we talk about the projects, we always discuss them in depth. And I also think that this quorum is an inspiring thing"*. Thus, there appears to be a solid consensus about the previously mentioned March and Olsen quote (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 127), which states that even in situations in which there are differences among individuals' values initially, there are processes of public dialogue and private reflection that arrive at better social solutions in the end than would bargaining or coalition formation in the service of goals established in advance. There is also a positive recognition that the LAG board is a forum that brings different people together. One might ask whether the discussions would become more competitive if there was a greater sense of scarcity for funding.

When asked about the benefit of the LEADER method, a board member directly expresses that it is a project that supports democracy as follows: *"It's a way... both what is happening in the LAG... the group here; it is a motley mix of people who come from all sorts of places. I think there's an interesting discussion, when it is not a professional selection in the way you read the applications, and the way applications are assessed through a variety of lenses. And I think that it matters in the long run also that people know.... I think part of the LAG method's success is that people know that there are local people who sit at the table here and ... [that] there is a dialogue about what is happening.... In that way, I think it is a project that supports democracy. ... The LAG is of course much better known than many other funding pools. It obviously has something to do with the time... that it has been around for so long. But it also has something to do with, I think, the local anchorage... the local decision-making"*. Another person describes democracy as beneficial in the following manner: *"We may well say that another approach to strengthening democracy, it's exactly also that. [On] the board ... we largely come from everywhere, that is, there are not many where you can say that they come from [the bigger towns]. They come from all the small communities of which we have 21 or 22 in the municipality"*. Some of the common ground among board members is established by virtue of board members being local people from local communities and decisions being made locally by a broad circle of board members. A LAG board member refers to this local decision-making and coaching as follows: *"I also believe that the LAG's success and hopefully future success is exactly related to that local decision. But [it is] also something about [the fact] that you can grab a local coordinator, so it is not [an organisation] that sits in Odense or Copenhagen or Brussels. So you can get to talk about, and you can get out and see, and you may be advised: is this something we have an opportunity for at all? So it's not all done by mail or by phone. We can pull project initiators in if we have doubts about whether it is justified that we should give grants"*. Overall, it is the logic of appropriateness that internally prevails on the LAG boards rather than the logic of consequentiality. Individual preferences for joining the LAG board appear to become less important over time compared to the development of a territorially based consensus and an integrative version of democracy.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the associational institutional design, including elections of board members, has created room for processes of integrative democracy that focus on involving more citizens in democratic discussions and promoting more deliberations and openness around the LAGs in general. The elections place LAG partnerships somewhere between a pure network structure and a traditional representative structure. The introduction of elections can thus be viewed as an expression of the move toward a more aggregative democratic approach, in which elections are meant to establish the legitimacy of the LAGs and in which sub-elite competition is viewed as an optimal democratic solution. Regarding the work on the LAG boards, these processes are ongoing. Moreover, as the assessment above demonstrated, this work is primarily based on principles of integrative democracy, in which communities of rules and norms develop over time.

Finally, I posit that experiments at the LAG level and at the project level can contribute to the further democratisation of the LEADER initiative in Denmark. Ideally, these experiments could be accompanied by national guidelines or nationally initiated experiments or games focused on inclusion. They would encourage participatory practices among all LAGs. By initiating broad projects on, for example, village development plans and concrete citizen involvement, LAGs can become important mediators in rural governance between formal authorities (i.e., the EU, state, region and municipality) and rural citizens.

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