

WORK IN PROGRESS – DO NOT CITE

Interactive research for learning from Leader projects: contradictions and dilemmas in the Leader programme

1. Introduction

This paper presents a study in which researchers worked in an ‘interactive research’ project with a Swedish Leader Local Action Group (LAG). The aim of the study was on the one hand to support learning processes within the LAG and in the activities they manage. On the other hand it was, and is, part of an ongoing research interest in learning and local practices of rural policy.

In adherence with the interactive research approach, the focus of the study was developed in cooperation with members of LAG and the Leader staff. In interviews and seminars with LAG members and employees, themes for possible improvements of the Leader activities were identified. This paper presents the themes and discusses them as dilemmas the LAG faces in managing Leader. The dilemmas are seen as expressions of contradictions within the Leader initiative, which the LAG as well as others involved in Leader, are affected by and which condition their activities. Theoretically, the study builds on theories on work place learning in general, and on understanding of the role of contradictions for learning in particular. However, as pointed out in the concluding discussion, the contradictions explored can also be seen in the light of the theories of governance and governmentability and be related to the debates on rural development and development partnerships, drawing on such theories. Seen that way, the analysis illustrates how ‘Janus faced’ qualities of Governance-beyond-the-State (c.f. Swyngedouw, 2005) penetrate the activities of the LAG.

The paper is structured as follows. The coming, second, part of the paper gives an overview over the theoretical approaches, giving brief presentations of concepts from work place learning and activity theory as used in this context. The third part describes the methodology and design of the study. It gives an introduction to the research setting, interactive research as a research methodology and describes how learning issues were explored with the LAG. The fourth part presents the themes. This is followed by a discussion on the dilemmas that emerged in this processes. Drawing on governmentability theories, the last part of the paper sketches the importance of reflection over dilemma and the marginalised themes, in order for local governance partnerships to become ‘active agents’ developing their strategies.

2. Theoretical framework: learning in activities.

During the last decades, the terms ‘learning’ and ‘knowledge’ have acquired an increasingly greater interest within social sciences and policy. Knowledge and learning are assumed to explain complex social changes (Bron & Schemmann, 2003). Creating supportive contexts for learning processes is therefore recommended in the formulation of policies for both regional and economic development (see, for example, Maskell, 2001) as well as for rural development. Leader can be seen as an example of such an initiative (Ray, 2000). It is assumed that learning that supports regional and local development is generated through networking, mobility, cross sectorial partnerships and education. Access to arenas for joint reflection and learning, such as partnerships, are often seen as key elements in dealing with conflicts and creating synergies supporting development. In rural research such processes

have been explored drawing on the notion of social learning as suggested by Glasbergen (Glasbergen, 1996; see e.g. Valve, 2003; High and Nemes, 2007). Communities of practice and local knowledge perspectives are other approaches by which issues of learning and knowledge have been explored in rural studies.

However, the link to theories and studies on learning in activities from other fields of study, such as work place learning or organisational development, is often weak in research on learning in rural development policy arrangements. Yet such theories may afford critical lenses as well as support in the development of rural policy practices, and may complement the present approaches to learning and knowledge in rural studies.

2.1. Work place learning: Scope of action and space for reflection

A recurring theme in theories of work place learning is the scope of action and space for reflection afforded participants in specific action contexts. In a comprehensive overview over research on learning in work situations, Ellström, points to that the work situation participants' control over the tasks, the methods and the results, has effects for the learning modes which the participants tend to use and develop (Ellström 2001). Work situations in which these three aspects are given tend to enhance 'adaptive learning modes'. Such learning modes support the formation of competencies for handling frequent routine problems. It corresponds to conditioning models of learning which aim at routinised and automated actions, performed without conscious attention and control¹.

In contrast, in contexts which support 'developmental learning modes' the subject has to:

“...use his or her own authority to not only to evaluate outcomes or choose methods but to define the task and the conditions at hand; the learner must diagnose a perhaps unclear and puzzling situation... one of the crucial elements in this process is to make explicit (and thereby testable) the often implicit and taken-for-granted premises of our actions (Dewey 1933). This requires that the actor be able to see the action and its consequences in perspective. It also requires an ability to consider alternatives and to critically analyze the underlying assumptions and other conditions of action.” (Ellström 2001: 424)

Furthermore, feedback is generally considered as necessary for learning. However, work place studies point to that feedback has a paradoxical function in relation to learning:

“Although it [feedback] is necessary in relation to adaptive forms of learning with a focus on efficient production (or reproduction) and refinement of actions under clear goals and stable conditions, a too-strong emphasis on the need for specific goals and feedback on the short-term results of actions would impede more developmental (innovative) forms of learning.” (Ellström 2001: 427)

Feedback presupposes clear goals, yet in situations which aim at innovation or long term development, goals are often vague and inconsistent and typically change as new goals are discovered. Intentions and purposes may also develop as parts of the learning process in carrying out an activity (Döös 1997). Feedback systems, such as evaluations and monitoring, can thus hamper as well as enhance particular modes of learning depending on how they are arranged.

¹ Processes of routinisation is a longstanding issue in work and action related learning research .

Adaptive and developmental modes of learning should not be seen as mutually exclusive. People need to be able to use several modes of learning concurrently. Furthermore, there are of course intermediary positions to those described here. However, as Ellström points out, organisations tend to get caught in preconditions which invite adaptive modes of learning. Yet, even if organisations tend to further adaptive modes of learning, employees may in practice be more creative and innovative than officially recognised. Creativity may be necessary, in work situations which seem to offer very little space for employees' interpretations and action, in order to establish "a reasonable effective and well functioning workplace" (Ellström 2002:87).

The Leader method is supposed to enhance collaboration among actors from different societal sectors and activities. It also aims at supporting 'innovation' and the sustainable development of activities which may be conducive for long term social and economic development in the area. Essentially, this presupposes that the LAG manages to establish conditions that support 'developmental learning modes' among those that are involved in the activities they manage. This would imply that opportunities for the interpretation and development of tasks and methods, and the interpretation of results are integrated in programme activities. At the same time the LAG needs to provide steering and vision which guide activities in an overarching way.

However, LAG also has to handle the demands which frame Leader as a policy intervention, e.g. see to that project owners manage the administrative routines for requiring funding, see to that programme and local indicators are met, keep activities in line with the demands from the auditing system etc. This presupposes an adaptive learning mode, getting administrative routines right and functioning. It also presupposes that important interpretations and controls of the tasks, methods and results are made on other (and higher) levels of the administrative system within which the local Leader activities are embedded. Reconciling accountability at European and national levels with flexible local approaches is a challenging task inherent to much of the EU policies. In the case of Leader, this is accentuated as Leader explicitly builds on territorial policy strategies and aims at long term local capacity building, while audits and evaluations mainly build on controls and quantitative indicators which are not geared to identify, measure or support such processes. High and Nemes point to this problem suggesting hybrid forms of evaluations of Leader that could combine exogenous and endogenous evaluation (High and Nemes, 2007). This then is one example of that there are in built contradictions in the Leader method which the LAG needs to handle. However, contradictions are not unusual to activities or organisations. In fact, another recurring theme in learning theory is the understanding of contradictions as inherent to activities and central to learning.

2.2. Contradictions as learning opportunities

In learning studies which draw on predominantly social theories, such as situated learning and sociocultural learning theories, contradictions are seldom focal in the analysis of the learning situation (see e.g. Lave & Wenger 1991, Säljö 2000). Learning processes are then explored as integral to activities with persons-acting-in-settings, appropriating the capacity to act as increasingly competent actors within an activity, increasingly understanding how social activities are structured and what they mean. In the social learning perspectives, mentioned earlier, which draw on Glasbergen's work on environmental policy implementation, the focus is, for instance, on communication and joint planning among actors emphasising the quality of the dialogue and relations among actors for successful policy implementation (Glasbergen, 1996).

The thought figure that contradictions are central to learning can be traced in many theories of learning which otherwise differ in ontological as well as epistemological points of departure. It was central to Piaget's theories on the construction of knowledge. Piaget proposed that contradictions between the individual subject's present experiences and previous understanding under certain conditions could lead to the construction of new ways of understanding (Piaget, 1970). This understanding of the construction of knowledge is hence included in the theories of others who essentially build on Piaget's epistemology (e.g. Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Dixon 1994). In these, individual and joint reflection over experiences and interpretations, teasing out contradictions, are focal to developing new ways of understanding and acting. Contradictions were also central to Bateson's more cybernetically inspired theory of levels of learning (Bateson 1972). Bateson's levels refer to whether contradictions between behaviour and expected outcomes can be handled through adaptations within a given frame of understanding and action, or if they demand changes on more overarching levels related to goals and values. Theories of organisational learning as loops of learning proposed by Argyris and Schön build on Bateson's levels (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Bateson furthermore developed the idea of double bind as a particular kind of contradiction in communication. In negative cases double bind communication can be victimising and pathogenic. In positive cases, it may spur break throughs transcending to other levels of understanding.

Contradictions are inherent to organisations as contradictions simply are inherent to human activity. A theoretical approach which elaborates on this from a collective learning perspective is cultural historic activity theory (CHAT). This is an approach to organisational development and work place learning which has primarily been developed by Engeström (Engeström, 1987, 2001). It builds on the cultural historic perspective on learning proposed by Vygotsky and Leont'ev. This implies a theoretical and empirical basis in developmental psychology which in many ways is similar to that of Piaget, but which also differs from his in fundamental aspects. Vygotsky's studies in developmental psychology and learning in the 1920s and 1930s, lead him to propose that human action and cultural development is historically grounded and mediated by cultural tools in the form of signs or artefacts (Vygotsky 1981). The development and acquisition of mediating tools leads to a reorganisation of thought, attention, perception and memory. Leont'ev, who built on Vygotsky, developed an analysis of human activities. An important part of this was that activities are social in nature and are intentionally oriented and collective (Leont'ev, 1981).

Engeström suggests that, being mediated, intentional and collective, any human activity can be understood as an 'activity system' composed of six interrelated elements: subject, object (i.e. the overarching purpose) and mediating artefacts, and community, rules and division of labour (Engeström, 1987). Contradictions in activities are partly related to the elements within an activity system. For instance, both the division of labour and mediation are sources of contradictions. Moreover, activity systems are not static or uniform, they are multi-voiced, with multiple points of view, traditions and interests, and should be seen in their network relations with other activities (Engeström, 2001). Contradictions may therefore also be produced by historically accumulated structural tensions between the elements of an activity as well as between activity systems which interrelate with one another.

2.3. Leader as context for learning

To summarise and relate to the present study, in many different strands of learning theory, the experience of contradictions is seen as potentially valuable for learning and development. However, contradictions do not automatically spur learning which contributes to handling

them. They need to be made salient and interpreted as relevant, and this as well as alternatives must be explored and negotiated among involved actors. If there is little scope of action and space for reflection for participants in an activity, there is little chance that such learning processes will come about.

The organisation and objectives which are inherent to the Leader method give it particular preconditions for collective learning processes. Leader can be seen as a very complex activity system, multi-levelled, networking and dependent on many other activities. The LAGs are partnerships in which representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors are to collaborate. The activities funded should furthermore be innovative, contribute to long term sustainability, to integration and equality and be based on bottom-up mobilisation, albeit in accordance with indicators and rules set on other administrative levels. All this grants a multiplicity of motives, perspectives and interpretations which can be very productive from a learning point of view, but which also form a basis for contradictions which may hamper collaboration, communication and learning processes.

3. The Study

This section introduces the LAG which participated in the study, interactive research and how the study was carried out.

3.1. The setting

As Sweden joined the EU in 1995, LEADER II was the first Leader period in Sweden. In Sweden, both LEADER II and Leader+ were implemented in a limited number of areas and groups competed for being accepted as Leader areas. However, as Leader was integrated into the European Rural Development Programme (RDP) in the present policy period (2007-2013), all Swedish rural areas can now apply to become Leader areas without competing with others. Other changes are that the budget per LAG has diminished substantially and the County Administrative Boards² (CABs) have been given the responsibilities to handle certain controls as well as much of the project administration. In Sweden, the political-administrative Leader arrangement reaches vertically from the EU (DG Agri) to the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, and on to the National Board of Agriculture, the CABs, the participating municipalities and LAGs, the Leader offices, project owners, project managers and participants in projects.

Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd - Leader area and association for rural development

The study presented here was made in Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd³ (ALH), a Leader area which was established during LEADER II and continued, slightly enlarged, in Leader+. Already during LEADER II the organisation ALH differed from other LAGs in Sweden as it had so many members. A large LAG was a way to get a good representation of interests and relevant actors included in the LAG. This was seen as part of the networking function of Leader and a venue to get local legitimacy. Thus all the municipal and regional public funding actors were represented in LAG. The public sector representatives made up a third of the

² The 23 CABs are the national government's regional administration. During LEADER II and Leader+ the CABs were funding partners to the LAGs. Today they are part of the administration and control of Leader funded projects.

³ The name refers to the 'homeland of Astrid Lindgren'. Astrid Lindgren was an author of childrens' books which have a central role in the Swedish literature and which also have international renown. The stories in many of the books are set in the region where Astrid Lindgren grew up and place names in the region are known to a wide Swedish public. Calling the Leader area Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd implies that it is easy to identify geographically and may also give it connotations of industriousness, harmoniousness and adventure.

members as did the voluntary and private sector representatives. Young members and people with expertise in environmental issues were also sought out to make up a LAG of ca 35 people in which gender representation was balanced. This implied that the actual running of Leader was handled by a board, chosen by and from the LAG. This board also had to fulfil the demands on sector representation, as well as equal representation of actors from the four municipalities in ALH, gender, youth and expertise in environmental issues.

During Leader+, the organisational form was further changed. During that period the LAGs were given space to thematise their activities and ALH focused on working with young people. The LAG and the staff became known for their work with rural youth and this led i.a. to assignments for The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. This implied that part of the budget was not connected to the Leader programme and a new organisational form was sought to handle these activities. Concurrently there were uncertainties about what would happen to Leader at the end of Leader+. To prepare for a possible continuation without EU funding or a national Leader programme and to handle the budget posts not related to Leader, ALH was reorganised into an association for local rural development which among other activities runs Leader+. This is the also the current organisation. It can be described as three layered: the association ALH, in which anyone who is interested in local rural development can become a member, the LAG which needs to have members according to the rules guiding Leader in the Swedish RDP, and the LAG board which is chosen from the LAG, but which is also the board of the ALH association. At present only a few persons are members of the association without being LAG members. LAG has 41 members of which eleven are board members. The main task and the main budget are managing Leader.

Changes due to the integration of Leader in RDP

In Sweden, the transition from Leader+ to Leader as part of the RDP also implied changes in the local Leader planning. The national and regional development plans need to be taken into account and the local plan may not disagree with other official plans which cover the same territory. The development strategy in the plan should furthermore relate to at least one of the three overarching RDP objectives (axis 1-3). These are listed below as is how they are specified on Swedish Board of Agriculture homepage giving advice on how to write an application to become a Leader area⁴:

1. The competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector
i.e. strengthening the competitiveness and development capacity in businesses in farming, forestry, reindeer herding and food production based on a sustainable use of natural resources;
2. The environment and the countryside
i.e. to maintain and develop an attractive landscape and a living countryside, and stimulate a resource effective and sustainable production with a decreased environmental impact being an example of activities. A holistic perspective on the landscape as a resource for recreation, development, growth and occupancy, and as a carrier of natural and cultural heritage;
3. The quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy
i.e. presupposing a diversified economy, a focus on the resources of rural areas in the form of attractive areas for occupancy and recreation, and an increased focus on local

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<http://www.sjv.se/download/18.313fdc3e116c968a30080001694/Guide+f%C3%B6r+att+bilda+Leaderomr%C3%A5den.pdf>

collaboration for e.g. services and infrastructure. The goal is to get a diversification of the rural economy in order to enhance occupation, higher quality of life and a sustainable use of resources in rural areas.

However, the homepage also states that in the evaluation of the strategy it's inclusion of strengthened competitiveness for rural industries, increased growth and occupation will be given particular attention. The homepage furthermore lists the horizontal objectives that should be included in the local strategy. These are: environmental and sustainable development, increased competence, youth, integration, equality and strengthened competitiveness. It also states the key characteristics of the Leader approach as the public, private and voluntary sector partnerships, local initiative, local development strategy, creative and innovative ways of working and being cross sectorial.

In ALH, the integration of Leader into the RDP, and CAP, led to a mobilisation of the local branch of the Swedish Confederation of Farmers (LRF) to get representation in the new LAG⁵. The present plan puts a much stronger focus on entrepreneurship, business development and on affording opportunities for learning about environmental issues and sustainable development to the general public. Youth issues and cultural projects are not as focal anymore. However, activities for rural youth continue, albeit mainly funded from other sources. As ALH also has other sources of income, they have been able to keep 2½ positions at the Leader office. This is seen as a great advantage in the current programme as the local budgets for administration of Leader have been substantially reduced. This is partly because the proportion of the total budget allowed for administration has been reduced and partly because the total budget is smaller. The budget post 'administration' covers that which is not direct project funding and includes support in developing project applications and project plans, administrative support for project owners, organising networking among those involved in projects, LAG meetings, local evaluations and follow-ups of projects and much more. In short, the integration into the RDP has reduced the budget for everything which is not direct support to projects; the local plan has been adapted to the demands to focus on entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability; LRF has an increased representation in the LAG board and part of the project administration has been taken over by the CAB

3.2. Interactive research

Interactive research is an action research approach which builds on the recognition of the different roles of researchers and the participants in the activities explored, as well as on the value of their collaboration. It can be seen as a response to the changing preconditions for research in contemporary society: On the one hand to safeguard the critical and independent character of research and its position as a societal institution for developing theoretical understanding, generalisable and valid, which is openly communicated and discussed. On the other hand that researchers need to handle the growing demand on university research from actors outside the academia to engage in the problems and questions on their agendas. The expectations on research to collaborate with and to engage in questions defined by actors and stakeholders from other sectors of society imply new demands on the contextualisation of research and on what research should be about (Nowotny et al, 2001). These expectations can

⁵ The mobilisation in the local LRF to get representation can be seen in relation to Shortall's discussion of motivations to participate in development programmes (Shortall, 2008). In Sweden, the inclusion of Leader in the CAP was seen by some as that money is taken from farmers to be used for general rural development purposes. Integrated in CAP Leader became more important to participate in.

be seen as results of several contemporary developments. One is that problems society faces today are not only complex and transcend disciplinary boundaries, they are also partly understood as the result of research driven developments. Other reasons are that research is increasingly carried out outside academic institutions and the number of research educated in general has increased in the work force. This implies that academic institutions no longer necessarily have sovereignty when it comes to research. This has contributed to present demands on the 'societal relevance' of research and to changes in the relations between the academy and society at large. It has also led to a focus on research as a process (*ibid*).

Ideally interactive research aims at a combination of development work and critical research. The researchers are to be resources for the participants, and the participants are resources for the researchers. The interaction and involvement of both groups in the stages of the research processes are emphasised. Contributions to theory development are expected, partly as valid research results are to be the result of the frequent feed back from the empirical field. The role of the researcher is also to support and mediate the participants' development of their practice:

What is the role for the researcher in an Interactive process of joint learning? The researchers' main role is not to solve problems, but assist the participants in defining and analysing them – often by re-contextualising them or creating arenas where participants can play with ideas. This is a critical approach in which reflection, imagination, and analysis are necessary elements. Such a long-term learning approach differs from the way many consultants are working (Alasoini 2002:67). (Aagard Nielsen & Svensson, 2006:40)

3.3. The research process

The study was initiated in the spring 2008 by the ALH manager, Jacob Käll, who asked me if I could support the learning processes in and among the LAG members. This led on to a discussion on how such support could be integrated with my research. It also led to the involvement of Hans-Olof Stålgren, previous manager of the Swedish Network for Leader + and Lennart Svensson, who has ample experience from interactive research in other EU-partnership settings, as partners in the research team. During the summer of 2008 the four of us developed the main focus and work plan for a pilot project on learning in the LAG. Of the four of us Lennart and I can be seen as representing research on learning in work life and partnerships, Jacob had the intimate familiarity with ALH and Hans-Olof had a broad overview over the activities and challenges of the Swedish Leader+ LAGs.

Our aim was to work interactively. A preliminary work plan and a list of research questions were developed during summer 2008 and were presented and discussed at a LAG board meeting in August. This led to an assignment for Cecilia, Hans-Olof and Lennart to proceed exploring the following issues⁶:

1. The ALH and LAG organisation, management and decision making,
2. The balance between the private, public and voluntary sectors and the perspectives they represent in LAG and in the board,
3. The implementation of the horizontal Leader objectives and 'sustainability', as described in the local plan, in the activities,

⁶ The work until now has been funded by the partners. The LAG funded expenses for travelling and accommodation relating to interviews and seminars and one week of work for Cecilia and Lennart respectively, the Rural Development and Agricultural Society funded part of Hans-Olof's time in the autumn. The rest has been funded by my own and Lennart's research funding. I have functioned as project manager.

4. The capacity to take account of experiences from the project activities in the development of work in LAG and in the board,
5. The LAG and board participants' feelings of involvement and meaningfulness in their engagement in the Leader activities,
6. The capacity to support openness, questioning, innovation and learning in activities.

The design decided on and carried out was that we interviewed the LAG board, the staff at the Leader office, ten other LAG members and the Leader responsible at the CAB, all in all 25 people. The results of the interviews were written up in a comprehensive report which served as a basis for discussions at a LAG seminar in February 2009. Notes and transcriptions from group and plenary discussions led to a new report which was presented at a LAG meeting in early June. On the basis of the work until now, the board will make decisions at meeting in early autumn on how to proceed with the issues that have been discussed. In the September 2009 there will also be a presentation at the CAB of our work.

The coming analysis builds on the interviews, the two reports and the notes and tapes from the two seminars. It also builds on parts of an evaluation that the LAG board made of all Leader+ projects. In this, all Leader+ project owners had been interviewed and i.a. asked a question on suggestions for improvements which had been answered by 75% of the project owners. We made a secondary analysis of these answers.

4. Themes in interviews and seminars

The themes that were focal to those interviewed, which they saw as areas for improvement and development of the ALH, and which therefore were given increasing attention in the discussions and the reports, did not include all the six initial issues in an equal way. Also not all issues that emerged as important in the interviews became themes in the seminars and group discussions. It is therefore possible to distinguish two strands of themes in the analysis. One strand consists of the issues which the participants did focus on in discussions and the other strand those that they were included in the initial list of issues or were explored in the interviews, but not in the group discussions.

The gradual exclusion of some themes can of course be seen as a result of the method. In an interview things may be said which are difficult to bring up in large meetings or small group discussions. As this is an ongoing study which will continue, drawing on several methods, this is something that future will tell. However, already in this first round of interviews it seemed that the gradual exclusion of some themes was connected with that other themes were experienced as more pertinent. Moreover, these were also within the capacity and control of the LAG and the board to handle overtly, whereas those excluded were obviously related to demands posed by Leader policy framework over which the LAG and staff had less control and which seemed more delicate to handle.

4.1 Focal themes in discussions

The issues that were given much space in group discussions were closely related to the project activities, the role and involvement of LAG members in ALH's activities, the relationships and networking with actors and the general public in the area. The five themes in the seminar in June were for example the following:

1. To support learning in projects and in project related activities

This theme was very prominent in the evaluation and in interviews with those who had experiences from being involved in projects. There was general consensus about the need for

more meetings for those involved in projects, more follow up from the Leader staff or the LAG, and also that when there had been such arrangements, this had been appreciated. Regardless of this it was not something that was arranged continuously. Why? The staff apparently had little time for the projects after having supported the development of applications and an initial start up meeting. One of the staff said in the plenary: “In the local plan and in the project plans there are no strategies for follow ups after the funding decision and it is not in our job descriptions to do it. We need a clear assignment to be able to give priority to these arrangements”. That evaluations do not capture such issues was raised as a problem in the group discussions.

2. To develop Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd as an organisation

Developing the organisation was a constant theme for discussion during the study. IT was seen as a resource and an opportunity, but also as unclear. In connection with the previous theme, the association ALH was talked about as a possible vehicle for creating a context for contacts among past and present projects leaders and project owners. But there had been no time to pursue that idea.

Another recurring issue was about how LAG members could become more involved in the Leader activities and in supporting the on-going projects. Such involvement could also be beneficial for making the LAG members more familiar with the tasks of the board. Over the years there had been several attempts with LAG members in different committees or as mentors for projects leaders. However, most of these had not worked, because as people said “there are so many rules and regulations and if you get that wrong and give the wrong information, then you can really create problems”.

The roles of and the expectations on LAG members were also issues which reappeared again and again. Obviously members had different reasons and preconditions for their participation in the LAG. The municipal chairmen were important members, who could contribute much regardless of their having little time for meetings, whereas other municipal members, such as the municipal rural developers came as part of their work and could contribute by supporting Leader through their ordinary work. Private entrepreneurs and voluntary sector participants might have to take time from their ordinary work to participate, but could also have particular interest which they might pursue in LAG. Furthermore, what could be expected from LAG members giving time and expertise, and acting as “ambassadors” for Leader? When should they be paid for their inputs and when could that be seen as normal voluntary work for an association in which you are a member? These were questions which were debated in meetings and interviews. Many pointed out that the roles and expectations on LAG members are related to the purpose of LAG, and the purpose and vision of the association ALH. These however were not so clear according to some members. Leader and ALH were not so easy to grasp for those not involved in the board or in the everyday activities.

3. Taking care of project results and outcomes

The importance of taking better care of project results and outcomes was another theme which many saw as important. Some pointed out that this is interrelated with that project applications are well prepared. It was also related to the capacity of the staff and LAG to follow up on projects during project time. However, there are different kinds of project outcomes reflecting the complexities and range of the Leader programme. The participants distinguished five different kinds of outcomes:

1. the particular activity which the project aims to accomplish,

2. that which is communicated and becomes available for others,
3. networks and preconditions for future collaboration, e.g. new relations and familiarity among local actors,
4. learning and competence among those that have been involved in the projects. This may be about the activity in the project, increased confidence, capacity to lead activities and manage projects as well as the capacity to generate income through project development,
5. learning and competence about project activities for ALH as an association, the board, the LAG members and the staff. This may contribute to the development of their work and the managing of Leader and other local development efforts.

One suggestion was that LAG should have a 'learning project' which would run in parallel with all projects and connect projects, LAG and the board in a context for evaluation and learning. This was related to the previous theme on developing the organisation and the theme below on 'Communicating the vision and activities of ALH'.

The diffuse project ownership was an obstacle for LAG when it came to taking care of project results. Many projects end as the funding ends because the project owners are not prepared to include them in their ordinary activities or they cannot find other sources of income. This was an issue many brought up: could there be more done during project time to ensure that projects or their results were better integrated in other activities or had developed a more stable basis. It was also seen as a problem that some projects live on, or inspire others to similar activities, without ALH getting any recognition for their support to them. For ALH such recognition is important. Unclear project ownership may also hamper the LAG's capacity to steer projects during the funding period. The whole notion of 'project ownership' seemed new to many and generated much talk. But when it came to more concrete discussions it was included in issues concerning relations with other local actors for example the municipalities.

4. To develop joint learning and collaboration with the municipalities

The relations with the municipalities were seen as very important. Although the chairmen of all four municipalities which ALH covers were LAG members, it was still an issue to see that the members of the municipal board as well as municipal staff were better acquainted with Leader and the activities of ALH. Not only is municipal co-funding crucial for ALH, several of the activities in projects related to the municipalities' responsibilities⁷. The relations with the CAB were also seen as very important, but this became a theme that was much mentioned in interviews, but not in the meetings, and is thus elaborated on below. The same goes for other administrative levels, such as the Board of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture.

5. To communicate the vision and activities of Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd.

Another theme was, lastly, about the difficulties in communicating Leader in general and the local plan and vision of ALH in particular. Several of the LAG members had said in the interviews that it was difficult to function as 'ambassadors' for Leader, because Leader was so difficult to get a grip on, and if one used the official programme plans etc. to communicate it, people were put off by the bureaucratic language. ALH had a vision which was carefully

⁷ In Scandinavia, in general, the municipalities are responsible for the main welfare, security and educational services. Good contacts with the municipal organisation are often also an entry point for good relations with other local and regional actors (c.f. Waldenström 2004).

formulated and written up, but even that was too complex according to several of those interviewed. The board had set up a working group for making a communication plan, something which was seen as an important task. Reworking the homepage was one part of this. Yet many claimed that the best would be to make the projects activities better known, because that would give examples to communicate and people would get to know Leader and ALH through them.

4.2 Themes which became marginalised in the process

The issues that were discussed in the first report as a result of the interviews, but which became increasingly peripheral in the continued process were about the horizontal objectives; the balance and representation of the public, private and voluntary sectors in the partnerships and in connection with that how LAG members are recruited; and finally, questions about the administration of projects especially in relation to the new organisation with the CAB as a new level of control and administration.

1. Horizontal objectives

The horizontal objectives seemed to many to be rather an abstract notion. In the interviews, questions concerning them usually led to us being asked, in somewhat embarrassed ways, which they are⁸, or to vague answers about gender equality being something that is taken for granted today anyway. As we probed, innovativeness and, to some degree, sustainability were themes which many had much to say about. This was although innovativeness is not a horizontal objective but a part of the Leader approach. Distinctions between the Leader method characteristics and the horizontal objectives were actually not very clear to anyone involved in the study. One person answered these questions by pointing out that all these aspects are included in the plan and the plan is the steering document for project decisions. They tick them off in project discussions. On that level the distinctions seemed not so relevant.

In the interviews, innovativeness was often closely related to the project decisions, and overall, project activities were something that many had much to say about. A common view was that something should be 'new here' i.e. it should be new in the area. Some pointed out that they had funded very commonplace activities if they had been part of something which was new or had been important to encourage new constellations of actors to collaborate. Questions of what was innovative had obviously been much discussed, contextualised and handled within a framework of local mobilisation and networking.

Issues of sustainability are very prominent in the present plan. One of the LAG members, a consultant in i.a. environmental issues, wrote an appendix about sustainable development to the plan which is quite radical. Yet not all LAG members seemed aware of that. A common response was that projects should not be detrimental to environmental sustainability. A common example was about the interest in motor sports among young rural men and a well known centre for motor cross in the Leader area. ALH has never had a project related to motor sports, but if such a project application appeared, it could hypothetically lead to a conflict in LAG, some claimed. Interestingly, gender equality was handled rather conventionally present plan, being only mentioned as supporting female business entrepreneurs. At the same time, projects during Leader + pointed to activities which had been

⁸ All interviewed had been mailed the list of issues beforehand and many had printed them out before we met them and had them.

more proactive in terms of gender issues, several having offered opportunities for young men and women to try out new activities and question gender contracts. Equality in terms of integration was mainly mentioned as something which was gaining more space as the newly elected LRF representative in the board actually worked with such issues at the LRF. One LAG member also said, rather exasperated: 'Look at what immigrants there are in LAG – a Finn and a German' implying that one has not been able to include people from groups which were more ethnically and culturally divergent from the main Swedish norm. That questions about rural youth had decreased in importance in the present plan was something many pointed out as a change which had to do with the new regulations.

2. Sector representation

When we brought up issues of sector representation in the interviews, some of the interviewed didn't know which sector they represented. Some pointed out that they belonged to, or could represent all three sectors and which 'they were referred' to had shifted during their time in LAG. There was a strong norm in this LAG that membership was in the capacity of being an interested participating citizen, rather than as representative for some organisation or sector. The only LAG member who was ambivalent about this in the interview was the new board member who had been elected as a consequence of the activities of the local LRF. At the same time, all had much to say about how activities were more or less embedded in the rationale of the different sectors and that this led to public sector dominance. This was spoken of as an effect of how the programme itself is organised and administered, rather than as an effect of the particular participants' exerting undue influence to enhance the interest of a particular sector. Leader was experienced as a public sector initiative much depending on the guiding rules and regulations.

3. Project administration and relations with CAB

The new arrangements for project administration and the new rules for auditing and controls which are a consequence of the integration of Leader into CAP were much commented on in interviews, but not so much in the group and plenary discussions. This is a delicate issue, with the board and staff aiming to build new working relations with the CAB staff, at the same time as they have acted on other levels to try to get changes in some of the present regulations. In fact, the only time I have been asked to make changes in the report texts was one word in a sentence which was experienced as perhaps a bit too blunt, and that that might be negative for this process. That the CAB primarily has become part of the control system and therefore not longer could be part of LAG, was one problem. However, the main problems raised in interviews were that:

- the CAB controls the LAG decisions in ways which the some of the other LAGs in the same county already had experienced as infringing on their rights to decide on funding,
- the CAB decisions take several months, something which make it difficult for projects to keep people who are to work in projects,
- the new funding system makes it more difficult for the LAG to use the municipal funding to start up projects. Now the entire funding comes when the projects have had their expenses and can account for expenses. This makes it very difficult for small actors to use Leader funding,
- the administration and demands on how funding is to be required have always been problematic for project owners. During Leader + the programme funding for administration made it possible for the Leader staff to help in this and they always had

to make changes before the requisitions were sent on. That these now were to be sent directly to the CAB was seen as a kind of time bomb, both because of the expected delays at the CAB, and because that mistakes might now be judged as attempts to fraud, and:

- in the CAP system there is the risk that if auditors or controls deem a payment incorrect, the project not only has to pay back what has been judged as unrightful, but also a fine of the whole sum on top of this. A large and well known project in the area had been subject to this. Their mistake had been due to following a suggestion from a CAB employee. This stopped the project, led to large deficits, to negotiations between the CAB and the auditors at the Board of Agriculture and attempts for compensation through other venues from the CAB to the project,
- This event has sent shivers not only through the locality, but also through the Swedish Leader context. Who dares to apply for Leader funding if this is a risk? There are no clear guidelines on when the fines apply.

The administrative system in CAP has been geared to handle support to farm businesses not to development projects aiming at supporting long term development. These are different kinds of activities, but fall now within the same administrative system. A LAG board member emphasised the differences and said that: “we are a local association for rural development and that is something else than just distributing money for projects within the RDP, if that is all it’s about, the CAB might just as well do it”.

5. Central dilemma in ALH activities

The themes presented above can be seen as problem areas which the LAG needs to handle in order to develop ALH and the project activities. However, they may also be seen as expressions of dilemmas to which there are no easy solutions as they are inherent to contradictions within the Leader approach. On the one hand Leader is an approach supposed to support sustainable capacity building for local development by local mobilisation, networking, cross sectorial collaboration and partnerships and creative and innovative ways of working. On the other hand it is increasingly being administered as a system for channelling project money to projects, presupposing that this will lead to long term development. While audits and evaluations mainly focus on controlling the economic flows and short term project results as measured by quantitative indicators, little effort is made to identify, evaluate and make visible the efforts put to support processes that may lead to sustained capacity building through learning, networking and long term project outcomes. For instance, in the guidelines for writing local strategies there is no support for securing such processes, and the budget for such efforts has been cut down. This contrast between the administrative regulative system and the central characteristics of the Leader approach can be seen as central contradiction within the approach. Both the themes which were focal in discussion and those marginalised in the study point to dilemmas which may be seen as reflecting this contradiction.

Focal Themes

All interviews, group discussions and the LAG evaluation of Leader+ projects pointed to that more support for learning in projects, networking among projects, taking care of project outcomes and more of learning and collaboration with municipalities was asked for. Such activities were experienced as essential and central to Leader. It is also such activities that may generate space for joint reflection, support local mobilisation and initiative, and lead to new constellations of collaboration. However, this was difficult to find time and money for. The staff and the LAG were busy setting up and developing new projects according to the plan, while the previous follow up which had been in connection with the support for project

administration had now been taken over by the CAB and the budget for other such inputs had been reduced. The LAG and the staff may be seen as caught in a dilemma between producing short term project results and securing long term capacity building outcomes. If focus is on short term results, supporting developmental modes of learning and networking which survives the project funding is not crucial. This dilemma was not only reflected in the project activities but also in the complex organisation itself and in participants' experiences of the purpose and vision as opaque. It may also be seen as a dilemma between development through planning vs. development through learning and networking.

Marginalised themes

The marginalised themes more directly referred to the policy regulations and demands: horizontal objectives, sector representation and the CAB's project administration. The two first of these seemed to be policy notions which were translated and managed rather pragmatically thereby adapting them to the local action context. The horizontal objectives, for instance, refer to cultural and structural aspects of society which de facto are difficult to handle and difficult to grasp. Translating them to local mobilising and bottom up project activities implies not only a re-contextualisation of the abstract policy notions but also an adaption of them into the particular local action contexts. Entrepreneurship and supporting businesses became in the local plan transformed into also supporting people's capacity to act, something which more resembles empowerment⁹. The same applies for the key aspects of the Leader approach. Thus funding the chairs for a village hall could be seen as innovative in the specific case, as it was a way to show support for a new constellation of actors and their initiative to set the hall in order. This may be seen as a balancing the local translations of policies with the abstract policy demands. Another example of this is the demand on LAG participants to represent one of the three societal sectors (i.e. the public, private and voluntary sectors) central to Leader partnerships. However, in the local action context, i.e. with participants in LAG acting from the subjective horizons of their particular positions and understandings, it was the handling of relations and the logic these sectors refer to (i.e. the market, civil society and the political-administrative government) in order to support rural development and realising the local plan that came to the forefront. It was in those terms 'the sectors' were talked about in the interviews in ALH. Then the participants' familiarity with activities and people active in the different sectors became important, regardless of how they themselves at a certain time mainly earned their income or spent their free time. Yet, officially they had to be referred to one specific sector.

In the interviews and discussions in this study, these themes also seemed related to a dilemma balancing formal vs. informal managing. At the same time as Leader is to build on local familiarity, local networks and people with an active interest in rural development, it should also be transparent, fulfil the demands of the framing regulations and prove its legitimacy to handle public money¹⁰. To gain legitimacy, ALH had chosen to have a large LAG and transformed into an open association. Yet, apart from public sector representatives, it had not always been easy to mobilise people with an interest in rural development, prepared to engage in Leader, which fit the LAG matrix demanded by the regulations. It was also obvious in interviews that building on local familiarity when recruiting LAG members, in project

⁹ This was partly possible by twisting the Swedish word 'företagsamhet' which has connotations of business, entrepreneurialism, and capacity to act, into – 'ta sig för' meaning more of being active in general.

¹⁰ The problems of legitimacy of partnerships, how participants are recruited and their roles have been amply discussed (e.g. Derkzen et al 2008)

development and project decisions could imply that staff and LAG members used their own networks and drew on their local knowledge about people. Moreover, certain issues were experienced as delicate to handle in the local context and thus called for discretion. The relations with the CAB were such an issue at present. At the same time there had been a constant development of routines and methods in LAG to become more transparent.

6. Learning in Leader as a strengthening of local governance arrangements

Any attempt to bring about sustainable change through policy interventions needs to include intentional processes and procedures for learning and reflection. This may seem a self-evident statement, unnecessary to point out, but as the study reported here demonstrates it is not easily implemented. Furthermore, the results of intentional learning processes may well uncover contradictions which need concerted attention from several policy levels difficult to achieve. Handling problems which are related to such contradictions entails negotiations with the others involved to explore them and develop more adequate and coherent interpretations and tools. In fact, it is such processes of reinterpretation and development of new tools that qualifies *as* learning from an activity theory perspective.

Such processes are not easily initiated from lower levels in the policy system. For instance, rules, regulations and practices related to the National Board of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and the EU were much mentioned in interviews and discussions. Also, the LAG board and the Leader office manager had mobilised for and initiated discussions with the Board of Agriculture and the Ministry about the budget for administration. This had probably contributed to a 2% raise in that budget. Yet on the whole, the policy regulations seemed to be perceived as given and as objects to handle, rather than as sources for joint learning across policy levels. The prudence about the relations with CAB about project administration can, however, be seen as the staff and board setting a stage for joint learning. This is the most immediate policy level they need to collaborate with.

Learning processes at the local level i.e. among LAG, project participants, the Leader staff and local actors are more within the control of LAG. Such processes are also what the focal themes in this study mainly were about. Essentially they reflected a wish to support more of joint reflection, networking and joint action. Today many LAGs make LAG owned projects to support networking and project development as a way to circumvent budget restrictions and yet support mobilising and networking activities connected to the projects. Thus they establish opportunities for support and learning among local rural development actors although the rules give little funding for such activities. To alleviate the administrative burden on project owners, LAGs also set up thematic LAG projects through which they can give small funding with little administrative burden for projects.

However, in Ellström's terms, if Leader should really be able to support the developmental and innovative learning modes, more spaces for reflection across levels and more local control over methods, results and tasks would be needed. This would demand not only more attention from the Leader staff and LAG but a policy framework open for a further decentralising and the development of systems of evaluation and monitoring which supported that. Today, this is not the case. Instead the integration of Leader into the RDP has, at least in Sweden, implied that the administrative system has become less adapted to Leader as a development policy, and the focus on local economy and business development has been strengthened.

Viewed from a governmentability theory perspective, the dilemma and contradictions discussed above may be interpreted as produced by the political rationalities and technologies which shape the Leader programme. Rose & Miller (1992) point to that governing at a distance builds on particular political rationalities and technologies for which particular forms of expertise and inscription are central. Much of the debate on governmentability in relation to local development partnerships have focused on the ways state power persist although governing is devolved and on the problems of power and legitimacy of the new governing constellations (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2005; Taylor, 2007). Swyngedouw draws attention to that there is a flip side to the new forms of relations between the state and civil society in these policy arrangements. Potentially democratising, they also redefine the meaning of citizenship and of civil society. He suggests that they may be counterproductive in supporting a strengthening of 'civil society'. As these forms of governing mobilise technologies as a means of disciplining forms of operation within an overall programme of responsabilisation, individuation, calculation and pluralist fragmentation, they may well contribute to a eroding of civil society:

"The socially innovative figures of horizontality organised, stakeholder arrangements of governance that appear to empower civil society in the face of an apparently overcrowded and 'excessive' State, may, in the end, prove to be the Trojan Horse that diffuses and consolidates the 'market' as the principal institutional form." (Swyngedouw 2005:2003)

This then may be seen as the 'dark side' of new governance arrangements. However, policy systems are heterogeneous, and resistance and promulgation of oppositional programmes are possible (Rose & Miller, 1992). There is the possibility for 'active subjects' to influence the exercise of government (Morison, 2000 in Taylor 2007). Engaging effectively demands not only skills but also that spaces are created in which local actors can develop their own strategic approaches and demonstrate their legitimacy (Taylor 2007). Yet, doing so, they may well, as in the case described in this paper, be caught in dilemmas and overwhelmed by the day to day handling of the programme. Still, this paper does describe a process in which a LAG has created space and support for joint reflection over how they may develop their organisation and the Leader activities. Apart from further developing the support for learning in and from projects, reflection over the policy related themes which became marginalised and exploring dilemma they face, may be a venue to both gain legitimacy and enhance further local involvement in rural development. However, for Leader as a programme to bring about sustainable processes of change and become a more coherent development policy, more parts of the policy system needs to be included in such processes.

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