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Rural Development: Making It Local

'You've got the crowd, you know the pitch...' (David Beckham on the advantages of playing at home)

This book is about 'rural development', about the attempts being made in Britain and other parts of Europe to address, in a co-ordinated and locally sensitive way, the range of pressing economic, social and environmental problems that beset the continent's rural areas. More specifically it is about some of the fundamental issues and concepts that underlie that intervention – concepts that relate both to the rationale of rural development and to the manner of its realisation.

Those issues and concepts form the focus of the 13 chapters that follow this introduction, but given the underlying thesis of the book, that rural development can only be pursued successfully at the local level, none of them is more important than *local development*, which involves bringing to bear the full range of local resources, human and material, to resolve identified concerns. The task of this first chapter then is to explore the meaning and purpose of 'rural' and 'local' development and to present as a case study the LEADER programme, both as a pan-European rural development programme devised in Brussels and as a local development venture carried out in a small part of rural Wales.

But first, the word 'rural'. A considerable literature exists on what 'rural' might mean and, indeed, on whether 'rurality' is really significant in the context of advanced western society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (see for example Denham and White, 1998; Dunn *et al.*, 1998; Shucksmith *et al.*, 1996). Here, however, we will be heavily pragmatic, simply defining 'rural areas' as those with 'low population density containing scattered dwellings, hamlets, villages and small towns', and effectively put to one side such questions as 'How low is "low"?' and 'How small is "small"?', since there is no agreed answer to such questions, the 'cut-off points' of density and settlement size being best set according to the task in hand.

The point is that an emphasis on population density – rather than on other possible criteria of rurality with strong competing claims such as land use, economic structure, culture and remoteness – usefully focuses attention on what, in the context of development initiatives, are three crucial elements of the rural scene:

- the fact that all rural people, and many of the economic, social, political and cultural activities which are relevant to their well-being, are by definition located in isolated buildings or in settlements that are both small and widely separated;
- the fact that the wide expanses of land that necessarily separate them are subject to a mass of powerful and competing demands and pressures as agriculture and other forms of land-extensive economic activity are compelled to restructure; and
- the fact that an increasingly prosperous and ‘space hungry’ urban population is drawn, in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, both to those small settlements and to the wide expanses of land that separate them.

That essential rural context has certainly conditioned, even if it has not ‘caused’, a set of inter-related concerns that have intensified in recent years and which underlie the various calls made for ‘rural development’ programmes. Those concerns are not universal – indeed we will later stress the diversity of rural Europe – but in varying ways and to a varying extent they are certainly widespread and keenly felt. The following is an indicative, and by no means exhaustive, list:

- First are some *economic concerns* which derive from the reduced and still reducing ability of land-extensive economic activities – notably agriculture, forestry, quarrying and mining – and of many other rural industries linked closely to them to provide secure employment and adequate incomes for the people engaged in them. Other ‘economic’ concerns relate not to the challenge of reformulating and complementing land-based industry but to the costs of servicing a widely scattered population that offers little in the way of economies of scale.
- Second are various *social and cultural concerns* which are often subsumed in the expression ‘rural deprivation’. They include un- and under-employment, low incomes, social exclusion, insufficient affordable housing for local people, the steady decline of local services and facilities and a deeper cultural malaise linked to the erosion of caring local communities, a sense of powerlessness in the face of rapid change, and latent or overt conflict between long-established residents and many newcomers with different sets of values.
- Third are *environmental concerns* which stem particularly from agricultural intensification and a consequent decline in wildlife and in habitat and

countryside diversity. They derive also from the growing pressures placed on the countryside by an urban population that is increasingly keen to live, work and/or enjoy its leisure time there.

- Fourth, to these may be added some *political and institutional concerns* related to the lack or frequent inadequacy of the machinery necessary to resolve such concerns at the local level in a way that recognises both their inter-relatedness and the vital need for collaborative working between a host of agencies and actors including local residents themselves.

Sometimes such concerns are expressed indirectly in ‘vision statements’ which encapsulate what would prevail if they were satisfactorily resolved. A recent example is that of the British government set out in a ‘Rural White Paper’ summarising its policies for rural England (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food 2000: 6):

Our vision is of

- a living countryside with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services
- a working countryside with a diverse economy giving high and stable levels of employment
- a protected countryside in which the environment is sustained and enhanced and which all can enjoy
- a vibrant countryside which can shape its own future...

Much the same sentiment had been expressed four years earlier in a declaration issued jointly by several hundred ‘rural leaders’ drawn from across Europe and meeting in Cork under the aegis of the European Union. The ‘Cork declaration’ of November 1996 (LEADER Observatory 1997a) marked a significant step on the road from narrow agricultural and other sectoral policies applied to rural Europe in general, towards specifically rural policies and programmes respecting the needs and resources of local areas. Its action plan made explicit the need for integrated rural development policy with a clear territorial dimension, the diversification of economic activity, respect for the tenets of sustainability and of subsidiarity (meaning the ‘decentralisation’ of decision-making) and improved mechanisms for planning, managing and financing rural development at the local level.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This brings us to the definition of *rural development*. The following three suggested definitions build on the above brief discussion of ‘rurality’ and of associated concerns and aspirations to encapsulate what most contemporary commentators understand by the term:

- ‘a broad notion encompassing all important issues pertinent to the collective vitality of rural people and places... [including] education, health, housing, public services and facilities, capacity for leadership and governance, and cultural heritage as well as sectoral and general economic issues...’ (OECD, 1990: 23);
- ‘a multi-dimensional process that seeks to integrate, in a sustainable manner, economic, socio-cultural and environmental objectives’ (Kearney *et al.*, 1994: 128); and
- ‘a *sustained* and *sustainable process* of *economic, social, cultural* and *environmental* change *designed* to enhance the *long-term well-being* of the *whole community*’ (Moseley, 1996: 20.)

The third of these definitions includes 12 italicised words which are central to the understanding of ‘rural development’ and to its promotion:

- sustained...not short-lived;
- sustainable...respecting our inherited ‘capital’;
- process...a continuing and inter-related set of actions;
- economic...relating to the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services;
- social...relating to human relationships;
- cultural...relating to ‘ways of life’ and sources of identity;
- environmental...relating to our physical and biotic surroundings;
- designed...deliberately induced, not naturally evolving;
- long-term...relating to decades not years;
- well-being...not just material prosperity;
- whole...inclusive of all ages, both genders, all social groups; and
- community...here meaning people living or working in the relevant area.

Many of those terms are defined more rigorously later. But for now the above shorthand expressions will suffice to reveal the multi-faceted nature of rural development as it is currently and generally understood.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

But why should ‘rural development’ be pursued principally at the local level? Why do rural programmes and plans and the projects that they contain need to relate not just to ‘rural areas in general’ but to this or that specific area? Why should machinery be put in place at the local level for determining and implementing rural development policies, programmes and projects? In short, why and how far should there be both ‘decentralisation’ (a shift of decision-making to ‘lower levels’) and ‘territorialisation’ (shift of focus from *sectors* such as education, transport and manufacturing to *areas*)? Setting aside for the present what ‘local’ might mean in terms of population size and geographical extent, there seem to be five main (and often overlapping) elements of the argument

for specifically *local* development. (Useful references on this key issue include O’Cinneide and Cuddy (1992) and National Economic and Social Council (1994), both relating to rural Ireland, Buller (2000), on rural France, and, more generally, LEADER Observatory (1999 a & b and 2001). The last-mentioned source posits the emergence of a distinctive ‘European rural model’ of development centred on the ‘local area perspective’.

1. The first argument for *local* rural development relates to *local diversity*. Rural areas across Europe have much in common but they are far from being identical. Some have economies still dominated by agriculture; for others tourism, mineral extraction, retirement migration or manufacturing industry may be their principal vocation. Some may still be experiencing de-population, while for others it is rapid population growth and related social upheavals that characterise them. Some suffer from being ‘too close’ to metropolitan areas; for others it is remoteness that underlies their situation. Some are well-endowed with natural resources, others are not. So while all rural areas have, by definition, a scattered population and a landscape dominated by open countryside, their economic and social circumstances, their problems, needs and development potential will all vary greatly. It follows that the programmes that address their problems must be locally sensitive.
2. Second, *rural problems are interlocking*, and, in consequence, so must be both the measures to address them and the agencies involved. And the most effective way of achieving this may well be at an intermediate level, somewhere between the nation or region on the one hand, and the village or parish/commune on the other. It is at this level, the argument runs, that partnerships are best forged and co-ordination achieved or, to put it another way, that top-down priorities relating to sectors (such as healthcare, energy or specific industrial sectors) and bottom-up needs (across relatively homogeneous geographical areas) are best reconciled. As one Irish commentator put it, ‘area-based partnerships have the potential to be the “central cog” that connects local needs and priorities with the “sectoral cogs” (sectoral programmes, funding and related agencies) which can supply the energy necessary for balanced and sustainable rural development’ (Mannion, 1996: 12).
3. The third argument relates to *local identification and mobilisation*. It accepts that local people – both as individuals and collectively in groups, organisations and firms are key resources in rural development, as sources of information, ideas, energy and enterprise. Such people will, however, only be enthused to participate if they feel that the venture at issue is clearly relevant to their concerns and that any contribution they make is likely to produce beneficial change. The more the area of operation is confined geographically and the more it is in some sense coherent rather than a hotch-potch of localities that happen to be in reasonable proximity to one another, the more this crucial resource of unpaid local energy is likely

to be forthcoming and sustained. So this argument is about building and mobilising social capital and drawing upon local knowledge and experience.

4. Fourth, there has been a growing sense that *adding value to local resources* is likely to provide a more secure and sustainable future for economic development than is a strategy involving excessive reliance upon imported materials and capital (even if, ironically, releasing that local added value often requires initial injections of non-local, for example EU, capital). This implies a need for a greater and more respectful understanding of local resources, in the broadest sense, and of their potential for creating new business opportunities. A second strand to this argument concerns the value of encouraging local purchasing by local people and organisations – a phenomenon graphically known as ‘plugging the leaky bucket’, with the implication that the local economic multiplier will be enhanced if money is recycled within the ‘bucket’ or local economy. Thus the argument is that local development driven by local people and institutions is more likely to foster both the adding of value to local resources and local purchasing.
5. The fifth argument has only really been voiced in recent years. It involves constructing a *defence against globalisation*. Globalisation (Bryden, 1998; Norberge-Hodge, 1999) entails the increased opening up of local economies to the cold blast of world competition. It arises particularly from the development and worldwide adoption of modern information and communication technologies, the global liberalisation of international trade and capital movements, the associated enhanced ability of multinational corporations to assemble capital wherever the costs of production are lowest and social and environmental restrictions are weakest, and international agreements that limit the power of national governments to directly bolster and protect the economies of their lagging areas. Thus cheese producers in Normandy, say, or cherry producers in Spain (see Case Study 7) have, increasingly, to accept that very similar produce from places thousands of miles away is occupying ‘their’ shelf space in their nation’s supermarkets. One response to this has been to deliberately accentuate and proclaim local diversity, to foster in each local area a distinctiveness and, thereby, a ‘niche’ at least in the mind of the consumer. The urgency of developing and marketing local identity and distinctive quality products and services linked to it is, then, another case for rural development being pursued at the local level, and it is one of growing importance – as recently argued in Ray’s consideration of what he terms ‘culture economies’ (Ray, 2001).

For some or all of these reasons the 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century have witnessed a proliferation of local development initiatives in both urban and rural areas. These have included, in England, various ‘Rural Development’ and ‘Single Regeneration Budget’ programmes (Cherrett, 1999) and the recently launched local authority ‘community strategies’, in Ireland

local Programmes for Economic and Social Progress (Keane, 1998), in France the 'contrats de pays' and 'intercommunal syndicates' (Buller, 2000), in Finland the 'POMO' or 'Programmes of Rural Development Based on Local Initiative' (Kahila, 1999) to take just a few nation-specific examples. And at the pan-European level we have, for example, LEADER (see Case Study 1) and the 'Territorial Employment Pacts' (European Commission, 1997).

Given those arguments and that experience, we may now define *local development* (whether urban or rural) as 'the pursuit of development – as previously defined – at a local scale with the aim of addressing local concerns, adding value to local resources – whether material, human or symbolic – and mobilising local actors – whether people, groups or agencies'. It follows that *local rural development* – the core focus of this book – is local development as nuanced by rurality.

Our definition of local development is very much in keeping with the remarks of an Irish commentator who observed some years ago that it is 'more than a scaling down of interventions previously organised from the top by centralised policy making units ... it is a radical response that seeks to achieve new objectives in relation to the development process by focusing on such concepts as multi-dimensionality, integration, co-ordination, subsidiarity and sustainability' (Walsh, 1995: 1). In that regard Walsh suggested three specific tasks for local development, namely:

- overcoming 'market failures' (meaning doing socially useful things that are generally unattractive to the market, such as delivering services to a scattered population and integrating environmental conservation and economic development programmes);
- improving 'local capacity' (meaning the ability and readiness of people and organisations to engage in development initiatives); and
- facilitating 'local empowerment' (meaning giving local 'actors' more power to influence what happens in their locality).

In similar vein, another influential Irish critique of 'rural development' stressed the importance of its pursuit at the local level where each of the following might be most effectively achieved (National Economic and Social Council, 1994: xiii–xiv):

- 'pre-development' – meaning capacity building and the animation of local groups;
- the operation of area-based partnerships;
- the adoption of a strategic planning approach;
- the fostering of innovative projects and methods;
- the reduction of social exclusion;
- the development of enterprise; and
- the promotion of community and group projects.

But how local is 'local'? Obviously the answer to that question must depend to a considerable degree on such local features as the population density, resource base and administrative structure, but some guidance is possible (see, for example, National Economic and Social Council, 1994 part 2, chapter 13, and various LEADER documentation). The main point is that to best pursue the sorts of objectives outlined above, the local area should be small enough to sustain a 'sense of place', the willingness of local people to get involved and the prospect of a real integration of individual initiatives, but also large enough to afford certain economies of scale in management and service delivery and the likely availability locally of a sufficient range and quality of expertise. And larger areas are also likely to embrace at least one small or medium-sized town which will bring its own benefits to the development process. Having weighed such factors, Ireland's National Economic and Social Council (1994) suggested the 15 to 25,000 population range as being generally preferable, while, as explained in the case study which follows, the experience of LEADER indicates an upper limit of 100,000 and an average of around 50,000. But as important as size, if not more so, is the desirability of focusing on reasonably coherent areas enjoying some measure of shared identity. That, and a firm preference for areas bigger than the individual English parish or French rural commune, and smaller than the English county or French *département*, is about as far as commentators on this subject generally go.

Interestingly, as this advice on local, rural development was being crystallised by and for practitioners, Marsden (1999) produced a quite similar list of research priorities for rural social scientists. He stressed a need for a greater understanding of diversity within and between rural areas; of the ways of achieving area-based, holistic and integrated rural development; of the emerging new forms of local governance and partnership; of citizenship, capacity building and the mobilisation of local populations; and of the capacity of rural areas for sustainable endogenous development.

THE PRESENT BOOK

So much for the arguments for 'rural development' in advanced western economies and for its pursuit at the local level. The chapters that follow take many of the concepts and ideas considered above and seek to explain them and their role in the development process. Collectively, they provide some 'building blocks' for a theory of 'local rural development' though they do not in themselves comprise such a theory.

What such theorisation would involve ('theory' being in essence an attempt to explain and predict real-world phenomena in as concise and elegant a form as possible) is a rigorous formulation of how these and other 'building blocks' inter-relate in practice and of how and how successfully they contribute to 'local rural development' on the ground. This would require, among other things, the careful analysis of hundreds of actual exercises in both the planning

and delivery of 'local rural development' and the teasing out of the relative contribution made to them by these and other elements whether individually or in tandem. To do that would be an ambitious, but not impossible, undertaking. All we can do in this book is to offer some material for that theorisation and some clarification of its significance. Also offered, however, is a good deal of practical advice to development agencies and local groups wanting to know 'how do we set about this?'

The 13 chapters that follow each focus on one particular concept or issue in local rural development – many of them already introduced earlier in the present chapter. Nine relate to broad principles or goals; four to the key steps to be taken at the area level to address or achieve them. But the distinction is not clear-cut for the simple reason that in local development the 'process is also the product' and that the 'product adds fuel to the process'. For example, several goals of the development process, such as 'sustainability', 'community' and 'social inclusion' (the foci of Chapters 2, 6 and 7 respectively), *themselves* provide a spur to further development. And necessary management tools like 'strategic planning' (Chapter 12) and 'evaluation' (Chapter 14) *themselves* help to develop the people and organisations involved in them – or at least they should do. This is nothing more than a reassuring confirmation of the author's conviction that, properly conceived and undertaken, development is a 'virtuous spiral' in which everything positively affects everything else. But in another sense it confirms a need to resist premature assertions about how the whole edifice hangs together. Thus the reader is invited to treat what follows as a series of individual essays, each devoted to a core theme of local rural development, and to ponder for him/herself the variety of ways in which they might be hooked together both intellectually and in the shaping of practice.

The structure *within* each chapter is common: first, an explanation of the meaning of the concept and of its significance in local rural development; second, a brief reflection on some key issues surrounding it; third, an outline of the 'toolkit' available to help attain or undertake it; and fourth, two case studies to give more real-world substance to a subject which might otherwise appear too abstract.

Chapter 2 is devoted to an overarching, perhaps *the* overarching, concept or guiding principle of local rural development namely *sustainability*. This is defined to embrace the conservation of an area's 'manufactured, human and social capital' as well as that which is inherently natural or 'environmental'. The chapter suggests various elements of 'good practice' in the pursuit of sustainability within local rural development.

Chapter 3 stresses the importance of *innovation* – of doing something different, of 'breaking the mould' – in the local rural development process, and explores the circumstances in which innovation is most readily adopted by the relevant 'actors'.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the *adding of value* to local resources as a strategy for local rural development. It links with the earlier chapter on 'sustainability' and with a later one on 'diagnosis', all three focusing on local resources but from different perspectives.

Chapter 5 focuses on business and community *entrepreneurs* – those crucial people with an eye for opportunity, a desire to achieve and a readiness to take risks. Economic and community development cannot take place without them and their careful cultivation is an essential element of strategies to foster local development.

Chapter 6 considers *community*, something which is difficult to define but clearly valued by residents and service delivery agencies alike. Often weak if not actually lacking in specific localities, and generally under threat, it is also central to the process of local development.

Chapter 7 is devoted to *social inclusion*. Its focus is on the mechanisms which exclude many rural people from the lifestyles of the majority and on the ways in which local rural development can best address them.

Chapter 8 explores *accessibility*, meaning the ability of people to reach the things that are important to them. It argues that there is much that local development strategies can do to improve the accessibility enjoyed by disadvantaged local people, by influencing transport, communications and service delivery, though the challenge is to do so by galvanising development and not simply by 'filling gaps'.

The next two chapters consider the local machinery and 'human and social capital' needed to devise and carry out local rural development programmes. Thus **Chapter 9** is devoted to *partnerships*, the formal structures needed if the relevant actors from the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors are to be harnessed together to work with common purpose. And **Chapter 10** explores the 'why, how, how far and who?' of *community involvement* in local development.

The last four substantive chapters all relate to the business of bringing about local development in an efficient and effective way. They suggest a sequential process. Thus **Chapter 11** is concerned with *diagnosis*, or the task of establishing the baseline conditions of an area prior to shaping a development programme for it – that 'baseline' embracing its resources, opportunities, problems, needs and constraints. **Chapter 12** is devoted to *strategic planning*, the process whereby the actors in a local area collectively build on that diagnosis to define a vision, set objectives and devise a coherent set of associated measures to resolve the problems identified. **Chapter 13** argues that no amount of elegant planning can promote development if corresponding attention is not paid to the *implementation* of plans on the ground over a sustained period of time, and it focuses

on the types of intervention that are possible and on how they can best be put into effect. Finally, **Chapter 14** deals with *evaluation*, whereby the achievements of a programme or its constituent projects are periodically assessed and explanations sought for any deviations from the intended plan.

What these four 'technical' chapters (Chapters 11 to 14) share is a conviction that technical expertise is not enough. Delegating the four tasks to 'experts' standing aside from the messy political process of making development happen on the ground is both to weaken the tasks' effectiveness and to miss a golden opportunity. Their effectiveness depends as much on harnessing the talents and wisdom of local people and groups as it does on the experts' technical competence in gathering, analysing and reporting information. And the 'golden opportunity' so easily squandered is the chance that they offer to *develop* those local people and groups through their being intimately involved in real and important exercises that promise to excite and stimulate them. Again 'the process is part of the product' or, more precisely, the process can and should of itself yield relevant products.

Thus the whole book is about the promotion of local rural development – what? why? and how?

CASE STUDY 1: EUROPE'S LEADER PROGRAMME

The challenge of trying to put into practice some of these principles of 'local rural development' is well illustrated with reference to the European Unions' LEADER Programme (*Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale*). That programme was born of Brussels' growing realisation (Commission of the European Communities, 1988) that in the 1990s it should more fully respect the diversity of rural Europe, complement narrow agricultural policies with others more comprehensively 'rural' in their scope, and give *local* actors and agencies more responsibility for devising and managing them than the national agencies with which the Commission had normally worked hitherto.

The LEADER Programme was launched initially for three years (1992–94). Then, having proved its worth, it was rolled forward with some relatively minor changes but on a larger scale as LEADER II (1995–2001) and again as 'LEADER Plus' (2002–6).¹ At the time of writing the details of the LEADER Plus programme remain somewhat sketchy but LEADER I involved 217 local areas within Europe's designated disadvantaged regions receiving funding to devise and implement local development programmes, and in LEADER II this increased to some 900 areas, ranging from Italy's 185, via the UK's 66 to Luxembourg's two.

Many of these LEADER II areas were carried forward from LEADER I with the result that about 200 local rural areas, spread across the 15 member states, had by 2001 had some nine or ten years' experience of practising local rural development, and so some interim assessment is possible. (The growing literature on this subject includes LEADER Observatory, 1999b and c; Ray, 1996a and b, 1998, 2000a, 2001; and a special issue of *Sociologia Ruralis* (2000).)

But it should first be noted that these local development programmes have not been lavishly funded; the European Union's LEADER II allocation of little more than £1 billion spread across about 900 areas and over six years was only about 2 per cent of all its 'Structural Funds' expenditure in its priority geographical areas – most of it going directly into agricultural support. Thus for LEADER II there was an average yearly allocation to the 'local action groups' of only some £200,000, though it was a requirement that this funding be matched by roughly equivalent money from national and local sources. Thus the hope was that local development would be triggered through a judicious programme of backing well-chosen small projects and by the innovative process of local action to which we will now turn.

There have been seven key elements of 'the LEADER approach' to local rural development (LEADER Observatory 1999a and b), two of which, relating to transnational collaboration between local LEADER groups and to the EU/nation/locality financial management procedures, will not concern us here. The other five, however, were and are fundamental:

1. The *area-based approach*, or the 'territorialisation of development initiatives', was substantially new to rural Europe when LEADER was launched in 1992, except in France (Buller, 2000) and in Britain and Ireland, where the national governments had initiated such an approach in the 1980s (Westholm, Moseley and Stenlas, 1999). Its rationale in the LEADER programme reflected points made at the start of this chapter – notably the championing of diversity, a determination to mobilise local people and organisations and the need to address inter-related problems in a way impossible at the national or even regional levels. The European Commission specified that the LEADER areas should have some real local identity, rather than simply respect established administrative boundaries, and should not normally have more than 100,000 inhabitants. In the case of the 20 English LEADER II areas, for example, their average geographical extent was some 1000 sq. km and their average population 52,000, and all but three crossed district and sometimes county boundaries (Ray, 1998).
2. The *bottom-up approach* has involved placing a high premium on the active participation of people living within the selected areas. This has meant partly the formation of *ad hoc* 'local action groups' to manage the programmes (see below), partly a requirement that local people be consulted and involved in shaping the development programme for the area and partly an expectation that most of the project proposals vying for

support would come 'up' from people, businesses and organisations at the most local level rather than 'down' from central or local government. Ray (2000a) has termed this an 'anarchic post-modern approach to intervention', and certainly it seems to have proved rather hard to palate for some regional and national governments across the continent. But allegations that such an approach is fundamentally 'undemocratic' in showing scant respect for the traditional organs of 'representative democracy' are commonly countered with arguments that, in fact, it fosters a richer 'participative democracy' (Ray, 1998).

3. The *local partnership approach* has involved the creation or consolidation of *local action groups* to devise and manage the local LEADER programmes, drawing up 'local action plans' to bed their work in local needs and resources and determining how the limited funds available should be disbursed between competing project applicants. In Britain, at least, these local action groups have generally been widely drawn from local business, the local authorities and voluntary and community organisations, and have been serviced by a salaried 'project co-ordinator' and one or more field staff. This 'partnership approach' has certainly worked, sometimes exceedingly well, but there have been frequent criticisms that some local action groups have focused excessively on project selection at the expense of championing the 'bigger picture' of integrated local development, or else have been effectively 'in the pocket' of state agencies or the local authorities. There is also clear evidence (see for example Case Studies 25 and 27 below) that many have grown frustrated at the complexity of the procedures for drawing down funds for even very modest projects, and more generally at the way over-cautious regional or national bodies have resisted 'letting go'.
4. *An emphasis on innovation.* 'Innovation' is a word that recurs time and again in the official LEADER literature – not surprisingly, as a major objective of LEADER has been to test out new ways of addressing rural problems in the hope that some would subsequently be 'mainstreamed' (meaning incorporated into European or national 'mainstream programmes and policies'). Thus the Commission has insisted on an innovative management approach at local level (see the previous paragraph) and also on innovative projects getting the bulk of the project funding. The Brussels-based 'LEADER Observatory', charged with helping the 900 or so local action groups of LEADER II to 'network' and thereby exchange good practice, laid great weight on monitoring and disseminating 'innovative practice' (see for example LEADER Observatory, 1999d, some of this work being summarised in Moseley, 2000a). But while substantial innovation has undoubtedly occurred – for example a host of locally novel ways of adding value to local agricultural produce or of exploiting an area's cultural heritage – it is also clear that 'more of the same' has been equally apparent. Kearney *et al.* (1994) noted, for example, in their evaluation of Ireland's LEADER I programme that a disproportionate amount of funding went into yet more 'run of the mill' bed and breakfast accommodation rather than into something really different or special.

5. *An emphasis on integration.* The final hallmark of the 'LEADER approach' has been a wish that the local programmes be not just multi-sectoral, relating, for example, to vocational training, rural tourism and the promotion and marketing of the local area, but genuinely *integrated*. An example of the latter would be training courses provided for farmers who are keen to diversify, linked to grants to help create on-farm accommodation and linked also to the marketing of the area as a destination for rural tourism. Hard data on this is hard to come by, but the author's impression is that, though some striking successes have occurred, such integration has generally proved to be elusive or else overlooked by local action groups anxious to treat individual applications for project funding on their merits.

In conclusion, and as befits a programme designed to champion local diversity, the character and success of LEADER has varied considerably across the 15 member states of the European Union. (For some national reviews in the English language see the special issue of *Sociologia Ruralis* (2000) devoted to LEADER. For brief reviews in this book of specific local LEADER programmes, see Case Studies 2, 7, 18, 25 and 27.) But there is some welcome evidence that LEADER has indeed, as initially hoped, served as a 'model programme', with its essential features, as listed above, increasingly replicated in other rural development programmes. Examples of replica programmes are PRODER in Spain and the POMO in Finland (Westholm *et al.*, 1999).

Whether, and how far, LEADER has genuinely spurred integrated, sustainable local development, rather than merely supported a worthwhile collection of small, one-off projects, is, however, a much harder question to answer. The answer is probably: 'to some extent and to an extent that varies greatly from place to place'. The cross-national PRIDE enquiry into the impact of local rural partnerships, discussed in Chapter 9 and reported more fully in Moseley (2001), provided some encouraging evidence in that respect, but even in 1999–2000, the time of that research, the indications were that it was too soon to say with real certainty just how influential LEADER had been. Local rural development is a long and often nebulous process.

CASE STUDY 2: SPARC – THE SOUTH PEMBROKESHIRE PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES

SPARC² was created in 1991 with a mission to involve local people in improving the social and economic well-being and enhancing the environment of rural South Pembrokeshire, an area of Wales with some 43,000 people living mainly in 35 small towns and villages and isolated farmsteads spread across an area of about 400 sq. km. It is an area with, historically, a strong reliance on agriculture, forestry and seasonal, almost

entirely coastal, tourism and with serious problems of low incomes, high unemployment and youth out-migration. (Midmore *et al.*, 1994; UK LEADER II Network, 2000).

SPARC was a local development partnership with a council of management elected by an assembly or 'consultative committee' which, in turn, drew its membership from four 'constituencies'. These were the area's local authorities, SPARC's funding agencies, various advisory bodies and, most interestingly, a network of local village-level community associations. The latter, which together covered virtually the whole area and to which all residents were entitled to belong, brought a genuine element of 'grass roots democracy' to the development partnership which served them.

As for staff, SPARC employed six development workers each with a sectoral remit – farm support, countryside, community tourism, business development and training, local food development and community support – plus an administrative officer and a co-ordinator who led the whole team and was responsible to the council of management. Funding came partly from the LEADER I and LEADER II programmes – which, together with LEADER Plus, will, by 2006, have supported many of the local development initiatives of SPARC and its successor body over a period of 14 years – and partly from a range of other EU, national and local sources.

The village-based community associations were central to SPARC's underlying aim of giving local people the chance to develop their own communities economically, socially, environmentally and culturally. Each association undertook at least one 'community appraisal' – a questionnaire-based survey of local people's needs and wants designed to provide the basis of a Village Action Plan which would set out priorities for the development of that community. In the larger villages and small towns much of the preparation of these action plans was undertaken by thematic working groups, focusing on employment, local services, the environment and other key issues emerging in the appraisal and translating the appraisal's findings into practical initiatives to be endorsed or modified at periodic conferences of local residents.

Once the 'action plan' had been adopted locally, SPARC then worked to support the relevant community in taking it forward, helping them to network with the agencies that could assist them, providing training and practical help of various kinds and part-funding new businesses and community projects. SPARC also developed and, in large measure, implemented a number of area-wide plans which addressed more strategically the needs identified in the various village action plans.

Before looking at SPARC's work on the ground it should be noted that the very process of conducting appraisals and developing action plans in an inclusive, democratic fashion produced its own developmental spin-off. It built up the awareness, confidence and skills of local people and an appreciation of the

benefits of working in partnership with neighbouring communities and outside agencies. It also served to persuade those agencies of the benefits to them of collaborating with local people.

What happened on the ground as a result of all this? Five particular projects, all pursued, in part, with EU funding, are indicative:

- *Makers of Wales* is a national campaign to celebrate Wales' heritage which SPARC turned to the advantage of local communities by helping them get funding for a number of conservation and cultural tourism initiatives including the restoration of historic sites, the upgrading and way-marking of footpaths and the production of promotional literature, interpretation panels etc.
- The *Local Products Initiative* recognised the economic benefits of purchasing from local sources. Networks linking local food producers and purchasers were created with an emphasis on encouraging the local tourism industry to buy locally. Training programmes were provided for local women wishing to learn new ways of adding value to local resources.
- The *Quality in Business* initiative served existing and potential small businesses by providing locally based advice and training, incubator premises, environmental and energy audits and small grants to enhance business efficiency.
- *Supporting Communities in South Pembrokeshire* encouraged a variety of village-based activities, such as the more efficient use of village halls, the provision of childcare facilities, local networking using information technology, community enterprises and conservation schemes identified by local people.
- The *Demonstration Farm Review and Development Scheme* encouraged the development of whole farm business plans linking training, diversification and conservation audits to funding for business and environmental improvements.

Recalling the various tenets of 'local rural development' discussed earlier in the chapter – notably its area-based focus, the adding of value to local products, the promotion of community involvement, local partnership, innovation and integration – it is not difficult to see why SPARC gained a reputation across Europe as a commendable model of the LEADER approach. Indeed, for that same reason it provides a good entrée into the rest of this book which will examine more carefully those various precepts.

NOTES

1. These dates reflect action on the ground and not the somewhat fictional timetable set out in EU pronouncements.
2. 'SPARC' was formally wound up in 2001, with PLANED emerging from it to undertake similar work but over a wider area of Pembrokeshire.