

The EMFF and local perspectives

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The Djursland FLAG

In the Djursland FLAG-area we have been working with LEADER/CLLD since 2008. In that period we have experienced a rapid decline in the amount of active fishermen and the overall landings in our harbours which led to a reduction of the FLAG area in 2014. The FLAG now only covers one of the two municipalities on Djursland.

We have always had a joint LAG and FLAG board, which means that the board largely consists of people who have no immediate relation to fisheries. However, when we started up the new FLAG in 2016 the fishermen expressed a clear wish to keep on working this way in the future. They felt that joining the LAG would provide more “muscle” in the FLAG-work, as the FLAG budget alone would not be sufficient to cover for sufficient hours for a potential manager.

In the Danish context and in this current period, the budget has been cut and rules have been tightened for the FLAGs compared to 2007-2013. We are now only allowed to fund projects that in one way or another are related to business and job creation. This on the one hand greatly limits what we are able to support in terms of maritime culture and social inclusion, while on the other hand secures a greater focus on business, which in turn may benefit the local fishermen.

What does CLLD take?

From my perspective, CLLD is a long term investment in local people and thus requires a lot of “time” in several senses of the word.

First of all, it takes quite a bit of “time to set up” and once that part is done it takes a lot of time and effort to be known (and trusted) in the local community. It is one thing to make people aware of a new funding opportunity, but to continuously keep them engaged and involved in the endeavours of the FLAG is a completely different matter.

This leads me to the second type of time that CLLD requires; namely that of people and man-hours. There is a crucial need for the “time to be put in” by the local FLAG representatives. Both board members and the manager need to spend a lot of facetime with the local community and the fishermen in particular to build up trust and mutual understanding. It also takes time to learn the rules and regulations by heart and to know how they apply to the specific local context. This capacity takes time to build and is vital to the CLLD work.

CLLD requires a high level of local knowledge. Not just on a “fact and figures” level, but right down to actually knowing the people in the local community that the FLAG is meant to engage with. In my experiences, this requirement is more pronounced in the FLAG compared to the LAG, as the FLAG is meant to target (at least in part) a very specific group of people. A group of people who – as a rule of thumb – are very sceptical towards authorities and EU-regulations. This in turn requires time in yet another way; CLLD takes “time in the sense of duration and continuity”. As the above is so crucial to facilitate great FLAG projects it also becomes very important that the people who build these relations and earn the trust of the community are in some part the same and not ever-changing. So that the same people continue to be available to the community even between programmes (and that they are quickly replaced if they choose to leave).

In my opinion, another vital element of CLLD is the ability to bridge the gap between the local community on the one hand and the MA/NN/EU on the other. This requires that the FLAG is able to operate in two different worlds; one of rules, funds, indicators and regulation, and one of local people with a wide range of different problems, projects and ideas. The latter are not used to applying for funding or reading complicated regulations and would perhaps not normally find their way to EMFF funding. When the FLAG is able to deliver on this type of translation, it grants access to funding for people and great projects, that otherwise might never have seen the light of day.

What does CLLD give?

It is my firm belief that CLLD, when given the time it needs to flourish, will create better and more long lasting results than other forms of funding could in this particular field. It allows for innovative solutions to local challenges and provides a greater sense of ownership in the local community. At its best, CLLD can change the negative direction of the small scale coastal fishery and rally an

entire community around the fishermen, so that their issues become the issues of the entire community – not just of the people on the small vessels. This in turn creates connections and builds capacity in the community to withstand the pressure of external challenges, whether they be maritime, rural or social. CLLD also provides invaluable local knowledge that can be utilized for a number of different purposes.

It is an absolutely vital point for me to emphasize that CLLD is a way of working with the fishermen and local community. It is something we do with them, not to them.

Current preventions for CLLD (at least in the Danish context)

With funds being limited (in the FLAG Djursland context at least) and rules and administrative requirements being increased compared to 2007-2013 the “on the ground” FLAG-work is sadly being reduced. Much time is spent in the FLAGs on administration, bureaucracy and approvals, which makes it more difficult to find the time to connect with the local community and help develop great projects. If this direction continues, the FLAG runs the risk of becoming just another administrative body, instead of doing what it does best; namely helping to foster and deliver great projects. It will also result in fewer innovative projects and fewer projects from fishermen themselves, as they often need the assistance and attention of the FLAG to be able to carry out projects themselves. It can also create a divide between the local community and the FLAG, as people may wonder, whether all the funds are simply being spent on administration. Furthermore it makes it increasingly difficult to convince people to apply for funding, as they are intimidated by the amount of bureaucracy FLAG-funding entails. They need to know that they have the FLAG on their side and by their side for the entire duration of the project.

With the current Danish framework we are only allowed to fund projects with up to 50%. This can be a challenge, when it comes to projects specifically targeting fishermen, as many of them are already so tightly bound financially, that they have trouble securing the additional 50%. Formal cooperation between FLAGs both national and international is also next to impossible as this is subject to the same maximum of 50% funding and there are very few other places to secure funding for cooperation projects.

Conclusion – beyond 2020

One major wish for what happens beyond 2020 is that we would be able to keep some continuity between the programmes. As of now, most of us will have to shut down completely by the end of 2020 and with no new operational programme in place at that time, this will in effect mean that the FLAG will disappear. The FLAG people will disappear and the projects still running will be left to fend completely for themselves, without the support and help of the FLAG that they have relied on. If we are serious about working with CLLD, we should also be serious about finding a solution to the problem of continuity. A solution that would allow for capacity building from one programme to transfer over in to the next, instead of being completely washed away only to be attempted again a few years later. In my opinion the most important part of continuity is keeping the people (FLAG

board and some amount of staff) operational in the gap that will undoubtedly open when we close this programme at the end of 2020 until a new operational programme is up and running.

In the Danish context increased funds and flexibility is something that could greatly benefit our work in the programme to come. For instance improving the possibilities for FLAG to initiate and run their own projects would be great. Currently this is difficult as we can only apply for 50% funding but even more so, because we have to fund the entire cost of the project while it is running and we have no way of a) raising that kind of money without collateral and b) covering the financial costs of a loan, as those are not eligible costs.

A specific budget for cooperation with 100% funding would enable and encourage FLAGs to pursue cooperation, whether in a national or European context. However, the same problem on covering the costs while running the project applies, though it seems to be a problem that could easily be fixed, if we truly want international cooperation between FLAGs.

Finally, after 2020, I would like for all of us to be a little less risk averse and a little less afraid of failure. When a project fails (and we will all come across failed projects eventually) we should not try to hide it. Rather, we should share our failures just as we share our best practices. Though best practice cases are inspirational and can generate a number of good ideas and projects, I personally believe that there is also a great deal for all of us to learn from examining the cases that went completely wrong. Allowing us to prevent similar projects failing in the future at a much higher rate than we perhaps do now.

There is no denying that CLLD is a complicated way to work, that might not at first glance be completely cost-effective. However it is my firm belief that in the long run, CLLD creates better and more lasting results that would have been difficult to achieve without it. CLLD is a long term investment and one that needs to be made, if we are serious about keeping our small coastal communities alive and ensuring the survival of the small scale coastal fishery.

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This article is one in a series of four developed by the four panellists of the workshop on “The EMFF and local perspectives” organized in the framework of the “Beyond 2020: Supporting Europe’s Coastal Territories” conference organised by DG MARE on 12 and 13 October 2017, in Tallinn.

Their aim is to trigger the reflection and fuel the debate on how to improve CLLD intervention in fisheries and aquaculture areas. [The other articles can be accessed on the FARNET website.](#)

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