



# Conference Report

## Post 2020: Local Action in a Changing World

Brussels, Belgium, 2-4 December 2019

**Organiser:** The FARNET Support Unit at the initiative of DG MARE, European Commission

**Venue:** The Square, Brussels, Belgium

**Participants:** Over 500 managing authorities, national networks, FLAG representatives and experts from over 30 countries, including 28 Member States implementing CLLD across all ESI funds.

As the new European Commission begins its operations, 2020 will see managing authorities and (F)LAGs begin their preparations for the new programming period, laying the foundations for their future priorities. Entering this period of reflection, now is the time for MAs to plan the new start-up of CLLD in 2021, avoiding programming gaps and ensuring more efficient administrative systems. At the same time, (F)LAGs are starting to think about their next local development strategies which should be fit to meet the challenges of the future and bring positive change and improvements to local communities.

To help foster this reflection, DG MARE led on the organisation of the 'Post-2020: Local Action in a Changing World' conference, a CLLD event for stakeholders from the four European Structural and Investment Funds supporting this bottom-up approach to local development.

**"You are all important, this is what Europe is about. Europe is not Brussels - it is you, fisherwomen and men, aquaculture producers, social workers... the best part of what we are doing. [...] If we have an opportunity to contribute to your work, then we must do that, and further discuss how to do that even more in the future. Let's get ready for the next steps [...] where everybody is looking to the future with optimism and much energy [...] with CLLD at the heart of it"**

*Bernhard Friess, Acting Director, DG MARE, European Commission*



The conference was set over three days and included a series of plenary and working group sessions. The first plenary, focused on the EMFF, opened with a speech from Bernhard Friess, Acting Director General of DG MARE whose key message was centred around extending the good work under the CLLD method into the next programming period.

A panel discussion on the future in FLAG areas took place between stakeholders from different sectors. Four EU panellists (Julie Skaar, Marstal Community hub, LLSÆ FLAG, Denmark; Jerry Gallagher, North FLAG, Ireland; Ante Sladoljev, Fishermen Recommend, GALEB FLAG, Croatia; and Márcia Pinto, Salina Green, ADREPES Costeiro FLAG, Portugal) were asked to provide three words which best describe the future of their area. The 12 words chosen by the panel were then put to an audience vote, revealing that the three words participants believed most important to the future of their areas were 'sustainability', 'zero-waste' and 'revitalising'.

Joining the panel as an external eye was Associate Professor Natalie Slawinski of Memorial University, Canada: "I'm really impressed that everybody is thinking about sustainability. 'Resilience' also comes to my mind, we need to find ways to bounce back from adversity, to be adaptive, innovate. Another important word is 'energy'. Being resourceful is incredibly important. Understand what you have at your disposal and within your communities."



## Keynote speech by Charles Guirriec, Founder of Poiscaille, France

Charles Guirriec, founder of [Poiscaille](#), a company which offers fresh seafood direct from fishers to consumers in France, [explained](#) the importance of a fresh, sustainable and ethical seafood supply chain.

The Poiscaille platform offers fishers (predominantly small-scale fishers in the FLAG areas) a good price for their catch. At the same time, consumers get access to fresher, local, and superior quality seafood (with a maximum of 24 hours between catch and delivery). Poiscaille shortens the seafood supply chain, providing sustainable economic and social benefits to producer and consumers alike. Furthermore, the web-based start-up has developed a 15 strong team, creating jobs in the sector. Another key message from Guirriec was the power of networking, and how it can benefit fishing communities; Poiscaille already connects 3 800 subscribers (customers) to more than 80 small-scale fishermen.



*In the subsequent working groups, participants were asked to reflect on the current programming period and what improvements might be made in the future, both at the level of local development strategies and to the administrative systems framing CLLD implementation. Here's a highlight of what the teams discussed in the different working group sessions.*

Some of the key challenges FLAGs are expecting to face in the next 10 years are (1) ensuring stable incomes within the fisheries sector, particularly in small-scale fisheries, (2) keeping small-scale fisheries at the heart of the Blue Economy and its growth, and (3) climate change and environmental deterioration. In many discussions it was stressed that FLAGs are well-placed to address these issues because of their capacity to create links and synergies between different stakeholders, focus on education and reach the small-scale sector. In the future, FLAGs will also have to increase the critical mass of their activity (e.g. through cooperation with other areas) and support projects with a multiplier effect.

In the 'better delivery systems' working group, the methods, tools and practices used to improve delivery systems were discussed. Such practices must ensure that delivery systems are agile and able to respond to change and opportunity, promote innovation and facilitate easy access to funding, and facilitate a transition from outputs to results.



Following on from the EMFF working groups, the conference then welcomed additional participants from the other three funds, the EAFRD, ERDF and ESF. The first multi-fund plenary was opened with a speech by Dacian Cioloş, Member of the European Parliament and Head of the European Parliament Renew Group, who discussed his own personal journey working with LEADER, starting as an intern in DG AGRI through to the support he lent to this approach as former European Commissioner for Agriculture. Highlighting the importance of local people, he said: "Even the best experts cannot think better than local people. Therefore, the process needs to be simple and more accessible for the people, not for administration. Local people have to remain a reference."

Participants then watched the premiere of the conference [CLLD video](#) which follows the stories of four individuals, from different countries and types of areas, helped in varying ways by the four ESI Funds (EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF and ESF). This was followed by a panel discussion between policy-makers and the local actors behind the four projects that helped the people in the video. Joining Dacian Cioloş, the other policy-makers on the panel were Christell Åström, Secretary-General of the Finnish Rural Policy Council, and Radim Sršeň, CLLD Rapporteur for the Committee of the Regions. The local actor's side of the panel was comprised of Guillermo González, Costa da Morte FLAG, Spain; Frédéric Lehubey, Enerterre Association, France; Kristjan Sigurdarson, Destination Falkenberg, Sweden; and Daniela Rejlová, Hradecký venkov LAG, Czech Republic. The discussion offered an opportunity to better understand what the four projects had brought to their respective communities and how local action can make a real difference when supported by national and EU policy.



Participants visited the CLLD project exhibition showcasing [40 local projects](#) supported by LAGs and FLAGs from the four ESI Funds (EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF and ESF). The new European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius, toured the projects and presented the following awards, four of which were selected via a public vote, and two additional awards selected by a jury comprised of representatives from the European Commission.

#### Best project strengthening the local economy

Fil&Fab (Brest FLAG, France): a French start-up which tackles harbour waste by turning used fishing nets into a reusable raw plastic material which is then used for making new plastic products.

#### Best project supporting ecological transition

Marlena (Galati FLAG, Romania): a transnational cooperation project raising public awareness about river and marine litter problems, emphasising biodiversity and the marine environment.

#### Best project building social capital

Xesmar (Ria de Arousa FLAG, Spain): a digital platform developed by and for the shellfish sector which simplifies and improves the day-to-day management, control and planning of shellfish activities.

#### Project with the best use of the CLLD method

Tarta-Tur (Venetian-VeGAL FLAG, Italy): in this project local fishers and scientists' team up to monitor the interaction between fishing and two of the area's protected species, turtles and dolphins.

#### Special Jury Prize - Best project offering a model for change

Pop-up Shops (Regionalentwicklungsverein Zukunft Linz-Land LAG, Austria): the innovative concept of Pop-up Shops is helping to revitalise rural and urban centres by offering flexible rental options for vacant retail spaces.

#### Special Mention from the Jury

The GOODie Shop (Podhůří Železných LAG, Czech Republic): this project received a special mention as the 'best project enhancing the quality of life in local communities' for creating a friendly, inspiring hub where people can eat and buy local food.



Day 3 of the conference opened with short pitches from three different types of areas (rural, fisheries and aquaculture, and urban), showcasing their visions for 2030.



The first pitch was from [Eva Jilken](#) from the Höga Kusten LEADER LAG, Sweden. Through a series of images and a [short film](#), Eva described her LAG's vision for the future which aims to challenge a local negative view of starting a business in the countryside. In a territory which combines the open sea, deep forest, and rich cultural history, the LAG's vision for 2030 is to have a thriving community where businesses actively work together in developing the countryside, nurturing a strong culture of young people remaining in the area.

The second pitch was by [Inmaculada Torres](#) from the Murcia FLAG, Spain. Torres described an area characterised by an ageing population and poorly organised small-scale fisheries under pressure from a growing aquaculture sector and uncontrolled leisure fishing activities. Asking the question: why does CLLD work? Torres said that for the Murcia FLAG, the answer is 'cooperation.' A process of continuous assessment in the area has seen projects develop and situations improve. Its vision for 2030 is to emulate this success but with less red-tape and local bureaucracy.



The final pitch was by [Rui Franco](#), president of Lisbon CLLD Network. Rui described Lisbon as a vibrant growing city with an above-average GDP, and an example of progressive policies in Europe. However, 30% of the city's population is not included in its thriving economy as they are not reached by traditional top-down approaches to policy. "CLLD is a strong solution," as it naturally aligns community needs to target investment, addressing the needs of the most deprived. The network's vision for 2030 is to reduce this divide.

Following the pitches, all three took part in a discussion and took questions from the audience. Themes from the discussion included how the LAGs interact with those outside their areas, bringing know-how and opportunities into their communities. Also discussed were the similarities and differences in their preparation for the new programming period, and what tools they will use to implement change. The panel cited cohesion as important for implementing and empowering change at a local level.

In the World Café sessions, participants were asked to join discussions on up to four of 10 themes, addressing pre-defined challenges and exploring how local communities can transition towards more sustainable practices. Here's a highlight of what the teams discussed.



**Promoting local food systems:** introduced by [Barbara Tocco](#), these thematic discussions focused on exploring what would make the local food systems in the participants' areas more sustainable and what needed to happen at a local level to transition towards such food systems. LAGs and FLAGs shared their experiences and discussed potential actions that they could take to promote more sustainable food systems, including shortening food supply chains.

**Making local resource management participative:** in his introduction, [Matthew Reed](#) offered some tips on how to ensure meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders in the management of local resources. Participants then selected different local resources in their areas, ranging from shellfish stocks to bio-energy, and discussed how they would benefit from a more participative model of management and what actions LAGs and FLAGs could take to ensure that a wider range of stakeholders are involved in decisions related to its use.

**Making tourism sustainable:** [Marko Koscak](#) spoke of the challenges of balancing the potential economic gains from tourism with the harm and disturbance it can cause to communities and their environment. Discussions explored how local action groups could help ensure that the natural environment and cultural assets are not over-exploited or destroyed by tourism, but instead revenue generated is invested in managing and protecting such resources.

**Combatting depopulation and attracting talent:** All local communities gain from having an active and dynamic population, be they entrepreneurs offering local goods and services, young families making local services viable or experienced people safeguarding the primary sectors and ensuring a supply of local food. But how to attract such people to your community? This is what participants focused on in this session, following an example by [Eva Jilkén](#) of her LAG's work to change perceptions of the countryside and support entrepreneurs to build a life for themselves in her community.

**Harnessing new technologies:** [Sveinn Margeirsson](#), from Iceland, spoke on this topic. He believes that small-scale economies need to capitalise on technological advances if they want to be successful. Discussions were focused on how new technologies can be harnessed to foster more sustainable local development and how local communities make use of technology to better preserve their environmental and cultural resources.

**Business clusters fostering collaboration:** The Flemish Blue Cluster's [Lien Loosvelt](#) maintains that business clusters on a smaller territorial scale can prove to be an effective way to stimulate innovation, entrepreneurship, learning, and better use of local resources. Participants discussed the overall benefits that can be gained by clustering different companies, as well as ways to ensure the market take-up of local innovation and eventually how (F)LAGs can help with these linkages.

**Rethinking social inclusion:** was introduced by [Natalie Slawinski](#), presenting the experience of how social enterprise has helped revitalise the fisheries community of the Fogo Island (Canada). Participants reflected on the kind of support needed for different target groups and what LAGs can do to ensure that economic development in their area also has a social impact. The (F)LAG can play an important role in stimulating cooperation and exchange of practices between different institutions responsible for helping the people in need.

**Shoring up local jobs and services:** in this working group, participants discussed the range of amenities local areas need in order to sustain a good quality of life, and what actions (F)LAGs could take to maintain and develop these services. The need for a common space for various activities such as education, communication and cultural participation were brought up. Participants were guided by the experience of [Alina Baba](#) from the Romanian LAG Cluj-Napoca.

**Moving to a circular economy:** [Thomas Binet](#) introduced this topic, outlining the importance of moving away from a linear economy and how this can be developed in a sustainable way. Participants then discussed what waste products could be re-directed to new uses, and how (F)LAGs can encourage and foster more circular production and consumption practices locally.

**Energy and climate transition:** [Myriam Castanie](#) from the European Federation of Renewable Energy Cooperatives kickstarted this session centred on moving towards renewable energy and climate change. Participants talked about the extent to which local communities can become self-sufficient in renewable energy and focused on the actions that can be taken at a local level to combat climate change. The importance of national legislation (e.g. appropriate tax regime) in encouraging sustainable use of energy was highlighted.

**“Congratulations to all of the projects that have received prizes and to everyone. You have all been doing a lot and are an asset to your local territories, ensuring that they can have a future. [...] I am fully committed to and believe that these initiatives should be increased. I believe in more funding (for CLLD) from the EAFRD and EMFF. [...] The experience exists, what you are doing is so important, and your innovative ideas are welcome.”**

*Clara Aguilera, Member of the European Parliament*

The closing plenary opened with a speech from Clara Aguilera, Member of the European Parliament, who outlined the ongoing importance of CLLD in ensuring the future of Europe's local territories. Several participants from the audience were then asked to present some of the key ideas that they will take back to their territories based on the World Café discussions. A common theme of these take-home messages was a feeling of being better placed to develop and capitalise on new opportunities using CLLD.

Team Leader of the FARNET Support Unit, Gilles van de Walle, closed the conference by outlining that the 2021-2027 programming period will be one of 'maturity': "following the learning process of the past six years, it is now time to take a qualitative leap into the new period and to really focus our efforts where CLLD can make a difference, using our combined experience and best practices as a driving force to refining CLLD in the future."

