

Reinforcing the territorial approach

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The first reflections have begun on the post-2020 period, in a context marked by Brexit and the need to face a number of new challenges: defence and security, migration issues, but also climate change, to cite but a few. The European scene is also marked by the rise of populism, a strong disaffection of citizens towards Europe, linked in particular to the emergence of new social and territorial divisions; many citizens feel excluded from the vast economic and social realignment created by the opening of both internal and external borders, the globalisation of economies, etc. The various financial perspectives of the European Union show there will be difficult choices to be made. What is the possible future for the EMFF CLLD? What added value does it bring to Europe?

Achievements

- Axis 4 of the EFF and now the 'EMFF CLLD' have significantly changed the situation both in terms of fisheries policy and territorial policy:
 - They have contributed to strengthening the competitiveness of the fisheries sector, opening up new prospects for the most fragile segments of the sector, namely small-scale fishing, and family or artisanal fishing.
 - These sectors have become more competitive, jobs have been created, and many others have been saved thanks to the links that have been created with other stakeholders within the regions concerned, including local authorities, the private sector, and local associations.

- This increased competitiveness has allowed other economic actors – hotels, restaurants, processing, culture, etc. – to take advantage of new opportunities offered by cooperation with the fishing sector.
- These new measures have considerably increased fishermen's awareness of society's demands for quality, traceability, proximity and respect for the environment.
- The territorial approach contributes to strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of the regions concerned. The fishing culture is a strong source of pride for the populations concerned, and of attraction, both for new residents and to develop various forms of tourism.
- These achievements deserve to be underlined, in that they represent a real 'revolution' for the fishing sector, which has in the past and is often still used to working in isolation!
- This new approach would not have been possible without Europe.
 - It would not have been possible without the implementation of Axis 4 of the EFF, and now the EMFF CLLD, setting out in detail the proposed approach, fixing the basic rules of the game, providing funding, which though modest is significant in many of the beneficiary regions.
 - It would not have been possible:
 - Without the considerable investment in capacity building, both at local and management authority level.
 - Without the vast circulation of information, which:
 - Highlights – using good practices – the vast range of available opportunities.
 - Encourages the exchange of experience and cooperation.
 - Inspires an ever increasing number of local stakeholders to get involved in enterprise.

And yet we could have done better

The potential offered by the territorial approach is now largely under-exploited:

- The very significant delays in implementation and the gaps between the various programming periods often lead to the departure of teams and the demobilisation of local fisheries action groups. We are now in the fourth year of implementation of the programme, yet about 100 groups have still not started their activities and most of the rest started only a few months ago.

- Administrative burdens remain significant, despite efforts to simplify procedures. This is not encouraging for innovators.
- In some countries, there are significant difficulties in co-financing operations. Cuts in public budgets at both state and local government levels make it difficult to mobilise counterpart funds to match European funding.

All this discourages potential project promoters, in particular private investors or associations, who have a poor understanding of the administrative complexities and do not have the financial capacity to wait several months for the validation of their project or to receive the funding that has been granted to them.

A new approach for the future

- Let's give it a different name! 'Axis 4' was incomprehensible enough for common mortals! 'EMFF CLLD' (or its equivalent acronym in every language of the European Union) is even worse! Let's come up with a term that we can 'sell'. Despite all the burdens in its implementation, the 'LEADER' programme for rural areas is still a well-known term, an identity that has become synonymous with innovation. Let's find an equivalent term, one that's catchy in all languages.... 'FARNET' could be a possibility: it is widely recognised by all the parties involved in this approach. Or, let's ask marketing specialists to come up with some proposals. I begin with this observation because in order to sell a product or service, in this case an innovative approach, the branding is essential! This 'brand' must be synonymous with opportunities for innovation, for inventing new activities. This name, this brand must be synonymous with a Europe that is close to its citizens, close to its regions, which makes people want to get involved... it cannot just be an administrative acronym.
- Fisheries policy is a common policy of the European Union. Today, the territorial approach is an integral part of that policy and must therefore assert itself and remain the responsibility of the European Union. It opens opportunities for competitiveness to the most fragile segments of the sector, small-scale fishing, artisanal fishing and family fishing, i.e. all those segments of fisheries that can become stronger by being better integrated into their territory.
- It must be more focused on those territories where such segments have everything to gain by being better integrated with other local actors. It should no longer concern those territories where there is no or no longer any fishing, nor those territories whose fishing activities are disconnected from their local base and who work mainly on national or international markets.
- The quality of local partnerships is an essential element of success. They must be credible and representative of the various elements involved in fisheries, and must enable the opening of genuine dialogue with other economic actors, as well as with local institutions and associations. In several countries, the fisheries sector has a long history and



practice of managing 'common resources', notably through the 'cofradias' in Spain, or the 'prudhomies' in the French Mediterranean region, etc. The role of the local action group is to extend this notion of 'common resources' to the rational and balanced management of the territory for the benefit of the greatest number of people, fishermen and other inhabitants.

- The constant search for innovation must be our guiding star. For this to be achieved it is essential to network territories at a regional, national and European level, to build up the capacities of all those involved in the process, to strengthen the exchange of good practices, to build up cooperation, to support each other in the most promising innovations, but also often the most complex ones.
- There needs to be a real 'revolution' in implementation methods. How can we respond to the calls for simplification coming from every side, from local operators exhausted by the complexity of procedures all the way to the highest level of the European Union's institutions? How can we ensure that any promising innovation in a territory can be assisted and promoted effectively? All the while, of course, meeting the absolute requirements for transparency and the proper use of public funds.
- It is imperative to set up right now a working group made of group managers, managing authorities and European officials in order to make innovative proposals that are acceptable to all sides and that perfectly align with the broad guidelines set at European level, as well as with those authorities that also operate CLLD approaches – DG AGRI, REGIO, Employment – which face the same difficulties in implementing a territorial approach. As a first step this working group could be tasked with finding ways to speed up the implementation of the current programmes which are suffering from important delays.
- The territorial approach could be central to a fisheries policy targeted at improving the competitiveness of the most fragile segments of the sector. It could become the key instrument to support small-scale, artisanal fisheries - in short those segments which can become more competitive by reinforcing the links to their areas.
- Cooperation between territories is a strong area of European added value. Over the past 15 years, despite repeated efforts from various sides, the management of transnational cooperation funds at

the level of national and regional managing authorities has proved to be complex and even ineffective. It has discouraged most project promoters. It is essential to return to a European management of these funds if we are to allow the full potential of this cooperation approach.

Bringing Europe closer to its citizens and its territories

Confronting the new social and territorial divides, bringing Europe closer to its citizens enabling them to feel that Europe matters to them, this is the backdrop against which we stand.

- By targeting the most fragile segments of the fisheries sector, the approach proposed can contribute a response to the social divisions and to the desire for a Europe that is closer to its citizens, whatever the territories concerned.
- Because of their isolation, and the disappearance of certain sectors of activity, some of these territories are also forgotten territories, territories that have been left behind.
- In these territories, an integrated territorial approach, targeted at all economic sectors present on the territory could be proposed, focusing on the challenges posed by climate change and the opportunities offered by energy transition and blue growth. In order to fully exploit the potential of the fisheries sector, and to not forget the sector, which is often very small, the best would be to allow local fisheries and aquaculture action groups a large degree of autonomy, while integrating the sector into the overall approach for the territory.

If it is to succeed, this global approach must be accompanied by a 'revolution' in its means of implementation. If it draws on several funds, implementation systems must be similar, regardless of the funds involved. Alternatively, the intervention possibilities under each fund could be broadened so that each territory had the possibility to only use one fund to support its global development strategy.

Europe needs to reinvent itself. An approach aimed at the most disadvantaged groups and territories can and must contribute to this.

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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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