

Rome, 13 April 2021

TUSCANY REGION

EVALUATION SERVICE OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM 2014-2020

Dissemination Synthesis E1.2 First LEADER Report: Analysis e LEADER self-assessment judgment

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dimensions identified by the evaluator-LAG interaction; the criteria for judgment that emerged during the mandate phase. In this way, the evaluation design incorporates a more detailed map of references that can guide the evaluator in the continuation of the evaluation activities (the path identified in the figure above).

During the coaching activities carried out with the LAGs, 51 subjects were interviewed, 41 beneficiaries and 10 non-beneficiaries.

This report therefore describes the outcome of a (self) evaluation process, in which the term "self" is linked to the concept of Collective Impact, to the proactivity of the LAG in the evaluation process led by the evaluator, who is the author of this report and the one who is able to carry out the evaluation research with the methods and techniques illustrated in the following paragraphs. In this process, the LAG will be able to learn how evaluation is done and, above all, what it is necessary to ask and expect from it.

2. The Tuscany LAG self-assessment model

2.1. The map of the CLLDs dimensions

The following figure contains the elements to be investigated in order to return an evaluative judgment on the impact of SISLs based on circumstantial evidence (► Process tracing). The figure contains 33 properties that will be investigated in order to fully answer the evaluation questions posed by the LAGs.



2.2. Some insights into the properties of the (self) evaluation model

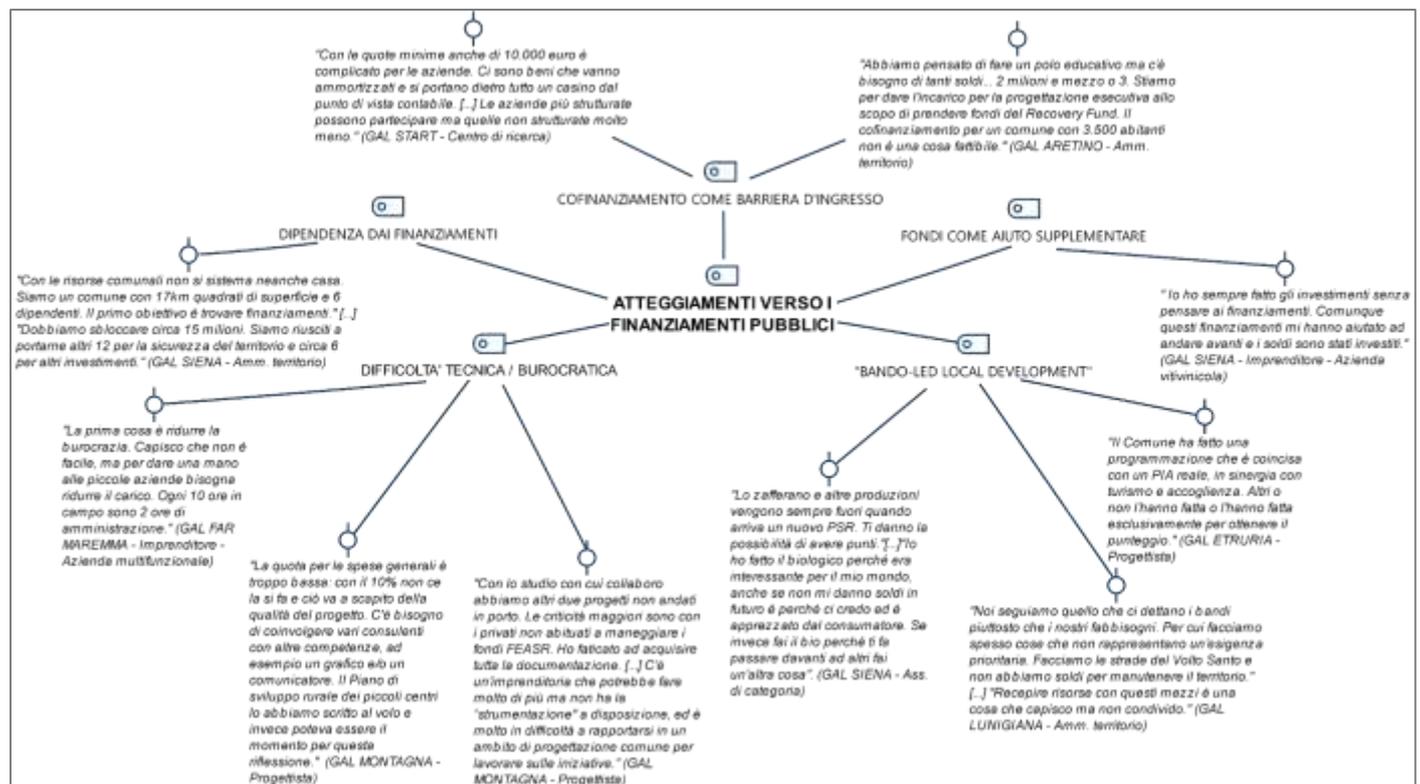
2.2.1. Attitudes towards Tuscan LAGs on the part of local stakeholders

From the interviews, an overall positive view of Tuscan LAGs emerges, however, it is also possible to highlight a series of positive and negative aspects that should be considered.

- A **limited capacity for bottom-up planning**: the role of the LAG is reduced to being "**a safe**", around which people "**try to bring home a few resources**".
- A **positive perception of the expertise of the LAGs' technical structures** and their work sometimes makes it possible to build "**a safety net for small municipalities**".
- An invitation to go further. LAGs should act as "**simplifiers and facilitators**" able to "**drop in**" to their territory not only strategically and technically but also operationally and relationally, so as to mitigate conflicts, unhide prejudices and "**shake off parochialism**" by helping to "**overcome the rough edges present in each community**".

It is useful to consider the influence that general **attitudes toward public funding** can have on the very mandate that LAGs are called upon to pursue from the perspective of participatory local development.

Figure 2 - Examples of statements indicating respondents' attitudes towards public funding



2.2.2. Respondents' perceptions of the area's demographic and tourism dynamics

The areas covered by the Tuscan LAGs vary greatly in terms of demographics, employment and production and, even within the same areas, different players have different perceptions of the evolution of the social and economic fabric in which they find themselves. Different perceptions give rise to different attitudes which, in turn, according to the type of subject, generate different intentions, propensities and preferences. In very low-density contexts, characterized by hamlets, villages and small urban aggregations, there is a **widespread perception that the process of abandonment and depopulation will exacerbate the difficulties in terms of availability of public services.**

"Schools are an engine for new residency. In absolute terms we have remained stable, but every year we have families moving here". Under certain conditions, schools are one of the elements capable of *"keeping families anchored"*.

It's not just a matter of attracting new residents, but also of attracting tourists. Some entrepreneurs in these inland areas, those who have "withstood" the impact of the lockdowns, are confident, because they have seen a new opportunity in the pandemic crisis: to create a slow tourism offer that responds to the increased demand for "escapist" experiences and to the clearance of smart working.

Not everyone, however, agrees on the role of tourism as a lever to trigger repopulation processes, because the increase in tourism activities can determine 'substitution' side effects, as in the case of a Sienese town of about 5,000 inhabitants in which the recent exponential growth of tourism activities (about 350 in the last 15 years) has *"transformed homes into B&Bs, making the town depopulated"* and also determining an **increase in the cost of living for residents.**

Even with respect to other sectors, situations vary greatly, and with them the perceptions and assessments of the interviewees on demographic evolution and the dynamics that have characterized it. From this point of view, the substitution of direct farmers to the advantage of multinationals linked to the large-scale retail trade is an element that is cited negatively by many voices.

Nonetheless, the influence of the agricultural productive fabric on the dynamics of the population is considered decisive only by some actors. The majority of those interviewed, on the other hand, believe that it is the **virtuous union between good administration and valorization of local identity** that is truly fundamental for creating the necessary conditions for scenarios of economic development and quality of life that will make their territory attractive and lively, both for residents and tourists. Therefore, it is about offering a **quality tourism**, sometimes for specific niches of visitors (next to food and wine, for example, also tourism and environment) to be welcomed in the structures of the so called "widespread tourism", which is well suited to the villages of the rural areas of Tuscany.

Just within the villages, some types of investment (for example, those for the **redevelopment** of historic centers) are perceived by some mayors as particularly functional with respect to specific **strategies of territorial marketing**. It is a matter of giving a new face to one's own municipality and at the same time **stimulating a 'leverage' effect on the private sector**, so that it in turn decides to make improvements that generate critical mass. As a premise for strategies of this type, the ability to network, **create significant ties and translate them into useful projects emerges as fundamental**. And this is where the role of the LAG and all those other actors who can play an important role in the development of their territory comes in.

Experiences of collaboration and networking among local actors

Many attempts at collaboration between subjects in the territory emerged from the stories of the interviewees. In good part of the cases they were narratives of "**monkish experiences**", begun but never brought to completion because progressively decayed or because cut off by a contingency (perhaps more or less casual like that which had given birth to the attempt) of political, administrative, business or - more banally - interpersonal or personal type.

With the advent of Covid-19, keeping a collaborative network or experience alive has become even more difficult. However, even without a pandemic there appear to be other risk factors that threaten collaboration in CLLD.

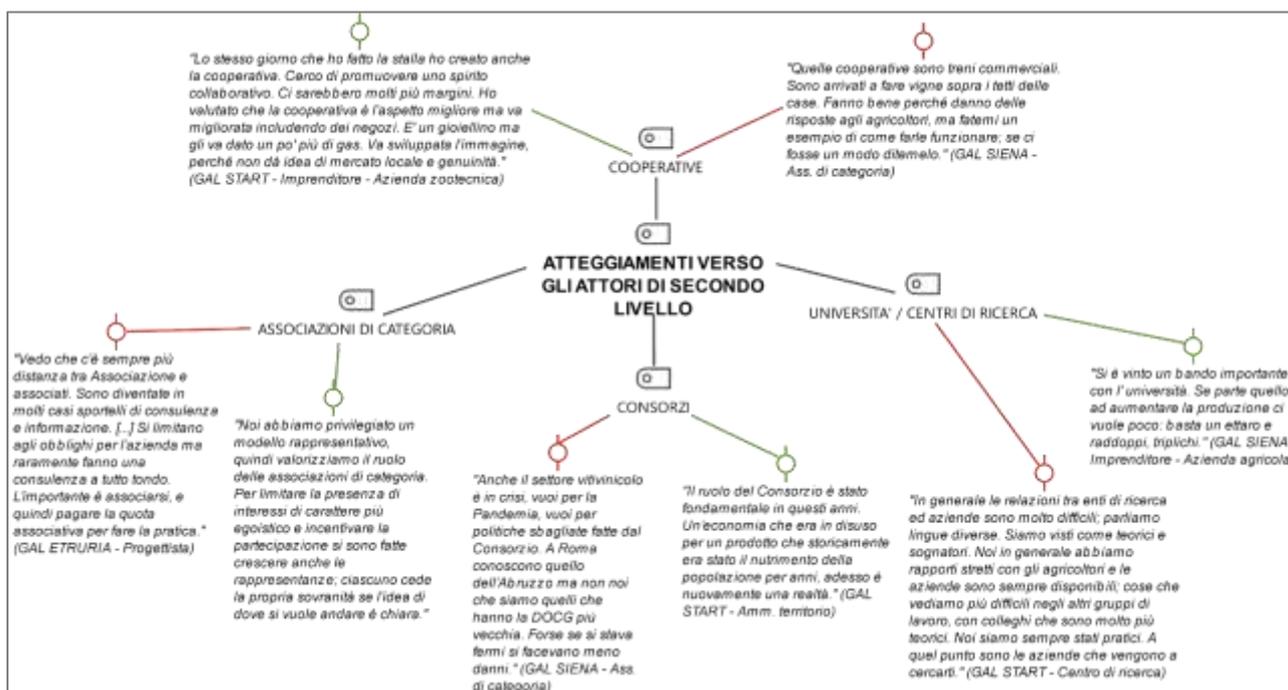
On some occasions, however, things do work out and **integrated planning becomes a means of overcoming "hesitancy and misunderstanding"** and sparking a strong enthusiasm that in turn has a positive spin-off on the quality of the content at the heart of the initiative. Not entirely dissimilar, though very different, are the dynamics outside the production chains (agricultural, forestry, livestock and tourism), in which the **private social sector moves together with the world of culture and the safeguarding and promotion of material and immaterial heritage.**

In both cases, a dominant role is assigned to **territorial animation** and this emerges across the board from the interviewees, both in geographical and sectoral terms. The accumulation of **functions of information, promotion, training and (inter)mediation between different interests**, desires and instances appears, therefore, as an essential element to allow the actors of the territory to give themselves "**a perspective beyond the everyday**".

But this animation, to be effective, must be capillary, in such a way that "as soon as an announcement comes out or there is a call for proposals, a word of mouth starts that makes the project be taken into consideration" and carried out possibly by subjects who know the territory and are **competent in facilitation and planning**, as well as in the theme in question. Cost limits for professional figures of this type often constitute a significant obstacle and only on specific occasions can be overcome by resorting to equally successful alternatives (for example, entrusting the mayor directly with the role of animator).

A couple of examples from interviews can better clarify the typology (see figure below).

Figure 3 - Examples of statements indicating positive (green) and negative (red) attitudes of respondents towards second-tier actors



2.3. Group coaching

2.3.1. Thematic focus: community led projects

The reflection that was carried out during the first coaching focused on the focus of the PdC, and in particular two perspectives of valorization of common goods were identified, as follows:

- the project for the community, understood as a type of project that has already matured within territorial contexts, characterized by the fact that the proposing subjects are individuals (entrepreneurs) and public and private associations that develop a projectuality in favor of the community;
- the project from the community, which arises from below from groups that ally themselves with other stronger ones to consolidate existing practices or to develop new ones around the enhancement of common goods.

What is being brought to the attention of the LAGs is that the same project may have different connotations of meaning with respect to those who propose it and, above all, may have a different pragmatic use observable through its usability. In the properties introduced relative to the PdC, the commonality of languages expresses precisely the importance of the attunement of meaning between actors who promote the community project (figure below).

Figure 4 - Map of possible common languages

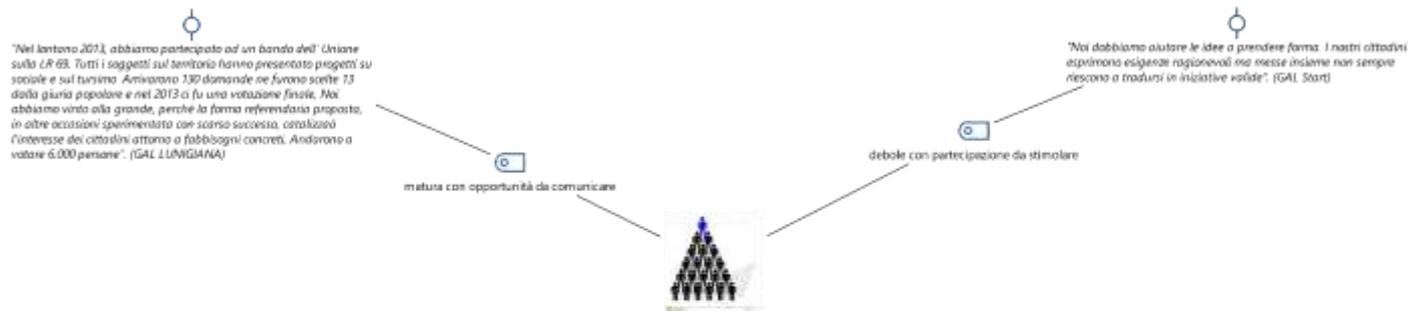


Other relevant properties, especially in the selection phase of the CDPs, concern the methods of communication and animation in the territories. In all the LAGs, thanks also to the coaching activities, it is clear that a traditional/artisanal type of communication and animation is not a viable path for the CDPs.

Not only are there different languages but also different programming skills, which imply a reasoned and professional way of communicating and a different way of animating and accompanying potential partnerships.

Figure 5 - Map of the possible programming levels from below

Livello di programmazione dal basso



Livello di programmazione dal basso

