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Title

Partnerships as associations: Input and output legitimacy of LEADER partnerships in
Denmark, Finland and Sweden

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Abstract

Formal EU regulations prescribe that LEADER local action groups (LAGs) should be
organised as partnerships consisting of representatives from the different socioeconomic
sectors. Three case studies of LAGs in Denmark, Finland and Sweden from the
LEADER+ period 2000-2006 indicate that partnerships have been organised in markedly
different ways in the Nordic countries and that these differences have had consequences
for the legitimacy of the groups. One important phenomenon is the increasing use of the
associational form when organising LAG partnerships. Through an evaluation of the input
legitimacy and output legitimacy of the three LAGs, the article identifies different mixes
of association and partnership and suggests combinations of the two organisational forms.
It argues that without strict meta-governance, partnerships organised as associations have
difficulties finding a place under the partnership umbrella.

1. Introduction

This article assesses the input and output legitimacy of a Danish, Finnish and Swedish LEADER+ partnership in relation to different mixes of organisational forms (partnership and association) applied. The LEADER programmes appearing in the 1990's have introduced partnership organising in local action groups (LAGs) into rural development policy (CEC, 2006). As a consequence, LEADER partnerships have become widespread in the Nordic EU countries.[1] From 2000-2006 this took the form of the LEADER+ initiative that included 12 Danish LAGs, 12 Swedish LAGs and 26 Finnish LAGs.[2] This article draws on experience from the LEADER+ period in a Danish, Swedish and Finnish LAG.[3]

According to the Commission the LEADER+ partnerships should:

"Consist of a balanced and representative selection of partners drawn from the different socioeconomic sectors in the territory concerned. At the decision-making level the economic and social partners and associations must make up at least 50% of the local partnership" (CEC, 2000)

As part of a new rural paradigm (OECD, 2006) creating new interactive governance structures (Böcher, 2008; Goodwin, 1998; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998), LAG partnerships exist alongside traditionally elected political councils and are not necessarily democratic (Bryden, 1994; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005a & 2005b). Questions about legitimacy become highly relevant since public money is distributed through the LAGs and these partnerships decide on and implement strategic plans. Their legitimacy is strongly related to the various organisational models that are chosen in individual countries for the organising of the partnerships. In the Nordic EU countries these organisational settings often relate to an associational model, whereas in other countries, more business-oriented organisational models are used.

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[1] There is no systematic use of partnership organising for rural development in Iceland and Norway. This organising method is clearly an EU phenomenon introduced in relation to Denmark, Sweden and Finland's EU membership.

[2] In total, Finland had almost 60 LAGs during the LEADER+ period 2000-2006. 26 of these LAGs received funds from the LEADER+ programme while the others received money from other programmes.

[3] The research for this article was carried out for the Agriculture and Forestry Section in the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007 and consisted of a comparative analysis of a Danish, Swedish and Finnish LAG from the LEADER+ period.

Often partnerships are created to solve complex and fragmented societal problems where one part is not able to deliver the results alone (Moseley et al., 2001; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005a). The specific purpose of LEADER partnerships can be described as multidimensional, namely as part of a territorial and area-based strategy comprising both a development dimension and a dimension of democracy and citizen participation. According to the Commission:

"The aim of Leader+ is to encourage and help rural actors to think about the longer-term potential of their area. It seeks to encourage the implementation of integrated, high-quality, original strategies for sustainable development designed to encourage experimenting with new ways of:

- *enhancing the natural and cultural heritage,*
- *reinforcing the economic environment, in order to contribute to job creation,*
- *improving the organisational abilities of their community"*

Institutional capacity building (Healey, 1998), which comprises intellectual capital (knowledge resources), social capital (relational resources) and political capital (mobilisation potential) therefore matters in relation to LEADER next to a focus on job creation. Establishing of ideal speech situations (Habermas, 1996) between different stakeholders in rural development (farmers, environmentalists, community groups etc.) becomes vital, too. Likewise, Putnam's concept of bridging social capital (2000) is important, since bridging social capital in the end becomes a condition for success in the economic development of local areas.

In the Nordic countries, there is a long associational tradition that roots back in civic movements of the 19th century (Clemmensen, 1987; Klausen & Selle, 1995; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004; Torpe, 2003). Today many different types of associations exist, not least in rural areas (Nielsen & Thuesen, 2002). The associational form includes written rules, a membership basis and annual general meetings where elections take place (Balle-Petersen, 1976; Boye & Ibsen, 2006; Clemmensen, 1987; Torpe, 2000). The election part of associations makes them differ from traditional partnerships. Still, in the Nordic EU countries, organising LAG partnerships as associations is becoming more and more common in order to improve the democratic legitimacy of the groups.

Legitimacy can be divided into *input-oriented* and *output-oriented* legitimacy. The two concepts embrace the full rationale for interactive governance both involving the accountability element and the efficiency element (Scharpf, 1997 & 1999). Scharpf's distinction between these two types of legitimacy is both relevant and necessary when assessing the legitimacy of LAGs. Questions about the legitimacy of governance networks have been examined by Skelcher, Marthur and Smith (2005), Klijn and Skelcher (2007) and Sørensen and Torfing (2009). Boedeltje & Cornips (2004) discuss whether there is a trade-off between input and output legitimacy in interactive governance arrangements. This will, however, depend on the conception of efficiency employed. If *institutional capacity* (Healey, 1998) or *collective actor capacity* (Healey, 2006, p. 302) are included as indicators of efficiency, the possible trade-off might prove to be less significant. Also Bäckstrand (2006) uses Scharpf's distinction between two types of legitimacy when assessing the legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development. Still, the legitimacy question has not been studied in relation to the different *organisational models* of LAGs. Consequently, the question becomes:

How can partnership and associational organisation be combined in order to secure input and output legitimacy of LEADER LAGs in rural interactive governance?

The article is structured in five sections. Part two is theoretical. It outlines the shift from government to governance and is followed by the theory on input and output legitimacy and the characteristics of partnerships and associations respectively. Part three contains methodological reflections. Part four consists of case studies of input and output legitimacy in LAG Vestsjælland, LAG Karhuseutu and LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd. In part five, a schematic illustration of the different mixes of association and partnership in the three cases is presented and discussed in relation to the concepts of input and output legitimacy. Part six provides a conclusion, which emphasises that there is a need to consider the consequences of different organisational models and to introduce active ministerial meta-governance if the organisational models are to succeed.

2. Theory - Legitimizing partnerships

From government to governance

Governance literature stresses the fact that the governance of a country has to do with more than what happens in its parliament. Many rural development initiatives take place in both the private and voluntary sector, supplementing decisions taken by parliaments and locally elected councils. The EU decision to hand over responsibility for decision-making and economy to LAGs is an expression of a need for the formal engagement of non-public players in rural development (CEC, 2006; Cork declaration, 1996). States cannot solve rural development problems on their own, and other groups of actors – among them actors from the private and voluntary sectors – must come up with new initiatives and help with the implementation of decisions taken by ordinary politicians at various levels. This means that the governance concept is about the development of new types of government, in which the boundaries between different sectors are partially blurred (Goodwin, 1998; Stoker, 1998). An increasingly widespread use of partnership organising and a related shift of power from the institutions of representative democracy to a 'patchwork' democracy (Navdeep & Skelcher, 2007), call for an assessment of the legitimacy of these organisational settings.

Input and output legitimacy

Legitimacy is about justification of political power relations or, more specifically, about making decisions and arrangements that will meet with the general consent of individuals and communities alike. Historically what has created legitimacy has varied. Weber distinguished between three types of authority as sources of legitimacy: traditional dominance, charismatic dominance and legal dominance, the latter being characteristic for modern democracies (Weber, 1964). In relation to legitimacy at the EU level, Scharpf (1997 & 1999) distinguishes between two types of legitimating belief: input-oriented legitimacy and output-oriented legitimacy.

Input-oriented arguments are based on participation and consensus - government *by* the people. Decisions are counted as legitimate if they represent the will of the people. Output-oriented arguments are concerned with government *for* the people, so decisions are legitimate when they serve the people. Using this argument, it is reasonable to delegate decisions to experts and network actors if these groups provide better results. The two aspects of the concept of legitimacy are highly revealing in an assessment of the legitimacy and rationale of different LAG partnerships. It is questionable whether starting to organise partnerships as associations gives precedence to the input side – the

governance by the people – over considerations of results. The political and civic part of citizenship becomes centre of attention instead of more situated forms of legitimacy (Connelly et al., 2006) that could also be relevant in relation to partnerships.

Since there are clear differences in pursuing input legitimacy and output legitimacy, I analyze different aspects in each of the legitimating beliefs. As to input legitimacy, parameters leading to fair and equal representation are included, such as *access procedures* (how to become a partner in the partnership) and *influence procedures* (how to influence decisions in the partnership). As to output legitimacy - the problem-solving capacity of the partnerships - the parameters in focus are the creation of *quantifiable output* (the 'hard' results of the partnership) and less quantifiable *institutional capacity* (the 'soft' results of the partnership).

Partnerships
The partnership concept appears in a wide variety of contexts, and it is difficult to provide a clear definition of it (Geddes, 1998; for a review see Selsky & Parker, 2005). Googins and Rochlin put forward the following definition:

"A partnership is a commitment by a corporation or a group of corporations to work with an organization from a different economic sector (public or non-profit). It involves a commitment of resources – time and effort – by individuals from all partner organizations. (…) The problem can be defined at least in part as a social issue; its solution will benefit all partners. Social partnership addresses issues that extend beyond organizational boundaries (…) and lie within the traditional realm of public policy (…). It requires active rather than passive involvement from all parties..." (Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 130)

This definition, involving the social dimension of partnership, is in part reflected in the reality of LEADER partnerships. Nevertheless, social partnerships often have only advisory capacities, while rural partnerships established through LEADER have decision-making capacities as well as economic means at their disposal. For this reason LEADER partnerships are fairly wide-ranging governance networks, and the governance carried out by LEADER partnerships cut across the governance carried out by municipal councils, regions etc. There is a fundamental logic behind partnership organising that stipulates that

each partner makes a particular contribution that complements the contributions of the other participants and assists in creating synergism (Hardis, 2003 & 2004), a win-win equation (Googins & Rochlin, 2000) or a collaborative advantage (Huxham & Vangen, 2004). Hardis emphasizes that this partnership ideal is far from reality since problems related to identity or legitimacy often dominate partnerships. If a partnership succeeds in creating a strong common organisational identity, this will often be at the expense of the sector-specific legitimacy that the various partners feel in relation to parent organisations. On the other hand, if partners stick to the legitimating beliefs of their parent organisations, this will frequently be at the expense of the creation of a common partnership identity (Hardis, 2003 & 2004). Identity and legitimacy problems aside, the ideal behind partnerships can also appear too positive, since there often exist between partnership members concrete cooperation problems (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001), management problems (Huxham & Vangen, 2004) or excluding power relations (Agger, 2009; Davies, 2007).

All things considered, access and influence procedures of partnerships receive less attention than their problem-solving capacity. Partnerships are generally not established to improve input legitimacy but to provide new solutions to complex societal problems. This can happen in the form of decision-making coalitions composed of representatives of the relevant parties or in the form of development organisations (Iliev et al., 2006) in which the common identity is stronger and attachment to backing groups weaker. Of course, efforts can be made to form democratically anchored partnerships as stated by Sørensen and Torfing (2005). However, this is not their main *raison d'être*.

Associations
As already put forward, associations entail written rules including an object clause, independent presentations of accounts, open and free membership and annual general assembly meetings where democratic elections to the board of the association take place (Balle-Petersen, 1976; Boye & Ibsen, 2006; Clemmensen, 1987; Torpe, 2000). Access procedures in associations normally permit everyone to become a member. If then additionally, a member wants to become a board member of the association, he/she is free to run as candidate and maybe get elected by the members. When it comes to influence procedures, every member can run as candidate or otherwise give their voice at the annual elections. The competence and problem-solving capacity of associations is not given

precedence over access and influence procedures, which means that it is the 'will of the members' that decides the composition of the board.

Through the years the associational form has been used to solve many tasks and has thereby shown its problem-solving capacity. Earlier organisational and institutional traditions in the Nordic EU countries make it natural to choose the associational form. The advantages of the partnership approach could, however, bear a risk of the baby being thrown out with the bath water when LAGs are organised as associations, since only those appearing at the yearly general assembly meeting decide who gets elected on the board. To avoid one-sided representation, it is necessary with very specific election procedures securing tri-sector representation. Moreover, it is important to remember that also the associational form can be criticized as being non-democratic because of the risk that only the active, sympathetic, friendly and/or intelligent persons are gaining access even though formally everyone has this possibility. When I now turn to the empirical results, it is exactly the need for procedures for how to make the associational model continuously work as an open partnership that will be one of the main points to illustrate.

3. Methods

The study used semi-structured interviews with the most active partnership members and their coordinators, as well as participant observations and extensive documentary analysis to supplement and validate the results. The reason for choosing qualitative data collection methods relied on an urge to make visible the nuances and motives behind each LAGs freedom to make its own strategic choice within the limits of the programme. In addition, design flexibility and a dialogue concentrated on understanding were necessary from the assumption that the respondents culturally construct their own world.

The interviews were conducted in Denmark, Finland and Sweden in June 2007 (LAG Vestsjælland), August 2007 (LAG Karhuseutu) and October 2007 (LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd) at a time when LEADER+ activities had already ended or were about to end and the new Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 was about to begin. In all, 16 interviews were conducted, each interview lasting about one hour. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to the three themes: Democracy and governance, Organisation and management, and Results, which also made up the main structure of the interview guide.

The participant observations included several project visits in the Danish and Finnish cases, a conference attendance in the Swedish case and attendance at an informal preparation meeting and a founding general assembly for the start-up of the new LAG for the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 in the Danish case. The documents used consisted of development plans of the three LAGs, written rules, brochures, annual reports, extensive project lists, PowerPoint presentations, midterm evaluations and LAG web pages.

Table 1: Sources of data

The three case descriptions represent some of the diversity of the LEADER way of partnership organising. From their focus on input and output legitimacy they can be compared to other LAGs and other cases of interactive governance in related policy areas (urban planning for example) and other countries. They have not been chosen from a criterion that each of the three LAGs is to represent all LAGs in the countries they belong to. For this, the LAG diversity is too large. They are examples of a Nordic way of meeting an EU phenomenon introduced from above. As described, the associational tradition is a common characteristic of the three countries, therefore making the associational form natural to choose contrary to for example the UK tradition of private limited companies. The cases also offer to the international audience examples of rural interactive governance seen from the perspective of high trust countries. Denmark, Finland and Sweden are among the four highest ranking countries in the World Values Survey (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2006). Subsequently, discussions of possible organisational forms in these countries will be different from discussions in low trust countries that are also subject to the LEADER initiative.

All three LAGs were described as well-functioning by external experts and were mainly chosen due to this. Still, the Vestsjælland case was initially selected because this LAG was involved in the realization of the comparative study conducted for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Finnish case was chosen because of a specific entry point in the form of a project that made it possible for foreigners to come and stay in a village in the LAG area. The Swedish LAG was selected from knowledge of their many activities related to

children and young people and as a kind of contrasting case because of this very strict strategic focus.

In the following analysis of the three cases, focus is on the LEADER+ period 2000-2006 and the word LAG covers different things in each case. In the Danish case, the LAG partnership is a group of 12 people appointed by organisations, authorities, institutions and associations. In the Finnish case, the LAG is an open association with 200 members who have elected a board of 10 persons (making up the partnership) to run the daily business. As regards the Swedish case, it is an association with a LAG of 40 nominated members (making up the partnership), who have elected a board of 10 persons to handle the day-to-day work. Other people interested in development work can become members of the association Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd, but not of the LAG.

4. Cases

The table below presents the main characteristics of the three LAGs. LAG Vestsjælland only existed during the LEADER+ period, while LAG Karhuseutu and LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd were established in the LEADER II period in the 1990's.

Table 2: LAG Vestsjælland, LAG Karhuseutu and LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd

Access and influence procedures in LAG Vestsjælland

Standards of entry to LAG Vestsjælland were not open during the LEADER+ period. LAG Vestsjælland used the association as legal form, but without making annual general meetings, a membership basis or elections to a board. The 12 members of the LAG were appointed and not elected, according to rules put down by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. The initiators made contact with central players in the area (authorities, organisations, institutions and others) who each selected one representative to the LAG. The LAG manager explained:

"We just took the view that it had to be important players who were involved in development work, so we could get across the community and get different points of views to play together" (Lægdsmand, 2007)

No legitimacy judgements were made and apart from the connection to the parent organisations, no democratic anchorage of the LAG was secured. This meant that for an outsider, it could be hard to obtain influence on the decision-making processes in the LAG. Initially, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries did not take initiative to securing the legitimacy of the group and was not concerned with the composition of the group either. This changed somewhat after the midterm evaluation. The real changes with the supervision of the input legitimacy did not appear until the programming period 2007-2013 where it became compulsory for Danish LAGs to be organised as associations.

Access and influence procedures in LAG Karhuseutu

The association, LAG Karhuseutu, had 200 members, of these 80 individuals, 80 associations and 20-30 small enterprises who all paid yearly dues. During the LEADER+ period, the board consisted of 10 persons elected at annual general assembly meetings. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry put down rules for the tripartite composition of the LAG between private persons, public authorities and associations, and later on also for the election periods (maximum six years). This implied that access procedures to the board were open for everyone who could be elected. Because of strict supervision by the Ministry, it was not possible to represent the group 'private persons' while being board member in for example a village house or a local community association. Neither was it possible for a person to represent 'associations' or 'private persons' if he/she held a post as public authority through their job. Because of these rules some of the board members represented different groups at different times to make it come right. This was the case for the vice-president who, in August 2007, represented 'private persons', but earlier on had represented both 'public authority' and 'associations':

"When I started, I belonged to a board of an association and then I represented the association. But at the last election, I did not belong to any association, so now I am a private person. And at one election I belonged to this public authority group. So at one moment I also represented this group" (Helkkula, 2007)

The relatively strict rules meant that everybody concerned was secured representation on the LAG board. Moreover, no single group was capable of removing the others by a coup at the yearly general meeting. It also meant that it could be difficult to put the puzzle together and many things had to be prepared in advance.

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Access and influence procedures in LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd

During the LEADER+ period, LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd was an association with free and open membership. The LAG consisted of 40 persons who elected a board of 10 persons at a yearly meeting. The board held meetings 12 times a year and decided on project grants. The LAG was involved in more overall strategic considerations at three to four meetings a year. Even though the association was open to all, there were only 10 members beside the 40 LAG members – and some of these 10 members were LAG members who had stepped back. The Ministry of Agriculture did not require the association to have members. The requirements only concerned the composition of the LAG. And the 40 members of the LAG were counted among the members of the association. If, in the group of the 40 LAG members, other interested persons were admitted access, once again it would be necessary to decide on the composition of the LAG as a partnership between three sectors, the distribution between ages, male and female partners etc. since changes in the composition were to be reported to the Swedish Monitoring Committee. That is why the LAG opened up for members who were not LAG members. When considering the relation to new members, the LAG manager said:

"One can ask if it is democratic... it depends on what you mean by democracy (…) It is not democratic in the way that it is a representative democracy. On the other hand, you can say that everyone who wants can participate. If you want to engage yourself, you can do it. It is possible to make your voice heard. But we do not have an established structure for how to do it" (Käll, 2007)

Concluding on input legitimacy

The three cases are examples of how partnership organising in LAGs *can* turn out. They illustrate differences in access and influence procedures in the three countries. Especially in Denmark, election procedures were absent. Access procedures in LAG Vestsjælland were very much similar to most of the other 11 Danish LEADER+ LAGs. Initiators tapped relevant persons at the shoulders or the parent organisations appointed relevant persons. Only few of the 12 Danish LAGs held yearly general meetings. In most cases, there was no membership basis behind Danish LAGs from 2000-2006.

In Sweden there were mixes of organising models. Examples existed, where the LAG was the board as in LAG Vestsjælland and where the LAG was made out of a big LAG and a small LAG. In some places the Swedish LAG members represented organisations. In other places, they acted as individuals on the boards. The Astrid Lindgren case represented the latter and no clearly defined resources of parent organisations existed.

In Finland, the Ministry put up strict uniform requirements for the composition and organising of LAGs, so access procedures in LAG Karhuseutu represented the situation in the other 57 LAGs from the 2000-2006 period. The situation in Denmark in the programming period 2007-2013 is very close to the Finnish model. However, crucial differences still exist, since the composition of Danish LAGs is less strictly monitored as is the case in Finland.

All in all, it differs whether the LAGs carry out the will of the people and steer through the people since access and influence procedures are different from case to case. LAG Vestsjælland fails in this assessment since access and influence procedures for the people in the area are almost non-existent. As to LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd it partly fails - access and influence procedures exist, but are quite opaque. Finally, LAG Karhuseutu has a high expression of input legitimacy since access and influence for everyone in the area is open. Having shown that input legitimacy has quite different expressions in the three cases, I now turn to the section assessing the expression of output legitimacy.

Problem-solving capacity of the three LAGs

It is difficult to assess the problem-solving capacity of LAGs. The difficulty is confronted by Selsky and Parker (2005) in their review of cross-sector partnerships. Outcome criteria are simply different for public, voluntary and business sectors. At the same time, partnerships achieve both tangible and intangible results. LEADER partnerships have to produce tangible results as job creation, attraction of new residents etc. and intangible results as changes of attitudes, citizen involvement, establishment of cooperation processes (Thuesen & Thomsen, 2008 pp. 19-27) and direction of attention to the subject etc. (Turtotte & Pasquoro, 2001). Healey (1997, p. 33) importantly queries the setting up of indicators and measurements in order to make ongoing judgements of the performance of projects, since this can lead to narrow rule-adherence more than it identifies the actual impact of a project on people. LEADER LAGs are subject to monitoring and evaluation

by EU and national authorities of their ability to deliver precisely defined impacts in terms of economic development and quality of life in rural areas and this has increased after LEADER has become part of the mainstream EU Rural Development Programme. However, even though the problem-solving capacity is evaluated by comparing the goals set by each LAG with the results created by the LAG, it is difficult to conclude that the LAG carries the sole responsibility for the result. National economic conjectures or the activities of other players in the area may still bear the main responsibility. Therefore, in the assessment of outcome legitimacy, I will mainly try to evaluate how outcome legitimacy expresses itself and not come up with exact answers as to what the precise impact of the partnership organising has been. In doing this, I touch upon the number of projects supported, the total turnover created, the project foci of the LAGs, and the use of citizen involvement, information activities and soft effects. The number of projects supported and the turnover created relate to quantifiable output, while the project foci, the use of citizen involvement and information activities as well as the soft effects mainly relate to processes and the creation of institutional capacity.

Number of projects supported

A total of 66, 177 and 243 projects were carried out in LAG Vestsjælland, LAG Karhuseutu and LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd, respectively, during the LEADER+ period. LAG Vestsjælland having the most clear partnership model, according to the definition by Googins and Rochlin, without much concern for input legitimacy made the smallest amount of projects or in other words they initiated bigger projects than the others. LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd with the opaque associational model made many projects. A big part of these projects (139) were development checks where the LAG agreed on granting a small amount of money that different players in the area could apply for and get paid almost from day to day. LAG Karhuseutu with the clear-cut associational model made many small and local projects. It is not possible to relate this directly to the different organisational models, but the case studies could indicate a tendency that the associational model results in small and local projects while the partnership model results in bigger projects on an organisational level.

Total turnover, job creation and networking

When the LEADER+ period was drawing to a close, the LAGs tried to make calculations of their achievements. As to LAG Vestsjælland, the 1.6 million Euros contributed to a

total turnover of 8 million Euros. It was estimated that the LAG created 200 work places and established 30 new networks. As to LAG Karhuseutu, the calculations indicated that for the 2 million Euros a total turnover of 6.6 million Euros was created resulting in the creation of 80 work places and the participation of 1,000 people in activities. LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd received 2.6 million Euros from EU for the implementation of the strategy and created a total turnover of 7.4 million Euros. The LAG created 72 work places, 37 new networks and involved more than 3,000 persons in educational activities. About 24,000 young people participated directly in the activities created by the LAG, and about 32,000 young people benefitted directly from the activities. Beside the activities financed through LEADER+ the LAGs could also raise money from other sources. An example of this was LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd that worked with money from the national youth agency. All three LAGs succeeded in attracting money according to the co-financing principles; but whether this was actually new money transferred to rural development initiatives, or whether the municipalities cut down their own expenses to rural development remains an open question.

Different project foci

It was first and foremost through project grants that the three LAGs left their marks on the development of their areas. Since they had different development plans, this was done in different ways, illustrated by the following examples.

LAG Vestsjælland carried out a shelter project during the LEADER+ period (a project with the establishment of primitive huts for accommodation). The LAG group told the project holder that in order to meet the requirements for project support, he had to extend his project to the whole LEADER+ area and not just operate in one municipality. This serves as an example of how LAG Vestsjælland successfully urged a project holder to think far beyond what was his plan originally, and in that way created more workplaces in the area (at the sawmill, in the tourism sector etc.). A LAG member said about this:

"Yes, for example the shelter project. It was a project (…) where we told the man… go home and try to make a better project. Because the project he showed up with in the first place was too narrow. And it had the effect that the Open-air board brought money, the municipalities came with money, many interested partners came with money to this

project. And we got a project up and running which we today are known for out in Europe" (Larsen, 2007)

In contrast to the focus of spreading the projects in LAG Vestsjælland, small local projects were all the time at the centre of the work of LAG Karhuseutu. The LAG manager explained:

"An important thing has been that when a person gets an idea in a village, which only benefits this village, not the whole region, only this community... they cannot get funds from other sources than LEADER+. This is what is essential... that LEADER+ can be this essential... and that is our purpose. There are really many of this type of very small projects. They can renovate their village houses, and make, not beaches, but swimming places and what they else have... marketing..." (Pukkila, 2007)

LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygds' focal point was on projects involving young people and cooperation across generations:

"We have a youth perspective on everything. (…) By activating young people, they become more interested in their native soil and you break the generation gap. That was the basic thought. And we wanted that the young, when they leave to study in another place, should say that when I grew up, (…) I had a say, and I was allowed to participate in projects. And I had a good childhood! So no project that did not include a youth perspective, has received money" (Gustafson, 2007)

All in all, the three LAGs worked with different development wheels and thereby influenced the development in different directions. LAG Vestsjælland worked to create network relations between different actors and thereby spread out the projects. In LAG Karhuseutu many isolated village projects were part of the strategy together with small projects supporting tourism and diversification of the economy. In LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd support was only given to projects involving children and young people. Target groups have been different, too. In one LAG the target group was the just mentioned children and young people. In another place it was independent entrepreneurs and village associations. In a third place, it was an intermediate level with different organisations as the target group.

Citizen involvement, information activities and soft effects

The development of social, intellectual and political capital (Healey, 1998), through citizen involvement and information activities, were at the centre of the work of all three LAGs. The LAGs had active homepages where they disseminated knowledge of their activities. Furthermore, they were all actively involved in arranging information meetings, workshops, covering in the media, newsletters and creation of brochures.

The interview persons found it quite paradoxical that the results of the LEADER work were all the time measured quantitatively, since, according to them, the most important results were of a qualitative kind in the form of citizen involvement, information and other more soft activities:

"They often want the number of (…) workplaces; it is very difficult. The most important things are the very processes. People, who take initiative, try... but how do you measure that? (…) A person can receive money for a project, which turns out badly. But this person has learnt so much that next time she tries something, it will be a success. But then it is not a LEADER project anymore! (…) It is all about stimulating people to dare to do things, and get experience. You cannot really measure this (…) we work with many soft factors. Soft qualities, I think" (Gustafson, 2007)

Examples of processes initiated by the LAGs and developing both knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation resources are idea development workshops in LAG Vestsjælland, village development plans in LAG Karhuseutu and a newsletter 'The letter from home' developed by LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd to attract young people's attention to the qualities of living in the LAG area.

Also improved cooperation between the players in the LAG areas is seen as a 'soft' result in all three areas:

"Among the more positive aspects in these LEADER years is that EU has taught us that people from the municipal authority, voluntary people and private companies shall sit down at the same table and cooperate and pull in the same direction (…) It is an extremely large positive effect of this" (Gustafson, 2007)

It therefore also has to be counted as a soft result that the local participants in the partnerships got a deeper understanding of the way EU works. In all three LAGs an acknowledgement of EU as an institution creating new arenas for local action could be observed.

Concluding on output legitimacy

As already stated it is difficult to assess the problem-solving capacity of LAGs in general. The examination of the three Nordic LAGs just carried out is no exception. The expression of output legitimacy has been analyzed through the number of projects supported, the total turnover created, the differences in project foci and the citizen involvement and informational activities of the LAGs. A comparison of the goals set by each LAG with the results would not lead to an exact estimation since a large part of the results are soft results that will not be measurable until after the actual projects have taken place. Improvement of the social capital is an example of a non-direct measurable effect that can have a big impact on the development in the areas in the long run. For that reason, an entirely quantitative measurement will be a limitation in an assessment of the effects of the work of the LAGs. The clearest indications of differences in output stem from the differences in the project foci of the three LAGs, which emphasize the importance of the strategic aspect of LAG work.

Because of the importance of soft results and the fact that all LAGs have been engaged in creating the capacity for local actors to make collective actions, it is not possible to conclude that one LAG has had a better problem-solving capacity than the others. The result of the comparison of the three LAGs on the output legitimacy side is therefore less clear than on the input side. However, indications as to what directions the three groups' activities point towards are possible. The most striking differences are that the results of LAG Vestsjælland are appearing at an intermediate organisational level, whereas the results of LAG Karhuseutu are showing up at grass-root level in the villages. The results of LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd are almost only concerned with activities related to children and young people.

5. Discussion

All three cases circle around the concepts of partnership and association. When I here discuss the legitimacy question in relation to the different organisational models of the three LAGs, I will assess the gains and pitfalls of first the partnership model that I mainly see practiced in LAG Vestsjælland, and then afterwards the associational model which I mostly see practiced in LAG Karhuseutu. LAG Astrid Lindgren is placed in between the two organisational types.

The partnership model
In the Vestsjælland case, the LAG members were appointed to hold their seats in the LAG and were assumed to represent the relevant partners in the area. A gain from this could be a closer relationship to parent organisations and therefore more clearly defined resources to draw from beside the LAG money:

"One of the important things is that the people in a LAG have a certain support base, so they can use their network. Because if we just sit 15 people in a LAG group, it does not provide any network. It is the network to the backing groups that are decisive for the realization of projects" (Larsen, 2007)

There was, however, a lack of a strong formal commitment to mother organisations in the Vestsjælland case (even though the commitment in LAG Vestsjælland was the highest identified in the three cases) and thereby somehow vague resources to draw upon. When no elections procedures exist this becomes a pitfall in relation to the question of input legitimacy. What could provide legitimacy in a clear partnership model would often be the clear connection to legitimate parent organisations. Networks could as well be activated in an associational model. It would, however, imply more ad hoc involvement of networks, since the general assembly decides on which networks get represented on the board.

Also in the Vestsjælland partnership model, some approaches to the associational model were identified, since the LAG did actually use the association as its legal form. Yet it did not imply that the LAG was elected or that general meetings were held, so it was more formal than real.

When LAG partnerships are organised as associations, the members are not to be found on the board on the mandate of an organisation but rather as an individual representative for a sector. The LAG Astrid Lindgren partnership consisted of private people with different competences and networks and there was no formal obligation from organisations behind to carry in resources. Neither was the partnership members obligated to guard the interests of potential parent organisations. The members joined the partnership as individuals:

"I think there is a huge difference on the way to think of a partnership where you have a mandate from an organisation and in ours where you do not have this. The advantages of our model are that you do not sit and guard the specific interest of your own organisation, but that you actually "take on the LEADER hat" and see what can be done. But (…) if you estimate it is important to bring in specific organisations in a partnership it is easier to do this if you have a mandate from an organisation. So you actually have validity in your home organisation. But our LAG members do not have this, only informally and morally. So we cannot claim that our partnership is a number of different organisations. It is a number of different persons, as individuals. It is kind of both good and bad" (Käll, 2007)

To conclude, the gain of a partnership model is the potential backing from mother organisations that can provide more resources to deliver results on the output side as well as legitimacy on the input side. Since this backing in the Vestsjælland case was vague and informal, it could potentially destabilize the LAG in situations characterized by conflicting interest and thereby become a pitfall.

The associational model
The Finnish example lives up to the associational guidelines with written rules, membership basis and annual general meetings where elections take place. In LAG Karhuseutu, where board members were elected by the ordinary members of the LAG, the interviewed board members identified themselves very explicitly with the LAG as an association and not as a partnership. The relatively strict rules from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry made the LAG association turn out to be some kind of a partnership though.

The gains of the Karhuseutu associational model is that access and influence procedures are very clear thereby providing a high input legitimacy. Without the Ministry providing guidelines for the composition of the board there could be a serious pitfall in that board members become too loosely coupled to existing networks and relevant organisations and authorities and thereby, perhaps, only have their own personal resources to draw from. The fact that a board member can represent all groups at different times makes it reasonable to ask if the right partners get represented. In addition, leaving large amounts of working hours to voluntary individual dedicated souls could become a serious drawback if they become worn out or dissatisfied and decide to step back.

Taken from the pragmatic view, the gains of the associational model are best achieved if actually people adhere to it, that is, show up at the yearly general meetings etc. The reality often is that ordinary people are busy and not so interested in the work of the LAGs. As outlined by the chairman of LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd:

"I would have liked to have 1,000 members who elected a LAG as well as a board of 12 or 15 persons. But that is a dream scenario (…) It is not easy to involve more people in this type of association. They play tennis, golf and football. It is quite strange for many people to work with local development" (Gustavson 2007)

The actual adherence to the associational model is modest, since in the Astrid Lindgren case there were only very few members beside the 40 members of the LAG partnership. In LAG Karhuseutu the almost 200 members partly entered the association because it was an informal requirement for the reception of funds.

The interviews indicate that in both the partnership model and the associational model only the most active and most interested parties end up in the decision making group. However, in the associational model, ordinary people *can* enter the association and elect candidates as well as they *can*, if they find it interesting, have the time etc., get elected to the board themselves. This possibility is nonexistent in a clear partnership model where parent organisations join the partnership through representatives.

In all three cases there has been no strong formal commitment from mother organisations and no clearly defined resources to draw upon. The advantage of this can be that LAGs

can come up with more innovative solutions to problems. The disadvantage can be that LAGs are not capable of bringing in organisational resources and just sit 10-15 individuals in a LAG without any resources to draw from.

Table 3: The mixes of association and partnership in the three cases

6. Conclusion: How to combine?

None of the three cases separately make up the ideal combination of associational and partnership forms in relation to securing both input and output legitimacy. The ideal should be found in combinations between the cases and through considering the following when organising LAGs as associations:

1. The upholding of the gains of resourceful supporting parent organisations.
2. The awareness of the risk of overburdening individual representatives.
3. The need to raise the eyes and consider overall strategic projects and not just small projects.
4. The need to combine the associational model with rules securing the tripartite representation.

As mentioned, in Denmark the 56 LAGs created in the programming period 2007-2013 are now also associations just as they are in Finland so the Karhuseutu example with a membership basis and a LAG board is gaining ground. More and more, board members are elected and not appointed to hold their seats. Also from the case material in this paper, this is the best combination in relation to securing input legitimacy. At the same time, LAG board members are increasingly placed in the partnerships as individually elected representatives for a sector and less on a mandate from an organisation, making absent the gains of resourceful supporting parent organisations. The challenge remains whether this can be done without having consequences for the output legitimacy of the groups, which remains hard to measure and must be approached in a multidimensional way including both quantifiable and less-quantifiable impacts. There is a danger that individually elected representatives, often dedicated souls, might be overburdened with work, and end up being exhausted instead of committed in a model like Karhuseutu. There is also a tendency that LAG associations will prioritize small local projects close to their own constituencies while LAG partnerships will give priority to more overall cross sector

projects as shown in the Vestsjælland case. Since a partnership must be put together by the people/organisations necessary to solve the problems the partnership is supposed to deal with, it is crucial to be aware that in order to deliver sustainable results, the ideal associational model must be combined with supervision concerning the tripartite representation as well as an awareness of the gains of the partners sector-specific attachments.

The reason why the Finnish LAGs can still be called partnerships is due to strict meta-governing of their composition from the part of the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Therefore, more research on meta-governance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009) or institutional design (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2006) of LAG partnerships will be relevant in a further assessment of how different partnership models are promoted in different countries, since meta-governance/institutional design is somehow what has produced the differences on the input side. More research into the composition of the LAG boards in the associational model in different countries is also necessary in order to discover whether the associational model is producing more inclusive representation than is the case in a partnership model with appointed board members. Another relevant research topic would be to look more into further ways of organising LAGs in Europe, among others the organisational model of a private limited company, which is broadly used. Research on the implementation of soft indicators would be very relevant too, since the players at the local level struggle to make such indicators and they are not at all implemented yet.

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Table 1: Sources of data

LAG Vestsjælland	LAG Karhuseutu	LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd
6 interviews	6 interviews	4 interviews
Participatory observations in relation to the general assembly	Participatory observations in the LAG area for three weeks, including project visits	Participatory observations at the Swedish closing conference for LEADER+
Document studies	Document studies	Document studies

Table 2: LAG Vestsjælland, LAG Karhuseutu and LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd

	LAG Vestsjælland	LAG Karhuseutu	LAG Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd
Strategic objectives 2000-2006	Creating living local communities, sustain learning, support quality and niche products, culture, business establishment, marketing and cooperation and to establish a regional knowledge centre.	Activating villages, development of tourism and diversifying the production.	Giving children and young people a good childhood/adolescence by creating good living environments, education, job opportunities, connections to the external world as well as cultural activities and meaningful leisure time.
Economy	1.6 mil. Euros. Expected turnover 8 mil. Euros	2 mil. Euros. Expected turnover 6.8 mil. Euros	2.6 mil. Euros. Expected turnover 7.4 mil. Euros
Location	100 kilometers from Copenhagen	Southwestern part of Finland around Pori	Southeastern part of Sweden around Vimmerby
Population	60,446 inhabitants	55,843 inhabitants	49,828 inhabitants
Territory	789 square kilometers	2,256 square kilometers	3,455 square kilometers
Population density	76 (national average 124)	25 (national average 17)	14 (national average 20)
Number of municipalities	7	8	3 municipalities and one part of a municipality (2 different regions)

Table 3: The mixes of association and partnership in the three cases

	Vestsjælland	Karhuseutu	Astrid Lindgrens Hembygd
Elements from the partnership model	LAG members are appointed to hold their seats and are supposed to represent the relevant organisations in the area, however, no formal commitment of parent organisations to bring in resources.	Rules for the tripartite composition of the LAG board and monitoring of the rules from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry make the LAG association turn out to resemble a partnership.	The LAG lives up to the tripartite composition, however, the partnership consists of private individuals with different competences and networks, and there is no formal obligation from organisations behind to carry in resources.
Elements from the associational model	The LAG uses the association as legal form, however, no members, no general assembly and no elections.	The LAG is an association with around 200 members with annual general meetings where election of board members takes place.	The LAG uses the association as organisational model and holds general meetings. However, board members are elected from the LAG group of 40 persons and not from the LAG association's membership basis. The association only has about 10 members beside the 40 LAG members.