The LEADER programme, initiated in 1991, aims to improve the development potential of rural areas in the European Union by drawing on local initiatives and skills. Highlighting this unique policy approach, this book presents up-to-date research results on LEADER’s achievements and restrictions at the local level in a comparative way in order to discuss its merits and problems. What makes LEADER important is not only that it has a major role in rural development efforts, but also that it has a pioneering role in the new type of governance, participatory democracy.

Asking whether LEADER strengthens local democracy or not, this book also looks at how it affects the power balance among stakeholders, between national and local actors and between genders. It questions whether LEADER projects are genuinely grass-root level activities, reflecting local needs and ideals; and if the approach brings local know-how back onto the development agenda in innovations and development activities. Finally, the authors examine the success of dissemination of knowledge within the LEADER programme to other regions.

Contents
Introduction: LEADER as an experiment in grass-roots democracy, Leo Granberg, Kjell Andersson and Imre Kovách; LEADER and local democracy: a comparison between Finland and the United Kingdom, Johan Munck af Rosenschöld and Johanna Löyhkö; A perspective of LEADER method in Spain based on the analysis of local action groups, Javier Esparcia, Jaime Escribano and Almudena Buciega; The LEADER program in Hungary - bottom-up development with top-down control?, Bernadett Csurgó and Imre Kovách; The democratic capabilities of and rhetoric on LEADER LAGs in the EU - the Danish case, Annette Aagaard Thuesen; A political perspective on LEADER in Finland - democracy and the problem of ‘troublemakers’, Marko Nousiainen; LEADER and possibilities of local development in the Russian countryside, Leo Granberg, Jouko Nikula and Inna Kopoteva; Questioning the gender distribution in Danish LEADER LAGs, Annette Aagaard Thuesen and Petra Derkzen; LEADER LAGs: neocorporatist local regimes or examples of economic democracy?, Giorgio Osti; Bottom-up initiatives and competing interests in Transylvania, Dénes Kiss and Eniko Veress; Can renewable energy contribute to poverty reduction? A case study on Romafa, a Hungarian LEADER, Ildikó Asztalos Morell; Developing or creating instability? Development management, scale and representativeness in Tunisia, Aude-Annabelle Canesse; Conclusion: the LEADER colours on the democracy palette, Leo Granberg, Kjell Andersson and Imre Kovách; Index.

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www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472443762