

Stakeholder participation in planning rural development strategies: Using backcasting to support Local Action Groups in complying with CLLD requirements



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ABSTRACT

In advanced countries, rural areas are a complex web of social, political and historical factors. In addition, several kinds of uncertainties are usually present. As a consequence, frequent mismatches arise in practise between measures and rural development goals and priorities. To overcome this pitfall, a key factor is represented by the acquisition of relevant knowledge from local stakeholders. In line with this idea, the European Commission encourages the Community-Led Local Development approach delivered by Local Action Groups. The aim of the study is to show the suitability of a participatory approach, namely backcasting, to the outline of the Local Action Plan of a specific LAG. Within this framework, a participative backcasting experience was carried out with the stakeholders of the LAG 'Daunia Rurale' in order to detect their needs and the strategic actions to carry out. The study provided stakeholders and policy makers with a rational approach and an operational tool to recognise the needs and design the actions for the specific endogenous potential of the investigated area. The proposed method proved to be rather innovative in CLLD contexts for the detection of expressed needs of local stakeholders and the definition of the LAP.

We submitted some questionnaires to stakeholders and looking at their results (either at the ones on the niceness of the workshop or at the strategy-validation ones), some encouraging remarks can be drawn. Backcasting has been particularly helpful to local stakeholders and decision makers in identifying the steps to give a clear direction to rural development. What we learn from this case study represents a valuable outcome that can support practitioners, policy makers and researchers in understanding how to design medium- to long-term planning development strategies in rural areas.

1. Introduction

In advanced countries, rural areas are a complex web of social, political and historical factors and processes in which the various groups of actors attempt to achieve outcomes that are commensurate with their aims (Terluin, 2003). In addition, several kinds of uncertainties (technology, market dynamics and economic constraints) are usually present while designing rural development plans (either at regional or Local Action Group level), where a number of different actors, processes and requirements need to be managed and included in the planning. As a consequence, frequent mismatches arise in practise between measures and rural development goals and priorities.

To overcome this pitfall, a key factor is represented by the acquisition of relevant knowledge from local stakeholders, usually embedded

and tacit. This can be achieved adopting participatory approaches that represent an opportunity to incorporate the perspectives and priorities of the local people (Bijlsma et al., 2011), reducing the risks associated with uncertainty and imperfect knowledge. In line with this idea, the European Commission (2014) encourages the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach that focuses on integrated area-based strategies for specific sub-regional territories. This approach is community led in the sense that it is delivered by Local Action Groups (LAG) made of representatives of local public and private actors.

As the vast array of literature on this topic indicates, there has been recent growth in experimentation with participatory methods (Holmberg and Robert, 2000; Kok et al., 2010; Ghişa et al., 2011; Stratigea and Giaoutzi, 2012; Sisto et al., 2016; Sisto et al., 2017). One of the most suitable methods for complex contexts as rural areas is

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backcasting (Schoemaker, 1991; Peterson et al., 2003; Sisto et al., 2016). It starts by defining a desirable future and then works backward to outline actions that will connect that future to the present (Robinson, 2003). By identifying long-term solutions to societal problems, it leads to a sustainable development strategy.

The paper focuses on the reduction of the mismatches between policy measures and the needs of local communities. Therefore, the aim of the study is to show the suitability of backcasting to the outline of the Local Action Plan (LAP) of a specific LAG. Within this framework, a participative backcasting experience was carried out with the stakeholders of the LAG ‘Daunia Rurale’ in order to detect their needs and the strategic actions to carry out. In particular, the study provided stakeholders and policy makers with a rational approach and an operational tool to recognise the needs and design the actions for the specific endogenous potential of the investigated area.

The main expected impacts of the study rely on the capability of the proposed method: *i*) to explore the so-called ‘embedded and tacit knowledge’ detained by local stakeholders; *ii*) to reduce biased behavior due to bounded rationality and opportunism in identifying strategic actions by means of participatory interaction; *iii*) to systematise stakeholders’ tacit knowledge within a rational framework. Finally, *iv*) the iterative nature of backcasting should improve the introspective ability of stakeholders.

The proposed method proved to be rather innovative in CLLD contexts for the detection of expressed needs of local stakeholders and the definition of the LAP.

In fact, despite the great interest shown by the Commission for community’ involvement and local participation, and the promotion of participatory methodologies to design quality Local Development Strategies, this approach was never explicitly applied, to the outline of the Italian Regional Rural Development Programmes.

The paper opens with a brief view on the relevance of stakeholders’ participation in local strategies’ outline. A short literature review on normative scenarios is presented in Section 3. Then, section 4 focuses on the link between the CLLD concept and backcasting. Section 5 describes the backcasting experiment and its results. Finally, Section 6 contains some discussion and concluding remarks.

2. Stakeholder participation in local development strategies design

As highlighted by Macken-Walsh and Curtin (2012), the LEADER model was designed to operate on the basis of two principles: decision-making taking place as close as possible to the site of implementation (the principle of subsidiarity) and hierarchical decision-making structures being replaced by mechanisms involving representatives from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental groups (principle of partnership) (Osti, 2000). Therefore, the promotion of LEADER, attests the EU Commission’s awareness that rural development involves “development by and of the local community, not just for it” (Moseley, 1997 p. 202) and the growing sense that decisions are more likely to succeed if locally and participatory made. This bottom-up approach is the central feature of the LEADER method and means that the local community has to be involved in the definition of rural development strategies.

The units targeted for this kind of intervention are the LAGs as local public-private partnerships among entrepreneurs, local authorities, rural associations, groups of citizens, voluntary organisations, etc.

Public participation has existed in the histories, politics and practices of European planning processes for a very long time. However, in the last 30 years, there has been a move away from top-down policies to promoting development through bottom-up, territorial approaches in which the human and social resources of localities are fully utilised. The development of such ‘endogenous’ approaches has, in part, been facilitated by the shift from hierarchical models of government to a system of ‘governance’ in which institutions and social relations better

utilise the endogenous local capacities (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010). The result has been new organisational structures, such as area-based, cross-sectoral partnerships that have attracted substantial academic and policy interest (Marsden and Murdoch, 1998). At the heart of the concept of the area-based partnership is the idea that territorial integration, the bringing together of different sectors and interests, is critical to achieving a more socially inclusive approach to rural development (Kovacs Katona et al., 2006).

There is a wealth of literature and guidelines on participatory methodologies that have contributed to a significant recognition of such approaches within different arenas of decision-making and research. Nevertheless, the field of public participation remains a fairly informal platform, in the sense that there is no formal body that oversees or regulates participatory processes (Patel et al., 2007).

The attention for stakeholders’ participation has increased markedly in recent decades. In the context of public participation, a stakeholder can be defined as any person (or group) who has an interest in a specific policy issue or could be potentially affected by it. It concerns public institutions (as municipalities, universities, and other local governments), companies, NGOs and individual citizens. van de Kerkhof, (2006a) highlights three features of a stakeholder: *i*) stakeholders can be either individuals or organised groups, *ii*) different actors may have different perceptions of their own and each other’s stakes (which may change over time), *iii*) the relevant group of stakeholders may vary. The number of stakeholders involved in a certain issue may change over time. As the policy process evolves, new stakeholders will enter the scene and others will leave.

Stakeholder groups are usually not homogenous entities. In fact, it is more likely that an identified ‘stakeholder group’ will comprise a diverse mix of individuals, who may – or may not – identify themselves with the particular ‘stakeholder group’ into which they have been categorised.

However, there is some criticism about stakeholders’ participation (van de Kerkhof, 2006b). The most relevant opinions are that of Schumpeter (1942), who argues that average people are not very informed and rational with regard to most of the issues for which they could be called to contribute. In addition, Webler (1995) highlights, in the case of complex issues such as rural development, that stakeholders do not have the scientific knowledge about all of the issues they are discussing while, for Rosa (1998), most of the stakeholders could be affected by the ‘Not In My Back Yard’ (NIMBY) syndrome. In particular, it refers to a potential opportunistic behavior detainable by some stakeholders when involved in planning actions for local community wellbeing and development.

Notwithstanding, the added value of public participation lies in the ability of generating insights for the design of policies fitting the needs of those concerned. This depends on the possibility to share and complete the fragmented knowledge detained by each stakeholder to achieve a common view.

Public participation or ‘public involvement’ is understood in different forms that vary in the level of actual participant interaction and involvement. It could refer to processes that only facilitate a ‘one-way’ flow of information or, in contrast, to more interactive processes that can facilitate a ‘two-way’ flow. This last form can provide opportunities for discussion and deliberation, as well as opportunities to reach common ground (Patel et al., 2007).

Interactive participation, such as when the participants can engage directly with each other and the researchers or decision-makers, seeks to enhance the confidence of stakeholders, so to enable them to define, express and analyse their reality without reflecting the opinions of the stronger, more dominant voices (Patel et al., 2007; Wilson, 2013).

3. A methodological tool to help local stakeholders in complying with CLLD requirements

Although backcasting originated in the energy sector (Lovins, 1976;

Robinson, 1982), the focus has shifted to greenhouse gas emissions (Robinson et al., 2011; Svenfelt et al., 2011; Vergragt and Quist, 2011), water management (Kok et al., 2011; Gleeson et al., 2012; Vliet and Kok, 2013), climate adaptation (van der Voorn et al., 2012; Carlsson-Kanyama et al., 2013), and food security (Vervoort et al., 2014). In addition, there are some studies in the field of rural development such as EU policy scenarios (Stratigea and Giaoutzi, 2012), organic food market (Zanoli et al., 2012), planning for rural communities in Romania (Ghişa et al., 2011), and sustainable land uses and landscape in the Netherlands (Quist et al., 2011; Van Berkel and Verburg, 2012).

According to the literature, backcasting is more an approach than a specific method and it is suitable to describe desired goals or future scenarios, and to analyse how they could be achieved (Dreborg, 1996; Robinson et al., 2011; Kok et al., 2011; Vliet and Kok, 2013).

The wide range of different methods demonstrates that there is not yet consensus about the best one to use. Mainly, backcasting is adopted to foster the inclusion of local community and stakeholders' knowledge in planning processes (Carlsson-Kanyama et al., 2008; Kok et al., 2011; Svenfelt et al., 2011).

Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the various solutions proposed to overcome the limitations of specific models have contributed to an increase in the general confusion about the analysis of its state of the art. Yet, the two main characteristics of backcasting are its normative nature (Van Vliet, 2011), and that it “work[s] backwards from a particular desired future endpoint” (Robinson, 2003: 842). This often translates to methods that at least include 1) a step during which desirable images of the future are developed and 2) a step during which these images are analysed by working backwards (Robinson, 2003; Höjer and Mattson, 2000).

Backcasting focuses on the possible solutions for dealing with current and future problems in order to reach the desired future (or prevent an undesired one).

Specifically, the choice between backcasting and forecasting is not just a matter of convenience. The two approaches stem from different views (Dreborg, 1996). Contrary to some forecasting methods, backcasting does not aim to predict the future or “...what futures are likely to happen, but ...how desirable futures can be attained” (Robinson, 1982).

Indeed, in participatory backcasting, stakeholders describe their desired end-conditions and work backwards to identify milestones and policy actions that are needed to achieve that future (Salter et al., 2010). Backcasting is a flexible approach to participatory planning that, for its normative nature, suggests what policy actions would be

required to reach different goals and their implications, chosen not on the basis of their likelihood but on the basis of other criteria defined externally to the analysis (e.g. criteria of social or environmental desirability or of rural development) (Robinson, 1982).

By working backwards from desired end-points, the participants are less constrained by current thinking or current conditions, allowing for more creativity in response assessments (Bradfield, 2004; Salter et al., 2010; Van Vliet, 2011). The result of a backcasting study is typically a target-fulfilling image of the future, which presents a solution to a societal problem, together with a discussion of what changes would be needed in order to attain the image.

Backcasting shares a number of characteristics and aims with the CLLD approach from LEADER. CLLD was designed to help “rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region, and has proven an effective and efficient tool in the delivery of development policies” (European Commission, 2014: 2). One of the aims of CLLD is to encourage local communities to plan integrated bottom-up strategies in circumstances where there is a need to respond to local challenges (European Commission, 2014). In particular, CLLD relies on the integration of stakeholders' knowledge into local development strategies (Shucksmith, 2010). In this view, participatory backcasting could help to include stakeholders' knowledge in planning actions taking into account their concerns and expectations.

By including a medium and long-term perspective in the development vision of local actors, backcasting gives a clear direction in the formulation of plans. This perspective is important not only in addressing urgent issues, but also to minimise impacts of possible future problems. Since backcasting needs to focus on a specific region and subject, this feature supports a local-size development as required by CLLD. In addition, backcasting involves participants belonging to various categories in the definition of the development strategy, as required by CLLD. Finally, the iterative nature of backcasting workshops, favours a cooperative attitude among the participants, creating valuable networking opportunities for the participants.

4. The backcasting experiment: a case study from a LAG in southern Italy

The study was implemented in response to request for advice of the LAG ‘Daunia Rurale’ to apply to a specific measure of the Rural Development Programme (Regional) Puglia (RDP Puglia) 2014-20 to identify the needs of the local area and the more suitable strategic actions. This was a fundamental preliminary step to the outline of the

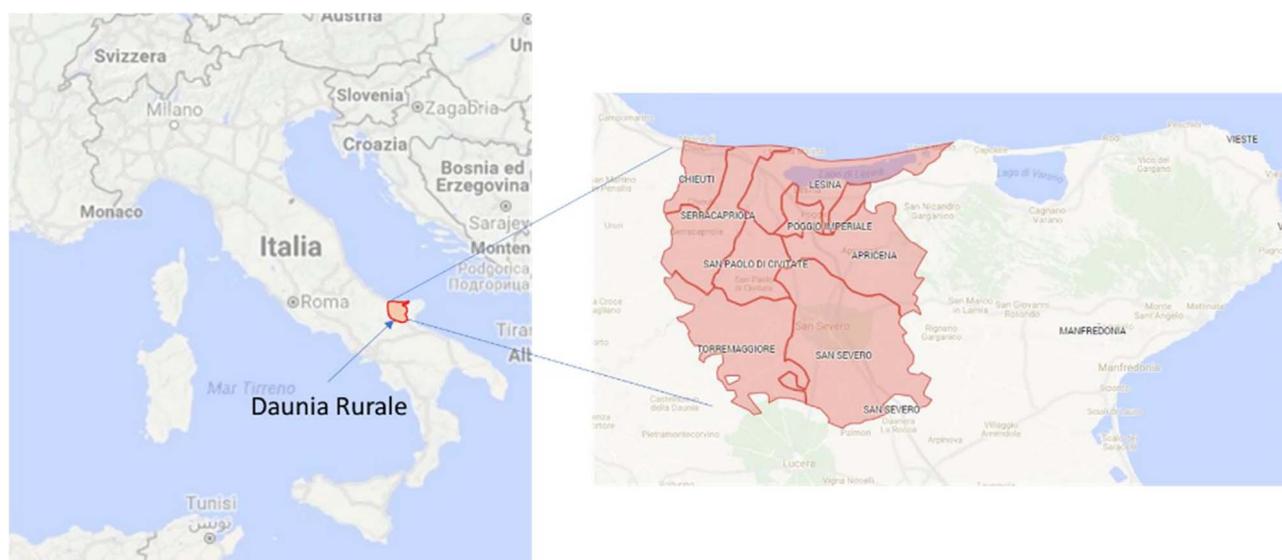


Fig. 1. The Daunia Rurale LAG.

LAP. The investigation was conducted in winter 2015 – summer 2016, in collaboration with the LAG ‘Daunia Rurale’ (Fig. 1).

The Daunia Rurale LAG has 53 members, 10 belonging to public institutions and 43 to private organisations. The economy of the Daunia Rurale district is strongly based on agriculture with noticeable contributions from stone quarries, fishing and tourism. The many local typical products of the district (wines and the extra-virgin olive oil Dop Dauno) are strictly linked with local folklore, traditions and festivals, which are very lively and heartfelt. Thus, the Alto Tavoliere territory represents not only landscapes and food, but culture as well.

To investigate local needs and actions, as requested by the public notice of the Measure 19.1 of the RDP Puglia, an integrated methodology (desk and field study) was used to develop images of future rural development paths. In particular, following the CLLD and the RDP Puglia requirements for LEADER areas, the method we applied had four distinct stages, namely:

- (1) Stage 1: Local context analysis and SWOT matrix (desk study)
- (2) Stage 2: Identification of desirable futures (pre-workshop e-mail survey)
- (3) Stage 3: Detection of needs and of main strategic actions (workshop)
- (4) Stage 4: Strategy outline and validation



4.1. Local context analysis and SWOT matrix

The first step towards the design of the LAP of ‘Daunia Rurale’ was the local context study about the socioeconomic and environmental features of the area and, afterwards, the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis. This analysis, conducted by a group of local experts and researchers, synthesizes in a matrix the most relevant internal features and external drivers of a territory to outline specific targeted actions. The results have highlighted the main opportunities as well obstacles characterizing the intervention area. Specifically, the investigated territory is a rural area, struggling with depopulation and declining economy. In addition, as many regions in the South of Italy, it lacks of ‘participation culture’ because most of the stakeholders are not aware of the relevant role they have in supporting policy-making processes.

Table 1
End point for the territory of the Daunia Rurale LAG (2030).
Source: our elaboration.

Topic	Preferences%
1. Area characterised by a full and synergistic enhancement of all the local tourist resources	35
2. Area characterised by a real improvement in the competitiveness of the local production system	23
3. Territory where there has been a real improvement in the law and social inclusion	13
4. A place in which economic activities are in tune with the landscape protection, land use and biodiversity	17
5. Other	13

4.2. Identifying desirable futures and selection of the desired ones (pre-workshop survey)

The second step was the identification of the most desired futures for the territory of the Daunia Rurale LAG.

We invited all the partners of the LAG (53), all the members belonging to the local agro-food network (123) and other local stakeholders (24) (producers associations, officers of local municipalities, voluntary organisations, social cooperatives, ecc.) to participate to the on-line survey. Firstly, they were recruited by phone. Afterwards, if interested, they received an e-mail with a formal invitation for the workshop and a request to fill out the questionnaire. We involved also local citizens, by publishing a very brief and simple questionnaire on the web page of the LAG.

The first section of the questionnaire gathered anagraphical data of the respondent. The second section focused on the selection of the most desired endpoints and on opportunities and obstacles to the achievement of the selected futures. To this aim, this section contained a brief presentation of the research topic, of the main characteristics of the area, and the results of the SWOT analysis. Respondents were then asked: “If you think about the territory of the LAG Daunia Rurale, how do you imagine the future of this area by 2030?” This open question permitted us to gather information about the stakeholders’ expectations

and needs regarding the future of the area in which they work and live.

Consequently, they were asked to express three preferences about most desirable futures for the year 2030 in a list of the twelve proposed by the RDP Puglia.¹ To help respondents to image them, each future was presented with images. In addition, to allow for more creativity in responses, we also included as a free answer.

Overall, we collected 455 valid answers. We applied a block to avoid duplication of responses. Table 1 highlights the most preferred endpoints.

Answers were ranked to determine the end points that would be discussed in the workshop. On this basis, the three most preferred endpoints were: ‘Area characterised by a full and synergistic enhancement of all the local tourist resources’; ‘Area characterised by a real improvement in the competitiveness of the local production system’; ‘A place in which economic activities are in tune with the landscape protection, land use and biodiversity’.

A similar procedure was followed to identify, for each end-point, opportunities and obstacles. Starting from the SWOT analysis of the LAG territory, we submitted a list of 18 opportunities and 14 obstacles fostering (creating opportunities for) and obstructing (creating obstacles in the way of) the achievement of the desired end-points.

Stakeholders were asked to vote for five opportunities and five

¹ The twelve themes resulted from the SWOT analysis at regional level. They represent the most significant development path to address the rural features of the region. Therefore, each LAG can choose among them its own ‘future development path’ or, alternatively, propose new ones. Namely, they are: 1) development and innovation of local production chains and agro-food systems; 2) development of the renewable energy supply; 3) sustainable tourism; 4) care and protection of landscape, land use and biodiversity; 5) valorisation and management of environmental and natural resources; 6) valorisation of cultural heritage and artistic heritage linked to the territory; 7) access to essential public services; 8) social inclusion of specific disadvantaged and/or marginalized groups; 9) legality and social promotion in areas with high social exclusion; 10) Urban redevelopment with the creation of inclusive services and spaces for the community; 11) intelligent networks and communities; 12) economic and social diversification linked to changes in the fisheries sector.

Table 2

Obstacles.

Source: our elaboration

Obstacles	Preferences
1 Insufficient level of infrastructure and community services to the population	15%
2 Poor aggregation propensity of local entrepreneurs	15%
3 Insufficient strategic capacity of integrated development of land resources	12%
4 Lack of management culture and innovative skills	11%
5 Failure to identify and enhancement of the rural areas of high nature value, with strong traditions and a high cultural content	8%
6 Absence of a positive picture of the local and national territory	8%
7 Lack of social and economic infrastructure for businesses	7%
8 Credit access difficulties	6%
9 Poor propensity for business creation	5%
10 Downward demographic dynamics and aging population trend	5%
11 Pressure on the environment and landscape of farmland and forestry arising from factors related to the intensification of agriculture, the specialized production, the abandonment of extensive traditional practices, the low uptake of sustainable management forms of agricultural and forestry areas	2%
12 Tendency to the abandonment of farming in marginal areas, and loss of knowledge related to agro-forestry-pastoral diversity (cultural desertification)	2%
13 Reduction of environmental oversight resulting in the progressive depopulation and rural marginalization, with negative impact on landscape and environmental management	2%
14 Competition from mass tourism attractions	1%

Table 3

Opportunities.

Source: our elaboration

Opportunities	Preferences
1 Presence of a coordination center for the promotion and enhancement of the local tourist supply	14%
2 Presence of an integrated supply (tourist and not) focused on the combination of product and territory	11%
3 High rural diversity in tourism (farms, educational farms, promotion of rural tourism agencies, guest houses and bed and breakfast, companies operating in “free time”, etc.)	11%
4 Presence of a network of small commercial enterprises for the promotion and marketing of local products	9%
5 Presence of a promotion agency for tourism	7%
6 Presence of a network of contact points located in the municipalities of the area and front office for tourists and consumers	7%
7 Presence of many typical food and quality, resulting from the rich regional tradition	7%
8 Strong image of authenticity, tradition and quality of local products (with the presence of productions that have started the procedures for the certification)	7%
9 Presence of itineraries and potential exploitation channels and promotion of the area	5%
10 Good performance of the tourism and regional food and wine sector (increase in tourist numbers)	5%
11 Presence of area brand “Daunia Rurale”	4%
12 Presence of rural areas of high nature value rooted traditions and a high cultural content	4%
13 Existence of a large heritage of biodiversity, plant and animal, in agriculture and forestry	2%
14 Growing demand turned towards forms of sustainable tourism in rural areas and to the agricultural and handicraft productions.	2%
15 Multiplicity and variety of natural resources, landscape, architectural, cultural, social and productive resources	2%
16 Relevant presence of a rural, natural, historical and cultural heritage	1%
17 Widespread tacit knowledge in the creation and development of actions and initiatives that focus on collaboration between local actors and stakeholders in the area	1%
18 Growing support for the creation of service centers for the aggregation and animation of the local populations	1%

**Fig. 2.** The workshops.

obstacles they felt relevant to the specific end-point. In addition, they could add obstacles and opportunities they felt missing from the list.

The most relevant obstacles affecting the development of the area relate to a lack of infrastructures and services to citizens; to a lack of cooperative attitude, and to a weak strategic valorisation of the area

(Table 2).

Among the opportunities, the most cited belong to the categories of the promotion of local tourism; the presence of local amenities as well as to tourist resources (Table 3). These results were elaborated and presented at the workshop.

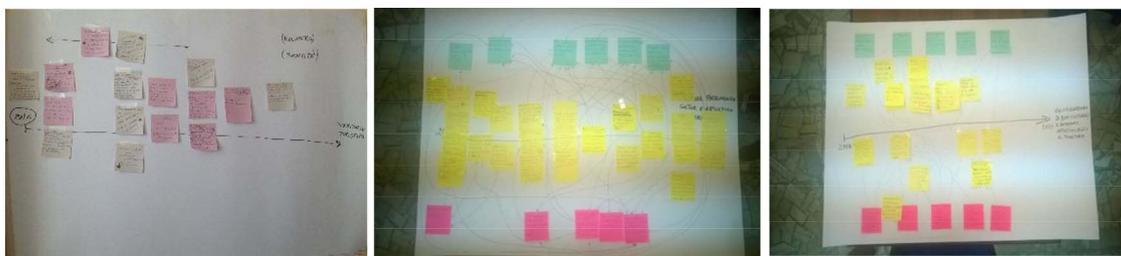


Fig. 3. Needs and actions on the timeline.

4.3. The workshop with stakeholders

Four workshops were held in the winter and summer 2016 at the LAG Daunia Rurale headquarters. Each workshop focused on a specific endpoint, while the final one was reserved to identify contact points between the different actions to outline an integrated strategy. Two of the authors were present at the workshops and worked together to probe the strength, connectedness and nuances of these themes and to ensure that analysis was consistent, valid and confirmable.

All the on-line questionnaire respondents were contacted by phone and e-mail. Overall 150 stakeholders took part to the workshops (the average number was of 40 stakeholders for each workshop). They were heterogeneous in terms of their backgrounds (farmers, local agro-food entrepreneurs, civil society representatives, public institutions officers, policy-makers, professional association representatives).

At the beginning of each workshop, an explanation of the backcasting approach was given in a plenary session to all participants. Then, they were asked to imagine travelling ahead in time and figuring out that they had arrived in the Daunia Rurale region during the year 2030, where economic activities were led and strictly linked to the development of the area. This was a way to introduce the right atmosphere for presenting the questionnaire's results. Then, participants were divided into three groups of 12–13 people each. Each group had a facilitator who guided the discussion and a student who registered the atmosphere among the participants and took notes on the discussion (Fig. 2).

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and voice their main concerns with respect to the local area's future development. Then, they had to plot the obstacles and opportunities derived from the on-line questionnaire on a timeline (2015–2030). Subsequently, they were asked to write on post-its about needs and actions for dealing with the obstacles and making use of the opportunities (see Fig. 3).

Afterwards, the actions were plotted on the same timeline linking them with the correspondent obstacles and opportunities.

When they finished to work, a rapporteur from each group presented the group's results to the others in a plenary session (Fig. 4). Afterwards, the results were discussed.

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to evaluate the workshop. All the stakeholders completed the questionnaire anonymously.

The results of the questionnaires were good: participants found the results useful and the approach a good-to-excellent way to outline a shared strategy (Table 4). The workshops were very useful to develop new relations and consolidate existing relations with actors they previously met at LAG's events and initiatives. The agreeableness and duration of the workshop were highly appreciated by the participants.

4.4. Strategy outline and validation

In this section, we'll focus only on the first end-point (tourism). During the discussion, the stakeholders identified specific milestones and related actions in order to achieve the agreed-upon end point. After the workshop, the results from each group were elaborated and combined to obtain an integrated strategy draft. On the whole, the actions identified by participants were grouped in 1) measures to be taken immediately (referring to the period of 2016–2019), 2) measures to become effective in the mid-term (in the period of 2019–2024), 3) measures to become effective in the long term (regarding the last part of the time frame: the period of 2024–2030). Fig. 5 reports the Milestones (MS1, MS2, ecc.) and Actions (A 1.1, A 1.2, ecc.).

Starting from the end point of "Area characterised by a full and synergistic enhancement of all the local tourist resources" and briefly "enhancement of the local tourist resources", the first milestone is the repopulation of the countryside (MS5).

In the vision of the stakeholders, this milestone can be obtained primarily by setting a coordinated network of tourist accommodations (guesthouses and B&B) and actions aimed at spreading the local culture. To make this final status viable, a preliminary step is that a positive image of the area is established (MS4) and the usability of the area is strengthened (MS3) (years 2019–2024). The relevant actions for this period are the improvements of infrastructures and transportation services and the introduction of advanced security services. In order to guarantee these services, a preliminary step could be the mapping of the private properties by means of advanced technology (e.g. GPS technology for mapping) in order to immediately identify the areas of intervention. In this phase, the stakeholders believe that it is crucial to enable the financial resources for local entrepreneurship and to promote environmental and ethical awareness. Previously (years 2016–2019), the diffusion of an entrepreneurial spirit should be promoted. This could be obtained by promoting



Fig. 4. The final plenary session.

Table 4
Participants feedback on the niceness of the workshop.
Source: our elaboration.

Statement	Percentage of respondents that gave a score of					
	1	2	3	4	5	> 4
Clarity of workshop scope	1,2	3,7	21	42,0	32,1	74,0
Adequacy of working methods with respect to the strategy setting	–	5,3	26,3	53,9	14,5	68,4
Utility of the final results in providing practical guidance for decision-makers	1,3	3,9	19,7	47,4	27,6	75,0
Workshop utility to develop new relationships and/or consolidate existing ones	–	2,6	15,8	51,3	30,3	81,6
Agreeableness of the meeting	–	3,9	9,2	50,0	36,8	86,8
Duration of the meeting	4,1	8,1	23,0	43,0	21,6	64,9

Notes: 1 = poor; 2 = sufficient; 3 = fairly good; 4 = good; 5 = very good; > 4 = percentage of scores of 4 or higher.

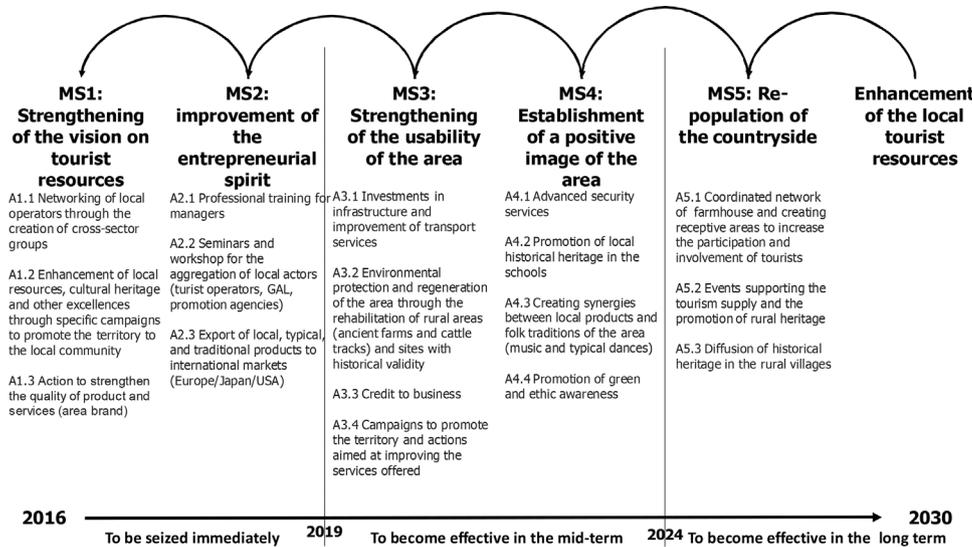


Fig. 5. Actions and milestones on the timeline.

Table 5
Strategy validation.
Source: our elaboration.

Items	Average	% score 4 or higher	%yes	Number of respondents
Empowerment				
Willing to participate in follow-up workshop	4.22	89%		9
Level of influence on the workshop's results	3.33	56%		9
Questionnaire helped to make my opinion heard	3.67	67%		9
Participating helped to make my opinion heard	3.71	57%		7
Robustness of the strategy				
Results reflect my own ideas on the area development	3.89	56%		9
Use of questionnaire results enriched workshop	3.71	57%		7
Use of questionnaire results does not decreased creativity	4.00	76%		7
Results are useful for own organization			0.89	9
Quality of workshop's results	3.89	67%		9

aggregation events and professional training for managers. At the very beginning of this period, the strengthening of the shared vision on tourist resources should be reached. This is the pre-condition of the medium and long term of the area's development. To this aim, three fundamental actions should be undertaken: the enhancement of the local actors networking; the enhancement of local community awareness (through specific campaigns of promotion of local resources and cultural heritage); and the strengthening of the quality of products and services (area brand).

The results of the thematic workshops were discussed in a fourth workshop to find contact points between the strategic actions of each endpoint. Afterwards, the results together with the comments collected through the on-line surveys were used to outline the draft of the

development strategy.

Some weeks after the workshop, this strategy draft was submitted by e-mail to all the stakeholders who were initially contacted (either the presents or the absent ones at the workshop) and to the participants to the on-line survey in order to be validated. Together with the strategy draft, we attached a questionnaire aiming to investigate the suitability of the proposed approach by measuring the level of influence they perceived to have on the results of the workshop, the quality of the workshop results and the quality of the final strategy.² In particular, we

² through a five-point Likert scale and yes/no items.

focussed on the empowerment of the local stakeholders and the robustness of the resulting strategy (Table 5).

For some items in the ‘Robustness’ section (i.e. “Results reflect my own ideas on the area development”, “Use of questionnaire results enriched workshop” and “Quality of workshop’s results”) we have high averages but relatively low percentage. This depends on the fact that while the percentage accounts for the *number* of respondents (that chose a value equal or higher than 4), the average reflects the *magnitude* of responses. For instance, the item “Results reflect my own ideas on the area development” shows a high average (3.89) but a medium percentage (56) because the proportion of equal/higher 4 respondents is relatively low (5 out of 9), but for the most part they chose the maximum value.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

It is important to note that the focus of the paper is to propose a quite suitable approach to the definition of rural development strategies rather than focusing on specific aspects of the strategy itself. This stems from the aim to identify a participatory approach fulfilling with CLLD requirements.

If we consider results as a whole we can state that backcasting was particularly suitable to this aim. Among its chief strengths, we have to mention that is a flexible approach that enabled us to identify the actions required to reach a specific policy goal through the involvement of LAG’s stakeholders and allowing for more creativity and participants’ influence on the results.

Looking at the questionnaire’s results (either at the ones on the niceness of the workshop or at the strategy-validation ones), some encouraging remarks can be drawn.

The participants were very enthusiastic about the whole process. Furthermore, on the whole, the proposed approach has allowed policy makers to reach a number of objectives at least in the design phase.

First of all, the backcasting can better legitimise the decisions with a positive effect on the democratisation of the policymaking and the consequent sustainability of plans, as the validation scores demonstrated. The heterogeneity in perspectives and knowledge of stakeholders contributes to the design of policies that are better suited to serve the needs of those concerned. In addition, the backcasting process has proved to enhance the confidence of stakeholders with an overall improvement of their empowerment and enabled them to follow and to keep trace of the whole process of strategy definition even when they couldn’t attend the workshop. This was guaranteed by the strategy validation questionnaire that was submitted to the whole LAG stakeholders’ network and not only to those who attended the workshop.

Other advantages of the proposed participatory approach, which emerged either from the case study or from literature, are: i) the reduction of bounded rationality and of subjectivity affecting the decision-making process by including different viewpoints; ii) the prevention of certain issues from being excluded from the analysis; iii) the exploration of different claims about the problems and its solutions (van de Kerkhof, 2006b); iv) the orientation and guidance among involved stakeholders and policymakers to plan actions over time provided by the timeline (Quist et al., 2011); v) a greater transparency of the whole process.

We recognise this paper is based upon long-term participatory research in which there was the awareness for the stakeholders that the outcome would be used to project the development path of their area. Therefore, it is important to highlight that as the results of the pre-workshop survey would condition the following workshop, this is a very sensitive phase either for the respondents or for the discussed topics because they could affect the following workshop and the quality of its results. Therefore, in a process seeking to define rural development strategies in a participatory way, the active involvement of stakeholders from the beginning is indispensable.

A first valuable output supporting the successfulness of the proposed

approach is represented by the very high score obtained by the ‘Daunia Rurale’ LAG in the valuation and selection process by the Management Authority proven that one of the valuation criterion was the quality of the participation process.

Some limits come from the assumption that desired future will occur, no estimate of likelihood is possible, that researchers or practitioners must be skilled and that it is a time and resources intensive approach.

Finally, we are aware that even if we adopted a participatory approach that has registered a high level of participants’ satisfaction, this doesn’t guarantee the quality of the results and the effects of the implemented and/or supported actions. They depend on many elements, most of them out of reach of any policymaker or planner.

Notwithstanding, the information of stakeholders, their involvement and the diffusion of a cooperative attitude, are a fundamental basis of any successful policy action.

An apparent inconsistency lies on the long-time horizon we considered corresponding to two programming periods rather than only the current one. However, it should be borne in mind that local development is a long term process, which lasts several funding periods, and that policy actions should be thought, designed and funded accordingly to sustainability criteria. Therefore, backcasting has been particularly helpful to local stakeholders and decision makers in giving a clear direction to the planning of rural development.

What we learn from this case study represents a valuable outcome that can support practitioners, policy makers and researchers in understanding how to design medium- to long-term planning of development strategies in rural areas.

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