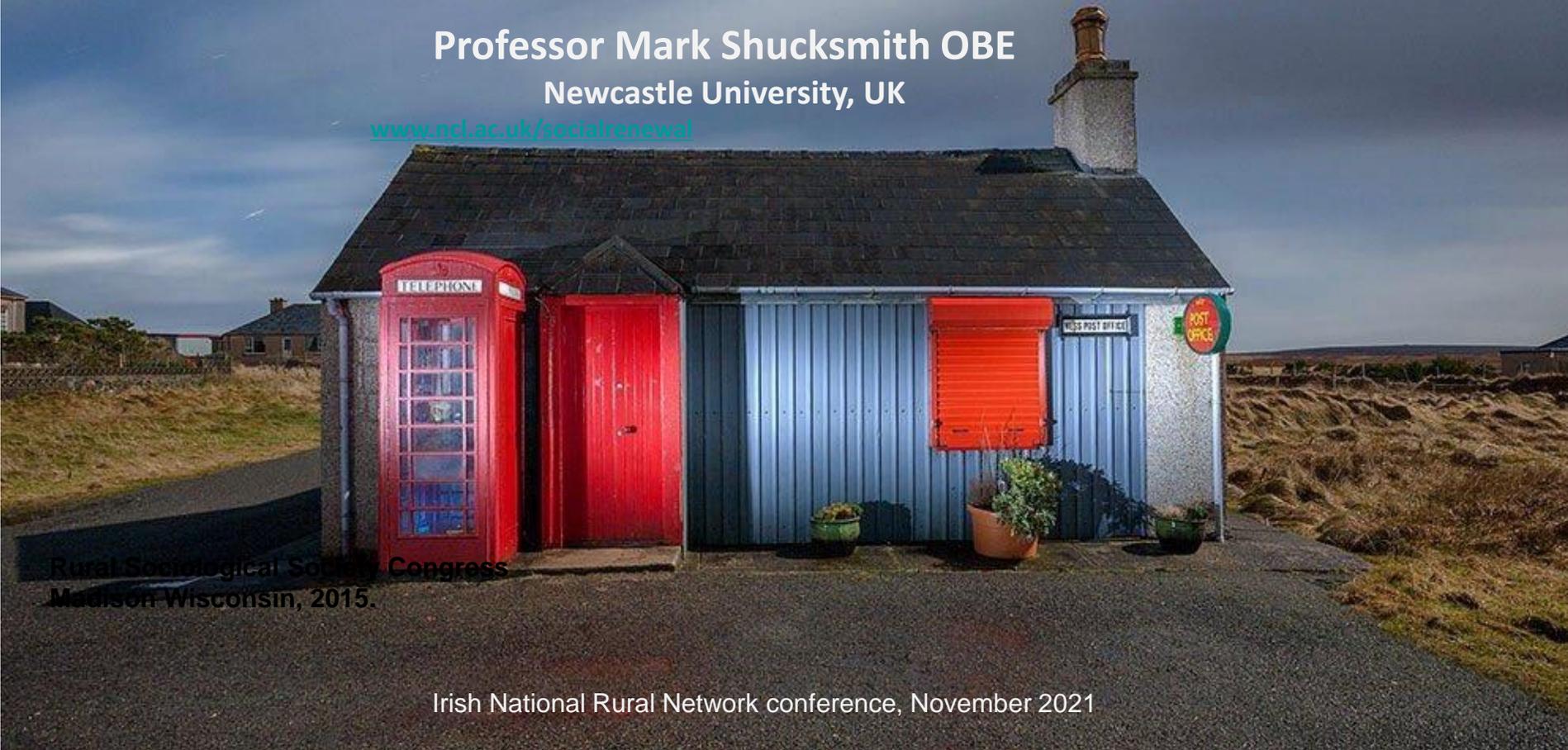


# 30 Years of LEADER: looking back, looking ahead

Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE  
Newcastle University, UK

[www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal)



Rural Sociological Society Congress  
Madison Wisconsin, 2015.

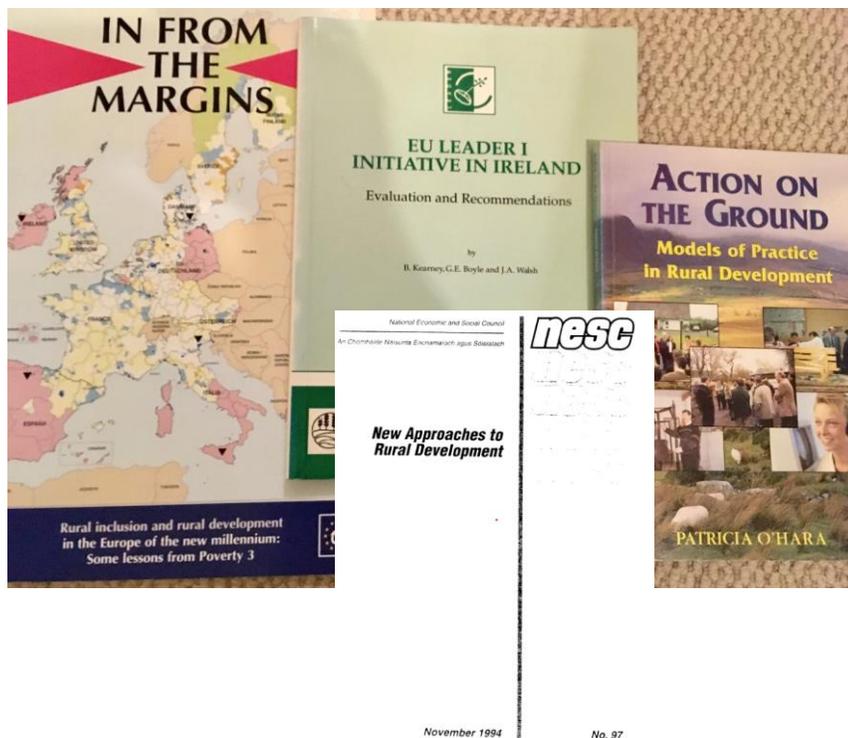
Irish National Rural Network conference, November 2021

# LEADER's Irish Origins

- LEADER is said to originate in Kitty O'Shea's pub in Brussels!
- Contemplating cuts in price support under the CAP, officials had the idea of a new territorial approach to rural development.
- The idea was that it would start as a pilot scheme but would grow to become the main pillar of the CAP as budgets were refocused from sectoral (agricultural) to territorial (place-based) actions.
- OECD's New Rural Paradigm.



# Ireland's pioneering of LEADER

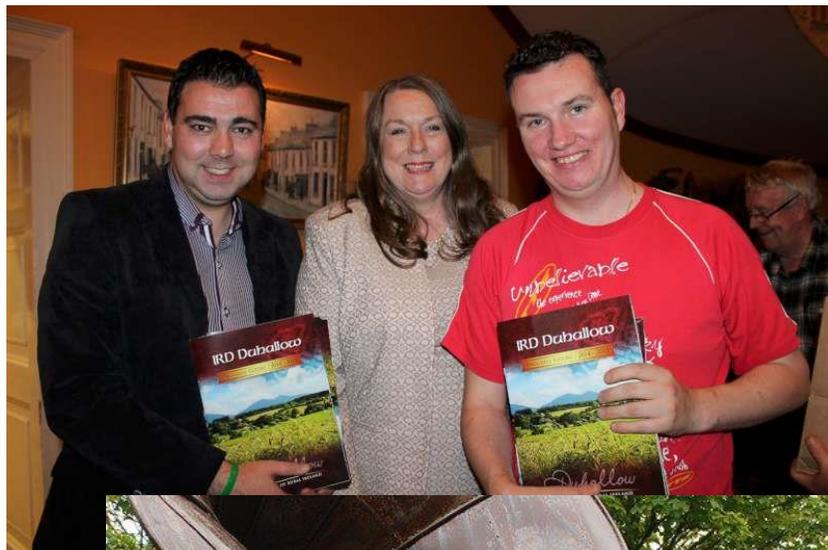


- Ireland not only originated the idea of LEADER. The concept was then worked out and pioneered in Ireland.
- These are just a few of the studies which influenced LEADER and IRD across Europe, emphasising the importance of local participation, animation and capacity building, social inclusion, partnerships and a strategic approach.

Patrick Commins, Brendan Kearney, Gerry Boyle, Jim Walsh, Michael Mernagh, Michael Keane, Pat O'Hara and others...

# LEADER practice in Ireland

From LEADER1 to LEADER CLLD today, inspiration has also come from the innovative practices of Ireland's Local Action Groups, with inspirational leaders like Carmel Fox and Maura Walsh.



## LEADER

Community-Led Local Development

Local Action Groups (LAGs) & Implementing Partners (IPs) Overview

Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs) that align with the objectives of the LEADER Programme. LAGs are developed in consultation with the local communities and companies in each area and are responsible for the implementation and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, in a wider LAG or by acting as the LAG Implementing Partner. Decisions are made to these Local Development Programme companies are the first port of call for LEADER funding.

Details of all LAGs and IP companies are included within this document. This document is an interactive map of all LAGs and IPs located in Ireland. It is available on the LEADER section of the NRN website. This 'one-stop' resource is interested in accessing assistance under the LEADER Programme. It provides convenient access to information about the LEADER Programme, geographical coverage of their LAGs as well as their names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. Links to each of the LAGs and implementing Partner's websites and social media pages are also embedded into this map.

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# LEADER as networked rural development



## Phases of LEADER

- 1991-94 LEADER1
- 1995-99 LEADER2
- 2000-06 LEADER+
- 2007-13 New LEADER: Axis 4 of RDPE.
- 2014-20 The LEADER approach

Subtle shifts in objectives, scope, style and control through these phases.

But still a LEADER “approach” or “philosophy”.

## Networked rural development

- Networked rural development involves local control and capacity-building but recognises in addition the essential role of the state and other external actors at multiple scales.
  - Institutional capacity to act
    - Knowledge resources
    - Network resources
    - Collective vision and capabilities
    - Social inclusion, active participation
  - Enabling state
    - Building capacity to act of marginalised individuals and places
    - Addressing higher level, non-local forces and rural-proofing policies
  - Social innovation
- Local actors cannot work only within their place but must also construct ‘spaces of engagement’ to secure their local spaces of dependence.
  - Engagement in relational networks
    - Powers of immunity
    - Powers of initiation
  - Responsibilities of enabling state and other actors

# LEADER and Innovation

- Prior to LEADER, rural citizens tended to think of innovation as science policy and as alien to rural areas.
- But LEADER funding required innovation, which prompted a new reflexive understanding of innovation in rural policy as social innovation and knowledge exchange, not technology transfer.
  - The territorial approach to rural development itself
  - The emphasis on social and cultural innovation – ie. capacity-building, networking, image and identity ('place-making')
  - Attention to rural economies and social inclusion beyond agriculture
- The OECD described this as a “new rural paradigm”.
- But researchers found the approach became less innovative and more constrained in later phases, largely because LEADER had challenged both clientalistic power relations and the local political class (within the region) and hierarchical structures of bureaucratic power (beyond the region).



# LEADER and Social Inclusion

- In a paper in 2000, I warned of the danger that LEADER could increase inequality both between and within areas because of differential capacity to act. This danger can be amplified by complex application procedures, by emphasis on capital grants, by short time scales, or by ‘elite capture’.
- Curtin and Varley (1991) found local notables tended to dominate, while Commins and Keane (1994) found pre-existing structures of inequality were usually not addressed in early LEADER phases.
- For LEADER to become more socially inclusive, I argued more funds should be devoted to targeted animation and capacity-building; less emphasis on capital grants; and there should be longer time scales, simpler application procedures, and greater diversity in the composition of LAG boards. No doubt many more lessons have emerged from Ireland’s experience in addressing social inclusion.



# LEADER and Spatial Justice

- Can LEADER promote spatial justice?
  - Plurality and diversity: locally-tailored approach
  - Active participation and capacity-building
  - Governance and power: powers of immunity and powers of initiation
- Case study of Northumberland Uplands LAG in northern England.



- Findings from the case study:
  - Local development strategy (LDS) circumscribed by national guidelines and EU funding rules; then LDS displaced by central government 'jobs and growth' directive and shift to capital grants. Increasing bureaucratic control by managing agency.
  - Consultation-led LDS, but smaller budget for staff and animation reduced possibilities for capacity-building and inclusion. The shift to capital grants favoured those with capital, and the greater complexity of the application process was also exclusionary.
  - The capture of control by central government and the discarding of the locally-generated LDS, undermined the accountability of LEADER to local citizens
  - In sum, a shift from LEADER as community-led local development (and LEADER principles) towards control through 'government at a distance', with not only a narrower scope than the LDS had proposed but also a far narrower range of beneficiaries.
  - Has LEADER come to reflect governance by hierarchy, while presented as promoting localism and networks?

# Looking ahead



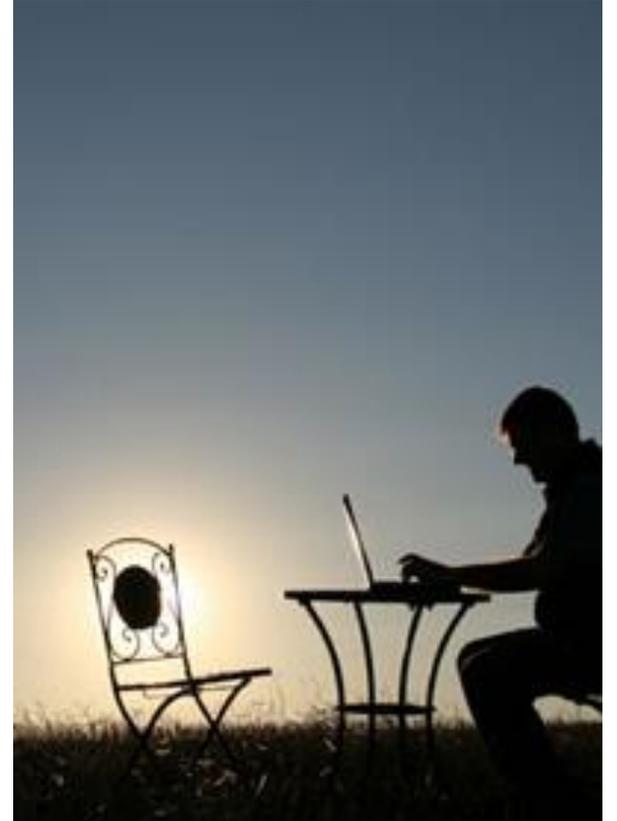
- Challenges ahead include:
  - Climate change: transition to net-zero
  - Impact of the pandemic: recovery
  - Demographic change: ageing, migration
  - Unequal development and Inequality
  - Digitalisation
  - Farm support and reorientation

- Building on LEADER (Atterton et al 2021):
  - Investment in addressing the needs of rural areas, building on their assets and opportunities
  - Maintain community-led approach with emphasis on animation, capacity-building and networking;
  - Innovation as a core principle;
  - Importance of Local Development Strategy, and of local participation in its preparation.
  - A better balance between top-down and bottom-up (vertical and horizontal partnerships);
  - Set out clearer divisions of responsibility and working relationships between governance levels
  - Simplified application, monitoring & evaluation.

Atterton, J., McMorran, R., Glass, J., Jones, S. and Meador, E. (2020). [The role of the LEADER approach post-Brexit](#). Rural Policy Centre, Scotland's Rural College. Technical Report to Scottish Government.

# Conclusion

- In summary,
  - Ireland led the way in the early development of LEADER.
  - We have learned during these 30 years - about the importance of local knowledge, plurality and diversity, capacity-building, local and extra-local networks, social innovation, social inclusion, autonomy, spaces of engagement, governance and power structures.
  - There are huge challenges ahead for rural (and urban) societies.
  - The LEADER approach should be an important means of enabling local communities to respond actively to these challenges, the more so if they have sufficient autonomy and agency, and have the support of an enabling state and learning networks.
  - I look forward to continuing to learn from and be inspired by the Irish experience of LEADER beyond 30 years...



Thank you!