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Title: Public policies supporting local networks for entrepreneurship and innovation: effectiveness and added value analysis of LEADER program in the Alentejo region of Portugal

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Journal: Int. J. of Entrepreneurship and Small Business, 2014 Vol.21, No.3, pp.406 - 435

Abstract: The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the role, effectiveness and added value of public policies supporting locally-based networks for entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas. The effects and impacts of public policies to support innovation and entrepreneurship in peripheral rural regions are often weak, diffuse and difficult to measure accurately. Therefore, and from the perspective of a case study, based on the LEADER initiative - links between actions of rural development approach in Portugal (Alentejo region) an attempt is made to assess direct and indirect impacts, the systemic effects of these policies and the effectiveness and added value of their effects. The LEADER initiative was launched in 1991 by European Commission as a result of growing concern about the future of rural areas. This approach to the subject of rural development by this instrument of public policy intervenes in the regions, notably, through cooperation between network agents and territories and encouragement of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: local networks; rural entrepreneurship; innovation; policy effectiveness; added value; public policy; LEADER initiative; Portugal; rural areas; rural development; cooperation.

DOI: 10.1504/IJESB.2014.060900
 10.1504/14.60900



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