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**Exploring the perspectives of a mixed case study approach  
for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy  
2007-2013**

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# Exploring the perspectives of a mixed case study approach for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013

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## Abstract

*For the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy in the programming period 2007-2013, the European Commission has designed a Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). Given a widespread lack of enthusiasm and the complexity of the CMEF, in this paper a comparative analysis of 22 evaluation methods of rural development policy is conducted in order to explore whether an alternative approach for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy exists. The mixed case study approach is identified as potential alternative. This approach combines the analysis of data on input and output with in-depth interviews. First results of testing this method in the mid-term evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in the Dutch NUTS2 region of Zeeland indicate that this approach might be a promising alternative to the CMEF. It is easier to implement and renders useful insight into the question why measures have been effective.*

*Keywords: evaluation methods, EU Rural Development Policy, mixed case-study approach.*

*JEL classification: R500,R580.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation of EU activities has gained importance over time and now forms an integral part of the policy process. The reform of the Structural Funds (1988) introduced a system of monitoring and evaluation in EU regional policies (OECD, 2009a). In the course of time, several EU guidelines towards evaluation have been made (Dwyer and Hill, 2009), like the MEANS Collection on evaluating socio-economic programmes (1999), Evaluation of rural development programmes 2000-2006 supported from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (1999), and a Practical Guide for the Commission services on evaluating EU activities (2004). In 2002 the European Commission announced a new approach for impact assessment of major proposals in all its policy areas, which established a procedure for an integrated assessment of the potential impacts of policy proposals on the economy, on society and on the environment (EC, 2002). Today all Directorates-General involved in spending EU funds have units responsible for evaluation of their respective policy areas.

For the evaluation of EU Rural Development Policies in the current programming period 2007-2013, the Handbook on Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) (EC, 2006) is used as a guide. CMEF distinguishes four types of evaluations of rural development policies (EC Reg. 1698/2005): ex ante evaluation, ongoing evaluation, mid-term and ex post evaluation. The principal aims of these various evaluations may be characterized as supporting

decision-making, improving the implementation of policy measures, assisting in resource allocation and enhancing accountability and transparency of public policies (OECD, 1999; EC, 2006). The evaluation information is applicable throughout the whole policy cycle of planning, preparation, budgeting and delivery. As such evaluation can be perceived as a feedback mechanism and a learning process, in which its success highly depends on close collaboration and mutual trust between its key participants: evaluators, users, stakeholders and the commissioner (OECD, 1999). Such cooperation may benefit from an evaluator understanding the substance and culture of the evaluated policy.

The CMEF forms a rather comprehensive approach of rural development policy evaluation. According to the guidelines in the CMEF handbook (EC, 2006), data for about 160 indicators (of which 83 output indicators, 12 result indicators, 7 impact indicators, 36 objective related baseline indicators and 23 context related baseline indicators) have to be collected and analysed and nearly 140 common evaluation questions (CEQs) have to be answered. Evidence in 20 case studies – conducted in the scope of the EU wide research project RuDi – reveals that programme authorities show a widespread lack of enthusiasm and indifference about the CMEF (Dwyer, 2010). Often, the heavily quantitative indicator-based CMEF is experienced as a cumbersome requirement of Brussels and in the context of the debate on the simplification of the CAP, many Member States wonder whether a simpler and more popular kind of evaluation framework could be produced, based on explaining the links between causes and effects (EC, 2009).

Other concerns on the CMEF refer to the fact that evaluation questions to be addressed are prescribed in advance by the European Commission. This might imply a reduction in the independence of the evaluation exercise (Bradley and Hill, 2009). However, considering the wish of the European Commission to synthesize the results of the evaluations of all RDPs into an overall evaluation at the EU level, the use of prescribed CEQs is understandable. Another main drawback of using prescribed CEQs is that – given the heterogeneity of rural areas in the EU – some CEQs bear little relevance to the circumstances of particular Member States or regions. In such cases, there is a danger that answers given are of poor quality or doubtful validity.

With regard to the indicators specified by the European Commission, concerns have been raised about their linkage to the evaluation questions and the use of inferior indicators (Bradley and Hill, 2009). In addition, it has been argued that the emphasis on quantifiable indicators for outputs, results and impacts detracts attention from the diagnosis of cause and effect: it describes what has happened and not how or why (Midmore, 2009). Understanding how policy measures interact with the structure and performance of the local rural economy, other policy impacts and support delivery mechanisms can be considered as critical for enabling evaluation to play its full role in improving policy and encouraging institutional learning and adaptation (Dwyer and Hill, 2009). Finally, data for the prescribed indicators are not always available in established sources or are extremely difficult to extract from administrative systems, often by

making rather crude assumptions. In other cases, data have to be collected by evaluators themselves (Dwyer and Hill, 2009).

### ***1.1. Objective of this study***

Given these concerns on the CMEF, the question arises whether alternative evaluation approaches for the evaluation of EU Rural Development Policy exist which suffer less from these worries. This paper describes our efforts to find an alternative approach to the CMEF. In particular, the following three objectives are addressed:

- To conduct a comparative analysis of evaluation methods of rural development policy in order to identify an alternative approach for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy in the programming period 2007-2013;
- To adapt and to test this alternative approach for the mid-term evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in The Netherlands;
- To assess the perspectives of this alternative approach for EU wide use in the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy.

In order to restrict our study, we only focus at evaluation methods that measure the effectiveness of rural development measures, i.e. the outcome in relation to the objective of the measure. So methods on determining efficiency are disregarded.

### ***1.2. Outline of this paper***

The outline of this paper is as follows. In section 2, we discuss the methodological approach of this paper. In section 3, we conduct a comparative analysis of different evaluation methods and identify an alternative for the CMEF. In section 4, we adapt and test this alternative approach in the midterm evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in the Dutch NUTS2 region of Zeeland. In section 5, we make some final remarks.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

By means of literature study we composed a global overview of 22 recently used evaluation methods of rural development measures in the EU Member States, that cover most of the measures of the second pillar of the CAP and that reflect the most commonly used approaches to evaluation of rural development policy as outlined by the OECD (2009b). By using an assessment scheme with a fixed set of 11 questions on the measure and location evaluated and applied methodology, we could give a systematic description of each of these evaluation approaches. As a next step, we classified the 22 evaluation methods into five groups, according to their methodological approach. Then, for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methods, we have listed main properties of evaluation methods and explored to which extent these properties are applicable to the five groups of methods. By comparing the

strengths and weaknesses of the CMEF with the other evaluation methods, one evaluation method was selected as alternative for the CMEF.

In order to adapt this alternative evaluation approach to the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013, we drafted a protocol with evaluation questions. This protocol was used for an alternative mid-term evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in The Netherlands. Based on the experiences in The Netherlands, the perspectives of this alternative approach for EU wide use in the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy are discussed.

### **3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF METHODS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

A wide array of approaches, methods and tools can be used to conduct evaluations. In this comparative analysis, we covered a set of 22 evaluation methods for rural development policy. These refer to individual measures of axis 1, 2, and 4 of the EU Rural Development Policy or to Rural Development Programmes as such, the CAP, EU Structural Policy, the Nordic Aid scheme, Federal Policy Programmes in the US, and national environmental and nature management measures. It has to be noted that this selected set is not meant as an extensive overview of all possible evaluation methods of rural development policy; we rather intended to provide a global overview of recently used evaluation methods that reflect the most commonly used approaches to evaluate rural development policy.

According to their approach, we can broadly classify the set of 22 evaluation methods into five groups (Table 1):

1. the CMEF type approach: this group includes evaluation methods that employ a hierarchy of indicators<sup>1</sup> combined with evaluation questions, often used for EU wide policy programmes;
2. the tally approach: this group refers to methods that simply measure by means of counting whether a quantified objective has been achieved;
3. the econometric approach: this group uses econometric methods in the policy evaluation;
4. the modelling approach: this group employs models for policy evaluation;
5. the mixed case study approach: this rather diverse group uses broad quantitative and qualitative analyses of direct and indirect results of the policy intervention, usually based on case studies.

For assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methods, we have listed main properties of evaluation methods and explored whether these properties are applicable to

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<sup>1</sup>First the needs are identified, which describe the socio-economic or environmental requirements to which the measure or programme should respond. Then the policy response is developed through a 'hierarchy of objectives', from general to specific to operational objectives. The operational objectives constitute the relevant goals and determine the rules of implementation, i.e. the input (financial resources). These inputs will generate a chain of outputs, results (immediate effects) and impacts (contribution to the achievement of the overall objectives).

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Table 1: Classification of evaluation methods according to their methodological approach

Approach	Method	Source
1. CMEF type approach (indicators and evaluation questions) (9)	Evaluation of the EU Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 (EU27)	European Commission (2006)
	Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 (The Netherlands)	Venema et al. (2009)
	Evaluation of the Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 (Flanders)	IDEA Consult et al. (2008)
	Ex-post evaluation of LEADER II programmes 1994-1999 (EU15)	ÖIR-Managementdienste GmbH (2003)
	Mid-term evaluation LEADER+ (2000-2006) (The Netherlands)	ECORYS-NEI (2003)
	Evaluation of Cohesion policy programmes in Objective 1 and 2 regions (France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden)	Tödting-Schönhofer et al. (2009)
	Evaluation of the Less Favoured Area measure (EU25)	IEEP (2006)
	Evaluation of the set-aside measure (EU25)	Areté srl and University of Bologna (2008)
	Evaluation of the Nordic Aid schemes (Northern Finland and Sweden)	MTT and SLI (2007)
2. Tally approach (5)	Evaluation of the LFA policy (Austria)	Hovorka (2004)
	Evaluation of the Dutch national policy for management of wintering goose populations (The Netherlands)	LNV (2009)
	Evaluation of the nature management measures (The Netherlands)	Milieu- and Natuurplanbureau (2007)
	Evaluation of the greenhouse horticulture policy (The Netherlands)	Algemene Rekenkamer (1996)
	Programme Assessment Rating Tool (PART) (United States)	OECD (2009b)
3. Econometric approach (2)	Non-parametric propensity score matching approach for evaluating agri-environmental and LFA measures (Germany)	Pufahl and Weiss (2008)
	Regression model on farm meadow birds (The Netherlands)	Willems et al. (2004)
4. Modelling approach (3)	Inter-regional Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) (Archanes, Nikos and Heraklion, Greece)	Psaltopoulos et al. (2006)
	Regional Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) (six rural regions in Scotland, Finland and Greece)	Psaltopoulos et al. (2004)
	LEITAP (EU15)	Nowicki et al. (2009)
5. Mixed case study approach (3)	Mixed-method case study (East Wales)	Midmore et al. (2008)
	Evaluation of the measure for setting up of young farmers (The Netherlands)	Ettema (1992)
	Evaluation of the territorial environmental policy (The Netherlands)	VROM (2003)

Source: Terluin and Roza (2010)

The five groups of methods (Table 2). It appears that a striking difference can be revealed between the evaluation methods in the CMEF type, tally, econometric and modelling approach on the one hand, and those in the mixed case study approach on the other hand: methods in the first four groups in particular identify quantitative effects of the policy intervention, whereas the mixed case study approach tends to focus on the qualitative effects and features in the context of the policy intervention.

Table 2: Assessment of main properties of the evaluation methods.

	CMEF type approach	Tally approach	Econo- metric approach	Model- ling approach	Mixed case study approach
Diagnosis of cause and effect:					
- description of what has happened (in quantitative terms)	x	x	x	x	
- description of what has happened (in qualitative terms)					x
- description of how and why it has happened in interaction with the local context and other policies					x
- impact is measured at the right territorial level	partly	x	x	partly	x
Indirect results of policy intervention are taken into account	x		x	x	x
Unintended effects of the policy intervention are taken into account					x
Reveals reasons why actors participate in a policy measure					x
Covers the whole territory in which measure is applied	x	x	x	partly	
Easy to apply for evaluator		x			x

Source: Terluin and Roza (2010)

On the whole, the impact of the policy intervention is measured at the appropriate territorial level (i.e. the level at which the policy intervention is targeted) for the methods in the tally, econometric and mixed case study approach. This is only partly the case for methods in the CMEF type and modelling approach. Methods in the CMEF type approach tend to measure the impact at regional or national level, which might be satisfying as far as territorial policies are evaluated. However, when sectoral policies are evaluated, it is preferable to measure the impact at farm or local level, as the impact of such measures is often only felt locally, and fades away in the total amount of actions at the regional or national level. Within the modelling approach, social accounting matrices (SAMs) are able to capture the impact at the right level, whereas a general equilibrium model like LEITAP is only able to identify impacts at the relatively high national level. Methods in the CMEF type, tally and econometric approach and LEITAP can be applied to the whole EU territory, whereas SAMs and methods in the mixed case study approach are restricted to case study areas.

Considering the amount of data needed for the evaluation method and the way in which these data have to be processed and analysed, it could be noted that the methods in the tally and mixed case study approach are rather easy to apply for evaluators, whereas methods in the econometric and modelling approach require specific skills of the evaluator and methods in the CMEF type approach are rather time consuming due to its huge number of indicators and evaluation questions.

The strengths and weaknesses in Table 2 serve as starting point for assessing whether evaluation methods in the tally, econometric, modelling and mixed case study approach give rise to recommendations for adaptation of the CMEF or whether they could act as an alternative to the CMEF. It seems that the methods in the tally approach do not result in suggestions for adaptations of the CMEF, as counting whether the objective has been achieved is already



included in the hierarchy of indicators in the CMEF. Strengths and weaknesses in the group of the econometric and modelling approach are quite similar to those in the CMEF type approach. Although the method for measuring the impact of the policy intervention differs, substitution of the hierarchy of indicators in the CMEF by econometrics or models like in the econometric and modelling approach would increase the complexity of the CMEF.

Considering the rather different strengths and weaknesses of the CMEF type and the mixed case study approach, this approach might be a promising source for recommendations for adaptation of the CMEF. Whereas CMEF could be described in terms of a global analysis of the impact of rural development policy, applicable to the whole EU territory, the mixed case study approach is rather an in-depth analysis of the impact of rural development policy in a specific case study region. Although it could be argued that the mixed case study approach provides very useful insights in the impact of rural development policy in a specific region, and explains why and how this impact is generated, while the workload for a few case studies is not too high, application of this approach to all EU regions would likely result in an unbearable workload. However, if it would be politically feasible to apply an approach to monitoring and evaluation of the EU rural development policy in which monitoring is conducted for the whole EU territory and in which evaluation is restricted to a number of case study regions, then the mixed case study approach could be a useful alternative to the CMEF.

#### **4. DESIGN AND TESTING OF AN ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION APPROACH**

The mixed case study approach seeks to explain how a policy intervention interacts with the structure and performance of the local economy, other policy impacts and the governance framework which delivers support. The mixed nature of the approach is reflected by the fact that the analysis consists of different stages, in which different methods are applied. By combining evidence from these stages, it is tried to find exploring patterns, which provide support for explanations for causal relationships and which assess relative strengths of each effect. This approach was, for example, used for the ex post evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2000-2006 in Wales by Midmore *et al.* (2008). First, they conducted an analysis of secondary data of the case study region, providing a contextual framework; then they held in-depth interviews with representatives of different interest groups. As the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 differs to some extent from that in the years 2000-2006, we had to make some slight adaptations to the interview questions; for the remainder we follow the two stages in the evaluation distinguished by Midmore *et al.*

In order to structure the design of the mixed case study approach as alternative approach for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013, its testing and reporting, we used a protocol in which we gave detailed instructions for the various steps in the evaluation:

1. Analysis of the baseline situation in the case study region by means of secondary data;
2. Analysis of the objectives of the EU Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 in the case study region;

3. Analysis of the financial input and the output for each rural development measure, derived from the monitoring data collected in the scope of the CMEF, in order to get insight in the quantitative realization of each measure;
4. Questions for in-depth interviews with representatives of the different interest groups, mainly on how and why the measures of the RDP are used. These questions refer, amongst others, to:
  - How and why have the target values for the input of each measure (not) been reached?
  - Which other factors have affected the achievement of the targets?
  - Would the activity supported by the measure also have been undertaken without policy support?
  - What is your impression of how the RDP affected (a) regional economic development, (b) the development of the agricultural sector, (c) the development of employment, (d) the development of diversification of economic activities, (e) the environment and the landscape, and (f) the quality of life in the case study region in the evaluated period?
  - What is your impression of the interaction of the RDP with other EU policies in the case study region in the evaluated period?
  - Do the objectives of the RDP fit, according to your opinion, into the needs of the case study region?
  - Which issues would you like to change in the current RDP?
5. A template for writing a report on the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy in the case study region, including chapters, questions to be addressed and tables to be completed.

By using the protocol, we tested the mixed case study approach for the mid-term evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in the NUTS2 region of Zeeland in The Netherlands in the second half of 2010. This test will be continued in the Dutch NUTS2 region of Gelderland in the first half of 2011. Below we report our findings of the testing of the mixed case study approach in Zeeland.

#### ***4.1. Experiences during the various stages in the evaluation***

It was quite easy to describe the baseline situation in the case study region, as data and literature were readily available. However, this does not apply to the analysis of the objectives of the RDP in Zeeland, due to the fairly complex way the Dutch RDP has been organized and implemented. The Dutch government has chosen to design one RDP 2007-2013 for the whole country without distinguishing separate objectives for the different provinces in the country. Within this RDP, there is a division of responsibilities between the national government and the provinces. The national government is responsible for the implementation of axis 1 (except

measure 125) and axis 2 (except measure 216), whereas the province of Zeeland is responsible for the implementation of measure 125, 216 and all measures under axis 3 and 4. The province has integrated these RDP measures with other national rural development policies into a multiannual program for the rural area. This program describes the goals of the rural development policies in Zeeland, which are complementary to the national objectives for rural development in the RDP. It should be noted that the majority of rural development measures in this program for Zeeland is not cofinanced by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and that the program also encompasses measures related to water and soil management, two areas that are not entirely within the scope of the European rural development measures. Disentangling the objectives of the national RDP and the multiannual program in Zeeland and the contribution of the different measures to these objectives is hardly possible.

The collection of data on the financial input and output of each rural development measure in Zeeland has been another concern. For those measures under axis 1 and 2, which are implemented at national level by the National Payment Service, data on input and output per measure at provincial level are not collected. However, with considerable efforts data on the uptake of measures at provincial level can be extracted. Based on the postal code that is mentioned in the application, the National Payment Service has extracted data for Zeeland from the national data. Working with postal codes has a disadvantage. Although the applicant can have a postal code in Zeeland, this does not necessarily mean that the whole farm area is in the province of Zeeland as well. Therefore, possibly part of the budget was not spent in Zeeland. Also, provinces can top up the national budget for the measures 111 and 121 under axis 1. This amount is not taken into account in the figures. As it is quite labour-intensive to extract data, only data on the EU budget spent in Zeeland were extracted for three measures: measure 111 on vocational training and information actions, measure 121 on the modernization of agricultural holdings, and measure 132 on supporting farmers who participate in food quality schemes. At national level, these three measures are the largest in terms of budget spent. We have supposed that for the province of Zeeland these measures are the most important measures as well. This, however, need not to be the case. Knowing the EU budget spent in Zeeland based on the calculations by the National Payment Service, it is possible to calculate the national budget spent in Zeeland and the number of participants. For measures 212 (farming in other LFA) and 214 (agri-environmental payments) provincial data on uptake have been extracted in the same way from the national data. On the other hand, provincial data on the financial input and output of the measures in axes 3 and 4 and of the measures 125 and 216 were readily available. It appeared that data on results and impact of the measures were not collected, which implies that any assessments of this has to be based on information collected by the evaluator.

Six interviews of 1-1.5 hour have been conducted with representatives of the provincial government, advisory services and the farmers' organisation, who are involved in the implementation of the rural development policy. For finding these persons, we first consulted the Ministry of Agriculture and the Dutch Managing Office for the Rural Development

Programme. In addition, we searched the internet for organisations in Zeeland who were active in the field of rural development. This gave us a few names to start with. At the end of the first couple of interviews, we asked the interviewee suggestions for other persons to interview. Using this combined approach, it turned out to be relatively easy to find persons to interview. For each interview we used the list of questions as described under step 4 in the protocol. Depending on the person to be interviewed, the questionnaire was slightly adapted, some questions were added and others were skipped. The questions were sent to the interviewees one week in advance, giving them time to prepare for the interview. Before starting the interviews, we had collected data about the uptake of the EU cofinanced rural development measures in Zeeland. This allowed us to ask very specific questions about the uptake of measures. A written report was drafted after each interview.

The template for the report was useful in reporting on the midterm evaluation of the RDP in Zeeland, and any gap in the report can be used as a sign which information is lacking.

#### **4.2. Results**

Zeeland is situated in the south western part of the Netherlands. It consists of a number of islands and a strip bordering Belgium. In the north, it borders to the Randstad. During the past decades, the population steadily increased, however, at a slower rate than in the Netherlands as a whole (Table 3). Within the Netherlands, Zeeland is considered a rural region: its population density is less than half the national one. Water has always had an enormous influence on Zeeland. During the disastrous floods of 1953, over 1800 people and many thousands of cattle lost their lives. This led to the implementation of the Delta works. The reputation of Zeeland's

Table 3: Some basic facts for Zeeland, 2007

	Zeeland	The Netherlands
Population (mln)	0.38	16.36
Population growth, 2000-2007 (% p.a.)	0.3	0.4
Population density (inh/km <sup>2</sup> )	213	485
Population <15 years (% of total population)	18	18
Population 15-65 years (% of total population)	65	67
Population >65 years (% of total population)	17	14
Population in main cities (1000 inh.):		
City 1: Terneuzen / Amsterdam	55.4	742.9
City 2: Middelburg / Rotterdam	47.3	584.1
City 3: Vlissingen / The Hague	45.0	473.9
GDP/capita (PPS)	31,536	34,713
Unemployment (%)	3.3	4.5
Participation rate (%)	66	66
Employment growth, 2000-2007 (% p.a.)	-1.3	1.1
Share of agriculture in total employment (%)	2.1	1.5
Development of agricultural labour, 2000-2009 (% p.a.)	-1.3	-1.3
Number of farms (1000) (2009)	3.2	73.0
Average farm size (ha) (2009)	37.2	26.3
Farms with other gainful activities (% of total farms)	21.9	15.3
Arable farms (% of total farms) (2009)	58.0	15.0
Dairy farms (% of total farms) (2009)	5.5	25.1
Grazing livestock farms (% of total farms) (2009)	10.1	27.4

Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and Agricultural Census, own adaptation

mussels and oysters stretches far abroad. The character of the countryside is, to a large extent, determined by arable farms. As a tourist destination, the sunny beaches are popular, especially among German tourists. Zeeland also attracts water sporters, cyclists and hikers. In some areas, the population can be two to four times higher during high summer season.

As described, the Netherlands has one national RDP, which does not distinguish specific objectives for the individual provinces. Hence the RDP objectives for Zeeland are the same as the national objectives: to enhance the quality of life in rural areas and to improve the vitality and sustainability of the agricultural sector. The province of Zeeland has integrated the rural development measures for which it is responsible in the 'Multiannual program for the rural area'. This program stresses the importance of maintaining the specific amenities of the landscape, whilst broadening the economic basis of the region. The economy of the province should become less dependent on agriculture, without losing the specific qualities often connected to the agricultural sector. According to this program, the rural development objectives for Zeeland for the period 2007-2013 are (1) improving the socio-cultural dynamics (involvement of the citizens); (2) facilitating vital economic dynamics (strike the right balance between a declining agricultural sector and maintaining the quality of the rural area); and (3) maintaining and strengthening the quality of the natural environment of Zeeland.

As we only had data on the absorption of the EAFRD budget in the period 2007-2009 for a few measures of axes 1 and 2 (Table 4), while data for the total budget 2007-2013 in Zeeland for these measures are lacking, no statements can be made about the progress of these measures. The budget for the measures of axes 3 and 4, as well as measures 125 and 216, is managed by the province. For these measures, it appears that in the years 2007-2009 the uptake of the EAFRD budget was rather moderate for measures 125, 311, 312 and 41, while it was more substantial for measures 313, 321, 322 and 323. This last group of measures focuses on tourism activities, basic services, village renewal and rural heritage, measures which fit rather well into the rural development needs in Zeeland. For a few measures (216, 341, 421 and 431), no budget has been spent in the years 2007-2009. As no need is felt in the province to use the measures 341, 421 and 431, it is not unlikely that the reserved budgets will be shifted towards other measures. In the interpretation of the uptake of the budget, it should be taken into account that the province could not start with selecting projects for funding at January 1, 2007, but had to wait on approval by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture till March 2008. Despite this initial delay, much progress has been made since. In the autumn of 2010, the province had to close the call for tenders for RDP projects as they had received so many applications for EAFRD funding, that the total EAFRD budget for the whole programming period can easily be spent.

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Table 4: Absorption of the EAFRD budget 2007-2009 in Zeeland

Measure	Realization (euro)	2007-2009	As % of total budget 2007-2013
111 Vocational training and information actions		46,954	n.a.
114 Use of advisory services		n.a.	n.a.
121 Modernisation of agricultural holdings		293,810	n.a.
124 Cooperation for development of new products		n.a.	n.a.
125 Infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry		480,351	10
132 Participation of farmers in food quality schemes		55,788	n.a.
212 Payments to farmers in other areas with handicaps		25,380	n.a.
214 Agri-environment payments		997,000	n.a.
216 Non-productive investments		0	0
221 First afforestation of agricultural land		n.a.	n.a.
311 Diversification into non-agricultural activities		83,998	12
312 Business creation and development		94,156	19
313 Encouragement of tourism activities		1378,228	39
321 Basic services for the economy and rural population		1172,521	60
322 Village renewal and development		296,690	33
323 Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage		1960,023	47
341 Skills acquisition, animation and implementation of local development strategies		0	0
41 Implementing local development strategies		505,123	13
421 Implementing cooperation projects		0	0
431 Running the local action group		0	0

Source: National Payment Service and Government Service for Land and Water Management in The Netherlands, own adaptation

Quantitative data on the results and impacts of the RDP measures are not available. The interviewed persons indicated that the landscape and quality of life have been improved in qualitative terms by the RDP, mainly due to the realization of arable strips with flowers, the restoration of farm barns and yards, tourist infrastructure and multifunctional centers. The upgraded landscape attracts tourists, who contribute to economic and employment development, whereas the multifunctional centres act as a market place at which new ideas for economic cooperation may originate. It has to be emphasized that these projects fit in the long tourist tradition in Zeeland as well as the need to maintain or improve the supply of basic services in rural areas. In addition, the economic diversification has been boosted, mainly by the support for care farms and minicamp sites at farms. Due to this diversification, employment at the involved farms can be maintained. Finally, the interviewed persons hardly had any idea of the impact of the measures of axis 1 on the development of the agricultural sector, which are implemented at national level. Farmers have to apply for funds at the National Payment Service and communication between this service and the provincial actors appears to be rather weak.

Actors participate in the RDP measures as this generates funds for their projects. Most of the projects would also have been conducted without EAFRD financing, but often at a smaller scale, in a sober way or at a smaller pace. A main reason for non-participation is that the administrative burden, especially after the project has been granted, is too large relative to the subsidies received.

There is hardly any interaction between the RDP and other EU policies. On the other hand, often EAFRD funding is combined with national policies. This means that many rural

development projects are supported by EAFRD funds, national cofinancing and other national funds.

Interviewees appreciated the easy communication and the openness of the province of Zeeland, which stimulates the implementation of the measures of axes 3 and 4 of the RDP. On the contrary, the inaccessibility of the National Payment Service on the implementation of most of the measures of axes 1 and 2 provoked the wish to shift the implementation of these measures to the provincial level. Although the implementation of the measures of axes 3 and 4 is at the provincial level, its administrative control is at the Government Service for Land and Water Management. This control is rather expensive (10,000 euro per project) and has to be paid by the province. Moreover, the Service is used to control large scale projects and is not very suitable for the assessment of small projects. These disadvantages give rise to the wish to shift the administrative control to the provincial level. In addition, the interviewed persons put forward that the requirement of 50% national cofinancing for each project is not always feasible and that it should be permitted to select projects with EAFRD and private funding only. Further, the participation in measures of axes 1 is discouraged by the fact that the calls for tender are only periodically opened for six weeks at unknown times. Participation and preparation of projects would be enforced if these calls for tender were announced in advance. On the other hand, projects for measures in axes 3 and 4 are only assessed at June 15 and December 1. Here it could be wondered why the calls are not permanently open.

## **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper we have made a comparative analysis of evaluation methods of rural development policy in order to identify an alternative approach to the CMEF for the evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy in the programming period 2007-2013. From this comparison the mixed case study approach emerged as a promising alternative. We have tested this approach for the midterm evaluation of the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2009 in the Dutch NUTS2 region of Zeeland. This testing gives rise to several considerations, which are discussed below.

An evaluation in a case study region requires regional data on budget spent (inputs) and results (outputs). Due to the complex way of implementation of the Dutch RDP, for a number of rural development measures such data were not available. This hampers the possibility to gain insight into the effectiveness of the measures concerned. The same problems would, however, have been faced when applying the CMEF at regional level.

We have been surprised by the amount of information six interviews can provide on the performance of the programme. In combination with the analysis of inputs and outputs of the measures, these six interviews turned out to be sufficient to get a good overview of the performance of the RDP. The fact that the province of Zeeland is quite small and homogeneous may have helped in this respect. A larger and more heterogeneous region might require more interviews. This is something we would like to test in our next case study in the region of Gelderland, which is nearly twice the size of Zeeland and has a more diverse countryside.

The two stages in the mixed case study approach of analysis of secondary data and in-depth interviews appear to complement each other in a very useful way. Whereas the first stage provided information about what happened, the second stage deepened the understanding of how and why it happened. In particular, the interviews yielded useful insights into processes within the region, like the cooperation of the actors, the attitude towards the RDP and the difficulties experienced due to the complex organization of the Dutch RDP. These issues deserve attention in any recommendations about improvements of the RDP, but would likely have been missed when applying the CMEF. The first results of testing the mixed case study approach in Zeeland are promising and ask for testing in other case study regions as well. When experiences with the mixed case study approach in other regions are also satisfying, then it could be considered to use it EU wide as an alternative to the CMEF.

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