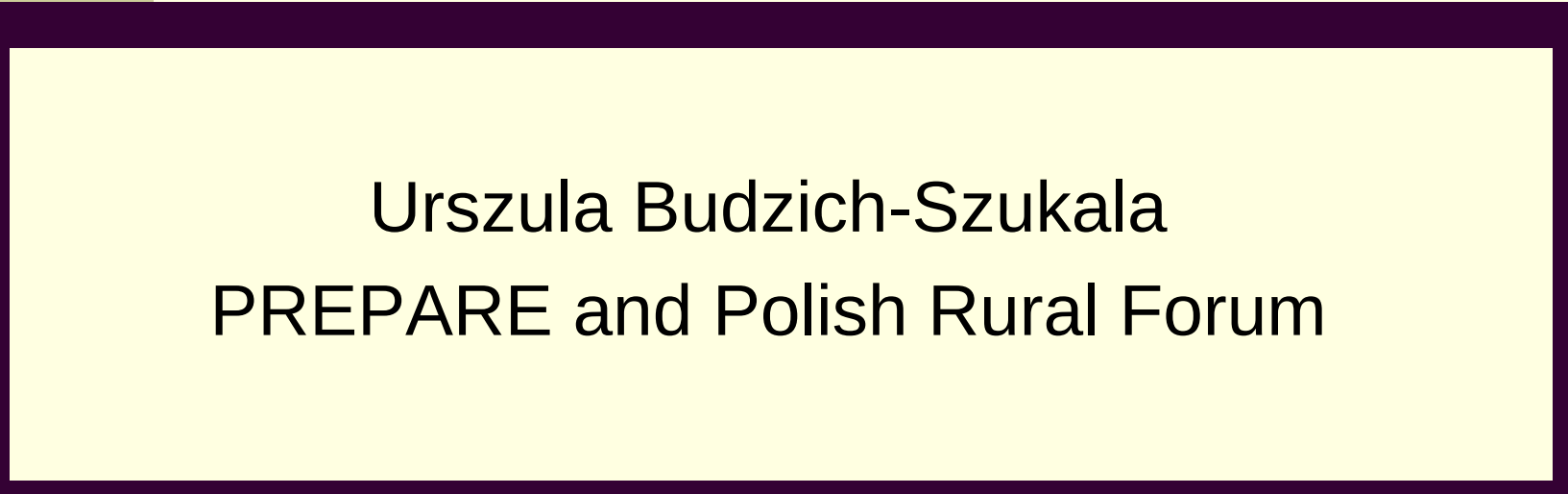




Bottom-up rural development: Lessons learned from the Leader experience in Poland



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Outline of presentation

- „Bottom-up rural development” – what does it mean?
- The situation in rural areas in Poland
- The LEADER approach and its implementation in the New Member States
- The bottom-up approach in Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013
- Lessons learnt

Bottom-up rural development

- Was practiced long before the name was invented (e.g. in the Scandinavian countries)
- Attention was drawn to it when „traditional” rural development methods proved ineffective
- Empirical studies showed key ingredients of success
- European Commission decided to introduce this approach on a „pilot” basis – as the Community Initiative LEADER

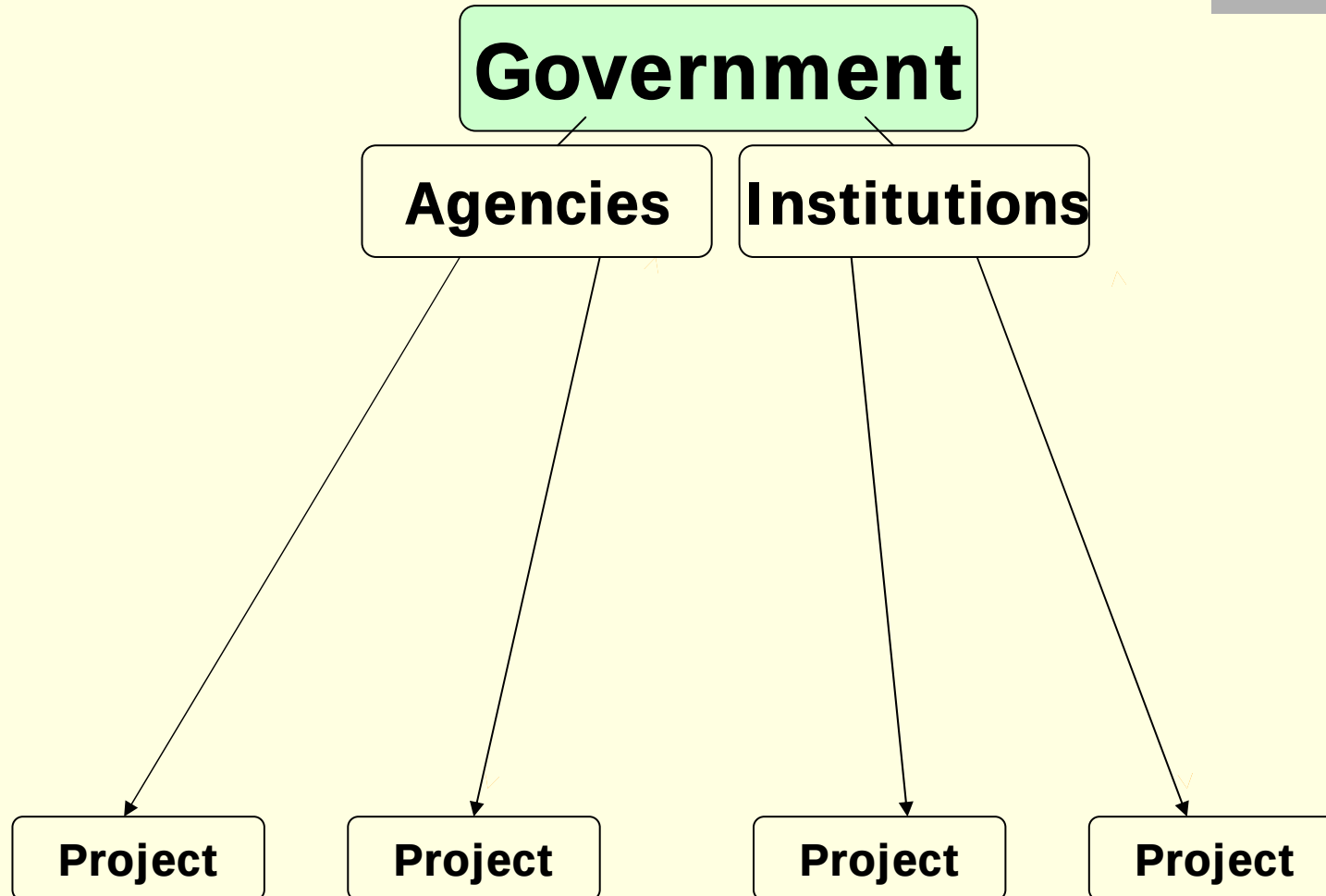
What works in rural development? (1)

- Support of an area, not of individual projects (territorial approach)
- As wide as possible group of local stakeholders involved in the initiation of projects and decision-making (bottom-up approach)
- Comprehensive view of problems, not sector by sector (integrated approach)
- Joint responsibility and partnership (Local Action Group, LAG)

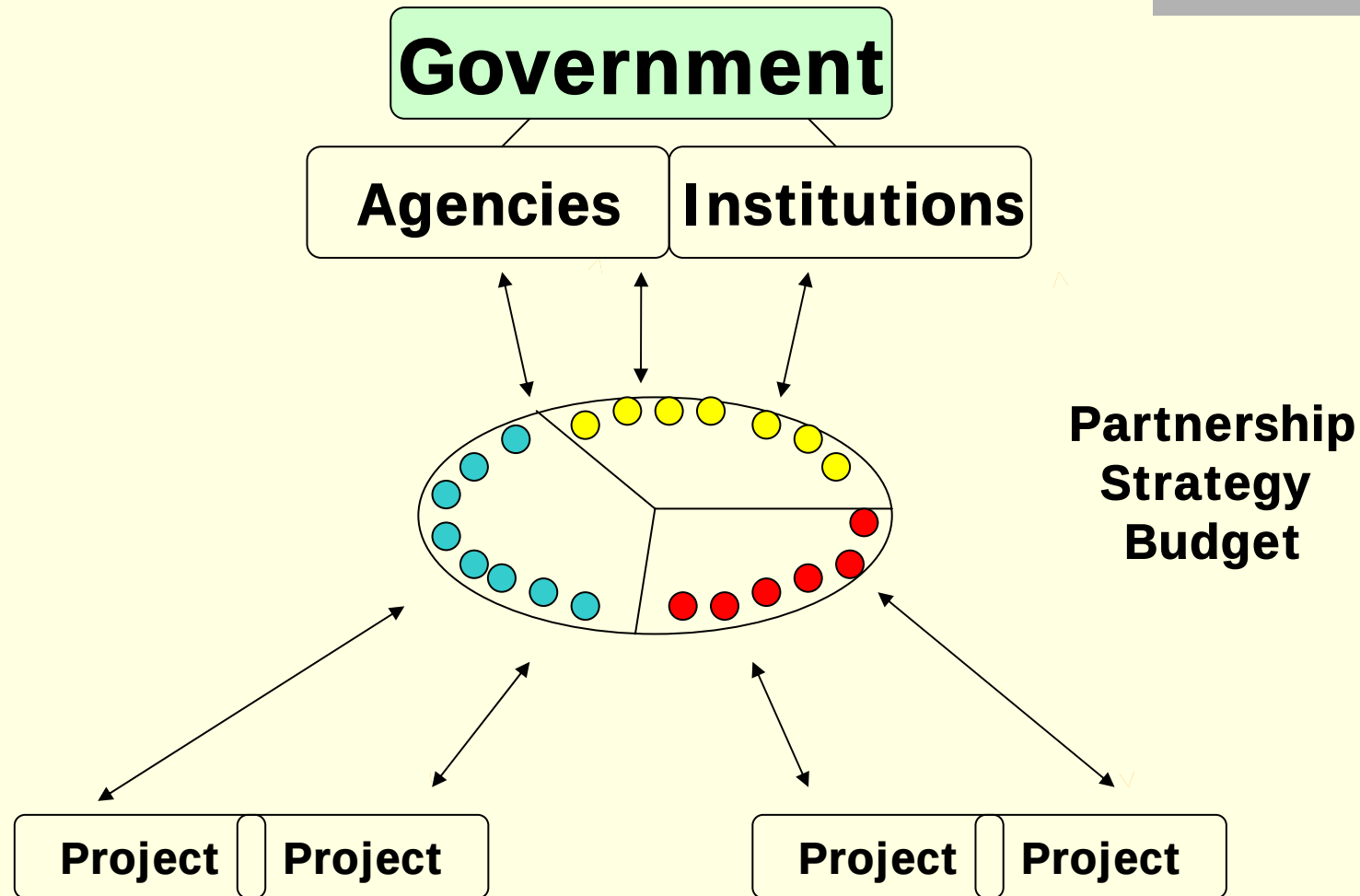
What works in rural development? (2)

- Innovation (within the area) – readiness to undertake risks and make mistakes
- Decentralisation of decision-making and financial management to the local level (as far as possible)
- Cooperation between areas at national and trans-national level, networking

Traditional versus bottom-up approach to rural development (1)



Traditional versus bottom-up approach to rural development (2)



Poland – basic economic indicators

	2003-2004	2006-2007
GDP growth	+5%	+6.1%
Unemployment	20%	14%
Exchange rate	1 EUR = 4.5 PLN	1 EUR = 3.8 PLN
Agri-food exports in M EUR	4 000	8 300
Agri-food trade balance	+454	+2 117

Key challenges (1)

- Fragmented farms (officially 1.5 million, but only about 300.000 draw significant income from agricultural production) and few non-farming job opportunities
- Economic restructuring resulted in a high rise of rural unemployment, including „hidden” unemployment (estimated 1 million people)
- Lower quality of life in rural areas (e.g. lack of infrastructure)

Key challenges (2)

- Low level of education (4% of rural inhabitants have university education, 13% in urban areas)
- But: in the educational boom of the past 15 years, aspirations of young people grow more quickly in rural areas
- Educational gap starts already at pre-school level (% of children aged 3-6 in pre-school education is 18 in rural, 45 in urban areas)
- High unemployment affects mainly young people, also in rural areas

Rural civil society



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- Relatively weak, but growing in strength
 - Stronger than urban in some types of activities (e.g. protection of small schools)
 - Differing views about social capital in rural versus urban areas
 - Not many „formal” NGOs active in rural areas (ca. 20% of all NGOs)
 - Numerous groups that don't meet formal NGO criteria but have the same function

Leader-type activities in Poland

- Started already in early 1990s (one of the oldest – Dolina Strugu)
- Since 2000 – conscious efforts to create local partnerships of the Leader type (with support of the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation)
- Even before accession – very strong interest of rural civil societies in the Leader approach in the EU

Preparatory activities



- A comprehensive programme was designed to prepare rural communities for Leader, involving:
 - Training of trainers
 - Training of local partnership animators
 - Survey of rural partnerships, creation of data base and website, discussion forum
 - Information meetings in all regions
 - Training of journalists
- Result: 250 applications received in the first Leader pilot measure call for proposals

Leader in Poland 2004-2006

- Funding: 18.75 M EUR
- Two schemes: (1) „capacity building” at LAG level and (2) implementation of strategies
- In scheme (1) there were over 170 initiatives, could finance training and preparation of strategies (action plans)
- In scheme (2) there are 150 LAGs covering over 30% of Poland's area; one LAG can get less than EUR 200.000
- Programme management at national level

Differences between EU-15 and New Member States

- Less money available to LAGs
- Short time for implementation, long delays at the start (learning phase)
- All LAGs must have a legal entity from the beginning
- Difficulties with pre-financing
- In most NMS, LAGs were not allowed to select projects for financing in the pilot phase
- Not many „horizontal” activities, networks started late and have a very limited mandate

Signs of success

- Numerous case studies, but not much in terms of national statistics
- National authorities are slowly adopting a more favourable attitude to Leader
- Regional authorities – very positive in many regions (provide funding for start-ups)
- Strong networking activities at regional level, increasingly at national level
- Positive attitude of LAGs towards learning and cooperation (e.g. participation at conferences, discussion forum)

Leader in 2007-2013

- Leader is no longer a „measure” (or Initiative), but an axis – recognition of the methodological value of Leader
- Fewer differences between „old” and „new” member states
- National Rural Development Networks – wider opportunities for exchange

Hopes for Leader in 2007-2013

- There will be more funding and broader scope (but in most NMS Leader will only cover objectives of Axis 3)
- LAGs will be able to select projects (with an unknown degree of autonomy); in Poland – small projects outside measures selected in Axis 3 are possible
- Some mistakes made in 2004-2006 due to lack of experience will be corrected (e.g. legal form of LAG, eligibility of partners etc.)

PREPARE – a European network



- Aim: to strengthen civil society and promote transnational cooperation in rural development
- National partners in: Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia
- Recent focus: Western Balkans, Ukraine and Turkey
- Memorandum of Understanding with the SWG

Lessons learnt (1)



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- Bottom-up approach to rural development is possible and can be very effective in transition countries
 - Very positive reaction from the rural civil society, at national as well as local level – Leader seen as a chance to make a change in rural areas
 - Important role of governments, not only at national, but also at regional and local level

Lessons learnt (2)



- Importance of preparatory activities (both to stimulate interest and to help create strong partnerships)
- Cooperation and networking – a valuable method to speed up the process, both at national and local level
- Need for flexibility at programming level (if we try to foresee too much, we lose the bottom-up and innovative character)
- Need for promotion and reaching a wider public