

LEADER in the Czech Republic and the farming sector

LEADER v České republice a sektor zemědělství

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Abstract: The paper addresses the LEADER approach in the Czech Republic. Using documentary research and content analysis of the appropriate documents and the Local Action Groups information sheets, the paper firstly outlines the evolution of the LEADER approach in the Czech Republic (the paper points out the difference in understanding LEADER in the EU /focusing on capacity building and the use of intangible forms of capital/ and in the Czech Republic EU /focusing on investments/). The paper also analyses the participation of farmers and the farming related actors in the LEADER approach (approx. 30% of local action groups are composed by those actors, however, they mostly do not aim /similarly like non-farming actors/ at developing partnership but want to achieve the investments into production; that is why the Czech local action groups are rather quasi-partnerships; it is also reflected in a very low number of strategies aiming at the “adding value to local products” which is the closest to farmers /but it is the less opted theme: only 6% of projects/). The paper ends with the analysis of projects implemented under the LEADER scheme where the farmers participate. It shows that more than the integrated strategies, the Czech local action groups prefer the strategies of the multi-sector type. The paper also points out that the publicly available information about the activities of the local action groups is not sufficient, although the groups are funded from the public budgets. This fact makes the analysis more difficult as for the scientific merit but also contradicts the principles of democratic governance.

Key words: LEADER approach in the EU and in the Czech Republic, farmers in the LEADER approach, local action groups, governance

Abstrakt: Článek je zaměřen na analýzu přístupu LEADER v ČR. Na základě studia dokumentů a obsahové analýzy příslušných dokumentů a informačních karet místních akčních skupin (1) ukazuje vývoj přístupu LEADER v ČR (zde je patrný rozdíl v chápání přístupu LEADER v EU /zaměření na utváření kapacit a využití nehmotatelných forem kapitálu/ a v ČR /zaměření na investice/), (2) přibližuje participaci zemědělců a navazujících aktérů v přístupu LEADER (cca 30 % místních akčních skupin má tyto aktéry, kteří však ve většině případů neusilují /podobně jako ostatní nezemědělské aktéři/ o naplňování principu partnerství, ale o investice do výroby, proto mohou být takové místní akční skupiny považovány za kvazi-partnerství, což se následně odráží i ve velmi nízkém počtu strategií vytvořených v tématu „zhodnocení místní produkce“, jež je nejbližší k zemědělcům /ale jedná se o nejméně volené téma: pouze 6 % ze všech zvolných témat/) a (3) končí analýzou projektů v rámci LEADER, na nichž participovali zemědělci, kde ukazuje, že spíše než s integrovanými strategiemi máme co do činění s vícesektorovým přístupem. Článek též upozorňuje na neúplnost veřejně dostupných informací o činnostech místních akčních skupin, které jsou však financovány z veřejných rozpočtů. Tento fakt nejen že ztěžuje analýzu jejich činnosti z vědeckého pohledu, ale je v rozporu i s principy demokratického spravování.

Klíčová slova: přístup LEADER v EU a ČR, zemědělci v přístupu LEADER, místní akční skupiny, správa

This text develops the ideas and thoughts, which were already published in the paper named “Agriculture and the farming related activities: their actors and position in the LEADER approach” (Lošťák, Hudečková 2008).

The reasons of addressing the LEADER approach were related, as the mentioned paper also documents, to several circumstances. First, LEADER was since its beginning in 1991 (starting as the Communitary

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Initiative) the most pronounced attempt to introduce the integrated approach (or at least the approach ranging through several sectors of the economy because of the participation of farming and non-farming actors) into rural development observing the principle of sustainability. Second, LEADER was also the endeavour to incorporate the principles of endogenous development and the partnership into rural development (in this sense, LEADER means the cooperation of the non-hierarchical type to support and to enhance the endogenous potentials of the rural areas). Finally yet importantly, for the programming period 2007–2013, there were adopted new rural development guidelines (The Council of the European Union 2006) known as the “Council Decision of 20th February 2006 on the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (programming period 2007 to 2013).” They developed two fundamental documents for rural development in the EU for the period 2007–2013. The first document is known as the “Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 of September 20, 2005, on the support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development” (The Council of the European Union 2005a). The second document is the “Council Regulation (EC) No 1290/2005 of 21st June 2005 on the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy” (The Council of the European Union 2005b). The guidelines together with both mentioned Council Regulations form the fundamental institutional frames for the EU Member States to develop their national strategy plans of rural development and the national rural development programmes as the tools of implementing the national strategy plans. The new documents are in accordance with other EU priorities reflecting not only the Common Agricultural Policy and its contemporary modifications but also the EU policy of economic and social cohesion (regional policy) related to the Lisbon Strategy emphasizing economic growth, employment, and innovations.

When looking at the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), everybody can see that the original Community initiative LEADER is now one of the key elements of this fund and consequently of the rural development programmes. It is because the LEADER approach in the form of the Axis 4 “LEADER” is transversal through three thematic axes in the EAFRD (Axis 1: “Improving the Competitiveness of the Agricultural and Forestry Sector”; Axis 2: “Improving the Environment and the Countryside”; Axis 3: “The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy”). It means that LEADER does not bring any new theme to rural development but it brings the way (approach)

how to develop the countryside with regard to the agricultural and forestry sector, environment and quality of life in the countryside.

The LEADER approach means that local development potential should be increased through local initiatives (institutionalized in the Local Action Groups – LAG). These groups utilize a relatively high degree of various intangible forms of capital. The most important for the LAGs (but also the most difficult to measure) is social capital. This fact is often referred to when addressing the rural development policy and the Common Agricultural Policy in the sense of their evaluation (Doucha, Foltýn 2008). However, social capital is crucial for LEADER, since through the established networks, there are supported also other forms of intangible capital such as the intellectual (Tichá 2008), human (Soukup 2007) or cultural capital (Lošťák 2006; Lošťák 2007). That is also why LEADER was recently studied as for the form of initialization of the forms of knowledge in rural development (Koutsouris 2008, Dargan, Sucksmisth 2008). Because the previous paper of the authors of this text (Lošťák, Hudečková 2008) had challenged the Czech scientific community to study more rural development from the point of view of LEADER approach (compared to the international milieu, this area of study is underdeveloped though it is very important), this text reflects this challenge and prolongs it as well.

GOALS AND METHODS USED

Prior to the adaptation of the strategic documents for rural development in 2007–2013, the approach typical for LEADER was intensively discussed. Especially the question about the incorporation of the LEADER type approach into all measures (axes) of the newly formed policy of rural development in 2007–2013 was addressed (Bryden 2006). This intensive political and scientific discourse is also the reason why the authors of this text decided to continue the thoughts they have already outlined in the paper “Agriculture and the farming related activities: their actors and position in the LEADER approach” (Lošťák, Hudečková 2008). The aim of the present paper is to look at the LEADER approach (since it is now one of the key elements of the EU Common Agricultural Policy) from the point of view of the Czech experience with introducing LEADER into the Czech Republic and to confront this experience with the EU context. Generally, this paper also contributes to the understanding of the adaptation of the Czech agrarian sector in the conditions of the EU in the terms of rural development

governance, since LEADER is also a powerful tool of this governance (Böcher 2008).

The outlined general goal of this paper is conceptualized in the following concrete goals:

- (1) To outline the tendencies in the evolution of implementing LEADER Community Initiative¹ in the Czech Republic;
- (2) To analyze the situation in implementation of this initiative with the participation of farming/forestry and the farming/forestry related actors in the Czech Republic;
- (3) To compare the analysis of the Czech situation with the experience with LEADER in the old EU Member States that participated in this initiative in its earlier phases (LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER+).

The main method used to achieve the outlined goals was documentary study. This method is often used in social sciences when the issue under investigation is not developed enough (Velký sociologický slovník 1996). LEADER in the Czech Republic is such a case as it has been already stated several times. Documentary research therefore gives the first insights into the studied questions. It also combines the qualitative (based on the grounded theory) and quantitative (based on numerical calculations) approaches. It gives not only the understanding of the studied phenomena and increases the validity (which is the goal of the qualitative approach /Previte et al. 2007; Zagata 2007/) but also through collecting data it helps to increase the reliability and has some features of the quantitative approach which helps to explain the complex problems using various data (Brabenec, Nešetřilová 2007).

Because of the short time of the LEADER implementation in the Czech Republic, the literature based on the profound theoretical background and a sound scientific research methodology with innovative findings addressing LEADER almost does not exist. The exceptions are the papers addressing other issues in the countryside, which somehow refer (not explicitly, but tacitly touching some principles of LEADER although not mentioning this approach) to LEADER (e.g. Škorecová, Farkašová 2007; Hubík

2007). On the other hand, there are plenty of materials about LEADER which are of the popular nature. However, they mostly only reword what is already known from the official documents or from scientific works looking variously (e.g. not as their prime interest) at LEADER. That is why the publicly accessible documents dealing with LEADER in the Czech Republic in the previous programming period (2004–2006) and in the contemporary programming period (2007–2013) were studied. The most important documents for the Czech context are: the Strategy of Regional Development, the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture, the Rural Development Programme, the National Strategy Plan of Rural Development of the Czech Republic, the Horizontal Rural Development Plan and other documents published by the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry for Regional Development. As for the international context, the source documents were published in the Leader+ Magazine and in the pre-reviewed scientific journals.

The analyses also used the information available at the web pages about LEADER+ program in the Czech Republic (<http://leader.isu.cz>). Although the information there is not the most accurate and the most comprehensible, it is, for sure, the most up to date information since the upgrading was done in October 2007 when the start of any new LEADER+ activity was not possible due to the end of the programming period. This web page contains the information about the activities of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic, which enabled to conduct the research related to the second concrete task of this paper.

Tendencies of the Community initiative LEADER evolution in the Czech Republic

Since May 2004 when the Czech Republic together with other 9 countries became the EU member, there has been started the funding supporting the measure in rural development known as LEADER+, although only as the pilot case². The support consisted in co-financing from the Guidance section of the European

¹Although LEADER is not any more the Community Initiative, the data about the current situation with the LEADER axis in the Rural Development Programme do not exist yet due to the short time since the start of the Programme implementation. That is why the object analyzed in this paper is LEADER as the Community Initiative. However, it will be very useful to analyze the LEADER axis later and to compare it with the achievement of the LEADER initiative. Such analytical work would demonstrate what institutional setting was more favourable in the terms of rural development (the Community Initiative till 2007 or solely the EU fund and the LEADER as its axis from 2007).

²While the Community initiatives Equal and Interreg were in 2004–2006 fully supported by the EU funding, the initiatives LEADER and Urban were only of the pilot nature.

Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF) under the Objective 1 of the EU policy of economic and social cohesion.

The preparation for this utilization had already started in 2002 through the seminars and workshops when the Phare programme was used (this programme was also used to prepare the candidate countries for the EU membership in the terms of the knowledge and skills related to the work of the EU institutional frameworks). In 2004, LEADER+ started under the sub-measure of the pilot nature in the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture (the sub-measure 2.1.4 "Rural development – sub-measure of LEADER+ type"). During the present programming period 2007–2013, LEADER is the Axis 4 in the Rural Development Programme. At the same time, also the financial instrument was changed. The Guidance section of the EAGGF was transformed into the new EU financial instrument: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This fund does not belong any more among structural funds which finance the policy of economic and social cohesion within the EU. The EAFRD finances rural development considered as the second pillar in the Common Agricultural Policy. However, since the countryside and rural development is also in the focus of the EU cohesion policy, it was necessary to make a strict delineation between operational programmes co-funded from the structural funds or the Cohesion Fund and the Rural Development Programme (funded from the EAFRD) in the terms of eligible payments (what can be financed from which fund and through what programme) and the eligible applicants of the appropriate funds (who can apply for the support under what programme and fund).

In 2004–2006, the LEADER approach was implemented under the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture. Its managing body was the Ministry of Agriculture. Because the pivot actors within LEADER are the Local Action Groups (LAG)³, it is useful to show their structure. When searching the data about the LAGs, the information about some of them in public sources (like internet) was not complete and was old-dated. It is also an interesting finding since many LAGs are co-financed from public budgets. As such, the public must have rights to know about the LAGs activities, structure etc. as much as possible. However, the transparency and public accountability of some LAGs is

far from the ideal needed for the democratic society. In this way, some of the Czech LAGs mismatch the original ideas behind the LAGs as they were formed in the EU context.

Because some of associations active in rural development in 2004 were already typical by the features of LAGs and they incorporated these features in their activities to such a degree that they simply formally transformed themselves into the LAGs, the vast number of the emerging LAGs (together with those which were transformed from the previous associations) can be distinguished into four groups (based on the delineation done by Šulák 2006):

- LAGs supported in the frame of LEADER+ (under the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture 2004–2006) which focused on the development of strategies of the integrated development of the territory they operated. These LAGs developed the grant schemes to support projects submitted under these schemes (in 2004–2006, out of 30 LAGs' applicants for this kind of support only 10 were selected to operate as real LAGs under the EU LEADER+ scheme). The selected 10 LAGs implemented 309 projects.
- LAGs of the type of other local partnerships. They were oriented towards capacity building. They were also supported under the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture (in 2004 there were supported 33 LAGs of this type; in 2005 there were supported 33 LAGs, and in 2006 there were supported 16 LAGs). In total, in 2004–2006 83 LAGs with projects on capacity building were supported under this scheme.
- LAGs supported by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture within the Czech funded programme the "Leader Czech Republic". They included those LAGs which, basing their strategies on the integrated development of the territory in which they operated, submitted the proposals for the grant schemes which were transformed into the individual project grants (in 2004, 16 LAGs of this type were supported; in 2005, 21 LAGs of this type were supported; in 2006, 23 LAGs of this type were supported; these LAGs represented about 40% of all LAGs-applicants). In total, in 2004–2006 34 LAGs were supported (because of the annual procedure, some LAGs were involved for several years at a yearly basis – it accounts for the numbers in years 2004, 2005 and 2006 being not equal to 34 LAGs). Under this

³Local Action Group is a legal entity (of public beneficiary association type, civic association or interest group of legal entities), which consists of more actors operating in public and private sectors. There were about 130 LAGs in the Czech Republic in 2006 and about 150 in 2007. Although this paper presents their structure, the data about the Czech LAGs available through internet are not completely reliable and comprehensible.

scheme, 284 projects were supported in 2004–2007 (130 farming related projects and 121 municipality related projects).

- LAGs supported by the Czech Ministry of Regional Development in the frame of the Programme for Rural Renewal (it is Czech funded programme aiming at rural development). Within the Programme for Rural Renewal, there was the measure No 7: Integrated projects of small rural regions (in Czech called micro-regions) which included the sub-measure “Pilot Leader programme”. This measure was implemented since 1998. In 2003, 657 applications were registered for the whole measure No. 7 within the Programme of Rural Renewal (out of them, 88 for the Leader programme for integrated projects of small rural regions), in 2004, there were registered 892 applications in this measure (out of them 91 for the Leader programme for integrated projects of small rural regions)⁴. This measure was cancelled after the Czech accession into the EU.

Since 2007, the LEADER is implemented in two ways: as the EU LEADER approach and as the Czech Leader. The main stream prolongs the former LEADER+ Community Initiative which is now transformed into the Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme (managed by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture and funded by the EAFRD). There are three measures in the Axis 4 LEADER: (1) Local Action Group, (2) Implementation of Local Development Strategies, (3) Implementation of the Projects of Cooperation.

The first measure in the axis LEADER named “Local Action Group” includes the support for local action groups which will in accordance with the LEADER principles guarantee the implementation of their Strategic Plan LEADER. The support for these LAGs is provided for their operation, administration and extension related to the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The selection of LAGs will be done in two calls (the end of 2007 and in 2008) for the whole period of 2007–2013. This measure includes maximum 18% of the funding for the whole Axis 4. In 2007, there were already been selected 48 LAGs (out of 99 LAGs eligible applicants).

The second measure in the axis LEADER “Implementation of Local Development Strategies” supports the very implementation of the projects and actions. They have to be in accordance with the Strategic Plan LEADER of the Local Action Group and with the conditions of this measure within the Rural Development Programme. The selection of the

eligible projects and actions done by the local action group must be organized at least once in a year. This measure includes minimum 72% of funding for the whole Axis 4.

The third measure “Implementation of the Projects of Cooperation” supports the projects of cooperation among LAGs within one EU member state or the transnational cooperation. The reason of this measure is to use the best practices to support innovative approaches and knowledge transfer. In such a way, it contributes to the achievement of the goal to develop and to promote the cooperation and the best results of the projects. The projects for this measure will be selected once a year. This measure includes 10% of funding for the whole Axis 4.

The programme Leader Czech Republic (as the second way of the LEADER in the Czech Republic, it is financed from the Czech national budget through the Ministry of Agriculture) works as a supplementary source of financing for those LAGs which were not selected in the first (and the only ones) two calls for the support under the first two measures of the Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme. This national form of the support will be more of the investment type support (as it used to be in the past) and as such, it will supply more the non-investment oriented measures in the EU LEADER approach.

The results of the Local Action Groups operation in the Czech Republic suggest (Kroupová, Červená 2007) that they function as the service and coordination organization for the so-called institutionalized communication in the governance of the development of their areas. Many of the Czech LAGs do not have enough experts and experienced members for the elaboration of strategies and concrete projects. That is why for instance in 2004–2006, some of the EU funded LAGs submitted the development strategies elaborated by the external advisory services not related to the higher education bodies. As the content analysis proved (Lošťák 2007), the quality of such strategies was much worse than the strategies developed by the experienced LAGs members in collaboration with universities focusing on rural development (Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague, Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry in Brno, South Bohemian University in České Budějovice). The same problem concerned also the concrete projects. Because the extension is often implemented through external companies for which the main goal is the profit, it suggests that some of the LAGs do not use fully the capacities of the re-

⁴The information is based on the web page of the Programme for Rural Renewal <http://www.isu.cz/pov/archiv.asp>. The web was cited on November 11, 2007.

gion they operate in. Instead of being the example of endogenous development (Ray 2000), some of LAGs rely on external services. Moreover, as this text has already indicated, since the Czech Leader is more of investment nature it mismatches the understanding of the LEADER in the EU context which is of the capacity building and social capital nature (Shucksmith 2000). Such understanding might also account for relying more on external services than on the knowledge and skills of the local people (incl. those with particular experience).

It is interesting that the LEADER+ Observatory founded by the European Commission developed the tool to search for the partners for international cooperation. Leader+ Magazine (No. 3, published in 2005) outlined the numbers of the offers of partnership according to the target country. The Czech Republic was addressed by 39 offers to cooperate from the foreign LAGs. Together with Romania and Hungary, the Czech Republic is within the group of the countries with about half of the offers to cooperate of the most sought countries such as France, Spain, Germany and Italy (about 80–90 offers to cooperate from abroad). The Czech Republic is listed as the 18th out of 29 countries. The lowest amount of offers was addressed to Turkey (29), Cyprus and Malta (32). Of course, the large the country, the more offers to cooperate from abroad.

The situation in implementing the integrated strategies of rural areas through LEADER+ and the LEADER Czech Republic with the particular focus on farming and the farming related activities

It is very difficult to answer unambiguously how far the farmers and the farming related actors participate in the LAGs and projects funded by LEADER. The official information about this issue is very limited in its scope and does not exist in a comprehensible form.

The research of Kroupová and Červená (Kroupová, Červená 2007) in the NUTS 3 region *Plzeňský kraj* documents that about 60% of the participants in the regional Local Action Groups are related to economic activities (they are doing business in any sector of economy). Out of these economic actors participating in LAGs, roughly half are the farmers and the farming related actors. It means the farmers and the farming related actors form about 30% of the members of LAGs in this region. This number is similar to the findings from the EU as it will be documented in the next section of this paper. The authors (Kroupová,

Červená 2007) point out that the representatives of LAGs in *Plzeňský kraj* often agree that very often the interest of farmers and farming related actors engaged in LAGs is in investments into machinery and business facilities. It, however, does not comply with the background ideas embedded in the LEADER programme which emphasizes the partnership developed through networks and social capital considered as the tool to enhance the potential of the collective action existing in the locality.

The same findings as for the reason of the farmers to participate in the LAG as in the case of *Plzeňský kraj* might be found in the whole Czech Republic. If looking at the information published in Leader+ Magazine (No. 5 in 2005), there are presented 16 LAGs from the whole Czech Republic. All these presented LAGs were supported through the Ministry of Agriculture (these LAGs will be analyzed in details in the next section). Eleven of these LAGs indicate the involvement of farmers, other LAGs indicate actors both involved in farming and the farming related activities and 2 LAGs are reported as having also partners from the farming related activities. These numbers seem to be high. However, what confirms the findings generated for *Plzeňský kraj* is the fact that only one LAG indicates the principle of partnership in joining together various activities (production, processing and marketing the biomass). The other kinds of the participation of farmers and the farming related actors can be characterized as a “quasi-partnership”. These partnerships are linked through belonging to the locality, not through the partnership in collective activities which would open the possibilities to enhance the local development potential based on the intangible forms of capital.

In April 2007, there was done a sort of a “quick-scan” of the active LAGs. At that time, there were listed 150 LAGs which were active, eventually their founders have just finished their legal origin. Out of this number, 119 LAGs provided the information about their activities.

In October 2007, there were registered 155 LAGs. Every LAG had to fill in the so-called LAG information sheet. This sheet contains the identification data (including the members of the LAG), a short description of the territory, characterization of the territory influencing the strategy of the LAG, its strategic goals, the plan of development, the forms of implementing the partnership and the examples of the implemented projects. However, only 35% of LAGs filled in this sheet. Again, the question how the LAGs contribute to the public accountability and transparency of their activities is on the agenda.

Using the available information (which is not complete and is scattered) about the activities of LAGs (not only the information in the sheets about the LAGs), there was done by the authors of this text the analysis focusing on three issues: (1) strategic theme of the territory development, (2) participation of farmers and farming related actors, (3) the projects supported/non-supported by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic.

The information about the strategic theme under which the LAGs develop their strategy was found among 120 LAGs (77%) of all LAGs. Out of this number, 48.5% of the LAGs applied for the theme “improving the quality of life in rural areas”; 37% applied under the theme “making the best use of natural and cultural resources”; 8.5% of LAGs operated under theme “the use of new know-how and new technologies to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive”, and 6% applied in the theme “adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions”. None of the LAGs in the last mentioned theme, which is obviously the closest to farming and farming related activities, provides the information if the members are also farmers as it might be assumed.

Only two of the available LAGs information sheets provide sound information that their member is also an actor involved in farming. Other 19 LAGs information sheets enable to find this fact looking at other information in the sheet. The other LAGs had the information about the participation of the farmers in other analyzed sources than in the sheet. Out of the total number of LAGs, only 24 can be definitely considered as those whose members are farmers or farming related actors. Out of them, 19 LAGs were supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and were co-funded by the EAGGF, which will be analyzed in the next section. They are the LAGs which have at least somehow completed the LAG information sheet and it means they are active and communicate with the public.

If in October 2007 (the time of writing this paper), there were registered 155 LAGs, the data available

indicate that in 15.5% of the existing LAGs, there are represented farmers and farming related actors. However, this low share can be also the result of the incomplete information. According to other types of information existing in the analyzed papers on LAGs, it can be estimated that about 1/3 of Czech LAGs are those where the farmers and farmer related actors participate.

Analysis of the projects with the participation of farmers and farming related actors supported by LEADER in the Czech Republic (LEADER+ and LEADER Czech Republic)

After the selection of the group of LAGs which elaborated the strategies of integrated development of the territory they operate in and which were supported by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, there were analyzed the information sheets of those LAGs where it was possible to identify the participation of farmers and farming related actors. It means such groups of this type were analyzed which filled in their information sheets (at least partially) and as such they are “live” (really operating), communicate and aim to be publicly accountable and transparent.

There are 19 LAGs of this type (12.25% out of all LAGs), i.e. the LAGs with the participation of farmers or farming related actors which operate under the support of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic and filed in (at least partly) the LAG information sheet. However, three of them did not fill in the part of the sheet which informs about the strategic goals, development plans, forms of implementation of the partnership and the examples of the implemented projects (the only possible data for the analysis were those outlining the identification of the LAG).

The most dominant structure of the partners in the LAGs of the analyzed type is composed of the partners in three areas: entrepreneurship + cluster of municipalities + non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In four cases, this composition is expanded by the individual municipalities. In three cases, there

Table 1. The summarized characteristics of the analyzed Local Action Groups

Characteristics of the LAG area operation	Lowest value	Highest value	Total	Average value
Size (km ²)	111.0	1 490.3	10 104.96	531.84
Number of inhabitants	10 306	87 694	615 208	32 379
Population density (inhabitants/km ²)	29.9	117.0	n/a	60.88
Number of municipalities	13	119	684	36

Source: LEADER information sheets and authors' calculations

are added also schools, twice the representatives of the local self-government (this term is not, however, specified) are added, and sometimes also other bodies participate (like church organizations, protected landscape areas, educational or other interest groups).

The most frequent case is the structure where more of the so-called micro-regions (5 cases) or other forms of clusters of municipalities (5 cases) are involved. Four cases are those where the area of the LAG overlaps with the micro-region the LAG operates in. Three cases are those where the LAG covers also the territory of other region. In two cases, the structure was not possible to be identified.

Five LAGs inform in the LAG information sheet about their international cooperation, four LAGs cooperate with other Czech LAGs. Seven cases only refer to the cooperation within the members of the LAG. The cooperation of the last mentioned "internal LAG's cooperation" is seldom presented as also cooperating with one external partner (mostly the public bodies/organizations are concerned such as universities, the bodies of the territorial and business self-government).

Concerning the geographic description, the LAGs in the border regions prevail over those operating in the inland regions. The largest number of the analyzed LAGs is located in the *Jihočeský kraj* – South Bohemia (6 cases), one case out of this number extends also into the *Plzeňský kraj* (West Bohemia), another case extends both into the *Vysočina kraj* (South-West Moravia) and the *Středočeský kraj* (Central Bohemia), the third case operates both in the *Vysočina kraj* (South-West Moravia) and the *Jihomoravský kraj* (South-East Moravia). Three cases of the analyzed LAGs operate in the *Zlínský kraj* (Central-East Moravia) and 3 cases in the *Moravskoslezský kraj* (North-East Moravia). Two cases of LAGs operate in the *Plzeňský kraj* (West Bohemia), two LAGs in the *Liberecký kraj* (North Bohemia) and two in the *Středočeský kraj* (Central Bohemia). One LAG operates in the territory of three NUTS 3 regions: the *Karlovarský kraj*, the *Plzeňský kraj* and the *Ústecký kraj* (North-West Bohemia).

The largest group of the analyzed LAGs (6 cases) is composed by those LAGs which succeeded in the support only from the programme LEADER Czech Republic (some of them even point out that it was the reason for setting up the LAG). As the text pointed out earlier, it was also the programme with more farmers' projects. The group of LAGs which combines the support from the LEADER Czech Republic with the Programme of Rural Renewal is represented by 3 LAGs. The same number is found also among the LAGs which combine the LEADER Czech Republic

with other programmes (the pre-accession funds and the programmes or the support from the regional government). A minority of the cases are those where the analyzed groups (with farmers and farming related actors in the LAG) succeeded in LEADER+. Even they mostly combine their support with the LEADER Czech Republic (4 cases), while the sole support from LEADER+ is reported only in one case. Generally it is obvious from the analysis that the LAGs which are more experienced in this scheme (e.g. they have been supported by the LEADER type schemes for a longer time and they use the more available sources to fund their activities) have also more developed (filled in) the information sheet in the terms of their strategic goals, development plans, forms and implementation of the partnership.

If looking at the strategic orientation of the analyzed LAG (in this case only 16 LAG since 3 of them did not fill in this section in their LAG's information sheet), the two strategic themes (reflecting the themes under LEADER+) are presented to a very significant degree: "making the best use of natural and cultural resources including the increase of the value of the locality", and "improving the quality of life in rural areas". The other two strategic themes ("the use of new know-how and new technologies to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive", and "adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions") are never pronounced in the explicit form as the themes integrating the strategies of the development of the territory. The numbers are based on the analysis of the information sheets. Eleven information sheets explicitly speak about strategic theme, in five cases the theme is constructed based on the content analysis. The content analysis helps to conclude that the theme "adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions" is subordinated to the theme "making the best use of natural and cultural resources" in the case of three LAGs. The other 2 LAGs only refer to business activities using local resources; however, they do not speak about the output of these activities in the form of local products. As for the theme "the use of new know-how and new technologies to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive", the context of the information sheets of the LAGs points out to this theme in two cases (one is cross-checked by the list of the LAGs supported by LEADER+). In one case, it is combined with the theme "improving the quality of life in rural areas", and in the second case with the theme "making the best use of natural and cultural resources".

A very interesting finding resulting from the content analysis is the fact that the integrated strategies of development of the analyzed LAGs (they might be considered as the best strategies since they got the support while the others were not supported) do not emphasize and outline the most typical features for LEADER such as partnership and networks, people and cooperation (social capital), and the background (roots) of strategies in the regional/local identities. Based on this finding, it is possible to conclude that the strategies are not of a complete endogenous nature (the strategies are close to the endogenous rural development but are not identical with its principles). Moreover, the integrated approach they substitute by the multi-sector approach that is typical by a lower level of the mutual links.

The mentioned multi-sectoral (but not sufficiently integrated) focus of the strategies covers these areas of activities:

- Protection and improvement of the natural heritage (forests, pastures, meadows, wetlands, mountains, healing water springs, ponds and lakes, environmentally protected natural areas);
 - Environmental protection (land management, waste management, the use of the renewable sources of energy, the improvement of the outlook of the public space);
 - Protection and improvement of the cultural heritage (folk architecture, small sacral buildings, castles, technical heritages) which is often supplemented by the so-called programmes of animation (to make the heritage “live”)
 - Support and renewal of traditions (traditional habits, celebration of holidays, support of the traditional crafts, specific activities and events, presentations of the traditional tools and instruments, materials and technological procedures);
 - Improvement of technical infrastructure (transport networks, heating systems, development of business zones /business parks/ in the countryside);
 - Development of the SMEs and farming business (farming in its various forms /traditional farming, modern farming, alternative farming/, production of organic foods, forestry, various services, technical and technological equipments for the SMEs);
 - Development of tourism (different types of tourism /agri-tourism, bicycle-tourism, horse riding/ spa tourisms, networks for leisure time incl. information centres), the ecological and environmentally friendly soft tourism is preferred;
 - Improvement of the civic infrastructure (housing, facilities for education, leisure time and entertainment);
- Development of the image of the territory (promotion, marketing, specific educational activities and other activities to disseminate the information).

CONCLUSIONS

After confronting the documents about the LEADER programme in the Czech Republic (the analysis of these documents focused on the activities of such LAGs, which developed and implement their strategies of the integrated territorial development and in the same way involve farmers and farming related actors, and were supported in the frame of LEADER+ scheme or the Leader Czech Republic Scheme) with the analysis of LEADER in the European context (Ray 2000), the following conclusions can be made:

- (1) Until now, in many cases the activities of the Czech LAGs are not able to meet the real aspiration of the LAGs. This aspiration is to coordinate the regional/local activities for the development of the areas the LAGs operate in. As such, many Czech LAGs are lagging behind the principles of LEADER+.
- (2) The content of the documents presented by the LAGs, which are supposed to be publicly available, is very heterogeneous and often insufficient. As such, many Czech LAGs do not have any background for setting up cooperative networks since they do not provide any information, which again mismatches the principles of LEADER+. Moreover, the lack of the publicly available information about activities, which are funded from the public budgets, does not reflect the principle of the public accountability and transparency, which erodes the democratic principles of LEADER+.
- (3) Because of the lack of the publicly available information, the level of the participation of farmers and the farming related actors in the LEADER schemes can be only guessed (based on the analysis of the available information). Therefore, roughly 35–45% of all Czech LAGs are those where farmers and farming related actors participate. However, such situation corresponds with the European situation. As such, the Czech LAGs are not out of the main European stream regarding the participation of farmers and the farming related actors.
- (4) The available information suggests that the strategic theme of the integrated development of rural areas in which the farmers and the farming related actors participate the most in the European context (“adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for

small production units via collective actions”) is the less opted strategic theme in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the Czech LAGs, which opted for this theme, provide ambiguous information. Such information prevents to conclude if the members of these LAGs are also farmers. On the other hand, it is obvious from the available data that none of the LAGs which opted for this theme was supported (in 2004–2006) by the LEADER programme under the Czech Ministry of Agriculture. Lošťák (Lošťák 2007) made a similar conclusion in the analysis of LAGs when developing and testing the methodology for measuring the quality of strategies of the integrated territorial development submitted by LAGs. As such, Czech LAGs orient their strategies to more broad topics, which, however, lack the real integrative elements. More concrete strategies (such as adding value to local products) are often omitted. However, the exclusion of farming and food production from the LEADER activities speaks against the real understanding of the LEADER+ principles in the Czech context.

- (5) Majority of the LAGs (regardless the theme), where – using the available information – the participation of farmers and farming related actors was identified, had the implemented strategies supported by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture.
- (6) The texts presented in the information sheets of the LAGs analyzed in this paper suggest that the majority of the Czech LAGs only approximates to the real endogenous activities done for the benefit of the whole region/locality. Such conclusion is done through the content analysis according to the categories selected in relation to the main principles incorporated into the fundamental features of the LEADER approach (see Lošťák, Hudečková 2008). These categories and principles are people, their interaction and cooperation, social networks, partnership and social capital, local identity. The projects, which are presented as the examples of the implemented actions, are seldom interconnected both by the actors and by the implemented activities. The projects mostly present the bulk of the separate activities and their actors. As such, many Czech LEADER projects and strategies are not of the cooperative nature as requested by LEADER.
- (7) Developing the ideas from the previous paragraph, the projects of the farmers and the farming related actors are significantly oriented at the technological and technical equipment of their farms. It is difficult to find any notion that these technical facilities can create the conditions for setting up

and spreading the cooperation with other partners in rural development. As such, the Czech LAGs also mismatch the principles of LEADER+ since they do not point out any issue of cooperation and networking (including the farmers and their involvement in rural development).

The general (although more or less hypothetical) conclusion is that the contemporary implementation of the LEADER approach in the Czech Republic (it means its focus oriented to the setting up and implementation of the strategies of the integrated development of rural territories) lags behind the European context. The old EU member states match better the principles related to the concept of the endogenous integrated rural development, which is deeply based on the use of the intangible forms of capital. This form of development does not aim at adjusting people in rural areas to the continual flow of subsidies but at teaching them how to be innovative and active in order to cope with the problems in their areas using the capacities (economic, social cultural, environmental) available.

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