

# Preliminary impacts of the LEADER+ approach in the Czech Republic

## *Předběžné dopady přístupu LEADER+ v České republice*

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**Abstract:** The paper outlines the backgrounds related to the necessity of searching for the new methods of assessing preliminary impacts of the rural development programmes. That is why the content analysis is tested in this paper for its possibilities to observe the preliminary impacts of one of the rural development tools – the Community initiative LEADER+ in the Czech Republic. The research pointed out that content analysis might be an appropriate method to define some impacts (and also the efficiency) of the LEADER+ approach. The results demonstrated that the transparency and public accountability of some local action groups (LAG) activities are not always on a high level. Also the differences among the LAGs are shown as for their ability to learn the principles of the LEADER+. The method also enabled to estimate how the LEADER+ contributes to eliminate the social exclusion in the countryside. It also pointed out a lower representation of farming oriented projects in the LEADER+ approach. The content analysis reflected the transfer of the best practices among the territories and also the possible knowledge of the public about the LEADER+ approach and about the projects implemented in this initiative.

**Key words:** rural development impacts, content analysis, LEADER+

**Abstrakt:** Článek se soustředil na přiblížení východisek spojených s nutností hledat nové metodiky zjišťování předběžných dopadů různých nástrojů rozvoje venkova. Proto testuje obsahovou analýzu pro možnosti sledování předběžných dopadů jednoho z těchto nástrojů, a to Iniciativy Společenství LEADER+. Výzkum ukázal, že obsahová analýza může být vhodnou metodou pro zjišťování některých dopadů (a i efektivitu) přístupu LEADER+. Z výsledků je patrná ne vždy vysoká transparentnost a veřejná vylíčitelnost fungování místních akčních skupin (MAS), rozdíly mezi MAS, pokud jde o umění naučit se principům LEADER, míra, s jakou LEADER+ přispívá k eliminaci sociální exkluze na venkově, nižší zastoupení zemědělsky orientovaných projektů v této iniciativě, schopnost transferu nejlepších praktik do jiných oblastí, i možné povědomí veřejnosti o samotném přístupu LEADER+ a o projektech v něm realizovaných.

**Klíčová slova:** dopady rozvoje venkova, obsahová analýza, LEADER+

Rural development is typified by various paradigms which echo its multiple understandings. Different understandings of rural development refer to different conceptualizations which are built on various theoretical concepts reflecting the changes of the society.

The key aspect of the contemporary rural development paradigm is the dual socio-economic-ecological process (the process referring to sustainability) of re-creating local resources (they are known as territorial capitals and since they are the capitals, they

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can be measured). The duality is manifested by the fact that the concrete type of rural development influences the way of using local resources, and vice-versa, local resources influence the economic, social and ecological characteristics of the rural development. In the frame of this duality, there are also expanding and deepening the interactions of the rural with the wider national and international economy (Marsden 2009). This duality reflects some late modern (or post-modern) thoughts including the concept of the rural-urban convergence and divergence. The concept of the convergence and divergence in urban-rural relations replaces the previous two concepts (Newby and Buttel 1980) of the rural-urban dichotomy (with roots in the Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft* views) and the rural-urban continuum (with roots in the Zimmerman and Sorokin's views refining the ideas of Tönnies into the continuum of communities between ideal types of urban and rural). The concept of rural-urban convergence and divergence points out the specificity of the countryside which makes the rural to be different (divergent) from the urban. This specificity is significantly related to farming (Ploeg 2000) in all its features (not only the productivist agriculture)<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the countryside is fully integrated into global and national societies. National and global societies dominate in the process of mutual exchange over rural societies and influence the countryside (convergence). It also means that farming is not highlighted as it used to be and farming is supplemented by other activities implemented in rural areas.

If looking into the practice of rural development, the conceptualization outlined above and related to

the rural-urban convergence and divergence is also institutionally reflected. The countryside is in the EU member states administered by the ministries of agriculture (and by the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development in the EU) due to the divergent (specific) nature of farming. At the same time, the countryside is considered as the space with many convergent elements with urban space. These elements do not refer to the specificity of agriculture<sup>2</sup> and are institutionally administered, for example, through the ministries of regional development (or by the Directorate General for Regional Policy in the case of the EU). In the other words, the countryside is addressed both by the Common Agricultural Policy (in a more concrete way, by the national Rural Development Programmes 2007–2013 funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and by the policy of economic and social cohesion/regional development policy (in a more concrete way, through the Regional Operational Programmes funded through the European Regional Development Fund). If farming is not emphasized and it is not possible to set up some special social characteristics of the countryside<sup>3</sup>, the only definition of the rural appears to be the density of population.

However, this simplified demarcation of rural and urban seems to be the challenge to develop a more sophisticated typology of rural regions than those coined by Dijkstra and Poelman (2008) who distinguish predominantly urban areas, intermediate areas close to the city, intermediate remote regions, predominantly rural regions close to the city and predominantly remote regions based on the density of population and the accessibility of the city. That is why the ESPON

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<sup>1</sup>Not only so-called agri-industrial (productivist) agriculture is concerned here. The focus is also on the socio-economic role of farming and other practices related to land management. In this way, the priority of farming in the countryside is re-established. Farming is again re-integrated with various markets (not only food market) and with social innovations, such as the emphasis on quality or retro-innovations of farming practices or new forms of environmental businesses (Marsden 2009).

<sup>2</sup>When referring to the specificity of farming, the paper uses the ideas of K. Polanyi (1957) who distinguishes substantial and formal meanings of economy. The substantive economy is typical by the mutual influence of people and the influence between people and nature when considering economic behaviour. On the other hand, formal economy is based on the forms of rationality of human reasoning. If the reasoning is used in a correct way, it can eliminate the external influence generated by other people or nature. The agriculture is typified as the substantive economy because it is dependent on (and it is influenced by) nature (and also by other people – such as consumers). No wonder H. Newby (1982) writes that the majority of agricultural economists are substantive economists par excellence.

<sup>3</sup>The discussion organized by the Czech journal *Respekt* on February 12, 2009 in the city of Brno opened the polarity in addressing the question if the countryside is specific in the sense of farming or its specificity is in other aspects. Post-modern complication is that farming is now not fully related to the countryside (Lošťák 2004). On the other hand, the other features which are not related to farming – such as close relations among people or traditions – are not the specificity of the countryside as it has been already demonstrated by R. Pahl (1968). The ambiguity in defining the rural using as the only demarcation fact the density of population which is constructed in various ways is reflected in the efforts to overcome the ambiguity through investigation of rural identity manifested in various new social movements (Woods 2008).

project “European Development Opportunities for Rural Areas” (EDORA, Applied Research Project 2013/1/2) suggests to bring a new typology of rural regions (The ESPON 2013 Programme EDORA Interim report 2009) based on more indicators such as demography, employment, business development, rural-urban relations, cultural heritage, changes of the farm structure, institutional potentials, and climatic conditions. The project preliminary suggests to define agrarian rural regions (strongly dominated only by agrarian sector), rural regions classified as “consumption countryside” (significant role of tourism in rural areas consumed by urban population), diversified rural regions with strong secondary sector and diversified rural regions with strong market services. Furthermore, all these regions can be classified as regions with accumulations and regions with depletion.

Nevertheless, any developed typology of rural areas (moreover, any typology of rural development) faces the problems how to measure some indicators whose nature is intangible and invisible (although the indicators are labeled as capitals). Although the indicators are difficult to be measured, they are the key indicators from the point of view of evaluating the impacts of various forms of rural development and the resources spent for any particular form of development. This issue is addressed in the EU documents. For instance, the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes Supported by the SAPARD (European Commission 2001) write that in the case when the indicators of the impacts of the SAPARD programme cannot be fully quantified due to their intangible nature, the evaluators should develop such procedures which will enable the measurement. Mostly the measurable indicators of qualitative nature and the corresponding qualitative approaches of data gathering and data processing are concerned. The Guidelines for the Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes Supported by the SAPARD (European Commission 2001) speak about interviews and case studies in this respect. However, this paper will test other way of the possible measuring the impacts of such rural development programmes which are not based only on unambiguously quantified resources of tangible nature. The case of the Community initiative LEADER+ implemented in the Czech Republic in 2004–2006 will help to test the possibilities of the content analysis to find out how far the LEADER+

was successful against its background. In the other words, the content analysis will be used to analyze the preliminary impacts of the LEADER+ when confronting this initiative with its background in the case when some possibilities of measuring the impacts are not well applicable, in this case due to the nature of the LEADER+ described in the next section.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As the introduction outlined, the situation concerning the countryside is ambiguous in the sense that the countryside is difficult to be precisely defined since more and more important are social networks which are able to substitute the traditional spatial structures (Hubík 2007). Moreover, the ambiguity continues when countryside, which is difficult to be defined, is exposed to various (and difficultly defined) instruments of government – e.g. various ministries (agriculture or regional development) and their policies often with conflicting interests. Under such circumstances, the new concept of governance started to be used. The concept of governance means the decentralized political coordination on the regional and local levels. At the same time, it helps to demonstrate how the regional and local policy can be created in an efficient way (Böcher 2008).

The concept of governance reflects the emerging post-modern paradigm of rural development. This paradigm portrays the countryside as a social construction (Hubík 2004). In the sense of government, the countryside is constructed through various quantitative definitions which are dominated by the definition based on the population and its density. On the other hand, the countryside is nowadays more and more constructed through new multiply definitions (as the mentioned EDORA project suggests) and new social movements accentuating rural identity which is mostly manifested in the LEADER Community initiative (the present Axis IV in the Rural Development Programmes). It is because new social movements are one of the crucial elements of the new rural governance. These movements leave the negotiations in the economic issues (these issues necessitated a clear quantification related to the idea of the growth of Growth<sup>4</sup>) and they move towards the post-materialism, social networks and the policy of identity (Woods 2008).

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<sup>4</sup>The idea of the “growth of Growth” is coined by Czech social philosopher V. Bělohradský (Bělohradský 2007). He considers the beliefs and fascination in the growth (typical are the words about the necessity of economic growth) as a new form of idolatry (imagine worship). He calls the “growth of Growth” as a fundamentalist religion reflecting the fetishism of goods and points out to the purposelessness of this idea (the meaning and sense is reduced to the goal).

The new model of rural development (Marsden 2009; Sucksmith 2010) linked with new social movements is not rooted in the principle of “*homo oeconomicus*”, which is based on the assumption of the competing atomized and individualized rural actors who always rationally compute the most efficient actions in clearly defined world (reflecting mainstream neoclassical economic approaches). Contrary, it is based on the flexible alliances and networks of farmers and other actors operating in the countryside, which makes the borders between various sectors and groups blurred (reflecting institutional economics and sociology).

The networks organize events in the society within the late modern (or already post-modern) world (Bauman 2002). The networks enable the multilevel democratic participation which might be considered as one of the features of the postmodern order (Giddens 1998). Instead of rigid hierarchical organizations (government), we are more and more facing fluid and polycentric groupings – governance (Woods 2008).

Governance (including rural governance) has already in the conditions of the modern society meant to find various forms of how to engage the citizens into the ways of governing the society (although in the practice, this engagement was minimal as it was the case of totalitarian systems). In the conditions of the late modernity (or post-modernity), the pressures on democratic participation move from the national states both to the transnational level and to the local level (in the sense of participation in local groups or in the new social movements). This situation is well reflected in the LEADER approach with its networks represented by the local action groups. It is the LEADER approach which is an efficient instrument of rural governance (Lee et al. 2005; High and Nemes 2007; Böcher 2008) because of the use of intangible (post-modern, post-productivist) resources which are difficult to be quantified.

Being post-modern, the LEADER approach does not comply with the experienced stereotypes of development interventions (state sponsorship of economic and social programmes and projects) which were illuminated from the “centre” (Sucksmith 2010) as the universal and forever valid principles. Contrary, the LEADER reflects the dynamics of political pluralism and the appropriate economic activities which necessitate the increased local participation and new forms of mutuality – the governance (Ray 2000). It means that endogenous approaches in rural development are related to the horizontal post-modern principles of the polyphony of various thoughts and reasons with bounded rationality which are merged in social events.

## THE LEADER APPROACH AND THE CONTEXT OF ITS IMPACTS MEASUREMENT

The paper has already suggested that to test the new possibilities of measuring the impacts (especially preliminary impacts) of the EU development programmes (as the reaction to the challenge of the above mentioned EU documents), the EU Community initiative LEADER was selected. Because it has been being introduced in the old EU member states since 1993, these countries can compare the contemporary development with the impacts of the previous phases. However, it is not the case of the Czech Republic and the other new EU member states. In the Czech Republic (and assuming also in all new EU member states), this approach was exploited to foster the institutional and capacity building in order to prepare the actors in these countries to use the LEADER approach in an efficient way after 2007 (i.e. in the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013). It also means that if we are going to evaluate the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013, we should also look into the impacts of the LEADER+ in 2004–2006.

Because the contemporary version of the LEADER (the Axis IV in the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013) is “going on” right now, to test the new possibilities of measuring the preliminary impacts of rural development measures, the LEADER+ was used. This Community initiative was implemented in the Czech Republic in the 2004–2006 programming period.

The key aspect in the LEADER approach is the strategy of the rural development of the area where local action groups, which prepare and implement their strategies, operate together with other actors. The strategies must be rooted in the locality (i.e. to be endogenous) and should link various segments and sectors of the society and economy. The outcomes, results and experiences of these strategies should be transferable into other rural areas. The activities implemented within the strategy should result in acquiring new capacities in new areas (the innovativeness). The local action groups, in order to be successful, have to demonstrate the use of a high stock of intangible forms of capitals such as social, cultural and human capital. The main features of the LEADER+ approaches are (based on Lukesch 2003):

- Approach rooted in the particular geographic area (territory).
- Bottom-up approach.
- Approach based on innovations.
- Approach integrating various sectors in the territory.

- Approach involving partnership.
- Approach based on cooperation within and between various territories.
- Approach based on the decentralized management and financing.
- Approach based on social networks.

The main features and key principles embedded in the LEADER will be the background against which the impacts of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic will be evaluated in the sense how far the implementation of the LEADER+ supported and fostered these features and principles. If looking in detail into the particular features, it is obvious that the LEADER necessitates a high stock of social capital. No wonder this approach is labeled as to be based on social capital (Sucksmith 2000). To measure this capital is, however, not easy (Putnam 1993). This fact decreases the possibilities of measuring the impacts of the LEADER+ through traditional procedures and necessitates developing new ways of measuring the impacts of the LEADER+ to evaluate it in a comprehensible (not in a shallow) way.

This paper will look at the LEADER+ implemented in v Czech Republic in 2004–2006. In these years, 130–140 local action groups (LAG) operated in this country. However, only 10 of them implemented the Strategy of the Development of the Territory, and their activities and projects were funded from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund in the frame of the Operational Programme “Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture 2004–2006”. These 10 LAGs were selected from 30 applicants and in total they were subsidized by 159 mil CZK (about 6.4 mil EUR in 2009 exchange rate). They will be the target of research because they were fully engaged in the EU LEADER+ Community initiative (other 82 LAGs were supported only to promote their capacity building).

The authors who investigate the theoretical background of the LEADER approach point out that the analysis of the LEADER should go beyond the research in the official rhetoric or the amount of money spend to implements the LEADER projects and strategies. Instead, they suggest investigating the LEADER as the rural development laboratory (Ray 2000) where every LAG operating in its territory should focus on the search for innovative thoughts. It is also because the Guidelines for Community Initiative for Rural Development (Leader+) speak about this approach as the laboratory encouraging the emergence and testing the new approaches to the integrated and sustainable rural development (The European Commission 2000). This framing should

not only contribute to the social and economic viability of the territory but should also be used as the demonstration for other territories. Such orientation echoes the fact that the EU declared the objective of the LEADER for local actors to cooperate in order to find “innovative solutions to rural problems which could reflect what is best suited to their areas and could also serve as models for developing rural areas elsewhere” (Sucksmith 2010: 2). It also means the challenge to investigate the information about the LEADER approach (the more the public knows about the LEADER, the more it is probable that its outcomes and results will be implemented in other territories which means its impacts will be far-reaching). This challenge is addressed by H. Buller (2000) who points out that the LEADER provides new forms of rural development. These forms are rooted in everyday life of rural population because they are built upon local experience, identity and actions. These forms are, however, often influenced by the existing political, economic and administrative institutions which only partly allow the innovations to be implemented in the development policy. Although it brings the question about the transfer of such innovation into other territories, the information about the innovation is not questioned. Moreover, as Buller (2000) and Osti (2000) demonstrate, the partnership and social networks, which are mobilized for the success of the LEADER+ local action groups, are often of the vertical type instead of the officially proclaimed horizontal mutuality (which is assumed by Putnam /1993/) in his concept of social capital).

The previous paragraph suggested that when looking at the LEADER, it is necessary to be critical when evaluating its impacts and implication in the Czech Republic. Above all, the LEADER is not a panacea and has its limitations. They are formed in its theoretical backgrounds. One of the limitations is that the local actors do not understand the theoretical concepts of the “invisible” forms of capital (social, human, cultural and intellectual). Firstly, the strategies and projects work with human capital and omit cultural capital. Even greater problems are faced when dealing with social capital. As M. Sucksmith (2000) shows, the implementation of the LEADER in the United Kingdom was based on two projections of Putnam’s (Putnam 1993, 2000) understandings of social capital into the practice of rural development: (1) long-time horizon in which the social capital is formed to be developed in an intended way (e.g. also to be formed through the LEADER) and (2) the importance to focus on social development, norms and networks of civic engagement instead of focusing on profit and jobs because the mentioned social elements are considered

to be the base of economic efficiency and long-term stability of the territory.

The practice of rural development differs from the words above. The LEADER, due to the term of its projects and due to the programming periods, limits the orientations towards long-term perspectives. Sucksmiths (2000) showed that the participation, which aimed at including the marginalized groups into small rural communities, was finally transformed into the advantage for the local elites. They were the only ones who were able to mobilize their networks and get the funding in short time because the experienced elites had the appropriate capacities to act. That is why Sucksmith suggests working with the concept of social capital coined by P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1983) in its links with cultural capital and the conversion of cultural and social capitals into economic capital. This approach differs from the often idealized thoughts about the power of Putnam's ideas concerning his concept of social capital. Sucksmith writes that social capital as an undivisible asset of the whole community (as understood by Putnam) might be in the endogenous initiatives (as in the case of the LEADER) appropriated by those (e.g. by local elites) who dispose of the appropriate social ties, the corresponding formal education and the appropriate level of socialization, the right life style and *habitus* (i.e. social capital related to an individual and his/her cultural capital as coined by P. Bourdieu). Because the LEADER disfavoured those who lacked the appropriate individual social and cultural capital, Sucksmith (Sucksmith 2000) suggests that the LEADER periods should not be limited to programming periods (and than changed). More emphasis should be given to include those who are not formally involved yet (e.g. new LAGs which were unsuccessful in the competition with the experienced LAGs). That would help to achieve the goal of endogenous development which means to eliminate social exclusion. In the other words, the LEADER should eliminate the mechanisms which limit the inclusion of other actors. If there are such limiting mechanisms, it is against the sense of the LEADER and this approach will mismatch its assumed goals. A quick scan, which was done in the Czech Republic (Šulák 2006), shows that the situation is similar to the UK experience in the sense of supporting the experienced local actions groups. Within the Leader Czech Republic (a programme funded from the Czech national budget) in 2006, out of 24 successful local action groups, only 7 were the new ones.

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<sup>5</sup>More detailed ideas about the relations between the organized modernity and networking post-modernity in the approaches to the countryside see in Hudečková and Lošťák (2008).

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND ITS CONTEXT

The contemporary ideas in social sciences suggest the networks are considered as an appropriate instrument for rural governance. The governance is of the horizontally-networking and bottom-up nature. The governance is complementary with the government when the latter means the vertically-organizing and top-down approach in governing. Only in the mutual complementarities of the late modern (or post-modern) horizontally networking governance and modern vertically-organizing government<sup>5</sup>, the countryside can be efficiently developed.

This paper does not focus on the issues of the vertically-organizing rural development government. It will focus on the issue of the horizontally-networking rural development governance. It is because this way of governing is supported through various rural development programmes which are in the case of the Czech Republic both of the EU and national origin. These programmes are by their nature of the vertically-organizational government shape since they are administered by various ministries. While the interest in investigating the vertically organizing approach is relatively well saturated by various researches (no doubt when tax-payers money is concerned), the interest in investigating the horizontally-networking approach in the Czech Republic is just starting and is underdeveloped. One of the reasons of such situation might be that it is a completely new approach with the roots in the post-modern ambiguity (which makes it difficult to exploit some traditional ways used to measure for instance the efficiency in the modernist rural development paradigms /e.g. agri-industrial paradigm/). The research explained in this paper will focus on the investigation of the impacts of the horizontally-networking governance of the countryside represented by the LEADER+ in 2004–2006.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the new possibilities in measuring the LEADER+ approach. That is why the paper firstly outlines the proposed method and than it will show some results of its application. The proposed method is of the pilot type and should be later supplemented by other standard methods of impact evaluation. This method allows implementing of a sort of preliminary evaluation of the LEADER impacts. It might suggest if the horizontally-networking governance of rural territories corresponds with the assumptions embedded into the vertically-organizational EU directives about rural development. This is the key research question.

There are 3 reasons (assumptions) why the proposed method is going to be tested for its use to evaluate preliminary impacts of the LEADER approach and why to choose this particular method:

- (1) There is the assumption that the more support within the LEADER is given to its main features and principles, the more the LEADER fulfils its function – i.e. to be an efficient tool of rural governance. It would also make this approach more successful since it should supply in a complementary way the rural government as it is outlined in the theoretical background embedded in the LEADER approach.
- (2) There is an assumption that it is inappropriate to analyze only the amount of money allocated to local actions groups within the various LEADER activities. The sum of money speaks out very little about the support of the principles (features) of the LEADER and it can help very little to evaluate its impacts. It limits the possibility to show if the LEADER is really the tool of rural governance. That is why the money for the LEADER actions should be compared not only with the project outcomes, but also with the fact how the projects implemented through LEADER support the features of the LEADER which might suggest the potential impacts of this approach.
- (3) The last reason is linked to the thoughts about the transparency of the LEADER activities and the transferability of its outcomes and results into other geographical territories which includes also the level of information about LEADER projects. As outlined above, the goal of the LEADER is to use its concrete innovative ways of solving rural problems in the territories where the solutions have not been applied yet. The low level of information about the LEADER might suggest lower impacts of this approach and vice-versa.

A very important circumstance of proposing the new method is related to the difficulties to find out which concrete projects were financed since the public accountability and transparency of the projects supported by the LEADER+ do not comply in the Czech

Republic with the principles of democratic governance (for instance, the principle of equal treatment is not emphasized enough<sup>6</sup>). That is why the new method had to be found and developed in order to match the challenge concerning the evaluation of rural development programmes (European Commission 2001). These requirements were highlighted above, and they also ask for developing the new methods when it is difficult to quantify the impacts of the qualitative nature. This challenge is grasped by this paper as well.

## THE DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHOD

To evaluate the impacts of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic, the proposed method to be used is content analysis of the articles and information about this approach in mass-media. It means all articles about the LEADER+ approach and local action groups engaged in this approach published in the main Czech serious (not tabloids) newspapers (*Právo, Mladá fronta Dnes, Lidové noviny, Hospodářské noviny* and regional newspapers *Deníky* which focus on the particular regions) will be scrutinized. The set of the texts for the analysis was provided by the agency Newton Media. The agency, which operates the database of the records from various media, selected the articles according to the guidelines developed by the authors of this text. As such, the agency provided the articles from the newspapers highlighted above. The articles contained the words “local action group” or “LEADER” (LEADER approach) and were published in the period January 1, 2002 – April 15, 2009. Totally, the agency provided 1634 such articles (texts). Out of them, the authors of this paper selected the articles which addressed such local action groups which were supported under the LEADER+ scheme within the Operational programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture (2004–2006)<sup>7</sup>. It total, there were 169 such articles (i.e. slightly more than 10% of all articles provided by the agency about the LEADER and local action groups in the Czech Republic).

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<sup>6</sup>This principle means that evaluating the impacts should be based on the same procedure of data gathering. It means that it is not possible to find out the information from one local action group via internet, from the second via phone interview and from the third via personal interview. Such situation would mismatch the principle of equal treatment and, above all, violates the requirements of the research. If the research is implemented to bring valid and reliable findings, it must be carried out in the uniform way. The data of quantitative nature cannot be gathered within one type of research action in different ways applied to the participants in the research – it would hamper the possibilities of comparison.

<sup>7</sup>This Operational Programme supported 10 local action groups with the total amount of 158.88 mil CZK (incl. overhead cost of the local action groups). They were supported through the measure 2.1.4 Rural Development (sub-measure of the LEADER+ type). The list of these local action groups is in the next section of the paper.

The proposed method of evaluating the preliminary impacts of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic is based on the well-known model of content analysis. This type of research is carried out in the following steps (Disman 1969; Bailey 1987; Neuendorf 2002):

- **Critical analysis:** It is the core of theoretical reasoning about the concrete content analysis. Based on this step, the analyzed texts are selected. When looking into the nature of the Czech mass-media milieu which can inform about the activities of the LEADER+ approach, the most appropriate texts for the analysis were assumed to be in the non-tabloid newspapers (*Právo, Mladá fronta Dnes, Lidové noviny, Hospodářské noviny* and regional newspapers *Deníky*). Another reason why to choose these articles from newspapers is related to their public availability which is not influenced by the demographic or social limitations.
- **Conceptualization:** It is rooted in eight main features of the LEADER approach which are presented in the section above. The other conceptual units were the types of the projects supported by the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic.
- **Operationalization:** It means the development of the concrete categories, i.e. the variables investigated in the text. These variables will refer to the main features of the LEADER+, the types of the analysed projects, the information about the LEADER+ approach. Here are the variables:
  - Bottom-up approach (the sentences which address this feature will be searched for).
  - The approach based on the decentralized management and financing (the sentences addressing the decision-making of local action group and civic engagement will be searched for).
  - The approach integrating various sectors in the territory (the sentences addressing the multisectoral design and strategy implementation will be searched for).
  - Approach involving partnership (the sentences about the partnership in the investigated local action groups will be searched for).
  - Approach based on innovations (the sentences about innovations will be searched for).
  - Approach related to cooperation (the sentences about cooperation within and between territories will be searched for) and the approach based on social networks (the sentences about cooperation of the NGOs focussing on non-economic issues, economic cooperation in the territory, other forms of the existence of social networks and coopera-

tion of inhabitants involved in the development of territories will be searched for).

- The approach rooted in the territory (the sentences about the defined territory of the strategy implementation will be searched for).
- Type of information about the LEADER+ (the investigation will search for the types of concrete information about the LEADER+ which are published, like the examples of good practices, positive impacts of the projects, information for the applicants, experience with the projects, general information about the LEADER+, information about international cooperation, information about the future of the LEADER).
- Types of supported projects in the frame of the LEADER+ (the promotion and information type projects, tools of communication and accessibility, project studies and territorial planning, the renewal of cultural heritage, farming activities, equipment for NGOs, the equipment and facilities for non-farming businesses, environment protection, leisure time activities and their facilities, traditions, municipality infrastructure).
- **Recording unit:** This unit is represented by the sentences in which the concrete operational categories will be presented. The operationalized categories presented above will be counted in the number of characters which are included in the recording unit. The spaces between the words will not be counted as characters.
- **Contextual unit:** It means the LEADER approach.
- **Coding key:** It will be used to work with the texts. Because the PhD. students are suitable for coding, their training was implemented.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH

As the paper has already pointed out, in total 169 articles about local action groups (LAG) were analysed. The short information about these LAGs is in the Table 1. Out of the total number of articles, 123 (72.8%) were published in regional newspapers (*Deníky*). Slightly more than one fourth of articles about the LEADER+ were published in the regional section of national newspapers.<sup>8</sup>

The Table 1 has already pointed out some interesting facts. It is obvious that the frequency of the articles about the local action groups (LAGs) supported through the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture funded

<sup>8</sup>No information about the LEADER approach related to concrete local action groups was available nationally throughout the newspapers covering the whole territory of the Czech Republic.



by the EAGGF as the pilot measure LEADER+ is highly different and it is not proportional. Three fourths out of all analyzed articles are about two local action groups (*Posázaví* and *Český západ*). On the other hand, no text related to the mentioned Operational programme (and explicitly to the LEADER+ Community initiative) was published about the LAG *Region Haná* or the LAG *Rýmařovsko*.

This finding does not mean at all that the preliminary impacts of the activities of these last two LAGs (similarly like LAGs *Pobeskydí*, *Moravské Slovácko*, *Hornolidečsko* or the *Chance in Nature*, which are also strongly underrepresented as for the number of articles about them) should be evaluated in the negative way. Contrary, there are very interesting activities implemented by these LAGs which have positive impacts on the communities and regions. For example, the Sunday School in the Stránské village where the LAG *Rýmařovsko* operates and where the visitors learn some traditional skills (e.g. spinning the wool, manufacturing wicker products, or the newly introduced possibility to make home bread) also contributed to

the growth of the size of this village within the last few years from 50 to 60 inhabitants. Similarly, the example of the contest *Hanácké cestovatel* (The Traveller of Haná; the name also uses the local dialect) produces annually the questions about various sites in the territory of the LAG *Region Haná*. To answer them, the participants in this quiz must visit the particular sites. Every year, the number of those who are interested in this activity grows and brings people to this locality which generates an extra income for the local services and supports the local identity through promoting the knowledge about this particular territory.

Therefore, the analysis does not question the work of the underrepresented LAGs, but it rather raises the question if all financial resources were used in the efficient way. The question is raised because the ordinary taxpayer (who is not working with the LEADER+ in details but whose part of taxes paid is redistributed within the LAG for the projects) does not have much chances to know without high transaction costs how the public money generated through taxes was used. It also means that the taxpayer loses

Table 1. The analyzed Local Action Groups, number of the analyzed articles and their scope

Name of LAG	NUTS 3 (LAU 1)	The grant awarded to LAG for LEADER+ (mil CZK) /in % out of total LEADER+ money/	Theme of LAG	Number of articles about LAG (in % from all articles)
Posázaví	Středočeský (Benešov)	26.18 /16.5%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	68 (40.2%)
Pobeskydí	Moravskoslezský (Frýdek-Místek)	23.77 /15.0%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	1 (0.6%)
Kyjevské Slovácko v pohybu	Jihomoravský (Hodonín)	19.41 /12.2%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	1 (0.6%)
Mikroregion Podralsko	Liberecký (Česká Lípa)	17.03 /10.7%/	Making the best use of natural and cultural resources	13 (7.7%)
Chance in Nature – Local Action Group	Jihočeský (Prachatice)	13.91 /8.7%/	The use of new know-how and new technologies to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive	4 (2.4%)
Český západ – Místní partnerství	Plzeňský (Tachov)	13.66 /8.6%/	Making the best use of natural and cultural resources	59 (34.9%)
MAS Sdružení Růže	Jihočeský (České Budějovice)	13.28 /8.4%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	21 (12.4%)
Region Haná	Olomoucký (Olomouc)	11.05 /7.0%/	Making the best use of natural and cultural resources	0 (0.0%)
Rýmařovsko	Moravskoslezský (Bruntál)	10.88 /6.8%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	0 (0.0%)
Hornolidečsko	Zlínský (Vsetín)	9.71 /6.1%/	Improving the quality of life and environment in rural areas	2 (1.2%)

Sources: Authors' calculation and Lopatová (2005): The report on the Operation Programme – The list of the approved applications in the sub-measure 2.1.4 Rural development (LEADER+ type, implementation of the LAG strategy) Available at <http://www.szif.cz/irj/go/km/docs/apa/op/zpravy/02/21/214/2141/1105517874312.pdf> (accessed 17 June 2009)

one of the ways how to control the efficient way of using the public money.

If looking at the impacts of the particular projects funded from the public money, a high level of transparency and public accountability is required. Transparency and public accountability should be manifested in the information about the activities (and their outcomes and results) supported under the measures funded by public resources. In this case, the non-proportionality (in relation to the amount of money the LAGs got from public funds) is obvious in the negative correlation between the percentage of public resources and the percentage of information (articles) about the activities funded by this amount of money. This non-proportionality concerns above all the LAG *Pobeskydí* (only one information-article, although outlining all features of the LEADER+ approach, concerned the activities related to renewable energy resources) and LAG *Kyjovské Slovácko*. The first LAG got 15% of all money redistributed under the sub-measure supporting the LEADER+, the second got 12.2%. However, the percentage of the texts about these LAGs represents only 0.6% out of all articles about the LEADER+ LAGs per each. The disproportions concern also (however, the gap is not as big as in the case of the LAG *Pobeskydí* and the LAG *Kyjovské Slovácko*) LAG *Region Haná*, the LAG *Hornolidečsko*, the LAG *Chance in Nature* and very slightly also the LAG *Podralsko*.

The tested method shows that it helps to evaluate one of the fundamental features of the democratic rural governance – the public accountability and transparency of the activities of local action groups who work with public resources. The more easy available information provided through various information channels about the activities implemented by the LAGs, the more possibilities for their public control. The higher the public control, the higher the pressures concerning the efficient impacts of LAGs.

A lower amount of information about LAGs in the mass media addressing the public does not necessary mean that the LAGs want “to hide” something. It rather suggests that some of the background principles embedded in the LEADER+ approach (transparency and accountability in rural governance) has not been being fully acquired by all LAGs yet. It also speaks about the lower level of learning the LEADER+ approach among some LAGs. In their case, the positive impacts of the LEADER+ might be more evident latter. This finding confirms the already mentioned fact (supported by foreign experience) that the periods of implementing the LEADER are shorter than required. Such time constraint is the product of the EU programming periods. The limited periods of

the particular stages of the LEADER do not allow for evaluating some impacts of this approach fully, since some of the impacts are obvious only in the long-term horizon. As it has been mentioned, the LEADER approach is a sort of rural development laboratory where people learn new activities. Learning necessitates certain time, as it is reflected in the theories of learning organizations (Tichá 2005) and in the theories of learning regions reflecting institutionalism and new institutional economics as ones of the contemporary leading regional development theories (Blažek and Uhlíř 2002).

The suggested method demonstrated which LAGs were able to learn some of the principles of the LEADER+ and to implement them in their activities faster. It suggests that these LAGs (*Posázaví*, *Český západ* and *Sdružení Růže*) used money in a very efficient way and the preliminary impact of the LEADER+ was highly positive in their case. Concerning the other analyzed LAG, this fact will be possible to be evaluated in a longer time period.

Because the articles about the individual LAGs are highly non-proportional, the following text will address the overall preliminary impacts of the LEADER+ regardless the particular LAGs. The Table 2 shows the types of information about the LEADER+ approach which were presented in the mass media (the types are in the agglomerated form). One third of the articles about LAGs supported under the LEADER+ scheme only mentioned that there is a LEADER+ approach (the texts only mentioned that there exists the LEADER+). Any other information about the LEADER+ was not published since the articles primarily addressed other issues than this approach. Above the average is the number of such kind of information in the articles about the LAG *Posázaví* (44.1%, i.e. 30 articles about this LAG). If looking at the articles about all analyzed LAGs, 66.9% of them (113 articles in total) addressed the LEADER+ in more detailed (albeit sometimes short) and concrete types of information (they not only mentioned the LEADER+). These types of information are outlined in Table 2.

The analyzed articles totally presented 172 items of information about the LEADER+ (one text sometimes presented more than one item of information). These items can be classified in 8 different categories. The analysis indicates that the largest number of information about the LEADER+ approach addressed those who were interested in the participation in this approach (also those who were potentially interested – that is why the general outline of the LEADER+ was published). Although the distribution of the frequencies of articles among the analyzed LAGs is not

appropriate for the investigation of the performance of the individual LAGs, it might be mentioned, that in the general outline of the LEADER+ approach in media, the most active were the LAG *Podralsko* (when taking into account the lower absolute amount of the articles, the relative number of this type of information is the biggest one compared to other LAGs), the LAG *Posázaví* and the LAG *Sdružení Růže*. The most active in the publication of the information about the possible types of supported projects were the LAGs *Český západ*, *Posázaví*, *Sdružení Růže* and partly also *Podralsko*.

Regardless of the individual LAGs, if analysing the types of information about the LEADER+, the overall preliminary impacts might be evaluated as positive and efficient. The more information about the LEADER+ is for those who are interested to join it, the more this approach contributes to eliminate social exclusion. This elimination is in accordance with the main orientation of the endogenous rural development represented by the LEADER+ approach. There is also another interesting finding related to the preparation of the strategy of the development of the territory where the particular LAG operates. The LAGs *Posázaví* or *Sdružení Růže* developed their strategies in cooperation with public universities (the Czech University of Life Sciences in the case of the *Posázaví*, or the University of South Bohemia and the Czech University of Life Sciences in the case of

the *Sdružení Růže*) and they are above the average in publishing the information about the LEADER+ in mass media. On the other hand, those LAGs who presented no type of the detailed information about the LEADER+ developed their strategies with the assistance of non-academic (rather profit-making oriented) organizations. These organizations give the origin to the so-called project class (see Kovách, Kučerová 2006) which uses its knowledge and experiences in preparing and implementing various development activities and which contradict the principles of social inclusion. Such position of the members of this class generates profits for them. That is why their interests might block others to access the possibilities of development activities and they might not be very interested in promoting these possible activities among others. The more people are “initiated” into the practices of the development and the more people are informed about the possibilities of their participation in the development, the less possibilities for the “project class” to benefit from its exclusive position. This class might not be always interested in social inclusion. Therefore, it is useful in the future to evaluate how far the LEADER+ approach enabled to introduce various groups of people into rural development practices. One of the ways how to promote social inclusion is to support the information among the people. The tested method enables to investigate and evaluate this information. In this sense, it might

Table 2. The types of the detailed information about the LEADER+

Type of detailed information (what was addressed in the information about LEADER+)	Information type	
	number	%
General outline of the LEADER+ (what the approach is about, what is its mission, etc.)	39	22.7
Information about the possible types of the supported projects (which projects might be supported)	38	22.1
Examples of the best practices implemented under the LEADER+	36	20.9
Information about the conditions of participation in LEADER+ (who might participate, for whom the LEADER+ is intended)	19	11.0
Information about seminars, workshops and consultations for project applicants	15	8.7
Information about the experiences with projects (what has to be done to prepare successful projects)	9	5.2
Information about the international cooperation and international presentations within the LEADER+	9	5.2
Information about the upcoming years of the LEADER approach (Axis IV of the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013)*	7	4.2

\*The articles that address only the Axis IV in the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 are not counted here unless they also mention the LEADER+ supported in 2004–2006 under the Operational Programme Rural Development and Multifunctional Agriculture.

Source: Authors' calculations

also suggest how far the LEADER approach helps to eliminate social exclusion.

The analysis also indicates an importance of the information about “the best practices”. This type of information is very important from the point of evaluating the preliminary impacts of this approach. In this respect, the LAG *Český západ* followed by the LAG *Sdružení Růže* dominate. The more “the best practices” related to the LEADER+ are published, the more efficient is the impact of this approach. It is because such publication increases the transfer of the LEADER+ outcomes and results. As such, the publication of the LEADER+ in mass media contributes to the dissemination of the information about the LEADER+ through the rural development networks. Mass media together with the rural development networks disseminate the innovations originated within the LEADER+ and as such the introduction of the innovations into practice contributes to rural development. It is the way how one of the features of the LEADER+ is achieved. The more positive experience with the LEADER+ is applied in other territories than those they originated in, the more visible are the impacts of this approach.

A positive finding is related to the information about the international context and cooperation of the LEADER+ approach. It is also very interesting that the articles about the analysed LAGs do not mention their cooperation with other LAGs in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, the articles about other LAGs write about acquiring the experience at one of the 10 LAGs analysed in this paper. It means that all

10 analysed LAGs are the leaders in the LEADER+ approach in the Czech Republic. In this context, their work brings highly positive impacts and the funding was used in the efficient way.

It is obvious that the content analysis also investigated the types of the projects which are presented in the articles and are referred as being the LEADER+ supported projects. The articles contain 237 items of information about the LEADER+ projects (references to projects). It does not mean that the articles refer to 237 projects. This number reflects the amount of hints to projects since one project could be referred about several times (in various newspapers and in various articles, for example). Therefore, the referred projects were classified according to the type of the projects. There were 189 items of references about the particular types of the projects under the LEADER+. It means that the referred project of one type could be addressed several times. The figures in Table 3 might suggest how the LEADER+ can be perceived by the public and it can outline the outcomes of the LEADER+.

The most often referred projects in articles are related to the leisure time. The highest amount of information (9 times) is about the projects related to the cultural events (found at 3 LAGs), 7 times the development of small parks (with sporting ground) is referred about (found at 2 LAGs) and 7 times there is also mentioned the reconstruction of sporting facilities (found at 3 LAGs). Six times the centre of mother care is brought about by media (found at 2 LAGs).

Table 3. Types of projects which are referred about analysed articles

Types of projects described in analyzed texts	Type		Hints about projects in this type	
	number	%	number	%
Leisure time activities, facilities and equipment for them	40	21.2	62	26.2
Promotion, information services, tools of communication and accessibility	36	19.0	40	16.9
Cultural heritage reconstruction and reconstruction of related facilities	31	16.4	42	17.7
Environmental protection and ecology	26	13.8	26	11.0
Traditions and celebrations of events	19	10.1	19	8.0
Project studies and territorial planning	14	7.4	14	5.9
Municipality infrastructure	11	5.8	19	8.0
Farming activities	9	4.7	12	5.1
Equipment for NGOs and local associations	2	1.1	2	0.8
Equipment for non-farming business actors	1	0.5	1	0.4

Source: Authors' calculations

Closely related to free-time activities is the type of projects addressing traditions and celebrations of events which contribute to support the local identity. This type of projects is never implemented by more than one LAG. That is why the media write about the support of a folklore group (6 times), about the celebration of the historical anniversary of the community (5 times), about the support of the relations of the inhabitants to the region based on the elaboration of publication about the history (3 times), about the celebration of a local railway (the LAG *Posázaví*, two times) or about the traditional Advent (the time before Christmas) implemented by the LAG *Český západ* (2 times mentioned).

Leisure time is also related to the projects addressing the support of the promotion of the territory and information services (e.g. information centres) which are linked with tourism (incl. the information about the municipalities or the provision of information to the inhabitants of municipalities which includes also, for instance, the municipal TV studio). This type of projects was the most often referred to the educative trail (the LAG *Posázaví* and the LAG *Podralsko*, together referred about 9 times), the publicity and promotion materials (the LAG *Posázaví* and the LAG *Chance in Nature*, together referred to 5 times).

The leisure time projects in all their dimensions support both the so-called “hard projects” (building or reconstruction, infrastructure) and “soft projects” (identity, celebrations, cultural events). Also the reconstruction of cultural heritage was intended to change the purpose of its use for the needs of the community (reconstruction of the belfry for the activities of NGOs /referred 8 times/, the reconstruction of railway water tower into the community club, the reconstruction of old railway coach as the facility for the work of local organizations) or for the support of leisure time activities (reconstruction of the part of the rural chateau to be used as small hostel /12 hits/ or the barn remaining as a small museum of the history of the community). The other projects concerning cultural heritage in the analysed texts were about reconstruction of the cemetery into a reverent and dutiful place or saving the church and improving its surroundings. The articles also referred about the renewal of the so-called Christ’s grave.

The analysis suggests that the LEADER+ approach is presented for the public not only as the infrastructural and material issue. Although many projects address the reconstruction or renewal of material goods, it is assumed they will be used to increase the quality of life and to support the activities of the community, or to be used for such leisure time activities as tourism. In total, there were 150 hints

about “hard” (material) projects and 87 hints about “soft” projects (free time activities, sociable activities, traditions and celebrations, books and information). Although “hard projects” are more supported, “soft projects” are not neglected. Contrary, many from the “hard” projects in their impacts influence the community life (i.e. the area which is primarily also addressed by the “soft” projects). The fact of the orientation towards community potentials in the sense of developing the skills and capacities of local people to participate in the life of rural communities reflects the nature of the LEADER+ approach. It is targeted to cooperation (supported leisure time activities are not only individual activities but they have a collective /community/ background and necessitate the cooperation of many actors), skills and capacities (for instance also the projects supporting purchasing the equipment, reconstructions or the tools of communication aim at facilitating various practices; as such they support the skills and capacities of the local people because the activities can be properly implemented only with appropriate tools) or the identity (the support of various publications, information materials, traditions and celebrations of historical events promotes the local identity as one of the necessary conditions of the successful rural development). Looking from this point of view, the LEADER+ matched with its background and the impacts in this sense are positive because the grant funding was spent in the appropriate way corresponding with the nature of the LEADER+.

Analysing the projects also necessitates looking at the farming oriented projects. Such projects which were referred about in the analysed mass media demonstrated their links with environmental protection (sheep to graze the grass; winter places for cattle to enable the cattle to be all year round on the pastures), occasionally also projects aiming at purchasing agricultural machines or technologies were mentioned. These projects might be also extended to the projects related to technologies for processing agricultural products (e.g. the digital baking oven for bakery, or the drying facility for making local sausages). If looking at the strategic themes of the LAGs (see Table 1), it is obvious that none of them opted for the theme “Adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions”. It was the theme which was the closest to agriculture. Considering the LEADER+ as the tool of rural development, it does not seem to be very a strategic approach to neglect in the LEADER+ the key rural activity – farming – which creates the specificity of rural areas. Although such objection might be turned back through the statements that

farmers have other possibilities to fund their activities, which are, comparing to the LEADER+, significantly higher as for the money available. However, such support does not often aim at restructuring the farming which was, on the other hand, the aim of the LEADER since this initiative was funded from the Guidance section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. Most of the supports which aimed to the farming sector till 2006 did not support the innovative forms of farming (according to the above mentioned EDORA projects, none of the Czech NUTS 3 regions belong to the regions with the new economy based on strongly diversified sectors), they did not show the the features of endogenous approach (the supports were decided outside the farming sector and the concrete rural localities; farming was not transformed in the bottom-up way through the initiatives of the farmers but in accordance with the exogenous principles /e.g. measures of the national government or the EU measures/), with very few exceptions, the support addressed various forms of cooperation among farmers and other (non-farming) sectors (see Lošťák et al. 2008), the networks of partnership and cooperation often indicated the features of closed social networks (with typical bonding social capital in the wording of R. Putnam /Putnam 2000/).

The farming related projects in the old EU member states represented about 1/3 of all projects implemented under the LEADER+ scheme (Lošťák and Hudečková 2008). This number is based on the content analysis and documentary study of materials related to the LEADER approach. A much lower number of references to the farming related projects (also in percentages in relation to other projects) in the Czech printed mass media suggests that the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic was not considered to be strongly related to agriculture. It is obvious that the outcomes, results and impacts of the LEADER+ might be significantly influenced by the previous

rural development policy which was not emphasizing farming too much. The practice of implementing the previous programme Leader Czech Republic found with difficulties its projection into farming. In this way, we might ask the question how far the institutionally-organizational backing of the LEADER+ approach in the Czech Republic was efficient as for the involvement of the farmers in this approach.

The final step in the research looked at the investigation of how the analyzed texts reflect the main principles (features) of the LEADER+ which are presented above. In total, 93 of the texts mentioned any of the principles of the LEADER+. Some articles mentioned more principles, therefore, in the texts there are 164 hints about the LEADER+ principles. Considering the fact that 45% of the analyzed texts did not mention any of the principles, it is possible to conclude that the media coverage of the LEADER+ approach in the sense of outlining its principles is not very intensive. The lower the number of information about the principles of the LEADER+, the less possibilities for the public to better understand the sense and meaning of this approach. Such situation, however, increased the possibility to manipulate the LEADER and to present it as something what does not need to correspond with its background. It might finally decrease the efficiency of this approach since it would not aim at the issues crucial for the LEADER+.

The question which was asked in the research was how far the funding used by the LAGs supported the LEADER+ approach in the sense as it is presented for the public (who finances this approach through its taxes) in the Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005. The impacts of the LEADER approach presented in the Table 4 and reflecting the mentioned Regulation is difficult to measure in the sense of the positivist paradigm of social sciences. To overcome the shortcomings of this paradigm, this paper suggested a new method ready to be used for the evaluation

Table 4. Principles of the LEADER reflected in mass media

Principle	Frequencies	%
The approach rooted in the territory	36	22.0
Bottom-up approach	34	20.7
The approach based on the decentralized management and financing	27	16.5
The approach related to cooperation and based on social networks	27	16.5
The approach involving partnership	19	11.5
The approach integrating various sectors in the territory	17	10.4
The approach based on innovations	4	2.4

Source: authors' calculations

of the preliminary impacts which are difficult to be quantifiable.

The information about the LEADER+ as the approach involving partnership, integrating various sectors and especially as the approach based on innovations are under the average compared with other types of information about the features about the LEADER+ in the Czech printed mass media. Their lower representation confirms what has been already stated when analyzing the situation of the farming-related projects. If farming is not fully integrated into the various LEADER+ projects, it decreases the integration of the individual sectors in the territory and in also limits the possibilities of various partnerships. In this sense, the LEADER+ approach was not used in the efficient way. Even more negatively, the number of the information about innovations can be evaluated. In this sense, the LEADER+ also did not meet its mission. That is why it is necessary to support more the LEADER+ orientation towards innovations in the future. Such endeavour would be also in accordance with the Lisbon Strategy. Similarly, the institutional measures related to the LEADER should be designed to support a higher integration of farmers into this approach.

## CONCLUSIONS

If the nature of the Community Initiatives (and today the Axis 4 LEADER in the Rural Development Programmes) is the transfer of the best practices into other sectors of the economy and society, it should be assumed that the best practices are published in the mass media in a relatively high frequency and scope (compared to other information about the LEADER+ approach). It is also assumed that the mass media will inform about what is the most obvious in the relation to the LEADER+ and the main features related to the activities of the LAGs. If the analysis of the media indicates that certain projects were supported, certain types of information were presented and certain features of this approach were achieved, then the LEADER+ can be evaluated for its preliminary impacts in the term of efficiency.

The suggested method discovered an interesting context of the implementation of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic. Here are the most interesting and significant findings:

– The lower transparency and public accountability of the activities of some local action groups (low amount of the information available in the public space) which was indentified in the research contradicts the nature of the LEADER+ approach (trans-

parency related to the transfer of the best practices). It might generally undermine the efficiency of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic understood as the “laboratory” of rural development. The taxpayers have the right to get as much as possible information about the use of the sources from the public budget (the LEADER+ uses such funds) in order to meet the democratic control which reflects the governance in rural development.

- The suggested method enables to demonstrate which LAGs were able to learn the nature and the principles of the LEADER+ faster (the more information from the particular LAG in the public space, the better the results of the mentioned learning). The LAGs which, based on the content analysis, are more adaptive and in advance regarding learning (*Český Západ, Posázaví, Sdružení Růže* and partly *Podralsko*) suggest that they used the funding in a more efficient way.
- The fact of the short period of implementing the LEADER+ approach was also probably reflected in the lower level of learning the nature and principles among some of the other LAGs. That is why it seems to be more appropriate to investigate the activities of the LAGs in a longer time period. The suggested method is appropriate for this longer-time investigation (it enables to make the research among many actors and the information about them in a longer time-span).
- The suggested methodology enables to find out the level of information about the activities of LAGs. As such, the methods helps to indicate which LAGs contributed more to eliminating social exclusion which is one of the main goals of the endogenous rural development. The LAGs which provide less information (it is interesting that the strategies of the development of the territory they operate were in some of them elaborated in cooperation with the non-academic sphere, while the strategies of the LAGs, which inform more about their activities, were developed in the cooperation with universities) are not so efficient. The sources they use are not spent in the most efficient way because these LAGs limit the possibilities of those who are not “in-the-know” to participate in the LEADER+ activities. As such, they do not contribute fully to the elimination of social exclusion.
- The method also pointed out the issues related to the transfer of the best practices. The results show (if not considering the low level of information about the activities of some LAGs) that the LEADER+ played a positive role and in this respect, it might be evaluated as highly efficient. The articles in the mass media, which addressed other LAGs than

those analyzed in this paper, also informed about the activities of these analyzed LAGs. It means that other LAGs searched for the inspiration in the first Czech 10 LAGs supported under the LEADER+ scheme. It was the way how to disseminate the good practices also into other territories.

- The support of the so-called “soft” (non-investment) projects and the use of investment projects to develop the infrastructure of non-investment activities indicates that the LEADER+ achieved its nature consisting in activating people in rural communities (the reconstructions and constructions were implemented to enable as much as possible the local people to be involved in the issues of the local community).
- A relatively less efficient is the involvement of the farmers in the LEADER+ (low number of the so-called farming projects). This situation might be the legacy of the previous development where the programme Leader Czech Republic was implemented. If the farmers are not more involved in the LEADER approach, some of its principles (the principles of partnership and of integration of the various sectors in the territory) are not met. As such, also the impacts of the LEADER approach would not be fully efficient since part of the rural actors and a very significant rural activity will be marginalized.
- The lower amount of information about the principles (main features) of the LEADER+ approach might suggest that some of the projects implemented under the LEADER+ only pretended to be such projects but in reality, they mismatched the nature of this initiative. The public misses a sort of guidance what is the practice of the LAGs (in the sense of knowing what the LEADER means and what it is about). For instance, the analysis showed that the LEADER+ was not considered as the approach aiming at developing various sorts of innovations. However, this fact is very important to evaluate its impacts. As such, the concrete development activities might aim toward other areas of action which were not assumed to be addressed by the LEADER+.

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