

SAPARD: experiences and challenges for the future

SAPARD: Zkušenosti a výzvy do budoucna

H. HUDEČKOVÁ, M. LOŠTÁK

Czech University of Agriculture, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract: Using the research technique of document study, the paper analyses printed mass media with national coverage (from the national daily newspapers to specialised journals) during the period of the beginning 2002 – October 2003. The task of the paper is to outline the experiences with the SAPARD Programme as they are recorded in mass media and found among stakeholders (i.e. farmers and the representatives of rural municipalities or rural businesses). The text prolongs the previous investigation among Czech SAPARD shareholders and compares the findings. The SAPARD Programme showed that they are the rural stakeholders who are well prepared to act in the institutionalised frames of the EU structural policy. As a necessary condition of stakeholders for the success in getting the EU funds, there are the visions, enthusiasm and appropriate objects for the the intended project. The issues which have to be developed (and therefore they are the challenge for the future) are achieving better co-ordination of activities, quality and good system of information, dissemination of gathered experiences and simplification of administration.

Key words: SAPARD, action, experience with EU Programmes, document study

Abstrakt: Článek na základě výzkumné techniky studia dokumentů analyzuje tišená masmedia s celostátní působností (od celostátních deníků až po odborné časopisy) v období od začátku roku 2002 do října 2003 s cílem přiblížit zkušenosti s programem SAPARD tak, jak je tato media zachytila mezi tzv. stakeholders (tj. zemědělci nebo představiteli venkovských komunit či venkovského nezemědělského podnikání). Text využívá návaznosti na předchozí šetření mezi shareholders, spojenými s českým programem SAPARD, a získaná zjištění mezi sebou konfrontuje. Program SAPARD ukázal, že především stakeholders jsou dobře připraveni na jednání v institucionalizovaných rámcích strukturální politiky EU. Za základní podmínky úspěchu stakeholders při získávání prostředků z EU lze považovat vizi, nadšení a vhodný objekt pro zamýšlený projekt. Mezi záležitostmi, které je třeba ještě rozvíjet, a představují tak výzvu do budoucna, patří dosažení vyšší koordinovanosti aktivit, kvalita a systematičnost informací, šíření získaných zkušeností a zjednodušení administrace.

Klíčová slova: SAPARD, jednání, zkušenosti s programy EU, studium dokumentů

INTRODUCTION

Considering an effective integration of the Czech agrarian sector into the European structures in relation with sustainable development, it is necessary to address the results and impacts of various instruments and approaches, which were used to achieve this goal. One of such tools was the SAPARD Programme. Its aim was to solve the priorities and specific problems in agriculture and rural development of the accession countries together with their long-term adaptation to the EU member states in the mentioned areas. At the same time the SAPARD Programme contributed to the implementation of *acquis communautaire* in the sphere of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and in other EU priorities in agriculture. It was assumed that through the participation in the projects implemented under the SAPARD Programme, the actors of rural life, farmers, and other rural stakeholders will be better prepared for the future mastery of act in the frames of the CAP. The links of the SAPARD Programme with the mastery to act and with institutionalisation of

acquis in the CAP open the room also for the sociological research. This field of the research is a great challenge for sociology to investigate the new circumstances within which rural people, farmers and food processors are to act.

GOALS AND METHODS USED

Achieved outcomes, results and impacts of the SAPARD Programme implementation from the point of view of the correspondence with those defined in the Plan SAPARD are the matter of the official evaluation procedures of the SAPARD Programme (especially ex-post evaluation). This paper will therefore highlight other aspects. We are interested in how do the people who are in contacts with this programme master their activities in the frames given by this programme. We would like to know how they learned to act in the newly established institutional structures and therefore how far are they ready to enter the EU.

If one of the sociological contributions to the study of human social life and one of sociology practical outcomes is (Giddens 1989) the assessment of the results of policy initiatives (assessing the effects of various policies), we could not avoid this challenge. Therefore, this text aims to assess the SAPARD Programme in relation to how the people can master their actions and how will the Czech people probably act in the frames of the CAP. The SAPARD Programme will be understood as a part of external structures corresponding with those existing in the EU. It is the difference from internalised and experienced structures within which the Czech farmers and rural people acted in the past.

We would like to outline in which way the SAPARD Programme enable participants (or even non-participants) to learn to master their activities, i.e. to act efficiently in accordance with our integration into the European structures. At a more concrete level, we would like to find out the real experience of people with this programme. They are the experiences of those who participated in the SAPARD Programmes directly as stakeholders.¹ There is also another value added to the goals outlined above. Our findings can be confronted and compared with findings gathered during the mid-term and ex-post official evaluation of the SAPARD Programme. What are we also going to achieve in this text is to respect the Cork declaration from 1996 which asks for rural stakeholders to be incorporated into evaluation of various rural development projects and programmes.

After considering pros and cons of qualitative and quantitative sociological research, we agreed to use the technique of documentary research, sometimes called document study (for more about this technique see: Bailey 1987, Holsti 1969, Majerová and Majer 1999, Pergler et al. 1969). If using appropriate research procedure, this type of research technique allows to achieve both high reliability (if observing the demands of representative documents sampling to analyse and to process the data from these documents – it allows to check similar documents at two or more points /instrument reliability/) and a high level of validity based on in-depth analysis of investigated issues in observed materials. Therefore, we are using quantitative analysis of the documents (an aim to gather quantified data about the SAPARD Programme, its results and impacts in relation to activities of people, for example in the sense of positive or negative influence) which can confirm or deny (as it is assumed from the quantitative research) our hypothetical thoughts, which emerged during the analysis of the documents using qualitative approach (a search for meanings and senses, which people ascribe to SAPARD Programme and to their activities).²

BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

The paper continues the previous work and research implemented as a part of the grant *Efektivní integrace českého agrárního sektoru v rámci evropských struktur – předpoklad trvale udržitelného rozvoje* (Effective integration of the Czech agrarian sector into the frames of European structures – the condition of sustainable development). The main idea embracing our research is that the SAPARD Programme means the creation of such structures (in the understanding of Giddens' theory of structuration – see Giddens 1984, 1993), which should contribute to higher efficiency of action of farmers and rural population after the Czech Republic joins the EU (in the sense of mastery to act in the context of the CAP).

We attempted to demonstrate that the activities within this structure are, as institutional economics suggests, joined with the ways how the people perceive and interpret them. Simply speaking, if people consider the structures of the SAPARD Programme as hostile, unclear or bad (i.e. they understand them in a negative way), then also the whole system of our participation in the CAP will not work efficiently. It will be more difficult to achieve the goals because the activities will be of higher transaction costs and their sustainability will be under question mark. On the other hand, internalisation of the structural frames given by the SAPARD Programme and their positive understanding will result in an efficient work of the system. It will decrease transaction costs.

The sources for our work presented in this paper are the documents dealing with the SAPARD, which were published in mass media (in press). These materials do not include only official information about the programme but they also present unofficial views concerning the SAPARD – how this programme is viewed by rural stakeholders (how farmers and rural people perceive and interpret it and what conclusion can be drawn upon their attitudes as for this programme). The reason to use materials from mass media for an analysis is because mass media significantly shape the contemporary society (Mc Luhan 1991). They also provide a great amount of information, and in principle, they do not rid people of the possibility of critical evaluation (Thompson in Giddens 1999). An advantage of communication in mass media is its great scope in space and time. On the other hand, its monologue character means its disadvantage. Another disadvantage is the possibility to misuse the symbolic power related to the justification and defence of the interests of dominant groups (Giddens 1999). Because documents printed in mass media significantly shape our experiences and public opinion, we opted for

¹ The experiences of shareholders were investigated in 2002 using in-depth interviews with them.

² Originally we considered to survey the SAPARD stakeholders – those who benefited from the SAPARD support. Within the research funded by the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic (grant No MSM 4111000013), which also supports the origin of this paper, we wanted to ask the SAPARD stakeholders about their experiences and in the paper's discussion and conclusion to confront them with the results of the interviews with the SAPARD shareholders (Tvrdouš et al 2003). However, the new circumstances and consideration of pros and cons of various research methods oriented our research activities towards the direction whose outcomes are presented in this paper.

the analysis of the SAPARD oriented documents as a relevant technique through which we would like to outline the answers to questions: if and how (in which way) did the SAPARD Programme contributed to an efficient integration of the Czech agriculture and rural areas into the EU.

MATERIALS

We analysed the articles in selected printed documents from the time of the SAPARD preparation and start (beginning of 2002) till the end of October 2003. Analysed media were selected regarding the area of interests (because the SAPARD is defined to support agriculture and the countryside we investigated printed mass media which address these areas) and regarding to representative coverage of the Czech Republic (national printed mass media). Therefore, we selected to analyse these documents:

- a. national daily newspapers – *MF Dnes*, *Právo*, *Hospodářské noviny*
- b. national news press agency and its news – *ČTK*
- c. weekly journals specialising in areas at which the SAPARD aimed – *Zemědělec*, *Veřejná správa*
- d. monthly journal specialising in the work and development of municipalities – *Moderní obec*
- e. regional printed mass media and their news/articles stored in www portal AGRIS (<http://www.agris.cz>)
- f. special journals whose papers are available through www portal AGRIS³

In total, we analysed 57 articles, which were transformed into 205 categorised records (other 23 items were not finally analysed because they were disordered and were not specific to our field of research). The analysis was divided into 7 time periods, which corresponded with the main activities implemented under the SAPARD Programme – i.e. the acceptance and approval of the projects for the particular main and specific periods (waves) of the SAPARD Programme implementation:

- 1st period: till May 2002 (till the deadline for the projects for the first wave of the SAPARD);
- 2nd period: June 2002 – till November 2002 (till the deadline for the projects for the second wave of the SAPARD);
- 3rd period: December 2002 (till the deadline for the projects for the third wave of the SAPARD);
- 4th period: January 2003 – till February 2003 (till the deadline for the projects for the fourth wave of the SAPARD);
- 5th period: March 2003 – till April 2003 (till the deadline for the projects for the fifth wave of the SAPARD);
- 6th period: May 2003 – July 2003 (the second and the third wave for submitting the projects under 3.1 measure /technical assistance/);

– 7th period: August 2003 – till October 2003 (acceptance of projects related to the fourth wave – under 2.3 measure /agricultural production used to protect environment and landscape/).

Our analysis was compared with the results of the study addressing similar issues: Samková, P. *Zkušenosti českých regionálních aktérů s finanční pomocí Evropské unie* (The experiences of the Czech regional actors with the financial assistance of the European Union)⁴. In the time of finishing our analysis (November 2003) we also discussed our findings with colleagues from the *VÚZE* (Research Institute of Agricultural Economics) in Brno (J. Pražan, J. Koutná) who investigated social and economic impacts and technological preconditions of the participation of farmers in the SAPARD Programme measure: Methods of agricultural production used to protect environment and landscape (measure 2.3).

RESULTS

Interest in the SAPARD in printed mass media

During the time which was investigated (beginning of 2002 – October 2003), the interest of selected mass media towards the SAPARD increased. The start of the increase was the beginning of 2003. The highest interest was in the time of submitting the projects for the 4th wave – in February 2003, when seven analysed articles addressed the SAPARD (however, they did not address the topic which is defined by the fourth wave of submitted projects – i.e. agri-environmental measure). The second peak when we found high interest of printed mass media in the SAPARD is the last period (August 2003 – October 2003). In August 2003 and also in October 2003, we found 4 articles dealing with the analysed issues. Most of the articles from this last period were of accounting (assessing) and forecasting character (see latter).

Concerning various mass media and their interest in the SAPARD during the time, the interest to the SAPARD grows in the press agency *ČTK* (in total 7 articles/news). The daily *Právo* (7 articles) shows at the beginning a growing interest in the SAPARD, which latter turns down. Declining interest was found in *Hospodářské noviny* (5 articles). *MF Dnes* (7 articles) shows stable interests in the SAPARD throughout the entire investigated time. The journals specialised in community and regional administration copy (7 articles) the general tendency outlined above – an increased interest till the beginning of 2003 with the peak in February 2003. *Zemědělec* (14 articles) indicates the regular frequency of articles about the SAPARD – roughly one article per one month (especially since January 2003). The last 9 articles

³ The list does not include the printed materials, which disappeared during the investigated time – *Zpravodaj Spolku pro obnovu venkova* and *Zemské noviny*.

⁴ This study, which is a report about the results of a questionnaire survey implemented by the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague, was co-funded by European Commission. The goal of the survey was to find out the experiences of the Czech regional actors with the programmes of EU and their readiness to use financial assistance from structural funds.

printed in regional newspapers or in special journals and recorded in the AGRIS database do not indicate any significant tendency of publication frequency.

What is interesting, it is to investigate (however only in non-specific mass media, which are not specially oriented to agriculture or the countryside), if the interest in the SAPARD aims more to rural development measures or to agricultural measures. *MF Dnes* almost exclusively reported about municipalities and regions (rural development) while *Právo* preferred the agricultural issues (ratio agriculture to rural development in *Právo* is 2:1). Similarly dominant (as in a case of *MF Dnes*) is the preference of the reports and news by the *ČTK*. In this case, however, the articles concern food processing and food industry and not rural development. A balanced interest in areas supported by the SAPARD is found only in *Hospodářské noviny* whose total interest in the SAPARD (compared with other printed mass media) is, however, significantly lower.

The development of the content in the printed information about the SAPARD

We cannot say that there exists a unanimous tendency that in the times when printed media were more interested in the SAPARD as for the number of articles, the articles were more comprehensive and substantial.

The most frequent addressed issues in the analysed articles (out of 205 analysed categories) were demonstrations and evaluations of practical experiences gathered through the participation in the SAPARD (their frequency and weight have been growing since half of 2002). In the half of 2003, these issues were changed into accountability and balancing these experiences. The third place in the frequency is held by negative comments concerning the SAPARD Programme (strong since the beginning of 2002), and also by general information about this programme (present since the beginning of 2002 with the slower tendency to decrease). Among more frequent issues in analysing content of information about the SAPARD, we also found its positive assessment, which counterbalanced its negative evaluation since the beginning of 2003 (in a sum, the frequency of positive evaluation is lower than the negative SAPARD assessment).

All other issues in articles about the SAPARD are significantly less frequent. They are ranked in this order: information about the results of the projects selection in particular waves (they are similar to frequent information about the experiences in the SAPARD but they lack any assessment); information about the SAPARD project developers (typical for the year 2002 and the beginning of 2003); information about the mechanism of the control (typical for the last two investigated periods).

Only a marginal position got the information about those who are interested in the SAPARD or about the SAPARD mission (although such kind of information could be published since the beginning of the investigated time). A similarly marginal is the information, which however could be published only at the end of

the SAPARD (or since April 2003) – information about the implemented projects, general information and expectation aiming to the EAGGF for which the SAPARD was a predecessor.

The overview of the content of printed information about the SAPARD is not complete without a note about misinformation. Misinformation in the analysed documents amounts to 1/20 (i.e. 10) of categorised items and their greatest producer was *MF Dnes*. The content of misinformation concerned the procedure of the SAPARD support – wrong (“wrong” means here unclear, biased, misleading or leading to misinterpretation) definition of the projects evaluating bodies, wrong definition of deadlines for projects proposal submitting, wrong definition of applicants. Other misinformation concerned the definition of activities related to the SAPARD and the definition of the maximal level of support from the SAPARD. We also found unclear, biased and misleading presentation of the structures of the submitted and successful projects, which can be counted as another misinformation.

Analysis of content of printed materials about the SAPARD

We start with the **information of more general character**, which mostly omits any evaluation. There can be found the information about the SAPARD Programme including its mission, mechanism and the amount of the SAPARD grants, and deadlines for submitting the projects application in announced waves. Another, less general information concerns the structures of the submitted and successful projects (sometimes even in various waves), which is often accompanied with the amount of finances or with presenting the differences in the proportion of the EU support and projects holders own financing of the SAPARD in various measures. We can find here the articles and news, which show the basic criteria of projects selection or the chances to be successful in the division according to the measures (Czech SAPARD measures 1.1–1.4, 2.1, 2.2 are always concerned). This information in mass media is based on the existing number of accepted and successful projects. The information of a more general character continues by outlooks (expectations) after the SAPARD Programme ends.

The mentioned information of non-evaluation type is continued by the **information with higher level of evaluating (assessing) attitudes**. It includes these ideas:

- If comparing the SAPARD with other similar programmes – then the SAPARD is more “generous”;
- then it was good that in the frames of the PHARE Programme and the TEST Programme (this programme was operated by the Ministry of Regional Development) it was possible to prepare for the project documentation necessary for the SAPARD Programme.
- If balancing the funding in the structure according to various waves and according to aims of the project applications

- then the interest in and the quality of projects (in the successive waves) grew;
- then the projects approved for the measures 1.1-1.4 (agricultural measures) outnumbered the approved projects for measures 2.1 and 2.2 (rural development measures);
- then the third and the fourth waves were typical by the relative higher number of approved projects (compared to the number of projects which were submitted).
- The demand that funding in the future should be more under the control of regional administration.
- If outlook (expectation) into the future is done
 - we found positive attitudes (good SAPARD mastering, whose evidence is in using all available finances from the EU compared to the problems of some other pre-accession countries; this fact signals that the adaptation to institutional frames of the EU structural funds goes well, especially as for the projects applicants);
 - we found negative attitudes (the preparation of the institutional basis on the Czech side is delayed – it concerns the paying agency);
 - we found suggestions (concrete conditions for the future institutionalised activities are not entirely known but the project preparation is so difficult that potential applicants should pay attention to this preparation today; what is necessary to address, it is the quality of agricultural products processing and integration of agrarian sector in regional economy);
 - we found ideas about the future (the SAPARD, which is transforming into the Sector Operation Programme, aims the Czech agriculture into other direction than we were used in the past; however, it is our matter to set up our own Czech vision of agriculture).

In the same way, we can divide, concrete information about the SAPARD – where non-evaluating and evaluating information links one to another. The majority of the **concrete information of non-evaluation character** shows a concrete orientation of the projects under measures 1.4–1.4, 2.1 and 2.2 (the interest in measures 2.3 and 3.1 is marginal). Another information concerns the question why there was the supremacy of the projects in sustainable development of rural areas over the projects addressing the increase of the competitiveness of agriculture (as the reasons of such situation in the first wave, there are mentioned: inappropriate term for the farmers from the point of view of their farming works; higher distrust of the farmers; the necessity of immediate implementation of farmers entrepreneurial needs while the time to get money from the SAPARD takes longer time), and information stating the tendency to equal this disproportion in the next wave. The concrete information concerns also appropriate advisory activities. The information is gradually changed into the articles and news about the projects implementation, which is sometime accompanied by the problems in meeting all the rules the SAPARD requires. It concerns mostly the conditions of the procurement (tender) procedures for the companies, which are to

implement the works necessary to achieve the goals of approved project – there is not a sufficient number of companies listed in the competition for the award. Another group of information addresses the statements that the fears concerning reimbursement of the invested sources (which were received in bank credits) are not frequent because the ongoing controls did not find significant shortcomings and imperfections, if project holders respect given rules.

Evaluating information, which is concerned, again continues this non-evaluating concrete information:

- Municipality and micro-regional projects
 - we found ideas about the TEST projects which gave the municipalities and micro-regions the chances to prepare for the elaboration project documents for the SAPARD;
 - there are suggestions concerning the projects to be successful (smaller and multifunctional projects are the suggested way).
- The difficulties of projects document elaboration and projects implementation from the administrative and professional point of view (this difficulty is high but it is necessary).
- Considering the interest in the SAPARD
 - the interest was high among the municipalities and micro-regions and lower among the farmers;
 - direct challenge to the food-industry (food-processors) to use the chances given by the SAPARD in order to meet the EU requirements in the area of their activities;
 - the rebuke toward the Land Register Offices that these offices are not active enough in the SAPARD.
- The control of the projects and of their implementation
 - the control has already become a common and normal reality and is not easy;
 - the control concerns matters of fact and not odd issues;
 - if a person who is implementing project complies with the agreed rules of the game, than the control is without big problems (and a person does not need to be afraid of this control).

A special category in the analysed texts was the group of **projects developers**. Any information about them always contained their assessment. At the beginning, the mass media pointed out a not very good experience of project applicants with the advisors (project developers) and their firms who advised or assisted in project preparation. The firms often worked on many projects at the same time, therefore they did not pay deep attention to them and they did not know the milieu of project implementation (in 2002). In 2003, the quality of their work increased. Mass media strongly suggest being careful in asking the project developers in the future as for their quality. Often we found the assessment that it is better to have a local expert because s/he knows the local environment (this statement was the most frequent among the successful project applicants in rural development measures 2.1 and 2.2).

All other categorised items were selected because they contain assessing statements – pros and cons, experiences and the SAPARD results.

Negative assessment of the SAPARD programme can be divided into following areas:

- Information (non-professional and fragmentary).
- Postponed start of the SAPARD implementation (it was the reason of the first distrust in the SAPARD).
- Setting up the SAPARD bodies (it was unfair because it included only the administrators and other officials who were not familiar with the local environment in which the projects were to be implemented).
- Difficult projects administration (it complicates the activities of projects applicants).
- The necessity to finance the project before the costs are reimbursed from the SAPARD grant (it puts economically weaker actors into more difficult position in the chances to submit the project and to be successful because of the existing obvious distrust of banks to provide them with credits).
- The preference was given to non-productive activities, the productive activities were the second.
- The preference was given to the projects in measures for increasing competitiveness of the agriculture, not to the measures for sustainable development of rural areas.
- The preference was given to the large businesses before the SME.
- The chance was not given to the processors of plant products and to forestry at all.

Positive assessment of the SAPARD Programme concentrated in following areas:

- Potential applicants had the chance to get funding for their own development.
- Good experience in the first wave generated the interest in other waves of the SAPARD.
- Activities aiming to apply for the support from the SAPARD resulted in associating the municipalities and increased the willingness and mastery of the co-operation.
- The SAPARD was good to prepare potential applicants for the procedures related to the EU structural funds

This paragraph brings the assessment of the **SAPARD results**. The primary distrust in the SAPARD was soon (after the first wave) replaced by the high interest in support from this programme. It is confirmed by the high number of demands towards the SAPARD and the limited possibility to satisfy them, although the vast majority of demands (submitted projects) were of good quality (in printed materials, only municipal and micro-regional project application and more rational behaviour of the applicants asking this kind of support are mentioned in this sense). When speaking about success in receiving the support for the projects, previous long-term campaign and quality of the advisory services are mentioned as reasons of success. Unsuccessful projects are related to the difficult conditions, which have to be met in elaborating the projects. In this area of the SAPARD assess-

ment, there is obvious disproportion – there exist both the information that setting up the rules gave the advantages to the projects aiming to increase the competitiveness of agriculture over the projects for the sustainable rural development and the information stating that nobody was put into advantageous or disadvantageous position (moreover, there are not such media where a biased assessment can be assumed as the result of the interest groups behind particular medium).

In the summarised assessment of the SAPARD results, the use of the funds (their spending) in the Czech Republic compared with the use (not spending) in other pre-accession countries sounds very favourable for the Czech Republic. The reason of such situation was high demand of well prepared projects in the Czech Republic which accounts for maximal spending of funding available for the Czech Republic, while in some other pre-accession countries, there were smaller or greater problems in spending the SAPARD funds (it concerns mostly finances about which the press oriented to agricultural and food industry refers).

The last block of analysed categories concerns the **experiences**. Their outline has the function of practical advises for the action of participants in the frame of institutionalised forms as for the support of the Czech Republic from the EU structural funds:

- It is necessary to have a vision, enthusiasm and appropriate object of activities corresponding with SAPARD Programme orientation.
- The quality of the project is more important than the quantity of submitted projects.
- In preparing the concrete project it is necessary to departure from the level of higher type – from the general strategy of development.
- It is appropriate to address the complexity in the project (to meet as much as possible criteria, not lower number of criteria with their significant fulfilment – multifunctional projects are preferred).
- What cannot be underestimated (what has to be taken into consideration seriously):
 - the duty to supply with the project the statements of the authorised administrative bodies;
 - the appraisal (estimation) of the property because of the credit and early request for the credit in a bank;
 - checking the process of accountability (to account the spending);
 - consultations with the authorised bodies and their extension services;
 - elaboration of the project's environmental impacts and social impacts of the project implementation.

Also in this area of analysis of categorised items concerning the SAPARD Programme in the press, there is an obvious disproportion as for the trustfulness of the submitted projects. We can find both the emphasis on the smaller projects (their trustfulness is derived from the easier time and financial accountability of projects feasibility) and the statements considering larger projects to be more trustful (their trustfulness is derived from their complexity and multifunctionality and also because they

confirm the mastery to co-operate and co-ordinate the activities of participating actors).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the printed mass media gave us a broader spectrum of information compared to information we gathered in the interviews with the shareholders. The reason was not only longer time period, which was analysed, but also the fact that analysis of the mass media represents much larger area of actors in the SAPARD Programme.

A specific experience is that printed articles and news indicate the differences in the opinions of stakeholders as for some significant issues. Comparing the document analysis (which represents the SAPARD stakeholders) and structured interviews (representing shareholders), which we implemented after the first wave of the SAPARD Programme⁵, there emerge other experiences with the SAPARD – experiences where both groups share the same opinions and experiences where their opinions differ.

The following text will outline the above-mentioned three types of experiences with their content. We can assume that the experiences with the SAPARD where both shareholders and stakeholders share the same opinion are reliable. The experiences where their opinions differ could mostly suggest a particular rivalry between the areas of rural development (representation related to municipalities/micro-regions – territories) and areas of agriculture and food-industry (representation related to production). The differences could be also explained in various views of those who manage (shareholders) and those who are the final beneficiaries (stakeholders). This difference emerges from their various social roles and social positions. The third type of experiences, where various groups of stakeholders differ, goes laterally through the potential and real applicants for the support from the SAPARD and only in a smaller level expresses the group interests of individual applicants.

Experiences where both stakeholders and shareholders agree

This first type of experience can be divided according to the time of the activities related to the SAPARD.

Experience with preparing the SAPARD Programme introduction

They were the shareholders whose adaptation to the action in institutionalised frames created by the EU was slow. As a consequence the problems and shortcomings

in information for the applicants (stakeholders) lasted till the second wave. After two waves, the formal information (from shareholders to stakeholders) was supplemented with informal information (among the stakeholders). The time and the existence of non-organised information contributed to successful action in a new institutional frame. It also supports the hypothesis that the adaptability of stakeholders (individuals and small, less formally organised groups) was faster than the adaptability of shareholders (large, formal organisations). The shortcomings among the shareholders (due to postponed start of the SAPARD Programme implementation) were obvious till about a half of the time in which the the SAPARD Programme was implemented.

Both stakeholders and shareholders also agree that the centre (core) excluded from the participation in decision-making the de-centralised (regional) bodies.

The experience with the beginning phase of the SAPARD Programme implementation

The time and deadline to submit the projects in the first wave of the SAPARD made municipalities/micro-regions advantageous compared to other stakeholders. The reason was the unsuitable term from the point of view of working cycle of farmers (in spring the farmers are in fields having no time to work on projects). As a consequence, there emerged a great demand to be supported in the projects addressing sustainable rural development. The demand was not saturated, which resulted into an opinion (among stakeholders) that non-producing activities are in disadvantageous position compared to productive (farming and food-processing) activities. This opinion was also supported by setting up the conditions for the division of finances for the agriculture (priority 1 in the Czech SAPARD) and rural development (priority 2) in the ratio 2:1.

Other shortcomings, which were found among the stakeholders, there was their underestimation of the really strict project ex-ante evaluation in the sense of necessity to meet all requirements concerning project submitting.

Both stakeholders and shareholders agree that the SAPARD favoured “large applicants” from private and public sphere in the detriment of the SME businesses.⁶

Ongoing experiences and their assessment

The SAPARD was a real practical experience how to act in a new institutionalised frame created by the EU structural policy. In this respect, however, the experience is related only to stakeholders, not to shareholders. Mass media mostly only report (refer without assessment) about shareholders or protect them but almost do not criticise them.

⁵ Shareholders are those who manage and administer the SAPARD, decide about it and control it. Stakeholders are the SAPARD clients.

⁶ Note: in non-formal interviews with the representatives of “large” food processing companies these people told us an opposite version – they believed the SAPARD was favourable for the SME businesses because the large firms needed a much higher financial support than available in the SAPARD. These views were not, however, presented in the analysed printed materials.

Experiences where opinions of stakeholders and shareholders differ

The analysed printed information (which presents the opinions of stakeholders) suggests that the projects of municipalities/micro-regions were better prepared. This conclusion is based most probably on the amount of the submitted project applications in rural development area. At the same time, it is added that municipalities/micro-regions showed a more rational behaviour compared to the other SAPARD actors among the stakeholders. It is necessary to emphasise that this sort of information was produced by *MF Dnes* (it is also the daily, which was the greatest producer of misinformation about the SAPARD compared to other analysed mass media).

However, when analysing the procedure of approval of the projects in the first wave of the SAPARD (which was due to shortcomings in information the most difficult for the stakeholders), it is evident that the projects under the governance of the Ministry for Regional Development (rural development projects) were the projects, which were more eliminated by the regional projects selection sub-committees because of being of a lower quality compared to agricultural projects (the rural development projects were not carefully prepared, there was evident underestimation of submitting all necessary formal requirements concerning the projects).

If the national daily newspaper with the largest number of readers presents as “better” the projects of municipalities/micro-regions, then we can assume that public opinion thinks about agriculture as asking the privileges that farming does not deserve. Public opinion is offered more with the interests of the municipalities or of regional governments. There are rather municipalities/micro-regions (compared to farmers), who are more incorporated into the creation of public opinion for their own benefit. The farmers are lagging behind in this type of communication⁷.

Experiences where opinions of stakeholders differ

The questions, which occupied significant place in mass media but the answers to them were ambiguous or significantly differed, can be divided into three areas:

Own elaboration of the project or its elaboration by advisory/extension firms

Positive assessment of the advisory/extension firms is supported by the acknowledgement of the professional character. On the other hand, favour to own project elaboration refers to advisory/extension firms' lower engage-

ment in project preparation and non-familiarity with local environment (low sensitivity to it). Moreover, in the first phase of project preparation, the quantity of projects preparation won over their quality. The opposite situation exists, if elaboration of the projects is done by the very project applicants (not by the advisory/extension firms). With the existence of the SAPARD and with growing experiences the project's preparing activities become more professional among the very applicants. The problem which continues is their lower social capital (compared to firms specialised in projecting and advisory/extension firms), which can be used in the decisive moments in processing and submitting the projects. The division of labour and co-operation between the clients (those who asked for the support) and project workers (specialists) is not mentioned in mass media.

Discrimination or equal chances

Some analysed documents confirm the absencing preferences, the other admit the discrimination⁸:

- ☞ We found the thoughts about the discrimination of municipalities/micro-regions compared to agriculture and processing industry.
- We found the thoughts about the discrimination of processors of plant production compared to processors of animal production.
- We found the thoughts about the discrimination of forestry compared to other areas (the reason can be that the forestry was not among the measures in the Czech SAPARD Programme although suggested by the Council Regulation 1268/1999).

Both attitudes (discrimination, preferences) are so diffused that it is difficult to think in which direction the public opinion is shaped.

Large or small projects

For submitting smaller projects, there speaks the availability of finances necessary for their implementation and their control – they are trustworthy, their accountability and controllability is easy. If thinking about larger projects, it is suggested to consider the basic view of the SAPARD mission. Only complex solution whose impacts are multifunctional (in the project application there must be evident the aim to fulfil more criteria) can be considered as the development in the proper sense of the word.

CONCLUSION

The daily newspapers, which have the largest number of readers in the Czech Republic, did not pay any great attention to the SAPARD. Before the half of 2003, it

⁷ Comparing the content of the specialised journals in the categories we analysed, that they are *Moderní obec* and *Veřejná správa*, which refer about the SAPARD in the way that can address “an average citizen who is not an expert”. In *Zemědělec*, we can find the detailed, comprehensive articles. They mostly present the state-of-art and are so specific they cannot attract larger public. We think that it is not only due to the content, which is referred.

⁸ The discrimination of the SME was agreed both by stakeholders and shareholders in analysed materials (see the above section The experience with the beginning phase of SAPARD Programme implementation).

seems they were delayed in reaction to the SAPARD existence, and in the last period (autumn 2003) they assess basic experience with the SAPARD in the support of the rural development and agriculture. In this work some of them (*MF Dnes*) omitted agriculture, while the other (*Právo*) paid more attention to agriculture than to the countryside. The information in *Hospodářské noviny* is more balanced as for agriculture and the countryside.

From the point of view of the content of the information in printed mass-media (daily newspapers *Právo*, *MF Dnes*, *Hospodářské noviny*, news from the press agency ČTK and the specialised weekly and monthly journals) there are found these basic tendencies:

- General information a little bit prevails over concrete information.
- Non-evaluating information a little bit prevails over evaluating (assessing) information.
- Negative assessing information prevails over positive assessing information.
- The change from negative towards positive evaluation during the time of investigated periods.

The SAPARD is generally considered to be relatively generous programme; the information about the chances to use this programme was disseminated fast (the milestone was the second wave). The outcome was growing interest to use offered chances and also the quality of projects increased.

The final thoughts about the SAPARD suggest it was, from the point of view of stakeholders, a really good preparation for the action in the institutionalised frames of the EU structural policy. Spending money for the Czech Republic confirms this probe was successful. Shareholders are not mentioned in this respect but the notes about problems at the beginning (the accreditation of the SAPARD Agency) and at the end (establishing the Payment Agency for the CAP) indicate that among them the adaptation is less successful.

The joining link between “direct” shareholders and stakeholders are the experts in project development (project elaboration). We found relatively many items of information about them, which also confirms their gradual adaptation to the action in the sense “from the surplus in quantity towards quality of projects working out”.

The difficult steps in required action (in preparing the projects) are:

- Considering the fact that in preparing the project, it is necessary to negotiate with many bodies and their statements have to be documented.
- Indicators of the impacts of prepared projects in environment and so-called social impacts have to be accurate and concrete (but finding concrete indicators of impacts in environmental and social areas was difficult).

- Real estimation of how much time is needed to put into project preparation regarding all other necessary talks and negotiations, documents, accountability of implemented action and other project administration.

The successful SAPARD applicants speak about three condition of their success: (i) to have the vision, (ii) to have the enthusiasm, and (iii) to have an appropriate object for the intended project. Continuing these thoughts in general we can say that the success of the support from the EAGGF depends from the point of view of the Czech Republic on national vision of agriculture and on strategic planning of this vision’s implementation on national and regional levels.

Another aspect of concluding more general thoughts is the transposition of agriculture into the area of rural life. In the principle of partnership, which was supported by the SAPARD, the dimension municipality (micro-region, region) – farmers (association of farmers, association of farmers and food processors) – the assistance of regional institutions engaged in the CAP implementation is still missing. It is the partnership, which goes through the public and private sectors and increases the role of decentralised bodies in the detriment of centralised ones.

The SAPARD Programme implementation in the Czech Republic indicates the needs to develop these means (and corresponding instruments) which should make the activities of actors in the new institutional frame easier: co-ordination of activities, quality of information and good system of information, dissemination of gathered experiences, and to simplify the administration.

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Arrived on 8th March 2004

Contact address:

Doc. Mgr. Helena Hudečková, CSc., PhDr. Michal Lošťák, Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze, Kamýcká 129, 165 21 Praha 6-Suchbát, Česká republika, tel.: +420 224 382 310 (311), e-mail: lostak@pef.czu.cz
