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COMPENDIUM

IMPACT OF INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE REGIONAL
MANAGEMENT – CASES OF SUCCESSFUL LAGS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Regional policy is currently one of the key policies in the European Union (EU). Regional policy was established in the 1970s with the aim to help disadvantaged regions. The most important objective of regional policy is to reduce economic, social and environmental disparities between regions. For the effective functioning of regional policy it is very important to cooperate within the region. The regional actors can easily achieve their goals particularly by mutual cooperation. The rural areas represent a large part of European territory where live more than half of the EU's population. That is why the support for rural area is becoming more and more serious.

Local Action Groups (LAGs) represent the regional actors developing the rural areas. LAGs have been created since 2004, in connection with the accession to the EU. Since this year, new opportunities for financial resources have been opened up to the Czech regions. Through LAGs, financial subsidies should be redistributed efficiently to the most needed, using the bottom-up principle. LAGs should work with the LEADER method, based on the fact that the region's own actors know their needs most and are able to solve them by themselves. Beside the redistribution of funds, LAGs started to focus on the other activities aimed at developing and exploiting the potential of the rural region.

The diploma thesis aims to evaluate the impact of interregional cooperation on regional management, based on the example of a successful LAG. The whole thesis is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical part focuses on regional policy, rural development policy, Rural Development Program, the LEADER method, explains the concept of "local action group" and different forms of cooperation. The second part is devoted to the analysis of selected LAG, including the characteristics of the territory, the strategic documents, the cooperation projects, and the overall activities of the LAG. The output of these analyses is the evaluation of the quality of the LAG's work and the proposal to any shortages.

2 AIMS AND METHODS

2.1 Aims

Diploma thesis focused on LAG so-called "MAS Brána Písecka, z.s" (LAG BP) and it aims to analyse and evaluate its activity within the region. This paper does not evaluate only the effectiveness of the work of the selected LAG but also its impact on regional

development. The work will bring out both the basic characteristics of the LAG's functioning and outlines the realized projects, explaining the principle and possibilities of financial support. Based on the questionnaire, the participation of municipalities in the area will be analysed. The answers of representatives of municipalities will outline the effectiveness of selected LAG and outline the impact of interregional cooperation. According to the findings and results, possible improvements will be proposed. The result of this work will be the analysis of the influence of regional cooperation of the selected LAG on the development of the region. Three main hypotheses were set out for this work and its aim is to find an appropriate explanation and answer for them:

- 1) Interregional cooperation plays a significant role in regional management.
- 2) Through the projects and other activities, LAGs support development beyond LEADER method.
- 3) The selected LAG contributes to the development of the region by its activities.

2.2 Methods

Dividing the thesis into two parts, the theoretical part is based on a literary research. This part uses secondary sources for theoretical information. A large part of the information was also obtained thanks to the regular communication with the employees of the selected LAG. The practical part represents the analysis of selected LAG and the research part. The introduction of this section provides basic information on selected LAG, including its strategic documents and cooperation projects. The quantitative method of the questionnaire was chosen as the most appropriate method of research for this kind of work.

The research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire, which was created as an online and printed form. Respondents of this survey were mayors of all 26 municipalities in the territory of the selected LAG. The questionnaire was based on 15 predominantly closed questions, with multiple responses or answers. Some questions were filtering, when respondents could be directed to other, additional questions. The questionnaire was structured into three thematic areas. The first three questions were focused on plans or problems in the municipalities. A large part of the questionnaire consisted of questions relating to subsidies, projects, cooperation, etc. At the end, the respondents have a chance

to add answers or comments relating to the LAG's work. The data obtained from the research were described and presented using tables and graphs.

The online form of the questionnaire was sent to municipal representatives on 16th May 2018. Due to the small number of answers, it was necessary to arrange personal appointments by phone and to answer the questions using the printed questionnaire. The meetings were more of a qualitative research that took place as a semi-standardized interview. At the end of the thesis, the results of the analysis were evaluated, and the initial hypothesis were confirmed or refuted.

3 LITERARY RESEARCH

3.1 Regional policy

Regional policy of the EU has been an important factor in last 20 years, helping poor regions to compete in the European Single Market and cope with more prosperous areas. This policy reflects the principle of solidarity within the whole of the European Union, which aims to reduce economic and social disparities between regions. (Euroskop.cz, 2008) Regional policy is the EU's main investing instrument within the largest part of the EU budget. In the current programming period it represents € 351.8 billion out of a total of € 1.082 billion. (European Union Policies: Regional Policy, 2014). The main instruments of EU regional policy include the so-called Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) and the Cohesion Fund. In EU Member States, national and regional authorities are responsible for the administration of the funds. Depending on the regions' needs, these managing authorities select, monitor and finance the relevant projects. The regional policy budget is set for seven years. (European Regional Policy, an inspiration for countries outside the EU ?, 2009). Professional literature considers regional policy as a set of activities aimed at creating and developing equitable regional development. Development can thus be understood as a process of positive quantitative or qualitative change. As literature states, the terms "development" and "growth" are often mistaken. Regional growth is defined as an increase in the total production of the region over a given period. Regional development, on the other hand, involves a complex of mentioned processes in the region. These processes are influenced a lot by the attitudes and activities of citizens, local authorities or other actors in the region. As part of regional policy, we are dealing with term of

regional management. Under this term is understood the interplay of regional actors, which develops development concepts, generates new project ideas and stabilizes the position of the region. The main objective of regional management is not the "leadership" of the region. Regional management thus represents a forming, negotiation and project orientation in the development of the region. In the Czech Republic, the concept of regional policy is beginning to come closer in the end of the 1990s in a national industry restructuring. By this change in industry, the unemployment rate suddenly increased. In the Czech Republic, the problem has also grown in areas affected by the impact of industry, for example in the areas of North Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. As a result, regional policy has once again come to help and restore all affected regions. In 1998, the Government of the Czech Republic adopted its Resolution No. 235 of the Regional Policy Principles, whose aim was to unify and stabilize the general rules for the implementation of regional policy in the Czech Republic in line with the EU practice. This document identifies regional policy as a conceptual activity of the state, regional and local authorities whose aim is to contribute to the balanced and harmonious development of individual regions in the Czech Republic and to reduce the differences between the levels of development of individual regions. (Principles of Regional Policy, 2018).

3.2 Rural development policy

EU rural development policy helps rural areas face economical, environmental and social challenges. Rural development policy programs are financed from both the EU budget and state, regional and local funds. Each EU Member State receives funding for the entire seven-year period through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The main task of the EAFRD is to fulfil the Europe 2020 strategy by supporting sustainable development in rural areas.

3.3 LEADER method

The philosophy of this method is that the actors in the region themselves know best their problems and are able to solve them by themselves. LAG creates strategic plans that define the direction the region should aim for. The basic document of the LAG is Strategy Community-Led Local Development (SCLLD). The LEADER method aims to contribute to a better targeting of support for rural areas and the development of cooperation among local actors. In addition to Rural Development Programme, the following programs will be included in the CLLD implementation: Integrated Regional Operational Program

(IROP), the Operational Program Employment (OPE) and the Operational Program Environment (OPE). (Metoda LEADER a CLLD, 2015)

3.4 Local Action Group

The LAG is a politically independent community of citizens, non-profit organizations, the private business community and public administration, especially municipalities or associations of municipalities. By acquiring and distributing subsidies, LAGs contribute to rural development and agriculture in their defined territory. In the Czech Republic, the number of LAGs is constantly increasing. According to the Czech Statistical Office, as at 21st June 2018, there are 179 LAGs in the Czech Republic which cover 94% of the municipalities in the Czech Republic. The European Network for Rural Development states that there are approximately 2600 LAGs in the EU that cover more than 54% of the rural population in the EU. The LAG uses both own and external resources as main finances. The use of external financial resources is mainly the regional resources and in addition to grants and subsidies, LAGs can obtain financial resources through charging services such as processing grant applications or processing expert studies. The LAG is a community of the private and public sector that cooperates on rural development and agriculture. One of its main tools is the active acquisition and redistribution of subsidies. (Leader - budoucnost venkova 2009, 2009)

3.5 Municipal cooperation

Rural development is one of the most important elements of regional policy, by which the country is changing, improving and developing. The key process of rural development is the cooperation. We can divide the actors according to their field of application to local – e.g. municipalities, regional – e.g. regions and national – e.g. relevant ministries. The current regional policy mentions the importance of the cooperation of municipalities in the development of the given territory, as they are mainly representatives of public administration, as the main subjects of the implementation of regional policy. Participants could be state administration units, local government units, non-profit organizations, business entities, citizens, etc. The synergy of municipalities represents a solution to a common problem, sharing of funds, joining projects, etc., which results in increased efficiency of implemented activities. Cooperation thus becomes a key starting point for the socio-economic development of the region and individual municipalities. There is a wide range of forms of cooperation, representing a specific legal and organizational form

of the cooperation system. In recent years, regional cooperation has focused on the development of particularly rural areas, the development of tourism and the exchange of experience. For this reason, we are often talking about cooperation in the form of an union of municipalities, local action groups, tourism organizations and a partner town or municipality. (Galvasová, 2007), (Binek, 2009, 2010)

4 PRACTICAL PART

4.1 LAG „MAS Brána Písecka“

The selected LAG operates in the South Bohemian Region. Two cities and 24 municipalities with a total area of 360.58 km² fall within the scope of the LAG. This territory, in which over 11,000 inhabitants live, is of a purely rural character with low population density. For the 2007-2013 programming period, the LAG BP has established the Strategic Plan LEADER MAS Brána Písecka. Their activity was to focus on the infrastructure of the region, improving the appearance of municipalities, improving the quality of life of the region's inhabitants, developing tourism, business and the labour market. However, implementation of the strategy was not supported for the mentioned period. Nevertheless, the selected LAG implemented several cooperation projects.

In the new programme period 2014-2020 LAG identified needs of its territory and in line with the vision, has focused on five key areas, which are further subdivided into appropriate measures - **I. Quality of life in rural areas** aims to improve conditions for the development of transport and technical infrastructure; **II. Education and leisure activities** aiming at ensuring adequate levels of pre-school and school education and ensuring diverse leisure activities; **III. Business in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector and the labour market** with the aim of promoting agriculture and diversifying rural entrepreneurship to maintain jobs; **IV. Tourism** aims to develop civil and solidary society and to develop cooperation and partnership with other regions and **V. Cooperation** with the aim to work on LAG's activities and to develop cooperation and partnership with other regions. In its strategy, the LAG BP has set out the program frameworks and decided to work with the IROP, RDP and OPE Operational Programs.

4.1.1 Realized projects

The selected LAG was not supported in the previous planning period but realized several cooperation projects. The main projects were aimed for example to introduce the regional brand and contribute to the development of producers of region so-called

Prácheňsko. As a part of the project of the Animation of School Facilities, the LAG conducts methodical and consulting assistance to the kindergarten and elementary schools. In the current planning period, several other projects have been already developed. An important project should be a cooperation project with the LAG Vltava The "Farmer's Way" project, which is aimed to create better conditions for the use of primary producers and regional producers in the markets of both LAGs. In addition, the LAG is also working on an international cooperation project supported by the Small Projects Fund under the INTERREG V-A Austria-Czech Republic Program. Thanks to this project, students will take part in excursions of agricultural production and practice.

4.1.2 Activities

LAGs have many options to engage in and actively participate in rural development. The LAG BP has thus gained numerous experience and advice from the good practices of cooperating LAGs and has thus become more aware of local actors. In the current planning period, the LAG also works very well with other LAGs within the South Bohemian Region and intends to continue in these activities. The LAG BP in its strategy mentions that the cooperation projects will be directed to the creation of destination management for region Prácheňsko, support for the creation of information and tourist centers in the region and for educational projects for the rural population and projects for the promotion of the territory. In addition to the activity of raising funds, LAG BP provides also information and animation services for residents, entrepreneurs or NGOs. LAG BP seeks to contribute also through other services such as the complete processing of projects into the Structural Funds, the preparation of feasibility studies, the processing of tenders, or a free complete service with the management and administration of the subsidy. For municipalities, entrepreneurs, NGOs, etc., LAG BP also organizes seminars for subsidy possibilities. During these seminars the participants gain an overview of the grant possibilities of the given operational programs, they are presented with all the administrative steps of the application and the subsequent submission process on the respective servers and portals.

4.2 Research

For the research part, this thesis conducted a questionnaire intended for the mayors of municipalities in the LAG's area for one month. After receiving only 7 responses by email, it was necessary to switch to a phone call and arrange personal meetings. In total

23 of 26 municipalities responded, which represent 88% of participation. The questionnaire should serve not only to confirm or refute the initial hypotheses, but also to evaluate the activities of member municipalities, their involvement in the use of subsidies and the view on the operation and functioning of the LAG BP.

4.2.1 Results and evaluation

As already mentioned, the questionnaire was divided into 3 parts. The first part of the questionnaire was used to obtain basic information about the municipalities. The municipalities have been approached, what are the most important problems for them and what areas they are looking for in the future. According to the answers received, the water and transport problems are the most important for municipalities. Municipalities often face the absence or necessary reconstruction of sewage system and sewage treatment plants.

The equipment of the technical infrastructure may reflect to the size of the municipality. In the case of technical infrastructure, it is not even advantageous for suppliers to build networks in small municipalities with a small number of potential users. According to the information found, 15 municipalities have built up water supply and sewerage systems in the LAG territory and only 4 municipalities have built the sewage treatment plant. They still suffer from insufficient infrastructure. The maintenance and repair of local roads represent a major interference for the municipal budget. However, this is linked to another problem of small municipalities, which is a small municipal budget. In addition to the lack of finance, mayors also mention the growing administration. Small municipalities often have insufficient official offices and are therefore very busy by a large administration that often requires expertise. In addition, 6 municipalities responded that their further problem is the loss of permanent residents. The representatives of 2 municipalities also mentioned the problem of non-employment opportunities. Two representatives declared the problem of the absence of protection against floods. Other problems were described rather sporadically, such as the absence of a gymnasium, the construction or reconstruction of a kindergarten or a nursing home, a lack of public services, or property disputes over land in the municipality.

In question n°2, the respondents should identify what areas will be supported in the current planning period. Most municipalities want to focus on technical infrastructure. This response was marked by 14 respondents representing 61% of respondents. A total of 12 representatives also opted for the Public Service for Citizens. Others supported areas

were Culture, Environment, Housing Development, Sport, Social Services, Education, Tourism, Agriculture and Entrepreneurship.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions regarding subsidy support. More than 73% of respondents said the LAG's challenges are more likely to match the real challenges and needs of the area. Almost 9% believe that the LAG BP is fully addressing its challenges to the problems and needs of the area. Only 3 municipalities claim that the challenges do not respond to the problems, and only 1 respondent said the challenges did not match the real challenges and needs of the region. In responding "no", "rather not", respondents could indicate specific areas for LAGs to devote more attention to. Three responses related to "real needs of municipalities", e.g. public utilities, or water supply. In the next question most respondents opted for a variant that the LAG BP respects and applies the bottom-up principle, 6 municipalities have chosen the option "yes", 13 "rather yes", 3 "rather not" and only 1 municipality has chosen the option "no". On the other hand, more than 82% of respondents did not use the opportunity to apply for a grant in the current programming period. Only 4 of 26 member municipalities have already applied for subsidies. One of the reasons is an excessive administration and insufficient funds to co-finance projects.

The most frequently used service is monitoring and consultancy about subsidy support for the project intentions and the search for possible financial resources. Another widely used services are seminars for the grant opportunities that the LAG BP organize for each announced call. Most respondents answered that at least once took part in these seminars. Most of respondents support the work of the LAG and admit the possible cooperation projects in the future. On the other hand, 61% of the respondents think, that the general public's awareness of the LAG's activities is insufficient. The last open question was devoted to suggesting possible points to improve in LAG's activities. One of the points for improvement was to propose greater cooperation with local entrepreneurs, municipalities and to help in obtaining subsidies for the private sector and municipalities, including the administration. It is not clear why these points have been proposed to improve. The LAG BP offers these services and member municipalities are or should be familiar with this fact. Other responses reflect more to the state policy and to the subsidy policy system.

4.2.2 Evaluation

The first hypothesis assumed that the Interregional cooperation plays a significant role in regional management. The theoretical part of this thesis explained that regional management is usually a model of regional development. The synergy of regional actors is an integral part of regional management. On the examples of the cooperation projects we have clearly seen what impact such projects can have. Thanks to these projects, LAG BP managed to create a regional brand, destination logo, repair cultural monuments, organize cultural events, create various promotional materials, etc. in cooperation with other LAGs. In most cases, the situation in municipalities that try to implement new projects and work with different actors is much better than in municipalities that do not engage any of these activities. Active municipalities are much more equipped, especially financially. These municipalities themselves evaluate the activities of the LAG as beneficial for the development of their municipality. LAG BP in its SCLLD strategy defined so-called “Integration elements” that bring innovative synergy effects. These elements proposed an innovative ways of cooperation projects for municipalities which could access to the new development tendencies of the region and bring many advantages and opportunities for municipalities.

Another hypothesis finds out whether LAGs supported their development beyond LEADER method through their projects and other activities. In the case of the LAG BP, it is necessary to recall that in the last programming period its strategy was not supported but was able to implement many cooperation projects and prepare well in the new programming period. The professional literature itself explains that the LAGs are also involved in other activities that contribute to the development of the region. More than 52% of respondents said they had also used other services through the LAG BP, which have been already mentioned. LAG BP also regularly communicates with other local actors, especially farmers, private entrepreneurs, associations, etc. It can be thus confirmed that the LAG BP falls under the LAG which supports development beyond the LEADER program.

As confirmed, the LAG BP contributes to the development of the region beyond the LEADER program. It means that the third hypothesis can be confirmed as well: The selected LAG contributes to the development of the region by its activities. For the 2014-2020 programming period, the LAG BP had to develop its SCLLD that would match the

problems and needs of the territory. LAG BP has developed a quality strategy that was based on the analytical, strategic and implementation part. In the analytical part of the LAG BP, the evaluation of questionnaires, SWOT analysis and socio-economic analysis of the territory were elaborated. Based on the obtained information, it subsequently prepared a strategic part, which included a strategic vision, objectives and measures, corresponding to the needs of the territory. All announced calls meet the requirements and needs of the territory set out in the approved strategy.

The chairman of the LAG BP highlighted that LAG BP is now starting to gain its important role in the region. He explained, that some mayors have understood the advantage and purpose of implementing the SCLLD in the territory, whether through web presentations, personal meetings, emails or seminars. They understand that support can only be directed to the areas identified in the approved operational programs. Unfortunately, there are also mayors who have no interest in the possibility of support through the LAG BP. Some of them are permanently very sceptical to the Government or EU subsidy policies, and their lack of awareness leads to negative responses, which are in most cases totally irrelevant. On the contrary, there are very active mayors who know very well all the possibilities of support for different areas within the LAG's activities. They actively use them, cooperate and in many cases also work in the bodies in the LAG's structure. The chairman added that the leadership of the municipalities is extremely important, and the differently capable mayors have an impact on the level and development of their municipalities.

LAG BP has determined in its strategy what areas need to be support the most. Based on the previous detailed analysis of the calls, it is sure that LAG BP is fulfilling and maintaining their plans. LAG BP seeks to support the activities of individual projects corresponding to the problems and needs of the area. Realized cooperation projects aim to establish new relationships and extend the impact of these projects to other regions. Applicants who have already applied for support via the LAG BP, in most cases come with other, new projects. This, among other things, is evidence of an expert approach by the LAG BP. The described challenges make it clear that the scope of the supported projects is large. Diversification of activities within the scope of the LAG is thus fully supported.

5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The diploma thesis responded to the initial hypothesis and outlined the importance of cooperation within the region. According to many experts, the concept of regional management is very different. This term is not theoretically defined, so we can only define it in a framework. At the regional level, the most important political actor has traditionally been the state and its relevant ministries. At the beginning of the 1990s, not only in the Czech Republic was the decentralization of public administration and the implementation of management approaches in the area of governance. In this context, the regions have taken on several competences in the field of regional policy and regional planning.

Ježek et al. (2015) also talk about the need for subsidiarity, decentralization, transfer of competencies, etc. According to Ježek (2017), regional governance is the method and procedure for achieving regional cooperation, communication and regional consensus. The main actors of regional and interregional cooperation are mainly municipalities and towns.

According to Tej, Burdová and Vagaš (2018), it is precisely the municipalities from which the main development potential of the region originates. Municipalities develop not only themselves but also the entire region, at social, cultural, and other levels. Municipalities, on the other hand, are faced with the problem of insufficient financial resources and are thus limited in many ways. According to their study, these and many other issues have a significant impact on the quality and scope of the economic policies that will be reflected in the level of services and activities provided. Financial problems and increasing demands for quality of public services are also increasingly faced by municipalities in Slovakia. Authors who are concerned with the issues of municipalities in Slovakia still point out that municipal cooperation enables cost reductions and the improvement of the quality and availability of local services leading to the development of the region. It is also important that the efforts of municipalities and other entities in the territory are supported mainly by the central authorities, through legislation, methodology and financial assistance. If interregional cooperation mechanisms develop, marginalized regions could become more developed, thereby improving the level and quality of individual regions.

The second hypothesis confirmed that LAGs support their development beyond LEADER through their projects and other activities. In addition to consulting,

methodological and monitoring services, the LAG BP also communicates and cooperates with entities in the area to transfer information, experience and good practice examples. Pelcl, Havránek, Lehmann and Martínek (2008) consider communication with local actors to be one of the important principles contributing to the effective functioning of LAGs. In their LAG's self-evaluation test, they focused on creating conditions for the quality of LAG work from the point of view of the correct setting of internal mechanisms for managing their activities. In the results, among other things, they determined that besides redistribution of funds from LEADER programs, LAGs also carry out their own projects or carry out commercial activities. This statement was also proved by the study of Wade & Rinne (2008), who appreciate the importance and benefits of the LAG's functioning in the region in all the surveyed countries.

The final hypothesis has confirmed that the selected LAG contributes to the development of the region. The publication of Pelcl, Havránek, Lehmannová and Martínek (2008) mentions that the role of the LAG in the area of renewal and development of the region is gaining importance and necessity. Pelcl et al. (2008) also sees an important role of the LAG in building a community way of life in the countryside. The possibility of the inhabitants of the area to participate directly in the decision-making on their region's activities and in planning its development is therefore a strong motivational factor. Pelcl et al. (2008) also points to the importance of the LAG's scope in the region. If its activity is to contribute to the development of the region, it is necessary for it to be active for a long time and to provide the region with long-term and systematic support.

It was concluded that even in the comparison of similar research by foreign authors, the hypotheses can be fully confirmed. Most expert articles try to outline the importance of LAGs in rural and regional development. The study of Pocol & Kassai (2016) focused on LAG initiatives in Romania. In their view, the functioning of the LAGs is an important tool for socio-economic development of the countryside to improve local governance and to promote social and territorial cohesion.

In addition to professional publications and articles dealing with the classic view of the LAG, as regional associations for regional development, we can also meet researches focusing on the marketing function of LAGs. A specific example is the Guzal-Deca (2016) research, which pointed to the LAG as new marketing entities in the territory.

Based on a survey of 22 Polish LAGs, it demonstrates their high potential to influence rural development. Guzal-Deca has begun to address the growing role of LAGs in the marketing area, particularly in promoting the region and tourism. Observing the LAGs, they see a significant contribution to the development of regional production and the creation of regional brands. It is therefore argued that the LAG's marketing activity represents an important synergic strengthening of local governments. The question remains whether LAG publicity is sufficient to the general public as well. Nowadays, the transmission of information via the Internet and e-mail is very common, but still some people do not have access to the Internet or do not use as a main source of information. The information about the activities of the LAG, announced calls, etc. should therefore be disseminated by other media and also in printed form, e.g. in regional press, radio, etc.). The final point to the discussion is to consider the extent to which the LAG can offer its services free of charge. Given the established funding principle, the LAG does not have too many options to obtain additional funding. Some LAGs offer free of charge methodological assistance when writing applications but charge the final application. This point should also be considered within the selected LAG, which offers most of its services free of charge. The final recommendation for selected LAGs would be to set a timetable for consultation meetings. Individual consultations should take place at a pre-arranged deadline so as not to disrupt the standard office operation.

6 CONCLUSION

The aim of the diploma thesis was to find out the impact of interregional cooperation in the regional management, based on the case of successful local action group. The thesis was divided into two main parts. The first one was dedicated to the theoretical background. The detailed description of regional policy, rural development policy and different European programmes were described. It was also necessary to explain the notion of local action group and its functioning. The last chapter of the theoretical part presented the reasons and the most frequent forms of cooperation of municipalities.

The second, practical part analysed the selected LAG, in terms of its structure, strategic documents, setting goals, related challenges and activities and its selection and implementation of projects. A precise analysis of the activities of LAG was the starting point for evaluating the benefits of activity and work efficiency of the selected LAG. This analysis was completed through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was meant for all mayors of municipalities in the LAG area. The aim of the questionnaire was to find the

appropriate answers and to confirm or refute the initial hypothesis. The first hypothesis assumed that interregional cooperation plays a significant role in regional management. This was confirmed by the fact that regional management represents development concepts and ideas that strengthen the position of the region in the interregional competition. The coordination and synergies of regional actors represent an important point in regional management. Based on both successful cooperation projects and the diverse activities of the LAG, was confirmed the next hypothesis assuming that LAGs support the development by their initiative beyond the programme LEADER. The last hypothesis assumed that the selected LAG contributes to the region's development through its activities. Besides redistribution of funds, the LAG also offers expert consultation, project monitoring and administration, as well as the search for appropriate financial resources. It follows that the activity of selected LAG was proved as a truly useful and effective for the region.

This work had as one of the objectives to find out the activities of individual municipal governments and their attitude towards the functioning and the principle of the LAG. Given the involvement of the private, public and non-profit sectors in the functioning of the LAG, a deeper exploration of the actors in the various sectors and their perception of the work of the LAG would surely give rise to further extensive work.

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