

LEADER LAGs in the post-socialist space

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Since the 1990s rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe have undergone a great socioeconomic transition. The LEADER program of the EU with its focus on bottom-up approach and local governance was something really novel for traditionally centralised rural societies. As Kovách stated a decade and a half ago, LEADER can help to redistribute power over material and intellectual resources. (Kovách, I. 2000) At the first stage of access high expectations were typical. LEADER was evaluated as an ultimate weapon for rural development. As implementation began, enthusiasm started to decline as in many Western European states. Usually the method was expropriated by ruling local elites, consequently it was transformed to a formal hunting ground of the "project class".

In our recent article a comparison of the national implementation of the LEADER program is investigated. Local action groups (LAGs) are angled in the research, as an analysis is made by the theory of Paasi's institutionalization. Beyond the survey of territorial shape and symbolic formation the institutional constellation and established role is studied.

The research is based firstly on desktop research (e.g. analyses of related basic statistics and that of integrated rural development plans) and secondly on a questionnaire inquiry of LAGs.

Although CEES joined the EU and the world of LEADER almost at the same time some national specialities can be found in the implementation and LAG formation process. In point of territorial and symbolic formation continuity or the lack of it seems to be crucial. In case of the institutional formation a harmonic mix of for-profit, non-profit organizations and authorities is the key of success. Among active actors members of the former power-holding elite and those of outsiders can be found as well. A local agency adequate in size and having qualified staff is another significant issue. At the same time there's no universal recipe of success, beyond national factors local ones can highly effect LAG activities.

Our results can contribute to the reading of local governance in case of post-socialist countries.

Recent processes of CLLD development (2014-2020) in the region could harness some achievement of this study.

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