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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEADER AXIS OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2007-2013 IN MOLDOVA

ALINA-MIRELA MARCU¹

Abstract: *At European level, LEADER programme appeared in 1990, when the public programs for rural developmental from several countries, were limited about their investment objectives, they were managed in a traditional mode top-down (from the central level to local). Since 2007, LEADER has not represented a Community initiative, but it was been introduced as a axis in the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. LEADER was addressed in special to implementation the local development strategies as well as to achievement the cooperation projects, by the operation of Local Action Groups and the establishment of public-private partnerships. In Moldova, the eligible beneficiaries of this axis have applied in particular to financial support of the Local Action Groups, the most projects being implemented in Suceava County (LAG "Sucevita-Putna", LAG "Basin of Dorna", LAG "Bucovina of Mountain") and Bacau County (LAG Valley of the Mountain, LAG Valley of Trotus). A possible explanation of this situation it represents the low capacity to involvement of economic and social partners, of the local community to establish formulas for cooperation, or associations, to ensure a higher level of economic and political affirmation, according to available resources.*

Keywords: *Axis, development, Local Action Groups, strategy, programme.*

INTRODUCTION

European Commission has designed the LEADER program (from the acronym "Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale" - Links between actions for the development of the rural economy) as a tool of implementing the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, in the direction of the sustainable rural communities' development. It was a "Community initiative" financed from the European Union Structural Funds [6] and for to encourage rural territories to become more competitive and be able to overcome the challenges they face, such as population aging, low level of performance or lack of employment opportunities [8].

In Romania, the concept of the LEADER was promoted in the documents approving the Rural Development National Programme 2007-2013, which represents the strategic planning and multiannual financial programming document, developed by a broad partnership that guides and stimulates the socio-economic development of Romania in accordance with European Union Cohesion Policy [5]. Through this programme have been established four priority Axes for funding by European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as follows:

- Axis I - Improving the competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sector;
- Axis II - Improving the environment and the countryside;
- Axis III - Improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy;
- Axis IV – LEADER.

The overall objective of LEADER Axis had in mind the starting and operation of local interest initiatives, using the approach "bottom up" and the involvement of local stakeholders for the implementation of rural development policy [7]. The aim of this axis was to improve the local governance through the establishment and operation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) [4]. These groups were an important element in rural development because they contributed to create a local development strategy, respectively a detailed development plan for a particular rural territory, and were responsible for the project submission and coordination process [3].

The most frequent types of cooperation between LAGs were communications (the exchange of information), educational activities, research, marketing strategies, the strategies of products' development and promotion. That is why the LEADER is considered to be the "laboratory of new ideas". [2] Regarding the LEADER target areas, they are by point of view geographically, socially and physically, homogeneous small territories, often characterized by common traditions, local identity, common needs and expectations [1].

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MATERIAL AND METHOD

For the programming period 2007-2013, LEADER represented the fourth generation of implementing initiatives Leader I, Leader II and Leader +. In the EU-10, a similar measure has been implemented in six of the new Member States, in the EU-15 about 52 million people lived in territories belonging to the Local Action Groups, and in the EU27, LEADER constituted about 6% from the contribution of the European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development.

In Romania, the authorities responsible for implementing LEADER Axis were: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - the Managing Authority for RDP, Directorates for Agriculture and Rural Development (Managing Authority representatives at the county level), the Payment Agency for Rural Development and Fishing (authority for implementation financial and technical of measures), and Local Action Groups responsible for developing and implementing local development strategies and project selection.

After consulting the information published by these institutions about the eligible beneficiaries of Measure 431 financed by the European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development, it was taken into account the realization an detailed analysis of selection and functioning of Local Action Groups in Moldova, by using statistical and mapping methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Development of rural space from Moldova through Axis IV LEADER was influenced by local actors in quality of decision makers and responsible for evolution over time of delimited territorial areas in which they acted. Thus, at the Local Action Groups level, public private partnerships were formed up of representatives of sectors: public (public administration and public services), private (commercial sector, financial sector, agricultural sector, organizations of entrepreneurs, companies providing community services), and civil society (non-profit organizations, associations, foundations, individuals, groups of individuals not formally registered).

Regarding activities undertaken under Axis IV, they have been summarized in the following measures:

- Measure 41 - "Implementation of local development strategies" in order to increase competitiveness of agriculture and forestry sectors, improving the environment and the countryside, increasing the quality of life and diversifying the economic activities of rural space through the implementation of integrated strategies of local development.
- Measure 421 - "Implementing cooperation projects" to optimize local strategies supporting actors at local level to implement expansion projects of experiences, to stimulate and support innovation, obtaining skills and improve them both inter-territorial but also transnational.
- Measure 431 - "Functioning Local Action Groups, skills acquisition and animation of territory", by forming partnerships, preparing and ensuring the implementation of local development strategies. This measure, in turn, was divided in two sub-measures:
 - Sub-measure 431.1 which has supported the development of public-private partnerships, achieving local development strategies and local development plan to participate in the selection of the Local Action Groups (LAGs);
 - Sub-measure 431.2 which provided to LAGs the financial support for performing functioning expenditures, animation and skills training.

The accentuated preoccupation of rural localities from Moldova to form Local Action Groups, was due to eligibility criteria of the National Rural Development Programme (RDP) which has limited the presence of urban localities with a population of over 20,000 inhabitants in the composition of the LAG. Through the inclusion of small towns in these structures it was taken into account the insurance of territorial cohesion, of human resources, financial and economic to supporting the local development strategies of the territory.

But to benefit from European funds allocated by Axis LEADER of National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, public-private partnerships in Romania participated in 2011 in a selection process organized by the Managing Authority for RDP of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development. After the selection process these partnerships have become official Local Action Groups.

According to information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Moldova currently operates 40 local action groups (Table 1), of which 16 were selected in 2011 and 24 in 2012, each comprising localities from one or more counties. From the administrative point of view, on the territory of Vrancea County meet, most associations type GAL (7), followed by the counties of Iasi (6); Bacau, Neamt, Suceava, Vaslui (5) at the opposite end being Galați County with 3 GAL type associations.

Table no. 1: List of Local Action Groups selected by AM-RDP in Moldova

COUNTY	YEAR	LOCAL ACTION GROUPS
BACAU	2011	The Local Action Group "Valley of the Mountain" The Association of Local Action Group "Valley of Trotus"
	2012	The Association of Local Development Group "Green Bacau" The Association of Local Development Group "Valley of Tazlau" The Association of Local Action Group "Tutova Hills"
BOTOSANI	2011	The Association of Rural Development Group "HertaWoods" The Association of Local Action Group "Siret Upper Valley"
	2012	The Association of Local Action Group "Baseu Upper Valley" The Local Action Group "Moldova Hills"
GALATI	2011	The Local Action Group "Zonal Development Association Tecuci"
	2012	The Association of Local Action Group "Floodplain of Siret" The Association of Local Action Group "Covurlui"
IASI	2011	The Association of Local Action Group "Valley of Prut"
	2012	The Association of Local Action Group "Rediu- Prajeni Region" The Association of Local Action Group "Southwest Iasi" The Association of Local Action Group "Iasi Hills" The Association of Local Action Group "Stefan cel Mare" The Association of Local Action Group "Belcesti-Focuri Microregion"
NEAMT	2011	The Association of Local Action Group "Ceahlau" The Association of Local Action Group "Nicolae Roznovanu"
	2012	The Local Action Group "North Plateau of Barlad" The Local Action Group "Stefan cel Mare" The Local Action Group "Valley of Siret"
SUCEAVA	2011	The Association of Local Action Group "Basin of Dorna" The Association of Local Action Group "Bucovina of Mountain"
	2012	The Local Action Group "Northern Confluence" The Local Action Group "Sucevita-Putna" The Association of Local Action Group "Land of Bucovina-Old Fratauti"
VASLUI	2011	The Association of Local Action Group "Moldo-Prut" The Association of Local Action Group "Burcel's mound-North Vaslui" The Association of Local Action Group "High Bridge-Vaslui"
	2012	The Association "Valley of Tutova and Zeletin" The Association "Valley of Racova"
VRANCEA	2011	The Association of Local Action Group "Country of Vrancea" The Association of Local Action Group "Green Siret" The Local Action Group "Vrancea South East"
	2012	The Association of Local Action Group "Land of Vine and Wine" The Association of Local Action Group "Panciu Vineyard" The Association of Local Action Group "Valley of Ramnic" The Association of Local Action Group "Dacian Forests"

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Also, statistical data published on the website of the Agency of Payments for Rural Development and Fisheries provided information on financial support granted by Measure 431.1 for preparing applications for the selection of the Local Action Groups and construction of public-private partnerships, sub-measure carried out in three phases.

Therefore, Phases 1 and 2 of Sub-measure 431.1 consisted of organizing training on the LEADER approach and had as direct beneficiaries of public or private entities in the field of training, information and diffusion of knowledge, selected according to the procurement procedure public. Among the final beneficiaries were in the first phase: economic and social partners, civil society representatives and public partners in the territories potential LEADER, and in the second phase: the representatives or members of a group composed of at least two private organizations and a public institution from potential territory which followed Phase 1 or who could demonstrate that have knowledge and experience of the LEADER approach. By Phase 3 was granted financial support for the preparation of local development plans to selection of LAGs.

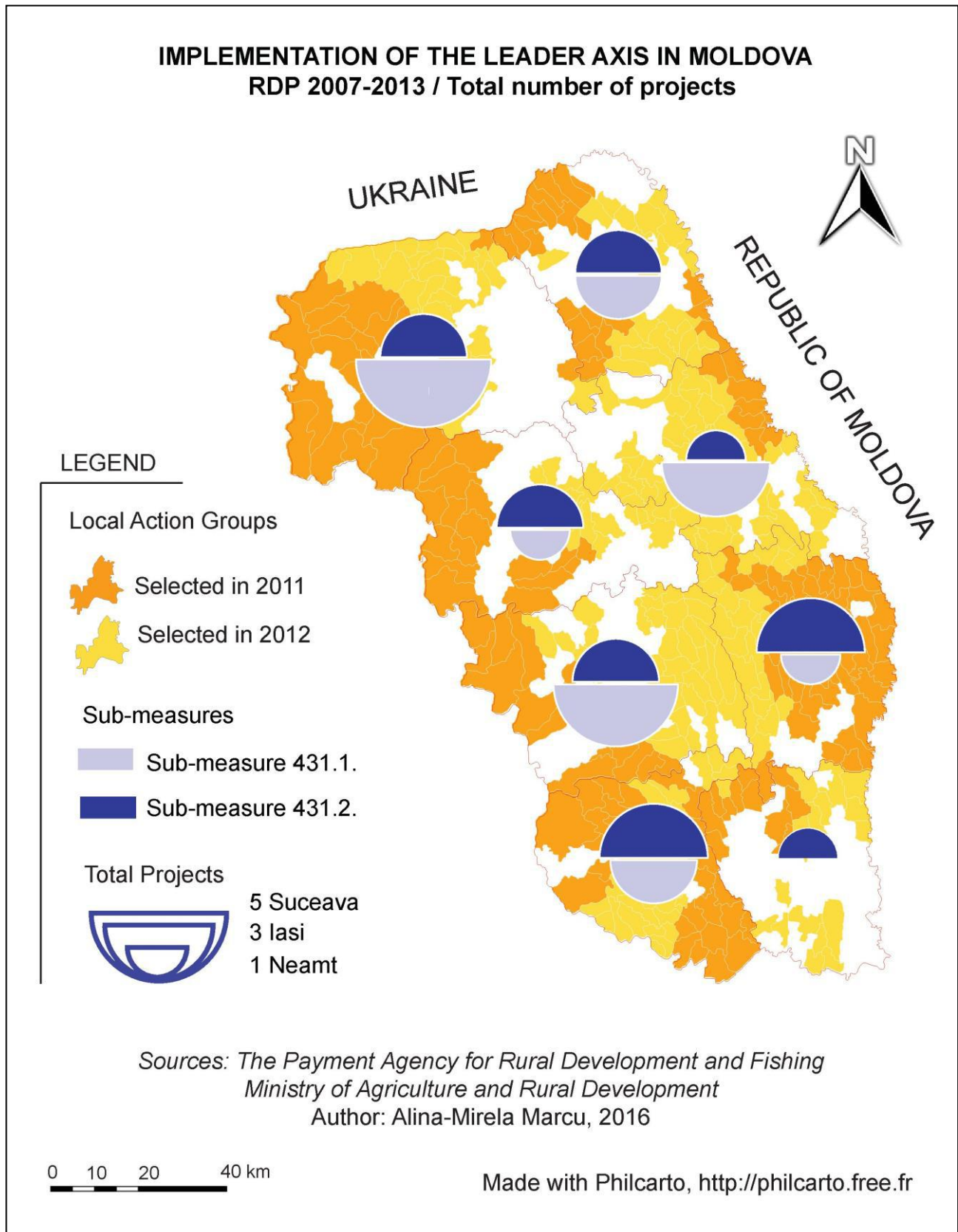
Regarding the status of implementation Sub-measure 431.1 in Moldova, the statistics published indicate that regionally have been supported 18 public-private partnerships, with a total financial value of 843.430 Euro. The most initiatives for preparing dossiers for selection of LAGs were funded in Suceava County (5 projects) and in Counties Bacau (4 projects) and Iasi (3 projects), in contrast to the Galați County where was not selected any partnership . (Fig. No.1)

Thus, at the initiative Intercommunal Development Association Obcinile Bucovina, to implement the project "Establishment and strategic planning of the Local Action Group Bucovina of Mountain", was founded Local Group of Action "Bucovina of Mountain", a public-private partnership made up of 10 communes in the county of Suceava (Breaza, Frumosu, Fundu Moldovei, Izvoarele Sucevei, Moldova Sulita, Moldovita, Pojorata, Sadova, Vama, Vatra Moldovitei), of Suceava County Council, Forest District Pojorata, 34 commercial companies and 16 associations. All on the territory of Suceava County has received financial support and the project conducted by the Professional Association for Regional Management Suceava for creating the Local Action Group "Sucevita-Putna". This group was formed by the association of local governments and private entrepreneurs of the 16 administrative units, respectively 15 localities (Arbore, Brodina, Burla, Cacica, Horodnic de Jos, Horodnic de Sus, Iaslovat, Manastirea Humorului, Marginea, Poieni Solca, Putna, Straja, Sucevita, Ulma, Volovat) and Solca city.

Among the beneficiaries of the sub-measure 431.1 was counted and the Association of Local Action Group "Moldo-Prut", made up of 17 communes (Arsura, Berezeni, Blagesti, Bunesti-Averesti, Crestesti, Dimitrie-Cantemir, Dranceni, Duda-Epureni, Falciu, Hoceni, Lunca Banului, Malusteni, Oltenesti, Padureni, Stanilesti, Tatarani and Vetrisoaia) and Murgeni city, with an area of 1.479 km², representing 27.8% of the county of Vaslui. The initiative to set up of this association was manifested among the 43 public and private partners (municipalities, farmers, agents from private economic environment, associations of animal breeders and non-governmental organizations) who have filed joint efforts to obtain the financing of project "Construction, public-private partnership and dossier preparation for LAG selection, Moldo-Prut territory, Vaslui county", amounting to 49,000 Euro.

Also, the Association "Obstilor Vrancea" benefited from European support to establish Local Action Group "Country of Vrancea" in the composition of which exist 15 localities (Barsesti, Campuri, Naruja, Negrilesti, Nereju, Nistoresti, Paltin, Paulesti, Racoasa, Spulber, Tulnici, Valea Sarii, Vidra, Vizantea-Livezi, Vrancioaia) all from Vrancea County. The LAG initiators decided to call him "Country of Vrancea" because localities coincide with ancient historical province "Republic of Vrancea" mentioned by great encyclopedic scholar and prince of Moldavia, Dimitrie Cantemir in one of the most important of his works "Descriptio Moldaviae". However, the territory of LAG "Country of Vrancea" is a distinct ethnographic area due preserving traditional cultural heritage reflected in objectives heritage and popular culture, habits and ancient crafts, but especially in gastronomic products with traditional specific: sheep cheese at Bârsești, mutton sausages smoked at Racoasa, plum brandy at Tulnici, and so on.

Fig. No 1. Implementation of the LEADER Axis in Moldova - The total number of projects



Looking at the Figure 1, we see that the state of implementation of the second Sub-measures (431.2) in Moldova differs from the previous in that the spatial distribution of the completed projects presents a new hierarchy in the territorial level. Thus, it can be noted a higher percentage of investments in counties Vaslui and Vrancea (3 projects), succeeded by counties

Bacau, Botosani, Neamt and Suceava (2 projects), on the last place being counties of Galati and Iasi (1 project) .

In this context, a possible justification can be given that the amount allocated to finance the Sub-measures has been divided between the two components as follows: Component A - The functioning of Local Action Group had a percentage at most 80%, and Component B - Training and animation of territory after the selection of LAG had a minimum percentage of 20% of the total amount allocated under Sub-measure 431.2.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, LEADER Axis has provided new opportunities for rural development in Moldova through strengthening capacity to implement regional strategies. Thus, by addressing the "bottom up", were mobilized local actors in order to create of methods and working practices common by meeting all public, private organisation and of civil society, to the Local Action Groups level for finding new solutions to persistent rural problems. Therefore, the socio-economic factors from Moldova have managed to achieve an effective collaboration to produce goods and services quality with the purpose of capitalization the natural potential and of cultural activities, of improvement the relations between producers and consumers, due to the development of public-private partnerships.

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