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DOES THE EU LEADER INSTRUMENT SUPPORT ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT AND NEW MODES OF GOVERNANCE IN ROMANIA?: EXPERIENCES FROM ELABORATING AN MCDA BASED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

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The well-known EU LEADER programme aims at using the endogenous potential of rural regions and at improving local governance. Especially since the current funding period doubts are rising about whether the programme actually delivers what it promises. Indeed, translating the LEADER approach is a challenge, not only for new EU member states. This paper looks at the case of post-socialist Romania where the programme is implemented for the first time. Our research questions are (a) in how far an endogenous approach can be practically implemented by local initiatives and (b) how the LEADER implementation contributes to the adoption of new modes of governance. We draw on a case study in which a potential Romanian Local Action Group has been externally supported in elaborating a Regional Development Concept. We observed the participatory decision-making process among local actors, which was facilitated by a Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA). MCDA turned out to be instrumental for integrated planning approaches and transparent decision-making with broad public participation. Our results underline that endogenous development and new modes of governance are hampered by provisions of superior administrative bodies due to inadequate translation of the policy instrument's intervention logic. Reviewing European and national LEADER guidelines seems important for better using the endogenous regional potential and reaching higher positive impact on local governance structures.

Keywords: Endogenous regional development, LEADER, multiple criteria decision analysis, Romania, governance

INTRODUCTION

Endogenous rural development and new modes of governance are on the tongues of Europe's rural development stakeholders. The LEADER¹ programme, running in the European Union (EU) since 1991, aims at using rural regions' endogenous potential effectively and at improving local governance. It builds upon public–private partnerships. LEADER originates from a process searching for answers to the problems of rural societies. This resulted in the incorporation of terms like 'bottom-up' or 'participative' in the vocabulary of European and national rural development policies in order to signal new styles of intervention (Ray 1999: 521). These rather flowery phrases, however, sometimes raise false hopes, as they often do not reflect reality—neither the programme design nor the spending of funds always follow the implied principles (for example, see Böcher 2008; Bruckmeier 2000; Convery *et al.* 2010).

Success and failure of LEADER are certainly country specific,² because they depend among others on the political, administrative, socio-economic and historico-cultural environment (Bruckmeier 2000; Jouen 1999). Romania, the country on which this paper focuses, is still suffering from after effects of socialism. Due to this background, many obstacles in the programme implementation, which has only recently started there, are to be expected (Marquardt *et al.* 2009a; NRDP 2010).

Our research interest is in the implementation of the complex LEADER programme in the difficult environment of a young democratic country that is, on the one hand, clearly in need of successes in rural development, but, on the other hand, is still in the middle of a restructuring of its administrative bodies and has almost no experience in integrated rural development. We ask (a) in how far an endogenous approach can be practically implemented by local initiatives in Romania and (b) how the LEADER implementation enforces the adoption of new modes of governance, in this case, the participatory decision-making of public and private partners. We draw on a case study in which a potential LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) has been externally supported in their decision-making for elaborating a Regional Development Concept (RDC). This crucial early phase of local initiatives, in which the basis for endogenous development is established, is generally underrepresented in rural research.

Our results are based on participatory observation of the decision-making processes and expert interviews. The project was embedded into actions financed under the preparatory LEADER measure, which supports local actors in capacity building for participating in the programme and managing their region sustainably following the LEADER approach. We report and analyze experiences with the application of Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) for the facilitation of local decision-making, including broad public participation. The aim of the application was to use MCDA as a tool for a coherent elaboration

of an integrated RDC. We consider the ideas of the endogenous and the neo-endogenous regional development approach. The latter incorporates not only local but also extra-local factors, in our case, particularly the impact of the programme design at national and European level.

In the following section, some background information about rural development approaches, the LEADER instrument itself and about the initial situation for the programme's implementation in Romania are given. The third section introduces the study design, the methodology and the MCDA concept. In Section 4 the results are presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A brief stock-taking of the rural development vocabulary

Rural development policies nowadays are well stocked with catchwords such as 'governance' or a development approach that is 'endogenous', 'bottom-up' or 'participatory'. These catchwords are very abstract and are often used without carefully considering their exact meaning.³ This may easily lead to a contradiction between expectations raised, the details in the actual programme design and the reality faced by actors involved in the programmes' implementation. Generally, there exist different opinions on details of the approaches behind these terms (Baldock *et al.* 2001; Thomson and Psaltopoulos 2004). Therefore, to be able to provide (a) an assessment if LEADER in Romania can potentially achieve what has been announced and to (b) identify factors that have an impact on the realization of an endogenous approach and on improving governance, we need to be clear on the related rural development terminology.

Endogenous development has emerged from other (rural) regional development approaches, which themselves are intertwined or build up on each other. Particularly fundamental is the integrated approach. 'Integrated rural development' has a long tradition, as it was already applied in the 1970s in developing countries (Ruttan 1984). The approach was introduced on a larger scale in Europe only in the early 1990s (Bröckling 2004; Shucksmith 2010; Thomson and Psaltopoulos 2004).⁴ Integrated development means that social, economic and environmental aspects are holistically considered within a regional strategy aiming at a sustainable development of a region (Bröckling 2004; Scott 2002; Stahl and Schreiber 2003).

'Territorial approaches' are area based and contrast sectoral development approaches. The size of a region—which is the operating level of a territorial approach—results from the depth of planning. Manageability is of particular importance for integrated territorial development. Further criteria for defining a territory can be applied such as for instance homogeneity.

'Endogenous development' is a concept that is embedded in an integrated territorial approach. The logic of the endogenous approach is that the territory concerned can think 'in terms of cultivating its own *development repertoire*' (Ray 1999: 525, *italics* in the original). In other words, this approach is about using the stock of regional resources as endogenous potential for developing a territory. Ray states that the term 'neatly encapsulates the principles of endogeneity: the idea of local *ownership* of resources and the sense of *choice* in how to employ those resources (physical and intangible) in the pursuit of local objectives' (Ray 1999: 525, *italics* in the original). Hence, endogenous development cannot result exclusively from top-down actions. Therefore, the 'bottom-up approach', meaning that decisions are made at local level, is inherent to endogenous development; but it is also applied in other fields, for example, sectoral planning. Neither the endogenous nor the bottom-up approach does necessarily imply that a 'participatory approach' is followed.⁵ Participation means that an initiative is open for the contributions of various (all interested and concerned) stakeholders, and that their opinions are taken into account. If applicable referring to a 'true endogenous approach' might emphasize that a participatory approach is followed.

The endogenous approach was further developed to a 'neo-endogenous approach' (Ray 2001). It rests on the assumption that a development trajectory emerges from an interplay of internal and external forces (Hubbard and Gorton 2011). Thus, 'neo' identifies the roles played by various manifestations of the extra-local (Ray 2006). Actors in the politico-administrative system (from the national up to the European level) as well as in other localities are all seen as part of the extra-local environment 'potentially recruitable' by rural localities for developing their region (Ray 2006: 278). The distinction of the endogenous and a neo-endogenous approach however is not commonly applied. In practice, most interventions intended to support endogenous rural development, including LEADER, would have to be classified as neo-endogenous, as they themselves represent an extra-local impact.

In the broader sense, 'Governance' is concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rules and collective action (Stoker 1998). It refers to ways in which stakeholders make decisions and solve problems. In the field of rural regional development, the term governance gained importance when it was accepted that the way of governing an area is crucial to its economic and social trajectory (Goodwin 1998). Hence, certain modes of regional governance are seen as a tool for successful endogenous development. They are used as normative⁶ concepts (Connelly *et al.* 2006), assuming that these new modes of governance lead to a more effective and sustainable use of regional resources. In a more specific sense, 'regional governance' or 'local governance', which is central in this paper, refers to modes of governance, which constitute new ways of doing regional policy (Böcher 2008). Normatively, these terms point to organizational structures of

interdisciplinary and horizontal (inter)actions among equitable partners (Clarke 2006; Fürst 2007; Weyer 2000). Furthermore, several authors (for example, Böcher 2008; Clarke 2006; Grieve and Weinspach 2010; Stoker 1998) stress the importance of interactions or negotiations between governmental and non-governmental actors. Others also emphasize regional self-steering and monitoring (Fürst 2007; Sousa Uva 2007) looking at regional governance rather from an institutional economical perspective having in mind the common ownership of the regional potential.

The LEADER programme in Romania

LEADER—a challenging approach within EU rural development policies

The objective of LEADER is to provide funding for the advancement of the endogenous socio-economic development of rural regions. Under LEADER, competitively selected RDCs of LAGs,⁷ that is, public-private partnerships, are co-financed from European and national resources. Primarily, the decision-making bodies of LAGs, which consist of at least 50 per cent private actors (Non-governmental organizations, that is NGOs, business men and so on) can select eligible regional projects to be supported from LEADER funds.

After its initial implementation in 1991, LEADER evolved into LEADER II and then into LEADER+. In the period 2007–13, LEADER is funded under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and is obligatory for Rural Development Programmes in the member states. The EAFRD is structured into four 'axes' (objectives) focusing on: (a) Competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; (b) Environment and countryside; (c) Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and (d) Implementation of the LEADER approach (EC/144/2006). For all four axes, the European Commission (EC) has set up a menu of partly pre-defined rural development measures (Annex B), from which the member states can choose measures. As horizontal axis, LEADER is expected to contribute to the objectives of the other three axes.

The LEADER instrument comprises seven key features, which are further explained in Annex A: (a) the territorial approach; (b) partnerships; (c) the bottom-up approach; (d) the integrated approach; (e) innovation; (f) networking; and (g) cooperation (EC/1698/2005, Article 61). Networking and cooperation refer to the relations between LAGs and are therefore not relevant for this study, which focuses on the region–internal initial processes. Formed by these features, LEADER funds are expected to be spent target-oriented and adapted to the local context: LAGs are seen to be effective in stimulating sustainable development according to local needs, because they aggregate and combine available human and

financial resources from the public, the private, the civil and voluntary sectors. Co-financing and own initiative of local actors should ensure the capitalization of the funding. Although the programme aims at endogenous development and at improving governance (EC/144/2006), the participatory approach, which is described by many authors as the nature of LEADER (see for example, High and Nemes 2007) is in fact—according to the programme guidelines—no key feature of LEADER. Although, according to the intervention logic of LEADER, improving governance is seen as a desired impact of the LEADER approach, it is not properly defined.⁸

LEADER is often counted to be the most successful policy instrument for rural development (see for example, Shucksmith 2010; EC/1698/2005). Nevertheless, although good practice examples are frequently presented, there is no evidence of the effectiveness of the LEADER programme and the added value of its approach (ECA 2010; Schuh *et al.* 2006). Moreover, that a region is funded under LEADER does not necessarily entail that the principles of LEADER are followed in practice (Böcher 2008; ECA 2010).

The initial situation for implementing LEADER in Romania

Implementing LEADER in Romania is a challenge. The programme is not only new for Romania, but people's mentality and policy perception are heavily influenced by four decades of socialism which generated mistrust of local actors—private and public ones—related to institutionalized forms of associations and cooperation. Both antipathy to collective actions and mistrust of formal institutions lead to problems in building formal partnerships in Romania. 83 per cent of programme agencies at county level perceive the collaboration between public and private actors as difficult (Marquardt *et al.* 2009b; see also Mandl *et al.* 2007). Until today, hierarchical structures in policy-making and in the administration predominate and developing new modes of regional governance stays demanding.

First steps towards decentralization were induced when EU membership was anticipated (Bachtler and Downes 2000). However, the main feature of this process was that competences in public service delivery were transferred from the central level of government to local public authorities without providing respective financial means (Bischoff and Giosan 2007; Dragos and Neamtu 2007). Administrative capacities at local level are still not sufficient for dealing with decentralized tasks and handling the various local needs due to lack of experience and qualified personnel. Local communities gained some first experience with inter-community associations, which jointly develop and co-finance projects for obtaining EU and national funds. Additionally, a few informal groups including private and public actors were established—mostly externally stimulated and

supported—for realising funded pilot-projects. However, these initiatives rarely applied an integrated approach and many dissolved after their project ended.

Some new bodies for administering EU funds were established and initial experience in the field of rural development policies was gained when the pre-accession instrument SAPARD⁹ was implemented (NRDP 2010). Yet, the LEADER programme is a completely new and more demanding approach for both the administration as well as for potential beneficiaries. Acknowledging this, the EC allowed Romania (as well as Bulgaria) to set up an additional preparatory LEADER measure aiming at capacity building at local level in the running funding period (EC/434/2007; NRDP 2010). Under this EAFRD measure the costs for building representative local partnerships, drawing up integrated development strategies, financing research and preparing applications for potential LAGs are covered (EC/434/2007). Furthermore, under this measure centrally organized trainings on the programme implementation were funded.

First, preparations for implementing LEADER in Romania began with the pre-selection of 121 potential LEADER regions in the end of 2006. However, between 2007 and 2009, no further LEADER-specific activities were carried out by the programme agencies. Instead, potential beneficiaries were faced with several changes in the programme guidelines and scheduling. The preparatory LEADER measure started with considerable delay only in the end of 2009. Also, the deadline for the submission of LEADER applications was rescheduled several times. With two years delay, the final selection of 81 LAGs took place in June 2011.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION, STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, the study design and the methodology applied for analyzing the MCDA-based RDC elaboration process are briefly described. The selected case region is introduced in the following paragraph. Qualitative data was collected through participatory observation and expert interviews. The research design is structured around an MCDA, which was applied for facilitating the decision making process of the case LAG on its RDC.

The case region and its potential local action group

The case study took place in a potential Romanian LEADER region. The cross-border region includes seven communes located in two counties. It is diverse with its border region being linked to the county capital and an industrial park, but an overall rural environment in a hilly area. The primary sector is dominated by forestry and small to medium sized farms (where farming is often semi-subsistence based or a sideline business). Despite the attractive natural

environment and rich cultural heritage, touristic infrastructure is missing. Before it was resurrected with the proclamation of LEADER with its demarcations based on geographical and historical facts, the region as such was not known to the broad public.

Motivated by the announcement of LEADER by the agricultural administration in 2006, one mayor publicly mobilized neighbouring communes and further stakeholders to jointly compete for the participation in LEADER. A local representative of the potential LAG, who works for one commune and is member of an involved association, participated in LEADER seminars early 2007. This local person also served as regional manager later on. After a longer period of inactivity until the preparatory LEADER measure was launched in summer 2009, the potential LAG was formally established in January 2010 in the form of an NGO consisting of 26 public and private partners (seven communes, five NGOs for example, a youth organization, an agricultural school and 13 private actors including businessmen and farmers). At around the same time, works on the elaboration of the RDC started. This activity was co-funded under the preparatory LEADER measure (20 per cent of the overall sum of 49,700 € had to be covered by the potential LAG itself). Funds could be spent for technical assistance, the preparation of information material and the organization of forums and workshops. The initially scheduled period for drafting the RDC set by programme administration was extended to six months during the elaboration process for many LAGs. The final deadline for submitting LEADER applications was in November 2010.

Study design and methodology

Collection of qualitative data

The RDC elaboration was accompanied by participatory observation. The strength of participatory observation is that it allows insight into contexts, relationships and behaviour (Mack *et al.* 2005) and thus also into the decision-making processes. Observation—in opposite to written statements and interviews—allows for example to determine whether the claims of intent are realized in practice, or whether they merely conceal issues like undemocratic decision-making (Midmore 1998). Moreover, through participatory observation, researchers can also uncover factors important for a thorough understanding of the research problem but that were unknown when the study was designed (Mack *et al.* 2005). A disadvantage of this method is that the mere presence of the observer may affect the actions of the observed (Vinten 1994). In our case, we assume no significant bias because participatory observation took place during workshops, in which the observer took the role of a neutral facilitator. RDC development is usually a moderated process and also other region-external resource persons participated in the workshops.

The aim of the participatory observation was (a) to identify factors that affected the realization of an endogenous approach and (b) assessing the development of new governance structures. An important observation criterion for both is the degree of *participation*. Further, statements on following an endogenous approach can be primarily drawn from assessing the coherence between the final version of the RDC on the one hand with the regional potential and needs and objectives as identified by the residents on the other.

When observing governance structures, informal and formal decision-making structures have to be differentiated. For the latter, the introduction of a new mode of governance can be more easily described: for example, the foundation of a public-private partnership. However, there is no single indicator for assessing the development of governance structures, nor a commonly used set of indicators for assessing (local) governance structures. Therefore, we assessed governance structures along the principles of good governance namely participation, equality of partners, transparency, democracy, respectively democratic decision-making, quality of communication and conflict management (EC 2001; Grieve and Weinspach 2010). We apply these principles as reference points for observing an LAG's decision-making process for two reasons: First, the formal introduction of a new mode of governance does not imply that this mode is applied in practice—informal governance structures based on the personal relations and characteristics of involved actors can pervade and impact formally institutionalized actions. Second, observing principles of good governance allows also statements on how far a 'true' endogenous approach has been followed.

In addition to participatory observation, local experts were consulted about LAG meetings at which the external facilitators could not participate, and on their opinion about the application of the MCDA approach. Expert interviews were also conducted with further stakeholders involved in the LEADER implementation process in Romania. This allows us to set our research results in a broader context and for instance to compare the situation of the case region with that of other potential Romanian LAGs. Finally, in order to sharpen the focus of observations and interviews, complementary findings on local governance processes of other authors were taken into account.

Multiple criteria decision analysis for supporting the elaboration of a regional development concept

Elaborating an RDC and setting priorities usually involves many objectives and several actors with different values and interests. MCDA (Belton and Stewart 2002; Figueira *et al.* 2005; Munda 2008) is an approach that considers different dimensions of decision alternatives and varying preferences for criteria. It aims to structure and model the actual choice problem for aiding decision-makers. The

approach is based on explicit documentation of objectives, preferences and rankings of options. This increases transparency and evaluation in the decision-making process. First experiences with facilitating the formation of EU rural development policies by MCDA are discussed, for example, in Kirschke *et al.* (2004, 2007), Prager and Nagel (2008), Wegener (2008) and Ziolkowska (2008).

In the case study presented here, MCDA was applied for facilitating an LAG's decision-making on its RDC. The role of the authors as facilitators in this process was the provision of the method and support in the implementation. From the menu of MCDA methods, the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty 1980) and the software *Expert Choice* were selected. Compared to other MCDA approaches the AHP provides a simple and intuitive procedure and outputs which was seen as an advantage for its application with a limited timeframe and in a context where actors were lacking experience with the LEADER programme as well as with formal decision-making methods.

The MCDA approach has to be adapted to the RDC elaboration process: (a) the participatory notion of LEADER and the perspectives of multiple regional stakeholders have to be explicitly considered; and (b) the demands of the Romanian LEADER guidelines on an RDC (Box 1), which require for example the identification of main and sub-objectives as well as selection of rural development measures have to be reflected in the MCDA. Both of the mentioned issues are facilitated by MCDA, which quantifies information on preferences and assesses the relations of objectives and measures.

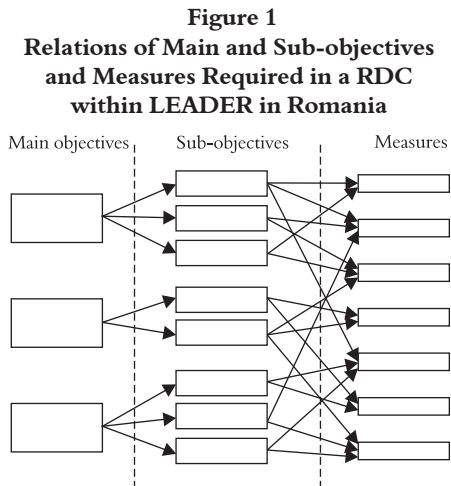
The MCDA approach was introduced at the first workshop of the LAG members (Table 1). At this workshop, furthermore the requirements for the participation in LEADER were presented to the LAG members and their expectations of the programme were inquired. Table 1 outlines the application of the MCDA process for deriving the objective hierarchy, the ranking and the selection of measures.

First, ideas on objectives for the development of the region were collected through questionnaires. This survey was conducted among (a) members and potential members at a first workshop; and (b) among local residents via seven public forums, which were organized by the potential LAG across the region. On each event, a *SWOT Analysis* (Box 1) was jointly elaborated with the participants. The SWOT-Analyses helped to turn the actors' perspective from a personal view to one considering the development of the region as a whole. Afterwards, they were surveyed individually on RDC objectives. Altogether, 142 individuals contributed to this tracing of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to the identification of objectives.

For categorizing and structuring the results (the named objectives), a hierarchy of objectives was first drafted by local experts and the facilitators, and then discussed in a mixed stakeholder group of around 30 persons. Afterwards, it was

Box 1
Demands on a Regional Development Concept (RDC)
for Participating in LEADER in Romania

An RDC forms the main part of a LEADER application and is the basis for the selection of LAGs. Guidelines on the required content and format were published in Romania by the agricultural ministry (MA NRDP 2010a). The guidelines set strict rules for the description of the region, the documentation of the functioning of an LAG in terms of decision-making and the foreseen financial distribution in the RDCs. Decisive elements for developing the strategy are, first, the *SWOT Analysis* (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats-Analysis) on the potential LEADER region for identifying its development potential and, second, a schematic framework on the relation between main objectives, sub-objectives and measures (Figure 1). That scheme can be seen as core of the RDC. While the objectives can be defined by the potential LAGs themselves, this freedom of choice is limited for the measures



Source: MA NRDP 2010a; modified.

foreseen to be integrated in the RDC. The National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) states that LEADER projects have to contribute to the achievement of at least one of the three EAFRD Axes, meaning that all measures listed in the EC documents (Annex B) could become part of an RDC. As the number of objectives of an integrated RDC should be manageable, the crucial task for a potential LAG is to identify and select the priority main objectives and sub-objectives for the development of their region and to select the measures, which contribute to achieving these objectives in the best way.

jointly modified at a second workshop with (potential) LAG members before a final agreement was reached.¹⁰

Then, applying the MCDA approach AHP, the importance of the agreed objectives was assessed by members of the future LAG and further potential members individually by pairwise comparisons of the objectives. Based on these assessments, weights reflecting the relative importance of each objective were quantified. The assessments of the objectives' importance were calculated for the group of 'local actors', consisting of 16 formal members¹¹ and 30 potential members of the future LAG, who participated in the second workshop, which focussed on tourism and was open to interested actors. Afterwards, a second

Table 1
Steps in the RDC Elaboration Process for the Identification of Priority
Main and Sub-objectives and Rural Development Measures

| <i>Steps</i> | <i>Time</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Collecting objectives from each actor individually after a joint SWOT Analysis at the first workshop of LAG members | 16–17 February 2010 |
| 2. Collecting objectives from people of the region via questionnaire after a joint SWOT Analysis at public forums | 1–11 March 2010 |
| 3. Pre-structuring objectives suggested during the steps one and two (desk work of facilitators) | 12–22 March 2010 |
| 4. Elaboration of a tentative objective hierarchy (ordering the objectives into main and sub-objectives) by local experts and facilitators | |
| 5. Second Workshop of (potential) LAG members: | 23–24 March 2010 |
| a) Presentation of the results of the survey conducted on the forums | |
| b) Discussing and adapting/revising the hierarchy of objectives | |
| c) Completing questionnaires (1. round) by LAG members and other participants of the workshop: | |
| pair wise comparisons for assessing the relative importance of objectives | 25–31 March 2010 |
| 6. Calculating and discussing the results of the local actors' assessment of the relative importance of objectives by local experts and facilitators | |
| 7. Completing questionnaire (2. round) by local experts for assessing the relative importance of objectives | 1. week of April 2010 |
| 8. Pre-selection of rural development measures for the regional development concept omitting measures that cannot be integrated into the RDC from a technical point of view | 1. week of April 2010 |
| 9. Estimating the potential impact of rural development measures on the achievement of objectives by local experts | 1. week of April 2010 |
| 10. Calculating rankings of measures using the AHP and discussing rankings with an LAG members | April–May 2010 |
| 11. Selection of measures (including adaptations to changing programme guidelines) | May–July 2010 |

model named 'local experts' was calculated. It is based on a joint assessment of the regional manager and three additional experts in charge with managing the preparatory LEADER measure in the region, who had discussed and definitively considered the results of the forums, the model 'local actors' and the situation in the region. The resulting weights of objectives were discussed with the local actors. For highlighting and debating differences in the assessment of local actors and local experts and thus for keeping the feeling of ownership, the work was continued with both models.

For simplifying the selection of rural development measures from the EC regulations (Annex B), a technical pre-selection was done by the local experts supported by the facilitators. From the EC menu of 38 measures, 15 measures, which can hardly be delivered under LEADER, were excluded from the beginning (among them *Early retirement* and area payments, see Annex B). Another 13 measures were omitted, because they imply a high administrative burden and/or potentially lost resources for the beneficiaries; this mainly applies to not area-related investment measures of Axis 2, which would involve several agencies if implemented.

The potential impacts of the preselected measures on each objective were estimated by the local experts who were familiar with the rural development measures and the respective regulations. In this way, it could be avoided that due to a lack of knowledge measures were erroneously assessed and ranked by the local actors. The measures were then ranked by applying the AHP algorithm according to these impact estimations and the assessed importance of the objectives for developing the region. Again, the calculations of rankings were made twice—for local actors and local experts based on their respective assessments of the objectives' importance.

Finally, the rankings of measures according to each single sub-objective as well as the overall ranking were presented to an LAG as a basis for discussing the final selection of measures for the RDC.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We first present the outcomes of the MCDA-based RDC elaboration (in the following section). Building upon the comparison of the situation of the region, the interests of the residents, the (interim) result of the MCDA and the final RDC, we then discuss factors which affected the intended endogenous approach and the development of governed structures (See the fourth section).

Outcomes of the MCDA facilitated RDC elaboration

The outcomes of the elaboration of the RDC are presented chronologically, following the steps introduced in Table 1. One outcome of the initial workshop

was that local actors were not very familiar with the LEADER approach and the programme design. Nonetheless, they came with a bundle of expectations. Beside their desire to gather resources for improving the situation in the region, and the appreciation of processual and interrelational dimensions of regional development, many LAG members revealed a thinking process from a community perspective (Box 2). The group is not a close-knit one focussing on their commonly predefined aims.

Box 2

Expectations of the Members of the Potential Local Action Group on the Implementation of LEADER in Romania

During the initial workshop, members of the case LAG were asked to note their expectations of the implementation of LEADER in Romania. Certainly, not all of the local actors had understood the LEADER approach completely yet. Nevertheless, most of them laid down their expectation in writing assiduously. The range of answers can be grouped into the following main categories: (a) Accessing financial resources for the development of the region; (b) Citizens' involvement in (local) decision-making ('dialogue'); (c) Responding to real local needs; (d) Decentralization and improvement of the functioning of the local administration; (e) Changes of the mentality of the people in terms of collaboration and partnerships, property, work, interpersonal relations and trust; and (f) Effective development of rural regions, particularly establishment of a proper business environment.

Workshop as well as forum participants also identified regional specifics and potentials. Among the potentials were for instance the UNESCO heritage and the local industry park, but also unused resources of mushrooms and wood berries. Thereupon, objectives for the development of the region were collected from each participant individually during the workshops and forums (step 1 and 2 in Table 1). A broad spectrum of possible objectives for the development of the region was the result. It included the development of all economic sectors, as well as social, environmental and cultural goals.

Next, a hierarchy of objectives (Box 3), that is, a division into main and sub-objectives was suggested by the local experts and facilitators at the second workshop (step 4 and 5 in Table 1). This proposal was not very intensively debated, because all objectives were derived from the individual suggestions and ideas of the participants. Only a few 'non-LEADER-like' objectives (that are not feasible under LEADER) had to be omitted or reformulated. For example, the objective of improving the traffic and technical infrastructure was seen by some as a big issue for the region. However, big infrastructure projects are generally not funded under LEADER because they lack 'innovative character' and are seen as 'normal local government activities' (ECA 2010). Here, it was finally agreed to include a sub-objective *Improving the regional facilities* in the list of goals.

Box 3
Hierarchy of Objectives as Basis for the Regional Development Concept

| Overall Goal: Development of the Case Region | |
|--|--|
| 1. Increasing the Quality of Social Services | |
| 1.1 Increasing social inclusion | |
| 1.2 Extending service infrastructure | |
| 1.3 Improving public safety | |
| 2. Developing Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery | |
| 2.1 Extending organic farming | |
| 2.2 Improving economical efficiency of agriculture/forestry/fishery businesses | |
| 2.3 Initiating value added chain/enhancing local products | |
| 2.4 Sustainable management of natural resources | |
| 2.5 Developing human resources in the primary sector | |
| 3. Developing Tourism/Agrotourism | |
| 3.1 Establishing and improving touristic attractions | |
| 3.2 Developing accommodations for tourists | |
| 3.3 Developing structures for promoting tourism | |
| 3.4 Developing human resources in the tourism industry | |
| 4. Developing Businesses | |
| 4.1 Promoting small and medium sized businesses | |
| 4.2 Creating an appealing environment for investors | |
| 4.3 Developing human resources for business activities | |
| 5. Increasing the Attractiveness of the Region | |
| 5.1 Valorizing culture, cultural heritage | |
| 5.2 Improving the image and the publicity of the region | |
| 5.3 Protecting the environment | |
| 5.4 Creation of jobs | |
| 5.5 Improving the regional facilities | |

The next important outcome was the weighting of the main and sub-objectives (step 5 in Table 1). For the assessment of the objectives' importance and deriving weights, the discussions on the public forums regarding strengths and weaknesses, as well as surveyed objectives and project ideas were recapped. Thus, the opinions of the participants of the forums, which reflect the regional population in terms of sectors, gender and age in a good way, potentially came into consideration.

Based on the pair wise comparisons of the objectives, two AHP models were calculated¹² (step 6 and 7 in Table 1); they reflect the relative importance of objectives for the overall development of the region (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The first model, 'local actors', refers to the whole group (46 respondents); the second model, 'local experts', is based solely on the weighting of objectives by four local experts (see third section above).¹³

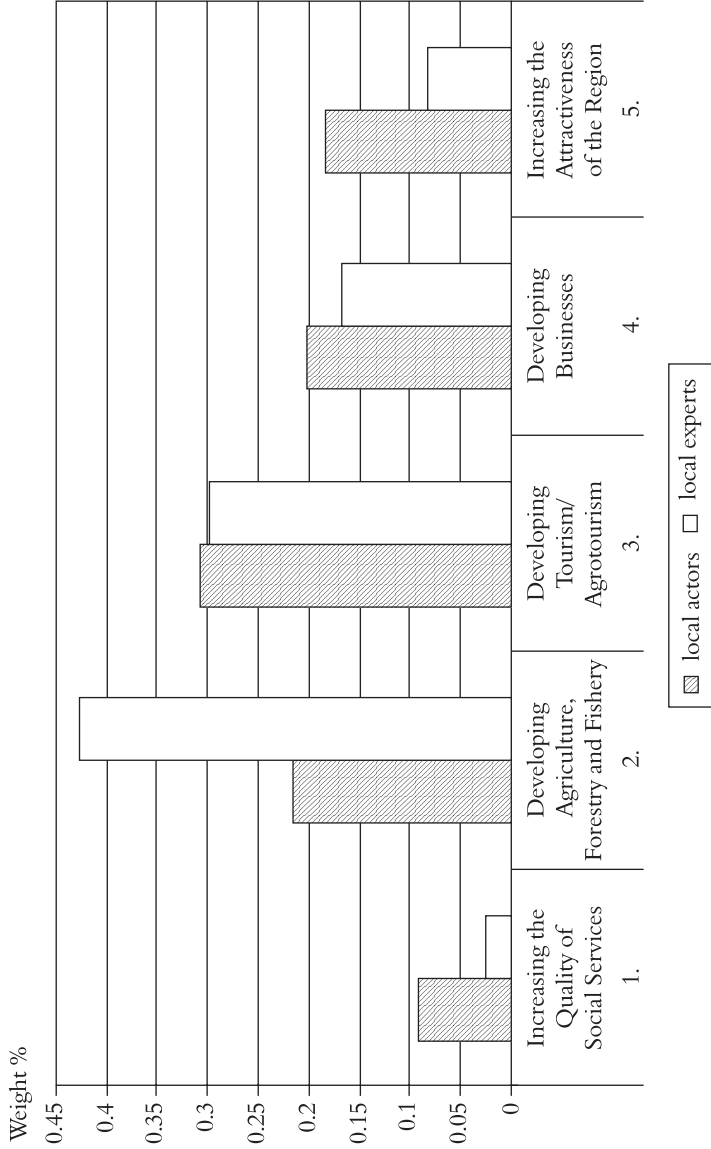
The weights for the main objectives (Figure 2) show that the local experts rated the development of the primary sector as most important and as more important than the whole group of local actors. Furthermore, they assessed social services as less important than the local actors. The latter see the development of the touristic sector as most important for developing the region. Certainly, due to the overall purpose of the event, local actors interested in tourism were highly represented¹⁴.

Also the weights of the sub-objectives (Figure 3) show differences in the assessments of local experts and actors especially for the following sub-objectives: 2.1 *Extending organic farming* and 2.3 *Initiating a value added chain* (for agricultural products). Both sub-objectives are given a higher weight by the local experts. Under the main objective *Developing tourism*, high differences occur for sub-objectives 3.3 *Developing structures for promoting tourism* and for 3.4 *Developing human resources in the tourism industry*, which are again ranked higher by the local experts. Of comparatively high importance for the local actors as compared to the local experts are for instance sub-objectives 1.2 *Extension of the service infrastructure*, 2.4 *Sustainable development of natural resources*, 4.2 *Creating an appealing environment for investors* and 5.4 *Creation of jobs*.

Generally, most local actors tended to give priority to more concrete objectives with an immediate impact, having in mind rather feasible projects such as for instance establishing silos or a kindergarten while the local experts used to take a broader view. Concerning the tourism related objectives this is directly reflected in the results since local experts gave a high importance to the sub-objective 3.3 *Developing structures for promoting tourism* while local actors preferred for instance the sub-objective 3.2 *Developing accommodation for tourists*.

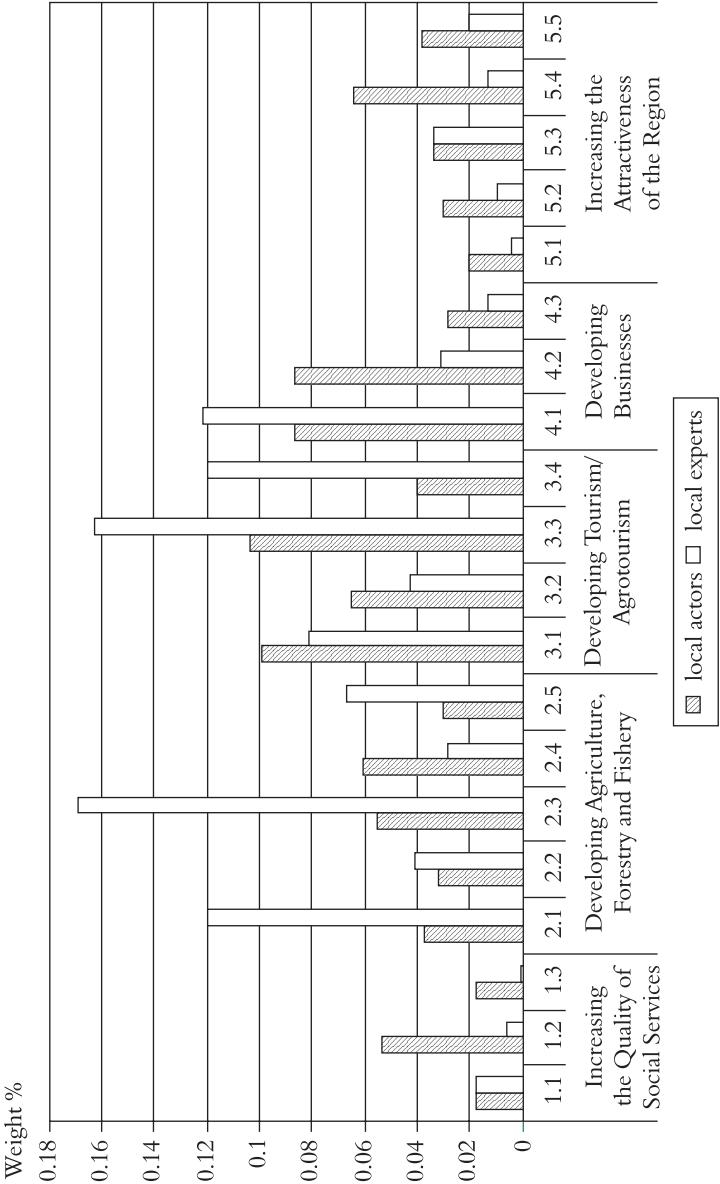
Concerning the related objectives, the lower weights for social services by local experts might be due to their knowledge of alternative funding possibilities under which an LAG's social aims can be better achieved. Further, the fact that LAGs receive additional scores in an LAG selection for demonstrating that their concept

Figure 2
Weights of Main Objectives for the Regional Development Concept



Note: The weights reflect the relative importance of the objectives and were derived by pair wise comparisons using the AHP method. The model 'local actors' considers 46 (potential) LAG members, the model 'local experts' bases on a joint assessment of four LAG members who are particularly familiar with the LEADER programme. The 'local experts' took preceding interim results of the RDC elaboration process explicitly into account.

Figure 3
Weights of Sub-objectives for the Regional Development Concept



Note: The weights reflect the relative importance of the objectives and were derived by pair wise comparisons using the AHP method. The model 'local actors' considers 46 (potential) LAG members, the model 'local experts' bases on a joint assessment of four LAG members who are particularly familiar with the LEADER programme. The 'local experts' took preceding interim results of the RDC elaboration process explicitly into account. The numbers of the sub-objectives refer to Box 3.

is complementary with other funding programmes (Annex C) directed the local experts to think about most suitable and complementary instruments. If at a later stage, LAGs met the challenge to realize possibilities for complementarity, which can be easily laid down in an RDC only for raising the chances of being selected, it would be constructive. However, in our case this instance together with the potential difficulties to finance social measures under LEADER led at first to a low weighting of social objectives by local experts although social projects played a considerable role during the discussions. This example gives some indication of how priorities for objectives can be biased by administrative settings.

The deviations in the assessments that are shown by MCDA, became subject to further discussion. However, the very limited time frame for developing the RDC inhibited using the full potential of the possibilities offered by MCDA.

In the next step, objectives to which future projects have to contribute to had to be selected. It was decided to concentrate for this purpose on a reduced number of three main objectives. Thus, for the RDC the objective *Increasing the Quality of Social Services* was omitted.¹⁵ The choice of objectives for being integrated in the RDC followed the weighting of the model of local experts: Agriculture, Tourism and Small Businesses were chosen as main objectives for the RDC. Indeed, following the model of the local actors would have led to the same objectives albeit in another order. No arguments or technical reasons for not following this procedure were raised by the local actors. *Increasing the Attractiveness of the Region* was defined as additional horizontal objective¹⁶. By doing so, the integrated approach was at least conceptually satisfied, as certain important dimensions like environmental concerns did not get out of sight despite the concentration on only three main objectives in the RDC.

As the number of sub-objectives had not obligatory to be reduced their number was kept to allow flexibility in the implementation of the RDC. Nevertheless, their weights are reported in the RDC to be used as indication in the internal project selection process at a later stage.

For deriving a ranking of the ten measures, which remained after omitting hardly deliverable measures from the EC menu of 38 measures (step 8 in Table 1), the local experts assessed their impact on all sub-objectives (Annex D) (step 9 in Table 1).

In contrast to the reduced number of objectives finally integrated in the RDC the final ranking and selection of measures (step 10 in Table 1) for the RDC was based on the derived weights of all objectives and the estimated impacts of the pre-selected measures on these objectives (cf. Annex D) based on the AHP.

Table 2 shows the overall ranking of the rural development measures for the two models 'local actors' and 'local experts'. Main discrepancies are found for Measure 123 *Adding value to agricultural and forestry products* and Measure 133 *Supporting producer groups*, which are both ranked better in the model of the local experts. The main reason for this different ranking is that both measures mainly

Table 2
Ranking of Rural Development Measures for the Overall Objective ‘Development of the Region’

| <i>Rural Development Measures^a</i> | <i>Rank</i> | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>Local Actors</i> | <i>Local Experts</i> |
| 111 Vocational training ^b | 2 | 1 |
| 121 Farm modernization ^b | 9 | 7 |
| 123 Adding value to agricultural and forestry products ^b | 8 | 4 |
| 125 Infrastructure development for the development and adaptation of the agricultural and forestry sector ^b | 10 | 9 |
| 133 Supporting producer groups | 6 | 3 |
| 312 Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises ^b | 5 | 8 |
| 313 Encouragement of tourism activities ^b | 1 | 2 |
| 321 Basic services for the economy and rural population | 3 | 5 |
| 322 Village Renewal ^b | 4 | 6 |
| 331 Training and information for economic actors | 7 | 10 |

Notes: ^a The complete official name of the rural development measures is provided in Annex B.

^b Measure is offered under the Romanian National Rural Development Programme.

□ Measures selected for the Regional Development Concept.

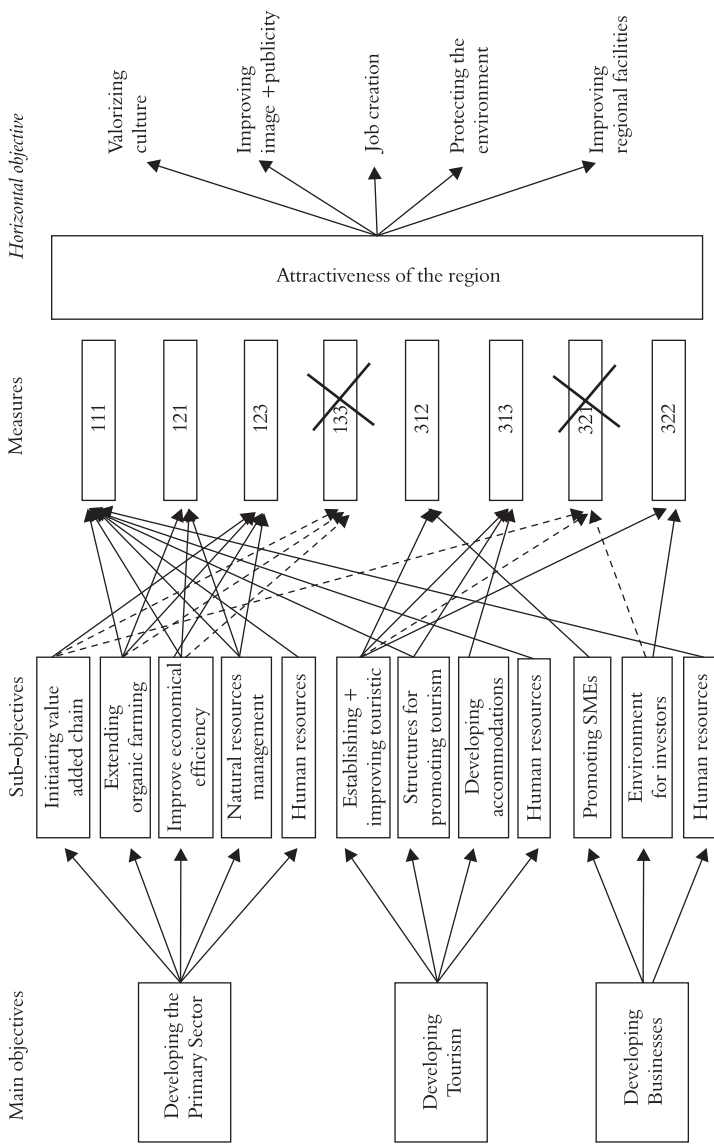
■ Measures later omitted because they are not offered in the National Rural Development Programme.

impact on the agricultural related objectives that were weighted higher by the local experts. In turn Measure 312 *Supporting the development of SMEs* is ranked higher in the model of the local actors, which is due to its estimated impacts on the objective *Increasing the Attractiveness of the Region* which was seen as more important by the local actors.

Despite the fact that tourism is not of highest priority as main objective, Measure 313 *Encouragement of tourism activities* is ranked high, as it was assessed as having comparatively high impact on many sub-objectives of other main objectives (Annex D). Measure 111 *Vocational training*, due to its horizontal focus, is ranked high in both models, although the local actors weighted the human resources related sub-objectives lower. The last examples underline the MCDA's significance of considering the cumulative impact on a coherent system of objectives for ranking RDC measures, allowing to find those which potentially contribute most to the overall objective and allowing the group discussion of differences in the assessments.

The MCDA results were commonly accepted by the group. A final strategic adaptation of selection of measures was made by the local experts. During a training on writing RDCs¹⁷ rumours were spread that measures that are not part of the NRDP (Annex B), were not welcomed by the administration. Additionally, ambiguity on selectable measures was evoked by a non-binding guide, which was not consistent with the NRDP (see also Box 1). It was published by the ministry during the course of the RDC preparation and maintained in the status of a draft until the submission of the applications. Hence, local experts were afraid of facing additional administrative efforts and disputes and of losing resources if such unfavoured, non-NRDP measures were to be included in the RDC. Therefore, it was decided to omit Measure 133, Measure 321 and Measure 331¹⁸—no matter how high their ranking was. It must be stressed, that the freedom of choice was severely narrowed by this: only 7 out of the former 23 measures, (respectively, 10 measures after the pre-selection), were left to choose from. The results were presented to the local actors, who—relying on the experts—nodded through the decision. The following six measures were finally selected for the RDC: 111, 121, 123, 312, 313 and 322 (Figure 4). Measure 125 *Development of infrastructure for the development of the agricultural and forestry sector* was not included, as it received a low rank, by both the local actors and the team of local experts. Measure 121 *Farm modernization* was included although an argument was raised that projects under this measure are likely to be individual projects and thus have little impact on the development of the whole region. The main reason for including Measure 121 was that the local experts had already received a number of project proposals (for example, from forum participants and hearings), which could be realized under this measure; examples are: building up storage capacities for fruits, vegetables and milk. This high interest made it likely that co-financing could be achieved.

Figure 4
Finally Selected Main Objectives, Sub-objectives and Measures for the Regional Development Concept



Note: SMEs = Small and Medium Enterprises.

This RDC scheme presents the originally selected main and sub-objectives. The measures, however, are not the first choice of local actors which had to be adapted to the unwritten LEADER guidelines. Due to those, Measure 133 and Measure 321, which were ranked high following the MCDA approach, had to be omitted; here, indicated through the crossed measures and their discontinued connection to the sub-objectives.

Further modifications of the already completed RDC were undertaken after the final selection criteria (Annex C) were published by the ministry.¹⁹ With the hope to increase the chances for selection by adapting to these criteria, additional 'operational objectives'²⁰ such as *supporting semi-subsistence farmers* (Annex C) were formulated by many applicants. Even regions where semi-subsistence farms do not play a major role in the agricultural sector declared the support of these holdings as an 'operational objective'. For this reason, the case LAG added four operational objectives: (a) semi-subsistence farmers, (b) young people, (c) producer groups and associations and (d) environmental issues. The agreed hierarchy of objectives was not modified; instead it was decided to operationalize these additional objectives by means of project selection criteria. Thus, projects proposals which address these issues would receive higher scores in an LAG internal project selection. From a methodological point of view, the issue of the selection criteria could have been adequately operationalized within the MCDA procedure, if the final selection criteria had been announced earlier.

Which factors further endogenous development in Romanian regions

Indicative for the realization of a true endogenous approach is a broad participation, and the reflection of the situation and the potential of the region (as identified by the local residents) in the final RDC. However, looking at the whole RDC elaboration process, it already became obvious that external factors had considerable influence. These external influence origins (a) from the LEADER programme design itself, especially the national guidelines and the programme administration; and (b) from external technical assistance.

The initial conditions were favourable for a successful endogenous approach. Broad public participation of several stakeholder groups in the RDC elaboration took place. The public opinion was, without doubt, incorporated by the potential LAG into their RDC. The MCDA approach, although offered by external experts, clearly facilitated this endogenous decision-making process without having a direct impact on the autonomy of the decision process.

The strongest limitations for true endogenous development originated from the 'programme's administration' and an LAGs will to avoid administrative burdens and possible loss of resources resulted in a very limited leeway for the RDC content. First, the small number of available measures hindered the optimal use of the endogenous potential of the case region: (at least) two preferred measures were abandoned due to this limitation in our case study. In other regions, especially the 'non-compatibility' of environmental measures of Axis 2 might be even more relevant and hamper an endogenous and integrated approach. Second, the

selection criteria (Annex 3) are critical. The content of the RDC was adapted with additional 'objectives' which did not result from the assessment of regional needs, but were operationalized only for increasing the chance to be selected. It seems that the selection criteria are used by the national authorities to steer local policies. This clearly endangers the endogenous approach of LEADER, particularly its bottom-up notion. If, however, such additional objectives will actually be achieved after the LAGs' selection is doubtful, because a LEADER group has some freedom in steering the funding to different objectives of their RDC.

These limitations in the RDC design led to further impacts, which in turn indirectly hampered the endogenous approach: the effort of selecting and ranking objectives and measures made in the case region was comparatively high. When external constraints, like changes in the programme guidelines, limit the room for manoeuvre, this leads to frustration, especially if they happen at a late stage. We found that the initially high engagement in the RDC elaboration process and strong feeling of ownership decreased due to this reason.

Another weak point is related to the obligatory *SWOT Analysis*, which is prone to 'manipulation'. Since the *SWOT Analysis* is theoretically highly useful, its coherence with the selected objectives in the RDC is checked and scored during the selection process (Annex C). Obviously, there is an incentive to 'harmonize' the original *SWOT Analyses* to the finally selected objectives before submission.²¹ To strengthen the endogenous notion, it might therefore be much more important to ask for a proof that the *SWOT Analysis* actually reflects the opinions of the regional residents (for example, survey results). This redounds to legitimacy and should also help to improve the quality of the RDC. In other words, selection criteria should stimulate a true endogenous development by concentrating on how the RDC was elaborated.

In a nutshell, we find that the Romanian LEADER programme design itself contributes to inhibiting a true endogenous development. On the other hand, for the local people it is most important to get access to extra-local funds for developing their region—one main motive for engaging in LEADER activities (Box 2). Explicitly following an endogenous approach stands second in line. Ray (2000) found that local initiatives adopt the endogenous approach as an opportunistic strategy for raising external funds by employing the rhetoric desired by the programme authorities. In our Romanian case, not only the desired rhetoric is adopted, but even the direction and content of the RDC and thus the LAGs' action potential is changed by such strategic behaviour.

Another notable factor that might further or inhibit endogenous development is 'external assistance' for preparing the RDC. Most (potential) LAGs in the EU make use of external assistance. Obviously, this can affect the realization of an endogenous approach. For instance, the *SWOT Analysis* should be

performed by the 'people concerned', but in reality the RDCs are often written by consultants. The degree of local participation varies from case to case (ECA 2010; Scott 2004).²² Typical reasons for little stakeholder involvement are (a) a lack of time due to strict deadlines (Kovács Katona *et al.* 2006; Scott 2004); (b) a lack of resources for paying experts for the additional effort needed for following a participatory approach (Kunze 2009); (c) a lack of experience (Scott 2004); (d) a lack of proactiveness among the locals to engage for the RDC elaboration (Marquardt *et al.* 2009a); and (e) an exclusive partnership, which does not want to share decision-making power in LEADER affairs.

In our case, the external consultants concentrated on supporting the decision-making process itself and not its results, that is, on guiding in 'how to act'. The application of MCDA allowed guiding the local actors through the decision-making process in such a way that the content of the RDC was still endogenously grown. Though time was a constraining factor because participatory approaches are time-consuming,²³ we believe that MCDA helped to facilitate the RDC development by efficiently structuring the process and by providing a factual basis for the discussions.

The following three main factors contributed to the potential positive effect of applying MCDA:

- (1) Only a small number of experts had to be familiar with details of rural development measures; as once the measures' impact on single objectives were assessed, their ranking could be derived from weighting feasible objectives; in other words, the design of our MCDA procedure has proven to work as an adaptor between the abstractness of an RDC and the ways of thinking of the people in the region;
- (2) the subjective part, namely the preferences for objectives, are made more transparent, compared to commonly used verbal-argumentative methods.²⁴
- (3) MCDA facilitates to overview the complex mosaic of different standpoints of local knowledge.²⁵ To be able to fall back on MCDA facilitated the ranking of measures. The choice of objectives and measures is based on a ranking in which the opinion of the local actors is made explicit.

Practising new modes of governance—a challenge?

While Stoker (1998), following Kooiman and Van Vliet (1993) explains that the creation of governance structures cannot be externally imposed, Böcher (2008) supports Knieling *et al.* (2001) in saying that regional governance does not come about naturally and must be initiated. Both opinions are not directly

controversial: experiences show that by introducing new forms of governance, like public-private partnerships within LEADER, governmental authorities have to learn an appropriate operating mode, which challenges hierarchical ways of thinking. This is true even in the traditionally democratic old member states, but applies all the more to the Romanian potential LAGs, because decision-making on regional development involving public and private partners was not commonly practiced up to now.

For observing the development of governance structures in the case region we considered the following principles of good governance as reference points: participation, equality of partners, transparency, democracy, respectively democratic decision-making, quality of communication and conflict management.

As mentioned above, it can be expected that many stakeholders are ultimately more concerned about accessing funds than about 'participation' and 'governance' (see Box 2). The prospect of resources for developing the region might thus be a strong trigger for adopting a new mode of governance in the form of public-private collaboration. The programme design and especially the selection criteria can, as described above, be used to steer such processes. A minimum level of participation is, for instance, ensured through composition requirements of LEADER partnerships; and selection criteria brought about an increased variety of LAGs' composition (Annex C). In this way, it may be obviated that weak or little organized stakeholder groups are not represented in an LAG, which is an often reported circumstance (see for example, Bruckmeier 2000; Shortall and Shucksmith 1998). Though, such prophylaxis does not entail that LAGs are inclusive.

For the case region, we found that some actors had to get used to the participatory approach. Moreover, some of them were not even aware, that a participatory approach, which might entail less power for the individual LAG members, should be followed. This became obvious when discussing the organization of the public forums. The intervention of the well-accepted regional manager helped to convince the LAG members of the advantages of broad public 'participation'. Not surprisingly, in retrospect, the experiences and results of the forums were much appreciated.

Ensuring participation cannot, however, guarantee that (other) principles of good governance are followed—local elites might still be able to dominate and pursue their interests (see for example, Böcher 2008; Bruckmeier 2000; Furmankiewicz 2006; Lošťák and Hudečková 2010). Moreover, despite that they are a 'creation of LEADER', LAGs do not necessarily follow transparent, democratically legitimized processes of decision-making (Bruckmeier 2000) which would be necessary for rectifying public spending under LEADER.²⁶

For legitimization and increased 'transparency', procedures might be institutionalized to a higher degree (Shortall and Shucksmith 1998). In the case region,

although the public-private partnership was formally established, rules for collaboration were not sufficiently defined and an LAG acted rather on an 'ad hoc basis'. It was the RDC elaboration process itself that offered an opportunity to establish new modes of governance: the LAG members have to decide and lay down in the RDC how they want to collaborate on the longer-term. Institutionalizing a LEADER-like mode of governance is challenging for LAGs. On the one hand, rules should not favour single stakeholders in the decision-making process; on the other hand, some actors whose resources are valuable for an LAG might demand a privileged position.

Experience shows that even if rules are set, informal power might lead to irregularities in the decision-making process (ECA 2010). Kovách (2000: 186) states that 'the political elite [in Eastern European countries] is able to subordinate civil organizations (...) to its authority' (see also Maurel 2008). Such subordination was also observed by Marquardt et al. (2009a) for other potential Romanian LAGs, but did not take place in the case region. In contrast to Kovách's observations, in our case study the members of the potential LAG, who had not worked together in that constellation before, used the workshops as a cross-sectoral discussion forum, indicating a good 'communication' structure. Also, Scott's finding (2004) that the lead partner or the initiator of an LAG has, to a large extent, ownership of the process at this early stage of strategy formulation, did not apply for the case LAG. Moreover, there is the risk that discussions lack democratic procedures and are negatively affected by (governmental) politics, as first, mayors might have to learn to subordinate to other actors, and second the mayors of the case LAG belong to different parties and political dispute could be expected. However, we found that the atmosphere in the discussions was civilized and fair. Dominant or high-ranking personalities backed off and acted discrete. Suggestions made by the paid regional manager such as the proposal to depoliticize the forums by treating mayors as guests instead of patrons were commonly accepted. The atmosphere was thus characterized by 'democratic decision making' and an 'equal treatment of the partners'. This factual atmosphere might have been supported by the presence of external actors (Vinten 1994), but was also present in their absence. 'Controversies' were only caused by a different level of knowledge on the NRDP measures, which is decisive for the understanding of arguments with regard to measure selection (Box 4). Thus, 'conflict management' by the regional manager was hardly required.

Why is the potential LAG of the case region doing so comparatively well with regard to following new modes of governance? It was surprising how well the group collaborated in a new actor constellation and practiced participative decision-making.

In the literature, there are hints that the initial situation of an LAG, particularly the group composition and the reasons behind their joint initiative, may play a role

Box 4

Impact of the Complexity and Bureaucracy of the LEADER Programme

The impact of the complexity and bureaucracy of the LEADER programme is manifold. One challenge is to motivate people in participating in LEADER activities without overloading them with the complex bureaucratic issues and without evoking false hopes. Some crucial decisions on the RDC have to follow administrative requirements which are not easily understood by all local actors. This might result in disappointment and conflicts. Consequently, there is a trade-off between information overload and frustration due to misunderstandings with regard to decisions that can only be understood with detailed knowledge of LEADER regulations. The challenge is to find the optimal balance for providing the right amount of information to LAG members, keeping the actors motivated and maintaining the regional manager's decisions as transparent as possible, at the same time.

Another consequence of the bureaucracy linked to LEADER is that some actors might raise the question whether the advantage resulting from joint activities are outweighing administrative burdens of LEADER. Therefore, for some individual project application might seem more attractive. Yet, some might see their only chance to realize certain projects under LEADER if other funding schemes are unsuitable or over-requested and, thus, stay with an LAG. In Romania, many local communities hope that their projects which were not selected under Measure 322 *Village renewal* can be realized under LEADER. Others hope for free advice from a regional manager when preparing their project application within the LEADER framework (see also ECA 2010).

(for example, Convery *et al.* 2010; Lee *et al.* 2005).²⁷ The case LAG was founded with the only aim to participate in LEADER. Moreover, while it is often found that existing regional power structures also pervade LAG activities, for instance, communal microregion–associations (Marquardt *et al.* 2009a; Maurel 2008), in the newly established case region extending to two counties no such coalitions were present. For instance, the seven communes had not formally worked together as a group, instead they had collaborated in different constellations. If actors were theoretically powerful due to their status or resources, practically they were so within another regional context, respectively within other social networks. In other potential Romanian LEADER regions (Marquardt *et al.* 2009a) and similarly in Hungary (Maurel 2008), county councils as supra-communal governmental body tried to influence LAGs' activities. In such cases, imbalanced power–constellations and the party–political dimension were introduced or exacerbated implying additional conflict potential that hampered democratic decision-making of the LAGs.

In contrast, the case LAG consisted—right from the beginning—a mixed stakeholder group. Although individual motives may vary (Box 2), the common constituting goal was to source LEADER funds for developing their region. All

members accepted the multisectoral approach and thus the multiple interests within an LAG. The group never was a closed circle, but always open for interested parties.²⁸ Some even explicitly hoped for increased citizens' involvement in decision-making and a change in people's mentality on collaboration (Box 3). We, therefore, confirm that also in our case the initial mixed and open composition allowed that the widespread tendency for endogenous development initiatives to favour those who are already powerful (Shucksmith 2000), was not found for the case region.

Another supporting factor was the trustworthy relation to the regional manager. She was not only accepted because the local actors depended on her skills in preparing the application, but had accumulated considerable trust in the process of preparing the RDC. Such a key person, who enjoys as manager confidence from all stakeholder groups, facilitates the acceptance of both technical and normative decisions.

The application of MCDA generally contributed to a structured and 'transparent' decision-making process. It supported the feeling of ownership among the local actors. Methods for facilitating LEADER-like elaboration of RDCs are described in several guides (for example, DVS LEADER+ 2002; LEADER Observatory 1999). However, tailored methods such as MCDA, despite their unquestioned advantages, are seldom practiced. The main reasons are time-constraints and lack of knowledge and skills. Yet, only recently, the Court of Auditors criticized a lack of transparency in LEADER (ECA 2010); the application of structured methods such as MCDA might be used as a tool to demonstrate that proper and transparent procedures were consistently followed. Transparency was further increased by broad communication of an LAG's work, publicity of workshops and unfolded drafts of the RDC. This might, in addition, have a positive back-coupling on the working atmosphere in an LAG as transparency leads to establishing trust in the process.

The programme's complexity can be seen as a constraint to practicing new modes of governance. For instance, some critical decisions on the RDC, like the final selection of measures, could not be made by the local actors themselves due to a lack of knowledge. In turn, it might be argued, that for this reason, the potential for controversial discussions in the case LAG was much lower. Limited participation in decision-making is thought to hinder not only practicing new modes of governance, but also truly endogenous development (for example, Scott 2004; Shucksmith 2000). Deeper discussion could have taken place, if the group had to rely less on the proposals and pre-selections of the local experts. However, for enabling the actors to discuss such proposals, it would have been necessary that they gained deep knowledge on the LEADER bureaucracy. Such extended capacity building was hardly possible in the limited available time.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper raises the question, if the LEADER implementation in Romania supports endogenous development and new modes of governance. Results reveal that LEADER indeed has a strong neo-endogenous notion: considerable influential factors on endogenous grown strategies and evolving governance structures of potential LAGs are region-external. In particular, the administration and the programme guidelines as well as supported capacity building have to be mentioned.

Although LEADER is generally an external stimulus for endogenous development, its specific design laid down in the programme guidelines partly inhibits its fruitful realization. In Romania, the endogenous potential of the LEADER regions cannot be fully exploited because the room for manoeuvring is very limited. Both, formal rules and informal pressure lead to a small number of eligible measures that can be included into the Regional Development Concepts. This cut-down of possibilities impedes the endogenous and in some cases also the integrated approach, because some of the identified regional needs and opportunities cannot be followed by the LAGs. This issue is also known in other member states in the current funding period; it is raised at European and at national level. Member states refrain from offering a broader menu of measures eligible under the LEADER-Axis because the rigid control system required by the EC and sanctions for non-compliance induce demotivation.

In Romania, we further found that the selection criteria have a significant impact on the content of RDCs. The RDCs are adapted to increase the probability of selection and thus funding. This means, however, that the RDCs do not necessarily reflect the real situation and needs of the regions. This is likely to happen, even if in fact true endogenous development is desired by the potential beneficiaries, because their main priority is accessing external funds. Thus, through the nationally defined selection criteria, policy makers and the agricultural administration can influence local policies. Endogenous development and also the bottom-up approach²⁹ are clearly endangered by this practice.

Theoretically, the idea of the neo-endogenous approach allows a flexible interface between local and extra-local factors. Extra-local factors can work as a support to endogenous development and the use of the regional potential. However, in the case of Romania, we find that both the limitation in selectable measures and the impact of selection criteria may result in an inefficient use of funds. Thus, the idea that the LEADER approach is—due to target-oriented spending at the ground—ultimately more effective and less costly than orthodox rural development interventions in bringing about socio-economic vibrancy (Ray 2006) can be questioned.

The still weak administration is another constraint to the LEADER approach in Romania. The late publishing of regulations and selection criteria, incoherence between informal guides and the binding NRDP as well as problems in the timing of the preparatory LEADER measure made the RDC development extremely difficult for the potential LAGs. Moreover, the delayed or even missing communication of the implementation procedures, particularly of 'eligible' measures, and the unfortunate scheduling of trainings for regional managers led to increased costs for the potential LAGs (and to a mispending of resources by the agricultural ministry). This means, *de facto*, that the intervention logic of the preparatory LEADER measure was not kept.

Not only time and money were wasted, but longer-term damage of the programme can be expected. False expectations were raised and frustration was the outcome. Indeed, the LEADER rhetoric 'offers the prospect of local areas assuming greater control of development' (Ray 2000: 166). Success stories ('good practices') were promoted, what led in turn to demotivation and lack of participation when it was recognized, that these prospects do not always materialize. Such impacts are particularly severe in the crucial 'pre-development phase', in which actors are prepared for the 'new, integrated development ethos' (Ray 1991: 521–22). Not only is the participatory elaboration of RDCs, which determine the development path of a LEADER region, but also the evolution of partnership and governance structures is affected.

In most Romanian LEADER regions, the foundation of public-private partnerships as decision-making body on regional development implies the introduction of a new mode of governance. However, further incentives to follow principles of good governance are not an integral part of the programme guidelines. One reason for this might be that governance processes are difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, despite the rather difficult Romanian politico-administrative and historico-cultural context, our case study showed no major issues with regard to governance. The purpose-oriented formation of an LAG, the capability and broad acceptance of the regional manager, the openness and publicity work of an LAG, and the structured, transparent and fact-based decision-making process (supported by external facilitators) significantly contributed to this positive picture.

However, for furthering practicing good governance and enabling a true endogenous approach, capacity building was found to be essential. Indeed, the importance of gaining expertise and building partnerships is already known (Shucksmith 2010) and partly operationalized in the LEADER guidelines. Our results underline that extended capacity building that goes beyond the regional manager (and its core team) is needed, because participatory decision-making needs a sufficient number of informed stakeholders. The duration of the preparatory LEADER measure was too short for imparting the knowledge on the

complex LEADER guidelines which would have been necessary for following some of the strategic decisions during the RDC development. Capacity building has also a potential to avoid social exclusion in the process of LAG formation (Scott 2004).

Additionally, external expertise for guiding potential LAGs through the decisive initial phase is essential. The preparatory LEADER measure, although otherwise beset with many implementation problems in Romania, offered the potential LAGs to buy external assistance. In our case study, the RDC was developed with the help of Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and external facilitators. MCDA proved to be a valuable tool, especially in supporting a participatory approach in which multiple opinions have to be considered. It works at a high level of analytical detail and considers various objectives in a coherent system. With this, it potentially contributes to an integrated approach. Moreover, the actors' preferences for objectives are made more transparent compared to commonly used verbal–argumentative methods. Thus, MCDA helps to structure the decision-making processes, provides a factual discussion basis and can be used to demonstrate that the procedures followed are in line with the LEADER approach. The only small drawback we find is that it requires slightly more expertise than other approaches.

Overall, considering the repeatedly found relevance of supported capacity building and external technical assistance, the trappings of the neo-endogenous notion of the programme design of LEADER become obvious. Scott (2004)—after experiences with LEADER II—is calling for more formal attention paid to capacity building. We think the preparatory LEADER measure for the Romanian LAGs was certainly a step in the right direction. However, it could be used more fruitfully: while the funds foreseen for the preparatory LEADER measure were sufficient, the time frame in which the financial resources had to be spent was too short and the centrally arranged technical support organized by the ministry was unfavourably scheduled.

Certainly, despite former experiences with LEADER, translating the neo-endogenous approach into an effective policy intervention which satisfies the objectives of both the locals and of the extra-local sponsors is challenging, and even more so for the authorities in a new member state. Our case shows that the devil is sometimes in the details: selection criteria and administering the programme can have high impact on realizing the LEADER approach. Nevertheless, attention to the promises and possible outcomes and achievements of the programme is needed to avoid frustration of (potential) beneficiaries and inefficient spending of funds.

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ANNEXES

Annex A

The Key Features of the LEADER Approach

- 1) Territorial approach: Area-based local development strategies for well-identified rural regions, which can be mostly described as small, homogenous, socially cohesive territories with a regional identity, are elaborately building up on a *SWOT Analysis* (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats Analysis);
- 2) Partnerships: Public-private partnerships so called local action groups (LAGs), which consist of at least 50 per cent private partners to which businesses, NGOs and so on are counted, work together;
- 3) Bottom-up approach: Decision-making power is settled at local level by the LAGs, which elaborate and implement the development strategies and thus define for what funds are spent. The realization of the bottom-up approach requires following a participatory approach at local level;
- 4) Integrated approach: The partnerships and strategies should (a) have a multisectoral design, meaning that projects of different sectors of the local economy are interlinked; and (b) consider social, economic and ecological concerns;
- 5) Innovation: Strategies or projects which are particularly innovative should be funded prior ranking;
- 6) Networking: Exchange of experiences and 'Good practice' examples among LAGs aiming at improving the overall quality of the implemented LEADER projects;
- 7) Cooperation: Implementation of joint projects with other LAGs of the same or other EU member states or third countries aiming at increasing the critical mass for economic action, strengthening trade relations and the human, administrative and social capital within LEADER regions; Cooperation is more than simple exchange of information.

(EC/1698/2005, Art. 61; EC 2006)

Annex B
Overview Over the Rural Development Measures to be Potentially Included
in the Regional Development Concept of the Local Action Group

| <i>Rural Development Measure Listed in the EC Regulation</i> | | <i>Measures in the Romanian NRDP</i> | <i>Measures which are likely to be included into the RDC of an LAG</i> |
|--|---|--|--|
| (111) | Vocational training, information actions, including diffusion of scientific knowledge and innovative practices for persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors | Yes | Yes |
| (112) | Setting up of young farmers | Yes | No |
| (113) | Early retirement of farmers and farm workers | Yes | No |
| (114) | Use by farmers and forest holders of advisory services | Yes | Yes |
| (115) | Setting up of farm management, farm relief and farm advisory services, as well as forestry advisory services | No | (Yes) |
| (121) | Farm modernization | Yes | Yes |
| (122) | Improving the economic value of the forest | Yes | Yes |
| (123) | Adding value to agricultural and forestry products | Yes | Yes |
| (124) | Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in the agricultural and food sector | No | Yes |
| (125) | Improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry | Yes | Yes |
| (126) | Restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and introducing appropriate prevention actions | No | (No) |

| | | | |
|-------|---|-----|-------|
| (131) | Helping farmers to adapt to demanding standards based on community legislation | No | (Yes) |
| (132) | Supporting farmers who participate in food quality schemes | No | (Yes) |
| (133) | Supporting producer groups for information and promotion activities for products under food quality schemes | No | Yes |
| (141) | Supporting semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring | Yes | (Yes) |
| (142) | Setting up of producer groups | Yes | Yes |
| (143) | Providing farm advisory and extension service | Yes | (Yes) |
| (211) | Natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas | Yes | No |
| (212) | Payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas | Yes | No |
| (213) | Natura 2000 payments and payments linked to Directive 2000/60/EC | Yes | No |
| (214) | Agri-environmental payments | Yes | (No) |
| (215) | Animal welfare payments | No | (No) |
| (216) | Support for non-productive investments | No | Yes |
| (221) | First afforestation of agricultural land | Yes | No |
| (222) | First establishment of agroforestry systems on agricultural land | No | No |
| (223) | First afforestation of non-agricultural land | Yes | No |
| (224) | Natura 2000 payments on forestry land | Yes | No |
| (225) | Forest environment payments | No | (No) |
| (226) | Restoring forestry potential and introducing prevention actions | No | (Yes) |
| (227) | Support for non-productive investments | No | Yes |

(Annex B continued)

(Annex B continued)

| <i>Rural Development Measure Listed in the EC Regulation</i> | | <i>Measures in the Romanian NRDP</i> | <i>Measures which are likely to be included into the RDC of an LAG</i> |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| (311) | Diversification into non-agricultural activities | No | (No) |
| (312) | Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises | Yes | (Yes) |
| (313) | Encouragement of tourism activities | Yes | Yes |
| (321) | Basic services for the economy and rural population | No | Yes |
| (322) | Village renewal and development | Yes | Yes |
| (323) | Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage | No | Yes |
| (331) | Training and information for economic actors operating in the fields covered by Axis 3 | No | Yes |
| (341) | Skills acquisition and animation with a view to preparing and implementing a local development strategy | Yes | No |
| (41) | Implementing Local Development Strategies | Yes | Not applicable |
| (411) | Projects related to Axis 1—Competitiveness | Yes | |
| (412) | Projects related to Axis 2—Environment and Land management | Yes | |
| (413) | Projects related to Axis 3—Quality of Life and Diversification | Yes | |
| (421) | Transnational and interregional cooperation | Yes | |
| (431) | Running the Local Action Group, Skills acquisition, animation | Yes | |
| <i>For Romania and Bulgaria sub-measures</i> | | | |
| | 431-1 Public-private partnership building | Yes | |
| | 431-2. Running costs, skills acquisition and animation | Yes | |

Note: *EC/1698/2005.

Annex C

Criteria for Selecting the Romanian Local Action Groups, which will be Funded under LEADER

| <i>Selection Criteria</i> | <i>Scoring</i> |
|---|----------------|
| Territory | |
| Territory with a population between 30,000 and 70,000 inhabitants | Max: 20 |
| Territory with a population density of less than 75 inhabitants per km ² | 5 |
| Territory encompasses disadvantaged areas, Natura 2000 areas, zones of high nature value/areas with high nature value (HNV) or/ and areas affected by restructuring industry | 5 |
| Territory that includes portions of different counties | 5 |
| Partnership | |
| Groups with representatives of ethnic minorities | Max: 25 |
| (To receive points, each partnership must include at least one ethnic minority organization) | 5 |
| Groups with a balanced representation of young people | 5 |
| (Young people are people aged up to 40 years. A balanced representation of young persons will be considered optimal and will receive maximum points if at least 25 per cent of the legal representatives of organizations forming the partnership are young, for the rest of the score will be obtained in proportion to the representation of young people in the partnership) | |
| Groups with a balanced representation of women | 5 |
| (A balanced representation of women will be considered optimal and will receive the maximum score if at least 25 per cent of the legal representatives of organizations that form the partnership are women; the rest of the score will be obtained proportional to the representation of women in the partnership) | |
| Groups that include representatives of agricultural organizations, producer groups, representatives of the forest industry, representatives of the economic sector or environmental organizations | 5 |
| (For each type of organization, it will be awarded one point. Only if the area covered by the partnership does not include forest, for each type of organization 1.25 points will be awarded) | |
| Groups in which the private partners and civil society representatives represents more than 65 per cent of total partners | 5 |

(Annex C continued)

(Annex C continued)

| Selection Criteria | Scoring |
|--|---------------|
| Strategy of which quality of the strategy | Max 55 |
| Initial situation assessment and needs analysis of the potential area (Diagnosis and SWOT Analysis) A partnership will be able to obtain scores allocated to this sub-criterion if a detailed diagnostic analysis of every aspect is present in the territory, and if the SWOT Analysis is consistent with the diagnosis. In this respect, we will take into account the requirements of the guide (MA NRD 2010a). | 4 |
| The objectives set for the implementation of the local development plan (Scores are obtained if the goals/priorities reflect the SWOT Analysis and if there is a synergistic and complementary relationship between objectives/priorities) | 3 |
| Actions to achieve objectives (Scores are obtained if the actions are consistent with the objectives set priorities/strategy) | 3 |
| Complementarity with other development programmes (Scores will be obtained if the strategy proposed by the partnership demonstrates the complementarity with other relevant programs providing local, national or European development funds) | 3 |
| The criteria used for selecting projects of an LAG | 3 |
| (Scores are obtained if the selection criteria are in line with the objectives of local strategy) | |
| Administrative provisions, detailed rules, audit trail and control | 3 |
| Provisions for evaluation—monitoring | 3 |
| Effectiveness of local partners for consultation regarding local development strategy (Score will be achieved if all elements of the strategy are supported by the minutes or records of meetings. Consultation actors should contain: 1) Involvement of interested entities in the preparation of Local Plan Development; 2) Dissemination of the progress made and constraints encountered; 3) The following consultation methods may be used by partnerships: Questionnaires sent to local actors; 4) meetings / forums; 5) Workshops / focus groups; 6) Exhibitions at the local level; 7) Consultations with the support of local opinion leaders; 8) local community committees; 9) Committees of citizens; 10) electronic consultations, and so on. Consultations will aim to clarify the following issues: 1) Decision-making stages of Local Development Plan; 2) Their content; 3) expected results; 4) Principles, methods and timing of work; 5) Factors relevant and necessary partnerships; 6) Partnership needs the cooperation of the experts; and so on | 3 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Efficiency of provision of information to potential beneficiaries on the activities undertaken within the Local Action Group (Points will be obtained if at least four types of actions are described with specified methodology and tools—meetings, thematic conferences, ad hoc seminars, workshops, posters, publications, access database, compilation and dissemination of materials, media, internet and so on. Information and communication for residents and stakeholders in development planning in connection with the proper functioning of an LAG and implementation of all actions of the local development strategy) | 4 |
|---|---|

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Strategy of which components of the strategy | | 25 |
| Innovative actions | | 4 |
| Cooperation actions | | 4 |
| Combine multiple axes of the RDP objectives | | 3 |
| It is aimed at semi-subsistence farmers (or diversification) | | 4 |
| The strategy is aimed at young people (It will be scored if the selection criteria ensures that over 30 per cent of beneficiaries will be young) | | 3 |
| The strategy integrates environmental problems (It will be scored if the selection criteria ensures that over 25 per cent of projects include actions for environmental protection) | | 4 |
| The strategy aims at facilitating the implementation of the measures specific beneficiaries such as producer groups, associations, partnerships, and so on. | | 3 |
| Total Max: | 100 | |

Source: MA NRDP, 2010b, (originally published in Romanian, not all explanatory phrases have been translated)

Annex D
Impact Assessment of Pre-selected Rural Development Measures
on the Sub-objectives for Developing the Case Region by Local Experts

| <i>Measures</i> | <i>111</i> | <i>121</i> | <i>123</i> | <i>125</i> | <i>133</i> | <i>312</i> | <i>313</i> | <i>321</i> | <i>322</i> | <i>331</i> |
|--|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Increasing social inclusion | Some | Some | A tad | None | A tad | Some | Some | Some | Some | A tad |
| Extending service infrastructure | None | A tad | None | None | None | A tad | None | A tad | A tad | A tad |
| Improving public safety | None | None | None | None | None | None | None | A tad | A tad | None |
| Extending organic farming | Significant | Fair | Some | Fair | Significant | A tad | Some | Some | A tad | Some |
| Improving economic efficiency of the primary sectors | Significant | Fair | Fair | Fair | Significant | A tad | A tad | A tad | None | A tad |
| Initiating value added chains/Enhancing local products | Fair | Fair | Significant | Fair | Fair | A tad | Some | A tad | Some | A tad |
| Sustainable management of natural resources | Some | A tad | Some | Fair | Some | A tad | Some | A tad | A tad | A tad |
| Strengthening human resources in the primary sectors | Significant | Some | Some | A tad | Fair | A tad | None | Some | Some | Some |
| Establishing and improving touristic attractions | Fair | A tad | A tad | A tad | Some | Some | Significant | Some | Some | Some |
| Developing accommodations | Fair | A tad | A tad | None | A tad | A tad | Significant | A tad | Some | A tad |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|------|-------|
| Developing structures for promoting tourism | Fair | None | None | None | A tad | A tad | Fair | Some | A tad |
| Strengthening human resources in tourism | Fair | None | None | None | A tad | Some | Fair | Some | A tad |
| Promoting SMEs | Some | A tad | A tad | A tad | Some | Fair | A tad | Some | Fair |
| Creating an appealing environment for investors | Some | A tad | A tad | A tad | A tad | Fair | A tad | Some | Fair |
| Strengthening human resources in industry and other businesses | Fair | None | None | None | Some | Fair | A tad | Some | Fair |
| Valorizing culture, cultural heritage | A tad | None | A tad | None | None | A tad | Fair | Fair | None |
| Improving the image and publicity of the region | A tad | A tad | A tad | A tad | Some | Some | Significant | Fair | Some |
| Protecting the environmental quality | A tad | Some | Some | A tad | Some | A tad | Fair | Fair | A tad |
| Creating jobs | Fair | Some | Some | None | Some | Fair | Fair | Fair | Some |
| Improving the regional facilities | Some | Some | Some | None | Some | Fair | Fair | Fair | Some |

Note: The verbal assessments were translated into a quantitative scale as follows: significant = 1; fair = 0,333; some = 0,111; a tad = 0,037, none = 0. This is one of the scales suggested in the AHP Software Expert choice. Before they assessed the impact, we asked local experts to make pairwise comparisons of the verbal terms used for the assessment. In these comparisons, they stated how they interpret the verbal terms, for example, how much more impact a measure with ‘some impact’ would have as compared to a measure with a ‘fair impact’. The results supported the applied scale.

Notes

1. LEADER means 'Liaison entre actions de développement de l' économie rurale'. The English translation is 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'.
2. For an extensive literature review on LEADER, see for instance, Convery *et al.* (2010). In view of the newer member states (entered the EU in 2004), there is also first literature in particular on LEADER in Poland (for example, Furmankiewicz 2006; Furmankiewicz and Slee 2007 or Furmankiewicz *et al.* 2010), and Hungary (for example, Varga 2009 or Kovács Katona *et al.* 2006), and a very limited number of studies on the other eight member states (for 'example, Lošťák and Hudečková 2010) for the Czech Republic.
3. An example of such carelessness is that the consideration of the needs of various stakeholders is sometimes seen as synonymous with the principles of endogenous development (Talbot *et al.* 2007: 36). That these phrases cannot be used synonymously will become obvious by looking at the explanation of endogenous development in the paper.
4. Here the opinions vary, for instance Bröckling (2004), who is also convinced that the approach of integrated rural development originates from practices in the development countries, notes that in Germany already during the 1950s, single policy-measures were realized under this heading and an experimental Integrated Development Programme for specific areas in Scotland, France and Belgium was approved in 1981 as part of EU policies (Thomson and Psaltopoulos 2004).
5. On this point, we do not agree with Ray (2006: 27), saying that generally by looking at development approaches a synonym for 'endogenous' would be 'participative'. Certainly, when following an endogenous approach, preferably, a participatory approach should be followed and it can be argued that for using the social resources of a region most effectively, the interests of all inhabitants should be considered. However, an endogenous approach might also be followed if only a limited number of actors in a region are involved. Also, in the Report of the European Court of Auditors on LEADER (ECA 2010) it is discussed that it is not self-evident that an endogenous approach entails participation.
6. Note, the theory on governance itself does not offer a normative theory (Stoker 1998) in a way that it states certain ways of policy making are good or bad. Rather, it provides a framework for understanding changing processes of governance (Stoker 1998).
7. Following the principle of subsidiarity, framing programme guidelines are formulated at EU level and specified at national/regional level. Consequently, LEADER programmes may vary in details. Nearly in all member states/regions, including Romania, there is a competitive LAG-selection, instead of offering LEADER funds area-wide for all applying LAGs.
8. In the strategic guidelines for rural development (EC/144/2006) neither an attribute or definition to governance nor a reference to an illuminative document, for instance to the Commission's White Paper on Governance (EC 2001) is given.
9. SAPARD stands for Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development.

10. This process of elaborating on the decision problem and developing a hierarchy of objectives is the first step of any MCDA application and summarized under the term 'problem structuring'.
11. Note that not all members of the potential LAG participated in all workshops.
12. Saaty (1980, 2005) describe in detail the AHP method of deriving weights from pair wise comparisons.
13. Note that the differences of the ranked objectives resulting from the two models cannot be directly compared with each other: If a value for a certain objective was 2 in the one model and 1 in the other, this does not necessarily mean that the importance of this objective is twice as high in the one model as compared to the other. It only shows that the importance is higher in the one model.
14. Further calculations showed however that the impact of the overrepresentation of actors interested in tourism was not significant: For this purpose, the weights were additionally re-calculated without considering the estimations of non-LAG members who attended the workshop due to their interest in becoming a future member or their interest in the tourism subject. Results show, that tourism still remains the highest ranked main objective albeit less distanced to the second ranked objective. Since this test showed no significant bias in the results, the original model 'local actors' considering all assessments of local actors were used together with the model 'local expert' in the following elaboration of the RDC.
15. Note, besides being aware of the good practice to keep the number of main objectives on a manageable number, local experts mainly decided to integrate only three main objectives in the RDC, as the guide drafted by the ministry suggests this (Figure 1). Maximizing the chances of becoming selected for funding had a high priority. Similarly, as Maurel (2008) reported for LAGs in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, formal and informal guidelines were perceived as grammar for success, respectively for a successful application.
16. The relevance of the horizontal objective will be reflected in the selection criteria for projects to be realized within the RDC in a way that projects submitted under a main/sub-objective will receive higher scores if they contribute to the horizontal objective.
17. These trainings were part of the set of preparatory LEADER measures. As the ministry did not keep the original schedule, the trainings on writing the RDCs were provided, when most RDCs were nearly finalized.
18. The local experts also explained that they preferred to include measures into the RDC, which they know, for being able to build upon experiences and thus to use them in a more efficient way. Logically, their preferences correlate with the measures known and already implemented by the agricultural administration.
19. A preliminary draft of selection criteria was known since 2008, but the final list of selection criteria and their weighting (Annex C) was published only during the preparation phase for applications.
20. The term 'operational objective' was not specified by the Romanian Managing Authority.
21. In the case region, this was not necessary as concerned issues had been picked up anyway. Nevertheless, also here, attention was paid, that certain keywords corresponding to the selection criteria and preferred by the national authorities, are used within the introduction of the RDC.

22. Note, the RDCs of most LAGs across the EU, including a description of the elaboration process, are published online on the websites of the LAGs.
23. Experiences from other countries show that for elaborating an RDC, including regional inventory taking and consultation of regional residents, one year preparatory time is needed.
24. In comparison to verbal–argumentative methods, MCDA is advantageous for following the intended integrated approach, as the measures’ contribution to low prioritized sub-objectives is also considered. In other words, despite prioritization, all objectives are still considered as a coherent system. MCDA thus, does not only facilitate a very detailed assessment regarding the number of opinion and variables, but also allows a more complex analysis.
25. EU-wide evaluation results show that even when LAGs have undertaken action for public involvement, there was no evidence how, or if, the consultations had influenced an LAG’s SWOT Analysis or the determination of RDC objectives (ECA 2010). The application of MCDA could contribute to remedy this deficit.
26. The question of legitimacy of rural governance is elaborately addressed by Connelly *et al.* (2006) and also discussed by for example, Aagaard Thuesen (2011), Böcher (2008), Goodwin (1998), or Shortall and Shucksmith (1998).
27. In their study on governance in the context of LEADER, Convery *et al.* (2010) raised the question ‘why this group?’ referring to the group of stakeholders which is the core in decision-making. Lee *et al.* (2005) found that the qualities of a particular (LAG) network specifically set up for the purposes of development very much depends on the pre-existing context.
28. Information on the idea to establish an LAG was spread via the local authorities’ offices and other key actors by mouth-to-mouth. Furthermore, the regional manager contacted or was contacted by around 200 persons. That shows that an LAG management set value on arranging external ‘communication’ right from the beginning, even before the funded project with public forums had started.
29. The Court of Auditors (ECA 2010) recently recommended reviewing the constraints of the programme design on the LAGs to implement innovative multisectoral strategies. At European level the LEADER sub-committee of the European Network for Rural Development has picked up the question in how far the idea of LEADER as instrument for supporting endogenous development is hampered by European or national regulations [see, for instance, ENRD (w.y.) and ENRD (2010)]

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