Ex post evaluation of LEADER approach delivery
The case of MAS-LEV

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Introduction
The concept of an integrated rural development has played a key role in the developmental programmes of the European Union. A great deal of attention both in development plans and programmes, and in policy implementations are some of the concrete testimonies to this fact. Indeed, the EU is heading toward this direction because it realized, albeit belatedly, that an improvement in the working and living condition of rural the population should be an important priority toward the achievement of a balanced rural-urban development.

The need for a holistic approach to rural development became very pressing and evidenced in the fact that in the proposal for a new rural development regulation (2007-2013) the EU had devoted a chunk of the EAFRD budget for the pursuance of the aims and objectives contained in the four Axes outlined by the regulation. At least 15% of the EAFRD resources are for the Improvement of agricultural competitiveness and Sylviculture, 25% for the Management of landscape and environment, 15% for rural economy diversification and quality of life in rural areas and 7% or more for carrying out actions corresponding to the objectives of one or several main axes according to a strategy of integrated local development- An approach referred to as LEADER.

This strategy has been deliberately structured for implementation within the EU in order to avoid a paradoxical situation in which the rural people produce the bulk of the wealth and yet live and experience the most abject standard of living, mainly, because their wealth is siphoned off to develop the urban centres. The consequences have been divergent and cumulative, making for the perpetuation of high factor endowment, reduced employment, high productivity and high income for the great majority of the people in the rural areas.

The group of students that took part in the Nitra Case Study 2014, comprising 14 IMRD Students, 1 privately attending student, were given the task to understand the complicated mechanisms that drive this engine for development in the EU. Together with teachers and assistants, they were invited to the rural areas of Slovakia with the aim to analyse, impact and assess the delivery mechanisms that can make the success or failure of the LEADER approach.

On the basis of the theory that they acquired they were able to devise a set of own tools in order to assess the task. They were able to test these tools in a simulation prior to their actual
implementation on the field. What will follow on the next pages is a presentation of their findings.

1. LEADER and its delivery mechanism

Reinforcement of agricultural activities and rural development in convergence areas is one of the most important priorities for the Slovakian Republic since its accession to European Union. The Slovak government has implemented a strengthened legal and operational framework with the aim of helping farmers and rural inhabitants to address their economic, social and environmental needs. One of the most important tools in this endeavour has been the LEADER approach implementation in different regions of the country. With its implementation, the RDP has provided small farmers, rural villages and community-based organization with methodological, financial and operational tools to boost its local development, involving a wide range of partners at local level in steering the future development of its communities.

In this section we will start by giving a general overview of the European Union Rural Development Policy. Afterwards, the most relevant actors in the delivery mechanism will be described. Next we will elaborate on the delivery mechanism at the RDP level, after which the delivery mechanism on the Local Action Groups level will be discussed.

1.1. The RDP: an overview

Rural development in the European Union is managed through the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. The fund for this pillar is given by the European Agriculture Fund of Rural Development. The Strategic Planning of Rural Development is composed by the EU strategic guidelines for rural development, the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development, and the Rural Development Program. Each member state makes a National Strategic Plan, in which the national strategy towards rural development is being described. The NSP can be submitted for an entire country or for its regions separately.

The RDP is subdivided in four axes, which are: 1) Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, 2) Improving the environment and the countryside, 3) The quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy and 4) LEADER.

In this report, the focus will be on the fourth axis, LEADER, and its implementation in Slovakia during the period 2007-2013. LEADER supports activities from the other axes, but
in a different way. Instead of a top-down approach, a regional approach is taken in which the capacities from inside the territory are being used for development.

LEADER is characterized by 7 different features: 1) Area-based local development strategies; 2) Bottom-up approach with decision power for LAGs; 3) Local public-private partnership; 4) Multi-sectorial design and implementation of strategies; 5) Implementation of innovative approaches; 6) Networking of local partnerships; and 7) Implementation of cooperation projects (Tvrdonova, 2014; Schwarcz, 2014).

In Slovakia, LEADER supports measures from the third axis of the RDP. As mentioned before, the third axis consists of three main groups, which in their turn are subdivided in different sets of measures. These sets are aimed at increasing the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy (European Commission, 2006). From these measures, the following were chosen to be supported through the LEADER axis: 1) diversification into non-agricultural activities, 2) encouragement of tourism activities, basic services for the economy and rural population, 3) village renewal and development and 4) training and information (Schwarcz, 2014).

Most submitted projects in Slovakia were focused on basic services for the economy and rural population, representing 46% of all projects. Secondly, 36% of the projects were focused on village renewal and development. 12% of the total of the projects are representing by: the area of diversification, where there were 20 running projects, while 111 projects were being done in order to encourage tourism. In the field of training and information, 39 projects were being executed (Kuruczova, 2014).

1.2. Actors

In the implementation of the RDP different actors are involved. The European Network for Rural Development mentions the Managing Authority, Paying Agency and Local Action Groups as some of the most important actors in Slovakia (ENRD, 2014). Therefore, these will be described in this paragraph.

1.2.1. Managing authority

The managing authority (MA) of the RDP in Slovakia is the Ministry of Agriculture. This body is responsible for program planning, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the RDP. In this sense, this body also defines a strategy for rural areas, using the LEADER
approach. The MA designs the content of the LEADER axis, including the planning of the resources (ENRD, 2014).

Next to this, the MA is responsible to make sure that projects are selected correctly, according to the criteria applicable to the RDP. It also should ensure that beneficiaries and other bodies that are involved in the implementation of projects are informed about their obligations in relation to financial aspects and the provision of data for monitoring purposes. Lastly, it needs to ensure that the Paying Agency receives relevant information relating to the projects that have been selected for funding (ENRD, 2011).

1.2.2. Paying agency

The Paying Agency is a department or body of each MS. Their most important tasks are to check the eligibility of requests, the procedure for allocating aid and their compliance with community rules, before the payment is authorized. Also, they are responsible to keep accurate accounts of the payments (ENRD, 2011).

In Slovakia, the Agricultural Paying Agency (APA) was introduced on the 1st of December, 2003. In the programming period 2007-2013, it had the implementation of the following measures: RDP for Slovakia 2007-2013, CAP, and the Fish Program 2007-2013 and to administer the state aid in the framework of legislation of the EU and Slovakia (Kuruczova, 2014).

1.2.3. Local Action Groups

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are the most important actors in the LEADER approach. They develop local strategies, support stakeholder networking and the appraisal and approval of individual LEADER projects (ENRD, 2014).

They should at least carry out capacity building actions for local actors, draw up project selection criteria and assess and select projects that will obtain financing under the Local Development Strategy (LDS). Lastly, they should monitor the implementation of the LDS and the supported projects. Next to this, LAGs can also fulfil additional functions (Tvrdonova, 2014).

1.3. Implementation through the delivery mechanism

The way in which LEADER is being implemented can be divided into two levels. First, decisions are being made by the Managing Authority that are then transferred to the level of
the Local Action Groups. Several steps have been defined in this process (For a synthesis on delivery mechanism steps refer to Annex 1). Both levels will be discussed in this section, after which the steps will shortly be elaborated upon.

1.3.1. MA level

As has been mentioned before, it is the task of the Managing Authority to elaborate the National Strategy. In this regard, the national authorities have elaborated the LEADER National Strategy and have proceeded launching the LEADER National Guidelines for the programming period of 2007-2013. Since the beginning of the program, several awareness and training activities have been conducted for the Ministry of Agriculture (MA) and the Agriculture Payment Agency. Different steps can be identified at this level that are relevant for the management and setting up of LAGs. The most important steps in this process are:

- **Call for proposals:** In total 29 LAGs have been selected by the Paying Agency, 15 by the end of 2008 and 14 by January 2010. The MA has delegated the call for proposals for LAGs to the APA delegation of MA, which then designed the call for proposals for LAGs at country level (European Commission, 2006).

- **Evaluation of proposals:** The PA coordinates the evaluation process the selection of LAGs. In order to this, the PA conducts administrative controls, reviews the eligibility criteria of LAGs (which are described in detail in the LEADER National Guidelines) and makes a comprehensive revision of eligibility of expenditures included in the proposals. This revision is supported by two independent external evaluators, who review the selection criteria and make a qualitative assessment of the strategies in the LAG proposal. The main topics evaluated are the *partnership related criteria, the integration of a Local Development Strategy (LDS) and the coherence with territory contexts and needs*.

- **Contract Signing:** In this stage, a formal agreement between the PA and the selected LAGs is made. In each contract the strategy, measures to implement and budget plan

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1The document for 2007 - 2013 has included the following criteria for selection: i) the selection procedure ensuring competition between LAGs no later than 2 years after approval of programs; ii) Budget availability and possible allocation for LAG granted; iii) selection criteria for the LAGs (following the guidelines of EU and National Guidelines for LEADER; iv) maximum number of LAGs; v) justification for selected rural areas for LEADER implementation; vi) templates for LAG´s proposal submission; vii) legal and administrative requirements for LAGs and; viii) Timeframe of the tender process.

For further details on selection criteria, please review the LEADER National Guidelines 2007 – 2013 - Slovak Republic
are described. There is also an agreement on administrative management of public funds for the LAGs.

- **Strategy Updates:** Each year, LAGs have the option to review and adjust their measures and budget according to the needs in their territory. If relevant, the PA is responsible for coordinating this revision.

- **Monitoring of LAGs performance and activities:** The PA is responsible for supporting and monitoring the activities of the LAGs. Among its responsibilities are the revision of administrative, financial and technical issues of management and project implementation.

- **Evaluation:** The PA is responsible for designing the terms of reference and contract the evaluation. The EU - Court of Auditors could commission one or more external evaluations. The MA has undertaken a mid-term and final evaluation of LEADERs National Strategy.

1.3.2. **Local action group level**

At the territorial level, it is the Local Action Groups that have the responsibility to operationalize the LEADER approach. The implementation process relies on how the principles of the seven features of LEADER are put into practice. Before the actual implementation, it is important to reinforce the capacities at the local level, gather the necessary information about the territory, analyse its strengths and weaknesses, develop an information and communication plan to explain LEADER principles and approach and start to create partnerships within the territory (European Commission, 2006).

The steps in the delivery mechanism of LEADER that can be identified at this level are the following:

- **Development of partnership:** In this stage, linkages between local structures and national RDP authorities (Ministry of agriculture and Paying agencies) are being established;

- **Setting-up partnership structures and bodies:** Here, LAGs are being created and its bodies (Supreme, executive, statutory, supervisory bodies) are constituted;

- **Strategy approval:** The strategies for each territory are proposed and implemented by the executive body of the LAG according to the criteria set at the RDP level, and approved by the supreme body;
• **Call for proposals**: communication of the LAG about the projects they propose in line with the strategy agreed on;

• **Selection committee evaluation and selection**: The LAG manager and the selection committee make the first administrative check of project proposals to verify the compliance with the eligibility criteria before handing them to the paying agency;

• **Approval of the projects by the paying agency**: the project proposals are checked a second time by the paying agency. LAGs are passive actors at this stage, waiting for the paying agency’s decision;

• **Communication of the paying agency’s decisions to the beneficiaries**;

• **Contract signing**: At this stage, the signing of the contract happens between the paying agency and the final beneficiaries;

• **Strategy updates**: the executive body prepares and implements the updates, which have to be approved by the supreme body;

• **Monitoring and evaluation**: Projects are monitored and evaluated by the supervisory body.

2. **The 7 features of LEADER: definitions and benchmarks**

LEADER approach is a unique approach and an important constituent of the European Union’s Rural Development policy which makes it separate from the other 3 Axis of the Rural Development Support. It is aimed at using local initiative to improve the development potential of the rural areas and also encouraging the acquisition of knowledge on local integrated development so as to spread this knowledge to other rural areas. This approach comprises of seven important characteristics which are outlined below: Area-based local development strategies, Local public-private partnerships, Bottom-up approach, Multi-sector design based on the interaction between actors and projects of the different sectors of the local economy, implementation of innovative approaches, implementation of cooperation projects, networking of local partnerships.

A general description of these characteristics is based on general ideas developed by the students. They will serve as a basis for the formulation of the benchmarks and will further act as guidelines in determining the success of the delivery mechanism of the LEADER approach at both RDP and LAG level.
2.1. Area Based Local Development Strategies
These strategies describe the main characteristics which make up an area. Such features make an area distinct from another area and enable its inhabitants to stay closer to each other. They are not only administrative related but comprise of other characteristics such as:

- Geographical characteristics which demonstrate the potential of an area such as: natural Resources, climate, topography.
- The Identity of an area is what portrays the symbolic aspects of an area most of them are generational and therefore not easily modified. They include: cultures, norms, traditions, language and religion, amongst others.
- Socio-Economic specificity which includes: various sectors of income generating activities taking place in an area.
- History (political): Most infrastructure and administration is set up based on previous historical experiences.
- Demographic characteristics: The composition of an area is based on characteristics such as: age, gender, income level and marital status.
- Education/Information play a major role in strengthening the capacities of area based strategies; because a more educated and informed area is more receptive to new ideas and easily adapts to new strategies.
- Networks/Social organizations enable the creation of linkages between and within regions.

2.1.1. Benchmarks
- There is a strong identity between local inhabitants which enables them to work in a better and efficient way with the topics that concern them.
- Each area is homogeneous in their language, their customs, their interests and they find it easy to work together and contribute towards their goals and ideals.
- The planned and implemented socio economic activities are a function of the diversity of sectors.
- Improved education and better information techniques enable broader access to information and enhanced communication tools and methods.
- There are strong linkages within and between regions as a result of a good network base.
• Existence of a strong education base, coupled with strong linkages and broader access to information, creates more opportunities which hinder out-migration and permit immigration.

2.2. Implementation of Innovative Approaches
• Innovative approaches consist of new ways to do things; either externally or internally, by identifying the existing knowledge or ideas to improve on a situation.
• This can be spread across a variety of sectors.
• Innovation exists when there is an effective change in the existing situation and where the ideas are adapted.

2.2.1. Benchmarks
• Governance is based on leadership within the community in a democratic way.
• Multi sector production takes place in areas where different sectors of activities can be an innovation in itself.
• New forms of technologies including machinery and software are introduced and adapted in areas where they didn’t exist before.
• External knowledge is spread between individuals within and across regions.
• New methods of using local resources are developed.

2.3. Bottom up Approach
This approach makes use of community based knowledge and involves the participation of all local actors in decision making. It is the complete opposite of “Top-down” approach; implying that there is no hierarchy in the process.

• Leadership roles are shared among local actors within the community.
• Part of the financial resources is mobilized by the community.
• Some level of skill is required to enable better decision making.

2.3.1. Benchmarks
• Local actors are actively involved in every step of the decision making process.
• Local resources are used efficiently to avoid waste and help the economy.
• Strategies designed takes into account the interests of all groups/sectors, thus giving them a chance to voice their concerns.
• Local actors are as heterogeneous as the population itself and are able to provide information and get feedback on decisions made.
• Decisions are made with a broad consensus where agreements are reached based on participatory processes from all members involved.

2.4. Local Public-Private partnerships (mutual benefit)
They foster the sharing of knowledge, experiences and resources between the private and the public sector, within the community. In these partnerships, there is an equal balance between the two sectors in terms of voice, power, resources and collaboration. This is based on trust and cooperation between both parties who are equally committed.

In these partnerships, the two sectors involved act as complements to each other

2.4.1. Benchmarks
• Partners are given a chance to share their ideas and experiences and elaborate them in the decision making process so as to maintain an equal balance.
• All cross-cutting themes are mainstreamed in every policy evaluation strategy (gender equality, climate change, environmental sustainability, democracy).
• All partners are held accountable for their actions and their partnership is based on trust.
• The partnership is composed of at least 50% private and 50% public shares.

2.5. Networking
Networking is the outreach of information by the linkages of individuals or groups. It is aimed at creating bonding and linking relationships to enable the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The various means by which networking can be achieved are: social media, word of mouth, formal and informal occasions. Through networking, there is coordination of information, enhanced communication, participation and increased awareness which create more opportunities. This in turn enables a shared vision.

2.5.1. Benchmarks
• There is better communication and increased awareness within and across the territories; thus resulting in better cooperation.
• All actors in the local community are involved in the coordination of activities relating to them.
• Feedback is enabled through effective coordination and collaboration of projects and other activities at community level.
• Growth and cooperation are fostered as a result of new opportunities and better performance.

2.6. Cooperation
Cooperation is aimed at bringing actors together, to participate and share common objectives that they could not manage individually. This increases the benefits of projects and activities for the parties involved especially those which could not be achieved on an individual basis. Resources are effectively utilized and this maintains efficiency. It is also a way of creating new learning opportunities. Cooperation is based on trust.

2.6.1. Benchmarks
• There is a two way communication between all actors with full transparency within the system.
• Coordination among actors results in efficient and optimal allocation of resources.
• Better actions are reached as a result of common interests with diverse talents.
• Cooperation creates possible linkages with other sectors/areas/regions/countries/with similar needs and approaches.
• There is a conducive environment which fully supports a self-regulatory system with no external influence.
• Trust is strengthened as a result of a strong social capital within the system and amongst the different actors.
• Cooperation brings a constant development of capacities.

2.7. Multilateral Design and Implementation of Strategies
This multidisciplinary approach involves combination of different sectors and strategies to achieve an integrated view of reality. This involvement enables participation and decision making is based on various ideas. All the strategies implemented are aimed at achieving a common objective.

2.7.1. Benchmarks
• There is equal representation of stakeholders present in the territory at the moment of designing local development strategies.
• Needs and interest from different sectors are considered and evaluated in order to be included in the strategy.
• The design of local development strategies encourages positive synergies among different sectors within the territory (geographic, social, and economic).
• The implementation of local development strategies has assured integrated effort to develop the territory between different sectors, regions and groups.
3. Development of Evaluation Tools

For the purpose of evaluating the LEADER delivery mechanism the research group developed two different tools that were used during fieldwork: an interview schedule and a focus group screen play. This section details the theoretical characteristics of both tools as well as how these tools came to be. The theoretical information was retrieved from Statistics Canada (2013), Gil et al (2008) and Nitra Case Study (2014) lecture materials.

3.1. Interview Schedule
The tool or instrument for data collection in interview method is called interview schedule or questionnaire. Interview is the main method for collecting data in qualitative research. It involves trained interviewers visiting people to collect questionnaire data in face-to-face situation. Qualitative methods, like interviews are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena. Interviews are, therefore, most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants. Structured interviews are more structured in questions and more limited in scope of possible answers.

When designing an interview schedule it is imperative to ask questions that are likely to yield as much information about the studied phenomenon as possible. These must also be able to address the aims and objectives of the study. In a qualitative interview, good questions should be open-ended, neutral and understandable. It is usually best to start with questions that respondents can answer easily and then proceed to more difficult or sensitive topics. This can help respondents to build up confidence and often generates rich data. The questions used in an interview schedule may be open, or close, or both. The open question allows the respondent to interpret the question and answer it anyway he or she desires. The closed question restricts the respondent to select an answer from the specified response options. For the interviewees, a closed question is easier and faster to answer and for the interviewer, closed questions are easier and less expensive to code and analyse.

3.1.1. Purpose of Interview
The purpose of the interview is to explore the ideas, views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individual respondents on specific matters. They are also particularly
appropriate for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment.

3.1.2. Advantages, Limitations and Preconditions
Advantages to a good approach help ensuring a high response rate to a sample survey and trained interviewers gather better quality data. Qualitative assessments are used in various settings such as: for the analysis of behaviour and structural patterns, for the interpretative analysis of narratives (e.g. about critical incidents) and the exploration of stakeholders’ mind-sets.

There are some limitations to the interview method. Respondents may not always be available for interviews and the travel costs of the interviewer could be high. It reaches only a part of the programme-related population and depends on the willingness of the addressees to respond. Sometimes, the problem of the researcher’s bias in the selection of the interviewees and by the way he/she poses questions may hamper the process of real data gathering.

Lastly, the following pre-conditions are necessary for the interview of data collection.

- Identify the most relevant person to interview.
- Set up the right environment.
- Design the structure of interview.
- Design relevant questions to answer.

3.2. Focus Group Screen Play
Focus groups share many common features with less structured interviews. A focus group is a group discussion on a particular topic organized for research objectives. Focus group consist of a small number of individuals brought together to discuss a topic of interest, and comprise not less than 7 and not more than 15 people, as far as possible stemming from different sub-groups of stakeholders (e.g. Managing Authority, implementing body, beneficiaries, independent experts, etc.). It should be facilitated by an external moderator; usually comes together several times and can as well be installed as a core element for the continuance of an on-going evaluation.

3.2.1. Purpose of Focus Group
Focus groups are used for gathering information on collective views and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also helpful in generating a rich understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs.
3.2.2. Advantages, Limitations and Preconditions

Focus groups allow verifying collected qualitative and quantitative evidence with various types of stakeholders at the same time. They reflect the universe of intervention’s stakeholders in a nutshell and are the instruments for institutional learning. Area-based perspective of focus group discovers important factors that are not observed by the other evaluation tools.

They are also some disadvantages to focus groups. Focus groups involve only a limited number of people and topics. It is therefore of utmost importance to pick the ‘right people’, to find the right mix, and to avoid ‘one-way thinking’ in the selection of participants. They only sketch the topic at a certain moment of time. Unless they are repeated across time, they cannot provide a picture on the trends and tendencies.

Finally, the following pre-conditions are considered for the focus groups:

- Identification of the most relevant participants.
- Carefully prepared method to run the focus group.
- Design relevant key questions to answer.

3.3. Development of Evaluation Tools

The main objective of the case study is to evaluate the delivery mechanism of LEADER approach. The research team decided to use an interview schedule and a focus group screen play for this purpose; a mixed method approach for data collection.

Before preparation of the tools, a group exercise was done on 21st July 2014, to determine the key steps of LEADER delivery mechanism at RDP and LAG level. The seven features and benchmarks of the LEADER approach were also defined by the group exercise. Then, the seven features were linked to the key steps of delivery mechanism at RDP and LAG level. A draft of the tools was prepared on 22nd July 2014 by carefully keeping the seven features and the steps of the delivery mechanism in mind. In the case of the questionnaire, both open and closed questions were used, each of them aimed at addressing the features of LEADER. In the case of the focus group, three activities were designed with the purpose of retrieving in-depth and comprehensive information pertaining each feature of LEADER that would complement and/or build on the information provided in the interviews.
3.3.1. Pre-testing and Finalization of Evaluation Tools

Pre-testing is a fundamental step in developing evaluation tools. This allows the research team to establish if (1) the schedule is clear, understandable and capable of answering the questions and (2) if the activities designed for the focus group were reliable, engaging and allow for in-depth and dynamic discussions. If this would not be the case the team would know that changes to the evaluation tools were required. Testing also helps to identify errors, poor wording or ordering of questions/activities and determine problems caused by the respondent’s inability or unwillingness to answer the questions in the case of an interview, and the group’s lack of interest in actively participating, in the case of a focus group. Keeping the above importance of pre-testing in mind, prior to final data collection, the draft interview schedule and focus group screen play were pre-tested in regional Local Action Groups on 23-24 July 2014. After pre-testing, the results of pre-test were reviewed and re-discussed by group exercise on 25 July 2014. During group exercise by the students, necessary corrections, alterations, modifications and adjustments followed in order to prepare the final questionnaire and focus group based on pre-test responses and activities.

The final version of the interview schedule consisted of a 6 page document that included 12 closed and open-ended questions. After the pre-tests, a thorough review, rephrase and rearrangement of the questions was carried out incorporating the feedback form the research team.

The final version of the focus group screen play consisted of 3 interactive activities and an introduction session aimed at building confidence between the research team and the group of respondents. The activities were redesigned and expanded after the pre-test as it became clear for the research team that they had to keep the focus group attendants engaged throughout the session.

The final and corrected versions of the evaluation tools are included in Annex 2 and Annex 3, and include a reference in italics regarding the relationship of each question with the features of LEADER approach.

3.4. Data collection and processing

Data was collected from the local action group beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries respondents by the case study students themselves during 28-30 July 2014. Before starting collection of data, the students first met the Manager of Local Action Group. The research team requested the Manager of the LAG to provide with a varied and representative sample that would include a balanced mix of actors (e.g. gender, age, sectors, etc.) from the area.
Finally, data was gathered from the respondents with the cordial help of the Manager of the Local Action Group. During the data collection activities, the interviewers first established connection with the interviewees and explained the objectives of the study clearly by using local language with the help of facilitators. For the focus group, the large group of respondents was sub-divided into smaller groups consisting of 3-4 members. Then the questions were posed to them in order to generate group discussion. After group discussion, they provided their feedback to each interactive session. Cordial cooperation was received from the respondents, Local Action Group personnel, local leaders and elites in various manners during staying in the study area. Then, collected data were compiled and analysed according to the objectives of the study.

4. Description of the LAG territory
The Local Action Group (LAG) LEV operates in the area surrounding the town of Levoča, in the Western half of the Prešov Region. This region, which is one out of eight administrative regions, is located in the north-east of the Slovak Republic, bordering Poland in the north and Ukraine in the east. The region is further subdivided in smaller territorial units, called districts. The municipality of Levoča gives its name to the whole district.
The action of the LAG, however, is not legally limited to any governmental administrative arrangement. Its main administrative office lies in Levoča because of its central and strategic position.

A mix of sources, such as the national statistics office and some primary data collection, have contributed to the elaboration of the LAG’s own territorial analysis: They have identified 31338 inhabitants in an area of 361.63 square kilometers, divided between 31 villages and with a population density of 80.02 inhabitants per square kilometer, which is typically lower than the country’s average in this region.

The District of Levoča is surrounded by predominatly mountainous landscapes which include the highest mountain ranges in the country (the High Tatras lie to the North, the Low Tatras in the West). These are part of the county’s national parks and are thus under environmental protection by special regulation. Of the total area surface, 59% is used for agricultural purposes: 31.2% pasture, 27% cropland and 33.9% use forest purposes. Water is abundant: there are many mineral springs as well as thermal areas. The population in this area has remained constant over the past decade and the ca. 31000 inhabitants are divided in the following ethnic groups: 87.07% Slovak, 11.20% Roma, and 0.64% Czech. This information is especially relevant when the level of education is evaluated; population with the basic level of education can vary dramatically from one municipality to the other: in some cases the amount of population that has reached only primary level education is as high as 35-45% while in the bottom tier it lies at around 5-12%; a clearly higher percentage than the national average. As a consequence the educational level of the population is broadly recognized to be one of the main goals for achieving future development in the territory. Services and infrastructures are well managed and generally adequate. The main concern, especially at municipal level, is given by the state of the roads, some of which are in very poor conditions and in urgent need of attention. The maintenance costs are very high and their outreach, i.e. length and capillarity, can be very burdensome in terms of municipal budget. On the other hand the national highway system is being expanded, creating a more direct and faster connection to the capital as well as the rest of the country.
The region as a whole is rich in natural resources, its economy however is mainly small scale and the lack of large scale businesses impacts its economy. According to the LAG’s General Data Report „of the 228 companies registered in the territory 97.4% are small and medium enterprises (1 - 20 employees), which denotes low levels of foreign investment in the territory, and therefore causing some of the population to travel to work daily in other districts.” Unemployment rates have been reportedly stable in the past years. From the partition of labour in its respective economic sectors (23.4% primary, 16.6% secondary and 57.8 tertiary), it becomes evident that the main economic activity of the region is the tourist sector. Tourism already contributes to a large share of the regional economy, but there is still space for improvement. It is not surprising that this consideration makes up a considerable share of the LAG’s strategy.

The Authors of this paper were able to visit a share of the territory and were able to see a number of towns and villages, some of which are very diverse one from the other, socially, economically and culturally. The most notable example of this is the towns, actually consisting of two villages that are under the same authority, of Doľany and Roškovce. These have the highest Roma percentage of population and the lowest levels of per capita income of the district. The first town looks like many other rural settlements in this region, here LEADER has contributed to the refurbishment of the communal house, a multipurpose building that can be used for a number of civic functions. The second looks like a shanty town that expands vertically into the crevice of a mountain, surrounded by managed forest. Here a new primary school is being built and, just like in its partner town, LEADER funding has created a multifunctional sport facility and a playground for the community. The reasons for this development, that seems far from optimal in terms of social cohesion, were briefly assessed by the mayor upon request of the students: Two tier development is necessary because a two tier society exists in the towns. Some are lacking even the most basic educational skills and must be schooled in “grade zero”, i.e. they have to be taught the national language. In addition to this cultural differences exist: work (or political participation for that matter), is not regarded as a societal value.

It is clear that this issue is deeply rooted in the history of the region and of the actor's involved. Even though there is confidence in future developments, no groundbreaking solution seems to be available in the short-term.
The visit to both villages has been an enriching experience for most students.

Other locations visited showed, in comparison, a rather uniform reality. Smaller villages that were able to access finances have refurbished and restored decaying and unused buildings (that were and still are common, state-owned goods) to use them for different purposes that can benefit the community as a whole: they generally include a conference room for town meetings and other public functions. In some cases they include rooms where traditional cultural artefacts are conserved and displayed; for the future generations to inherit. In some cases educational / recreational / hobby rooms (such as public libraries and computer rooms) are made available, as well as gym's for training.

5. Results of interviews and focus groups

During the third week of the case study, the research team conducted the field work using the methodology previously described. In the following pages the development of the interviews and focus group will be described, providing also a summary of the main findings (For full transcription refers to Annex 4 and Annex 6). Most importantly these findings will be put in relation to the seven features of LEADER, in order to answer the evaluation questions.

5.1. Interview development and findings

The Levoča group interviewed a total of 11 actors, who were appointed to come during different days to the LAG premises in the centre of Levoča. The interviews were conducted in separate spaces but since the offices were being used by LAG employees, privacy was not always completely achieved. Also, the fact that we divided our team in three groups and the language barrier between interviewees and researchers, made it necessary for the LAG manager to assist by translating some of the interviews; a fact that could have affected the responses. The interviewees hold different functions in the LAG and that is why they could provide us with different inputs regarding the topic of study. Also, the general socio-economic characteristics of the interviewees were very diverse which in return offered us a full picture of the people involved in the LEADER implementation.

Out of the 11 interviewees, 7 were female and 5 male. This is not representative of the composition of the LAG, but the availability of interview volunteers and the fact that the manager was contacting the interviewees could have influenced this gender distribution of our
sample. Regarding the educational and professional background, more than 50% of the interviewees had a higher education degree in different fields. In addition, their professional background is also diverse as some of the interviewees worked directly for the LAG, some worked for the municipalities, and some others in the private sector. The percentage of interviewees invited by the manager of the LAG in the age groups 18-30, 30-50, 50+ was 27%, 45% and 27% respectively. We do not find this distribution representative for the population of the territory or for the LAG composition, but it was the only one available for us considering the difficulties of gathering interviewees during holiday period. Most of the interviewees were directly involved in the LAG as members or beneficiaries besides one. In order to analyse the information provided by the interviews, we decided to look at each question and make a discourse analysis to find the similarities and differences between the answers of the interviewees.

As for the first question, the purpose of which was to see whether the community has a common goal that drives the existence of the LAG, we identified that the most frequent answers included improvement of financial capacity, regional development (including quality of life regarding services and infrastructure), tourism development and promotion of the territory. On top of that, some other common goals were the encouragement of social cohesion, improved communication and coordination among villages and keeping youth in the region.

Regarding the frequency of meetings between LAG members and other actors (Question 2), there were different answers depending on the role of the interviewee. The general assembly meets 3-4 times per year, while the executive board is more flexible. Concerning the final beneficiaries, it was clear that they feel the freedom to contact the LAG based on need. Based on their function, some actors meet with the LAG more than others. Also, most of the meetings are held in the central premises of the LAG, except for the meetings regarding monitoring/evaluation of the projects, which take place on site. The LAG management team was the only one to meet the higher authorities at least once per month. As for the non-members, their only interaction with the LAG took place during events or rarely during needs for consultation.

When asked about the inclusion of different age, gender, occupation and geography categories (Question 4) we obtained different answers. As for the age categories, most of the
interviewees stated that the main age group represented in the LAG was 30-50 followed by 50+. This perception does not match the real situation. Out of the general assembly (81 members), 52% are older than 50 years old. The age group of 30-50 represents 43% of the members. Some of the interviewees had a skewed idea of the LAG composition as they stated that the younger group 18-30 represented 1/3 or majority of the members, when in reality it is only 3%. Regarding gender category, more than half of the interviewees perceived the LAG as being male dominant, while the other half implied that the relationship is 50-50. In reality though, out of the general assembly (81 members) only 30 were female (37%), which enforces the perception of most interviewees. As for the occupation, it was perceived that the majority of LAG members work in the tertiary sector and tourism. The tertiary sector is followed by the educational, agricultural and lastly industry sector. When asked about the geographical spread of LAG members, most of the interviewees confirmed that there are representatives from the whole region in the LAG. Some interviewees stated that there are more members from Levoča, considering its geographically centralized position, but the general perception is that the geographical location is equally distributed.

As for the decision making process and consensus achievement (Question 5), the answer of the interviewees was quite homogenous in that there is a classical voting system where one member has one vote. They described it as a democratic system, transparent and in which, when a decision has to be approved, more than 50% of the members must agree on it. However, a private beneficiary stated that he is not interested in voting processes unless he has something of interest to say; something that shows the little involvement of the private sector in the decision making processes of the LAG.

Regarding the common identity of the region (Question 6), the majority of the interviewees stated that they share a common history, nature and culture (traditions, language, etc.). They also linked common identity to the idea of tourism development being a common drive in the region. Still, almost none of the interviewees identified a common economic identity.

Concerning the functioning of the public private partnership in the LAG (Question 7), most of the respondents agree that in general there is a good collaboration which is facilitated by good communication between partners and an overall cooperation environment. Yet, some interviewees stated that there were some problems to attract the private sector into the
partnership mainly due to the financial burdens (the share of the investment that they will not get reimbursed for) present in the whole process.

In relation to the provision of information from the LAG to the territory (Question 8), the interviewees stated that there were very diverse delivery mechanisms including website, blog, local newspaper, emails, local radio and TV, and information boards in municipalities. Still, we could not assess appropriately (due to the insufficiency of non-member interviewees) whether the information is spreading all the way to the bottom or if it is kept between members and persons related to them. On the other hand, we also found that most of the interviewees felt that they could freely approach the LAG in case of need for information or assistance. As well, they felt that their voices were heard during strategy preparation and other decision making processes.

As for the support that beneficiaries receive from LAG administration in the development of proposals (Question 9), it was stated by the interviewees that they receive a lot of assistance, including technical assistance, in writing the proposal and making sure that overall it fits the requirements. Although the manager stated that the beneficiaries hold the final responsibility for writing these proposals, we could extract from the responses that sometimes there was extensive involvement of the LAG administration in this process.

Concerning the diversity of projects implemented in the region (Question 10), we found that the majority of them address measures 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of axis 3, which are related to service provision and renovation of infrastructure for regional development. Some practical examples of these projects are multifunctional playgrounds, computer rooms, community halls, bridges, etc. This could be the result of the municipalities being highly involved and presenting a lot of project proposals. It can also bring up the matter of low diversity between these projects.

As for the innovation that these projects would bring (Question 10 a), the interviewees stated that innovation was included in most projects implemented by LAG, but the definition of innovation is debatable.

Moreover, the support of new ideas by the LAG (Question 11) was considered to be limited by many of the interviewees because of the time, resource and eligible cost constraints.

Finally, in relation to the linkages that the LAG has created between beneficiaries (Question 12), municipalities and their inhabitants and different villages, most of the interviewees stated
that the networks created by the implementation of LEADER in the area have enhanced and promoted the cooperation and communication between the above mentioned actors. This has resulted in stronger linkages that will influence the overall development of the territory.

5.2. Focus group development and findings
The focus group took place in the central administrative seat of the Local Action Group LEV in Levoča. The event began on time and ten LAG Members, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, were present. In addition to them three academic staff members were present, who were not directly involved in the group dynamics but served as translators and greatly facilitated the mediation process.

The students, previously defined as authors of this paper, proceeded to welcome their guests and thank them for their participation. The first item on the schedule was a "country presentation". Each student, when being correctly identified, presented himself and his nationality in Slovak. This interactive game served the purpose to break the ice and was very well received. After this informal introduction the actual focus group exercise began with a type of Bingo game, for which the participants were divided as equally as possible among three tables thus forming distinct working groups: gender equality and roles within the LAG were taken into consideration, as a consequence at least one member of administration was assigned to each table.

The first question of the Bingo game ("What new things has LEADER brought to your area?") was asked and the different groups engaged in significant discussion. They displayed proactive behaviour by presenting more findings than was initially requested of them. The prolific results further resulted in a large amount of Bingos being awarded. Some linked the results of two tables (7), some of all three (4). Beginning with the latter:

The participants all agreed that LEADER has contributed to bringing better information within the territory, increased publicity and information propagation in the region. They also agreed that it contributed to the creation and reinforcements of bottom up approaches. Also they identified a higher degree of participation of the people in the area and an improvement of the relationships with the partnerships that concern the public and the private sector. Finally they found common ground by stating that knowledge is being increased in the area and that more excursions are being developed in the territory.
The second set of replies could be matched between two of the groups:
Agreement was found on the contribution of LEADER in increasing the attractiveness of rural areas as well as contributing to bringing an improvement in terms of infrastructure. This was confirmed by another shared idea regarding the increasing amount of newcomers to the region, thus stating the effective role of the programme in the marketing of the regional area.
Another very important feature that was attributed to the programme was the increased opportunity for local decision making, mainly by tackling problems in informal meetings with direct participation from the actors involved. Improved cooperation, both on national and international level, as well as the improvement of the relations between the public and private sector were also commonly identified. Furthermore items like the increase in voluntary work and entrepreneurship of the region; a positive development of the service sector and free time activities as well as improved support to culture in general (more museums and protection of traditions) was mentioned.

Once the Bingo came to conclusion the table-groups set up was maintained and the second task was assigned: participants had to identify challenges and possible solutions in a two tiered question ("What are the challenges in LEADER implementation and how could these problems be assessed?"). Again the groups displayed positive dynamics and interaction between their respective members, to the point that some extra time had to be awarded in order for all to write down their findings. Upon completion the groups took turns to present their conclusions and it must be noted that in this context very interesting discussions between them occurred. What follows is a synthesis of the individual findings, complemented by the most significant contributions that were given during the open discussions:

The main and most important finding regards a multitude of issues that can be linked to one another, the main issues being public procurement and conflict of interest: On one hand it is the LAG's management responsibility to make sure that projects are brought to completion. This is due to the fact that LAG's incur into sanctions for every project that fails to do so. The sanctions consist in a percentage cut of LAG’s awarded budget for administrative expenses, i.e. running costs. On the other hand a strict control mechanism is implemented, that specifically targets conflicts of interests between administration, beneficiaries and third parties involved. This system undermines the creation and maintenance of linkages, since members must be careful as to what, as well as to whom, they communicate with. Sanctions
are severe and consequences can be harsh: exclusion from access to future funds as well as loss of membership within the LAG. The consequence is that necessary communications, vital in ensuring the correct development of projects, lie under external scrutiny, thus putting management, as well as beneficiaries, in a permanent state of alert, in regard of their actions and choice of spokespersons. In certain cases this leads to oddities: If the husband of the LAG manager, for example, was a constructor he would not be able to be involved in LAG projects. Similarly, relatives of LAG members must be excluded, even though they are not directly involved. On top of this the public procurement mechanism tends to be very slow and complicated: once a proposal for expenses is submitted it can be left pending for years before approval. Of course the aforementioned proposal will no longer be valid after such long time causing the whole process to either stall or fail entirely. The groups could, neither individually nor collectively, identify a solution to the problem but this is not surprising considering the broadness of its scope. It is remarkable however those feelings of optimism were expressed in regards of the future.

The second problem is closely linked to the first: this time the constraints of bureaucracy are addressed from top to bottom. Approval processes are very lengthy even for small amounts of money and the conditions required for receiving funds have sometimes been revised during the period of implementation. This would of course not be as limiting if the budget of small villages was more thoroughly adjusted to their actual needs. There was a consensual agreement that the bureaucratic burden should be relieved and that conditions should be defined and maintained over time as sudden changes inhibit the realisation of projects. The government should face the challenge and simplify the procedure for public procurement as well as delegate more powers from the APA to the LAG’s in the selection of projects. Since this was expressed with a tone of incredulity the following, perhaps more realistic, suggestion was to at least increase the number of employees in the public administration responsible for the evaluation and selection of projects, in order to speed up the procedure.

A further issue that has been addressed in this context concerns the lack of effective control at state (i.e. national) level: control from above is exceedingly meticulous even in regard of very small projects, this can delay actual implementation significantly.

The third challenge was framed under the financial aspect:
Small villages, poorer municipalities as well as civil associations are comparatively disadvantaged in comparison to other actors when it comes to pre-financing the implementation of a project. In some cases there are good ideas that never make it to submission because of the high expenses that are required to support them. The suggested solution was to create some opportunities for the award of advanced payments that would enable them to kick-start projects. In addition to this there was general discontent with the selected eligible costs, mainly with the fact that VAT is not included, and with the expense limits. These were described by some as "limiting innovation". Last but not least one flaw was attributed to the current LEADER Approach, i.e. that LAG’s are all awarded the same budgetary amount, independently from how many municipalities and inhabitants they include.

The third and final task posed a more future oriented approach ("What will happen if tomorrow LEADER ends?") in which every participant was asked to cast a vote individually and secretly. A set of answers was provided but each voter was asked to provide motivation upon disclosure. A net majority chose the option in which the work of the LAG would continue with other (external) funds. Few others stated that the same would happen but with own financial resources. The fact that only one respondent out of 11 believed that the LAG would disband altogether without the LEADER finances, shows a high degree of faith in the programme but mostly a willingness to continue in this path. It also shows that the members believe that they are doing something significant, up to the point that they believe that other institutions may be willing to finance them and their projects, should the programme cease to exist. Since this will not be the case they are sure that they will apply for the next programming period 2014 - 2020 and look to the future with confidence.

The third and last question concluded the focus group and the students proceeded to thank the participants for their availability. The latter also offered some significant feedback: They complimented the playful but thought-provoking format of the tasks and gave a generally positive evaluation of the focus group. They praised the questions for being innovative from their point of view in that they required them to consider things from a previously unexplored perspective.
5.3. Transversal analysis

All the information we gathered through the different research methods used in Levoča, can be used to answer the evaluation questions related to the seven features of LEADER. They can also be related to the steps in delivery mechanisms (Please see Annex 7).

Firstly, we found that the territory is strongly connected and has a strong identity, which makes it easier to develop area-based local development strategies. These linkages between the territory are due to cultural reasons and also due to sharing a common space, and can help to define a common goal which we actually were able to deduct from the data collected. Yet, the composition of the LAG was not representative of the territories’ socio-economic and demographic characteristics (under-representation of young people, lower participation of women, etc.). This could affect the way in which the strategies are linked to the area since only some sections of the area are represented and have a voice inside the LAG.

We also found that the bottom up approach is supported as from the interviews we concluded that there is a wide actor involvement, participation, inclusiveness, spread of information, consensus based decisions; measures which enhance community based decision making and facilitate the representation of all levels of the territory. On the other hand, we identified some issues that would compromise this approach such as slow bureaucratic processes, which create dependencies between final beneficiaries and consulting bodies. Sometimes time and finance constraints are burdens in the development and support of all ideas. Moreover, we could not contrast if the actual information spread is flowing down to the general population which is not related to LAG.

As for the implementation of cooperation projects and general cooperation in the area, we found that LAG has increased the level of communication and brought different actors together, which has created synergies and learning opportunities that will benefit the development of the territory. This strong cooperation also enhances the development of public private partnerships that were highly regarded in the territory, and that were thought to bring collaboration and coordination of the different actors for their mutual benefit. However, we found that there was a main issue threatening cooperation and public private partnerships, and it was related to unequal financial support of the different partners. The real issue though, is the lack of understanding that even if one does not receive direct financial benefits, cooperation can still bring indirect benefits for the long run.
Concerning the existence of multi-sector actions, we found a clear problem of lack of representation of some sectors in the LAG that could prevent comprehensive understanding and multi-disciplinary approaches from happening. This is one of the less developed features that threaten the appropriate implementation of LEADER in the territory. It also affects the overall outcomes of the program.

In relation to the implementation of innovative approaches, we found a wide gap in the conceptualization of the relative definition of innovation. The low diversity of projects implemented in the area, time and financial constraints for some ideas to materialize are clear indicators of the constraints for the development of this feature.

Finally, we found that networking as the channel for expansion of linkages that will bond the different actors in the territory and enhance the exchange of ideas, has been one of the major achievements of LEADER implementation. This was possible due to an effective communication and coordination between the participants. However, we found that one of the main threats for networking is the rigid application of the public procurement law, as mentioned above.

6. **SWOT analysis of Leader delivery mechanism**

After collecting and analysing all the information from the field work, the two groups came together to develop SWOT analysis for the features of LAG based on the findings. In the rural development, the SWOT analysis is slightly different from business oriented SWOT analyses, since there is a need to take into consideration the dynamics of the rural development process. Following this idea, strengths and weakness were referred to the current situation of the rural area while opportunities and threats will refer to the future situation. This way we take into account the issue of change that should be addressed both internally and externally.

In the following tables, this type of analysis is done to extract the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the territories which are taken into consideration.
## SWOT Analysis

### Area-based

| **Strengths** | • The territory has common identity and there is adequate information available about the potential of area.  
• LEADER funding has enforced identification to the territory and it has facilitated the increase of awareness for the development of particular areas. |
| **Weaknesses** | • Limited human resources in terms of knowledge, skill, innovation, information etc.,  
• Lack of understanding between ethnicities within territory. |
| **Opportunities** | • LEADER can promote strong socio-economic linkages within the territory which creates economic virtuous circles and provides locales heritage preservation.  
• Enforcing Socio Economic strengths, encourages immigration which maintains and encourages population retention within the territory. |
| **Threats** | • Limited prospects for a better integration and communication due to ethnic conflicts within the territory. This lead to improper diagnosis to reflect the real situation.  
• Limited local financial resources.  
• Public procurement law: lowest bid wins (cooperation to arrange the competition in the interested individuals’ favour).This is due to the guidelines which limit the numbers of measures implementable. |
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<th><strong>Bottom-up</strong></th>
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| **Strengths** | • Given capacity for all members of community to engage in decision making.  
• Incentives to direct participation of local population in development of the territory. |
| **Weakness**  | • Lack of capacity for inclusion of individuals in the process to fully participate.  
• Exclusion of non-members as they do not benefit much from LAG projects.  
• Information gap for people involved in the LAG. |
| **Opportunities** | • Generation of Linkages and capacity building for local development will improve better communication thus leading to broader participation. |
| **Threats**    | • Top-down decision making.  
• Tendency to create elites within the territory.  
• Discouraging processes and high bureaucracy: APA time for DM.  
• Guidelines impede the participation of local stakeholders. |
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<th>Public-Private Partnership</th>
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<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
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<td>• Creates a framework for cooperation between both public and private sectors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Weakness</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Administrative burden/complicated control mechanism decreases incentives for involvement of private actors.</td>
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<td>• Low level of awareness of private sector of their role in the development of the region.</td>
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<td>• Private sectors failing to realize that the visibility is an important aspect of their participation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
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<td>• Creation of synergies between sectors, pooling of resources results in inclusive development of the territory.</td>
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<td>• It will be better for the future projects provided stronger PPP.</td>
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<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• limited choice of measures (RDP): Private actors are not necessarily interested in the chosen measures under RDP level</td>
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<td>• Limited available funding (RDP)</td>
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<td>• 50% private funding (RDP), 50% private fund: less incentives to launch future projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Limited available funding (small projects): less involvement of private actors (mentality private actors not in line with LEADER-direct profit based vision of private actors) to the borderlines and giving wrong idea about LEADER through its budget allocation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eligibility costs encourage to strengthen borderlines between sectors.</td>
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### Multi-sector design

| Strengths | • The approach in itself is integral which meant to integrate all/many sectors with strategic thinking at the designs of LDS. |
| Weakness | • Restrictive choices of initiatives because only Axis 3/4 measures are allowed.  
| | • Lack of possibilities to integrate initiatives in different sectors, due to the guidelines and measurements covered by LEADER. |
| Opportunities | • There is opportunity for integration and broadening of all measures  
| | • All sectors can be heard and integrated into common projects. |
| Threats | • No integrated implementation due to guidelines. |

### Networking

| Strengths | • Helps actors who would not normally know each other to connect and work together.  
| | • Increases awareness of actors/stakeholders in the area beyond the municipal level. |
| Weakness | • Network takes place at higher level (cf. LAG ≠ FB).  
| | • Dynamic impedes inclusion of all actors (it is exclusive as it does not support clusters).  
| | • Limited efforts to foster network among beneficiaries/actors. |
| Opportunities | • Creates initiatives for development of potential markets.  
| | • Knowledge and experience exchange between different regions, territories and countries. |
| Threats | • Public procurement law can hinder networking because of conflicts of interests |
## Cooperation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>• Concrete incentive and measures that encourage exchange</th>
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| Weakness  | • Bureaucratic burdens (E.g. attempt to cooperate with CZ LAG, but was made impossible because of heavy bureaucracy)  
• Unequal funding from one LAG to the other |
| Opportunities | • Enhanced visibility from Pooling of capacities, resources and exchange of knowledge.  
• Broadening the scope of cooperation beyond LEADER, from LAG level to independent level. |
| Threats | • Bureaucratic burdens are increased substantially which threat cooperation (E.g. attempt to cooperate with CZ LAG, but was made impossible because of heavy bureaucracy). |

## Innovation

| Strengths | • Willingness of LEADER to implement innovative project in territory (LEADER includes concepts for innovation).  
• Existing resources used in an innovative way which generates capacity to get support for the territory. |
| Weakness | • Relativity of the definition of "innovation" concept and Lack of capacity at territorial level to be innovative, therefore few projects are implemented. |
| Opportunities | • LEADER fosters capacity to support innovation. New ideas can bring in more investments, encourage creativity and make better use of resources |
| Threats | • Limited choice of innovation approach in the guidelines threatens the innovation. |
7. Conclusions and recommendations

After gathering all the information, performing the SWOT analysis, as a group we came to a series of conclusions and recommendations that will hopefully answer the evaluation questions and provide useful information for further effective policy making.

Conclusions and Recommendations

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<td><strong>Question:</strong> Do LEADER interventions reflect the needs, diversity and interest of the territory?</td>
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<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Recommendations</strong></td>
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**Bottom Up**

**Question:** In what extent LEADER approach has reinforced participatory approaches based on the subsidiarity principle?

| **Conclusions** | The decision making process allows for participation of different actors within the LAGs. However, there is still room for improvement at the moment of sharing information about LAG activities and stimulate the participation of non-members.

Despite of the effort conducted by LAGs to spread out the information about strategy and its priorities, there is still scope of improve the capacity to identify the strategic needs of the territory. This situation might lead limited possibilities to participate in the decision making process.

Due to existence of intricate bureaucratic processes, the capacities of final beneficiaries are limited to be independent. There is a high dependence on LAG Management structure.

Guidelines dictate type of projects and measures and the territories are not consulted during identification of national priorities. This gap between LAG, APA and MA is reducing the possibilities for Community-based organizations and potential beneficiaries to participate in decision-making.

Although LEADER approach has been key to provide concrete tools for local stakeholder to address their own development goals, there is still a wide scope of decision that are not respond to the subsidiarity principle (beneficiaries are not always involved in strategy design and project approval instances). |
| **Recommendations** | All the actors (LAGs, APA, and MA) should continue maintaining all the different means of information dissemination. However, it is quite important to develop events that ensure widespread awareness about LAG strategies, population needs, procedures and participatory tools.

National Guidelines should include measure from other CAP Axis. This adjustment would provide a more chances to potential beneficiaries to... |
access funds and technical support from the LAGs. As a result, the Local Development Strategy could be more diverse and adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries.

National LEADER Guidelines should include a certain mandatory measures in which the LAGs encourage capacity building activities with potential beneficiaries and members about how to connect the needs of different stakeholders and Local Development Strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Private Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question:</strong> How effective has been the collaboration between public and private sectors in LEADER implementation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Conclusions** | LEADER institutionalized the collaboration between the private and the public sectors. 
This framework had a multiplier effect on the public investments. 
LAGs are allocating funds to restore/improve public goods (municipal houses, small roads, bus stops, etc.) instead of target more strategic interventions towards to strengthen local development. This situation misleads the purpose of LEADER, creates a distortion on public funds responsibilities and discourages the participation of other private and society actors. 
Nevertheless, the reason for existence of Public-Private Partnership is misunderstood and participation of the private sector is driven by subsidies |
| **Recommendations** | Public-Private Partnership should be based on other considerations like shared objectives rather than finances. 
Analyse alternatives to increase the amount of “seed capital” provided by LAGs to private ventures in the territory, harnessing the local initiatives and creating the conditions for potential alternative sources of employment or income. |
### Multi-sector design

**Question:** To which extent LEADER has been able to integrate different sectors?

| Conclusions | LEADER is encouraging the inclusion of different sectors in the design of the local development strategy. However, in practice, due to the narrow options of measures, it is difficult to bring this feature into action.  
At the same time, broadening the range of measures to choose from is not the only solution to the weak sector diversification within LEADER projects in Slovakia. In fact, this is also due to financially led motivations of some sectors that cannot derive subsidies from LEADER. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Open a discussion on the possibility of increasing the flexibility of the measures included in LEADER (cf. New EU guidance for the upcoming period 2014-2020).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Networking

**Question:** To which extent LEADER has created linkages between different stakeholders involved (LAGs and other organizations involved in rural development)?

| Conclusions | LEADER has created the opportunity to strengthen and develop the linkages within and between the villages in the same territory, but also between the actors directly and indirectly in the LAGs.  
However, depending on the territories, these networks are more or less strong, in the sense that the work undertaken by the different communities would – or not – continue without the existence of the LAG in the future.  
Furthermore, there is a contradiction between the encouragement of linkages’ creation from the LEADER side and the strict regulations on public procurement that might not always allow the local competences to engage in the development of their territories. |
|---|---|
| Recommendations | There are two issues that the management of the LAG must work harder in solving: feedback/information flow and the overall involvement of various groups of actors. Certainly there are many attempts to provide information and increase engagement, but there should be more significant and explicit efforts so that the links between people are stronger.  
At the legislative level, the public procurement clause should be readapted, taking into account the requirements of LEADER in strengthening local networks. |
**Cooperation**

**Question:** To what extent has LEADER promoted cooperation activities as transfer of information, good practices and know-how between rural areas?

| Conclusions | Cooperation has been promoted through concrete initiatives between different actors and territories;  
LAGs have strengthened the linkages and networks that are most likely to keep on working in the future and sustaining further cooperation. This has also enhanced an increased sharing of knowledge, experience and capacities, inside and outside the LAG territories.  
However, the excessive bureaucratic burdens can compromise the capacity of the LAGs to encourage this feature. In addition to that, the misunderstanding on how cooperation can benefit the territory in other way regardless of the financial one. This issue could discourage cooperation between partners that do not have equal financial support. |

| Recommendations | Better communication and information tools and activities should be implemented in order to clarify that the LEADER approach is a method more than a fund.  
Furthermore, programme authorities should strengthen the technical and financial support for the early and latter stages of cooperation, as trying to dismantle bureaucratic burdens to make regulatory requirement more bearable for the LAGs and the final beneficiaries.  
Finally, it is also important to keep on sustaining and broadening networks that promote and deepen the cooperation between all the stakeholders. |
## Innovation

### Question
Is the innovation clearly understood/embraced by LAGs participants and LEADER beneficiaries? – In what extent LEADER has allowed innovative initiatives in the rural sector in Slovakia?

### Conclusions

In general, LAGs are supportive to finance innovative projects, but those projects are not able to materialize due to lack of financial support, time constraints and misunderstanding of the concept of innovation.

The National LEADER guidelines have not defined clearly the concept of innovation and the characteristics that one innovative project has. The LEADER National Guidelines seems to be not precise on defines the concept and provides illustrative examples to LAGs with concrete experiences. (RDP level).

Different definitions of innovation might cause confusion among LAG participants and beneficiaries, misleading the results of LEADER within the areas. (LAG Level).

At LAG level, despite of the openness of members to receive innovative proposals, there are not particular promotion mechanisms (within the call for proposals, budget) that encourage beneficiaries to present an innovative ideas. (LAG Level).

The low participation of young inhabitants (under 30 years old) in the LAG might lead the decrease of innovative proposals included in LDS and further projects.

Limited available measures defined by the guidelines can also be a constraint to develop innovative ideas.

### Recommendations

Better communication and information tools and activities should be implemented in order to clarify that the LEADER approach is a method more than a fund.

Furthermore, programme authorities should strengthen the technical and financial support for the early and latter stages of cooperation, as trying to dismantle bureaucratic burdens to make regulatory requirement more bearable for the LAGs and the final beneficiaries.

Finally, it is also important to keep on sustaining and broadening networks that promote and deepen the cooperation between all the stakeholders.
### Annex 1 – Steps in Delivery Mechanism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRE-ASSESMENT</strong></td>
<td>• Gather preliminary information about rural development situation, growth rate, most relevant productive activities, country priorities and most relevant strategies to promote sustainable growth of the sector.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **NATIONAL STRATEGY**        | • Slovakia as an EU member has submitted a National Strategic plan for 2007 – 2014 setting up priorities for action for European Agriculture Fund of Rural Development (EAFRD), taking into account the guideline, the specific objectives and the contribution from the EAFRD fund and other sources of funding.  
  • Assessment of the economic, social and environmental situation.  
  • Thematic and territorial priorities under each axis, including the main quantified objectives and appropriate indicator for monitoring and evaluation.  
  • List of rural development programs. |
| **NATIONAL GUIDELINES**      | • Measures of the Axis 4 – Leader to implement in Slovakia (implemented through technical measures of the Axis 3).  
  • Budget availability.  
  • Procedures and conditions for eligibility of the LAGs  
  • Legal and administrative framework.  
  • Definition of Payment agency responsibility.  
  • Financial reports |
| **GUIDELINES UPDATES**        | • Changes on the guidelines (financial, legal, administrative and program adjustments to the national guidelines).                                                                                  |
| **AWARENESS CREATION**        | • The Ministry and Payment Agency spread the information about LEADER National Guidelines through small regional workshops, leaflets, website updates, awareness sessions with key stakeholders at regional level, etc. |
| **CAPACITY BUILDING**         | • Through providing specific training to the LAGs interested regarding of operational issues of LEADER, selection criteria, strategies adaptation, financial and legal arrangements and technical issues of the program. |
| **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**        | • The ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Payment Agency (APA) are on charge of the process. The APA elaborates the call for proposal based on the LEADER National Guidelines and the Rural Development National Strategy.  
  • The selection procedure ensuring competition between LAGs no later than 2 years after approval of programs.  
  • The Call for proposal specifies the budget, clear indication of selection criteria for the LAGs, planned maximum number of LAGs, planned percentage of rural territories covered by local development strategies, justification for selection areas.  
  • The templates for present the proposal  
  • Legal and financial requirements.  
  • Timeframe of the tender process. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS</th>
<th>Selection of the local action groups (LAGs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Partnership related criteria:</strong> i) Be responsible for the implementation of the strategy; ii) Representative of partners from the various locally based socio-economic sectors; iii) At decision-making level representation of the economic and social actors of territory (at least 50% of the total partnership); iv) Ability to define and implement a development strategy; and v) Ability to manage public funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Strategy related criteria:</strong> Integrated local action strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Territory:</strong> Coherent area and critical mass to support a viable development strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRACT SIGNING</td>
<td>• Formal agreement between APA and selected LAGs. Each LAG has to sign in a contract, the strategy and budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agreement on administrative management of public funds for the LAGs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The contract lasts for 7 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY UPDATES</td>
<td>• Each year the measures budget could be reviewed and adjusted, depending on the implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONITORING OF THE LAGs</td>
<td>• In charge of the PA in annual basis (administrative, financial and technical issues).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>• The Payment Agency is in charge of design the TORs and contract the evaluation. The European Union – Court of auditors could commission one or more external evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Ministry of Agriculture has undertaken a mid-term and final evaluation of LEADER National Strategy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2 – Interview Schedule

1. Interview Schedule

FINAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES: Who asks? Who fills the questionnaire? Who takes extra notes?

Introductory sentence (what is the intention of the interview, how much time we will need to complete the interview, thank for the time)

The following questions deal with general information about the participant and respond to the implicit question: who is included and to what extent?

(feature: area based, multi-sector design, public-private partnership)

Name:

Occupation/professional background:

Education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHD degree</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Role/involvement in the LAG:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member of the LAG</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Member of the LAG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries (public)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries (private)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Why do you have a Local Action Group?

(Feature: networking, cooperation, area based)

a. Do the members/does the community have a common goal?

   YES
   NO

(Which? why?)

2. In case you are a LAG member, how often do you meet? Where?

(Feature: public-private partnership, networking, cooperation, bottom-up)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>With LAG</th>
<th>With beneficiaries</th>
<th>Higher authority APA, Ministry, …</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>With LAG</th>
<th>With beneficiaries</th>
<th>Higher authority APA, Ministry, …</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 3 month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. In case you are not LAG member, how frequent is your interaction with LAG?

4. Who is included / involved in the LAG and to what extend? (percentage/perception)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30-50</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 50</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Sector: Agricultural, Forestry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Sector: Industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Sector: Service, commerce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Sector: Education</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographical representativeness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How do you reach agreements in the LAG? (feature: bottom-up, cooperation, public-private partnership)

6. Does the area have a common identity? (social, cultural, economic). (feature: area-based, multi-sector design)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. What is your opinion about how public-private partnerships work in in your Local Action Group? (feature: public-private partnership, cooperation)
8. To which extent are you informed/able to provide information?  
(feature: networking, cooperation, bottom-up) 

a. By which means are you informed? 

b. Is your voice heard? Is the management of your Local Action Group approachable and receptive? 

9. How much support does LAG give in the development of proposals (projects, ideas, etc.)?  
(feature: cooperation, innovation) 

10. What kinds of projects are being implemented in your area through your Local Action Group?  
(feature: multi-sector design, innovation, public-private partnership, cooperation) 

a) Do you think they are innovative and why? 

11. How does the Local Action Group support new ideas in general? 

12. What kind of linkages has the Local Action Group created?
## Annex 3 – Focus Group Screenplay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time allow</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Who does what</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Overall presentation</td>
<td>projector</td>
<td>give badges – Intro -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Country game and student</td>
<td>slides country</td>
<td>Game -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>presentation (see below)</td>
<td>name</td>
<td>Projector –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intro focus group members</td>
<td>tags/badges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 mins for discussion &amp; 20 mins for gathering of information/setting up the timeline</td>
<td><strong>Interactive session</strong></td>
<td>Q1: ‘What new things has LEADER brought to your area?’</td>
<td>-paper -pens -post-its -set the tables -board for post-its -Poster with Q3 + headings</td>
<td>Introduce the dynamic – Moderating : Q1 – Q2 – Q3 -- prepare tables – collect post-its - arrange answers on board –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 minutes brainstorming and writing cards 25 min presentation: only what was not already said</td>
<td></td>
<td>Q2: What are the challenges in LEADER implementation? + How could these problems be addressed?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing the minutes and summary (x2) :</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Q3: What will happen if tomorrow LEADER ends?</td>
<td>-paper -pens -post-its -set the tables -board for post-its -Poster with Q3 + headings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion and goodbye</td>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE</strong></td>
<td>Big flip chart with question and numbered headings (answers)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Country Game:**
1. Each student supplies a representative visual of their country.
2. The images are shown to the group members and they are asked if they can identify the place.
3. Then they are asked who in our group is from that country.
4. Then the person who is identified (or not!) introduces himself or herself (in Slovak).

**To introduce yourself in Slovak:**

Volám sa (your name)  
Ja som z (your country) *(pr. : ya som zé)*

**Bingo:**
1. The group members are divided into smaller groups (4-5 per table) and they are given the first question.
2. They have 20-25 minutes to discuss and write their answers on the cue cards given to them. After 25 minutes, the first table is asked to give one answer.
3. Then the other tables have the chance to say BINGO! if they have the same answer.
4. All the answers are then given one by one in the same manner.
5. The students gather the information and put it on a board, in order to be able to provide results.

**Brainstorming + Open discussion:**

1. Participants discuss question in groups  
2. They write findings in flipchart paper  
3. They present the ideas/findings  
4. One of the students makes a summary of findings

**Individual exercise**

1. Big flip chart with question and answers is prepared:  
   What will happen if tomorrow LEADER ends?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 No continuation</th>
<th>2 Continuation without money (volunteers)</th>
<th>3 Continuation with other money (external)</th>
<th>4 Continuation with own money</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Each participant receives one post-its for writing number of answer (secret voting) and their comments  
3. Students collect post-its and write votes in flipchart and place comments in flipchart  
4. Students summarize findings
Annex 4 – Interview Database

Find attached in email.

Annex 5 – Abbreviations

EU – European Union

EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

LEADER – Liaison Entre Actions de Development Economique Rurale

IMRD – International Masters in Rural Development

RDP – Rural Development Programme

CAP – Common Agriculture Policy

NSP - National Strategic Plan

LAG – Local Action Group

ENRD – European Network for Rural Development

MA – Ministry of Agriculture

MS – Member State

APA – Agricultural Paying Agency

PA – Paying Agency
Annex 6 – Focus Group Minutes

The meeting starts at 13:50. There are a total of 10 members from the LAG who are participating in the focus group. After the country game, the members present themselves and then we continue with the Bingo game. After Carlo presents the Bingo game, Karim asks the first question. Bhuvana gives the members the papers where they will write the answer.

ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS

MAYOR
IT EXPERT
MAYOR OF AGRICULTURE
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
LAG WORKER FROM LEVOCA
REPRESENTATIVE OF CIVIC ASSOCIATION ENGAGED IN PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
MAYOR
MANAGER OF THE LAG
MEMBER OF LAG

The members have a total of 15 minutes to discuss the questions with each other and then present the findings to us. The game starts at 14:10.

Answers for BINGO game:

1. To increase attractiveness of rural area (1 B) To improve infrastructure
2. Cooperation national and international (1 B) Improvement of relation btw public private sector
3. Museum, traditions, support of culture (1B) within the group
4. Better information within the territory, publicity and more propagation on the region (3B)
5. More knowledge and opportunity to develop excursions (2B)
6. Opportunity for local decision making (1B) Solving problems in non formal meetings
7. More activities and events in the region
8. Bottom up approach (2B)
9. Increasing the number of new comers in the region (1B) marketing of the country, media presentation of the country
10. High intensity of people and improvement of relationship with ppp (2B)
11. Voluntary work, increased entrepreneurship in the region (1B)
12. Services and free time activities (1B)
13. Organization of Intra-regional and Inter-Regional events
14. Support free time activities for youth and older people. Separate activities for youths and senior population. Creating specific activities for each age group.
15. Project management approaches within the LAG

Game ends at 14:40.

We gave your answers a structure to see the keywords that move your ideas. For the next question they should engage in their tables for close discussion.
For the second question they will have 20 minutes and Karim reads the question at 14:41. They only take 10 minutes and start with the answers.

Q: What are the challenges in LEADER implementation? How could these problems be addressed? Answers:

1. Financial resources of the applicants. For the small villages its very low, low budget of the municipality so the experience of the beneficiaries with funding is low and also there is low level of knowledge.
2. Very often the conditions change during the implementation: Bureaucracy in process of approval, small villages if they could receive more money from the state it would be better.
3. For civil sector there is not enough sources to pre-finance the projects so somehow in international level must be created opportunities for advance payment (prepayment)
4. The challenge is that there is a long term evaluation of the project in national level.
5. There is a challenge for the state, they should keep the conditions that they define (and not change constantly). So, solution is to make bureaucracy easier, and public procurement to be made simpler, to have the selection decision in the hands of the LAG for small projects, or increase the number of people who work in APA in the selection of projects.
6. Here in Slovakia the public procurement is constrained, if there is a project you cannot approve it for your own region so it doesn’t help the locals. So for example it’s not included in the legal act, but there must be at least 3 projects to be approved for purchasing something, so their solution is that they make an exception for the LAGS. Also, procurements shouldn’t be done before having the project selected to continue, but after the project has been approved.
7. No effective control from the state (national level) in case of small projects, there are 160 projects being supported by LAG and they need to check 3 times the projects if they’re being implemented. So they lose a lot of time checking the implementation and they’re small projects.
8. There are limits for eligible costs for projects, and they suggest to make the costs more open for innovative projects. The biggest problem is municipalities in western area and VAT is not an eligible cost so there is a payment from the state but not full. So they lose time paying the full amount to the VAT. Solution is to extend some other non-eligible costs and make them eligible.
9. Conflicts of interest bcs the state is influencing the whole process...so they are building a partnership, know each other and so on and then they can’t be in any relationship (conflict of interest). It appears mostly in educational projects, when they need to work with people and you can’t have any relationship with those people so you need to give evidence about your relationships to them. If someone wins a public procurement project, they can’t deliver this service. So family members and friends are excluded from LAG...LAG members can’t be in close relation with beneficiaries. If the selection committee evaluates a project, and a delivery subject is there whom the manager knows, it becomes a problem, (so they are against this conflict of interest because it doesn’t allow people to benefit from projects if they are close to selection committee).
10. Financing of LAG is not deferred because they all have the same budget, like this LAG has 31 municipalities and another lag has 4 municipalities and they receive the same budget so solution is to differ.

11. If you don’t use the money in some measure you will lose this money and the office doesn’t have the power to use this money. They have applications who sign the contracts, they don’t implement the work. There is a 20% reduction in the amount of money they can use for office expenditures (running costs). For each euro of un-implemented project, 20 cents are cut from running costs. In the contract should be some limitations for the applicants to make sure that they realize all projects because if not there will be some cuts for them too.

We discuss for 30 minutes the answers and then continue with the third question. Petra explains the third question and the voting process.

What will happen if tomorrow LEADER ends?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 No continuation</th>
<th>2 Continuation without money (volunteers)</th>
<th>3 Continuation with other money (external)</th>
<th>4 Continuation with own money</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the idea is that most people think that the LEADER will continue with other (external) money. They will cooperate with other institutions; find other sources of financing. So they will believe that they will apply as well for the LEADER next year, and for the future the procedure will become easier. They have few ideas on what to develop in the territory. So they need to also develop a business plan for developing businesses through LAG.

Petra concludes and thanks them for participating.

The chairman of the LAG says that she’s happy because this activity is also interactive feedback for her and also members. A LAG member (mayor) says that they would like to talk to the students even more and they feel that they benefited from this. They like the format of the activity and they can already imagine how to use this discussion in the future. This was positive and they liked the questions. They ask if in Italy or Spain they have similar problems.

The manager says that these questions push them to think about things they never think about. They already are thinking of broadening these questions and discuss them with other people, like in a village level, village ensemble where they have started to discuss the next strategy. For them external feedback is important as well.
## Annex 7 – Cross Table Analysis

### Definition of Steps in the Delivery Mechanism Both at RDP and LAG Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>INNOVATION</th>
<th>AREA BASED</th>
<th>BOTTOM UP</th>
<th>PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP</th>
<th>MULTI-SECTOR ACTION</th>
<th>NETWORKING</th>
<th>COOPERATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BENCHMARKS</strong></td>
<td>• Governance based on the Leadership</td>
<td>• Strong Identity</td>
<td>• Local Actors</td>
<td>• Partners shares their common resources accordingly</td>
<td>• Representation of stakeholders represents various needs and interests</td>
<td>• Enabling constant feedback??</td>
<td>• Two way communication between all actors.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Multi-sectoral actions?</td>
<td>• Homogeneity</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>• Partners share experiences and ideas to delivery mechanisms.</td>
<td>• Needs and interest from diff. sectors are considered in strategy design</td>
<td>• Facilitating awareness among network members??</td>
<td>• Common interests with diverse talents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Capacity building for innovation?</td>
<td>• Socio-Econ. Diversity</td>
<td>Local Resources used efficiently</td>
<td>• Cross-cutting themes are mainstreamed in policy evaluation strategy</td>
<td>• Synergy encouragement</td>
<td>• All possible linkages among various sectors/regions with similar approach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Area-based adapted method</td>
<td>• Demographic Diversity</td>
<td>Every actor can contribute – Get feedback, information</td>
<td>• Collaboration in equal balance</td>
<td>• Complementarity assurance (sectors, regions, groups)</td>
<td>• Environment full supports and gives space for cooperation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sharing the knowledge transfer?</td>
<td>• Immigration</td>
<td>Consensus based decisions.</td>
<td>• Partners are accountable for their action</td>
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<td>• Strong social capital within system and between different actors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• New technologies</td>
<td>• Area Based Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Partnership is based on trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Constant development of capacities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• New processes and products?</td>
<td>• Access to information</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Composition of partnership is balanced from sector, social territory, institutional and gender point of view</td>
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<td>• Networks</td>
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### Steps of Delivery Mechanism – Rural Development Programme (RDP) Level

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