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HVTK – giving local relevance to European-wide rural development expertise

Abstract: *In the current EU programming period, rural areas in the North Great Plain region of Hungary will benefit from investment through the New Hungary Rural Development Programme (NHRDP) and the North Great Plain Regional Operational Programme (NGPOP). Using keywords from Section 3.1 of Annex II to Community Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006, we quantified the priority placed in each Programme on topics relating to the horizontal objectives and Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Rural Development Regulation (RDR). In the NHRDP the emphasis is on Axis 1 whilst in the NGPOP the emphasis is on topics related to the horizontal objectives of the RDR. A similar analysis was carried out on 200 EU Framework Programme (FP) and Interreg projects, which can provide expertise to support rural development in the region. Information about these projects is available on the website www.hvtk.org. The priorities of the FP projects were found to be closely correlated to the priorities of the NHRDP but amongst Interreg projects there was a strong emphasis on topics related to Axis 3. A workshop attended by rural development practitioners from the region demonstrated that the distinctions between regional, rural and agricultural development are far from simple.*

Keywords: *rural development, Hungary, Romania, networks, capacity building*

Introduction

The Hungary-Romania cross-border region, in terms of GDP per capita, is amongst the poorest in the EU-27 (Eurostat, 2006). The North and South Great Plain regions of Hungary, and the North West and West regions of Romania are all classified as “convergence regions” in the current EU programming period, as they have GDP per capita of less than 75% of the EU-25 average. Rural communities on both sides of the border have close geographic, environmental, cultural and historical ties and face threats that are commonplace in “peripheral” Europe. These include the declining profitability of agriculture, economic pressures which encourage a drift to the cities and a loss of skills and social factors

including poor communications and a declining, ageing population (Nagy, 2005). Given the widespread nature of these threats, it might be expected that expertise exists across Europe that can be used to help to address them.

In February 2006, six organisations, including Writtle College and the University of Debrecen, agreed to set up an informal organisation entitled the Cross-Border Centre of Expertise in Rural Development (Határmenti Vidékfejlesztési Tanácsadó Központ or HVTK). The objective of HVTK is to encourage dialogue and exchange of experiences between academics, students and practitioners in the subject of sustainable rural development (Fieldsend et al., 2007). It is based in Debrecen, centre of the North Great Plain region. Its first 14 month long programme of activities has focused on (a) building a network of individuals with an interest in rural development in the Hungary-Romania cross-border region, (b) creating an online database of expertise in rural development and (c) supporting the education of students about sustainable rural development.

For the disbursement of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funds, Community Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 (European Commission, 2005), the “Rural Development Regulation” (RDR), requires each Member State to prepare a rural development national strategy plan constituting the reference framework for the preparation of its national and/or regional rural development programmes for the period 2007–2013. The content of these programmes should be established in accordance with Annex II to Community Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 (EC, 2006a) which lays down detailed rules for the application of Community Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005. Section 3.1 of Annex II requires an analysis of the current situation of a geographical area, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, disparities, needs and gaps and potential for rural development. It states that the description should include five general topics and for each specifies a set of key issues to be addressed, as follows: (1) the general socio-economic context of a territory; (2) the performance of the agricultural, forestry and food sectors; (3) environment and land management; (4) rural economy and quality of life; and (5) Leader. These five general topics relate to the horizontal objectives and Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the RDR respectively (EC, 2006a).

In Hungary, the RDR is being implemented at the national level via the New Hungary Rural Development Programme (NHRDP, 2007) with a budget of EUR 3.806 million over seven years. The only EU-funded regionally-focused programmes are the Regional Operational Programmes using Structural (ERDF) Funds allocated regionally at the NUTS II level from the New Hungary Development Programme (ROP). One of these, the North Great Plain ROP (NGPOP, 2007) addresses an area of 17,729 km² and a population of 1,554,000 people and commands 18.2% of the total national ROP budget of EUR 5.589 million over seven years (NHDP, 2007). This Programme expressly excludes agricultural development in accordance with Community Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (EC, 2006b) which stipulates that the funding priorities of the ERDF (and other

EU funds) should not duplicate those of the EAFRD. However, it recognises that close to 80% of the region's settlements and approximately 40% of the populations constitute "regions awaiting convergence" as the economies of these almost exclusively rural areas are either stagnating or declining. Hence, apart from the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the NHRDP and the NGPOP represent the major programmes for EU funding for sectoral and territorial development of rural areas of the North Great Plain region.

The concept of rural development (and of rurality) has been a topic of continuing debate (e.g. Dorgai, 1998; Kovács, 2003; Mantino, 2003; Fehér, 2005), particularly with respect to the relative importance of its sectoral (i.e. agricultural) and territorial dimensions. The NHRDP states that "rural areas comprise a special type of region characterised by low population density, heavy reliance on land as a source of livelihood, and a non-urbanised settlement structure (typified by villages, small towns, and, in certain regions, by isolated farms)". Rural development can be interpreted as the economic, social and environmental development of such territories.

The HVTK database therefore includes sectorally-focused and territorially-focused projects selected for their relevance to rural development in the cross-border region. Those focusing on mountain areas or coastal zones, for example, were normally excluded but otherwise between them the chosen projects cover a broad range of subject areas. The majority of projects were funded by two of the major sources of EU funding. Firstly, Interreg III, a Community Initiative designed to promote transnational co-operation on spatial planning, which ran from 2000 to 2006 and consisted of three "strands", A (cross-border), B (transnational) and C (interregional). The transnational programmes "Alpine Space", "Baltic Sea Region" (BSR) and "CADSES" cover the territories of the (2004) New Member States and the territories immediately west of Hungary. The Interact scheme was designed to capitalise on the wealth of knowledge accumulated through Interreg. Secondly, the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP) which is a major tool to support the creation of the European Research Area. The Fifth Framework Programme (FP5) ran from 1998 to 2002 whilst the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) ran from 2002 to 2006. Many Interreg III and FP6 projects are still in progress.

The objectives of this paper were, firstly, to quantify the relative importance of the horizontal objectives and the four Axes of the RDR in the two Programmes applicable to the North Great Plain region and, secondly, to quantify the extent to which the key issues in rural development (as defined by Section 3.1 of Annex II) have been addressed in projects funded by Interreg and the FP. The relevance of research and cooperation activities funded by the EU was then related to the rural development priorities of the North Great Plain region. Finally, we show how HVTK is disseminating European-wide rural development expertise in the cross-border region.

The keyword analysis method described by Felici et al. (2007) was used, with Section 3.1 of Annex II as the source of keywords (Appendix 1), to interrogate the two Programmes and 200 projects in the HVTK database. The frequency of the keywords was used as a measure of the importance given to each issue in each document.

The incidence of the keywords (plus the word “rural”) in the NHRDP (excluding the table of contents, some listings of organisations and the annexes) and the NGPOP (excluding the ex-ante evaluation) was recorded. To ensure that all variants of the word were counted, roots of the keyword were used where appropriate. For example, “agri” was used to include all variants such as “agriculture” and “agricultural”. In a few instances, synonyms were included, such as “marginal” and “peripheral” in addition to “remoteness”. The keyword “Roma” was also used, as it has local significance. References to other programmes, such as the CAP, and organisations were disregarded.

A similar analysis was conducted on 200 FP and Interreg projects (Table 1). For each project, a summary of at least 500 words (where available) was compiled, including the title, abstract, objectives, activities, expected or actual results and/or impacts. Where possible this information was taken from online project directories supplemented where necessary from project websites. To define the “centre of gravity” of each programme or project, the incidence of keywords within each of the five topics was summed.

HVTK uses several tools to disseminate information through its “Cross-Border Rural Network” of 750 rural development practitioners. Its website can be accessed via www.hvtk.org and it has staged a series of conferences. At a conference in Debrecen in April 2007, members of the Network discussed the relationship between regional, rural and agricultural development through a series of presented papers and a workshop.

Table 1. Number of projects categorised by funding scheme and primary source of information used for keyword analysis.

Type of project	Primary source of information	No. projects analysed
Framework 5	http://bookshop.europa.eu/eubookshop/FileCache/PUBPDF/KINA22361ENC/KINA22361ENC_002.pdf	25
Framework 6	http://cordis.europa.eu/fp6/projects.htm	39
Interreg IIIB Alp. Space	http://www.alpinespace.org/uploads/media/The_Projects_EN.pdf	17
Interreg IIIB BSR	http://www.spatial.baltic.net/programm/projects.php	19
Interreg IIIB CADSES	http://www.cadses.net/en/projects/apprpro.html	12
Interreg IIIC	http://www.interreg3c.net/sixcms/detail.php?id=6183	84
Interact	http://www.interact-eu.net/4098/4115/800955/0	4

Source: NHPD, 2007

Results

The differing numbers of keywords used for each topic (Appendix 1) appear not to have strongly influenced the “centre of gravity” of Programmes or projects (Fig. 1), with the clear exception of topic 5. Topic 2, although including relatively few keywords, featured strongly owing to the frequent occurrence of “agriculture”, “food” and “forestry”. By contrast, although “environment” and “water” occurred frequently, several keywords under topic 3 occurred only rarely (data not shown).

In the NHRDP 5,185 keywords were recorded out of a total word count of 123,417. In addition the word “rural” occurred 777 times. The centre of gravity of the document is topic 2, accounting for 39.2% of keywords (Fig. 1). Topic 3 accounts for 29% of keywords, whilst the two keywords in topic 5 only constitute 1.5% of the total. “Agriculture” and “forestry” together represent over 25% of the keywords in the NHRDP (Table 2). “Environment” (topic 3) accounts for almost 10% of keywords whilst “services” (topic 4) is the fourth most frequently occurring keyword. Under topic 1, only “age” exceeds 1.5% of all keywords, as does “Leader” (topic 5).

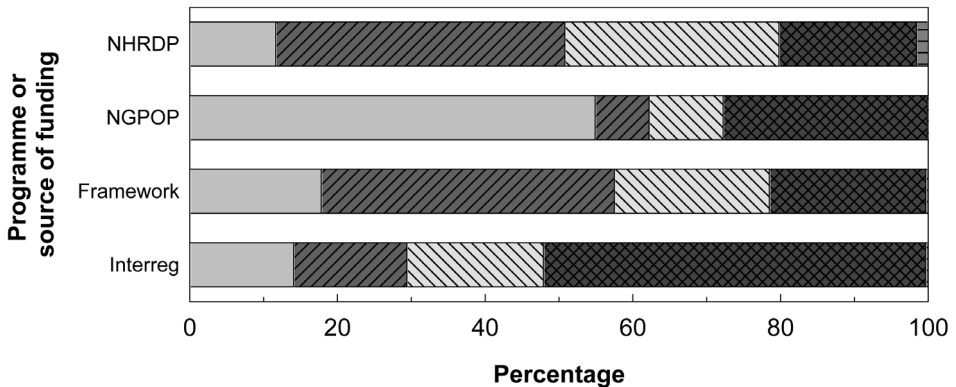


Figure 1. “Centre of gravity” of the New Hungary Rural Development Programme (NHRDP), the North Great Plain Operational Programme 2007–2013 (NGPOP), 64 EU Framework Programme and 136 Interreg projects. Bars: plain: topic 1; hatched, dark background: topic 2; opposite hatched, pale background: topic 3; cross hatched: topic 4; horizontal lines: topic 5.

Keywords represented 918 out of 54,095 words in the NGPOP. “Rural” occurred 30 times. In contrast to the NHRDP, theme 1, equivalent to the horizontal objectives of the RDR, is dominant, accounting for over 55% of keywords (Fig. 1). A further 27% of keywords belong to topic 4. “Employment / unemployment” is the most frequently occurring keyword in topic 1 but “population structure” (including “Roma”), “competitiveness” and “growth” also exceed 6%. In topic 4 “tourism” accounts for over 15% of keywords. Topics 2 and 3 each represent less than 10% of total keywords whilst only one instance of a keyword under topic 5 was recorded.

The mean number of words per project summary was 589 (the interquartile range was 291) and the mean number of keywords per project summary (excluding the word “rural”) was 18.6. “Rural” occurred in 117 project summaries. In terms of overall incidence of keywords, a clear difference in centre of gravity can be observed between FP and Interreg projects (Fig. 1). Topic 2 accounted for almost 40% of the keywords in the FP projects, whilst in the Interreg projects over 50% of the keywords fall under topic 4. The keywords under topic 5 occurred only rarely in both types of project.

These differences are reflected in the relative occurrence of keywords (Table 2). Across all projects, the most commonly occurring keywords are “agriculture”, “food”, “environment”, “services” and “cultural heritage”. However, the first two occur almost twice as frequently amongst keywords in FP projects compared to Interreg projects. Conversely, the latter two occur considerably more frequently in Interreg projects.

The centres of gravity of individual projects follow a similar pattern (Fig. 2). Topic 2 was the centre of gravity for 26% of FP5 and 54% of FP6 projects whilst topic 4 represented the centre of gravity for 53% of Interreg IIC projects and over 60% of Interreg IIIB and Interact projects. Only the Interact project “Intermed” had topic 5 as its centre of gravity (shared with topic 4). For most projects, the centre of gravity was clearly evident but in 14 summaries (including Intermed), an equal number of keywords under two topics were recorded (in Fig. 2 these projects are split between topics as appropriate i.e. 0.5 of a project is allocated to each topic). In a further 17 summaries the number of keywords for

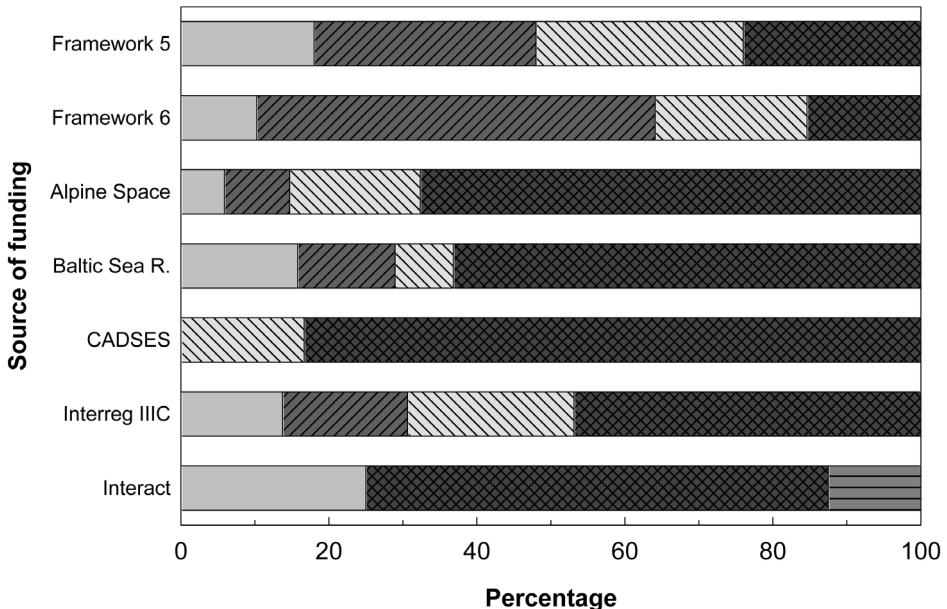


Figure 2. “Centre of gravity” of individual EU projects categorised by source of funding. For key see Figure 1.

Table 2. Most frequently occurring keywords (as a percentage of total keywords) per topic in the New Hungary Rural Development Programme (NHRDP), the North Great Plain Regional Operational Programme (NGPOP) and 200 EU Framework Programme (FP) and Interreg project summaries. Also the ratio of the frequency of occurrence in FP compared to Interreg projects.

Topic	NHRDP	NGPOP	Projects	Ratio
1. The general socio-economic context of a territory	Age (1.7)	Age (2.4)	Remoteness (1.7)	1.77
		Population structure (6.9)	Productivity (1.5)	3.94
		Competitiveness (6.1)	Un/employment (2.0)	1.08
		Productivity (3.2)	Land use (1.5)	1.45
		Growth (6.4)		
		Labour market (2.3)		
		Un/employment (14.9)		
		Skills (2.3)		
2. The performance of the agricultural, forestry and food sectors	Agriculture (18.1)	Agriculture (2.3)	Agriculture (7.9)	2.11
	Forestry (7.2)	Innovation (2.2)	Forestry (2.8)	0.66
	Food (2.6)		Food (6.6)	1.92
	Competitiveness (2.0)			
	Innovation (1.6)			
3. Environment and land management	Environment (9.2)	Environment (5.4)	Environment (5.9)	0.96
	Land management (1.9)	Organic (1.5)	Land management (1.9)	0.29
	Natura 2000 (2.8)		Water use (3.9)	0.27
	Water use (3.2)		Organic (2.0)	1.33
	Soil (2.3)			
	Forest cover (2.5)			
4. Rural economy and quality of life	Tourism (2.7)	Quality of life (2.1)	Rural economy (4.4)	0.40
	Services (6.4)	Tourism (15.4)	Tourism (14.7)	0.12
	Infrastructure (2.1)	Services (1.5)	Services (6.0)	0.33
	Cultural heritage (2.5)	Infrastructure (6.1)	Infrastructure (1.6)	0.18
			Cultural heritage (5.6)	0.06
5. Leader	Leader (1.5)			

Source: NHDP, 2007

second most common topic was 75% or more of the total for the most common topic. In four Interreg IIC projects no keywords were recorded.

The following keywords were the most frequent, or jointly most frequent, in individual FP projects: “agriculture”: 16 projects; “food”: 12; “environment”: 6; “employment”: 3; “innovation”: 3 and “tourism”: 3. The equivalent results for Interreg projects were: “tourism”: 30; “services”: 18; “cultural heritage”: 15; “agriculture”: 10; “rural economy”: 10 and “food”: 7.

The incidence of the keywords grouped by topics for the NHRDP and for the FP project descriptions was positively correlated ($r^2 = 0.86$, $p < 0.05$). A stronger

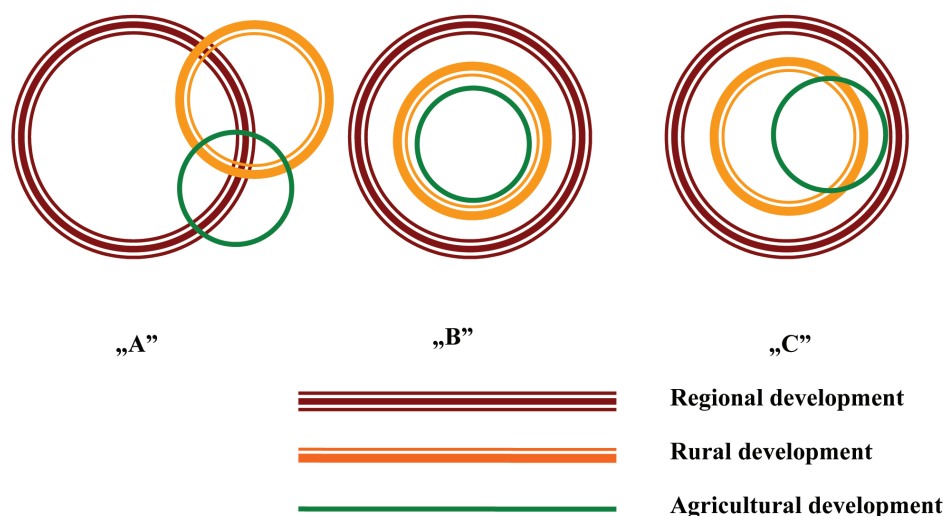


Figure 3. Perceptions of participants in an HVTK workshop of the relationship between regional, rural and agricultural development.

correlation ($r^2 = 0.94$, $p < 0.01$) existed between the incidence of the keywords grouped by topics for the NHRDP and the number of individual FP7 projects with their centre of gravity in each topic. No significant correlations were present between the NHRDP and Interreg projects or between the NGPOP and either group of projects.

Although the participants in the HVTK conference and workshop held in Debrecen in April 2007 came from all parts of the cross-border region covered by the project, most were based in development poles (i.e. the major cities in the region) or dynamic regional centres. Most represented organisations which are close to sources of information such as universities, Ministry institutes and microregion managers. In the workshop, participants were asked to describe their perception of the relationship between regional, rural and agricultural development. A slight majority believed that, although there was a considerable overlap between the three, each had unique aspects (Fig. 3, version A). A smaller number believed that agricultural development lay entirely within rural development, which in turn lay entirely within regional development (version B). The least favoured option (version C) was that rural development lay entirely within regional development but that agricultural development had unique aspects.

Discussion

The keyword analysis method demonstrates that both Programmes have a clear centre of gravity (Fig. 1); for the NHRDP it is topic 2 whilst for the NGPOP it is topic 1. However, in rural areas such as the North Great Plain the two topics are interdependent to a considerable extent and both would seem to fit the long-term overall objective of the NGPOP which is “the improvement of regional competi-

tiveness and reducing the territorial imbalances within the region through the utilisation of the natural and social values and the characteristics of the settlement network in the North Great Plain”. Furthermore, the “sectoral” NHRDP includes the territorially-focused Leader Axis.

Mantino (2003) suggested that from 1970 the focus of EU rural development policies evolved from sectoral (to 1988) to sectoral and “marginalist” (to 1999) and back to sectoral. More recently, emphasis in development ethics has shifted from sectoral to territorial (High and Nemes, 2006). The results of the keyword analysis and of the workshop demonstrate the increasing difficulty in implementing the NHRDP and the ROPs separately, with different Managing Authorities at different levels (the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development and the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) respectively). The harmonisation of these Programmes is a stated aim of the EU (EC, 2006b) but, although they are harmonised during the preparation phase, the experience of the programming period 2004–2006 was that in practice they were implemented separately. If regionalisation is selected for a harmonised implementation structure for Hungary a question which remains is whether the NUTS I or the NUTS II level would be the most appropriate. Delegating all responsibility for rural development to the RDAs, whilst superficially attractive, may not be the solution. In England, for example, RDAs continue to be preoccupied with urban-based growth even after the experience of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease crisis (Donaldson et al., 2006).

The greater representation of topic 2 in the Framework projects can be explained in part by the way the projects were selected. The FP5 projects were drawn from Key Action 5: Sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry, sub-area 5: Rural development. In FP6 there was not a specific “rural development” action line. Instead, the projects used in this research were selected by keyword search from the website shown in Table 1: “rural” yielded 27 projects and “agriculture” a further 12. Many of the FP6 projects selected using “rural” as a keyword also had an agricultural focus. Selection of “agricultural” FP6 projects was restricted to those with a clear relevance to rural development, such as those funded under the action line “The modernisation and sustainability of agriculture and forestry”. By using other keywords, particularly from topic 3 of Section 3.1 of Annex II, it seems likely that other FP6 projects of relevance to rural development can be identified.

Interreg IIIC priority action areas included several sectors of direct relevance to rural development including entrepreneurship, social inclusion, environment and natural resources, and tourism, heritage and culture. In Interreg IIIB the priorities for action (with slight variations between regional programmes) were (a) drawing up regional development strategies (b) promoting effective and sustainable transport systems and (c) promoting protection of the environment and natural resources. Whilst it is clear that the agricultural, forestry and food sectors (topic 2) were not a priority and hence not strongly represented amongst Interreg

IIIB projects, the relatively small number of projects which were grouped under topic 3 was a surprise and the very heavy emphasis on topic 4 in the Interreg programme as a whole was due in part to the large number of projects focusing on tourism and/or cultural heritage.

The topic profile of the analysed Framework projects suggests that “rural development” projects from this programme are a very relevant source of information to support the implementation of the NHRDP (Fig. 1), mainly through their focus on agriculture and related topics. They are not so relevant to the territorial development of rural areas envisaged in the NGPOP. Although the analysed Interreg projects include some with a focus on topics 1 or 2 (although notably not amongst the Interreg IIIB CADSES projects which cover Hungary), there is a much greater emphasis on topic 4 compared to either of the two programmes. Tourism, cultural heritage and services are the focus of 63 Interreg projects, i.e. almost one-third of all projects analysed. “Tourism” accounts for 15.4% of the keywords in the NGPOP, and “services” for 6.4% in the NHRDP (Table 2) but otherwise these keywords do not feature strongly. It is not possible to say whether the emphasis is “correct” in the Programmes or the projects but it has been shown (Vizvári and Bacsí, 2003) that, in Hungary, at least, tourism is not a complete solution to the problems of rural areas. On the other hand, some priorities of the two Programmes perhaps merit greater FP and Interreg funding in the future, including Roma and Leader-related topics.

Through its Cross-Border Rural Network, HVTK can gather European-wide expertise and disseminate it in a local area. The nature of the Network reflects the facts that (a) since the political and economic changes local government has been decentralised and that (b) rural development is to a large extent now project-based. HVTK particularly targets the new intermediate actors who are experts in application systems, EU regulations and fund-raising, called the “project class” by Kovách, (2005), who have appeared in this decentralised development system (Fieldsend et al. 2007). These intellectuals have the capacity to make use of the information they receive to stimulate rural development in the region. The credibility of HVTK is strengthened by the fact that the University of Debrecen, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the North Great Plain RDA are associated with it. However, whether the information disseminated by HVTK reaches beyond the “project class” is unclear. Kovách (2005) notes that members of this group are often urban dwellers or newcomers in rural settlements and small rural settlements, which are not powerful candidates within the system, may be at a disadvantage. For the future it may be necessary for HVTK to find a way to directly contact more people living and working in such rural areas.

Finally, we have identified specific topics in which several projects funded from different sources have been undertaken, such as remoteness, employment, innovation, entrepreneurship, organic farming, food, services, tourism and cultural heritage. Details of all of the projects used in this study, including the title,

a short description of the project, the website address and other contact information, is available in Hungarian and English on the HVTK website www.hvtk.org. The database can be queried using a search engine that will sort by keyword or category. This gives rural development practitioners the facility to undertake a combined analysis of the results of different projects, so generating a critical mass of knowledge, which can be used in support of rural development in the North Great Plain region. In this way, the local impact of EU-funded research and knowledge exchange projects can be significantly enhanced.

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Appendix

List of keywords derived from Annex II to Community Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 (EC, 2006a) which were used in this research:

1. *The general socio-economic context of the geographical area*: socio-economic; demographic; age; gender; population structure; migration; peri-urban; remoteness; economic drivers; productivity; growth; labour market; employment; unemployment; skills; land use; land ownership structure, size of holdings.

2. *Performance of the agricultural, forestry and food sectors*: agriculture; forestry; food; competitiveness; restructuring; modernisation; human capital; entrepreneurship; innovation; knowledge transfer; quality; standards.

3. *Environment and land management*: Environment; land management; abandonment; marginalisation; biodiversity; natural capital; Natura 2000; water use; water quality; pollution; nitrate; climate change; greenhouse gas; ammonia; bioenergy; soil; pesticide; organic farming; animal welfare; forest cover.

4. *Rural economy and quality of life*: rural economy; quality of life; economic structure; diversification; alternative employment; micro-business; tourism; services; online; broadband; infrastructure; cultural heritage; social capital; human potential; governance.

5. *Leader*: Leader; bottom-up.