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## **EVALUATING THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF LEADER IN ROMANIA**

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## Abstract

LEADER supports integrated rural regional development. The programme is characterized by a participatory and bottom-up approach, public-private partnerships, multi-sectoral regional development strategies and innovation. An obligatory Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) was set up for evaluating EU interventions. The CMEF builds upon sets of common indicators and evaluation questions. Romania, where LEADER is currently introduced, has set national priorities for the programme implementation. For assessing the impact of LEADER in Romania meaningfully, an extension of the CMEF is needed. This paper, identifies and suggests appropriate indicators. Social Network Analysis is proposed as a tool for investigating intangible outcomes of LEADER in a quantitative way.

**Keywords:** LEADER, Evaluation, Romania, Social Network Analysis, Common Monitoring and Evaluation System

**JEL:** D 79; P 25; R 19; R 59

## 1. Introduction

The policy instrument LEADER<sup>1</sup>, which runs in the European Union (EU) since 1991, supports integrated rural regional development. LEADER is characterized by a participatory and bottom-up approach, public-private partnerships, so-called Local Action Groups (LAGs), multi-sectoral regional development strategies and innovation. In the running period 2007-2013 LEADER is funded under the European Agriculture Funds for Rural Development (EAFRD). A Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) was set up for evaluating Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) funded under the EAFRD. The CMEF builds upon sets of common indicators and evaluation questions, which have to be applied by all member states (DGAgri, 2006).

In Romania, LEADER is currently implemented for the first time. Given the complexity of the programme, it cannot be expected that programme outcomes are comparable with those of the old member states from the beginning on. To overcome teething troubles an additional preparatory LEADER measure is offered in Romania. Due to delays in the programme implementation in Romania it will not (or only partly) be possible to answer the common evaluation questions on LEADER within the 2010 mid-term evaluation and in the subsequent ex-post evaluation, as time is needed until impacts of LEADER on, for instance, governance structures are measurable (Schuh et al., 2006). Because of this and the levelled horizon of expectations on to be achieved objectives, it seems reasonable that Romania develops additional national indicators and evaluation questions. However, up to now Romania has not published an evaluation system which goes beyond the CMEF.

Considering these circumstances, current needs and that the main LEADER measure has not started yet, this paper investigates possibilities for evaluating the LEADER implementation process in Romania in a meaningful way. We develop and suggest indicators, evaluation questions and evaluation methods taking into consideration: (1) the specificities of the Romanian RDP, particularly the preparatory LEADER measure; (2) the socio-economic, political and administrative environment in Romania; (3) challenges faced by LEADER evaluators in other member states in the past; and (4) the practicability of the evaluation system and the CMEF requirements for the Romanian case. Methodologically, we refer to results of a Social Network Analysis (SNA) of potential Romanian LAGs and draw conclusions with regard to the question of evaluating LEADER. Data was collected within a case study, surveys and workshops conducted in 2008 and 2010.

In the following two sections, an overview over the development of LEADER and the principles of the CMEF are given. A review on experiences with the evaluation of LEADER programmes is presented in the fourth section, before the elaboration of the Romanian specific evaluation system building up on SNA is introduced and discussed. The paper ends with a conclusion on the LEADER evaluation in Romania and policy recommendations directed to Romania and the European Commission (EC).

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<sup>1</sup> LEADER means “Liaison entre actions de développement de l’économie rurale”. The English translation is “Links between the rural economy and development actions”.

## **2. LEADER – a challenging rural development approach**

The objective of LEADER is to advance the socio-economic development of rural regions. Under LEADER competitively selected regional development concepts of local action groups (LAGs) are co-financed. After its initial implementation in 1991, LEADER evolved into LEADER II and then into LEADER+ which, in 2007, was transformed into a horizontal axis of the rural development pillar (Pillar 2) of the Common Agricultural Policy. It thus became ‘mainstreamed’: LEADER is now an obligatory part of the RDPs in the member states, and is funded in the running funding period under the EAFRD, which is structured into four objective axes, which focus on: (1) Competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; (2) Environment and countryside; (3) Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and (4) the overarching Leader axis (2006/144/EC). As fourth axis, LEADER is expected to contribute to the objectives of the other three axes, but also to improving governance and mobilising the endogenous development potential of rural areas (see Table 3). (EC/144/2006) Over all periods, LEADER was signed by seven key features, which are further explained in Box 1: (1) territorial approach; (2) partnerships; (3) bottom-up approach; (4) integrated approach; (5) innovation; (6) networking; and (7) cooperation.

LEADER is a policy instrument for realizing the objectives of the EAFRD at local level most target-oriented. Co-financing and own initiative of the local actors should ensure the capitalization of the funding. LAGs are seen to be effective in stimulating sustainable development answering the local needs because they aggregate and combine available human and financial resources from the public sector, the private sector, the civil and voluntary sectors. Furthermore, the EU hopes that through the European-wide exchange of experience the quality of rural development measures will increase. In the period 2007 – 2013, the following measures can be financially supported under the LEADER Axis (Table 3): Measure 4.1 Implementing local development strategies with a view to achieving the objectives of one or more of the three other EAFRD Axes; Measure 4.2 Implementing cooperation projects; Measure 4.3 Running the Local Action Groups, acquiring skills and animating the territory.

The member states have room for manoeuvre in terms of objectives set and budget allocation. Some see LEADER as a chance to strengthen their regions in a sustainable way, while other member states allocate only small amounts to the LEADER Axis. Exactly at this point, programme evaluation plays a key role. The weight that is given to LEADER depends a lot on meaningful evaluation results and the associated policy recommendations. Failures and successes must become visible through evaluation to allow well grounded policy decisions.

## **3. Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes in the period 2007 - 2013**

Rural development evaluation must provide information on the implementation and impact of the co-financed programmes. Evaluation should increase transparency and accountability of public spending and improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the RDPs. Thus, the evaluation of the (RDPs) funded under the EAFRD is obligatory and a Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) was set up for assessing the impact of the programmes as regards the Community priorities and the rural development problems specific to the member states and regions concerned. The progress, efficiency and effectiveness of RDPs in relation to their objectives shall be measured by means of indicators. Thus, the CMEF, which has to be applied by all member states, builds upon sets of common indicators relating to the baseline situation as well as to the financial execution, outputs, results and impacts of the programmes (see Box 2) and common evaluation questions (DGAgri, 2006). Additionally, the member states have to define indicators specific to their national RDPs (EC/1698/2005, Art 81).

The system comprises Monitoring, Ex-ante-, Ongoing, Mid-term-, and Ex-post Evaluation (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Interventions are judged according to their results, impacts, the needs they aim to satisfy, and the objectives anticipated to be achieved. Within the CMEF the indicators correspond to hierarchies of objectives of the intervention logic. Starting from identified needs, overall-, main- and sub-objectives were defined leading to operational objectives for each measure. The rural development regulation

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<sup>2</sup> Ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluations shall be carried out by independent evaluators. Member states shall provide the human and financial resources necessary for carrying out the evaluations, shall organise the production and gathering of the requisite data. (EC/1698/2005, Art. 84)

contains also horizontal objectives that cut across all programme measures. The common objectives and indicators for the LEADER measures are presented in Table 3.

#### **4. Experiences with the evaluation of LEADER**

Reviewing the experiences of nearly two decades of evaluating LEADER programmes, point at two main streams of problems. First, common technical evaluation problems such as the choice of appropriate indicators, how to define the baseline, where to draw boundaries in terms of impact and time, and the effect of additionality and causality (Blandfort et al., 2010). Second, to assess the intangible and added values resulting from the application of the LEADER approach, for instance improved social cohesion, is a particular challenge.<sup>3</sup> LEADER does not only generate products, which are more easy to evaluate, but also stimulates processes like improvements in governance, which are intricate to evaluate. Furthermore, measuring the impact of integrated strategies is difficult as long as monitoring is conducted at project level. Therefore LEADER evaluations apply mainly qualitative methods, complemented by quantitative methods.

For measuring qualitative impacts of such integrated but locally diverse programme, in which in the various regions even different sectors may be concerned, judging primarily aggregated sectoral data against quantifiable economic criteria is little meaningful. In the LEADER context measurable indicators formulated to describe the programme outcomes are recognized to be limited in their descriptive power. Furthermore, they are often costly to collect as many statistics are not available at regional level (Midmore, 1998). Case studies or surveys as well as analyses of supplementary statistical data are conducted by evaluators. In this context, Midmore (1998) stresses the importance of observation, as it provides the opportunity to determine whether the claims made in interviews and in written declarations of intent are realised in practice, or whether they merely conceal the continued dominance of local elites. Due to the different means used for explaining the results of LEADER in the different regions, the direct comparison of cases and aggregation of evaluation result data is difficult and thus many synthetically LEADER evaluations bring about the identification of individual success stories and good practices. The CMEF tries to cover the gap of common indicators, which provide evidence on causality, with common evaluation questions (see Table 3). However, even if common questions are used, several methods might be applied in collecting data. Also, answering these questions within the midterm-evaluation might be little meaningful as it needs time until impacts of LEADER measures on for instance governance structures or capitalization of the endogenous potential of regions are measurable at all (Schuh et al., 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

For LEADER two kinds of evaluation can be distinguished: a) internal or self-evaluation, which is conducted by the LAGs themselves; and b) external evaluation, which is the regular programme evaluation. The idea of the internal self-evaluation is that the LAGs have a “view in the own region” - not only in the initial stage. Moreover it has the function of self-reflection and provides a basis for future decisions to be made by the LAG. Ideally, self-evaluation leads to the effect of social learning (High and Nemes, 2005). External evaluation is the basis for programme interventions and has the function of legitimization, control and distanced cognition. It should also enable statements on the EU-wide impact of rural development policies.

There is growing conscience of the importance and benefits of evaluation among the LAGs; however an issues calling further deliberation is how LAGs could use the results of self-assessment more efficiently (Schuh et al., 2006). Self-assessment seems in most cases to be a one-off operation, and systematic analysis of experience and the resulting corrective actions and learning are suffering from lack of time. How successful self-evaluation is, is mostly a question of the attitude of the LAGs themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, the success of LEADER will become manifest in the ‘intangible’ part, which is not part of the evaluation. “With the evaluation of ‘intangible aspects’ it would be possible to know if a territory ‘breathes’ the LEADER philosophy. This is the most important point that should be measured, although it is recognised that it is very difficult.” (Director of a Spanish Rural Development Agency, in Schuh et al., 2006: IV)

<sup>4</sup> The attempt to pre-establish a set of common evaluation questions with related judgement criteria was seen as a well-meant attempt to improve the knowledge and the conditions of institutional learning across Europe. However this attempt was hampered as the midterm evaluation is not the adequate moment for such exhaustive exercise; also, there is a lack of a harmonized system of observation (Schuh et al., 2006).

Although criticism that an evaluation structure and analytical frameworks are long-needed is widespread<sup>5</sup>, results of an ad-hoc survey among actors working on the 2010 midterm evaluation highlight that also in the fourth period of LEADER many evaluators will work without a pre-defined system, meaning that baseline data has to be collected mostly retrospective. Altogether there is a cleavage for evaluators which method to apply in the LEADER evaluation: On the one hand quantitative methods lack expressiveness on causality patterns and fail to investigate the intangible outputs of LEADER, on the other hand, results of qualitative methods are difficult to compare and to aggregate, they lack accountability and are often more costly.

## 5. LEADER in Romania

Looking at the initial situation for implementing LEADER in Romania or, using the terminology of programming, at the 'baseline' described through a needs assessment and a SWOT-Analysis, it becomes obvious that realizing the LEADER approaches will be no cakewalk. This is not only due to the fact that LEADER in Romania is implemented the first time: In Romania, people's mentality and policy perception are heavily influenced by four decades of socialism, which generated mistrust of local actors related to institutionalised forms of association and cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, during that era, regional policy measures, as well as local institutions, were virtually non-existent (Mandl et al., 2007). Until today, hierarchical structures predominate, for instance, the county councils have a particularly influential role on the local communities. Such top-down structures inhibit a participatory and bottom-up approach if those in power are not willing to share political influence. At the same time there is a lack of initiative of the local people, which strengthens the influence of (individual) policy makers (see Marquardt et al., 2009).

First steps towards decentralisation were induced when EU membership was anticipated. However, administrative capacities at local level are still inadequate for dealing with the various local communities' needs. Limitations are due to the low number of qualified personnel and a lack of experience. Since the pre-accession period some experiences were gained with inter-community associations, which jointly develop and co-finance projects enabling them to obtain EU and national funds. Additionally, a few informal groups including private and public actors were established - mostly externally stimulated and supported - for realizing funded pilot-projects. However, the projects undertaken rarely applied an integrated approach and many initiatives dissolved after their project ended. Furthermore, the lack of financially strong partners for co-financing projects is seen as constraint for the implementation of LEADER.

At the administrative level, initial experience in rural development policy was gained during the implementation of SAPARD<sup>7</sup>. Yet, administering the LEADER programme is a complete new approach and is even more complicated.

The SWOT-Analysis prepared for the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) identifies the following threats for the implementation of LEADER: 1) existence of non-representative partnerships<sup>8</sup> and; 2) a low absorption of funds. The potential burdens and threats were acknowledged by the EC, which therefore allowed Romania as well as Bulgaria to set the minimum budget for the LEADER Axis on only 2.5% while the other member states have to allocate at least 5% of their EAFRD budget for the LEADER Axis (EC/434/2007). Furthermore, for facilitating the implementation process, in both countries Measure 43 has an additional sub-measure (cp. Table 3) under which also the costs related to building representative local partnerships, drawing up integrated development strategies, financing research and preparing applications for potential LAGs are covered (EC/434/2007).

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<sup>5</sup> Midmore (1998) sees the lack of a evaluation system as unsatisfactory because in order to understand the implications of experiences made in LEADER regions, and whether it is transferable to other local areas (which appears to be the major incongruity of LEADER), the insights that can be generated from consistent qualitative inquiry could have been very helpful.

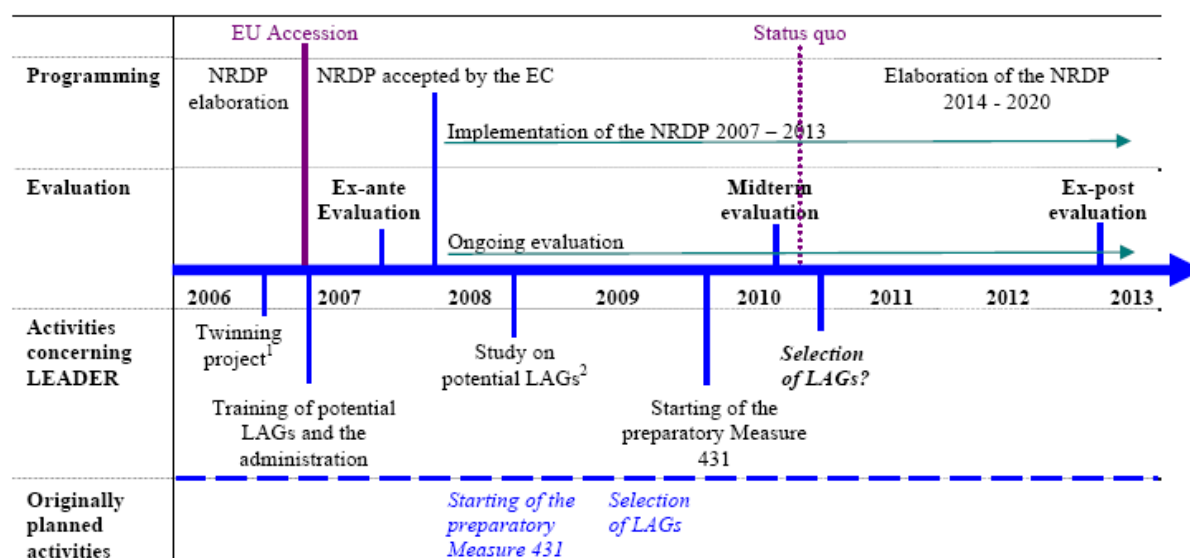
<sup>6</sup> Both antipathy to collective actions and mistrust vis-à-vis formal institutions are (still) strong in Romania and lead to problems in building formal partnerships. Indeed, a general problem perceived by 83% of programme agencies at county level concerns collaboration between public and private actors (Marquardt et al., 2009; see also Mandl et al., 2007).

<sup>7</sup> SAPARD stands for the EU's pre-accession instrument "Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development".

<sup>8</sup> Within the SWOT-Analysis the phrase "non-representative partnerships" is used without any explanation (NRDP, 2009: 54). However looking at the different sections in the NRDP it can be concluded that this phrase refers to a configuration of partnerships which are not representative for the population groups in the regions and do not adequately add weight to the private sector.

According to the Romanian NRDP the main objective of LEADER is – closely following the European priorities - *strengthening governance and use of the endogenous potential of the regions*. Additional national objectives and priorities adapted to the socio-economic situation, which are enlisted in Table 3, were set. Noteworthy, beside the objective linked to the additional preparatory measure, namely *Fostering partnerships, preparing and assuring implementation of the local development strategies*, main priorities for the period 2007 – 2013 were assigned, taking into account the small horizon of experience with LEADER. These are a) setting up and developing LAGs; and b) to achieve the cooperation between rural actors. Further objectives mentioned are the participation of the local community members, the bottom-up approach and the alleviation of disparities between regions. Romania decided to pay less attention to the application of the integrated approach and the added value resulting from the horizontal character of the LEADER Axis, as it is clearly challenging enough for the LAGs to follow the remaining main LEADER features, which should form the basis for any economical impact of the programme. However, the common evaluation questions do not cover the assessment of the achievements of the Romanian priorities.

This gap should be filled by the national indicators. Though, looking at the additional indicators defined in the Romanian NRDP (Table 3), their explanatory power can be seen as limited and they hardly correspond to the national priorities and problems. They are mostly linked to the CMEF requirement to break down the indicator data by sex and age of beneficiaries (EC/1698/2005, Art. 81) extended to the break down in further different groups of beneficiaries. One would have expected that in the Romanian programme the evaluation focuses on the realization of the LEADER approaches or at least on the main national priorities. Instead, even basic definitions of terms such as for example “governance” are missing in the NRDP<sup>9</sup> and indicators are defined in a questionable way. For instance for underlying the objective of *Promoting Cooperation and Best practices*, only the Gross number of jobs created is foreseen as result indicator (Table 3).



Note: NRDP = National Rural Development Programme

<sup>1</sup> Within this Twinning project Hungarian, French and German actors supported the Romanian Agricultural Ministry to prepare the implementation of LEADER.

<sup>2</sup> The study on potential LAGs was conducted by the author and is described below.

Source: Own design

**Figure 1: Planned and realized schedule of programming, implementation and evaluation of LEADER as part of the National Rural Development Programme in Romania 2007-2013**

The expectations from the local actors on LEADER vary: While some actors see LEADER simply as an additional funding source to address the local needs such as lacking (technical) infrastructure, others expect improved governance – even if the term as such may be very abstract for most actors

<sup>9</sup> Already within the ex-ante evaluation, first comments on the application of the CMEF in the NRDP were made. Among others it was criticized that there is a lack of indicators assessing the intangible results of LEADER measures, like the reinforcement of local identity and self-respect e.g. throughout the number of regional product development, local labelling etc (NRDP, 2009).

(see Box 3). These different expectations and various objectives make programme evaluation even harder.

In practice, preparations for putting LEADER into action in Romania began at the end of 2006 when 121 potential LEADER regions were pre-selected and representatives could participate in LEADER seminars. The deadline initially scheduled for submission of LEADER applications passed at the beginning of 2009 (Figure 1). Between 2007 and 2008 no further LEADER-specific activities were carried out by the programme agencies. Instead, the potential beneficiaries were faced with several changes to the programme guidelines and the first measure of the LEADER axis (Measure 43.1), intended to provide financial support for building up capacities and elaborating strategies to all potential beneficiaries, was delayed and started only at the end of 2009. The final selection of 80 LAGs is foreseen for autumn 2010. Consequently, the upcoming 2010 midterm evaluation will not lead to any well-grounded statements with regard to LEADER impacts. Furthermore, analyses done in 2006/07 can hardly be used as baseline data for the LEADER evaluation as in four years the situation may have changed considerably. As in Romania the main LEADER measures have not started yet, the chance should not be missed to improve the set of national indicators and to establish an up-to date baseline.

## **6. Applying Social Network Analysis for Evaluating the first Romanian LEADER Programme**

Marquardt et al. (2009) have used Social Network Analysis (SNA) for investigating the development of potential Romanian LAGs. This section briefly summarizes the design and implementation of this work with the aim to make suggestions how SNA, which allows the quantitative assessment of interactions and processes by analysing relations between actors, can be used also for evaluating the development of funded Romanian LAGs in the near future. We will show that the application of SNA is particularly useful for measuring the intangible outcomes of LEADER, which can hardly be assessed with common evaluation methods.

In 2008, 39 potential Romanian LAGs and various program agencies were surveyed<sup>10</sup> for collecting background and comparative data for a case study investigating specific network relations of the individual actors of two potential LAGs, and other related stakeholders. One main objective was to assess the development of the two potential LAGs in terms of actor constellation, building up capacities, partnerships and executing governance. Semi-structured interviews played an important role in identifying social network relations.

The network data collected among the stakeholders of the two LAGs were processed with the SNA software UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2000). UCINET facilitates quantitative evaluation of specific structures of networks and of the position of actors within the social network. In network theory, a social network “consists of a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them” (Wassermann and Faust, 1994: 20). In SNA, the term ‘actor’ can be used for individuals as well as for (formal and informal) organizations. In the graphical presentation of networks, actors are represented as nodes connected by lines (Figure 2). Two kinds of social networks were analyzed: a) open networks, in which actor relations are surveyed through open questions and only a part of a network is constituted; and b) complete networks, in which the sample of actors is fixed. Generally, by assessing the development of a group of actors over a longer period, the actors, who have been identified within the survey<sub>n</sub> through open questions, can be included in the “set of actors” of the complete network analysis in the survey<sub>n+1</sub>. Contact matrices were used for collecting relational data of complete networks. A contact matrix reveals whether or not there is any relation between all actors in the network. Different types of relations were analyzed, including ‘forms of communication’, ‘formal and informal contacts’ and ‘flows of information’ (see Table 1). There is one network matrix for each type of relation. Relations can be registered as normative ones, meaning it is registered if a relation is present or not, or as weighted relation, by which also the intensity or frequency of a relation is considered.

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of the survey, 105 Romanian LAGs were active. In addition 33 (out of 42) Romanian Directorates for Agriculture and Rural Development and 13 experts, including some from the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, participated in the survey, in which a questionnaire was distributed via e-mail.



**Table 1: Social network relations and their methodological attributes for analyzing the development of LAGs**

Relation	Form of data collection		Type of SNA		Relation
	Contact Matrix	Open questions	Open	Complete	Weighted
<b>Relations used for the analysis of the development of potential LAGs</b>					
Communication	✗			✗	✗
Formal/ Informal contact	✗			✗	
Initial information		Who first told you about LEADER?	✗		
Current information		Who gives you current information about LEADER?	✗		✗
LAG internal information flows *		Who informs you about the LAG? Whom do you inform about the LAG?		✗	✗
LAG external information flows *, **		Whom do you inform about the LAG? (Who informs you about the LAG?)	✗		✗
Outreach of the LAG *		Who alerted you to the LAG and whom did you solicit to join the LAG?	✗		
Experience with other actors	✗			✗	✗
Importance of the contact	✗			✗	✗
<b>Additional relations for the analysis of the development of funded LAGs</b>					
Formal partnerships	✗		✗	✗	
Informal partnerships	✗		✗	✗	
Contributing to the LAG's work and projects		What have you contributed to the LAG's work? Who else, next to the LAG members contributed to the work of the LAG?	✗		✗
Transfer of experience gained in trainings	✗			✗	✗
Working relation for LEADER purposes	✗		✗	✗	✗
Active/ Passive participation in LAG activities		Who does participate in the activities of the LAG in a active/ passive way?			✗
Formal/ Informal Participation in decision making **		Who does formally/ informally participate in decision making processes concerning the LAG?	✗		✗
Dependency on actors in the realization of LAG activities	✗		✗	✗	✗
<b>Relations for the analysis of the development of regional-external links of funded LAGs</b>					
Formal/ Informal partnerships with other LAGs		With which LAG(s) do you have a formal/ informal partnership?	✗		
Information transfer/ networking		Have you transferred LEADER related information to the MA, the NNRD or other LAGs? Have you received LEADER related information from the MA, the NNRD or other LAGs?	✗		✗

Note: \* Relation should definitively also be applied by the analysis of the development of funded LAGs.

\*\* By examining this relation it is particular important to consult also persons in the region who are no members of the LAG.

MA = Managing Authority; NNRD = National Network for Rural Development

Source: Adapted from Marquardt et al. w. y.

One merit of the network approach is the understanding of non-reducibility: single relations are considered relations in a comprehensive network. The underlying question is: what effect do certain network properties have for interpreting interactions in a network (Hollstein, 2001)? This means that not only is the position of single actors important; the actor constellation in the overall network context is also of importance. For instance, if one seeks to make a statement about the power of a

particular actor, looking at a single relation between two actors is not very revealing.<sup>11</sup> Also complete networks can be analytically compared with regard to their properties for instance in terms of density of collaborative partnership relations. Table 2 presents examples of network properties and how these are calculated. For the direct quantitative comparison of networks at different development stages or of different networks, for many network variables it is necessary to build the calculations upon complete networks.

**Table 2: Examples for SNA network properties**

Network property	Description and calculation
<b>Network size</b>	Number of actors in a network.
<b>Network density</b>	Number of ties in a network, expressed as a proportion of the maximum possible number of ties, which is: $\frac{n \times (n-1)}{2}$ , if n = number of actors.
<b>Degree (centrality)</b> (of an actor)	Total number of actors to which the examined actor is connected. This measure is standardized by expressing it as a percentage of the maximum possible connections.
- Out-degree	Relations to which the focused actor is connected by outgoing arrows.
- In-degree	Relations which have arrowheads directed towards the focused actor.
<b>Network centralization</b>	Measurement of how tightly the graph is organized around its most central point(s). The differences between the centrality scores (e.g. the degree-centrality) of the most central point and those of all other points are measured. Centralization, then, is the ratio of the actual sum of differences to the maximum sum of differences (Scott 2001, 90).
<b>Isolator</b>	Actor with a degree of 0% – i.e. with no in- and no out-degree.
<b>Betweenness</b> (of an actor)	For each actor, the proportion of times that they are ‘between’ other actors, e.g. for sending information, is measured. This measure is standardized by expressing it as a percentage of the maximum possible betweenness that an actor could have had.

Comparing the development of a bottom-up growing LAG and an administrative steered potential LAG, SNA results highlighted among others that (a) many mayors avoid the execution of a participatory approach by neglecting publicity of the funding opportunity, (b) the key position of reputable actors able to convince mayors to accept a bottom-up approach, (c) the high influence of policy makers when people do not search information actively and the administration is weak, as well as (d) the high relevance of informal and formal relations for a fruitful development of potential LAGs. Noteworthy, with SNA we could draw up development processes through snapshot series of interactions.

For evaluating achievements of the Romanian LEADER programme 2007-2013, network variables have to be identified, which reflect the development of LAGs in terms of partnerships, capacity building<sup>12</sup>, governance, execution of the bottom-up approach and participation; this paper cannot be exhaustive in this regard, but rather presents selected possible variables. For some of these issues there is a straightforward translation into network variables. For instance, for evaluating the achievement of the objectives *Promoting cooperation* networks on the relations *collaboration between actors* or *establishing partnerships* (Figure 2) can be drawn up<sup>13</sup>. Other terms like “governance” have to be operationalized, meaning that the term has to be defined and measurable proxies which indicate the development of governance have to be selected. Governance can be understood as horizontal organizational structures of interdisciplinary and horizontal (inter)actions among equitable partners without any kind of hierarchy (Clarke, 2006; Fürst, 2007; Weyer, 2000). Furthermore, Clarke (2006: 44) defines governance as a “flexible pattern of public decision-making based on loose networks of individuals”. Translating this into network variables, we can record at first, that practicing (local) governance can be assessed by using indicators related to the constellation of actors involved in regional policy making, respectively involved in LAG affairs. However, this would not be a

<sup>11</sup>The network perspective suggests that the power of individual actors is “not an individual attribute, but arises from their relations with others” (HANNEMANN, 2001: 75).

<sup>12</sup> By evaluating capacity building, the authors suggest paying attention to establishing organizational structures as that turned out as a mayor problem of the potential LAGs.

<sup>13</sup> Here, rising network densities indicate an increase in establishing partnerships between LAGs. This result is likely to be recognized without the application of SNA. But furthermore, SNA allows the calculation of network structures e.g. clusters among LAGs which can hardly identified by common statistics.

satisfactory indication for governance.<sup>14</sup> The discussion on how to evaluate improving governance concerns all member states and actually a working group has been established to deal with this difficult question. As Romania has set one priority on a participatory approach, we will start with the proof in how far it is followed, as basis for evaluating governance structures. For getting insights into the governance issue, we draw up a network of the relations concerning the “*formal and informal participation in decision making*”. Whereupon for the proof of participation more information is needed than the knowledge, which actors are actually involved in the decision making network. - It is necessary to find out in how far formal and informal participation is offered by the LAG itself.<sup>15</sup> This can be done by investigating who was informed about its activities and from which source. This investigation should also include the consultation of non-LAG members (see Table 1).<sup>16</sup> Further the relation “*dependency on actors in the realization of LAG activities*” will provide essential information on governance structures. Here, we ask the LAG members in how far they depend on the decisions of other actors by realizing LAG activities. It has to be differed between informal and formal influence of actors; an actor can have formally influence if he has an institutionalized position e.g. a president of an LAG. Furthermore, it might be useful to declare certain institutional elements network analytically as “actor”, for instance here one working group might be seen as one actor having more or less power in the LAG decision making process. Alternatively, collecting attribute data to the actors e.g. membership in working groups might be enlightening – if the reason for decision making power of actors is their membership in a working group, this would be highlighted as cluster by the SNA.

The relation “*contributing to the LAG's work and projects*” is not only relevant for the evaluation of capacity building and establishing organizational structures, but also informs about the quality of network relations, collaboration and partnerships, as well as it is an indication for reciprocity<sup>17</sup>. Through the application of open questions, external supporters and their importance for the LAG's work – reflected by their *centrality* in that network - can be investigated.

Relations can also be more specific: For Measure 43 the impact could be analysed looking in how far the knowledge gained by the representatives of the potential LAGs is transferred to other persons in the region and thus in how far further capacities by networking have been built up.

As LEADER should not only be evaluated at LAG level, and, at programme level, not necessarily only through the aggregation of the evaluation results of the individual LAGs, SNA offers the opportunity to analyse the LEADER network as a whole. Drawing up the Romanian-wide network for the relation “*partnerships*” (see Figure 2) would also allow investigating the relevance of the intervention of Measure 42. The effect of funded and non-funded partnerships between LAGs can be more easily assessed by measuring the density of the network including all Romanian LAGs.

The advantage of the SNA is obvious in analysing internal and external relations of an LAG, because the total number of network members or the fraction of local population involved in LAG activities is not the decisive factor, instead the links among the members and thus the density of relations and the embeddedness of actors, respectively LAGs, in the overall LEADER context count more.

Altogether, an SNA based evaluation system is operational as most relations relevant for evaluating LEADER have already been applied (Table 1). Which kinds of relations are used by the evaluation beside the basic ones depends a) on the depth of analysis; and b) on the development stage of an LAG. For instance, for understanding the development of very young LAGs it might be more relevant to draw up the network on alerting new LAG members. If in-depth analysis is anticipated, e.g.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, drawing on the definitions of governance discussed e.g. by Stoker (1998), an outcome of governance can also be the *conceiving of functions that has to be performed* be seen. But as establishing principles of governance are on their grassroots in Romania, we narrow the analytical view point. Generally, by adding a complementary question on the functioning of the LAGs, considering the deeper definition of governance within the evaluation could be satisfied.

<sup>15</sup> In other words, for determining whether fairness is adequate, the interaction that needs to be examined is how LAGs organise themselves to promote inclusiveness and offering the same chance to every individual share in project outcomes.

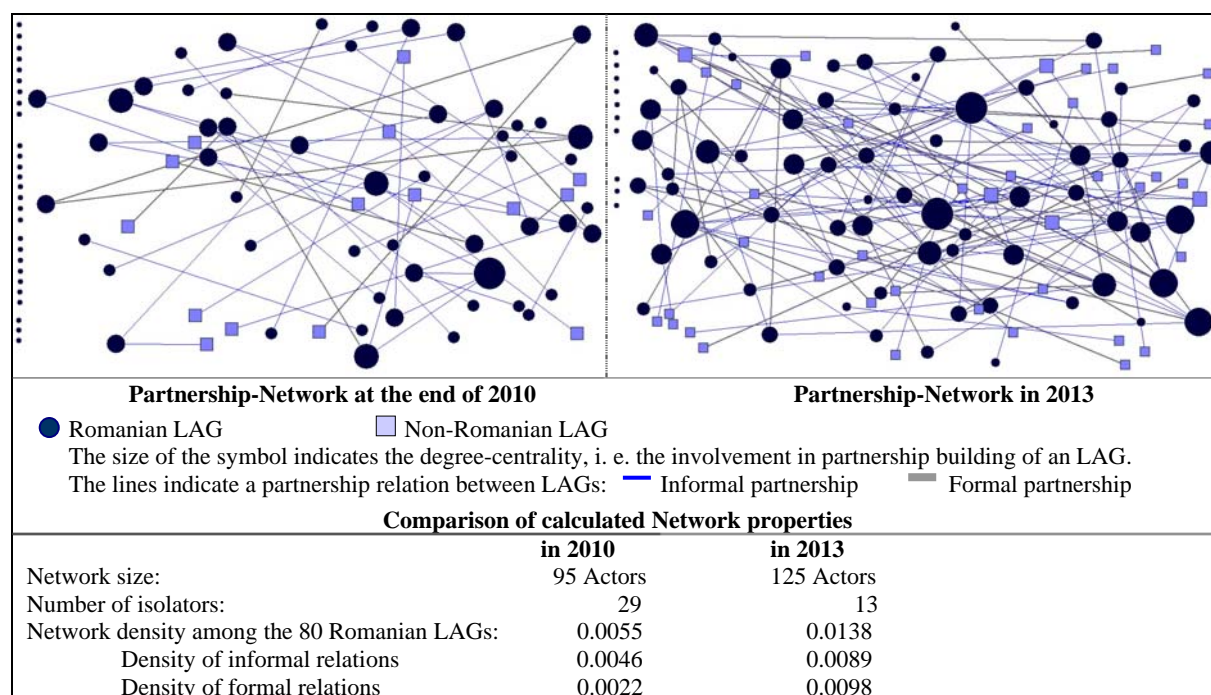
<sup>16</sup> Considering that some potential LAGs have been organised in a more representative than a participatory manner as a “set of LAG members representative for a LEADER region” is a criterion for the selection of the LAGs, it becomes clear that the application of SNA for proofing the participatory approach is more meaningful than looking at the stakeholders present in an LAG, as the configuration of an LAG can be easily established artificially on paper.

<sup>17</sup> A relation in a network is reciprocal if it is a two-way relation e.g. if the Actor A and Actor B exchange information, and not only Actor A forward information to Actor B, but he also receives information from Actor B, the relation between the Actors A and B is reciprocal.

the differentiation on formal and informal contacts between actors allows statements on causality for the preconditions for partnership building.

In contrast to many other LEADER evaluation methods, in the SNA all members of an LAG are directly, and all further actors relevant for its development are at least indirectly considered. Here, participatory evaluation starts at the basis instead of only discussing external monitoring results. Experiences show, that the set of directly considered actors, meaning those, who complete a contact matrix, should not be limited to the LAG members, but should include for instance the local agricultural administration, County Councils and further key actors identified with open questions in previous evaluations (see above). The main work for SNA evaluation is the data collection among the actors directly and indirectly linked to the LAGs' work with matrices and some open questions for investigating actors. This should be done by regional-external actors either by semi-structured interviews or via e-mail survey, to keep the costs manageable. An ongoing evaluation of network relations in a yearly or later in a two-year-cycle should be conducted, while more extensive evaluations could be undertaken in a wider cycle.

Certainly, SNA evaluation can be complemented by surveys, case studies or continuous observation. At least the data for the obligatory CMEF indicators has to be collected. A set of additional indicators and evaluation questions, which seem to be relevant for the evaluation of LEADER in Romania, is presented in Table 4.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 2: Vision – Predicted increase of partnerships of future Romanian LAGs with other LAGs at the end of 2010 and in 2013 as example for developing of social networks**

## 7. Discussion

With the CMEF, policy evaluation has become institutionalized in the EU, but there are inherent weaknesses in tracing the chain of causality of actions to impact (Midmore et al. 2008). While Blandford and Hill (2010) argue that the use of indicators make a valuable contribution to evaluating rural development policies and guiding policy formation, Margarian (2010) highlights the danger of only focussing on collecting indicator data, namely the risk to miss significant indirect effects that may have important development implications; she calls for a theoretical foundation of rural development intervention and evaluation. In this funding period according to the CMEF, the introduction of the LEADER approaches in the mainstream programme is the main objective for the fourth EAFRD Axis (Table 3). Thus, in evaluating LEADER, in opposite to the other axes, it is not only the identification

<sup>18</sup> A basis, suitable for the evaluation of LEADER in Romania, are the indicators suggested in guidelines for the evaluation of LEADER+ programmes for answering the common evaluation questions on participation and organizational capacities from the previous funding period (DGAgri, 2002: 53-55).

of the net effects that is decisive, but it is rather the assessment of the added and/or intangible values resulting from the LEADER approach. However, until today the classical LEADER outcomes are only considered with common evaluation questions but not with common indicators in the CMEF. This becomes problematic if a member state, such as Romania, sets objectives that are not covered by a set of additional indicators. The priorities of the Romanian LEADER programme are strongly linked to interactions and interpersonal relations, particularly to building up organizational structures and the creation of social capital. Despite this, social capital is not - neither in the EC nor in the national guidelines - explicitly mentioned as desired impact of LEADER. Due to an absence of clarity and agreement on concepts and methods of measurement there is the tendency to default to conventional development outcome indicators like number of new jobs created and number of people trained. But the dependency on measuring the “end product” of rural development fails to recognize the creation of processes which are themselves important in rural development (Kinsella et al., 2010).

The application of SNA can contribute to tackle above mentioned deficits by providing a theoretical frame including indicators, which allow analysing and drawing up the performance of the LEADER approach. Furthermore, the framework leads to quantitative, comparable results, allows the investigation of causality and processes of interactions, evokes the effects of educational evaluation and does not require a higher effort than the prevalent LEADER evaluation methods. SNA does not only allow the comparison of different development stages of LAGs but also the comparison between cases. The dangers (a) of being overwhelmed by mixed detailed evaluation method at local level, which must be traded off against higher level of abstraction that result in inaccurate assessment and inappropriate policy decisions as feared by Midmore et al. (2008) and (b) of data gaps by answering the common evaluation questions, which would lead to a weak synthesis of the RDPs in the EU as prognosticated by Bradley et al. (2010), could be averted by applying SNA as one main tool by the evaluation of LEADER at local level. As SNA focuses on the relation between actors, the evaluation does not only measure the “end product” but the processes leading to them and thus brings up a meaningful contribution to a better understanding of rural *development* by assessing interactions.

As SNA evaluation mainly focuses on networks, its applicability as an evaluation tool is obviously limited. Looking at the enlisted objectives of LEADER (Table 3) we have to note that the evaluation of all of them cannot be covered with SNA: For instance, although, some experiences have been gained with the geographical distribution of LAG networks and their impact on different parts of the regions, the use of the endogenous potential of LEADER regions or economic disparities between regions cannot be shown satisfactory. Thus, the application of SNA is particularly meaningful in member states like Romania where practicing the LEADER approach is not self-evident and has to be observed.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, SNA can be a meaningful tool for LEADER evaluation in all member states, and at European level it can significantly contribute to the evaluation of Measure 42 – cooperation between LAGs. (See Figure 2)

It is not only about, that in practice, the application of SNA does not require more effort than other common evaluation methods and it provides the educational effects of self-evaluation. – At the same time it comprises the aspect of accountability normally resulting from external evaluation. On the one hand, multiplex evidence sources impart both, internal and external validity, to the quantitative SNA results, which are calculated by independent third parties, who collaborate with the local actors by drawing up the evaluation conclusions. Within the evaluation process, the learning effect arises by rethinking the work of the LAG and by discussing the evaluation results within the group concerned led by an independent actor.<sup>20</sup> Particularly with regard to governance, this educational effect is more important in Romania than in most other member states. Therefore, SNA allows a relatively objective discussion basis. The visualization allows bringing an abstract topic closer to the people. The statements of the local actors presented in Box 3 might be seen as indication that there is interest in participatory educational evaluation and discussing the development of governance. It would be

<sup>19</sup> Actually, considering the small amounts of LEADER funds, Romania might benefit more from focussing on improving governance instead on the sheer economical output of projects in the first LEADER period, as on long term, improved governance can be a fundamental basis for sustainable (economic) development of the LEADER regions.

<sup>20</sup> Following personal experiences, the discussions on topics like governance will be more fruitful if they are led by non-involved actors who are accepted by local policy makers, the agricultural administration as well as by private and other actors (see also Marquardt et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is advantageous if that actor has a distanced condition to the LAG, for being neutral and if he leads the discussions just on the basis of the SNA results.

desirable if also the actors administering LEADER in Romania would see that it is both possible and important to learn from participatory evaluation (in the style of Bradley et al., 2010).

The manageability of SNA is not throughout sound: While the graphical SNA results may be demonstrative, not all mathematical SNA results are easily to interpret and also for elaborating the evaluation design experts are needed. Moreover, by analysing complete networks it is important to consult all relevant actors, what sometimes might be burdensome<sup>21</sup>.

Furthermore, by selecting an evaluation method it has to be considered that in Romania the aspect of accountability gains weight because evaluation results are presented to the public and policy makers. This is of particular importance as Romania is known for still being strongly affected by corruption and because public resources are rare and thus there is particular interest in their spending.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, it will take time until an e.g. improvement in governance structures might become obvious (cp. Schuh et al., 2006) and thus until the value of LEADER spendings becomes evident. Yet, the main part of LEADER funds are foreseen for investment projects, which have a visible output and are strictly controlled by the paying agencies.<sup>23</sup>

From the perspective of the Romanian agricultural administration, currently the main focus in implementing rural development policies is on compliance with EC criteria, control and absorption of funds, while evaluation is of minor importance. Although not sustainable, it is to some degree understandable that member states like Romania, which still face problems to implement the EAFRD measures, focus on the obligatory indicators, before extending the evaluation system. This, however, could have severe negative impacts on the programme in the medium and longer term. For instance, only considering CMEF indicators, the size of the area funded under LEADER is an important indication for the programme's outcomes. This might result in particularly large, artificial LEADER regions<sup>24</sup>. Another example is the measuring of the successful implementation of LEADER by the amount of absorbed funds – what might lead to completely neglecting the key features of the LEADER approach.<sup>25</sup>

Because of this, we believe that external convincing power will be needed to initiate the extension of the Romanian LEADER evaluation system. At this point of time, a clear advantage for the Romanian actors is, that they still have the chance to construct a baseline as a solid starting point, and that they can still develop a pre-structured evaluation system and thus avoid retrospective data collection and ad hoc surveys shortly before the obligatory evaluation(s). Thus, we recommend to the Romanian Managing Authority to set up a Romanian specific LEADER evaluation system and to collect baseline data on the potential LAGs - prior the final selection of LAGs - for having a control group of non-funded LAGs for discussing later evaluation results. Generally, besides further improvement of the CMEF, the EC should pay attention that member states have elaborated a sufficient evaluation system and have foreseen to collect necessary baseline data in the RDP approval process. Furthermore, it should be clearly highlighted that the Managing Authority is responsible for assuring that adequate indicator data is collected so that retrospective data collection can be avoided.

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<sup>21</sup> Although data collection via e-mail is possible, to convince all relevant actors to complete a contact matrix might be time consuming.

<sup>22</sup> The need for underlying public spending with sufficient results is not a Romanian specific issue, generally convincing politicians and the general public of the worth of investment in social capital that may not yield tangible benefits in the short term will be a difficult task (Kinsella et al., 2010). However the continuous failure to integrate indicators of trust, identity and reciprocity will seriously undermine public support and confidence by EU citizens in the rural development agenda. (Ibid.)

<sup>23</sup> Paying agencies have no advisory function for Romanian LEADER beneficiaries and should not or only carefully be involved in the participatory evaluation, because if the local actors would feel evaluation as control the educational effect might be low. The beneficiaries have to understand that external evaluation and, if applied, continuously observation is not comparable to control – it might be good that paying agencies and programme agencies at county level are different organizations or that evaluation is conducted by other actors. Nevertheless, it is important that the Romanian LAGs feel that somebody pays attention to the realization of the LEADER approach – otherwise LEADER will, particularly where the LAG was initiated by communal actors, easily become one support instrument among others.

<sup>24</sup> Areas covered by the LEADER strategy should of course offer a sufficient critical mass (human, financial, economic); but the larger LEADER regions become, the less the connection to and among local people they will be. This could be an obstacle for the successful implementation of the first generation of the LEADER approach in Romania.

<sup>25</sup> On the one hand you find the opinion that no reputable evaluator would fail to go beyond the common indicators at measure level (Blandford and Hill, 2010) on the other hand Bradley et al. (2010) observed that - although member states are formally required to consider and propose additional indicators where they feel that those specified by the EC may be insufficient - this task has been undertaken with highly variable degrees of rigour across member state was.

## 8. Conclusions

For assessing the impact of LEADER in Romania i.e. the achievement of practicing a participatory approach, establishing partnerships and capacities as well as improving governance, in a meaningful manner an extension of the obligatory evaluation system is needed. Therefore, Social Network Analysis has been shown to be an effective tool which also enables investigating these intangible outcomes of LEADER quantitatively. It allows evaluation results to be aggregated, compared and allows first insights into patterns of causality of the intervention. Moreover, building upon social network analysis, which provides the basis participatory evaluation and for objective discussion among the involved actors led by external independent actors is likely to have direct impact to improve governance among rural actors. Still, Romania has the room for manoeuvre and to turn the delay of the programme into an advantage by preparing a solid baseline for the later evaluation systematically. Inactivity might lead to the implementation of “LEADER” by neglecting the key LEADER features.

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### Legal Acts

- Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Funds for Rural Development (EAFRD).
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 of 15 December 2006 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- Council Decision of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013).
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 434/2007 of 20 April 2007 amending Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 by reason of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union.

## Annex

### Box 1: Key Features of the LEADER Approach

- 1) **Territorial approach:** Area-based local development strategies for well-identified rural regions, which can mostly be described as small, homogenous, socially cohesive territories with a regional identity, are elaborated building up on a SWOT-Analysis (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats-Analysis);
  - 2) **Partnerships:** Public-private partnerships so called local action groups (LAGs), which consist of at least 50% private partners to which businesses, NGOs etc. are counted, work together;
  - 3) **Bottom-up approach:** Decision-making power is settled at local level by the LAGs, which elaborate and implement the development strategies and thus define for what funds are spent. The realization of the bottom-up approach requires to follow a participatory approach at local level;
  - 4) **Integrated approach:** The partnerships and strategies should a) have a multi-sectoral design meaning that projects of different sectors of the local economy are interlinked; and b) consider social, economic and ecological concerns;
  - 5) **Innovation:** Strategies or projects which are particular innovative should be funded prior ranking;
  - 6) **Networking:** Exchange of experiences and good practice examples among LAGs aiming at improving the overall quality of the implemented LEADER projects;
  - 7) **Cooperation:** Implementation of joint projects with other LAGs of the same or other EU member states or third countries aiming at increasing the critical mass for economic action, strengthening trade relations and the human, administrative and social capital within LEADER regions; Cooperation is more than simple exchange of information.
- (EC/1698/2005, Art. 61; EC, 2006)

### Box 2: System of Indicators used in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

For the purpose of evaluating rural development programmes, following types of indicators are distinguished:	
<b>Baseline indicators:</b>	Assessing the initial situation; basis for SWOT-Analysis; Data on Baseline indicators allow to measure in how far a measure has contributed to achieve an objective.
<b>Input indicators:</b>	Refer to the budget or other resources allocated at each level of the assistance.
<b>Output indicators:</b>	Measure activities directly realised within programmes. The activities are the first step towards realising the operational objectives of the intervention; Measured in physical or monetary units.
<b>Result indicators:</b>	Measure the direct and immediate effects of the intervention; Provide information on changes in, for example, the behaviour, capacity or performance of direct beneficiaries; Measured in physical or monetary terms.
<b>Impact indicators:</b>	Refer to the benefits of the programme both at the level of the intervention but also more generally in the programme area; Linked to the wider objectives of the programme.
According to CMEF indicators should if possible be quantified (DGAgri, 2006). However, results of a need assessment (ENRD, 2009) show that the member states have problems to operationalize respective indicators.	



**Box 3: Expectations of the members of a potential Local Action Group on the implementation of LEADER in Romania**

During a workshop on the first steps for preparing the participation in LEADER the members of a potential Romanian Local Action Group were asked to note their expectations on the implementation of LEADER in Romania. It was a mixed group of around 30 private and public actors; certainly not all of them had understood the LEADER approach completely. Nevertheless, most of them laid down their opinion in writing devotedly. The range of answers can be grouped into the following categories: 1) Accessing financial resources for the development of the region; 2) Citizens' involvement in (local) decision making ("dialogue"); 3) Responds to real local needs; 4) Decentralization and improvement of the functioning of the local administration; 5) Changes of the mentality of the people in terms of collaboration and partnerships, property, work, interpersonal relations and trust; and 6) Development of the rural area/ effective regional development, particularly establishment of a proper business environment.

**Table 3: Key figures of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for the Romanian LEADER Programme 2007 - 2013**

LEADER Measure	Objectives according to the CMEF	Additional national objectives and priorities	Common indicators	Additional national indicators	Common Evaluation Questions **
<b>Measure 41 Implementing local development strategies with a view to achieving the objectives of one or more of the three other axes *</b>	<p>LEADER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of the LEADER approach in the mainstream rural development programming</li> <li>- Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, the landscape and environment, the quality of life in rural areas and economical diversification</li> </ul>	<p>Participation of the local communities members at the local development process and encouraging innovative actions</p> <p>Promotion of the endogenous potential of the territories on the basis of a bottom-up approach</p> <p>Alleviating disparities between regions</p>	<p><b>Baseline</b> Development of LAGs Economic development of the non-agricultural sector Employment development in the non-agricultural sector</p> <p><b>Input</b> Amount of public expenditure realised (total versus EAFRD)</p> <p><b>Output</b> Number of LAGs (division according to new or existing LAGs) Total size of LAG area (in km<sup>2</sup>) (division according to new or existing LAGs) Total population in LAG area (division according to new or existing LAGs) Number of projects financed by LAGs (divided by Axis and types of measure) Number of beneficiaries supported (divided by Axis, types of measure and type of beneficiaries)</p> <p><b>Result</b> Gross number of jobs created (division according to on-farm/off-farm jobs, age and gender) Number of participants that successfully ended a training activity</p> <p><b>Impact</b> Economic growth Employment creation (division according to age and gender)</p>	<p><b>Output</b> Number of LAG members (divided by gender, age, nationality) Number of private partners and NGOs members in an LAG</p> <p><b>Result</b> Number of the beneficiaries developing innovative actions</p>	<p>To what extent has the LEADER approach contributed to improving governance in rural areas?</p> <p>To what extent has the LEADER approach contributed to mobilising the endogenous development potential of rural areas?</p> <p>To what extent has the LEADER approach contributed to introduce multisectoral approaches and to promote cooperation for the implementation of rural development programmes?</p> <p>To what extent has the LEADER approach contributed to the priorities of axis 1, 2 and 3? *</p>
<b>Measure 42 Implementing cooperation projects involving the objective selected [for the local development strategies]</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LEADER</li> <li>- Implementation of the LEADER approach in the mainstream rural development programming</li> <li>- Promoting Cooperation and Best practices</li> </ul>	<p>Encouraging the local actors to work together with representatives of other communities inside the country or from abroad.</p>	<p><b>Baseline</b> Development of LAGs Economic development of the non-agricultural sector Employment development in the non-agricultural sector</p> <p><b>Input</b> Amount of public expenditure realised (total versus EAFRD)</p> <p><b>Output</b> Number of supported cooperation projects (division according to the level of cooperation –interterritorial or transnational- and according to each of the 3 axes) Number of cooperating LAGs (division according to the 3 axes* and to the level of cooperation)</p> <p><b>Result</b> Gross number of jobs created (division according to age, gender and on /off farm)</p> <p><b>Impact</b> Employment creation (division according to age, gender and on/off farm)</p>	<p><b>Output</b> The number of cooperation projects that involves more than two LAGs in Romania The number of cooperation projects that involve a LAG from EU with LEADER+ experience</p>	<p>To what extent has the support contributed to promoting cooperation and to encouraging transfer of best practices?</p> <p>To what extent have cooperation projects and/or transfer of best practices based on the LEADER approach contributed to a better achievement of the objectives of one or more of the three other axes? *</p>

LEADER Measure	Objectives according to the CMEF	Additional national objectives and priorities	Common indicators	Additional national indicators	Common Evaluation Questions **
<b>Measure 431</b> <b>Running the local action group, acquiring skills and animating the territory</b>  <i>For Romania</i> 431-1 Public-private partnership building 431-2 Running costs, skills acquisition and animation	- LEADER  - Implementation of the LEADER approach in the mainstream rural development programming  Increasing the capacity for the implementation of LEADER	Fostering partnerships, preparing and assuring implementation of the local development strategies  <b>Priorities:</b> Setting up and developing the LAGs; Cooperation between actors	<b>Baseline</b> Development of LAGs Employment development in the non-agricultural sector <b>Input</b> Amount of public expenditure realised (total versus EAFRD) <b>Output</b> Number of actions supported (division according to the type of skills acquisition and animation action) <b>Result</b> Number of participants that successfully ended a training activity <b>Impact</b> -----	<b>Output</b> Number of actions supported divided by type of actions: general training (1 action =1 training session); specialised training for the representative of LAG (1 action =1 training session); drawing up the applications for selection of LAGs (1 action = 1 strategy) <b>Result</b> Total number of people trained who successfully ended the training actions, out of which: - general training - specialised training for the representatives of the LAG	To what extent has the support increased the capacities of Local Action Groups and other partners involved for implementing local development strategies?  To what extent has the support contributed to increasing the capacity for the implementation of LEADER?

Note: \* The objective of the three axes are improving the (1) Competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; (2) Environment and countryside; (3) Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.

\*\* Common Evaluation Questions related to the horizontal objectives of the European strategy which are particular relevant in the context of evaluating LEADER are the following: (1) To what extent has the programme contributed to achieving economic and social cohesion policy objectives with respect to a) reducing the disparities among EU citizens; and b) reducing territorial imbalances? (2) To what extent has the programme maximised synergies between the axes? (3) To what extent has the programme contributed to an integrated approach to rural development?

Source: (DGAgri, 2006; NRDP, 2009)

**Table 4: Suggested complementary system for the evaluation of the priorities of the Romanian LEADER Programme 2007 - 2013**

LEADER Measure	National priorities	Proposed Indicators	Assessment with SNA *	Evaluation Questions
<b>Measure 41 Implementing local development strategies with a view to achieving the objectives of one or more of the three other axes**</b>	Participation of the local communities members at the local development process and encouraging innovative actions	Share of the population knowing about LEADER Share of population knowing about the LAG Share of population participating in the LAG/LAG actions Area/ No of inhabitant on which projects have impacts	Yes	Is the spectrum of actors involved in LEADER affairs representative for the region?
	Promotion of the endogenous potential of the territories on the basis of a bottom up approach	No of applications for projects No of projects successfully implemented No of projects realized under LEADER which were not only projects failed in Axis-1 or Axis-3 sessions ** Realisation of original planned projects Achievement of the original objectives of the LAG	No	Does the spectrum of funded projects reflect the results of the originally prepared SWOT-Analysis?
	Alleviating disparities between regions	<i>The authors are convinced that it will not be measurable within three years if this objective was (partly) achieved.</i>	No	
<b>Measure 42 Implementing cooperation projects involving the objective [for the local development strategies]</b>	Encouraging the local actors to work together with representative of other communities inside the country or from abroad	No of actors formally/ informally involved in cooperation projects No of funded partnerships compared to number of non-funded partnerships	Yes	
<b>Measure 431 Running the local action group, acquiring skills and animating the territory</b> <i>For Romania_</i> 431-1 Public-private partnership building 431-2 Running costs, skills acquisition and animation	Fostering partnerships, preparing and assuring implementation of the local development strategies	No of projects including several communes No of LAG members preferring to apply for a pre-selected and defined measure instead of elaborating strategies on their own	Yes	In how far do you find passive LAG members and non-members, who actively support the activities of the LAG?
	Priorities: Setting up and developing the LAGs represent a priority for the period 2007-2013; Building up capacities	No of self-organized in-house trainings No of projects written by consulting firms/ No of projects written by the LAG No of improved regional development concepts No of non-funded activities realized by the LAG	Yes	Have capacity building and evaluation led to improving the regional development concept? In which way do the people assimilate LEADER affairs?
	Cooperation between actors	Fluctuation of LAG members (No of actors) No of LAGs remaining in their constellation (after political elections)	Yes	In how far has the actor constellation within the LAGs and in the LAGs' environment changed over time?
<b>Overall objectives for LEADER in Romania</b> (these are not explicitly defined in the NRDP)	Improving the quality of implemented rural development measures through Networking	No of LAGs delivered good practice examples/ LEADER relevant information to the MA/ or the NNRD	Yes	Who are the key actors advancing the LAGs development?
	Improving overall governance (not only at LAG-level)	No of suggestions directed to the MA for improving the programme guidelines from LAGs or county agencies of the agricultural administration	Yes	How much influence have decisions made at national level on the implementation of LEADER at local level?

Note: \* See Table 1

\*\* The objective of the three axes are improving the (1) Competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; (2) Environment and countryside; (3) Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.

MA = Managing Authority; NNRD = National Network for Rural Development; SNA = Social Network Analysis

