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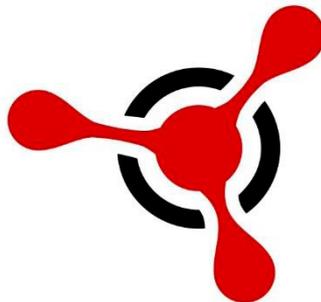


EUROPEAN RURAL PARLIAMENT

NATIONAL REPORT

NATIONAL NETWORK OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

THE CZECH REPUBLIC





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METHODOLOGY

This report draws upon the reports and other relevant documents submitted by Local Action Groups to the Work Group International Cooperation established within the Czech National Network of LAGs in order to assist the network in questions and tasks related to international cooperation. The Work group being composed of regional networks' representatives took an initiative of coordination of findings collection and thus, in compliance with the cascade pattern, it mobilised all levels of the National network to collect the findings from truly local levels. LAGs (writing their Local Development Strategies at that time and therefore having a great overview about the situation in a particular region) were asked to define the most important rural development issues and report them to hierarchically higher regional networks. Several meetings with partner organisation were simultaneously held as well to ensure a comprehensive feedback from all relevant stakeholders and shareholders. Outputs and supporting materials were consequently aggregated into main national report.



APPREHENSIONS expressed by rural people about the future coming to the rural areas

Aging population

The ongoing out migration of young people troubles rural areas; numbers of young people leave the region they were brought-up in order to find better opportunities for living in cities; the population is thus getting older and gets into deep social tensions - while young people move to cities, process of urbanism has been gaining its intensity at the same time and has been gradually influencing in many aspects the traditional rural values.

These “neo-residents” are considered as “countryside-dwellers” rather than real inhabitants as they are staying in countryside than living in countryside. They do unfortunately bring their urban life style with themselves to the rural communities and while not fully respecting the rooted rural models of behaviour they contribute to traditional rural pattern suppression. The newly coming people do not get identified with the new community environment and the population consequently gets diversified and individualised. Such fragmentation involves lack of the sense of belongings and solidarity and the community loses its unity.

Why are we calling them “neo-residents?” Because mostly they are just “sleeping” in countryside satellite outskirts. They leave for work and go back to a village without any relationship and emotion as real inhabitants are able to do.

The quality of rural living the young people are currently offered is not colourful and exciting enough. Their lives are becoming boring and these young people rather move to the cities. LAGs bring plenty of activities how to develop the particular area, how to involve people looking for the exciting life – but these possibilities might be a bit hidden and hardly visible for ordinary inhabitants because of plain and unattractive PR of Local Action Groups. The work of explaining to the public what a LAG does, so that they will understand it fully, is highly desirable.

Maybe local actions have bad and unattractive PR, poor financial and commercial support, but intergenerational cooperation among people, which is necessary for living together in countryside is not lost yet.



Concrete example of good practice

"The Olympics for the elderly"

Sunny weather and the general good mood and an excellent number of participants. How simple. As in previous years the competitors organised an athletic event comprising of four disciplines - the hammer throw, the tennis ball throw, the long jump and minigolf. Regardless each participant's achievements in a particular discipline, the Olympics was a fruitful gathering. The Olympics event was attended even by people who could take part just in one discipline for their poor health for example. But it did not matter, because at least they had more time to socialize with peers and enjoy a day!

"The travelling cinematographer and the film crew"

A group of young volunteers shoots and edits documents capturing the cultural, sport and social events and attractions in the region. These newly created documents are published on Youtube, Facebook and they are also played in an open air cinema during the summer. A LAG presents interesting events and places of their region in order to strengthen the bond and wake up the attachment of the people to the region.

Public facilities

The smaller the municipality is the more limited public facilities are available in the particular place. Post offices in remote areas were closed and brought to bigger cities, so were the schools and medical services. Shortage of medical care systems and caring services in such aging areas is a cardinal question for the future.

Development of relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas can only take place when there is an adequate support of appropriate infrastructure. A postal network provides support in various critical functions through communication, financial services, and other retail services. Moreover, in very many cases the post office, as a hub of a municipality, is to provide the locals much-needed occasions to meet the neighbours and other inhabitants.

People, living in villages far away from larger towns, are not well informed what is going on or they do not absolutely know there is a need to be informed. Local municipalities



have to be patient as they are actually the ones responsible for having right knowledge of a large framework of public affairs and inform appropriately all inhabitants.

Concrete examples of good practice

„Service authorities“

A unified information system between municipalities in a particular administrative district they belong to was the main reason for the establishment of “the Technology Centre of Electronic Records Management and internal integration”. The project is useful for the state, municipalities and citizens. Thanks to the information and mutual communication the service is faster, flexible and more efficient. Municipalities with each other can share experiences and better respond to new processes of changes.

“a Healthy City Project and Local Agenda 21”

This project focuses on all aspects of the city life - the environment, transport, sport, education and training, culture, crime prevention, social affairs and health, public administration and urban planning, etc. The Strategy of the city is implemented through so called Local Agenda 21 the municipality representatives struggle with complaints coming from the public and various target groups.

The project has been developed and approved by the Health Plan Chrudim, which means subprojects gradually implemented (Project Learning healthy to sit and practice, project Stop smoking, project Changing eating habits among children, Project Learning to live healthy, Project Safe Routes to School etc.). Fulfilling the objectives of the project is supported by a number of sub-projects and events (Earth Day, European Day of mobility and the European Car Free Day, the Day of Technical Services, No Tobacco Day, National Days Without Injuries, Health Days, Running Hope, March generations).

Another area of an activity within the project is a crime prevention program under which they are implemented sub-projects and activities that contribute to the reduction of crime in the city (camera system, creating legal spaces for graffiti, building a skate park, discussions with seniors = carefree old age and prevention project in the field of self-defence).



Employment

A structure of rural employers is considered as disadvantageous as the dependence on a few big employers still prevails. The potential leave of those key employers from the region means severe loss – the diversification of job opportunities is necessary.

Currently, the partial mismatch between the labour supply and demand is obvious, especially specifically skilled people are missing in the entire Czech Republic. Nevertheless, while technical qualification is the most demanded in the entire Czech Republic the core of supply lies in the humanities. This instability requires additional trainings, professional qualifications and so on. Moreover, this problem is to be greatly multiplied in the future. Building on findings of studies carried recently out, it was proved that in 15 years there will be the demand at a rate of 50% for such positions that do not exist even today! It is apparent, that the news, changes in the education, trainings and retraining courses always get a delay and come belatedly. This is perceived as one of the major threats.

Concrete examples of good practice

"Easier way through obstacles to business"

In this project we focused on individuals caring for children under 15 years of age and on jobseekers who are more than 5 months unemployed and listed in the records of the Employment Office. One way how to get out of the problem of being unemployed can be self-employment and to learn how to start running somebody's own business-which was the gist of the project. The project comprised of three rounds of retraining courses called "Basics of Business". 36 people took part in the project and finally two of them successfully started to run their own business. As for the others, they got new knowledge, new inspiration, they learned how to write a business plan, gained self-confidence, so that some of them were able to find a new job easily.

"Shared work crews"

In relation to the problem of unemployment, the project focused on the people at risk of social exclusion. The LAG has designed a regional concept called "the shared work



crews". These crews provided the identified individuals with the trainings and the people were subsequently hired as the maintenance having responsibility for public green areas in various member municipalities. A mobile work crew was established, too. The particular municipalities share it and utilize it as necessary.

Support for local producers

In recent decades, the country let many foreign chain stores go into the market, both food and hobby shops as well. But that began to fade local shops and local producers, who process rather local sources than imported goods, notably from foreign exotic countries. Needless to say, that food made of the local ingredients is fresh and without any preservatives and stabilizers.

Unfortunately, there is a large proportion of the rural population that is not interested in the product composition and product freshness and goes to large commercial supermarkets, where they buy cheap but harmful products. In the cities, the trend of doing shopping in smaller shops with a range of organic products from farms is coming back into fashion, but it is necessary to support rural local small producers and sellers, and above all, it is necessary to raise awareness among the rural population about the composition of foods and following impacts on their health. It is also crucial to prefer local producers to products imported from afar in order to respect the environment and nature.

Concrete examples of good practice

"A Network of regional products"

One example for all, a regional products network! This network shows producers important, better, healthy and local products not only to residents from the region but the united actions make the producers strong enough to present their products even beyond the region's borders. These products are traditional, mostly handmade and higher quality. But constantly weak PR makes the products hardly competitive and consequently saleable. Regional and national trade fairs and trade shows help to raise people's awareness about such products, but it is a run for long time and any innovative stringent and energetic ideas are welcome! We would like to share an option that local producers and their ware are



unique. Wares are food (dairy products, ciders, honey, bread, beer etc.) or material things (glass, ceramics, textiles, soap, DIY things, toys and jewellery etc.).

The brand of the Network is similar for each of 26 regions – members of the Network. Every brand has the same pattern with different colour which makes the brand clearly distinguishable and easy for costumers to remember. Hopefully, this will help the brand to achieve fame all over the country.

“LOVE FOOD - Gastronomic Festival”

Three LAGs work together in mutual cooperation to organize three food festivals in their regions. These festivals promote local farmers, fruit-growers, fishermen, butchers, bakers, brewers, other food producers and restaurants. It regards the promotion of fresh local products from local producers. Visitors of the LOVE FOOD festival can taste and learn a lot about details of manufacturing processes and materials used.

Local Police forces and traffic

The social exclusion together with the concentration of underprivileged people in brownfields requires substantial intervention and subsequent remedial actions. The detection of this type of criminal activity and its origins, as well as criminal surveillance, can be greatly facilitated by local police forces, which should have a detailed knowledge of their local area. However, due to lack of relevant authorities (police stations, detention centres) in the municipalities, there is no body that would do so and the space for deviations enlarges.

Particularly transit regions and their municipalities are overloaded by road freight transport - this is due mainly to the low cost of road transport; heavy goods vehicles are thus responsible for increased air and noise pollution and have a more lasting harmful effect on local communities and their environment. That is why we are supporting cycling in all its forms.



Concrete examples of good practice

“A Municipal police officer working for neighbours”

Municipalities with small population manage only a very tiny budget, so that it is problematic to run their own Police force. Therefore a group of municipalities put their effort and limited financial means together and manage the common police force - based on public contracts, within the inter municipal cooperation. The Police officer works for a few hours a week in one community or another and is still on alert and operates on the request of a mayor. Contracts are concluded for an indefinite period. The benefits of inter municipal cooperation are reversible. The municipal police action contributes to the security and maintenance of public order in particular villages. One of the officer’s duties is to supervise the observance of the ban on the passage of vehicles over 3.5 tons through the village.

“Tour de Elbe”

The international bicycle path along the river Elbe crosses many Czech villages. Generally, bicycle paths used mostly for spending leisure time, skating, cycling or walking with baby carriage. A new trend is the cycling path linking villages because of easing traffic situation in villages and returning people to the sport mode. That is why many people choose the option go to the job by the bike in the morning. Ideal cycling track is along the river.

Natural wealth

The conservation of natural wealth is one of the most important questions for every country in the world. The same is in our country. Why? The threat of gold mining is recently very actual in the municipalities, where companies intends carry out exploration well in this area, where the potential surface extraction would mean a total destruction of nature (river, groundwater, flora and fauna too). The Ministry of Environment (under the pressure of the local authorities and inhabitants) rejected the application for authorisation to extract gold in this area. However, the pressure from the mining company still lasts.



It was one of examples of uncontrolled destruction of our land and our soil. At the same time we are fighting with ineffective land and wood management and inefficient utilization of the land.

Concrete examples of good practice

“A Project ‘Step by Step true Geopark’”

The project aims at development of tourist area. The main aim is to increase interest of children and youth people, the general in the geological attractions of this area. It is a historical connection with mining of mineral resources in the region. Besides geological objects and phenomena another important points of interest are to be found in the area, such as ecological phenomena, archaeological and historical monuments. The geopark unites the promotion of geological heritage to regional development and appropriate public acquainted with geological processes, the importance of natural resources and their use in the economic and the cultural history.

“SONDAR – The soil Strategy Network in the Danube Region”

Soil is the starting point for all life on Earth, and provides more than 90% of our food. Soils are living systems, which can only perform their functions in the ecosystem and for humans, if their properties remain largely intact. Sustainable cultivation of land in the Danube region can afford a decisive contribution towards soil fertility, preventive protection against flooding and use of soils as carbon storage tanks and thus towards climate protection. It is the aim of the SONDAR project to establish a network of increasing responsibility for soil: between science and practice, between administration and users of land, between education, arts and the entire population. The aim was to involve mainly primary school children to the problems of soil protection. Project involved painting the colours of the country. Pupils learned to recognize soil types and mix of natural colours for their paintings.



SUMMARY

REQUIREMENTS of rural communities

- Infrastructure in the rural areas – transport infrastructure, availability of remote areas,
- Transfer of information – high-speed internet coverage (very remote areas included),
- Support of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, regional products and producers,
- Maintenance of existing public services and its development (schools, public administration and government services, medical services, caring services),
- Support of Community life, the society is fragmented into small groups and it is therefore necessary to design and establish new models of activities to meet the social and cultural requirements of present and future generations.
- Basic infrastructure, public areas and places maintenance - people used to clean the streets and public properties (regardless forms of properties – individual or public), nowadays this is the matter of public services, moreover the ecological requirements makes the waste management system more complicated.
- Important decisions about rural issues are taken at higher regional levels – in cities and regional centres – it is necessary to support intensive communication between urban and rural areas – to build functional urban rural linkages in order to ensure a complex regional development – not to separate rural development from regional policy.
- Complex and comprehensive awareness of inhabitants about municipality activities and development,
- Support of police forces, out of school activities, rest areas, rest points,
- Simplifying procedures, legislative stability - Building permit and residence application procedures must be simplified and more flexible.
- Safety component in traffic, intelligent transport systems
- Diverting heavy goods traffic from the rural areas, coordination of transport required,
- Just common sense into rural communities!



GOOD PRACTICE EXPAMPLES of rural communities

- mobilisation of human capital by the means of the LEADER approach
- long lasting calls of inhabitants and mayors for more precise strategic planning and the active involvement of people into the planning processes.
- strengthening of the employment by the job creation with a particular focus on socially excluded people (the maintenance crew taking care of public areas); another example regards the social business – a social fund. The fund was established to concentrate financial means given by particular municipalities, LAGs, schools, SMEs etc. These means are then allocated to the “beneficiaries, services” were necessary and where so called a market gap occurs but in social area exclusively).
- The Youth Parliament at the LAG level, the very valuable cooperation among the municipalities and a LAG on the base of the micro-region=association of municipalities), rural areas as a valuable partner to the urban areas!!! Cooperation in the field of the waste management, infrastructure issues, etc.
- Regional Branding – helps to integrate departments of the regional economy and boosts small traditional entrepreneurs, with respect to local heritage (natural, cultural...) and by utilizing local resources.
- The cooperation of the municipalities in the running of a local railway and a primary school, if they weren't run by the association of these municipalities, both the school and the railway would be immediately closed. It would be for the locals a total disaster.
- the municipalities' and micro-region's huge support for the socio-cultural events in the region.