

ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF FINANCING ON THE SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL TERRITORIES, PART OF THE LAGS, THROUGH THE LEADER METHOD

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight the importance of funding through the M19 LEADER measure on eligible territories from a qualitative perspective through the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods: questionnaire and interview, designed to confirm or deny the importance of LEADER funding on rural development of the LAG territory at the level of the Romanian regions. The analysis was realised in period between 31.10.2020 – 31.05.2021. The data collected come in support of a deeper understanding of the LEADER approach and the way in which it acts in the territory, implicitly of the identification and remedy of deficiencies. Following the analysis, based on a series of questions sent to the representatives of the local action groups, questions related to territorial, financial and social issues were found that: over 70% of LAGs face an aging population and lack of jobs work, over 70% of the eligible territories being inhabited by the population aged between 40 and 50, territories where agriculture is the main income-generating resource (100% of respondents). All respondents consider that LEADER financing is very important but also insufficient for the needs of the territory (over 85% of respondents).

Key words: LEADER, LAG, sustainable development, local development, financing

INTRODUCTION

Scientific knowledge is realized through the scientific analysis of the surrounding world, the analysis that is realized from different points of view [13]. The process of scientific research uses all the methods and theories on them, procedures and rules, elements that constitute the research methodology.

The LEADER approach is an innovative approach whose principles operate and are implemented in the eligible territories through the Local Action Groups. These, through their specificity and uniqueness, attract the financing provided by measure 19 LEADER, whose purpose is meant to lead to the rural development of the perimeter of the structure with direct effects on the quality of life of the inhabitants. The impact that financing through LEADER has on the territory is periodically

analyzed through various methods of data collection, quantitative and qualitative to highlight the degree of absorption, relevance of financing, the degree of rural development of the eligible territory and possible deficiencies to be remedied or improved in the future. This article follows the relevance of the financing through the M19 LEADER measure, in the light of the answers collected from the representatives of the local action groups and not starting from official financial data published by the Managing Authority in charge of controlling and monitoring their activity. The answers received in the completed questionnaire in conjunction with those received in the interview will validate or invalidate the contribution of the LEADER approach in the territory.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both methods

can be used in a unique, staged process to highlight a certain truth, while maintaining scientific rigor [4], [6]. The difference between a quantitative and a qualitative research begins with the formulation of the research problem [5].

Qualitative research is based on the assumption that people attribute certain meanings to the world in which they live, and these meanings are to some extent different from one person to another [8].

The main objectives of this type of approach are attitudes, models of daily behaviors, individual experiences in relation to the social and interpersonal environment, aspects related to cultural values and norms, interpersonal, verbal and nonverbal communication [1], [2], [12].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article aims to highlight the pros and cons of financing through M19 LEADER from a qualitative but also quantitative perspective. The following were used as research methods: survey, using as a technique the survey and the interview (as a qualitative research method). A set of 22 questions was developed, which contained both closed questions (with predefined answer options) and open-ended questions (without predefined answer options, the answer being to the respondent's assessment and his perception of the questionable event), with reference to territorial, financial and social aspects, which were transmitted to the representatives of all the Local Action Groups, respectively 239. Of the 8 regions, the Bucharest-Ilfov region did not answer any questions, if we refer to the number of existing LAGs, about 2% of the total. Responses were collected and centralized through online data collection tools. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, related to the perception of the responding human factors on the impact of funding through measure 19 LEADER on the territory of the LAG. The data collected from various sources were centralized by regions and the three components, analyzed and the possibility of a correlation between the

financing obtained through measure 19 LEADER, certain specific indicators and the perception of the impact of financing in the LEADER eligible territory was studied.

Investigation, using as a survey technique - is a method of quantitative research by asking people who have certain knowledge about a particular or phenomenon under analysis, people who have certain characteristics (education, age, gender, etc.) or simply people to find out the opinions, attitudes related to a certain topic, etc. The opinion poll collects information through a questionnaire that contains closed information with answer options. In order to obtain relevant information, certain rules must be observed in selecting the group of respondents, the data collected being very quantitative.

The opinion poll has 5 essential characteristics [7].

1. involves a large number of cases;
2. their selection must be made according to rigorous sampling criteria;
3. data must be collected in normal situations, as close as possible to daily life;
4. the collection is made in accordance with standardized procedures;
5. data are in a quantitatively measurable form, the simplest being the presence or absence of an attribute.

Investigation - interview - is a technique used to collect qualitative data, respectively the opinions of people who are or may be interested in the intervention, in the given context, their perception of the events studied and their effects in the territory, time, etc. The interview is useful to highlight cause-effect links, phenomena and processes associated with the financing process, qualitative aspects of the financing effect, factors influencing the absorption of funding in the territory, issues regarding the motivations of the interviewees or lack of motivation opinions, ideas on possible measures. correction or regarding the lessons learned, etc. The qualitative interview allows free exploration of the universe under investigation, without constraints on the form, number or order of questions. Usually, the interview is a way for the researcher to explore the psychic universe of other people, but in qualitative phenomenological research

the researcher himself is interviewed by an expert, not involved in that research. This is what is called, with an expression taken from the philosopher Edmund Husserl, "bracketing interview"[9].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The responses received from the representatives of the Local Action Groups were centralized in each region in order of importance and grouped into three components: territorial, financial and social in order to make it easier to understand the relevant issues. In the answers to the

questionnaire questions the first two most important answers were highlighted, and in the interview questions the answers are presented in the order of importance expressed by the respondent, taking into account how many times this answer is found in the opinions of the interviewees. It is followed in each component if there is a correlation between the quantitative answers collected and the qualitative ones.

It should be mentioned that the Bucharest-Ilfov region, on the territory of which 4 Local Action Groups operate, did not answer any questions.

Territorial component

Table 1. Centralization of the answers to the questionnaire within the territorial component

In which region is the LAG you represent located?		North East	South East	South	South West	West	North West	Centre	Bucharest Ilfov
What are the main issues of the LAG community you represent?	Aging population	57.1	70	80	85.7	100	20	76.9	0
	Inefficiently capitalized natural resources	4.28	50	30	28.6	100	40	84.6	0
	High degree of poverty	71.4	70	40	42.9	0	20	7.7	0
	Insufficient or non-existent utilities	71.4	40	70	42.9	66.7	40	38.5	0
	Fragmented agricultural land	21.4	30	50	28.6	66.7	40	30.8	0
	The lack of jobs	64.3	80	90	85.7	66.7	80	53.8	0
What are the main resources located in the territory of the LAG you represent?	Agriculture	100	100	80	100	100	100	84.6	0
	Forestry	21.4	10	40	14.3	33.3	20	23.1	0
	Aquaculture	7.1	40	1	0	33.3	20	15.4	0
	Services, excluding tourism	28.6	10	60	28.6	66.7	40	30.8	0
	Tourism	28.6	40	20	14.3	66.7	80	46.2	0
	Traditional crafts	21.4	20	30	14.3	33.3	20	23.1	0
	Non-agricultural business, production	7.1	30	40	28.6	0	40	46.2	0
	Non-agricultural business, services	71.4	60	100	42.9	100	100	84.6	0
What changes have you noticed in the LAG community as a result of the absorption of financial resources allocated through M19 Leader?	Social	42.9	60	20	42.9	66.7	40	38.5	0
	Cooperation	7.1	20	10	14.3	33.3	20	23.1	0
	Collaboration between community members	42.9	20	50	42.9	66.7	60	53.8	0
	Increasing the number of young people eager to return to rural areas	50	60	60	28.6	0	60	38.5	0
	Increasing the quality of life	78.6	30	60	42.9	66.7	40	76.9	0
What is the average age of people who have received funding through the LAG?	The evolution towards modernity by changing the mentality of the inhabitants	57.1	70	60	57.1	66.7	60	69.2	0
	I didn't notice any change	0	0	0	14.3	0	0	0	0
	25-35 years	28.6	20	0	14.3	33.3	20	15.4	0
36-45 years	50.1	80	90	71.4	66.7	80	69.2	0	
46-55 years	21.3	0	10	14.3	0	0	15.4	0	

Source: Own calculation.

Table 2. Centralization of the answers in the interview for the question “What resources are insufficiently exploited in the territory of the LAG you represent?”, territorial component

Region							
North East	South East	South	South West	West	North West	Centre	Bucharest Ilfov
Agriculture: production and processing	Agriculture: primary products, animal husbandry	Agriculture: products, land; Fruit resources	Tourism	Tourism	Tourism	Tourism (eco-tourism)	-
Jobs	Tourism	Human resource	Agriculture	Traditions and culture	Traditional crafts	Natural resources (including mineral water)	-
Traditions, crafts, local products	Human resource	Tourism	Human resource	Tangible and intangible heritage: natural resources (geothermal water)	Agriculture (vegetable growing, animal husbandry), including processing	Agriculture, including processing	-
Fishery resources	Environment	Aquaculture	Crafts	Aquaculture	Forestry (forest products), including processing	Forestry	-
Tourism: objectives, tourist formations, artistic	Local primary products (reeds, rushes)	Services	-	Human resource	Gastronomic resources	Local products (meat, milk, berries)	-
Tangible and intangible cultural heritage; Therapeutic groundwater	-	Social	-	-	-	Human resource	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	Entrepreneurship	-

Source: Own construction.

Table 3. Centralization of the answers in the interview for the question "What benefits have been brought to the community as a result of the implementation of the LEADER approach in the territory of the LAG?"

Region							
North East	South East	South	South West	West	North West	Centre	Bucharest Ilfov
Increasing living standards	Rural development	Increasing the quality of life	Increasing the quality of life	Cooperation between public and private actors, cooperation between communities	Jobs created	Jobs created, tourism development	-
Collaboration between community members	Job creation	Job creation	New created jobs.	Creating business in the field of tourism	Increasing the degree of information, association, involvement in community life, rural economic development	Increasing the quality of life	-
Rural development	Increasing the quality of life	Rural development	Direct involvement of local actors in the decision-making process	Jobs created	Changing the mentality of the inhabitants and their involvement in community issues	Community cooperation	-
Access to funding, increased confidence in funding with European funds, distribution of funding to almost the entire territory of the LAG	Renewal of the agricultural machinery park	Establishment of medical centers	Modernized agricultural holdings, creation of new non-agricultural activities	The public's confidence in non-reimbursable programs has increased.	-	Supported / modernized agricultural holdings, farm efficiency	-
-	Increasing the level of information, counseling and cooperation	Modernization of agricultural holdings	Changing mentality, improved local public services;	-	-	The emergence of new categories of services (eg dental)	-
-	Better perception on accessing funds and funds distributed strictly for this territory	Raising awareness of accessing European funds	-	-	-	Purchase of equipment necessary for the collection and preparation of biomass from forests, pastures, hayfields	-

Source: Own construction.

Financial component

Table 4. Centralization of questionnaire answers within the financial component

Questions	Answers	Regions							
		North East	South East	South	South West	West	North West	Centre	Bucharest Ilfov
In which region is the LAG you represent?									
How important do you consider funding, through M19 Leader, for the rural development of the LAG territory you represent?	Very important	92.9	90	100	85.7	100	80	76.9	0
	Important	7.1	10	0	14.3	0	20	15.4	0
	Moderately Important	0	0	0	0	0	0	7.7	0
	Slightly Important	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
To what extent is the funding obtained through M19 Leader sufficient for the needs of the territory of the LAG you represent?	More than enough	7.1	0	0	0	0	80	0	0
	Enough	21.4	0	0	0	0	20	7.7	0
	Insufficient	71.4	100	100	100	100	0	92.3	0
In the LAG that you represent, the allocated amounts went mainly to?	Agriculture	92.9	70	70	71.4	0	60	38.5	0
	Non-agricultural business, production	7.1	30	40	28.6	0	40	46.2	0
	Non-agricultural business, services	71.4	60	100	42.9	100	100	84.6	0
	Social	42.9	60	20	42.9	66.7	40	38.5	0
	Cooperation	7.1	20	10	14.3	33.3	20	23.1	0
What are the main result and monitoring indicators, assumed by SDL, as a result of the implementation of the actions financed by M19 Leader?	Supported farms	78.6	70	90	71.4	66.7	40	46.2	0
	Supported non - agricultural activities	57.1	5	50	57.1	66.7	60	46.2	0
	Jobs created	92.9	100	90	100	100	100	92.3	0
	Cooperative partnerships	28.6	30	20	28.6	100	40	38.5	0
	Social measures	71.4	60	80	42.9	66.7	60	30.8	0
To what extent can the assumed performance indicators indicate the progress made towards the rural development of the community?	To a very large extent	7.1	0	40	14.3	0	0	7.7	0
	To a large extent	71.4	30	40	42.9	66.7	100	38.5	0
	To a small extent	21.4	70	20	42.9	33.3	0	53.8	0
	To a very small extent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
To what extent have the amounts allocated to the LAG you represent through M19 Leader been contracted? *	95-100%	64.3	40	50	57.1	66.7	20	75	0
	85-94.9%	28.6	50	40	42.9	0	80	25	0
	75-84.9%	0	10	0	0	33.3	0	0	0
	65-74.9%	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
	50-64.9%	7.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Under 50%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
To what extent were the contracted amounts paid?	100%	0	10	10	0	0	0	7.7	0
	70-99%	71.4	30	20	57.1	33.3	20	30.8	0
	50-69%	21.5	60	70	42.9	33.3	80	61.5	0
	Under 50%	7.1	0	0	0	33.3	0	0	0
Would you like to see a change in the way the financial resources are distributed through Leader to the LAG in the next programming period?	No	42.9	30	20	28.6	0	0	23.1	0
	Yes	57.1	70	60	71.4	100	100	61.5	0
	I never thought	0	0	20	0	0	0	15.4	0

Source: Own calculation. *31.01.2021.

Within the territorial component, the centralized data reveal the following aspects: over 63% of the regions underline the fact that one of the main problems in the territory is the aging population from which automatically derives a high degree of poverty corroborated with lack of jobs. regions, as shown in Table 1.

At the same time, the acute problems facing the "Romanian village" tend to worsen, and among the main causes are the migration of rural people to large urban centers or other

more developed countries, due to unsatisfactory living conditions [3]. The decline in the rural population is explained by the decline in the birth rate, the high mortality rate and the migration mainly from rural to urban and to other countries [11].

On the other hand, the answers given to the interview question confirm the problems in the territory, as shown in Table 2. All regions agree that agriculture is the main natural resource of the perimeter of the Local Action Group (87.5%), but also services and then

tourism, but insufficiently exploited, which is in line with the high degree of poverty and lack of jobs.

Tourism is a dynamic branch of the Romanian economy with a high potential to create jobs, to employ young people and also women [10]. Over 87.5% of respondents notice an evolution in the mentality of the inhabitants of the private-public partnership, the increase of the quality of life following the attraction of the financing through the LEADER measure (50%) but also a better collaboration between the community members. To the interview question on the benefits of implementing the LEADER approach in the LAG territory (Table 3), the first answers, in order of importance, are rural development implicitly by increasing the quality of life and creating jobs, which may suggest the intention to attract young people in the territory of the LAG in order to counteract the negative effects of the aging population, in accordance with the age range of those who benefited from funding through the LAG (87.5% of respondents say that the average age of funding beneficiaries is between 35 and 45 years, more preferably 40), implicitly LEADER, as it appears from the existing question in Table 1 with reference to this aspect.

Question 1 - interview: If this organizational structure did not exist, the LAG, with specific funding, what other development opportunities would your community have? Specify the sources.

Answer 1: "On a scale from 1 to 10, somewhere at 2. We have 2 communes, which have through the LAG the first projects with European funding (and not because they had no projects submitted but because they were always below the national score and were always waiting)

A2: "The funds are insufficient. At the national level, the communities had little chance of funding due to the extremely restrictive selection criteria, the funds were unevenly distributed in the country and in the N - E region they were the fewest in the country. Through the LAG, the funds are distributed in a balanced way and reach every commune in the territory. "

A3: "LAGs are perfect tools for attracting money for small / medium projects that cannot be funded from other sources. Competition is much higher at the national level, and the "bottom-up" approach is non-existent at the level of Operational Programs outside the LEADER axis. "

A4: "RNDP, however, the financing measures through LEADER are designed according to the bottom-up principle, starting from the specific needs in a given territory, which cannot be achieved through RNDP.

A5: "The chances would be disproportionate because most would not benefit from the actions of informing and animating the territory, the selection calls would go unnoticed. There is also the impression that EU funds are preferentially or fraudulently distributed. "

A6: "Yes, with little chance: National Rural Development Program, Human Capital Operational Program, National Local Development Program, Administrative Capacity Operational Program, Agency for the Financing of Rural Investments, Government funds. "

A7: " In other partnerships, none. "

A8: " Other answers: local budget, investors, Danube Strategy, Large Infrastructure Operational Program, FLAG".

Question 2 - Interview: What proposals do you have regarding the organization and distribution of financial resources to the LAG through LEADER?

Answer 1: "Increase the percentage according to the LEADER measure and maintain the criterion of distribution per inhabitant and area (ex. 12%)."

A2: "LAG resources should be set according to national and local priorities. LEADER is not a small RNDP program but it should fill the gaps at the local level compared to the national program. Local needs and priorities vary from area to area. In the mountain area, for example, there are other needs than in the plain area. Also, the national contribution to the LEADER program may increase depending on the priorities identified in the SDLs: the development of community services and infrastructure (water-sewer, roads of local interest, telecommunications,

nurseries, etc.); stimulating the development of the association and covering local needs (product processing, storage, marketing structures, cooperatives).”

A3: "Depending on the territory, the population, the degree of poverty and the complex of atypical measures specific to LEADER.

A4: "Decentralization, as a national concept, must be achieved. Implicitly increasing the importance of the LAG structure, as a share of financial allocation and as a multi-fund approach.”

A5: "Let's not take into account the number of inhabitants and the surface of the territory, we are a Gal with a cumulative population not

scattered, so to distribute larger amounts, we promote and we have nothing to offer people because the money runs out quickly.”

A6: “To take into account the contracting and payment percentages obtained in the previous year.”

A7: “National flat-rate measures to be implemented only through Leader.”

A8: ”Territory, population, performance, assumed criteria.”

A9: "Using the same fundraising algorithm."

A10: “Other answers: depending on the number of inhabitants, not on the area; 50% - inhabitants, 50% - surface”.

Social component

Table 5. Centralization of the answers to the questionnaire within the social component

Questions	Answer options	Regions							
		North East	South East	South	South West	West	North West	Centre	Bucharest Ilfov
In which region is the LAG you represent?									
What is the age category of the active people in the territory of the LAG you represent?	Over 50 years	14.3	10	0	14.3	66.7	0	7.7	0
	Between 40 and 50 years	57.1	70	50	85.7	33.3	40	76.9	0
	Between 30 and 40 years	28.6	20	40	0	0	60	15.4	0
	Between 20 and 30 years	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
What are the chances of achieving the young people from the LAG community, in the territorial area served by it?	Very High	7.1	0	30	0	0	0	7.7	0
	High	14.3	10	10	14.3	33.3	60	30.8	0
	Moderate	64.3	40	60	42.9	66.7	40	53.8	0
	Low	14.3	40	0	42.9	0	0	7.7	0
	Very Low	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
To what extent have the number of jobs assumed by SDL, as a result of the implementation of projects financed by M19 Leader, been achieved?	Over 100%	71.4	50	70	71.4	66.7	40	53.8	0
	100%	7.2	40	0	0	0	40	15.4	0
	70-90%	14.3	10	20	14.3	33.3	20	7.7	0
	50-69%	7.1	0	10	14.3	0	0	7.7	0
	Under 50%		0	0	0	0	0	15.4	0
What is the average age of people who have received funding through the LAG?	25-35 years	28.6	20	0	14.3	33.3	20	15.4	0
	36-45 years	50.1	80	90	71.4	66.7	80	69.2	0
	46-55 years	21.3	0	10	14.3	0	0	15.4	0

Source: Own calculation.

The financial part of this analysis highlights the fact that 87.5% of the respondents consider that the financial allocation is very important but insufficient for the development needs of the partnership, consider 75% of the respondents (Table 4). The allocations went mainly to services (75% of respondents) and to agriculture (62.5% of respondents). The allocation structure is in line with the main result and monitoring indicators assumed in the SDL, respectively jobs created - 75% of respondents (this being a direct consequence of the specific territorial assessment in order to develop an SDL that would lead to increased development rural areas of the

LAG) and supported farms - 50% of respondents. The importance of funding through M19 LEADER is also supported by the answers received in Question-Interview 1, which emphasizes that there are small communities that in the absence of this funding would have no other chance of accessing funds because they would not meet the selection criteria. , through this organizational structure, public-private partnership -GAL- manage to attract financial resources. In a percentage of 62.5%, the distributed amounts were contracted, and most of the respondents (62.5%) claim that they were also paid in proportion of 50-69%

(* the reference date being 31.01.2021). At the same time, in their opinion, the assumed result and monitoring indicators reveal the degree of rural development of the eligible territory LEADER, which can be supported by the high percentage of non-agricultural business (services) sustained in conjunction with the increase of jobs, but also with the increase of quality. as a derivative of material benefits. However, the majority of respondents (87.5%) want to change the way funds are distributed at LAG level through LEADER, increase the percentage of funding allocated to this measure, including decentralization (Question 2 - interview).

Question 1 - interview: What benefits have been brought to the community as a result of the implementation of the LEADER approach in the territory of the LAG?

Answer 1: "Top-down community development through job creation. Development of the tourist area."

A2: "Increasing competitiveness, support for business development, support for the development of social services."

A3: "Revarsarea Social Center and Grindu Cultural Center."

A4: "New units at standards adapted to the present for the activity of preschoolers."

A5: "Quality services for the population, infrastructure for public and social services, support for the introduction of hot water and heating systems."

A6: "Improving the quality of life in rural areas is by far the greatest benefit to rural areas."

A7: "Increasing the possibilities for spending free time."

A8: "Newly created jobs, setting up new businesses, attracting young people to rural areas."

A9: "The CLLD approach distributed money evenly across the territory and brought added value, describing a larger community with less money."

A10: "Job creation, modernization of social services."

From a social point of view, we notice that in all regions, the active population is in the age range of 40-50 years, which strengthens the respondents' opinion according to which the

aging population is one of the problems of the LAG territory (Table 5). Even if the 40-50 age range is not considered an age range of the "old" population, there is this tendency to age, especially by depopulating the territories with the young population, which in the absence of opportunities migrates to urban areas. The chances of achieving a young LAG perimeter is "average", according to the respondents of the questionnaire (75%). Thus, the financing through M19 LEADER has the role of creating jobs for them and retaining them in the territory of the LAG, a fact confirmed by the percentage of 87.5% of beneficiaries aged between 35-45 years who obtained financing through this measure, implicitly job creation and accomplishment. Also, the attracted funding has led not only to material but also immaterial benefits, which can be likened to the establishment of social centers or unions for preschoolers, as evidenced by the answers to Question-Interview 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected show that funding through the 19 LEADER measure is very important for eligible territories but at the same time insufficient, as evidenced by the centralization of responses. A deeper analysis shows that the 3 components: territorial, financial and social are interdependent, so that to solve the problems found in over 63% of the regions (aging population, lack of jobs, insufficiently exploited resources) we try to solve them by directing financing to the respective segments, which results from the centralized answers within the financial component, respectively over 75% of the allocation went to services and agriculture, with direct effect on the increase of the number of jobs. Funding received through M19 LEADER gives small communities the opportunity to access funding, as representatives of local action groups tell us, respectively: "We have 2 communes, which have through the LAG the first projects with European funding (and not because they had no projects submitted, but because they were always below the national score and were always waiting), but at the same time they claim that in order to be more

obvious the positive effects, the general percentage allocated to LEADER must increase. Through the sustained financing programs, there is a timid beginning of attracting young people to rural areas, the age range that obtained funding through the LAG being between 35-45 years, but also increasing the quality of life of residents by establishing or modernizing units. for preschoolers, social centers. Overall, funding through M19 LEADER has a positive impact on eligible communities.

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