

# **PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES OF LEADER+ PROGRAMME**

## **based on the example of the Zselica Action Group**

**EDINA, SÁRINÉ DR. CSAJKA**

### **Abstract**

Among the EU community initiatives LEADER Programme deals with rural development, which is the most successful rural development programme of the EU. LEADER stands for the abbreviation of the French expression: **L**iaison **E**ntre **A**ctions pour le **D**eveloppement de l'**E**conomie **R**urale, which means the links between actions for the development of the rural economy.

In Hungary, the LEADER Programme is in the third phase of its history. The pre-accession funds for the LEADER pilot programme was replaced by the Agricultural and Rural Development Operative Programme's (ARDOP) LEADER+ programme after the accession. During the planning period between 2007 and 2013 the rural development measures are integrated in the New Hungary Rural Development Programme. The current study aims to summarise the most significant experiences of the ARDOP LEADER+ programme closed 2009, based on the example of the Zselica Action group. This action group belongs to few of those that took part in the LEADER pilot programme, as well; thus the long-term effects usually being difficult to analyse are visible, as well.

The basis of the primary research is partly the analysis of the submitted and implemented projects (number 17) applied for any of the 5 measures of "ZSELIC LIGHT" Local Rural Development Programme; and the deep interview conducted with the manager of the host organisation provided also information to be analysed on the successes and challenges of the program.

As regards the spatial-specific aspects, the plight analysis considers tourism as break out point in the settlements of Zselic. Summarising, the LEADER+ applications were successful, and the aims defined by the "ZSELIC LIGHT" Local Rural Development Programme were achieved. By improving the information system, establishing resting areas, improving the services of advantage cottages, establishing student bases as well as renovating the older ones contributed to the economic and tourism related utilisation of natural values and cultural heritage. It is important for the future that all settlements have printed brochures on their attractions and programs, based on them a suitable marketing could help a wide introduction of these settlements and thus the improvement of tourism in the sub-region.

Organisation of study tours allowed for introducing Hungarian and foreign model projects; while the ensured village development service enhanced village communities, improved human resources and contributed to networking.

In the course of the completion of the application the most important negative experience was the complicated documentation and the guide on filling in the application form which was not detailed enough. It was made even more complicated by frequent modifications, delays of pay offs, and the lack of professionals on rural development in the agency. Due to the tireless work of the colleagues of the host institution, however, the applicants got through the problems easily.

LEADER+ Programme brought numerous new experiences for the civil organisations, enterprises and local governments acting on the area of the Zselica Action Group. A new approach, a different way of thinking was adapted by the area. By grabbing the opportunities given by bottom-up initiatives, by utilising the power of partnership the region made a step on the route of development. The beneficiaries faced many challenges between the period from

planning their projects to closing them, thus they must have gained tremendous experiences in applying, implementing and accounting EU funds. Finally, LEADER+ programme had an overall positive effect on the area.