

**LOCAL ACTION GROUPS - A POSSIBILITY OF RURAL AREA AND
TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.
IMPORTANCE AND PROPOSALS**

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***Abstract:** The lack of a realist vision of European village's future, on the necessary qualifications in the process of activities diversification, which would lay the foundations for a multifunctional rural development, is becoming more and more acute. The LAG represents a possible solution to sustain the transformation of local communities potential into reality and in this manner to susutain this new approach of European village development. Communities thus manage to exploit new ways to become or remain competitive, to exploit their goods and resources to the maximum, as well as to overcome the various difficulties they encounter, such as the aging population, the reduced level of health benefits services, the absence of employment opportunities or the large discrepancy regarding the development degree comparing to urban areas.*

***Key words:** LAG,s, rural area, economic development, proposals*

INTRODUCTION

The development process of rural environment and comunity [7] is very important and difficult to achieve process, starting from the size of the rural area, and activities from different fields. Another aspect is added: this development must be a sustainable one. In order to achieve this aspect the local rural comunity must control the development process through various actors, groups, associations and institutions. The purpose of all this entities is to ensure long-term common actions and support the responsibility for this continuous development process. Bringing all these actors together in partnership is possible through the Local Action Groups (LAGs).[1,5,9]

The operating engine of the LEADER program, (after 1989) respectively its beneficiary, is the Local Action Group (hereinafter referred to as GAL), which represents partnerships established between various representatives of the socio-economic sector in the territory and which determines the development direction of the region.

From the experience of the LAGs operation through the LEADER perspective, the expression "Working With People (WWP)" was born, understood as the professional practice in a team that seeks - in addition to the development of technical management and project management skills - the production of goods and services - adding the development of behavioral skills and values to people involved that participate in the context of a territorial program. [2,8,10] The LAGs represent public-private partnerships created from representatives of the sectors present in the rural environment. [3,4]

The LAGs is a well-balanced structure, made up of both public and private actors, with municipal authorities and other public authorities, cooperatives and producer associations representing private actors and representatives of different sectors present and active in partnership. [12,13,14]

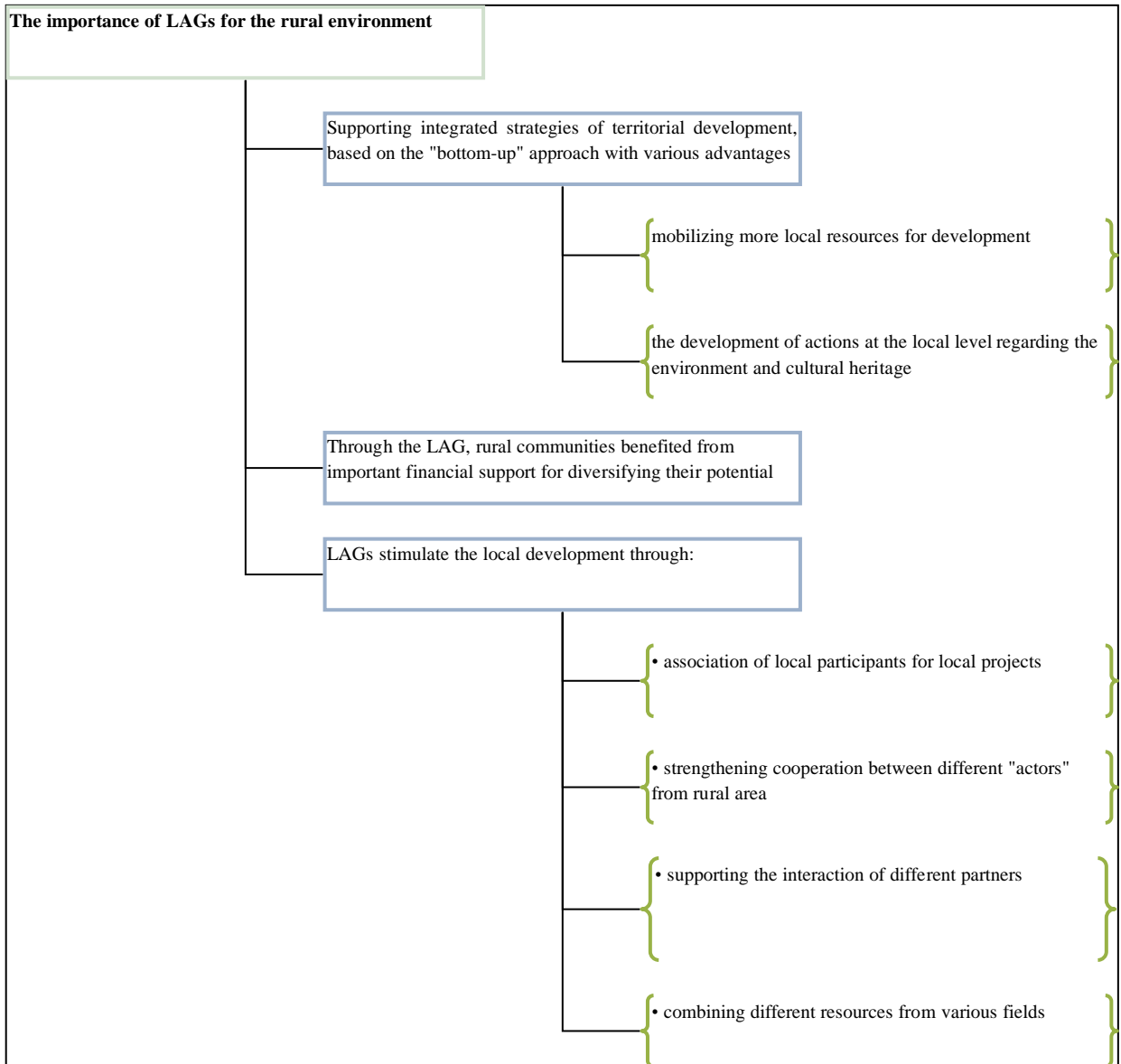


Figure 1. The importance of LAGs for the rural environment

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this research is to justify the fact that LAGs can be a way to support the development of the rural environment, and the proposed objectives are: mentioning the importance of LAGs for the rural environment, underlining the importance of LAGs in carrying out local diagnoses and strategic planning, on rural micro-regions, the proposal to implement a project through LAG, as a possibility of rural area and traditional products economic development. Thus, they were used theoretical and bibliographical resources as background for obtaining the final objectives proposed and qualitative research method.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Starting from 2011, the emergence of Local Action Groups in the rural environment (LAG) within the LEADER Program [6,11,12] generated in many rural areas of Romania a more sustained exercise for the realization of local diagnoses and strategic planning, in rural micro-regions, including in the social field. We consider that these

associations constituted in the form of LAG represent important opportunities for planning priorities for the development of (and investments for) social services.

We detail such a proposal in this research, namely: *Reintegration of agriculture into social life through traditional products - possibility of local economic development through LAGs.*

Justification of the proposal. Traditional crafts, handicrafts and food products have reduced a lot, as a result of industrialization, some of them are even disappeared. Traditional food products, with a small market, not supported by adequate measures, is continuously regressing. There is no network for the capitalization of traditional food products from the Mures Valley area. The project promotes the idea of traditional agriculture principles, which should become a widespread practice in rural areas and a positive model of combining local economic interests, community development, with those aimed at nature conservation.

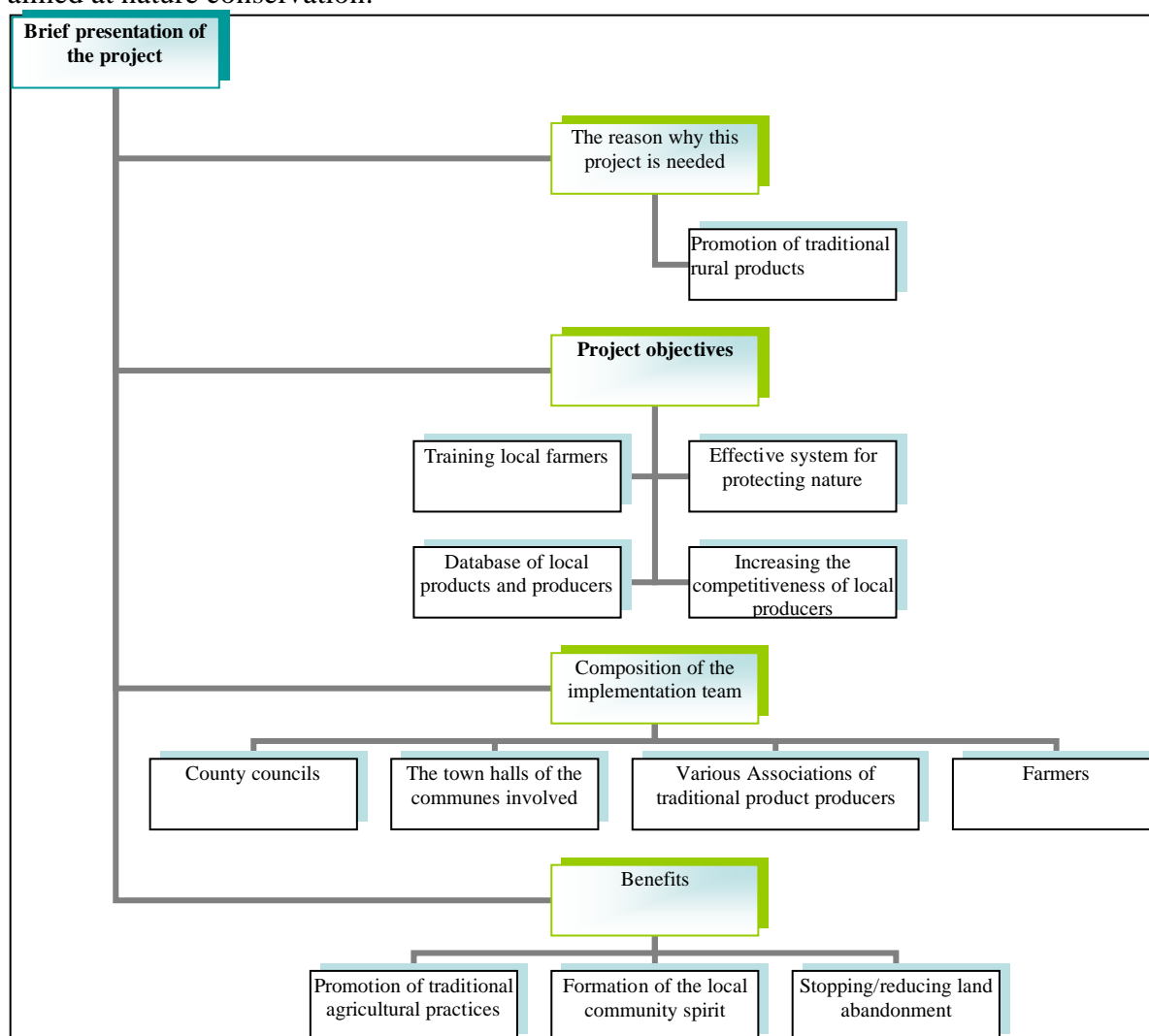


Figure 2. Brief presentation of the project

The reason why this project is needed. Today's agriculture is industrialized, often moving away from natural processes. Traditional, local food products represent an important principle of the local economy development. It refers to the procurement of locally produced goods and services. Food and agricultural practices through which the land, pastures and orchards are farmed, animals are raised and cared for play an essential role both in the creation and maintenance of the local culture, the landscape, but especially

for the health of people and children. Thus, obtaining local food products is a catalyst for maintaining and developing the community and, at the same time, a source of benefits for local economies.

Table 1.

SWOT analysis of the proposal

Strong points	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training local farmers in choosing and applying the best agricultural practices; - database and information on local culinary products and local producers; - increasing the capacity of local producers in obtaining local products of superior quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the population of the area is not aware of the use of EU funds designed for the Traditional Agricultural System; - traditional food products are still made only by elderly people, so they are on the way to extinction.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - building/consolidating civil society and encouraging the continuation of social transformation in the target areas; - the development and use of the "Local Food Products Guide" as an effective tool for promoting traditional food products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the project will not be able to attract enough followers; - difficulties in stimulating the interest of local authorities.

Source: own analysis

The area to which such a project can be applied. The project is proposed to be applied at the level of any areas where traditional products are obtained. The project must have as main objective, the encouragement of local decision-makers to be actively involved in the promotion and application of original economic instruments for the conservation of resources and traditional products, and as long-term objectives:

- training local farmers in choosing and applying the best agricultural practices;
- a consistent and efficient economic system (model) for nature conservation;
- database and information on local culinary products and local producers;
- increasing the capacity of local producers, so that they become more competitive and confident in obtaining local products of superior quality in order to participate in fairs, exhibitions, etc.

The type of proposal aims to support the practice of traditional activities in rural communities, leading to possible benefits such as:

- reducing the main threats to traditional agricultural practices;
- formation of the spirit of rural communities;
- stopping the abandonment of land and supporting the development of tourist activities, in deep disagreement with the specifics of the place, the architecture and the representative natural capital.

Table 2.

Main actors of the partnership

Main actors	The role in the territory	The position in the territory	Function in the territory
County councils	Development strategies of local communities	Public Administration	Representation of citizens' interests
The town halls of the communes involved	Representation of citizens' interests	Local public administration	Administration and development of the framework necessary for the development of traditional products
Various Associations of traditional products producers	Implementation of development strategies for traditional products	Non-governmental organization	Promotion of certified traditional products and those in the process of being certified
Producers/farmers of traditional products	Representation of own interests	Private partners	Production, trade based on the valorization of local products

Source: own proposals

The success of the proposal depends on a number of factors, among which we mention:

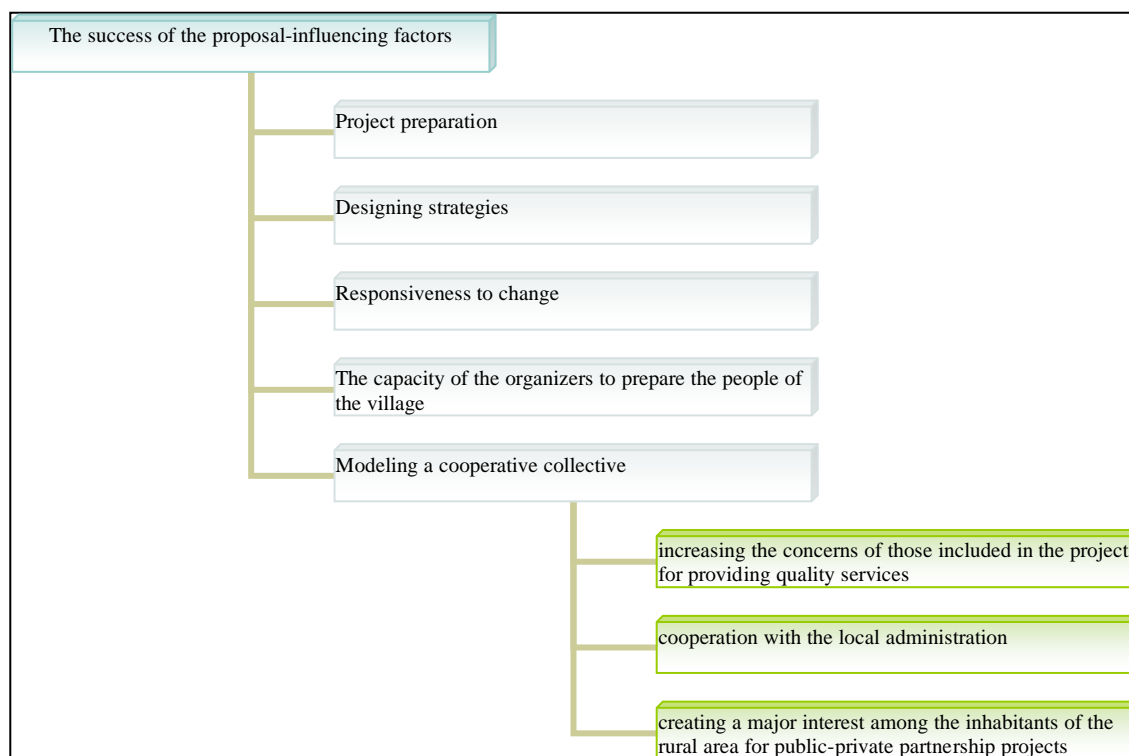


Figure 3. The success of the proposal-influencing factors

Values that can be promoted through such a proposal: belief in one's own strength to keep the community united between the traditional specifics and the challenges of the present; trust in the economic, educational and spiritual value of local traditions; care for nature; creativity in identifying alternative methods of developing the area.

CONCLUSIONS

Along the years, the LEADER approach has proven its value in countless ways. LEADER has also demonstrated that diverse partnerships can work. All these characteristics make LEADER one of the success stories of the European Union. The initiative provided jobs, brought improvements to the natural environment and new services. The examples of solving the problems of the rural environment through public private partnership show the effective way in which the Local Action Groups used the opportunities available within the LEADER program, to collaborate at the regional, national, and European level and to establish contacts, with the aim of share experiences and best practices.

Agriculture has been and is in recent years in decline. As a result, it is difficult for farmers to focus on future activities and development. Therefore, the support provided by the LAG is essential to support the reintegration of farms into the center of local life. Such a proposal helps to develop new visions and solutions for the future of agriculture. The bottom-up approach is demonstrated in all project activities. The LAG can recreate social links between local people and farmers by providing opportunities for them to meet, exchange and discuss the present and future of agriculture and farm life. These occasions have proven to be a good way to boost farmers' confidence.

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