Methodical guide for local action groups – the LEADER approach in the Nitra region.

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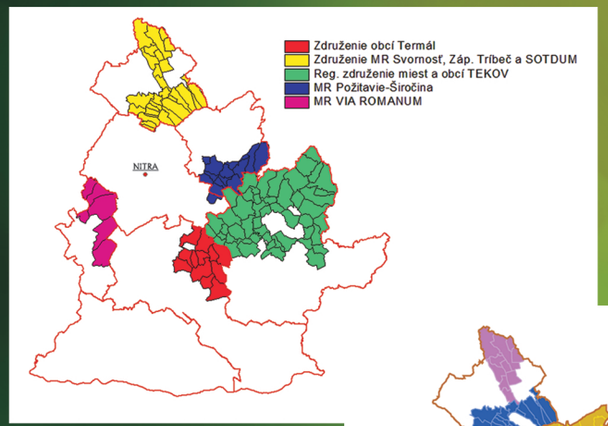
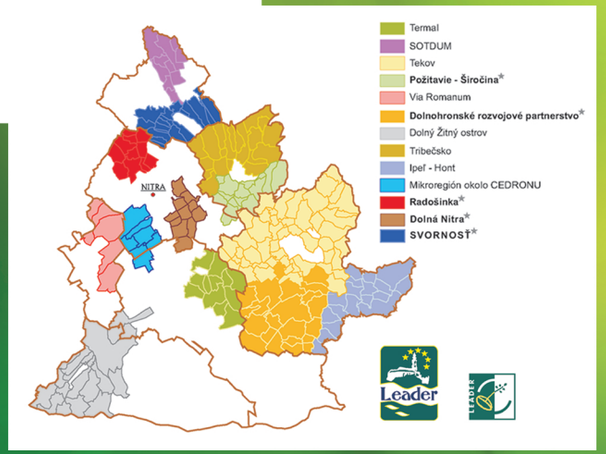


Year 2006, at the beginning …



Year 2010, what we have achieved …

- Information of the LEADER approach in the European Union and Slovakia.
- Implementation of the LEADER approach in the Nitra Self-governing region.
- Methodical process for integrated strategies LEADER.
- Approaches to self-evaluation of local action groups and integrated strategies of local development.

We continue to develop a dynamic image of the region.

Photo gallery of projects funded by grants of the Nitra Self-governing Region through financial instruments LEADER Nitra between 2009 and 2010.

Integrated rural development is now widely promoted approach, mainly through Organisation for economic cooperation and development (OECD) called „place based", development oriented on place or certain defined territory. However, this term includes more than just an integrated approach to development an area, it involves the application of the principles of wise governance based on principles of partnership, cooperation and share a number of sectors and their representatives in decisions about its future direction, combining public and private resources, mobilization of endogenous potential for addressing the needs and problems. European Union implements the LEADER approach, which is one of the most effective tools to promote integrated rural development, including also the possibility of obtaining grants managed by multi-sectoral partnership engaged directly in rural areas.

This guide aims to:

- promote rural development based on local potential, supported by the LEADER approach;
- indicate the main principles of this support,
- explain the basic structure and nature of its main instrument - an integrated strategy of territorial development,
- provide instructions, techniques and tools how to evaluate the implementation of an integrated strategy and its institutional support for local development to LEADER local action groups,
- assess the situation and development in building public-private partnerships in the Nitra region.

LEADER approach in the European Union and Slovakia

LEADER approach was initiated by the European Commission in the early 90's in launching a Community Initiatives as a pilot project to promote integrated rural development in selected rural areas in old Member States. In this period was important to support activities or development schemes, which were first programmed and implemented by local development partnerships in their defined territories.

The name of the pilot initiative LEADER is actually an abbreviation of the name „Laisons entre actions de développement rural", which means "Connections for rural development activities". The first opportunity to financially support these activities by the European LEADER I was opened in 1992 and involved about 200 local partnerships called "local action group" in the EU Member States. It was mostly very successful.

The greatest success was the application of the principle of innovation, partnership, participation and rural development from the bottom up. The program was supported by long-term strategies and innovative use of local potential to ensure sustainable rural development. For the new programming period 2000 - 2006, under Agenda 2000, LEADER II was substituted by another European initiative LEADER Plus, where around 1000 local action groups were involved - mostly followers of the LEADER II. After re-enlargement of the European Union from Central and Eastern Europe about 250 partnerships from the new Member States have added to this number between the period of 2004 – 2006.

LEADER approach differs from all previous approaches in the implementation of rural development policy, which has so far carried horizontally in the agricultural and forestry

sectors, less in rural infrastructure. Activities of businesses or municipalities were supported, regardless of the specific features of the place where this or that entity is situated, including socio-economic situation.

The principles of the LEADER approach

In this spirit the principles of integrated and sustainable development and thereby also the LEADER approach can be summarized as laid down by Council Regulation 1698/2005 and Commission Notice from 14 April 2000 (2000/C 139/05): **bottom - up approach, partnerships, multisectoral approach, territorial strategy, innovation, networking and cooperation**.

To the principles of the LEADER approach in terms of integrated and sustainable development other principles can be assigned: participation, a combination of internal and external sources, interaction, use of tools and vertical measures.

All of the above principles are also the basis for a successful and highly innovative management and control area in an integrated manner.

Legislation LEADER approach in the European Union and in the Slovak Republic

At present, the rural policy is a new separate status relatively independent from agricultural and structural policies with new approaches, particularly the use of a strategic approach at European level and at national level, traceable to the actual programming document. At the same time more powers are applied and transferred to the national level, greater balance between the three pillars of rural development and implementing simplified procedures.

Legislative framework for the implementation of rural policy is currently in **Council Regulation 1698/2005**, which objectives shall be pursued through four axes: Axis 1) Competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sectors, Axis 2) Environment and Landscape Management, Axis 3) Wider rural development on off-farm and Axis 4) LEADER approach.

Slovak Republic as an EU member country can finally seize the opportunities to apply the LEADER approach. Beside the mentioned Council Regulation, its implementation is regulated in the **Commission Notice of 14 April 2000** (2000 / C 139/05), which provides types of activities eligible for support under the LEADER approach. In this sense, the LEADER approach is also implemented in Slovakia with support the following measures:

- Implementation of local development strategies through the LEADER approach and contribution to achieve of one or several thematic axes;
- Territorial and international cooperation between local action groups;
- Capacity building and functioning local action groups.

The end user of the LEADER approach in Slovakia, as well as elsewhere in the EU Member States, is **local partnership of public, private and civil sector = Local Action Group (LAG)**, which defines its territory, where activities will be implemented and through them simultaneously pursue the objectives provided in integrated local development strategies, which itself constructed and for which is responsible to its citizens.

Representation of the public sector should not exceed 50 % of members in decision-making bodies of local action groups and the population of a defined territory in Slovakia should not be less than 10000 and more than 150000. Territory should be more or less

homogeneous in terms of socio-economic development. Further conditions for obtaining the status of the Local Action Group and also related grants from the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic are in the Guidelines for the Administration of axis 4 LEADER published on the website of the Agricultural Paying Agency.

Why is the LEADER approach so important for the future development of Slovak rural areas? Because it allows:

- more efficient and effective use of public funds,
- local and transparent use of public funds on the basis of the functioning of local multi-sectoral partnerships,
- decisions „made" for the territory abiding realities in all areas in contrast with the existing circuit approaches of the programming documents.

Implementation of the LEADER approach in the Nitra Region

The first and most important step in the LEADER approach is **the emergence and development of local multi-sectoral partnership**. In terms of Nitra Region it was based on the existing associations in the area already existed for several years, but their activity was mostly uncoordinated without quality managerial background. Gradually, from these groups became local action groups, on which we can be just proud.

It is not just a coincidence that just partnership is the first principle of good management in areas, and at any level. Partnerships LAG may arise for various reasons. One of them is the very existence of the LEADER approach and the ability to draw funds from it. Permanent local action groups are the partnerships that develop naturally, govern development in long-term and any outside sources including the LEADER approach are only accelerators of existing development processes.

Almost every association or group, which has been involved in capacity building in the Nitra region to the LEADER approach, passed following 10 developing stages: Regular meetings, Build confidence, Activation of citizens, Education of leaders, Partnership, Creation of an integrated strategy, Formalization of partnership, Building awareness group, Common management, Sustainable socio-economic development, Joint investment.

Formalization of the local action group and its role in the LEADER approach

If the institutions, groups and individuals in the community decided to cooperate in the development of their region, if they already had a previous stage of their development, build the necessary trust between them and can be called a partnership, it is useful to create a formal structure with an identification number, account and registration. LAG is composed of representatives of institutions, associations, individuals belonging to the public, civic and business sectors. Its membership must be open, wide and tied to the area defined by the LAG leadership development processes. It is important that all parties (which are important for development, interest and authority) are engaged in activities directly through membership or indirectly as an advisory capacity. All adopted rules and structures must also meet the basic mission of the local action group - the efforts to promote and develop high quality of life for residents of rural areas, which LAG defined.

Table: Public - private partnerships LEADER in the Nitra region

Name of the LEADER rural microregion*	First involvement in a project LEADER funded by the budget of the Nitra Self-governing Region**	LAG status (awarded by the MA SR)	Area in ha	Number of community	Population
Civic association Via Romanum	2006		15 955,6	6	13 972
Regional association of municipalities Tekov	2006		184 643,00	48	37 763
Civic association for the development of microregion Požitavie - Širočina	2006	LAG	16 181,00	14	10 092
Association of municipalities Termál	2006		20 638,00	12	14 175
Dolnohronské development partnership	2007	LAG	45 767,5	21	26 408
LAG Association Dolný Žitný ostrov	2007		45 261,6	19	31 339
Microregion Tribečsko	2007		51 048,00	19	19 628
Civic association Ipeľ - Hont	2007		30 555,00	18	18 214
Microregion around Cedron	2007		12 661,00	7	10 147
Civic association microregion Radošinka	2007	LAG	12 751,7	11	12 207
Regional association Dolná Nitra c. a.	2008	LAG	11 027,00	11	12 329
Association microregion Svornosť	2008	LAG	17 954,00	17	16 892
LAG Community of villages topolciansko - duchonsky microregion	2009		14 666,70	12	11 746

Source: Division of the strategic activities, Office of the Nitra Self-governing Region, 2010

* Public - private partnerships with the legal form of civil association

** Funding analysis, mapping the territory and prepare integrated strategies

Integrated territorial development strategies of local action groups

LAG Civic association for the development of microregion Požitavie - Širočina

Seat: Malé Vozokany
Website: www.ozpozitavie-sirocina.sk
Strategic priority 1: Rural Tourism and Recreation
Strategic priority 2: Renewal communities
Strategic priority 3: Developing partnership and cooperation
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Reconstruction and modernization of the portable stage in the village Vieska nad Žitavou“

* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 3/2009

LAG Civic association Dolnohronské development partnership

Seat: Želiezovce
Website: www.drp.sk
Strategic priority 1: Lifelong Learning
Strategic priority 2: Housing and the Environment
Strategic priority 3: Enough job opportunities in the region
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Change an existing sports club building and rebuilding the annex building, new tennis courts, multifunctional playground“ (Hontianska Vrbica)
„Reconstruction of bus stops“ (Hronovce)

* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 3/2009

LAG Association microregion Svornosť

Seat: Chrabrany
Website: www.mrsvornost.sk
Strategic priority 1: Basic infrastructure and business environment
Strategic priority 2: Rural Tourism
Strategic priority 3: Protecting natural and cultural heritage
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Architectural study“ - Construction of a playground in the village Čeľadince
„Architectural study“ - Čermany Amphitheatre - reconstruction and modernization“
„Architectural study of a playground in the village Nitrianska Streda“
„Architectural study - reconstruction and modernization of the bus stop in the centre of village Koniarovce“
„Architectural study“, Playground in the House of Culture Krnča
„Reconstruction of bus stops in the village Oponice - Architectural study“

* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 3/2009

LAG Regional association Dolná Nitra c. a.

Seat: Babindol
Website: www.dolnanitra.sk
Strategic priority 1: Village renewal and development
Strategic priority 2: Development cooperation and partnership
Strategic priority 3: Environmental protection
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Advisory and consultancy services for the renovation project of the former buildings in the village notary Klasov“
„Advisory and consultancy services for the reconstruction project of the municipal office, bus stops, playgrounds and playground - community Čechynce“
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 3/2009

LAG Civic association microregion Radošinka

Seat: Nové Sady
Website: www.radosinka.sk
Strategic priority 1: Local infrastructure and amenities
Strategic priority 2: Environmental protection
Strategic priority 3: Mobilization and promotion of human resources
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„We want to meet again“ (Malé Zálužie)
„Plant material“ (Alekšince)
„Playground“ (Alekšince)
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 3/2009

„Nitra LEADER“ - integrated local development strategies

Civic association Via Romanum

Seat: Močenok
Website: www.viaromanum.sk
Strategic priority 1: Attractive recreational potential
Strategic priority 2: Improving life for local people by building infrastructure leisure
Strategic priority 3: Development cooperation based on micro-cultural exchange and transfer of know-how
Strategic priority 4: Development of Environmental Quality
Strategic priority 5: Development of health and social care
Strategic priority 6: Development of small and medium-sized enterprises
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Modernisation of local radio in the village Dlhá nad Váhom“
„Reconstruction and expansion of recreation zone in the church park“ (Civic Association of St. Gorazd)

„Green Oasis“ (Civic Association TRNKY)
„Extension of public information system in the village Trnovec nad Váhom“
„The park campus“ (Parents Association for Elementary School Horná Kráľová)
„Reconstruction of public radio in the village Horná Kráľová“
„ Promotional material about Via Romanum“ (Christian youth club Močenok)
„Innovation support traditions“ (Parents Association for Elementary School Močenok)
„Reconstruction and expansion of radio broadcasting units management“ (Selice)
„Extending the information system in the village Močenok“
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 4/2009

Microregion around Cedron

Seat: Mojmírovce
Website: www.mikroregioncedron.sk
Strategic priority 1: Services for the population
Strategic priority 2: Leisure Infrastructure
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Modernization of public radio in the village Poľný Kesov“
„Information Billboards“ (Štefanovičová)
„Fencing Sportcomplex“ (TJ Družstevník Veľká Dolina)
„Fencing multipurpose playground“ (Družstevník Svätoplukovo)
„www.mikroregioncedron.sk creating a website for Local action group Microregion around Cedron“
„Welcome signs at the entrance to the microregion Cedron“
„Adjustment of public space in the village“ (Association for community development Rastislavice)
„Promoting cultural and social life in the village“ (Hunting Association Štefanovičová)
„Together, the culture and history of our community“ (Citizens‘ initiative „LEADER is fun“)
„Edition book History of the village Svätoplukovo“ (Citizens‘ initiative for rural development and promoting traditions)
„Mojmírovce - transport solution and information system“
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 4/2009

Microregion Tribečsko

Seat: Topoľčianky
Website: www.tribecsko.eu
Strategic priority 1: Tourism development
Strategic priority 2: Quality rural environment and landscape
Strategic priority 3: Building advanced knowledge and skills
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Tribeč information boards“ (Jedľové Kostolany)
„Tribeč information boards“ (Žitavany)
„Tribeč information boards“ (Velčice)

„Tribeč information boards“ (Sľažany)
„Tribeč information boards“ (Beladice)
„Tribeč wine festival“ (Traditional club, c. a.)
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 4/2009

LAG Association Dolný Žitný ostrov

Seat: Klížska Nemá
Website: www.maszdzo.biznisweb.sk
Strategic priority 1: Rural Tourism
Strategic priority 2: Amenities
Strategic priority 3: Rural moral values
Strategic priority 4: Employment of mothers with children
Supported projects from the budget of the Nitra Self-governing region in 2009*:
„Creation and installation of information boards in the village Klížska Nemá“
„Creation and installation of information boards in the village Zlatná na ostrove“ (Civic association Koczan Mór)
„Creation and installation of information boards in the village Číčov“
„Creation and installation of information boards in the village Veľké Kosihy“
„Creation and installation of information boards in the village Zemné“
* under Generally binding regulation of the Nitra Self-governing Region No. 4/2009

LAG Community of villages topolciansko - duchonsky microregion

Seat: Prašice
Website: www.massotdum.sk
Strategic priority 1: Suprastructure tourism
Strategic priority 2: Activation of children and youth in developing areas
Strategic priority 3: Local infrastructure
Strategic priority 4: Attractive environment village

Občianske združenie Ipeľ – Hont

Seat: Plášťovce
Strategic priority 1: Development of local economy
Strategic priority 2: Tourism development
Strategic priority 3: Increase the attractiveness of the region, improvement of basic services

Association of municipalities Termál

Seat: Podhájska
Strategic priority 1: Support and development of tourism
Strategic priority 2: Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises
Strategic priority 3: Infrastructure Development

Regional association of municipalities Tekov

Seat: Hronské Kľačany
Strategic priority 1: Creation of employment opportunities in villages
Strategic priority 2: Environmental protection
Strategic priority 3: Addressing the communications and small infrastructure in villages

Methodical process for integrated area development strategies LEADER

Development programme - strategy is the second important element of sustainable integrated development and tool for decision-making and management development process at any level of partnership, including community and regional development LEADER.

In general, strategy holds the force of logic programming. Approach to programming at local level differs in approach and procedure. First, we must bear in mind the fact that access to the development agenda must be as simple as possible, so people with different education, experience and the status would understand the process. For this reason, the Nitra region acceded to the development strategy by the most effective interactive approach, which included constant communication between local people, forming the partnership - the future local action group, methodologists, external experts and managers of local development.

While an interactive programming and planning in the Nitra region, a wide range of animation resources, facilitation and many of interactive tools were used. In the interactive approach methods called animation and facilitation are used very often. When drawing up integrated development strategies the Nitra region proceeded as follows:

- Establishment of a vision - vision for the future shape of municipalities as well as the entire territory,
- Audit resources - the collection of accurate data at village level and their incorporation into tables and graphs,
- Establishment of SWOT analysis on the level of individual municipalities as well as the entire territory,
- Identify the key issues and needs of the whole territory,
- The priority areas of development - the strategic priorities and strategic goal,
- Setting specific goals, which are filled with achievement priorities,
- Determination of concrete measures and activities which support achieving the specific targets,
- Determination of the conditions under which the measures and activities will use,
- Establishment of monitoring and evaluation framework.

Vision - the future of rural communities

At the beginning of the development program a vision or idea, how the villages and the entire territory will look like for 15 to 20 years, was formulated in Nitra groups. Vision may not be exactly based on full knowledge of the environment, but rather should reflect the dreams and aspirations of citizens with regard to their future and its various aspects - jobs, housing, environment, participation in social life and leisure. It was important to formulate the vision together. Based on the experience of strategy-making process in the Nitra region it has been really helpful to draw up a vision first on level of each community and then together for the whole territory. This enabled the unification of the ideas.

Mapping, audit resources

When community representatives agreed on a common vision for the future, systematically mapping the resources available in the area began. That would help to gradually fill in order to get the best picture of the social, physical and economic character of the area. Precision mapping of resources is a necessary for the creation of a SWOT analysis and make the right decisions in a strategic part of the programming process. Mapping should also bring a picture of the dynamics of development and therefore information about developing trends in the last 10 years is needed.

SWOT Analysis - Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

SWOT analysis helps to understand information about the area and look at them in terms of present and future development. It should be explained that the traditional SWOT analysis to which the method was established in the corporate management could not be good idea to use the open system, where areas of future LAGs were in the Nitra region. Therefore it was recommended to use **"open SWOT analysis**", which fitted more to logic processes in the system. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses, monitor the current state of the micro-region on the basis of audit resources. Analysis of opportunities and threats are concentrated on the development of micro-region in terms of future possibilities and looks.

Problem analysis

If SWOT analysis took into account the whole territory, the problem analysis highlighted in its final phase the key issues arising therefrom. Such key issues have also future LAGs in the Nitra region. To identify problems, their causes and solutions are used the following techniques: a conceptual map, sieve local action groups, matrix problems and analysis of costs and benefits. The interactive approach has most proved matrix problems, which seems the simplest and clearest identification technique key issues in cooperation with the locals.

Setting strategic objectives, strategic development priorities and specific goals

The next step of the strategy was to set strategic priorities and the inversion of the identified key issues. A strategic objective was subsequently formulated, therefore a milestone that is most likely achieved if the investment in selected strategic priorities, and which is also linked with the vision of the territory. The strategic objective is a simple expression of what is realistically achievable in a specified timeframe and what is reasonably measurable. Subsequently, in each development priority specific objectives were set. It means measurable intermediate milestones which are necessary and realistically achievable in a given time in order to fulfill the strategic objective.

Action and financial planning

Action planning involves deciding what concrete measures and eligible activities will be supported within the different priorities and specific objectives. An action plan has to be realistic, specific, flexible, transparent, be able to be monitored, evaluable and should reflect common practice.

The capacity building support to the LEADER approach the Nitra region considered with the programming package, therefore an action plan was build in a view of the global grant that could the LAG obtained under Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme. The

Action Plan was organically connected by financial plan, which was necessary to rethink - estimate of the necessary funds for each measure by the nature of the measures, identified needs in the territory according the number of projects, the average budget. This procedure is repea ted for all the measures separately.

How should the local action groups approach to the evaluation of the implementation of LEADER strategies

An important component of programming and planning is the process of monitoring and evaluation strategy during its implementation. Local action groups may seek to update the strategy, while this process should be preceded by assessment of the achievement of policy objectives.

In the Nitra region, while three selected local action groups have already completed this process as the hosting organizations of case study in the International Study for rural development, which provides Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra for a consortium of European universities. In the next section of this guide therefore we briefly describe how the local action group in the process of self-assessment may determine itself whether keeps with the objectives in implementing its strategy.

Monitoring is a continuous activity that lasts while the implementation of the strategy and it is implemented in regular and frequent intervals.

Evaluation is an activity that takes place at predetermined longer time intervals - usually at the beginning, middle and end of the implementation strategy and aims to determine whether planning and implementation of intervention will have (top strategy - ex-ante), has (in the middle of implementation - mid-term) or had (after the implementation of the strategy - ex-post) the desired effect. The evaluation is conducted using a set of **indicators** - of result and output compared to baseline at the time of the initial implementation of the strategy, values of these characteristics in that time and with respect to other interventions, which are carried out the strategy.

Procedure for drawing up the evaluation and monitoring framework

As mentioned above, during the programming phase is necessary to construct a monitoring and evaluation framework of strategy and under it to perform ex-ante evaluation before intervention. In this phase is to answer the evaluation questions in the form of assumptions under which the intervention occurs in the desired shape and help achieve the desired change. Ex-ante phase has also another meaning. It allows you to make changes in strategy for the elimination of known risks before it has begun, but also for the correct use of planned public resources.

The evaluation framework

The level of strategic objectives is calculated with the evaluation of the impact of intervention and therefore it is needed:

- Compilation of impact indicators in line with the objectives and their level,
- Define target levels for each key indicators compared with the current situation.

Level for specific targets is calculated with the evaluation results and should be:

- Compilation of the specific evaluation questions,

- Compilation of outcome indicators in accordance with the question,
- Define target levels for each key indicators compared with the current situation.

Monitoring framework

To measure the level of the monitoring output based on specified inputs and it is needed:

- Compilation of a set of input indicators (financial, physical),
- Compilation of a set of outcome indicators (physical, environmental).

Mid-term and ex-post evaluation of local development strategies

Ideally, preparation of the local development strategies is prepared in the logic of using back links in the whole process, where monitoring and evaluation framework is the organic part. In such a situation, medium- and Ex-post evaluation, or ongoing evaluation facilitated by periodically or continuously used frameworks drawn Ex-ante in already preparing a strategic document. The procedure of evaluation strategies can be divided into two phases:

- Phase 1 - evaluation from the perspective of the intervention logic of strategies, namely "top down";
- Phase 2 - assessment of "bottom up" - in terms of implemented projects;

Summary

Evaluation in the medium term and to conclude the implementation of the strategy should take place in two directions. From the term of setting intervention and its logic in relation to this territory, its problems, needs and also in terms of real resource utilization by final users at the project level, and consequently their contribution to specific objectives and strategic goals.

If the intervention logic of the strategy (selected priorities are targeted for a given period of time strategies, objectives are properly constructed and implemented in an appropriate combination of measures and activities and financial resources are properly allocated and respect the situation in the area as well as tariffs) is well set and found outputs at the project level correspond to it (conflict-level evaluation indicators, or in other words, the target at least approximately coincides with the facts at the outcome and impact indicators, implementation of the strategy of a local action group has been successful.

In a case of differences (positive or negative) their causes should be pursued further. Overall results of the strategies should be compared with the facts during the end of intervention within our integrated strategy, so that we can assess the proportion of the overall change in the territory of our strategic goal and specific objectives.

To sum up, the quality assessment of the implementation strategy is possible only if the quality of the strategy and particularly its intervention logic. Therefore, the key to good, realistic impact assessment is already in the process of preparing the strategy. Knowledge of evaluation and monitoring should be part of all the equipment of makers and implementers of strategies, including those responsible in the local action groups LEADER.