

Ivan Markov/Иван Марков

PROGRAM "LIDER" – OPPORTUNITIES AND PRACTICES

Програмата "ЛИДЕР" – Възможности и Практики

Националният стратегически план за развитие на селските райони в България поставя основните стратегически цели за периода 2007–2013 г. на базата на стратегическите цели на Общността за развитие на селските райони, на основните приоритети на Европейския съюз по отношение на заетостта, растежа и устойчивостта (Лисабон, Гьотеборг) и на останалите политики на Европейския съюз. Три са основните стратегически цели:

- Развитие на конкурентно земеделие и горско стопанство основан на иновации хранително-преработвателен сектор;
- Опазване на природните ресурси и защита на околната среда в селските райони;
- Подобряване на качеството на живот и насърчаване на възможностите за заетост в селските райони.

Те отразяват дългосрочната визия за развитието на селските райони в България:

- Жизнени селски райони с укрепнала и разнообразна икономика, предлагащи добро качество на живот в селските общности;
- Съхранени природни ресурси и културно-историческо наследство;
- Ефективни, иновационни и конкурентни земеделие и хранителна промишленост, които прилагат устойчиви земеделски практики, произвеждат качествени продукти с висока добавена стойност, използва пълноценно, природните и човешки ресурси на селските райони и допринася за увеличаване на доходите на земеделските производители.

Чрез програмата за развитие на селските райони ще се реализират основните стратегически цели на плана за развитие на земеделието и селските райони.

ОС 4 "LIDER" от програмата е насочена към засилване на участието и организираността на местната общност в процесите на развитие на селските територии, като създаде активни партньорство на местно ниво за реализиране на инициативи отдолу-нагоре; да разнообрази икономическите дейности,

подобри конкурентоспособността на местните продукти и развитие на по-качествени услуги в съответствие с нуждите и очакванията на местното население; да стимулира иновативни, интегрирани и устойчиви практики.

В доклада се разглеждат практики за използване на програма "ЛИДЕР" и разработване на местни стратегии за развитие.

The politics for development of the rural regions is a part of the General agricultural policy (GAP) with an increasing importance. It encourages the stable development in the rural regions of Europe and it is directed towards economic, social and ecological problems. Half and even more of the population of the European Union live in rural areas which are about 90% of the territory of the EU. "Lider" is an innovative approach within the frames of the policy of the EU for development of the rural regions.

The abbreviation "Lider" means "Relations between the activities for development of the rural regions". As the name suggests it is a method for mobilizing and supporting the development of the rural areas in the local rural societies, not only a particular series of measures which have to be applied. The experience shows that "Lider" can really change the everyday life of the people from the rural regions. This approach can play an important role in the encouraging of innovative decisions about old and new problems in the rural regions and to turn into a kind of "laboratory" for developing the local opportunities for trying new ways for satisfying the needs of the societies in the rural regions. The approach brought valuable results in many rural regions in the 15 EU countries and plays a significant role in the support of the rural regions in the new and the future members of the EU in their adapting to the changing reality of today.

From its beginning in 1991 "Lider" gave to the societies from the rural regions of EU instruments for taking an active role in the building of their own future. It developed with time together with the other parts of the GAP. Information collected from valuations and from the local interested parties show that the approach "Lider" is an instrument which works well in different conditions and types of regions, and in that way adapt the politics of the rural regions towards the big differences in the needs of the rural regions. According to all these reasons it has turned into inseparable part of the policy for development of the rural regions. By encouraging the local participation in the planning and accomplishing of the strategies for stable development, the approach "Lider" can turn into valuable instrument for the future policy of the rural regions.

For the programme period 2007-2013 "Lider" will not continue to be a separate programme but the mainstreaming will be integrated into all national and regional programmes for development of the rural regions. This will give new opportunities for applying the approach "Lider" in a bigger scale and in a bigger part of the activities for development of the rural regions.

"Lider" encourages the rural regions to look for new ways to become or to stay competitive, to use their maximum resources and to overcome the challenges in front of which they are standing as: old population, low quality of offering services or lack of

opportunities for employment. In that way "Lider" contributes to the improving the quality of life in the rural regions. It is used a holistic method for solving the rural regions. The method accepts, for example, that the competitiveness in the production of food, the protection of clean environment and the creation of the opportunities for work of the local population are interconnected aspects of life in the rural regions which require specific abilities, appropriate technologies and services, which have to be solved as an entire package and with appropriate political measures.

From its start in 1991, the initiative "Lider" works for giving to the rural societies in EU a method for encouraging the local partners for management of the future development of their region. The approach "Lider" attracted a big interest within the frames of EU and outside it. It was applied from countries outside its own circle of beneficiaries. The interest aroused by "Lider" in some cases had influence on the national, regional and local administrations and policies with the opportunities to handle with the problems of development through new forms of partnership and connecting activities.

"Lider" adds other European and national programmes. For example, the activities of "Lider" can activate and mobilize the local resources through supporting of preliminary projects for development (as diagnostic researches and researches for enforceability or creating of local abilities) which will improve the opportunity of these regions for access and usage not only of the "Lider" funds but also of other resources for financing of their development (for example more general European and national programmes for regional development and development of the rural regions). "Lider" also supports sectors and beneficiaries which often do not receive support or only partial support on other programmes which act in the rural regions like cultural activities, improving of the environment, rehabilitation of architectural sights and buildings, the rural tourism, improving the connections between the producers and the clients, etc.

"Lider" started in 1991 with an aim to improve the potential for development of the rural regions as relying on the local initiative and abilities by supporting the achieving of know-how of the whole local development and distribution of that know-how in other rural regions.

"Lider" is a part of the general policy for development of the rural regions of EU. The aims of "Lider" correspond to the aims of the general policy of EU for development of the rural regions. The changing General Agricultural Policy (GAP) takes into consideration the diversity of the rural regions and areas, rich of local identities and the increasing significance which the society ascribes to the high quality of the environment. These characteristics are considered as a basic advantage of the rural regions of EU.

The different approaches for development of the rural regions which were tried before the 90s were with typical sector character, directed mainly towards farmers and aiming to encourage the structural changes in the agriculture. They used an approach "from the bottom upwards" with schemes for supporting, solved on a national or regional level. The local active persons have not always been encouraged to acquire the abilities which they need. The approach which is based on a local level and on **the method "from**

the bottom upwards” includes the local societies and adds value to the local resources, it gradually began to acquire popularity as a new way for creating places of work and new business in the rural regions. “Lider” started as an experiment for collecting together, on a local level, of different projects and ideas, interested parties and resources. It turned out a perfect instrument for testing how to be increased the opportunities for the rural regions.

In political relation “Lider” was established as “Initiative of the society” financed by the structural funds of EU. There are three generations “Lider”: Lider I (1991-93), Lider II (1994-99) and Lider+ (2000-06). During that time the EU-members and the regions supported only the programmes “Lider” with a separate financing, different from the level of the EU. Since 2007 the approach “Lider” will be integrated (“will be a part of the basic policy”) within the frames of general policy for development of the rural regions of EU. This means that “Lider” will be included in the general national and regional programmes for development of the rural regions, financed by EU, together with other types of axes for development of the rural regions. The financing for the axis “Lider” from 2007 will come from the general financial transfers received by each EU-member from the new European Agricultural Fund for Development of the Rural Regions (EAFDRR) for supporting the development of the rural regions.

Basic elements of the approach “Lider”

The main idea of the approach “Lider” is based on the understanding that because of the diversity of the rural regions in Europe, the strategies for development are much more effective if they are sold and applied on a local level from the local participants, accompanied by clear procedures, support by the relevant state administrations and a necessary technical help for distribution of the good practices. The difference between “Lider” and other more traditional political measures for development of the rural regions consists in the fact that “Lider” points “how” to act, and not “what” should be done. The approach “Lider” has seven basic characteristics (figure 1). They have to be examined as a **general tool box**. Each characteristic adds and interacts with the rest in the process of realizing the measures and activities for development of the rural regions.

1. Strategies for local development according to the territory

The territorial approach, based on the region, includes a small, homogeneous, socially connected territory, which is characterized with general traditions, local identity, sense of belonging or general needs and expectations as a target region for accomplishing of particular policy. The existing of such regions as a reference facilitates the acquaintance with the local strong and weak points, threats and opportunities, internal potential and identification of basic problems which slows the stable development. “Based in the territory/region” means local. It is possible this approach to work better than other approaches because it allows the activities for be projected more precisely, to answer the real needs and the local competitive advantages. The chosen regions should have enough cohesion (**homogeneity**) and **critical mass of people** in relation to human, financial and

economic resources for supporting of vital local strategy for development. It is not necessary to answer the preliminary defined administrative borders.

Seven basic characteristics of Lider

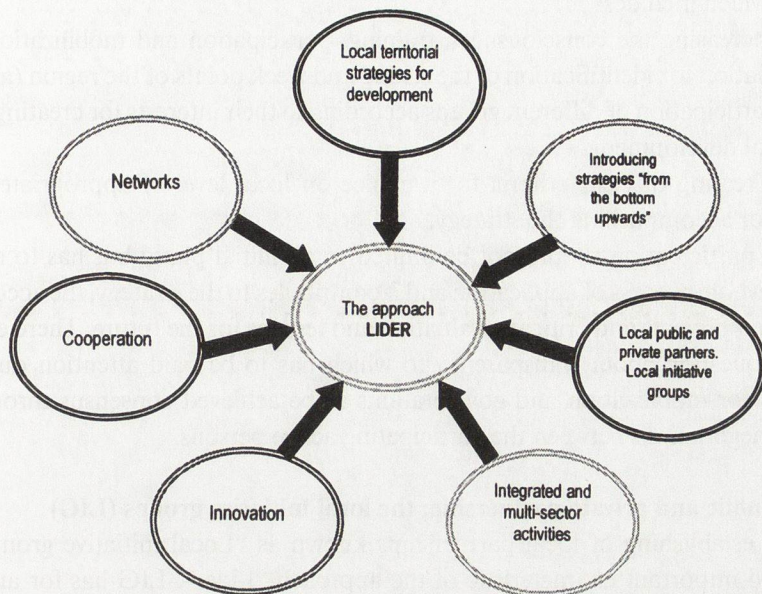


Fig.1

The definition "territory/local region" is not universal or static. Just the opposite, it develops and changes with the more general economic and social changes, the role of the rural economy, the management of the land and the care for the environment and the general perceptions of the rural regions.

2. The approach "from the bottom upwards"

The approach "from the bottom upwards" means that the local authorities take part in the taking of decisions about the strategy and the choice of priorities in their local area. The experience shows that the approach "from the bottom upwards" should not be considered as an alternative or to oppose to the approaches "from the bottom upwards" from the national and/or regional bodies, but rather as an approach which combines and interacts with them in order to be achieved better general results.

From the seven characteristics of "Lider" the most significant is the approach "from the bottom upwards". The policies for the rural regions which follow that approach should be designed and introduced in a way which is the most appropriate for the needs of the society which they serve. One of the ways to be achieved that is to be invited the local interested persons who will take the initiative and will take part. This is true for the EU with 15 members and for EU with 25 members, but also so important for coun-

tries which want to be part of the EU where exist a lot of structural problems in the rural regions. The participation of local active persons (participants) means the population as a whole, groups with economic and social interests and representative public and private institutions. The creation of a capacity is the main part of the approach “from the bottom upwards” which includes:

- increasing the consciousness, training, participation and mobilization of the local population for identification of the strong and weak points of the region (**analysis**);
- participation of different groups according to their interests for creating a **strategy** for local development;
- Creating of clear criteria for a choice on local level of appropriate **actions** (projects) for accomplishing the strategy.

The participation should not be limited to an initial phase but has to continue during the whole process of application and it contributes to the strategy, the accomplishing of chosen projects and critical reevaluation and lessons for the future. There exists the important question about transparency to which has to be paid attention during the procedures for mobilization and consultations to be achieved consensus through dialogue and negotiations between the participating active persons.

3. Public and private partnership: the local initiative groups (LIG)

The establishing of local partnerships known as “Local initiative group” is an original and important characteristic of the approach “Lider”. LIG has for an aim to identify and accomplish the strategy for local development by taking decisions for the distribution of the financial resources and their management. It is possible LIG to be effective in the stimulation of a stable development because they:

- collect and combine the available human and financial resources from the public sector, the private sector, the civil and volunteers sector;
- unite the local acting persons in team projects and complex activities necessary for improving of the economic competitiveness of the region;
- strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between the different active persons in the rural regions which often have limited experience in their work together through decreasing the potential conflicts and facilitating the negotiation of decisions through consultations and discussions;
- Facilitate through the interaction between different partners of the processes of adaptation and change in the agricultural sector (for example qualitative products, food chains), the integration of the care for environment, diversification of economics of the rural regions and the quality of life.

LIG should unite the partners from the public and private sector, to be well balanced and representative for the existing local groups by interests occurred in the different social and economic sectors of the region.

On the level of taking decisions, the private partners and associations should be at least 50% of the local partnership.

LIG can be created *ad hoc* (specially) to acquire access to financing from the programme “Lider” or to be based on the preliminary established partnerships. They are created by a team of professionals and agencies for taking decisions, LIG is a model of organization which has influence on the accomplishing of policies in a positive way. The experience shows that several types of LIG has developed from these general characteristics as a result from the different types of regional, national political and institutional organization and also with different levels of autonomy concerning the approval of the projects and the management of financing. The role and responsibility of LIG developed in time in some EU-members after the increase of knowledge for the approach “Lider”.

LIG decide the tendencies and contents of the strategy for local development and take decisions for the different project which have to be financed. The real payments are often done by a body which is occupied with public financing, not only from LIG itself, but on the basis of the choice of projects done by LIG.

The active persons in the rural regions which are the most active in the local initiatives are:

- ❖ professional organizations and unions (representing the farmers; professionals non-farmers and micro-companies);
- ❖ trade associations;
- ❖ citizens, inhabitants and their local organizations;
- ❖ local political representatives;
- ❖ ecological associations;
- ❖ providers of cultural and public services, including media;
- ❖ female associations;
- ❖ Young people.

4. Facilitating the innovations

“Lider” can play an important role for stimulation of new and innovative approaches for the development of the rural regions. Such innovation is stimulated as one of the LIG. The innovation in the rural regions can mean a transfer and adaptation of innovations, modernization of traditional forms of know-how, or finding of new decisions of stable problems of the rural regions which other political interference did not manage to solve in a satisfactory or long-term manner. This can give new answers to the specific problems of the rural regions.

5. Integrated and multi-sector activities

“Lider” is not a sector programme for development; the strategy for local development should have **multi-sector (many branches)** direction by integrating several sectors of activities. The activities and projects which are part of the local strategies should be connected and coordinated as a connected whole. The integration may concern activities which are done in one sector, all programme activities or particular groups of activities, or the most important, the connections between the different economic, social, ecological active persons and sectors.

6. Networks

The networks include the exchange of results, experience and know-how between the groups "Lider", the rural regions, the administrations and organization, which participate in the development of the rural regions within the frames of the European Union, regardless the fact whether they are direct beneficiaries of the program "Lider". The networks are a way for sharing the good practices, of distribution of the innovations and developing on the basis of lessons from the local development of the rural regions. The networks create **connections between people, projects and rural regions** and in that way assist for overcoming the isolation of some rural regions. They can stimulate the projects for interaction by connecting the groups "Lider" together.

7. Cooperation

The cooperation can be developed into **something more than establishing contacts**. It includes the Local initiative group which initiates a general project with other group "Lider" or with a group which uses a similar approach in other region, a EU-member or even a third country.

The cooperation can support the groups "Lider" to assist their local activities. They could be allowed to solve some problems or to add value to the local resources. For example this could be a way for achieving a critical mass of people, necessary for the viability of a particular project or through encouraging of additional activities, for example a general marketing through groups "Lider" in different regions with general specialization of a particular product (chestnuts, wool, etc.), or developing of general tourist initiatives, based on general cultural heritage (celtic, roman, etc.).

The projects for **cooperation are not just an exchange of experience**. They have to include a specific **general project**, in the best way guided by a general structure. There are two basic types of cooperation which are possible in the programme "Lider":

§ **Inter-territorial** cooperation: this means cooperation between different rural regions within the frames of a EU-member. It can be between groups "Lider" and can be opened for other local groups which use a similar approach of participation;

§ **Trans-national** cooperation: this means cooperation between groups "Lider" from at least two EU-members or with groups in third countries where used similar approach is.

In Bulgaria was developed a pilot project in which took part 11 Bulgarian municipalities. In the last few years were developed several other projects from Local initiative groups which will use the resources of the programme "Development of the rural regions", pivot 4, programme "Lider".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Markov, Iv., N. Dimov.** Rural regions in Bulgaria: through priorities of regional development, First international conference Human dimensions of global change in Bulgaria, Sofia, 2004.

2. **Markov, Iv.** The European agricultural convention and the development of the rural regions, Scientific conference "Bulgarian and Europe — traditions and the presence", V. Turnovo, 2003.

3. **Tvrdonova, Jela.** The approach "LIDER", Basic manual, MZP, Sofia, 2007.

*** National strategic plan for development of the rural regions in Bulgaria 2007–2013.

*** Programme for development of the rural regions in Bulgaria 2007–2013.