

ACTORS AND PARTNERSHIPS IN THE LAGS: A NEW CIVIC SPACE?

A CZECH CASE STUDY.

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INTRODUCTION

LEADER (“Links between actions of rural development”) is usually said to be an innovative policy (Sociologia Ruralis 2000. Special issue 42-2; Maurel and Chevalier, in this issue) as well as a new model for local rural development (EEC 1988). It differs from former policies for rural territories which focused essentially on agricultural development and modernization of production structures based on intensification and specialization of food and fiber production (Maurel 2008). Through leader programs, the approach aims at defining a project on a territorial basis and no more on a sectorial basis. Territorial projects designed at community level through LEADER aim at valorizing local resources in order to create benefits for local communities, to fulfill their needs and to answer to their demand. Leader is a tool designed for promoting an integrated and sustainable rural development based on an autonomous, community-based and participatory approach (The Cork declaration, 1996).

LEADER programs were first launched in 1991-1993 by the ECC in order to support local development actions and to strengthen the capacity of local actors to design their own projects, according to the vision of rural development elaborated at the end of the 1980’s (EEC, 1988). In the LEADER approach a Local action group (LAG) - a local body constituted of public and private actors - designs a strategy and allows funding to local projects coming up from public sector, companies or nongovernmental organizations. After the 1991-1993 period, LEADER II (1995-1999) helped launching pilot actions for stimulating local innovative projects. The LEADER+ program (2000-2007) extended this approach, especially with the adhesion of new member states (2004 and 2007). In the current programming period (2007-2013), Leader is no longer a separated program but is integrated (“mainstreaming”) in the rural development program of the Common Agricultural Policy.

If we focus particularly on EU new member states, the LEADER approach breaks with the management practices in former communist countries (Kovach 2008): thinking rural development in terms of community-based initiatives associating different social actors is a new approach in countries where the legacy of collectivist system, bureaucratic control and centralist tradition is just beginning to fade away. However, some authors’s analysis (Nemes 2005) do not support this view and think that LEADER brought above all a new rhetoric.

Analysis of empirical data is thus needed to discuss to what extent, and even more in the EU new member states than elsewhere in Europe, the leader approach is a new mode of governance and as a new model for collective action. In terms of policy and decision making, LEADER is based on the possibility for local communities to get funding for their initiatives, within the guidelines set up by State administrations and based on the EU LEADER framework. This bottom-up approach allows connecting different governance levels but with the final aim of supporting local initiatives and strengthening local capacities.

However, in this paper we want to focus on another assumed effect of LEADER implementation. As LAGs have to be composed of local representatives, of local entrepreneurs and of NGOs members, they could form a new model of collective action. They are the institutional place where multiple and diverse actors cooperate and manage to solve conflicts of interest. This process has been described as “social innovation” (Dargan and Shucksmith 2008). LAGs are supposed to be a tool for local partnership (Nardone et al 2010), negotiation and contractualization (Koutsouris 2008). In that way, LAGs could be a new civic space in the sense of it could offer a potential for creating, through participation and social inclusion (Shortall 2008) at local scale, initiatives within a new social partnership. The relevance of analyzing LAGs as a potential new civic space is strengthened by the recent emphasis put in research in social sciences on participatory approaches through concepts like “legitimacy of proximity” (Rosanvallon 2008) or like “hybrid collectives” for decision making (Latour 1999).

Focusing on Leader implementation in a former communist new member state, the Czech Republic, where, since the beginning of the 1990’s, local democratic institutions were progressively rebuild in rural areas, we will analyze results from a field research conducted within the ALDETEC program (<http://www.cefres.cz/aldetec/index.html>) in three LAGs, representing contrasted geographical situations in the Czech Republic (Šumava mountain, periphery of the Prague urban region and South Moravia).

Our objective is to analyze empirical data in order to know if the social forces present in LAGs reveal the emergence of a new civic space. If LEADER is a driving force for changing local modalities of collective action for rural development, thus it should be reflected in LAGs composition (age, gender, social and professional background) and in the way of building and sharing a community-based project in a bottom-up process (knowledge of and familiarity with the local strategy). On the contrary, if LEADER only supports an additional way of getting resources through the use of a new rhetoric, thus LAGs composition should be less diverse and interactions within the group should be limited because of lack of dialogue and consultation.

DATA AND METHOD

As in previous studies based on empirical data we selected a small number of case studies. Ray (1997) analyses two LAGs; Nardone et al. (2010) selected four LAGs. Beyond the 112 LAGs existing in the Czech Republic in 2009, three have been selected in order to open the scope of the potential factors that intervene in a positive or a negative way in the LEADER implementation process.

Each of the three LAGs selected takes place in different contrasted regions: The LAG “Hornácko-Ostrožsko” is located in the region of South Moravia close to the Slovakian and Austrian borders. The LAG “Ekoregion Uhlava”, in Šumava Mountains, South Bohemia, is situated on the former Sudete regions, nearby the German border. The LAG “Podlipansko” is located on the Prague peri-urban area.

They distinguish one from another by their modality of accession into the Program LEADER: The LAG “Hornácko-Ostrožsko”, has been selected at the first round of the 2007-2013 LEADER call for application. The LAG “Podlipansko” has been selected at the second round of the 2007-2013 LEADER call for application and has benefited in 2006 of the Rural Renewing Financial Support (*Podpora obnovy venkova*, POV). The LAG “Ekoregion Uhlava” has been selected after the application closing following the minister of Agriculture

decision to add some 32 more LAGs. In 2006, this LAG has benefited of the so-called “LEADER CZ” financial support (a national version of the LEADER program).

Each of them stresses their strategic plan on specific points: The LAG “Hornácko-Ostrožsko” is characterized by a key interest given on rural folklore and traditions imbedded in the local social life. The LAG “Ekoregion Uhlava” is characterized by an intense cross-border exchange with Germany (reactivated with the collapse of the Iron Curtain and facilitated with the integration into the European Union), that takes place in a complex historical context related to the issue of the expulsion of Germans inhabitants after World War II. The LAG “Podlipansko”, characterized by his location in the zone of influence of the national capital, has a strong focus on the “quality of life”.

We surveyed on the members of the board of directors, i.e. the administrators of the LAG (non-profit-making) association. These members are elected during the annual general meeting and are the civil representatives of their organization. They are in charge of the well running of the association as well as of the implementation of the decisions taken during the annual general meeting. The board of directors is usually composed proportionally of representatives of every of the three sectors: elected representatives (e.g. mayors), and actors from the private and the associative sectors. In total, 46 interviews have been performed from June to November 2009.

Our analysis is based on the data collected thanks to the sections of the interview dealing with:

- board members socioeconomic profile;
- board members level of knowledge on the drafting and contents of the strategy;
- board members involvement in this process.

Among the different themes broached in the questionnaire ALDETEC, we especially retained the questions from the following sections:

Section I – Participation in the LAG project
1. Who took the initiative for the LAG creation?
2. How were you associated to the LAG formation project?
3. Who prepared the LAG local development strategy?
4. Did you personally participate in the strategy drafting, in which moment?
5. Could you briefly describe the strategy?
6. Which were the most active people?
7. How did the inhabitants have been consulted?
Section IV – Identification questions

The empirical data were processed by contingency tables (or cross tabulations) in order to analyze the relation between two or more categorical variables.

This method allowed drawing up an *ideal type* of the Czech LAG. According to Max Weber, the *ideal type* has to be perceived as a reflexive instrument and not as a fixed result. Weber wrote: “An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly

emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct...” (Max Weber, 1949, p.89). The *ideal type* could be considered as a simplified and schematized picture of the object analyzed with which the systematic observation of reality has to be confronted. In this way, it is a useful tool for comparative sociology and for rural sociology (Madsen and Adriansen 2004).

Additionally, our analysis is helpful for elaborating a typology of the persons forming the LAG board of directors and for characterizing the differences between the three study cases.

MAIN RESULTS

The Czech LAG *ideal type*

We could define the Czech LAG “ideal type” as following:

Lower proportion of women: 28%.

Over-representation of the 50-59 years old age group and quasi-absence of people below of 35 years old.

Secondary and higher education.

Lower proportion of the associative sector: 13%.

Associative sector mainly female: 83% of the associative representatives are women.

Few elected representatives women: only 14% of the mayors.

High proportion of elective representatives: 60% (including those who sit in the LAG with another status)

Numerous mayors sit in the LAG with another status (22%): approximately 1/4 in the private sector and 1/3 in the associative sector.

Typology of the LAG members groups

According to the interview results we elaborated a typology of LAG members. Three groups are distinguished:

Group A: The best assimilation of the project and its strategy

The Group A consists of approximately 15% of our sample. The members of this group are characterized by the best knowledge of how the LAG came into being and its strategy, comparatively with the other members. Except one individual, all of them joined the project on their own initiative and participated to the strategy drafting. The members of the Group A are a majority of women (57% approximately) which constitutes besides a minority in the whole sample (only 25%). Except one individual, all of them are mayors. The dominant age groups are 35-49 and 50-59 years old, and one of them is less than 35 years old (the only one on the whole sample).

Group B: The lowest assimilation

The Group B represents about 30 % of our sample and could be defined in opposition with the Group A. Its members have the lowest knowledge of their LAG constitution as well as its strategy. All of them have been associated to the project by invitation or by necessity (not on their own initiative) and only half of them have participated to the strategy drafting. They are a majority of men (two thirds). The repartition between the mayors and the private sectors

representatives is well-balanced, although the associative sector is quasi-absent. The dominant age groups are 50-59 years old and 60 and older.

Group C: Partial and general assimilation

The Group C (30% of the sample approximately) could be defined as a group with an average knowledge of their LAG constitution and its strategy. All of them have participated to the strategy drafting. They are an important majority of men (86%) and mayors (73%). The dominant age group is 50-59 years old.

Three types of LAGs very contrasted

The previous typology of the LAG members was drawn up from a common sample of 46 individuals. Considering the three selected LAGs separately, we can observe that every of these groups are more or less significantly represented in these LAGs.

The LAG “Podlipansko”: Assimilation and diversity in a peri-urban context

Half of the “Podlipansko” LAG members corresponds to the Group A, which is defined as the group with the best assimilation of the project and its strategy. One quarter fits to the Group B characteristics, and no one is part of the Group C. The LAG “Podlipansko” is constituted of half of women, i.e. more than the “ideal type” average (25%). Most of the women have participated in the LAG drafting. The repartitions between age groups, education levels and sectors are well-balanced. Most of the members have a good acquaintance of the LAG creation process and the strategy. Not any mayors sit in the LAG with another status.

The LAG “Uhlava”: Local and individual centralization, dependency on few local leaders

The LAG “Uhlava” is predominantly constituted by the Group B (60% approximately) which is defined as the group with the lowest assimilation of the project and its strategy. One third of the members correspond to the Group C, and only a few (13%) correspond to the Group A. There is very few women (only one quarter), and not any representatives of the associative sector. Only the mayors have the best acquaintance of the LAG creation process and its strategy.

The LAG “Hornácko-Ostrožsko”: Inter-municipal model

The Group C, which is defined by the partial and general assimilation of the project and the strategy, is the biggest group in the LAG “Hornacko-Ostrozsko” (60% approximately). The Groups A and B are equally represented (roughly 20% each one). There are few women (one third). The mayors are over-represented (72%) and approximately one third of them sit in the LAG with another status. They have the best acquaintance of the LAG creation process and its strategy. Only the mayors have been associated to the project by their own initiative, and they are almost the only ones who have participated to the strategy drafting from the beginning.

DISCUSSION

In order to evaluate if the social forces present in the LAGs reveal the emergence of a new civic space, we characterized a model of collective action based on the Pierre Rosanvallon’s theory of democratic legitimacy (Rosanvallon, 2008).

According to Pierre Rosanvallon, we observe since the 1980’s the decline of the “double legitimacy system”. On the one hand, the decline of the legitimacy of the election process, i.e. the vote, related to a change in the meaning of the notion of majority. People are perceived

not anymore as a homogenous mass but through a succession of different specific situations. The minority, one of the many expressions of the social totality, has replaced the notion of majority conceived as the interest of the great majority. Second, the decline of the legitimacy of the administrative power progressively deprived of its moral and professional attributes. The ongoing decline of the former democratic legitimacy system is following by the appearance of new expectations from citizens in terms of impartiality, plurality, compassion or proximity.

Pierre Rosanvallon distinguishes three emerging forms of legitimacy which are associated to the new approach of the “social generality”: the legitimacy of impartiality, the legitimacy of reflexivity, the legitimacy of proximity. According to this author, these three new forms, unlike the former legitimacy ones, do not consist in a *status* but are constituted of *qualities*. It means that they are never definitely established. “Constantly dependants to the social perception of action and to the institutions’ behaviors, the legitimacies of impartiality, of reflexivity, of proximity are hybrid” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p.19).

The first forms of legitimacy match two kinds of institutions: the independent authorities of surveillance and regulation (Quango or qango: quasi non-governmental organization) is based on a legitimacy of impartiality because of their constitution; the constitutional courts, whose legitimacy is related to the reflexive character of their intervention. The third form is not connected to a particular institution and corresponds rather to a whole of social expectations.

By confronting our results with these three types of legitimacy, we will evaluate how and in what extend the LAG, as a model of collective action, constitutes a new civic space.

The legitimacy of impartiality

The electoral legitimacy relies on a popular recognition. It is based on a “social generality” conceived on an aggregative mode as a social volume. On the contrary, the impartiality refers to a “generality” of another nature, constituted by the fact that nobody can not benefit of any advantage or privilege. This legitimacy can not be claimed as an attribute. Therefore, how has to be interpreted the presence of elective representatives in the LAGs? Does it have to be perceived as an expansion of the electoral legitimacy through the LAG model? Does the LAG can pretend to a legitimacy of impartiality?

Regarding the Czech LAG *ideal type*, the over-representation of mayors (60%) including the fact that some of them sit in the LAG with another status (22%), corroborate the assumption of an expansion of the electoral legitimacy into the LAG collective action model. In the case of the LAGs “Hornácko-Ostrožsko” and “Uhlava” the electoral legitimacy seems to be extended but in two different ways: in Hornácko-Ostrožsko many mayors sit in the LAG with another statute (approximately one third of them); in Uhlava only a few mayors occupies the predominant and central position. On the contrary, the LAG “Podlipansko” seems to getting closer to a legitimacy of impartiality because of its collegial aspect and its relative well-balanced repartition between the sectors representatives.

Considering the LAG members typology, the group A, defined by the best assimilation of the project and its strategy, is almost exclusively constituted by elective representatives. Because of the significant contribution of the mayors into the LAG until now, it is not possible to determinate in what precise extend the LAG collective action model is complying with a legitimacy of impartiality. It is very probable that, at the present stage of the LAG implementation process, it is still too premature to answer this question.

The legitimacy of reflexivity

The legitimacy of reflexivity is based on the principles of citizen partnership and public debate. The demand of reflexivity might not be reduced only to the experts' intervention. The doubts and uncertainties towards the expertise itself have to be taken into account. This demand of reflexivity supposes mainly that the expertise comes out from the enclosed space of its production. Studies in sociology of science (Callon, 1986 ; Callon and Latour, 1991 ; Latour 1999) insisted on the emergence of hybrid collectives gathering experts and non-experts, humans and non humans (the latest being represented by stakeholders acting as spokesmen). These works open new perspectives on modalities of decision making.

Our analyses on LAGs board members show that such hybrid collectives are being set up through LEADER approaches. First, LAGs are constituted by non-experts, i. e. persons being in possession of lay knowledge and concerned by development issues. Some LAG board members acquired experience in management of municipalities (local representatives); others have an empirical knowledge of the territory and the main issues at stake for its development, this knowledge coming from their professional experience (entrepreneurs) or from their practice as NGO member. The LAG collective is hybrid also because stakeholders may cumulate two types of knowledge, i. e. being both local representative and local entrepreneur or NGO member. LAGs are thus a structure for decision making that is not linked to a scholarly-based expertise. In top-down development policies, experts with a strong academic legitimacy are consulted at high decision-making level; they elaborate solutions to be implemented by local actors and supposed to solve problems at local scale.

On the contrary, in LAGs as hybrid collectives, projects are build on local, empirical, multiple and non expert experience, in a participatory way. LAGs are close to the model of hybrid collectives for another reason. Stakeholders involved in LAG boards are also spokesmen/women for "non human things" (Latour 1999), like a territory, a cultural landscape or the natural environment. These stakeholders do not hold their legitimacy from a democratic elective process but from their capacity for defending, in the discussion on local development, the interests of the local territory. In other words they feed the local debate with concern about the interactions between a society and non-human things like the physical components of the territory.

Lastly, LAGs functioning have another property in common with hybrid collectives for decision making. Their approach is not oriented to finding definitive solutions for local development; on the contrary they contribute to the emergence of ad hoc projects that contribute to the development of the local territory but, at the same time, to a new deal in terms of social relationships. They help constructing the local territory both in its material (roads, buildings, landscape planning...) and in its social and political dimension. In that sense LAGs contribute to the emergence of a new civic space. One can call it new because of the way the LAG is composed and because of its way of tackling development issues. It can be compared to Latour's "parliament of human and non-human things" (1999). In that way, LAGs are another of bringing local areas into politics.

The legitimacy of proximity

According to Rosanvallon, three different variables can be distinguished regarding proximity: First, the proximity of *position*. The words of "presence", "attention", "empathy", and "compassion", as a new language, express that the relation between citizens and those who govern them can not be thought anymore on the mode of figuration. An imperative of presence has replaced the demand of representativeness. "To be *present* has replaced the

project to *represent (repraesentare)*” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p.295). Secondly, the proximity of *interaction* corresponds to a modality of relation between citizens and those who govern them based on *justification* and *information exchange*. In France, this is the term of “autogestion” that appeared to express the aspiration for a citizenship more directly active and an increase of people’s autonomy. The term of “participative democracy” was first constitutionally mentioned at the European level (European Constitutional Treaty, 2004). Finally, the proximity of *intervention* consists in considering attentively the particularity of every situation: “Acting in accordance with the diversity of contexts and preferring the informal arrangement to the mechanical application of rule” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p.269).

The Czech LAG *ideal type* shows an incomplete correspondence with the definition of the legitimacy of proximity. Although the LAG is supposed to be close to people because of its local level position (proximity of *interaction*), the lower proportion of the associative sector representatives (13%) expresses an obvious restriction towards the expression of diversity (proximity of *position*). This fact is obviously observable in Horňácko-Ostrožsko where the group C, constituted by a huge majority of men and mayors, is clearly dominant. On the other hand, the case of the group A shows that is precisely the members coming from under-represented categories, as women or youngest people, which demonstrate the best ability to assimilate the project and its strategy.

CONCLUSION

The LAG can be considered as new civic space but still imperfectly realized at the present time. In order to be completely part of this emerging mode of governance and to constitute a new model for collective action, the LAG might correspond closely to a “democracy of appropriation” and not be conceived anymore as an electoral legitimacy resource (“democracy of identification”).

This is obviously in terms of legitimacy of reflexivity that the LAG has its most relevant potential. The LAGs constitute an institutional place where stakeholders with different backgrounds and sociological properties interact for building and implementing a local development project. The decision making is shared between persons having a legitimacy resulting from democratic elective process (local representatives) and non elected persons wanting to participate in local development for private or business purposes or for more general reasons connected to the general interest (cultural, environmental, quality of life issues).

However, the restriction towards the expression of diversity and the dominant position of mayors still constitute obstacles in terms of legitimacies of proximity and impartiality respectively. We observed that, in some LAGs, the proportion of representatives, entrepreneurs and NGO members was unbalanced and that municipal representatives were actually the main group. In another case, the local partnership was closer to an inter-municipal organization than to a participatory approach based on mixed stakeholders.

Finally, a cross country comparison, possible with the empirical material gathered in the ALDETEC program, could help to examine the differences in that new civic space emergence, throughout central European countries

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