



Future Oriented Collaborative Policy
Development for Rural Areas and People

**Compendium of Regional
Evaluation Reports**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this compendium is to provide insights into results of evaluation of various regional policies in 12 PoliRural pilot regions. The authors hope that this compendium can be used as an input into the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. Evaluation was done by conducting desk review, interviews and surveys with regional stakeholders and experts.

In Section 2, there is an overview table and a link to full reports provided at the end of the section. Section 3 presents overview of main findings and recommendations in individual regions. Section 4 contains a summary and conclusion.

It is important to note the PoliRural team intends to work with the pilots on an iteration of their regional evaluation reports to make sure that the lessons learned are shared with the group and focus on issues that will add value to their foresight initiatives.

2. Overview of regional evaluation reports

Table 1 - Overview of regional evaluation reports

Country	Region	Evaluated policy	Used evaluation technique
Belgium	Flanders	Common Agricultural Policy, Article 28 of Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013	Literature review, multi-annual geodatabase analysis, cross-checking with policy makers.
Czech Republic	Central Bohemia	Development strategy of the territorial district of the Central Bohemian Region, for the period 2019-2024, up to 2030	Desk research, results of the evaluation survey, in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders and text-mining.
Finland	Häme	LOCAL TIME - Hämeenlinna region's local development strategy for 2014-2020 (LEADER)	Literature review, PoliRural evaluation survey, structured interviews with stakeholders and text mining.
Greece	Central Greece	Measure 41 of LEADER, Digitalisation	Desk review, interviews and survey.
Ireland	Monaghan	Monaghan LEADER Environmental Theme and outcomes during 2014-2020	Literature review, PoliRural evaluation survey and structured interviews with stakeholders.
Israel	Galilee	Digitalisation for economic development and youth return	Desk review, survey, consultation with stakeholders at workshop and with responsible national authority, examination with governmental agencies.
Italy	Apulia	Measure 19 of Apulia RDP 2014-2019	Desk and literature review, PoliRural evaluation survey, consultation with stakeholders and text mining.
Latvia	Vidzeme	1) EAFRD LEADER M019.21 "Initiatives to strengthen the local economy"	Survey, interviews with representatives of LAGs, local governments, entrepreneurs, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and Ministry of

Country	Region	Evaluated policy	Used evaluation technique
		2) Specific Support Objective 3.3.1. “To increase private investments in regions, by making investments for entrepreneurship development according to economic specialization of territories stated in development programmes of municipalities and based on needs of local entrepreneurs”	Agriculture; document analysis, statistical data analysis.
North Macedonia	Gevgelija-Strumica	LEADER Measure 124	Desk review, SWOT, regional panel discussions.
Poland	Mazowieckie	LEADER - local labour market support	Desk review, survey among local stakeholders.
Slovakia	Slovakia	EU Quality Policy	Desk review, survey, consultation with stakeholders at workshop and with responsible national authority, comparison analysis with other EU countries, online forum, text mining.
Spain	Segóbriga	M19.2 LEADER	Desk review, interviews with representatives of LAG LEADER, survey to beneficiaries (rural population), Text Mining.

The full evaluation reports are available here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1c4W7WrdPesZq7-rvTgjERWGrw4yIVJc>

3. Main findings and recommendations

3.1 Flanders (BE)

The overall ambitions of the region are to create attractive and sustainable climate resilient productive landscapes, thereby balancing agricultural intensification with environmental concerns and climate resilience. The policy instrument of Rural Development Plans, and more specifically agri-environment-climate management agreements between farmers and the Government of Flanders seems suitable for realising the overall ambition of the region.

European agri-environment-climate measures are based on the common principle that farmers deliver environment-climate services for which society pays. Due to the voluntary nature the issue of farmers' motives or reasons for participation has been an important topic of investigation both from an academic and policy side ([Van Herzele et al., 2013](#)). The farmers' rationale for participation in agri-environment-climate management agreements plays against the backdrop of a continued debate over whether to develop relatively simple management agreements that can be readily applied by many farmers or give greater priority to management agreements that are more targeted but are often more complex. The analyses suggest that participation varies with the management agreements' complexity. Engaged participants wish to integrate agri-environment-climate management into the overall farm enterprise, and they are most likely to commit themselves for the long term. The primary recommendation here is to ensure that enough flexibility and entrepreneurship is appropriately fostered and supported.

Overall 3823 farmers participated in agri-environment-climate management agreements in 2020. The most popular agri-environment-climate management agreements are (in order of importance): (1) parcel edges with 60% participation and most popular the creation and maintenance of a stretch of land covered with flowers, (2) species management with 36% participation and most popular wildlife management, (3) small landscape elements with 33% participation and most popular the maintenance of hedges and hedgerows, and (4) erosion measures with 23% participation and most popular the creation and maintenance of a mixed grass strip. The least popular was botanical management with only 6.5% of farmers' participation. The degree of participation depends on the ease of implementation, the degree of compensation for the effort, the need for the measure in a certain region or environment and the farm typology. In accordance with a meta-analysis of agri-environmental measures by [Lastra-Bravo et al. \(2015\)](#), farmers with larger farms or larger incomes are more inclined to participate, since they can bear the risk of losing surface area or income through intensification.

Since the potential for creating landscape attractiveness varies greatly from one location to another, GIS and remote sensing-based tools could be helpful to farm advisors and farmers in evaluating specific locations against criteria such as management agreement specifications, estimated crop productivity, climate resilience and environmental performance. The ambition formulated is at the interface between the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the European green deal and the new strategy for biodiversity. In rural areas, farmers, businesses and communities are particularly affected by the corona pandemic.

3.2 Central Bohemia (CZ)

The Development strategy of the territorial district of the Central Bohemian Region, for the period 2019-2024, up to 2030 is a core policy framework in the field of (sustainable) development of the Central Bohemian Region that was evaluated in PoliRural. The Strategy is divided into 10 priority areas, namely Economic Development, Research and Development, Tourism, Human Capital and Education, Transport, Energy Infrastructure, Environment, ICT Infrastructure, Social and Health Services and Culture. As a part of the main pillar of the PoliRural project (according to the Rural attractiveness needs D1.3) “Living conditions and quality of life”, the evaluation process was focused on (i) the need to support the wellbeing of all inhabitants, (ii) the need of minimizing intra-regional disparities and (iii) the need to support the local identity to sustain the proper development of all areas of the Region. In conclusion, the topic of “wellbeing” is a part of the declared visions and missions of the Strategy and it is in accordance with policy measures of all mentioned priority areas.

Although the Development strategy of the territorial district of the Central Bohemian Region, for the period 2019-2024, up to 2030 was prepared in 2017, the respondents agreed that the Strategy is coherent with latest policy interventions on the local, national and European levels.

The Strategy is in line with all relevant (development) policies at European level, mainly due to the respect to global trends and long-term foresights¹ (such as decentralisation, individualisation, support for the local economy, circular economy transition, low-carbon economy transition, decentralised energy, etc.). Main emphasis is placed on digital transformation and its role in the development of the Region, particularly taking into account the specific settlement structure with a predominant number of small municipalities and the prevention of digital exclusion.

On the national level, the Strategy is aligned with the Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic 2019 - 2030² with its brand “The Czech Republic: The Country For The Future” and with the National Regional Development Strategy 2021+³, especially in the area of the so-called territorial dimensions and the aim of reducing intra-regional disparities. With respect to the identified needs - the need to support wellbeing of all inhabitants and the need to support the local identity to sustain the proper development of all areas of the Region, the Strategy is in line also with the Strategy of SMART solution for municipalities, cities and regions (expected in 2021).

As regards the covid-19 pandemic, three main changes on the level of the Regional Authority in the field of the regional development were identified: (i) administrative capacities are focused in a different direction - there is currently no capacity to involve external actors/partners/stakeholders to achieve the objectives successfully on time, (ii) at the same time, investment funds are redirected to activities related to dealing with the pandemic, (iii) expected cuts to regional programs due to the decline in GDP and the decline in tax revenue.

¹ Based primarily on OECD publications.

² <https://www.databaze-strategie.cz/cz/urad-vlady/strategie/inovacni-strategie-ceske-republiky-2019-2030>

³ <https://www.databaze-strategie.cz/cz/mmr/strategie/strategie-regionalniho-rozvoje-cr-2021>

Although the Strategy was adopted at the end of 2019, it is fully usable on the level of the (covid-19) recovery strategy for the whole Region and it is applicable to the strengthening of resilience of the territory. Unfortunately, due to the situation caused by covid-19 and due to the delay based on the elections for the Regional Government held on 2nd and 3rd October 2020 and later settings of the new Central Bohemian Regional Government, further work as preparation of the Action Plan and the implementation of indicated measures is currently pending.

3.3 Häme (FI)

The name of the strategy from which the measure was chosen is LOCAL TIME - Hämeenlinna region's local development strategy for 2014-2020. In this Leader strategy one of its objectives is to support and facilitate viable business and local services, and the measure's overall aim is to encourage small businesses to support diversification, expansion, new product and service creation, investment, communication, co-operation and internationalization. Companies are also encouraged to develop new and innovative solutions to strengthen local services and local entrepreneurship and employment. Projects related to the employment of young people add value to the projects. The policy responded to one relevant need of Häme pilot; supporting new business opportunities in rural areas.

Linnaseutu Leader operates as a policy actor and decision maker in this policy strategy. The formal financial authority is the regional Häme Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Häme ELY-Centre). The Linnaseutu Leader finances the activities of rural associations and companies in its area; municipalities of Hattula and Janakkala and the city of Hämeenlinna (excluding the downtown areas) with project funds. The population of the area is 57 549 (2013).

The status of the policy measure is in an advanced stage of implementation (about 90%) because of the programming period 2014-2020. In the current programming period, the amount of public funding was 3,6 million euros. Fund for business was 1 million euros (28% of all funding).

Beneficiaries (SMEs, associations), the financing authorities and Leader board were interviewed. The survey shows that the measure has achieved its initial objectives; to support investments, expansion of businesses and local services. Investments promoting business diversification became the most important action mentioned. The effect for employment of young people and start-up companies was low. Effectiveness and relevance of the measure met their objectives excellently or well according to 80% of the respondents. Coherence of the measure proved to be more difficult to assess as this requires background information that not all respondents had.

The following is a summary of the most significant conclusions for policy makers.

- The inclusion of farm-based enterprises in Leader programs in the case of non-agricultural entrepreneurship. Now funding goes through ELY-Centre and with an emphasis on large projects, this is not fully understood by SMEs.

- Making project impact assessment more business-like for companies. Funding has also indirect effects that are not directly considered in monitoring. These spill-over effects have effectiveness e.g. through subcontractor chains and to local services. The number of people employed is not always a relevant indicator, money used for purchasing services can have a bigger impact locally. It was also noted that the rigid labor market does not encourage companies to hire people, purchasing services are preferred. In previous Leader strategies, the funding enabled companies to hire the first employee, but this has not been possible anymore.
- The effectiveness of the measure must be considered in the long term. The study showed that e.g. investments are made in the long run. The effects will be significant, but they will not be immediately visible and will even take years.
- Almost 85 % of the respondents estimated that external factors affected the progress of the measure. For example, COVID-19 causes problems for business overall, but also includes some success stories. Other external factors like the policy of municipalities and legislation were also mentioned.
- The profile of Leader programs for modern business funding should be raised. Increased cooperation with business advisers, Leader groups and authorities is needed. The amount of start-up aid could be higher and the information on this possibility needs to be increased and resourced.

3.4 Central Greece (EL)

The LEADER program was implemented in the area of Central Greece entitled: "Initiative for the sustainable development of rural Fthiotia" of Axis 4 of the Rural Development Program of Greece (RDP) 2007-2013 "Implementation of the LEADER approach". The objectives of the program focused on strengthening the manufacturing, tourism and services sector of the local community of Fthiotia. The long-term strategic goal of the program was the integrated and sustainable development of the region in such a way as to ensure its economic and social upgrading, the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of the elements that compose its natural and cultural heritage.

The overall conclusion of the 61 completed surveys and interviews indicate that the involved stakeholders consider the implementation and outcomes of the Measure 41 of the LEADER Programme during 2007-2013 to be generally successful to a "Moderate and Great Extent". The specific questions revealed gaps regarding the bio economy, environmental, ICT and EU policies awareness, stressing the fact that significant learning and capacity building (awareness, training, wider community collaboration and political support) is required to ensure the potential of measures utilised by LEADER. The findings highlighted the need for additional measures to support vulnerable groups and attract new entrants to the countryside. A combination of linked policy approaches is necessary to entice newcomers to rural areas, considering that it is a long-term objective.

The measure aimed at existing farmers and it didn't promote new entrants getting into farming. New policy initiatives need to provide more schemes with financial rewards for attracting people in rural areas. Limited and

fragmented funding of primary production activities in agriculture can be a constraining factor. Furthermore, the fact that the consulting agriculture services are limited and not well organised, act as a barrier for the regeneration renewal of the agricultural sector. The measure contributed to achieving the rural policy objectives/package for the region, but not as a whole. The region is characterised by geographical and economic heterogeneity, with urban areas being more developed than the rural and mountainous zones. Therefore, the proposed measures should take account of the different needs and the disparities within the region.

Economic crisis of the period 2010-2013 delayed the funding procedures and also the budget was reduced, resulting in a decreased number of beneficiaries. One of the main key obstacles in achieving the objectives of the measure was the lack of political stability (at least 4 election periods) during the implementation period (changes in laws, staff, bureaucratic procedures).

Besides the funded projects and the new job opportunities, the final report of the measure didn't mention any other predefined quantitative indicators or quantitative indicators of the impact.

The Table 3 below shows the success factors and the barriers that will need to be considered in future policy initiatives, according to the participants.

3.5 Monaghan (IE)

Monaghan's Stakeholder's feedback clearly indicates that the needs and objectives currently targeted by the Environmental measures in LEADER still apply at the end of its implementation and should be extended and made an integral part of Monaghan's next LEADER Plan based on what has been learned from the feedback.

Monaghan is a disadvantaged border region, where more investment is needed. The stakeholders hope for more practical projects as training/education increase. While Farmers are willing, they feel that the political will is lacking. As a rural area that is environmentally aware Monaghan could be a driver post-COVID for urban dwellers to take up residence there. Biodiversity training will impact on the local community over time, making rural areas more attractive. COVID has driven people outdoors and these projects will enhance outdoor spaces. Regarding Brexit, the preparation work to date has been good.

The environment remains under threat, loss of biodiversity continues to be an issue. A lot has been done, but there is a lot to do. Environmental measures should continue to be a priority in future policy measures in Monaghan. Environmental measures also represent opportunities for farm diversification, i.e., biomass, biogas, etc. COVID has highlighted the human need for sustainable locally produced foods and a clean environment, cheaper to protect and preserve rather than correct the damage. There is a need for educating people in general regarding the environment.

Stakeholders felt that more needs to be done through the environmental measures in LEADER to improve the focus on the potential for renewable energy for rural areas. Training and capacity building are key. People must

first understand the technology potential for savings. Flowing from this will be project ideas and applications for funding.

Rural Attractiveness to entice newcomers to rural Monaghan is a long-term objective, requiring a combination of policy approaches. The stakeholders felt that newcomers are fundamental to farming in future. However current environmental measures are aimed at existing farmers, some new entrants may want to farm for the purpose of protecting biodiversity or creating renewable energy, but they would be very small in number. Current Irish National policy does not promote new entrants, and it's very difficult to get into farming in Ireland due to the difficulty in accessing land due to costs. Currently in LEADER the operating rules limit funding of projects which could be deemed to be related to primary production activities in agriculture. This can be a constraining factor due to the broad interpretation of the rules. New policy initiatives need to provide more schemes with financial rewards.

3.6 Galilee (IL)

Evaluation summary of the Galilee pilot activity resulting decision to develop the digitalization infrastructure

The Galilee region in Israel has a mixture of agriculture and industries, many Kibbutzim, some Moshavim (private farms), and a town with around 20,000 residents. The Kibbutzim have a sophisticated industry on which most of them rely financially more than on agriculture. The total population is around 150,000 residents, and is almost stable in the last years, while the average age of the population is rising.

Policy measures are in an advanced stage but must be further evaluated, and allocation of budgets are needed. The different options are presented to stakeholders, but the COVID-19 is stopping almost all activities, and it is difficult to estimate how we will develop it further. The development of programmes and search for funds is on continuous/ongoing process.

This review encompasses the existing situation, however, and although we do not have a formally coordinated decision, the region seems to understand that academia and research is the lever for development and leapfrogging. A smart economy in a peripheral area like Galilee, needs development with great added value, mainly in order to get out of the place where we are and to attract a young and educated population.

The Galilee Conference deals with the establishment of a university and applied research. There is no doubt that this will happen in the future, especially if the academic programs will be developer to the doctoral level, and at the same time the state will invest in institutions, while formulating the area around the above vision.

Under PoliRural, we have prepared four alternatives for the advancement and development of the Galilee:

1. Establish **the University of the Galilee**, by merging Tel-Hai College and MIGAL Research Institute.
2. Construction of broadband **digitalization infrastructure** for the Galilee, for the development of industry, agriculture, health, education and tourism.

3. Improve mobility -continuing the **line of the train** from Carmiel to the Eastern Galilee.
4. Development of the **tourism sector** as a significant field of employment and revenue in the Galilee.

The result of the discussions, are now presented to the Mayors of the municipalities and to the governmental agencies, was to upgrade the digitalisation infrastructure of the region. We are living in a time when digitalization has an extreme effect on agriculture and business development. It was concluded that digitalisation infrastructure will enable people, especially young people, to work from a distance, living in the Galilee, which is the "Green Lungs" and the fruit barn of Israel. We believe that such opportunities exist and that they must be exploited. The purpose of the "Plan" is to indicate the manners by which citizens, local authorities, research and education officials, businesses and all other stakeholders across the Galilee can work together, to create a digital region – with an active future that is bold, inspiring and influential. This fits a plan for the post COVID-19 period. The ideas and lines of thought show how various stakeholders in the Galilee can in collaboration and with initiative, build partnerships, develop local talents and attract skilled young people from the country's centre and the world, and invest in infrastructure that drives growth and prosperity, by means of digital transformation. All of this, of course, depends on raising funds for the construction of the infrastructure, and this is planned for the near future activities.

We plan to establish an integrated approach, based on tangible elements, such as technology and processes, on the one hand, and intangible elements, such as social interactions, on the other. In other words, the integration of teams, in a lengthwise manner, "a transformation journey" in the Galilee region. This year we have implemented remote lectures on the impact of climate change on agriculture development. To nine webinars performed, between 300 to 1200 people participated in each. The ability to allow people to watch lectures online allows for a large audience over time.

3.7 Apulia (IT)

Apulia is the easternmost region of all Italy and is in the South and is the eighth region by demographic size. The Rural Development Program is the main instrument for financing, programming, and implementing the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) through which the Apulia Region promotes interventions useful for the development of the territory. The Measure 19 was evaluated because it promotes definition and implementation of Local Development Strategies (LDS) regarding economic and social development. We have chosen this measure because it allows us to analyse how much attention is paid to the needs of the region in the creation and implementation of local development strategies in terms of economic and social development of rural areas.

From the evaluation of measure 19, we can say that, in general, the various stakeholders consider it to be unsatisfactory and this probably derives from the delay in its application in the Apulia region. In detail, we noted that the assessment of effectiveness, hence the progress of the measure towards achieving its objectives, produced more negative than positive opinions. There is a strong context analysis supported by a bottom-up strategy accompanied by clarity of the objectives to be achieved. The obstacles, on the other hand, have

highlighted the excessive bureaucracy borne by farmers and SMEs. The risk is that an important opportunity to invest may be missed. To this problem, we must certainly add the current Covid-19 pandemic which has slowed down the implementation of the Apulia PSR and therefore of measure 19. As for the relevance, the analysis of the relationship between needs, problems and the objectives of measure 19 revealed more negative than positive results. Farmers and SMEs are the most dissatisfied beneficiaries. Coherence of measure 19 in terms of its alignment with other local, regional, national or EU policy measures was more negative than positive, with SMEs and farmers being the most dissatisfied beneficiaries. Specific questions on measure 19 found more negative opinions than positive ones. Again, the negative aspects were highlighted mostly by SMEs and farmers. This evaluation allowed us to analyse and grasp the vision of the various stakeholders regarding measure 19. As a result, we were able to confirm that in general there is a contrasting vision of measure 19. Farmers and SMEs are certainly the most dissatisfied as they often gave negative answers. On the contrary, local PAs and the agronomists are on average satisfied with the work done so far. The dissatisfaction of farmers and SMEs is certainly consistent with the delay in the application of measure 19.

For the future, it is important to remember the problems that were highlighted in the evaluation, chief among which is the bureaucracy. It adds unnecessary cost and delay to the process. It is no coincidence that the measure was subjected to 834 judicial appeals, both extraordinary and hierarchical, which significantly affect administrative, physical, and financial progress. The emergency of Covid-19 also taught us that the unexpected is just around the corner, so good organization and coordination with the various stakeholders is essential.

3.8 Vidzeme (LV)

Two policy measures were evaluated: **1) EAFRD LEADER M019.21 "Initiatives to strengthen the local economy"** (hereafter - M19.21) and **2) Specific Support Objective 3.3.1.** "To increase private investments in regions, by making investments for entrepreneurship development according to economic specialization of territories stated in development programmes of municipalities and based on needs of local entrepreneurs" (hereafter – SO3.3.1).

Both policy measures address the issue of economic activities and promoting employment in regions that respond to the needs identified in the Latvia pilot area - Vidzeme planning region (D.4.4.): a) development of high value-added products and services and b) diversification of business. SO3.3.1 focuses on increasing the amount of private investment in business and development of public infrastructure necessary for entrepreneurs in the regions; M19.21 - on diversity of economic activities, creating new values in the local area and developing new business models.

Although both policy measures are still in the implementation phase, it can be expected that the effectiveness of both policy measures will be high towards achieving the objectives. Results of implemented projects already show that all indicated outputs and outcomes will be achieved and even exceeded - SO3.3.1 impact will be more seen at national level, while M19.21 - at local level.

Evaluating the relevance of policy measures, it can be expected that SO3.3.1 will have an impact on addressing the general needs of municipalities and enterprises for developed public infrastructure. It is difficult to assess to

what extent the policy measure will respond to local enterprises needs and territorial economic specializations, as they are not defined in policy planning and development. Whereas M19.2 responds to the needs of mainly local SMEs and active citizens, but the strategic needs for wider areas and systematic change has not been fully addressed to.

The development and planning phase of both policy measures has been fully aligned with other relevant national measures and EU policies. However, the coherence of the SO3.3.1 policy measure with regional and local programs is debatable, but M19.2 due to not aligned timelines did not reach its possible synergies with SOs, but have strong synergies with local development programs.

To reduce the above-mentioned shortcomings, it would be advisable to ensure and monitor the coherence of the policy measures also during the implementation period. It would facilitate complementarity of SO3.3.1 and M19.2 and ensure not only achievement of objectives of both policies, but also their precise correspondence to defined needs of the pilot region – to develop high value-added products, services and diversification of business. M19.2 and SO3.3.1 provide the necessary preconditions to meet these needs, but more strategic and systematic coordination between local governments and VPR is needed.

3.9 Gevgelija-Strumica (MK)

The measure 124 "Investments in infrastructure for development of agriculture, forestry and water economy" was chosen to be evaluated based on the results of the SWOT and needs analysis and later was also confirmed through the debate with the regional panel group. All three steps have shown that one of the main needs that has an impact on rural attractiveness for the pilot region Gevgelija-Strumica is *N06 Development of rural road Infrastructure*. According to these results the measure that covers infrastructure in the analyzed policy documents is measure **124 from the Program for Financial Support for Rural Development** in which rural road is one of the most exploited sub-measures (above 90%).

According to the results of the conducted survey supporting the policy evaluation process in North Macedonia, policy measure *124 - Investments in infrastructure for development of agriculture, forestry and water economy*, is to a great extent effective, relevant and coherent.

In relation to the *effectiveness* of measure 124 in North Macedonia, it can be concluded that in most of the municipalities as main beneficiaries, this measure has achieved its main objective. Three groups of factors were determined as key obstacles in the process of implementation of this measure: **financial, institutional capacity, political and procedural factors**. From these groups of factors institutional capacity is the dominant constraining factor. These results are consistent with a large number of expert observations where one of the main sources for the current situation of institutional capacity is the significant influence of politics in the employment process. Continuous usage of the public administration as a biased electoral body by the political parties in the last three

decades has resulted in significant deterioration of the technical capacities in the municipalities and the central government.

Based on the survey, measure 124 is *relevant*. Municipalities perceived this policy measure as consistent with their infrastructural needs but it is not contributing enough in resolving the infrastructural problems in rural areas. Even though the measure has positive impact, the amount of allocated financial support combined with the limited financial capacities of the municipalities does not allow for delivery of projects that can make a change in the context of rural attractiveness. As a specific limitation emphasized by a large number of municipalities is that the measures cannot significantly support the infrastructure that enables access to agricultural arable lands. According to the responding municipalities, measure 124 is *coherent* with the policy objectives and other programs for rural development on national, regional and local level, and it is designed in accordance to the EU requirements in the pre-accession process, as well as the EU CAP.

According to the survey results and responses from municipalities, the measure 124 is relevant and necessary and it should be continued in the future. Considering all the above-mentioned conclusions, the following recommendations for improving the measure 124 are provided:

- Avoiding frequent changes in the initially defined deadlines for budget transfers which will allow consistent flow of finance in the municipalities thus avoidance of execution of the stages of the infrastructural projects. Secured and consistent inflow of finance enables on-time payment of the financial obligations towards the entities (commercial and non-commercial) involved in the project execution and contributes to stronger negotiation power for the municipalities resulting in better prices for products and services.
- More frequent involvement of the relevant stakeholders (direct and indirect) in the process of designing the measures to achieve even more accurate consistency of the measure with the real infrastructural needs. By improving the approach in this direction, policy makers will become more aware about the specific need for roads that will enable better access to agricultural arable lands.
- Structural changes are needed to lower the impact of politics on the approval process.
- Achieving a higher level of consistency in the process of publishing calls which will allow municipalities to create better plans in accordance to the potential sources of financing. This improvement in the process will also enable municipalities to better manage their own financial capacities and to look for additional sources for financing.
- Core recommendation in the context of improving measure 124 is a proposal for creating a structural program for increasing the capacities of the public administration on how to access publicly available funds, international funds and EU funds. This program should also include increasing the technical capacity around project execution, project monitoring and project reporting. Development and execution of this program will enable better access to external funds, increasing the municipality budget for co-financing and higher level of compliance with the specific rules of using funds from the National rural development program.

3.10 Mazowieckie (PL)

The evaluated measure under the LEADER approach aimed at supporting the creation of new economic entities and the development of the local labour market at the local level. The activities within the measure serve to stimulate the development of the existing firms and the creation of new, local non-burdensome activities, using the local economic and human potential in accordance with the character of the town and the culture of the area. The measure is divided into 2 schemes: start-up premium (for citizens starting a new business) and grants for business development, especially aimed at creating additional jobs in existing entities.

The measure was coordinated by Local Action Group and involves local stakeholders: business entities and citizens (local community). The body entitled to implement the monitoring procedure is the LAG Management Board. Supervisory authority for the programme and the specific measure implementation is the office of the regional administration unit: Rural Development Office of the Mazovian Voivodeship Government. The amount of budget allocated to the intervention for 2016-2020 is PLN 2 875 000, of which start-up premium budget is PLN 2 300 232 and grants for business development are PLN 574,768 in total. At the end of 2020 support grants were transferred to 85% of planned beneficiaries to the tune of 86% of the whole budget of the measure.

The evaluation report includes the results of desk research, questionnaires addressed to beneficiaries, as well as people involved in the evaluation of applications, employees of the local administration, other entrepreneurs and inhabitants of small localities, who are involved in local activities (65 people in total). Their evaluation of the activities was very valuable as it is based on their unique experience of everyday life. For this reason, the monitoring of local policies and the process of implementation of the action/policy tool is quite effective in the process of mitigating the risks of implementing the planned actions, but also of achieving the set strategic goals.

The product indicator of the measure was planned as the number of operations aimed at establishing new enterprises and the number of operations concerning the development of an existing enterprise.

According to the evaluation study, the planned activities are still relevant. Due to the local specificity and well-chosen selection criteria, the action has a strong impact on the local economy and community. The promotion of specific activities made it possible to support those ideas which involve the use of local potential and support various social groups, including young women, people bringing up children, the elderly or the disabled.

Usually beneficiaries indicated that their project had a fairly significant impact on the creation of new jobs, which confirmed that the support realised was in line with its intention to support the creation of new jobs in new fields in the local area.

Thanks to the support of the administration, reporting went very smoothly. The beneficiaries pointed out clearly delineated tasks to be performed within the project as a result of a good definition of the business plan framework at the application stage and thus the fact that at the very beginning of the activity the beneficiary had professional tools to work with was a very positive aspect. The bureaucracy on the other hand was very stressful.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that also in terms of supporting sources of income for local residents, the measure in question had a moderate, although positive, impact, as indicated (even during the pandemic) by more than 70% of respondents.

In particular, it should be pointed out that almost all surveyed beneficiaries who obtained support agree that their ideas are innovative at the local level, i.e. they introduce new services or activities not present in the area before, or significantly improve them.

The local measure supported companies using advanced processes, products and services in their activities. This is confirmed not only by the beneficiaries, but also by the participants of the workshops conducted, who pointed to many very advanced projects at the local level (e.g. in the field of robotics or technologically advanced services, ICT and innovative services) among the companies applying for support.

According to the beneficiaries, in the process of applying for support the most positive thing was very substantial assistance from the LAG. Thanks to the measure in question the new entities had a fairly significant impact on the creation of new jobs, which confirmed that the support realised was in line with its intention to support the creation of new jobs in new fields in the local area.

As to the main obstacles in the process of applying for support, beneficiaries pointed out the complexity and huge amount of formalities. There are also technical difficulties resulting from the software used for managing the application system. In terms of supporting sources of income for local residents, the measure in question had a moderate, although positive, impact.

One interesting finding is that COVID-19 had a limited impact on the functioning of the projects implemented under the measure in question. According to the beneficiaries, COVID inhibited business traffic in many industries which was a problem for the developing start-ups, so the nature of this impact was mostly related to the external factors.

The measure was designed in 2014 but reflects very well the current local and global challenges related to the environment, natural resources, innovation and new business models.

3.11 Slovakia (SK)

The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia over 17 years since its introduction in June 2003. It will also contribute to the ongoing EU wide public consultation on its promotion policy for agricultural and food products.

Overall, the statistics are fairly low, since only 19 products are registered in total and only two in the highest category of PDO (Protected Designation of Origin). There is a significant space for improvement based on the evaluation of the implementation of the current national instruments and policies in place.

In the beginning of the policy implementation there was an interest from groups of producers to use this instrument which enables consumers to trust and distinguish quality products and at the same time helping

producers to market their products better. In recent years we can see stagnation and no product has been registered since 2016. The initial enthusiasm of the policy implementation in the first years eased over the years.

Part of the evaluation was a comparison analysis with several selected EU countries, which demonstrates the need for increased effort, especially in the area of PDOs, where Slovakia is among the few countries with a very low number of registrations. Much more successful are some other new Member States, such as Croatia with 18 PDOs, Slovenia and Hungary each with 9 PDOs and Poland with 8 PDOs.

Furthermore, there are several other competing, complementing and differentiating registrations of agricultural and food products available in Slovakia with separate and much diverse procedures.

Overall the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia was designed and implemented appropriately and coherently. The national legal framework allowing the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia is appropriate and in line with the EU legislation. In this regard, additional **attention needs to be given to other voluntary labels being used on the national level** especially in terms of informing the consumers on differences between them.

Some positive results have been achieved over the last 17 years, but there is still a lot of space for improvement of the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia and increasing its effectiveness. This measure requires more attention from the responsible Ministry, relevant associations, retailers and consumers. Therefore, the decision needs to be taken at the national level if more effort and resources shall be put into this measure or not, depending on the available capacities of the relevant public authorities and interest of producers' groups.

The main issue that came out of the evaluation process is **very poor information** on the EU Quality Policy implementation process in Slovakia. At the moment there is just a website run by the MofA&RD of SR. Furthermore, there is **not much motivation for producers** to have an interest in the registration process. Therefore, priority should be given to overcoming this.

8 main recommendations were drafted and many of them were considered and taken on board by the MofA&RD of SR. The results of the survey were also welcomed by the Ministry and will serve as one of the basis documents for current elaboration of the new Marketing Strategy and legislative amendments in preparation.

3.12 Segóbriga (ES)

The evaluated measure is sub-measure 19.2 LEADER, implemented by the Local Action Group (LAG) ADESIMAN in Segóbriga area. This sub-measure 19.2 is part of the Rural Development Program (RDP) 2014-2020 of Castilla-La Mancha region in Spain. In order to implement the LEADER Measure, the LAG drew up a "County Plan", consisting of a series of actions, with the aim of addressing the needs identified in the context of the territory. The beneficiaries of the sub-measure (rural population, local administration, entrepreneurs, entities, etc) receive a grant to promote new businesses and new initiatives, to meet the objectives and needs established in the County Plan.

LEADER measure is the most important rural development strategy implemented in Segóbriga territory, not only in financial terms but also due to the mobilization and involvement of the population and stakeholders.

Regarding Relevance the objectives set out in M19.2 are balanced and regarding Coherence, sub-measure 19.2 is harmonized with a large number of local, regional, national and European Plans related to depopulation, conservation and improvement of the environment and business promotion and entrepreneurship.

Regarding effectiveness it is necessary to bear in mind that the sub-measure's budget was reduced by 30% in 2014-2020 compared to the 2007-2013 period. Most of the executed projects come from local administrations, followed by SMEs and less by individuals, specifically men. The lack of individualized promoters corresponds to a lack of critical mass of population with the capacity and will to invest in new businesses. Local administrations have filled this gap by proposing projects that have largely been related to the efficient use of energy resources and public infrastructures. The uncertainty and economic recession associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down investors' entrepreneurship plans, coinciding with the time when LEADER grants could be reaching their forecasts in terms of mobilizing private capital and generating new businesses in the territory.

Most of the projects (67%) are related to the creation of Public Infrastructures and Services to reduce the Carbon Footprint. 15% are related to SME, Diversification and Employment. The rest of the projects are distributed equally between the promotion of Agrifood companies and the tourism sector with 9% of the projects for each of these objectives.

In the opinion of the beneficiaries, the greatest difficulties they have faced when starting the projects have been financial difficulties (36%) and to a lesser extent difficulties with the administrative processing of the subsidy. On the contrary, the close treatment and support received by the GAL technicians has been an advantage and added value when it comes to improving the effectiveness of the measure.

It is important to highlight that all the Objectives of measure 19.2 remain in force in the current situation, so it is key for the LAG to continue promoting projects associated with the circular economy, community building, etc, so that they serve as a lever for other productive initiatives and to raise awareness about the principles of Smart Villages.

In the next period it is necessary to i) stop depopulation in order to maintain the human and material investment capacity in new businesses that generate employment and wealth, and ii) promote private-sector initiatives as well as European principles of circular economy, resource efficiency and sustainable development. Beyond measure 19.2, it is also necessary to boost cooperation between Local Action Groups in order to advance projects that seek harmonized solutions to common problems such as differentiated taxation for rural areas.

4. Conclusion

The evaluation exercise serves three main purposes in the POLIRURAL project.

- It provides each regional Foresight team with an opportunity to survey the policies and measures that have been implemented in their region, clarifying the current status of development in their region, while identifying a 'platform' of prior initiatives on which future policies and measures can build.
- It provides each team with a framework for the critical analysis of a selection of those policies and measures, with a view to understanding what has worked and why, as well as which measures may need to be continued, completed or scaled-up in future action plans.
- It provides an opportunity to further develop our understanding of the concept of rural attractiveness. This has already been studied in the project on the basis of a literature review. Now it can be examined on the basis of policies measures that have been implemented in each of the target regions of the project.

By its very nature, the evaluation exercise looks to the past and is therefore unlikely to provide insights of relevance for entirely new issues which have emerged in recent years, and which may require policy intervention at regional level.

These issues are primarily being addressed via the Foresight approach, in particular on the basis of a series of deep dives on the impact of COVID, the Green deal, CAP reform and Biodiversity. The project is providing explicit guidance to the regional teams on these issues.

Nevertheless, some of the factors of success identified by partners in their evaluation reports may be of relevance for the treatment of these new issues. In particular factors of success related to governance and stakeholder engagement at regional level, as illustrated by the LEADER program. An essential feature of the LEADER program is that the design and implementation of Local Development Strategies or LDSs, is overseen by Local Action Groups or LAGs. Many of the regional teams refer to LEADER in their evaluation work and have underlined the role of LAGs as factors for success in the implementation of local measures.

The obvious lesson to be drawn from this is that the management principles and techniques of LEADER should be employed in initiatives that go beyond those covered by LEADER, to ensure that the lessons of LEADER are not confined to LEADER but are built into the management of initiatives funded by other frameworks.

In a sense, this is already being done on the basis of what the European Commission calls CLLD, or Community Led Local Development. This is the extension of key features of LEADER to other programs. In particular its focus on innovative actions and networking, and its use of LAGs to supervise the design and funding of Local Development Strategies or LDSs.

Of course, LEADER is only one of the many programs operating at regional level. It focuses on innovative projects in a limited number of domains. The funding allocated to LEADER is limited, being of the order of 5% of the ERDF.

Although it comprises about 2500 LAGs, it represents only 50% of the rural population of Europe. And so, LEADER and its extension to CLLD programs, covers only a fraction of the development needs of a region.

Since LEADER is only one of many programming instruments available at regional level, it is expected that the 12 POLIRURAL Foresight initiatives, will develop action plans that address a more complete range of measures than those accommodated under LEADER. Based on the summary provided in the evaluation report, the plan that has started to emerge in the case of Galilee, seems to have got this right. It is currently working on a range of 4 key measures that include the extension of train line, the creation of a university, the development of broadband connectivity and support for the development of the tourism in the region. These measures are mutually complementary and none of them would fit under a program such as LEADER.

If the lesson to be drawn from the evaluation reports is that the key features of LEADER which have been identified as key factors of success, be extended to all measures that make up the development strategy of the region, then we are well on the way to doing so, as this is the reason for the participative approach employed in Foresight.

The COVID pandemic has radically disrupted life in rural communities, in ways that are both positive and negative, both permanent and transient. We are now in what some refer to as “the great acceleration” where change is happening at an unprecedented rate and is expected to speed up in future. Whatever concept of rural attractiveness a region may have had in the past, this must now be revised in the light of recent events.

One of the findings of our previous work on rural attractiveness is that the concept of attractiveness, is very wide and means different things to different groups at different times. We experienced great difficulty in our efforts to develop a universal concept of rural attractiveness and now question the wisdom or utility of such an approach. The work done on evaluation has provided new insights into this issue and suggests that it may be better to allow each region to determine its own concept based on its own values, sense of self, economic and social need.

In the evaluation reports provided by each region, we see that many of the measures or policies that were evaluated, explicit concepts of rural attractiveness, and where no explicit concept has been described, an implicit concept seem to play an important role in shaping the overall orientation and logic of the intervention.

Flanders: The focus is on a concept of rural attractiveness based on “landscapes” which are sustainable, climate resilient, and productive, based on balancing:

- Agricultural intensification,
- Environmental concerns,
- Climate resilience.

Central Bohemia: The development strategy addresses 10 dimensions of rural development. All of these refer to issues related to attractiveness identified in the meta study carried out previously in POLIRURAL. “Well-being” is

singled out as an important part of the vision adopted by the region. The team focused their evaluation efforts on the policy dimension called “living conditions and quality of life” which emphasized:

- The need to support the well-being of all inhabitants,
- Minimizing intra-regional disparities,
- Supporting local identity.

Häme: The focus of their evaluation work was on policies to support employment of young people. The implicit concept of attractiveness appears to be based on creating an environment for the creation of new business and developing existing business in rural areas based on:

- Diversification expansion
- Services
- Productization
- Investment
- Communication
- Cooperation
- Internationalization.

Central Greece: The focus of evaluated policies was “integrated and sustainable development of the region in such a way as to ensure its economic and social upgrading, the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of the elements that compose its natural and cultural heritage.” The analysis referred to gaps in the sense of issues not adequately addressed by existing policies. These included attention to vulnerable groups, new entrants, and a need for institutional development. There is no explicit reference to the “attractiveness”.

Monaghan: This is a region that suffers from political neglect. It refers to the idea of “making rural areas more attractive” but this is not developed. It refers to the need for investment and presumably this means making the region more attractive to investors. It sees potential in specific sectors such as renewable energy and the possibility of attracting “new entrants” and rightly observes that enticing “newcomers to rural Monaghan is a long-term objective, requiring a combination of policy approaches.” The idea of “rural attractiveness” exists in various forms and may need to be developed in various forms before it can be operationalized.

Galilee: This project has focused very clearly on digitization, a subject which is obviously connected with “attractiveness” whether it is for the entrepreneur with a business to run or for teenagers and tourists with an urgent need to take selfies. The concept is not developed but that may be alright. There is no law that says it should. This approach suggests that ideas such as “attractiveness” though nice, may not be necessary or even useful.

Apulia: The analysis of the Italian team focuses on the role of excessive bureaucracy, which destroys the energy and initiative of both farmers and small business entrepreneurs. There is no doubt that this along with corruption is an important factor of living in Italy. Despite these things get done. The problem is not limited to Italy. In Ireland for example 60% of the time and effort of extension officers goes into helping farmers do their paperwork. The concept of “attractiveness” is not explicitly developed in the evaluation, but the situation seems to scream out for one that crystalizes what a light touch bureaucracy might mean for the people of rural areas.

Vidzeme: The focus of this region is clearly on entrepreneurship and investment. It should be obvious to anyone that criteria for attractiveness of a region for entrepreneurs will be quite different from those for investors. They have very different needs and the measures a government might take to attract one or the other or other are also different. The language they use is interesting in that they talk about creating “new values and business models.” They do not make explicitly adopt an intervention logic based on a concept of attractiveness, but ideas of attractiveness are presented in their approach and there could be a rich vein to mine in this line of thinking about “new values and business models.”

Gevgelija-Strumica: This region has (rightly) put the emphasis on the development of local institutions and local capacities. The issue for them may not be to make the region more attractive for investors or farmers or new entrants, but to make it more attractive for brilliant young people with a strong sense of public service who will transform the sector from within. The analysis provided is very clear and pertinent, but to the extent that it evokes a concept of “attractiveness” the applicable and useful concept lies way outside anything identified so far in the analysis that POLIRURAL has provided.

Mazowieckie: This Polish region has decided to emphasize new business and entrepreneurship development and is happy to report many successful policy initiatives that have aimed at achieving related goals. They do not explicitly refer to “rural attractiveness” as a driver of their intervention logic. Based on their analysis, policies developed in 2014 are still very relevant. This may be true, but a lot has happened since then and new elements may be required. It might be useful for them to consider a concept of rural attractiveness as a driver of policy thinking for subsequent phases of rural development.

Slovakia: Their focus has been on food quality issues and in particular on PDO. The link with “attractiveness” is clear as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) is an important marketing tool and we are talking about the attractiveness of the country as a place from which to buy or source food or visit for the excellence of its gastronomy. The report explains how this issue is problematic and how the opportunity has not been fully exploited. It seems to suggest that work is required to develop a concept of rural attractiveness that is relevant for the international marketing of the countries agricultural produce. Without a clear idea on this issue, it seems impossible for the country to do justice to its agricultural producers. It remains to be seen if the Slovakian team will tackle this issue in their foresight exercise.

Ségobriga: This region has focused on the role of the LEADER program, and on measures intended to help local business, especially in the agriculture and tourism sector. They do not refer to any concept of “attractiveness” but raise many issues and challenges faced by local actors, which if addressed together, could make the region

much more accommodating to those who live there and much more attractive to those who might move there to start or develop their business. The elements are there, but no concept of attractiveness has been developed as a tool for thinking about growth and development.

The teams have finished their evaluation work but need more time to digest the findings, to share the wisdom gained and integrate the lessons learned into their Foresight work going forward. It is therefore too soon to be able to codify all of the lessons that have been learned from the exercise and which may inform the development of the regional “packages” comprising regional visions, action plans and roadmaps. A final step is required to consolidate those lessons. For example, an online conference of the regional pilots, such as that held on 15 December 2020.

What is clear at this stage is the merit of having varied definitions of “rural attractiveness” and the possibility of using the process of developing one as a tool for clarifying the development goals that need to be achieved at regional level. It is possible that few of the examined measures and policies explicitly articulate or develop rigorous concepts of “rural attractiveness” as a result of a misguided attempt of the project to create a universal concept of attractiveness. It may be far more productive to encourage regions to develop their own unique concept or concepts of rural attractiveness. Based on their own needs, aligned with their own values, sense of identity and vision of the future. This is exactly what a well-run Foresight initiative would aim to obtain.

Based on the findings of our previous work on rural attractiveness and incorporating new insights gained through the evaluation exercise, we plan to explicitly embed the development of regionally adapted concepts of rural attractiveness into the vision building process. This will help to engage local stakeholders, enrich the concept of the vision, and provide a basis for aligning the intervention logic of the action plan with local values and identity as well as a shared vision of an “attractive” future.



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Future Oriented Collaborative Policy
Development for Rural Areas and People