



Chevalier, P. Dedeire, M., Kovács, D, Póla, P., 2012, *The implementation of the Leader programme in Central Europe: between a local development approach and political instrumentalisation*, Lux, G (editor), discussion Papers, n°89, Pécs.

Abstract:

Over the course of the last thirty years, the rural development paradigm in the European Union, albeit at different rates and according to different processes in individual countries, evolved significantly. A paradigm of agricultural development based on intensification and modernization reflecting the tenets of a productivist model has gradually been replaced by a new paradigm in which rural development is integrated, sustainable and, above all, local (Cork Declaration, 1996). In central Europe, in countries still marked by the influence of centralized political approaches and a sometimes partial, incomplete re-establishment of the autonomy of local powers (communes, micro-regions, regions, etc.), this transition

implies a reappraisal, here perhaps more than elsewhere, of the local powers, partnerships and territories from which, it is hoped, new local development projects will emerge. In countries in which the duo “power-territory” is still strongly marked by the traces of a once dominant state centralism (both in terms of institutional frameworks and political representation) and in which the first dominates the second, the implementation of rural development policies, based on bottom-up initiatives, is radically changing the rapport between collective action and the territories in which it is carried out. Using the results of an analysis of the implementation of the Leader programme in Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Hungary, we will look at how the European local development model is received and applied in central Europe. Can we really talk about a bottom-up approach in line with the philosophy of local development? To what degree are these territories capable of elaborating and initiating development projects? Is it simply a question of national governments imposing upon local territories and instrumentalizing local development?

In the first part of the article, we will revisit the Leader+ programme which constitutes, in Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Hungary, the first local development initiative based on the European model. In the second part, we will focus on current European policy on rural development (2007-2013), notably on specific approaches to the implementation of the new Leader model in the three countries in question. In the last part of the article, we will discuss the implementation process in regard to the founding principles of local development. Is it really a case of a bottom-up approach? Can we really talk of an adjustment of the local development model with a potential for action on the part of local beneficiary communities? Do the methods of transfer of the model in these central European countries conform to the original principles of the Leader programme?