

# The role of farmers in Local Action Groups: The case of the national network of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** The social inclusion of different rural population groups is one of the objectives of the Rural Development Programme of the Czech Republic for the period of 2007–2013. The fourth axis of this programme is devoted to the LEADER method and, as such, it establishes and supports an inclusive and participative bottom-up approach. This article is concerned especially with a specific social group of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs, and the position of this group in the local action groups that constitute the National Network of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the Czech Republic. With regard to this subject, the role of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in LAGs was analysed using a questionnaire-based survey and testing a hypothesis of external and internal inclusion/exclusion (see Thuesen 2010) of farmers into/from local action groups. The results show that the level of participation differs in the local action groups, but generally speaking the position of agricultural subjects is decreasing off the subjects from the different spheres (especially NGOs).

**Key words:** social inclusion, social exclusion, farmers, agricultural entrepreneurship, LEADER, National Network of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic

One of the goals of Rural Development Programme of the Czech Republic for 2007–2013 (RDP CZ) is to increase social cohesion in rural areas. In Axis IV – LEADER, one of the objectives is the quality of life in rural areas (Program... 2007). Following this, many scholars discuss the strengthening of solidarity, which is often conceptualized as a social inclusion, with a social exclusion as an analogous process<sup>1</sup>. The strengthening of quality of life, which is itself complex concept (Hagerty et al. 2001) is linked with possibility to participate in local self-government and possibility to influence local matters, which are processes linked with new democratizing tendencies. In this sense it is useful to think about new forms of local governance and new forms of regional development (especially endogenous and neo-endogenous forms). In a broader meaning, it is possible to think about the LAGs as a form of third sector, as an instrument for strengthening of the social inclusion and cohesion.

The LEADER programme, which this paper is concerned with, aims to connect the actors from business and non-business spheres in the proportional representation with the local administrative. Ray (2000) sees the LEADER as a form of politicization and democratization of rural areas. But it is obvious that although there is an open area for involvement and cooperation, not all these groups are involved equally. In addition, there are of course many questions about the concepts of participation itself. Some authors (Williams 2007: 97) raise the questions how can the poor participate, what they can offer in this process to the powerful and how they are included and excluded from this process itself. Some authors are much more critical and see the participation in general as a new form of tyranny (Cooke and Kothari 2004).

Thuessen (2010) reminds us that there are two types of social exclusion: external and internal. In

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<sup>1</sup>For discussion about the interrelationship of concepts of social exclusion and inclusion see Mareš and Sirovátka (2008). From the point of view of these authors, it would be possible to use the term marginalization in this article instead of exclusion. But as authors state, these are mainly terminological finetunings. According to their contribution, there is the term social inclusion and exclusion used for a process, not for a certain state.

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context of the research presented here, it is possible to see the external exclusion as a state when some of the groups are marginalized and not included or involved<sup>2</sup>. The internal exclusion refers to a state when some actors are partly included, but have no power to influence any activity of the group or to animate the activity of the group. From this perspective, it is possible to think about stratification inside a particular group – inside a LAG, for example. Following Thuesen “... if there is public money distributed through LAGs and their members decide, they create and implement strategical development plans, it is important to ask who they are” (Ibid., p. 32). From the internal social exclusion point of view, there is a question who and how participates in the LAGs, who and how is involved and what is the position of different social groups.

This paper is focused on a specific segment of the LAGs' private sector: the position, forms of involvement and cooperation of farmers, agricultural entrepreneurship and collective farms in the Czech Republic. From the external social exclusion point of view, there is an accent on the numbers and evolution of these subjects in the LAGs. From the point of view of the internal social exclusion, the research presented here was focused on the position of agricultural subjects and the development thereof. This is the most important goal. The next goal is to uncover the character of the production and product specialization of farmers and agricultural enterprises. To fulfil these goals, it was important to use the publicly available data and because of the lack of it, we needed to ask the managers of the LAGs who constituted the National Network of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic at the end of 2009 by a survey questionnaire, distributed via email. The method, as well as the cross-sectional nature of the results, is also the main limit of the findings. But because this information is still missing in the Czech Republic, this research offers some insight into the problematic. Finally, the methods used in the research do not offer any possibility to generalize. Instead, the goal was to identify two groups of LAGs: the LAGs endangered by the internal social exclusion and the LAGs that can be characterized as internally inclusive.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

There are many scientific papers, as well as statistical sources, which illustrate the changes of the numbers of agricultural workforce in the Czech Republic in the last 20 years. There were changes not only in numbers of agricultural workers, but the position and function of Czech agriculture has changed, too (Lošťák 2004; Nešpor 2006). The level of income is lower when compared to other sectors, as well as to the national economy's average (Zpráva ... 2010; Spěšná et al. 2009).

The numbers, positions and structural characteristics of farmers in the LAGs are not mapped in the Czech Republic. It is possible to obtain some information from the document *Leader ...* (2009). This document states that there were 697 farmers (51.2% of them in the Bohemian part of the Czech Republic), but does not give any additional information about these subjects (legal form, production character etc.). From the total amount of 155 LAGs, there was at least one farmer in 114 LAGs (73.5%). For 17 LAGs in the Central Bohemia Region, these numbers were missing.

From the scientific point of view, Lošťák and Hudečková (2010) tried to analyse the impacts of the LEADER+ in the Czech Republic<sup>3</sup>. Their content analysis-based survey resulted in a statement that in case of farmers, the LEADER+ was not successful at all: “... a relatively low efficiency is problem of low farmers involvement and their projects ... important part of rural actors and important rural activity will be marginalized.” (Ibid., p. 264). But this analysis was not focused on farmers and agricultural enterprises in particular. In their different study, the same authors estimate that in 2007, about 35–45% LAGs included farmers or agriculture-linked subjects, who participated in their activities (Hudečková and Lošťák 2008: 563)<sup>4</sup>. Despite all the transformation processes, it is still clear that the position of agriculture in the rural areas is significant.

The significance of farmers is demonstrated by the goals of the fiches of LAGs, which are targeted to farmers. As one of the goals of the RDP CZ, the measure IV.1.1 Local action group, there is a proclamation of increasing the farmers' competitiveness

<sup>2</sup>Šulák (2006) pointed out this external social exclusion when talking about the institutionalisation of the LEADER approach in the Czech Republic. The position of some LAGs was established much better than others and the LAGs that were subsidised in the LEADER CR were later strongly subsidised in the EU LEADER programmes.

<sup>3</sup>LEADER+ was a programme assigned to the countries acceding to the EU. In the Czech Republic, the programme was implemented as an Operational Programme during the period 2004–2007.

<sup>4</sup>However, the authors do not specify the forms of the participation. They say that the participation percentage is similar to the average share in other EU countries.

(Program ... 2007: 144). Similarly, the Axis I of the same programme is directly aimed at agriculture. With regard to the changes of structure, size and significance of Czech agriculture in the last two decades, Nešpor (2006: 1191) talks about the differentiation of farming entrepreneurs into subgroups of “industrial mammoths, who prefer modernization and rationalization, and small scale farms, which prefer the local and regional foundation”.

The contemporary situation in the agricultural sector, as well as the participation of farmers in the LAGs, is interesting seen from the view of new forms of governance, too. These are connected with the continual democratizations trends and changes in the rural developmental theories. Bennington and Geddes (2001: 2) noted that “the partnership is homogenizing concept of the EU ... basic conceptual and operational framework of the developed EU countries. The EU implemented a different program of cooperation (URBAN, LEADER and others), which begun to be a new type of funds and services supporting the local governance.” From their point of view, a partnership is seen as an instrument of policy and a new form of organization between private and public sectors<sup>5</sup>. Larouche (2006) talks about the European focus on the participative local governance, the horizontal and vertical coordination of administration that is linked to the territory. He calls this approach a neo-endogenous development. For the purposes of this study, the contribution of Powell and Exworthy (2002) and Treib et al. (2005) seems to be useful, too. The former suggest that for a successful connection of the deprived territories, there is a need to involve the marginalized actors as partners and to create a commitment of cooperation between these partners (not only a “silent partnership”), to involve different levels of governance in which the central government should be working only as a facilitator. They stress the importance of the common shared visions (Powell and Exworthy 2002: 23). Their concepts, in relation to the survey presented here, seem to support the thesis of involvement of all sectors in LAGs.

The changes in the functions of agriculture (not only the production, but the protection of environment, the social function as an employer of the rural workforce) after all kept the importance of farmers in the rural areas. For a coordinative cooperation, the renewal and development of locality, farmers need to be involved in the LAGs, and have some level of influence within them. The farmers should not be marginalized in the LAGs; their position on the edge is not enough. According to these statements, there is an emphasis on the numbers and positions of the farmers in the LAGs.

The contribution of Treib et al. (2005) moves our theoretical thinking closer to the endogenous and especially neo-endogenous development. In their paper, the authors discuss the decentralized and centralized forms of governance and the horizontal and vertical dimensions of authorities, which they described as a new and old form of governance. New forms of governance, however, are not only these<sup>6</sup>. It is much more the result of combination of these forms (Ibid., p. 9). Despite the democratization processes, it is not possible to reject the vertical dimension.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, there is a need to include this dimension, to integrate it. Mark Shucksmith (2010: 8) talks about the vertical integration and states that “LEADER was presented (falsely) as an experiment in endogenous development ... (it is) controlled and restricted by regional, national and supranational levels of government ... and became the catalyst for local action ...”. According to this, it is necessary to keep in mind that the participation of farmers in the LAGs is not initiated only from the bottom (-up), as the use of social capital, but that there are many more programs and subsidies from the higher levels of administrative positions (the regional government, the Ministry of Agriculture). The involvement and participation of farmers in the LAGs is influenced by wider politico-economic conditions, by different subsidies and programmes usable for farmers<sup>8</sup> Adamski and Gorlach (2007) define a neo-endogenous model of development as longstanding, self-supporting and

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<sup>5</sup>There are only partial results of evaluation of the LEADER in the Czech Republic – mainly as an evaluation of the policy cycle used for the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. For the evaluation and re-theorization of the impacts of the LEADER in the terms of new governance and area based partnership in the neighbouring Poland, see Furmankiewicz et al. (2010). However, this article does not focused on the specific group of farmers and agricultural enterpreneurships.

<sup>6</sup>Regarding some major trends, see the OECD (2006) – municipality facilities, pressure on reformulation of agricultural policy, decentralization and changes in rural developmental policy.

<sup>7</sup>Hučka et al. (2008), similarly, considers the LEADER a form of the neo-endogenous development. It is a vertical integration of actors involved in the renewal and development of rural areas.

<sup>8</sup>The interconnection of regional, agricultural and others policies (social, industrial and so on) is, according to Hučka et al. (2008: 15), one of the typical characteristics of the neo-endogenous rural development.

integrated, as the “mechanism of participation of special interest groups during formulation and application of developmental strategies in cooperation with other actors” (Ibid., p. 486). The neo-endogenous development, which links the local, managerial and political, as well as scientific knowledge, defined by the authors as a sustainable development, is focused on culture, subjective feelings and the quality of life of the rural population (Ibid., p. 496). According to Lapka and Gotlieb (2000), farmers, especially small scale farmers, are the social group with the best local knowledge.

As stated by Murk Shucksmith at the XXVI Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology (2011), it is of course necessary to think about new forms of inequalities and injustice in the rural areas. He used the Bourdieus concept of class and habitus and shows on the examples from England, that the application of the participatory approach, new forms of governance, as well as new forms of development can cause and re-product the construction of the place, the local social identity and inequalities. In the sense of his speech and some older writings (2000), how can groups not quite participating and not sharing the developmental vision with dominant and powerful resist and act independently? There are similar problems and questions raised by Williams (2007) or Cooke and Kothari (2004).

## METHODS AND DATA

The population consisting of the members of the National Network of the Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic (NNLAG) were selected. The NNLAG is an interest public organisation, which connects the LAGs. The membership in this organization is voluntary and has no influence on obtaining any public subsidies. The data about the LAGs and farmers involved in the LAGs were collected via a standardized questionnaire with closed and half closed questions. The questionnaires were distributed via email to managers of the LAGs. The contacts were obtained from the available public

sources – the web of the NNLAG and <http://leader.isu.cz>, where it is possible to find the characteristics of the individual LAGs.

In October 2009, when the questionnaires were distributed, there were, according to the web of the NNLAG, 115 LAGs as the members (it was later found that one of the organizations was inscribed at the list by mistake). According to the annual report of this organization, there were 117 LAGs at the end of the year 2009. The source states 151 LAGs in the Czech Republic at the end of the same year. The chairman of the NNLAG František Winter said that there were 149 LAGs in the Czech Republic and that in the NNLAG, there were 116 members (Leader ... 2009: 2). The table shown on the web of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic presented 140 LAGs. It is possible to see, that the individual sources differed in the numbers of LAGs in the Czech Republic. As a basis for conducting the research, 114 LAGs were selected, the members of NNLAG, and these were asked. For illustration, there are 112 LAGs in the Czech Republic, the existence of which was subsidized from the public money.

The final return rate of the questionnaires was 43% (49 LAGs). The area covered by the LAGs that returned questionnaires represented 40.5 % of all members of the NNLAG, the share of inhabitants living in this area was 40.1%. A Table 1 shows some indicators for all the members of the NNLAG and for the respondents. The measured values were similar to those presented by Čepelka (2008).

From the available public sources, it was possible to look at the legal form of the respondents and the information about the categorized number of employees. As for the legal form: 63.6% of respondents were associations, 32.7% of them were publicly beneficial organization and two of the LAGs were special-interest associations of legal entities. Only 61.2% of the respondents displayed the information about the number of employees, with all of those falling into the smallest category of 1–5 employees.

To sum it up, 94% of the respondents (LAGs) were subsidized by the public money (a strategical developmental plan was supported). It means that these

Table 1. Indicators characterizing members of the NNLAG and the respondents

Indicators	NNLAG*	Respondents
Number of LAGs	114	49
Average number of inhabitants in LAG	28 331	27 706
Average size of area of LAG (ha)	37 783	35 592
Average density of inhabitants in LAG (inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> )	74.98	77.84

\*Number of LAGs according to the web of the NNLAG at the time of the research preparation (September–October 2009)

Table 2. Development of numbers of the members according to the sectors for LAGs

Sectors and legal forms of business sector	Starting years of establishing LAGs (2004–2006)	Research time (2009)	Index of change (%)
Business sector	500	655	134.8
individual	233	342	146.8
company	158	182	115.2
cooperative	43	42	97.7
other	66	89	134.8
Non-business sector	290	437	150.7
Public sector	355	501	141.1
Total	1145	1593	142.2

Source: empirical research,  $N = 49$  (LAGs)

LAGs were institutionalized and had prepared strategies and all necessary documents.

Finally, 86% of the LAGs who returned the questionnaires were established between 2004 and 2006. This period is regarded below as the “starting years” of establishing LAGs<sup>9</sup> and it is compared to the situation at the end of 2009.

## RESULTS

Having the information presented above, it is possible to see that there is no accord in the numbers of LAGs that existed in the Czech Republic at the time of conducting the research. The numbers of the existing LAGs differ depending on the used source. The only clear number of LAGs is the number of the subsidized organizations and the number of members of the NNLAG. The conducted research had to concentrate on a specific group of LAGs, because there is no information about all the LAGs. There is only some signal information about the number of LAGs that existed in the Czech Republic and these are usually dependent on informal contacts and the social capital of the people who work in the rural development field as practitioners.

The situation is much worse regarding the numbers of members of the individual LAGs in the particular sectors. It is possible to find rough data about the representation of the major segments (public, business, non-business) and in some cases, to find some more detailed data. But finding information about the members of the individual LAGs is possible only via the websites of the individual LAGs. There is a problem that the data are presented in

a different structure, so for obtaining a structured scientific knowledge, it is often necessary to ask again. This brings repeated answers to the same questions by the managers and takes their time and it generally does not contribute to the transparency of the method.

As it was mentioned above, there is an increasing significance of the work of LAGs in the rural areas. Similarly a statement was made about the not decreasing role of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in the rural areas. But what is the position and role of them in the LAGs in comparison to the other subjects? Or if we consider farmers and entrepreneurs as a part of a business members segment of the LAGs, what is the position of this business subgroup in comparison to the others? First, there is a Table 2 showing the evolution of different sectors.

The results show, that the most dynamic sector is the non-business sector. The business sector represented in the “starting year” of establishing LAGs 43.7% of all members. The share of this sector was weakened up to 41.1% in 2009. The greatest strengthening was recorded for the non-business sector – from 25.3% in 2004–2006 to 27.4% in 2009. Inside the business sector, the highest increase was registered for private subjects. But how do these results fit with the evolution in the agricultural subgroup? See the results shown in Table 3.

In the “starting years” of establishing LAGs, the share of private subjects was 49.3% of private subjects among agricultural entities, in 2009 the share of this legal form was 54.5%. Relatively speaking, the companies and cooperatives have weakened their position. In absolute numbers, all the legal forms show an increase except cooperatives. The total increase of

<sup>9</sup>It was 14 LAGs in 2004, 15 LAGs in 2005 and 14 LAGs in 2006. Only one LAG was established in 2002 and 6 LAGs in 2007.

Table 3. Development of agricultural subjects according to their legal forms

Agricultural subjects and their legal forms	Starting years of establishing LAGs (2004–2006)	Research time (2009)	Index of change (%)
Individual	138	182	131.9
Business company	95	102	107.4
Cooperative	40	40	100.0
Other	7	10	142.9
Total	280	334	119.3

Source: empirical research, *N* = 49 (LAGs)

the agricultural entities share (119.3%) does not meet the value for the business sector as a whole (134.8%).

Before looking at the share of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in powerful positions inside the LAGs, there is a Table 4 which shows the share of these entities in the total number of members in the LAGs. There is an evident decrease in the share of them in all legal forms, as well as a total decrease of the share for this subgroup. Despite of this decrease, more than a half share of agricultural subjects in the business sector in the LAGs is evident. Here, it can be concluded, that although there is an increase in the total number of agricultural subjects who participate in the LAGs, their increase is the lowest from all sectors and their relative share is decreasing.

These tables show that there is, generally speaking, not such a problem in the involvement of agricultural subjects into LAGs. But this is a general conclusion and as such it ignores the individual situation in LAGs. Not all of the LAGs participating in the research were so successful in the involvement of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. But let us turn to the case of the internal social exclusion.

Table 4. Share of agricultural subjects in the total number of business members according to their legal form

Legal form of agricultural subjects	Starting years of establishing LAGs (2004–2006)	Research time (2009)
Individual	61.8	57.0
Business company	53.8	50.0
Cooperative	95.3	95.2
Other	15.2	21.3
Total	56.5	55.9

Source: empirical research, *N* = 49 (LAGs)

In the LAGs, there are many positions which a person, as a representative of a specific organization, can occupy. Based on the analysis of the structure of LAGs, 33 possible positions were identified. These were divided into two basic groups: members of LAGs who were ordinary members, it means they were “only” members, or members of some specific organizational units, or the chiefs of these units and the chiefs of statutory authority<sup>10</sup>.

Table 5. Representatives of agricultural entities in statutory organs of LAGs in 2009

Position of farmer in LAG	Number	(%)	
chairman	3	1.0	
vice-chairman	5	1.6	
Chief (of)	supervisory board	1	0.3
	programme board	2	0.6
	selection committee	1	0.3
	audit and controlling board	1	0.3
	total	13	4.1
	board	17	5.5
	supervisory board	6	1.9
Member (of)	programme board	36	11.7
	selection committee	46	14.9
	monitoring committee	4	1.3
	audit and controlling board	7	2.3
	working group	3	1.0
	total	119	38.6
“ordinary member”	177	57.3	
Total	309	100.0	

Source: empirical research, *N* = 47 (LAGs)

<sup>10</sup>Of course that the ordinary memberships does not mean no possibility to change or influence some activities or plans of the LAG. General meetings of all members are not only formal randevouz. If there is an idea strong enough, it is possible to try to promote it. But on the other hand, and according to the formal structure, in an organisational scheme, there are several positions that give more power to ones rather than the others.

Table 6. LAGs endangered by internal exclusion of farmers

LAG*	Number of members in business sector	Share of agricultural subjects (%)	
		in business sector	in top management
Y1	21	100.0	0.0
Y2	18	77.8	0.0
Y3	23	56.5	0.0
Y4	20	65.0	0.0
Y5	13	100.0	0.0
Y6	19	63.2	0.0

\*anonymized

Source: empirical research,  $N = 47$  (LAGs)

As stated above, there were 334 agricultural entities that were at the end of 2009 members of the LAGs participating in the research. But the data about the position of them between decision-makers inside of LAG were, based on the respondents answers, accessible only for 309 members (92.5%). In this section, the results refer only to 47 LAGs and the structures were observed only for the year 2009. This is another limit of this paper, but due to the absence of any information, it is possible to see the following analysis as a look inside into an unexplored area.

More than one half (53.7%) of all agricultural members of the LAGs were ordinary members as Table 5 shows. As a member of some authority, there were 38.6% of the farmers, and only 4.1% of farmers were the chiefs of some authority.

Table 7. LAGs characterized as internally inclusive for farmers

LAG*	Number of members in business sector	Share of agricultural subjects (%)	
		in business sector	in top management
X1	14	57.1	42.9
X2	7	71.4	40.0
X3	8	50.0	25.0
X4	18	100.0	16.7
X5	17	52.9	11.1
X6	11	100.0	9.1
X7	11	81.8	9.1
X8	27	63.0	5.9

\*anonymized

Source: empirical research,  $N = 47$  (MAS)

It is possible to see, that agricultural entities are not so often members of the LAGs top management. But similarly as we look at the external social exclusion, it is not possible to generalize the conclusions. According to the combination of these findings, it was possible to identify two groups of LAGs: the LAGs endangered by the internal social exclusion and the LAGs that can be characterized as internally inclusive.<sup>11</sup> These two groups, their proportion of private as well as agricultural subjects and the share of these subjects in the top management are demonstrated in Tables 6 and 7.

Finally and only shortly, let us look at the character of the production and production specialization of

Table 8. Character of production and product specialization of agricultural subjects

Character of production and product specialization of agricultural subjects		Individuals		Corporations		Total	
		number	(%)	number	(%)	number	(%)
Prevailing character of production	conventional	115	67.3	100	66.2	215	66.8
	organic	16	9.3	18	11.9	34	10.5
	missing	40	23.4	33	21.9	73	22.7
	total	171	100.0	151	100.0	322	100.0
Prevailing product specialization	plant	63	36.8	30	19.9	93	28.9
	livestock	18	10.5	18	11.9	36	11.2
	combined	87	50.9	94	62.3	181	56.2
	missing	3	1.8	9	6.0	12	3.7
	total	171	100.0	151	100.0	322	100.0

Source: empirical research,  $N = 49$  (MAS)

<sup>11</sup>There was an analytical need to establish a line to identify some LAG as internally inclusive. It was decided, that the line will be the share of agricultural subjects higher than the average for all LAGs.

agricultural subjects in the LAGs. The information about these characteristics was available for 49 LAGs, but only for 322 farmers. As Table 8 shows, between the individuals and the corporations, the subjects with the conventional character of the production predominate. If we exclude the subjects where there were no information about the character of the production, then organic farmers constitutes 13.7% of all agricultural subjects in the LAGs, with the share of 72% of corporations. This share (13.7%) is twice more than the share of all organic farmers in relation to all agricultural subjects in the Czech Republic. It seems that the LAGs are interesting for the organic farmers or those organic enterprises enter the LAGs in great extent. The product specialization of farmers was not so surprising and it is similar to the structure of agricultural subjects in the Czech Republic. The combined production specialization is prevailing. The animal specialization is marginal for individuals, as well as for corporations (about 11% of subjects).

## CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of this article was the position, role and form of participation of agricultural subjects in LAGs which were members of the National Network of Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic. These were analysed with regards to the Thuesen's concept of an external and internal social exclusion. The analysis showed that, generally speaking, the situation in the LAGs is not bad in the terms of the external social exclusion of farmers. If we keep in mind that for establishing of a LAG, there is a condition of participation of more than half of the subjects from the private sector (business and non-business), then the share of farmers in the business sector, which is still more than one half, is still enough. However, this conclusion is not adequate if we keep in mind two following problems. The first one is that not all LAGs have the share of farmers so high. The generalization does not make sense, it is necessary to view each LAG individually. The second problem, which seems to be more crucial, is that the development in the numbers and significance of farmers' subjects is decreasing. There is a continuous increase in the number of farmers participating in the LAGs, but their relative share, similarly to the business sector, is decreasing. It means that the position of farmers is weakening. For the future, there is a possibility that despite the significance of these subjects in the rural areas, their influence will be lower. These results are supported when we look at the position of farmers in the structure of LAGs. In the case of the analysed

LAGs, there is a decreasing share of farmers and their position in the top management at the end of 2009 was not so good. But again, these conclusions are dependent on each individual LAG, because, as it was shown, there were some LAGs, where the situation was not so bad. The next step in examining the role and position of this (or any other) group could be to look closely at the LAGs endangered by the internal social exclusion, as well as at those characterized as internally inclusive, and to ask for specific processes that influence the situation and the possible ways of improvement.

But keeping these results in mind, it is of course possible to ask if increasing of the share of agricultural subjects in the LAGs is so important. Or how does it fit with the statements of participating as a form of tyranny (Cooke and Kothari 2004; Williams 2007)? If agricultural entities did not cooperate in the preparation of basic developmental documents, if their vision of the local future is different from that, which was established and is being fulfilled through the LAG acting, what is the possibility for them to change these trajectories? And if Shucksmith (2011) talks about the forms of the re-production of inequalities and social exclusion, he states, that the newcomers and people of some status and habitus are driving forces of changes in some locality (they transform and re-produce the meaning of the local places, prepare the developmental documents), how can the agricultural subjects, which are usually connected with locality for a long time and have some specific interests, act? What are the possibilities for them to change the situation? These questions need to be elaborated in a deeper (and probably qualitative based case) study. But we can see from the results presented above that in some LAGs, agricultural subjects are represented not only as the ordinary member – this is the case of the LAGs characterized as internally inclusive for farmers. But what are the reasons and specifics in these LAGs, it is again the theme for the next research.

Two additional goals were to analyse the character of the production and product specialization of agricultural subjects involved in the LAGs. It could be said, that in the Czech LAGs participating in the research, there is a similar structure according to the product specialization but a higher proportion of organic farmers than their average share in the total agricultural population of the Czech Republic (especially cooperatives). Again, it is possible to ask why the participating in the LAGs is so attractive for organic farmers, what they feel as the benefits in participating. These results suggest as well, that the new ways of thinking (the organic food movement



and the form of business) are not so important in the Czech rural areas and that the LEADER, as a “new” developmental method, is not meeting the prevailing economic and production functions of the Czech agriculture. According to Percy-Smith (2000) and the results about the number of agricultural entities in the LAGs, it is of course necessary to ask to which form of social exclusion are the agricultural subjects exposed the most.

Finally, it is possible to state that the public availability of information about the members of the LAGs is not sufficient. Of course the centralized administrative system is no solution, but as Theusen (2010) stated, it is important to ask who decides about the area development, who defines the goals and who is involved in the preparation of the strategy. Answering this question in the contemporary situation is difficult for scholars as well as for the local people. It is surprising that a method, which uses transparency as one of the basic rules, does not offer any transparent information. The trustfulness of the LEADER method is thus weakened. This is a challenge for each LAG and it is a part of its promotion and communication with the local actors. This could strengthen the position and perception of the LAG by the locals.

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