

**EDIFICATIONS FROM THE LEADER PROGRAM BASED ON THE  
RESULTS OF A HUNGARIAN MICRO-REGIONI.  
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

*15 years ago Hungary joined the European Union. The first full financial period for the nation as a member of the European Community was 2007-2013. As a full member, Hungary gained access to many financial sources granted by the European Union. It is necessary to inspect the efficiency of how these sources have been spent on development, focusing on the LEADER program. The best way to do this is by selecting one of the poorer micro-regions and examining it using different methods. Within my research I used inspected different statistics, I looked into the traditional profession of shepherding which has a long history in the region and I interviewed the citizens of the Sárrét microregion. This multidisciplinary research gave more precise results and conclusions for my research. Suggestions made on the on the conclusions can provide a much more accurate help to decision makers in the periods that are ahead of us.*

**Key words:** LEADER program, Hungary, Sárrét, development, shepherding

**INTRODUCTION**

In Hungary – just like in every other countries – the social or economical investments are all achieved from multiple financial sources. Executing the projects is possible from national or foreign capital, support from companies, private people or the state, or maybe from community contribution. Just like the projects that are financed by the European Union through tenders, and sometimes co-founded by national sources. It is necessary to inspect the changes have been made in Hungary, in its regions and in its subregions, because Hungary became a member of the EU 14 years ago. I am examining the complete process, from the founding of the European Community, through Hungary joining the EU and after that, up until today. Taking the concept of the LEADER programme into consideration and using it to examine the local capabilities, traditions in the villages and towns of the rural micro regions.

During my research I set the goal to examine the projects completed within the LEADER programme in 5 settlements that are located in the micro region called Sárrét. My choice was greatly influenced by the fact that in earlier times I have worked with several people living and working in this microregion and that I personally knew some of the mayors before.

The importance of the Sárrét micro region is shown by the large scale of international transit of goods and passenger traffic (Oláh, 1987). The reason for this is that the Sárrét is located on the eastern edge of the Schengen border (Osváth, 1875). At the same time, it is not a typical tourist attraction, so tourism is not the major source of incomes and cannot support the financial background for developments in the settlements of the Sárrét. In my opinion the local inhabitants have a strong identity and have a strong bond with their village. These are the reasons why I decided that the vicinity and the people living in it are suitable subjects for my research.

Based on my experiences, I am convinced, and this applies to all Eastern European countries, that we can only become full members of the EU if all of Hungary's 7 regions achieve the EU's average (Sarudi, 1997). For this it is necessary to strengthen the macro and micro environment of the local communities by involving all actors who live in them.

Hungary needs to be efficient when using the funding sources, it has won, and since there is a huge disparity between the economical, the environmental circumstances and in the quality of life as well, that makes the sources especially big. Unfortunately, the opportunities ahead of us are limited in time, because we can already see the will to centrally modify and reduce the sources, which is due by 2020.

My research focused on 3 main areas:

The first topic is the distribution of the use of EU funds in the period 2007-2013, especially in the Northern Great Plain region and within it in the Sárrét region.

The first and most important aspect for me was not the size of the source, but the evaluation of the region's independence, creativity, and the micro-regions ability to apply for the sources, so I examined the LEADER programs using the aspects that I presented in the material and method.

The second area of my research was to study the agricultural supporting capacity of the area. For this I chose a real, traditionally operating sector, the shepherding, which partly provided the livelihood of the people living in the Sárrét region for centuries and has a long tradition among the local population.

The third element of my research was the public opinion of the projects made in the Sárrét. Actually analyzing the evaluation of developments based on the opinion of the population (Pálmai, 2013). How do people living, working and originated from the area judge the development of their habitat, its directions and speed. Do they have a vision, how do they feel about the development of the rural existence (Soós, 2004). It was important to determine how much they know about their living space, how much they know about improvements, and whether they feel the

changes in their individual lives. In order to answer these questions, I chose an in-depth interview and questionnaire method.

I did my research at the Doctoral School of History and Ethnography at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Debrecen. My research was primarily based on the anthropological aspects of the economy. This discipline combines the basics of economics with social science and historical foundations. This required a complex examination, which often set extremely difficult challenges during my research. Not only did I need to be aware of economic concepts and methodology, but I also needed to know a micro-region and its population, past, and habits in order to see the necessary connections properly. I found it important to examine the micro-region not only by itself, but as part of a larger unit, a system, because they interact with each other. Therefore, every decision affects the whole system and all its parts. In order to understand the current economic and social situation in the Sárret micro-region, we need to look into all the details at the European Union's current cohesion and agricultural policy and the process that led to its present form. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of my research, the development of the social and economic and agricultural support system is of great importance for my research. The goal is to understand the background and motivation behind efforts of the poorer regions to catch up with the more developed regions.

#### **Literature review**

One of the most important aims of the European Union and its predecessors was to create a strong and uniform entity, which plays a decisive role in international economic and political life, by successfully working together to reduce and eliminate economic and social disparities at regional level. The purpose of the Cohesion Fund, set up in 1993, was to bring about major transport and environmental projects in the then poorest Member States of the Community. Only regions with a GDP per capita below 75% of the EU average are eligible. There are several such regions in Hungary which perform below 75% of the EU average, including the North Great Plain region, which is also home to the Sárret micro-region.

It is important for a country to be divided into territorial units to carry out development, as this is the only way to compare them and produce and analyse statistics to develop a successful development strategy (Szakál, 1999). Regional policy is particularly important for Hungary. Although agricultural subsidies are extremely beneficial for the country due to its special characteristics, the low domestic GDP per capita also means that Hungary is significantly lagging behind in terms of the quality of life.

Europe, home of my country – as the famous saying goes. Going from global to local thinking, the same is true for the North Great Plain region, as the area under investigation in Hungary - the Sárret micro-region - and my

home region, in the narrower sense of the word, is the administrative area in the eastern part of the country. Accordingly, we need to look at the situation in the world, in the Union and in the country.

Regional policy did not begin with the European Union, although the conscious organising activity and the establishment of institutions was performed in parallel to the history of the Union. Schuman dreamed up the necessity of cooperation between European countries and the principles of cooperation and summarised his ideas and concepts in the Schuman Plan (1951). This work laid the foundations for the development and organisation that we today call the European Union.

During the 2000-2006 period, community initiatives have been strengthened, providing EU policy objectives and a common political and economic context for the needs of local-based communities.

The sources for implementing Community initiatives are:

- INTERREG III: support for cross-border cooperation programs
- URBAN II: regeneration of urban areas in crisis
- EQUAL: combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market
- LEADER +: rural development

LEADER is the name of a program developed by the European Commission as part of the European Union's rural development policy. LEADER is one of the so-called "Four Community Initiatives". The name of the program is derived from the initials of the French name Liaison Entre Actions de l'Economie Rurale (Varga, 2010; Zsigáné, 2013).

LEADER developments can be characterised by the following seven key principles: area-based development, bottom-up approach, tripartite partnerships (business, civil and public), innovation, an integrated sectoral approach, network operation, cooperation (Zsigáné, 2013)

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