

# **Comparative Case Study GR: Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia (Axis 7) – ROP Thessalia (Axis 2)<sup>1</sup>**

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## **1. Programme Description**

Under this comparative study, two programmes are being described, the first, influenced by Leader features, is the 7<sup>th</sup> Priority Axis “Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia” of the Ministry of Agriculture Operational Programme “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006” and the second one which is a sectoral programme, is the Axis 2 “Agriculture and Rural Development” of the Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia.

### **1.1 Description of the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia**

The Programme under comparison (Integrated Rural Development of Thessalia) falls within the “Integrated Rural Development Programme” which constitutes Priority Axis 7 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Operational Programme, “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006” in the context of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Community Support Framework. This programme is the only one in Greece that has been influenced by Leader and has mainstreamed Leader features. Below we provide a short description of Priority Axis 7 and then we shall describe the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia.

**Sub-programme: Integrated Rural Development Programme (Priority Axis 7), Ministry of Agriculture Operational Programme “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006”.**

This sub-programme was perceived and designed specifically with a view to the development of the mountainous and disadvantageous rural areas of Greece and represents an innovative approach to rural development. It includes a series of measures addressing in particular the needs of rural population in mountainous and less-favoured areas of Greece. The measures of the sub-programme were based mainly on article 33 of Reg. 1257/99.

The programme is managed following Reg. 1260/1999 and the bodies involved are

- (a) The Managing Authority of the Operational Programme “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006”.
- (b) As the final beneficiary (implementing bodies): Directorate of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture
- (c) At local/ regional level, the Support Structures which have been set up with the aid of measure 14 as described below and provide support services for the sub-programme at local level to final beneficiaries as well as to the managing/ paying authority (Ministry of Agriculture). Such services involve animation of the local population, the publication of the call for proposals, assistance to the population in the application process, support to the Ministry of Agriculture for the implementation of the measures of the programme. Most Leader LAGs have been selected as Support Structures and promote the implementation of this programme as well as LEADER+.

#### *Financial Information*

The sub-programme represents 17.56% of the Operational Programme’s total public expenditure which amounts to € 311,903,185 and its total cost (public plus private expenditure) is €564,597,090. As is the case of the Operational Programme, the sub-programme is a single Fund programme (FEOGA – Guidance). The sub-programme is implemented on a land area of 34,184 Km<sup>2</sup> which corresponds to 25.9% of the country’s total land area and covers 221 municipalities with a population of 868,032 inhabitants (7.9% of the total population).

The main elements of this sub-programme are the territorial element and the multisectoral one.

The territorial units (mountainous and disadvantaged rural areas) where the programme, would be implemented, were selected by the Ministry, based on a set of criteria. In total 40 rural areas were selected. After that the Ministry commissioned 40 studies, one for each area, which were carried by external consultants in order to prepare business plans describing the interventions to be carried out for the development of the areas. The consultants collaborated with local authorities and local actors in order to prepare the development strategy and the business plans, which were submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry, in order to finalise each business plan collaborated with the authorities at local level so as to incorporate their views (top-down approach with elements of local participation).

The *Objectives* of the sub-programme are the following:

- The protection of rural areas with weak socio-economic fabric and of those affected by structural adjustments
- The effort to reduce inequalities among the Greek regions and the support for the development the least developed areas of Greece.
- The re-integration of the mountainous areas and small islands in the national productive system so as to avoid their marginalisation.

The main characteristics of the policy for the integrated and sustainable development of rural areas could be summarised as follows:

- Tackling problems at geographical level (territorial approach)
- Contribution of all the sectors of the economy in the development process (multi-sectoral)
- Integrated approach in order to promote private initiatives, the creation of the appropriate infrastructure and the provision of public services (integrated)
- Utilisation of each area's endogenous potential
- Top-down and partial bottom-up process.
- Development of a new scheme for support and promotion of the programme (Support Structures)

#### *Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia*

One of the 40 Greek rural areas is located in the region of Thessalia and covers an area of 2,597 Km<sup>2</sup> which is distributed in two prefectures (the north-eastern part of the prefecture of Larissa and the eastern part of the prefecture of Trikala) and accounts for 15 municipalities and in total, 68,053 inhabitants.

The total cost of the programme of Thessalia amounts to €38,208,000.

The Sub-Programme of Thessalia is financed by FEOGA- Guidance and its measures are addressed to farmers, non-farmers as well as local government (municipalities etc.). The menu of measures which is based mainly on Article 33 of Regulation 1257/1999, contains the following:

Measure 1:      *Land reclamation and irrigation projects*

Measure 2:      *Development of farming management services*

- Measure 3:     *Marketing of quality agricultural products*
- Measure 4:     *Basic support services for the rural population and the economy*
- Measure 5:     *Renovation and development of villages and preservation of the agricultural tradition*
- Measure 6:     *Diversification of agricultural activities in order to provide the opportunity for pluriactivity or alternative income*
- Measure 7:     *Management of water resources for agriculture*
- Measure 8:     *Development and improvement of the infrastructure related to the development of agriculture*
- Measure 9:     *Encouragement of tourism and handicraft related activities.*
- Measure 10:    *Protection of the environment in relation to agriculture, forestry, landscape preservation and the improvement of animal living conditions.*
- Measure 11:    *Improvement of the competitiveness of farms*
- Measure 12:    *Investments for the improvement of processing and trading of agricultural products.*
- Measure 13:    *Investments for the improvement of the exploitation of forestry and timber trading*
- Measure 14:    *Provision of basic services for the rural population and the local economy.*

As the above list of measures indicates, there are no measures for training or infrastructure creation in accordance to the provisions of the Fund. However and in order to maintain the integrated nature of the programme, such activities are foreseen through the Regional Operational Programme (that will be described below). Thus in the designated areas covered by the sub-programme, the creation of infrastructure (small public works etc.) and training in order to support local employment initiatives are financed through the regional programme's budget.

## **1.2 Description of the ROP Thessalia**

### ***Axis 2 "Agriculture and Rural Development 2000-2006", Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia***

In general, the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for Thessalia reflects the specialization of the priorities in the context of the new 2000-2006 Development Strategy for the region. These priorities could be summarised as follows:

- Increase of the development pace
- Formulation of a viable, sectoral mix which incorporates new technologies and modern operational approaches.
- Utilisation of the endogenous expertise and specialisation, know-how and the accumulated potential of human resources.
- Exploitation of developing markets

These aims will be achieved without compromising the effort for the combating of discrimination (equal opportunities) and without harming the environment, its resources and the areas of natural beauty. Efforts are also made so that these aims do not undermine social cohesion, which is endangered due to the fast paced transition to the new era and the evolution of the sectors towards a new balance.

In that aspect, the Regional Operational Programme for Thessalia 2000-2006 was designed by the Regional Authorities with an integrated approach and is focused on sectors demonstrating a significant competitive advantage or sectors facing particular problems, which have not been solved so far. It also focuses on particular geographic zones-poles of attraction, which have the potential to become means of dissemination towards the neighbouring regions, so that the final result is characterized by continuous and sustainable growth for the entire region. The programme is structured in 6 sub-programmes or priority axes and its total cost amounts to €928,839,893 of which €751,179,893 constitutes public expenditure. The EU funding involves the three Structural Funds, the ESF, the ERDF and FEOGA- Guidance.

The second priority axis or sub-programme "Agriculture and Rural Development" concerns the development of the Region's rural areas, it has a total cost of €299,870,000 of which €242,690,000 is public expenditure and as regards the contribution from the EU, this involves all three Funds (more specifically ERDF: €55,792,500, ESF: €8,790,000 and FEOGA-Guidance: €117,435,000). As mentioned in the previous section, part of the ERDF and ESF budget which amounts to approximately 22.3 million EURO is made available to the Integrated Rural Development Programme sub-programme of the Ministry of Agriculture implemented at the region of Thessalia for small scale infrastructure investments and training.

The Managing authority for the priority axis is the Regional Authority of Thessalia and the Ministry of Agriculture (Directorate of Planning and Agricultural Structures). However the situation is different regarding the executive authority in public or private projects. In the case of public projects, the managing authority publicises a call for tenders addressed to local administration (municipalities etc.), various directorates of the Prefectures depending on the nature of the project, cultural associations if the projects involves cultural aspects or any legal entity of public status. These organisations are then responsible for the publication of the expression of interest for the final beneficiaries that will be responsible for the implementation of each investment project. As regards private projects, the executive authority is the Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Regional Authority of Thessalia and the final beneficiaries may be farmers, non-farmers etc.

The priority axis that introduces an integrated strategy for the support of the agricultural sector's competitiveness and the sustainability of the region's rural areas includes two sub-axes which are:

**Sub-Axis A: Sectoral Interventions aiming to the Support of the Competitiveness of the Agricultural Structures and Infrastructures of the Region's Rural Space.**

The sectoral interventions supported under this sub-axis are horizontal schemes and address all rural areas of the region of Thessalia and bear a selective approach to the products that are considered of strategic importance to the region. Those are in particular, cotton, sheep and goat products, organic farming products and traditional local products.

The measures supported under this sub-axis are the following:

*Measure A.1: Investments of farms*

*Measure A.2: Support for market orientation*

*Measure A.3: Creation and modernisation of infrastructures for the quality improvement, preservation of hygiene conditions and sustainable development of farming and livestock production*

*Measure A.4: Land reclamation and Irrigation works*

- Measure A.5: Improvement of fisheries small ports*
- Measure A.6: Protection of the environment*
- Measure A.7: Completion of land improvement projects (from the second CSF)*

**Sub-Axis B: Territorial interventions aiming to the integrated development of the mountainous areas and islands of the region and activities for the protection and sustainable management of the environment**

The activities financed under the second sub-axis are mostly related to local development with a territorial view. Certain of the activities financed which refer to article of the EC Regulation 1257/99, bear a territorial and multisectoral approach in order to support the most isolated, mountainous and less-favoured areas of the region. Priority is given to the areas presenting comparative advantages that can be utilized in a rural development strategy and to zones and groups of the population that are most affected by structural changes. In this framework, the regional authorities selected seven areas within the region and seven business plans were prepared for their development.

The measures under the second sub-axis are:

- Measure B.1: Rational management of water and soil resources*
- Measure B.2: Special activities for the development of rural areas (ESF)*
- Measure B.3: Management of natural and cultural resources of the region's rural areas*
- Measure B.4: Forest management and protection*
- Measure B.5: Improvement of the accessibility and infrastructure creation for the promotion of mountainous tourist areas*
- Measure B.6: Improvement of farms' competitiveness*
- Measure B.7: Diversification of agricultural activities*
- Measure B.8: Promotion of tourist and craft activities*
- Measure B.9: Investment for the improvement of small processing and marketing industries*
- Measure B.10: Development and improvement of the agricultural sector's infrastructure*

Regarding the beneficiaries of the above mentioned measures, there are two categories of projects, public and private.

In both sub-axes' activities special attention is given to the improvement of local skills, training and information of the local population in order to promote diversification of activities and equal opportunities to access the labour market.

## **2. Starting conditions**

### **2.1 Starting conditions and initiation of the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia**

#### ***Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia***

At the outset of the third Community Support Framework, the Greek authorities responsible for designing the rural development programme for Greece decided to request a budget specifically for the development of mountainous and less-favoured rural areas. The Commission accepted their request and thus the Ministry of Agriculture proceeded to the design of the Integrated Rural Development Programme with the aim to select a number of rural areas where rural development plans would be targeted.

When the financial issues were clarified and the budget break down was finally decided, the policy planners of the Ministry of Agricultural (central level) proceeded to the selection of, initially, 35 rural areas based on specific criteria such as the mountainous or less favoured conditions, the population criterion etc. The Ministry assigned 35 studies to private consulting agencies for the designated areas and then added five more areas (40 in total) and assigned the relevant studies to be carried out. The objective was to formulate a business plan for each area that would promote its integrated, multi-sectoral development. For that purpose, the consultants had several meetings and consultations with local actors and local authorities in order to understand the needs and priorities of the areas and design the development plans based on their potential and resources. Those business plans were submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture that initiated a second series of consultations at local level in order to finalise the Business Plans and proceed to their implementation. This process makes evident the fact that the design and planning of the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia was at central level and only some degree of bottom-up approach was achieved through consultations with local actors and authorities.

For purposes of monitoring and implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Programmes, Support Structures were set up. Each one has a network of “antennas” at local level in each one of the designated areas where the programme is implemented and they are responsible for the provision of information regarding the Integrated Rural Development Programme to the local population, the support to the beneficiaries of the programme and the monitoring of the implementation of the projects (both financially and in terms of physical output). In the Region of Thessalia the Support Structure is located in the region’s chair, Larissa, and there are antennas, one in each of the region’s prefectures.

The role of the Support Structure is to provide the following range of services to the population and the programme’s beneficiaries:

- Animation and information to the population regarding the programme and the activities supported
- Publication of the calls for tendering
- Information on the conditions for participation and the obligations deriving from the programme
- Provision of all documentation necessary for applying under the various measures
- Provision of advice and clarifications where necessary
- Collection of the applications and checks in order to establish that each application is complete



- Provision of technical and administrative support to the Evaluation of the applications' Committees (eligibility of applicants)
- Publication of the results of the evaluation carried out at central level and communication of the results to the applicants (both successful and unsuccessful ones)
- Monitoring of the implementation of the projects with on-the-spot checks and monitoring of the physical output, the financial aspects of the projects, of the observation of the time-schedule and provision of solutions where the beneficiary finds difficulties.
- Collection of the documents (invoices etc.) in behalf of the beneficiaries in order to send them to the Ministry of Agriculture for the final control and payments.
- Provision of all necessary information to the Ministry of Agriculture regarding all aspects of the progress of the programme.

## **2.2 Starting conditions and initiation of the ROP Thessalia**

### ***Axis 2 "Agriculture and Rural Development 2000-2006", Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia***

The Regional Operational Programme is structured around various sectors – areas of priority which constitute the programme's priority axes. One of these sectors is agriculture and rural development, where the regional authorities defined the priorities of the region and based on that formulated the measures to be supported, as those were previously described.

Following the Commission's request, part of the budget requested by the Greek authorities for the development of mountainous and less-favoured rural areas, was to be made available to the regions for the development of such areas through the Regional Operational Programmes. In that context the regional authorities of Thessalia selected 7 rural areas based on their mountainous character, the unfavourable conditions prevailing, the population exodus etc. and carried out diagnostic studies for these particular areas. Initially, a series of measures were selected to be implemented in these areas in particular (measures B.6 – B.10 as described in previous section), based on the "menu" provided by Regulation 1257/99. However no Business Plans were prepared for the areas selected until after the Regional Board of Thessalia approved the Regional Operational Programme (and consequently the sub-programme for Agriculture and Rural development).

The management of the programme is carried out by the Managing Authority of Thessalia whereas regarding the implementation, the body responsible is the Directorate of Agricultural Development of the Regional Authority of Thessalia. Moreover the Support Structures are also involved in the provision of support and in the monitoring of private investments financed by FEOGA – Guidance, which are implemented in the selected 7 rural territories in the region of Thessalia.

Although the selection of the areas and the implementation of the Business Plans were an indication that the regional authorities made an effort to introduce the territorial dimension for development and the integrated and multisectoral approach, there were no appropriate structures for this approach to operate. Therefore the preparation of the development business plan was top-down whereas the management is not carried out at territorial level. It seems that the programme is characterised by a practically entirely sectoral thematic approach.

### 3. Time line reconstruction

#### *Time-line for the Integrated Rural Development Programme, Priority Axis 7, Operational Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture*

##### *(Leader type Programme)*

Year	1999-2000	2001	2002		2003		2004
Decision making level		Decision EC 845/6-4-2001 for the approval of the programme	Decision for the selection of the Support Structures	Common Ministerial Decision (505/19-11-02) for the implementing rules and support conditions of the Int. Rural Dev. Programmes			
Programme, measure or activity	Design of the Programme- Selection of the territorial units-Initiation of Business plans by consultants	Completion of the Business Plans of the designated areas	Call for tenders for public investments by the Ministry (central level)	Establishment of the Support Structures (June)	Call for tenders for private investments by the Ministry of Agric. Submission of applications (Feb)	Selection process by the Ministry (Sept '03, on going)	Publication of lists of beneficiaries (expected)
Support structures				Support structures in operation	Animation and mobilization of the local population by the Support Structures (Feb-May)	Checks for completeness and eligibility of the applicants by the Sup. Structures (June-July)	

***Time – Line for the Sub-Programme “Agriculture and Rural Development” of the Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia***

***(The other programme)***

Year	1999-2000	2001			2002	2003			2004
Decision making level		Approval by the Regional Council of Thessalia	Approval by the EEC	Common Ministerial Decision for the implementation of the programme (Sept)					
Programme, measure or activity	Planning by the Regional Authority			Call for tenders for public projects (Sub-Axis A)	Call for tenders for Sub-Axis A private projects and selection of beneficiaries (May)	Approval of final beneficiaries for Sub-Axis A (January)	Call for tenders for projects under Sub-Axis B (May)	Evaluation of proposals by Evaluation Committees (Sub-Axis B) (September-on going)	List of selected applicants (expected)
Support structures						Mobilisation, animation of the local population by groups of volunteers		Pre-evaluation from Support Structures (Sub-Axis B) (July)	

#### **4. Description of the features which have been mainstreamed in the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia**

##### **4.1 Concerning the eight LEADER features**

As regards the LEADER features that were mainstreamed, this involved only the territorial approach and the multisectoral integration whereas the bottom up approach was only partly mainstreamed. Main reasons behind that reported that only through the multisectoral territorial approach at local level would there be achieved the revitalisation and development of rural areas. However the basic features of Leader which were the local partnership and the decentralised management were not mainstreamed and this became a serious obstacle to the programme's multisectoral approach.

The mainstreaming attempt of these two LEADER features is evident in all of the measures of the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia as those have been described in the first section. All the measures are addressed to the designated areas which were selected based on specific criteria, following a business plan drawn up according to the specific needs and priorities of the areas.

As regards the partly bottom-up approach, this becomes evident in the drawing up of the Business Plans where local authorities and local actors were involved and participated in consultations with the Ministry of Agriculture planners who had the responsibility for the planning of the programme.

However, regarding the mainstreaming of the multisectoral approach, this was seriously impeded by the lack of local partnership and the decentralised management and this was evident in the implementation phase that was carried out very centrally.

#### **4.2 Finance and organisation for cooperation and networking**

The trans-national cooperation was not mainstreamed in the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia, since its implementation required the mainstreaming of the two features, the local partnership and the decentralised management, mainly though that of local partnership.

As regards networking, this feature was also not mainstreamed, however it may be argued that there is a degree of networking among the Support Structure and its antennas that operate at local level (there is the Support Structure of Thessalia and antennas for each of the prefectures of the region) for the promotion of the programme.

It has to be noted that the decision for not mainstreaming these particular features was made by the Ministry of Agriculture that had the responsibility for designing the Integrated Rural Development Programmes at national level. Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that mainstreaming was attempted for the first time and this was a pilot effort that is also used as a learning tool for future planning. The results from the implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Programmes will provide valuable information and insight for the next programming period where more mainstreaming of LEADER features is expected to occur at a larger scale and extent.

#### **4.3 Concerning the specific EC requirements for LEADER<sup>2</sup>**

As regards these specific requirements, those did not apply in the case of the Integrated Rural development Programme as no local partnership was in effect.

#### **4.4 Concerning the enlargement or multiplication of projects initiated under LEADER**

No projects initiated under LEADER have been enlarged or multiplied in the Integrated Rural Development Programme and this could be attributed to the fact that no innovative measures were included in its menu of measures.

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<sup>2</sup> 50% public, target beneficiaries, thematic approach, qualitative monitoring and evaluation

## **5. Furthering and hindering factors in the “leader-type” programme**

### **5.1 What has furthered mainstreaming?**

Mainstreaming of LEADER features was only partially attempted in the Integrated Rural Development Programme, involving only certain characteristics such as the territorial approach and the integrated multisectoral one.

As regards the territorial approach, the main factor promoting its mainstreaming was the divergence and the geographical heterogeneity of the Greek rural areas which made apparent the need to tackle problems at a local level through a business plan suitable to the needs and priorities of each area and thus promote rural development through an integrated and multisectoral approach. Also the move from the first pillar of the CAP to the second pillar, and the understanding that interventions only in farming cannot succeed sustainable development in rural areas.

### **5.2 What has hindered mainstreaming?**

As mentioned previously, mainstreaming of the LEADER features was attempted for the first time in rural development programmes in Greece. So this effort could be considered as a pilot attempt mainly used as a learning tool for future planning. The fact that only certain features were mainstreamed whereas others such as the local partnership and the decentralised management were left out was a result of a combination of factors. Those were the lack of legal provisions of Regulation 1257/99 since the Support Structures which would operate as Local Action Groups, could not be financed from FEOGA. The review of Regulation 1257/99 by Reg 1783/2003 however amends that and such support will be provided in the next programming period. Moreover there was a certain scepticism based on the results of LEADER II implementation (successful, less successful or unsuccessful LAGs), whether the implementation of this sub-programme should be realised in a decentralised way. As a result of not mainstreaming the local partnership and the decentralised management of the programme, trans-national cooperation and networking could not also be mainstreamed since there were no vectors that would enable and promote them.

As regards the features actually mainstreamed in the programme, the mid-term evaluation indicated that certain measures showed considerably higher demand than others and this was observed not only in the region of Thessalia but also at national level.

In particular the measures with a high demand were those concerning agrotourism and handicraft investments whereas other measures (e.g for forestry and the protection of the environment) did not present a high appeal to the rural population. It has to be noted that those were some first observations and results since the programme is still at its initial stages and more calls for tenders are to be announced. However this imbalance in favour of rural tourism and handicraft “threatens” the integrated approach of the programme. As pointed out by the Ministry of Agriculture officers, this may be attributed to the fact that the local population that was familiar with the LEADER Community Initiative where rural tourism and related activities were very popular, perceived this programme as another type of LEADER given that the implementation of LEADER+ started quite late in the current programming period. It seems that further animation and information of the local population is required on behalf of the Support Structures and the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to present and promote also the other measures and activities supported by the programme.

## **6. Synergies**

### **6.1 Synergies between Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia and the ROP Thessalia**

#### ***Integrated Rural Development Programme for Thessalia***

At the stage of planning there was no co-ordination between the various authorities responsible for the design of the programmes. There was no harmonisation of objectives since each authority set their own priorities and goals to achieve at national or regional/ local level.

Some degree of synergy appeared between the Integrated Rural Development Programme and other rural development programmes (LEADER+) implemented in the same areas deriving from the fact that the LAGs implementing LEADER+ have an active part in the “leader-type” programme as the Support Structures and its antennas. Therefore there was at some extent the transmission and feed-back of expertise in order to achieve some co-ordination of the two programmes in the best possible manner in order to promote the development of the rural areas.

The incidence of overlapping of activities became evident to the central authorities (Ministry of Agriculture) since a number of measures were common among all rural development programmes and certain rules were issued for the better implementation of the programmes. Thus, in the areas where both LEADER+ and the Integrated Rural Development Programmes are implemented, at national level, and in the case that the same type of investment is supported under both programmes (e.g. agrotourism, handicraft, preservation of the architectural heritage, protection of the environment, promotion of local products, cultural events etc.), those investments are financed and implemented only by the Integrated Rural Development Programmes and LEADER+ can only support and implement “soft” type of investments (such as clusters, networking etc.). This arrangement aims to avoid overlapping among the programmes and achieve complementarities between similar activities as well as increased added value. With that aim, a number of meetings took place between the local actors designing LEADER+ for the prefectures of Thessalia and officers from the Managing Authority for the Operational Programme “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006” responsible for the Integrated Rural Development Programmes so as to try and design the measures in both programmes based on the above mentioned rules and conditions.

Moreover and in order to observe these rules and arrangements and resolve any difficulties arising during the implementation of the programmes, a coordination unit has been set-up by virtue of a Common Ministerial Decision (Common Ministerial Decision 3040/10-04-03) with the participation of officers from the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006”, the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme of the Community Initiative LEADER+, The Ministry of Economy and Economics and the Directorate of Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture.

### **6.2 Synergies between the ROP Thessalia and other programmes**

#### ***Sub-programme 2: Agricultural and Rural Development, Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia***

Given the sectoral nature of the sub-programme for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Regional Operational Programme, it is not easy to pin-point the synergies developed with other programmes implemented at national level such as the LEADER+ Community Initiative and the

Operational Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006”.

In terms of designing the programme, there was lack of synchronisation of planning and this led to overlapping in activities which were made evident during the implementation of the programmes. At that stage (the implementation) an effort was made to coordinate activities however it seems that further coordination of activities is required.

Some degree of coordination of activities appears in the cases of the measures implemented in the seven designated mountainous and less-favoured areas selected by the regional authorities, where rules and conditions apply as described in the previous section. The Coordination Unit collaborates with the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme of Thessalia in order to avoid the overlapping of activities in those parts of the rural areas where both LEADER+ and the rural development programme of the Region of Thessalia are implemented.

## **7. Comparison of outcomes and added value between the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia and the ROP Thessalia**

It has to be noted and stressed out that the implementation of both programmes is still at their early stages and it is difficult to assess the outcomes and added value of the programmes. However some useful results can be drawn particularly from the procedures adopted.

As a general remark, it might be argued that experience has indicated that *the “closer to the basis” a programme is, the better and more effectively it is implemented and this becomes more and more evident at the local as well as at the central administration level.* A characteristic example of this is that although LEADER+ was the last programme that started being implemented in Thessalia, it progresses at a much faster pace and this could be attributed basically to the local partnership and its decentralised management and funding.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme of Thessalia although it had an earlier initiation and started off as a programme that would support endogenous development, it “stumbled” to the top-down and centralised management (since the local partnership and decentralised management features were not implemented). It is being burdened with a large number of controls, for instance the evaluation of proposals is carried out at the Ministry of Agriculture at central level by an Evaluation Committee, after the initial check by the Support Structures to determine that the applications are properly completed and meet eligibility criteria. After the Evaluation Committee, the applications are also checked by the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture “Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000 – 2006” and then the final results are sent to the Support Structure in order to notify the applicants (expected to be sent). These procedures slow down its implementation and eliminate its flexibility. However, as this was considered as a pilot and innovative attempt to introduce the territorial approach and the multisectoral integration in mainstream rural development programmes, all this experience proved to be a valuable learning experience that supports the need for the introduction of the key features of Leader (local partnership and decentralised management) in the next planning period.

In the case of the regional programme, the fact that the management of the programme and the implementation are carried out by different authorities does not allow for the know-how created and the expertise acquired to be fed-back to the programme in terms of programming. The large number of

intermediate executive beneficiaries responsible for the various types of measures, prevents management at territorial level. Although an effort was made to introduce the territorial approach into the Regional Operational Programme, the lack of supporting institutions was a major obstacle to this attempt and no conditions were created for the programme to become “leader-infected” and it remains sectoral.

<b>7.1 Outcomes concerning behavioural changes (formulation of a joint vision and area-based strategy, participation of people in development processes, local ownership of development processes, encouragement of innovative practices, attracting private co-funding, links between sectors, inter-territorial cooperation, networking, management and financing)</b>	
<i>“Leader-type programme</i> No behavioural changes have been observed but the complexity of centralised procedures result in a general understanding for the need of decentralisation as in the Leader programme	<i>Other programme</i> The difficulties also in its implementation and the delays resulting from the lack of a single final beneficiary (the LAG) to implement, manage and fund the programme were evident in our interviews.
<b>7.2 Expected or observed added value in respect to the achievement of the goals of the respective programme</b>	
<i>“Leader-type programme</i> No added value was observed in this respect, as procedures followed, reallocation of funding regardless of the business plans, do not ensure the achievement of goals through the mainstreaming of the territorial – multisectoral approach.	<i>Other programme</i> Similar comments as the fragmentation of the categories of final beneficiaries for each measure does not ensure the achievement of territorial development.
<b>7.3 Expected or observed added value in respect to the Community Objectives (agricultural adjustment and diversification, employment, income, environment, equal opportunities)</b>	
Although both programmes have Community objectives such as agricultural adjustment and diversification, at this early stage of its implementation it is not possible to assess the added value in this respect. However it can be argued that some of these objectives will be fulfilled even partly.	
<b>7.4 Expected or observed added value in respect to governance aspects (policy: improved relevance and usefulness, political legitimacy and support; programming: operational efficiency, effectiveness and transparency; institutions: fitness and leanness of structures, cross-institutional linkages and networking)</b>	
<i>“Leader-type programme</i> It is observed that added value is derived from learning from the difficulties, delays in the governance aspects (lack of synchronisation in planning with regional authorities, overlapping in actions, highly centralised management that reduces efficiency and effectiveness at local level). It is recognised that institutional structures with regards implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programmes should become decentralised. Added value has resulted from the recognition that the Leader LAGs are the necessary agents for the facilitation and promotion of rural programmes in rural areas. Based on that it is expected that in the next programming period, a new institutional setting will be developed and that territorial – multisectoral programmes will be managed and funded by local partnerships (the Leader LAGs)	<i>Other programme</i> The recognition and understanding of shortcomings in planning and implementation procedures and the need for more effective and efficient procedures in this respect with cross-institutional linkages seem to be an added value. However as the regional authorities are closer to local than the central level, it does not seem mature at the administration level that regional programmes implemented at rural areas need further decentralisation. Only the need for better co-ordination and cross-institutional involvement in planning and implementing procedures is recognised in order to improve programmes objectives, actions and impact.



<b>7.5 Expected or observed added value in respect to competences (learning at individual, groups and organisational levels, culture of evaluation)</b>	
<i>“Leader-type programme</i> The involvement of the Leader LAGs as Support Structures in this centrally managed programme creates added value as competencies, attitudes and mentalities from the Leader programme are integrated in this programme. This integration of competencies favour future decentralisation of the rural development programmes	<i>Other programme</i> No added value is observed or expected in this respect

## **8. Success factors for mainstreaming**

- (a) The understanding that the differentiation of rural areas (heterogeneity) requires interventions facing constraints and exploiting opportunities at local level. This leads to the need for a strategy and a business plan at local; level compared to sectoral interventions.
- (b) Realisation that farming could not be the only activity for sustainable development of rural areas and that a broader development encompassing all rural population should be pursued.
- (c) The complexities, delays and low effectiveness observed in the implementation of integrated programmes managed centrally lead to the need of mainstreaming the LAG and the decentralised management and funding.
- (d) The limited mainstreaming of the Leader features (territorial- multisectoral) served as a learning tool and a valuable experience for the next programming period, as first evidence supports the need of mainstreaming also the other key features of the Leader (LAG and local management/ funding).

## **9. Recommendations**

### **9.1 Concerning particular aspects which could be simplified or should be better adapted**

This comparative case study has enlightened many aspects of the leader-type and the non leader type programmes in Greece and identified areas that significant constrains exist that do not allow efficient and effective management of the rural development programmes. Despite the rather limited mainstreaming occurred, there are important institutional aspects that need adjustments which will allow more essential mainstreaming of the Leader features.

Main result from our analysis is that among the three Rural Development Programmes implemented in Thessalia, the most efficient and effective one proved to be the LEADER+ followed by the non-leader type of the Region and then by the centrally managed leader-type programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, So the closer to the local level the rural development programme is planned and managed, the more effective it tends to be.

Based on this finding, Greece in the next programming period should plan and implement rural development programmes with a decentralised way, mainstreaming local partnership, local management and funding with territorial and integrated approach.

Moreover, planning procedures should be improved with cross-institutional linkages and involvement of central and regional level. At present the centre and the regions seem to plan rural development programmes separately without synchronisation of objectives and goals.

## **9.2 Concerning specific implementation questions of LEADER features**

Mainstreaming in Greece has been very limited. There are not many programmes that have been inspired or influenced by Leader. The programme that has been influenced and is the base of our comparative case study is the sub-programme “Integrated Rural Development” Priority Axis 7 of the Ministry of Agriculture Operational Programme. This programme has introduced/ mainstreamed two Leader features, the territorial and the multisectoral approach at the level of 40 designated territorial units based on business plans developed by consultants. However, the centralised management of it by the Ministry of Agriculture, and specifically the Directorate of Planning and Agricultural Structures proved very difficult to implement successfully without local partnership even those two Leader features (territorial approach and multisectoral integration) without local partnership.

*This first effort turned into a learning tool for mainstreaming the Leader in Greece and a valuable experience. Main result of it is that, mainstreaming of Leader features cannot be achieved separately (one or two features) but should concern all its basic elements as:*

- (a) the local partnership
- (b) the decentralised funding and management
- (c) the territorial approach
- (d) the multisectoral integration and
- (e) the bottom-up

These features proved to be essential ones with strong interdependence, in the Leader model, if successful implementation of the local programmes is to be achieved.

## **9.3 Concerning the removal of obstacles for mainstreaming**

1. A main constrain for not mainstreaming the local partnership feature was that Regulation 1257/1999 did not provide for financial support of LAGs and hence for decentralised management of the Leader – type programme. However, relevant provision has been included in EC Regulation 1783/2003, which will facilitate the situation.
2. Another obstacle that constrained mainstreaming of the decentralised funding and management was that many LAGs have not been successful in the decentralised management and funding due to lack of competence and capacities.  
To remove this constrain there is need for new schemes like networks of LAGs at regional level that will allow transfer of know-how in decentralised management, mobilisation of local population, bottom-up approach and overall improvement of their competencies.
3. Centralisation has a long history in Greece and this has contributed to weak regional and local institutional structures. The situation has been improving with Structural Funds implementation. However, more decentralisation of funding and management should be introduced for Rural Development programmes. The EU should introduce indicators for decentralised management of Integrated Rural Development Programmes which EU Member States have to follow.

#### 9.4 What should not be mainstreamed and why?

Trans-national co-operation seemed to be a rather weak Leader feature, which was not promoted by LAGs or the Intermediary Body. Although innovative ideas and good practices could be exchanged and transferred, the local actors feel that due to differences in attitudes, mentalities and institutional structures among European rural areas, it proved difficult for innovative ideas to be integrated in other rural contexts. However, trans-territorial cooperation proved a more efficient approach to transferring know-how and improving capacity buildings at local level.

### 10. Comment and personal impression of the survey process

The survey process proved extremely useful and resulted in new information and insights of the mainstreaming. The selection of the two programmes (Leader-type and non-Leader type) in the Region of Thessalia and the interviews with central, regional and local actors involved with the programmes ensured different perspectives to be integrated into our comparative analysis and identified overlapping and the lack of synchronisation in objectives and actions. The survey process as a methodological tool and the Qcom served as very useful tools for highlighting and interpreting mainstreaming aspects.

### 11. Table of interviews<sup>3</sup>

Name of interviewee	Function	Date of interview
1. Officer A	Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture, responsible for the design of the Ministry's Operational Programme "Rural Development – Reconstruction of the Countryside 2000-2006"	7/1/2004
2. Officer B	Officer, ANKA, LAG of Karditsa, Antenna, Integrated Rural Development Programme in the prefecture of Karditsa	8/1/2004
3. Officer C	Project Manager of the Support Structure of Thessalia and Director General of KENAKAP LEADER+ LAG	9/1/2004
4. Officer D	Officer, Responsible for Priority Axis 2, Managing Authority of Thessalia, "Agriculture and Rural Development" programme	9/1/2004
5. Officer E	Director, Directorate of Agricultural Development, Regional Authority of Thessalia	9/1/2004
6. Officer F	Officer, Directorate of Agricultural Development, responsible for priority Axis 2A "Agriculture and Rural Development" programme	9/1/2004
7. Officer G	Officer, Directorate of Agriculture Development, responsible for priority Axis 2A "Agriculture and Rural Development" programme	9/1/2004

<sup>3</sup> The names of the Greek officers and their coordinates are with the OIR (coordinator) and the geographical expert.