



ACHIEVEMENT OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LOCAL INITIATIVE GROUPS. CASE STUDY OF HARMANLI MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

The program for Rural Development of Bulgaria 2007-2013 examines the creation of Local Initiative Groups (LIGs) as an opportunity to integrate the local population around collective projects and activities to improve economic competitiveness of the region, integrating environmental concerns and quality of life of all citizens.

The main goal of this paper is to examine the experience of Harmanli Municipality to create a LIG, and the role of LIG in developing and implementing local development strategies. The tasks for the realization of the goal are as follows: 1) Study the legal basis for the establishment and funding of LIGs. 2) Investigation of activities and partners in establishing a LIG in the Harmanli municipality, 3) Analysis of problems and opportunities for achieving the objectives of LIG.

One of the main ways to increase participation and organization of local communities in development processes is through the creation of active partnerships at local level to implement initiatives to ensure continued sustainable development of the area.

Key words: LIGs, “Leader”, RDP 2007-2013.

INTRODUCTION

The program for Rural Development of Bulgaria 2007-2013 examines the creation of Local Initiative Groups (LIGs) as an opportunity to integrate the local population around collective projects and activities to improve economic competitiveness of the region, integrating environmental concerns and quality of life of all citizens.

The main goal of this paper is to examine the experience of Harmanli Municipality to create a LIG, and the role of LIG in developing and implementing local development strategies. The tasks for the realization of the goal are as follows: 1) Study the legal basis for the establishment and funding of LIGs. 2) Investigation of activities and partners in establishing a LIG in the Harmanli municipality, 3) Analysis of problems and opportunities for achieving the objectives of LIG.

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implement initiatives to ensure continued sustainable development of the area.

1. General characteristic of the Harmanly municipality.

The Harmanli municipality is situated at the border between the Upper Thracian lowlands, Sakar Mountain and the foothills of the Eastern Rhodopes. The municipality is located 47km from the border checkpoint Kapitan Andreevo and 38 km from the border checkpoint Kapitan Petko Voyvoda. It has a varied topography and changing altitude. Most of its territory is flat; the rest has mountainous and hilly terrain. Two-thirds of the settlements are located in the Sakar Mountain and one third in the Eastern Rhodopes.

The territory of the municipality is crossed by Maritsa River and its tributaries – the Harmanliiska and Biserska Rivers. The total quantity of drinking water is drawn mainly from wells. There are over 70 dams and reservoirs constructed in this area and its water is used primarily for irrigation. The Harmanli Municipality has a total area of 694,625 acres of

which 420,998 acres are farmland where the cultivated tillable ground is 335,398 acres and the forests - 203,266 acres. Water area is 12,205 acres. The most remote settlements in the municipality are the villages Dripchevo and Vurbovo and the distance between them is 55 km.

The municipality is home for various species and the most significant ones are: Whitehead duck, hare, kikkitsi, quail, pheasants, partridges, turtle doves, wild boar, jackals and foxes.

Harmanli town is the municipal centre of the municipality, which includes another 24 villages. The total population is 26,114 people - 12,851 men and 13,263 women. The rural population is 7368 people and the population of the town of Harmanli is 18,746 people. The residents of 21 villages are no more than 500 people in each of them, while the other 3 villages have population between 500 and 1,000 people. The age characteristics of the population in 2009 are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Age characteristics of the population in the municipality of Harmanli in 2009

	Population	Under working age	In working age	Over working age
Total	26 114	3 911	15 604	6 599
Urban	18 746	3 077	12 316	3 353
Rural	7 368	834	3 288	3 246

For the year the live births are 146 boys and 126 girls. The mortality rate in the municipality is high - 477 people. The natural population growth is 209 and the mechanical growth is (-49). There firmly manifested migration processes in the municipality that are aimed at larger cities and abroad.

It's typical for the region that in the settlements of the municipality traditional fairs are held. Some of the culture festivals are Trifonovski feast, "Poki" - poets with guitars, the National Cultural Celebration "The Spring of the White-legged Woman. The old crafts are reserved by the goldsmith art, the hand made soap art, the horseshoe craft and copper engraving art. The culture club activity has 135-year history. There are 8 centers, 2 of them in the administrative center.

The unemployment rate based on registered unemployed at the Employment Office Harmanli is 7.82% in 2009. The number of people involved in the working process in the municipality is 5063 from which 4402 are employees so the economically active population is 60% of the whole population in the working age. The remaining 32% are abroad, in the informal economy, reassigned or do not work.

The diverse terrain combined with stable water resources and fertile soils create favorable conditions for agriculture, especially grapes,

vegetables and tobacco production. In the sector of livestock breeding the most important fields are breeding of pigs, cattle, sheep and beekeeping. In the industrial sector the best developed is the light industry. The total number of the economic entities registered in the municipality is almost 900 (**Table 2**).

There is a daily connection with the administrative center by bus except for 5 villages where the link is only 2 times per week. The bus destinations are served by private operators. The only public transport is that of the schools. There is one railroad unit.

There is no major industrial infrastructure to attract workers from places outside the municipality. A part of the population works in The Maritsa East Plant Complex and in some tailoring shops in the neighboring municipalities.

The municipality is covered by three mobile operators and the ISPs are 4 from which the major share has BTC. All the settlements are supplied with water and electricity. The water supply is fulfilled by 9 drilling, 5 pipe and 9 shaft wells. In rural areas there is no sewerage. Only the administrative center has a drainage system built but there is no purification treatment plant.

Table 2. Number of enterprises by sectors in the municipality Harmanli 2009

Economic sector	Number of enterprises	Involved people	Employed people
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	38	479	475
Production, except for energy producing resources	4	31	28
Manufacture of food products, beverages and tobacco	29	522	507
Manufacture of textiles and textile products	16	689	675
Production of leather and leather products	2	0	0
Manufacture of wood and cork, except for furniture	6	17	11
Manufacture of wood pulp, paper and paper products	3	11	9
Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products	11	124	113
Metals and fabricated metal products	7	12	5
Manufacturing industry, not mentioned above	3	41	39
Construction	13	224	216
Trade, repairing and technical servicing of cars and bikes	531	1422	227
Hotels and restaurants	79	273	217
Transport, storage and communications	55	216	181
Real estate, rental and business activities and services	44	111	69
Education	6	15	0
Health care and social activities	30	271	253
Other activities in favor of the society and the individuals	16	23	9

The bank offices in the territory of the municipality are 12. In the region there are 25 settlements – 1 town and 24 villages. The municipal administrative centre is the town of Harmanli. The biggest distance from a settlement to the municipal centre is 35km. Harmanli belongs to the regional administration of Haskovo where the offices of State Fund Agriculture - Haskovo, PA - Hasovo, RVMS - Haskovo Regional Inspectorate - Haskovo, HEI -Haskovo Basin Directorate - Plovdiv and Haskovo District

Court are. Still it is a separate judicial district including the municipalities Madzharovo and Simenovgrad.

2. Study on local development through projects financed by EU

In the local development policy it is a priority to attract substantial funding from the EU Structural Funds. The **table 3** represents the main projects on which were fulfilled in the municipality of Harmanli during the time 2005-2009.

Table 3. Harmani Municipality Projects funded by the EU for the period 2005-2009

Name of the project	"Young people - partners in the local government" - funded by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe
Main executor: Foundation Arbitra	Partner – Harmanli municipality
Period for fulfilling the project	Six months 2005 - 2006
Total budget of the project	5000 00 Euro
Description of the fulfilled tasks	Meetings with young people from the schools in Harmanli, one-day seminar on the theme ‘European Charter of youth involvement in the life of the municipalities and regions and the role of young people as partners of local authorities’. Forming of focus groups to identify the problems of young people in the municipality, round table discussions, making videos and an information booklet, Youth Forum on the theme ‘Youth for the Future of Harmanli’
Name of project	Culture – the base for a sustainable cross-border cooperation between the municipalities Harmanli and Babaeski
Main executor: Harmanli municipality	Partner – Babaeski municipality, Turkey
Period for fulfilling the project	7 months - 01.12.2006-30.06.2007
Total budget of the project	42 000 Euro
Description of the fulfilled tasks	Creating of a real cross-border contacts between the two communities and good neighborly relations between the artists of Harmanli and Babaeski municipalities.
Name of project	Promoting the economic development BG 2005/017-454.02.01.01. ‘Promoting cross-border networks and clusters as an engine for economic productivity’
Main executor – Harmanly municipality	Partners: Trigono municipality, The Republic of Greece and Business Club - Harmanly
Period for fulfilling the tasks	January 2007 – November 2008
Total budget of the project	148 568,13 Euro
Description of the fulfilled tasks	Conducting a diagnostic study on the development of cross-border cluster, informational campaign on the cluster model, organizing a workshop, business forums and seminars, preparation of concept for development of textile cluster, providing training for managing a cluster, the issue of joint Bulgarian-Greek cluster catalog and other printed materials
Name of project	‘Via Diagonalis and the Bulgarian Stonehenge’
Main executor – Harmanly municipality	Partners: Trigono municipality, The Republic of Greece
Period for fulfilling the tasks	18 months - 01December 2007 - 30 may 2008
Total budget of the project	182 709,84 Euro
Description of the fulfilled tasks	The general objective is to stimulate the development of the rich cultural potential of the municipality of Harmanly and thus to stimulate local employment, linking tourism

	activities with the nearby Greek region. Actions are taken to protect key sights - "VIA DIAGONALIS" - the road connecting Constantinople with Europe and one of the fortresses along the way-"CASTRARUBRA". It is worked on the development of local tourism product based on key sights and tourist activities in connection with the nearby Greek region. Better employment opportunities for local people were created and the project encourages temporary and permanent employment.
Name of project	'Extension of the sustainable use of natural resources in the area of high natural value – 'The Defile' through the development of new green integrated tourist product'.
Main executor – Harmanly municipality	Partner – Babaeski municipality, Turkey
Period for fulfilling the tasks	18 months – 01 January 2007 – 30 November 2008
Total budget of the project	106 700,17 Euro
Description of the fulfilled tasks	Increasing of the knowledge and the education of the public on the proper identification and collection of non-forest products, increasing of the public knowledge about the legal framework, regulating the collection of non-forest products and its promotion, the wider use of natural resources through the development and promotion of innovative integrated tourist product, focusing on "green "(eco) tourism, increasing of competence, adaptability and flexibility of human resources involved in providing tourist services.
Name of project	Cross border protection measures of the transboundary biodiversity. Construction of an aviary and a nursery garden in the village of Slavyanovo
Main executor – Harmanly municipality	Basic Partner: Trigono municipality Associated partner: Municipal administration - Haskovo
Period for fulfilling the tasks	12months – 01.December 2007 – 30 November 2008
Total budget of the project	255 146,14 Euro, 10% of which are an own contribution of the municipality of Haskovo
Description of the fulfilled tasks	Ensuring the prevention, restoration and conservation of important habitats, restoring of affected and burned areas, forestation and restoration of populations of endemic species by creating a nursery garden and aviary in the municipality Harmanly – village of Slavyanovo, strengthening the local capacity for sustainable management of the biodiversity in the region by introducing European best practices and initiate joint cross-border initiatives.
Name of project	Rehabilitation of the municipal road HKV - 1214 - the road junction III -503 / village of Ivanovo – village of Varbovo / village of

	Slavyanovo, km 0 +000 to km 7 +000
Main executor	Harmanly municipality
Period for fulfilling the tasks	15 months – 16 September 2008 – 15 December 2009
Total budget of the project	4 731 886.06 lv.-100% from the EC
Description of the fulfilled tasks	To improve the accessibility and to support sustainable development of the small settlements located in the periphery of the municipality of Harmanly by improving the technical and operational condition of the road HKV - 1214 - Junction of Road III - 503 / village of Ivanovo –village of Varbovo / in the direction of village of Bolyarski izvor and village of Slavyanovo, Harmanly municipality.

3. The ‘LEADER’ approach in the municipality of Harmanly.

Following the publication of 18 June 2008 of the first invitations for stating ideas on the sub-measure 431-2 of the RDP Ministry of Agriculture and Food a proposal based on built public-private partnerships has been developed. It includes the Municipality of Harmanly, NGO-Democratic Union of Women - Harmanly and the representatives of local business.

The project proposal for a financing of the preparatory project to mobilize local people to participate and create MIG with a leading organization in the Harmanly Municipality was approved and on 03.06.2009№ the contract RD50-177/03.06.2009 was signed. This is an agreement on the financing of the preparatory projects under N 431-2-03-3. Originally approved grants under this contract are 185,588lv and the period for fulfilling the tasks of the project is 03.06.2009 - 03.12.2010.

The local action groups are the main instruments for implementing ‘LEADER’ and include public, business and civil society organizations operating in a given territory. MIG integrates the local people and organizations caring about similar shared ideas for development. It facilitates the process of decision making and enhances the dialogue and the cooperation within the rural areas.

The establishment of MIG is necessary in order to:

- plan in the sphere of the partnerships taking into account the local specifics;

- create local capacity;
- administrate the applying of the strategy;
- take the responsibility for the selection of project proposals and their negotiation.

By the means of the project for support the following is achieved:

- Conducting researches in order to gather information for the development of a situational analysis;
- Identification of beneficiaries and their involvement in the preparatory work;
- Training of the members of the MIG;
- Designing in a cooperation a local development strategy taking into account the strengths and weaknesses within the two municipalities;
- Promotion of local development strategy;
- Exchange of experience between Bulgarian and European MIGs;
- Creating and legal registration of the MIG;
- Applications for approval of the MIG in the MAF (the approval of the MIG will be done under special regulation and its first call is expected to be announced by the end of 2009);
- Implementation of the strategies - from the moment of approval till the end of 2013

After the development of strategies and the approval of the MIG from MAF this new structure will administrate the full implementation of the strategy by the means of:

- publishing ads for applying for projects;
- informing and assisting the potential applicants;
- registering the submitted application;

- checking for administrative compliance and eligibility;
- making a technical evaluation and ranking of project proposals (on criteria established in the approved strategy);
- making a preliminary selection of projects for financing under the strategy;
- organizing meetings of the Committee for selection of projects for the MIG.

CONCLUSION:

The local development strategies of the MIG aim a sustainable rural development through diversification of economic activities, conservation of the nature and the rural regions, development of high quality services that meet the needs and expectations of the local people.

Harmanly Municipality implements a successful project for local development with

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the help of the Local action group and the developing its own strategy for the local development by involving all interested parties and the local community.

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