



MAS Šumperský venkov

The case study abstract describes the good practice of cooperation among local actors in the Local Action Group (LAG) Šumperk Rural Area.

1. Brief introduction of the LAG

LAG Šumperk Rural Area was established in 2006. During its existence, LAG Šumperk Rural Area has supported more than 200 projects from various operational programmes, worth more than CZK 51 million. LAG Šumperk Rural Area consists of 16 municipalities.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LAG activities focused on 3 goals under the thematic areas of the programme framework of the Operational Programme Employment (OP Emp):

- **Employment:** the aim was to systematically address the high unemployment in rural areas, with an emphasis on increasing the number of new businesses, increasing the number of jobs in the region, supporting retraining, counselling and continuous motivation of people to work, and trying to improve the labour market position of hard-to-employ population groups.
- **Social services:** the aim was to promote social inclusion of persons socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion through activities aimed at preventing social exclusion of persons, support for services provided as outreach and outpatient, support for community social work and the activity of community centres.
- **Pro-family measures:** the aim was to create new and improve existing services that help working parents to care for their children, facilitate an earlier return to working life, and prevent social exclusion of the parents of young children.

These themes are also reflected in the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development (SCLLD) 2021-2027 in Area C Rural Employment, Area G Social Inclusion and Area D Strengthening Family Ties.

2. The setting of cooperation among local actors in CLLD

LAG Šumperk Rural Area unites three interest groups (municipalities and public entities, entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations) on its territory.



The LAG follows the three-thirds principle, each interest group makes up about one-third of the LAG. The involvement of the **civil sector** is also important. In total, LAG Šumperk Rural Area brings together 51 entities.

As part of the activities of LAG Šumperk Rural Area, the following actors collaborate in the development of the territory under the thematic area of the OP Emp programme framework: the LAG partners, organisations that apply for grants and then implement projects, the Labour Office and the general public. The **key partners for the OP Emp projects are social service providers, a school integrating children with disabilities, a social enterprise and a business and employment co-operative**, and the LAG also involves **local associations** in its activities and seeks to interlink the projects with the **community**.

LAG Šumperk Rural Area places great emphasis on involving all actors in the process of designing the SCLLD. The cooperation of local actors in the thematic areas of the OP Emp programme framework has the form of **community consultation**: meetings of LAG bodies, events for the general public, surveys and comment forms. The local actors also cooperate in the preparation and implementation of projects financed by the OP Emp.

The main motivation for local actors to cooperate is the easier way to obtain funding for a project developing the territory. The LAG can also supervise interlinked projects that draw grants from several operational programmes and funds, as the possibility of **combining funds** is important for **integrated solutions to** problems in the territory. Another motivation is the opportunity to try doing things differently, which is made possible by Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and LEADER.

The LAG does not support existing social services, but seeks to support the establishment of new social services and to get these services into the register of social services, thus ensuring their **long-term sustainability**.

LAG Šumpek Rural Area is succeeding in building a **sustainable network of local actors** by trying to find active actors who want to work intensively on the development of the LAG territory. The LAG already has such proven partners and **is looking for more active partners**. In addition, LAG Šumpek Rural Area supports the **activation and participation of youth** in non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs), in local politics or within their communities.

The contribution of local actors to the design and implementation of the SCLLD in the OP Emp themes is significant. It lies in **excellent local knowledge** and a willingness to approach and address local issues. The **benefits of joint involvement** of local actors from the business, public and non-profit sectors include overcoming individual narrow perspectives on the development of the territory.

LAG Šumpek Rural Area receives not only methodological support from the **OP Emp Managing Authority**. A representative of the LAG sees this methodological support as **very beneficial** and appreciates the fact that the OP Emp Managing Authority uses simplified tools for reporting on project administration, and also positively evaluates the visits of representatives of the OP Emp Managing Authority to the LAG territory and **that they get acquainted with the practice "in the field"**, as well as the fact that the MA uses **feedback** from the LAG for setting the conditions of grant support. The representative of the LAG states that the OP Emp MA "understands the LEADER method".

The main barrier to cooperation is the limited time entrepreneurs can spare for meetings with other LAG members. The managers of LAG Šumpek Rural Area make sure that every meeting is conducted **efficiently**. There is also a need to **educate mayors in the areas of social inclusion** and employment support. The LAG representative would also welcome **more influence of local knowledge** on the appraisal of projects in the MA's processes.

3. Added value of the support in the CLLD instrument

The established cooperation of local actors has a positive impact on the preparation and implementation of projects within the CLLD system in the thematic area of the OP Emp programme framework. Thanks to the CLLD system, LAG Šumpek Rural Area has managed to set up the cooperation so that competing enterprises and organizations turn into a **team focused on the development of the territory**.

The support of synergy was manifested in the Accessible Social Counselling project implemented in the Třemešek Chateau, where a shared social worker works for 16 municipalities. It is a prime example of interlinking investment and non-investment funds in one place that has become a hub of the community and social support in the territory. This chateau houses a maternity centre and field social workers from the PONTIS Šumpek organisation who successfully cooperate, and there are also social and municipal flats here.



In the new programming period, the LAG expects an increase in synergies.

Advice from the LAG management on the preparation and implementation of projects plays a crucial role in the success of the projects. The managers of LAG Šumpek Rural Area assist applicants in all stages of project preparation and implementation through consultations, assist with the administration of the grants and carry out other information, educational and advisory activities, projects and events aimed at the development of the LAG region. The LAG communicates with each applicant individually to find possibilities of adapting the project to the needs of the applicant as well as the inhabitants of the LAG territory.

The small size of the LAG territory, personal ties and relationships, close cooperation with municipalities (mayors) and the ability of individual actors to **think innovatively** also help to establish successful cooperation between local actors.

LAG Šumpek Rural Area gets inspiration in the social field from other LAGs, in particular LAG Brdy Vltava. The transfer of good practice between LAGs is important.

LAG Šumpek Rural Area **transfers good practice from the Czech Republic to other countries**. They participated in establishing a "sister" LAG in Georgia. This is an important activity of international cooperation.

4. The contribution of CLLD support to the development of the territory in the themes of the OP Emp programme framework

Thanks to the CLLD support for the development of the territory in the themes of the OP Emp programme framework, positive changes have been achieved in the employment of residents, entrepreneurship, childcare and social counselling. The advantage of implementing a CLLD project through the OP Emp in the area of employment, compared to community service where people repeatedly return to the Labour Office, is the possibility to **employ target groups for a longer period of time and support them more comprehensively**. The main benefit of employment support is crime prevention. The support through discounted day camps helped parents to actively pursue their employment.



The supported projects and activities of the LAG have also benefited the functioning of the community as a whole. They interlinked the actors and so developed cooperation in the LAG activities, and helped to prevent social exclusion (projects in the field of employment and social counselling). As part of the business and employment co-operative (BEC) project, an **innovative model was adopted from abroad** and piloted in the LAG.

LAG Šumperk Rural Area uses the expected advantages of support through CLLD for specific solutions to problems falling within the themes of the OP Emp programme framework. Knowledge of the needs of the population in the territory or of specific target groups is used in specific solutions to problems, strategic planning and in the design of SCLLD. Knowledge of local conditions and local businesses and organisations helps in the appraisal of project proposals and helps to exclude projects that abuse the aid.

The advantage of using coordination and networking in the territory is overcoming the narrow perspective of the territory development. The narrow perspective is caused by different knowledge of the problems of the territory and differences of opinion. The closer contact of the municipal leaders with the wider public, the **activation of the community and the promotion of volunteering** gives **credibility** and trust to the LAG and the projects created as part of its activities.

