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Alternatives for Local Development for the Kyrgyz Republic

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

(Summary)

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## Abstract

This research explores alternative local development models for Kyrgyzstan. Local development research is motivated by socioeconomic factors such as slow development, political instability, and migration that impede development at the grassroots level in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, this research chose two role models: the European Union's LEADER and the Republic of Korea's Saemaul Undong (New Village Development). Local development concepts, LEADER, and the Saemaul Undong frameworks are outlined. For local development, partnerships with critical actors like public-private agencies should be formed in a particular territory (community or equivalent). Local development is based on identifying and utilizing endogenous potentials such as resources and capacity. Moreover, it may not achieve its intended purpose without a clear understanding of "where," "for whom," and "what kind" of development is needed.

As for role models, the study examined their similarities and differences to identify basic principles, characteristics, and schemes for local development through a comparative analysis. It appears from a comparison of role models that LEADER emphasizes a bottom-up approach based on seven principles. It aims to establish partnerships by forming Local Action Groups (LAGs) to mitigate disparities in the diverse and heterogeneous EU context. On the other hand, the Korean Saemaul Undong model emphasizes a top-down approach that facilitates the full participation of high-ranking officials, local governments, and villagers. Participation in Saemaul Undong is encouraged through the Korean cooperation tradition. After examining the main similarities and differences between the role model schemes for local development, this study proposes an actor-based "Tripartite Stakeholders' Model" (TSM) for Kyrgyzstan's local development. TSM is based on LEADER's LAG principle. A tradition of cooperation among Koreans during Saemaul Undong inspired this research to explore its counterpart in Kyrgyzstan.

Three case studies are conducted in Kyrgyzstan, two international and one locally led, to explore the presence of TSM's local actors and cooperation. Semi-structured questionnaires are developed for international field studies and in-depth interviews for domestic research to get qualitative and quantitative data. Study findings indicate that local development is still emerging in Kyrgyzstan. In each case study, local actors are different but present. The *Ashar* method is proposed as the Kyrgyz cooperation tradition. It is the cooperation tradition of the country's nomadic culture, where movable houses (*yurts*) are built with joint efforts. The Kyrgyz analog for collaboration has proven handy in remote and mountainous areas. However, it has revealed its limitations and ineffectiveness for long-term local development. Instead, this research encourages participation and cooperation through partnerships with TSM's local stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *LEADER, Saemaul Undong, KOICA My Village, EBRD, Exemplary local self-government, Ashar, Kyrgyzstan.*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Country context and local development challenges

Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan) is a landlocked and one of the post-Soviet countries in Central Asia. After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, it became a sovereign country. Administratively, Kyrgyzstan comprises 7 regions (*oblasts*), and regions are subdivided into 40 districts (*rayons*), 32 cities, and 452 *Ayil Ökmötüs'* (local self-governments) (NSC, 2019). The capital is Bishkek. In 2022 the population reached 7 million. The territory is 199,949 km<sup>2</sup>, of which nearly 90 percent lies in mountainous areas over 1,500 meters above sea level.

World Bank (2021a) categorizes Kyrgyzstan as a lower-middle-income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$ 8,5 billion and a per capita GDP of US\$ 1,276 in 2021. The economy depends on one gold mine, Kumtor, which accounts for about 9,7% of GDP, and on worker remittances (mainly in Russia), equivalent to approximately 31,1% of the country's GDP (WB, 2021b). The long-run positive impact of remittances<sup>1</sup> on economic growth is significant for Kyrgyzstan (Aitymbetov, 2006; Kumar et al., 2017). However, Murzakulova (2020: 12) argues remittances' flow does not do anything to generate sustainable economic development. They are usually used for daily consumption and cover low payments. Although it positively impacts reducing poverty. Most studies (Ergeshbayev, 2006; Schmidt and Sagynbekova, 2008; Thieme, 2014) indicate that external migration is primarily an economic issue of the meager labor market, limited opportunities, and slow development of the national economy that have an impact on the development of the labor market outside of Kyrgyzstan. According to the Department of External Migration under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, 740,500 citizens registered as migrants in 2018.

### *Local development challenges in Kyrgyzstan*

Kyrgyzstan is a land of contradictions (Anderson, 2013). Once referred to as the "island of democracy," it experienced revolutions in 2005 and 2010, the latest in 2020. In all these revolutions, Presidents have been overthrown. The fundamental causes of political unrest are

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<sup>1</sup>Remittances are personal transfers: cash and in-kind compensation, workers' seasonal and other short-term work income.

unfair parliamentary elections, corruption, nepotism, and the failure of national development programmes. Aside from its neighbors, whose leaders have been in power since Soviet times, Kyrgyzstan elected its sixth president in 2021. The only positive outcome of all these political instabilities is the emergence of a vibrant society, opposition parties, and independent media that neighboring countries in Central Asia lack (Marat, 2012). In Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is the only state characterized by its open political process, but weaknesses in governance are pervasive (WB, 2021b). In 2022, Kyrgyzstan ranked 140th out of 180 economies in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, scoring 27 out of 100<sup>2</sup>. Improving state governance is a top priority to achieve better development outcomes, and corruption is the biggest obstacle to economic development (WB, 2021b).

Political instability, nepotism, and corruption are the consequences of slow development that leave no chance for local development. The regime change led to the frequent replacement of high-ranking officials, including the prime ministers. The newly appointed prime minister comes with a new national development programme. Adapting to the new policies takes time, and the previous national development programmes are neglected. It is because of the length of service, where some served for three months and the longest, nine months. Around thirty prime ministers have served since the country's independence. A parliamentary system of governance has not been successful; instead, Kyrgyzstan's third revolution (2020) has resulted in the change from a parliamentary<sup>3</sup> to a presidential government.

## **1.2 The motivation for the research**

The country's current socioeconomic and political context poses challenges and requires research and, more importantly, action. Kyrgyzstan faces many unresolved issues; the most pressings are regional, rural, and local development, which require immediate attention. Accordingly, this research focuses on local development in rural Kyrgyzstan, home to more than 4,4 million people (63% of the total population). Today, remittances and agriculture are the primary sources of

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<sup>2</sup> On a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 being very corrupt and 100 being very clean.

<sup>3</sup> With the passage of the new constitution in 2010, most formal powers were delegated to Parliament. However, the President continued to play a crucial role in formulating foreign and domestic policy decisions. On 10 January 2021, Kyrgyzstan voted to change the system of government from parliamentary to presidential in parallel with the presidential elections, reversing the transition to a parliamentary system following the 2010 popular revolution, in which most executive power rests with the prime minister.

income in the country's rural areas. Therefore, to expand the opportunities and enhance the quality of life in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, this research looks for local development alternatives.

Two role models are selected for this: the European Union's (EU) “LEADER” and the Republic of Korea’s (Korea<sup>4</sup>) “Saemaul Undong.” In selecting these models, several factors were considered. First, the selected models have become a popular area of research, with *Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l’Economie Rurale* (LEADER) in the European Union and Korea's Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement/Development) gaining popularity in Africa, Latin America, the ASEAN region, and Central Asia. Second, both regions motivate academics, the public sector, policymakers, and ordinary citizens with their development paths: the EU core value of democracy in a diverse and heterogeneous environment and the rapid development of East Asia (particularly Korea) resulting from an authoritarian regime and developmental state and modern technologies. Last but not least, Kyrgyzstan has shown interest in the Korean Saemaul Undong, introducing it as a model of action in its rural areas and as the first Central Asian country to do so.

### **1.3 Aim and Research Questions**

This thesis explores the potential for local development strategies for rural Kyrgyzstan. As a first step, we examine literature to determine the critical components of the local development concept. Then we examine the role models' fundamental principles, characteristics, and local development schemes through comparative analysis. After examining the main similarities and differences between the role models, this study proposes an actor-based 'tripartite stakeholders' model' (TSM) for Kyrgyzstan's local development. The model combines LEADER and Saemaul Undong's core principles. Three case studies are chosen in Kyrgyzstan to explore the existence of critical actors of the TSM: two international and one locally led. Semi-structured questionnaires are developed for international field studies and in-depth interviews for domestic research.

The following research questions are selected. Accordingly, the research postulates are:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What are the guiding principles and characteristics of the European Union’s LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong's approach to local development?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: What are the main similarities and differences between European Union’s LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong schemes for local development?

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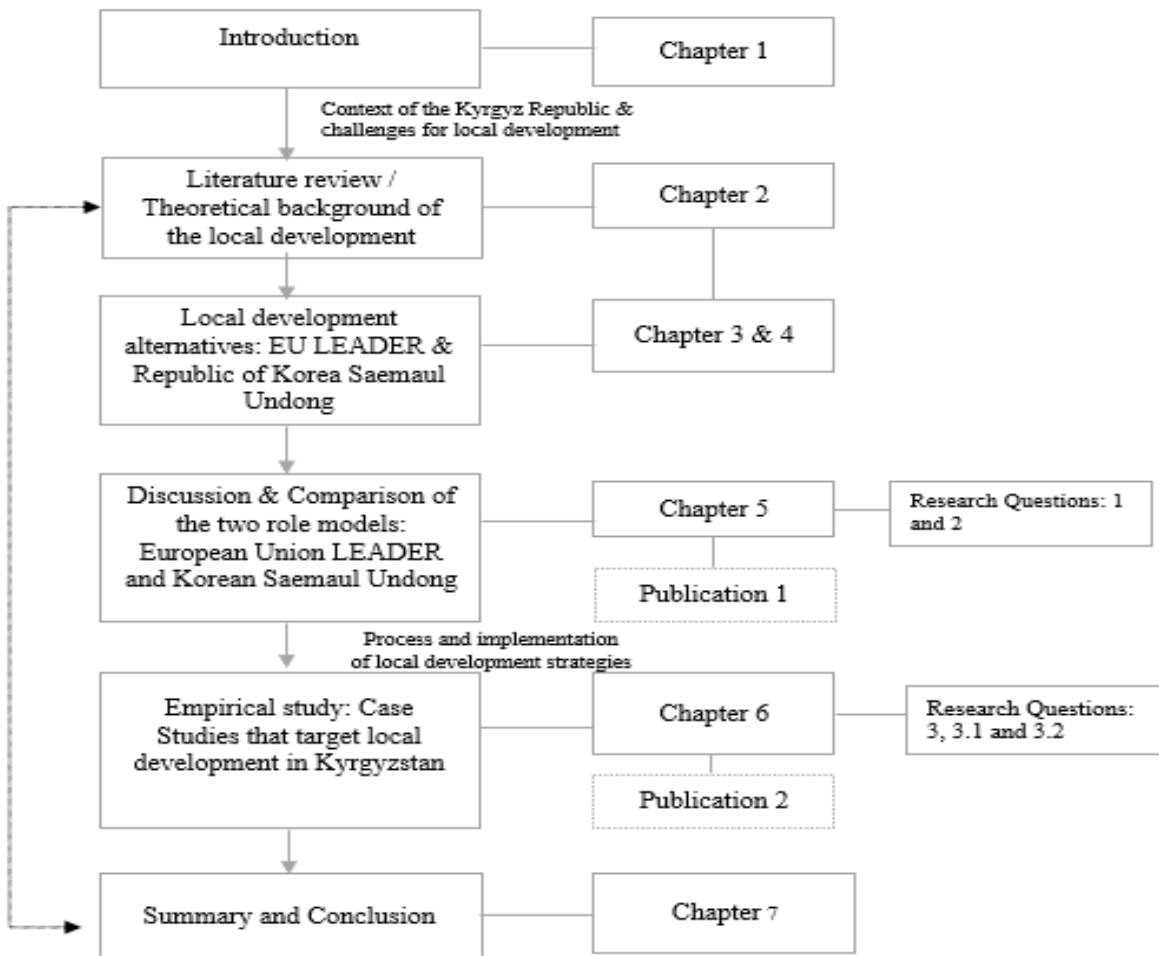
<sup>4</sup> South Korea is officially named the Republic of Korea.

RQ<sub>3</sub>: How can European Union’s LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong be applied as an alternative model for local development in Kyrgyzstan?

RQ<sub>3.1</sub>: Who are the key local stakeholders, and how do they collaborate in the selected international and domestic-led local development case studies in Kyrgyzstan?

RQ<sub>3.2</sub>: What are the main similarities and differences between the international and domestic-led local development case studies schemes for local development in Kyrgyzstan?

#### 1.4 Structure of the doctoral dissertation



Source: own elaboration

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Local Development Theories**

Local and regional development has established multi and inter-disciplinary contexts of social, cultural, economics, geography, planning, urban studies, and environmental and political studies (Pike et al., 2011: 3-4). It has extended and integrated with the "Development Studies" to address ongoing and future challenges. "What kind of local and regional development" and for "whom" framework of understanding, instruments, and policies should be considered as the fundamental questions of the concept of local and regional development (Pike et al., 2007: 1254; 2011). Consideration should also be given to the historical context and the "where" of local and regional development in space, territory, place, and scale. It has been suggested that localities' and regions' success, failure, and development are shaped and determined by the processes and politics of government (who governs) and governance (how power is exercised). The lack of a local and regional development vision would make this task even more challenging (Pike et al., 2007: 1266).

Regional development theories consider local development as a policy based on local aspects of a particular territory. Cochrane (2011: 97) emphasizes that historically and until the 1980s, regional policy was defined as "distressed" or otherwise economically disadvantaged areas. Similarly, local development has been framed within the economic decline or decay discourse. Local and regional development policies have concentrated on attracting new industries and stimulating relocation from thriving in less affluent areas. However, since the mid-1990s, self-help processes have been emphasized to identify how regions can generate growth and prosperity through the initiative of locally based actors of public-private agencies. Tödting (2011) stresses the importance of indigenous and endogenous development for local and regional development. Indigenous is characterized by "homegrown" assets and resources embedded locally. Such resources comprise land, natural resources, the inhabitants' local labor force, historically rooted traditional skills, and local entrepreneurship. Endogenous development includes social and political factors: engagement of social agents and civil society that trigger self-help processes, local initiatives, and social movements to improve a specific region's living conditions. Due to the influential role of local forces and factors of the development strategy is often referred to as a "bottom-up" approach. Endogenous approaches to local and regional development have evolved



as a counter-thesis to previous regional development approaches for less developed areas, which strongly emphasize external factors (Tödtling, 2011: 334). As outlined in a recent study by Pálné Kovács (2015), local governments play an essential role in local development. However, they must improve their capabilities and enhance local knowledge to succeed. The term "local knowledge" refers to "mixed knowledge." The concept of a place representing a mix of distinct types of knowledge is implied; it is also intended to convey the meaning of a place in which the environment shapes knowledge. The author discusses the application of local knowledge (the slightest moveable knowledge) to support local governance and economic development. A significant focus is placed on the degree of competence and maneuvering space granted to local governments as well as the degree of centralization and decentralization of their powers. Local governments are providing direct participation since being closer to the citizens. It is not closed within branch logic; therefore, it can make complex decisions based on local knowledge. Although there is a contradiction in the more complex decision-making processes, the more significant is the danger of the selection of actors to be involved. Government openness is broader at easier decisions; however, in the case of complex decisions, the only chance of "consensus" is in bargaining mechanisms. The learning process of local government requires the time of one generation and the continuous demand for governance renewal. Based on excellent tolerance and sensitivity, it is recognized that a lot of energy and knowledge of different individuals and groups are needed to develop a city or region. The world of local governments is colorful; they cannot motivate local knowledge or adapt to the changes. The empowerment and investments granted by the government system are only the starting point for successful "good" local governance. The crucial driving forces are local knowledge, information on local circumstances, and the ability to cooperate with partners. Blakely & Bradshaw (2002: xvi) define local economic development (hereinafter LED) as a process through which partnerships are formed between local governments, community groups, and the private sector to manage existing resources to create jobs and stimulate the economy in a specific community. It emphasizes local control, using the potential of human, institutional and physical, and area natural resources. LED initiatives mobilize actors, organizations, and resources and develop new institutions and local systems through "dialogue" and "strategic actions." Further, it is based on identifying and utilizing endogenous potentials such as *r* (resources) and *c* (capacity) of a specific area. LED is an emerging field of study that is currently more of a movement than a strict economic model that specifies a standardized approach

(Blakely & Bradshaw, 2002). World Bank's (2006) perspectives on LED "is a collaborative process in which the public, private, and non-governmental agencies work together to improve economic development capacity, job creation and overall quality of life." Today, a community's success is determined by its ability to adapt to the volatile local, national, and international market economies.

### **3. Local Development Alternative I: European Union's LEADER model**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

LEADER was introduced in 1991 for three years and was extended in 1995 by an expanded, five-year version: LEADER II (Ray, 2000: 164). A pilot intervention of "Community Initiatives" was introduced by the European Commission. LEADER is the version of this programme designed specifically for rural development (Maurel, 2008). The Cork Declaration (1996) underlines the importance of a new paradigm in which rural development is integrated, sustainable, community-oriented, and local within a coherent European framework. LEADER programme was aimed to enhance the quality of life in rural areas and encourage rural economic diversification by providing support initiatives for rural-agricultural tourism, local entrepreneurship, and community facilities.

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the EU are developed and implemented based on the unique challenges and opportunities of each Member State. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy are the backbones of the LEADER programme (EC, 2006). In the rural development context of each Member State, the LEADER programme was implemented under the national and regional RDPs, co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The approval process involved negotiations between the European Commission, the local organization, and the designated intermediary representative of the national government (Ray, 2000: 165). The origin of LEADER is the French abbreviation for "*Liaison Entre Actions pour le Development de l'Economie Rurale*," meaning links between the rural economy and development actions (EC, 2006). LEADER programme aims to establish a partnership by forming local action groups (LAGs) to mitigate disparities in the diverse and heterogeneous context of the European Union (EC, 2006; Van de Poele, 2015). The LAG is the tool to implement the LEADER principles (Staic & Vladu, 2020). The main feature of LEADER

is the local action group representing the public-private partnership. The role of the LAG is to manage financial resources and implement local development strategies. The private partners must represent the majority (at least 51% of the partnership structure). LAGs are chosen through an open procedure based on the criteria set out in the programs. The operation of the LEADER programme takes place in a geographical area where the population of LEADER territory should be at least 5000, 10,000, and not more than 100,000.

Each EU Member State can decide how to implement LEADER on its territory (planning, selection, and funding of LEADER areas). This policy initiative is based on a territorial rather than a sectoral approach. It offers a new way of thinking about territorial development, which was initially based on a centralized, exogenous model (top-down), which allows for an endogenous perspective (bottom-up), including new forms of governance (Chevalier et al., 2012).

LEADER programme has four generations: LEADER I (1991-1993) focused on an innovative approach to rural development. It focused on territorially oriented, integrative, and participatory mechanisms. LEADER II (1994-1999) emphasized the creative aspects of projects. LEADER + (2000-2006) and LEADER Axis (2007-2013) are the EU mainstream rural development policy. It plays the role of a laboratory and contributes to uniting and assessing the novel approaches to integrated and sustainable development to influence, complete, and strengthen the EU policy on rural development. In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER programme has extended under the broader term Community-led Local Development (CLLD). Three other EU funds have funded CLLD: the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Social Fund. The LEADER method was developed 30 years ago in 217 pioneering LAGs. Its currently implemented by an impressive network of 2800 LAGs, each of which can count on hundreds of active citizens, covering 61% of the rural population in the European Union (EU Rural Review, 2020).

### **3.2 The basic principles and characteristics of LEADER**

The central concept behind the LEADER approach is that it considers the diversity of European rural areas (EU, 2006). Local development strategies are more effective and efficient when adopted and implemented by stakeholders led by public-private agencies. To this end, establishing local action groups (LAGs) is crucial. In order to transfer successful local development practices, the seven LEADER principles must be adhered to, namely: (1) area-based, (2) bottom-up, (3) public-

private partnerships, (4) integrated and multisectoral actions, (5) promoting innovation, (6) cooperation and (7) networking.

## **4. Local Development Alternative II: Korean Saemaul Undong model**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The “Saemaul Undong” originates from the Republic of Korea, which means “New Village Movement/Development” (Choi, 2018). Rural development in Korea at a community (village) level is linked to Saemaul Undong as a rural and community development paradigm. It started with alternatives, such as narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas caused by the first (1962-1966) and second (1967-1971) Five-Year Economic Development Plan<sup>5</sup>. Saemaul Undong was blessed with these Economic Development policies, and the government spent billions to modernize rural areas (Park Jin-Hwan, 1998; Park Sooyoung, 2009; Goh, 2010; Eom, 2011a). On April 22, the 1970s, Saemaul Undong officially launched the slogan “Let us live a better life” with our effort (Chung, 2009; Choi, 2018). The diligence, self-help, and cooperation, including ‘*can do*’ and ‘*must do*’ spirits, applied in the Saemaul Undong. In addition, the collaborative culture<sup>6</sup> in Korean rural communities. The late President Park Chung-Hee founded Saemaul Undong, and his government provided administrative guidance, material, and technical support. In addition, the government spent on Saemaul Undong, on average 2.5% of the country’s GDP (Kwon, 2010).

The execution of Saemaul Undong took ten years (1970-1979) as a nationwide social movement (Chung, 2009). The second stage was during the 1980s and was called ‘the stage of cooperation between the government and non-government entities.’ The central role of the 1980s Saemaul Undong was to advocate national values and played a significant role in the Seoul Olympics in 1988. The headquarters organized Saemaul National Olympic Committee to

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<sup>5</sup> The Five-Year Economic Development has focused on heavy and chemical industrial policies and export-oriented trade policies.

<sup>6</sup> The Korean society has a tradition of cooperation, it is known as “*dure*” and “*hyangyak*.” “*Dure*” is a tradition of over 500 years of working together to do hard work that no family can do. “*Hyangyak*” is an autonomous, generally accepted norm that promotes cooperation and good relations among rural residents based on the Confucian values. This tradition has increased social capital (trust) in rural villages, and government launched Saemaul Undong was not a foreign idea, instead it ignited a cooperation and good relations among rural dwellers.

propagate three social values of order, kindness, and cleanliness to advance the general public's consciousness. From the 1990s until now, Saemaul Undong has operated as a non-government movement to provide volunteer services in Korea. In 2010<sup>7</sup>, Saemaul Undong globalized and became the Korean government's Official Development Assistance (ODA).

#### **4.2 The basic principles and characteristics of Saemaul Undong**

Rural communities in Korea have several characteristics that distinguish them from other rural communities, such as their long history of settlement by people usually related by kinship, rice cultivation as their primary source of income, and sharing of traditional customs and autonomous norms based on Confucian values. The homogeneity of ethnic groups also contributed significantly to the development of coherent cooperation and reduced the probability of disputes and conflict. The doctrines of the Saemaul Undong are diligence, self-help, and cooperation (Park Sooyoung, 2009; Han, 2012).

### **5. Discussion and Comparison of two role-models**

*Similarities.* There is a significant similarity between Korean Saemaul Undong and European LEADER in policy formulation and design. In both cases, local development initiatives are designed from the top. LEADER originates from the European Commission and is delivered to its Member States, Saemaul Undong, by the late President Park Chung-Hee and his administration. Both role models permit flexibility in project implementation at the grassroots level, where the main focus is development at the local level, participation, and cooperation. In both cases, the bottom-up approach to local development operates within a centrally defined set of development strategies and principles. Both role models target the territorial approach, the village as a development unit in Saemaul Undong. The LEADER (LAG) area comprises at least two and several settlements with small-scale projects.

*Differences.* The substantial difference between LEADER and Saemaul Undong lies in the regime. It is the regime that makes the difference between the two cases, liberal democracies (decentralization) in EU LEADER and authoritarianism (high centralization) in Korea, Saemaul

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<sup>7</sup> In 2010 Korea changed its national status from a recipient to a donor, and Saemaul Undong became a Korean type of Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Undong era (1970-1979). Decentralization is a core value in the European Union. Nonetheless, Central and Eastern Europe still suffer from their path dependency due to the Soviet legacy of bureaucratic control and political centralism. For example, implementing the EU LEADER method in Hungary is challenging. It has been assessed that the EU principle of bottom-up development is challenging due to Hungary’s increasing centralization (Maurel, 2008; Chevalier et al., 2012; Csurgo & Kovach, 2016). Local action groups have no real decision-making power; they have been controlled by government agencies (Csurgo & Kovach, 2016). Over-bureaucratization violates bottom-up principles. This was also the case with the Romanian LEADER, where weak administrative networks, political influence, and the legacy of the socialist era hindered the smooth implementation of the LEADER programme (Marquardt & Buchenrieder, 2012). Another difference lies in the target goals. Saemaul Undong aims to alleviate poverty, modernize villages by building infrastructure, and build people’s confidence in social change. Another critical difference is the culture of cooperation among Koreans, which is rooted in Confucian values. In contrast, LEADER aims to assist rural communities in improving the quality of life and local economic prosperity in rural areas of the EU region. Table 1 compares the two role models in terms of local development schemes.

**Table 1 – Comparison of the Korean Saemaul Undong and EU LEADER**

Indicator	EU LEADER	Korean Saemaul Undong
Policy initiation	The supranational level programme, initiated by the European Union (EU Commission)	Government-led policy, initiated by the late President Park Chung-Hee and his administration
Objective	Mitigate disparities in rural areas in the EU Member States, job creation, helping to develop innovative projects, tourism, conservation of cultural heritage, non-agricultural activities, and enterprise development.	Saemaul Undong aims to alleviate poverty, upgrade villages, increase income, develop rural areas, and change farmer attitudes by incorporating a can-do and must-do spirit.
Local development scheme	Top-down and bottom-up approaches (EU funding instrument and obligation to set up a Local Action Group (LAG). LAGs are vital local actors in the implementation of the LEADER programme. They ensure local development strategies and	Top-down and bottom-up approaches (government resources and guidance, villagers’ participation).

	projects that respond to the specific needs and potential of each local area).	
Basic principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Area-based</li> <li>(2) Bottom-up</li> <li>(3) Local action groups</li> <li>(4) Integrated and multisectoral actions</li> <li>(5) Innovation</li> <li>(6) Cooperation</li> <li>(7) Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Diligence</li> <li>(2) Self-help</li> <li>(3) Cooperation</li> </ul>
Government and governance	Democratic regime (decentralized)	Authoritarian regime (Highly centralized)
Main actors (stakeholders)	Municipalities, the private sector, and local associations (residents of that area).	Central government includes all layers of government institutions, officials, and villagers (community residents).
Local participation	Participation in the EU Member States varies passive in Eastern Europe with the communist heritage and weak due to sparsely populated rural areas in Western Europe.	Full voluntary participation
Precondition for success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Formation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) for a successful LEADER implementation in the pilot area; they are an essential agent in the LEADER programme.</li> <li>(2) Pan-European example of participatory democracy</li> <li>(3) Local characteristics: (area-based, bottom-up, partnership, innovation, multisectoral. Trans-local: (networking, transnational, and cooperation. Vertical: (decentralized management and financing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) A village is the strategic unit of community action</li> <li>(2) Integration of two extremes of development approaches (top-down and bottom-up)</li> <li>(3) Voluntary participation and democratic decision-making</li> <li>(4) Selection of Saemaul leaders (male and female) with a sense of duty, patience, and perseverance who were able to lead the community</li> <li>(5) Nationwide Saemaul leadership education and training</li> <li>(6) Classification of villages (basic, self-help, and self-reliant) to promote competition between villages</li> <li>(7) Public relations (PR) promotion in local community development</li> </ul>
Local-level scale	The LAG area comprises a minimum of two and several settlements	In Korea, Saemaul Undong targets a <i>village</i> as a unit for development.

	The population target should be between 10,000 (exceptionally 5,000) and 100,000 inhabitants.	The size of the village is determined by the number of households in one village. For example, one village has less than 20 households, while another has 200 or more.
Geographical domain	Expanded in the Member States, but only within the European Union.	Saemaul Undong has become a global development paradigm and is now being implemented in Africa, Latin America, and ASEAN countries, and recently Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) has joined.

Source: Musaeva, 2020, p. 21-22.

**5.1 Possibilities and limitations of role models to the application in Kyrgyzstan**

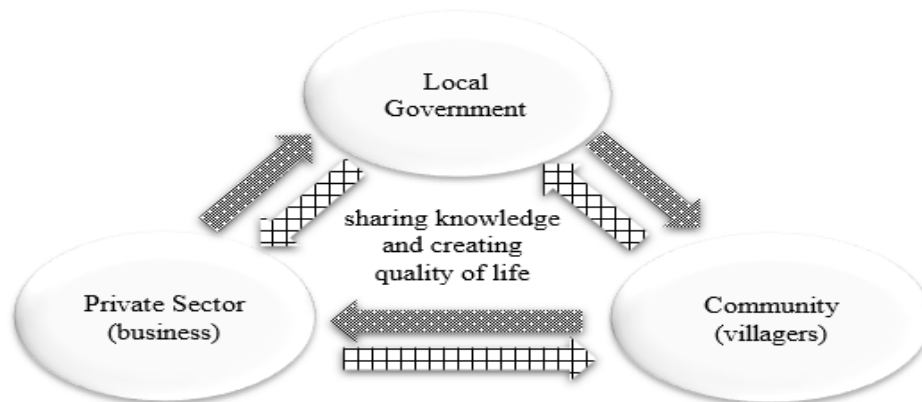
Throughout the study of LEADER and Saemaul Undong, this thesis identified that the sustainability of local development models depends on continuous investment in the implementation stage. As we have observed in our selected role models, the Korean government played a crucial role in Saemaul Undong. It was blessed with the country’s industrialization and export-oriented economy to fund Saemaul Undong. In the case of LEADER, all EU Member States are eligible for LEADER funding from the European Union’s European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and other related funding schemes. Furthermore, clear institutional coordination policies on applying projects to develop rural and local development is another vital component of the Korean Saemaul Undong. As regards LEADER, freedom is given to each member state on the implementation of LEADER and LAGs establishment. Based on all key characteristics and principles of role models, this research designed actor based ‘tripartite stakeholders model’ for Kyrgyzstan.

**5.2 A Tripartite Stakeholders’ Model**

The backbone of the Tripartite Stakeholders’ Model (hereinafter TSM) is LEADER’s Local Action Groups (LAGs) actors: local government, the private (business) sector, and the community (residents of a particular area). The key actors join their efforts, knowledge, and experience to promote local development in a particular area. The tradition of cooperation among rural people in Saemaul Undong, Korea, prompted this research to seek its counterpart in the cultural context of Kyrgyzstan, the beneficiary country.



**Figure 2 – Tripartite Stakeholders’ Model for local development for the Kyrgyz Republic**



Source: Musaeva, 2020, p. 26.

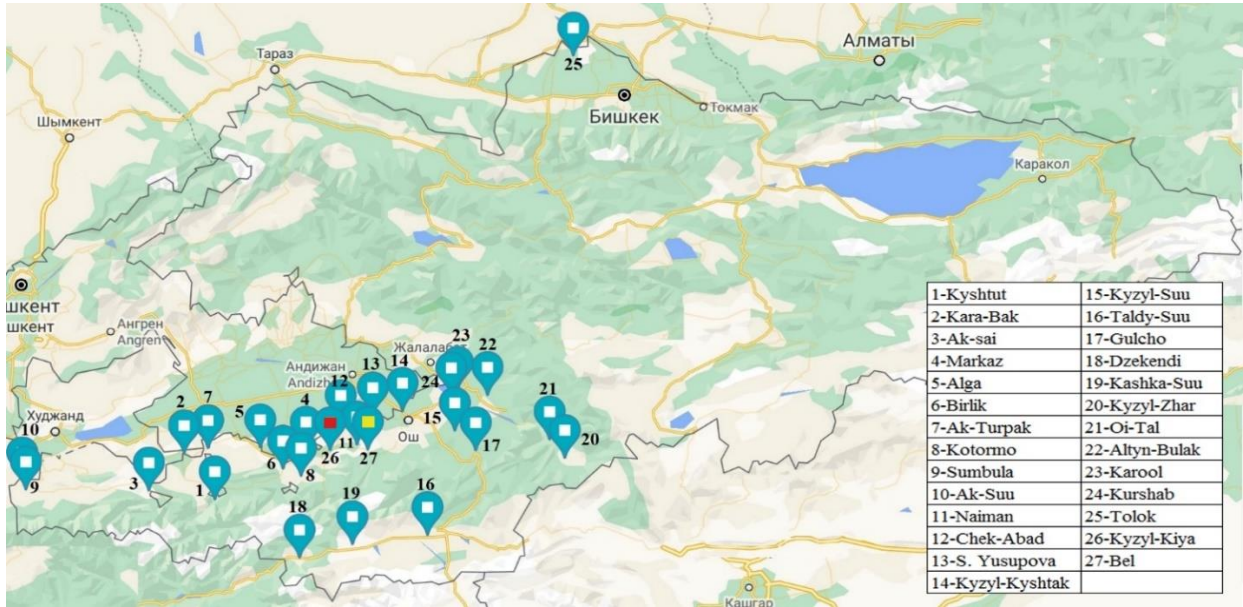
## **6. International and Domestic-led local development case studies in Kyrgyzstan**

The empirical part of this research explores three different case studies, two of which are sponsored by foreign donors, and the third is locally led, initiated by a Kyrgyz businessman (private sector). As mentioned earlier, Kyrgyzstan has expressed interest in adapting the Korean Saemaul Undong. The first field research is the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) funded My Village Initiative. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) project is next. This research searched to conduct LEADER-type initiatives in Kyrgyzstan but failed to do so. EU projects are hard to reach in Kyrgyzstan, let alone conduct research in their local development activities. The EBRD project was chosen through the personal networks of the author<sup>8</sup>. The field research aims to explore the presence of proposed TSM critical actors and collaboration principles and identify local development schemes from three different case studies that are carried out in Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>8</sup> The pilot area of the EBRD project is the former working place of the author, Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality, Batken region, Kyrgyzstan.

**Figure 3 – The geographical scope of the study**



Source: own illustration

### 6.1 Research Methodology

A multiple case study (Yin, 2003) is a research approach used in the empirical part of this thesis. This research has designed a semi-structured questionnaire survey for the international-led KOICA My Village and EBRD projects to get quantitative and qualitative data. As for the businessman-launched initiative, in-depth interviews were conducted in the pilot areas of Kyrgyzstan. I chose the potentially most knowledgeable individuals (key informants) about KOICA My Village and EBRD projects. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions regarding the businessman-initiated project are conducted in the pilot villages. These are typically up to five women and men in different focus groups. The study did not initially limit the number of semi-structured questionnaires, respondents, and interviews. The sample size in each field research reflects the natural “breakpoint,” after which the new evidence did not add different information. The sample size was defined by theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and verified after not finding new data relevant to this research.

In all these studies, I needed the approval of the local authorities of pilot territories. As a result, such individuals as the head of *Ayil Ökmötüs*’ (local self-governments) had a somewhat formal response. They restricted themselves from freely expressing their views. In contrast, local

leaders and activists were open, as they did not feel they were being interviewed. Our key informants range from local self-government officials, local council (*ayil kenesh*) members, a village chief, Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leaders, schoolteachers, medical personnel, businessperson (initiator of the Exemplary local self-government project), academia, village elders (*aksakals*), as well as ordinary participants of the pilot areas and non-participants involved in the selected case studies in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, secondary data such as public policy documents, official decrees, reports, and publications were also included in this field study in Kyrgyzstan for data collection. Seminar and workshop materials pertinent to our investigation also contributed to data collection.

The field study is conducted in 25 KOICA My Village pilot areas of *Batken* (10), *Osh* (14), and *Chuy* (1) *oblasts* (regions). The EBRD project area comprises one, Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality in *Batken oblast*. Finally, the Exemplary local self-government project area includes two pilot villages: *Bel* and *Borbash*, of the *Osh* region, Kyrgyzstan.

There are forty-eight respondents ( $n=48$ ) from KOICA My Village Initiative, EBRD Water projects respondents, fifty-two ( $n=52$ ), and twelve ( $n=12$ ) key informants from Exemplary local self-government in the *Bel* area. The field study period: autumn (2020), spring (2021), and summer of 2021.

## **6.2 Data Collection Techniques**

This research uses numerical ID for key informants to ensure anonymity. The semi-structured questionnaire survey and interview were developed by an author through several discussions and considering previous literature focused on local development. Fieldwork was completed with observation notes on some aspects found during the interviews. Interviews and focus group discussions lasted 30~80 minutes, were audiotaped in mp3, and transcribed. In addition, interviews were translated from the Kyrgyz language to English. All quantification table data analyses were performed in SPSS for descriptive analysis. NVivo 12 Pro is applied for this research study's semi-structured questionnaires' open questions, and in-depth interviews. NVivo 12 Pro is a computer software program that allows researchers to manage, analyze, and visualize qualitative data and documents systematically and individually.

### 6.3 Facilitating data management, coding, and analysis

The 'coding' had to be created first to analyze 'textual data' files and organize data for analysis, display, and reporting. The data sets were coded based on the research questions. Coding means labeling and creating categories for data sections in the dataset. In addition, the mapping tools include templates and visual representations that allow users to interact with and populate data and relationships established between blocks of data. These coding, classification, and mapping tools promote the additional organization of the data so that the researcher can query the data to analyze it, draw conclusions and verify findings across all units of analysis. It must be noted that interview transcripts are classified as files before coding begins.

**Table 2 – Codes**

No.	Name	Description
1	Donor demand	What requirements were for selecting your <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> / Local Self-Government from donors? (Identification prerequisites of the donors: KOICA My Village, EBRD, and Exemplary local self-government)
2	Financial incentives	How much investment did your <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> / local self-government receive under ___KOICA My Village, EBRD, and Exemplary LSG? (Identifying financial incentives of the KOICA, EBRD, and Businessman launched initiatives)
3	Scale	How many villages (administrative area) participate in your <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> / local self-government? (identifying the scale of the KOICA My Village, EBRD Water project, and Exemplary local self-government)
4	Leader selection	How do local leaders were chosen in the pilot areas? (How did you get selected as the KOICA My Village leader?)
5	<i>Ashar</i>	Is <i>Ashar</i> (traditional voluntary participation method) suitable for the Korean-led My Village project? Are you using the traditional method of voluntary participation ( <i>Ashar</i> ) in the EBRD and Exemplary local self-government projects?
6	Participation	Overall, how many local inhabitants have participated so far in the KOICA My Village, EBRD, and Exemplary LSG projects in your village? Is participation through <i>Ashar</i> (voluntary basis)?
7	Sustainability	What do you think about the project (KOICA My Village, EBRD, and Exemplary local self-government)? How successful and sustainable are they?
8	Other opinions	Share other additional opinions, experiences, and plans

Source: author's research

## 6.4 Result

The empirical part of the research has identified that the critical actors of the Korean Saemaul Undong in Kyrgyzstan are central and local governments and locally selected Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leaders. The private (business/entrepreneurs) sector is absent. Collaboration occurs through the tradition of the cooperation method known as *Ashar*. The scheme for local development is “grant assistance.” However, local governments and community contributions are necessary and one of the prerequisites of Korean donors in Kyrgyzstan.

A pure institutional or hierarchical top-down approach is taken for the EBRD drinking water project. The vital actors are the Ministry of Economy, Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality, and the Kyzyl-Kiya Water Company. *Ashar* method is absent. The local development scheme is on a “grant and loan basis.”

The businessman-initiated project has all *Tripartite Stakeholders Model’s* actors: local government, business sector, and community. No *Ashar* method is applied. The cooperation takes place via the formed focus groups. Businessperson who is mainly abroad, social media (Telegram) plays a crucial role in communicating with all participants and stakeholders of the Exemplary local self-government initiative. Although, this research suggests that the business sector of the TSM should be embedded in the local community. Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of Kyrgyzstan's three different case studies. Figure 4 illustrates the complexity of local development perspectives promoted by international and local donors in Kyrgyzstan.

**Table 3 – A comparative analysis of international and domestic approaches to promoting local development in Kyrgyzstan**

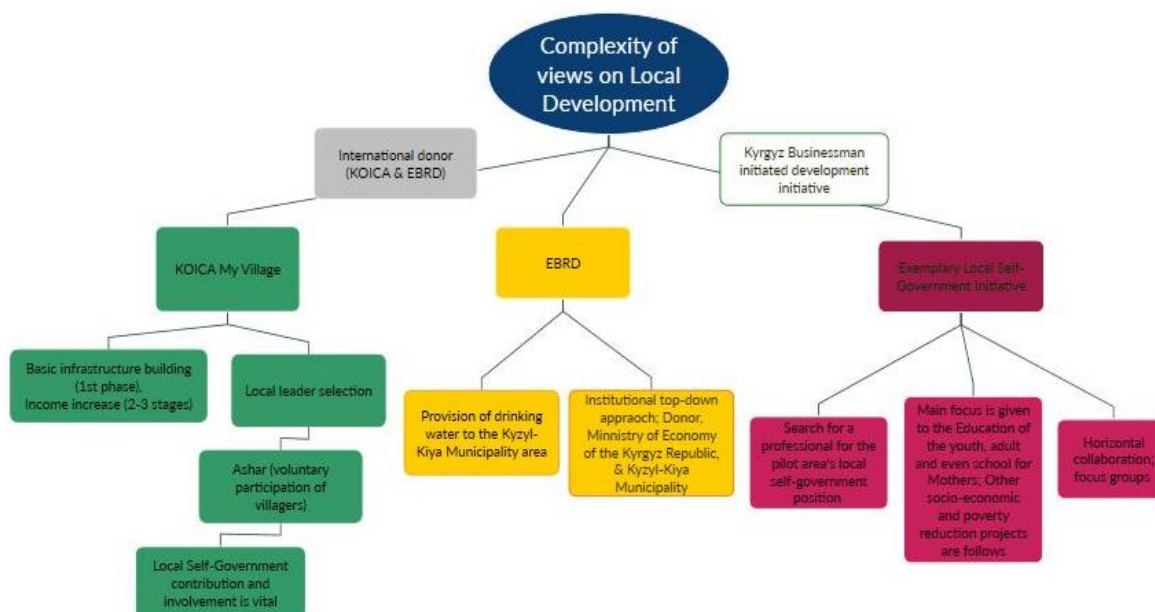
Indicator	KOICA My Village Initiative	EBRD Drinking Water project	Exemplary Local Self-Government Initiative
Objectives	Improving the lifestyles of rural residents of Kyrgyzstan	Improving the life and health of the population through the modernization of water supply and sanitation services	Improving villagers' quality of life and the activities of Bel local self-government
Project initiation	A bilateral agreement between the Republic of	A bilateral agreement between European	At the request of the local authorities of Bel territory of the

	Korea and the Kyrgyz Republic	Union and the Kyrgyz Republic	southern part of Kyrgyzstan
Critical stakeholders	Donor (foreign NGO or KOICA), Government institutions (GAMSUMO from central & <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> / LSG from local), Local Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul Leaders, including residents of pilot areas	Donor (foreign NGO or EBRD), Ministry of Economy and Finance from central, Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality from a local level and its departments	Donor (Kyrgyz businessperson), <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> , LSG, Focus groups members and Villagers
Roles of local development stakeholders'	Government institution (coordinator), International NGO (investor), LSG & Community/villagers (executors & beneficiaries)	Government institution (implementor), International NGO (investor & lender), Community/municipality residents (beneficiaries & debt payors for the utility)	Local self-government (local level coordinator), Private sector/businessman (initiator & investor), Community/villagers (executors & beneficiaries)
Cooperation mechanism	A combination of vertical and horizontal collaboration exists. <i>Ashar</i> , the traditional voluntary participation method, played a crucial role in the first infrastructure-building phase, only in the first phase of the KOICA My Village project in Kyrgyzstan. The inhabitants of the pilot areas have indeed participated and cooperated through the <i>Ashar</i> method.	Hierarchical (top-down)	Collaboration with project executors happens through the established different focus groups. However, communication with a businessman occurs through social media ( <i>Telegram</i> ) <i>Telegram</i> is an online platform for all Exemplary local self-government project participants to exchange feedback and receive information from each other and the initiator (Businessman).
Local development scheme	The combination of vertical and horizontal collaborative scheme, where <i>Ayil Ökmötü</i> ,	Institutional top-down	Horizontal

	LSG, a local Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leader, and ordinary participants work together		
Communication with investors	Through selected leaders & <i>WhatsApp</i> social media	Through Mayor's Office and responsible Municipal departments	Focus groups leaders, face-to-face and online communication through <i>Telegram</i>
Investment scheme	A grant from a donor, an in-kind contribution from pilot area residents, and a local self-government contribution. Besides, migrants also contributed to the KOICA My Village project.	Grant & loan	A grant from a businessperson, local self-government contribution and in-kind contribution of residents
Scope and scale	Thirty pilot villages of the three regions: Batken, Osh, and Chuy, Kyrgyzstan	Only one Municipality of the Batken region, Kyrgyzstan	Only one, Bel local self-government from Osh region, Kyrgyzstan
Beneficiary	From 35,000 rural residents ~ up to 100,000	56,000 ~ 100,000 residents	13,527 Bel LSG residents

Source: author's research

**Figure 4 – The complexity of local development perspectives**



Source: obtained through NVivo 12 Pro mapping tool

## 7. Theses of the research study and conclusion

### 7.1 Theses

This section presents the synthesis of the research theses based on the results of the comparative theoretical analysis and multiple empirical case studies conducted in Kyrgyzstan. The main goal of this research study was to search for local development alternatives for rural Kyrgyzstan by looking at Korean Saemaul Undong and the EU LEADER role models.

**Thesis 1.** *RQ1: What are the guiding principles and characteristics of the European Union's LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong's approach to local development?*

European Union's LEADER programme is based on its core seven principles: (1) area-based approach, (2) bottom-up, (3) public-private partnerships or Local Action Groups (LAGs), (4) integrated and multisectoral actions, (5) promoting innovation, (6) cooperation, and (7) networking. Characteristics of the LEADER is a pan-European example of participatory democracy, where territorial diversity and community values should be considered in the programme. Moreover, a territorial approach and multisectoral integration is the cornerstone for creating a platform to tackle local challenges in the EU through its LEADER model.

Korea's Saemaul Undong basic principles are (1) diligence, (2) self-help, and (3) cooperation. In addition, *can-do* and *must-do* are considered complementary spirits to the original ones. The collaborative culture of the Korean nation, such as *dure* (working together) and *hyangyak* (cooperation norm among rural residents based on Confucian values), inspired Saemaul Undong's principles to pull themselves out of the hardship of life. The characteristics of the Saemaul Undong are pan-Governmental promotion and appropriate use of the principles of cooperation and competition (categorizing villages into basic, self-help, and self-reliant villages). Most importantly, a village is a strategic unit of local development strategy. Improving living conditions through building basic infrastructures have paved the path to income generation projects that ultimately changed the poor living condition.

**Thesis 2.** *RQ2: What are the main differences and similarities between European Union's LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong schemes for local development?*



The main **similarity** of both role models' schemes for local development is designed and promoted by the top EU Commission and the Korean government. Both role models emphasize core principles of local development. Among the **differences** between LEADER and Saemaul Undong is that the regime is high centralization, authoritarian in Korea, decentralized, and democratic in the EU. A further significant difference is that implementing local development strategies in the LEADER is the obligation of local action groups' representation of public-private partnerships. Whereas in Korean Saemaul Undong, the selection of male and female Saemaul Leaders was mandatory. The significant similarities and differences between the selected role models are presented above in Table 1.

**Thesis 3. RQ<sub>3</sub>:** *How can European Union's LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong be applied as an alternative model for local development in Kyrgyzstan?*

My dissertation aims to find a local development model for Kyrgyzstan. For this purpose, this research chose two role models from the European Union and the Republic of Korea. They are EU LEADER and Korean Saemaul Undong models of local development. This research has studied each role model's background, core principles, and local development schemes separately. Further, the comparative analysis is applied to find role models' main similarities and differences. Based on them, this research has designed a Tripartite Stakeholders' Model (TSM) for Kyrgyzstan's local development. TSM is an actor-based model, where its locomotives for local development are local government, private sector (business), and community (villagers). This research believes that joint efforts of the core local stakeholders are critical in local development. The complex problems of a community in a specific territory require a novel approach to bringing together critical local stakeholders, who will function as a catalyst in the decision-making and implementation of local development activities. In order to observe and discover critical actors of our proposed TSM, three distinct case studies in Kyrgyzstan are chosen for this research. Although this research aims to bring together key local actors to establish collaboration and partnership, it also explores the Kyrgyz tradition of cooperation.

As mentioned, the proposed TSM originated from the EU LEADER's Local Action Group and Korean Saemaul Undong's tradition of cooperation principles (theoretical part of this research). Each case study identifies different critical actors at the local level. Cooperation tradition, namely *Ashar*, voluntary participation, and cooperation is seen in the Korean donor-led

case study, KOICA My Village project in Kyrgyzstan. However, in the EBRD water project, the traditional method of collaboration is missing. Furthermore, in the domestic case study, Exemplary local self-government initiative cooperation occurred through the formed Focus Groups.

*RQ3.1: Who are the key local stakeholders, and how do they collaborate in the selected international and domestic-led local development case studies in Kyrgyzstan?*

**Case study I: KOICA My Village.** KOICA, most local Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leaders implement the My Village Initiative. Local self-governments are the primary coordinators at the local level and owners of all KOICA My Village projects in their administrative units. Government Agency for Local Government and Interethnic Relations under the Kyrgyz Government (GAMSUMO) is a coordinator at the central level. This institution is responsible for collecting data on project implementation in the pilot areas of Kyrgyzstan. This research highlights that the involvement of central and local government agencies is a critical factor for Korean donors to implement the Saemaul Undong model in Kyrgyzstan. The private sector (business) does not play any role in this project. Businesses are scarce in remote mountainous rural areas. If it exists, it is one of those “necessity-driven” businesses in rural Kyrgyzstan.

**Cooperation tradition.** *Ashar* method is suggested for the KOICA My Village Initiative as an analog of the collaboration culture of Koreans. It is important to note that *Ashar*, the tradition of cooperation and voluntary participation from Kyrgyzstan, has played a crucial role in localizing the original Korean Saemaul Undong principles of "diligence," "self-help," and "cooperation." *Ashar* method is included in the KOICA My Village project as part of the cooperation of villagers at the local (village) level under the coordination and supervision of local self-government and selected Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leaders. The role of social media (*WhatsApp*) is also indispensable in the KOICA My Village project in Kyrgyzstan. The pilot villages are located in remote areas; social networks provide an ideal platform for sharing and receiving information regarding the project, seminars, training, and other related activities. The cooperation between crucial actors, including the central government (GAMSUMO), local self-government (vertical), and Kyrgyz and Uzbek Saemaul leaders (horizontal), is a combination of both vertical and horizontal. However, this research has found that the *Ashar* method (voluntary participation and cooperation) is a handy tool rather than a principle of localization of Korean Saemaul Undong’s diligence, self-help, and cooperation in Kyrgyzstan under the KOICA My Village project. In the

first basic infrastructure-building phase of the KOICA My Village project in Kyrgyzstan, the *Ashar* cooperation tradition has played a significant role. As the project has targeted the whole community (village), every villager has contributed its resources, mainly free labor. Although, some pilot areas of the KOICA My Village project could not benefit from a tradition of cooperation method. Kyrgyz Saemaul leaders hired firms to finish the project. The failure of the voluntary participation of villagers is a socioeconomic issue of unemployment and high migration. Villagers just wanted to get compensation for their labor in the project.

A clear statement should be made that the practical application of *Ashar* occurs when a real problem arises for community collaboration or when relatives seek assistance (brotherhood) without compensation. Nevertheless, the donor's (Korean) prerequisite was clear from initiating the Saemaul Undong model in Kyrgyzstan: "Villagers should contribute, and it must be voluntarily." The historical experience of villages' development in Kyrgyzstan using the *Ashar* method does not confirm the relevance of large-scale implementation programmes to introduce Korean Saemaul Undong in Kyrgyzstan, given the differences in spiritual and ideological factors between the two countries. The President and his administration backed the Korean Saemaul Undong. Its success depends on the extensive coordination and involvement of high-ranking officials, ministries, agencies, and local authorities. Economic growth through industrialization, political stability, and the firm and committed leadership of President Park Chung Hee and elected Korea's Saemaul leaders are the critical factors behind Saemaul Undong's success in Korea.

Regarding Kyrgyzstan, the lack of presidential leadership, the political instability that followed multiple colorful revolutions, frequent changes in high-ranking officials, and the lack of a clear ideological foundation are gaps that require generations to fill. Local development in Kyrgyzstan is a long-term process that needs the leaders' political will and commitment.

***Case study II: EBRD drinking water project.*** The EBRD takes an institutional approach from top to bottom. The Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality is primarily responsible for project coordination, and implementation is delegated to the Kyzyl-Kiya Water Company. There is also a role of the Ministry of Economy as a central government responsible for the coordination at the central level and data collection of the EBRD project in Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality. Civil society has been excluded from the EBRD drinking water project. The private (business) sector is not involved.

***Cooperation*** is institutional, top-down. The tradition of cooperation or the *Ashar* method is absent in the EBRD drinking water provision project in Kyzyl-Kiya Municipality. A pure

institutional approach is taken to solve the water provision project, which is vital for quality of life, health and sanitation, and the local economy.

**Case study III. Exemplary Bel local self-government initiative.** Businessman-initiated local development project's local actors are the businessperson (private sector), the invited head of *Ayil Ökmötü* (local self-government), and villagers (community). The domestic case study presents all desired vital actors of the proposed Tripartite Stakeholders' Model: local government, private sector (business), and community (villagers).

**Collaboration** is horizontal and occurs through established focus groups. There is no tradition of collaboration or the *Ashar* method in the businessman-initiated project in Bel territory. In particular, the Businessman explained that the *Ashar* method is ancient, and the tradition of cooperation does not fit into his project of Exemplary local self-government.

Communication with a businessman who is mainly lives abroad is through social networks (*Telegram*). Businessman emphasizes that there is no need to travel to the countryside, where technology is developed and available in the 21st century. Social networks provide a platform to resolve issues related to the Exemplary local self-government initiative for a businessperson.

*RQ3.2: What are the main similarities and differences between the international and domestic-led local development case studies schemes for local development in Kyrgyzstan?*

**Similarities.** The similarities between the three case studies selected for analysis are scarce in this study. Nevertheless, the empirical part of this study indicates some similarities, namely geographic location, rural areas, and the initiatives that target local development. Three different case studies reveal that local development promotion in rural Kyrgyzstan is a primary responsibility of the central and local governments. It is also important to note that international and domestic donors play a vital role in funding and promoting local development initiatives, whether it is in the form of a grant or loan assistance.

**Differences.** Local development case studies conducted by international and domestic donors differ substantially, starting with objectives and key stakeholders and further developing schemes for implementing local development activities in rural Kyrgyzstan (see Table 3).

## 7.2 Conclusion

### *Tripartite Stakeholders Model for local development in Kyrgyzstan*

The field research is interesting in understanding and exploring international and domestic donors' approaches to developing locally in third-world countries like Kyrgyzstan. In every case study, the critical actors are present and active but differ. For example, in KOICA My Village Initiative, the private (business) sector is missing. The EBRD case is purely institutional. The business sector and civil society are excluded. Although our domestic Exemplary Bel local self-government has all desired critical local actors such as local government, private sector, and community, the absence of "local" entrepreneurs is evident. Developing the business sector is vital for the local development foundation in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the rotation of the best professionals into the local government implies "trust" and "human capital" issues. "An invited candidate" for the head of the Bel local self-government position from the northern part of Kyrgyzstan by the deal of businessperson proves that professional managers with novel local development ideas are needed in the first place. Then creating the condition for local development, such as infrastructure building, increasing income follows. An initiator of the domestic field study stresses that *"if the man or woman can lead the community and improve the economy of his home village Bel, he can even attract professionals from Africa."* His statement about Africa is rhetoric, implying that professionals should be attracted to the local self-government in Kyrgyzstan.

The local development phenomenon is still a developing concept in Kyrgyzstan; it needs investment in human capital, especially in creating local entrepreneurs embedded in the local territory. Another key factor is establishing a partnership with a critical local development stakeholder. Collaboration should build on mutual interest, and partnership should be encouraged instead of the tradition of cooperation (*Ashar* method). Even though the traditional way of cooperation and participation (*Ashar*) is not the best alternative in the 21st century, it can still be handy in remote areas with a scarce population due to the high migration situation in Kyrgyzstan. This study considers that it is a time to think about collaboration through a partnership with the key local stakeholders, and that is what Kyrgyzstan needs today regarding developing locally.

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