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THE IMPACT OF CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITY LAGS IN LUBLIN PROVINCE

Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyze the impact of LAGs on the local socio-economic development of Lublin region. The main thesis of the research is based on the assumption that local governments today are not the only and most important entities responsible for the creation of local socio-economic development, particularly in rural areas. This role is also played by Local Action Groups.

Key words: local development, Local Action Groups, the European Union, the partnership.

Introduction

On the basis of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Journal of Laws No. 124, item 1994. 607), local governments have the right and ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to direct and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interest of their residents (art. 3, par. 1). In this definition the following characteristics of local government were highlighted: 1) the legal nature of the separation of local communities, 2) entrusting them by law with a substantial part of public affairs, 3) autonomy to manage these issues, 4) acting in the interest of residents. The EKSL also points to the need for the implementation of this law by the collective bodies (councils, assemblies), elected in free, secret, equal, direct and universal elections, and the possibility of the use of forms of direct democracy (the citizens' assembly, a referendum), as well as the need to equip local government with sufficient financial resources.

Social and political transformation in Poland, which occurred at the beginning of the nineties, gave rise to the construction of decentralized public

administration. The decentralization process started primarily with the inception of municipality local government in 1990, which as the basic unit of the division of the basic state and at the same time independent and autonomous legal person became a platform of development of local activity, civil dialogue and the implementation of new forms of governance at the local level.

Development of decentralization and democratization of public life came in the late nineties. Based on the public administration reform established in 1998, further categories of public tasks were handed over to local and regional communities by creating new levels of self-government – county and regional self-government. At the same time the mechanisms of effective functioning of local communities in the context of Polish membership in the European Union structures were designed. The purpose of these mechanisms was mainly absorption of structural funds, a major distributor of which the regional government has become.

Along with the progressive local development, the development of civic participation and cross-sectoral collaboration also took place. These processes were favored by the implemented programs and initiatives of the European Union. A key role in helping to shape local development by local communities was played by an EU initiative known as Leader.

The ability to obtain financial support initiated the creation of Local Action Groups (LAGs), entities consisting of representatives of the public, social and economic sector. The diagnosis was prepared and the development objectives of the business area of LAGs were formulated, which were included in local development strategies. As a result, virtually since 2007 leader and local action groups have permanently etched into the local reality and are an important entity that more and more effectively influences the socio-economic development.

Research methodology

To make a proper verification of the research, of the assumed theses, and to answer the formulated questions, descriptive methods, document analyses, system and quality analyses were used. The source of the data were analyzed observations, interviews, strategy documents, databases run by different institutions. The study used “a multiple case study” – where, within the same research process several cases are examined, comparisons are made and theoretical generalizations are created [Stake, 1997: 123–124]. One of the used techniques was the analysis of the existing materials (Desk research), and another one was telephone interviews with employees of LAG offices and of the Marshal’s Office. The analysis of existing materials and information obtained through telephone interviews enabled the collection of information needed to determine the values of the variables that are important from the point of view of their impact on local development (composition, scope and size of the LAG, formulated objectives, pursued projects). It is important to note that according to the report Personality Star Data Base (PSDB) “Assessment of the LAG”, half of the LAGs do not perform any research on their activities.

I. Local development – cooperation – collaboration – partnership

Kożuch [2011] defines local development, on the one hand, as an autonomous process, which is the subject of sovereign decisions taken by local authorities, and on the other hand as comprehensive shaping of optimal living conditions of the local community, improving the organization, structure and functioning of the municipality by making the best use of local resources: labor, municipal property, space, environment, cultural heritage, financial resources.

Local development is determined, *inter alia*, by the effectiveness of local government in the management of local affairs and its economic and social creativity [Sługocki, 2006; Kulesza, 1987], as well as the creation of networks in both the internal and external dimension.

We should share the view of Ura and Pieprzny [2006], that the period of political transformation taking place in Poland since 1990 and the accession to the European Union had a significant impact on the need to search by the legislator for new forms of action of public administration to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. These forms of actions relate, among others, to carrying out of public tasks jointly with other entities, both within the public sector and other sectors of socio-economic life.

Cooperation and collaboration of public administration, including local government, has its legal base in Poland and has been widely studied in the literature. Ura and Pieprzny [2006], referring to the legal division of forms of the administration action presented in the doctrine, indicate the action based on cooperation and collaboration. According to the authors the concept of co-operation in the administration is determined by the development of civilization and the diversity of public life. In the doctrine of administrative law, it is considered to be no legal imperious form of the administration and is a key element of concluded administrative agreements and civil contracts. From a sociological point of view, cooperation means social interaction consisting in the joint action and mutual assistance in achieving a particular purpose.

In the Polish system of administrative law there are not many regulations that impose a statutory obligation on authorities to cooperate with other entities [Ura, Pieprzny, 2006]. There are, however, numerous regulations, as well as specific patterns of activities that allow public and non-public entities to cooperate. To these regulations we can include, for example, The Constitution of 1997, which sets out the general principles of law, including public law, as well as determines the possibility of taking different actions for the public good. An example of a specific regulation is The Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer of 2003.

The issue of partnership is related to the issue of cooperation. The main feature distinguishing partnership from cooperation refers to the role of the actors involved in the process as well as its durability and complexity. The idea of partnerships functioning at the level of the public sphere has been popularized in Poland, among others, thanks to the accession to the European Union. The

partnership principle is one of the guiding principles of the functioning of the EU, in particular of planning and implementation of the objectives of EU funds.

There are a number of definitions of both partnership, as well as many typologies of cross-sector partnerships. According to one of the many definitions, partnership is a platform for cooperation between various partners, who together, in a systematic, sustained way and by using innovative methods and means, plan, design, implement and execute specific actions and initiatives aimed at the development of the local socio-economic environment and the construction of local identity among the members of the local community [*Przez współpracę do sukcesu...*, 2007]. According to another term, partnership is a relationship of organizations, institutions, entities acting together, having a common mission and vision, focused on the achievement of certain goals. A feature of partnership is also carrying out sustained and systematic action using the resources of organizations working in partnership (Building partnerships between the public administration, business and NGOs).

One of the important premises for the establishment and development of public partnerships is the creation of various kinds of internal networks, which constitute an important platform to intensify the local socio-economic development [Rokoszewski, 2006]. It is commonly believed that the partnership approach to the development more effectively than individual action promotes the efficiency of solving problems in the given area and triggers the social and economic creativity [Rokoszewski, 2006].

Agnieszka Ziomek rightly believes [2009] that the current state of development of local partnerships was formed due to favorable factors that should be understood as a system of processes shaping the conditions for efficient activation of partnerships. Administrative reforms in Poland undoubtedly belong to the first group of factors; mainly the reform of 1990 introducing municipal government in Poland, but also the reform of 1998 creating new levels of self-government – county and province. The other group of factors, already mentioned above, was the process of European integration and the acquisition of the principles of partnership in local development management, mainly thanks to the support of EU funds. The result of the occurrence of these types of factors in Poland is the work of Local Action Groups – cross-sectoral partnerships created under the Leader Programme.

2. Local Action Groups in Lublin province and their impact on local development

Leader is a new approach to solving the problems of rural areas (see: *Ewaluacja Lokalnych Grup Działania...*, 2013]. A necessary condition for the full and effective implementation of rural development policies is to involve rural communities representing different sectors in the decision making process at the local level. The initiative puts a strong emphasis on the partnership between the three

sectors: public, social and economic ones, and on the creation of networks between them for the purpose of exchanging experiences, mutual cooperation and implementation of joint projects.

Local Action Groups, as new entities, appeared in the Polish social reality already in 2004. LAGs legally operate in accordance with Art. 15 of the Act on support for rural development with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development dated 7 March 2007 (Journal of Laws no. 64, item. 427). Most of the LAGs took the form of associations having legal personality. In the study area they began their operation in the years 2006–2008 (table 1). Direct supervision over their functioning is exercised by Marshals, which stems from the fact that the projects carried out by these groups are co-financed by the European Union. The primary activity of the LAG is to manage the implementation of the local development strategy, which is a basis for the realization of projects combining human, natural, cultural, historical resources, and the knowledge and skills of representatives of three sectors: public, economic and social ones.

In the study area 26 local action groups currently operate. A total of 196 municipal governments are involved in the activities of the program. The LAG range typically includes several, and sometimes over a dozen municipalities. Only cities excluded from Leader do not remain under the influence of LAGs activities. In total, there are 17 of them. The range of the LAG operation in the province of Lublin covers a total area of 23,093.56 km², representing 91.88% of the total area of the province. In turn, the percentage of the population in the total population of the region is smaller. The LAG area is inhabited by 1293.6 thousand people. This represents 60.1% of the total population of Lublin province (as of 30.06.2014). We can see, thus, a disproportionate share of the number of inhabitants of the region in relation to the geographical scope of LAGs. Of course, this is due to the exclusion of the largest cities in the region from the initiative.

Almost all LAGs operating in Lublin province have the legal form of an association. One of the LAGs, Fundacja “Nasza Nadzieja” has the legal status of a foundation. It should be added that according to the latest regulations in the new EU programming period 2014-2020 the only possible legal form of LAGs will be an association.

Local Action Groups are quite varied in terms of territorial coverage, as well as the number of people covered by their activity. Białskopodlaska LAG includes the biggest number of municipalities – 17. By far the smallest number of municipalities in the study area, only two (Mełgiew and Milejów), belong to LAG Fundacja “Nasza Nadzieja”. The characteristics of LAGs in the province of Lublin is presented in the following table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Local Action Groups in Lublin region in 2007–2013

Lp.	LAG Name	LAG Head-quarters	Attendance in Leader Programme	Number of municipalities covered by LAG	LAG activity area (km ²)	Population living in the area LAG (in thous.)
1.	Lokalna Grupa Działania Ziemi Kraśnickiej	Kraśnik	Yes	9	907,62	64226
2.	Stowarzyszenie "Poleska Dolina Bugu"	Okuninka	Partially yes	7	981,00	28507
3.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Leśny Krąg"	Janów Lubelski	Partially yes	7	875,00	42098
4.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Razem ku Lepszej Przyszłości"	Łuków	No	12	1573,42	93584
5.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Kraina wokół Lublina"	Lublin	No	15	1595,96	135475
6.	Fundacja "Nasza Nadzieja"	Świdnik	Partially yes	2	211,6	17786
7.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Zamojska"	Sitno	Nie	7	843,46	40973
8.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "G6 Grzęda Sokalska"	Łaszczów	Partially yes	6	711,00	32397
9.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Krasnystaw Plus"	Krasnystaw	No	9	989,31	50060
10.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Zapiecek"	Radzyń Podlaski	No	8	1084,00	50627
11.	Stowarzyszenie "Polesie"	Cyców	Partially yes	9	1098,00	42285

Lp.	LAG Name	LAG Head-quarters	Attendance in Leader Programme	Number of municipalities covered by LAG	LAG activity area (km²)	Population living in the area LAG (in thous.)
12.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Biłgorajska"	Biłgoraj	No	12	1533,00	70765
13.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Owocowy Szlak"	Opole Lubelskie	No	7	810,00	63913
14.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Zielony Pierścień"	Nałęczów	No	11	964,00	73218
15.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Dolina Wieprza i Poru"	Szczep-rzeszyn	No	4	439,60	29898
16.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Lepsza Przyszłość Ziemi Ryckiej"	Ryki	No	3	362,14	29682
17.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Nasze Roztocze"	Zamość	No	5	705,26	66685
18.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Lepsze Jutro"	Hrubieszów	Partially yes	7	1235.00	51155
19.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Dolina Giełczwi"	Piaski	No	3	352,16	23897
20.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Małe Mazowsze"	Michów	No	3	287,0	13947
21.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Chełmska"	Chełm	No	7	853,20	28759

Lp.	LAG Name	LAG Head-quarters	Attendance in Leader Programme	Number of municipalities covered by LAG	LAG activity area (km ²)	Population living in the area LAG (in thous.)
22.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Promenada S-12"	Rejowiec Fabryczny	No	6	774,05	41762
23.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Doliną Wieprza i Leśnym Szlakiem"	Lubartów	No	7	759,02	32827
24.	Białkopodlaska LGD	Biała Podlaska	No	17	2725,00	91923
25.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Roztocze Tomaszowskie"	Tomaszów Lubelski	No	6	759,06	37153
26.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Jagiellońska Przystań"	Parczew	No	7	899,70	39927
	Total			196	23093,56	1293529

Source: own analysis based on the database of the National Rural Network.

The above data show significant territorial and administrative diversity of LAGs in Lublin province. In some cases, at the stage of the LAG creation, the basic criterion was the administrative affiliation of municipalities to the district. Yet the important determinants of the creation of LAGs should be not only territorial, but also natural, historical and tourist cohesion. Finding the largest possible number of common features of the area was to ensure the accurate formulation of the vision and development goals.

Additionally, we should share Psyk-Piotrowska's (2013) view that some structures are too big and impede regular contact with members of the decision-making and regulatory bodies. "Demands for further expansion of the boundaries of partnerships, for which the argument is more favorable financing of projects undertaken by major LAGs, threaten the essence of the Leader approach: support for rural development, whose vision was to be shaped and implemented by the widest possible community of inhabitants of the area covered by local action groups".

2.1 Role and involvement of sectors in LAG activity and local development

Effective implementation of local development strategies formulated by LAGs, thus influencing the local socio-economic development, is determined among others by the involvement of relevant communities. According to the essence of the Leader approach, the process should include representatives of the public, social and economic sectors of the given area.

Following Gulc [2013], it should be noted that the multi sectoral form is one of the most original features of Leader, because it gives a chance for mutual understanding of different perspectives of different partners and for the development of better solutions for the given region. A Local Action Group, composed of practitioners, having decision-making powers, legal personality and considerable financial resources, is an example of a new model of organization that can significantly affect the institutional and political balance of the area.

In order to determine the level of involvement of representatives of the various sectors in activity within LAGs, an analysis of local development strategies of each of the 26 LAGs in Lublin region was carried out. The analysis showed that there is a significant imbalance in the share of individual sectors in LAGs. In particular, this applies to the business sector. At the same time in all LAGs there was a large participation of representatives of the social sector, or civil society organizations and individuals. Colloquially, it is believed [*Partnerstwa lokalne...*, 2010] that most probably a large group of representatives of the public sector was hiding among the representatives of the social sector, appearing there as “normal” individuals. It can be caused by legal conditions and ministerial interpretations regarding the participation of the public sector in LAGs. Table 2 indicates the calculation of the percentage of representatives of the various sectors in LAGs.

Table 2

Percentage of representatives of public, social and economic sectors
in LAGs in Lublin province

l.p.	LAG's Name	Number of members	The participation of representatives of the public sector %	The participation of representatives of the social sector %	The participation of representatives of the private sector %
1.	Lokalna Grupa Działania Ziemi Kraśnickiej	56	35,71	51,79	12,5
2.	Stowarzyszenie “Poleska Dolina Bugu”	77	9,09	77,92	12,98

l.p.	LAG's Name	Number of members	The participation of representatives of the public sector %	The participation of representatives of the social sector %	The participation of representatives of the private sector %
3.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Leśny Krąg"	89	25,84	58,43	15,73
4.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Razem ku Lepszej Przyszłości"	62	20,00	60,00	20,00
5.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Kraina wokół Lublina"	50	32,00	48,00	20,00
6.	Fundacja "Nasza Nadzieja"	Fundacja	Fundacja	Fundacja	Fundacja
7.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Zamojska"	88	31,00	57,64	11,36
8.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "G6 Grzęda Sokalska"	86	13,00	80,00	7,00
9.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Krasnystaw Plus"	97	19,59	67,01	13,40
10.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Zapiecek"	78	15,38	67,95	16,67
11.	Stowarzyszenie "Polesie"	75	17,33	64,00	18,66
12.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Biłgorajska"	53	34,0	49,0	17,0
13.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Owocowy Szlak"	110	12,0	72,0	16,0
14.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Zielony Pierścień"	120	13,33	75,0	11,67
15.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Dolina Wieprza i Poru"	71	8,45	70,43	21,12

lp.	LAG's Name	Number of members	The participation of representatives of the public sector %	The participation of representatives of the social sector %	The participation of representatives of the private sector %
16.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Lepsza Przyszłość Ziemi Ryckiej"	92	7,61	73,91	18,48
17.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Nasze Roztocze"	65	16,92	67,69	84,61
18.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Lepsze Jutro"	57	17,5	73,7	8,8
19.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Dolina Gielczwi"	51	13,72	74,52	11,76
20.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Małe Mazowsze"	35	10,5	78,08	11,42
21.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Ziemia Chełmska"	79	19,00	59,00	22,00
22.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Promenada S-12"	81	62,96	12,34	24,69
23.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Doliną Wieprza i Leśnym Szlakiem"	51	31,37	50,99	17,64
24.	Białskopodlaska LGD	65	26,15	63,09	10,76
25.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Roztocze Tomaszowskie"	98	12,24	70,41	17,35
26.	Lokalna Grupa Działania "Jagiellońska Przystań"	84	23,80	65,49	10,71
Average		75	21,14	65,53	18,09

Source: own analysis based on LDS of 26 LAGs from Lublin province.

Support of local economic development is hardly effective without the participation of the economic sector representatives in the process. The role of business does not only refer to the identification of problems in local economy or accurate indication of the concept of solving them. Businessmen involved in social activities also play an important role in the management of the organization, decision making, critical analysis of the problem, or participation in the implementation of various projects in the area. Why, then, virtually in all surveyed LAGs in Lublin region is the business share so small? Of course, Lublin province is not significantly different in this respect from other parts of Poland. The reasons most frequently mentioned by LAGs are [*Partnerstwa lokalne...*, 2010]:

- reluctance to engage in social objectives – LAGs are often mistakenly seen as purely social organizations, which do not pursue “hard” projects;
- “educated” organizational culture of many NGOs – aversion to undertaking business activity, aversion to people who earn money;
- lack of prospects for fast financial benefits derived from participation in the LAG, which results from the natural profit orientation;
- the belief that the beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups are not desirable business customers;
- weak incentives from the LAG and local authorities – the inability to convince the business and show future benefits for the LAG and the entrepreneurs themselves.

Psyk-Piotrowska is correct in thinking [2013], that the weakness of the internal network component of LAG cooperation is an important shortcoming, given the nature of the Leader approach, in which the basis of its implementation is the active cooperation of representatives of the three sectors. A similar view is expressed by Anna Kołomycew [2010], who argues that conditions and requirements for formal regulation of partnerships may discourage not only entrepreneurs from the active involvement in the LAG. This affects the fact that the idea of bottom-up participation and opportunities for self-organization by members of the local community are lost. In addition, excessive control and security mechanisms in the form of quotas and approval of action by the provincial government undermine confidence in social capital concentrated in local units.

2.2 Objectives of the development of the LAG areas

The basic document which is an instrument of the LAG activity is the Local Development Strategy. The LAG management is responsible for its development, but not only the entire LAG, but also the broadest possible representation of representatives of various communities in the area of the group activities should be included in the process of its creation. The strategy shows a diagnosis of the area, its development potential, problem areas as well as internal and external factors that influence the development processes taking place in the area of the LAG. On the basis of these analyses development objectives at the strategic and operational levels and the so-called operations or projects are formulated.

The essence of the local development strategy is to identify such policies which will actuate local socio-economic development in the greatest extent. Therefore, their proper wording, adequate to the coherent specificity of the whole area, is important. At the same time, the content of these objectives should be adjusted to the rules and regulations which are in force in the program regulations (e.g. Rural Area Development Programme 2007–2013).

On the basis of analyses of Local Strategies, the analysis of the formulated strategic and operational objectives was made. The main objectives pursued by almost all LAGs in the province of Lublin contained in local development strategies included the mobilization of residents and strengthening of social capital, improving the quality of life of residents, as well as the diversification of economic activities and creating off-farm jobs. To a lesser extent – the preservation of cultural heritage and natural heritage of the countryside, as well as the development of local resources and their valorization.

It should be noted that the specific objectives overlap, e.g. the improvement of the quality of life can be seen as a result of infrastructure development. The analyses of local development strategies show that all LAGs implement activities for the development of agro-tourism and rural tourism and cultural heritage protection. Moreover, among the thematic areas, on which the projects included in the LDSs concentrate, we should mention the development of entrepreneurship, improving rural infrastructure, promotion of local products, ecology and environmental protection as well as the use of natural resources. In turn, actions undertaken for the development of integration and communication of the local community, the development of information society, the promotion of new technologies and the use of renewable energy sources enjoy the lowest interest (table 3).

Table 3

Thematic areas on which projects contained in local development strategies focus in individual LAGs in Lublin province

Thematic areas	The number of LAGs that included thematic area in LDS	Share %
Agritourism and rural tourism	25	96,15
Protection of cultural heritage	25	96,15
Improvement of rural infrastructure	25	96,15
Development of entrepreneurship	23	88,46
Promotion of local products	22	84,61
Use of natural resources	21	80,76
Culinary heritage protection	14	53,84
Ecology and Environment	13	50,00
Support for new technologies	10	38,46
The use of renewable energy sources	9	34,61

Thematic areas	The number of LAGs that included thematic area in LDS	Share %
Integration and communication development of the local community	1	3,84
The development of information society	1	3,84

Source: own analysis. Data from the National Rural Network, 2014.

The conducted analysis of targets in local development strategies indicates that LAGs, on the one hand, act in a fairly wide range, on the other hand, in many cases duplicate the development objectives, which points to the difficulty in identifying targets specific for the area which will more effectively affect local development. This view is also shared by Knieć [*Partnerstwa lokalne...*2010], who, analyzing local partnerships in other parts of Poland, drew a conclusion that, on the one hand, LAGs approach solving of social and economic problems broadly, holistically, which is positive. In contrast, the disadvantage of this approach is the blur of activity and chaotic attempts to solve many different problems simultaneously, without sufficient resources available within the partnership.

Generally, however, despite the sometimes not exactly correctly formulated development goals of the LAG area, each local strategy is a valuable instrument for the creation of local socio-economic development. The quality of the strategy depends on many factors, but the benefits of its adoption and implementation are usually enormous.

Conclusion

The coordination of development processes within the local area currently requires the use of greater and greater human, property and financial resources. What is also important is skillful triggering of internal potential of a local unit and activating the local community to work together.

Development processes based on cooperation and partnership can be initiated to a greatest extent at the municipal and inter-municipal level [Rokoszewski, 2006]. Rokoszewski [2006] rightly argues that local partnerships allow for a more effective intervention, resulting from the effective formulation of goals and a greater sense of co-participation in local development processes. The activity of local partnerships for development prevents inefficient duplication of activities in the given area, as well as stimulates local innovativeness. The result of this is the development and strengthening of civil society structures and the creation of social capital.

All these factors relating to the partnership cooperation which improve the socio-economic development have been apparent in the results of operations of Local Action Groups in recent years. LAGs, as specific three sector partnerships,

not seen before in Polish local reality, have permanently etched into the circle of entities relevant to local development and socio-economic activation .

Unfortunately, the activities of local communities involved in these partnerships, as well as beneficiaries of their activity often encounter a number of problems in their path. Problems with the effective functioning of the LAG are usually associated with conditions and regulation requirements for formal partnerships. This results in the fact that the idea of bottom-up participation and opportunities for self-organization by members of the local community are lost [Kołomycew, 2010]. Kołomycew rightly argues [2010] that excessive control and security mechanisms in the form of quotas and approval of action by the provincial government undermine confidence in social capital concentrated in local units . Then, there are problems of structural nature [Psyk-Piotrowska, 2013]. They refer to the size and scope of the partnership. Some structures are too big and impede regular contact with members of the decision-making and regulatory bodies. Regulations and demands for further expansion of the boundaries of partnerships, for which the argument is more favorable financing of projects undertaken by major LAGs, threaten the essence of the Leader approach: support for rural development, based on the vision shaped and implemented by the widest possible community of inhabitants of the area covered by local action groups. It is also worth emphasizing the problem of “appropriation” of LAGs by the local administration [Kraczkowski, 2014]. This is connected with the visible influence of local government employees on conducting the affairs of LAGs. This is, in turn, caused by insufficient substantive knowledge of LAG members. Secondly, there is a financial impact. Often, municipalities are the only entity that can support the implementation of the Local Development Strategy objectives. They sometimes see in this, unfortunately, particular benefits for themselves.

In summary, it is clear that the experience of the activities of Local Action Groups, in spite of many obstacles having inner and outer form, result in tangible benefits not only directly for the local community, but first and foremost influence the improvement of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the territorial units.

Launched in 2007, the process of functioning of local partnerships on such a large scale cannot be compromised, either by over-extended procedures and administrative requirements, or by reducing the level of support for the activities of LAGs by national and Community institutions. Rokoszewski [2006: 61] rightly argues that “on the regions and local communities rests growing burden of responsibility for the development of the mechanisms of internal coordination of activities and development, using possessed and possible to acquire assets, in order to achieve consistent and long-term growth supporting local human resources, business environment, quality of life, growth prospects and opportunities to participate in the globalizing economy”.

Reinforcing the idea of functioning of partnerships and integrated management model in local government was been formulated in the Report on the state of local government in Poland and the proposal for changes in the system of local government in Poland. With regard to strengthening of the developmental

function of local government units and improvement of partnership mechanisms, several directional proposals for action were included in the report (Hausner *et al.*, 2014), for example:

- To promote the principles of integrated policy for local development.
- Better use of e-government mechanisms for the provision of public services and to promote access to digital information resources and knowledge.
- Building a system of civil dialogue and consultation.
- Competence and financial strengthening of auxiliary units of local government (village councils, settlements, neighborhoods).
- Creation of local development strategies and building local partnerships for their implementation.
- To provide training to local leaders, politicians and officials in the knowledge of local development.

It is believed that, in the EU new programming period 2014–2020, Local Action Groups, as multi-sectoral partnerships, will continue the effects of their activities and, to an even greater extent, use the existing development potential of the area in which they operate. Much also depends on the new regulations, which are associated with the so-called Local Development Led by the Community (Ref. Terms and conditions of the realization of the instrument local development led by the community in Poland in 2014), and which are supposed to slightly changed the functioning of LAGs and support categories. However, the most important is the right approach of the interested parties to local development, i.e. LAG members, intermediate bodies and the local community, which benefits from the LAG activity.

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