

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF LAND CONSOLIDATION PROJECTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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Summary

Since the year 2000 with the help of the specialists from the Land Consolidation Division of the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, pilot land consolidation projects have been started. Besides the simple territorial readjustment of land parcels, these projects aimed to encourage local initiatives as well as to develop the land consolidation mechanism as an essential tool for the development of the integrated rural development including environment protection, development of infrastructure together with the creation of competitive farms. Experience gained during these pilot projects (cadastral areas of Dotnuva and Akademija in Kedainiai district, cadastral areas of Puskelniai in Marijampole municipality and cadastral area of Pabaiskas in Ukmerge district) was used when preparing legal acts regulating land consolidation.

In Lithuania, already fourteen land consolidation projects (which were finished in October of 2008) have been started since the year 2006 following the provisions of the legal acts regulating land consolidation.

The total area of the consolidated land covered 4827 ha, 380 landowners with 731 land parcels took part in this process. During the time of the fulfilment of these projects, in order to form land parcels of rational size and form as well as to expand agricultural land holdings, the number of projected land parcels has reduced by 219. Best results were achieved in the land consolidation project of Deguciai cadastral area in Telsiai district (which covered the largest territory). After the enlargement of the land-ownership, 67 land parcels were formed instead of 115.

According to the National Land Consolidation Strategy approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2008, it will be necessary to carry out the land consolidation gradually in the area of about 900.000 hectares. During the period of 2008-2013, it is aimed to increase the average size of the project from 300 up to 600 hectares, and the average size of the land holding – from 12 up to 20 hectares.

Keywords: land consolidation, pilot projects, land consolidation strategy, land owners.

Introduction

A very important stage in Lithuania's history is coming to an end, i.e. the restoration of ownership rights to land, forest and water bodies. The ownership rights were restored to 98 percent of all Lithuanian citizens, who submitted applications, and the rest part of the applications will be satisfied in upcoming years. However, it is obvious already now what the after-effects of this land reform will be. Usually, the restored land parcels are rather small – the average area of agricultural land belonging to the owner was 6.0 ha, at present – about 12 hectares. The average area of the land parcel used for agricultural activities is only 3.3 ha. The average area of the private household plot is even smaller. Such small land parcels often divide former large fields into several land holdings, which are too small for the establishment of competitive farms. Free state-owned land areas intervening between the areas of private lands (restored in kind) increase land fragmentation even more.

Land is a valuable commodity; therefore, the question of the rational use of land was and always will be the topical one. After Lithuania had joined the European Union in 2009, the question of competitive farms, which is inseparable from the enlargement of landownership, was especially emphasized. It becomes obvious that for the successful competition of our farmers in the European Union market it is necessary to predict new land management measures, which should help readjust small and scattered land parcels into rational land-ownerships suitable for more efficient farms. The establishment of competitive farms is directly connected with land consolidation. Such measure is widely known and has been carried out in European countries for hundred years and even more (Aleknavičius, 2004).

Since the year 2000 with the help of the specialists from the Land Consolidation Division of the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, pilot projects of land consolidation have been started.

During the implementation of the first pilot project, the main attention was paid to the readjustment process of land parcels in the areas of traditional agriculture as well as to the formation of the main principles of the legal base necessary for that process. The second pilot project was carried out in three different Lithuanian rural areas. This second project was the continuation of the first one. Without the simple re-parcelling of the territory more aims, encompassing the encouragement of local initiatives,

were focused on. Besides, it was aimed to develop the land consolidation mechanism as an instrument for the development of the integrated rural development; encompassing environment protection policy together with the establishment of competitive farms. Experience gained during these pilot projects was used preparing legal acts regulating land consolidation (Žemės, 2006).

The main aim of land consolidation is to improve the structure of land holdings, to design and built approach roads as well as to create other necessary infrastructure. The element of land consolidation is also very important for the environment protection and the improvement of the living conditions for rural communities. Not only the owners of private lands, but the trustees of the state-owned lands as well take part in this voluntary process. Every farmer participating in this process should feel the benefit of land consolidation. With the decrease of the distance from the centre of the farm to the cultivated lands and with the improvement of the form of parcels, farm production expenses decrease; farming conditions improve and farm and land value increase after the reparacling. Land consolidation is useful to rural communities as well, because the territorial base for alternative activities as well as for the development of the network of local significance roads, etc. is being formed during the implementation of this process (Aleknavičius, 2004).

Since the year 2006, already fourteen land consolidations projects were started and implemented according to the provisions of legal acts regulating land consolidation. They were finished in October of the year 2008.

The aim of the article was to summarise the problems as well as to foresee perspectives of the land consolidation projects prepared in Lithuania.

In order to reveal the problems of land consolidation works, the accumulated documentary, graphical and statistical data was analysed using comparative, analogical, summarising and depictive methods.

Work results

In Lithuania, land consolidation takes only first steps. During that time our country carried out 4 pilot and 14 land consolidation projects, prepared legal acts on land consolidation, land consolidation strategy during the process of these projects and instructed employees in the working in this field. Specialists from various West European countries helped Lithuania. Various instructions and seminars, during which the accumulated experience was transferred to land management employees, took place. Land consolidation projects could not be simply transferred from one country to another, because land consolidation is unique in every country. It depend on various circumstances, demands, traditions, however, it is obvious that West European countries have a long tradition for land consolidation. Therefore, one can find many wonderful examples of consolidation projects in these countries as well as priceless experience aiming for the sustainable rural development (Aleknavičius, 2004).

Table 1.
Main results of pilot projects on land consolidation, which were carried out in Lithuania

Dsitric	Cadastral area	Total area, ha	Number of private land owners	Avera-ge parcel size, ha	Fund of free state-owned land, ha	Number of owners participa-ting in the project	Land area, which changed owners, ha
Kedainiai	Dotnuva	392	79	4.4	46.0	19	86.0
Kedainiai	Akademija	662	57	10.0	92.0	21	122.0
Marijampole	Puskelniai	350	58	4.8	5.0	10	22.0
Ukmerge	Pabaiskas	472	95	3.4	76.0	32	82.0

The first pilot project on land consolidation in Dotnuva was started on September 1, 2000, and lasted till December 31, 2001. This project was prepared together with Danish specialists. Therefore, one of the main aims of this pilot land consolidation project was to create system for future land consolidation works (to be carried out in Lithuania) with reference to the practical experience obtained during the project. This system encompassed both legal and methodical provisions for the preparation of land consolidation projects (Daugalienė, 2007).

Generalizing design results from the table one can see that the total area of the project was 392.0 hectares, 19 land owners agreed to participate in the project, the average parcel size of those who participated in the project was 4.4 ha. During the project, owners changed in 22% hectares of the land, 6 landowners sold their land parcels, 4 bought additional land parcels, 9 landowners exchanged their land parcels. The pilot project proved that it is possible to improve local agricultural structures with the help of land consolidation and to increase economical stability of family farms situated in the projected territory. The first pilot project on land consolidation provided people with knowledge on the practical preparation of such projects, problems arising during the process as well as on the necessity of legal acts regulating land consolidation.

Continuing the first pilot project on land consolidation, new pilot projects „Land consolidation – an essential tool for the sustainable rural development“ were started since October 2002. The first land consolidation project was prepared in the Akademija cadastral area (Kedainiai district), the project's total area was 662 hectares. 21 land owner took part in the project. The average size of land parcel in the project's territory was 10 ha. About 18% of the land changed the owner, the size of farm increased by 6 hectares and 14 hectares of free state-owned land was privatised (Gurskienė, 2005).

Since this territory is situated in very fertile soils, the main scope of this first project was the improvement of agricultural structures by enlarging farm sizes, reduction of fragmentation of land parcels, improved access to roads, building of new roads, arrangement of places for relaxation and rural tourism, afforestation for recreational purposes and repair works of land reclamation systems. Though the new roads and the reconstruction of land reclamation systems were designed, however, it was failed to get SAPARD financing for the implementation of rural development measures. It showed the imperfection of the financing mechanism for land consolidation projects.

The second pilot land consolidation project was prepared in the Pabaiskas cadastral area (Ukmerge district). The project's total area was 472 hectares. 32 land owners took part in the project. The average land parcel size in the project's territory was 3.4 hectares. About 17% of the land changed the owner, 30 ha of free state-owned land was privatised (which obtained landowners living in that territory). The same problems as in the Akademija cadastral area occurred in the project – there was no financing for other rural development measures (road improvement and building).

The area of the pilot land consolidation project carried out in the Puskelniai cadastral area (Marijampole municipality) covered 350 ha, the average parcel area – 4.8 hectares, only 10 of 58 landowners took part in the project and 6% of the land changed owners. This land consolidation project is not a typical one, because the Via Baltica highway divides the territory of the project into two parts. The main aim of this project was to improve agricultural structures, because the highway had partitioned land parcels. Fragmentary land holdings had formed, land parcels were small and irregular shaped. These factors decrease economic value of such parcels and impede land cultivation and usage (Aleknavičius, 2009).

From the results of the pilot land consolidation projects one can come to the conclusion that less than 30 percent of the owners of the land parcels situated in the projects' territories took part in the pilot projects. It shows that first pilot land consolidation projects were met with mistrust. People did not know what land consolidation was and what results should be expected (Table 1).

Analysing land consolidation projects one can notice that in the majority of projects some other measures (besides the land parcel readjustment) able to improve life quality as well as to increase productivity of lands and competitive ability of farms were foreseen. In the projects of Akademija and Pabaiskas cadastral areas it was foreseen to improve condition of roads, to build new ones, to arrange places for relaxation and rural tourism, to renovate drainage systems. Unfortunately, no financial means were allocated for the implementation of these measures, financial means were allocated only for the preparation of the projects. Some measures were implemented in the project of the Pabaiskas cadastral area: abandoned, unfertile land was left for the preservation of natural areas. It increased the recreational value of the territory, besides, some land owners decided to be engaged in rural tourism.

Still and all, pilot land consolidation projects in Lithuania acknowledged people with the practical preparation of such projects, problems arising during that time and the necessity of legal acts regulating land consolidation. The system of the preparation of land consolidation projects in Lithuania was created with reference to the experience of foreign experts and specific Lithuanian legal provisions as well as physical and social peculiarities (Martinkus, 2010).

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Till May 1, 2006, 14 applications were submitted concerning the execution of land consolidation projects. Financial support was allocated in 4 counties: Telsiai, Marijampole, Panevezys and Taurage. All 14 projects were implemented on October 14, 2008. Main statistical data on the land consolidation projects carried out in Lithuania are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Survey of the 14 land consolidation projects carried out in Lithuania in 2006-2008

District	Cadastral area	The area of land consolidation project	Number of land owners and state-owned land trustees	Number of land parcels	
				before the project	after the project
I. Telsiai county					
Telsiai	Degaiciai	670	44	115	67
Telsiai	Luoke	341	20	46	33
Mazeikiai	Zidikai and Ukrinai	638	55	111	81
Mazeikiai	Uzezere and Plinkisiai	362	29	52	40
Plunge	Sateikiai	136	11	23	17
II. Marijampole county					
Sakiai	Griskabudis	482	74	101	82
Vilkaviskis	Gizai and Keturvalakiai	607	31	57	41
Vilkaviskis	Gizai	199	9	8	8
Marijampole	Patasine	192	28	40	24
III. Taurage county					
Jurbarkas	Jurbarkai	208	14	38	10
Taurage	Zigaiciai	133	12	26	9
IV. Panevezys county					
Kupiskis	Juodupenai	397	22	57	41
Kupiskis	Adomyne	270	18	26	17
Pasvalys	Ustukiai	192	21	31	39

As one can see from the table, land consolidation projects were prepared in four counties and ten districts. These projects were prepared not only in different counties and districts, but in the territories of different areas as well. The largest territory covered 670 hectares (Degaiciai cadastral area, Telsiai district), the smallest territory covered 133 ha (Zigaiciai cadastral area, Taurage district). Different number of land owners took part in these projects. The smallest number of land owners (9) took part in the land consolidation project carried out in the Gizai cadastral area of Vilkaviskis district, the largest number of land owners (74) took part in the land consolidation project carried out in the Griskabudis cadastral area of Sakiai district. After the implementation of the project, compactness of parcels was improved and 8 land parcels were formed.

Wishes were very different during the preparation of these projects: to readjust land parcels, to build new roads and improve already existing ones, to arrange and reconstruct drainage systems and water reservoirs, to install electrical equipment, etc. The total land area of all 14 projects was 4827 ha, 380 land owners with 731 land parcels took part in the execution of these projects. In order to form rational land parcels as well as to enlarge land holdings and improve their compactness, 219 less land parcels were designed.

Since there were many requests, many of them were not satisfied, except enlarged land holdings, improved compactness of land parcels and built roads, because projects of rural infrastructure, such as the building of road network, the installation of electrical equipment or the establishment of recreational zones in Lithuania cannot be financed from the means allocated for land consolidation.

Rural communities should enter the program supported by the European Union and should look for financing sources according to the land consolidation project.

The best results were achieved in the land consolidation project, which covered the largest territory, i.e. the Deguciai cadstral area of Telsiai district. After the enlargement of land holdings, 67 land parcels (instead of 115) were formed (Table 2).

The land consolidation process should be substantiated by the integrated land interchange, when incorporating into it the free state-owned land fund and the forest land in order to make land consolidation more effective. However, the use of the free state land fund was stopped and forest land consolidation was even not predicted by laws. Besides, after the change of many legal acts it was forbidden to exchange state land since January 1, 2007, therefore, the process of the enlargement of land parcels had slowed down (Žemės konsolidacija, 2007).

It is most convenient to prepare land consolidation projects in larger territories, where more land parcels would take part and, thus, would be created preconditions for the achievement of better results when designing land parcels. Unfortunately, almost in all land consolidation projects it wasn't possible to achieve optimal results, because these projects could not involve state-owned land parcels because of the changes of legal acts. The state-owned land in the land consolidation projects was not formed by separate land parcels and made up irrationally formed, inconvenient to use and, in some cases, having no approach roads land parcels (Aleknavičius, et al. 2007).

After the evaluation of the experience of foreign countries, pilot and first land consolidation projects, the National Land Consolidation Strategy was prepared during the fulfilment of the project "Support to the preparation of an operational land consolidation system in Lithuania" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) and was approved by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on January 23, 2008. The main aim of the strategy – to create preconditions and foresee measures for the successful land consolidation ensuring the rational land use in rural inhabited localities, at the same time solving demands of the state, society and separate citizens in an integrated way.

The implementation of this aim is foreseen through the safeguarding of the connections of land consolidation with rural and regional development as well as through the optimisation of the land consolidation process itself.

The duration of the implementation of the strategy – the years 2008-2027. After seven years the intermediate assessment of the strategy according to the set assessment criteria will be carried out. The strategy implementation measures as well as financing sources will be revised. The priority in 2007-2013 should be paid to the land consolidation projects, the implementation of which is connected with the complex readjustment of the territory, i.e. with the development of rural infrastructure, afforestation as well as with the implementation of other tasks and goals of the agricultural and rural development as well as environment protection policy.

The object of the National Land Consolidation Strategy – the rural inhabited areas of the Lithuanian territory, except small towns. After the evaluation of the composition of the land fund of the Republic of Lithuania, the land area used for agricultural production, the size of farms and the areas of protected recreational and suburban territories, the land consolidation should be gradually carried out in the area of about 900.000 ha (Nacionalinė, 2008).

Table 3.

The present situation and perspective according to the National Land Consolidation Strategy
(national land consolidation strategy)

No	Indices	Present value (2008)	Reachable value (2013)
1.	The total area of the territory in which land consolidation projects were carried out	4.8 thou. ha	112.8 thou. ha
2.	The average size of land holding	12.2 ha	20.0 ha
3.	Land consolidation projects, the content which include complex solutions from all land consolidation projects	0 %	80 %
4.	The proportion between foreseen and implemented solutions in the land consolidation project	70 %	100 %
5.	The area of the state-owned land privatised during the land consolidation	There is no data for this day	4 thou. ha
6.	The number of initiated land consolidation projects	14	54
7.	The established land fund	0	1
8.	The positive society's opinion on land consolidation	0 % (there is no data for this day)	70 %
9.	The number of land consolidation specialists, who raised qualification	200	1000
10.	The average area of the territory of the land consolidation project	300 ha	600 ha

The data in the table show what was achieved and what should be expected in upcoming years. We see that 12.5 percent from the total area are prepared to be consolidated till 2013, it makes up about 3% of the land designated for agricultural purposes, the average size of land holding (20 ha) should be achieved, 4 thousand hectares of state-owned land should be privatized, 54 land consolidation projects should be prepared, the average area of the territory of the land consolidation project should be increased up to 60 hectares and the state enterprise State Land Fund should be established. In order to reach all this it is necessary to solve the management of the remaining land. Land reform should be finished, ownership rights should be restored, precise cadastral measurements should be carried out, the areas of abandoned land should be decreased. Landmarks are missing in many land holdings and land holdings are not registered in the Immovable Property Registry, therefore, one should look for the solution, to correct mistakes made during the reform, because billions from the European Union funds will reach rural areas. After the consolidation of our lands we could use received financial support more efficiently. We have already lost two years and nothing was done for the land consolidation benefit (Nacionalinė, 2008).

Of course, we can notice and positive aspects. Many changes took place in 2010 in the land management system of our country. In June of 2010 the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania approved the amendments of laws regulating land management and administration. Administrations of the heads of the counties, where land management departments and their subdivisions, i.e. territorial land management departments were responsible for the land reform and other land management works, were liquidated beginning with July 1, 2010, and land management and administration functions were transferred to one state institution – the National Land Service under the Ministry of Agriculture (NLS) of the Republic of Lithuania. On the basis of the territorial land management departments of the counties, structural subdivisions of NLS (48 territorial land management departments, which carry out land management and administration functions in the territories of municipalities of districts (towns)) were established beginning with July 1, 2010. Now NLS is the trustee of all state-owned land, except land, which was transferred to the trust (Bagdonas, 2010).

The Government following the amendments and supplements on the Law on Land had approved the decision “concerning the change of the title of the state enterprise State Land Management Institute

and the implementation of the rights and duties of the owner of the state enterprise State Land Fund” on 12 August, 2010. The Institute, which was founded in 1961, had not only changed its title, but has been given new functions in the field of land management. The following functions will be trusted to the state land fund: to prepare data on the condition of the country’s land fund, to carry out the observation on the use of land resources as well as to manage land information system.

Other new functions include the improvement of the land use efficiency, the implementation of the measures for the improvement of the land holding structure and the decrease of the abandoned land areas, the organization of the preparation of land consolidation projects and the implementation of their solutions, to act on behalf of the state when inheriting or taking into the ownership private land plots allocated to the territory of the land consolidation project, etc. (Lietuvos, 2010).

According to the head of the State Land fund A.Petkevicius, the most important task now is to start implementing measures allowing to reduce areas of abandoned (uncultivated) lands. According to the approximate data, there are 0.5 million hectares of abandoned lands in Lithuania. When using this land, agricultural production for more than one million Litas could be produced every year. Land is an exceptional valuable and should be used rationally in order to give the biggest benefit both to land owners and society.

Land consolidation is also a very important long-term measure for the increase of the efficiency of agricultural production. It is unreal to achieve quick results in this field, because in some foreign countries such projects are being implemented for decades. We have implemented only several land consolidation projects to date. A big job is waiting for us to be done in order to enlarge small land holdings. Of course, it is impossible to fulfill such works without the help of the state and without the repurchase of land parcels by state means. That’s why the speed of land consolidation will depend on the possibilities of our state (Survila, 2010).

Conclusions

1. Having analyzed results of the land consolidation projects one can state that less than 30 percent of the land owners living in the territories, where projects had been carried out, took part in these projects.
2. Pilot land consolidation projects gave knowledge on the practical preparation of such projects, problems arising during the fulfillment of these projects, the necessity of legal acts regulating land consolidation and allowed to create the system for the preparation of land consolidation projects.
3. During the years 2006-2008, 14 projects in 4 counties and 10 districts of Lithuania had been prepared and implemented. The total area of the consolidated land reached 4827 hectares, 380 land owners with 731 land parcels took part in the fulfillment of these projects.
4. In order to form rational land holdings as well as enlarge these land holdings 219 less land parcels were designed.
5. The best results were achieved in the land consolidation project, which encompassed the largest territory of 670 hectares. 67 land parcels were formed instead of 115 land parcels after the enlargement of land holdings.
6. According to the National land consolidation strategy approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2008, it will be necessary to carry out the land consolidation gradually in the area of about 900.000 hectares.
7. With the EU financing, possibilities to prepare land consolidation project in the area of 100 thousand ha (during the period of 2008-2013) appear, when expanding land holdings of the land designated for agricultural purposes from 12.3 up to 20 hectares, on the average. One land consolidation project should encompass the territory of about 600 ha area.

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Резюме

БИРУТЕ КАВАЛЯУСКЕНЕ, МАРИТЕ ЭЛЕНА ТАРВИДЕНЕ. ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВА ПРОЕКТОВ КОНСОЛИДАЦИИ ЗЕМЕЛЬ В ЛИТОВСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ

В 2000 г. начата разработка экспериментальных проектов консолидации земель по совместному решению Министерства Дании и национальной земельной службы при Министерстве сельского хозяйства Литвы. В проектах кроме переустройства и укрупнения территорий земельных участков, решались вопросы: поощрение местной инициативы, стремление развивать механизм консолидации земель, как инструмент интеграции развития села, в том числе охрану окружающей среды, развитие инфраструктуры, одновременно создавая конкурентоспособные хозяйства. Во время составления пилотных проектов (кадастровых местностей Дотнува и Академия Кедайняйского района, кадастровой местности Пускаляняй Мариямпольского самоуправления и кадастровой местности Пабайска Укмяргяйского района) приобретенный опыт был использован при разработке правовых актов, регламентирующих консолидацию земель.

2006–2008 г.г. в Литве согласно положениям правовых актов, регламентирующими консолидацию земель, разработаны и осуществлены 14 проектов консолидации земель. Общая площадь консолидируемых земель заняла 4827 га, участвовали 380 собственников земли, имеющих 731 земельный участок. После консолидации на 219 земельных участках стало меньше. Наилучший результат проекта консолидации по занимающей наибольшей территории достигнут в кадастровой местности Дегайчяй Тельшяйского района. Укрупнив землевладения, вместо 115 землевладений будет сформировано 67 земельных участков. Руководствуясь Национальной стратегией консолидации земель, подтвержденной руководством Литовской Республики, консолидация земель постепенно охватит площадь около 900 тыс. га. В период 2008–2013 г.г. увеличится средний размер земли, от 300 до 600 га, а средний размер землевладения – с 12 до 20 га.

***Ключевые слова:** консолидация земель, пилотные проекты, стратегия консолидации земель, собственники земли.*

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