

## EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS IN THE RURAL AREAS IN THE KUJAWSKO-POMORSKIE – RESEARCH RESULTS

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**Abstract.** Local Action Groups are important entities creating the development of rural areas. The aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorskie province in terms of implementing the 2007-2013 Rural Areas Development Programme. Additionally, an attempt was made to identify the barriers and limitations identified in the execution of the programme LEADER 2007 - 2013 in terms of implementing a new instrument, 2014-2020 Rural Areas Development Programme "Community-led local development". The analysis involved data provided by the Marshal's Office, e.g. the number of projects executed divided into respective actions, the budget used, involvement of the entities and the number of new jobs. There was also performed an individual in-depth interview with the use of survey questionnaire with the director of the Department of Rural Areas Development, the most essential institution responsible for Rural Areas Development Programme project implementation in the kujawsko-pomorskie province. The research demonstrated that Local Action Groups showed a high level of activity in project execution, thus enhancing the local development, including, at the same time, the local communities. Considering the occurrence of problem areas identified in the previous period, attention was paid to the new period 2014-2020 to e.g. the adequacy of objectives of Local Development Strategies to identify the needs and the method of determining the measures of effectiveness for the projects executed. Finally, it will be important to focus on an increased involvement of the local community, leader training and teams implementing Local Development Strategies.

**Key words:** Local Action Groups, Rural Areas Development Programme, effectiveness of Local Action Groups.

**JEL code:** R11

### Introduction

Essential modernization transformations in rural areas in reference to almost all domains of socio-economic life were largely possible by implementing the Rural Areas Development Programme in 2007-2013. The Axis 4 LEADER was essential; its objective was to activate the residents of rural areas, e.g. by building the social potential in the countryside (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2016).

In rural areas, a number of tasks were commissioned to Local Action Groups; namely, the entities appointed responsible for the development of the regional and local policy of sustainable rural areas development. Local Action Groups in 2007-2013 were a partnership evenly represented by three sectors: social, public and economy (Futymski A., Kaminski R., 2008).

For a few years already, as part of the programme LEADER, it is possible to support the local community development through the activity of Local Action Groups, which, as partnerships, enhance the economy of the areas covered by the Local Development Strategy and attend to their cultural and social development

(Osiecka-Chojnacka J., Klos B., 2010). Local Action Groups were obliged to operate based on the Local Development Strategies. The Local Development Strategy is a document which provides the grounds for all the actions of the Local Action Group as part of Rural Areas Development Programme (Koscielecki P. et al.; 2010). In the applicable literature, it is stressed that the regional or local development strategy should show a comprehensive approach to the problems of the residents and the method of the fund allocation" (Kozuch A., 2008).

The strategy should include the analysis of needs and the potential of the separated area together with SWOT (strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities), as well as the strategy of innovativeness. The strategies should include the concept of the action showing in what way the plans will be converted to specific projects, the monitoring and management document as well as the financial plan. The operation of the Local Action Groups is a guarantee of local development focused on the needs of the residents using local resources, triggering social activity and involvement of the

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local authorities and other local institutions (Sobczyk A., 2010).

Upon the completion of the Rural Areas Development Programme 2007-2013 execution, it is necessary to pay attention to the effectiveness of the actions taken so far by Local Action Groups and to the next prospect of their operation in 2014-2020.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorski region in terms of the 2007-2013 Rural Areas Development Programme implementation. Another objective was the analysis of the execution of measures of Axis 4 LEADER by the Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorski region in 2007-2013. And yet another objective was an analysis of 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme documents in terms of evaluating the adequacy of the new criteria to be met by Local Action Groups.

The subject of the study are Local Action Groups. The study used the document analysis method considering secondary data derived from reports, statements as well as primary data based on the interview. The analysis included data made available by the Marshal's Office, e.g. a number of the projects executed divided into actions, the budget used, involvement of entities and the number of new jobs. Besides, there were identified problems which occur in the execution of the programme LEADER 2007 - 2013 in terms of the implementation of a new instrument, Rural Areas Development Programme, 2014-2020: "Community-led local development". To do so, individual in-depth interview was made with the use of survey questionnaire with the director of the Department of Rural Areas Development, which is the supreme institution responsible for Rural Areas Development Programme implementation in the kujawsko-pomorskie province.

### **Research results and discussion**

The 2007-2013 Rural Areas Development Programme was implemented by the Local

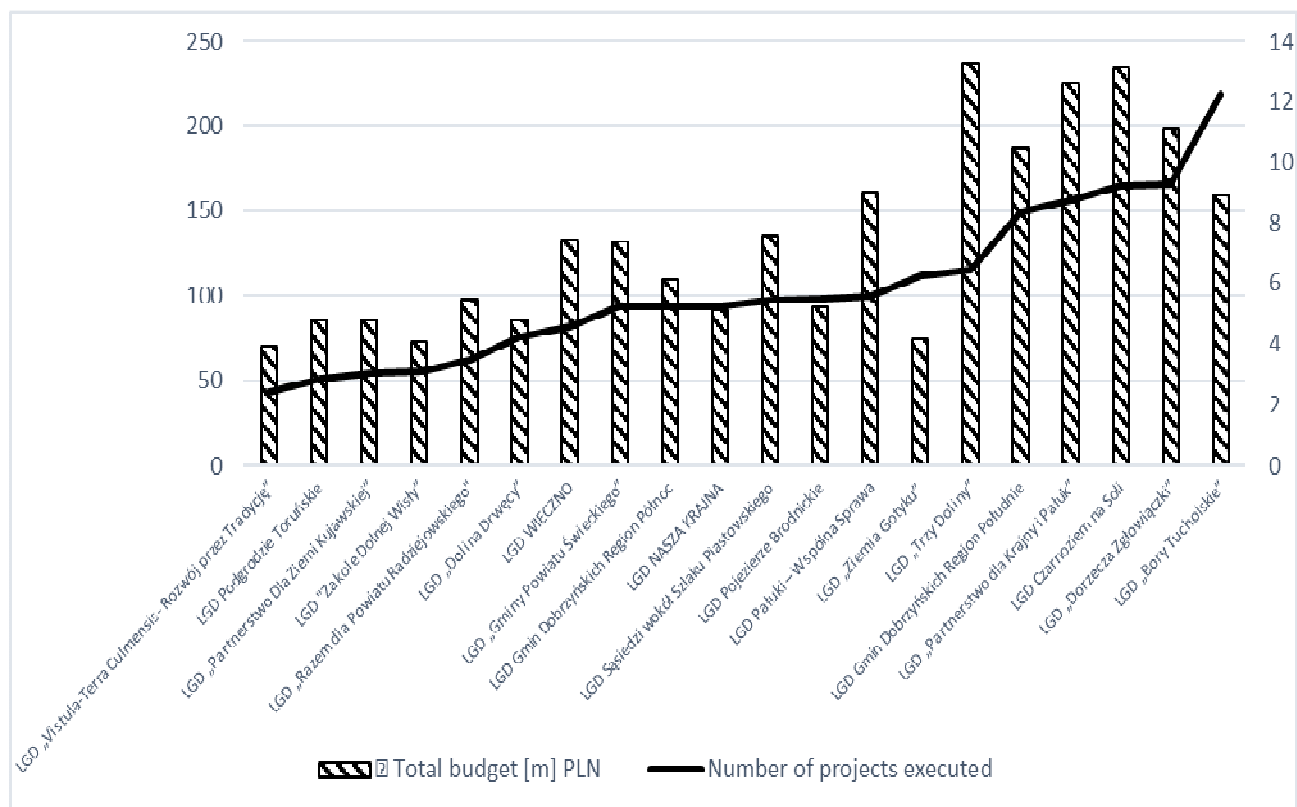
Authorities of the kujawsko-pomorskie province (Act 2007; Agreement, 2014). Measure 4 Axis LEADER performance points to a high activity of the Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorski region. In 2007-2013, in the kujawsko-pomorskie province there operated 20 Local Action Groups, which disposed more than PLN 142 million (Europa inwestująca w obszary wiejskie, 2007). The study demonstrates that the Local Action Groups as part of a series of the actions taken, activated the rural areas' residents as well as made the local resources management more efficient. Interestingly, however, Local Action Groups operating in the kujawsko-pomorskie province in 2007 - 2013 varied a lot in terms of the institutional and personnel potential; however, with a possibility of a further development and extending the scope of measures (Zajdel M., Michalcewicz-Kaniowska M., 2013). As on 31.12.2015, as part of one of the action priorities "Local development strategies implementation", the Local Action Groups executed 624 projects covering the total budget of more than PLN 85.4 million. Additionally, as part of the so-called "Small projects", they completed 1458 projects at the amount of more than PLN 26.8 million, which is, in total, as many as 2082 projects with the total value of more than 112.1 million PLN. Besides, Local Action Groups filed 64 requests for co-financing as part of the measure "Operation of the local action group, acquiring skills and activation". The limit of funds for 2007-2013 was 28.8 million PLN; however, only 59 agreements were concluded, yet the total pool of money was disposed. As for measure "Cooperation project implementation", as on 31.12.2015, the projects at the total amount of more than 2.6 million PLN were executed. One can state that with the participation of the Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorski region, 143 public halls, 604 playgrounds and 284 sports facilities were constructed or provided with additional sports infrastructure, 636 public halls were redecorated

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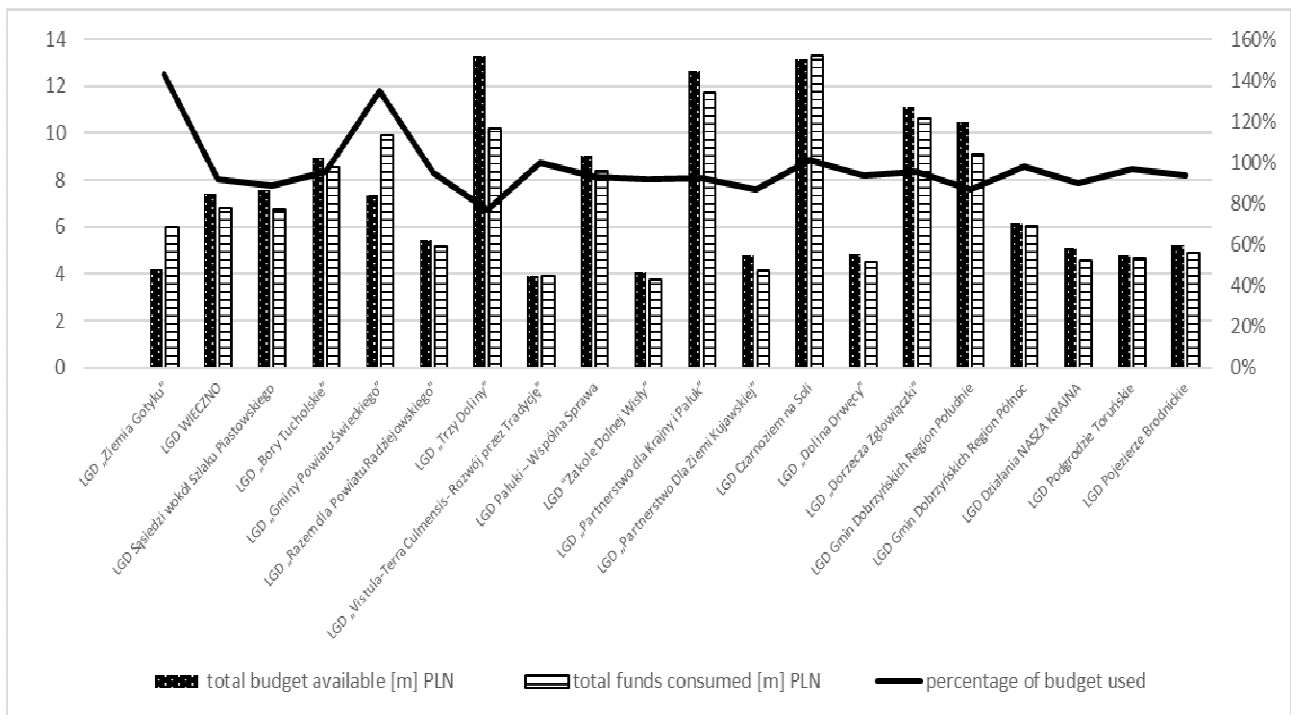
and another 630 public halls were equipped as well as 483 socialising events were held. The 2007-2013 perspective also considerably affected the development of the province by enhancing the attractiveness of the region and booming tourism. At that time, microenterprises were established to offer agritourism services, canoeing, bike rides etc., 260 leisure facilities were established or refurbished, namely beaches, barbecue facilities, jetties, marinas, kayak and pedal boats rentals, 43 monument structures and 83 historic churches were renovated. For the province promotion purposes, 320 guides, albums, atlases and other materials were published. The activity of Local Action Groups of the kujawsko-pomorskie province was expressed with a number of executed projects, in reference to the budget (Figure 1). However, to determine which of the Action Groups was most effective in terms of the number of the projects executed,

their number was referred to each allocated million PLN of the budget available. The results show that in the province, the groups executed on average 14 projects as part of the implementation of the Local Development Strategy for each 1 million PLN of the budget. The most effective here appeared to be the Local Action Group "Ziemia Gotyku" (27 projects) and "Bory Tucholskie" (25 projects); however, the Local Action Group "Trzy Doliny" scored lowest; it completed only 9 projects per 1 million PLN of budget, and it had the greatest budget of the entire province. Since such analysis did not fully reflect the effectiveness of the operation of the groups, it was decided that one must indicate the level of the total available budget to the values of the funds consumed, thus pointing to additional funds acquired by Local Action Groups (Figure 2).



Source: authors' study

Fig. 1. Number and budget of the projects completed



Source: authors' study

Fig. 2. Percentage of the budget use by Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorskie province

In terms of the use of the budget available, three Local Action Groups which acquired the funds from additional sources were outstanding: Local Action Group "Ziemia Gotyku" (143 % of the budget use), "Gminy Powiatu Swieckiego" (135 %) and "Czarnoziem na Soli" (101 %). Also in that aspect, the Local Action Group which used only 77 % of the budget available, with the mean of 97 % scored lowest.

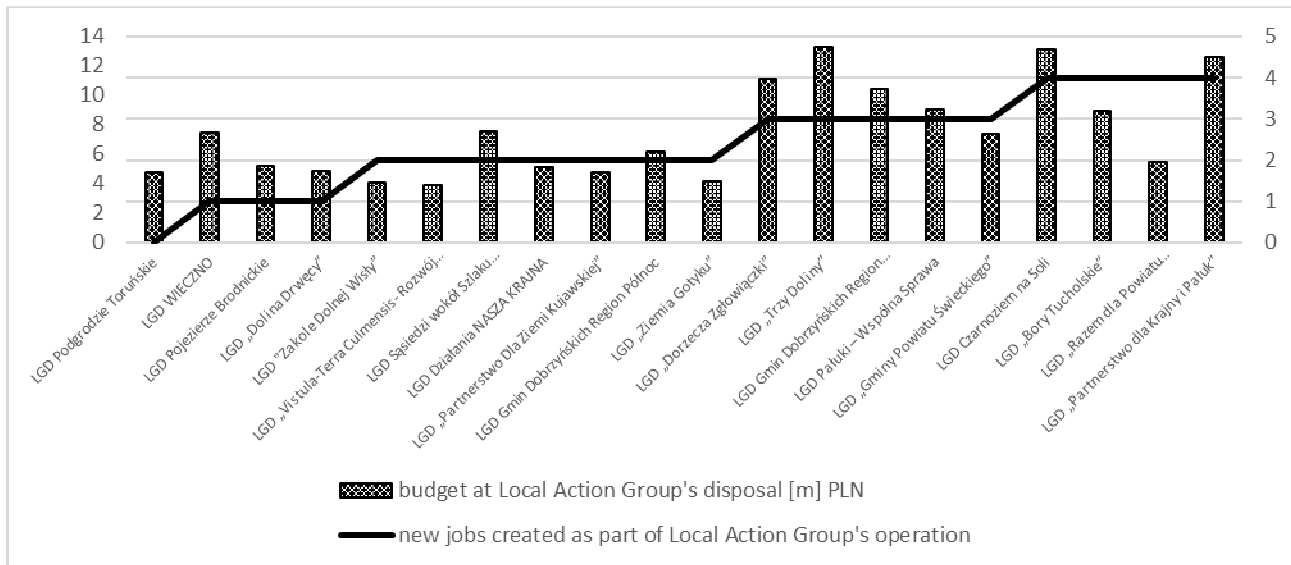
The situation of fund allocation into respective among Local Action Groups was similar. Most funds were allocated to the implementation of Local Development Strategies, ranging from 75 to 83 %, for the operation of Local Action Groups (16-22 %) and the so-called cooperation projects (1-3 %). The distribution is also atypical for Local Action Group "Trzy Doliny", which focused, more than other Local Action Groups, on the implementation of cooperation projects (3 %); it allocated quite a high share of funds to Local Action Group operation (22 %), whereas it focused a slightly lower percentage, than other Local Action Groups, on measure: Local Action Group implementation (75 %). Such Local Action Group as "Ziemia Gotyku", "Gminy Powiatu Swieckiego", or "Czarnoziem na Soli",

emphasised Local Action Group implementation more (from 83 % to 82 %) and the operation of Local Action Group (16 %-17 %), or cooperation projects implementation (1 %) less. The analysis points to a lack of the effect of the number of members of respective sectors for the number of the projects executed by that sector. One can, however, see a clear variation in the allocation as part of the actions related to "Local Development Strategy Implementation". Such tendency can result from various needs of local communities of each of the Local Action Group. However, one should note that as part of "Local Development Strategy Implementation", sub-measure "Village renewal and development" was mostly addressed to public entities, while sub-measure 2 "Small projects" was addressed to the social and public sectors, while sub-measure 3 "Diversification into non-agricultural activities" and the next one "Creation and development of microenterprises" was addressed to the economy sector. Thus, one can observe that some Local Action Groups focused on the public and social sector development more, while others focused more on the economy sector. The highest share of funds was allocated to public and social sector by the

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following Local Action Groups: "Czarnoziem na Soli" (98 %), "Sasiedzi wokół Szlaku Piastowskiego" (92 %), "Bory Tucholskie" (92 %) as well as "Zakole Dolnej Wisły" (91 %); hence a minimum (2 to 9 %) share of the budget was allocated to the economy sector by those Local Action Groups, whereas "Paluki - Wspólna Sprawa" (38 %), "Pogrodzie Toruńskie" (35 %),

"Gminy Powiatu Świeckiego" (33 %) as well as "Gminy Dobrzyńskie Region Południe" (31 %) focused on the economy sector. However, depending on the needs, some Local Action Groups invested more in the formation and development of microenterprises, and others - in diversification into non-agricultural activity.



Source: Authors' study

Fig. 3. Number of new jobs as part of the operation of Local Action Groups in comparison to the Local Action Group budget

Analysing the number of new jobs related to the operation of Local Action Groups, it is clear that the Local Action Groups which had a lower budget at their disposal hired fewer employees, which must have been due to the fact that "poorer" Local Action Groups could not afford a big number of employees. Local Action Groups with their budget below the average, in general, did not employ more than 2 employees (except for "Gminy Powiatu Świeckiego" (3 employees) and "Razem dla powiatu Radziejowskiego" (4 employees)). In total, as part of the measure "operation of Local Action Group" in the kujawsko-pomorskie province, 48 new jobs were created (Figure 3).

The analysis shows that the more funds allocated to sub-measures "Differentiation into non-agricultural activity", as well as "Creation and development of microenterprises", the more new jobs emerged as part of the execution of those projects (Table 1). Local Action Group

Paluki – Wspólna Sprawa can serve as an example; with the budget of 2.4 million PLN, it created 28 jobs and Local Action Group Sasiedzi wokół Szlaku Piastowskiego, with the budget of 0.4 million PLN – a single job only.

The 2014-2020 Rural Areas Development Programme analyses documents show that the new perspective requires the Local Action Groups to satisfy new criteria.

It is important now to identify problems the Local Action Groups were facing previously to be able to avoid similar problems in the future and to execute new projects more efficiently as well as to plan new investments and enterprises.

To have a complete knowledge in that field, an interview was made with the Director of the Department of Rural Areas Development who cooperates with all the groups in the kujawsko-pomorskie province.

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**The number of new jobs as part of Local Development Strategy implementation, in comparison to the total funds allocated to measure "Differentiation into non-agricultural activity" as well as "Creation and development of microenterprises"**

Local Action Group	Number of new jobs created as part of Local Development Strategy implementation	Amount of funds allocated
Local Action Group "Zakole Dolnej Wisly"	4	PLN 256 031.00
Local Action Group "Sasiedzi wokół Szlaku Piastowskiego"	1	PLN 400 000.00
Local Action Group "Działania NASZA KRAJNA"	4	PLN 481 525.00
Local Action Group "Bory Tucholskie"	4	PLN 522 516.40
Local Action Group "Razem dla Powiatu Radziejowskiego"	3	PLN 544 387.00
Local Action Group "Pojezierze Brodnickie"	8	PLN 626 459.00
Local Action Group "Partnerstwo Dla Ziemi Kujawskiej"	8	PLN 763 133.60
Local Action Group "Partnerstwo dla Krajny i Paluk"	14	PLN 1 223 444.00
<b>Local Action Group "Paluki – Wspólna Sprawa"</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>PLN 2 452 456.50</b>
Local Action Group "Gminy Powiatu Swieckiego"	12	PLN 2 784 682.90
MEAN	8.6	

**Source: Authors' study**

When asked to indicate the problem areas in the period 2007-2013 while executing the Local Development Strategy it turned out that there was a number of complex problems from the execution stage. Other problems were present at the very beginning, others – during that stage, and still others – at the end of the period. At the very beginning, the problem was to determine who is to finance the strategy development and the initial operation of Local Action Groups if co-financing has not been launched yet and it was to be in a form of reimbursement. Finally, that role was taken over by the public entities. Another difficulty was the red tape and the requirements of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Areas Development. Here the Marshal's Office had a difficult role to play since many local ideas did not meet the criteria determined by the Ministry and it was the Marshal's Office which had to select those ideas and later to reject those which did not meet the criteria even though they often appeared very interesting. All that was obviously facing a lot of criticism and disappointment from Local Action Groups and local communities. The

problem was also the need to provide too many details to justify the costs. Yet another obstacle was the evaluation of the effects achieved, which was revealed only after the funds were paid for the first collection of the applications. It turned out that some Local Action Groups determined the measures inadequately. Local Action Groups claimed that they could not determine how big the part of the society is a given project has an impact on. At the very beginning, the measures were totally inadequately defined, and once the projects were completed, the measures were matched to the effects received, which makes the evaluation impossible. The most difficult assumptions in terms of execution were to demonstrate innovativeness. First there was missing a transparent description what innovativeness is and to what extent the project innovativeness should be. It was not clear whether it is about the innovativeness at global, national level or simply about such solutions which had not been available yet at local level. The difficulties also appeared in terms of the bottom-up approach. The projects were to result

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from the needs of the local communities and so they had to meet the "top-down" requirements imposed by the European Commission. Some needs coincided with the requirements and were classified for the reimbursement and the needs which did not comply with the indicators defined by the European Commission had to be rejected.

The question "Which projects executed by the groups are considered the biggest success of Local Action Groups accomplished in the kujawsko-pomorskie province in 2007-2013?" did not receive a definite answer. It is very difficult to determine which project provided most benefits since each was giving some benefit to some group of beneficiaries. Those are numerous bike and walking trails, public halls, marinas, playgrounds, football grounds, fireman's halls, museums, tourist attractions and many cultural events.

It appeared that the reports developed on regular basis were the grounds for the evaluation of effectiveness of the operation of Local Action Groups. However, a reliable evaluation of the effects is very difficult to achieve, mostly due to incorrectly determined measures already at the beginning of the operation of Local Action Groups.

The current selection of Local Development Strategies executed with a new instrument "Local Development managed by the Community-led local development" as part of Rural Areas Development Programme 2014-2020 is determined by the highest scored criterion evaluating whether the objectives of the strategy are adequate to the needs defined by the local communities during consultations and the method of determining the indicators. Similarly, the principles considered when selecting the projects for execution are also essential. The involvement of the community in creating the Local Development Strategy is of much importance. Attention will also be paid to the area covered by the Local Development Strategy,

mostly its characteristics as well as the principles the Local Action Group is to be based on.

In the new period 2014-2020, the kujawsko-pomorski region focuses most on competitive economy, rural and city development, a strong metropolitan area of Bydgoszcz and Torun as well as modern society. The instrument of the Community-led local development covers practically all the four provincial strategy priorities. Community-led local development includes also such objectives as new jobs, activating the society, innovativeness, modern agrifood sector and maintaining the identity and cultural heritage. The priorities and objectives of the province are very closely connected to the priorities and objectives of Community-led local development. A joint effort to reach those objectives will surely bring the expected results.

In the previous programming period there were selected 20 Local Action Groups to execute Local Development Strategies. In the new EU budget period some requirements changed in terms of the area covered by Local Development Strategy. Thanks to Community-led local development, assistance was also given to the cities up to 20 thousand residents. In the kujawsko-pomorskie province, in the period 2014-2020, there will be operating 20 rural and rural-municipal Local Action Groups, 7 municipal Action Groups which will be operating in Bydgoszcz, Torun, Wloclawek, Inowroclaw, Grudziadz and they will be acquiring funds from the European Social Fund. There will be also created a fishermen's Local Action Group which will receive funds from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Interestingly the kujawsko-pomorski region will be one of the two Polish provinces which, in the new period, will be receiving assistance from all the four funds.

One should note that the period 2007-2013 focused mostly on the development of entrepreneurship, increasing employment and sources of income and the current perspective focuses mostly on the economy sector. It is

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essential now to increase employment and to co-finance small- and medium-sized enterprises. The previous perspective allocated a lot of funds to measure "Rural areas renewal and development", or "Small projects" which executed the measures of public sectors and focused on cultivating tradition.

### Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

- 4) The research has demonstrated that in 2007-2013 Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorskie province, as part of 4 Axis LEADER of the Rural Areas Development Programme, showed a high activity. The groups executed many projects and received considerable co-financing for local communities, using more than 143 million PLN. The effect of the projects executed by 20 Local Action Groups in the kujawsko-pomorskie province were numerous public halls, playgrounds, sports facilities, walking and bicycle trails, marinas, fireman's halls, museums, tourist attractions and the organization of cultural and socialising events as well as the emergence of new jobs.
- 5) The development strategy of the kujawsko-pomorskie province for the years 2014-2020 is cohesive with the objectives of the measures provided in the programme Leader for the period 2014-2020.

- 6) One can assume that the financial perspective for 2014-2020 can ensure the most effective operation of the Local Action Groups and eliminate the problem areas identified in 2007-2013 in the kujawsko-pomorskie province.
- 7) The grounds for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the operation of Local Action Groups in 2007 - 2014 were the regular reports with inadequately determined measures.
- 8) In the 2014-2020 perspective in the kujawsko-pomorskie province, there will be created 28 Local Action Groups the increased competences of which will ensure a possibility of deciding about the disposal and allocating co-financing. Attention is also paid to the involvement of the local community, training of leaders and teams implementing the Local Development Strategies.
- 9) Selecting the Local Development Strategy for the period 2014-2020, a special attention was paid to the adequacy of the objectives provided in the Local Development Strategy to identify needs. An important aspect is also adequately defining the measures of effectiveness of the projects executed. The criteria for selecting the projects for execution will also be made more precise.

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