

## LOCAL ACTION GROUPS AS NEW ORGANISATIONS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AN EXAMPLE OF THE LUBLIN REGION (POLAND)

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**Abstract.** The aim of this article is to determine the resource potential and the importance of the new forms of organization that are LAGs in rural development on the example of the Lublin region. The paper presents the characteristics of the resource potential of the LAGs, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities of the LAG perspective 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 and the analysis of the objectives of LAGs in terms of their impact on the processes of local and regional development on the basis of the statutes and LDSs for 2014-2020. The study used the following methods: a diagnostic survey, a document analysis, desk research. The interview was conducted in the third quarter of 2016. The study verified two hypotheses: 1) LAGs are organizations with growing resource potential and the scope of impact on the development processes of the region, especially in the area of stimulating the integration process of sectors (cross-linking); 2) bureaucracy is still the main barrier to the functioning and implementing the strategic / statutory objectives of LAGs. The assessment of the operation of LAGs in the perspective of 2014-2020, as compared to 2007-2013, indicates their growing role in influencing the processes of local and regional development. This role is reflected in the growth of the resource potential of the organisations and the high effectiveness of LAGs. LAGs insufficiently focus on creating various network links. Bureaucracy is still the main barrier to the effectiveness of achieving the objectives. In the current term, the LDS objectives seem to be the objectives common to all interest groups that constitute these organizations. The objectives formulated in LDSs enable the accomplishment of all of the assumed principles of the LEADER approach.

**Key words:** LAGs, rural networks, rural development.

**JEL code:** O17

### Introduction

The role of the organizations in the process of socio-economic research is the subject of many sciences, especially sociology and economics. However, the representatives of both of the disciplines differently examine the organizations, focusing on other aspects of their creation, operation and impact on the environment. Economists are primarily interested in economic organizations (seeking economic objectives) and their activities in the field of management. Economists, studying the impact of organizations and interest groups on the environment, focus on the "economic environment" and economic resources, conducting research on the economic impact, including the impact of the organisations on economic growth. The development of institutional economics, especially the new institutional economics, has led to a greater interest of economists in the notion of the organization. What, according to D. C. North, is the common characteristic of the different types of organisations are the conscious activities of their members focused on the implementation of

specific objectives (Milczarek-Andrzejewska D., Spiewak R., 2015).

The difficulties in defining the organization as a social phenomenon result from its nature. It is easier to point out the universal characteristics of constituent organisations. Organisations are purposeful (define the tasks aimed at achieving the objectives), social (are created by people in various relationships), economic (they raise funds for the implementation of the objectives), structural (they are often based on informal social contracts, customs, law and the behaviour of the members is regulated by values, norms and principles). For organizations it is also characteristic that their members identify themselves with them (Kozminski A. K., Latusek-Jurczak D., 2011).

The assumptions of the main streams of economics about rationality mean that economists are closest to the definitions of sociologists that refer to the desirability of the creation of the organization and the activities of the members targeted at certain benefits (Milczarek-Andrzejewska D., Spiewak R., 2015).

The classic paper on collective activities, "The Logic of Collective Action" by M. Olson emphasised that the only purpose that is a characteristic of most organizations, and certainly all organizations with a significant economic aspect, is to promote the interests of its members (Olson M., 2012).

As the degree of the complexity of the processes taking place in the organization and its environment increases, greater and greater is the need for cooperation that transcends the boundaries of the organisation, and even the boundaries of sectors. On the other hand, one can observe an increase in the awareness of one's own subjectivity of the participants of the numerous relationships and the understanding how organized activities affect the organisation, the people making them and the organizational and natural environment. This is a good platform for the development of cooperation of local government entities and their environment (Kozuch B., 2011). An example of an organisation in which municipal governments work together, including working with actors outside the sector are Local Action Groups (LAGs). They are the units dealing with implementation of the LEADER initiative into life (Kisiel R., Gierwiatowska M., 2013). This initiative contributed to emergence of the territorial partnership idea (Mosely M. J., 2003). Within its framework collaboration of three sectors: public, private and non-government take place (Furmankiewicz M., Stefanska J., 2010). This partnership is realized within the framework of LAGs.

The LEADER programme begun in 1991 but in Polish social reality LAGs appeared in 2004, after Polish accession to the EU. Due to ever-increasing role the LEADER approach has played in realizing rural development policies, LAGs have become crucial to the institutional system of European rural development (Shucksmith M., 2000; Dargan L., Shucksmith, M., 2008; Labianca M. et al., 2016).

The functioning of LAGs can be clarified through the prism of the theory of collective activities, including the concepts by M. Olson, the so-called traditional, but the modern theories represented by E. Ostrom (Grodzicki M., 2015) are more appropriate to clarifying collective behaviours within LAGs, not always subject to the principle of rational behaviour. Utilising them can justify the behaviours of various local governments and non-governmental units cooperating in LAGs.

As pointed out by K. Krzyzanowska (2016), studies of group behaviour should systematically monitor such factors as the size of the group, motivation, democracy, the role of leaders, possession and protection of valuable resources, so that information about the importance of them could be used in the creation of cooperation.

The start of a new EU Financial Perspective 2014-2020 is the right moment to study the effects of the impact achieved in the previous term, as well as the factors determining the institutional capacity of those organizations. The aim of this article is therefore to determine the resource potential and the importance of the new form of organization, that are LAGs, in rural the development, as exemplified by the Lublin region.

The specific objectives include: 1) the characteristics of the resource potential of LAGs through the description of the spatial extent and LAG population territory, membership and decision-making structures and budgets; 2) assessment of the effectiveness of LAG activities in the 2007-2013 perspective based on surveys (description of the key barriers to success and effectiveness in achieving the objectives of LAGs), and an analysis of the LDS documents for 2014-2020 (an analysis of the achievement of the indicators of the product and the indicator of the implementation of the budget); 3) an analysis of the objectives of LAGs in terms of their impact on the local and regional

development processes in the current term on the basis of statutes and the LDS for 2014-2020.

The study used the following methods: a diagnostic survey (in the form of telephone interviews), a document analysis, desk research. A thorough analysis was performed of the content of the LDS, websites, statutes, literature, including a national report (Report ..., 2012) on the functioning of LAGs in the 2007-2013 perspective, which allowed to reference the results to the results of previous research. The telephone interview was conducted in the third quarter of 2016. It was utilised to gather feedback on the experience in the functioning of LAGs in the 2007-2013 perspective and the first experiences of LAGs in the implementation of the calls for proposals for 2014-2020.

The study verified two hypotheses: 1) LAGs are organizations with growing resource potential and the scope of impact on the development processes of the region, especially in the area of stimulating the integration process of sectors (cross-linking); 2) bureaucracy is still the main barrier to the functioning and implementing the strategic / statutory objectives of LAGs (despite the greater experience of the managing institution – marshals' offices and the LAGs themselves).

### **Research results and discussion LAGs as a new form of organization in the rural space**

As L. Melece (2015) stresses, one way to operate the initiatives of local communities in rural areas are LAGs, made up of public and private partners from the particular territory, and may include representatives from different socio-economic sectors and act under the LEADER initiative. They receive financial assistance to implement Local Development Strategies (LDSs), by awarding grants to local projects. LAGs, organized as tripartite (civil, governmental and business) rural development partnerships, are good examples of where different spheres can cooperate without major problems. LAGs in their functioning implements the main principles set

out by the LEADER programme such as: area-based, bottom-up, public-private partnership, innovation, integration, networking, co-operation (The Leader approach..., 2006). According to R. Lukesh (2007), depending on the state of development or maturity of the rural area, as "instruments for change" LAGs can play this role at various levels: starting from simply defining local needs, through acting as facilitators, creating platforms for negotiation, to becoming key players of local governance, enhancing practical development in many areas of rural life.

The main aim of LAGs is to develop, update and implement the objectives identified in LDSs. These strategies are the basis for action of each LAG and contain directions for the development of areas which belong to the group. In addition to performing LDSs, LAGs use the resources of the area for which they operate also in "cooperation projects". This activity allows for the implementation of joint projects within the framework of interregional or international (transnational), cooperation and serves to strengthen the competence of cross-organizational cooperation of LAGs. Therefore the functioning of LAGs can be identified as a model example of cooperation, the essence of which is to run the local potential of resources human, social, relational capital aimed at identifying and mobilizing utilization (by definition, in an innovative way) of resources in the local development process (Guzal-Dec D., 2016).

Local Action Groups, also referred to as "partner groups" or "territorial partnerships" (Furmankiewicz M., 2006), exist in the form of associations and represent cross-sectoral organisations, very complex with respect to their objective. They represent the objectives of particular interest groups, subject to compliance with the shared - statutory objectives. Such territorial partnerships, as groups made up of the representatives of formal (organisations) or individual units, may be the subject of network analysis, as emphasised by N. Stenlas (1999).

In the context of the objectives implemented by them (which relate to the objectives of the LEADER initiative), it should be noted that LAGs are support institutions of social economy entities (The National Programme ..., 2014). One of the leading objectives in the 2014-2020 perspective implemented by LAGs is to support social inclusion, enterprise growth and job creation (Regulation..., 2013) 1.

The research carried out in the Lublin region on environmentally valuable areas has shown that the formation of such local cooperation form as LAGs, based on the integration of local entities to cooperate for the innovative use of local resources is an important factor in the development of those areas. In rural areas, with a not-too-active advisory system (excluding advice for agriculture), LAGs filled the gap in the system of institutional support of non-agricultural entrepreneurship development (Guzal-Dec D., Zwolinska-Ligaj M., 2015, p. 269, Zwolinska-Ligaj M., 2015, p. 44).

The fulfilment of the above-mentioned role of the LAGs depended on the effectiveness of their activities. Polish research on the functioning of LAGs in the period 2007-2013<sup>2</sup> showed that larger LAGs in terms of the number of residents living in the area - at least more than 50,000 people, possessing a larger budget (over 2 million) and increasing the number of partners are more effective in their functioning, activate the local community more and better implement the principle of partnership (Report ..., 2012).

### **Characteristics of the study area and studied LAGs**

The Lublin Region is located in the border zone, in the Eastern Polish macro-region. The Lublin Region is one of the least populated and urbanized regions of the country. In this region,

<sup>1</sup>In accordance with the requirements of the RDP 2014-2020, the min. of 50 % of the LDS budget allocated for the measure 19.2 "Support for the implementation of operations under local development strategies driven by the community" is allocated to projects related to the creation or maintenance of jobs under the RDP. The value of cooperation projects may be up to 5 % of the LDS budget plus the current costs and activation (www.minrol.gov.pl) 15/12/2016

<sup>2</sup> The study conducted in June-July 2012 with a group of 97 % of the LAGs in Poland, commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

the share of the persons employed by the kind of activity in 2014 in section "Agriculture, forestry, and fishing" was the highest in the country (in 2015 it was 23.3 % versus 11.5 in Poland) (Regions..., 2015).

Leader is a very popular programme for the rural areas of the Lublin Region. In the period 2007-2013, all rural and urban-rural communes were affiliated to 26 LAGs. These associations were very diverse in terms of the number of municipalities. This number ranged from 2 to 17 (Catalogue..., 2012).

In the 2014-2020 perspective, the legal form under which LAGs may operate are associations<sup>3</sup>. The basic framework of their functioning is determined, therefore by the *Law on Associations and the Law of 20 February 2015 on local development with the participation of local community*. In the context of the functioning of LAGs, they should be defined as associations with specific characteristics. It should be noted that the supervision over LAGs is exercised by an executive authority and a provincial government, what significantly differs LAGs from the typical social organisations is their permission to do business. LAG, to the extent specified in their statutes, may conduct economic activity which pursues the LDS objectives.

After the end of the 2007-2013 perspective, the 3 smallest LAGs in the Lublin region joined the other already-functioning LAGs in the region. Therefore, their number as at 01.01.2016 amounted to 23, except that during the study period 1 LAG had no LDS approved and was excluded from the analyses. The 22 LAGs studied (as at 31.12.2013) covered a total area of 23 977.7 km<sup>2</sup> inhabited by 1 388 007 people - which accounted for 95.44 % of the area of the region and 64.09 % of the total population in the region. The average area of the study LAGs was 1089.89 km<sup>2</sup> with a standard deviation of

<sup>3</sup> In the previous perspective, the legal form of a foundation was rarely utilised, the Act on Community-led Local Development art. 4 indicates that the creation and operation of LAGs are subject to the provisions of the Act of 7 April 1989 - Law on Associations (Journal of Laws of 2001, No. 79, item 855, as amended)

458.34, and the average number of residents was 63091.23, with a standard deviation 24813.03. The number of member local governments ranged from 5-17.

**Experience of LAGs in the 2007-2013 perspective**

By far the greatest interest in forming all tested LAGs was displayed by the local government sector, and local authorities most often initiated the formation of LAGs. The least interest was shown by citizens. The interest in LAG membership among entrepreneurs was average (Guzal-Dec D., Zwolinska-Ligaj M., 2016) (Table 1).

When assessing the possibility of further development (increasing the number of members) of these organizations, it is essential to note that the applicants for the LAGs' projects in the period 2007-2013 included entities that were not directly involved in the activities of the LAGs, especially the new non-governmental organizations which, as pointed by office directors of LAGs, began to emerge actively with the beginning of LAGs, but also entrepreneurs and non-agricultural population, the groups less involved in the actual process of creating the organisations (Table 2).

Table 1

**Assessment of interest in forming LAGs in particular groups of local population**

No	Local population groups	Measures of descriptive statistics		
		Arithmetic average (x)	Standard deviations (s)	Variation coefficient $s/x*100\%$
1.	Local government authorities	4.65	0.65	0.13
2.	Non-government organizations	4.15	0.85	0.21
3.	Entrepreneurs	3.00	1.00	0.25
4.	Citizens	2.67	1.09	0.41

Source: authors' study based on research; evaluation scale (0-5), where 0=lack of interest, and 5=very high level of interest

**Application for project implementation by persons not involved in the activities of LAGs by social groups**

No	Groups	% of LAGs which reported applications of people from outside the LAGs
1.	Entrepreneurs	0.90
2.	Farmers	0.70
3.	Organisations	0.95
4.	Local authorities	0.55
5.	Non-agricultural population	0.80

Source: authors' study based on research

Since the establishment of the surveyed LAGs, an average of 13 jobs (statistical deviation 8.41) was created in each of the groups. The number of jobs created in each group ranged from 2 to 34. In the Lublin voivodship, most micro-enterprises established, were in the tourist services (40.22 %) and services for the population (21.74 %). The jobs under the measure "diversification into non-agricultural activities" were created mainly in services for farms and forestry (47.56 %). Thus, it has been shown how small the scale of projects aimed at the development of non-agricultural functions of rural areas is. The surveyed LAGs facilitated diversification of economies mainly in the development of the tourism sector (Guzal-Dec D., Zwolinska-Ligaj M., 2016). Similar problems were indicated in the functioning of LAGs in Poland (Final Report. Impact assessment ..., 2016) and other EU countries. For example, as stresses Krievina et. al. (2015) on a Lithuanian case in practice, the implementation of the LDS in the framework of LEADER RDP 2007-2013 was not balanced: at the planning level, priorities and activities of LDS widely cover entrepreneurship development, though among the implemented projects economy related projects account for only about 18 % of the total approved financing. Most of LEADER projects have been implemented to facilitate the development of infrastructure related to active recreation and quality leisure time as well as culture and sports.

In the Lublin region, the LDS budgets in the financial perspective 2007-2013 were, on average, implemented in 96.10 % (standard deviation of 4.43, and the coefficient of variation 4.61). The implementation of their statutory objectives was not only carried out with the use of the RDP resources, but they often (54.55 % of the total) effectively applied for support from other sources of external financing (the total of 13 sources). Most often, these were funds from the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Human Capital (11 responses).

Inter-organizational activity was noted in the case of all of the studied LAGs implementing cooperation projects (usually one – 45.46 %), but 54.54 % of all respondents implemented more than one project (27.27 % - two projects and 27.27 % three projects). The LAGs studied created networks with different numbers of members (number of partners ranged from 2 to 20) in these projects<sup>1</sup>.

The greatest successes of the LAG impact on the local development processes indicated by the surveyed office directors were primarily achievements in the social dimension of local development processes. The respondents particularly indicated the following: increased social activity and the emergence of new NGOs and strengthening the role of local leaders (12 responses), high rate of the LDS implementation (8), the creation of local products (5), development of tourist infrastructure (4), entrepreneurship development and the creation of new jobs (4), the integration of the population (3), the integration of sectors, (3) increase in the recognisability of LAGs among the members of the local community and success in promoting LAGs (4), the implementation of projects serving the local community (2) improving the quality of life (2), strengthening the territorial identity and the preservation of traditions and culture (2),

obtaining a large budget support in the new term (1), preparation of a two-fund development strategy for the period 2014-2020 awarded by the Marshal's Office (1) and the development of a network of cooperating undertakings (1).

The greatest difficulties in achieving efficiency in relation to the objectives of the LAGs included: a large number of documents required with the support applications (bureaucracy) - 10 indications and complexity of the legislation - 7 indications. These problems are also identified in the LAG nationwide study (Report ..., 2012) where the bureaucracy was indicated as the main barrier (83 % of responses) hindering the activities of the LAGs.

Other barriers to the effectiveness of the respondent LAGs in the Lublin region, as indicated by the applicants, included: non-compliance of the beneficiaries of the projects (interrupting projects, failure to comply with time limits) (3 indications), the lack of sufficient knowledge of applicants on fundraising and the applicable procedures and concerns of projects concerning the submission of applications (one indication each). With regard to the functioning of the LAGs, the identified problems included: problems with maintaining the stability of the executive offices of the LAGs (1), financial constraints hindering the marketing activity of the LAGs (1), and the dominance of the local government sector, which limited the activity of social organisations (1). In addition, attention was paid to such institutional problems as insufficient nationwide promotion of LAGs (the issue was also reported in a nationwide study of the functioning of LAGs which recognised that rural residents often do not identify a number of projects implemented under the LEADER programme - Report ..., 2012), the failure of the units managing the RDP to consider the arguments and ideas of LAGs, the lack of a well-developed model of cooperation between local social organizations and the issue of the ever-

<sup>1</sup> An example of cooperation with the largest range can be the cooperation of the LAG "Kraina wokół Lublina" and nineteen partners in the international project ENERDECA whose aim was the development of rural tourism by strengthening cooperation between entrepreneurs of the tourism industry and the representatives of local authorities and the use of modern e-promotion.

Table 3

**Characteristics of resource-member potential of the LAGs surveyed in 2009 and 2015**

No	Feature / descriptive statistics	Measures of descriptive statistics		
		Arithmetic average (x)	Standard deviations (s)	Variation coefficient s/x*100 %
1.	Number of members as at 2009	73	21.87	29.95
2.	Number of members as at 2015	98.991	28.88	29.20
3.	Change in the number of members between 2009 and 2015.	40.64	38.82	95.53
4.	Share of the social sector in the membership in 2015	58.36	5.69	9.75
5.	Share of the public sector in the membership in 2015	17.49	4.64	26.56
6.	Share of public sector in the structure of the board for 2009	37.23	14.23	38.22
7.	Share of the public sector in the structure of the board for 2015	22.48	7.85	34.94

*Source: authors' study based on LDSs for period 2007-2013 and 2014-2020*

Table 4

**Characteristics of the financial-resource potential (LAG budgets for the programming period 2014-2020)**

No	Feature / descriptive statistics	Measures of descriptive statistics		
		Arithmetic average (x)	Standard deviations (s)	Variation coefficient s/x*100 %
1.	Total budget of the LAG	9824804.29	3431250.63	34.92
2.	Total budget per capita	160.13	35.70	22.30
3.	LDS budget	7918145.16	2965937.61	37.46
4.	Share of co-operation projects in the LDS budget plus current costs and activation	1.74	0.51	29.55
5.	Share of spending on job creation	50.85	1.84	4.00

*Source: authors' study based on LDSs for period 2014-2020*

The value of the total budgets for the period of 2014-2020 in the studied LAGs in the Lublin region ranged from PLN 6032500 to

changing needs of the residents of LAGs was also highlighted.

**Analysis of the resource potential of LAGs in the 2014-2020 perspective**

In the context of the analysis of human resources of the 22 surveyed LAGs (quantitative approach the number of members of the LAG), it was shown that there was a significant increase there<sup>1</sup>. The number of the members of all of the surveyed organisations between 2009 and 2015 increased by an average of 40.64 % with a standard deviation of 38.82, where the communes studied were very much different in terms of their changes in membership. The maximum increase in the number of their members amounted to 161.76 %. Table 3 details the characterization of the member potential with the participation of the sectors in the decision-making body – the board.

The share of the social sector in membership in 2015 averaged 58.36 %, as compared to the 17.49 % of the share of the public sector. The share of the public sector in the structure of the decision-making authorities between 2009 and 2015 decreased significantly from 37.23 % to 22.48 %<sup>2</sup>. The LAGs studied showed little differentiation in terms of their structure and the membership of the decision-making body (the coefficient of variation does not exceed 40 %). Reducing the share of the public sector in the decision-making body as a solution called for in the new perspective (the Act of 20 February 2015 on local development ..., 2015) is a factor that helps to solve the problem of the so-called "hidden dominance of the public sector" recognized in the research concerning the LAGs in Poland for the perspective 2007-2013 (Furmankiewicz M., 2013).

<sup>1</sup> In the case of 20 LAGs, an increase was recorded of 90,91, and only two decreased by approx. 10 %.

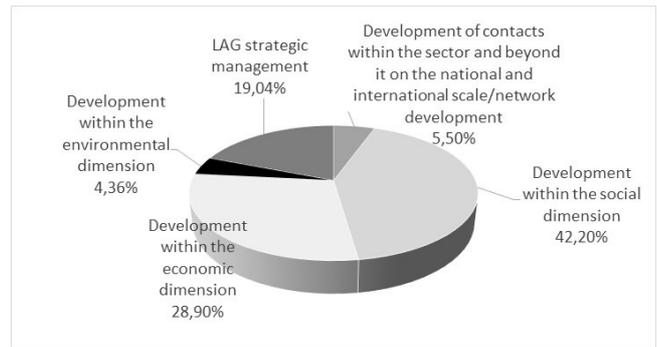
<sup>2</sup>Only one LAG did not meet the additional criterion for the assessment of the LDS in the 2014-2020 perspective for the sector participation in the public decision-making body to be less than 30 %.

PLN 18970000. In comparison to the budget for the perspective 2007-2013, there was an average increase in the value, by 22.71 % with a standard deviation of 29.53 %. The studied LAGs were not largely varied in terms of the total budget and the budget per capita, as well as the LDS budget (Table 4). All of the studied LAGs assumed to incur the min. of the 50 % of the share of spending on job creation (the maximum value here was 58.25 %).

The share of co-operation projects in the LDS budget plus the current costs and activation did not exceed the permissible level of 5 % - the average was 1.74 %.

#### **Development objectives, as pursued by LAGs in the 2014-2020 perspective**

The statutes of LAGs updated in 2016 focused on the social objectives of the activities of these organisations, mainly the development of social capital and social inclusion. The second group of statutory objectives were those aimed at the transformation of the local economy, related to the development of entrepreneurship, development of selected sectors (mainly rural tourism), local products and services. However, little attention was devoted to the issues of innovation in the economy. Quite extended objectives related to the provisions concerning the strategic management of the LAGs, including the processes of preparation, update and implementation of LDSs. Some attention was paid to the socialization of the process. To a small extent, the statutes of the studied LAGs relate to matters concerning the integration of sectors (development of cross-sectoral cooperation) and the overall development of LAG relationships with other entities on the national and international scale, as well as issues to the concerns about the state of the local environment and the ecological awareness of local communities (Figure 1).



Source: authors' study based on research

Fig. 1. Structure of the statutory objectives of LAGs

The content of the objectives of the analysed statutes referred largely to the social sector. Half of them (49.77 %) - to all of the three interest groups - the public, economic and social sectors. These included, among others, the development, updating and implementation of local development strategies, assumptions relating to the development of the local economy, the growth of innovative local integration sectors and the development of entrepreneurship. Considerable was also the share (33.03 %) of the objectives related to the interest of local communities, including development support for the social capital, social inclusion and care for the culture. In the structure of the provisions of the statutes, the smallest was the share (17.20 %) of the objectives relating jointly to the public and social sectors, including such as the development of education, environmental education and the care for the natural environment and the health and safety of residents.

A wide range of the objectives indicated in the statutes of LAGs was narrowed down to the most urgent / most priority ones in LDSs. The LDS objectives for 2014-2020 were concentrated on the economic dimension more than the social impact of these organisations on local development (Table 5).

Table 5

**LDSs specific objectives for the years 2014-2020 (number of indications)**

No	Subject / content of objective	Number of responses
1.	Increase in the competitiveness of the economy based on local resources	21
2.	Development of entrepreneurship	17
3.	Development of social capital	13
4.	Improving the quality of life	12
5.	Preservation of cultural heritage	11
6.	Social inclusion of disadvantaged groups	8
7.	Development of human capital	7
8.	Increase in innovativeness	6
9.	Development of integration links	5
10.	Multifunctionality	5
11.	Sub-regional identity	4
12.	Increasing environmental awareness	4
13.	Reduction of migration and depopulation	3
14.	Improving the efficiency of LAGs	3
15.	Promoting the LAG area	2

**Source: author's calculations based on LDSs for period 2014-2020**

The development of social capital was indicated relatively less often, as compared to the need for increase in the case of the entrepreneurship of the residents. The most frequently mentioned goal was to strive for the economic use of local resources, primarily through the development of tourism, fine processing, rarely - farming. It should be noted as positive that the objectives were different for each LAG (which gave the impression that were created "as needed" and not on the basis of the mapping of the strategies of other LAGs). Pawlewicz A and Szamrowski P. (2012) pointed out the issue in the initial planning phase of the LDS in the Warmia-Mazury region.

The objectives which should be more exposed should include the multifunctional and innovative development of the local economies in conjunction with the attention to the development of integration links, both on the local and supra-local - regional, national and

international scales. With regard to the innovativeness perceived as under-articulated in the LDS objectives, a mention should be made that a detailed analysis of these documents can claim that innovativeness was widely assumed as a criterion for the evaluation of operations to be financed.

**Conclusions, proposals, recommendations**

- 1) Evaluation of LAGs' operation in 2014-2020, as compared to the 2007-2013 perspective, indicates their growing role in influencing the processes of local and regional development. This role is reflected in the growing resource potential of the organisation - the increase of the number of members and positive changes in the structure of the membership consisting of a clear increase in the participation of partners from the social and economic development and a clear increase in the budgets of the LAGs. At the same, the effectiveness of the LAGs was highly evaluated.
- 2) In the period 2007-2013, LDSs allowed mainly the development of the social capital, increase in the impact of job places and the current area is expected to increase impact in the creation and business development of inhabitants and the growth of the innovative projects undertaken. The LAGs still insufficiently focused on creating various network links. The issues are not significant in the on-going development strategies, and should be perceived as one of the main local and regional development factors of the socio-economic systems. Thus, the first hypothesis is partly verified positively. In contrast, negative verification concerns the issue of the positive impact of LAGs on the development of networking.
- 3) In the current perspective, the LDS objectives seem to be objectives common to all of the interest groups that constitute these organisations. The objectives formulated in the LDS enable the accomplishment of all of

the assumed principles of the LEADER approach, but more emphasis should be placed on the development of public-private partnerships.

- 4) In their activities of LAGs, a greater emphasis should be placed on environmental issues. This issue should be a selection criterion of projects. LAGs should also be involved to a greater extent in the environmental education of the local community.
- 5) The bureaucracy associated with the operation of LAGs is still the main obstacle to the effectiveness of attaining the objectives. To a lesser extent, difficulties arise from the

attitudes of the applicants and management difficulties of LAGs and the general measures governing the management of LAGs on a national scale. The second hypothesis must be then verified positively.

- 6) The activity of the LAGs should be better promoted, residents often do not identify the actions undertaken by LAGs, it negatively affects the assessment of their impact on the development and interest in joining these organisations.

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