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Research Article

Functioning of the Local Groups of Action (LAG) in the Aspects of Sustainable Rural Development Policy

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Abstract

In recent years rural areas of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship have seen very significant changes, especially with the participation of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013. The aim of the article was to diagnose the factors determining the implementation and management of the Leader 2007-2013 program in the institutional and personnel aspect in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, and to diagnose the functioning of the Local Action Groups as the actors responsible for shaping the regional and local sustainable rural development policy, RDP 2007-2013 program. As a result of the research, there is a need to continue research leading to an assessment of the effectiveness of LAG activities and the creation of local leaders, which may have a significant impact on local community participation in moderating local development.

Key words: Local action groups (LAG), rural development program (RDP).

Introduction

In recent years rural areas of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship have seen very significant changes, especially with the participation of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013. It is no longer the same village because it is different from the previous 10 years. Modernization transformations related to many spheres of life and inhabitants, including the smallest towns, are also significant. When planning new investments and ventures for the next seven years, attention should be paid to the problems encountered by the Local Action Groups (LAG) in the past, so that they can be avoided and even more effective in the future. On the basis of data obtained from the Marshal Office concerning the effects of the functioning of the LAG in the period 2007-2013 in

the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, the number of projects implemented by activity, the budget used, the level of involvement of the entities and the number of new jobs can be indicated [1].

Material and Methods

The study uses a participatory approach to obtain information and to analyse implementation processes, taking into account the opinions of people directly or indirectly involved in RDP 2007-2013, i.e. the employees of the Marshal's Office and LAG employees.

The study was conducted in the Department of Rural Areas - RDP Managing Authority in Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodship and in all LAG operating in the voivodship.

Results and Discussions

The first objective of the article was to diagnose the factors determining the implementation and management of the Leader 2007-2013 program in the institutional and personnel aspect in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship.

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The following research questions were answered:

- Has the organization and working environment of the RDP Managing Authority ensured the effectiveness of its activities?
- Was the process of implementing and managing the RDP 2007-2013 effective?
- Are the tools planned in the promotion and information about RDPs adequate to the expectations of potential beneficiaries?
- Did the training policy of the RDP Managing Authority ensure the development of human resources?
- What were the factors influencing the public consultation process within the RDP in the region?

The second objective of the article was to assess the functioning of the Local Action Groups as the actors responsible for shaping regional and local rural development policy in the context of the implementation of the RDP 2007-2013 program.

It was advisable to answer the questions:

- To what extent does the current institutional and personnel structure of the LAG ensure the effectiveness of its tasks?
- Does the implemented training policy in the LAG ensure the development of human resources?
- What are the problem areas in implementing the RDP in the opinion of LAG staff?
- Does the communication system ensure the proper flow of information between the partnerships as well as between local and regional authorities and how does it affect the functioning of the LAGs?

In the period 2007-2013, there were 20 LAGs in the voivodeship, which carried out 2082 projects under the "Implementation of Local Development Strategies" over PLN 112,122,988.11 and 59 "Local Action Group Activities, Skills Acquisition and Activation" For the amount of 28 769 285,87 PLN, and also realized cooperation projects for a total of 2 565 364,93 zł. Thus, the activity of LAGs in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship in the period 2007-2013 was approximately 143 mln. Resulting in numerous day-care centres, playgrounds, sports facilities, walking and cycling trails, water harbours, shelters, museums, tourist attractions as well as cultural and integration events. Many monuments and churches were renovated and renovated, and many SMEs were funded under the "Diversification of non-agricultural activities" and "Creation and development of micro-enterprises" [2].

Among the best are two Local Action Groups, including: LAG "Gotyk Land" and "Tucholskie Forests", which implemented respectively 26.7 and 24.6 projects for every PLN 1 million (with the average voivodeship of 13.9 projects). LAGs were also able to raise funds from additional sources. In

this respect, three LAGs, "Gothic Land", "Świecka District Communes" and "Czarnoziem na Soli", used 143%, 135%, 101% of the budget, with 97% of the average voivodeship. In terms of reliability and substantive preparation, the LAG has been awarded the "Partnership for the Country and Punch". The division of funds into individual actions was similar in all the LAGs in the voivodeship and looked as follows: implementation of LSR 75-83%, operation of LAGs 16-22% and cooperation projects 1-3%. The division of funds under the "Implementation of Local Collaboration Strategies", which was probably due to the diversity of the needs of each of the LAGs, was diverse [3]. Some of the LAGs were more targeted to those sub-measures that concerned the economic sector, while others focused on sub-measures addressed to public and social actors. LAGs have created many new jobs. They originated both within the framework of LSR implementation (mainly "Creating and developing microenterprises" and "Diversification of non-agricultural activities") and the functioning of LAGs. As many as 48 new jobs were created within the LAG. LAGs with larger budgets employed more people.

The effects achieved in the previous perspective are very impressive; however, they needed to overcome many difficulties. There were cases of LAGs with low social capital, which translated into less efficiency, and also treated the LAG as a tool for municipal offices to carry out their own tasks. Therefore, the focus of the 2014-2020 period is on the needs of residents and the training of leaders and teams implementing LSR. Another problem was the overshadowing of small towns that were coherent with the LAG area but were not eligible in size. In order not to deprive small towns of support, the prospect of 2014-2020 introduced the possibility of including LAGs in the cities to 20 thousand. Residents at the beginning of the operation of the LAG there were problems with adopting the legal form and lack of credit history of the LAGs. In order to solve this problem, a new "special" association was introduced as well as a refund option was added [4]. Another obstacle was the large bureaucracy of "small projects" that were supposed to be easy to implement. To address this problem, "umbrella projects", managed by LAGs, incorporate many micro-projects. Very important issue was also measuring the effects. Indicators have been unreliable, which makes it impossible to assess the functioning. LAGs have only been learning how to measure performance measures during their operation. Most problems arising in the 2007-2013 perspective have been solved during the period. LAGs have been constantly learning how they

should function and what the Marshal's Office requires of them. Other difficulties were resolved by formal and legal changes that introduced the 2014-2020 perspective.

The Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship has identified 4 priorities and 8 strategic objectives in its development strategy, which largely coincide with the Leader program and address the needs of rural areas. The "competitive economy" priority is about increasing the incomes of local governments at all levels and creating new jobs. "Modernization of rural and urban spaces" is to accelerate the development of rural areas, mainly through the development of the local economy (agro-food processing, tourism) and access to large urban centres (Bydgoszcz and Toruń). "Modern society" is associated with the rise of social development, which forms one of the lowest in the country. It is necessary to change the mentality of society, to stimulate activity and to prevent social exclusion.

The selection of the LSR for the period 2014-2020 drew the greatest attention to whether LSR objectives are relevant to the needs identified in social consultations, i.e. whether they are consistent with the needs defined by the public. Drawing conclusions from the previous perspective, it was pointed out how the performance measures of the implemented projects were determined [5]. Significant in the selection of LSR are also the rules by which projects will be selected for implementation. The involvement of the local community and the characteristics of the LSR area are also highlighted. Also important are the general principles on which the operation of the LAG will be based.

In the 2014-2020 perspective, 28 LAGs will be established in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship. There is much more opportunity ahead than before. Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, as one of the two Polish voivodships, will acquire financial resources from all four funds within RLKS [3]. More opportunities are also associated with greater challenges. Each of the funds is linked to other goals and objectives, and there are other requirements. LAGs will have to learn the rules on which each fund is based, to help local communities, businesses and the public to make the most of the resources available. The current perspective gives more opportunities to raise funds for the economic sector. Now it focuses on the development of SMEs as well as the creation of new jobs. LAGs are largely responsible, because it depends primarily on them, activating the community and encouraging social and economic actors to use the funds. The LAG's competences have been

enhanced and they will decide who and for what purpose to grant funding.

It should be noted that the development strategy for the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Region for 2014-2020 is coherent with the objectives of the Leader program for 2014-2020. Thus, the 2014-2020 perspective gives the LAG greater opportunities than in the previous period [6].

In the context of the conducted research, the implementation of the Leader Program in the rural areas of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship has become innovative, contributing to a number of positive changes in various areas of socio-economic life. The analysis indicates that the employees of the Marshal's Office in Toruń engaged in the implementation of the RDP have education consistent with the nature of their work, which allows them to assume that they are able to use their knowledge in the tasks entrusted to them [7, 10]. Employees have professional experience and skills acquired through previous work, through participation in self-funded training and training provided by the UM. However, because of the work experience and the age of employees, the level of this experience is varied. Some of the employees use and intend to use in the future expert advice useful for the purpose of their work.

Taking into account the length of work of the UM students and their young age, it is to be expected that a significant role in their future career with the Office is likely to play a formal career path with clear promotion criteria [8]. Another factor affecting the level of motivation to perform a given job is the level of pay, which can be of particular importance for public administration employees involved in the implementation and management of EU programs.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results of the study revealed that the Local Action Groups operating in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship had a very diverse institutional and personnel potential, but with the possibility of further development and expansion of activities. An essential element for the further development of the Local Action Groups is to provide them with appropriate tools, and the diagnosed needs during the study clearly identify the barriers and constraints both in the LAG and the implementing institution, thus contributing to the improvement of the professionalization of activities and the raising of knowledge. In this regard an important factor building on the further potential of LAGs will also be their proper promotion and dissemination of information about their activities [9].

At the current stage of implementation of the Operational Programs and preparation for the new budgeting period 2014-2020, it would be advisable to undertake a comprehensive analysis

of what ICT projects are implemented in rural areas in particular poviats of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, and then to consider a further coherent concept To develop the development of information and communication technologies in order to achieve the effect of synergy. It is necessary to encourage intensified efforts to promote ICT in rural areas and to support local capacities including The MMSP sector and farms. In more than 60% of LGDs, there has been an accent in the Local Development Strategies the ability to carry out IT projects, which creates opportunities for the development of information and communication technologies in rural areas, if beneficiaries are beneficiaries whose level of awareness is low.

Conclusions

In the rural areas of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, it is necessary to implement such solutions under the Rural Development Program 2014-2020, which, to date, despite the use of existing intervention measures and sometimes ineffective methods of implementation of the adopted policy, have not yet solved many problems. .

Meeting the needs and reducing problem areas will be possible, at least in part, through the exchange of good practice and the transfer of knowledge to other actors in the country which already have considerable experience in building social capital.

It is also recognized that further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of LAGs and local leaders, which may have a significant impact on local community involvement in moderating local development. It should be noted that community-led local development is one of the instruments for implementing the territorial policy proposed by the European Commission.

Speaking about the financial perspective 2014-2020, it should be pointed out that it is able to ensure more effective functioning of the LAG and to eliminate the problems encountered by these organizations in the period 2007-2013 in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship.

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