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# THE ROLE OF LOCAL ACTIVITY GROUPS IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMUNES

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## **Abstract**

Polish accession to the European Union has set many challenges facing the country in a variety of ways: social, economic and political. It created a chance of getting financial support for rural development. The chance of growth among local communities depends on the capacity to self-organize their efforts and making creative collective activity. The activities of local authorities depend on people, their ideas and the way in which they understand the goal of the local authority, so the level of social capital may significantly influence the pattern of local social politics.

This article aims to highlight the role of the Local Activity Group (LAG) in the social and economic communities implementing the Common Strategy of the Local Development.

**Key words:** Local Activity Group, local strategies

## **1. Introduction**

In order to stimulate community involvement in development of the area and make better use of its resources is to build social and economic capital in the country. Due to the low level of activity and engagement of rural communities in local structures and reluctance to cooperate, activities stimulating, promotion or training which is maintained by the Local Activity Groups, are especially important for the development of rural areas.

This article aims to highlight the role of the Local Activity Group (LAG) in the social and economic communities implementing the Common Strategy of the Local Development.

**Local Activity Group** (LAG) is a type of territorial partnership formed usually in rural areas, bringing representatives of local organizations together (both public

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and private sectors and non-governmental) and the inhabitants of the area designated communities. Local Activity Group performs Local Development Strategies (LDS) in the area of 10 thousand to 150 thousand residents. This condition is designed, on the one side – to provide “local” character, and on the other – to provide adequate capacity for the implementation of the strategy (*Status of implementation of the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013*, 2012). A very important element in the creation of LAG is that at least 50% of its members belonged to the private and non-governmental sector as well as to be representative for the area in which it operates.

## 2. Local Activity Groups in Poland

LAG as residents associations, businesses, local authorities can maximize the benefits of their site for social and economic recovery. External support – the development of a particular region is local and it is very important. The country sees the rapid development of LAG.

Local Activity Groups in Poland was divided into three categories according to the number of inhabitants of the area covered by the activity (Supera Markowska M., 2008):

- small groups from 10 thousand to 50 thousand people;
- the average group size: more than 50 thousand to 100 thousand people;
- a large group of more than 100 thousand to 150 thousand residents.

The category of small groups includes 187 groups, i.e. 55% of all Polish LAG. The category of medium-sized groups include 140 LAGs. The largest groups account for only 3.24% of all LAGs in the country (Kwaterna K., 2010). The area covered by the local development strategies resides 16 877 180 people – 91.29% of rural population in Poland and 44.27% of Poles.<sup>2)</sup> Most of LAG is located in western and northern parts of Polish. The Mazovian Voivodeship operates 35 Local Activity Groups (Table 1).

**Table 1.** List of Local Activity Groups Masovian Voivodeship

No	Name of Local Activity Group
1	Development Association of Płock
2	Local Activity Group „Zapilicze”
3	Local Activity Group Orzyc-Narew
4	Association of Communes and Towns Development District Garwoliński
5	Association „Land Blooming Orchard”
6	Local Activity Group “Forest Kozienicka”
7	Union of Associations “Partnership the Lagoon Reservoir”
8	Association of Local Activity Group “Let’s be Together”

<sup>2)</sup> Data obtained during the interview with the employee UM Warsaw, December 18, 2012.

continued table 1

9	Association of Local Activity Group "Sierpeckie Partnership"
10	Union of Associations "Kurpsie Together"
11	Local Activity Group Commune Nadpiliczna
12	Association „Together for Radomka”
13	Development Association of Commons Tarczyn, Prażmów – Local Activity Group today LAG Pearl Mazovia
14	Local Activity Group "Plain Wołomińska"
15	LAG Nature Society and Culture
16	Association "Green Bridges of Narwia"
17	Association „Legacy and Development"
18	Association of Local Activity Group "Chełmoński Land"
19	Local Activity Group "Common Route"
20	Local Activity Group – Friendly Mazowsze
21	Foundation Partners Group Local Activities "Train Krasinski"
22	ASSOCIATION „CAPITAL-LABOR-DEVELOPMENT"
23	Local Activity Group "Echo of the Forest Bolimowska „
24	Local Activity Group Minsk Land
25	TOTAL ACTIVE Foundation
26	The association "Between the Vistula and the Kampinos"
27	Association of Social Self-Local Activity Group
28	Local Activity Group „Warka"
29	Local Activity Group "All Together"
30	Association of Local Activity Group "Neighbor Mazowsze"
31	Association of Local Activity Group "Green Neighborhood"
32	Local Activity Group "GREEN SIOŁO"
33	Local Activity Group "On sandstone"
34	Association of Local Activity Group – Powered by county Garwoliński
35	Association of Local Activity Group "TOGETHER FOR DEVELOPMENT"

*Source:* PRODUCT LAG – Local Activity Groups and their activities in rural areas, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Warsaw 2012

Polish LAGs works as foundations, associations, unions, associations, and the "special" associations established under the provisions of the Act of 7 March 2007 on support for rural development with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Journal of Laws, No. 64, pos. 427, with later amended). Out of the 338 LAGs in Poland, until 310 groups chose form of association. In addition, there are 21 foundations and 7 trade associations (Augustynowicz M., 2011).

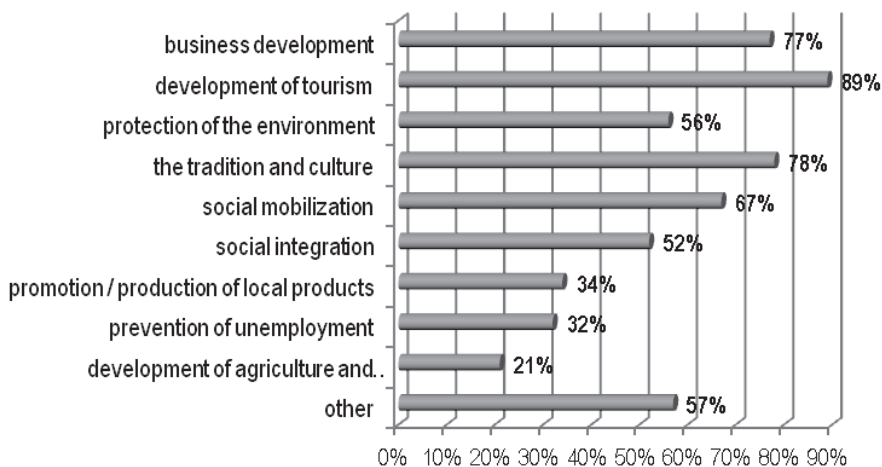
### 3. Local Development Strategies

Local Activity Groups are responsible for creating and implementing a local development strategy for their territory and the distribution of grants for these purposes. Local rural community is developing a Local Development Strategy (LDS), the content of which must be consistent with that defined in the implementing regulations. One of the main elements of the strategy is to present the general and specific objectives.

Objectives should meet the SMART criteria, it means to be (Futymski, Kamiński, 2008):

- S (specific) – a solution to the problems identified by the strategy and challenges;
- M (measurable) – measured by indicators – objective must have a indicator and scale values;
- A (ambitious) – ambitious;
- R (rational) – possible to achieve;
- T (time-bounded) – time horizon.

Most LDS implemented by the LAGs indicate specific objectives included within the following areas: prevention of unemployment, promotion or production of local products, social mobilization, the tradition, environment, development of tourism, the development of agriculture (Figure no. 1) (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2009).



**Figure 1.** The specific objectives of the LAG in Poland (in %)

*Source:* own study based on data from Axis IV of the RDP 2007–2013 – Local Activity Groups and Local Development Strategies, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Warsaw 2009, p 14

Among other objectives LAGs most indicate a higher quality of life, education, improve safety, improve infrastructure and public space and the overall promotion of local communities.

Budgets of Local Activity Groups (grants) depends on the number of people registered for permanent residence in the LAG. The implementation of the local development strategy LAG has at its disposal is an amount equal to the product of number of inhabitants and rate of 116 PLN. In addition, LAG can get 29 PLN operating costs and 3 PLN for cooperation projects.

The role of the LAG in the selection of projects and operations financed by the EU is the following:

- implementation of LDS (about 79% of the LDS budget);
- preparation and implementation of projects and transnational cooperation (approximately 2% of the LDS budget);
- strengthening the institutional capacity of LAG and its members (up to 15% of the budget);
- the acquisition of skills and activation (approximately 4% of the budget).

The implementation of LDS is selected projects through a competitive process, in four patterns: country renewal and development, diversification into non-agricultural activities, creation and development of micro and small projects. Each LAG based on the LDS chooses topics of projects and determines the total pool of funds for financing projects in each of the schemas.

LAG requests Provincial Government to open call for grant aid, assess the proposals of the LDS, evaluates applications based on local criteria for selecting, recommending proposals for grant support. LAG also monitors the implementation of projects that have received support and advises the implementers. LAG is not fully autonomous in decision-making, calls for proposals accepted regional authority and the funds paid by the regional authority or the Agency for Restructurisation and Modernization of Agriculture.

#### **4. Association of Social Help Local Groups as an example of LAG in Poland**

The initiators of the creation of the Social Help Association – Local Activity Group (SSS-LAG) were institutions from public administration and local government, social security and trade unions (Kapczyński, 2010). SSS-LAG brings together 68 members, including 16 legal entities and 53 individuals. Among the members of the Association include Representatives: Regional Labour Office in Ciechanów District Employment Offices in Mława and Zuořmin, entrepreneurs, representatives of local governments in Biežuń, Zuořmin, Lutocin, Kuczbork, Lubowidz, Siemiątkowo, Radzanów, Strzegow, Szreńsk, Wińniew, Lipowiec Koscielny, Głinojeck and Lidzbark, Association tourist farms “Green Northern Mazowsze”, University of

Warsaw – Faculty of Management’s Ciechanów and farmers (Assumptions to LDS for SSS-LAG, 2009).

Area of SSS-LAG’s Effect is mostly rural (9) and urban areas (4). Gliniojeck, Biezuń, Żuromin and Lidzbark as urban and rural areas have less than 20 thousand residents, so they can be incorporated into the present institutions. LAG area is 4.48% of the Mazowieckie Province, and is inhabited by 1.46% of the total population of the region’s population and 1.0% Warmia – Mazury 1.1%. LAG area is inhabited 87 875 people,<sup>3)</sup> including 3 668 unemployed.<sup>4)</sup>

The aim of SSS-LAG is implementation of tasks related to the development of local activity to mitigate effects of unemployment, promotion of entrepreneurship in rural district of Zuromin, Mława, Gliniojeck and town with district Lidzbark.

**Table 2.** The main objectives and details recorded in the LDS

<b>Vision</b>	Area attractive for settlement – “to want to live here” and promoting development of local entrepreneurship, weekend tourism center, the area known in the region with local products				
<b>General objectives</b>	<b>I.</b> Improving the quality of life in rural areas including conditions of employment			<b>II.</b> Valorisation of natural and cultural resources	
<b>Specific objectives</b>	<b>I.1.</b> The development of tourism and agrotourism	<b>I.2.</b> Development and promotion of entrepreneurship, including agricultural services	<b>I.3.</b> To develop the products and services of local	<b>II.1.</b> Preservation and promotion of cultural and natural heritage	<b>II.2.</b> The development of agriculture through advice, training and promotion of modern methods of farming, with particular emphasis on environmental concerns and healthy food

Source: own study based on Długolecki A, Stefanski J., Local Development Strategy for the SSS-LAG, Ciechanów 2012

The SSS-LAG provides assistance to families in difficult situation, people with disabilities, people at risk of social exclusion, through charitable activities, integration, cultural and scientific organization of training courses and conferences to stimulate economic activity, providing expert advice in the field of fundraising, business, professional qualifications. The aim of the Association are also activities

<sup>3)</sup> Data according to the Civil Registration Offices Municipalities included in the LAG area.

<sup>4)</sup> Data by Regional Labour Office in Mława and Żuromin and High School in Ciechanów.

and developing cultural awareness of society, keeping local traditions, protect the environment, ecology, development of science, culture and arts, promotion of physical culture, sport and active recreation (Table 2) (Długołęcki, Stefański, 2012).

**Table 3.** Objectives and measures to achieve in 2015

The general objectives	Indicator	The value of the expected in 2015
I. Improving the quality of life, including conditions of employment II. Valorisation of natural resources and culture.	Migration rate per 1,000 population	-3
	Entrepreneurship rate – the number of operators in the TAX per 1000 inhabitants	56
	Number of tourists per 100 inhabitants (Schneider's indicator)	350
<b>I.1.1.</b> Development of infrastructure, gastronomical and accommodation	1. Number of new and modernized dining options	3
	2. Number of new and modernized farm tourism, including e-services	5
<b>I.2.1.</b> The creation of new businesses and investment support existing and creation of new jobs	3. Number of new, upgraded or better-equipped enterprises including e-services	28
	4. Number of farmers or family members who started a non-agricultural activity	14
	5. Number of new jobs, including self-employment	28
<b>I.3.1.</b> Creating a base for hiking, cycling and water mainly along the river Wkra	6. Number of new hiking trails	3
	7. Number of new cycle paths	3
	8. Number of developed sites related to tourism (parking, lighting these places, the sidewalks at these locations), including town centers	13
	9. Number of bases for the development of gastronomical infrastructure and accommodation along the hiking trails	8
	10. Number of modernized existing and new demarcated and marked trails for hiking	3
	11. Number of new boathouses	2
	12. Number of purchased equipment for water sports	4
13. Number of executed promotional activities in the field of tourism	4	



continued table 3

The general objectives	Indicator	The value of the expected in 2015
<b>II.1.1</b> Sports adults, children and adolescents	14. Number of new or modernized sports and recreation facilities, including a base for active leisure of children and young adults	15
	15. Number of cultural or sports and recreation or better equipped teams (clubs) sporting or artistic groups	17
	16. Number of new or modernized play-grounds	13
	17. Number of new or modernized dayrooms	40
<b>II.2.1</b> Efforts to adapt to the requirements of local EU waste management and environmental protection in the LAG	18. Number of farmers covered by training and consultancy	60

Source: Długołęcki, Stefański, Local Development Strategy for the SSS-LAG, Ciechanów 2012

The general objectives are strictly linked to the planning documents for the region. These documents include: Mazowieckie Province Development Strategy 2020, the District Development Strategy Zuromin, Mława, Ciechanów, Działdowo and Development Strategies of each of the member municipalities. In each strategy records of employment growth competitiveness can be found, shaping the identity of the region, the development of tourism infrastructure, recreation and social services, promoting innovation and environmental protection.<sup>5)</sup>

The following projects (defined as number of projects or operations), and preferred types of operations include strategic intentions LDS (Table 3).

Owing to the funding SSS-LAG is working on the development of:

- tourism by creating a base for hiking, cycling and water centered around the river Wkra (Newsletter, 2010);
- entrepreneurship by creating a new businesses or provide support for the development of existing or creation of new jobs, creating vacancies, modernization of enterprises, their use in e-services; for farmers and their family members to create the possibility of starting a secondary activity that would be a an additional source of income; the large and absorptive market for goods and services, and a number of farms, poultry and eggs;

<sup>5)</sup> More: SR WM, intermediate objectives 1–5.

- rural economy through the provision of advice and training operation to adapt to the requirements of households Common Agricultural Policy, especially on environmental issues and waste management in the area of LAG, and therefore promotes projects that contribute to creation of the information centers, organizing cycle training to farmers and of producers to local products;
- rural tourism through the creation or modernization of infrastructure gastronomical and accommodation farm tourism;
- promotion of local products and services, training and promotion of traditional products, environmental and regional construction of facilities for the purpose of promotion, organization of events, exhibitions and fairs;
- the local heritage by including equipping of sports clubs and arts, building of sports facilities for the children to their summer and winter activities, upgrading playgrounds, organization of recreational, cultural and sporting events, rallies, etc.

## 5. Conclusions

Local Activity Group is a new organization in the area of social life in the Polish countryside. Their aim is to stimulate the activity of rural communities and their participation in the development and implementation of local development strategies. Looking for new ways to improve the quality of life in rural areas, to act as advisors, provide training, and activate the local community.

Completed projects in accordance with the LDS influence on the development local economy through business development, introduction of new services and products. With the financial assistance received there are created new jobs, provide income, and also a source of livelihood for the applicant and his family. Infrastructure projects improve the quality of life in rural areas, as exemplified by the built sports fields, providing residents access to modern sports infrastructure. These projects are also affected by an increase in the attractiveness of rural areas.

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