

Local Self-Government as an Architect of Coalitions for Local Development¹

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Abstract

The paper addresses the new role played by local self-government units in Poland. Main factors that determine the public authorities' capacity to become architects of coalitions for local development are identified. Coalitions are defined as partnerships linking and mobilizing stakeholders anchored in three sectors: public, economic and non-governmental. The coalition-making role of the public organs is investigated on the basis of Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are pro-developmental cross-sector organizations established in rural areas of the Podkarpackie (Sub-Carpathian) Voivodeship, Poland. Findings are presented that draw on quantitative and qualitative results of the research project that investigated mechanisms involved in the operation of the cross-sector coalitions. The dominant role of the public authorities in those coalitions is demonstrated. The Community-led Local Development model is referred to as the future framework for LAGs.

Keywords: local government, local development, Local Action Groups, Community-led Local Development, Poland

Introduction

Municipal self-government delivers nearly 70% of all public services in Poland, which constitutes a serious organizational and financial challenge for public authorities in charge of administrative units, especially those whose resident population is less than 5 thousand². Moreover, the role of territorial self-government is not limited to the delivery of public services. Basing on a new paradigm of local development, functions of the municipal public authorities are defined more holistically.

The new paradigm of local development emphasizes a multi-dimensional nature of activities undertaken by public administration at all sub-national tiers. In terms of agency, this means that local authorities are made responsible for creating conditions in which various

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² Polish municipalities count 15,5 thousand residents on average. However, 1967 out of their total number (2479) count less than 15 thousand residents (GUS, 2013, pp. 46, 48).

public and non-public stakeholders can co-operate in order to jointly tackle socio-economic problems of local communities involved. In terms of objectives, this means that local public policy-making is expected to become both multi-directional and integrated in order to make an impact on several aspects of socio-economic life simultaneously.

The need to act and intervene multi-dimensionally is especially important when programming and implementing policies of local development, whose spatial reach and socio-economic effects are increasingly more difficult to delimit precisely. This is, *inter alia*, because administrative boundaries of territorial units are becoming ever more porous: mobility of local residents grows in parallel to de-territorialization of employment; many types of economic activity have become footloose; service provision can often be either delocalized or de-territorialized (including public services).

Also, public support for local development ceases to be exclusively focused on promotion of economic activity in the local community. It starts (again) to include broader issues of social dynamics, including the quality of life. This change finds reflection in new expectations expressed by entrepreneurs who are no longer satisfied with opportunities to maximize their profit. They want to live in a pleasant and friendly environment as well, having access to high standard public services and attractive leisure offers. Such expectations are fully congruent with the local societies' general needs. Therefore, new municipal policies of development are expected to become more holistic and multi-dimensional.

Unfortunately, many small municipalities, especially the ones located in rural areas, find it increasingly more difficult to embark on such multi-dimensional policies because of organizational shortages, including human resources. In several cases, the municipal authorities are unable to implement such policies because of severe financial constraints. In the circumstances, the municipal public authorities may resort to redefining their traditional roles and instruments. One of the options is for them to turn into an animator who creates conditions that foster other local actors' stronger involvement in making and implementing decisions about territorial development.

In the present paper we are interested in this new role played by local self-government units in Poland. We identify main factors that determine the public authorities' capacity to become architects of coalitions for local development. Coalitions of this kind attempt to link and mobilize stakeholders who represent three sectors: public, economic and social (non-governmental). We investigate the coalition-making role of the public organs basing on the

case of Local Action Groups (LAGs) which are pro-developmental cross-sector organizations established in rural areas of the Podkarpackie (Sub-Carpathian) Voivodeship³.

Supported by the Axis 4 LEADER of the Program for Rural Areas' Development 2007-2013, the LAGs were explicitly created to overcome (at least partly) developmental difficulties experienced by small rural municipalities. We pay special attention to the role played by the municipal authorities in the establishing and functioning of the LAGs, which include local stakeholders from all of the three sectors. Basing on our field research, we note these coalitions' capacity to promote more integrated and participative development in the rural municipalities. However, a question arises about the LAGs' future goodness of fit with the program of Community-led Local Development (CLLD) which is to replace the LEADER program in the period 2014-2020.

The paper is structured in the following manner: in the first section the concept of local development is discussed, inclusive of development-related competencies of local territorial self-government in Poland. In the second section, the Community Initiative LEADER is briefly presented, which provides an organizational-financial framework for the LAGs, encouraging also their conceptualization in terms of voluntary, cross-sector coalitions for local development. In the third section the actual role of municipal authorities in the establishing and operating of the LAGs in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship is focused upon.

Findings are presented that draw on quantitative and qualitative results of our research project (see footnote 1) that investigated mechanisms involved in the operation of those cross-sector coalitions, which are formally premised on the principle of partnership between the three sectors. The dominant role of the public authorities in the LAG coalitions is demonstrated. In the final section of the paper, the CLLD model is overviewed briefly. The paper ends with conclusions concerning the viability of the LAGs as coalitions for local development in the CLLD framework.

Public authorities' responsibility for local development

As stressed by Andrzej Sobczyk, „endogenous potential, whose mobilization ensures sustainable local [...] dynamic” (2010, p. 126) is currently considered the main factor of local development. This approach exemplifies the first group of definitions of local development as distinguished by Agnieszka Ziomek: 1) definitions that concentrate on intentional (goal-oriented) activities undertaken by local residents, units of self-government and other local

³ Voivodeships are the biggest administrative-territorial units in Poland, which are equivalent to NUTS 2.

actors; 2) definitions that focus on increasing economic efficiency of the region, which is achieved by mobilization of its material and financial resources (2010, p. 181).

Moreover, local development is ever more frequently perceived in terms of „harmonized and systematic activities that involve the local community, the local authorities and the remaining actors who operate in the given municipality”. These activities are oriented toward „creating new and improving existing assets of the municipality, creating favorable conditions for the local economy and entrepreneurship as well as providing for the spatial and environmental order” (Szewczuk, Kogut-Jaworska, Ziolo, 2011, pp. 21-23). Clearly, the territorial dimension is highlighted in so defined local development, which marks a break with thinking about development in terms of sector-based interventionism. Instead, economic, spatial, social and cultural features of the given territorial unit are all to be taken into account, including the municipal residents’ needs alongside their value preferences and resources (Sobczyk, 2010, p. 126).

It follows that, basing on the new developmental paradigm, private local actors are perceived as integral factors of local development, which should be reflected in their inclusion in public decision-making processes concerning preferred directions of local development. Furthermore, the local economic and non-governmental actors are expected to pursue their proper activities in ways that may contribute to the whole local community’s developmental goals. It is assumed that their contributions to the collective goals can be greatly facilitated if their individual strategic choices are informed with a feeling of belonging to the specific, place-based communities.

Organs of local territorial self-government play a crucial role in steering and organizing the developmental processes, being endowed in Poland with competences that enable them a considerable degree of flexibility in supporting initiatives to increase the local residents’ well-being. However, interestingly, with reference to the municipal level, the existing legal regulations do not list local development explicitly in terms of the public authorities’ task. Nevertheless, among their other 22 assigned tasks to do with satisfying needs of the local communities, one could hardly indicate an obligation that is not related – directly or indirectly – to the broadly defined local development⁴.

Art. 6 of the Local Government Act delegates to the municipal level all such tasks that are not explicitly assigned by law to other subjects (entities). This arrangement provides the public authorities with considerable autonomy – in the legal sense – as far as their

⁴ Art. 7, Act of 8 March 1990 concerning municipal self-government (Dz. U. 1990, nr 16, poz. 95).

intervention in the field of local development. In the Act concerning Principles of Development Policy Implementation, that was adopted on 6 December 2006⁵, the Polish Legislator defined the municipal responsibilities in the field of development more precisely, even if explaining them only succinctly. Art. 3 of this Act lists the following public organs to be involved in the programming and implementation of the policy of development: the Council of Ministers, regional self-government (at the Voivodeship level), the county-level self-government and, finally, the municipal self-government.

Importantly, regulations contained in the two quoted Acts of Parliament do not exhaust legal foundations basing upon which municipal authorities may take action aimed at stimulating local development in Poland. As a result, in legal, political and societal terms territorial self-government is the key actor of local development in Poland. It follows that it is commonly held responsible for developmental dynamic and its outcomes. This explains, *inter alia*, why local public authorities may (and are expected to) play the role of an architect and/or strategic partner in coalitions for local development. This role of the municipal authorities is clearly visible in Local Action Groups, which are pro-developmental organizations established in rural areas in the framework of the LEADER program.

The LEADER and Local Action Groups

The Community Initiative LEADER⁶ was first launched in 1991. It contributed to promotion of an integrated approach to development in rural areas. It had been designed basing on an assumption that development must have endogenous roots. Therefore, support available through the LEADER Initiative was earmarked for creating conditions that fostered rural residents' involvement in decisions concerning their local ways to develop. At the same time, an emphasis was put on innovative inputs in rural development. Also, the rural pro-developmental initiatives were expected to be holistic in terms of their scope and impact (European Commission, 2006, p. 6).

Implementation of the LEADER Initiative ended in 1993, which was followed up by the LEADER II in the period 1994-1999. Subsequently, the LEADER+ program was created, which lasted until 2006. The LEADER+ was made available – since 2004 – to the new EU Member States, including Poland. During the 2007-2013 programming period, the LEADER program was integrated with national programs for rural areas, continuing to receive support

⁵ Act of 6 December 2006 concerning Principles of Development Policy Implementation (Dz. U. 2009, nr 74, poz. 712).

⁶ LEADER –*Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale* – Linkages between Actions Addressing Development of Rural Economy.

in the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In Poland, a special axis of the National Program for Rural Areas' Development (Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich [PROW]) was created in order to implement the LEADER component.

It needs to be stressed that LEADER is not just one of the many similar EU programs. Rather, it stands for a specific methodology of bottom-up action in impoverished rural areas. Ultimately, owing to its demonstrated merits, this approach to local development is currently also applied in urban areas. In general, the LEADER approach features the following characteristics (European Commission, 2006, pp. 8-14):

1. territoriality – initiatives are focused on small and bounded areas which are relatively homogenous in economic, social and cultural terms; the local residents' traditions, shared experiences, needs and expectations are integral part of this place-based approach;
2. a bottom-up character – the residents are offered an opportunity to express and meet their needs and expectations; conditions must be created to facilitate their involvement in decisions and actions that determine directions of local development;
3. partnership – key actors who represent the public, social (non-governmental) and economic sector in the given local community are expected to form pro-developmental networks that, preferably, coalesce into partnerships called Local Action Groups;
4. innovative inputs – innovation is emphasized when drafting local strategies of development and supporting projects, whose aim is to introduce new products, new services or new organizational arrangements in the local communities involved;
5. integrated intervention – the individual developmental projects implemented within the LEADER framework should complement and reinforce one another, being oriented to improving all aspects of local life;
6. local networks – networks of local actors need to be created as platforms for exchanging and sharing information, for mutual learning and pooling resources as well as negotiating most desirable directions and outcomes of local development;
7. co-operation between networks – the need to build networks of networks is highlighted within regions as well as between regions and countries.

Apart from the path-breaking methodology of development, the institutionalization of the LEADER approach doubtlessly created an opportunity for the municipal authorities to reach for additional financial resources that could be used to stimulate local development. In the circumstances, wherever there was no other strong social entrepreneur, the public organs

embraced the role of an initiator of a local pro-developmental coalition which, in accordance with the LEADER program's requirements, eventually had to be registered in the form of a Local Action Group.

A single LAG covers an area corresponding to – at least – 2 rural (or rural-urban) municipalities. Towns inhabited by more than 20 thousand residents are, however, excluded from participation in the LAGs. A single LAG's area may be inhabited by between 10 thousand and 150 thousand of residents (MRiRW, 2007, pp. 329-330).

The popularity of the LEADER+ and the LEADER program in Poland is best evidenced by the fact that 338 Polish LAGs cover 93,22% of the areas that were allowed to participate in the program, which amounts to 278 235,7 km². In terms of population, the 338 Polish LAGs count 16 877 180 residents altogether, which is equal to 91,29% of the population living in the Polish rural areas (constituting 44,27% of the country's total population) (MRiRW, 2009, pp. 6-7).

The LAGs operate basing mainly on regulations included in the Act of 7 March 2007 concerning support for development of rural areas with a contribution from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Dz. U. 2007., nr 64, poz. 427). However, they must also follow numerous minor regulations issued by the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

In most cases, the Polish LAGs are registered as so called special associations. Like regular associations they are legal persons who have their own statutes and autonomous organs, such as the general assembly of members, the executive board and the auditing board. However, on top of this, they also have a council – a decision-making organ which is responsible for evaluation and selection of developmental project applications that are submitted by local applicants for funding *via* the LAGs. The main criterion used for evaluation and selection of the project applications is their compliance with the LAGs' Local Development Strategies. Unlike other types of associations, the LAGs are supervised by the regional self-government organs.

The legal and organizational construction of the LAGs endows them with a capacity to create a strong basis for representation of local interests. The LAGs' membership structures as well as their statutory organs must reflect the principle of cross-sector partnership⁷. Being

⁷ Fearing that the partnerships could be dominated by public stakeholders – who have greater financial, organizational and human resources as well as being more experienced in European projects' implementation – a principle was introduced that required at least 50% of the stakeholders to be recruited from among the social and economic partners (this principle was applied to both the general membership structures and the executive and decision-making organs of the LAGs).

legal persons who manage (predominantly) public financial resources, they are also obliged to ensure full transparency of their activities. Moreover, they are required to inform their local societies regularly about their decision-making processes as well as consulting their decisions and plans for action with the local stakeholders. Their statutory activities are explicitly oriented to integration and mobilization of the local societies.

Paradoxically, some of their organizational principles seem to make it difficult for the LAGs to meet expectations related to their bottom-up and voluntary character. Especially, their obligation to ensure that their membership structures and organs meet the cross-sector partnership criteria (see footnote 7), actually restricts their autonomy in recruiting members, electing organs and making decisions. At the same time, given a weak propensity for cross-sector co-operation in rural Poland, introducing this kind of a legal requirement might, in many cases, be considered as the only way to establish a multi-sector developmental coalition at the local level.

One more important issue to be mentioned at this point is the fact that the local public authorities' interests are commonly perceived as identical with the interests of the whole local community in Poland. This perception is one of the main reasons why their strategic role in creating coalitions for local development such as the LAGs is widely accepted in society. However, there are other reasons involved, too, that facilitate their leadership, if not overt domination, in the local coalition-building. In the next section of the paper, which is basing on our empirical research, the key role of the local authorities in the creation and operation of the LAGs is discussed in more detail.

Local self-government as a key stakeholder of the Local Action Groups

The research project, whose results are presented below, aimed to cover all of the LAGs established in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship for the period 2007-2013. The field research included both quantitative component – whereby questionnaires were distributed with the aim of reaching all of the LAG members – and a qualitative component which consisted of participant observation and in-depth interviews that were conducted with representatives of pre-selected LAGs. Ultimately, 518 respondents (33% of all LAG members) took part in the quantitative part of the project. They represented 26 LAGs. The qualitative part involved 75 interviewees.

In the ultimate sample, the LAG members who represented social organizations, business entities, themselves (meaning: physical persons) as well as other non-public categories

constituted 63,9% of the respondents, whereas the public sector representatives amounted to 28% of the respondents (table 1).

Table 1. Shares of various categories in the sample of respondents

Units of territorial self-government	26,6%
Self-government associations	1,4%
Social organizations	19,7%
Economic entities	8,1%
Physical persons	34,4%
Other	1,7%
Data unavailable	8,1%

Source: the Authors' calculations.

In quantitative terms, the representatives of public authorities did not rank first. However, several respondents mentioned problems that the LAGs had faced when recruiting members representing non-public sectors. In particular, the involvement of local business representatives seemed unsatisfactory, which evidenced the private economic actors' weak interest in such collective initiatives. In consequence, participation of the local entrepreneurs in the LAGs was usually limited to formal membership. Even if they were adequately represented in the executive and decision-making organs of these organizations, which, as mentioned, was required by law, their actual involvement in the LAGs' activities was seen as insufficient.

Another serious problem – which was also identified by other researchers (Halamska, Michalska, Śpiewak, 2010; Furmankiewicz, 2013) – concerned practices whereby the members' sector identification was manipulated. For example, a LAG member, who officially represented a social organization or a business entity in the LAG coalition, could simultaneously turn out to be an employee of a local administration unit or a councilor involved in territorial self-government. Members of this kind had been most often recruited in the initial stages, which was routine whenever it was the public authorities who had initiated and coordinated the process to establish a LAG. Such practices could serve three basic functions: 1. they facilitated the creation of the LAGs; 2. they helped the LAGs to meet the legal requirements concerning their membership structures; and/or 3. they ensured the public authorities' control over the LAGs.

On the one hand such practices could reduce the scope of local interests represented in the LAGs as coalitions for local development, making them less inclusive. Also, they may have undermined the position of non-public sector stakeholders in the LAGs, whose representation – as demonstrated by the case of economic actors – was already distorted. In consequence, the non-public stakeholders might have had too weak influence on decisions

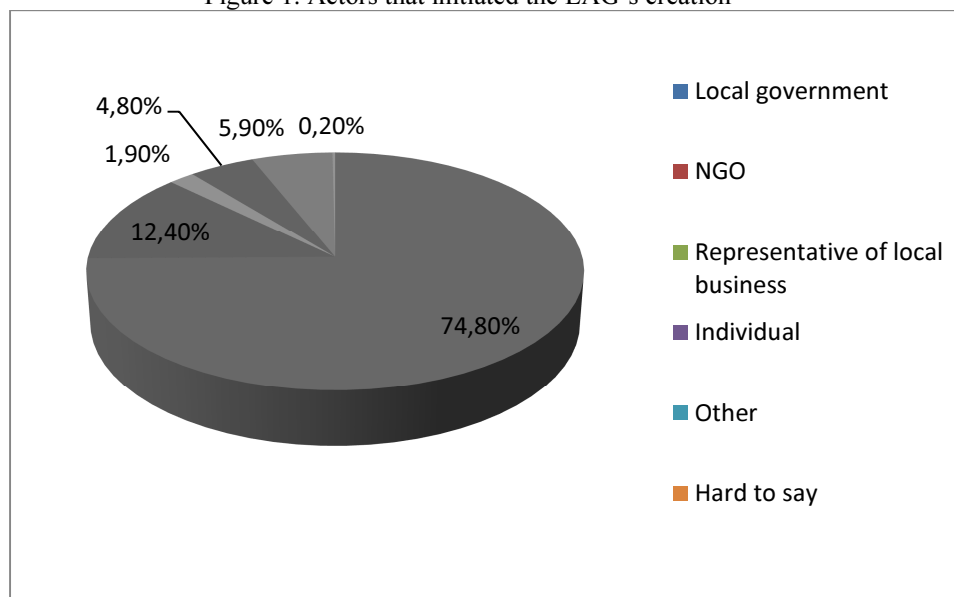
concerning directions of local development that were taken by the LAGs. Lastly, this kind of „gerrymandering” could affect the legitimacy of the LAGs by breeding suspicions that they were instruments used by the public authorities to reinforce the latter’s dominance in the field of local development.

On the other hand, paradoxically, the sources and effects of those practices could be interpreted in more positive/pragmatic terms. Firstly, the architects of the LAGs often had to act in rural communities where the social and economic sectors were very weak. In other words, the spontaneous supply of the non-public actors who were willing to access the LAGs might have been limited. Since the public authorities were usually determined to establish a coalition for local development that could be supported in the framework of the LEADER program, they might have experienced “a necessity” to gerrymander the LAGs’ membership in order to fulfill the restrictive legal obligations that had imposed on them the requirement to secure the at least 50% share of the non-public stakeholders.

Secondly, the creation and successful operation of pro-developmental coalitions such as the LAGs was doubtlessly premised on availability of professional know-how and experience in absorbing the EU funding. Those assets could be, in many cases, only provided by persons closely related to the local public administration in rural areas. Thirdly, apart from being complicated, the programming and implementation procedures imposed on the LAGs by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development required significant up-front financial contributions of the stakeholders involved, whereby (initially) no institutional assistance was envisaged at the national level. In many impoverished rural communities the local territorial government was the only stakeholder capable of providing this kind of contribution on behalf of the whole coalition.

The strong part played by the local self-government organs in establishing of the LAGs as *sui generis* coalitions for local development to be funded by the LEADER component of the national Program for Rural Areas’ Development is clearly documented by the results of our research. Nearly 75% of our respondents indicated that their LAG had been created owing to an initiative undertaken by the municipal authorities (figure 1). Only slightly more than 12% pointed at a social organization; less than 5% indicated a physical person, and even fewer respondents – an entrepreneur as an architect of their LAGs.

Figure 1. Actors that initiated the LAG's creation



Source: the Authors' calculations.

The dominant role played by the local authorities in the creation of the LAGs was confirmed by nation-wide research, even though their dominance proved not so pronounced as in the Podkarpackie Province: 44% of the national respondents indicated the local territorial self-government organ as an architect of their LAGs (Knieć, 2010, p. 19). One of our interviewees described the process of a LAG's creation in the following manner, starting from the idea's emergence and ending with the LAG's successful establishing:

I happened to be a mayor at that time (...) and one day I found myself taking part in a meeting organized at the Marshal Office and after the meeting the Marshal tells me that there is going to be another meeting with the already existing LAGs [some of the LAGs had been created in the framework of the LEADER+ program] and if I'm interested I should come and listen to what they say. And so I went there and listened to what they were talking about, even though I did not quite understand what was it all about. But I liked it because they talked a lot about some kind of societal initiatives (...) And later it just all began like this, I first organized a meeting of mayors from some municipalities, because I've come to the conclusion that it will be easier for us to recruit the leaders using the self-government units (...) The mayors brought with them to this meeting in K. [the name of one of the municipalities participating in this LAG] leaders from their local communities, ladies from rural housewives' societies, some associations' chairmen, some active councilors, and this is how all this began (XII/1/CA).

It seems that this manner of the local public authorities' involvement in the creation of the LAGs was quite typical in the Podkarpackie Voivodship. Importantly, it was most often highly appreciated.

What is more, the leading role of the municipal self-government organs was appreciated not only during the process when the LAGs were being formed. It was also welcomed at a later stage, when the newly established LAGs were obliged to produce their strategic documents. The public administration employees were frequently the key contributors to the

LAGs' Local Development Strategies (LDS) – unless external experts were commissioned. The know-how, experience and professional skills of the local government staff were no less essential when the LAGs started to apply for and absorb the EU financial support. Also, apart from procedural and technical know-how, working contacts made earlier by the local mayors with the Marshal Offices were highly appreciated by the LAGs. Those contacts could be used in situations when formal procedures proved of no help. This is how one of our interviewees put it:

(...) well, it was also owing to the mayors' help, because a group like ours, if it had had no support on the part of this mayor, that mayor and another one, it would have stood no chance of achieving anything at the Marshal Office (...) they, being from territorial self-government, are knowledgeable about all those structures, [they know] where to find money and how to arrange it all (VI/8/ZA).

As mentioned, one of the biggest advantages of the local self-government organs' involvement in the LAGs' structures was the financial stability that they could provide. The availability of financial resources was crucial because the LEADER component, in which the LAGs participated, was based – similarly to other EU programs – on principles of additional funding and re-financing of developmental tasks. As such, the municipal authorities could demonstrate the biggest financial resources which were earmarked for local development. If necessary, they could take loans on preferential terms as well. Also, the public authorities agreed to shoulder the biggest share of the membership fees collected by the LAGs. Lastly, in the majority of cases, it was the municipal governments that secured premises for the LAGs' offices – often free of charge or at reduced rates.

Those financial realities of the LAGs were stressed by all our respondents and interviewees. This is, for example, demonstrated by distribution of answers to a question concerning factors that motivated them to form a coalition such as their LAG. Even though “local needs” proved to be the most frequently indicated (74,8%), this choice was followed by 46,5% indications pointing to the necessity to institutionalize co-operation in the form of the LAG in order to be able to apply for external financial support for local development. In consequence, since the LEADER component of the Program for Rural Areas' Development was commonly interpreted in terms of yet another source of external (EU) funding, the LAGs were most often treated as just one more way to get access to this funding. This instrumental motivation was openly admitted by several interviewees. One of them stated:

To tell you the truth, it was all initiated by the people from the [territorial] self-government, small town mayors, rural mayors. This started because you need to find the money, and how else to find it? There was no other way than to have to create this association [i.e. the LAG]. (IV)

Furthermore, the dominant position of the municipal governments within the LAG coalitions for local development finds also reflection in the manner in which the financial means available to the LAGs from the LEADER component were distributed among the four types of activity permitted within the program in the 2007-2013 period. The data for the Podkarpackie Voivodeship evidence the following logic of allocation:

1. Diversification toward non-agricultural economic activity: 11 158 339.51 PLN (ca. 2 675 860 Euro) – 6.31%
2. Creation and development of micro-enterprises: 21 426 717.30 PLN (ca. 5 138 301 Euro) – 12.13%
3. Village renewal and development: 106 868 039.71 PLN (ca. 25 627 827 Euro) – 60.48%
4. Small projects: 37 255 512.26 PLN (ca. 8 934 175) – 21.08% (Pawłowska, Gąsior-Niemiec, Kołomycew 2014).

Noteworthy, financial support available through Activity 1 and Activity 2 was typically earmarked for farmers and local businesses, while non-governmental and grassroots organizations could apply for funding through Activity 4. By contrast, the municipal organs were by far the most frequent beneficiary of financial support available *via* Activity 3. As is easily seen from the data presented above, the share of the funding allocated to Activity 3. was the biggest.

What is more, the projects supported through Activity 3. carried, on average, the biggest financial value, which could reach up to 500 000 PLN (ca. 120 000 euro). They were usually related to building various types of infrastructure intended for public use, which could facilitate development of tourism, sports, culture and leisure opportunities. Other types of projects concentrated on improvement of public space, restoration of heritage, renovation of monuments etc. In their majority, the projects implemented *via* Activity 3. were thus focused on public utilities and amenities whose construction and maintenance are listed among the municipal self-government's assigned tasks. In many rural municipalities regularly available financial means to meet obligations of this kind are very limited.

Community-led Local Development

In the new EU financial perspective 2014-2020, the LEADER approach is to evolve in the direction of a new model called Community-led Local Development (CLLD). The CLLD model preserves the fundamental LEADER's features, such as: the bottom-up initiative, territoriality, integrated actions, partnership, innovation, decentralization of management and

financing as well as networking and co-operation. What distinguishes the CLLD from the LEADER model is first of all the fact that it may be supported by all of the four major EU structural funds: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF).

The CLLD model is to be an obligatory instrument in the area of Common Agricultural Policy, whereas its implementation remains optional in the other policy fields – subject to decisions taken by the individual Member States (MIiR, 2014, p. 3). Even if only optional, the expansion of collaborative and participative ways to involve local citizens in public policies must be interpreted in terms of an official appreciation of the LEADER approach⁸. Irrespective of the factors responsible for the promotion of local coalitions made up of stakeholders anchored in different sectors, in the 2014-2020 financial perspective such local coalitions will be expected to increase their scope of action.

For example, they will need to plan activities aimed at: facilitating access to the labor market for the long-unemployed and professionally passive; improving access to high quality public services; supporting social entrepreneurship; re-developing impoverished urban and rural communities. Importantly, all of the listed activities are found among the tasks attributed by law to the territorial self-government in Poland. In the circumstances, it is almost certain that local coalitions operating under the CLLD will be used to support the municipal public organs in fulfilling their responsibilities. This is likely to further reinforce the dominant role played in them by the public authorities. Their strategic collaboration and skillful coordination will also be crucial because an opportunity to finance developmental initiatives through the CLLD mechanisms is expected to trigger the effects of scale.

This is because the reach of activities pursued will be able to cover an area exceeding a single municipality and thus reaching a bigger population. For the same reason, the CLLD coalitions will be able to involve more stakeholders and, hopefully, make them more engaged in cross-sector enterprises. In consequence, the initiatives undertaken in accordance with the CLLD model will have a supra-local character with all of the consequences involved. Their positive consequences will certainly include more opportunities to overcome financial and organizational constraints typical of small municipalities. Their negative consequences might

⁸ However, it should be noticed that the further promotion of institutionalized, cross-sector coalitions based on the principle of partnership is in no lesser degree related to the priority given by the EU decision-makers to institutional transformation pursued in accordance with theories of the New Public Governance.

entail a loss of the local feeling and the relative operational accessibility that was typical of the LAGs.

Conclusions

Research focused on members of the Local Action Groups in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship demonstrates that the local public authorities were the most frequent architects of this kind of coalitions for local development. What is more, the territorial self-government organs proved to be those coalitions' most powerful stakeholders, offering access to the biggest financial resources, providing most of the needed human and organizational resources as well as mobilizing the other actors to network and co-operate. Also, the local government organs provided the most competent know-how as far as applying for EU financial support earmarked for local development *via* the LEADER component of the national Program for Rural Areas' Development.

However, the dominant position of the municipal authorities in pro-developmental coalitions such as the LAGs was not only secured owing to their structural advantages over the other types of local stakeholders. Apart from being anchored in the existing legal regulations, this position was also made possible because of their strong legitimacy in the role of an animator in the field of local development. Owing to the nearly 25 years of its effective operation in Poland, the municipal self-government has become the most legitimate addressee of expectations that local communities have as far as their development. This conclusion is clearly supported by quite unequivocal evidence produced by our field research on Local Actions Groups (LAGs), which are pro-developmental coalitions established in the Polish rural areas⁹.

The formula of coalitions grouping various stakeholders involved in local development – such as exemplified by the LAGs – has only started to be practiced in Poland. The initial disproportions between the different types of stakeholders involved in the LAGs – in terms of their resources, know-how, capacity to act and, last but not least, their social legitimacy – were too big to genuinely expect a partnership of equals. This explains why – in spite of the requirements imposed by law – the LAGs became dominated by the municipal authorities. Moreover, finding a better balance between the stakeholders representing different sectors does not seem a realistic option in rural parts of Poland, even in a longer term because of the structural weakness of the non-governmental and economic sector there. While this

⁹ Critical remarks concerning the towering role of the local public authorities in the LAGs were only rarely expressed during the in-depth interviews conducted by our research team.

conclusion might read uncomfortable theoretically, it could also be interpreted in a more upbeat tenor since local development is not predominantly about constructing ideally balanced coalitions. Rather, it is about finding most effective ways to make relevant stakeholders involved to the benefit of the local communities.

This pragmatic statement does not preclude an expectation that processes of learning and emancipation on part of the non-public stakeholders may succeed in some local communities, enabling more balanced pro-developmental coalitions to emerge. Inter alia, the formal need to abide by the partnership regulations is likely to result in the so far weaker stakeholders' growing capacity to articulate their needs and interests, which might encourage them to bargain with the so far more powerful public partners on more equal terms. However, the role of an architect will probably continue to be associated with the municipal authorities – not least because of their democratic legitimacy and their assumed interest in the promotion of well-being of the whole local community, whereas the other stakeholders may be perceived as motivated by narrower objectives.

Also, the strategic position of local government is likely to be reinforced when coalitions for local development, such as the LAGs, will start operating according to the CLLD model – receiving more funding and increasing the scale and scope of permitted activities. Such changes may help resolve difficulties experienced by small municipalities more effectively, not the least because they will facilitate processes to create supra-local economies of scale, including in the area of public service delivery. Incentives offered are likely to foster co-operation rather than competition between individual municipalities, which will increase the overall capacity of the public authorities to coordinate developmental processes. By contrast, the roles and positions of the other stakeholders might not necessarily be strengthened under the CLLD model, which is, however, subject to future research. Similarly, systematic research is needed in order to see whether the switch from the LEADER model to the CLLD model will indeed result in more integrated and participative patterns of local development.

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