

## Are LAGs contributing to solving social exclusion problems? The case of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship

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**How to cite:**

Kola-Bezka, M. (2020). Are LAGs contributing to solving social exclusion problems? The case of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 48(48): 35-45. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2020-0012>

**Abstract.** The article draws on research covering all local action groups (LAGs) operating in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship. The objectives include: determining what portion of local development activities implemented by LAGs are activities for social inclusion and what their expected effects are; and determining whether LAG activities for social inclusion are adequate to the scale of social exclusion in the areas where they operate. The research demonstrates that actions against social exclusion were provided for in the strategies of 26 out of 28 LAGs and they were usually not central, but only one of several categories of planned projects. The research also revealed that in the voivodship there is no relationship between the level of threat of social exclusion in the areas where LAGs operate and the level of social inclusiveness of their strategies. It is suggested that the scale and effects of the social inclusion projects planned by LAGs are not adequate to the problems actually occurring in the areas covered by their activity.

**Article details:**

Received: 19 March 2019  
 Revised: 22 April 2019  
 Accepted: 3 May 2019

**Key words:**

social exclusion,  
 social inclusion,  
 community-led local development,  
 local action groups,  
 Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship

**Contents:**

1. Introduction .....	36
2. Outline of the issue of social inclusion and exclusion.....	36
3. Community-led local development and area-based partnerships: theoretical background .....	37
4. Research methodology .....	38
5. Results .....	39
6. Conclusion.....	42
Notes .....	42
References .....	43

## 1. Introduction

In the EU, in the current programming period, regional and especially local development policy puts a lot of emphasis on enabling and empowering people to take greater control over their own lives through a bottom-up development approach that involves local people in their planning. For this purpose, the instrument named Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is used, the essence of which is the functioning of Local Action Groups (LAGs). LAGs are area-based partnerships whose presence in local governance is hardly new. They include representatives of public, private, voluntary and community “sectors” who are assumed to realise concrete objectives of local development policy (Derkzen and Boch, 2009; Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). By combining the varying resources and skills of partners from different sectors rooted in the socio-economic local environment, and taking account of local needs, LAGs may offer solutions tailored to local circumstances and provide resources that add up to more than the sum of their parts.

LAGs prepare their strategies (Local Development Strategies; LDSs), which are programmes frequently presented as a means of addressing social exclusion both through the inclusive nature of the partnership structure and through the local nature of the partnership, which is perceived to allow excluded groups greater access than does a centralised policy (Shortall 2004: 113). However, the key question is: are LAGs, which in theory have social inclusion outcomes at their core, truly effective tools for social inclusion?

This article discusses the effectiveness of area-based partnerships as tools for solving social exclusion problems in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship. Its aim is twofold: to determine what proportion of local development activities implemented by LAGs are activities for social inclusion and what their expected effects are, and to determine whether the scope of these activities is adequate to the scale of social exclusion in the areas where the LAGs operate.

The paper begins with an outline of the problems of social inclusion and exclusion. The theoretical aspects of area-based partnerships and community-led local development in the context of solving

social exclusion problems are then briefly presented. This is followed by a description of the research methods. The findings are then presented, followed by the conclusions.

## 2. Outline of the issue of social inclusion and exclusion

The term “social exclusion” was first used in the early 1970s in France to refer to those who were not protected by the welfare state and were considered social misfits, i.e. the physically disabled, the aged and invalid, drug users, delinquents, suicidal people, and so on (Saith 2001: 3). In the 1970s and 1980s in connection with globalisation processes (Beall 2002: 43), the privatisations, the deregulation of the labour market and the cuts in public services that took place in Western Europe, the term “social exclusion” was extended to include those who experienced long-term and permanent unemployment, the associated losses of income and sense of self-worth, exclusion from normal activities in society, and growing instability of social relations (Saith 2001: 3). Such an approach was adapted by the European Community and later by the EU. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century social inclusion was defined in the EU as:

*a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making, which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights. (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 9)*

In the EU in 2014–20 programming period the issues of social inclusion and exclusion are most commonly discussed in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (hereinafter referred to as the “Strategy”). For each member country the goals of this Strategy set the direction for socio-economic policies be-

tween 2010 and 2020. One of the three priorities of the Strategy is inclusive growth (alongside smart growth and sustainable growth) defined as growth that supports the economy with a high level of employment guaranteeing social and territorial cohesion. The intended proof of achieving this goal would be a reduction in the scale of poverty (the number of people living below the poverty threshold) through maximising work activity and limiting structural unemployment, increasing social responsibility in the business area, providing help for children or anybody else who is financially dependent on another person, introducing the model of flexible labour market and flexicurity, providing people with opportunities to learn new skills in order to easily adjust to new circumstances or possible career changes, balancing access to health services, and supporting a healthy lifestyle among the elderly (European Commission, 2010). In fact, a desirable result of actions aimed at ensuring inclusive development is an increase in the degree of social inclusion or, in other words, a decrease in the degree of social exclusion. Such an approach means that the social exclusion discourse taking place in the EU in the context of realising the Strategy implies that the solution to social exclusion is to intensify social inclusion. The assumption that these are opposing processes is also accepted in this article. However, one should keep in mind that the discourse on social exclusion and inclusion undertaken both in the literature and by development agencies and non-governmental organisations goes far beyond the EU framework and concerns the situation in various countries around the world, raising their specific problems related to development processes and not always assuming that social exclusion and inclusion are reverse processes (United Nations, 2016: 20; World Bank, 2013: 7; Du Toit, 2004; Hickey and Du Toit, 2007; Fischer, 2011).

### 3. Community-led local development and area-based partnerships: theoretical background

Community-led local development is widely regarded all over the advanced world as the key to im-

proving the sustainability of disadvantaged regions (mainly rural) and providing local people with the capacities to respond positively to the negative impacts of problems such as unemployment, poverty, poor health and social exclusion (Murray and Dunn, 1995; Ashby and Midmore, 1996; Day, 1998; Marsden and Murdoch, 1998; Ward and McNicholas, 1998; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Sharp et al., 2002).

In the EU in the present programming period, CLLD is a response to a difficult situation that the EU has faced over the past several years. The situation is related to declining competitiveness in the face of emerging economies, global warming, resource depletion, declining real wages and living standards for a high proportion of the population, growing inequality and social exclusion, and threats to health and social security systems created partly by aging and demographic change (Guidance on Community-Led Local Development for Local Actors, 2014). Because the impact of these problems across Europe has been diverging significantly, it was impossible to propose common solutions at the EU level. It is expected that locally adapted approaches such as CLLD are more efficient. The idea is that:

*under CLLD, local people take the reins and form a local partnership that designs and implements an integrated development strategy. The strategy is designed to build on the community's social, environmental and economic strengths or "assets" rather than simply compensate for its problems. (Guidance on Community-Led Local Development for Local Actors 2014: 9)*

In the 2014–20 funding period, CLLD as a specific tool for use at sub-regional level (and complementary to other development support) is expected to foster new opportunities, socio-economic benefits, diversification of activities, networking and innovation in urban, rural and other EU areas (Birolo et al., 2012; Kołomycew, 2017). In the forthcoming programming period CLLD is to be strengthened (mainly by increasing the share of funding for it) to be able to “play a crucial role in bringing Europe closer to citizens and re-establishing missing legitimacy of the UE” (European Committee of the Regions, 2019).

CLLD consists of three key components: local action groups (LAGs), the local development strategies (LDSs) prepared by them, and their own designated area covered by the strategy (Regulation 1303/2013). Establishing LAGs refers to the introduction of self-governance in horizontal partnerships between the private, public and voluntary sectors at the local level of the vertical multi-level governance system. They are perceived to be optimally situated to identify the best solutions to local problems, to mobilise and integrate local potential in the most effective way, and to be more able to act responsively (Thuesen and Nielsen, 2014). They are believed to create social capital (Shucksmith, 2000; Nardone et al., 2010) and institutional capacity (Scott, 2004; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010). They can lead to synergy (Hardis, 2003), win-win situations (Googins and Rochlin, 2000) and collaborative advantages (Huxham and Vangen, 2004). Among many positive aspects of their creation and functioning in local communities (see e.g., Scott, 2012: 1–2), promoting social inclusion and tackling social exclusion occupy an important place. However, as Edwards et al. noted, the establishment of a partnership does not itself guarantee benefits for the various interests that it represents. The key issue is the processes followed during their establishment and implementation (Edwards et al., 2001).

#### 4. Research methodology

The article has two aims: firstly, to determine what proportion of local development activities implemented by LAGs in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship are activities for social inclusion and what their expected effects are and, secondly, to determine whether these activities are adequate to the scale of the threat of social exclusion in areas where LAGs operate.

The study covered 28 LAGs operating in all communes of the voivodship, including: seven urban LAGs (operating in the seven largest cities), 18 urban-rural LAGs (operating in other cities, urban-rural and rural communes) and two rural LAGs (operating only in rural communes).<sup>1</sup>

The LAGs' involvement in activities for social inclusion is reflected in their LDSs, which is why, to achieve the first goal, the LDSs of all LAGs were analysed in terms of the budget allocated to social inclusion projects and the planned effects of these projects. In order to achieve the second goal, multidimensional comparative analysis methods were used to determine the level of threat of social exclusion in each LAG's geographical area of operation, and this was compared against the LAG's involvement in activities for social inclusion reflected in the level of social inclusiveness of its LDS.

The level of LDSs' social inclusiveness was calculated using data and information contained in individual strategies of LAGs. The level of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs was measured using publicly available statistical data on Polish communes (Local Data Bank; online). In both cases, the data refer to 2016, as this was the base year for project indicators adopted in LDSs.

Potential variables describing level of LDS social inclusiveness and level of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs are presented in Table 1.

Potential variables describing LDS social inclusiveness (set 1) and threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs (set 2) were reduced using a variation coefficient (threshold level = 10%) and correlation coefficient (critical level = 0.5). Ultimately, set 1 numbered three variables (X1, X2, X3) and set 2 numbered two variables (X8, X9). All were stimulants. They were the basis for calculating two synthetic variables: an LDS social inclusiveness index and an index of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by an LAG. Calculations were carried out by two linear ordering methods: the Hellwig method and a non-model method (Table 2). In both methods diagnostic variables were not assigned different weighting factors.

Indexes were used to rank LAGs according to the level of social inclusiveness of their LDSs and according to the level of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by them. Subsequently, it was examined whether rankings of LAGs according to the value of the synthetic variables calculated by two different methods of linear ordering were compatible. It was also examined to what extent the ranking of LAGs by LDS social inclusiveness index coincided with the ranking of LAGs by index of threat of social exclusion, i.e. whether LAGs operating in

**Table 1.** Potential variables describing the level of LDSs social inclusiveness and the level of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs

Symbol	Description
<b>LDSs social inclusiveness (set 1)</b>	
X1	Social efficiency of the LDS, % (calculated as: the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion whose social activity increased after leaving the programme, divided by the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the programme)
X2	Proportion of total LDS implementation budget allocated to budget for social inclusion, %
X3	Budget for social inclusion per person at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the program, PLN
<b>The threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs (set 2)</b>	
X5	Persons under 35 years old in the total number of inhabitants of the area covered by the LAG, %
X6	Women of working and post-working age in the total number of inhabitants of the area covered by the LAG), %
X7	Persons aged 50 and above in the total number of inhabitants of the area covered by the LAG, %
X8	Beneficiaries of social assistance at domicile in the total number of inhabitants of the area covered by the LAG, %
X9	Registered long-term unemployed persons in the population of working age in the area covered by the LAG, %

Source: author’s elaboration

**Table 2.** Linear ordering methods applied in the study

Method of ordering	Variable normalisation formula
Hellwig method	
$d_i = 1 - \frac{c_{io}}{c_o}$	Standardisation
where:	
$c_{io} = \left[ \sum_{j=1}^n (z_{ij} - z_{oj})^2 \right]^{\frac{1}{2}}$ , $c_o = \bar{c}_o + 2S_o$ , $\bar{c}_o = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=1}^m c_{io}$ ,	$Z_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - \bar{x}_j}{s_j}$
$S_o = \left[ \frac{1}{m} \sum_{i=1}^m (c_{io} - \bar{c}_o)^2 \right]^{\frac{1}{2}}$ ,	Zero unitarisation
Non-model method	
$d_i = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{j=1}^m Z_{ij}$	$Z_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - \min_i x_{ij}}{\max_i x_{ij} - \min_i x_{ij}}$

Notes:  $d_i$  – value of synthetic variables for i-th object,  $z_{ij}$  – normalised value of the j-th variable for the i-th object, m – number of normalised variables,  $x_{ij}$  – value of j-th variable for i-th object,  $\bar{x}_j$  – arithmetic mean of variable  $x_j$ ,  $s_j$  - standard deviation of j-th variable,  $x_{ij}$  – maximum value of j-th variable for i-th object,  $\min_i x_{ij}$  – minimum value of j-th variable for i-th object. Source: author’s elaboration

communes with a high level of risk of social exclusion developed strategies with a higher level of inclusiveness than those LAGs operating in communes with a lower level of such risk. The rankings’ compliance was tested using Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient ( $R_s$ ).

### 5. Results

The analysis of LDSs, which is summarised in Table 3, revealed that social inclusion activities constitute a relatively small proportion of the total activities implemented by the average LAG, as re-

flected by their share of planned financial expenditure in the total budget for the implementation of LDS. On average, one LAG allocated only 26.9% of the total budget of its LDS to activities aimed at increasing social inclusion and half of all LAGs allocated less than 17.5%. The planned effects of these activities are also insignificant. One strategy envisaged supporting an average of 640 people (for half of the LDSs the figure was less than 390), and increasing the social activity of an average of 221 people, undertaking activities to support job-seeking for 34 people, and taking up work by an average of 17 people. Thus, the average social efficiency of activities aimed at increasing the level of social inclusion was 34%, the average potential employment efficiency was 5%, while the employment efficiency was only 3%.

The study also showed that actions for social inclusion undertaken by LAGs are not adequate to the scale of the threat of social exclusion in the areas where LAGs operate. It was not found that LAGs operating in areas at high risk of social exclusion

implement strategies with a higher level of inclusiveness than those operating in areas with a lower such risk. This conclusion was made on the basis of the  $R_s$  coefficient calculated for rankings of LAGs by LDS social inclusiveness index and by the index of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by the LAG, the value of which equalled -0.079 (for ordering by non-model method) and -0.084 (for ordering by Hellwig method). The lack of such a relationship can also be seen in Fig. 1.

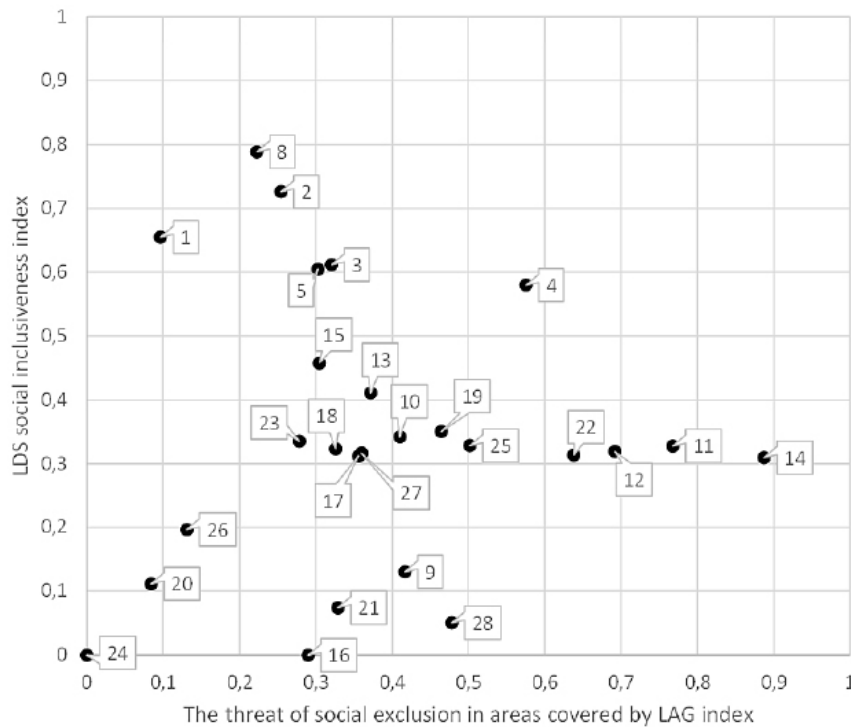
Generally, the highest level of LDS inclusiveness pertained to all urban LAGs (including LAG6 and LAG7, which are not included in Fig. 1), which allocated all or almost all the budget planned in the strategy to social inclusion, and for LAG8, where the share was 86.3%. This last, LAG8, took first place in the ranking due to its above-average value of support per person. The amount of this support was PLN 33,450, whereas for urban LAGs it was on average PLN 6,621 and for LAGs operating in other areas (without LAG8) PLN 4,140. In terms of social efficiency, with an efficiency of 92% LAG2

**Table 3.** Indicators concerning LAGs' activities for social inclusion envisaged in their LDSs

	Mean value	Minimum value	Maximum value	Median
Budget for social inclusion in the total budget for the implementation of LDS, %	26.9	0	100	17.5
Budget for social inclusion per person at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the programme, PLN	5,801	344	33,450	7,400
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion covered by support in the programme	640	0	5,000	390
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, whose social activity increased after leaving the programme	221	0	770	189
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion seeking work after leaving the programme	34	0	80	32
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion working after leaving the program (including self-employed)	17	0	42	16
Social efficiency of LDSs*, %	34	0	92	54
Potential employment efficiency of LDSs**, %	5	0	40	7
Employment efficiency of LDSs***, %	3	0	13	4

Notes: \* number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion whose social activity has increased after leaving the programme divided by number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the programme; \*\* number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion seeking work after leaving the programme divided by number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the programme; \*\*\* number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion working after leaving the programme (including self-employed) divided by number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion supported in the programme

Source: author's elaboration on the basis of Local Development Strategies



**Fig. 1.** LAGs according to level of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by them and according to their level of LDS social inclusiveness (non-model method of ordering)

Notes: numbers indicate the numbering of LAGs. The figure does not include LAG6 and LAG7 due to the lack of publicly available statistical data on individual urban units of the cities covered by their activity. Rankings of LAGs according to the LDS social inclusiveness index calculated with non-model method and Hellwig method were compatible ( $R_s = 0.94$ ), as were the rankings of LAGs according to the index of threat of social exclusion in areas covered by LAG calculated with these methods ( $R_s = 0.99$ ).

Source: author's elaboration on the basis of data from Local Development Strategies and Local Data Bank

stood out from those LAGs with the highest levels of inclusiveness of LDSs. The social efficiency of the strategies of the other LAGs in the top group ranged from 46% (LAG8) to 64% (LAG1). All these LAGs (with the exception of LAG4) were characterised by a relatively low threat of social exclusion.

Meanwhile, LAGs operating in areas with the highest level of the threat of social exclusion (LAG22, LAG12, LAG11, LAG14) implemented LDSs with a relatively low level of inclusiveness. Although they were characterised by above-average social efficiency indicator values (ranging from 51% in LAG12 to 56% in LAG14), the budget allocated for social inclusion ranged from only 10.3% of total LDS budget in LAG 14 to 18.4% in LAG11.

There were also several LAGs with an even lower level of involvement in implementing social inclusion activities than the aforementioned LAGs. They were: LAG24, LAG20, LAG16, LAG21, LAG9 and

LAG 28. Two of those admittedly had a relatively low threat of social exclusion (LAG24 and LAG20), but according to the assumptions of CLLD even they should be involved in social inclusion activities. Meanwhile, like the other LAGs with the lowest social inclusiveness of LDSs, they were characterised by zero social efficiency, which resulted from the fact that their strategies either provided no financial support for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (such as LAG16 and LAG24), or did not predict an increase in the social activity of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion covered by support in the programme (LAG9, LAG20, LAG21, LAG28). The lack of effects in terms of improving the social activity of these people in the strategies of the latter LAGs was probably due to the very small share of funds for social inclusion, ranging from 10.2% in LAG20 to 17.8% in LAG9.

## 6. Conclusion

The study revealed that activities for social inclusion undertaken by LAGs in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship constitute a relatively small proportion of the actions planned in their LDSs. This is demonstrated both by the social inclusion projects' share in the total LDS budget and by the planned effects of these projects. In half of all LAGs the budget for social inclusion projects was less than 17.5% of the total budget and support was intended to cover fewer than 390 people. The average social efficiency of activities aimed at increasing the level of social inclusion was 34%, but in the case of six LAGs, social efficiency was zero (two LAGs did not assume support for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion at all, and four LAGs did not predict any increase in social activity of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion covered by support). This means that the financial resources allocated by these LAGs for social inclusion are unlikely to bring any significant measurable effects. The potential employment efficiency indicator and the employment efficiency indicator were even at a much lower level. The former, indicating the percentage of people who will be seeking employment as a result of the support, was on average only 5%, and the second, which indicates the percentage of people who will find employment as a result of the support, was on average only 3%. This means that, while LAGs assumed an increase in broadly understood social activity of people involved in activities for social inclusion, they were very cautious in their assumptions about the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion that would enter the labour market. This raises the question of the effectiveness of the support instruments planned in LDSs and the effectiveness of the funds incurred for this purpose, the more so that there is no certainty that the indicators regarding projects envisaging social inclusion specified in the LDSs will actually be implemented. This is, in fact, the basic limitation of the study. The level of LDSs' social inclusiveness was calculated on the basis of data and information contained in individual strategies of LAGs, not on the basis of the actual results of the implementation of the projects included in the strategies. Verifying the effects of actions of LAGs for social inclusion in future research will

only be possible after 2023, when all projects envisaged in LDSs have been completed.

The study also revealed that in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship there is no relationship between the level of threat of social exclusion in the areas covered by LAGs and the level of social inclusiveness of their LDSs. This means that the scale and effects of the social inclusion projects planned by LAGs are generally not adequate to the problems actually occurring in the areas they cover. However, one should remember that the lack of publicly available statistical data on individual urban units of cities in the Voivodship meant that this part of the study did not include LAGs operating in the two largest cities.

The conclusions seem worrying in the context of the forthcoming financial perspective, which envisages strengthening the role of the CLLD instrument as a key for local development. If this instrument is to be an effective tool for supporting social inclusion and preventing exclusion processes, its implementation should be preceded by a proper diagnosis of the scale of threat of social exclusion in the voivodship in spatial terms, as made by the institution managing the EU funds and directing these funds where this phenomenon occurs most intensively. On the other hand, LAGs, especially those operating in areas with the highest threat of social exclusion, should plan in their development strategies projects for social inclusion with a higher level of social and employment efficiency.

The study focused primarily on comparing the scale of social exclusion in areas covered by LAGs against LAGs' inclusion activities, and used statistical data and data from LDSs. Future, complementary research that could shed new light on the problem of effectiveness and efficiency of LAGs' actions for social inclusion could consist in assessing the adequacy of these actions with the feelings of those most concerned, i.e. people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

## Notes

Urban LAGs are: LGD Miasta Brodnicy (LAG1), LGD Grudziądzki Spichlerz (LAG2), LGD Inowrocław (LAG3), LGD Miasto Włocławek (LAG4),



LGD Chełmno (LAG5), LGD Dla Miasta Torunia (LAG6), LGD Dwie Rzeki (LAG7).

Urban–rural LAGs are: LGD Gminy Powiatu Świeckiego (LAG8), LGD Dolina Drwęcy (LAG9), LGD Bory Tucholskie (LAG10), LGD Dorze-  
cza Zgłowiączki (LAG11), LGD Gmin Dobrzyń-  
skich Region Północ (LAG12), LGD Czarnoziem  
na Soli (LAG13), LGD Gmin Dobrzyńskich Re-  
gion Południe (LAG14), Stowarzyszenie Nasza  
Krajna (LAG15), Stowarzyszenie Lokalna Gru-  
pa Rybacka Nasza Krajna i Pałuki (LAG16), LGD  
Pałuki-Wspólna Sprawa (LAG17), Stowarzyszenie  
Partnerstwo dla Krajny i Pałuk (LAG18),  
Stowarzyszenie Partnerstwo dla Ziemi Kujawskiej  
(LAG19), LGD Pojezierze Brodnickie (LAG21),  
LGD Razem dla Powiatu Radziejowskiego (LAG22),  
LGD Sąsiedzi wokół Szlaku Piastowskiego (LAG23),  
LGD Trzy Doliny (LAG24), LGD Vistula-Terra Cul-  
mensis-Rozwój przez Tradycję (LAG25), LGD Zie-  
mia Gotyku (LAG27), LGD Ziemia Wąbrzeska  
(LAG28).

Rural LAGs are: LGD Podgrodzie Toruńskie  
(LAG20), LGD Zakole Dolnej Wisły (LAG26).

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