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**Problems of functioning
of Polish local action groups from the perspective
of the social capital concept**

Abstract

The LEADER approach was introduced in Poland as part of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (implemented in the programming period 2004–2006) and, at present, it is being implemented as Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme. Many researchers are interested in its progress. In their analyses, they use various concepts of social capital. It may be concluded on the basis of the studies published so far that local action groups are dominated by the public sector, whereas the economic sector is rather marginalised. Having taken into account the available publications, a team of sociologists from the University of Łódź conducted in 2011–2013 research devoted to the level and structure of social capital of local action groups. The study focused on organisations from 6 voivodeships which implemented scheme 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme. The article presents the analyses of the most important problems of these organisations related to the condition of the components of social capital possessed by their members (partners). The researchers used the material from individual surveys completed by 573 respondents from 34 local action groups. It was proven that the surveyed organisations mainly cope with the problem of a low activity level of their members (partners), petrification of their boards and councils, marginalisation of representatives of the economic sector, high level of professionalization and low level of generalised trust among the persons who belong to these groups.

Keywords: social capital, LEADER approach, territorial partnerships, problems of Polish local action groups

Introduction

The LEADER approach was introduced in Poland as part of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (implemented in the programming period 2004–2006). The first part of this programme (referred to as scheme 1) was devoted, among other things, to promotion of the principles of this approach and to forming local action groups. Group members include representatives of the public, social and economic sectors. By assumption, they form a partnership which is above the divisions set by particular interests or place of residence (representatives of these three sectors live in various villages and communes which are covered by the support of their local action group). They cooperate on their own accord, act for the benefit of rural communities, and use their endogenous resources while doing so. They have their voice in deciding about the future of their villages (see also Kamiński and Kwatara 2005; Futymski and Kamiński 2008; Knieć and Hałasiewicz 2008; Cutin and Varley 1997: 142).

Local action groups are legally registered as associations, foundations and unions of associations. Their members have prepared strategic documents (referred to as an integrated strategy of rural development), which set their objectives and the priorities of development of the area covered by their support. The groups which wanted to obtain financial resources for implementation of the activities included in the strategies of rural development (within the framework of the second part of the programme, referred to as scheme 2), took part in a call for applications. The quality of the submitted studies was assessed, as well as the competences of board members, characteristics of the area covered by support (such as, i.e. the number of its inhabitants, percentage of village inhabitants, tax income per inhabitant). In total, 150 local action groups signed their contracts for implementation of scheme 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (Halamska, Michalska and Śpiewak 2010: 107–108; Zajda 2011: 66–78).

In the programming period 2007–2013, the LEADER approach was implemented in Poland within the framework of the Rural Development Programme. Four priority axes have been set. The fourth one is the LEADER axis, which enables implementation of the remaining three axes

(i.e. 1. Improvement of competitiveness of the sector of agriculture and forestry, 2. Improvement of the natural environment and rural areas, 3. Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural economy), but it also has its own objectives, such as activating inhabitants of villages, gaining cooperation skills by local action groups and their effective operation. In this period, these organisations have had an opportunity to obtain funds for implementation of their objectives included in development strategies (also by taking part in a call for applications). It is worth emphasising that over a few years only, their number has increased considerably. Especially in 2007 and 2008, numerous new groups were formed, which then applied for the funds for implementation of the LEADER approach in the programming period 2007–2013. In total, 338 local action groups from 16 voivodeships signed contracts¹(PSDB 2012: 17).

Many researchers are interested in the issue of implementation of the LEADER approach in Poland. In their analyses, they particularly often use various concepts of social capital (or their elements²). There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, they are eclectic³. As Laschewski stresses, many

¹ At present, the LEADER approach is being implemented by 336 local action groups. Contracts with two groups have been terminated for the reasons on the part of these organisations.

² In this study, the use of the notion of “social capital concepts” is not accidental. Like Castiglione (Castiglione 2008, p.13), we believe that the multitude of definitions of this term and possible ways of its operationalisation, different interpretations of the social capital function all show that it is not a coherent social theory.

³ It is worth mentioning that international studies not always analyse the LEADER approach from the perspective of social capital concepts. Probably the largest international project which focuses on implementation of this approach in Europe, entitled “*Local action and territorial development in Central Europe*” is targeted not on the various resources of social capital of local action groups, but on the way in which (in various member states) the transfer of its universal (by assumption) principles takes place. Attempts have been made to answer the question whether the in-state and regional policies modify them and if therefore it is possible at all to implement the LEADER approach in the EU states (see also Chevalier and Maurel 2010, Halamska and Maurel 2010). The project was developed by Centre Français de Recherche en Sciences Sociales (CEFRES) in cooperation with researchers from: Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, Université de Perpignan, Université de Lyon III, Vilnius University, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The research was conducted in Germany (eastern states), Hungary, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Poland [<http://www.cefres.cz/aldetec/eng/indexeng.html>, accessed on 26.04.2013].

issues, to which the theoreticians of social capital refer, have been analysed by sociologists of rural areas who focus on endogenous development (in German-speaking countries – autonomic development) (Laschewski 2009: 94.; see also Van der Ploeg and Long 1994; van der Ploeg and van Dijk 1995; Lowe 1995, Pongratz and Kreil 1991). This type of development assumes involvement of local communities in rural development, and the use of resources which they have. According to Chevalier and Maurel: *“It is characterised by a priori faith in the potential of rural communities and their ability to discover what best suits their environment, culture and tradition”* (Chevalier and Maurel 2010: 30, see also Shortall and Shucksmith 1998; Dargan and Shucksmith 2008). Thus, using the concept of social capital in the analyses of the LEADER approach allows to take into account the wider context of change in rural areas. Moreover, analyses of the social capital which local action groups have at their disposal (and also its resources that are formed through their activity) take into account the concept of co-governance (see also Wódz and Wódz 2007; Izdebski 2010). Furmankiewicz describes its role in the studies on local action groups in the following way: *“Territorial partnerships in the form of LEADER local action groups are a practical element of state organisation that is created in accordance with the ideas of co-governance by the public, social (non-governmental) and economic sector. Decisions on spending a given amount of public money are to be taken by the members of their councils in which interests of representatives of various sectors are to balance each other and prompt negotiation and compromise”* (Furmankiewicz 2013: 74).

Secondly, the popularity of social capital concepts among the researchers interested in local action groups is a result of their particular usefulness in analysis of the complexity of relations between representatives of the three sectors, who form these organisations. Some social capital concepts (referred to in the next part of the study) underline that various social networks and links between individual and group social actors contribute not only to exchange of resources between them, but also to forming the potential of their cooperation (based on trust and norms and values they share). Moreover, social capital resources may be converted into other resources, i.e. those of economic and human capital, so creating (and strengthening) them is especially beneficial for socio-economic development (see also Putnam 1995, 2008; Mikiewicz and Szafraniec 2009: 116)

Use of social capital concepts in the analysis of implementation of the LEADER approach in Poland – publications on the subject

The notion of social capital was popularised by Bourdieu⁴ and Coleman⁵. Publications by Fukuyama⁶, and, above all, Putnam⁷ (developed in the 1990s) contributed to stronger awareness of this issue and popularisation of this term in social and economic sciences (see also Zajda 2011: 8).

As Laschewski remarks, although there is no single definition of social capital (see also Woolcock 1998; Dasgupta and Serageldin 2000), there are four common elements of its various interpretations (see also Pretty and Ward 2001). The first is treating trust as either a component of social capital or its effect. The second is spreading the assumption about building up social capital through the exchange relation between various social actors. The third is the assumption that these relations are possible thanks to shared norms and values. Finally, these relations take place in more or less complex social networks (Laschewski 2009: 93).

The classical definitions of social capital (by e.g. Bourdieu, Coleman, Fukuyama and Putnam) differ from one another. One of the differences lies in determining whether social capital is a uniform category in which no components are singled out or rather a whole which consists of many

⁴ Bourdieu defines social capital as: „[...] *the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition*” (Bourdieu 2001:104–105).

⁵ In „*Foundation of Social Theory*”, Coleman writes: “*Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, and it makes it possible to reach certain goals which would be unreachable without it.*” (Coleman 1990: 300).

⁶ According to Fukuyama, social capital is “[...] *a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them.*” (Fukuyama 2003: 169).

⁷ In his opinion, “*Social capital refers to such characteristics of society organisation as trust, norms and links which may improve the society’s efficiency and thus facilitate coordinated action*” (Putnam 1995: 258).

components⁸. For Bourdieu, social capital is a network of relations which are a sum of resources of individual or group actors. As the multi-component concepts have the advantage of possibility of operationalisation of social capital by selecting a few or more variable components and studying relations between them (plus determining which component, and to what extent, influences the level of social capital), these are the interpretations that are most often used by researchers (who often do not even determine whether they were inspired by Putnam, Fukuyama or Coleman's definition (Zajda 2011: 21). For instance, Trutkowski and Mandes consider the following to be the key components of social capital: trust, social networks, norms and liabilities (2005: 65). Frykowski and Starosta enumerate: the network component, values and norms, and the trust component (Frykowski and Starosta 2006: 247).

Polish researchers interested in the LEADER approach most often analyse selected elements, components of the social capital of local action groups and country inhabitants who belong to them. For instance, Hanke and Psyk-Piotrowska analysed the chance to implement the LEADER+ Pilot Programme on the basis of existing data about the trust component (social trust of country inhabitants) and the network component (number of operating non-governmental organisations) (Hanke and Psyk-Piotrowska 2006). Śpiewak (also basing on the existing data) conducted research on the relation between the network component of social capital of country residents and their involvement in the process of creating these territorial partnerships. She analysed their social activity, measured on the basis of voter turnout during presidential elections, an average number of non-governmental organisations and an average number of volunteer fire brigades (Śpiewak 2009: 74–78). A similar relation (in a selected region, i.e. Lower Silesia) was studied by Furmankiewicz and Janc (they used a variable:

⁸ Other differences are related to treating social capital as a private or public good. For Bourdieu, social capital is a private good which may be used by a social actor and also shaped by him in order to ensure him the best possible position in a given social field. Other authors show that social capital is first and foremost a public good. A social actor using its potential does not exclude the activity of others in this respect. Another difference is related to the functions of social capital. For Bourdieu, these were mainly related to enabling social actors to retain their position in social fields or fight for change in this respect. For other authors, social capital is mainly meant to facilitate cooperation (Zajda 2011: 21–22).

an average number of non-governmental organisations⁹) (Furmankiewicz and Janc 2011: 116). Halamska has also focused on this issue (in relation to the Łódzkie Voivodeship), and she based her research on such variables of the network component as: a number of non-governmental organisations and associations, voter turnout in parliamentary elections, voter turnout in local self-government elections, sum of donations for the charity campaign of Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy¹⁰ (Halamska 2009: 15, 21).

The studies conducted so far have resulted in specifying of several problems with which local action groups cope (in the aspect of social capital). The mostly discussed one is that of the relations between representatives of the three sectors that form these organisations. It was named municipalisation or colonisation of local action groups, as these phenomena manifest themselves in an excessive influence of public sector representatives on functioning of these structures. Local authorities dominate in the field of establishing the priorities of strategic documents for local action groups (and they believe that their “proper” specification will help finance the investments necessary for individual communes which belong to their area of support). In some partnerships, researchers noted that the proposals of objectives and priorities of partnership development submitted by their inhabitants are replaced (or complemented) with those recommended by representatives of local self-government units (Furmankiewicz and Królikowska 2010: 86). Informal relations between local authorities and selected board members often decide about the order in which funds are granted to beneficiaries. Moreover, such unofficial agreements between local authorities of communes are often a basis for establishing the maximum sums which can be granted in calls for applications (they determine how many projects from a given commune may receive financial support in a given call for applications) (LEADER – czy można lepiej 2011: 34). Furmankiewicz, basing on the studies conducted in three intentionally selected regions (Łódzkie,

⁹ In the studies by Śpiewak and Furmankiewicz and Janc, this relation was positively verified.

¹⁰ The author has shown that there is no relation in the Łódzkie Voivodeship between social activity of country inhabitants (understood in this way) and the number of local action groups. In this case, these organisations are formed upon the initiative of rather small groups of leaders than as a result of mobilisation of rural communities.

Dolnośląskie and Małopolskie Voivodeships), observed that the public sector outnumbers other sectors in councils of local action groups. These organs are responsible for distribution of funds which these organisations have at their disposal. Their “proper” personal composition results in the fact that it is this sector’s representatives that constitute the majority during any voting, and they frequently take advantage of this situation in order to show preference for the projects that are important for infrastructure of individual communes (e.g. those which ensure financing of volunteer fire brigades, community centres, construction of pavements and playgrounds). In this way, local authorities control the distribution of funds available in the LEADER approach. Participation of representatives of the social and economic sectors is minimized in the process of taking decisions which are important for the partnership, whereas the appearances would suggest that the postulate of co-governance is applied (the author calls this ‘tokenism’) (Furmankiewicz 2013: 75, 81–82, 86, see also Munro and others 2008). Their actions result in centralisation of the flow of resources in local action groups. In other words, only one sector decides about their distribution, which leads to even deeper hierarchisation (see also Hanke 2009, Furmankiewicz and Królikowska 2010: 21). Yet, as Macken-Walsh remarks, “*Encouraging collaboration between diverse local development stakeholders is promoted in the bureaucratic literature as a means towards addressing the complexity of locally-specific development problems, the need for diversity in the EU rural economy (involving a range of sectoral interests outside of agriculture); and the need to facilitate the participation of local representatives in the development process through adherence to principles of ‘good governance’*” (Macken-Walsh 2010: 45–46).

In the search for explanation for municipalisation and colonisation of local action groups, the significance of two kinds of factors is emphasised. First of all, objective ones – it is the public sector that has the most competent personnel, especially in the field of EU applications (which has always been important for local action groups as they apply for funds for their activity). Therefore, even though; formally, the ratio of participation of the three sectors in each local action group is maintained (otherwise it would not receive support from the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013), public sector representatives are in fact a majority. As Halamska, Michalska and Śpiewak notice, almost acrobatic steps are taken in Polish partnerships.

For instance, a commune secretary may be delegated to the local action group council as a representative of a sports club, or a commune council member may become a representative of the economic sector, delegated by his wife's farmstead (Halamska, Michalska and Śpiewak 2011: 112, see also Knieć 2010: 5). Moreover, the public sector is characterised by financial stability, which is often used to secure the loans taken by these organisations for their activity. Secondly, municipalisation and colonisation of local action groups result from subjective factors – in small communities, the public sector has a significant informal influence. Until recently, it was the commune office that was the most important institution responsible for local development. After forming local action groups, their members are often perceived (by representatives of the public sector) as competitors in the power race, which triggers their tendency to control things (PSDB 2012: 48–49).

Local action groups also have to deal with marginalisation of the economic sector (by representatives of the two other sectors). The experience from scheme 1 and 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme showed how difficult it was to build partnerships with participation of this sector (during implementation of scheme 2, representatives of the economic sector were a minority, as they constituted only 17% of all members of local action groups) (Knieć and Hałasiewicz 2008: 40). The difficulties resulted from, e.g. lack of entrepreneurs who would be interested in a non-profit activity. As all-Poland research (conducted in 2011) proved, this sector still has the weakest representation in these organisations (PSDB 2012: 49). Not only are this sector's representatives outnumbered in local action groups, but they are also excluded from work in these organisations (entrepreneurs are heads of boards in only 9% of Polish local action groups) (PSDB 2012: 6, 45). They also have the weakest trust of other LAG members, and least frequently participate in works of these groups (even in general meetings which are organised only once or twice a year) (Zajda 2011: 127).

Methodology of own research

Taking into account the publications of 2011, a team of researchers from the Institute of Sociology of the University of Łódź decided to develop a project which objective was to assess the level and structure of social

capital in Polish local action groups¹¹. This article presents the most important conclusions concerning the problems of these organisations related to the condition of social capital of their members (partners¹²). The case study method was used in research, defined by Yin as “[...] *an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used, multiple techniques of data gathering and analysis*” (Yin 1989: 80).

As a theoretical basis, Putnam’s definition of social capital was accepted, according to which it is a system of three components which determine one another: trust and networks of relations between society members based on this trust, along with norms and values which determine their behaviour in mutual relations. Thus, the study focused on: the trust component of social capital of members (partners) of local action groups, i.e. vertical and horizontal behaviour which is characteristic of them¹³, the component of norms and values shared by these persons¹⁴ and the network

¹¹ Project entitled „Struktura i uwarunkowania kapitału społecznego lokalnych grup działania” (Structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups) financed from the resources of the National Science Centre (agreement no. 6996/B/H03/2011/40), developed in 2011–2013. The research team: dr hab. E. Psyk-Piotrowska, prof. nadzw. UŁ, dr K. Zajda, mgr A. Kretek-Kamińska, prof. zw. dr hab. D. Walczak-Duraj.

¹² In accordance with the Act of 7 April 1989 Law on Associations (consolidated text [Journal of Laws] Dz. U. of 2001, issue 79, item 855 as amended), work in an association is performed by its members, whereas in a foundation, work is performed by its partners, pursuant to the Act of 6 April 1984 Law on Foundations (consolidated text [Journal of Laws] Dz. U. of 1991, issue 46, item 203 as amended).

¹³ In the case of the trust component, the following variables have been stressed: 1. trust of LAG members to familiar persons (family, neighbours, colleagues from outside LAGs and colleagues from LAGs), 2. social trust of LAG members (belief that the majority of people can be trusted and trust to strange persons encountered in various life situations), 3. trust of LAG members to local institutions and organisations (local authorities, non-governmental organisations, local entrepreneurs).

¹⁴ In the case of the component of norms and values, the following aspects have been analysed: 1. local patriotism of LAG members – their bond with their commune of residence, participation in the last local self-government election, readiness to bear expenses for promotion of local culture, 2. values and norms shared by LAG members – due to the character of LAGs, partnership is an important value, understood as an area which is coherent in the aspects of natural environment, economy and culture. Attempts have been made to determine the reasons for membership in an organisation, and whether LAG

component (i.e. the cooperation network of members, partners of these organisations¹⁵).

The research object were local action groups from the voivodeships with the largest and smallest numbers of these organisations. While selecting them, the statistical data from the period of implementation of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme were used. All the LAGs which were taken into account while forming the survey sample realised scheme 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme. In Poland, there are also local action groups which were formed after the LEADER+ Pilot Programme implementation finished. In practice, most often they started operation only in 2009–2010 (see Zajda 2011: 77). According to the researchers, this period is too short to conclude about the potential of their social capital.

The analysis covered the organisations from western voivodeships, i.e. Lubuskie, Opolskie and Zachodniopomorskie (included in the 1st set – voivodeships with the smallest network of LAGs¹⁶), and from central and

members (partners) operate for its good or they are more focused on the interest of one specific social group or their personal interests. Moreover, the researchers have analysed the respondents' attitude towards the norm of three-sectoral cooperation (to check if they are convinced that all members of this organisation should cooperate regardless of whether they represent the social, public or economic sector) and the level of their conviction that it is necessary for LAG members to know the LAG operational procedures, 3. socially-involved attitude of the surveyed – their readiness to provide support to other people, willingness to continue their membership in a LAG (work for the common good). The level of sense of subjectivity of the surveyed has also been analysed (understood as a conviction that they have control over their own lives).

¹⁵ In the case of the network component, the following variables have been listed: 1. involvement of LAG members in networks of cooperation for their partnership or commune, 2. participation of the surveyed in LAG works – assessment of their activity in LAG works during implementation of scheme 2 of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (including assessment of the forms of their activity in a group, frequency of participation in LAG general meetings, flow of information about group meeting among LAG members), 3. sense of LAG members having influence on functioning of the partnership and conviction of the surveyed about the influence of LAG operations on development of the partnership.

¹⁶ In the Lubuskie Voivodeship, three territorial partnerships were analysed – Stowarzyszenie Lokalna Grupa Działania Regionu Kozła, Fundacja Porozumienie Wzgórz Dałkowskich and Fundacja Zielonej Doliny Odry i Warty. In the Opolskie Voivodeship, three local action groups were analysed: Partnerstwo Borów Niemodlińskich, Dolina Stobrawy and EURO Country. In the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship, also three

southern voivodeships – Wielkopolskie, Małopolskie and Podkarpackie (belonging to the 2nd set – voivodeships with the highest “saturation” of this kind of organisations¹⁷). Thus, the research was conducted in 6 out of 16 voivodeships. So far, the publications resulted from the analyses conducted in three voivodeships at the most. Thus, it was interesting to determine whether problems of local action groups observed in these regions are shared by such organisations from other parts of the country.

All the groups operating in the selected voivodeships were requested to participate in the survey (59 LAGs). Representatives of slightly more than a half of them agreed (34 LAGs), including 9 out of 14 local action groups of set 1 and 25 out of 45 local action groups from set 2.

The research was conducted as an individual survey (addressed to members, partners of local action groups operating in the selected voivodeships).

1500 survey forms were distributed, 586 of them were returned, and 573 surveys from members of 34 out of 59 local action groups, to which the request for participation was sent, were qualified for further analysis (due to the content, especially numerous cases of lack of data).

While assessing the level of individual components of social capital, indices representing the value of its individual components were constructed. As a result of statistical procedures, the index of each component was expressed as a three-point value, where 0 meant e.g. lack of trust (or lack of acceptance of norms and values, participation in LAG works), and 2 meant

ocal action groups were researched: Szanse Bezdroży Gmin Powiatu Goleniowskiego, Stowarzyszenie Lider Pojezierza and Fundacja Środkowopomorska Grupa Działania.
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¹⁷ In the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, the following were analysed: Lokalna Grupa Działania Gościnną Wielkopolska, Ostrzeszowska Lokalna Grupa Działania, Lokalna Grupa Działania Stowarzyszenie KOLD, Stowarzyszenie Światowid, Stowarzyszenie Czarnkowsko-Trzcianecka Lokalna Grupa Działania. In the Małopolskie Voivodeship, eleven local action groups were included in a survey: Dunajec-Biała, PROKOPARA, Dolina Karpia, Jaksa, Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Spisza i Okolicy, Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Orawy, Gorce Pieniny, Gościniec 4 Żywiołów, Korona Północnego Krakowa, LGD Olkusz, Podhalańska LGD. In the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, research was conducted in: Subregion Magurski, Partnerstwo dla Ziemi Nizańskiej, Lasovia, CK Podkarpackie, PROWENT, Kraina Sanu, Dolina Strugu, Dorzecze Wisłoka, Czarnorzecko-Strzyszowska LGD.

a high level of trust (or acceptance of norms and values, participation in LAG works).

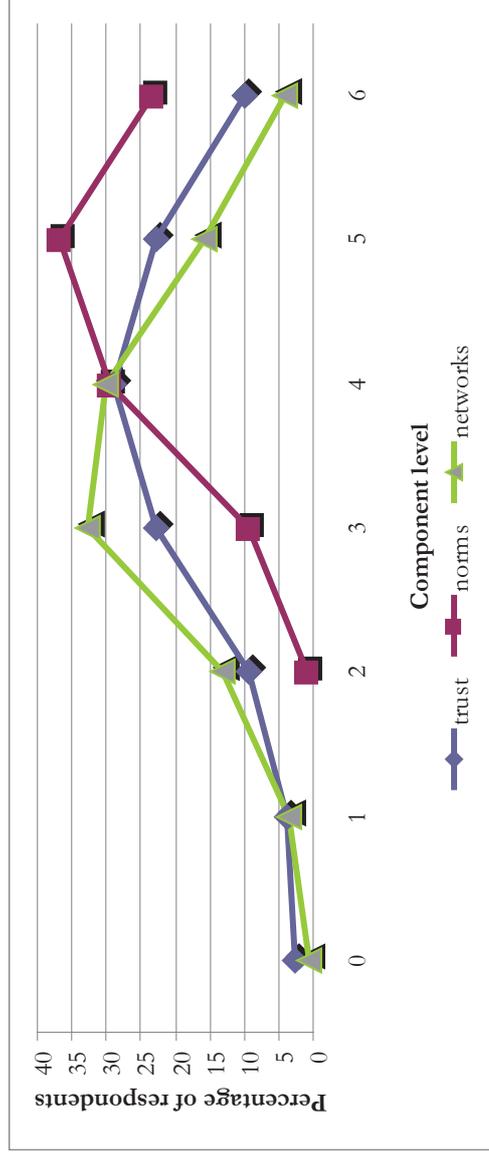
The synthetic value of each component (as a whole) was obtained by summing up the values of individual components (as a result, seven-point indices of trust, norms and values, and networks have been obtained, with potential values of 0 to 6).

Research results. Problems of local action groups in the aspect of the network component of social capital

The analyses conducted within the framework of the research showed that the main problem with which local action groups have to cope is the condition of the network component and (to a smaller extent) the condition of a trust component which characterise their members, partners. An average level (scale 0 to 6 points) of the network component was 3.53 points, trust component: 3.79 points, norms and values: 4.73 points (see graph 1). It is worth noticing that the level of the component of norms and values was determined by declarations of respondents related e.g. to their local patriotism, acceptance for the standard of three-sectoral cooperation, and the sense of subjectivity¹⁸. The level of the network component was assessed e.g. basing on their practical activities for the benefit of their local action group.

The main problem of local action groups is a low level of activity of their members (partners) in these organisations. About 31% of the respondents admitted that their activity in the group is limited to speaking during

¹⁸ Majority of members, partners of local action groups are involved citizens who were ready to provide support to other people and; in fact, majority of them work in various associations and organisations and/or independently of them take part in projects for the benefit of their local communities. They are attached to the idea of partnership as a new and coherent value for which it is worth taking action in cooperation with representatives of various sectors (even if they are not highly trusted). At the same time, they are local patriots who are attached to their place of residence, ready to support local culture with their own funds, taking part in local self-government elections (often doing significantly more than just casting their votes), convinced about a significant influence of persons similar to them on their immediate surroundings (commune and partnership).



Graph 1. Level of social capital components in the surveyed LAGs

Source: compilation from the project „Struktura i uwarunkowania kapitału społecznego lokalnych grup działających” (Structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups)

meetings. As many as 14% of the respondents admitted that they do not get involved in functioning of their local action group at all, and they are only formal members (partners).

When the respondents who are active only to a small extent and the passive respondents were asked about the reasons for such a situation, they most often explained it with lack of time (39%), or they emphasised that they are convinced that other LAG members will prove better in action (39%). About 14% of these respondents remarked that they would like to get involved in functioning of their organisations, but they have no such possibility as there are some persons in their groups who are constantly delegated to various works. It is significant that as many as 11% of the respondents who are active only to a small extent and the passive respondents pointed out that they did not take part in implementation of various initiatives for the benefit of the inhabitants of communes in their partnership area because they were not informed about them. This means that various methods of communication between organs of local action groups, their offices and members (partners) are not always evaluated as positive. Each of these organisations decides whether information about its activities will be published on the website, given to their members (partners) in writing (via post or e-mail) or via telephone. Regardless of the method (and situation in which it is used), some respondents have objections to them.

It was mainly LAG board and council members who had the opportunity to show their activity. However, these organs underwent petrification, which means that; for many years, work in these organs has been performed by the same persons, most often those who have belonged to the group since the time of implementation of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of board members have gained experience related to implementation of the LEADER approach in that very period, the same refers to nearly 3 in 5 council members). The experience gained during implementation of the LEADER+ proved beneficial and it increased the chances of getting various functions in the period 2007–2013¹⁹. However, these persons are not the only ones who have competences which are necessary to be

¹⁹ Advanced age of the respondents was most related to various functions in these organisations. Participation of the youngest persons (especially those aged 18–24) in works of LAG boards was least significant.

active in these organisations. It is worth emphasising that the surveyed members (partners) of local action groups were mostly well-educated – about 28% of them completed secondary school²⁰, and 59.4% of them graduated from high schools²¹. Nearly ¾ of the respondents (before joining these organisations) were active in various projects for the benefit of the inhabitants of their communes, either on behalf of public institutions (e.g. as civil servants, commune council members, commune administrators), in non-governmental organisations, individually, or in cooperation with other inhabitants (for 30% of the most active respondents, involvement in the issues of the commune/partnership meant participation in three or more types of projects initiated by various institutions or by themselves). Growing involvement of the respondents in the issues of local communities is also reflected in the fact that nearly 71% of them (before they joined local action groups) had participated in various events related to promotion of the cultural heritage of their area of residence. Thus, most of local action group members have knowledge and skills which would enable their activity in these organisations which would go further beyond just speaking during meetings. Even more so, if we consider the fact that both in boards and in councils of local action groups, there are some “accidental” people who are not active in any way (about 8% of members of each of these organs). Their participation in these bodies is a result of informal agreements between the actors involved in the process of forming local action groups. For instance, as there was no woman who would represent the social sector in the council, the commune administrator appointed an employee of the commune office who had recently become a member of the country housewives’ association.

Local action groups lack organs (units) which would make it possible to include more members (partners) in works of these organisations²². These structures are often too large to offer their members any opportunity to be

²⁰ The category of secondary education also included those persons who graduated from postsecondary community colleges (6.2%) and those who have not completed their academic studies (4.3%).

²¹ Nearly 13% of the surveyed had education lower than secondary.

²² In this context, it is problematic whether the so-called small partnerships (especially those operating in the areas with fewer than thousand inhabitants) should be encouraged to merge with each other. Supporters of this idea argue that such fusions have chance for more funds due to their size. It is assumed here that the effectiveness of their activity is

pro-active (and shape in themselves the sense of actual influence on the change of the image of their villages). If there are 150–200 members in a local action group, the board consists of 5–7 members, and the number of councillors does not exceed 20, then the question arises about the space for (more or less) regular work of other members (partners) of such organisations.

Involvement in the works of local action groups is also hindered by their professionalization and economisation. They use the advisory services of so-called experts and companies which specialise in organisation of various projects much more willingly than turn to the village inhabitants, as they are afraid that audit results would otherwise show some irregularities. Such course of action is also encouraged by the fact that the procedures of LEADER approach implementation are described as very complicated (even by board and council members) – about 54% of all the respondents answered that implementation of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme was particularly difficult, and about 46% of all the respondents had the same opinion about implementation of Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013.

Problems of local action groups in the aspect of the trust component of social capital

Problems of local action groups in the aspect of the trust component are mostly related to the trust of members (partners) of these organisations towards the representatives of the economic sector and the level of their generalised trust. Those members (partners) of local action groups who belong to the economic sector were trusted only by slightly more than half of their colleagues. Mistrust characterised mainly representatives of the public sector (over 16% of these respondents answered that they do not trust them at all). The largest level of trust towards them was declared by representatives of the economic sector (63% of these respondents answered in this way) (see table I).

measured by the number of implemented projects. However, larger partnership area may limit the possibility of contact between village inhabitants and LAG office workers.

Table 1. Trust of LAG members towards their colleagues from this organisation

In general, do you trust members of the local action group who represent:	Respondents' answers [%], N=573		
	yes	no	it is hard to say
public sector	65.1	12.9	21.9
social sector	70.8	7.6	21.6
economic sector	56.1	14.6	29.3

Source: compilation from the project „Struktura i uwarunkowania kapitału społecznego lokalnych grup działania” (Structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups).

The attitude of respondents towards their colleagues from local action groups who represent the economic sector is related to the opinion about entrepreneurs in their local communities. When the level of respondents' trust in the local authorities, non-governmental organisations and entrepreneurs from their commune of residence was analysed, it turned out that it was relatively lowest in the case of trust in local entrepreneurs. They were highly trusted by only every fourth respondent, and also every fourth respondent did not trust them at all. Half of local action group members declared only moderate trust in the representatives of business (see table II). It seems that most of the respondents are convinced about the “Machiavellian” attitude of entrepreneurs to the social reality, which is manifested in the fact that the only indication of their activity is their willingness to gain profit and satisfy their own interests. Thus, the problems (mentioned in publications) related to the deficit of trust of members (partners) of local action groups in the entrepreneurs and farmers who are also members of these organisations were reflected in research.

Moreover, local action groups cope with the problem of relatively low level of generalised trust of their members (partners). Only less than 20% of the surveyed declared a high level of trust to strangers encountered in various life situations, and as many as 34% of them responded that they do not trust such people at all (see table III).

Yet, this is this type of trust (towards strangers encountered in various life situations) that determines the inclination to enter more diversified social relations and facilitates access to diversified information and taking

Table 2. Trust in local institutions that are important for functioning of LAGs – distribution of answers to index questions

Trust in local institutions and organisations	High		Moderate		No trust	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Trust in local authorities (N=567)	254	44.8	170	30	143	25.2
Trust in non-governmental organisations operating in the commune area (N=567)	308	54.3	172	30.3	87	15.3
Trust in local entrepreneurs (N=551)	145	26.3	269	48.8	137	24.9

Source: compilation from the project „Struktura i uwarunkowania kapitału społecznego lokalnych grup działania” (Structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups).

Table 3. Social trust – distribution of answers to index questions

Social trust	High		Moderate		No trust	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Trust in strangers encountered in various life situations (N=566)	112	19.8	264	46.6	190	33.6
	Yes					
Conviction that most people can be trusted (N=546)	367	67.2	-	-	179	32.8
	No					

Source: compilation from the project „Struktura i uwarunkowania kapitału społecznego lokalnych grup działania” (Structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups).

advantage of them, including economic advantage. The low level of generalised trust reflects not only the low inclination to enter new contacts and form new networks (only the closest colleagues, mostly from one's own sector are trusted), but it also shows how fragile the basis for current cooperation within local action groups is. Actual cooperation in local action groups often takes place within a relatively limited and closed circle of persons who have long-term high functions on decision-making organs of their groups.

Conclusions

The research allowed to confirm some observations made in the literature on this subjects published so far, but also to highlight new problems with which local action groups have to cope. Putnam's multi-component definition of social capital was used, and the value of all three components was assessed, thanks to which the authors were able to notice that the main problem of these organisations is the condition of the network component of social capital which characterises their members (partners).

The value of the network component was assessed in relation to not only members (partners) of local action groups, but also in the process of verification of their level of activity within the structure. Only a little more than half of the respondents turned out to be active (and some of those "not involved" had a sense of exclusion from various activities and decisions, despite their willingness to participate in the work of these organisations). Those who joined local action groups a bit later (i.e. after implementation of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme) and would like to be more active than just speak during group meetings found it hard to do so due to petrification of key group organs, namely the board and the council. Perhaps this problem could be eliminated if limited terms of office were introduced, and control over their real composition was tightened.

Local action groups definitely lack additional units thanks to which the remaining persons could work for their benefit. The structural organisation of the researched groups (to various extents) may exclude (or lower the chance of) participation of their members (partners) in decision-making processes, and thus it puts at question compliance with some principles of the LEADER approach – the partnership principle and the bottom-up approach). "Technicalisation" of the LEADER approach in Poland is also

interesting – it is defined by the number of implemented projects (the more, the better), which makes it easy to forget about its essence, i.e. cooperation of countryside inhabitants towards rural development. It results in professionalisation of these organisations, which also limits access of their members (partners) to various kinds of work in them.

Undoubtedly, local action groups have to cope with the problem of a low level of involvement of economic sector representatives in implementation of the LEADER approach. It seems that little has changed in this respect over the years. In comparison to representatives of the social and public sector, the level of trust in them is still lower, which does not help them become active members of the boards or councils of these organisations.

Therefore, it can be stated that despite the legal form of local action groups in Poland (foundations, associations, unions of associations), they are more like new forms of regional development agencies than like organisations that attempt to include as many members as possible into their activity.

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