CHANGES IN THE IMAGE OF POLISH RURAL AREAS AS A RESULT OF EUROPEAN UNION FUNDS FINANCES PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION

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Introduction

Rural areas represent ca. 90% of the European Union territory (in Poland, according to the TERYT register territorial division and the OECD classification - over 90%) and they are populated by ca. 60% of the population (in Poland – according to the TERYT classification – 38,6%, according to the OECD – 34,4%) [10]. In the Agenda 21 accepted in 1992 it was postulated to include the principles of sustainable development in the process of agricultural policy implementation and the motion was presented to evaluate agricultural policy from the perspective of the issues of multifunctional agriculture [13].

The concept of multifunctional agriculture concerns, among others, the fact that agriculture as economic activity, next to its basic function of providing food and raw materials for industry also provides numerous non-market benefits, which include also retention of cultural heritage. As indicated by Duczewska-Małysz [11], the increasingly frequent focus on the development of rural areas and not only the agricultural sector is a new trend in the European Union. That widening of perspective appeared in mid-1990s within the frameworks of evolution in the Common Agricultural Policy that for decades gave the priority to common organization of agricultural markets and high subsidies from the common budget supporting profitability of production of many agricultural raw materials. The priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy evolve towards increasing the incomes of rural population and environment protection. In 2007, the new common policy was identified as financed from the separate fund established for that purpose – the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development ((EAFRD).

Revitalization of rural areas is promoted in the European Union programs as a method for development of rural areas. This encompasses the full spectrum of human needs and problems related to living in rural areas. This is the process of shaping the living conditions of the people in rural areas that adjusts the rural areas to the modern requirements and to fulfilling new functions to the benefit of the entire society. Implemented projects in revitalization of rural areas result in social and economic transformations. They cover the place of residence and its environment, infrastructure and public space organization, services and satisfying both material and spiritual needs, communication and safety. Revitalization of rural areas represents the best method for regional development of rural areas [2, 16]. Rural revitalization programs must be strategically adjusted to the long-term development concepts of the entire region [12].

Aim of study and the methodology

This paper aims at presenting the implementation progress of activities financed from the European funds implemented in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship to the benefit of revitalization of rural areas and retaining their cultural heritage. The analysis encompassed projects implemented within the frameworks of measure 1.3 Support to manufacture and promotion of regional products of the Regional Operational Program Warmia and Mazury 2007-2013 and measure Revitalization of rural areas as well as retention and protection of the cultural heritage of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013.

Empirical studies cover Warmińsko-Mazurskie
voivodship, as that region is a component of the northeastern macroregion of Poland known for underinvestment. Excessive domination of agriculture in the socio-economic structure of the region decreased the demand flexibility of the labor market. Before 1990, almost 50% of the agricultural land was owned by the State-owned agricultural enterprises that employed more than 65,000 people. Liquidation of those farms during the transformation process became the major cause of unemployment in the region. Low number of jobs in the existing business entities and slow process of creating new jobs cause that the north-eastern region is the one with the most pronounced unemployment problems [18]. Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship is characterized by the worst situation in the labor market in the country. As at the end of 2009, the unemployment rate in the analyzed region was 20.2%, which was almost twice higher than the national average in Poland, which was 11.9%. This means that in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship there are over 20 unemployed people per 100 vocationally active people while the national average is less than 12 people. The share of rural areas in the total area of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship is the highest in the country at 97.5% [10].

Outline of the rural revitalization issues, cultural heritage and regional products according to the subject literature

Revitalization of rural areas is not only a method for development of rural areas but also a carrier of ideas and a social movement. Revitalization of rural areas exists thanks to the involvement of the local community in the process of changes in their environment, their entrepreneurship and creativity. Each revitalization project has its unique nature differentiating a given village and promoting its identity. The message of rural revitalization is optimistic as it assumes that the development is possible under any conditions, that the development will not occur where people just expect it and undertake no effort to make it possible [4].

Revitalization of rural areas as an alternative for the paradigm of modernization aims at protection of cultural heritage of rural areas, their individuality and identity. This, nevertheless, does not mean isolation of rural areas from current socio-economic problems. Just to the contrary, rural development should take place in line with the flow of civilization processes and adjust to the modern requirements, although the rural areas must retain their unique resources and values that create the quality of living unattainable in towns [4].

This is an endogenous process drawing from the resources of bottom-up initiatives and involvement. This is also a formula of aid for self-aid consistent with the principle of solidarity encompassing bottom-up involvement of residents using the local resources (human capital, partnership in action, territorial approach to development involving also non-agricultural aspects of living in rural areas) and public support (of municipality, region, country as well as the EU) [4].

Revitalization of rural areas represents a group of practical measures with very modern theoretical bases that represents the reaction to the crisis in rural areas and agriculture caused by the belief that rural areas should develop according to the principles of urban areas development and agriculture according to the functional patterns of industry. Those actions seem to represent the practical expression of modern, holistic concept of development of rural areas and small towns defining the role of smaller settlement units in the processes of sustainable development of integrating Europe, indicating targets and principles of their functioning and methods for attaining the assumed standards guarantying economic success of their residents and assuring protection of the cultural and natural heritage [14].

The cultural heritage is the entire material and spiritual potential of humanity accumulated, established and enriched during the history and, which is the most important, passed from generation to generation. In other words, it is the heritage (inheritance, succession, residues) of material resources, certain principles, modes of operation, patterns to be followed, esthetic and moral opinions established in a given community. Transfer from generation to generation is the condition for maintaining separate, own culture in a given community [17].

Folk culture encompasses music, songs and dances, products of such materials as clay, timber, metal, fibers, leather, and paper as well as style of construction, decoration and costumes. It also involves the customs and rites related to consecutive year seasons, religious celebrations, the rhythm of work and living. Under the influence of the oldest traditions, first of all the Christian traditions, the separate, unique, beautiful and rich custom of holidays – the Polish rites year – has developed. The customs and rites are the source of joy, moods, exceptional experiences, the proof of family ties and ties between generations; they are also the proof of our ties with our history and tradition [19].

The folk culture is the source and core of the nation. It is the foundation of our statehood. It represents a historically and socially defined whole possessing never passing importance. The group of once created values represents the achievement of a specific group but at the same time it has the value of creating standards and the power of commitment for the contempo-
Folk culture is then not just a certain phenomenon developed in the past, but also a specific appeal, call for action, postulate and directive addressed to the contemporary man and society [7]. Sociologists and researchers of culture highlight the permanent presence of traditions stemming from rural areas in the national heritage and in the mentality of contemporary Poles [8].

The cultural heritage of Polish rural areas represents a particular type of capital with which the Polish society entered the united Europe [8]. Poland is a country with great tradition and diversity of folk culture. Those values should be retained and developed on the base of the potential of local communities and assistance from the State and European funds. The cultural individuality of the individual regions of the country that is expressed, among others, through the diversified, traditional forms of artistic creations and crafts is the value that should be protected and supported according to the principle of unity in diversity. Aid in development and promotion of widely understood folk art encompassing different forms: crafts, handicrafts, musical folklore, traditions and rites, is necessary. To take care of preserving the cultural heritage of rural areas the folk artist should be taken care of and promoted. Their works should be popularized including the works of arts, handicrafts, folk dances and folk music [15].

From the very beginnings of existence of rural areas the activities of their residents were mainly related to agriculture – but not only. Rural areas were true sanctuaries of craftsmen, e.g. manufacturing clay products – which covered the fired bricks, waterproof roof tiles and household ceramics, i.e. pots, jugs, flowerpots, pots for storage of butter, etc. Few contemporary potters in most cases manufacture the household ceramics only, and this is manufactured for decorative purposes mainly, but the process of forming and firing the pots is identical as in the old days. The cooper worked to cater for the needs of rural residents producing barrels, milk mugs, butter-makers, dough pots, etc. Rural areas could not function without a smith, who in addition to shoeing horses manufactured and repaired tools necessary at the farm. Today the opportunity to see a blacksmith’s shop and a blacksmith at work or a potter turning the wheel and making pots attracts numerous tourists [17].

In the area of the entire European Union regional and traditional products enjoy very much interest currently. The Europeans, in the markets dominated by products of mass production, increasingly often search for unique products that are characterized by the highest quality and they are ready to pay high prices for them. Propagation of culture and tradition as well as support to activities aiming at spreading the knowledge on our culinary heritage can cause that culinary products could contribute to increasing the competitiveness of a given region [21].

Each region of the country has its own, developed for years, regional cuisine in which the recipes are passed from generation to generation and frequently represent carefully protected secrets. As a consequence of the locations some regions specialize in such delicacies as: “kartacz”, “chłodnik”, “sękacz” and sour cucumbers while others in “oscypek” or “żętyca”, and still others in baking bread or “zalewajka”.

Old culinary recipes are frequently the treasures of knowledge on the dishes consumed by our ancestors during the times when the refrigerators, freezers or microwave ovens were not known. It should be highlighted that food prepared according to the old recipes is today considered healthy food while the dishes have magnificent, unique taste, and which is the most important, they are characterized by vast diversity. Culinary specialties have become the brands of regions (e.g. oscypek, żętyca in Podhale, sękacz in Podlasie), municipalities or even individual locations (plum vodka from Łącko, sausage from Knyszyn) [17].

The idea of revival of the rural areas reminds that rural areas are different from cities and that they should not repeat the urban development path but search for their own forms of existence respecting what is precious, individual in life of the rural community and specific to rural areas [5].

As indicated by Błąd [5] following Wilczyński, revitalization of rural areas takes place on all levels of life of the rural community. This manifests in the economy, architecture and in the social life, culture as well as the natural environment. The space influenced by rural revitalization is defined with four dimensions: economic conditions of rural areas, material conditions of residents, their non-material needs and rural identity. So we deal with the multilevel process that integrates different aspects of rural life and contributes to harmonization of its development.

Poorly developed technical and social infrastructure in rural areas represents one of the major barriers to multifunctional development of rural areas and development of non-agricultural economic activity. Inadequate level of rural infrastructure development not only lowers the living and economic standards of rural residents but also determines poor attractiveness of rural areas for investors. Capital barriers and limited financial potential of local governments also prevent adequate satisfaction of the social and cultural needs of rural residents and preserving the cultural heritage.

Undertaking the measure Revitalization of rural areas as well as retention and protection of the cultural heritage also serves mobilization of local commu-
nities and stimulating activities to implement common projects for improvement of living standards and conditions in the given location. Within the frameworks of that measure investment projects are supported that are covered by the application for financial support including the descriptions of activities planned initiated by the local communities. The measure serves mobilization of local communities to undertake projects for improvement of living conditions and quality in rural areas, creating conditions for development of economic as well as social and cultural functions of rural areas. Within that measure implementation of investment initiatives in modernization and equipping facilities fulfilling cultural, recreational and sports functions, rehabilitation of objects characteristic for the traditional of rural construction in the region and adaptation of them for cultural and social purposes as well as modernization of the public space in villages (sidewalks, squares, parks, markets) is supported. Also projects contributing to development of public infrastructure related to development of tourist function in rural areas and actions involved in promotion of the region are supported.\(^1\)

## Results of studies

The Entrepreneurship axis is the second largest as concerns the funds allocated for its implementation in the ROP Warmia and Mazury. Measure 1.3 *Support to manufacturing and promotion of regional products* is one of three measures within that axis. It aims at increase of competitiveness of enterprises through financial support aimed at creating regional products and recognized brands as well as promoting them using state of the art marketing tools. The amount of EUR 11.76 million during the entire period of seven years has been allocated for implementation of that measure.

The projects undertaken should allow entrepreneurs from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship establishing and presenting the offer of products as well as more efficient establishment of contacts with the potential domestic and foreign partners. Projects in the area of regional marketing allow promoting Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship as the region attractive for investors [22].

At the beginning of December 2009, the Management Board of the voivodship as the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Program Warmia and Mazury for the years 2007-2013, passed the resolution on the choice of projects for support within the frameworks of measure 1.3 *Support to manufacturing and promotion of regional products*. In total, 13 projects were qualified for financing with the territorial government of the voivodship as the main beneficiary. Only 4 projects were implemented by enterprises. The values of individual projects and the amounts of support applied for are presented in figure 1.

![Fig. 1. Value and amount of support for projects implemented within the frameworks of measure 1.3](image)

*Source:* own work based on the data by the Marshal’s Office of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship.

\(^1\) [www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/ue/spo_rol/dzialania/dzialanie_2_3.htm](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/ue/spo_rol/dzialania/dzialanie_2_3.htm) [12 02 2008]
Projects implemented by enterprises (1, 6, 12, 13) differed from the others because of much lower value, with the exception of project 1, the value of which in the final list was the highest reaching PLN 2 mln. Additionally, the level of support for projects implemented by enterprises was 50%, while in case of the other projects it reached 85%.

The initiatives represented by the projects focused mainly on the international promotion of the region (participation in fairs, exhibitions, development of the souvenir from Warmia and Mazury region).

Entirely different types of projects were implemented within the frameworks of the measure Revitalization of rural areas as well as retention and protection of the cultural heritage of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013, the aim of which is to improve the quality of living in rural areas through satisfying the social and cultural needs of rural residents and promotion of rural areas. The initiatives undertaken aim at development of rural community identity, maintaining the cultural heritage and specificity of rural areas as well as increasing attractiveness of rural areas for tourism and investments [20].

A municipality, municipal institutions of culture, churches or religious organizations as well as public utility organizations can be the beneficiaries of that measure. Preference is given to rural municipalities. The criteria considered during evaluation of applications included, among others: the value of per capita tax income of the municipality, level of own contribution to project implementation and the amount of subsidy applied for [20].

In total, 82 applications were lodged from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship of which 1 was presented by a center of culture and the others by municipalities. Following formal and content evaluation the ranking list consisted of 60 projects, of which, as a consequence of limited funds, 15 were qualified for subsidizing.

Although only one application per municipality could obtain the subsidy, some units showed high activity in applying for funds for implementation of projects. The data presented in figure 2 shows that there were 9 municipalities that lodged more than one application for project co-financing. The municipalities situated in the southwestern part of the voivodship showed much higher activity.

The applications also differed in the amounts of subsidy applied for. The maximum subsidy could cover 75% of eligible project costs. The data presented in figure 3 indicate that the share of projects in case of which the value ranged from PLN 30.00 to PLN 70.00 and projects where that value exceeded PLN 150.000. In both cases the share of the subsidy was 30%.

Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of applications lodged and projects implemented within the frameworks of the measure Revitalization of rural areas as well as retention and protection of the cultural heritage of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013

Source: own work based on the data by the Marshal’s Office of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship.
Fig. 3. Amount of subsidies for projects within the frameworks of the measure Revitalization of rural areas as well as retention and protection of the cultural heritage of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013 included in the ranking lists

Source: own work based on the data by the Marshal’s Office of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship.

The average value of projects approved for implementation was PLN 60.000. The detailed analysis, however, allows noticing significant disproportions in that respect. The value of subsidies in case of two projects reached almost PLN 160.000 while in case of 4 projects it did not reach even PLN 20.000.

Fig. 4. Value of subsidies for projects approved for implementation

Source: own work based on the data by the Marshal’s Office of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship.

It should be highlighted that the maximum level of support provided for implementation of investments of that type was set at the level of PLN 500.000 (slightly over EUR 128.000).

The initiatives undertaken by the projects focused mainly on refurbishment and modernization of village community center buildings (23 applications), construction and refurbishment of village play gardens for children (8 applications) purchase of equipment for village community centers (5 applications). A few projects were outstanding declaring purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments. It can be noticed, however, that the activities undertaken support integration of rural communities and improvement of living conditions in rural areas.
Conclusion

The diversity of folk culture and national traditions are important factors in multidirectional of Polish rural areas. The wider opportunities for implementation of revitalization of rural areas in Poland have been offered by the financial support from the EU funds.

The European funds subsidizing projects implementing through different programs, on one hand, allow improvement of living standards in rural areas, which is exemplified by subsidies from the Rural Development Program 2007-2013. The projects implemented focused mainly on investments in technical infrastructure, i.e. refurbishment and equipping village community centers, playgrounds, etc. They also help preserving the value of rural living and revival of identity and integrity of rural areas through financing, e.g. purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments. On the other hand the European Union funds allow promotion of regional products and brands supporting the regional enterprises. Projects subsidized from the ROP Warmia and Mazury 2007-2013 can be the example here.

It is expected that the European Union support will contribute to accelerating the processes of revitalization of rural areas in Poland. It should also contribute to better integration of the local community.

References

Changes in the Image of Polish Rural Areas as a Result of European Union Funds Finances Projects Implementation

Summary

Rural development in Poland in recent years, accompanied by a recovery aspect of the village, which boils down to this shape the lives of people in rural areas, which adjusts to the requirements of the present village, and to perform new functions for the benefit of society as a whole. Objective of the study was to present the financial activities of the European funds realized in the Warmia and Mazury in favor of the village renewal and conservation of cultural heritage. Analyzed projects under Action 1.3 Support the production and promotion of the Regional Operational Program Regional Warmia and Masuria 2007-2013 and the renewal of rural areas and the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage Rural Development Program 2007-2013. The beneficiary of the projects under ROP was mainly provincial government. Of the 13 projects approved for 4 were carried out by the company. Initiatives were focused mainly on the international promotion of the region (participation in fairs, exhibitions, development of souvenirs from the region of Warmia and Mazury). Presented a slightly different implementation of projects funded by the RDP. A total of 82 proposals submitted, but after assessing the merits created formal ranking list contained 60 projects, of which, due to limited resources, to achieve the 15 qualified Undertaken in projects focussed mainly on the repair or reconstruction of buildings in rural recreation (23 applications), construction or repair of rural playgrounds (8 applications), purchase of equipment in rural clubs (5 applications). Against this background, a few stand out projects which were declared to purchase costumes and musical instruments. It recognizes, however, that the actions encourage social integration of the rural population and improving living conditions in rural areas.

Keywords: countryside, rural areas, the countryside restoration, cultural capital, regional and traditional products.