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THE CONDITIONS FOR SUPPORTING MULTIFUNCTIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE „RURAL RENEWAL PROGRAMME IN THE OPOLE VOIVODSHIP”

1. Introduction

The rural regions of many European countries are currently in a deep crisis on many levels: economic, social and cultural, spatial and environmental. The long term industrialisation policy and rapid development of urban agglomerations have effects on the environment, which are unbearable for rural regions. Modernisation of agriculture, overdeveloped or incorrectly organised mass leisure, centralisation tendencies in production and management and standardisation tendencies in culture – are but a few processes leading to the loss of social and economic vigour in rural areas, along with irreversible damages to the landscape, architecture, environment and culture of such areas. A reaction to this state of affairs has come in the form of the recently developed European programmes for rural communities and their environment. The capacity for growth in the local perspective is decisive for the development of rural areas. Deficiencies in this respect have initiated an intensive search for effective local government structures, non-government organisations and government and research institutions supported by many facilitative funds [*Integracja polskiej wsi...*, 1998]. Due to the future realisation of regional development programs, creating proper organisational structures would be favourable to the development of enterprises in the Opole region. Regional economic differences in the near future will depend on the ability of regions to compete successfully for foreign investment and

intake of new technologies, as well as on the speed and quality of diffusion processes and innovations in businesses. It is believed that effective use of production factors will, to a large extent, help reduce regional disproportions. The ability to adapt to change and readiness to meet challenges from the global economy will also play an important role.

This paper aims to present the possibilities of multifunctional rural development, in particular of activation of local communities in rural areas in Poland, based on the Rural Renewal Programme in the Opole Voivodship mentioned above.

2. The origin and assumptions of rural renewal in the Opole Voivodship

Rural renewal is a package of practical operations resulting from the crisis of rural areas, which resulted from the belief that rural areas should follow the development patterns of urban areas and that agriculture should follow the development patterns of industry. Rural renewal is both a social and economic process, which covers the key areas of local community functioning and which reorganises the structure of rural areas. Restructuring includes management of housing, infrastructure, public space and service facilities, the fulfilment of existential and spiritual needs, public transport and safety. This synergic process creates a friendly environment for the development of new management areas.

A prerequisite for the rural renewal process is the involvement of the local community in enterprises beneficial to their villages, their own homes and vicinities. By creating a sense of self-fulfilment and engagement, rural renewal programmes activate community members and apply existing assets and potential. In this way, rural renewal programmes emphasise the basic importance of human and endogenous factors that need to be taken into account when formulating any development strategy.

The basic assumptions of rural renewal are [Kaleta, 1998]:

- Rejection of the principle of the dominance of economic factors over socio-cultural and environmental factors (the principle of balanced growth);
- Introduction of the principle of personalisation for villages and their inhabitants;
- Change in the social status of agriculture (functions, the recognition of the stability of a family farm, the recognition of a farmer as the administrator of environmental and cultural inheritance);

- Recognition of modern telecommunication media as a basic instrument of economic and social development in rural areas;
- Protection of cultural diversity.

Rural renewal programmes, which function as an instrument for the development of rural areas, consist of the activation and maintenance of such activities. The activation of the villagers is accompanied by the use of their own resources and the formulation and realisation of a vision of rural development at the level of a particular village by the application of methods of strategic and spatial planning. Territorial government and local authorities should be of a supportive character and provide comprehensive assistance (animation of formulating visions and objectives of development, participation of professionals in the creation and realisation of projects, co-financing), for both public and private projects. Rural renewal in rural areas exemplifies the rule of subsidisation (assistance). As a method of development, it effectively combines the individual character of enterprises and the use of local resources with the support of public subsidies, including structural grants from the European Union [LEADER Magazine, 2001].

It is necessary to re-emphasise the assumption of balance in the rural renewal programme and the mutual support of the three key elements which are decisive in rural development; namely: people, the economy and environment. Economic growth takes place within a given environment (natural and cultural) and it is effected by the population of that environment. The quality of the environment in turn influences the direction and level of economic growth. This interdependence mainly applies to agricultural management and interdependent social and spatial structures. The history of the development of rural areas, so different in so many European countries, is united by this particular strict principle.

Rural renewal initiatives assume that any growth should follow three basic principles:

- the importance of the relation of people to the environment, or equal treatment of the issues concerning people and their natural and cultural environment,
- integrated activity, or effective cooperation between various governmental and local administrative bodies with local residents in the process of construction and completion of all the local development programmes,
- consultation and engagement, or the recognition of the views, needs, resources and powers of local community members in the development processes.

3. Involvement of the local community in the implementation and functioning of the rural renewal programme

These remarks are fully applicable to the reality of the Opole Voivodship, all the more so because until 1997 no programme within the state regional policy had been carried out in the area of the Opole region. Still, it is worth pointing to the factors which have facilitated the adoption of Western patterns and the commencement of the Opole rural renewal programme.

- the diversification of the economic situation of villages and their functions within the Opole region, ethnic and cultural diversity of the local communities and the broad contacts with the West serve the transformation and exchange of experience better than anywhere else in Poland.

- 2/3 of the rural population in Opole works outside agriculture.

- The Silesian traditions of prudence, dedication to the home community, relative wealth and high quality of the technical and social infrastructure of the Opole rural areas, where basic problems have already been solved, make the Opole Voivodship well prepared to take up the next step of development, going beyond just basic needs

- A number of local communities have rich traditions of cooperating with the local government for their own village's good. Many typical rural renewal programmes have long been carried out in many villages on an individual scale. Thus, there is a rich stock of experience to refer to.

The main goal of the programme is the cultural, social and economic activation of rural communities, as well as protection of their natural and cultural inheritance. Activity is centred around typical issues in rural areas, the search for and popularisation of practical spatial solutions, as well as international exchange of opinions and experience in such matters. The number of programme participants grew rapidly: 17 districts and 40 villages at the beginning of 1997, 28 districts and 63 villages at the end of 1997, 24 districts and 77 villages at the end of 1998. Up to 2001, 145 villages have participated in the rural renewal programme. Out of the 68 rural, and mixed districts of the Opole Voivodship, 51 districts (75% of the total) had filed for accession into the programme by 2001 and 145 villages out of the total number of 992 (14.6%). A few stages in the implementation of programmes can be observed (Table 1). One of the key stages is a training course for rural leaders called *Planning in the Rural Renewal Programme*. This course is meant to educate leaders in the creation of rural strategies – development projects and rural renewal programmes in both the short-term and

Table 1. Stages of the Implementation of a Rural Renewal Programme

Stages and their duration	Steps taken	Number of people to be trained
Promotion and shaping of the programme concept. Started 22 Oct, 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seminar called Promotion of the Rural Renewal Concept - popularisation of the programme concept among local governments - acceptance of applications of local governments willing to participate 	70
Enrolment of participants Started 5 March, 1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inauguration conference - formal application of local governments and villages for participation - selection of programme coordinators among leaders of rural and local communities 	110
Training course and effecting of the rural renewal agenda Started 22 May, 1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seminar on the organisation of rural communities for the rural renewal programme, - training courses, 3 research trips, - spontaneous organisation of rural renewal groups and creation of rural renewal programmes, effecting of the agenda 	340
Creation of rural renewal personnel and drafting of renewal plans and programmes From 9 Jan, 1998 until 29 May, 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training of moderators to draft development plans and rural renewal programmes, - creation of rural renewal groups 	ca 600
From 1998 until 2002 A training course called Planning in the Rural Renewal Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - moderators prepare a local vision of the village before the course - a training course for 3-4 rural renewal groups covers the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analysis of the resources of a village and its vicinity, identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the village, identification of opportunities and hazards, - preparation of a vision of rural development, - preparation of development plans and rural renewal programmes, support courses for the leaders of rural renewal groups 	595

Source: based on Wilczyński, 2002.

long-term. Leaders of all the villages involved in the programme have been participants in this course.

The final decisive stage for the success of the implementation of the programme was the preparation of development plans and rural renewal programmes by the rural leaders in the first half of 1998. This was the first Polish attempt to build a development strategy at the village level on such a large scale. Looking back, we can see that the incentive for the programme was the participants' motivation ingrained by educational action. The research trips to Germany (Rheinland-Pfalz) and to Austria were particularly important. In 1997–1998 550 people completed various training courses. Another 375 people participated in the workshop on development plan and rural renewal programme construction. Since 1998 the roles of the programme participants have become defined and include rural communities, districts and regions.

Over its five years of implementation the program has functioned in accordance with the model shown in Table 2.

4. Effects and character of ventures within the rural renewal programme in the Opole Voivodship

The main effect of the programme in 1997–2002 was the implementation of a successful mechanism of rural renewal thanks to the propagation of the concept of rural renewal at every level of programme realisation, particularly among local communities. The material effects achieved and the strengthening of the integration of local communities resulted in trust and belief in the effectiveness of the concept of rural renewal. The programme was perceived as the first step concerned with rural areas and their populations after years of regression. Effects of the rural renewal programme can be grouped into material, economic, social and political.

In 1998 the number of ventures carried out by local leaders in the social and non-material area grew, especially in areas concerned with culture, tradition and sports, due to the fact that local communities recognised the need to integrate as being crucial in meeting the objectives set forth in the development plans and rural renewal programmes. This priority was reflected in material ventures – in 1998 the number of projects aimed at developing social infrastructure almost tripled (in absolute numbers). The character of steps taken in the material area is equally interesting: redevelopment, modernisation, reclamation (32.5%), construction, extensions, purchases for investment purposes (27.0%), order-

Table 2. A model of the progression of a rural renewal programme

Stages of rural renewal	Actions taken	Activities and organisational development	Duration (in years)
Preliminary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – organisation of village – preparation of a development plan and rural renewal programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – initiative group – rural renewal group – frequent spontaneous action 	1–2
Initial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – projects aimed at an increase in living standard and quality of life – activation of the population to act according to their abilities/resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – large rural renewal group – planning of actions – simple instruments of inner communication and rural renewal support 	2–3
Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – effecting of large projects aimed at qualitative changes in key areas of life – joint involvement of the population in public projects – renewal of private property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – rural renewal association – action design – developed instruments of inner communication and rural renewal support 	3–5
Comprehensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – comprehensive steps regarding standards and quality, jobs, maintenance of village identity based on planning – conscious shaping of development factors in order to create new jobs – adaptation of private projects to rural renewal programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – animating the actions of rural renewal associations (e.g. youth, farmer's, business people's groups) – institutions promoting local development and giving professional advice – comprehensive spatial and strategic planning – developed promotion of the activities of rural renewal groups 	5–8

Source: based on Wilczyński, 2002.

ing, renovation, protection, maintenance (18.4%), conceptual and preparatory work and design (7.5%), purchase, acquisition of equipment (3.2%), renting, preparation for exploitation (1.7%), decoration, interior arrangement (1.4%), purchase, acquisition of real property (1.4%), change of function, adaptation (1.4%), collection of funds (1.1%), demolitions, disassembly, liquidation (1.1%), reorganisation of traffic (1.1%), signposting and related activities (0.9%), creation of institutions and social organisations (0.9%), revisions, local visions (0.3%).

To sum up, it should be noted that most steps taken by rural communities are directed at a tangible effect. Over 50% of the ventures are

Table 3. Ventures in the rural areas of the Opole Region in 1997–1998

Item	Areas of the ventures	1997 % of the total % in an area	1998 % of the total % in an area
I.	Material area:	87.3	68.0
	aesthetics of the village	24.2	24.6
	environmental protection	4.8	3.2
	technological infrastructure	42.7	40.4
	social infrastructure	22.6	30.4
	tourism and leisure	5.6	1.4
II.	Economic area:	2.8	4.4
	spatial planning	75.0	26.1
	business activity, jobs promotion and information	25.0 0.0	43.5 30.4
III.	Social and non-material area:	9.9	27.6
	activation of the rural population	75.0	70.0
	education culture, tradition and sports	25.0 0.0	23.5 6.5

Sources: Survey conducted by the Marshall Office in Opole.

aimed at revaluating resources already possessed. Most actions are of an investment character and are meant to multiply the possessions of the village. Qualitative effects include:

- presentation of a positive perspective for a village and an effective direction of searching for a solution for that village,
- intensification of the restructuring process of the awareness of rural communities,
- intensification of the sense of community and integration of rural communities,
- activation of rural areas and organisation of communities to develop,
- enlargement of the group of rural community leaders,
- implementation of procedures of development planning at the village level and identification of priorities,
- intensification of local/rural community cooperation, acceleration of the common decentralisation process,
- creation of local government and voivodship personnel for rural renewal,
- acceleration of the development of local spatial plans for rural development,

– creation of new ways of communication and exchanging experience and pattern following

The examples presented of supporting programmes undertaken at the regional level obviously do not give us an overall picture, yet they underline the complexity and importance of such actions, as well as benefits resulting from their completion. Such benefits can be discussed in both their social and economic aspects, both in the short and long term. Apart from the highlighted advantages of absorbing unemployment by creating new workplaces and spreading innovativeness, there are also others, e.g. realisation of an entrepreneur's individual goals, meeting the needs of the local community in a better way, improving the region's management, increasing the community spirit and raising living standards.

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