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## THE ROLE OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS IN THE FORMATION OF HUMAN, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CAPITAL OF RURAL AREAS<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** The main objective of Local Action Groups (LAGs), in accordance with the principles of LEADER, as implemented in EU Member States, and who were formed under this approach is to conduct such activities which contribute to the generation and reinforcement of human and social capital in local communities as well as to activate local community members. Importantly LAGs are entities through which the financial resources provided by EU programmes, are distributed to partnership areas for the purposes of development and the improvement of living conditions of their inhabitants. The present article studies various types of capital (human, social, economic) which is accumulated within analysed territorial partnerships as well as their potential to reinforce the existing supplies of these types of capital and generate new capital supplies in local communities.

**Key words:** social capital, human capital, local communities, Local Action Groups

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<sup>2</sup> Empirically, the article is based on the research conducted within the framework of the project entitled "The structure and determinants of social capital in local action groups" implemented under contract no. 6996/B/H03/2011/40 with the National Science Centre. The survey sample is comprised of 573 participants of 34 Local Action Groups. The LAGs and their members (individuals and representatives of organisations working in the framework of local action groups) were chosen from six Voivodeships: Małopolskie, Lubuskie, Opolskie, Podkarpackie, Wielkopolskie and Zachodniopomorskie. The research was conducted as an individual survey distributed to members of LAGs during general meetings, and via their organisation offices. 39% of the surveyed LAG participants returned their survey questionnaires, as a result the survey sample did not fulfill the criteria of being a random sample, which undoubtedly limits the scope of conclusions related to the empirically grounded hypotheses.

## INTRODUCTION AND BASIC TERMINOLOGY

Well rooted in the early history of economics, the concept of capital is now one of the most frequently used theoretical and analytical methods used in social sciences. In its classical interpretation capital is understood as financial or technological resources alongside “land” and “Labour” as one of the three basic factors of production which determine economic processes. By the turn of the 20th century the notion of capital had been expanded to include social capital” in reference to social cohesion and personal investment in communities. And by the 1990’s, to increasingly express the role of other factors in economic development new forms have been added to this definition. Now in developed countries analysts combine the study of other sciences with economics to illustrate the potential of extra market components in the shaping of the economic competitiveness of the state.

In numerous studies, sociologists, politologists and economists, such as “M. Woolcock (...), D. Halpren (...) and R. Florida (...) expose the significance of combining classical determinants of economic growth, namely modern technologies, with the social foundations of social organisation and skills of individuals, both of which are components of human and social capital” [Rokicka 2012, p. 42]. The growing relevance of social capital is emphasised, and it is stressed that, as was the case with financial capital (i.e. what one owns) in pre-modern times and human capital (one’s knowledge and skills) in modern times, now (in the post-modern era) it is social capital (whom one knows and whom one is linked to) that determines the success of individuals and wider social groups” [Rymsza 2007, p. 20].

Extensive analysis by representatives of all social sciences has considered the origin, function and possibilities of creating non-material sources of capital as these are indispensable if material forms of capital are too, to be created.

The significance of social capital and human capital (in its most general sense) for the wellbeing of modern societies is emphasised not only by theoretical proposals, which are important from the point of view of social economic sciences, but also by those documents which outline the framework and directions of socio-economic development of individual member states of the European Union. These include such programmes as the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 and the Human Capital Operational Programme 2007–2013 which stress the role of human capital in stimulating economic growth, and (as a consequence) the need to implement certain systematic measures with the purpose of enhancing development of this kind of capital. From a Polish perspective the “Poland 2030” report is worth particular attention. This document states that “the need for a systemic change of stresses, or even the paradigm shift from a Welfare State to a Welfare Society [...], the need to develop human capital, is one of the central themes” [Wygnański and Herbst 2010, p. 7].

General consensus seems to agree about the scope of the notion of economic capital and the character of elements which denote it, however, when it comes to the increasingly popular other two categories of capital mentioned above, no generally accepted theories or unambiguous operational definitions have been developed. Czapiński [2008, p. 1] suggested “They are usually treated as latent constructs which may manifest themselves in various ways and have various empirical indicators”

and it is this which significantly hinders accumulation of the results of research projects devoted to them.

The notion of human capital, related to the concept of knowledge-based society and economy based on knowledge and information, is defined both in literature [see Rokicka 2012], and in this article. It is defined as something inherent to individuals and the skills, competences and knowledge resulting from education, which is used by them in their economic activity<sup>3</sup>. A high level of human capital in this sense positively influences competitiveness and effectiveness of an individual on the labor market, and, as a result, his/her social status and quality of life” [Rokicka 2012, p. 43].

The notion of social capital, as defined by Lyda Judson Hanifan in 1916<sup>4</sup>, was included in the theoretical reflection of social sciences by Pierre Bourdieu as “...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” [1985, p. 248], coexisting with other kinds of capital (cultural, symbolic, political, and, finally, economic) and subject to mutual conversion with them.

Developed and modified by various theoretical and (less frequently) empirical studies, the notion of social capital is currently functioning mainly in the context of reflection regarding the condition of modern democracy and civil society which constitutes its basis.

According to Tomasz Kaźmierczak, as a result of introducing this notion, “...to the discourse of social sciences, it is possible to include, recognise and measure the influence and role of the context (social, socio-cultural and/or institutional) in the political and economic processes set in this context, and vice versa” [2008, p. 38].

Without focusing on a full presentation of the concept of social capital, it has been assumed as a basis for further considerations that “...in its most basic formula, it says that when people remain in contact with other people and in particular when they act together in a regular and repetitive manner in order to achieve common goals, it has durable and positive results in three dimensions: for the individuals themselves, for the reinforcement of the relations between them, and for the functioning of institutions (especially democratic ones)” [Trutkowski and Mandes 2005, p. 46–47]. At the same time, it should be emphasised that it is not just network density and regular contact with other people which ensures the above mentioned benefits. The main decisive factors are the differentiation of network “links”, heterogeneity of network resources (for instance, of human capital in the form of knowledge and information) which network members have at their disposal and which they can offer or exchange within the network [see e.g. Burt 1992, Putnam 2008].

Whilst a basic definition of social capital, mentioned here, is considered as fully legitimate, this article is based on the concepts which treat social capital as resources which are produced, and function, within the network of relations between members of a given community.

This is mainly based on mutual trust (and trust to the institutions which are important for functioning of the community). It is reflected in a norm of cooperation

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<sup>3</sup> In some concepts, indicators of human capital also include individual skills and physical and mental health – see also Czapiński [2008].

<sup>4</sup> See also R. Putnam [2008].

shared for the sake of extra-individual good and in engagement in activities which serve the community [Coleman 1988, 2006, Fukuyama 1997, Putnam 2008].

Depending on the type of relations between community members, this kind of capital may either serve the interest of a relatively small, homogenous and exclusive community or contribute to development of extensive social networks which enable free flow of information, engaging in various types of relations (including cooperation in pursuit of common objectives) between multi-diversified social groups. In the first case, we call it bonding capital, based on strong relations of persons who have a lot in common, while in the second case it is bridging and linking capital [Putnam 2008].

## **LOCAL ACTION GROUP – ASSUMPTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

Social development in a general (regional, local) sense, aimed at improving the quality of life of inhabitants, is based on various endogenous resources or the resources obtained within a given territory. From the perspective of the considerations presented in this article, the analyses which lead to the conclusions that social capital is understood as those resources based on relations and bonds between people and those which allow “activation” and/or intensify the use of other resources (human, economic) are of particular importance. This is especially the case in those areas where these resources have a limited scope and various projects are implemented with the aim of enhancing “natural” resources within local communities. Consideration must be given that the creation and stabilisation of social and human capital takes some time, and that they may be influenced by adequate local policy [Lewenstein and Theiss 2008].

An example of exerting influence on the resources which constitute the basis for various forms of local community capital is seen in the LEADER approach, developed and implemented in the EU Member States since 1991 as part of the EU policy for Rural Development. According to the website of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), the primary objective of the project is to make “use of the energy and resources of those persons who could contribute to rural development by forming a partnership between the public, private and civil sectors on the local level” [<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>]. The idea of a tri-sectoral partnership which guarantees realisation of this goal is formally “embodied” by means of forming Local Action Groups (LAGs). According to the assumptions, they take the form of affiliations, unions or foundations. They conduct their activity in accordance with local development strategies, developed “on the basis of diagnosis of the potential, situation and needs of a given territory”, and “financial support is granted on a territorial, not sectoral, basis” [Wasielewski ed. 2009, p. 136]. The suggested form of organisation – partnership, is based on discretionary cooperation of various categories of actors that function in the locality (with minimum 50% participation of representatives of local social and economic entities). The LAG is autonomous in decisions regarding directions of action and obliged to develop original solutions to local problems. It also has significant influence on the distribution of obtained

resources<sup>5</sup>. Local Action Groups should stimulate effective use of the obtained funding, human potential of the persons engaged in its redistribution, and social capital of the existing and new relations between them. At the same time, the LAG, by being based on the “original” resources contributed by members of the organisation, should participate in generating new resources in the local community, positively affecting the development in their area of activity.

Accounts of experiences of LEADER implementation in the European Union Member States were grounds for expectations that applying this methodology in Poland will also bring positive results. This was backed by the researchers’ own conclusion that “...particularly positive effect of this kind of approach should be expected in those countries in which rural development is hindered mainly by a low level of social capital, because an authentic local partnership may help break a passive attitude and encourage people to cooperate” [Budzich-Szukała 2005, after: Juroszek 2009, p. 84]. It was expected that a LEADER approach would contribute to improving the civic activity of local community members and encourage them to participate in organisations which develop various initiatives for inhabitants of these communities.

Thus, the functioning of Local Action Groups should be both an impulse prompting the activity of capital resources (material, human, social) which already exist in local rural communities, and also a potential platform for their mutual conversion and creation.

The question arises to what extent are these assumptions put into practice? Do Polish local partnerships fulfil the hope put in them and to what extent?

## **RESOURCES OF THE ANALYSED LAGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON VARIOUS FORMS OF CAPITAL IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

From an economic perspective, LAGs which act towards development of their partnership region have capital from membership fees, and they obtain EU funds. Most of them “...seek additional sources of funding by submitting applications to other programmes (e.g. HC OP, European Territorial Co-operation, Financial Mechanisms etc.) and they are often granted additional financial support (...) and gain experience in the principles of implementation of other programmes, which is a factor that prepares them for multi-funding” [PSDB 2012, p. 8].

In the current programming period, Local Action Groups assign so-called “small grants”, and in 2014 they may become (according to initial assumptions pertaining to PROW 2014–2020) grant giving institutions for other organisations and entrepreneurs. They, therefore, are expanding their financial capital, which may be used by institutions and organisations in the partnership area, e.g. for the purpose of development or improvement of local infrastructure. Undoubtedly, a number of such projects will be implemented, and they will contribute to the improvement of

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<sup>5</sup> LAG is not fully autonomous in the process of decision-making, as both Local Development Strategies, and individual calls for applications need to be approved by regional authorities, and the funds are provided by (depending on the scope of support) Marshal’s Offices (or a designated local institution) and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture [PSDB 2012].

life quality for local community inhabitants and respond to their most identifiable needs (by creating places of safe leisure and recreation, places for potential common meetings, friendly space for various activities).

Unfortunately, many valuable local projects are not implemented due to the assessment procedure (both formal and financial) of the applications submitted by LAGs, both on their own behalf and for other institutions. “Compared to other countries or regions, LAGs in Poland have minimal powers. (...) LAGs are reliant on a call for applications for projects for funding, assessment of the compliance of these projects with the Local Development Strategy and the selection of applications in accordance with local criteria. Next, the applications are sent to Implementing Institutions and formally this is the end of their role” [Kwaterna 2012, p. 29]. The LEADER approach (in Poland in perspective 2007–2013) is based on refinancing and most of the ideas (and applications for funds for putting these ideas into practice) come from persons who belong to small, sometimes not even formalised, local organisations which have limited financial resources. As a result they usually have significant problems gaining funds for implementation of their proposed projects. Often, having obtained such resources in a form of various loans (also private), they are not able to survive the long period of waiting for the decision and possible refinancing (when the decision is positive). Due to these circumstances, they often resign from many interesting projects which are important for local communities. Moreover, the trust which potential partners put in LAGs is lowered, and sometimes they even give up their planned pro-social activity, which is also a very significant issue from the perspective of the subject of this article.

“The complex and long period of waiting for funding leads entrepreneurs to resign from it and invest their own resources in projects which have much less powerful socio-economic results, instead of adding the funds from the Rural Development Programme to them and thus improve the results of their investment” [Kwaterna 2012, p. 29].

It is also observed that obtaining financial resources and positive change of infrastructural capital of the partnership area does not translate directly into change in levels of other types of capital in a local community. Apart from creating a friendly space with functional objects, involvement of the inhabitants is necessary in order for this space and objects to serve social purposes. This is not always the case in practice, where in extreme situations (hopefully, really rare) an example is a new community centre which becomes a sort of tightly-guarded monument devoted to the memory of its founder, and access to it is under careful control and is limited as is possible.

The significance of the material aspect of projects undertaken by local action groups for inhabitants of the areas supported by them should not be neglected and it is also worth taking a closer examination of other resources which are part of the capital-building potential of these organisations, especially considering that by definition they have been predestined as creators of human and social capital resources in local rural communities.



In the research<sup>6</sup>, the level of human capital in the analysed organisations was assessed on the level of education of their members and their belonging to a specific social and occupational category (which determines the status of an individual in the social structure). Additionally, two socio-demographic variables which have potential influence on the form and scope of social activity of the surveyed persons have been analysed, namely their age and gender. In the survey sample, dominant were people in the age range of 35–54 years (over 50% of the surveyed), at the same time, these persons were also the most occupationally active group. Nearly one in three respondents were over 55 years of age, and the youngest people, below 35 years of age, constituted less than 16% of the sample. Among 573 members of 34 Local Action Groups who participated in the researched, most (58%) were male. The surveyed LAG members were well-educated – almost 60% of them had higher education, more than a quarter (28%) had secondary education<sup>7</sup>, and only 13% of the surveyed completed a basic vocational school at the most. As many as 82% of the surveyed were occupationally active<sup>8</sup>, of which 90% were employed outside the agricultural sector. More than a half of the surveyed belonged to the social sector, more than a fourth of the surveyed (28%) belonged to the public sector, and every fifth surveyed person worked in the economic sector. Most of the surveyed were mid-level office workers (in public administration, trade and services) and executive and managerial staff in various institutions (specialists, managers). These categories constituted 37% and 41%, respectively, of the surveyed. Therefore, the high level of education of members of Local Action Groups revealed in the survey and their occupational status seem to reflect their human capital.

There is a so-called trust component of social capital. This characterised on the basis of analysis of variables of trust in the private sphere: to family, neighbours and

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<sup>6</sup> The identifications of factors (i.a. economic and social) inhibiting or stimulating the conceiving of LAGs was one of the main aims of the research. Therefore, the criterion of selection became the density of the LAGs network. The survey focused on local action groups from the voivodeships with the smallest (Lubuskie, Opolskie, Zachodniopomorskie) and largest number of these organisations (Małopolskie, Podkarpackie and Wielkopolskie). They were selected on the basis of statistical data from the implementation period of the Pilot Programme LEADER+. All the groups functioning in the selected voivodeships were asked to participate in the survey (59 LAGs). Representatives of more than a half of them agreed (34 LAGs): Stowarzyszenie LGD Regionu Kozła, Fundacja Porozumienie Wzgórz Dąlkowskich and Fundacja Zielonej Doliny Odry i Warty from the Lubuskie Voivodeship, Partnerstwo Borów Niemodlińskich, Dolina Stobrawy and EURO Country from the Opolskie Voivodeship, Szansa Bezdroży Gmin Powiatu Goleniowskiego, Stowarzyszenie Lider Pojezierza and Fundacja Śródkowopomorska Grupa Działania from the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship, LGD Gościńska Wielkopolska, Ostrzeszowska LGD, LGD Stowarzyszenia KOLD, Stowarzyszenie Światowid, Stowarzyszenie Czarnkowsko-Trzcianecka LGD from the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, LGD Dunajec-Biała, LGD PROKOPARA, Dolina Karpia, LGD Jaksa, Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Spisza i Okolicy, Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Orawy, LGD Gorce Pieniny, LGD Gościniec 4 Żywiołów, Korona Północnego Krakowa, LGD Olkusz, Podhalańska LGD from the Małopolskie Voivodeship and Subregion Magurski, Partnerstwo dla Ziemi Nizańskiej, Lasovia, CK Podkarpacie, LGD PROWENT, Kraina Sanu, Dolina Strugu, Dorzecze Wisłoka, Czarnorzecko-Strzyszowska LGD from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

<sup>7</sup> The category of people with secondary education included also graduates of postsecondary community colleges and those who have not completed their academic studies.

<sup>8</sup> Among the inactive respondents, retired persons (55.8%) and disability pension beneficiaries (24.2%) were the majority. The remaining part of these group were unemployed persons.

colleagues, and respondents' trust to strangers encountered in various life situations and variables of trust in the public sphere: to local commune authorities, to non-governmental organisations operating in the commune and to local entrepreneurs.

Such activity is also expressed in participation in local self-government elections – in the act of casting a vote, preparation of an election campaign and in an intent to run for a post in local authorities.

On the basis of the current results of research on social trust [*Zaufanie społeczne* 2012] throughout Poland, and taking into account the specific features of rural communities, the authors of the research expected that the respondents would not be different from other Poles in general, as far as their trust of people who are familiar to them was concerned. At the same time, their involvement in the structure of a Local Action Group (which by definition requires cooperation of entities from various sectors and having various positions in a local community) was expected to be reflected in a relatively high level of so-called “generalised trust” (including trust of strangers encountered in various situations in life) and trust of local institutions and partners from other sectors. Thus, by operationalising social capital on the basis of a category of trust, among others, a hypothesis was formulated which stated that its level in people working in LAGs (representatives of members organisations personally involved in group activity) would be above average in comparison with Poles in general.

The survey results have confirmed the above assumption only in part. The surveyed were not different from Poles in general in terms of their declared “ratio” of trust towards the selected categories of people encountered in various life situations. The majority of those surveyed (in both sets subject to comparison) trusted the most familiar people: family members, a few respondents trusted also neighbours and colleagues (including members of their Local Action Group, especially if they represented the same sector as the respondent – 72% of the surveyed). Significantly fewer respondents (in both sets) declared trust towards strangers encountered in various life situations and towards local authorities. At the same time, the number of LAG activists who declared trust in all the mentioned categories was slightly lower than the number of the participants of the National survey who responded in the same way (see Figure 1).

Similarly as in the National survey, respondents with a higher education and those who belonged to occupational categories of higher prestige and implicating a higher socio-economic status (managerial and specialist staff) showed the highest level of trust of most of the analysed categories<sup>9</sup>. In the National survey, this group included also entrepreneurs. In the survey focusing on LAG participants, this result was confirmed only in relation to generalised trust (see Figures 2 and 3).

The data present related to LAG participants is not significantly different from average National results, and does not evoke too much enthusiasm, especially if trust of strangers encountered in various life situations is considered, as this determines a disposition to enter into more diversified social relations and facilitates, access to diversified information sources and various benefits from them, including economic

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<sup>9</sup> In the surveyed group, higher level of trust was also more characteristic of men than women, people from the 35–54 age category than those from other age categories (exception: trust to strangers encountered in various life situations, which becomes higher with age).



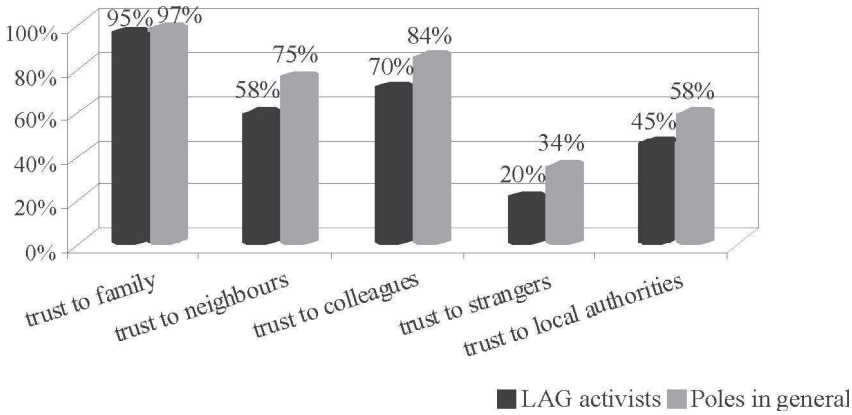


FIGURE 1. Trust to various categories of people – LAG activists vs. Poles in general  
 RYSUNEK 1. Zaufanie do różnych kategorii osób – działacze LGD na tle ogółu Polaków

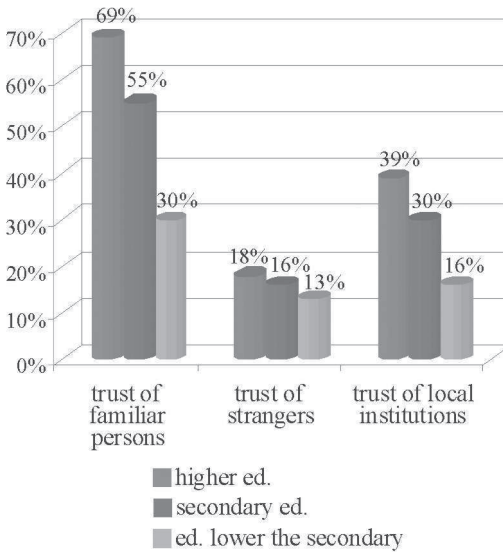


FIGURE 2. Trust and education level  
 RYSUNEK 2. Zaufanie według poziomu wykształcenia

(building up diversified types of social capital resources). By assumption, cooperation between representatives of various sectors was to build up trust not only between them, but also (basing on it) trust of wider social circles to structures of this kind. It would therefore contribute to building new networks of relations both between partnership inhabitants and between potential LAG partners from beyond the partnership area. The presented results (although their status is only that of hypotheses which are empirically grounded in research material originating from a relatively large sample, which is nonetheless not representative for Polish LAGs in general) seem to cast doubt on the realisation of this assumption.

Effective functioning of a local rural community is largely based on direct contact between various categories of its inhabitants. Trust of familiar people may



FIGURE 3. Trust and occupation  
 RYSUNEK 3. Zaufanie według kategorii zawodowej

sufficiently encourage those to act towards a realisation of their interests and it may be a sufficient motivating factor to break reluctance towards strangers when this interest requires contact with them. Further answers are required to determine the different socio-demographic characteristics of the social and civic activity of Local Action Group participants.

As far as activity within LAG itself is concerned, the high number of those surveyed who have some function in decision-making groups of their organisations is significant. More than a half of the surveyed (53%) represent the board or council of their group, which translates directly into their active participation in realisation of LAG initiatives.

Most of the respondents who influenced the functioning of their LAGs have the highest (in relation to other organisation members) level of resources of human capital (and, most probably, also economic capital) – they have higher education and high occupational status [see Figures 4 and 5]. Having a function in the organisation is also commonly related to being involved in the public sector. As high as 65% of representatives of self-government institutions are members of decision-making groups of LAGs, versus 61% of representatives of social organisations and only 44% of entrepreneurs.

The dominant age category in the decision-making group (and the one who took greatest part in implementation of group initiatives) was of 34–54 year-old LAG members. Over 60% of representatives of this age group were board or council members in their LAGs, whereas in the group of oldest LAG members (at least 55 years old) this percentage was 57%, and only every fourth of the youngest LAG members held one of these functions. Activity of the youngest surveyed people was probably limited by their continuing education, starting a career and raising small children. A lack of occupational experience was also significant in this case, as it was valued by board or council members. Lack of a sufficient network of contacts which would lead to activation of the existing human capital resources might also have

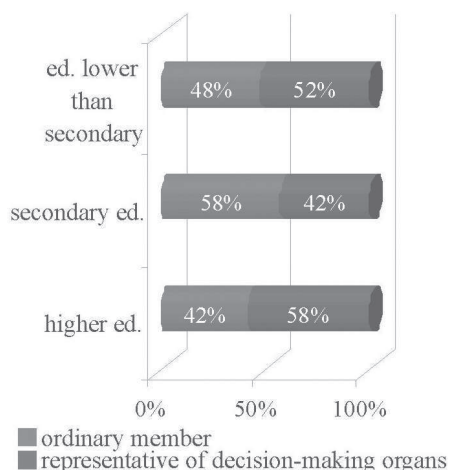


FIGURE 4. Education and respondent's function in LAG

RYSUNEK 4. Wykształcenie a funkcja w LGD



FIGURE 5. Occupational category and respondent's function in LAG

RYSUNEK 5. Kategoria zawodowa a funkcja w LGD

been a factor here. Interestingly, in this group there was the highest percentage of respondents who estimated their own activity in their organisation as above average.

Men more often held various functions in the analysed organisations<sup>10</sup> (58% of the surveyed in this category), whereas women were more frequently ordinary members of LAGs (53% of female LAG members).

This analysis highlighted a significant group of LAG participants (individuals or as personally delegated representatives of organisations working in the framework of local action groups) who openly admit that they do not engage in the functioning of their LAGs, and are just formal members (partners) in their groups (almost 14%

<sup>10</sup> According to the formal principles of LAG functioning (the rule of gender equality), there should be gender balance in LAG organs. The fact that there were more men than women in the sample might result from the fact that the surveyed group was not representative for the population of organisation members.

of the surveyed declared so). They justified this situation in the following ways (their answers are ordered according to the decreasing number of respondents providing them): lack of time, belief that other LAG activists have better competence (39% of the surveyed in this category in both cases), lack of opportunity to participate in the LAGs' functioning as certain spheres of activity had been "conquered" by a concrete solid group with the LAG (14% of the surveyed), and lack of information about implementation of initiatives (11% of the surveyed).

This situation encourages a very careful (taking into account the character of data on which the analyses were based) hypothesis about the limitation of the potential capital-generating role of LAGs to only certain categories of their participants.

Only an active engagement in various group initiatives which generates and modifies new resources and contact networks will allow for the development of social and human capital (gaining new competences and discovering new opportunities). Yet, participation in these initiatives seems to be "reserved" for some privileged group activists (representatives of membership organisations). Benefits of social capital created in this kind of organisations seem to be drawn mostly by those who already have a high level of human capital resources. Regardless of their activity in LAGs, they function in other environments (also occupational), where openness, mobility, and ability to work with partners who have other interests and competences are valued and indispensable characteristics. It means that these persons have a high level of social capital already before they join LAGs.

This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the analysis of social and civil activity of the surveyed LAG members, diversified due to their socio-demographic characteristics. Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents, regardless of their membership in LAGs, were active in initiatives for local inhabitants, whether within the framework of public institutions (e.g. as office workers, local council members, commune administrators) or in non-governmental organisations, or as private persons, or in cooperation with other commune inhabitants<sup>11</sup>. However, within the framework of individual aspects, the highest percentage of activists was among the respondents with higher education, who had high positions in their workplaces. The only exception from this rule is membership in social organisations which had been functioning (for a very long time) in respondents' communes (especially Volunteer Fire Departments, Country Housewives' Clubs, sport and artistic organisations). A relatively highest percentage of farm owners belong to them.

LAG activists also declared the following characteristics which reflect their above average interest in local community issues: voting in the last self-government election, participation in accompanying election campaigns or willingness to run for posts in the next elections for the local administration. These all proved to be higher than average among Polish voters in general. Here also the highest partici-

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<sup>11</sup> In the case of 60% of the persons involved in action for the benefit of the commune/partnership (and nearly 44% of the surveyed in general), this activity had one or maximum two forms, e.g. they participated only in the projects implemented by local public institutions or in projects by a non-governmental organisation to which they belonged. However, 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 undertaken upon their own initiative.

pation was noted among the respondents with higher education, who belonged to managerial staff. As was the case with the activity within LAGs, more men than women engaged in the activity for the benefit of the community and in “civic” duties. Engagement on both of these spheres would increase with the age of the surveyed, which might be related both to their reflection ability and a resulting higher sense of responsibility for shaping one’s own surroundings and with more flexible time (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of LAG activists and their social and political activity  
 TABELA 1. Cechy społeczno-demograficzne działaczy LGD a ich aktywność społeczno-polityczna

Socio-demographic characteristics of LAG members		Percentage of respondents belonging to a given category who declare:				
		activity for the benefit of their commune	participation in an election campaign	participation in a local self-government election	intent to run for a post in an election	activity in organisations
Education	higher	81	65	93	60	71
	secondary	72	55	81	43	64
	below secondary	54	31	85	32	74
Occupational category	managers and specialists	86	71	93	69	77
	office workers	68	49	85	41	64
	entrepreneurs	74	51	81	42	55
	farmers	73	48	92	56	80
	physical workers	62	52	83	45	44
Age	below 35	54	42	84	24	52
	35–54	79	59	89	54	71
	55	80	71	93	66	79
Sex	women	65	44	88	34	65
	men	82	69	89	66	73

These results show that although in local action groups we observe a relatively high level of social capital, not all members are its carriers to the same extent. In relation to the surveyed group, it seems justified to formulate a hypothesis that its relatively high level of social capital is, at least partially, determined by socio-demographic characteristics of its members (i.e. by the level of human capital). If we are dealing with social capital understood as an activity for the benefit of the local community based on trust to various categories of people encountered in various life situations here, then its roots are undoubtedly beyond LAG structures.

The surveyed sample which constitutes the basis for the theses presented in this article, importantly, was spontaneous. It may be assumed that the most active and open people with the highest level of human, social and economic capital in their groups participated in the survey. The obtained results and hypotheses formulated based on them, as such, may only partially translate into hypotheses related to human capital in Local Action Groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

The authors of these studies, which are based on the results of analyses related to the effects of implementation of the LEADER approach and activity of local partnerships, emphasise firstly their positive role in integrating of local communities, forming local elites and, above all, creating educational and information sources for the inhabitants of local communities which is to help build up their human capital [Każmierczak ed. 2008, Wasielewski ed. 2009, Knieć 2010, Zajda 2011].

The Local Action Groups "...run truly expanded educational and advisory activities, often supported by cooperation with specialised academic/scientific and educational centres, and eventually they make use of resources of local teachers. Importantly, members of partnerships observe numerous tangible effects of this educational activity, which gives them the sense of creation and encourages to them to continue activity in this scope" [Knieć 2010, p. 6].

Even if only applying for funds from grants monitored by local partnerships this is still a priceless platform of civil education for many entities which otherwise, in other circumstances and without LAG patronage, would probably not decide to come up with their ideas.

Despite the generally positive diagnosis of functioning of local partnerships, as presented above, many studies point out certain problems which are related to organisational structures (resulting from the relations between representatives of individual sectors represented in them), the formal and legal determinants of their activity and their social environment, which does not result in sufficient enthusiasm for their initiatives. Emphasis is put on excessive participation and the role of the public sector, increasing bureaucratisation of procedures related to obtaining funds for activity and "professionalization of personnel" related to it, the fact that these structures are not open to new members, and kind of commercialisation of activity of partnerships, based on an approach which is focused on gaining funds rather than on the purpose of these funds [Każmierczak ed. 2008, Wasielewski ed. 2009, Knieć 2010, Zajda 2011].

The results of this research lead to the conclusion that within LAGs, social capital is multiplied mainly by those persons who had an already high level of this capital at the moment of joining these structures, in accordance with the rule that "...it is easier to accumulate their social capital for persons who (...) take part in organisations, but also vice versa – organisations are joined by such persons who already at the beginning have higher resources of this kind of capital" [Growiec 2011, p. 17].

These organisations do not seem to have a "capital-generating" character in relation to large groups of inhabitants of the partnership area. Instead, it seems to activate and support those members of the partnership who on their own search for opportunities to engage their existing resources on the one hand and multiply them on the other hand. Although there are new and relatively wide platforms for activity, it is not equally accessible for all the inhabitants of the partnership area. Both formal requirements of the organisation itself (possibility of membership only for legal entities) and the way it functions result in a platform of activity for local leaders (sometimes it supports people obtaining this status who previously had not been perceived as leaders).



The trust-related side of human capital in LAGs is mostly based on its horizontal aspect. This may suggest that members of these groups are more willing to work among and for the benefit of people they know. They focus their actions around the issues related to a relatively small group of inhabitants, and are less willing to enter more complex relations which require more innovativeness and openness. It may be expected that whilst their level of social capital is high, this does not lead to an increase in the level of social capital of local inhabitants. It assumes the form of bonding of capital, which limits the network of contacts to a selected group of familiar persons that are similar to them, and sometimes (in the case of persons from outside the public sector) a form of linking capital, related to these persons obtaining competences in contact with institutions and entities which allow for access to wider resources located outside their own community. It does not transform into bridging capital which generates new forms of relations between actors of the local community whose positions are significantly diversified. On the other hand, introducing wider social circles to any activity requires time. Perhaps strong social capital of LAG members, combined with strengthening of economic (also infrastructural) and human (also in terms of civil competences) capital of the local community will become a catalyst of positive changes, also in the scope of social capital of the inhabitants of rural areas.

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## ROLA LOKALNYCH GRUP DZIAŁANIA W TWORZENIU LUDZKIEGO, SPOŁECZNEGO I EKONOMICZNEGO KAPITAŁU NA OBSZARACH WIEJSKICH

**Abstrakt.** Zgodnie z założeniami podejścia LEADER, wdrażanego w krajach Unii Europejskiej, także w Polsce, podstawowym celem powstających w jego ramach lokalnych grup działania (dalej LGD) jest realizacja działań służących generowaniu i wzmocnieniu zasobów kapitału ludzkiego i społecznego lokalnych społeczności oraz aktywizacja ich członków. LGD są także podmiotami, dzięki którym na obszary partnerstw dystrybuowane są środki finansowe, zasoby pozyskiwane z programów Unii Europejskiej, przeznaczone na rozwój i poprawę warunków życia mieszkańców tych terenów. Artykuł analizuje różne typy

kapitałów (ludzki, społeczny, ekonomiczny), akumulowanych w ramach badanych partnerstw terytorialnych oraz ich rolę we wzmacnianiu istniejących i generowaniu nowych zasobów tychże kapitałów w lokalnych społecznościach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kapitał społeczny, kapitał ludzki, społeczności lokalne, lokalne grupy działania