

## Chapter 7

# Rural Governance in the New EU Member States: The Experience of the Polish LEADER+ Pilot Programme (2004–2008)

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**Abstract** The chapter examines the main features of local cross-sectoral partnerships in rural Poland and compares them with experiences in England, UK. These forms of local cooperation are considered a new form of rural governance, especially in post-socialist countries. Due to a European Union requirement regarding the operation of ‘LEADER-type’ programmes, partnership structures in Poland developed rapidly between 2004 and 2008. Approximately 210 partnerships existed in Poland in 2008. Most of them were created after 2004, within the framework of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme. Projects were focused on improving the quality of life and the development of natural and cultural resources. Local governments and local voluntary organisations were the most active partners. The main targets of activity were tourist promotion and infrastructure development, the restructuring of rural areas and local product promotion. Partnership projects were similar in Poland and the UK. However, the social, economic and institutional bases in the two countries are completely different. The challenges faced by the Polish partnerships (and not by those in England) were relatively low level of engagement by the business and third sectors, attempts by local governments to dominate partnerships, and additional rules and constraints, many due to central government controls, which were not applied to programmes in old EU member states.

**Keywords** Territorial rural governance • Civil society and economic development • Cross-sectoral partnerships • European Union LEADER Community initiative

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## Introduction

In this paper, we examine the main features of the implementation of a new form of rural governance through territorial partnerships in rural Poland from 2004 to 2008 (connected with the utilisation of Structural Funds in the 2000–2006 EU programming period), drawing comparisons with the experiences of partnership governance processes in Western European countries, especially the UK. These forms of local cooperation have evolved over the last 20–30 years in advanced liberal democracies like the UK, but they are a new form of rural governance in post-communist countries.

The Common Agricultural Policy represents a top-down sectoral model of intervention in rural areas. It has been successful from an agricultural productivity point of view, but could be considered as having had a negative impact on the social development of rural areas (Van Depoele 2003). As a result, the European Commission decided to shift attention towards lagging regions and thus to limit the dominant sectoral approach in development policy, replacing it with a more territorially based approach. One tool in this approach was the LEADER Community Initiative. In 1991, the Directorate General for Agriculture launched LEADER I (1991–1995) as an experimental socio-economic initiative. After positive evaluation of this approach, the initiative was continued until 2006 in two further phases: LEADER II (1996–1999) and LEADER+ (2000–2006). LEADER represented a new rural development concept, based on territorial, bottom-up, cross-sectoral initiatives drawing on local resources and internal financial support and on local actions designed and undertaken by local communities (Ray 2000). The main aims were making the best use of natural and cultural resources, improving the quality of life in rural areas, adding value to local products and the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive (European Union 2012). It was thought that a new rural policy oriented towards the socio-economic development and diversification of rural economies (tourism, small crafts, services, etc.) might be more effective than a sectoral agricultural policy alone in helping to solve the isolation and dysfunctions of rural areas (Saraceno 1999). The OECD ‘New Rural Paradigm’ report also confirms the limited impact of sectoral measures to support agriculture on broader rural economies (OECD 2006). Some authors describe these changes as a shift from agriculture to rural development (Van Depoele 2003, 81) or more precisely to neo-endogenous development (Ray 2005), whilst in the context of general policy processes, these changes were considered as representing a shift from ‘governing’ to ‘governance’ (Marsden and Murdoch 1998; Ray 2005).

Alongside the adoption of the LEADER Community Initiative in the EU, there were many other examples of territorial approaches developing in EU countries such as *contracts de pays* in France, Local Partnership Companies and Area-Based Partnerships in Ireland, PRODER in Spain, POMO in Finland, ‘Regional Action’ in Germany and others (Commins 1994; Westholm et al. 1999; Buller 2000; Ray 2005; Siebert and Dosch 2005; Macken-Walsh 2010). This new mode of rural governance

has been the subject of much research and theoretical discourse in advanced western democracies and in 'old' EU countries from the beginning of the 1990s (Ray 2000; Moseley 2003). However, in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), these types of initiatives have only become common in the twenty-first century, and thus the literature is considerably more limited. After the EU's 'great broadening' in 2004 and 2006, LEADER+ type measures started to be implemented in five new member states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), whilst another three countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania) did not initially decide to adopt measures of this type (Wade and Rinne 2008). In Poland, partnership structures were adopted rapidly across the country from 2004 to 2006 as a result of the requirement to run an EU LEADER-type programme in the following programming period. In the 2007–2013 programming period, LEADER is no longer a discretionary rural development programme but rather is embedded in the Rural Development Programme of all member states with a requirement placed on delivery bodies to spend a proportion of funding according to the principles of LEADER through designated Local Action Groups.

In analysing the development of territorial, partnership modes of rural governance in the EU's new member states (i.e. those that joined in 2004 and 2007), it is important to take into consideration the different social and institutional environments in post-communist countries, which have shaped the central programmes supporting the partnerships and structures of Local Action Groups. According to Kovách (2000), LEADER-type programmes are potentially a positive political force to break down bureaucratic rural policy regulations in CEE countries. However, there is evidence that local government remains the dominant player in LEADER partnerships in these countries and, in East Germany, that the voluntary sector remains a weak participant (Siebert and Dosch 2005; Dąbrowski 2008; Knieć 2009; Furmankiewicz et al. 2010). To understand the differences between the Polish LEADER-type pilot programmes and the EU LEADER Community Initiative, it is important to analyse the characteristics of the institutional and social environment in Poland.

Area-based partnerships are seen to enhance local societal activity, develop social capital and promote socio-economic development, based primarily on the use of local human, economic and natural resources. The Polish LEADER+ Pilot Programme had similar aims. However, the main rules and impacts were different from the EU LEADER Community Initiative. In this paper, we analyse the three aspects of partnership issues as distinguished by Yarwood (2002):

1. Partnership *programmes* which are initiatives instigated and organised by a central body (these include the LEADER Initiatives founded by the EU from 1991 to 2006 and the Polish LEADER+ Pilot Programme analysed in this paper).
2. Partnership *organisations* which often emerge in response to the above-mentioned partnership programmes. The LEADER-type Local Action Groups are one example of such initiatives.
3. Partnership *projects* which may occur as part of partnership programmes, implemented by a partnership organisation or based on an arrangement between two or more partners established to manage or implement a specific project.

In the context of these levels, we show that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the institutional base of rural governance in Poland was very different from that of LEADER+ in the UK. At the end, we analyse the perspectives of rural governance in the 2007–2013 EU programming period in Poland, and we conclude with some actions which could improve the implementation of this new governance system in Poland and other post-communist countries.

We draw on material from our own research projects conducted in Poland (Furmankiewicz and Slee 2007; Knieć and Hałasiewicz 2008; Knieć 2009; Furmankiewicz et al. 2010; Knieć and Jarzębska 2011).<sup>1</sup> We analyse reports and evaluations dealing with issues of partnership rural governance implementation in Poland (Borek et al. 2006; Borek 2007) and the findings of other authors described in the Polish literature (Błąd and Kamiński 2005; Wasielewski 2005, 2009; Futymski 2007; Goszczyński 2008, 2009; Halamska 2009; Hanke-Zajda 2009).

## From Governing to Governance in Post-communist EU Countries

Governance can be defined as ‘the system of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and private sector’ (Work 2002, 1). By participatory governance, we mean the existence of institutional arrangements that facilitate the participation of ordinary citizens in the public policy process within the realms of the local government (Andersson and van Laerhoven 2007). According to Little (2001), within the social sciences and human geography, this concept has been connected with broader theoretical debates on regulation theory, which resulted in the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of accumulation. In the debate, researchers found that the distribution of governance responsibilities across multiple territorial jurisdictions allows for more flexibility in the provision and production of collective goods than does the centralisation of governance within a single central jurisdiction (Andersson and van Laerhoven 2007). It is connected with the concept of decentralised governance, which according to a UNDP report, ‘carefully planned, effectively implemented and appropriately managed, can lead to significant improvement in the welfare of people at the local level, the cumulative effect of which can lead to enhanced human development’ (Work 2002, 1). In effect, this concept supports the retreat of the state from a welfarist position as provider of support to one of coordinator and manager of the various participants in the process of governance. LEADER-type programmes are one tool to implement such an approach, as they aim to complement central state activities (government) using less institutionalised mechanisms of coordination (governance) (Siebert and Dosch 2005).

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Changes in state institutions can be implemented more successfully when new patterns of behaviour are established amongst both the political elite and amongst citizens themselves. The key role is given to 'civic society' in which individuals or groups gathered in voluntary organisations take greater responsibility for processes of development (Siebert and Dosch 2005). In LEADER-type programmes, local partnership networks of actors from the voluntary, public and private sector are supported in producing a local development strategy through consensus building and based on the valorisation of local resources. Following the design of this strategy, the projects of local organisations (acting in compliance with these strategies) are implemented.

In post-communist countries, the processes of decentralisation are typically 'works-in-progress', but the implementation of participatory governance tackles several problems, such as passive citizens not engaging in voluntary organisations and cooperative actions to a great degree; low levels of trust in society, including trust in state institutions and voluntary actions; centralism and clientelism in the administrative system; and a lack of traditions of cooperation between the state and civil society (Siebert and Dosch 2005; Dąbrowski 2008). Local governments in Poland often do not appreciate the role of NGOs and see them rather as rivals and a potential threat to their influence, or at best as collaborators who should not be trusted (Grochowski and Regulska 2000). On the other hand, NGOs have already shown their power and potential as a source of 'new' local leaders, new types of initiatives and innovation for local and regional development (Lewenstein and Palska 2004). Almost 35 % of Polish adult society were members of voluntary associations in 2004 (Klon-Jawor 2005). However, many of these organisations – especially in rural areas – represent structures that were built-up in the top-down communist political system where they mainly played the role of actors legitimising the system. The activity of NGO 'alternatives' to the communist regime was thus limited or forbidden. Therefore, trust in voluntarism and non-governmental organisations decreased as a response to the 'collaboration' of 'official' NGOs with the oppressive state (Hubner 2002). Additionally the number of NGOs in rural areas is currently visibly lower than in urban areas (81 % of all NGOs in Poland were registered in towns and cities in 2006), making it even more difficult to create cross-sectoral partnerships.

In the context of the LEADER+ Pilot Programme (2004–2008), Bład and Kamiński (2005) list five main obstacles to the implementation of the partnership mode of rural governance in Poland. These are a top-down way of thinking about rural development, administrative formalism (legal problems), special principles established additionally by the Polish central government, irregularities in the implementation of the programme (e.g. non-transparency of quality criteria used to evaluate applications, changes in programme rules) and a deficit of social capital and lack of tradition of cooperation in Poland.

Four of these five obstacles can be considered as exogenous factors, connected with the political system. In post-communist countries, this is often strongly centralised and hierarchical. The long-standing arrangements of top-town governance are deeply embedded through formal and informal norms and conventions. When

reformers (e.g. local voluntary organisations) attempt to introduce new institutional frameworks – like cross-sectoral partnerships – they are faced with the problem of deinstitutionalising old ways of working, which are very bureaucratic and imposed by public authorities (Furmankiewicz et al. 2010). This is connected with the fact that politicians, as the main beneficiaries of the existing administrative system, are likely to strongly defend the status quo (Lowndes and Sullivan 2004).

According to Ray (2005), the partnership mode of rural governance often raises issues of democratic legitimacy (accountability) in the minds of civil servants and elected representatives. Rural partnerships often have no features of representative democracy between themselves and local residents, so different tensions can emerge between local authority members who often want to keep control of partnerships (as a primary administrative unit of action). These features are especially strong in post-communist countries with a tradition of strong public administration.

In the next parts of this paper, we consider the institutional frames of partnership governance development, showing the main rules of partnership support programmes, the typical structures of Local Action Groups and their actions. To highlight the main differences from West European modes of partnership rural governance, we compare the Polish cases to LEADER+ experiences in the UK (England).

## The Partnership Programmes

The first organisation considered as a LEADER-type area-based partnership in Poland was the Strug Valley Association. This was created in 1994, and it remained probably the sole example of a partnership until 2000. In the mid-1990s, some ‘early bird’, bottom-up and regionally funded initiatives were established in rural areas in Poland, as a reflection of growing attention on a new type of governance amongst regional authorities. The Opolskie Region Rural Renewal Programme (Wilczyński 2000) was an example of a regional government’s funded and region-wide action to promote community actions for planning, preparing and implementing development strategies. Another interesting early initiative was Nakło County Renewal Programme, which was funded by the local government to promote small-scale, bottom-up village-based initiatives as a tool to activate rural communities (Kamiński 2005).

At the end of the 1990s, external programmes started to promote local cross-sectoral cooperation in Poland. From 1997 to 2004, the most important were the programmes of the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation (in Polish – *Fundacja Partnerstwo dla Środowiska*) from Krakow (initially financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation and followed by other external grants), which enhanced the creation of ‘partnership groups’ aimed at local sustainable development. The main target of the programme was to overcome passiveness in rural areas, to give local communities a chance to generate their own innovative ideas and put them into practice and to help gather experience in local initiative implementation by

creating cooperative networks on a regional and national basis. The programme provided support to organise local area cross-sectoral coalitions. These could act to facilitate programmes by obtaining funding from local and external resources. This supported a variety of local initiatives, including organisation building, advisory services, vocational training, study visits to the US and Western Europe, local conferences and meetings. Through this programme, 14 partnerships had been created by 2004, all with an important role granted to the voluntary sector. At the same time in Poland, approximately 40 other local networks were also initiated with the support of other institutions, e.g. with EU PHARE programmes, British Know-How Fund and Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs funds. However, many of them did not survive until the end of the grant support period.

After joining the EU in 2004 (towards the end of the 2000–2006 programme period), financial support available to beneficiaries in the rural sector in Poland amounted to EUR 5.4 billion. This included EUR 3.6 billion under the Rural Development Programme (direct payments, technical assistance and rule 1268/1999 implementation) and EUR 1.8 billion under the SOP (Sectoral Operational Programme). SOP comprised support for changes and adjustments in the agro-food sector, sustainable rural development and technical assistance (Wigier 2006). The centrally implemented LEADER+ Pilot Programme (LPP) was measure 2.7 of the SOP and eventually had a budget of EUR 30.4 million. The Managing Authority was the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Rural Development, and the Implementing Authority was the Foundation of Assistance Programmes for Agriculture (FAPA).

The first phase of LPP (2004–2006) was divided into two main budget lines: *Acquisition of skills* and *Pilot integrated strategies*. The maximum level of aid amounted to 100 % of eligible costs (up to EUR 37 000). It aimed at establishing Local Action Groups, analysing the development potential of territories and writing integrated development strategies. Training, information and consultancy activities were supported to get local populations involved in the process of building public–private partnerships and creating local development strategies. The beneficiaries could be local governments or NGOs (foundations, associations, unions of associations and other non-governmental organisations) located in rural and urban–rural municipalities. 249 representatives of local rural communities (also part of the old partnerships) sent applications to the LPP in December 2004. The formal applicants were mostly local authorities (67 %), voluntary organisations (32 %) and other institutions (1.2 %). After qualification, 167 partnerships were given financial support for organisational affairs and strategy building in the years 2005–2006.

In 2006, the second part of the LPP, Scheme II *Implementation of a development strategy*, was announced to all created partnerships. It was an open competition. Partnerships created in Scheme I and those created independently outside the Pilot Programme could apply for a grant. Through LPP Measure 2, 162 LAGs were created and 149 LAGs received funding for the implementation of their integrated local strategies which included the development of rural territories and cooperation between local partners. The projects had to be realised by early 2008. Only soft (non-investment) projects were financed from the programme. The LAGs in the



LPP had to follow specific national requirements which are specified in Table 7.1 and which are compared to the rules of the LEADER+ Community Initiative (2000–2006) implemented by the England Rural Development Plan (UK).

Comparing the LEADER programme in England (UK) and Poland, we observe a higher level of restrictions in the Polish LPP, for example, the strict exclusion of ‘urban municipalities’ (some of which have 5,000–10,000 inhabitants, with agriculture important in employment terms) and the need to be formally registered as an NGO. Additionally, and very important in terms of civil participation, was the exclusion of ‘global grants’ (small grant funds managed by

**Table 7.1** The eligibility criteria of LEADER+ in England (UK) and in LPP (Poland)

UK, England – LEADER+ Community Initiative 2000–2006	Poland – LEADER+ Pilot Programme, Measure II, 2006–2008
The economic and social partners (e.g. voluntary, community and private sector) must comprise at least 50 % of the decision-making body	The same as England
The group must have either an administrative and financial leader with the ability to administer public funds or a legally constituted common structure which will guarantee the ability to administer public funds	The LAG has to be a formally registered unit, registered as one of the following, (a) a foundation, (b) an association of individuals or (c) a union of associations, whose statutory aim has to be rural development. This unit administers the public funds
The territory of a given LAG could not cover the area of another LAG	The same as England
LEADER+ areas (either wholly or partly) cannot be part of areas selected for the URBAN programme	All municipalities classified as ‘urban’ are excluded from the Pilot Programme; in ‘urban–rural’ classified municipalities, towns above 20,000 inhabitants are completely excluded (the URBAN Community Initiative was not available in Poland)
A local action group area should not have more than 40 % of its total population in settlements over 20,000 inhabitants	
Local action group areas should not exceed the population threshold and/or the population density by more than 25 % or fall below the minimum population threshold by more than 5 %	The population of the partnership area has to contain between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants; the density of population for the LEADER area is a maximum of 150 inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup>
The strategy must be built around one or more of the four themes listed in LEADER+ Programme	The same as England
The development plan and its programme of proposed activities must not benefit simultaneously from funding from other Structural Funds, England Rural Development Programme or other Common Agricultural Policy (EAGGF guarantee) schemes	LAGs cannot combine LEADER funds in Scheme II LEADER project realisation with any other public funds

(continued)



**Table 7.1** (continued)

UK, England – LEADER+ Community Initiative 2000–2006	Poland – LEADER+ Pilot Programme, Measure II, 2006–2008
<p>The approaches to LEADER in England are differentiated on the basis of their business plan and its delivery and the project approval processes. These are the Strategic Plan and Action Plan approaches. The Action Plan groups are responsible for all aspects of delivery, decision-making, administration and reporting in relation to their business plan. The partnership includes a locally accountable body that is responsible for the administrative and financial compliance of the programme. Strategic Plan groups are differentiated by their requirement to submit annual plans to the relevant Government Office (GO), which acts as the accountable body. LAG responsibilities are similar, other than that the ultimate responsibility for the approval of projects rests with the GO. In this case, the GO is also responsible for the processing of claims. LAGs have funds in the form of ‘global grants’ so the local organisation could apply for small grants</p>	<p>LAGs as a legal unit realise one large project based on the created strategy, having full responsibility for its realisation and the settlement of accounts. There is no ‘global grant’, so LAGs cannot implement the small grant funds (from LEADER resources) and the local organisation cannot apply independently for funds and realise individual projects (even in concordance with strategy); however, they could propose actions for LAGs in the strategy building process</p>

*Source: England LEADER+ Programme 2000–2006: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2001; Uzupełnienie Sektorowego Programu Operacyjnego Restrukturyzacja i modernizacja sektora żywnościowego oraz rozwój obszarów wiejskich, 2004–2006. Załącznik do rozporządzenia Ministra Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi z dnia 8 września 2004 r. (poz. 2117), Warszawa 2004*

LAGs). In such cases, ‘regranting’ would have strengthened the role and position of newly created partnerships as important players on the community development scene. The central state administration was aiming for greater control of funds and did not allow the transfer of financial responsibility to the LAG. The project could be realised only by the LAG. It was not possible for local organisations in partnership territories to apply independently for small grants (however, their needs were to be taken into consideration in larger LAG projects). As a result, most commonly, small elites within the LAG management boards decided on project planning and implementation. This was not conducive to the aims of transparency and greater engagement of local actors in project implementation. This resulted in a decreasing level of enthusiasm for LEADER amongst independent, local organisations and the business sector and had a critical influence on the style of governance represented by LAGs (Knieć 2009). On the other hand, the LPP in Poland created fertile ground for the re-establishment of a new rural elite on the basis of strategies of local development, as an alternative to the existing community development strategies prepared by local governments in the late 1990s. The LAG strategies effectively created a new paradigm of rural development, which had previously not been known at such a local level (Kaleta 2004).

## The Partnership Organisations

According to Kniec and Hafasiewicz (2008), amongst the 162 LAGs established in 2005–2006 in Poland, 99 had the legal form of ‘associations of individual persons’, 50 were foundations, 11 were ‘unions of associations’ and 2 were associations in the form of so-called Local Tourist Organisations. In the authors’ own questionnaire research in 2007 on partnerships across Poland, on average, representatives of 22 different legal units were involved in cooperation within these partnership structures (regardless of their legal forms). These included voluntary organisations (on average 7 per partnership), municipal councils (including municipalities gathered in associations) (5), powiat (county) (average less than 1), business entities (5 and less), 2 representatives of institutions run by local councils (community centres, museums, schools and other cultural and educational or sports and recreation centres) as well as 2 farm owners. When we take into consideration that the areas within partnerships have between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, the average participation of two farmers and five entrepreneurs testifies to their very low engagement in LAGs. On the other hand, it is evident that local authorities were over-represented in Polish LAGs. Regardless of the overall membership structure, all the surveyed organisations formally met the requirement of the minimum 50 % participation of social and private sectors in the managing bodies of LAGs as legal entities. However, Goszczyński (2008), in his analysis of forms of social capital in LEADER partnerships in Łódź region (Voivodship) in central Poland, found that this rule on participation did not effectively prevent government domination. The authors also found that some local organisations or individual members formally classified as ‘independent’ were closely related to local government or were under the influence of government, which reinforced the dominant role of local government in partnership structures. In such cases, the structure of the management board was legitimate from the point of view of the programme rules, but strong connections were observed between the local authorities, which showed features of Putnam’s bonding social capital (Putnam 2000). In several surveys (see, e.g. Goszczyński 2009; Kniec 2009), the phenomenon of the over-representation of local authorities in LAGs was even deeper. In many cases, individual LAG members who officially represented NGOs, actually represented the interests of the public sector, for example, being employed as local government clerks. Although fundamentally this was an instrument to meet parity standards, in reality this often led to the abandonment of internal democracy within the partnership and so-called colonisation of the partnership by local government (Kniec 2009). The dominance of elites (often political elites) in the creation and participation of LAGs confirms research undertaken by Halamska (2009) in the Łódź region. Similarly, Hanke-Zajda (2009, 207) found that the main members of LAGs in this region were local government officials, some of whom stated that they participated in the LAG *to control* it and *to use the financial resources* available for LAGs.

In comparing the Middle Odra River Partnership in Lower Silesia (Poland) and Somerset Levels and Moors LEADER+ Partnership in England (UK), we found the

Polish partnership was based on a network of representatives of local institutions rather than on individual citizens. The UK organisational model, with its embeddedness in local Parish Groups and the election of civil representatives to a Partnership Council Forum, had stronger participatory features (Furmankiewicz and Slee 2007). Overall, we can say that Polish partnerships probably had more elitist structures than English partnerships.

## The Partnership Projects

According to the final reports produced by LAGs in the LPP, between 2006 and 2008, at the national scale, about 43 % of the funds were spent on making the best use of natural and cultural resources, 34 % on improving the local quality of life and about 11 % on each of two categories: ‘adding value to local products’ and ‘the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive’. The authors found that partnerships typically concentrated their activities on tourist promotion and cultural issues rather than on more innovative actions. Detailed analysis of a sample of 40 local strategies created by Polish Local Action Groups was undertaken by Futymiski (2007). He found the main activities planned in the strategies were:

1. Tourism (most commonly agrotourism or ecotourism). Measures in this field were defined in all of the 40 strategies regardless of the leading theme and the geographical area they pertained to.
2. Encouraging local residents to create and develop small and medium enterprises. One in every two strategies envisaged measures in this area.
3. Developing renewable energy, including energy crops. Approximately 40 % of the strategies analysed provided measures in this area.
4. Developing local, traditional and organic food (ecological) products. These types of projects occurred in one in three strategies. Approximately 16 % of LAGs planned to promote and register these types of products as a local brand.

Thus tourism seems to be the expected driving force for local development for most LAGs. The authors agree with Futymiski’s conclusion that this expectation is too optimistic and that the implementation of the plans in the partnership areas would not always give the expected results. It is difficult to imagine that all LAG areas in Poland would achieve significant income generation for local communities from tourism. In Futymiski’s opinion, very few strategies paid adequate attention to the active participation of the local community in strategy and projects. He argues that the authors of the strategies perceived their local communities more as passive recipients of measures taken by LAGs, rather than as active participants in implementing policies. Often the projects did not involve local society at all. Grants were often spent on preparing different investment documents, local spatial plans, etc. which were more connected with local authority plans.

The authors even have evidence of dominant local authorities excluding local inhabitants' projects from the LEADER strategy, considering infrastructure development as the most important aim (Furmankiewicz et al. 2010). Hanke-Zajda (2009, 210) also found that members of partnerships rarely had any influence on partnership management body decisions and generally did not participate in the realisation of projects.

Comparing the main features of projects realised by one LEADER+ LAG project in South West England, UK (Somerset Levels and Moors) and in Kujawsko-Pomorskie region, Poland (Toruń Rural Boroughs Association), we can see many similarities in the scope of action (Tables 7.2 and 7.3). However, in the UK, there appears to have been a more 'authentic' response to local needs, through projects prepared and realised by local organisations in a Small Grant Scheme. In the Polish LPP, this was impossible, and decisions about the actions taken were most commonly made by the LAG management board. Even when local needs were taken into consideration in LAG strategy building, the responsibility for implementing new ideas was not transferred to local organisations, so it is not possible to foresee great effects in terms of real 'capacity building' or 'civil society' creation. This shows the weaknesses of institutional support for bottom-up initiatives in Poland in the first years of membership of the EU. Some of the best organised partnerships in Poland (like the Middle Odra River Partnership) gained additional money from other resources (e.g. the 'Act Locally' programme financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation). However, in the authors' research in 2006–2007, only 2 out of 100 investigated partnerships implemented these kinds of local funds.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that even in conditions that were so unfavourable to real bottom-up actions in Poland with an absence of complete democracy and the dominance of local authority representatives, it is still possible to observe many interesting and innovative initiatives, for example, those presented by 'Toruń Rural Boroughs' LAG. This organisation prepared and implemented actions that represented a real alternative to the more usual infrastructure development focused strategies. The lack of regranteeing possibility in the LPP definitely lowered the value of projects implemented, as was stated above. However, the innovative character of actions taken in the environment, where ideas of sustainable and integrated rural development were previously unknown, led to a real – albeit not a widespread or holistic – shift in the definition of local community development goals. Therefore, it can be said that the LPP in Poland established the conditions for the development of liberal governance in rural areas in terms of the content of actions, rather than in terms of the implementation methods for this content. In reality, the Programme started to disseminate the concept of partnership governance all over the country: at the end of the 1990s, there was only one area-based rural partnership in Poland, in 2004 there were 20–40 such partnerships, but in 2007 there were nearly 210 and by 2010 (according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), 336 partnerships covered almost all rural regions in Poland.

**Table 7.2** The main projects realised in years 2000–2006 by Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ (England, UK)

The name of the action	Main aims/objectives	Intended beneficiaries	Actions	Results
1 Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ Small Grants Scheme	Provide small grants to enable locally based projects to launch or add value to larger projects. Examples include grants for illustrations for a book about local bird species, promotion of locally distinct brands of food, production of leaflets for walking and to promote local areas	Local community groups, small businesses, tourism individuals, tourism suppliers, producers	Advice on small grants. Feasibility studies, leaflet design and printing, public infrastructure created. Festivals supported and launched	Festivals, walking routes, book publications, leaflets, school visits organised, branding of local products. A wide variety of small and large projects have been supported using the Small Grants Scheme that has been used throughout the Levels and Moors area
2 Selling The Levels	Focus on opportunities for adding value to local products, developing marketing initiatives and creating sustainable market outlets through links with other small businesses in the area, which can use those products	Local producers and outlets, farmers, tourism providers, rural businesses	Feasibility studies for brand and market development. Creating promotional materials, map existing production in the area, facilitate collaboration and cooperative working	Database of local producers and stakeholders. Brand of 'Levels Best' launched. Marketing groups and coops established, display material produced, a number of publicity events and markets hosted linking in with food festivals. National recognition through mainstream media interest

(continued)

Table 7.2 (continued)

The name of the action	Main aims/objectives	Intended beneficiaries	Actions	Results
3 Avalon Marshes Heritage Network	To develop literature and interpretation boards for tourists celebrating and representing the Avalon Marshes area of the Levels	Local communities, tourists, tourism outlets	Historical research and documentation. Scripting for boards and book, publication process, consultation about format and style, local interviews	Interpretation boards erected. Leaflets printed and widely available. Books published in print, Braille and on CD-ROM
4 River Parrett Development Programme	Develop and promote walks and trails of interest on and around the River Parrett Trail. Promote local places of interest and boost tourism in nearby villages and for local businesses	Local communities, walking groups, tourists, tourism providers	Risk analysis of walks, engaging local landowners. Mapping of routes, creating leaflets and distributing information. National promotion and involvement of regional and national tourism agencies	Production of leaflets to promote the area. Identify and publicise specific walks and trails. Engage local community groups and individuals in process of developing walks. Raising profile of the River Parrett Trail and addressing landowner issues

Source: Own research

**Table 7.3** The main projects implemented or planned in years 2006–2008 by Toruń Rural Boroughs Association (Kujawsko-Pomorskie region, Poland)

The name of action	Main aims/objectives	Intended beneficiaries	Actions	Results
1 Healthy Life – Healthy Style	Development of active tourism activities on rural boroughs near to Toruń city	Local tourism entities, agrotourism farms, local governments	Promotional activities, surveys, training, new tourist trails promotion	Creation of 'eco-cultural trail of Toruń Rural Boroughs' Establishment of action plan for promotion and development of tourism activities on the trail
2 Green fairs	Establishment of month-to-month fairs – with wide offer of local food products and crafts Establishment and development of alternative food network amongst farmers, local processors and consumers from Torun to diversify local economy	Farmers, food processors, retailers from local communities	Organisation of 'green fairs' – an event gathering approx. 150 participants Promotion of 'green fairs' in local media and the internet Further actions to develop 'box-scheme' offer of local food products for urban and suburban consumers	Growing attention to tourism development amongst local authorities Integration of farmers and food processors in informal networks Creation of alternative food network Growing attention to food quality and the role of diversification of farm businesses for rural development Establishment of close links between rural entrepreneurs and urban consumers

(continued)



Table 7.3 (continued)

The name of action	Main aims/objectives	Intended beneficiaries	Actions	Results
3 Sport and recreation for community integration	Promotion of group sport and recreation activities through sporting events, festivals, feasts and other events	Local sport associations	Organisation of football cup	Integration of different social groups mixed in rural boroughs and isolated from each other – through sport and recreation
	Promotion of sport associations	Informal sport and recreation groups	Organisation of half-marathons	Putting more attention to the development of sport and recreation infrastructure
	Increase in quality of life through creation of attractive offer for filling free-time for children and adults	Local communities	Promotion of healthy life through study visits, training and events	
	Integration of generations through sport activities			
4 Small grants (only planned)	Promotion of community-based, bottom-up actions on the basis of one village	Informal and semiformal groups of inhabitants and local voluntary organisations	<b>Failed</b> – due to lack of possibility of financing regaining instruments from LEADER+ Pilot Programme	<b>Failed</b> – due to lack of possibility of financing regaining instruments from LEADER+ Pilot Programme

Source: Own research

## The Partnership Perspectives

Under the current Rural Development Plan (programming period 2007–2013), the rules underlying rural partnership support in Poland are now different in the current when compared to the LEADER+ Pilot Programme. The new principles state that the LAG territory can be inhabited by 10,000–150,000 people, so the upper limit has been increased. LAGs have to prepare a new strategy. The area of the partnership must be spatially coherent and it may cover urban–rural municipalities (excluding towns above 20,000 inhabitants) and urban municipalities with the exclusion of the towns above 5,000 inhabitants. An example of a LAG for which this change has been useful is the Kaczawskie Partnership in Lower Silesia. In this LAG, the local government of the town of Wojcieszów, inhabited by 3,964 people with 16 % of them employed in agriculture, applied to participate in the LAG. They were excluded according to the rules of the Pilot Programme. However, they can participate in the partnership in the current programming period. The LAGs created in the LPP can be supported, but in 2007 a new legal form was created for all new LAGs in Poland. This new form enables membership by legal units representing different sectors, as well as local inhabitants, within the framework of one association (to date it has not been possible to create an organisation with formal membership by legal units representing different sectors). However, in the authors' research, respondents doubted the benefits of giving equal rights to individuals and legal units within one organisation. The new associations can engage in not-for-profit activity listed in the statute, aimed at realising the local strategy. The financial resources available to LAGs are now wider than in the Pilot Programme, and at the same time investment projects (such as the renewal of traditional buildings, infrastructure reconstruction, etc.) can be implemented. However, local government tensions can be exacerbated by efforts to dominate local partnerships. As was revealed in the nationwide partnership survey in 2009, LAGs declared numerous different attempts by local government to take control over them, as well as growing pressure from LAGs internal bureaucracy to influence decision-making processes within the organisation (Knieć and Jarzębska 2011).

The duty of a LAG is to form a Partnership Council, which has a significant role in encouraging cooperation and an appropriate balance of power between different sectors. For each measure (implementation of the local development strategy, enhancing nonagricultural activity, rural renewal and development, funding and developing microbusiness enterprises, small rural renewal projects), a LAG should plan at least 10 % of the partnership budget in the LEADER axis, so the local grant fund is obligatory. It is now possible to include voluntary and unpaid work as a part of the budget. However, that has been limited to 10 % of eligible costs. It is also possible to apply for all types of projects to be undertaken under the LEADER axis. These features are more conducive to supporting the voluntary sector than in the Pilot Programme. However, the support level should not exceed 70 % of whole project costs, so given the 10 % allowance, in reality voluntary organisations should engage 20 % of their own financial resources. In the 'small rural renewal projects'

scheme, both NGOs and local government can apply and compete for grants, which creates unclear divisions of interests between municipalities and NGOs in LAGs. These conditions can eliminate local voluntary organisations from participating in current LEADER activities. In our opinion, the voluntary sector needs extra support to participate in this programme and indeed in other similar programmes. A designated support fund only for NGOs could be provided to help fill this financial gap.

## Concluding Remarks

Some authors suggest the features of rural areas in Europe vary from place to place, and the programmes that address them need to be locally sensitive (Moseley 2003). On the other hand, the opportunity to create extra rules in the Polish LPP resulted in some additional constraints that did not exist in the LEADER+ Community Initiative in western liberal democracies. These restrictions made the fund spending safe from the public administration point of view, but it did not sufficiently enhance local capacity or build civil society. Additional constraints were added by the Polish central government as a result of their distrust of voluntary organisations and cross-sectoral cooperation and their resistance to full decentralisation. Such decisions made it more difficult to develop cross-sectoral partnerships and to achieve the engagement of local communities and the third sector.

Polish society has no experience of cross-sectoral cooperation or the realisation of LEADER-type projects. This was bound to be evident in the implementation of the pilot projects of LAGs. The partnership idea – according to Lewenstein and Palska (2004) – still seems to be absent from the commonly produced vision of voluntary work and civil society in Poland. This vision is based upon the assumption that the third sector still plays the role of a ‘necessary add-on’ to local democracy, but it does not define this situation. Polish Pilot LEADER case studies show that the corporate governance of rural areas is still impeded by a very limited understanding of partnership principles and/or limited perception of its effects at the local level, but also at the regional and – perhaps surprisingly – the national (or central) level. The LEADER methodology as a tool for rural governance comes from a Western European cultural and political milieu. It is not clear if this model can be easily transposed to CEE conditions, where different historical experiences have shaped specific attitudes towards the voluntary sector, partnerships and governance processes.

In conclusion, we suggest the following recommendations for future programmes supporting cross-sectoral partnerships in post-communist, new member states:

- The rule of a maximum 50 % share by public bodies is not effective in LAGs in post-communist society with their strong public administration and weak voluntary sector. Thus we propose the use of the Finnish model of partnership in the post-communist countries in which the public sector share in the management body is limited to one third (see Rizzo 2009, 207).

- Combating the phenomenon of the ‘colonisation of partnerships’ by the local public sector is possible only when LAGs become financially independent from municipalities and develop their own independent administrative structures, which are open to new members.
- The possibilities of prefinancing should be explored in countries with a weak voluntary sector (e.g. payment on account in small grant funds for voluntary organisations) or additional support should be established, especially for voluntary organisations (e.g. special loans with very low bank costs, national funds to cover bank costs, etc.).
- In particular, innovative projects should be promoted (they can be adapted from Western European partnerships, so international networking between west and east is very important). Local rural society often lacks innovative ideas, so some projects could be also prepared by experts and promoted to rural partnerships for adoption with advisory help made available.
- Local farmers and entrepreneurs should be involved and greater entrepreneurship encouraged, as this is the main way to secure income for local communities. Help based on social aid was largely responsible for creating the passive, aid-dependent groups.

In Grochowski and Regulaska’s (2000) opinion, the associations, unions, foundations and other institutions that support local governance are beginning to assume the same or even greater representation of social interests as formal political institutions, such as political parties. The programmes supporting partnership governance should pay greater attention to enhancing the development and role of the voluntary sector and real local participation in partnership management, which in post-communist countries are typically weaker than in Western European democratic countries. Monitoring should disclose cases of domination, decision-making in small, exclusive groups, etc. and address these situations. This is the most important area for further research on power relations in rural partnerships in post-communist countries to find the model through which local community (or voluntary sector) participation will be substantially enhanced.

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