

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEADER PROGRAMME 2007 – 2013 IN THE RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND

Agnieszka Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska

Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, Poland

agnieszka_wojewodzka@sggw.pl

Abstract

The article deals with the implementation of the LEADER programme in Poland. The aim of the paper was to present the influence of the LEADER programme 2007 – 2013 on rural areas development taking into account its objectives. This topic is current in the context of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 evaluation and search for effective tools for supporting rural areas. The results of research conducted in 2016 among residents and local action groups are presented. Firstly, the LEADER programme had little impact on the possibility of finding work outside the agriculture. Secondly, the realized projects have contributed to the improvement of the quality of life of the residents in rural areas, especially when it comes to meeting the needs of tourism and leisure. The programme was of great importance in underpinning social capital in the countryside, especially its behavioral and bonding dimension. It is very significant taking into account the low level of social capital in rural areas in Poland. An overall level of activity of rural residents and other entities increased, so as the propensity to engage in joint initiatives and the level of trust. The observed effects of the LEADER programme may in the future contribute significantly to the endogenous development of rural areas.

Key words: rural areas, endogenous development, social capital, LEADER approach, Local Action Groups, Poland.

Introduction

Rural areas in Poland occupy 93 percent of the area inhabited by 40 percent of Poland's population (CSO, 2015)¹, which means they are very important in the country's development policy. The development level of rural areas is strongly differentiated both regionally and interregionally (Rosner, 2007; Rakowska & Wojewódzka, 2010; Stanny & Drygas, 2010; Stawicki, 2015) (NUTS 2), depending mostly on the location of rural areas vis-à-vis urban centres. The analyses of disparities in the level of development in Poland point, among others, to the existing discrepancies between the development level of rural areas and that of other areas (Grosse, 2004; Rosner & Stanny, 2014). The main socio-economic problems in rural areas include poorly developed social and hard infrastructure, high unemployment level, poorly developed services and low level of education of the local residents. Research studies corroborate a dynamic development of rural areas in the recent years, a phenomenon which is also confirmed by observable convergence processes (Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska & Dudek, 2016). Moreover, the characteristic feature of rural areas in Poland is the low level of social capital which is very differentiated spatially (Czapiński, 2013), owing to such factors as the historical policies of the countries occupying Poland at the time of the Partitions, impact of many religions, changes in the administrative borders, operation of the communist regime or migrations, particularly in the recent years. In the rural areas, the level of social capital is much lower than in the cities (Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, 2015, 2016).

In Poland, instruments supporting the development of rural areas and solving its problems included the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 (RDP 2007 – 2013), a component of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. The programme's main goal was to implement the concept of multifunctionality of agriculture and rural areas; it comprised specific objectives reflected in the Programme axes, i.e. improving the competitiveness of agriculture and rural areas; improving the environment; improving the quality of life, and social activation (RDP, 2007).

The LEADER approach was the Axis 4 of the RDP 2007 – 2013, which covered 4.2% of its funds. The aim of the LEADER programme was building social capital by stimulating the activity of rural communities and engaging them in the process of designing and implementing local development strategies (LDS). Implementing this goal in practice is significant because building and developing social capital, regarded as a major factor underpinning the development of rural areas (Kłodziński, 2003; Antoci *et al.*, 2009; Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, 2011a, 2011b; Lopolito *et al.*, 2015), lies in promoting the creation and strengthening of relationships between the community members. For these reasons, the object of the research is the implementation of the LEADER programme and its effects for rural development in Poland. The essence of the LEADER is local partnerships and cooperation of many entities, enabling the pooling of resources, knowledge and skills. There are formed local action groups (LAGs) where the social, economic and public sector cooperate, using local resources and the involvement of the local population. It reflects

¹ According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland rural areas are defined as rural communes and rural parts in urban-rural communes.

Table 1

The LEADER programme 2007 – 2013 broken down into measures in Poland

Measure code	Title of the measure	Limit of funds for measure of RDP 2007 – 2013		Number of beneficiaries
		(PLN)	%	
413	Implementation of Local Development Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification towards non-agricultural activities • Establishment and development of micro-enterprises • Village renewal and development • Small projects 	2 452 124 566.42	81.4	15 327
421	Implementation of cooperation projects	48 039 512.72	1.6	333
431	Running the Local Action Groups, acquisition of skills and activation	513 048 396.46	17.0	336
	Total	3 013 212 475.60	100	15997

the new approach adopted by the EU concerning the multifunctional development of rural areas stipulating an active involvement of the local communities. Rather importantly, the intervention areas are not determined by administrative boundaries but by the way in which development processes evolve². There were 336 LAGs operating in the 2007 – 2013 perspective, scattered unevenly across the provinces (voivodships).

The assumptions and tasks of the RDP relating to the LEADER initiatives take into account the specific nature of the rural areas in Poland, notably the level and determinants of social capital development. Three measures were distinguished (Table 1): implementation of LSD, implementation of cooperation projects and running the LAGs. The division of funds into measures was clearly differentiated. The vast majority of funds were devoted to the implementation of LSD, which reflected the diagnosed development needs of rural areas. This measure covered the largest number of beneficiaries.

The aim of the paper is to present the influence of the implementation of the LEADER programme under RDP 2007 – 2013 on rural areas development in Poland. To reach the purpose, the following tasks have been set: 1) to define the importance of the LEADER for creating jobs outside agriculture; 2) to identify changes in the standard of living in rural areas in the opinion of the residents; 3) to indicate the importance of the LEADER programme in the development of social capital, including the types of social capital.

Materials and Methods

The basis of the study was an analysis of existing data. Consideration was taken of the very wide

material which contains programmatic and strategic documents of RDP 2007 – 2013, binding legal acts, LAGs report and implemented LDS. The research was conducted in 2016, the time span covered the years 2007-2015. In the next stage of the research, the report uses the data of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (31 Dec 2015) and findings from the RDP 2007 – 2013 evaluation study from 2016 (Ledzion *et al.*, 2016). Based on the data of the Ministry regarding the allocation of funds under the RDP 2007-2013 (Axis 4), the communes and local action groups were selected for in-depth research. Quantitative methods were used, comprising: CAPI survey of rural residents in 10 communes (n = 500) and a CATI survey of LAG representatives (n = 120). Qualitative methods were also applied: IDI with representatives of LAG and implementing institutions. In the discussion of the results of the study, the research carried out in other European Union countries on the effects of the LEADER approach for rural development was taken into account.

The literature identifies several categories of social capital (Krishna & Uphoff, 2002; Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002; Kaasa & Parts, 2007; Skawińska, 2012) which were included in the study. Social capital describes relationships between people such as social ties, norms of reciprocity or trust and is based on the willingness to cooperate, which improves the performance of groups and institutions alike (Fukuyama, 1997). This is reflected in self-organisation and self-governance, mainly as part of voluntary associations. Structural capital refers to all state and local institutions operating in a given area such as foundations or associations. Another category known as behavioural capital comprises trust

² According to the RDP, rural areas include: rural municipalities, urban-rural municipalities with the exception of towns with a population exceeding 20 thousand residents, and urban municipalities with the exception of towns with a population exceeding 5 thousand residents.

as well as shared norms and values. Depending on the types of ties between individuals, we can talk about bonding capital (with strong family and neighborly ties), bridging capital (with ties with individuals other than family and neighbours) and linking capital (for interactions between

communities from various sectors and tiers of authorities).

Results and Discussion

Rural residents assessed what changes took place in the years 2007 – 2013 in the place of residence.

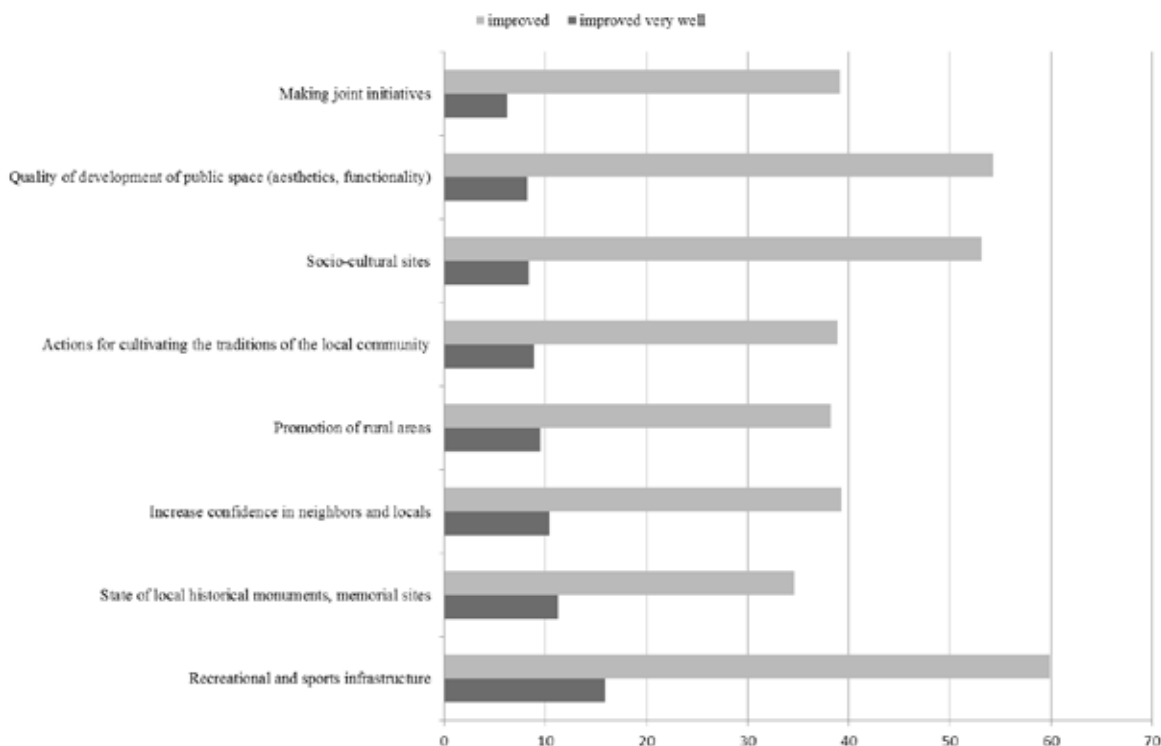


Figure 1. Changes in rural areas in Poland in 2007 – 2013 in the opinion of its residents (%).

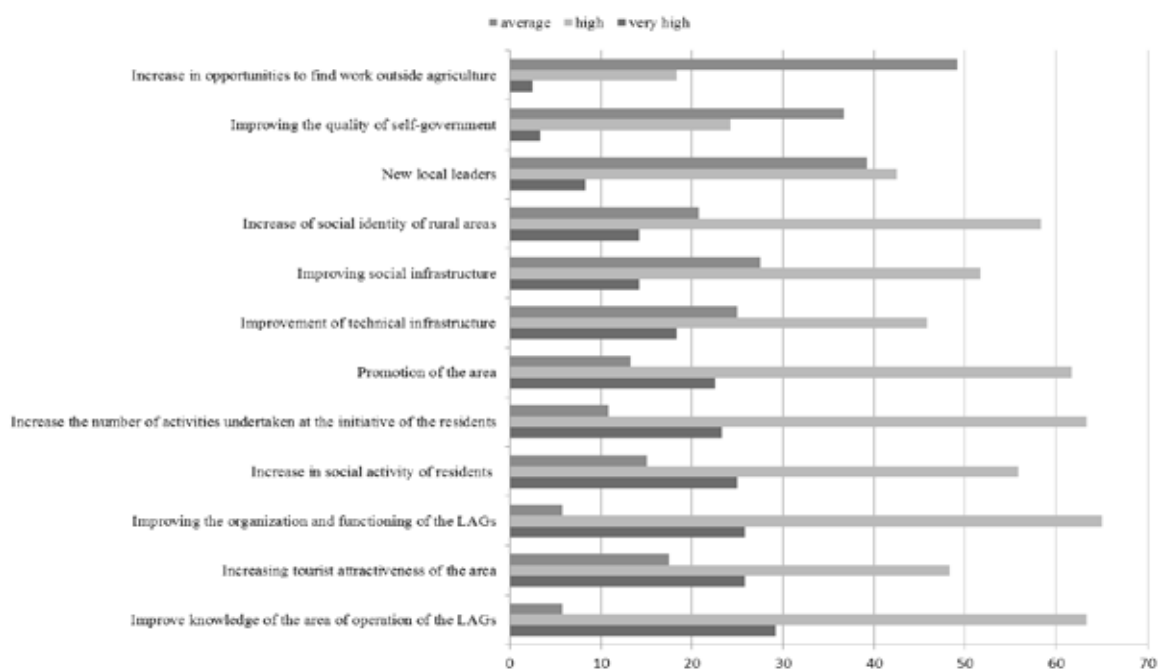


Figure 2. Impact of activities implemented by the Local Action Groups 2007 – 2013 on rural areas development in Poland in the opinion of LGD representatives (%).

It turned out that the inhabitants see a significant improvement in all the indicated areas (Figure 1). According to them, the situation has improved the most in terms of recreational and sports infrastructure, quality of development of public space and socio-cultural sites.

The representatives of the LAGs pointed out different aspects of rural development affected by their actions (Figure 2). According to the surveyed, the greatest influence LAGs on the development of the area concerned increased knowledge of the LAG's area and improvement of the functioning of the LAG itself. The relatively least influence of LAGs was on the possibility of employment outside agriculture and to improve the quality of governance at the local level. These analyzed in detail research results combined with the results of qualitative research have allowed to determine the impact of the LEADER on rural development. The research demonstrated the multi-faceted impacts of the LEADER approach on the development of rural areas.

Firstly, they involve building the local potential in the sphere of employment and creating new jobs outside agriculture. Altogether, more than 3,000 jobs were created, i.e. fewer than originally expected. The relatively modest impact of Axis 4 on job creation is a consequence of the way the funds were allocated: public funds in Axis 4 accounted for 7.8% funds in Axis 3, which was reflected in a very small number and value of projects implemented as part of Axis 4 compared to Axis 3. The minor role of LAGs in employment diversification is also corroborated by the surveys of LAGs and residents of rural areas. According to the surveyed LAGs, the impact of the LEADER programme on employment opportunities outside of agriculture was rather mediocre (49% answers), or high or very high according to about 21% of the respondents. It was pointed out that the relevant actions were rather difficult to execute, not least because of procedural and organisational issues associated with the submission of applications. The residents of rural areas were aware that job opportunities outside agriculture had increased, with 40% being of the opinion that such conditions had been improved. It can be said that the role of the LEADER programme in creating new jobs depends on the actual needs in that regard, the specific nature of rural areas and the role of agriculture.

The projects carried out by LAGs as in the Czech Republic were directly reflected in the improved quality of life of the residents in rural areas (Nunvarova, 2014), mainly due to providing them with access to new infrastructure. The tangible outputs include a huge number of either newly built or upgraded facilities, i.e. 7,000 as part of small projects, 10,000 as part of the renewal and development of rural

areas (including modernisation), and 650 facilities as part of interregional and international cooperation. In addition, public space has been revitalised in some 6,000 villages, a much bigger number than originally anticipated. These effects are recognised by the local residents. In their opinion, the overall standards of living in their municipalities have improved, as indicated by 85% of the respondents.

Axis 4 had a particularly significant impact on certain spheres of life, such as recreation, preservation of traditions and promotion. Projects from those spheres provided many opportunities for meeting new people from the neighbourhood and other milieus (e.g. other parents in a playground, residents during picnics, local community leaders from various municipalities during the preparation of a cookbook based on local produce); all these activities, through increased trust and contacts established with people other than family or direct neighbours has helped to develop social capital, especially bridging capital. At the same time, LAGs are hardly recognised by the local residents, which may considerably reduce the possibility of attributing the changes observable in the quality of life to the results of activities implemented by LAGs.

The residents most frequently listed the following benefits derived from LAGs' activity: development of technical infrastructure (sports grounds), social infrastructure (recreation sites), new jobs, better living conditions, overall development of the municipality. In their opinion, LAGs and their activities are viewed positively, as entities that produce specific results and bring desirable changes for a given area. It should be borne in mind that certain effects arising from projects implemented by LAGs such as e.g. promotion of rural areas and their assets or improved aesthetic value of their villages may positively affect the quality of life of the local residents in the future (Nunvarova, 2014). Tourists' interest in a given area may e.g. drive the development of the local enterprise, help to increase the incomes of the local residents and encourage them to undertake new joint initiatives promoting the development of their 'little homeland', and this is partly dependent on how, and how effectively, rural areas will be supported in the future.

The LEADER 2007 – 2013 programme helped to increase social capital and boosted the involvement of the rural communities in local matters, as was also found in other EU countries (Kis *et al.*, 2015; Lopolito *et al.*, 2015). In the residents' opinion, in the case of 60% municipalities the residents are interested in becoming engaged in matters associated with the development of their village or community; recently, the situation regarding embarking on joint initiatives such as meetings or trips has improved, as indicated by 45.3% of the respondents. According to 47.1% of

the surveyed residents, the overall trust in neighbours and other local residents has also increased.

The survey also suggested the emergence of new leaders who launch various initiatives promoting the development of rural areas. LAG representatives who have direct contacts with the residents of the LAG impact area pointed to a distinct increase in the local residents' activity who have now learnt to cooperate. This is reflected in an increased number of associations, also due to the fact that some of the already existing organisations have acquired a formal status, notably the so-called Farmers' Wives' Associations. All this has boosted the existing structural capital.

Greater activity of the local residents is confirmed by the increasingly growing interest in social consultations and many queries about the possible means of engaging in the development of a specific area, which is also corroborated by the conclusions from the study with representatives of the implementing institutions. The very structure of the LEADER programme entailing the need to include representatives of various sectors is conducive to the development of social capital.

LAG representatives pointed out that such forms of cooperation had never been present in Poland's rural areas before, nor looking at problems from many different points of view, taking into account the bottom-up approach which is needed to effectively diagnose and resolve various problems afflicting rural areas. Due to participation in joint initiatives bringing together many people from the local community and representing various milieus (activists, businesspeople, members of the authorities), the local communities become more responsible for the place that they live in and with which they identify, and look more broadly, not at an area confined to their own municipality but rather an area that has certain common features or attributes that can be used to promote development, such as natural assets. This in turn has increased management capacity in rural areas due to the involvement of other entities than the local authorities alone. The conclusions of other authors have been confirmed (Arabatzis *et al.*, 2010; Pechrova & Boukalova, 2015).

It can be concluded that the activities undertaken as part of the LEADER programme have considerably increased participation and strengthened the social sector, a statement that is not always true in relation to businesspeople who above all want to pursue their individual goals and believe that their initiatives and economic effectiveness are curtailed by excessive

bureaucracy. The observable merging of communities from various sectors and tiers of the authorities means that bonding capital is being forged. One important feature of projects implemented as part of LAGs is providing support and promotion of cultural activity, especially among young and elderly people, strengthening the bonds with the place of residence, coupled with integration and activation of the local residents (Nunvarova, 2014), both important factors underpinning the development of social capital.

Conclusions

On the basis of conducted research, the following conclusions can be reached:

1. The activities carried out as part of the LEADER Programme relating to the creation of new jobs outside agriculture were of little significance for shaping the labour market in rural areas as this was dependent on the needs and unique characteristics of a given area.
2. The implemented projects positively affected the standards of living of the residents in rural areas, mainly as regards satisfying social needs of the residents in the sphere of recreation and leisure. Thanks to the Programme small infrastructure amenities, so important for the residents and usually either marginalised or neglected in the earlier development policies, were considerably improved.
3. The LEADER Programme played a significant role in building social capital nationwide, especially with regard to behavioural capital. An overall level of activity of rural residents and other entities increased, so as the propensity to engage in joint initiatives and the level of trust. Bonding capital was also increased, largely due to the structure of the Programme itself. Locally, the significance of the Programme varied depending on the level of social capital at the inception of the intervention and on the existing determinants concerning capital development.

In assessing the impact of the LEADER Programme on the development of rural areas, the small overall financial allocation should also be taken into account, with Axis 4 representing ca. 4% of the RDP 2007 – 2013 public expenditure. The evaluation of the programme results for the development of rural areas requires time and should be made together with the analysis of the remaining RDP 2007 – 2013 components.

References

1. Antoci, A., Sabatini, F., & Sodini, M. (2009). *Fragility of Social Capital*. University of Siena.
2. Arabatzis, G., Aggelopoulos, S., & Tsiantikoudis, S. (2010). Rural development and LEADER + in Greece: Evaluation of local action groups. *Journal of Food, Agriculture & Environment* Vol.8 (1), 302 – 307.

3. Central Statistical Office, Local Data Base Retrieved March 10, 2017, from: [http://http://stat.gov.pl/bdl/](http://stat.gov.pl/bdl/).
4. *Collective current report on the implementation of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013* as at 31 December 2015, Retrieved March 10, 2017, from: <http://www.minrol.gov.pl>.
5. Czapiński, J. (2013). The State of Civil Society. Social Capital. In J. Czapiński & T. Panek (Eds.), *Social Diagnosis 2013. Conditions and Quality of Life of Poles* (pp. 285 – 297). Warsaw: The Council for Social Monitoring.
6. Fukuyama, F. (1997). *Zaufanie. Kapitał społeczny a droga do dobrobytu. (Trust. Social capital and the way to prosperity)*. Warsaw-Wrocław: PWN. (in Polish).
7. Grootaert, Ch., & Bastelaer, Th., van. (2002). Conclusion: Measuring Impact and Drawing Policy Implications. In Ch. Grootaert & Th. van Bastelaer, *The Role of Social Capital in Development. An Empirical Assessment*. (pp. 343 – 345). Cambridge University Press.
8. Grosse, T.G. (2004). *Polityka regionalna Unii Europejskiej. Przykład Grecji, Włoch, Irlandii i Polski (EU regional policy. The example of Greece, Italy, Ireland and Poland)*. Warszawa: ISP. (in Polish).
9. Kaasa, A., & Parts, E. (2007). *Individual- Level Determinants of Social Capital in Europe: Differences Between Country Groups*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.
10. Kis, K., Gal, J., & Veba, A. (2015). *Effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in local rural development partnerships*. Abstract Applied Studies in Agribusiness and Commerce, Agroinform Publishing House. Budapest, 31 – 37.
11. Kłodziński, M. (2003). Kapitał społeczny jako podstawowy czynnik różnicujący stopień rozwoju gospodarczo-społecznego gmin wiejskich. (Social Capital as the Main Factor Differentiating the Degree of Economic and Social Development of Rural Communities). In M. Adamowicz (Eds.), *The Local Development Strategies. Institutional Aspects*, Vol. I (pp. 161 – 169). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SGGW. (in Polish).
12. Krishna, A., & Uphoff, N. (2002). Mapping and Measuring Social Capital Through Assessment of Collective Action to Conserve and Develop Watersheds in Rajasthan, India. In Ch. Grootaert & Th. Van Bastelaer, *The Role of Social Capital in Development. An Empirical Assessment*. (pp. 86 – 87). Cambridge University Press.
13. Ledzion, B., Grabowska, I., Kupiec, T., Płoszaj, A., Widła-Domaradzki, Ł., Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A., ... Wójtowicz, D. (2016). *Ocena wpływu PROW 2007-2013 na jakość życia na obszarach wiejskich z uwzględnieniem podejścia LEADER (Evaluation of the RDP 2007 – 2013 impact on quality of life in rural areas taking into account the LEADER approach)*, Evaluation report, Warsaw: EGO. (in Polish).
14. Lopolito, A., Sisto, R., & Barbuto, A., & Da Re, R. (2015). What is the impact of LEADER on the local social resources? *Rivista di Economia Agraria*, Anno LXX. 1, 55 – 75. DOI: 10.13128/REA-16977.
15. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2007). *Rural Development Programme for 2007 – 2013*. Warsaw.
16. Nunvarova, S. (2014). Local Action Groups – Entities of Rural Development, *MendelNet*, 361 – 366.
17. Pechrova, M., & Boukalova, K. (2015). Differences among Czech Local Action Groups in Using Selected Principles of Leader, *Scientia Agriculturae Bohemica*, 46, 41 – 48. DOI: 10.1515/sab-2015-0015.
18. Rakowska J., & Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A. (2010). *Zróżnicowanie przestrzenne obszarów wiejskich w Polsce – stan i perspektywy rozwoju w kontekście powiązań funkcjonalnych (Spatial diversity of rural areas in Poland - the state and prospects of development in the context of functional relationships)*. Warszawa: Ekspertyza dla Ministerstwa Rozwoju Regionalnego. (in Polish).
19. Rosner, A. (2007). *Zróżnicowanie poziomu rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego obszarów wiejskich a zróżnicowanie dynamiki przemian (Different levels of socio-economic development of rural areas and diversification of the dynamics of change)*. Warszawa: IRWiR PAN. (in Polish).
20. Rosner, A., & Stanny, M. (2014). *Monitoring rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Etap I (Monitoring of rural development. Stage I)*. Warszawa: FEFRWP. IRWiR PAN. (in Polish).
21. Skawińska, E. (2012). *Kapitał społeczny w rozwoju region. (Social Capital in the Region's Development)*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. (in Polish).
22. Stanny, M., & Drygas, M. (2010). *Przestrzenne, społeczno-ekonomiczne zróżnicowanie obszarów wiejskich w Polsce (Spatial, socio-economic diversity of rural areas in Poland)*. Warszawa: IRWiR PAN. (in Polish).
23. Stawicki, M. (2015). Absorption of EU Funds and the Development of Rural Areas in Latvia and Poland, In *Research for Rural Development 2015*. Vol. 2, (pp. 97 – 103). Jelgava, Latvia: Latvia University of Agriculture.

24. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A. (2011a). Determinants of Rural Areas Development in the Theory. In Development Prospects of Rural Areas Lagging Behind in the CEE Region. 24 – 27 May 2011 (pp. 186 – 192), Godollo, Hungary, Szent Istvan University.
25. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A. (2011b). Social Capital as an Endogenous Factor of Local Development. *Roczniki Naukowe SERiA*. Vol XIII. Issue 6. Warsaw-Poznan- Wroclaw, 255 – 259.
26. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A. (2015). Structural Dimension of Social Capital in Poland. Urban Versus Rural Areas. In Proceedings of the 7th International Scientific Conference: Rural Development. 19 – 20 November 2015 (pp. 1 – 6), Kaunas, Lithuania, Aleksandras Stulginskis University.
27. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A. (2016). Behavioral dimension of social capital of rural areas in Poland, *Economic Science for Rural Development 2016*. No 41, (pp. 173 – 179). Jelgava, Latvia: Latvia University of Agriculture.
28. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, A., & Dudek, H. (2016). Dynamics of rural areas development in Poland - convergence analysis, *Research for Rural Development 2016*. Vol. 2, (pp. 99 – 105). Jelgava, Latvia: Latvia University of Agriculture.