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## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COHESION POLICY IN RURAL AREAS OF DOLNOŚLĄSKIE REGION

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**Abstract.** The aim of this paper is to present the implementation of cohesion policy in rural areas on the example of Dolnośląskie voivodeship, based on an assessment of the direction and scale of funding for rural areas under two operational programs, the Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013 and the Regional Operational Programme of Lower Silesia Voivodeship 2007–2013. In the present study, expert-based, documentary, and k-means clustering methods were used. Studies indicate that in 2007–2013 the majority of investments from the RDP were related to improving the quality of life of rural residents. The amount of support, both in total and per capita, varied widely. Most municipalities received this support at the lowest level available on the scale of the whole province. Support for investments in rural areas of the ROP of Dolnośląskie voivodeship 2007–2013 was primarily related to the improvement of transport conditions and environmental protection projects.

**Key words:** coherence, rural areas, Dolnośląskie, RDP 2007–2013, RPO WD 2007–2013

### INTRODUCTION

Rural areas cover 91% of the European Union and are inhabited by more than 50% of the Community's population (Oleszko-Kurzyna, 2010). Their importance in socioeconomic development is due to the essential role they play both in production and sociocultural terms (Wilkin, 2010).

The growth of rural areas is to a large extent dependent on the actions taken as part of the cohesion policy as some of its objectives relate to local development. The overall aim of cohesion policy is to reduce economic disparities and to promote more balanced social and territorial development (Kołodziejczyk, 2015; Marszał and Pielesiak, 2008). According to Churski (2009), the term cohesion on a regional level is a certain intraregional consistency leading to its complementarity, which means taking actions that complement each other and enable the achievement of a common goal. For such cohesion to be attained, certain economic, social and technical ties must exist to form a foundation for the functional relations to drive the development of the whole region, in spite of the internal differences (Kołodziejczyk, 2014). The goals of both policies related to rural area development, that is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the cohesion policy, are similar as regards facilitating the improvement of road infrastructure, infrastructure for the protection of the natural environment and human resources, sociocultural infrastructure, and entrepreneurship. The cohesion policy is also about supporting rural areas in fields such as education, health, information society, local roads, regional transportation system, as well as entrepreneurship, investments water distribution and sewage systems and waste management (Chmieliński, 2008).

After 2004, Poland became the largest beneficiary of the cohesion policy among the new Member States,

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and after 2007, in the entire EU (Nurzyńska, 2013). During that time, the conditions and quality of rural life have improved significantly. This involved primarily providing households with equipment and sanitary ware. Also, there has been a large increase in access to the Internet<sup>1</sup>. However, there are still marked differences in Poland between urban and rural areas in terms of the level of income, poverty and education or the availability of transport (Łysoń, 2014). Heffner (2011) emphasises that rural areas in Poland are characterised by a large variation in spatial and functional arrangements. On a national scale, areas with lower levels of socioeconomic development dominate, which is reflected in the possibility of economic activity and the living conditions of their inhabitants. Research by Stanny (2012, 2013) and Rosner and Stanny (2007) has proven that rural areas do not develop evenly. Multi-functional communes located around larger cities show a far higher level of development in comparison to traditional agricultural communities, which are often located peripherally. Similarly, research on the development of rural areas located in the Dolnośląskie region confirms these regularities (Kazak and Pilawka, 2013).

The aim of this paper is to present the principles underlying how the cohesion policy is meant to be implemented in rural areas, using the example of Dolny Śląsk.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In particular, attention was paid to the following issues:

- Fields and scale of financing for these areas under two operational programmes, namely: 2007–2013 RDP and 2007–2013 LS ROP<sup>2</sup>
- Objectives of the cohesion policy in relation to rural areas of the region for 2014–2020.

This paper uses documents provided by the Dolnośląskie voivodeship Marshal's Office (the documentary method) and also opinions of the employees of that Office responsible for implementation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Regional

Operational Programme (ROP) as regards barriers to effective implementation of the cohesion policy in rural areas (the expert-based method). All actions allocated under 2007–2013 RDP were considered with reference to 133 rural and urban/rural communes of the province. Unfortunately, the actions under 2007–2013 LS ROP were not capable of being captured in the same way. It was only possible to select actions aimed collectively at rural and mountain areas in the entire province.

For the delimitation of communes in terms of the amount of funds allocated under 2007–2013 RDP, a non-hierarchical method of k-means clustering was used<sup>3</sup>.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF COHESION POLICY INSTRUMENTS IN RURAL AREAS OF DOLNY ŚLĄSK

Actions towards cohesion of rural areas in the region involve rational use of endogenous factors of development and the possibilities inherent in the instruments of external support. This is facilitated by the *neo-endogenous mechanism*, which uses an optimal combination of internal and external resources, as well as scientific, managerial and local knowledge (Adamski and Gorchach, 2007 as cited in Kołodziejczyk, 2015). The rural development policy implemented over the 2007–2013 period was based on coordination of aid from different funds<sup>4</sup>. Instruments of external support, which are supposed to be complementary, are intended to increase the synergies between actions taken towards rural development (Słodowa-Hełpa, 2010; Kutkowska and Ratuszniak, 2014). Funds were directed to rural areas under the two operational programmes, namely the 2007–2013 Rural Development Programme and the 2007–2013 Dolnośląskie Regional Operational Programme. The Dolnośląskie voivodeship Government

<sup>1</sup> B. Chmielewska (2015) notes that “in Poland, the changes that have occurred in the structure of expenditure after accession to the EU are expressed mainly as a reduction in the share of expenditure on food with a simultaneous increase in the spending on household equipment and usage charges as well as transport. This indicates an improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants of our country”.

<sup>2</sup> 2007–2013 Dolnośląskie Regional Operational Programme.

<sup>3</sup> This method, described by MacQueen (1962), leads to grouping of objects into a predetermined number of clusters in such a way as to minimise variation within the cluster, while maximising variation between clusters. Variation is defined as the sum of distances of the elements of a cluster from its centre of gravity. The adopted procedure uses standard Euclidean distance as a measure of distance.

<sup>4</sup> European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, and Cohesion Fund.

**Table 1.** The financing of projects under the RDP 2007–2013 implemented by the Dolnośląskie voivodeship Government

**Tabela 1.** Finansowanie projektów w ramach PROW 2007–2013 realizowanych przez samorząd województwa dolnośląskiego

Operational programme Program operacyjny	Value of financing – Wartość dofinansowania			
	total ogółem		including the EAFRD w tym z EFRROW	
	thous. PLN tys. zł	%	thous. PLN tys. zł	%
PROW 2007–2013 RPD 2007–2013	1 120 340.7	100	749 824.8	100
Axis 1 – Oś 1	206 729.9	19	157 247.1	21
Axis 3 – Oś 3	730 114.1	66	444 401.6	60
Axis 4 – Oś 4	210 496.7	15	148 176.1	19

Source: Materials Marshal's Office in Wrocław (as of 31.07.2015).

Źródło: Materiały Urzędu Marszałkowskiego we Wrocławiu (stan na 31.07.2015 r.).

was the implementing body of 2007–2013 RDP under seven actions<sup>5</sup>.

## 2007–2013 RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The actions under 2007–2013 RDP implemented by the Dolnośląskie voivodeship Government enabled execution of more than PLN 1120 million worth of projects, including co-financed from EU funds in the amount of nearly PLN 750 million (Table 1). Based on the amount of funding criterion, the most significant were the actions under Axis 3, which focuses on improving the quality of life for rural residents, that is *Basic services for the economy and rural population* and *Village renewal and development*. 66% of the funding was allocated for these actions. Projects executed under *Implementation of local development strategies*, which are related to *Village renewal and development*, accounted for 15%

<sup>5</sup> Improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry by merging land, Improving and developing infrastructure related to the development of agriculture and forestry by agricultural water resources management (Axis 1), Basic services for the economy and rural population, Village renewal and development (Axis 3), Implementation of local development strategies, Implementation of cooperation projects, and Running the local action group (Axis 4).

of the funding, which means that 81% of 2007–2013 RDP funding allocated to rural areas was spent on investments to improve the quality of life in rural areas, while 19% was used for land merging and improvement of water resources management in agriculture and forestry.

Table 2 shows tangible effects of 2007–2013 RDP measures in Dolny Śląsk aimed at improving the quality of rural life. As part of village renewal, community centres, sports and recreational facilities, playgrounds and other facilities for public use have been renovated. This involved 2224 projects. An interesting issue is how they will be used by the local community in the future. Furthermore, 2007–2013 RDP funding allowed the implementation of projects related to building water and sewage networks and to municipal waste collection and management.

An analysis of the amounts directed to rural areas under 2007–2013 RDP for the measures specified above shows significant disparities in the effectiveness of their acquisition between communes. These differences range from PLN 15.5 thousand (rural area of Bielawa commune) to about PLN 13 million (Środa Śląska commune). Under the measure *Basic services for the economy and rural population*, the communes of Męcinka and Łagiewniki received high total funding in the amount of about PLN 5 million, while the communes of Dziadowa Kłoda (PLN 28.5 thousand) and

**Table 2.** Results of the RDP 2007–2013 measures in the Dolnośląskie voivodeship

**Tabela 2.** Efekty realizacji działań PROW 2007–2013 ukierunkowanych na poprawę jakości życia na wsi w woj. dolnośląskim

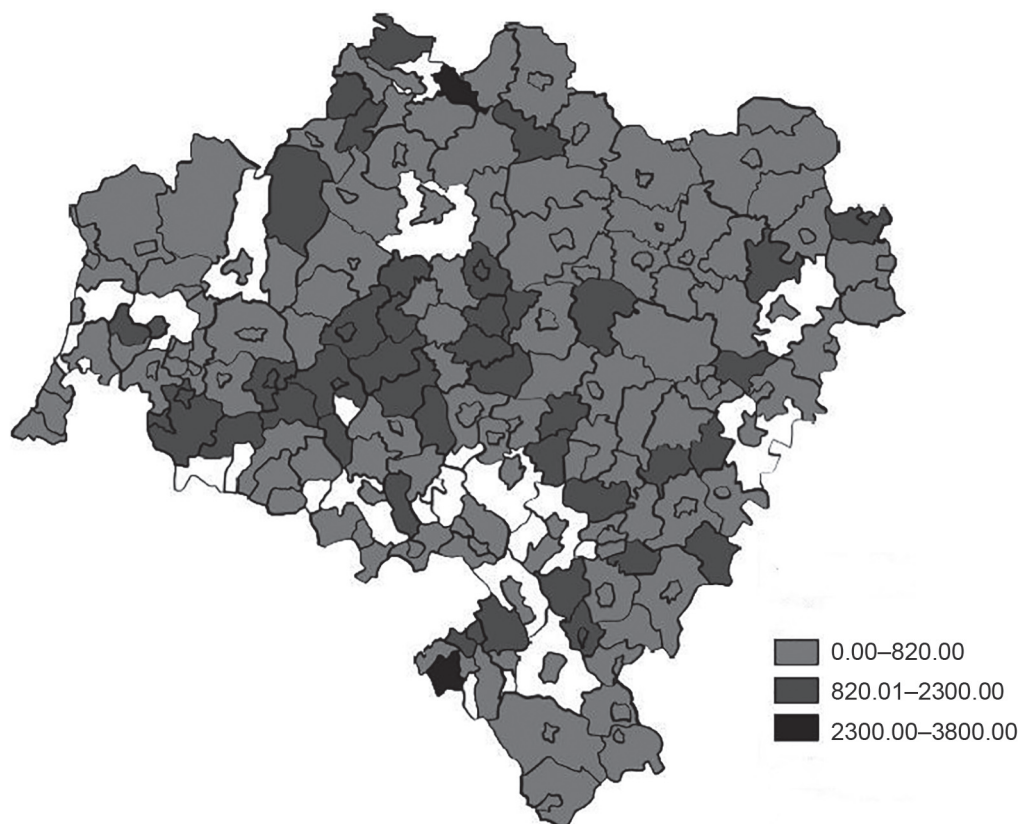
Action – Działanie	Material indicators – Wskaźniki rzeczowe
“Village renewal and development” and “Implementation of local development strategies” „Odnowa i rozwój wsi” i „Wdrażanie lokalnych strategii rozwoju”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 566 buildings built, rebuilt and equipped as recreation, sports and socio-cultural facilities, including community centres and cultural centres, with the exception of schools, kindergartens and nurseries 566 wybudowanych, przebudowanych i wyposażonych budynków pełniących funkcje rekreacyjne, sportowe, społeczno-kulturalne, w tym świetlice i domy kultury z wyłączeniem szkół, przedszkoli i żłobków</li> <li>• 304 sports facilities, playgrounds and recreation places for public use built, rebuilt and renovated 304 wybudowane, przebudowane i wyremontowane obiekty sportowe, place zabaw i miejsca rekreacji przeznaczone do użytku publicznego</li> <li>• 127 museums and national monuments renovated or restored, including the purchase of hardware and equipment 127 muzeów i obiektów wpisanych do rejestru zabytków wyremontowanych bądź odrestaurowanych wraz z zakupami sprzętu i wyposażeniem</li> <li>• 227 community centres renovated and equipped with new equipment 227 świetlic wyremontowanych i wyposażonych w nowy sprzęt</li> <li>• over 1000 tourist and recreational landscape architecture objects built, renovated and reconstructed ponad 1000 wybudowanych, odnowionych i przebudowanych obiektów małej infrastruktury turystycznej i rekreacyjnej</li> </ul>

Source: Materials Marshal’s Office in Wrocław (as of 31.07.2015).

Źródło: Materiały Urzędu Marszałkowskiego we Wrocławiu (stan na 31.07.2015 r.).

Żukowice (PLN 43.3 thousand) secured low amounts for this purpose. Under the measures *Leader* and *Village renewal and development*, funding ranged from PLN 15 thousand (rural area of Bielawa commune) to PLN 4.9 million (Miękinia commune). When assessing the amount of financial support sourced by the communes under 2007–2013 RDP per capita, large spatial variation is also observed (Fig. 1). Only two communes (Lewin Kłodzki and Pęcław) received comparatively high levels of financial support. It amounted to PLN 3788 per capita in Lewin Kłodzki and PLN 3037 per capita in Pęcław. The vast majority – 70% of the 133 communes – secured low levels of this support. These amounts were in the range of about PLN 0.40 per capita (rural areas of the communes of Bielawa, Jelenia Góra, and Legnica) to PLN 820 per capita (Marciszów commune). The funding obtained by 28% of the communes in the province was ranked as medium. The distribution of indicators of the amount of support per capita for the measure *Basic services for the economy and rural population* was similar. High levels of support for this measure were received by three

communes (Lewin Kłodzki, Pęcław, and Ciepłowody: PLN 2050, PLN 1639, and PLN 1278 per capita, respectively), and 70% of the communes secured low amounts of the funding. Low funding was obtained by the communes of Dziadowa Kłoda (PLN 6.2 per capita) and Żukowice (PLN 12.3 per capita). Funds under the measures *Village renewal and development* and *Leader* were allocated completely differently, as 13% of the communes received high levels of support per capita, nearly 40% – medium levels, and 47% – low levels. These amounts ranged from PLN 0.40 per capita in Jelenia Góra commune (rural area) to PLN 904 per capita in Pęcław commune. The scale of disparities is thus enormous. The amount of funding acquired may have been affected by factors such as substantive preparation of officials in Dolnośląskie communes, their experience in obtaining EU funds, as well as financial capacity of the local government budget. In the case of projects under *Village renewal and development*, an important factor could have been the activity of the local population and its desire to acquire financing for local initiatives from external sources.



**Fig. 1.** The amount of funds received by municipalities under the RDP 2007–2013 (PLN/1 capita)  
Source: Office of the Marshal of Dolnośląskie voivodeship.

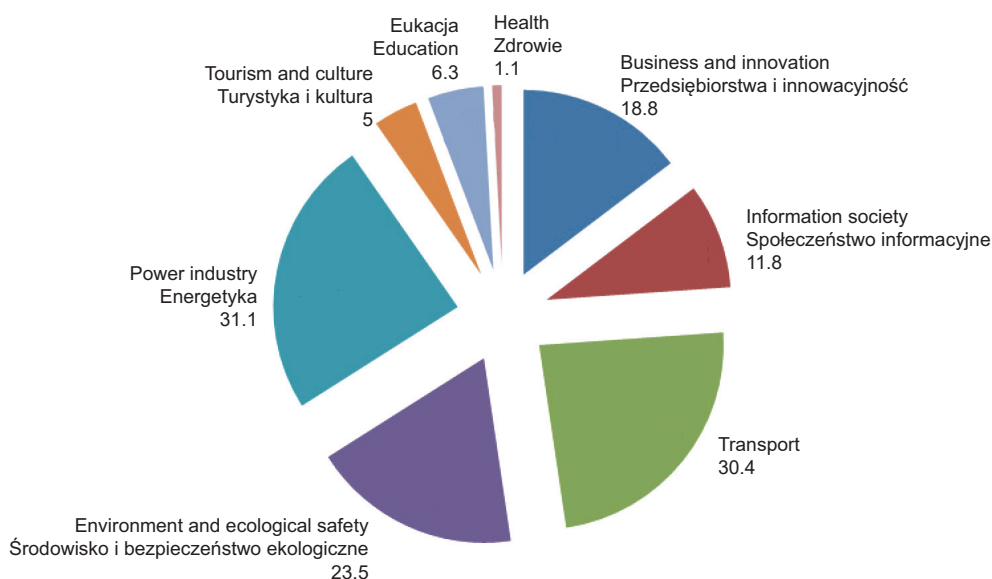
**Rys. 1.** Wysokość środków pozyskana przez gminy w ramach PROW 2007–2013 (zł/1 mieszkańca)  
Źródło: Dane Urzędu Marszałkowskiego Województwa Dolnośląskiego.

## 2007–2013 DOLNOŚLĄSKIE REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME

An attempt to analyse the support for rural areas under the cohesion policy proved to be challenging due to difficulty in delineating these areas. The statistics of the Managing Authority for 2007–2013 LS ROP do not take into account the distinction between types of communes (rural and rural/urban) and they only indicate the area of the project. Furthermore, it was possible to segregate rural areas of the province only in combination with its mountain areas. The 496 projects implemented under 2007–2013 LS ROP in these areas related to eight priorities. Most of the projects related to the priority *Business and innovation*, which involved investment funding for businesses (236, that is 48% of all projects), and the priority *Environment and ecological safety*, which

concerned building water and sewage infrastructure (48, that is 10% of the total).

An analysis of the structure of the priorities in terms of amount of funding shows that *Transport* accounted for 30% of all funding, *Environment and ecological safety* for 29%, and *Business and innovation* for 19% (Fig. 1). These three priorities were also responsible for the largest share of funding from the European Union. Under the priority *Transport*, 80% of total funding, amounting to PLN 402 million, was spent on upgrading roads, while the remainder on rail infrastructure. These investments have helped improve the condition of local roads and safety of rural residents. Projects funded under this priority in rural and mountain areas accounted for over 33% of total financing in Dolnośląskie. A significant part of the funds from 2007–2013 LS ROP was earmarked for investments to improve the environment and ecological safety. PLN



**Fig. 2.** The percentage share of support for rural and mountainous areas of European Union funds in the framework of the priorities of the ROP WD 2007–2013 (%)

Source: Office of the Marshal of Dolnośląskie voivodeship (as of 31.07.2015).

**Rys. 2.** Struktura wsparcia finansowego obszarów wiejskich i górskich środkami Unii Europejskiej w ramach priorytetów RPO WD 2007–2013 (%)

Źródło: Dane Urzędu Marszałkowskiego Województwa Dolnośląskiego (stan na 31.07.2015).

311 million was allocated for the construction and upgrading of a water supply and sewage system and a treatment plant. Nearly 60% of the provincial amount allocated to this priority was spent on investments executed in rural and mountain areas. Significant support was also received by businesses (PLN 291 million, 20% of total funding), while a slightly smaller portion of the funds was earmarked for the development of telecommunications infrastructure. Investments in Education, Power industry, Tourism and culture, and Health had the largest share in rural areas compared to other priorities.

All investments significantly raised the standard of living of rural people in the region, and the support from EU funds has enabled the commune authorities to funnel their own financial resources towards other development activities. As pointed out by experts<sup>6</sup>, the implemen-

tation of the above actions was also met with barriers, which largely resulted from the lack of experience in implementing such projects as 2007–2013 was the first full programming period in Poland to function fully in accordance with the formal EU terms. Furthermore, experts point to the factors affecting the uneven socioeconomic development of rural areas in the region. These include low level of development, which has been inherited from previous periods and is difficult to improve, spatial and settlement structure, structure of businesses in terms of sectors and size, amount of money available to put towards the commune's own contribution, institutional efficiency of the administrative authorities of the area, including their effectiveness in applying for external funding for development, and ability to enter into agreements with other parties in order to implement development projects. Therefore, local knowledge is important to trigger the neo-endogenous mechanism described by Kołodziejczyk (2015). He says that "local knowledge is an element that enables putting this mechanism into action" in the specific conditions underlying the development potential. The efficiency of this mechanism is also

<sup>6</sup> At the conference "Challenges in the development of agriculture and rural areas in Dolny Śląsk" organised on 20 November 2014 by the Institute of Economic and Social Sciences of the University of Life Sciences in Wrocław and the Statistical Office in Wrocław.

conditioned by the quality of human and social capital: demographic structure of the population, level of education of the citizens, and their civic activity.

2014–2020 LS ROP establishes a new method of implementation of the cohesion policy, which involves an integrated territorial approach at the local level, achieved through projects executed in the form of partnership between various entities, which should give them a real chance to participate in the creation of local development. A minimum of 15% of the programme will be allocated to rural areas. The integrated territorial approach in rural areas will be supported by initiating actions aimed at reducing disparities in the quality of life of the rural population compared to urban living conditions, especially in terms of access to infrastructure and public services, while taking advantage of the endogenous potential of these areas. First of all, measures will be taken to facilitate the development of businesses, including in the agri-food sector; also investments in the field of environmental protection will continue, which is important from the point of view of the function of rural areas: food production, tourism and recreation, and living environment for plants and animals. An important element of the support will be the development of local institutions aimed at people experiencing social exclusion by increasing the availability and quality of specialised services, assistance and social inclusion. Actions contributing to the development of human and social capital will be taken in order to improve the quality and accessibility of education at different levels. Also, measures will be implemented to promote the involvement of local communities in public life through the Internet (e-health and e-education) and an increase of the access of rural population to digital resources. Rural areas will receive support for projects relating to the generation of energy from renewable sources, as well as other forms of entrepreneurship based on the use of local resources<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, the support for rural areas under the cohesion policy originating from 2014–2020 RDP<sup>8</sup> is only modified. The activities delegated to province governments are similar to those in the previous programming

<sup>7</sup> Materials provided by the Marshal's Office in Wrocław and interviews with experts.

<sup>8</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

periods and concern: land merging, basic services for the economy and population, village renewal and development, and, as part of the *Leader* axis, community-led local development (CLLD). This last action is a new approach to cooperation at a local level (Nurzyńska, 2014). CLLD preserves the basic principles underlying the *Leader* axis, namely bottom-up approach, territoriality, integration, partnership, innovation at a local level, decentralisation of management and financing, networking and cooperation<sup>9</sup>, thus enabling application of the *Leader* approach as part of the cohesion policy, including with the use of funding from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

## SUMMARY

The new paradigm of rural development is based on a territorially-focused policy (Kołodziejczyk, 2015). Thus, rural development policy shows a gradual shift from sectoral approach to territorial approach, and such a perception of rural areas strengthens their sustainability. The comprehensiveness<sup>10</sup>, complexity and spatial nature of rural development necessitates the inclusion of rural development policy into the cohesion policy (Drygas, 2012). Research conducted in Dolnośląskie voivodeship indicates that:

- In 2007–2013, the majority of RDP investments concerned improvement of the level and quality of life of rural residents. The provincial government allocated 81% of the total amount funds under 2007–2013 RDP for the implementation of projects in this area.
- The amounts of RDP support acquired by the communes, both in total and per capita, were very diverse. The vast majority of communes (70%) received

<sup>9</sup> Guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 1/1/2015.

<sup>10</sup> Strategic documents concerning rural development that take such comprehensiveness into account have been developed nationally and include: “Prospects for Rural Development – Guidelines for the Strategy for Sustainable Rural and Fishery Development (2010)” and “Strategy for Sustainable Rural, Agriculture and Fishery Development (2012)”. Objective 6 of the National Strategic Reference Framework, a document developed by the Ministry of Regional Development, is: “Ensuring equal development opportunities and supporting structural changes in rural areas”. In the 2007–2015 National Development Strategy, Priority 5 relates to the development of rural areas, while Priority 6 to regional development and increasing territorial cohesion.



support per capita at the lowest level in the scale of the whole province, 28% of the communes at a medium level, and 2% at the highest level compared to the rest of the province. The distribution of funding under *Basic services for the economy and rural population* was similar. As regards the actions *Leader* and *Village renewal and development*, the distribution of funding per capita is different, namely 47% of the communes obtained support at the lowest level, 40% at a medium level, and 13% at the highest level.

- The support for investments in rural areas under 2007–2013 LS ROP concerned primarily improvement of transport conditions and environmental protection projects (59% in monetary terms). In quantitative terms, projects aimed at supporting businesses dominated.
- The implementation of activities under RDP and LS ROP in rural areas encountered barriers which largely resulted from the lack of experience of officials in the communes of Dolnośląskie voivodeship as well as the financial limitations of local government budgets and the activity of local communities.
- The new 2014–2020 LS ROP provides for an integrated territorial approach at the local level, to be achieved through projects executed in the form of partnership between various entities. As regards 2014–2020 RDP, the novelty is an instrument for community-led local development (CLLD). It represents a new approach to cooperation at a local level, which, together with the integrated territorial approach, will ensure real participation of citizens in the shaping of rural area development.

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## REALIZACJA POLITYKI SPÓJNOŚCI NA OBSZARACH WIEJSKICH REGIONU DOLNOŚLĄSKIEGO

**Streszczenie.** Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie realizacji założeń polityki spójności na obszarach wiejskich na przykładzie województwa dolnośląskiego, na podstawie oceny kierunków i skali finansowania obszarów wiejskich w ramach dwóch programów operacyjnych, tj. Programu Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich na lata 2007–2013 i Regionalnego Programu Operacyjnego Województwa Dolnośląskiego na lata 2007–2013. W badaniach zastosowano metodę ekspercką i dokumentacyjną oraz metodę grupowania k-średnich. Wskazują one, że w latach 2007–2013 większość inwestycji z PROW-u dotyczyło poprawy jakości życia mieszkańców wsi. Kwoty wsparcia zarówno w ujęciu ogółem, jak i na 1 mieszkańca były bardzo zróżnicowane. Większość gmin uzyskała wsparcie na najniższym poziomie w skali województwa. Wsparcie inwestycji na obszarach wiejskich z RPO WD 2007–2013 dotyczyło głównie poprawy warunków transportu oraz przedsięwzięć na rzecz ochrony środowiska.

**Słowa kluczowe:** spójność, obszary wiejskie, Dolny Śląsk, PROW 2007–2013, RPO WD 2007–2013

Accepted for print – Zaakceptowano do druku: 08.11.2016