



THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN MAŁOPOLSKA – EXPECTATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Summary

In recent years a powerful development process for public (so called “hard”) and social investments in the rural areas has been observed. The quality of the countryside has changed at an unprecedented rate, due to the use of EU funds. We are now at the beginning of the next financial cycle. It is a suitable moment to reflect and analyze the effects of our social and economic actions. Such a reflection would have a positive impact on the effective spending of funds by our country in the next financial cycle.

Keywords

rural areas • European funds • land consolidation • local action groups • Rural Development Program

1. Introduction

European funds (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) have a constructive influence on the development of rural areas. In fact, the nature and extent of modernizing tasks directly depends on the amount of funds. For Małopolska they create a number of opportunities for the renewal of rural areas and agriculture. They have opened up new possibilities for the use of diverse resources received by the region. Together with the support of local authorities these funds ideally correspond to the chances and challenges a modern village faces today. The funds now represent a guarantee for Rural Development in Małopolska, and they form the financial basis for the reactivation of agriculture and the farmers.

In relation with the EU funds there are many historic changes taking place in Małopolska villages, which have never been seen and were not even expected. EU funds have had an impact on the creation of a new reality, a different image of rural areas, agriculture and farmers. They induced changes in thinking and acting towards improving the quality of life of the local communities. With the increase of financial support and readiness of local authority to cooperate there is a growing awareness of possibilities of changes among farmers who, in spite of various kinds of difficulties in

the organizational and financial sphere as well in the absence of real opportunities to develop agricultural production EU funds, try to increase yields, explore new methods and solutions to better their positions. Their line of action is mostly aligned with the previous agricultural production but sometimes they set up innovative agricultural businesses [Sorys 2011].

In many small and low-profitable farms in Małopolska a new room for action opened up, giving a chance to combine tradition with innovation, to merge an old sentiment for a particular type of agricultural activity with a pragmatic approach to it as a source of income.

European funds have created expectations and opportunities. Future development of rural areas and the condition of local community and individuals depend on the way these funds are used. They are an antidote to the perennial problems of agriculture in Małopolska. They are real opportunities to improvement, despite the problems of employment, poor financial conditions of most small farms, beliefs and prejudices to change and novelty and fears that rural areas would lose their typical agricultural character. Following the direction of changes, with the help of EU funding, is a prerequisite of improvement of the rural infrastructure and living conditions of rural residents. In this article the author examines the issue of rural development based on available funds. He will present the main direction of development of the rural areas as resulting from the adopted Małopolska development strategy. He will present the biggest problems in the implementation of the current financial perspective and effective measures to adopt in the future to eliminate them.

2. Agricultural characteristics of Małopolska

Agriculture in the Małopolska voivodeship has its own characteristics, dependent on environmental conditions and historical reasons. It is characterized by high fragmentation of farms. Small farms dominate: farms less than 1 ha constitute 38.5%, farms from the group of 1–5 ha area constitute 52%, a slightly larger group includes farms of 5–30 ha at 9.3%, while farms with an area exceeding 30 ha represent a small percentage of only 0.2%. The average farm size in Małopolska in 2010, according to GUS data, was 2.98 ha, including an agricultural area of 2.23 ha. In the most urbanized area, a tendency towards further fragmentation of farms can be noticed. In the south the persistence of the current structure can be seen, in the northern part of the region there is a slight tendency to concentrate the land. The agrarian structure in Małopolska has a stagnation character that can be even called recessive and it's much worse than the national average [Sorys 2011]. The average farm consists of a dozen or so plots and in the south of the voivodeship even of dozens of spaced plots. Small farms are less profitable, generate higher costs and predetermine low-scale production. In turn, in some areas of the southern part of the voivodeship this is a major factor leading to the marginalization of agriculture and even to the disappearance of agricultural activities. One of the factors adversely affecting agriculture in Małopolska is the dwindling number of the economically active population in agriculture – due to the lack of profitability

of production in these areas. This has led to the disabling of the area of agricultural production, causing the fallowing of agricultural land. In recent years a steady outflow of population from the peripheral zones (or rural areas located away from urban areas) of the province can be observed. Also, daily emigration worsens the situation, especially in the monofunctional municipalities which are dominated by traditional agricultural production.

In turn, mainly in the vicinity of large cities in the multifunctional municipalities, there is an influx of people. Agriculture in Małopolska is characterized by large differences in economic performance that are dependent largely on the degree of concentration and intensification of agricultural production and variable environmental conditions. For many years in the villages of Małopolska the most significant source of income are financial transfers (pensions, benefits), next it is the income from off-farm work and lastly it is income derived from the farms [Sorys 2012].

Statistically farming in Małopolska has the economic size of 2 ESU, which means that it is four times smaller than the size deemed necessary for the efficient functioning on the EU market. The gross value added per worker in agriculture is low. In 2008 it amounted to 9 197 zloty with the value in the country equal to 18 897 zloty. In agriculture in Małopolska adverse events occurred, such as the limitation or abandonment of agricultural production in general, the so-called “winding up” of farms. Abandonment of agricultural production in the first place refers to the production of animals. In turn, this contributes to the abandonment of the use of meadows, pastures and forage crops on arable land and crops of cereals for animal feed. There are frequent cases where land use is motivated by the acquisition of direct payments to farmers. There is also a definite lack of interest in land leasing [Flaga and Sroka 2012a].

However, it is worth mentioning that over the past twenty years there have been observable progressive changes resulting from the state government approach to rural areas. Attempts to reactivate agricultural production and consideration of the cultural, scenic and natural values of villages have yielded results. This is mostly due to a number of events that contribute to changes in the countryside, the activities of local and regional authorities, as well as structural transformations in agriculture. The socio-political situation affecting the transformation of the countryside and different view for the work in agriculture of the inhabitants of the village had their impact on the progressive development of rural areas [Stankiewicz 2009].

3. Development advantages of Małopolska agriculture: tradition and progress

Małopolska has a competitive advantage in sectors requiring a suitable environment, terrain configuration, intensive labor and that are very difficult to mechanize. This especially applies to the focus production of (particularly the production of fruit and vegetables) high quality products. The use of environmentally friendly methods, the relatively low level of environmental degradation and a high level of biodiversity increase the value and quality of production [Sorys 2012].

The low rate of factors and the high yield of creative components favors the development of organic farming and the production of high quality food for which there is growing demand. Ahead of Małopolska agriculture lies a large range of possibilities, despite its flawed agrarian structure, which can and will promote revitalization of rural areas and agricultural activities. In particular, new possibilities to stimulate alternative forms of management and an intensification of activities connected with agriculture. These changes are correlated with the appearance of other sources of income of farmers, the protection of local material and spiritual culture which are derived from folk tradition, with capabilities of increasing biodiversity, landscape protection, market flexibility of farms and a high tourist attractiveness of the region [Flaga and Sroka 2012b].

Significant labor resources in rural areas allow for the development of labor-intensive but profitable types of production. In turn, this may prevent rural unemployment. Residents of the countryside of Małopolska are known for their diligence, ingenuity, self-reliance and extraordinary ability to survive the changing socio-political conditions. Small farms that typically have a family character have to work together to support the family and to obtain income. Organic farming opens up a range of possibilities for profit earning [Flaga and Sroka 2012a]. The young farmers of Małopolska are becoming better educated and are customarily taking over the family farm. They are trying to manage farms in a modern manner, to face the new era and the challenges to the agriculture.

Good prospects are seen for small farms by directing agriculture towards alternative and unconventional sources of income. This is reflected in organic farming in the traditional pastoral life, bee-keeping, aquaculture (inland fisheries sector), herbivorous animal breeding and the dedicated application of non-conventional types of farm production. This is favored by natural conditions, the living tradition and in many cases the same manner of farmers approach to management. All these are associated with a number of local conditions. Bright future lies ahead of organic farming which corresponds with the interest and expectations of consumers as to both the way of production and the quality of high quality food (so-called natural, healthy food) [Musiał 2008].

The small farms in Małopolska successfully produced traditional and regional foods based on local raw materials with the usage of old, traditional recipes of a given region, place and family. Availability of raw materials, a strong commitment to labor in the usually small-scale production often lead to making a good quality product that has a unique flavor, an original appearance and a high nutritional value. These products evoke sentiment and respect for tradition and ancestors among farmers and the pride of earning opportunities through their production. And consumers (including tourists), traders and specialists in the area of nutrition are interested in discovering the unique values of farmers' products and are delighted by them.

These products are valued, recognized, sought out not only in the region but beyond, gain certificates, awards and distinctions, and they include: podhalański sheep cheese, Kraków bagel, *lisiecka* sausage, *suska sechłońska* (plum), Łącko apple, *prądnicki* bread, Zator carp, sheep cheese *oscypek*, sheep cheese *redykołka*, *Piękny Jaś* beans, and

podhalańska lamb. These products are registered in the records of the EU, in systems of PDO, PGI, TSG. The Ministerial List of Traditional Products contains approximately 100 regional products from the Małopolska area¹. This is accompanied by the legal protection of specific product names and strict allocation to the area of origin. As the source of income for farms of the Małopolska voivodeship, it can be regarded as traditional pastoralism. This is determined by economic and cultural factors. Pastoralism benefits from natural specifics of Małopolska and it contributes to the maintenance of biodiversity and cultural landscape of rural areas [Musiał 2008].

The cultural grazing of cattle is considered to be an active factor in the creation of new jobs in a traditional professions and tourism. Also, the direction of development of regional products and services based on a specific pastoral activity, such as maintaining the culture of natural grazing, is treated as an essential aspect of preserving the material heritage of mountain regions.

Małopolska has a tradition in the field of beekeeping. Consumers are currently looking for bee products of high nutritional and health values. Raw materials and beekeeping products are commonly used in the food, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industry. Beekeeping has a positive influence on the development of an adequate environmental biodiversity. Its implementation and expansion can take place throughout the voivodeship.

Inland fisheries in Małopolska are based on the tradition of fish farming and consumer preferences. They contribute to the protection of fish populations, valuable plant species and animals. Development of this kind of activity can promote additional employment and have achievement of significant benefits.

Herbivorous animals breeding is inscribed into the traditional type of farming and the traditions and habits of farmers. This applies particularly to cattle, sheep and horse breeding. Such activities greatly contribute to the effective management of permanent agricultural land. Not only does herbivorous animals breeding enrich the cultural landscape of the region but it also contributes to the development of certain forms of tourism and sport. For example, horses are used for recreation or hippotherapy.

Other directions of agricultural production refer to the old rural traditions in Małopolska that include viticulture and herbalism. Besides, these traditions include the breeding of some species, such as: hens *Czubatka staropolska*, musky duck or the common guinea fowl. These directions are not yet very popular in Małopolska but they have already gained their supporters and followers. Their promotion and support offered by the authorities provides an opportunity for their rebirth and gradual development.

In the Małopolska voivodeship ecotourism is developing. The concept basis of ecotourism is called sustainable tourism, what amounts to achieving harmony between the needs of tourists, the environment and local communities. Ecotourism opens up a range of possibilities for the use of the natural and cultural resources of the region. These possibilities highlight the strengths of rural areas which consist of natural, scenic and cultural values. With eco-tourism related forms of sustainable tourism are linked.

¹ <http://www.minrol.gov.pl/Jakosc-zywnosci> [accessed 04.12.2013].

These include agro-tourism and active and specialist tourism, sightseeing tourism, cultural heritage tourism, culinary tourism and adventure, health prevention and spa tourism. The various forms of tourism are realized in rural areas, quite often using unique natural and cultural values, characteristic to the region. Ecotourism and its derivatives constitute a green job market. They give opportunities for employment to the local population using their professional and tradition skills. They do not require a large expenditure funds but entrepreneurship and the utilization of existing rural farm advantages. The population in rural areas, by participating in various forms of eco-tourism and its related forms, uses mainly their own talents, passions and skills. They do this without having to give up their existing profession or acquiring new knowledge and skills in new fields or specializations [Flaga and Sroka 2012b].

The source of income for small farms in Małopolska of a non-agricultural character has become traditional arts and crafts, handicraft and souvenirs. In this area craft tradition dates back hundreds of years. The various sub-regions of voivodeship are famous for their original crafts with unique aesthetic, designs and utility qualities. The production and sale of handicrafts can be a significant source of income for small farms. Also, it expands the tourist offer of the region. The craft professions, typical of the Małopolska voivodeship, still practiced in rural include: wheelwrighting, cooperage, embroidery (Sucha Beskidzka), metalwork (Świątniki), basketry (Tarnów District), carpentry (Kalwaria Zebrzydowska), weaving (Limanowa).

Noticing and using of the Małopolska advantages can be associated with a cultural change occurring in front of our eyes. This includes such phenomena as: social ties, types of attitudes and life orientation of rural residents, change of existing authorities in this environment and value systems. Village community already has a different character and different priorities. It is more strongly integrated with the nation but at the same time retains its cultural identity and the ability of action [Bukraba-Rylska 2008].

4. Rural areas in the Małopolska Regional Development Strategy for 2011–2020

In recent years rural areas are subject to rapid economic, social and spatial changes, stimulated by the investment process. The role of local authorities is significant, especially in the modernization of rural areas. Socio-economic changes are caused by the acceleration of civilization, due to the opening of Poland to “the world” after 2004 with the considerable assistance from the European Union. European funds greatly contribute to the strengthening of human resources and supporting tasks for rural development and agriculture. Local authorities implementing the EU guidelines on local rural areas development created changes for the long term and are mostly focus and spread over time. They require a significant amount of power and financial resources over the long haul. Activation of human resources, the strategic implementation of pre-planned tasks and the implementation of specific projects, promote the development of the Małopolska countryside in all its aspect and improve the quality of life of local communities [Bondyra 2001].

The current strategy and proceedings concerning rural area open up the door to a comprehensive review of the directions of their development and the use of the unique resources and quality of Małopolska countryside. The Małopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy for the years 2012–2020 refers to the following courses of action related to rural areas [Sorys 2012]:

- Functional space management (implementation of regulatory and planning instruments aimed at preventing the low-density housing in rural areas and the proper management of mountain and protected areas).
- Economic stimulation of rural areas (promoting employment in agriculture and ancillary domains by increasing the marketability and efficiency through the implementation of instruments to support the development of organic farming and processing and marketing of high-quality regional products: supporting jobs in activities related to agriculture).
- Protection of cultural space in Małopolska (sustainable shaping of the cultural landscape; maintaining the multicultural wealth and the local and regional identity, particularly through the promotion of folklore, traditions and folk art; integrated protection of the cultural landscape and the natural environment, especially with regard to high quality of surroundings and spatial order).
- Environmental, health and social safety.

The development of Małopolska after 2020 will be determined by its ability to respond effectively to changes in many areas of activities and by using adopted instruments of action. The most important tasks include [Sorys 2012]:

- improvement of the agrarian structure: activation of villages and farmers to take up land consolidation processes and shortening the time of carrying them out,
- popularizing, strengthening and giving credibility of different forms of dependent use of agricultural land through leasing and lending to support structural transformation in Małopolska agriculture,
- protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources of the region,
- registration of regional and local products in the voivodeship,
- activation of mountain and foothill areas,
- protection of water resources,
- increasing the retention capacity of river basins and increasing flood safety,
- conservation and restoration of the productive potential of soils and their reclamation,
- increase in the level of renewable energy sources utilization,
- reduction of potential risks arising from the use of GMOs,
- modernization of agricultural production technology associated with the expansion of production scale and comprehensive mechanization of land cultivation, harvesting, storage, etc.,

- development of market places network,
- development of horizontal and vertical integration (development of institutions and organizations of the agricultural market, development of agricultural producers).

Małopolska Region Development Strategy for 2011–2020 includes all activities that contribute to the development of agriculture and rural areas and their adjustment to the line of development policy and to the ways of using available assistance funds of the European Union, especially Structural Funds. The strategy recognizes in a comprehensive manner the way of action for rural areas and takes into account the assumptions and the use of unique resources of the Małopolska countryside. Also, it indicates solutions to a number of problems of the Małopolska countryside and to meeting the needs of local communities.

5. Developmental activities under the Małopolska Rural Development Program for 2007–2013

Rural Development Plan (RDP) for 2007–2013 is the largest aid program for the agricultural food sector, in the history of Poland. The activities are co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (13.4 billion euro) and Polish national funds allocated for this purpose in the budget act (about 4 billion euro). The program budget is more than 17.4 billion euro.

Strategic assumptions of the Program are implemented under the four priority axes²:

- Axis 1 (economic): Improvement of the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector.
- Axis 2 (environmental): Improvement of the environment and rural areas.
- Axis 3 (social): Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.
- Axis 4: Leader.

Owing to the funding under the Rural Development Program for 2007–2013, it is possible to support projects such as: the construction of water supply and sewage networks, wastewater treatment plants, projects involving the use of energy from renewable sources, as well as (widely understood) shaping of the public space.

The budget of the Małopolska voivodeship for 2007–2013 has resources of over 272 million euro for the following enterprises³:

1. Improvement and development of the infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry.
 - Scheme I – Land consolidation – 8 944 000 euro,
 - Scheme II – Agricultural water resources management – 19 307 200 euro.

² http://www.fundusze.malopolska.pl/prow/Strony/o_programie.aspx [accessed 04.12.2013].

³ http://www.fundusze.malopolska.pl/prow/Strony/o_programie.aspx [accessed 04.12.2013].

2. Basic services for the rural economy and population – 114 330 912 euro.
3. Countryside renewal and development – 45 810 366 euro.
4. Leader – 83 962 425 euro.

The state of implementation of the RDP in the activities of local government (according to data of 30.09.2013) are as follows:

- limit of measures – 932.33 million zloty,
- total number of applications – 6291,
- expected grant resulting from gathered applications – 1 497.18 million zloty,
- the number of grant agreements – 3010,
- awarded grants – 776.03 million zloty,
- executed payments – 395.32 million zloty,
- measures covered by the contracts – 83.31%.
- funds paid – 42.44 million zloty.

Action 123: Scheme I – Land consolidation has a limited funds that amount to 37.81 million zloty. Within its framework the contracts were awarded for the sum of 34.93 million zloty and nine decisions were issued: in Brzeski district – 3, in Suski district – 2, in Tarnowski district– 2 and Gorlicki – 1. Available funds derived from foreign exchange differences amounted to 2.89 million zloty.

So far Operation 123 RDP 2007–2013: Scheme I – Land consolidation indicates:

- moderate interest prefects of districts,
- complicated and time-consuming projects,
- narrow range of activities,
- little awareness of the benefits of conducting land consolidations,
- more than 5 000 ha planned to land consolidations (according to made decision).

Expectations of beneficiaries for 2014–2020 refer to:

- continuation of land consolidations in RDP 2014–2020,
- creation of opportunities for combining three actions: land consolidation, land improvement and rural renewal in an integrated and comprehensive projects,
- changing the beneficiary of the district administrator for a community administrator (municipality) or marshal (act amendment),
- changing the definition of land consolidation for a broader one – land consolidation should serve development of rural areas.

Action 125: Scheme II – Agricultural water resources management (including “low retention”) has a limit of 88.59 million zloty, value of the contracts was 59.62 million zloty which resulted in the making of 10 decisions covering:

- the embankment of the Vistula river – Chrzanowski district,
- the embankment of the Vistula river – Wadowicki district,

- the embankment of the Small Vistula river – Oświęcimski district (2 decisions),
- the riverbed of the Kalinka river – Miechowski district,
- Radwan–Smęgorzów Channel – Dąbrowski district,
- Żymanka Stream – Dąbrowski district,
- reconstruction of the streambed of Zagórnicki stream – Wadowicki district,
- expansion of the left embankment of the Vistula river – Chrzanowski district,
- construction of drainage pumping station Hubenice – Dąbrowski district.

Construction of the water land reclamation ditch in the Dąbrowski district is in the process of realisation. Its cost is 352 million zloty. There are currently 7 applications (of total cost 82.78 million zloty) in the stage of verification.

In the course of implementing Action 125: Scheme II: Agricultural water resources management, some obstacles were encountered:

- difficulties with the development of documentation, complicated environmental procedures,
- difficulties with the preparation of the tasks of “low retention”.

In turn, expectations of beneficiaries for period 2014–2020 refer to:

- a demand to encompass the action 125 in a new RDP (a view presented by Marshals Convention),
- RDP role in financing this type of task (key or the only source) to finance this type of tasks from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund of the priorities in the field of fire protection.

Action: basic services for the economy and rural population have a common limit of funds in the amount of 380 447 426 zloty. These are intended for: the water and sewage management, waste management, market places and 19 394 055 zloty for broadband internet infrastructure. In the case of the last services in two calls for proposals no applications have been made. The next intake will be conducted soon.

The total limit of RDP funds was 399.54 million zloty, 242 contracts with a value of zloty 375.83 million were concluded. Free resources included the amount of 24.03 million zloty of which 19.3 million relates to broadband internet networks. So far in the frame of RDP 2007–2013, 180.60 million zloty were paid.

The balance of the RDP action: Basic services for the economy and rural population:

- very high interest in tasks, in the field of water and wastewater management,
- marketplaces,
- Renewable Energy Sources (RES) – financing under the Małopolska Regional Operational Program (MROP) – no announced competition in RDP,
- waste management – new rules severely limit the possibility of carrying out these tasks (commune bids),
- broadband Internet – so far there is a total lack of interest in this activity.

In comparison with the above the following expectations are formed for the period 2014–2020:

- the need to ensure the opportunities for water and sewage investments in the new RDP (multiple positions and demands) – in particular outside the “urban agglomerations” – National Program for Municipal Wastewater Treatment (NPMWT),
- the need to enter into the scope of the action category of “local roads”,
- action should include a “menu” to choose from by the Voivodeship Government (flexible approach, depending on the specifics of the region), planning on the extension of replacing heat sources on farms.

Next 2007–2013 RDP Action: Renewal and development of villages have 100% coverage of projects selected for implementation. Limit of resources is 145.26 million zloty, 463 contracts for the sum of 126.79 million zloty were concluded. On the reserve list there were 66 projects worth 14.42 million zloty. Payments of funds were made in the amount of 95.23 million zloty.

The balance of activities 2007–2013:

- the action is very important for local communities,
- the funds at the disposal of the Voivodeship Government more or less met the needs,
- criteria for assessing applications did not favoured good “projects” but rather specific entities or areas,
- slower pace of implementation of similar measures under Axis 4: Leader.

Expectations for the years 2014–2020:

- the need for follow-up,
- consideration of the diversification of the financial limit – previously the limit was 500 thousand zloty for a town or village, regardless of their size,
- criteria for assessing applications should refer to the “projects”.

Action Leader “Small Projects” are characterized by the development dynamics. Rating work in progress (10%) included 28 applications, 416 applications during the verification, in the absence of proposals pending for agreement. Evaluation completed (90%) indicated the 74 applications pending for contract and 56 terminated contracts. 1702 agreements were concluded and the remaining processed applications (appeals, rejected, withdrawn, unelected) were 1989 units.

The balance of Action Leader “Small Projects” in 2007–2013:

- “Small Projects” – very important operations involving local communities,
- complex bureaucratic requirements for applicants,
- a large number of Local Action Groups (LAG), large number of projects (39 LAG, > 4000 submitted applications).

Expectations under Action Leader – “Small Projects” for the period 2014–2020:

- increasing the allocation in the range of Leader >5% at the level of the program cost of activities beyond the local government,
- implementation of the “umbrella” projects – packages of small grants,
- number of LAG should correspond to the tasks carried out, determination of the minimum number of communities and residents included in the LAG for a level that guarantees in Małopolska support of no more than 25 LAG.

Action Leader have a current limit of funds amounting to 138.47 million zloty. Of the 428 contracts and the decisions issued 89.06 million zloty. Applications submitted during verification are 116 and amount to 23.39 million zloty. The available funds are 27.02 million zloty and calls for proposals are conducted by the LAG.

The balance of 2007–2013 indicates:

- the identity of the action implemented by the Voivodeship Government,
- slower rate of contracting resources in relation to the action of Renewal and development of villages, implemented directly at the regional level.

The expectations of beneficiaries for the period 2014–2020 are: continuation of implementation of the LAG dependent from programmatic decisions (method of the allocation of funds to the regions).

Implementation of the individual Action under the RDP for 2007–2013 opened up a number of opportunities to satisfy the most important needs of particular regions and communities and to improve the quality of life of the population, development of rural areas – according to available resources, their distribution and proper use. The approach and the implementation of specific actions showed that some of them raise enormous interest, while others do not. The most popular were activities such as countryside renewal, construction of public infrastructure or the organization of cultural and social events. Definitely less popular were actions in the range of international cooperation or cooperation between groups of actions or farmers. However, the aspirations of the Małopolska voivodeship authorities seek to define and popularize the actions necessary from the point of public interest, activation and full use of EU funds. This can contribute to the development and vitalization of agriculture and to solution of important problems of the Małopolska countryside and the farmers.

Plans of Government of Małopolska included in the RDP for 2007–2013 covered the efforts to raise funds, especially additional resources for projects. In 2012 Małopolska (6 LAG) acquired additional resources under the Axis 4 Leader in the amount of 20.6 million zloty. They also applied for additional funds for water and sewage projects in the amount of 90 million zloty. This was done because the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (ARMA) could not use the funds in the “Micro-enterprise” project. In addition three contests are planned:

- Action 125: Land improvement (low retention),
- Action 321: Broadband Internet,
- Action 321: Water and sewage operations.

Government plans in the framework of RDP are related to those areas that either did not meet with sufficient interest (broadband Internet) or were critical and necessary for the rapid implementation (remaining tasks).

6. Main demands and recommendations in respect of the RDP for 2014–2020

Actions in RDP for 2014–2020, after the experiences gained in the implementation of projects, have taken the form of recommendations and refer to difficulties in their implementation and to organizational and substantive needs. The actions include:

1. Increasing the role of the Voivodeship Government in the implementation of the RDP – this is a recommendation to regionalize the program, mainly with regard to regions with fragmented agrarian structure. The Voivodeship Government would be the managing authority, adapting actions to the expectations of the beneficiaries, especially those living in mountain areas.
2. Urgent acceptance of assumptions by managing institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the financing of RDP. Discussions about tasks, without the adoption of a methodology for allocating funding for the regions, do not lead to substantive final decisions about efficient use of resources in the future financial perspective.
3. Determination of the operation and implementation of the tasks of the LAG in the future, and during the transitional period between the present and future programs. The financial means of the Local Action Groups are derivatives of the projects.
4. Increasing the scope of support under the Action: “Restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and catastrophes and the introduction of appropriate prevention actions”.
5. The possibility of shaping regions access criteria under the Action: “Agri-environmental-climate program”.

The Małopolska Voivodeship, in the implementation of the RDP for 2014–2020, as part of the demand of regionalization, will take the actions proposed by the Voivodeship Government. They include:

- transfer of knowledge and innovations,
- consulting,
- quality systems for agricultural products and foodstuffs,
- processing and marketing of agricultural products,
- land consolidation,
- restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and disasters and introducing appropriate prevention actions,
- basic services and countryside and rural areas renovation,
- creation of producer groups,

- cooperation,
- “Leader”.

It should be noted that the regions have not engaged in the discussions initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture concerning the algorithm of the allocation of funds for the voivodeships. Only the need for an in-depth discussion and the final decision concerning the regionalization of the program (determination of the number of regionalized activities) was pointed out. Currently, there are no financial assumptions of RDP for 2014–2020.

This leads to the conclusion that criteria for the allocation of funds should correspond to the structure and specificity of regionalized actions. As for the funds allocated to the “Leader”, they should be shared at the program level and not by regional key.

7. Conclusions

The actions of the RDP 2007–2013, undertaken as various projects focused on the comprehensive development of the Małopolska region, its countryside, agriculture and rural areas. The actions are currently of a progressive character and create a new image of rural areas, agriculture and farmers, while keeping connection with tradition and culture of the region with a simultaneous modification or a complete change of management.

Projects implemented under the RDP 2007–2014 have basically favourable results, but the difficulties, mostly organizational, in their implementation and validity of the undertaken projects for the local communities should also be mentioned. The interest in projects is demonstrated by the disbursed amounts of money from European funds and the number of agreements, decisions issued and the decisions under implementation. Previous problems with meeting current needs encountered in the framework of the RDP for 2014–2020 are already taken into account in the plans of the Małopolska Voivodeship Government. They also address the demands regarding introducing and advisability of other projects essential for the development of rural areas in Małopolska.

At the beginning of 2014 the issue of allocation of funds for 2014–2020 for Małopolska in the new RDP remains a great unknown. It gives food for thought and is a source of recommendations as to the question of regionalization and leads to proposals of actions that would be aligned with the specificity of rural areas of the Małopolska region. And it opens up the door to discussion and conclusions based on agreements of the sides involved.

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