



The impact of EU governance and rural development policy on the development of the third sector in rural Poland: A nation-wide analysis



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ABSTRACT

Governance and rural development programmes such as the European Union's LEADER programme are claimed in the policy literature to mobilise the involvement of the third sector in local development decision-making. Tracing the emergence of the third sector from the collapse of the socialist regime in the late 1980s to the aftermath of Poland's EU LEADER programme, this paper presents nation-wide data relating to the changing profile of the third sector in Poland's rural areas over time. Our analysis suggests that the implementation of the Polish LEADER + Pilot Programme (2004–2006) and the LEADER 4th Axis in Rural Development Programme (2007–2013) resulted in a significant increase in the number of third sector organisations. Using secondary data to examine the factors attributed to this increase, we found that the financial support offered by the LEADER programme incentivised the formal registration of third sector organisations. However, an analysis of primary data found that third sector organisations' dependence on acquiring funding constrained how they identified and achieved their own objectives. Nonetheless, we found that active involvement of the third sector in LAGs had a positive impact on the latter's engagement with local inhabitants in activities such as formulating local development strategies. We conclude that now, over a decade since the initiation of the Polish LEADER programme, the third sector has grown exponentially but its institutional character remains in flux. The presence of the third sector, its resources, and its power in rural governance is patchy. A greater period of time and targeted policy supports are required for the third sector to have a more defined and powerful presence in inter-sectoral partnerships and in rural areas more generally.

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1. Introduction

Governance and rural development partnerships are now a mainstream approach to fostering the participation of non-statutory actors in the management and development of local resources. Such partnerships have been prevalent in many Western countries since the 1980s (Geddes, 2000) and have been popularised in rural areas of European countries since 1991, largely through the European Union LEADER Community Initiatives (Edwards et al., 2001; Moseley, 2003; Scott, 2003). Rural

partnerships, following the principle of subsidiarity, are typically organised on a territorial basis, representing geographical units that are sufficiently cohesive to allow the identification of territorially congruous development concerns (Murdoch and Ward, 1997; Osti, 2000). Following the principle of partnership, different sectoral actors representing the public, private and third sectors within territories ought to be proportionately represented in the membership of a partnership board, which undertakes decision-making in relation to the design and implementation of local development (Ray, 2000). The territorial and inter-sectoral dynamics of partnerships are their defining features, underpinned by a rationale that “all the competent actors in the development process be brought together in a way that will allow them to pool their talents and complement each other over a set period during which, under the stimulus provided by the partnership, a cycle of accelerated local

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development will occur" Curtin and Varley (1997, p. 142).

The active role of the third sector is considered pivotal in the creation of rural development conditions in which social and economic development can be stimulated (Curtin and Varley, 1997; Chaney, 2002; Hudson, 2002). With profiteering intrinsically associated with the private sector and bureaucracy and hierarchical power relations traditionally associated with the public sector, the third sector is imbued with notions of locality, voluntarism and promotion of the common good. A crucial role of the third sector in rural development initiatives is to address marginalised issues that have fallen between the cracks of public and private sector mandates (Vaceková and Škarabelová, 2013). Furthermore, the mobilisation of the third sector is associated with the nuanced local development approach required to maximise the use of local knowledge and resources, an important characteristic of neo-endogenous development (Shucksmith, 2000; Ray, 2006; Adamski and Grolach, 2007) and place-based development (OECD, 2003; Wellbrock et al., 2013; Woods, 2013). The third sector is acknowledged to represent what had been, prior to the establishment of inter-sectoral governance approaches, an 'untapped' resource of labour and ideas for state-sponsored local development (Hudson, 2002; Moseley, 2003).

Representing both marginalised development issues and unexploited forms of development potential, the involvement of the third sector is symbolic of the 'opening up' of decision-making processes to non-statutory actors, crucial for instigating the 'transverse inter-sectoral debate' in addressing local development problems more effectively (Macken-Walsh, 2010). Partnerships are challenged with the general goal of advancing 'public purpose' and the third sector is an important participant in the 'deliberative arenas' through which the legitimacy of partnerships as public development institutions is generated (Connelly et al., 2006; Thuesen, 2011). Public involvement, advocacy, citizen participation, collaborative planning and inclusive development – all of which rely upon the involvement of third-sector actors – are themes that are drawn upon frequently in justifications of why governance programmes are funded and promoted by international, national and regional authorities (Healey, 2008; OECD, 2009).

There is a growing emphasis in the literature on how different public, private and third sector representatives interact with each other and influence local development processes (Scott, 2003; Lošťák and Hudečková, 2008; Munro et al., 2008; Shortall, 2008; Delin, 2012; Maurel, 2012). The underpinning theoretical discourse is typically preoccupied with issues of (neo-)endogenous and place-based development, social capital, social inclusion, power, and legitimacy (Shucksmith, 2000; Shortall, 2008; Ray, 2006; Böcher, 2008; Wellbrock et al., 2013). Dominant themes in the presentation of mostly qualitative empirical data have been how different sectors are strategically represented in LEADER partnerships (Thuesen, 2010; Macken-Walsh and Curtin, 2013) and inter-sectoral power relations (Edwards et al., 2001; Derkzen and Bock, 2009; Furmankiewicz et al., 2010; Marquardt et al., 2012). In post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) differentiations between private, public and third sector interests formally emerged after the collapse of 'uni-sectoral' state socialism in the early 1990s. Studies of rural partnerships have since observed the marginalisation of the third sector in governance and rural development programmes (Dąbrowski, 2008; Halamska, 2011; Lackowska-Madurowicz and Swianiewicz, 2013); the prevalence of power imbalances between statutory and non-statutory actors (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010); and the impact of the governance and rural development approach on local stakeholders' engagement in and outcomes of local development (Petrick and Gramzow, 2012; Wellbrock et al., 2013). Some quantitative studies have assessed

partnership board membership (Bristow et al., 2008; Thuesen, 2010); political accountability structures (Falkowski, 2013) and network relations between local actors (Marquardt et al., 2012; Furmankiewicz et al., 2014). How the third sector has developed at national levels, taking into account the impact of inter-sectoral governance and rural development programmes such as LEADER, has not taken a discrete focus heretofore.

This paper aims to contribute to the existing literature by presenting a straightforward analysis of the development of the third sector in Poland, taking into account the impact of LEADER type support programs. We begin by reviewing the existing literature on the changing role of the third sector, particularly in the context of governance and rural development programmes. Next, we trace the evolution of governance and rural development institutions in post-socialist Poland and, drawing from secondary data, we present a geographical illustration of the emergence of LEADER inter-sectoral development partnerships (Local Action Groups – LAGs) over time. The characteristics of LAGs and the role of the third sector in their operation is analysed with specific reference to the formulation of local development strategies. Against that backdrop, we then focus specifically on the emergence and development of the third sector in rural Poland, highlighting increases in the establishment rate of new organisations corresponding to the initiation of the LEADER programme. Using qualitative data drawn from interviews with members of 45 LAGs and 37 third sector organisations, we overview the challenges encountered by the third sector. Finally, we present a discussion of the changing picture of the third sector in rural Poland, taking into account its ongoing institutional flux and identifying key considerations for supporting its participation in inter-sectoral approaches to rural development henceforth.

2. Governance and rural development: the role of the third sector

One of the key differences between governance and government lies in the processes by which society's approval of and involvement in official decision-making and outcomes is achieved (Buček and Smith, 2000). In direct, electoral democracy formally elected representatives and their administrations play leading roles in the management of resources. Civic participation through consultations, public hearings, meetings, and protests can potentially shape final outcomes, but such processes can be inconsistent. Governance-based approaches and participatory democracy, on the other hand, advocate direct citizen participation through citizens' assemblies and QUANGOs (QUAsi Non-Governmental Organisations), such as cross-sectoral, area-based partnerships. Partnerships do away with the traditional divisions of responsibility between elected local representatives and non-elected stakeholders (Edwards et al., 2001), creating a locus for building of 'public purpose' through 'deliberative arenas' (Connelly et al., 2006).

According to policy advocates (OECD, 1990, 2001, 2003), multi-level partnerships can help create coordination and cooperation networks that propagate negotiation and consensus norms between diverse development stakeholders. Third sector organisations are necessary participants in governance processes and LEADER type initiatives are identified as ways of supporting and incentivising the mobilisation and participation of third sector organisations (Bład and Kamiński, 2005; Adamski and Grolach, 2007; Varga, 2009; Shucksmith, 2010; Marquardt et al., 2012). The success of governance and rural development programmes in supporting and mobilising the third sector can depend on the commitment of political and the status of non-statutory actors at the local level. The government is encouraged to act as a facilitator, supporting and enabling local interest groups to act on their own (Andersson and

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