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**THE VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME AS AN ELEMENT FOSTERING
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL AREAS: THE CASE OF THE OPOLE
VOIVODESHIP**

Abstract: The village renewal as a development method is one of the ways to achieve development goals, understood not only as an improvement of the infrastructure quality but broader as improvement of the widely comprehended quality of life, which cannot be achieved without involvement of the inhabitants.

The aim of this article is an attempt to present the Village Renewal Scheme (shown by the example of the Opole Voivodeship) as an element stimulating local communities, strengthening social capital and contributing to support of entrepreneurship in rural areas.

It was to achieve the aim that the reports of the village administrator's offices (about 600 per year) on the implementation of the Village Renewal Scheme in the years 2010-2015.

The most important conclusion resulting from the conducted research is that the village renewal scheme has proved to be an effective concept and method for development of rural areas, in which it was implemented so far. Therefore, it was possible to mobilize numerous rural communities with small amount of funds to many activities, which was reflected in the number of implemented projects, generating significant effects with strong developmental stimulus.

Key words: village renewal, rural areas, development.

INTRODUCTION

It was in the programming period for the years 2014-2020 that the EU financial support had been addressed to Polish agriculture and rural areas for the implementation of the objectives set out in the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Agriculture and Fisheries, which reflects the priorities of the EU policy within the scope of sustainable socio-economic and environmentally-friendly development of rural areas.

The successful implementation of the sustainable development depends on the equal treatment of all the listed goals (orders), which means on the comprehensive approach. These issues are particularly visible at the municipality (local) level, since the development of local communities should be perceived as a process of continuous improvement in the quality of life of local communities based on mutually balanced social, economic and ecological factors.

The development of rural areas depends mainly on locating various non-agricultural activities, which should eliminate the monofunctionality of the rural areas in order to develop broadly defined entrepreneurship.

The village renewal as a development method is one the ways to achieve development goals, understood not only as an improvement of the infrastructure quality but broader as an improvement of the widely comprehended quality of life, which cannot be achieved without involvement of the inhabitants themselves.

The village renewal scheme initiated in the Opole Voivodeship 20 years ago is the longest active program of activating local communities and at the same time the first one, which applied the method of the long-term strategic planning at the level of the village administrator's offices. The village renewal scheme as a way to develop rural areas is characterized by:

- Bottom-up initiatives and involvement of local communities,

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- Use of the resources available in the village,
- Planning the development of own village and striving after achieving the adopted vision and goals,
- Development of the public space with participation of the inhabitants,
- Support of the municipality for village initiatives and help from the region.

The process of village renewal significantly stimulates local communities and builds society. Activation of inhabitants results not only in creation of new cultural and recreational facilities or renovation of old buildings in the village. These measures rebuild identity, integrate inhabitants and increase the quality of life in the village.

The aim of this article is an attempt to present the Village Renewal Scheme (shown by the example of the Opole Voivodeship) as an element stimulating local communities, strengthening social capital and contributing to supporting entrepreneurship in rural areas.

It was to achieve the aim that the reports of the village administrator's offices (about 600 per year) on the implementation of the Village Renewal Scheme (in the years 2010-2015) and the resulting information (such as the number of villages participating in the scheme, the value of the funds used for implementation of various projects and their number, which illustrated the level of people involvement) were analyzed.

OPPORTUNITIES OF DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS, INCLUDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The development of rural areas is of the local nature. The local development as a category of socio-economic development is defined as comprehensive creation of the best possible living conditions in the local environment or improvement of the organization, structure and functioning of local development resources (Chądryński 2007).

I. Pietrzyk has acknowledged that the main factor of regional and local development is the mobilization of the endogenous potential in regions, whose aim is to launch the sustainable dynamics of local development. Therefore, the local development can be defined as an endogenous "bottom-up" way of generating development dynamics in a wide spatial scale. It is a process of mobilizing local material and human resources using various "micro-initiatives" (Pietrzyk 2000).

The prerequisite for strengthening development in the local scale is creation of a local environment, which consists of people and institutions concentrated on and collaborating for an acceptable and understandable program. The local development occurs in the economic, cultural, political and social spheres. The local development at the social level consists in the possibility of articulating group interests, formation of associations and taking responsibility for the spheres of everyday life and their managing in the fields of education, culture, health and social care (Chądryński 2007).

According to Pietrzyk, successful local development depends on the existence of the effective leadership, wide-ranging participation of the population in the undertaken activities, mutual trust, seeking consensus in cooperation and public-private partnerships. The quality of the local social capital is of particular importance in the bottom-up development processes.

Nowadays, when doing business in rural areas, two factors are of great importance: distance from urban centers and low population density which generates significant challenges. As E.J. Malecki and B.Moriset (2008) notice, the big distance from towns means more difficult access to markets, factors of production, costly and time-consuming business trips. The lower population density means bigger dispersion of local resources (mainly human resources (human capital)) and sales markets. The dispersed nature of production and places of residence of the population causes their peripheralization in the access to traditional sources of knowledge and markets.



However, the existence of many development barriers does not mean that the rural areas have no chance for development. It is in recent years that the improvement of the social capital and access to information can be noticed in the rural areas.

Therefore, it is necessary to take into account local and regional strengths. The use of local natural and socio-economic characteristics should foster greater efficiency and diversity of enterprises in rural areas.

The use of diversity and specific competitive advantages is one of the main objectives in the modern planning of socio-economic development of regions. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account local and regional strengths to a greater extent. The use of local natural and socio-economic characteristics should foster greater efficiency and diversity of enterprises in rural areas.

For example: emphasizing distinctive cultural features, promoting regional and local products, caring for specific elements of the landscape architecture, use of natural resources, etc. In the regions, the businesses with features arising from the location in relation to large urban centers and their accessibility, the quality of the natural environment and specific economic and socio-cultural functions of the area should be developed (Bański 2014).

Table 1. Development (strategies) documents containing elements of development of rural areas

Document	Depiction of the entrepreneurship issue
National Development Strategy for the years 2007-2015	Finding of the too weak non-agricultural activity, the necessity of modernization of the food sector and development of infrastructure fostering creation of new companies in rural areas
Mid-term National Development Strategy 2020	Finding of the necessity of diversification of economic activity in rural areas, which should be fostered among others by improving education level of inhabitants of a village, creating conditions for raising professional qualifications and supporting social activity.
Long-term National Development Strategy. Poland 2030	Emphasizing the importance of competitiveness and innovativeness, which will play a key role in the development of the diversifying economic activity in rural areas in the coming years.
Strategy of Human Capital Development	Paying attention to the decline in the number of people in working age, which makes it necessary to look for "reserves" and new solutions. Among others, it is proposed to reformulate labor market policy into a one creating offers for people who are currently inactive and to increase the cost-effectiveness of employment.
The National Strategy for Regional Development - Regions Towns Rural Areas	Supporting the network of advisory institutions and business incubators or improving business cooperation, which will result in increasing their competitiveness and economic potential.
Strategy for Sustainable Rural Development, Agriculture and Fisheries for the years 2012-2020	Emphasizing the great importance of the business environment institutions and the need for their support and development. It is also concluded that stimulating entrepreneurship in rural areas and increasing their investment attractiveness are a way to diversify the forms of economic activity in rural areas and create additional sources of income.

Source: Own study.

K. Heffner is of a similar opinion and believes that the sources of positive changes in rural areas can be found in the greater use of local resources and potentials understood as material and non-material development factors. The first group consists of the cultural heritage elements of the village, such as the settlement system, the type of buildings as well as the technical and social



infrastructure. Its condition and usability significantly affect development opportunities of the village. This group of resources includes also human capital, whose quality and size is a key factor in development. In the group of immaterial resources of the village, those characteristics of inhabitants are fundamental, which are associated with experience, skills, entrepreneurship, education and innovativeness. A separate asset of a village, which not only significantly affects but very often determines implementation of a village renewal scheme is the quality of the natural, cultural and social environment (Heffner 2007).

Therefore, the policy of the development of rural areas should ensure that these specific opportunities and competitive advantages are properly used, meet new challenges related to the need of diversifying economic functions by introducing new forms of non-agricultural employment and supporting a system of services and facilities for different populations living in rural areas. The depiction of entrepreneurship in the documents devoted to rural development policy is presented in the Table 1.

While summarizing the information contained in the Table 1, it should be concluded that all strategic documents take into consideration development of entrepreneurship, including enterprises in rural areas, and they describe the issue with varying degrees of detail and address it differently.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

An important factor in development of cooperation among entrepreneurs in rural areas is the level of social capital. The social capital is a feature of the community and its sources are in the culture and collective ethos of social groups. It is in this case that social activity and density of social networks in which people are involved, social activities, membership in non-governmental organizations are very important. Relationships based on trust and mutuality are also very important (Osiecka-Chojnacka, Kłos 2010).

According to Halamska (2008), social capital is a certain property, characteristic of the community, which promotes individual and collective actions of social actors. It is a certain "synthetic property", which consists of many elements such as organizations, participation in organizations, network coverage, trust, social solidarity, cooperation, its scope and willingness to cooperate, existence of information and communication networks, internal cohesion and stratification of a village as well as empowerment that appears in the sense of influence on public, local affairs as well as real use of this influence.

According to Szafranec, this capital can be defined as "social resources," and it is: a certain general willingness of rural communities to take local initiatives, to engage in solving problems important for them, and the quality of the social ties and the level of identification of local (and wider) community as well as existence of local leaders (Szafranec 2007).

W. Kłodziński concludes that the condition for a success of development projects in rural areas is not accumulation of material resources, but people, their entrepreneurship, ability to self-organization and cooperation as well as emergence of respected leaders (Kłodziński 2006).

These leaders shall create the elite of rural communities playing a key role in capitalizing of social resources related to "the sense of social trust, strength of ties and the sense of influence on affairs of own villages and communities" (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2004).

It is in present-day development strategies that the importance of the so-called "soft resources" determining the so-called smart development is emphasized. According to some researchers (Sosenko 2008), the involvement of human capital in economic processes brings the greatest benefits, when it is used in cooperation and collaboration.

The emergence of an entrepreneurial society in rural areas is a result of needs of the socio-economic development. Entrepreneurial society should be defined on the basis of the following characteristics:

- Continuous improvement and extension of knowledge,



- Rational and effective economic decision making,
- Creating and applying innovative solutions,
- Constant mobility in pursuit of a goal,
- Striving after improving quality of production or services provided.

So, in that case, the ways to prepare villagers for new opportunities for acquiring knowledge should be sought. Especially in the less urbanized areas with a poor development potential, non-agricultural activities should be developed in order to exploit the region's natural values and turn them into goods and services. These activities should strengthen competitiveness of farms and villages. Promotion of small producers in rural areas may safeguard the needs of the local population, create a micro-market for services and production and thus create jobs.

RURAL RENEWAL SCHEME IN THE OPOLE VOIVODESHIP

Germany is a pioneer of the Village Renewal Schemes in Europe. While analyzing the decades of experience resulting from the West European Village Renewal Schemes, it can be concluded that there are two ways of their implementation. The first one could be observed in Germany, especially in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, while the second one in Lower Austria. Due to differences in the implementation process of village renewal schemes in these countries (historically conditioned), there are two ways which can be mentioned: "Bavarian" top-down and "Lower Austria" bottom-up (Wilczyński 1999, Bład 2005). However, it should be emphasized that despite some differences, both ways aim at the same goal of improving living conditions in rural areas and engaging residents in the development of their rural areas.

In Poland, the earliest attempts of implementation of the idea of village renewal in the form of a "Village Renewal Scheme" were made in the Opole Voivodeship. Hence its influence on other regional programs and the shape of support from the EU funds determined on the central level. It should be noted that the Opole scheme was created under the influence of the scheme of the Partner Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate and was developed with the support of Lower Austria. The dissemination of the experience gained from the Opole Village Renewal Scheme was started already in 1998 and resulted in the initiation of village renewal schemes in the following voivodeships: Pomeranian (2001), Silesia (2002) and Kuyavian-Pomeranian (2002).

Village Renewal is generally a process of improving living conditions of rural residents. Due to the fact that the renewal concerns both the spiritual, cultural and material heritage, it is quite difficult to formulate a clear definition of this process.

According to R. Wilczyński: "Village renewal is a process of shaping living conditions of people in rural areas, whose animator and subject is the local community. It affects the standard of living and its quality as well as sources of income, while preserving the village identity reflected in values of rural life, strengthening and development of the spiritual, cultural and material heritage of the village." (Wilczyński 2003)

According to the same author, the space of a village renewal scheme includes four thematic areas. In the first place, there is a particular concern for the economic life of the village which is focused on inhabitants and their creativeness as well as searching for new economic opportunities, while providing appropriate support from outside. The next area of action is improvement of the standard of living in the village, which is inextricably linked with shaping of material factors. The third element covers the quality of life, which means everything that is related to the non-physical, spiritual and social needs of man. However, the most important is to preserve the identity and integrity of the village and the value of rural life rooted in the culture and tradition at every possible level. The nature and tradition of the place, which play a significant role in the perception of settlement landscapes, should be taken into account at any time" (Wilczyński 2003).

According to R. Wilczyński, the village renewal concept is a unique trend: it strongly emphasizes the importance of the human factor as the subject and the driving force of development.

It assumes that the growth of living standards and satisfaction with the place of residence in rural areas depends on mobilization of all own resources and the use of external support available from the European Union structural funds (Wilczyński 2002).

Village renewal is a result of the cooperation of inhabitants, who want to improve their environment through changes in infrastructure, services, architecture, culture, social life, education, agriculture, space, communication, etc. The village renewal is also an opportunity to change the mentality of its inhabitants and stop the disintegration process. It is reflected both in economy, architecture, social life, culture and the environment.

The village renewal does not substitute for restructuring and modernization of agriculture but supports these processes. It facilitates farmers acquisition of additional sources of income, as well as the use of facilities, real estates and equipment, which were unused in rural areas.

The Opole Village Renewal Scheme has been operating since 1997 and is the longest-running regional program in Poland. It is a distinguishing feature and hallmark of the region and one of the most important national social innovations in the field of development of rural areas. The position of a pioneer and activity in promoting of the experience caused that other regional programs have largely adopted the Opole solutions. Since the moment of launching the scheme by the voivodeship self-government in 1999 the number of its participants doubled every 4 years. After 10 years of operation of the program (2007), the number of officially reported village administrator's offices reached 551. Further growth was slower and in 2012, 719 villages (70% of all village administrator's offices) were formally registered in the program.

An incremental increase in the number of the registered village administrator's offices took place in 2003 (by 74 village administrator's offices) and 2007 (by 145 village administrator's offices), which was associated with the beginning of successive tenures of local governments and village authorities and announced support for village renewal from the European Union funds (at the beginning in the years 2004-2006 from SOP and later in the years 2007-2013 from RDP) as well as announced and implemented will of the voivodeship self-government that the participation in the program would be rewarded in access to these funds. The projects from the village administrator's offices participating in the scheme received a so-called regional point while applying for SOP funds - village renewal activities, preservation and protection of cultural heritage.



Figure 1. The number of village administrator's offices in the Opole Voivodeship, in which projects under the Rural Renewal Scheme were implemented

Source: own study based on annual reports from the Rural Renewal Scheme implemented by the village administrator's offices in the Opole Voivodeship

In the years 2010-2016, the number of village administrator's offices participating in the program was fluctuating but it ranged from 600 to almost 700.



Village Renewal was implemented in the years 2004-2006 as part of the Sectoral Operational Program: "Restructuring and Modernization of the Food Sector and Rural Development", Measure 2.3 "Village renewal and preservation and protection of cultural heritage". In the Rural Development Program 2007-2013, the Village Renewal has been included as one of the points in the Axis 3: "Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural economy", which was included in the point 3.4. - "Village renewal and development".



Figure 2. The number of projects implemented under the Rural Renewal Scheme in 2010-2015

Source: own study based on annual reports from the Rural Renewal Scheme implemented by the village administrator's offices in the Opole Voivodeship



Figure 3. The value of projects implemented under the Rural Renewal Scheme in 2010-2015

Source: own study based on annual reports from the Rural Renewal Scheme implemented by the village administrator's offices in the Opole Voivodeship



Figure 4. The number of projects implemented under the Rural Renewal Scheme in 2010-2015 per 100 inhabitants

Source: own study based on annual reports from the Rural Renewal Scheme implemented by the village administrator's offices in the Opole Voivodeship

In the places, where village renewal occurred as a process of development, it brought a number of effects. There have been significant changes in the appearance of public spaces, properties and community facilities improving community life and recreation in the villages. Traditions, history and memorabilia have been used on a massive scale to reproduce the past of villages and use it as development "material".

Village renewal helps also to preserve vitality of rural areas and stimulate the increase of their attractiveness as a place of work and residence, and consequently to improve living conditions of the rural population.

Being the leader of a village renewal scheme, or at least the advanced stage of this process, causes that the village starts to stand out from the commune and even the region becoming a more attractive place to invest, since a success of a project is more probable.

One of the fundamental results of a renewal process consists in multiplicity and variety of events.

Many village administrator's offices organize a lot of projects of a cyclical nature every year.

The versatility of the projects implemented by the village administrator's offices and their aims are a proof that the activities within rural renewal schemes support sustainable development, which harmoniously combines economic, social, cultural and environmental needs.

The results of the cooperation of village administrator's offices and communes are reflected in projects improving the quality of life and shaping the image of the villages that is especially important.

The number of executed projects was at the level of 4362 to 5395, with a significant predominance of immaterial projects.

The value of projects (material and immaterial) implemented in the village administrator's offices of the Opole Voivodeship under the program amounted to PLN 26,138 million in 2015 and to PLN 38,205 million in 2014. In the period under research, the level of social activity (measured by the number of projects per 100 inhabitants) was very similar: in the last five years covered by the research 1.4 to 1.5.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the research was to present the village renewal scheme implemented in the Opolskie Voivodeship and some of the achievements within the scope of improving the social capital through, among others, increase of the local communities' integration, sense of responsibility for their development through projects implemented by the village administrator's offices against the background of the generally described problems concerning rural areas and their development (i.e. sustainable and multifunctional development).

The implementation of joint projects leads to mobilization and cooperation within the society, strengthens faith in own strengths, stimulates optimism, and most importantly stimulates bottom-up activities at the village level. The bottom-up nature of village renewal schemes is the most important feature and the involvement of village leaders for new ideas, consistent with the intentions of the smallest communities, is often a key issue for a successful program.

The village renewal scheme implemented in the Opole Voivodeship allows rural communities to decide directly on the goal. Therefore, the implementation of socially desirable initiatives contributes to sustainable socio-economic development and stimulates the population as well as results in improved quality of life in rural areas. It can be assumed that the value added of VRS is measured primarily by social effects in the development of social capital in rural areas.

Conclusions:

- 1) Village renewal schemes have proved to be an extremely effective concept and method of development of rural areas, where they have been implemented so far. With small amount



- of funds, it was possible to mobilize numerous rural communities to many activities generating significant effects with a strong developmental stimulus.
- 2) It can be generally accepted that the activities undertaken under village renewal schemes support sustainable development, that is the one, which harmoniously combines economic, social, cultural and environmental needs.
 - 3) The number of the village administrator's offices involved in the Rural Renewal Schemes has increased to more than 600 at the beginning of the program and stays at this level.
 - 4) The value of the projects implemented in the voivodeship can be estimated for about PLN 30 million
 - 5) The number of the projects per 100 inhabitants has been about 1.5 for a few years.
 - 6) The villages advanced "inward" in the process of renewal are already taking "outward" measures creating their offers.
 - 7) The village renewal schemes need new impulses, transition to revenue-generating activities and ensuring continuation and development of rural areas, especially in the face of negative demographic phenomena.

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