www.jard.edu.pl http://dx.doi.org/10.17306/J.JARD.2017.00307

Journal of Agribusiness and Rural Development

pISSN 1899-5241
eISSN 1899-5772

2(44) 2017, 435–443

EUROPEAN UNION FUNDS AS A TOOL FOR CREATING NEW FUNCTIONS OF RURAL AREAS, AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE EXAMPLE OF RDP

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Abstract. The processes occurring in Polish rural areas undeniably reflect the evolution of the concept of their functioning. However, their performance of modern functions depends on the solid support of the activities undertaken both on the local and the regional level. The aim of this study is to analyze and evaluate the opportunities for subsidizing Polish rural areas' activities other than agricultural production, as well the scale of the funds earmarked for these aims. Two EU programmes were analysed: The Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 and The Rural Development Programme 2014–2020. The comparative analysis of the programmes was conducted from the perspective of macroeconomics i.e. on a national scale. The subsequent programming periods indicate the limited extent of the changes occurring in the structure of the ways in which subsidies are used. What seems to be clear is the lack of a modern view on the functioning of rural areas and the directions for their development. The evaluated programme is dedicated to rural areas, but it focuses mainly on agriculture, whereas The Rural Development Programme does not include the problem of public goods and the benefits related to them.

Keywords: functions of rural areas, The Rural Development Programme, EU funds

INTRODUCTION

When presenting a vision of what could become the Polish agriculture sector and rural areas in 25 years, Wilkin et al. (2005) focused on several processes, including: the increased importance of the agriculture sector as a custodian of a large part of the country's national resources; the declining importance of agriculture in the incomes of the rural population; strong diversification of the sources of rural income; the farmers' engagement in the production of both commercial and public goods; a shift towards multi-functional agriculture; the decreasing area of agricultural land; the increased importance of the agriculture in the country's food and energy security.

It can be claimed with certainty that at the mid-point of the time horizon set for that vision, many (if not most) of the processes foreseen by the authors have already taken place or have been at least initiated. Changes occurring in rural areas include: the declining importance of the agriculture's productive function; converting agricultural land to non-agricultural uses; the increasing expectations of the rural population as to the local availability of products and services; emergence of new needs and expectations regarding rural areas (Wilkin, 2008).

Undoubtedly, the processes taking place in the Polish countryside are a manifestation of the changing role of rural areas in developing the socio-economic realities. Also, they show how did the perception of that role evolve over the years. In turn, the development trend of rural areas continues to be strictly related to the development of agriculture which remains the dominating

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sector in the Polish countryside. However, it is difficult not to agree with M. Kłodziński (2008) who claims that "while agriculture is a highly important sector of the rural economy, the non-agricultural development of rural areas is an equally important aspect which requires support from the national budget".

According to Czarnecki et al. (2015), the rural shift towards multi-functionality primarily consists in reorganizing the three basic ways (i.e. production, consumption and protection) of using the rural resources. There are three basic types of the above functions of rural areas which may be combined into three additional (mixed) types (Holmes typology):

- type 1: agricultural production with a predominant manufacturing function;
- type 2: attractive investment and residential land with a predominant consumption function;
- type 3: a bipolar type with a combined value chain based on manufacturing and consumption;
- type 4: peri-urban areas where the production, consumption and protection functions compete with each other;
- type 5: areas of marginalized agriculture where the manufacturing and protection functions could potentially be integrated;
- type 6: the protective type focusing on socially relevant values that match the sustainable growth and protection goals[1].

The evolving functioning concepts of the Polish rural areas are reflected by processes taking place in the countryside. However, to deliver modern functions, rural areas need to be strongly supported at the central, regional and local level. This includes Union funds available under dedicated rural development programs.

[1] Today, there are multiple classification criteria for the functions of rural areas. A recapitulation of the most important typologies was presented by E. Niedzielski (2015) who specified the following classification of functions delivered by rural areas: 1) natural and anthropogenic, 2) commercial and non-commercial, 3) economic, natural, social and cultural (after J. Wilkin), 4) functions for the preservation and maintenance of landscape, architecture, agricultural production activities, culinary traditions, non-agricultural rural production and folk arts and rituals (after M. Błąd), 5) from the perspective of goods delivered by rural areas: environmental, economic and socio-cultural (after J. Wilkin), 6) green, blue, yellow and white (after J. Wilkin). For a broader description, see (Niedzielski, 2015, p. 85–87).

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHOD OF STUDIES

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and assess the support for non-agricultural activities in rural areas based on the amount of funds allocated. The analysis covers two Union programs: the 2007–2013 Rural Development Program and the 2014–2020 Rural Development Program. The two programs were compared based on a macroeconomic approach (on a national level). The desk research primarily relied on data made available by the Ministry of the Agriculture and Rural Development. This paper uses basic methods of descriptive statistics, such as dynamics of change and structural indicators.

LINES FOR ACTION SUPPORTED UNDER THE RDP AND THE AMOUNT OF SUPPORT

The comparative analysis of spending patterns of EU funds in two different temporal perspectives is made difficult by structural changes to the Program under the new financial framework: there are less measures but various sub-measures may be used in parallel. The basic objective of the 2007–2013 RDP was to implement the concept of multifunctional agriculture and rural areas, assuming an improvement of the farms' economic situation and an enhancement of competitiveness of the agri-food sector (PROW 2007–2013, 2016). Support under the 2014–2020 RDP is oriented at enhancing the competitiveness of the agriculture sector which is assumed to demonstrate particular development needs and to play a key role from the perspective of rural development (PROW 2014–2020, 2014a). Many measures implemented at an early stage of the Program are continued in the current budgetary period. However, a totally different approach was adopted towards some other lines of support. An example could be the non-agricultural development of rural areas and the creation of new jobs which are supported only as a part of Leader in the 2014–2020 period. This is because the development of enterprise in rural areas is supposed to be financed under the Cohesion Fund and its programs.

As shown in Table 1, the financing for projects enhancing the quality of life and forging the identity of Polish rural areas decreased by around 5 percentage points

Table 1. Actions and measures of the Rural Development Programme for the improvement of the quality of products, quality of life, and building the identity of Polish rural areas
Tabela 1. Działania i poddziałania Programu Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich służące poprawie jakości produktów, życia oraz budowie tożsamości polskiej wsi

2007–2013 RDP PROW 2007–2013		2014–2020 RDP PROW 2014–2020	
Action Działanie	% of total funds % ogółu środków	Action (Measure) Działanie (Poddziałanie)	% of total funds % ogółu środków
Product quality improvement Poprawa jakości produktów			
Farmers' participation in food quality systems Uczestnictwo rolników w systemach jakości żywności	0.07	Systems of quality of food and agriculture products Systemy jakości produktów rolnych i środków spożywczych	0.24
The improvement of quality of life and bulding the identity of the Polish rural areas Poprawa jakości życia i budowa tożsamości polskiej wsi			
Basic services for the industry and the inhabitants of rural areas Podstawowe usługi dla gospodarki i ludności wiejskiej	9.33	Basic services and reconstruction of rural areas: Podstawowe usługi i odnowa wsi na obszarach wiejskich: – construction and modernization of local roads budowa i modernizacja dróg lokalnych – water and sewage management gospodarka wodno-ściekowa	7.96
Reconstruction and development of rural areas Odnowa i rozwój wsi	3.33	Basic services and reconstruction of rural areas: Podstawowe usługi i odnowa wsi na obszarach wiejskich: – investing in objects with cultural function or with the function of shaping the public realm inwestycje w obiekty pełniące funkcje kulturalne lub kształtowanie przestrzeni publicznej – investment in open air markets or the objects promoting local products inwestycje w targowiska lub obiekty budowlane przeznaczone na cele promocji lokalnych produktów – preservation of the monuments of historical construction ochrona zabytków i budownictwa tradycyjnego	

Source: own elaboration on the basis of PROW 2007–2013 (2016) and PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie PROW 2007–2013 (2016) oraz PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).

(nearly 13% of total funds under the 2007–2013 RDP and 8% of total funds under the 2014–2020 RDP[2]).

Despite a broad range of measures that need to be included in the programs for the Polish agricultural sector and rural areas, it seems that a stronger emphasis should be put on the aforesaid objective. In the current situation, the development of competitive rural areas requires the use of specific rural features which include the culture of rural communities. The cultural importance of the Polish countryside is winning ever greater recognition from the Polish society and from other European nations. Therefore, the decreasing share of RDP funds earmarked for this objective in subsequent budgeting periods is an unfavorable development for the Polish rural areas.

[2] The total amount of public funds allocated to the 2007–2013 RDP was EUR 17.4 billion. In the case of the 2014–2020 RDP, it will be EUR 13.5 billion.

In Poland, extremely limited amounts of financing are allocated to the implementation of quality management systems that enhance the quality of agri-food products. Even though the share of funds earmarked for this objective in the total RDP funds has increased in the current programming period, it continues to represent a marginal level. Meanwhile, having in mind the changing behavior of food consumers and the fact that they pay increasingly more attention to food safety and health issues, investing in quality assurance systems for foodstuffs seems to be a highly desirable measure.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, in both programming periods, the largest amounts of financing were allocated to the modernization of the agricultural sector (28.5% of total funds under the 2007–2013 RDP and 43.5% of total funds under the 2014–2020 RDP). Note that this line of support does not seem to be directly related to non-agricultural functions of rural areas. However, indirectly, changes in this area definitely affect the nature and condition of Polish rural areas and their readiness to deliver a series of non-production functions. The modernization of farms involves infrastructural improvements; investments that reduce the adverse environmental impact; developing (and enhancing the quality of) agricultural products; improving the agrarian structure; the implementation of environmental objectives by farms located in valuable natural areas or in less favorable areas; the development of producer groups etc.

Most of the agricultural sector modernization measures implemented over the 2007–2013 period are continued. The current RDP does not include financing for projects adding value to primary agricultural and forestry production which represented 4.8% of total funds under the 2007–2013 RDP. In turn, there was a significant increase of support for the development of farms as a part of the Setting up of young farmers (4.4% of funds under the 2007–2013 RDP) and the Development of farms and economic activity in 2014–2020 with the following sub-measures: premiums for young farmers, payments for farmers handing over small farms, and restructuring of small farms (12.8% of RDP funds). In the current budgeting period, the share of RDP funds allocated to the establishment of agricultural producer groups and organizations has almost tripled: from 1.1% in the 2007–2013 period to 3.0% in the 2014–2020 period (PROW 2007–2013, 2016; PROW 2014–2020, 2014a). For the farmers, being a member of producer groups means multiple opportunities in the area of production organization, marketing, participation in the information system, implementation of R&D projects and cooperation with the environment. Therefore, the increase in support for these purposes is a favorable development that could improve the functioning of farms and of the entire rural community.

Table 2 shows information on the amounts of support for the multi-functional development of the agricultural sector and rural areas. In the current programming period, there is a clear decrease in the share of support for enterprise development, in accordance with the previously mentioned assumptions for the 2014–2020 RDP.

The marginalization of non-agricultural employment in the RDP should be considered a negative development: the figures from recent years clearly show that the rural population turns away from agriculture, and fewer and fewer people rely exclusively or mainly on income from farming operations. In the early 1990s, over 60% of rural families earned their income from agriculture. In 2005 and 2011, that share was 48% and only around 30%, respectively (Szafraniec, 2015, after J. Wilkin). While the multi-functional development of Polish rural areas could also (or perhaps primarily) be based on other funding sources, it should be given more careful consideration in a program focused on rural areas.

Currently, rural areas are accorded a particular role related to the protection and use of the natural environment (Table 3).

In the 2007–2013 RDP, projects for the protection of water, soil and landscape and the maintenance of biodiversity were financed under the Agri-environmental Program whereas in the 2014–2020 RDP support was provided through agri-environmental and climatic measures. The current budgeting period includes a new measure, Organic farming, previously implemented as an agri-environmental package. In each of the programming periods under consideration, around 13% of total funds available under the RDP were allocated to agri-environmental measures and to agri-environmental and climatic measures (including organic farming support). Most of the packages within an agri-environmental and climatic measure are a continuation of the 2007–2013 RDP offering and are intended to implement the sustainable development concept in rural areas.

An opportunity to improve the agri-environmental situation is provided by afforestation, a measure which proves to be extremely useful because rural areas are perceived as an important producer of public goods such

Table 2. Actions and measures of the Rural Development Programme for multifunctional agriculture and rural areas
Tabela 2. Działania i poddziałania Programu Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich na rzecz wielofunkcyjnego rolnictwa i obszarów wiejskich

2007–2013 RDP PROW 2007–2013		2014–2020 RDP PROW 2014–2020	
Action Działanie	% of total funds % ogółu środków	Action (Measure) Działanie (Poddziałanie)	% of total funds % ogółu środków
Diversification towards non-agricultural activity Różnicowanie w kierunku działalności nierolniczej	1.90	Development of farms and business activity – bonuses for starting non-agricultural activity Rozwój gospodarstw i działalności gospodarczej – premie na rozpoczęcie działalności pozarolniczej	3.06
Setting up and developing micro-companies Tworzenie i rozwój mikroprzedsiębiorstw	3.62	Development of farms and business activities – development of entrepreneurship, development of agricultural services Rozwój gospodarstw i działalności gospodarczej – rozwój przedsiębiorczości, rozwój usług rolniczych	0.48

Source: own elaboration on the basis of PROW 2007–2013 (2016) and PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie PROW 2007–2013 (2016) oraz PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).

Table 3. Actions and measures of the Rural Development Programme for the protection of natural environment
Tabela 3. Działania i poddziałania Programu Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich służące ochronie środowiska przyrodniczego

2007–2013 RDP PROW 2007–2013		2014–2020 RDP PROW 2014–2020	
Action Działanie	% of total funds % ogółu środków	Action (Measure) Działanie (Poddziałanie)	% of total funds % ogółu środków
Agri-environmental programme Program rolnośrodowiskowy	13.21	Agricultural – environmental – climate actions Działania rolnośrodowiskowo-klimatyczne	8.76
		Organic farming Rolnictwo ekologiczne	5.18
Afforestation of farmland and other land Zalesianie gruntów rolnych oraz gruntów innych niż rolne	1.41	Investment in the development of forest areas and the improvement of the sustainability of forests – afforestation and creating wooded areas Inwestycje w rozwój obszarów leśnych i poprawę żywotności lasów – zalesianie i tworzenie terenów zalesionych	2.23
Reconstruction of the potential of forest production damaged by disasters and introducing preventive measures Odtwarzanie potencjału produkcji leśnej zniszczonego przez katastrofy oraz wprowadzenie instrumentów zapobiegawczych	0.73		
Supporting farming in mountainous areas and other less favoured areas Wspieranie gospodarowania na obszarach górskich i innych obszarach ONW	15.00	Funds for the areas with natural limitations or other particular limitations – funds for less favoured areas Płatności dla obszarów z ograniczeniami naturalnymi lub innymi szczególnymi ograniczeniami – płatności ONW	16.03

Source: own elaboration on the basis of PROW 2007–2013 (2016) and PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie PROW 2007–2013 (2016) oraz PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).

Table 4. Actions and measures of the Rural Development Programme within community activisation, the strategy for development of rural municipalities, as well as knowledge and education
Tabela 4. Działania i poddziałania Programu Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich w obszarze aktywizacji społeczeństwa, strategii rozwoju gmin oraz wiedzy i edukacji

2007–2013 RDP PROW 2007–2013		2014–2020 RDP PROW 2014–2020	
Action Działanie	% of total funds % ogółu środków	Action (Measure) Działanie (Poddziałanie)	% of total funds % ogółu środków
Local development and activation of rural communities – Rozwój lokalny i aktywizacja społeczności wiejskiej			
Implementation of cooperation projects Wdrażanie projektów współpracy	0.07	Support for local development within LEADER initiative – implementation of cooperation projects Wsparcie dla rozwoju lokalnego w ramach inicjatywy LEADER – wdrażanie projektów współpracy	5.44
Functioning of local action groups, acquiring skills and activation Funkcjonowanie LGD, nabywanie umiejętności i aktywizacja	0.70	Support for local development within LEADER initiative – support for running costs and activation Wsparcie dla rozwoju lokalnego w ramach inicjatywy LEADER – wsparcie kosztów bieżących i aktywizacji	
		Support for local development within LEADER initiative – preparatory support Wsparcie dla rozwoju lokalnego w ramach inicjatywy LEADER – wsparcie przygotowawcze	
Implementing local strategies for development Wdrażanie lokalnych strategii rozwoju	3.38	Support for local development within the LEADER – implementing local strategies for development Wsparcie dla rozwoju lokalnego w ramach inicjatywy LEADER– wdrażanie lokalnych strategii rozwoju	
		Cooperation Współpraca	0.43
Knowledge and education – Wiedza i edukacja			
Vocational training for people employed in agriculture and forestry Szkolenia zawodowe dla osób zatrudnionych w rolnictwie i leśnictwie	0.16	Consulting services, services related to farm management and replacement services Usługi doradcze, usługi z zakresu zarządzania gospodarstwem i usługi z zakresu zastępstw	0.56
Using consulting services by farmers and forest owners Korzystanie z usług doradczych przez rolników i posiadaczy lasów	0.19		
Information and promotional actions Działania informacyjne i promocyjne	0.02	Transfer of knowledge and information activity Transfer wiedzy i działalność informacyjna	0.43

Source: own elaboration on the basis of PROW 2007–2013 (2016) and PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie PROW 2007–2013 (2016) oraz PROW 2014–2020 (2014a).

as clean air, beautiful landscapes and quiet. Although a small part of RDP funds is allocated to afforestation in Poland, this situation should not be considered to have manifestly adverse consequences. Even today, while demonstrating a large share of poor quality soils, Poland is one of the most forested EU countries with a forestation rate of 29.4% in 2014 (GUS, 2015). As forecasted by the foresters, that share should reach 30% by 2020 and 33% by 2050. With the existing support system for afforestation measures, this seems very likely.

In the structure of RDP spending, there is an important share of support for farming in less-favored areas (LFA), reaching a similar level in both programs (15% and 16%, respectively). The objectives pursued by compensatory payments to LFA farms have evolved over the years and budgeting periods. However, focus is still put on the importance of continued agricultural land use and on preserving the traditional agricultural landscape (displacement of social objectives by environmental objectives) (Kutkowska and Berbeka, 2014). In the 2014–2020 programming period, the financing rules for LFA farming provided for in the 2007–2013 RDP remain applicable. However, by the end of 2017 at the latest, Poland is required to specify the lowland areas covered by LFA in accordance with the new delimitation principles. This is extremely important because, as noted by Roszkowska-Mądra (2010), the analysis of LFA delimitation in EU countries (including Poland) demonstrated that the existing criteria failed to properly reflect the diversity of complex conditions and economic situations in these areas.

Certainly, support for LFA farms is necessary due to extensification of the agricultural production, unfavorable combination of natural conditions, limited value-adding capacity, distance from markets etc. But should it reach such levels? As shown by the RDP structure, more funds are spent on LFA support than on agri-environmental measures. Note that around 80% of Natural 2000 areas, 72% of land under permanent pasture and 67% of agricultural land reported for coverage under the Agri-environmental Program of the 2007–2013 RDP were located in LFAs (PROW 2014–2020, 2014a). This confirms the trend towards a seemingly undue emphasis on the importance of LFAs in the agriculture and rural areas support policy.

Social inclusion and local development are the conditions that must be met in order for the rural areas to properly deliver various functions. The importance of these measures was recognized in the 2014–2020 RDP which included a new instrument referred to as *Cooperation*. Although no significant resources were allocated to it, the fact itself that it was established as a separate measure is a positive development (Table 4). In the current budgetary period, the share of spending on projects involving cooperation, social inclusion of local communities and operating strategies of rural municipalities in the total spending under the RDP has increased by 1.7 percentage points. Meanwhile, the share of spending on trainings, education, consultancy, knowledge transfer and information activities has increased by 0.6 percentage points. The support for these aims is definitely insufficient, given the need to change the mindset of the rural community, to enhance access to knowledge and to improve the education level of the rural population.

Cooperation between various operators is of extraordinary importance for the delivery of non-agricultural functions by the Polish rural areas. It helps promoting local products; provides the local producers with better opportunities to tap new markets; enables the most effective use of local resources; and provides an opportunity to revive the local or regional tradition. The experiences of previous programming periods show that the rural population is highly interested in cooperation projects under the Leader axis. The Implementation of local development strategies played a major role. That measure, if properly implemented, offers the potential for improving the quality of life in rural areas due to adequate identification of problems and ways of addressing them with the participation of the community of the municipality concerned.

CONCLUSIONS

The functions of rural areas cannot be considered only (or mainly) from the perspective of the production function and economic aspects. The evolution of development trends in rural areas requires a holistic overview, taking into account the multi-functionality and mutual relationships, both internal (between specific components of the social, economic and environmental system of the Polish countryside) and external (with the environment of that system). Rural Development Programs hardly take into account the need to support a multi-functional development.

The subsequent programming periods show the small scale of changes to the expenditure structure. Certainly, one can argue about the lines of support to be adopted, the measures to be preferred, and the areas to be considered of strategic importance given the limited amounts of available funds. However, what seems obvious is the absence of a modern vision for the functioning and development trends of rural areas. Although the program discussed in this paper is intended for rural areas, it focuses primarily on the agriculture sector. But while the agriculture is extremely important, some significant development opportunities exist outside that sector.

The RDP clearly fails to address the problem of public goods and related benefits (which is tackled indirectly only in the case of afforestation)[3]. This area is extremely difficult to quantify: it is hard to imagine a way to calculate the support for the rural population in return for the production of public goods. While the valuation methodology for public goods is being explored by various scientific centers, it remains difficult to implement and monitor.

The declining support for measures aimed at improving the quality of life and forging the identity of Polish rural areas does not seem to be a favorable trend because these are the socio-economic areas that require interventions. Just as in the case of environmental measures, peer pressure (rather than personal beliefs) continues to be the prevailing reason why people engage into such activities.

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[3] Public goods mean goods that are both non-excludable and non-rival in consumption (Samuelson, 1954). The agriculture delivers public goods of a global nature which are universal to all countries, population groups and generations (oxygen production, carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, assurance of food safety), and public goods of a local nature which are consumed locally (protection of land, water conditions, landscape, cultural heritage of rural areas, developing leisure and relaxation facilities, creating jobs in rural areas) (FAPA, 2009).

FUNDUSZE UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ JAKO INSTRUMENT KREOWANIA NOWYCH FUNKCJI OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH – NA PRZYKŁADZIE PROW

Streszczenie. Procesy zachodzące na polskiej wsi są niewątpliwie przejawem ewolucji koncepcji funkcjonowania tych obszarów, jednak wypełnianie przez nie nowoczesnych funkcji zależy od solidnego wsparcia działań na szczeblu lokalnym i regionalnym. Celem opracowania jest analiza i ocena możliwości dofinansowania działań w ramach realizacji przez polską wieś funkcji innych niż produkcja rolna oraz skali środków przeznaczanych na te zadania. Przedmiotem analizy są dwa programy unijne: Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich 2007–2013 oraz Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich 2014–2020. Analiza porównawcza programów została przeprowadzona w ujęciu makroekonomicznym, tj. w skali kraju. Kolejne okresy programowania pokazują, jak niewielkie są zmiany w strukturze wydatkowania środków. Wyraźny wydaje się brak nowoczesnego spojrzenia na funkcjonowanie i kierunki rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Poddany ocenie program dedykowany jest obszarom wiejskim, ale koncentruje się przede wszystkim na rolnictwie. Tymczasem pominięty jest w PROW na przykład problem dóbr publicznych i związanych z nimi korzyści.

Słowa kluczowe: funkcje obszarów wiejskich, Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich, fundusze UE

Accepted for print – Zaakceptowano do druku: 10.10.2016