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**A difficult way
from social passivity to participation:
a case study of the
Middle Odra River Valley Partnership
Poland**

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Area-based partnership:

“a voluntary and open, formal or informal coalition of at least 3 partner institutions as well as individuals representing at least 2 sectors (from 3 sectors: public, business, and civil society (voluntarily)). While maintaining their autonomy, members of the coalition work with each other for the long-term benefit of a specific geographic region, accepting the principle of sharing responsibility, risks, costs, as well as benefits” (Biderman et al. 2004)

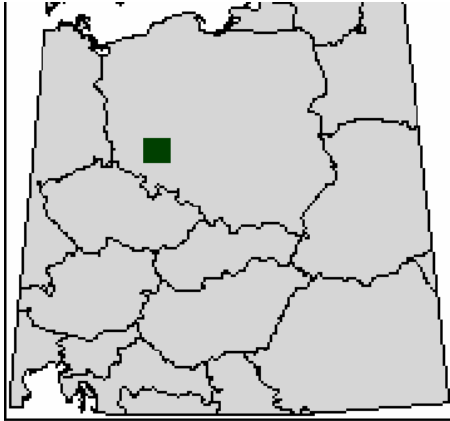
Main reasons and features of social exclusion in rural areas in Poland:

- bankruptcies of state farms at the beginning of 1990s, workers were not used to working for themselves,
- the increase of unemployment (19,8% in 2002) and „hidden” unemployment in rural areas,
- the low and unstable incomes of individual farmers - only 6% of all farms conducted **effective** economic activity in 2002,
- apathy and marginalization, subjection to social aid, disintegration of family and neighbour ties, social and spatial isolation, lack of motivation to change their bad situation, social pathologies (increasing crime, alcoholism etc.) and passing on these attitudes from parents to youth,
- weak infrastructure.

The potential advantages of partnership in rural areas:

- wider public participation in local affairs (e.g. through NGOs),
- the reduction of inter-agency conflict,
- consensus building,
- promoting the building of local strategies,
- facilitating co-ordinated actions,
- giving access to different skills and innovations,
- strengthening local identity and competitiveness,
- enhancing local sensitivity,
- increasing funding opportunities,
- enlisting the support of the private sector,

Case Study: Middle Odra River Valley Partnership



Policy area: the territory of 16 municipalities in middle Odra River Valley

Partners:

- 16 local governments
- 4 counties governments,
- 16 NGOs,
- 2 Forest Inspectorates,
- 1 small entrepreneurship



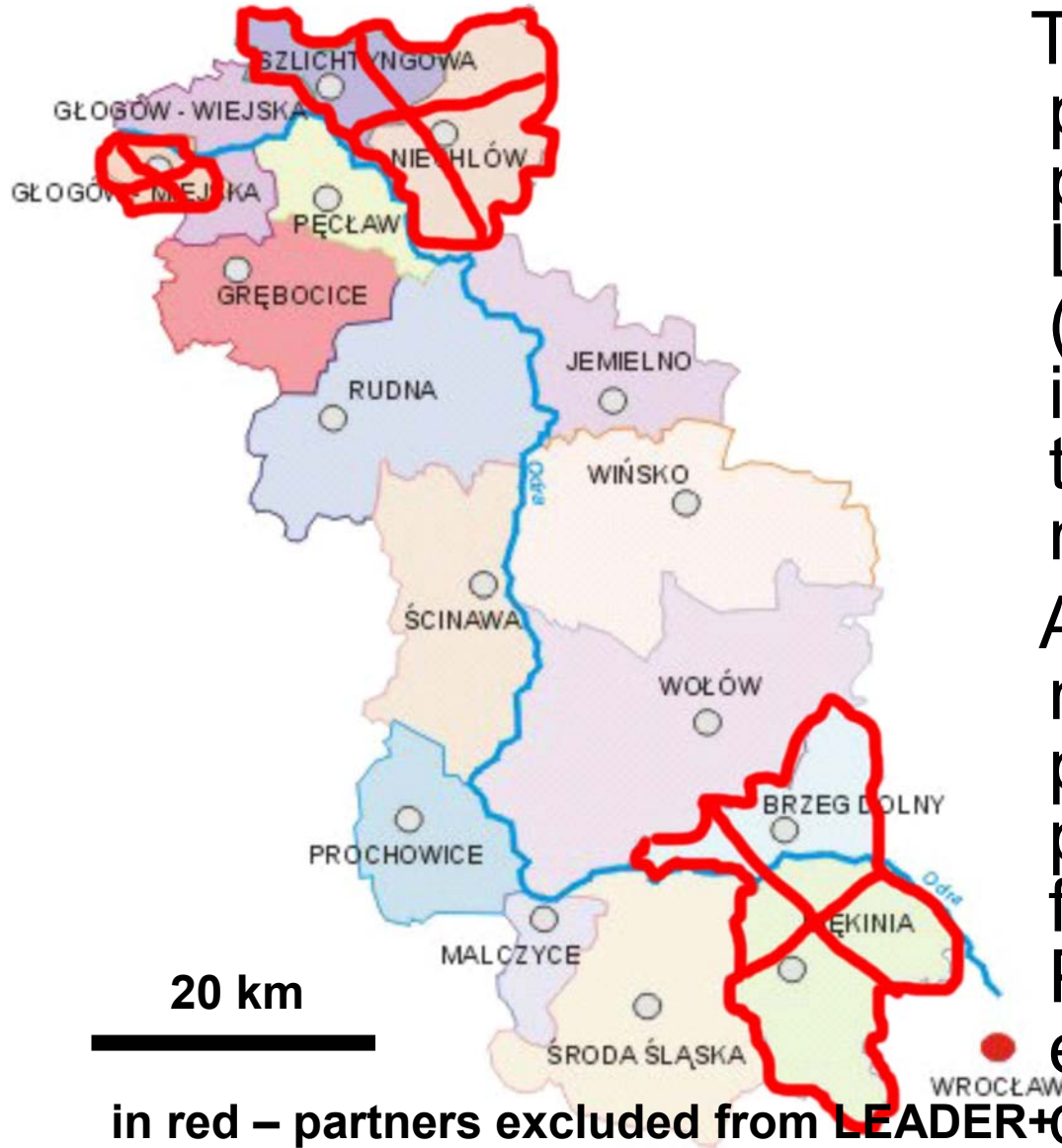
Legal status: without legal status, partnership based on a signed declaration of cooperation with secretariat managed by NGO (Ecological Foundation “Green Action”) from Legnica (not in the area of partnership)

Main policy tool: Partnership Fund (PF). The Fund is a part of existing Ecological Foundation „Green Action” and is managed by public Founders (donators) Council. The account and secretary is provided by Ecological Foundation „Green Action”. The schools, culture centres and NGOs are main beneficiaries.

Some other projects:

- ‘schools for eco-development’ (educational projects for schools),
- establishing public special areas of conservation (landscape stewardship),
- promotion of waste segregation,
- tourist routes marking, e.g. bicycle “Odra route”,
- tourist promotion,
- **grant from LEADER+ Pilot Programme (creating the Local Action Group, building a common strategy etc.) – since 2005.**

Potential obstacles in LEADER:



The whole existing partnership is too big to participate in the LEADER Programme (more than 100 000 inhabitants, with the town Głogów as a member).

As a result, only some members of the partnership were able to prepare an application for the LEADER+ Pilot Programme. It can engender some dysfunctions.

The main features of partnership model implementation in Poland:

- The idea of partnership to enhance local social activities in Polish rural areas has started to be implemented only after 10 years of transformation, near 2000,
- it is not really a self-organizing process of local society, but a process initiated and supported by foreign funds (initially from the USA funds, since 2004 mainly from the EU), initially not supported by the Polish central government,
- Polish partnerships often had the form of a voluntary declaration of cooperation with clear organisational structures, but often without a legal form due to legal constraints,

- in Polish partnerships, NGOs and local governments are currently of the greatest importance. The participation of local business in partnerships is very low,
- lack of long-term strategies of local social and economic development,
- lack of experienced staff on the local level,
- misunderstanding of partnership ideas (local governments' or NGOs inclination for domination),
- the initial projects of partnerships are mostly: tourist promotion and soft projects aimed at enhancing local society activity (e.g. local grant funds). The projects are not large due to limited financial resources.

Polish partnerships need mainly:

- to increase **the real** engagement of different **local organisations/institutions** in „partnership” activities, without one or/and external institution domination,
- to enhance the role of local funds supporting actions of local, small social groups,
- to enhance creation of common long-term strategies of partnerships,
- to solve the legal obstacles to participation of institutions from different sectors (local government, NGOs, business) as units with equal status in a „partnership” organisation,
- to lobby for making the EU Programmes more flexible and locally sensitive (*e.g. only preferential for partnerships having no more than 100,000 inhabitants, but without unconditional exclusion of those which exceed the criteria, like in the Polish LEADER+ Pilot Programme*).