

AGNIESZKA PAWŁOWSKA
University of Rzeszów

Territorial Partnerships in Rural Regions— Neo-Institutional Perspective

Abstract: This paper examines territorial partnerships (TPs) through the prism of neo-institutional theory and governance. As an example, it considers area-based rural partnerships (Local Action Groups—LAGs) situated in the Sub-Carpathian region of Poland. It identifies the mechanisms by which TPs are created and major aspects of their activities. An overview is given of the social-economic factors conditioning the implementation of TPs in the Sub-Carpathian region. The important role of local authorities in establishing and managing the majority of the LAGs under analysis is revealed. The analysis concludes that LAGs are run in a manner typical of representative democracy and that this manner is contrary to the basic tenets of heterarchic governance. However, the partnership model of accomplishing common projects and the positive outcomes of the projects are likely to produce considerable added value in rural communities.

Keywords: Territorial partnership, Local Action Group, neo-institutional theory, governance, rural areas

Introduction

Territorial partnerships (TPs) involve voluntary cooperation between entities in the public, private, and civic sectors of a specific territory in order to identify problems of a public nature and work toward a joint elaboration of their resolution, while respecting each others' equality in regard to sharing resources, responsibilities, risks, and benefits (Little 2001; Shortall 2004; Shortall and Shucksmith 1998). TPs became a topic of academic research in the late 1990s (Moseley 2003) and numerous studies in that period reported on the experiences of rural partnerships in a single country (Bruckmeier 2000; Buller 2000; Marquardt et al., 2012; Mehnen et al. 2013; Pérez 2000; Scott 2003; Shortall 2004; Shortall and Shucksmith 1998; Shucksmith 2010) or compared the experiences of several countries (Chevalier 2012; Chevalier et al. 2012; Dargan and Shucksmith 2008; Derkzen 2008; Halamska and Maurel 2010; Kull 2008). The studies predominantly examined partnerships that took the form of Local Action Groups (LAGs), which were established within the framework of the European Union's LEADER Programme.¹

¹ The EU LEADER Initiative was launched in 1991 to support development in rural communities. Till 2006 there were three generations of LEADER: LEADER I (1991–1993), LEADER II (1994–1999), and LEADER+ (2000–2006). In the programming period 2007–2013, LEADER was included in the rural development policy supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Based on the experiences of the LEADER Initiative, the “LEADER approach” was defined and promoted as a bottom-up, cross-sectorial, area-based approach to local affairs. The LEADER Programme has been implemented in Poland since the country's accession

In Poland, TPs, including LAGs, have been investigated in numerous projects: several covered the partnerships that emerged immediately after the country's accession to the EU and were based on the LEADER+ Programme (Bukraba-Rylska 2011; Furmankiewicz and Królikowska 2010; Furmankiewicz et al. 2010), while others concerned TPs operating in the programming period of 2007–2013 (Knieć 2010; PSDB 2013; Psyk-Piotrowska et al. 2013). The study considered in the present paper concerns LAGs in one of the sixteen Polish regions: the peripherally situated Sub-Carpathia.

In general, the aim of the study was to identify the mechanisms by which the TPs were created, to discover the premises of their formation, and to analyze how successfully the TPs coped with governance as a framework for decision-making. The questions addressed in the study involve observations made in respect to TPs in countries that have experienced the evolution of the LEADER Programme since its beginning in 1991. The partnerships that were elaborated there, and became an inherent feature of the LEADER approach, were novel in Eastern and Central European states. Thus the following questions are addressed: *To what degree are the TPs innovative and to what extent are they perceived as “strange” models of governance? Are they the new mode of doing things or just instruments for obtaining a share of the resources managed by the LEADER Programme?* The present social investments of the LEADER Programme are made with the expectation that they benefit the whole community and will be reduced or withdrawn at a later date (Shortall and Shucksmith 1998). Therefore we need to ask: *How likely are TPs to survive without the EU's support?*

As partnerships are strongly connected with governance, the latter was frequently referred to as the theoretical basis for their analyses. Governance is not a homogenous concept—it offers numerous contexts of analysis (Bevir 2009; Bevir 2011; Stoker 1998). H. George Frederickson and Kevin B. Smith observe (2003: 209) that “[L]acking a universal definition, governance is currently more an acknowledgement of the empirical reality of changing times than it is a body of coherent theory.” Governance is generally seen as a framework for negotiating and implementing public policies with the participation of different stakeholders. Peter John (2001: 9) notices that

[T]he concept conveys the idea that public decisions rest less within hierarchically organized bureaucracies, but take place more in long-term relationships between key individuals located in a diverse set of organizations located at various territorial levels.

There are numerous theoretical contexts in which the concept of governance is used (Bevir 2011: 4–6). The hypotheses in this paper were based on neo-institutional theory. Neo-institutional theory departs from traditional institutionalism, whose understanding of institutions is strongly related to the concept of state, with its formal rules, processes, and structures. James G. March and John P. Olsen (1989: 18), proponents of the neo-institutional approach, mention that “political institutions define the framework within which politics takes place,” but institutions are much more than formal organizations: they are

to the EU in 2004. In the period 2007–2013 the LEADER Programme constituted Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme. It has mainly supported the creation of Integrated Rural Development Strategies; information, training and promotion; and consultative and advisory activities.

“routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, and technologies around which political activity is constructed,” as well as “beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge that surround, elaborate, and contradict those rules and routines.” (1989: 22). Vivien Lowndes (2006: 95) names seven trends in neo-institutional theory. Of these, the normative trend, rational choice, and historic institutionalism were platforms for the hypotheses of the present study.

These hypotheses and their theoretical background are discussed in the first part of the paper. The succeeding part addresses local development as a policy field and the social-economic factors conditioning the foundation of TPs in the Sub-Carpathian region. Research methodology and findings are presented in the third part of the paper, and are followed by the conclusions.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Having reviewed a number of definitions of partnerships, Jo Hutchinson and Mike Campbell (1998) stated that there is common agreement concerning some of their features, for instance, that they bring together interests drawn from more than one sector to produce agreement; they have collective aims and a strategy to achieve them; they share risks, resources, and skills; and they achieve a common benefit and synergy.

The present paper concerns territorial partnerships, that is, forms of cooperation involving several actors whose common denominator is their connection with the same, relatively homogenous territory. The actors are close to each other geographically as well as symbolically. They have approximately similar experiences related to the economy, society, and culture of the given area. Such area-based partnerships are characterized by a formal organizational structure meeting decision-making and implementation needs, a merger of interests, the commitment of a range of different partners, and a programme of joint action (Geddes 1998; Shortall 2004). Local partnerships of this kind are believed to be capable of solving the diverse and interrelated problems of rural areas more efficiently than independent actors.

In transitional (post-authoritarian) states such as Poland (but also Spain at the turn of 1970s and 1980s), governance—meaning a system of policy-making—is still perceived as strange or ineffective. This has been noted in reference to Spain by Javier E. Pérez (2000); in reference to Poland by Marek Furmankiewicz et al. (2010, 2013), and Maria Halamska et al. (2010); in reference to Romania by Doris Marquardt et al. (2012); and in reference to Hungary by Ilona Pálné Kovács (2012). In such states, governmental structures are strongly dependent on conventional democratic mechanisms, especially those based on a majority vote. Effective mechanisms of societal self-organization are largely missing in these states and their third (civil society) sectors show many malfunctions. Therefore, governance theory—with all its spectrum of approaches—may have limited explanatory power as far as phenomena related to governance are concerned. This is the case for territorial partnerships, which are inspired by the idea of good governance and promoted by the EU’s policies, but which are called into being in conjunction with political conditions and mentalities inherited from transitional societies’ previous stage of development.

The above reasoning leads us to path-dependency theory, according to which current institutional structures and functions are associated with decisions made in circumstances that no longer exist. This theory is the source of the first hypothesis referring to the innovation of TPs, which are seen as “forced” structures that easily “accommodate” themselves to pre-existing traditional, hierarchical patterns of decision-making. Notably, the path-dependence approach “rejects the traditional postulate that the same operative forces will generate the same results everywhere in favour of the view that the effect of such forces will be mediated by the contextual features of a given situation often inherited from the past” (Hall and Taylor 1996: 941). The neo-endogenous approach, adopted by the LEADER Programme, “whereby top-down programmes meet bottom-up approaches to development” (Dargan and Shucksmith 2008: 286), seems to take into account the above proposition—the operative forces are top-down programmes (the LEADER Programme), while the social and political conditions of implementing LEADER projects (the contextual features) are bottom-up approaches.

Path-dependence has been confirmed by the experience of TPs in post-authoritarian regimes (Chevalier et al. 2012; Marquardt et al., 2012), but it appears also in certain “old” EU member-states. For example, in the case of Germany, “LEADER projects have only taken up ideas that have been discussed and used before in other policy contexts, changing them only so that they conform to the budgetary logic of EU policy” (Bruckmeier 2000: 224).

Members of partnerships know the rules and practices of collective, public action. Therefore, the stakeholders act in a way that, by their premises, is appropriate and expected of them by those whom they represent, the community as a whole, other stakeholders, and the monitoring institutions. This is why liberal democracy (and its mechanisms) is more widely accepted than deliberative democracy, which is closer to the idea of governance in general and of partnership in particular. The above reasoning (the second hypothesis) is anchored in the “logic of appropriateness” as elaborated by normative institutionalism, which states that government agencies “are carriers of cultures, missions, values, and identities” (March and Olsen 1989: 114) and has also been articulated by Marek Furmankiewicz (2012: 272), who noticed that introducing new institutional frameworks for territorial partnerships faces “the problem of de-institutionalising old ways of working, whether bureaucratic or deriving from a tradition of strong public administration.”

Polish TPs, in the example of the LAGs, are rather utilitarian “constructions” (the third hypothesis); their actions are based on calculated decisions and to a lesser degree on responses to obligations and duties, as stated by March and Olsen (1984). The TPs are used in a manner and for aims that are not entirely consistent with the objectives inherent in the LEADER approach, which is their original framework. This hypothesis derives from rational choice institutionalism, which suggests that “the relevant actors have a fixed set of preferences (...), behave entirely instrumentally so as to maximize the attainment of these preferences, and do so in a highly strategic manner that presumes extensive calculation” (Hall and Taylor 1996: 944–945; see also: Diermeier and Krehbiel 2003).

The utilitarian attitude towards TPs was also identified by Javier Pérez (2000: 203) in reference to TPs in Spain: “(...) many local actors perceived the writing of the Business (‘Rural Innovation’) Plan as merely a formulaic procedure to gain access to new public

funding”; or by Petra Derkzen (2008: 75) in reference to TPs in Wales: “In the first phase, a common vision and common interest in the Objective One monies served as a binding element in the rural partnership.”

In reference to rural TPs in Poland, the calculation is directly related to EU funds: the partnerships are ready to fulfil the conditions to qualify for EU financial support not because they believe this form of cooperation is productive and generally beneficial for community development but because it is indispensable for them to compete for EU finances. This hypothesis seems also to be shared, in reference to Poland, by Pascal Chevalier and Marie-Claude Maurel (2010), as well as Maria Halamska et al. (2010).

Local Development as a Policy Field and a Driving Force behind Territorial Partnerships

The Sub-Carpathian region, where the LAGs under study are located, is predominantly rural, but the productive potential of its agriculture is low due to the high fragmentation of arable land. Small farms (up to 2 hectares) make up 39% of all farms, which is more than in any other region of Poland. Sub-Carpathia also has the lowest percentage of households in which the main source of income is agriculture—12.2 % (GUS 2013).

As of December 31, 2013, 2,129,294 people live in the region; 58.8% of them reside in rural areas. 259,686 people (12.19% of the region’s population) are employed in agriculture (mostly farmers and their families). The region has a relatively high share of young people (up to 35 years of age) when compared to other regions of the country (45% in Sub-Carpathia, 43.5% in Poland). However, the outflow of young people affects the demographic structure negatively, generates problems in the labor market, and reduces the competitiveness of the regional economy (GUS 2014a).

Social capital, measured by the number of NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants, is relatively high in the Sub-Carpathian region when compared to other regions and the country average. Nationally, the average was 21.7 active NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants in 2012; Sub-Carpathia’s average of 23.8 was the third highest among all regions (GUS 2014b). Scholars also report that the region has high social capital measured by other indicators (e.g., trust in others) (Tuziak 2013: 279–280).

The social problems of rural parts of the Sub-Carpathian region—the low degree of urbanization, the increasing number of elderly or retired residents—are a challenge for the region’s authorities. Furthermore, these circumstances are a serious test of the policies of the national government, which decided to launch a special Operational Programme (OP) “Development of Eastern Poland.” Between 2007 and 2013, the OP was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The OP has attempted to achieve the following main aims: 1) to stimulate development of a competitive, knowledge-based economy; 2) to improve access to broadband Internet in Eastern Poland; 3) to develop selected metropolitan functions of eastern regions’ capitals and cities; 4) to improve the standard and accessibility of transportation networks in Eastern Poland; 5) and to enhance the role of sustainable tourism in the economic development of the eastern regions. Moreover, the OP’s objectives include the development of interregional infrastructure and improvement of the capaci-

ties of urban areas. The OP has focused on supporting rural areas and local development to a much lesser extent. The problems of the latter have been largely left to the regional and local authorities, who, with some support from the Rural Development Program, are supposed to mobilize their own resources in order to advance local development policies. Territorial partnerships are one of the instruments of this policy.

Research Methodology

Local Action Groups are an example of TPs. At the time the research was conducted, there were 338 LAGs in Poland. They covered 89% of the territory of the Republic of Poland (amounting to 93.22% of the areas entitled to be supported by the Rural Development Programme) and were inhabited by 91.29% of Poland's rural population (44% of the entire population of the country) (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2009).

Creation of the LAGs was associated with the following objectives (which are frequently referred to as the "LAG formula"): a) the targeting of rural areas not exceeding 150,000 inhabitants; b) the adoption of a formal structure making them legal entities; and c) the requirement that at least 50% of the partners represent the private and civic sector, including representatives of farmers, women, and young people, and their associations.

In this study, 31 LAGs situated in the Sub-Carpathian region serve as examples of TPs. The questionnaire was distributed among all members of all the LAGs in the region.² In 2011, 1,557 members were identified, although membership was distributed unevenly across the LAGs: the smallest had 20 members; the largest, 107 (only one other LAG in the Sub-Carpathian region had over 100 members). The majority of LAGs had between 40 and 60 members.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 closed and open questions. The questions concerned the persons who initiated and were participating in the LAGs; activity profiles of the LAGs and their objectives; the manner of co-opting partners into the LAGs; decision-making within the LAGs and their boards; consulting the LAGs' activities with their members and local communities; and future prospects for the LAGs.

Altogether, 518 members from 26 LAGs filled out the questionnaire. They constituted 33% of all the persons identified as being members of an LAG in the region. The lowest number of returns per LAG was 1; the highest was 41. The quantitative research lasted from March till November 2011. Selected findings of this investigation are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

Discussion of Research Findings

Local Actors in the TPs

The respondents represented different entities (table 1). The LAGs observe the principle of having at least a 50% share of non-public members. Respondents representing NGOs,

² Another questionnaire was distributed among members of the LAGs' boards (its results were discussed in: Pawłowska 2012). In this paper, the results of that questionnaire are referred to only occasionally.

businesses, individual persons, and other categories constitute 63.9% of the whole. Business actors are severely underrepresented, which seems to be a staple feature of TPs in Poland, as has been revealed by previous research. For example, a study conducted in 2009 indicated that in a sample of 46 LAGs from all over Poland the share of business partners was only 13% (Knieć 2010). The high share of individual partners—constituting over one third of all members in the Sub-Carpathian LAGs—seems to be a peculiar feature of Polish LAGs. This means that those respondents legitimately represent only themselves. In fact, to become a member of a LAG they usually need the support either of other members or of local residents. Especially in the latter case, such persons may—in their own opinion and in the opinion of their neighbourhood—represent the whole community.

Table 1
Share of Different Types of Entities Among Respondents (%)

Local governments	26.6
Federations of local governments	1.4
NGOs	19.7
Businesses	8.1
Individuals	34.4
Other	1.7
ND	8.1

Source: own research.

An interesting feature, which has been noticed during reviews and carefully investigated by other researchers, is the dual identification of some LAG members (Halamska et al., 2010; Furmankiewicz 2013). Dual identification is understood here as representing an NGO or business in the LAG, while being at the same time a municipal employee or councillor. This situation makes representation of private and civic-sector interests dubious. On the other hand, in Michael Kull's study (2008: 205), which revealed that several members of the German LAGs he investigated were working for the public administration, this "multipositionality," as he calls it, was perceived by the respondents as an advantage, due to the professionalism of those members.

The Architects of the TPs

The core mission of LAGs is to author, update, and implement strategies for local development. Since the overall responsibility for local development rests with the local government, it would appear that the local authorities are the partners who are the most interested in TPs. Almost three quarters of our respondents declared that their TP was established by local authorities (table 2). Slightly more than a dozen respondents indicated an NGO as the architect of their LAG. Just a few respondents indicated an individual person and even fewer mentioned a business partner as an initiator of the partnerships. The important position of local authorities in the creation of partnerships was confirmed in nationwide research into TPs, in which 44% of respondents indicated local governments as the architects of their LAGs (Knieć 2010: 19). The principal role of local authorities has also been noticed in

Table 2

Entity that Initiated LAG (%)

Local government	74.8
NGO	12.4
Representative of local business	1.9
Individual	4.8
Hard to say	5.9
Other	0.2

Source: own research.

other parts of Europe, for example, in Northern Ireland, where two thirds of LAGs were initiated by local governments (Scott 2003: 285).

The dominant position of the local authorities is due to several factors in addition to their above-mentioned interest in the TPs, that is, 1) the local authorities are knowledgeable about EU programmes; 2) they have better relations with the regional authorities (who are the LAGs' monitoring institutions) on a daily basis; 3) local administration has better access than other partners in the LAGs to the necessary organizational, personal, and financial resources. These advantages were also indicated by the German respondents in Kull's research. Furthermore, they prized the exceptional role of members from the public sector (Kull 2008: 205–206).

The Premises for Founding TPs

The respondents usually indicated more than one reason for the creation of their LAGs. The decisive factor was local needs (table 3). However, nearly half of the persons surveyed pointed at the need to institutionalize territorial cooperation in order to gain access to financial resources offered by the EU. Only every fifth respondent mentioned a tradition of previous cooperation at the local level as the basis for present collaboration within the LAG formula. It has to be admitted that at the time of the study the community capacity³ of rural Poland was weak—civic organisations were less numerous and smaller there than in urban areas. Even farmers' organisations, which are frequently mentioned as leading partners in LAGs in other EU countries (Derksen 2008), were not active in representing the interests of local agriculture.

Local authorities perceived LAGs as an alternative source of financing for various local activities. Pascal Chevalier and Marie-Claude Maurel (2010: 38) openly state that “the majority of local officials are convinced that the LEADER Programme is a good business.” According to them, this “godsend” from the EU “can support the construction of the infrastructure indispensable to their municipalities.” This was the primary motivator for a number of civic organizations as well.

³ Community capacity is defined as “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of the community.” (Chaskin et al., 2001: 7).

Table 3

Prerequisites for Choosing the LAGs' Profile^a (%)

Natural features of LAG's territory	37.4
Local needs	74.8
Rich traditions of local cooperation	20.9
Prerequisite to institutionalize local cooperation to get financial support	46.5

^aSelection of more than one answer was possible.

Source: own research.

Decision-making in TPs

The overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that decisions were made in the LAGs by way of voting (table 4). A vote seemed the easiest, cheapest, and least time-consuming manner of making decisions during the LAGs' general meetings. The number and diversity of the LAGs' members might make other forms of reaching a consensus more difficult and time-consuming, as supported by the fact that only 9.8% of the respondents indicated "achieving a consensus without voting" as the decision-making procedure of their LAGs. Members of the LAGs' boards were also asked the same question. The LAGs' boards are small bodies (of 3–10 members) where conclusions can be arrived at in a consensus-like manner. Nevertheless, 90.3% of the respondents admitted that their board's decisions were reached by voting and only 17.2 % pointed to a consensus.

Table 4

The Way of Decision-making in LAGs^a (%)

Voting	92.8
Getting consensus without voting	9.9
By circulating the decision draft	1.8
Hard to say	2.3
Other	0.2

^aSelection of more than one answer was possible.

Source: own research.

This result can be interpreted as an old-school attitude to decision-making that has been copied and/or preserved from the normal, predominant political practice in local representative bodies in Poland. On the one hand, it might be supposed that neither the partners nor members of the LAGs' boards are familiar with alternative decision-making procedures. On the other hand, it is possible that even if they are familiar with the idea of "managing" local partners through the process of consensus-building (and have the necessary skills), they might consider the procedure too troublesome. Furthermore, it might be supposed that even if they were ready to undertake this burden, they might be concerned about running into the problem of accountability—decisions made by vote are perceived as credible. Moreover, such decisions are easier to verify, while decisions that are the result of a long process of negotiations can easily be questioned and contested.

The above considerations reaffirm earlier findings described in the literature on the subject. In researching LAGs in Northern Ireland, Mark Scott (2003: 291) noticed that “Often, inexperienced community interests expressed difficulty in adapting to partnership meetings, suggesting the need for participants to develop partnership-working skills and for partnerships to embrace commonly agreed practices rather than adopt procedures familiar to a single group of stakeholders.” It is, however, necessary to remark that in the proceedings of the research reported in the present paper, no special expectations of either stakeholders or monitoring institutions concerning “partnership meetings” or “partnership-working skills” were identified.

The Persistence of TPs

In the opinion of the majority of the respondents, their LAGs would not have been created without the EU’s financial support (table 5). For the majority of the local actors, the EU’s funds constituted the most important incentive to create partnerships. On the other hand, it was confirmed that in the case of the several groups that had had previous experience with pooling and combining resources in the framework of a partnership of three sectors the LEADER Programme simply provided an additional opportunity to gain new resources and develop. However, based on the quantitative research, in respect to nearly all the LAGs studied, generally no one would have thought of establishing a TP focused on rural development had it not been for the EU’s external stimulus.

Table 5

Would LAGs Be Created Without Financial Support from EU? (%)

Yes	6.4
No	68.3
Hard to say	23.4
Missing data	1.9

Source: own research.

In comparison to the respondents’ opinions concerning the likelihood of the creation of their LAGs without external stimulus, opinions were more ambivalent in regard to the LAGs’ future following the cessation of EU support.⁴ Almost one half of the respondents chose the answer “hard to say” (table 6). Yet one third seemed to have no doubts that their group would continue to exist. This might be evidence of a high degree of satisfaction with the LAGs’ activities and their merger into the local communities.

Conclusions

LAGs in the Sub-Carpathian region follow the requirement of having at least a 50% share of non-public members. If LAGs did not meet this requirement they would simply not

⁴ The research was conducted at a time when the essentials of the succeeding EU programming period (2014–2020) had not been identified. Neither the researchers nor the respondents were aware that the LEADER Programme would be continued in the new formula of Community-Led Local Development.

Table 6

Will Your LAG Survive After Closing EU Financial Support? (%)

Yes	31.9
No	17.8
Hard to say	48.3
ND	2.1

Source: own research.

benefit from the Rural Development Program, which in turn would undermine their *raison d'être*. This leveled share of public and other sectors in LAGs seems false, though. The excessively high share of individuals among the members might be a proof of the weakness of rural NGOs at the time the research was conducted, as well as of the dual identification of some LAG members, which gives agents of the public sector greater representation than might appear from membership records. This finding supports the hypothesis of the logic of appropriateness.

The core responsibility for local development rests mainly with local authorities—they are responsible and accountable for the well-being of their local communities. They are also usually the first to take the blame for evils such as unemployment, poverty, the low incomes of local enterprises, the poor state of local roads, etc. Therefore, the idea of counterbalancing their impact on local affairs is checked by this key responsibility of local governments. The LAGs under study were created predominantly on the initiative of local authorities, and such initiatives were facilitated by the existing legal regulations, the local authorities' know-how and the resources at their disposal, and by traditional ways of perceiving the (local) government's role as the legitimate addressee of all societal expectations and claims.

The supremacy of local authorities in the LAGs determines how the partnerships are run, especially with reference to their decision-making procedures, which are typical of representative—and not participatory or deliberative—democracy. Being closer to the model of liberal democracy, real-life partnerships in rural Poland stand in contradiction to some of the basic tenets of governance. They are path-dependent rather than oriented toward innovative procedures. What seems ground-breaking is the formula of using the partnership itself as a platform for bringing together individuals from different sectors. This advantage is only ostensible, though, as decision-making anchored in liberal democracy denies the core principle of a partnership, i.e., consideration of the interests of all the partners.

Although the TPs were the result of a bottom-up initiative, what was critical for their emergence was the LEADER Initiative and the related financial resources. The hypothesis on the utilitarian attitude of the stakeholders to their partnerships is moderated, however, by the shortage of other financial resources and the immense needs of local communities (these were indicated as the reason for choosing the LAG profile by three quarters of the respondents in the present research). And even though only slightly more than 6% of respondents agreed (versus over 68% who disagreed) that the TPs would have emerged without external financial support, the percentage of those who believed that the TPs would endure without it rose to almost 32%, while those who disagreed fell to almost 18%. This particular result

partly undermines the hypothesis on the utilitarian attitude—TP stakeholders apparently value LAGs as more than just a way to raise funds.

In summarizing the research findings and on that basis projecting the future of TPs, it can be concluded that the LEADER Programme was indubitably a driving force for the TPs, as were local authorities, who simply took this opportunity to obtain additional resources for the development of their communities. To do so, they had to adjust their activities in accordance with external requirements. The process of building partnerships and the partnerships' further operations could be called "domestication," which in respect to this particular phenomenon signifies action according to the logic of appropriateness. Nevertheless, when TPs begin to operate, acting according to the logic of appropriateness restrains their opportunities.

Adherence to the logic of appropriateness will result in TPs having a low degree of self-sufficiency in financial and organizational terms. Although the EU has provided LAGs with funding till 2020, the further duration of the funding is dubious unless the TPs undergo endogenous change. TPs must find their own objectives, logic, and formula for action, and should reach for EU programmes only when additional support is needed.

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Biographical Note: Agnieszka Pawłowska, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at the University of Rzeszów, Poland. She is the Head of the Department of Public Administration and Public Policy and the Head of the Institute of Political Science there. She is Fulbright fellow and the fellow of Kosciuszko Foundation. Her research and publications are focused on e-government, comparative local government, governance and partnerships in the public sector.

E-mail: apawłowska@ur.edu.pl