Abstract

The increasing role and significance of social capital in the process of integrated territorial development underscore the importance of alternative forms of development management based on networks and voluntary collaboration, exemplified by territorial partnerships for development.

A notable instance of such formalized partnerships are local action groups (LAGs) and local fisheries groups (LFGs) established under the EU LEADER initiative, which involve local stakeholders representing all sectors of socio-economic life. The success of this innovative, bottom-up approach to development founded on tri-sectoral territorial partnerships has led to the widespread adoption of the LEADER as a tool for stimulating local development processes.

With the proliferation of territorial partnerships, their enhanced role in local development policy, and the increasing responsibility for implementing strategic documents and managing the development of the areas covered by these partnerships, it becomes particularly important to understand the conditions that influence the functioning and development of these organizations. Accordingly, the research problem addressed in this thesis pertains to the essence of the functioning of formalized territorial partnerships, as well as defining their actual role in stimulating local socio-economic development. In this context, the objective of this study is to identify the role of territorial partnerships and the strategies they employ in stimulating local socio-economic development.

The central hypothesis of this research posits that territorial partnerships, as instruments of decentralized, territorial, and participatory approaches to local development, significantly influence local socio-economic development. This hypothesis is complemented by a secondary assertion that tri-sectoral territorial partnerships operating in rural areas primarily contribute to local development within the social sphere. The final hypothesis indicates that the scope of objectives and actions undertaken by these partnerships, encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions, is contingent upon the needs reported in the local environment.

In addition to a comprehensive review of national and international literature, as well as strategic and programmatic documents from the European Union, the country, and the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, field research was conducted. This involved direct interviews with 30 managerial representatives and 38 staff members from local action groups (LAGs) and local fisheries groups (LFGs), as well as a survey completed by a randomly selected group of 88 members of territorial partnerships and 46 representatives from the councils of LAGs and

LFGs. The study encompassed representatives from all twelve territorial partnerships operating within the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

The research findings confirm the significant role of territorial partnerships in stimulating socio-economic development within cohesive local systems. The results indicate that the effectiveness of development-oriented processes is contingent upon the ability to valorize and convert local resources into territorial capital, particularly the capacity of partnerships to stimulate, create, and accumulate social capital, as well as their proficiency in establishing effective structures for local governance.

As observed, the activities of local action groups (LAGs) and local fisheries groups (LFGs) operating within the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship contribute to the creation of networks facilitating mutual interactions among diverse entities within local systems. This occurs through the establishment of new connections among organizations, institutions, and individuals of varying statuses and educational backgrounds, representing different groups and communities. By engaging representatives from the social, economic, and public sectors, as well as stakeholders involved in the formulation and implementation of local development strategies, territorial partnerships play a crucial role in addressing complex social and economic challenges. They enhance the management of local resources, thereby stimulating socio-economic development.

The findings further indicate that the activities of territorial partnerships contribute to an overall enhancement of living conditions. The positive effects of the implemented local development strategies are particularly evident in the social dimension, encompassing cultural aspects. Substantial improvements have been documented in infrastructure development, as well as in cultural and social offerings, alongside initiatives focused on promoting the region and fostering local identity. Moreover, it has been observed that local action groups predominantly stimulate engagement among representatives from the social sector. The research shows that LAGs and LFGs allocate less attention to supporting local entrepreneurship, promoting economic activation of residents and implementing environmentally sustainable solutions.