

THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ON CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF POLISH VILLAGES

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This paper presents selected issues related to changes occurring in the landscape of the Polish countryside, resulting from an increase in the use of European Union funds. The article discusses traditional rural area development, its most important contemporary transformations and examples of the impact of projects implemented with the use of EU funds. The aim of the research – to analyse of EU spending for rural architecture and landscape projects in Poland and to propose measures to eliminate negative such projects preparation and execution results. The research method is based on an analysis of data originating from official reports and statistical data. The analysis of data covers period 2007–2013. The authors of the article proposes to improve the process of projects preparation, conciliate this with the rural landscape and building architects.

Key words: contemporary transformations, European support funds, rural landscape, traditions, village.

JEL Codes: O18, R00, R51.

1. Introduction

The notion of a “rural landscape” describes an area constantly being developed by agriculture, with farming crops as the predominant feature of this landscape (Zaniewska, 2000). Additionally, it makes up a significant element of the cultural heritage. With planting systems created by local inhabitants, it makes it possible to learn about the past, local traditions, culture and communities living in a given area (Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz, 2005). Polish village is identified with homestead, wooden hut, surrounded farmlands. The charming space that is filled with folklore and traditional crafts.

This paper describes rural areas and presents some examples of EU funds and their effect on changes in the Polish landscape.

The aim of the research – to analyse of EU spending for rural architecture and landscape projects in Poland and to propose measures to eliminate negative such projects preparation and execution results.

The effect of EU funds on changes in the contemporary rural landscape is huge, although it has not yet been thoroughly investigated and described. Many of the implemented investments evoke mixed feelings among the visual users of a space. The investments are evaluated on the basis of their usefulness, and the aspect of their aesthetic value is considered only as a secondary issue. The inhabitants are glad to have new paths, amphitheatres and open air gyms, yet many of those investments, because of errors committed at the design stage, instead of significantly improving the quality of space, actually resulted in lowering its visual value. Numerous reports and literature written on the subject of this research have analysed the impact of subsidies on the general development of rural areas and agriculture in individual provinces, mainly in social and economic terms. However, no detailed research has been conducted so far as on the effect of the EU funds intended for rural areas in Poland on changes with regard to spatial aesthetics. The development of rural areas and improvement of their aesthetics are facilitated by financial support from the European Union. Despite this, in recent decades there is a noticeable disorder in rural areas. Therefore, the theory is that European funds, despite many positive effects, do not always have a positive impact on the landscape.

Research methods are based on analysis of statistical data from Polish Statistical Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and implemented activities in European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Program. The analysis of data covers mainly period 2007–2013. It is the time of the last completed RDP edition from which the final reports were prepared. Data is supplemented with more recent information from partial reports from the currently ongoing edition of the EAFRD 2014–2020 program. Moreover, the analysis of specific investments realized with EU funds was made and their impact on the landscape was identified.

2. Research results

2.1. Rural areas in Poland – general informations

Rural areas cover a prevailing part of the area of Poland. In 12 out of 16 provinces, the share of rural areas exceeds 90% of their total area. The highest percentage share is recorded for the province of Warmia and Mazury and the lowest for the province of Silesia (an industrial region) (Table 1, based on Central Statistical Office of Poland (2014). With reference to 2006, a significant decrease in the area of rural land has been observed (by 26.7 thousands ha).

The rural area in Poland consists of 1566 rural communes and 608 urban and rural communes with 52 thousands localities. Rural areas are inhabited by almost 40% of Poland's population – 15.3 million people. In 2014, an average rural locality had 290 inhabitants (Central Statistical ..., 2016).

Table 1. Rural areas in the total area of the provinces in Poland in 2014

Province	Total area, thousands, km ²	Rural areas, thousands, km ²	Share of rural, areas, %
Dolnośląskie	20	18	89
Kujawsko-pomorskie	18	17	95
Lubelskie	25	24	96
Lubuskie	14	13	95
Łódzkie	18	17	94
Małopolskie	15	14	89
Mazowieckie	36	33	94
Opolskie	10	9	92
Podkarpackie	18	17	93
Podlaskie	20	19	95
Pomorskie	18	17	94
Śląskie	12	9	69
Świętokrzyskie	12	11	94
Warmińsko-mazurskie	24	24	98
Wielkopolskie	30	28	95
Zachodnio-pomorskie	23	21	94
Total	313	291	93

Social and economic development of rural areas is evidently differentiated, with the highest degree of development demonstrated by the western part of the country and the peripheral areas near the cities. The same areas are characterized by a high degree of urbanisation and multifunctional agriculture (Drygas, 2014). Taking a closer look at the coverage of rural areas in Poland, it can be observed that the largest part consists of arable land (17.8 million ha). A large area is also occupied by forests or covered with trees and bushes (9.2 million ha). Developed and urbanized land, such as residential or industrial areas and roads, cover a relatively smaller area (1 million ha) Percentage coverage of rural areas in Poland: farmland – 61%, forest land – 31%, build-up areas – 4%, other – 4%. (Central Statistical ..., 2016).

With current changes in development of rural areas, it is important to preserve publicly accessible greenery. As of 2014, publicly accessible greenery covered 10.9 thousands ha. This included parks for walking and relaxing (5.7 ha), squares (2.8 thousands ha) and housing estate greenery areas (2.5 thousands ha). Different types of publicly accessible greenery in rural areas of Poland in percentage terms: strolling-recreational parks – 52%, lawns – 26%, street greenery – 10%, green areas of the housing estate – 12% (Central Statistical ..., 2016).

2.2. European Union funds

More than half of the population of EU Member States inhabit rural areas, which cover 90% of the European Union territory. Consequently, rural development is regarded as a priority task (Polityka..., 2008). The emphasis on a coherent rural development strategy in the EU as a whole is placed for the efficient management of

rural areas. The purpose and scope of the EAFRD assistance is defined. EU rural development policy focuses on three key areas: agri-food economy, environmental protection and the broader understood economy and rural population. (Council Decision, 2006). Aid from the EAFRD is implemented through the close consultations between the Commission and the Member State and the authorities and bodies designated by the Member State under national laws and practices (Council Regulation, 2005).

The European Union supports economic development of all EU states through five main funds: the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development addressed directly to rural areas. The EAFRD is divided into four priority axes: Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, Axis 2: Improvement of the environment and the countryside, Axis 3: Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy, Axis 4: Leader. Each of them has been assigned specific instruments.

The Rural Development Programme is intended for the support and implementation of activities for the benefit of rural development with the participation of means from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, two editions of the programme have been completed: RDP 2004–2006 and RDP 2007–2013. Another programme, intended for the years of 2014–2020 is currently being implemented. By 2015, more than 778 thousands applications for financial aid were submitted. Approved for the implementation were more than 394 thousands of operations. By the end of 2015, 9% of the Program budget was contracted. (Ministry of Agriculture ..., 2016).

By the end of 2013, over 6.342 millions of applications were submitted under the Programme (Figure 1). By the end of the reporting period, 5.961 millions of operations were approved for implementation and disbursed payments amounted to PLN about 52 billions (more than 71% of the programme budget) (Ministry of Agriculture ..., 2014).

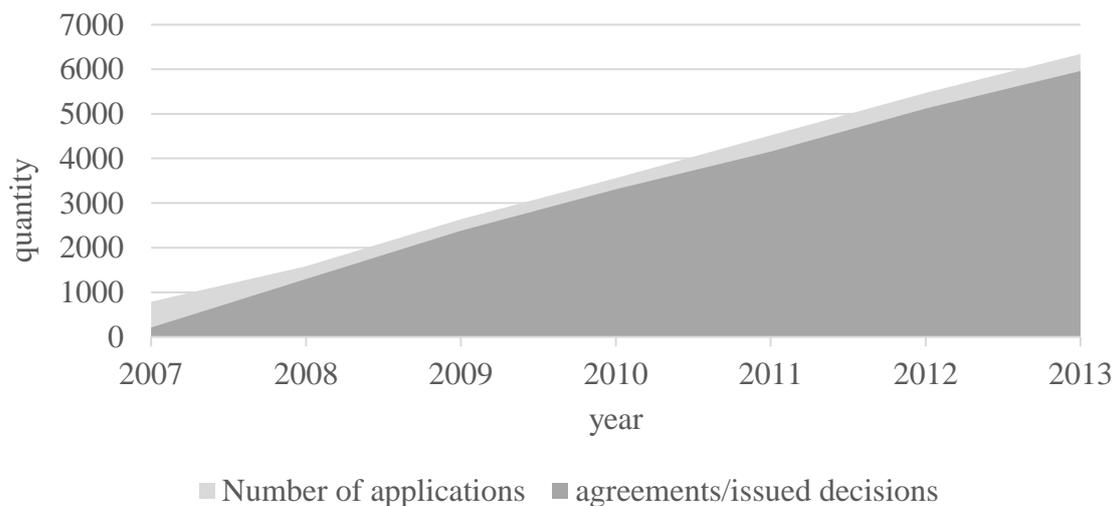


Figure 1. Number of applications and contracts within the EAFRD 2007–2013

Priority Axis 2 – Improvement of the natural environment and the countryside is the most popular, with about 6 millions of applications, in which payment was disbursed in the amount of 4 billions EUR*. Most payments were made in the province of Mazovia –1716.7 million EUR* (Ministry of Agriculture ..., 2014).

Table 2. Implement payments with regard to each axis of the EAFRD 2007–2013 fund

Name of EAFRD axis	Number of applications (thousands)	Approved operations (thousands)	Implemented payments EUR* (millions)
1. Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector	262	185	5447
2. Improvement of the environment and the countryside	5925	5707	4069
3. Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy	88	38	2073
4. Leader	63	28	363
Technical assistance	3	2	140
Total	6341	5960	12092

Significant funds allocated to each axis influenced at the development of rural areas in Poland. The RDP was responsible for about 0.63% GDP growth (data of 2006–2015), which was higher than predicted (WYG PSBD a). There have also been improvements in many other areas such as job creation, especially in the non-agricultural sector, environmental quality, quality of life. Each of them affects the landscape directly or indirectly.

2.3. Contemporary transformation of the rural landscape – a case study

Recent decades have featured a distortion in typical rural development. The main reasons for these changes include a willingness to achieve multifunctionality and allocation of the land for other purposes apart from agriculture. Currently, the countryside is the main area where new places for residential development are being sought (Kulczyk-Dynatowska, 2012). This results in the destruction of former spatial systems, which had been developed through a long-term process. Geometric forms of developmental arrangements, squares and streets have been introduced and many new buildings often do not suit their surroundings. What can commonly be observed is the major transformation of buildings with traditional architectonic values (Photo 1, 2). The public space is enriched with areas whose purpose had not been previously present, such as e. g. playgrounds. Additionally, a reduction in the amount of agricultural land has been observed and, consequently, liquidation of green fields, which are precious from the landscape point of view.



Photo 1. Traditional building –
Open-air museum in Sanok
Photo M. Antolak (September 2007)



Photo 2. Contemporary buildings –
Lipowo village
Photo M. Antolak (August 2011)

The popularity of using EU funds has resulted in numerous implementations, in which both positive and negative examples can be found. One of the positive examples of using EU funds is the implementation of a set of activities related to investment, repair, maintenance and museum work for the management of the Grunwald Battlefields (Photo 3, 4). The project was implemented in 2007–2013. As a result of the project, a new reception building was constructed, along with a parking site and communication routes, permanent entertainment area and a social and sanitary facility building with a campsite. Apart from that, the Monumental Unit was modernized, together with the construction of the water, sewerage and electrical infrastructure and renovation of the battlefield chapel ruins. The investment was financed by the European Regional Development Fund (sub-measure 2.1.6. Cultural infrastructure). The investment suits the local landscape and the facility is popular with tourists. The problem is the periodical attractiveness of the complex, which is visited by crowds of tourists only once a year. Additionally, next to the quite interesting new development, temporary facilities of low aesthetic value emerge (tents, stalls, etc.).



Photo 3. Grunwald Fields after the restoration process related to obtaining EU subsidies
Photo M. Antolak (May 2015)



Photo 4. A museum building in the Grunwald Fields and an unsightly tent with a temporary exposition
Photo M. Antolak (May 2015)

Another example of an investment carried out with EU funds is the project entitled “Development of the SPA function of the Provincial Rehabilitation Hospital for Children in Ameryka through construction of the rehabilitation and treatment infrastructure”. The investment was implemented in 2010–2014 and subsidized under the Regional Operational Programme Warmia and Mazury 2007–2013. Under the investment, the forest area surrounding the Hospital was comprehensively developed and fitness trails and paths for walking treatment and oxygen therapy were constructed (Photo 5, 6). In the vicinity of the Hospital, kinesiotherapy parks, fulfilling the role of sensory integration gardens for children of various age groups were created, which feature, among others, slides, swings, balance beams, jungle-gyms, seesaws, ladders, spring riders, climbing walls and slopes, lines, interactive games and a fountain supporting sensory integration. The investment resulted in a significant intervention into the local landscape. In the forest complex surrounding the hospital, numerical landscape architecture elements were created, and a system of walking paths, the aesthetic value of which is disputable. The projects used catalogue facilities, whose gaudy form does not suit the surroundings.



Photo 5. The amphitheatre during implementation of the spatial management concept at the Provincial Rehabilitation Hospital for Children in Ameryka near Olsztynek

Photo M. Antolak (June 2014)



Photo 6. Forest walking paths and landscape architecture elements during the implementation of the spatial management concept at the Provincial Rehabilitation Hospital

Photo M. Antolak (June 2014)

Subsidies related to environmental protection under Regional Operational Programmes have become very popular in the latest years. The amounts of subsidies that can be obtained are so high that numerous investors became interested in this programme. In order to obtain the subsidies, they established foundations to become beneficiaries of the project. Projects are evaluated on the basis of previously-established criteria and the companies engaged to prepare feasibility studies for the projects became specialised in the appropriate preparation of the documents. The result is that the subsidies are granted to the investments with the best-written applications and not the ones which most deserved them. The topic of EU investments is exceptionally popular and widely discussed in Poland and abroad. Ex-post reports of the

rural development programmes indicate errors and inappropriate fund management. Ill-planned investments may ruin the finances of local governments. The real challenge is not to obtain the funds, but to maintain the investment in subsequent years.

The specific character has Axis 4 – Leader, in which the action is focused on bottom-up activity by local groups involvement in collaboration with specialists. Polish Groups of Local Development include 278 thousand km² of the country's area, representing 93.22% of the area eligible for RDP 2007–2013 support. The main principle of the Leader approach is to achieve spatial, historical, cultural, geographical and natural cohesion (Ministry of Agriculture ..., 2009). The purpose of the program is to increase the social potential in a country by activating its inhabitants. Therefore, the type of investment, its scale and location must be based on local needs and capabilities. Unfortunately, the ex-post report indicates that the half of the Local Development Groups do not carry out any research to check local needs. In addition, one quarter did not take any joint action with entities outside the Local Development Groups. Attention is also paid to the superficial approach to the projects implemented by the municipalities, treating the program as a source of additional funds for the implementation of own tasks. An additional barrier is the bloated bureaucracy and complicated procedures, as well as too long period of processing applications (WYG PSDB, b).

A serious problem related to contemporary investments financed by the European Union is the low aesthetic quality of implemented projects. In this case, it is important to use advisory services of specialists, such as landscape architects. It is important that those persons should be able to support project management to ensure that the project matches the surrounding landscape and follows its current nature, without introducing further disharmony. The problem emerges with the designer's supervision of the implemented project. Since subsidies usually cannot be obtained for this purpose, decisions are made omit it during the investment of the project. Deadlines for project implementation are short, which additionally affects their performance quality. The investor, who pays for preparation of project documentation, searches for the cheapest designer, which results in the lower quality of the study. Eligible costs cover only a small part of the investment, which leads to the fact that only the richest can afford obtaining the subsidies.

Subsidies awarded for forestation of the land are another way of obtaining funds that has become very popular in the latest years. They are applied for by private land owners, which leads to spatial chaos – a mosaic of questionable visual qualities. Selection of species is not consistent with potential plants, with pine and birch monocultures (usually unattractive in terms of the natural environment) selected for planting. Foresting leads to disharmony in the forest line and contributes to a reduction of the biological diversity of the area.

Conversion of local roads, accompanied by the construction of cycling paths along them, so popular in recent years, results in clearing precious roadside trees. Cycling paths deprived of trees to give a shade are not popular with tourists. The greatest investment of this type, carried out on a grand scale, was the Green Velo Eastern Cycling Trail which is about 2.000 km long. During the construction of the trail,

thousands of trees were cleared, and the new landscape architecture accompanying the route is clichéd and shoddy.



Photo 7. The low value of landscape architecture elements and errors in plant selection in a public space in the village of Węgój

Photo M. Antolak (July 2014)



Photo 8. Entry to the "Following Forest Spirits" educational path in Węgój

Photo M. Antolak (July 2014)

Some particularly interesting investments carried out with the support of EU funds include thematic villages co-financed under the local developmental strategies (RDP 2007–2013). Many localities ventured to implement interesting project solutions, related to the history of the region. A good example is the village of Węgój in the Warmia and Mazury Province (Photo 7), where an educational path, "Following Forest Spirits" (Photo 8), was created.

The assumptions of EU funding do not focus on the quality of the aesthetic landscape but more on and the development of the state by improving the quality of life in a minimal way. The analyzes and the partial and final reports are prepared in the form of reports and focus primarily on the presentation of the program implementation in the form of statements of money spending and the impact for example on economy, environment, climate and quality of life. Issues related to the landscape and the aesthetics of space are not their purpose. For the aesthetics of space responsible are officials at the municipality level, for example a spatial planner. However, the documents often leave many possibilities for interpretation. Because of that in most cases, the final result depends on the investor. In addition, rural areas which are historically valuable are protected by law. Unfortunately, for various reasons, the protection does not always cover the whole historical landscape, but only its individual objects.

Examples of inappropriately spent EU funds include plantations of invasive walnuts established in areas with unfavourable climatic conditions (Antolak, 2014). Great damage to the cultural landscape is also caused by thermal efficiency improvement of buildings, where a precious architectural detail is quite frequently lost under a thick layer of foamed polystyrene (Antolak, 2013). Many of the investments carried out are performed stereotypically using catalogue elements of landscape ar-

chitecture, with its colours, forms and scale unfit for the surrounding (football pitches, playgrounds, places of recreation and relaxation).

3. Conclusion

1. Transformations of traditional Polish villages are noticeable. These changes are motivated by political, financial, social, cultural, spatial and ecological factors. Subsidies for rural areas from the European Union became an additional driving force for those changes.

2. European funds indirectly influence on the landscape by projects. Projects implemented with the use of money obtained from those funds unquestionably improve the quality of living and working conditions. However, projects related to spatial development most often represent a low architectural level. The impact of those projects on the development of the rural landscape is often unfavourable and results in deepening the existing problems as regards rural development.

3. Most money is invested in places where an efficient leader and change-oriented authorities can be found and not where the money is really needed. Unfortunately, local leaders often prefer their own interests to the welfare of the general public.

4. Since the Polish entry into the European Union, there are strong, uncontrolled changes in the landscape which are caused mostly by:

- poor management of funds;
- low sense of aesthetics in society;
- introduction of many trivial ideas;
- eligible costs are not equal to demand;
- lack of professional consultancy.

5. In order to improve the analysed problem, the aesthetic education of society is important.

6. Because of that aesthetic education should be carried out from the youngest age. To repair errors indicated in the reports attempts are made. However, it is not possible to create regulations and scheme guaranteeing perfect project implementation in every case. Decisions belong to people and they should belong to them, especially in programs that underline bottom-up activities.

7. It is important to take advantage of expert advisory services such as landscape architects. It is important that these people, at all stages, have the opportunity to support project management in order to make conscious and harmonious changes to the existing rural landscape.

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**EUROPOS SAJUNGOS FONDUŲ ĮTAKA KRAŠTOVAIZDŽIO POKYČIAMS
LENKIJOS KAIMO VIETOVĖSE**

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Santrauka

Nepaisant teigiamos įtakos Europos Sąjungos finansinė parama turi ir neigiamų pasekmių besikeičiančiam Lenkijos kaimo vietovių kraštovaizdžiui. Daugybė investicijų netinka vietiniam kraštovaizdžiui. Įgyvendinant projektus, atsiranda statiniai, kuriems trūksta kaimo vietovėms būdingos estetikos. Architektūros elementai dažnai nesikomponuoja su vietiniu kraštovaizdžiu. Straipsnyje aptariamos problemos susijusios su besikeičiančiu Lenkijos kaimo vietovių kraštovaizdžiu ir jo pasikeitimus naudojant Europos Sąjungos skiriamas lėšas. Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizavus ES lėšų panaudojimo poveikį kaimo architektūros ir kraštovaizdžio projektams Lenkijoje, pasiūlyti priemonės išelminuojančias neigiamas tokių projektų rengimo ir vykdymo pasėkmės. Tyrimo metu analizuojami oficialių ataskaitų ir statistinių šaltinių už 2007–2013 metų duomenys. Straipsnyje siūloma tobulinti projektų rengimo procesą, derinti statinius prie aplinkos, žemės reljefo, spalvingumo, išlaikyti žmogaus ir gamtos sąveiką ir darną.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Europos paramos fondai, kaimas, kraštovaizdis, tradicijos, šiuolaikinės transformacijos.

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