

LOCAL ACTION GROUPS AS A NEW MARKETING ENTITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. A CASE STUDY FROM THE LUBELSKIE PROVINCE¹

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Abstract

This paper defines the scope and tools used within the framework of a marketing function, particularly including communications by Local Action Groups (LAGs). The aim of the research was to determine the significance of LAGs in the creation of a territorial product and the range of Public Relation (PR) applications by LAGs in the marketing communication of municipalities. This was achieved by means of a literature review, desk research and the analysis of documents including those that directly regulate the functioning of all 22 LAGs from the Lubelskie Province during the 2014 to 2020 period. According to the research results, the marketing activities of LAGs constitute a combination of activity with respect to product development and PR, activity related to the creation/development of tourism products and their promotion. The marketing activity of LAGs is a synergistic reinforcement of the marketing activity conducted by individual local governments in the area of product development and shaping of the image. LAGs are an entity actively participating in PR. They also enhance the catalogue of PR tools used by the administration of rural municipalities.

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**LOKALNE GRUPY DZIAŁANIA JAKO NOWY PODMIOT AKTYWNOŚCI
MARKETINGOWEJ SAMORZĄDÓW GMINNYCH.
PRZYKŁAD WOJEWÓDZTWA LUBELSKIEGO**

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Abstrakt

W pracy określono zakres i narzędzia funkcji marketingowej, w tym szczególnie funkcji komunikacyjnej lokalnych grup działania (LGD). Celem badań było określenie znaczenia LGD w kreowaniu produktu terytorialnego oraz zakresu wykorzystania PR przez LGD w komunikacji marketingowej gmin. Cel zrealizowano dzięki przeglądowi literatury, desk research oraz analizie dokumentów, szczególnie dokumentów bezpośrednio regulujących w perspektywie 2014–2020 funkcjonowanie ogółu 22 LGD w województwie lubelskim. W świetle wyników badań działania marketingowe LGD stanowią połączenie aktywności w zakresie rozwoju produktu i PR, aktywności związanej z tworzeniem/rozwojem produktów turystycznych oraz ich promocją. Działalność marketingowa LGD jest wzmocnieniem synergicznym aktywności marketingowej pojedynczych samorządów w obszarze rozwoju produktu i kształtowania wizerunku. LGD stanowią podmiot aktywnie uczestniczący w PR, a w tym w event marketingu, wzbogacając katalog stosowanych przez urzędy gmin wiejskich narzędzi PR.

Introduction

Public policy and the role it plays in stimulating and targeting socio-economic development should lead to the creation of space for intensive social interactions. The pre-requisites for the success of development policy are: the inclusion of a wide array of stakeholders to its programming and implementation as well as the creation of a network for the coordination of development activities, which requires appropriate and coherent measures to be taken in the fields of: public communication, accessibility, freedom of information, local media, education, as well as the creation and animation of public space. In Poland, the intensity and effectiveness of activities taken by public authorities are oriented in a very weak way. Local government should receive systemic support in conducting development policy that uses endogenous potential. One of the elements of the support system is the practical application of the CLLD mechanism (Community-Led Local Development) which involves the creation of local development strategies and local partnership building (Local Action Groups) based on the experience of the LEADER approach (HAUSNER et al. 2013, p.102, 103). The complexity

of the processes taking place in the organization and its surroundings generates a need for interaction which exceeds the boundaries of that organization and even the boundaries of entire sectors. It is a circumstance for the development of cooperation between the municipal government and surrounding entities. Representative organizations in which municipal governments interact and cooperate with entities from outside this sector are Local Action Groups (LAGs). They are units dealing with the implementation of the LEADER initiative into life. Within this framework, the collaboration of three sectors takes place: public, private and non-government. The LEADER programme began in 1991. However, due to Polish social reality, LAGs appeared in 2004 after Polish accession to the EU. In Poland, LAGs are becoming the main partner for municipalities in terms of providing support for rural development. Local development strategies, which have been implemented by the LEADER groups, constitute an important source of support to ventures that have been undertaken in the rural municipalities; as well as to initiatives addressed to municipalities and other groups of residents (BRODZIŃSKI 2010).

This paper aims to identify the scope and tools of the marketing function, particularly including the communication of Local Action Groups (LAGs) as a new entity in the rural space. The aim of the study was to determine the significance of LAG marketing activities in the creation of a territorial product, and the range of PR applications by LAGs in the marketing communication of municipalities; as evidenced by the case of LAGs within the Lubelskie province.

Specific goals included:

- defining the importance of territorial marketing in the activities of local governments in rural communes;
- the characterization of marketing by local governments in rural communes within Poland;
- presenting examples of marketing activities of LAGs in Poland during the 2004–2013 period;
- the characterization of implemented and planned marketing activities of the studied LAGs in the financial framework of 2014–2020.

Materials and Methods

The aim was achieved with the use of literature analysis, document analysis and desk research. The analysis of documents included, among others, documents that directly regulate the functioning of all 22 LAGs from the Lublin region (LAG statutes, and Local Development Strategies of LAGs from 2014 to 2020, mostly including communication schemes). LAG websites were used as additional sources of information. The collected material was analyzed statistically by using descriptive statistics. Graphical data presentation was used.

Place Marketing in the Activity of Municipal Governments

In the search for the grounds of a marketing orientation of municipalities, a reference to KOTLER and LEVY (1969, p. 15) needs to be made. They define the concept of marketing as „a function of organization that can keep in constant touch with the organization’s consumers, read their needs, develop “products” that meet these needs, and build a program of communications to express the organization’s purposes”. In accordance with the accepted assumptions, place marketing covers the same elements which are used in business marketing i.e. product development, price, distribution and communication. The entities to which the concept of place marketing relates include: territorial subdivisions and their unions, territorial units of particular socio-political, economic, environmental and tourist importance such as frontier zones, euroregions, national parks, as well as individual owners of territories (KAMIŃSKI 2012). The fundamental space for the development of place marketing remains the municipality, since that is where the local government authorities are closest to the residents.

When we think about “rural place marketing”, it should be stressed that rural areas are more vulnerable than cities and metropolitan areas to changes in economic business cycles, affecting welfare, tourism and investments (ANDREOTTI, MINGIONE 2014, CAPELLO et al. 2015). As rural areas differ from cities and metropolitan areas, in terms of resources and vulnerability, it could be argued that these areas would benefit relatively more than cities and metropolitan areas from successful place marketing (DOMINGUEZ GARCIA et al. 2013, RAUHUT KOMPANIETS, RAUHUT 2015). This was stressed by RAUHUT KOMPANIETS, RAUHUT (2015, p. 9–11) who said “to place market a small rural town or a rural area thus requires: a clear strategy or plan, the target audience(s) must be identified as they can be assumed to be few and not so numerous, the unique selling points must be clear and well-articulated, and, finally, the agents to carry the good image of this place must be identified and they must be willing to be agents. Thus, the place marketing of a rural place requires significantly more effort to succeed, but is in no way impossible”.

By undertaking marketing activities, a municipality will create a marketing concept of a product, and it will shape its price, organize its distribution and undertake promotion measures. Effectiveness and efficiency of applied tools of the marketing mix depend on the subject matter and on the aim of the actions as well as on the developmental determinants of the municipality. The highest efficiency of consumer impact lies in the product of a municipality. Price as an element of the product does not indicate a high effectiveness in marketing activities of municipalities due to their non-profit nature. Promotion is of particular importance while distribution is less significant (IWANKIEWICZ-RAK 1997). W. Kuźniar was correct when he wrote that even the best product will not

flourish on the market if the clients are not informed about its attractiveness and do not feel the urge to purchase it (KUŹNIAR 2012a).

Promotional activities are generally intended to serve as a starting point for further application of marketing in rural communes. Simultaneously, based on the experience of the functioning of local governments in rural communes, the marketing activities focused mainly on promotion. These local governments displayed a low level comprehensive approach towards marketing. What is more, the concept of marketing in local government offices was often equated to promotion (GUZAL-DEC 2009, PARKER et al. 2015).

In Poland, the actions of local governments with regard to promotional activities stems from the fact that promotion is assigned to each individual municipality (Ustawa z 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie terytorialnym, DzU z 1990 r., nr 16, poz. 95). In practice, and in a broad sense, promotion is addressed as being a communication policy between the organization and its environment (FLOREK, AUGUSTYN 2011). The marketing communication system, in the case of a territorial local government unit, includes a set of measures and major tools which are used to communicate with the local community, to promote its image and to provide the community with the information that characterizes its socio-economic profile. This includes its assets, attractions, achievements, objectives, justifications, as well as strategic and tactical decisions (BARCZAK 1999).

Analysis of the literature related to place marketing makes it possible to assume that the most crucially important for the promotion of Local Government Units (LGU) are activities related to public relations and advertising, while the remaining tools of the promotional mix are of less importance and are applied in a rather selective manner (NIEDZIELSKA 2011). The specific role of public relations stems from the fact that the scope of its addressees is much wider than the scope of recipients to whom advertising or other forms of promotion are addressed (CZORNIK 1998). In order to define public relations in the context of a tool that is used to promote LGU, it can be assumed that PR constitute “conscious, intended and long term actions aimed at creating a positive image of LGU through effective communication between local government authorities and the environment as well as by gaining trust and acceptance of the public for the initiative launched by them, which could lead to economic development and recovery” (FLOREK, AUGUSTYN 2011).

Considering the extent and character of the marketing actions of the municipal governments, it should be recalled that KOTLER (2004) said that one of the most important values for an organization is the partner relationship it has with the surroundings. For a municipality, partnership in internal as well as in external contacts will become an important priority for action. What is more, it will constitute a strategic development strategy (GUZAL-DEC 2009).

With respect to local authorities, public relations are the tool of partnership marketing implementation. PR involves the creation and maintenance of a two-way communication with the environment as well as the provision of information

concerning the authorities' actions and its advantages (POKRZYCKA 2006). Actions with regard to PR should be primarily focused on the maintenance of contacts with the media, giving publicity to the activities undertaken by local government, maintaining good relations with investors, neighboring municipalities, higher education institutions and other organizations; as well as on fostering positive relations with residents of the municipality. The above-mentioned actions can be achieved using the PR tools described by (NIEDZIELSKA 2011):

- events (outdoor events, commemorative events, contests, festivals), sponsorship, patronage of local government authorities over the selected cultural and sports events, etc.;

- establishing and maintaining good relations with the media, in particular with: the press (press releases, interviews, documentaries, press statements, press conferences, sponsored articles), television (documentaries concerning the development of LGU, videos), radio (documentaries, broadcasts, discussions with experts), using the Internet and social media networks in communication;

- own website, own publications (newsletters), publishing monographic elaborations and promotional movies concerning the LGU;

- symposia, seminars, conferences dedicated to e.g. local/regional development;

- developing a system of communication with the immediate and more distant environment;

- giving publicity to and explaining the development strategy of LGU and the policy of the local government board; disclosure of information on local spatial management plans;

- building partner relations with the investors and preparation of information and promotion materials, co-organization of or participation in fairs and exhibition events, maintaining regular contacts with institutions of economic promotion;

- organizing meetings between local authorities and representatives of opinion-building groups, conducting systematic opinion polls, especially among the residents;

- creating Citizens Requests and Complaints Bureaus, helplines;

- developing a visual identification system of an office and information system of the municipality;

- cooperating with partner towns, lobbying for the support and promotion of LGU interests at the supra-local level.

The activity of municipal governments that are targeted toward the promotion of the territory, in order to achieve synergy, should be supported by the actions of other entities either directly or indirectly, and should formally or informally deal with the promotion of LGU (KUŹNIAR 2012b). According to CZORNIK (1998), among such entities are: entities whose promotional activity stems from tasks that were imposed upon them; entities whose actions contribute to the promotion of the region and are oriented on attaining individual objectives; entities whose goals are to promote the region as an element that contributes to profit;

and finally entities whose promotional activities are not profit-oriented, but rather are an expression of „local patriotism”. With regards to the municipality and at the local level, promotion activities are implemented by local associations, foundations, and municipal authorities. These actions are supported at the regional level through the activity of local and regional tourist organizations, local action groups (LAGs), or higher level authorities of territorial units, as well as authorities under their jurisdiction e.g. the Regional Agricultural Advisory Centers (KUŹNIAR 2012b).

Studies of the marketing activity as undertaken by Polish rural and rural-urban municipality offices (POKRZYCKA 2006, GUZAL-DEC 2009, GUZAL-DEC, ZWOLIŃSKA-LIGAJ 2011, POMIANEK 2011, KUŹNIAR 2012a, ANDRUSZKIEWICZ, SCHULZ 2016, SCHULZ, ANDRUSZKIEWICZ 2016) have so far indicated that:

- marketing activities were only occasionally subjected to strategic planning, and follow-up of the efficacy of the marketing tools used was administered sporadically;

- marketing occupied the edges of the organizational unit of the office as well as in its training policy, it was a common practice to combine various competences of the persons involved in the promotion and to allocate marketing responsibilities to different units;

- the scope of cooperation in terms of counselling and guidance provided by entities that specialize in marketing was fairly minor;

- rural communes provided modest amounts for marketing activities, given the fact that most of these expenses were spent on promotion²;

- there is a scarcity of, if not a lack of, regular opinion polls;

- PR, similar to other marketing activities, is still underestimated by local governments;

- the most popular form of formal social communication was the use of promotional tools/ means of information transfer such as: billboards, websites, and the press; as well as municipal festivals, which were often organized on the occasion of town days such as during the harvest. Meanwhile, the least used PR instruments were: participation in competitions, publishing of local magazines, organization of meetings & conferences, and participation in fairs organized for the promotion of municipalities. Moreover, an analysis of promotional tools found a lack of systematic activities, such as the limitation of promotional activities with regards to the tourism product. This was seen as a lack of synchronization of promotional activities.

² The results of research, which was conducted by D. Guzal-Dec on 40 municipalities of the Lubelskie Province in 2004, showed that 80% of the share of marketing expenditures in total budgets was lower than 0.5% This was also indicated by I. Pomianek in her studies on 30 municipalities of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province in 2018.

Marketing Activities of Polish LAGs (Taking into Account the Example of LAGs from the Lubelskie Province)

The LEADER programme for 2014–2020, in line with the RDP guidelines for 2014–2020, aims to support Community-Led Local Development in rural areas through the preparation and implementation of Local Development Strategies (LDSs). From the perspective of this study, they are referred to as community-driven development strategies (*PROW na lata 2014–2020*). The functioning of LAGs during this period is governed primarily by a specific legal act (Rozporządzenie 2013, Ustawa z 20 lutego 2015 r. o rozwoju lokalnym z udziałem lokalnej społeczności, DzU z 2015 r., poz. 378). In accordance with the above-mentioned act on LAGs, these organizations operate in the form of associations involving representatives of the public, as well as economic and social sectors, with no interest group having more than 49% of votes at the decision-making level. At least 50% of the decision-making bodies should come from outside the public sector (outside of the local authorities). As required by the RDP for 2014–2020, at least 50% of the LDS budget dedicated to the sub-measure “Support for implementation of community-led local development strategies” is devoted for projects involving the creation or maintenance of job placements. LAGs may carry out: individual operations under applications submitted by beneficiaries other than LAGs, grant projects in which the beneficiary, LAGs, awards financial grants to other entities that have been selected by LAGs and “own” LAGs’ operations in which LAGs are the beneficiaries and operators of the operation, and finally collaborative projects with other LAGs from the home country and from abroad.

Among the specific objectives to which LAGs relate in their statutes and which derive from the RDP, there are records which authorize LAGs to engage in marketing activities in favor of the area they represent. These objectives relate in particular to: the development of local products, the preservation of local heritage, the development of public and non-commercial tourism, leisure or cultural infrastructure, and the development of local processing incubators i.e. infrastructure for processing agricultural products to make it available to local producers (*PROW na lata 2014–2020*). Under the statutory objectives assigned to these organizations in the area of their marketing activity, what remains to be done is the creation and development of the elements of the mega-product of the municipality, including LDSs, projects of cooperation, and other projects implemented by LAGs, which are organized or promoted by local governments. Within the afore-mentioned projects, local products and integrated tourist products are being created. The second area of LAG marketing activity is promotional activity, which refers to the tourism products that have been created. In the 2014 to 2020 period, the communication significance of LAGs has increased considerably through the introduction of communication plans to LDSs. Communication plans are used to promote LDSs, among others.

Research on the functioning of LAGs in Poland based on pilot phase experiences from 2004–2006, and from 2007–2013 and the present, indicates an increasing role of LAGs in marketing activity, as well as in the area of creation and development of the elements of the mega-product of the municipality and its promotion. Already during the PPL+pilot phase, the activity was demonstrated in³ (BOROWSKA 2009): initiating the creation of, processing or introducing products and services based on local resources including traditional and regional food products; development of services related to tourist traffic management and the development of tourism infrastructure; promotion, demonstrated most commonly in actions such as: organizing festivals, fairs, traditional product days, competitions, conferences, trainings, courses, meetings, lectures, educational and integration classes, realization of promotional events on the Internet, organizing cultural, recreational or sports events, publishing maps, folders, newsletters, catalogs, leaflets, brochures, albums and culinary books.

Research (KISIEL, GIERWIATOWSKA 2012)⁴ conducted among LAGs operating in the period 2007–2013 showed that the priorities for the activities of the groups (fundamental objectives and tasks formulated in their LDS) included promoting the region and tourism development (84% of indications). When it comes to the results of LDS implementation, promotion of the group activities (understood also as tourism development) was reported by almost 71% of the sample.

In the Lubelskie Province all rural and urban-rural communes have affiliated themselves with LAGs since the 2007 to 2013 period. As of 31.10.2016 in the Lubelskie Province, as many as 22 LAGs were functioning (<http://www.ksow.pl>, access 10.05.2016). The surveyed LAGs consisted of 5 to 17 local governments. The average size of the area of surveyed LAGs was 1,085 square kilometers (standard deviation – 482.73) and the average number of residents reached 62,119.50 (standard deviation – 28,091.13)⁵.

In all LAGs that were subjected to the survey, together with the implementation of the Community-led Local Development concept in 2014–2020, the current statutes have been updated. Analysis of the statutes of the surveyed LAGs indicated that among various statutory objectives, promotion of the area affected by the LAGs was included in all documents (22). In 19 statutes (86.36% of total) the development of tourism and agritourism was mentioned, while only in 12 of them (54.54%) the promotion of local, traditional and regional products was envisaged.

Local Development Strategies constituted the basic instrument for the implementation of the statutory objectives and, at the same time, they served as the specific strategic product. Two of the LAGs surveyed, in addition to LDSs, have also elaborated tourism development strategies, which is another product

³ At the end of the PPL+ pilot phase, there were 167 LAGs operating in Poland.

⁴ The primary data was obtained between September 4th and October 11th, 2011. The survey sample consisted of 147 LAGs that responded. The sample represents almost 44% of the entire population (335 LAGs were operating by the end of the 2007 to 2013 period).

⁵ Data of the Central Statistical Office as of December 31st, 2013.

created within the LAGs. This is not directly with the participation of the local government, but rather with the support of the promotional activities of the local incubators. Four of the LAGs surveyed, planned to set up local processing incubators⁶. In relation to the incubator offer, Krasnystaw PLUS Action Group has adopted a strategy of promoting local products under the joint brand of “Krasna Chata”.

Activities that develop and promote individual territorial products can be realized through various LEADER projects carried out by the LAGs, including, inter alia, cooperation projects. All surveyed LAGs planned to implement cooperation projects, including at least one with international cooperation. Apart from international projects, interregional and national intra-regional projects were also planned⁷. Most commonly (in 16 LAGs) there were 2 cooperation projects, in five of them – there were three projects and in one case – only 1 project. Analysis of the subjects of the planned projects indicates that all LAGs, which were subjected to the survey, planned, in the framework of the cooperation projects, to create and promote integrated tourism products and/or local products, of which four of the LAGs included both integrated tourism products and local products. In 19 LAGs (86.36% of the total) there were plans to create integrated tourism products (culinary trails can be pointed out as a good example).

According to RDP guidelines for 2014–2020, PR activities (in relation to LAG activities and LDS implementation) should be included in the running cost budget and LAG activation⁸. The budgets for the LAG communication plans ranged between PLN 13,200 and PLN 113,336, with an average of PLN 81,588.64 and a standard deviation of PLN 95,427.25. The surveyed LAGs were very different in terms of funds allocated to communication plans (the coefficient of variation was above 100). The analysis of the relation between the budget of the communication plan, the running costs and the activation of the LAGs also shows that there is a high variation of the LAGs surveyed (the coefficient of variation was over 90%). These shares were in the range of 0.01 to 0.13. In the case of the analyzed relationship, the majority of the surveyed LAGs had a score below the arithmetic mean with a right skewed distribution. Nevertheless, irrespective of the level and diversity of LAG promotional expenditures, the budgets of the communication plans provide additional funding and opportunities to promote LAG member municipalities. Analysis of the communication budget share of a municipality, in the examined LAGs, indicates that this share ranged from PLN 2,200 to PLN 18,235.29.

According to the provisions of the communication plans, the LAGs used and planned to use a very diverse set of PR instruments (Tab. 1).

⁶ “Kraina wokół Lublina” Local Action Group – planned to set up 2 incubators.

⁷ An example of which is the project entitled “Canoe Trail on the Wieprz River” implemented by 7 local action groups from the region.

⁸ Under the “running costs and activation” sub-measure, LAGs can spend up to 25% of their LDSs budget.

Table 1

Public Relations instruments used by the LAGs in the Lubelskie Province

Type of PR instrument	Number of indications of use, where $N = 22$
Articles on LAG and municipality websites	22
Information and promotion publications	22
Information and consultation meetings in the municipalities of Poviats Labor Offices and lags	22
Profile on social media	22
Running the LAG website	22
Articles in the local press	20
Event for the residents	18
Counseling/trainings for beneficiaries	17
Information on notice boards at the premises of public institutions (municipal offices, Poviats Labor Offices, Municipal Cultural Centers)	16
Online questionnaires sent to beneficiaries	15
Questionnaires completed by participants of trainings	15
Tourist information posted on LAG websites	15
Information posted on social network sites	14
Printed and electronic training materials	11
Newsletters	9
Conference organization	9
Publication of reports on monitoring and evaluation of communication activities	7
On-line surveys	6
Study visits for beneficiaries	6
Contests	4
Placing virtual walk applications on LAG websites	4
Functioning of Mobile Information and Advisory Points of Idss	4
Trainings/information for local leaders	4
Interviews with the employees of LAG Offices	3
Consultation meetings concerning changes introduced into Idss	3
Organization of Entrepreneurial and Job Fairs	3
E-consultations	3
Meetings with representatives of disadvantaged groups	3
Information transmitted via the parishes	2
Information placed on notice boards in civil parishes	2
Interviews with the residents of the area on the occasion of events organized by particular municipalities	2
Radio announcements	2
Departure to and participation in fairs	2
Spots/ announcements in local/ regional television	2

Source: own elaboration based on LDS and LAG communication plans for financial Framework 2014–2020

An overview of the catalog of applied tools allows not only to extract some of their categories including: maintaining contact with the media, maintaining contact with the locals, public opinion research, information and training tools, tools that create an image of the territory, but also to state that they display a greater diversity in relation to instruments that are typical in the social communication of municipal offices. Based on this review, it can be noted that it is common to use the Internet and social media in contemporary communication. Through the LAG websites, including “virtual walk” applications, tourist information and the promotion of tourism products are also ensured. The tools used allow for feedback communication (which is a formal assumption of communication plans). Various means and channels of information transmission, tools for direct contact with the general public as well as with the representatives of social groups, including opinion leaders are used. It is quite common to organize training courses, conferences, and study visits that enable its participants to integrate and get acquainted with good practices. In all LAGs that were surveyed, or in the framework of communication plans or other activities, there were plans to organize events for the local community; for example there were collaborative projects. In six LAGs, there were plans to organize events related to the promotion of local products⁹.

Organization of marketing activities of LAGs is facilitated by the inclusion of this activity in the creation of the organizational structure of LAG offices. In the organizational structure of five LAG offices (22.7% of the total) the animation and communication units were differentiated. In one office, the post of municipal coordinator was established, while in the remaining LAGs the communication functions, apart from the LAG Managing Directors, were exercised by employees responsible for the coordination of LAG projects.

Summary

In light of the research findings, the previously formulated hypotheses should be positively verified as.

Marketing activities of LAGs are a mix of product development and PR activities as they combine activities related to the creation/development of tourism products and their promotion. All LAG planned cooperation projects involved the creation and promotion of local products and/or integrated tourism products. The communication plans served to promote all the projects planned to be implemented under the LDSs.

⁹ eg.: “Zielony Pierścień” Local Action Group organizes the Local Product Festival and created a Local Product Center. It also implements a project entitled “Promotion of the sub-region networking through the creation of a network of 11 bicycle friendly places and 7 Local Product Chambers as well as publishing a publication popularizing questing.”

Local Action Groups contribute substantially to the creation of integrated tourism products and gradually to the formation of sub-regional territorial brands. Most of the surveyed LAGs planned to create integrated tourism products. What still requires a greater popularization among LAGs is the need to indicate the opportunities and benefits of branding.

Local Action Groups as organizations, which involve the cooperation of municipal governments with entities from public and economic sectors, not only apply tools used in public communication of municipal authorities that have a formalized character, but also tools which are endorsed and used as a means of communication by businesses, residents or non-profit organizations. The catalogue of the applied PR tools includes more modern tools in relation to the catalogue of communication activities that are typical of municipal governments. The use of social media is very common, but at the same time more traditional while still being very effective. These forms of communication are being maintained in rural areas such as e.g. “altar announcements”. Communication plans include two-way communication tools as well as monitoring and evaluation of undertaken communication activities.

The marketing activity of LAGs is a synergistic reinforcement of marketing activities of individual local governments in the area of product development and shaping of the image. The limited employment capabilities of LAG offices (not all offices have identified a communication manager position) evoke the need for support in terms of marketing training¹⁰.

LAG marketing activity requires further evaluation. Research is needed to document the tangible results achieved in product development and the analysis of reports monitoring the implementation of communication plans. It is necessary to study the public perception of LAG marketing activity. It would also be interesting to know in what direction LAGs will develop their municipal mega-products. It is not clear whether these will be done solely or as part of tourism products and associated sports and leisure activities, or whether they will also develop social products (by creating new non-agricultural jobs) and to what extent.

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¹⁰ such activities, e.g. for the Malopolska Province, are conducted by the Provincial Agricultural Advisory Center.

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