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Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

MAP Position Paper

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF RURAL AREAS



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Authors

ERDN | Katarzyna Gizińska

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Find out more about the Bieszczady Multi-Actor Platform in Poland!

<https://rural-interfaces.eu/maps/poland-bieszczady/>

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1. Summary and key messages

The Position Paper MAP Bieszczady is a position paper from MAP members from the Leski and Bieszczadzki poviats (the Polish administrative level corresponding to districts) within the Podkarpackie voivodship in Poland, bordering Ukraine and Slovakia. The theme of our research was the social dimension of rural areas on the example of Bieszczady region.

In the following sections, we describe the area studied, the definition of the "social dimension" according to MAP members, present data from social diagnoses and other strategic documents for the region, and then give the floor to the Bieszczady MAP members. We asked them about their needs in relation to the "social dimension" of the place where they live and work. They were invited to provide examples of good practice which respond to these needs and which can be implemented also in other areas of the EU, as well as making recommendations for future policies at the local, but also national and European level. Finally, in the 'Conclusions' section, we describe the key issues that were considered. The last section of the report is an appendix, which provides a description of the methodology. Despite previous assumptions in the DAP, we had to make subtle changes to the research and technical methods used in order to gain a deeper and better understanding of this topic.

We hope you will find the accompanying photos and quotes a nice touch, adding a new dimension to the topics discussed.

You are cordially invited to read PP MAP Bieszczady,

Katarzyna Gizińska & Barbara Wieliczko, *European Rural Development Network*

2. Introduction

This report aims to provide an overview of the objectives and sub-themes of the Bieszczady MAP and to clarify the relevance of the included themes in relation to the area represented by the MAP.

MAP Bieszczady sought answers to the following key questions:

- What are the needs and problems of the Bieszczady MAP area in relation to the theme "Social dimension of rural areas"?
- What are the policy interventions already in place and what are examples of actions taken by local actors to address these needs being implemented in the MAP area?
- What policy interventions (i.e. instruments, measures) are recommended by MAP members for implementation at local, regional and/or national level? How can the EU support these interventions?
- What are the knowledge gaps and what research projects are needed in this area?

MAP Bieszczady covers the area of two poviats - the poviats of Lesko (Leski) and Bieszczady (Bieszczadzki). These two poviats had been united since 1998 as a result of administrative changes in Poland, but were separated into two separate poviats in 2002 due to strong public opposition and protests by the residents of the Lesko poviat. The two poviats are considered together, because our study covers the broader Bieszczady Mountains. They are marked by the Polish-Ukrainian border on one side, the border with Slovakia on the other, the Beskidy Mountains on the left, and from above - the towns, which are considered the "gates of the Bieszczady" - Lesko and Ustrzyki Dolne, i.e. the capitals of the two poviats. This is a social border, not an administrative or geographical one. It is largely determined by the inhabitants' feeling that they belong to this area. However, these inhabitants are also diverse. Those living more to the north of the area refer to those living to the south as "mountain people". "People from the mountains" often say about those living outside the mountains that they in turn do not live in the Bieszczady, because they define the Bieszczady through the prism of the mountain range - the High Bieszczady Mountains. It is hard to deny that they are

right. On the other hand, however, imagined group membership is important here. People from outside the mountains want to be perceived as belonging to this area. Living in Lesko or Ustrzyki Dolne, they also feel like "citizens" of the Bieszczady, just like the inhabitants of Dwernik, Wetlina or Cisna (High Bieszczady/Otryt).

The inhabitants of the Bieszczady can be divided into three groups based on the length of time they have lived in the area. This division was outlined on the basis of interviews, and the typology - referred to several times in different places in the study area (both in the High Bieszczady and 'lowlands):

- **Pnioki (trunks) / Old inhabitants** - indigenous, rooted inhabitants who have lived here for "a long time" (at least 2 generations); this is the least represented group due to the specifics of the area - first the nightmare of World War II, pogroms against the Jews, and then the displacement of the indigenous inhabitants - Boykos, Ukrainians, Ruthenians. There are virtually no indigenous inhabitants here. What remains are the abandoned villages that one tries to save from oblivion - e.g. Hulskie, Krywe, Tworylne, Jaworzec, Zawój as well as fruit trees that grow in various places where there used to be villages.
- **Krzoki (bushes)** - migrant residents who have lived here for some time but have not yet 'put down roots', do not feel like people 'from here', even if they are perceived by the local community as being 'here' and have lived here for several decades. Even people who were born here (they are in their 30s, 40s, 50s) sometimes do not feel they are residents 'from here'. However outsiders from the area perceive them as if they were true 'pnioki'.

"Even though I have lived here since I was born, my children live here, I don't feel "from here." Because before us, there were other residents here - such as the displaced Boykos during Operation Vistula. So can I say that I am from here?"

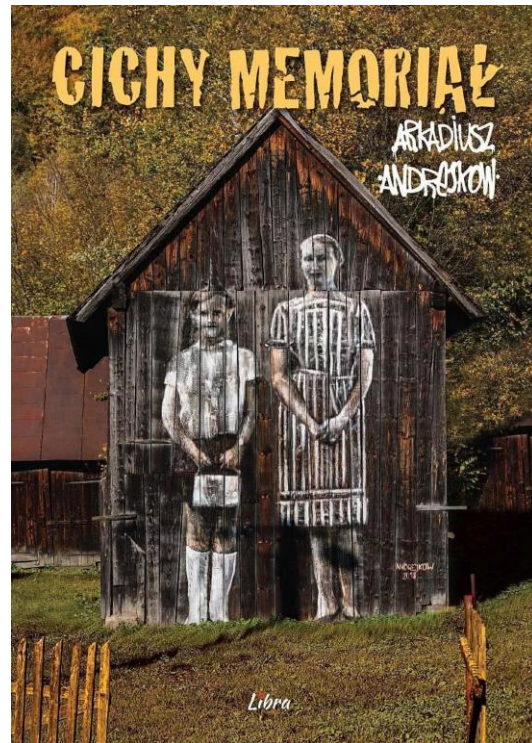
- **Ptoki (birds) / New fry (some arrived during the Covid-19 pandemic) / "Zawołoki"** (a term from the Solina area) - **new, incoming residents**. Perceived a little as strangers and a little as their own. "Krzoki" and "Pnioki" look at them a little with reserve, because they don't know if they will stay here for long and what their intentions are, and a little perhaps with hope, because they know that partly to become a "krzok" you had to be a "ptok". They are the ones who often bring a breath of fresh air, new social capital and an eagerness to make the place they have chosen to live even more pleasant and better. "Birds" mostly come here from other parts of Poland because they have grown fond of the Bieszczady Mountains, want to escape from the hustle and bustle of the cities, from the rush, from the eternal deadlines, and have the power within themselves to create change.

"When the pandemic started it was suddenly our professional work in the city stopped. Therefore, we thought this was the time. We bought a plot of land here earlier and decided to sell our house in the city and build our new life here."

It should be noted that the Bieszczady is dominated by "birds" and "bushes", which means that the driving force of the area are the people who have largely chosen to live here, rather than this being imposed on them. That is to say, these are people who know what life in the Bieszczady Mountains entails, since they choose to "make their place on earth" here. They know the difficulties, they know the hard living conditions, and they have humility before the forces of nature, before nature. No electricity, no high-speed internet access, no mobile phone coverage, snow-covered roads, no infrastructure, no paved access roads to their homes, not infrequent lack of access to sewage systems or running water. Noteworthy, during the Covid-19 pandemic period quite a few new 'birds' appeared in the Bieszczady Mountains. A second new wave has been observed since 23 February 2022 - since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, but this is specific to the whole of Poland, although here an influx of Ukrainians has been very strongly observed due to the fact that it is a border region.

It is noteworthy that the inhabitants of the Bieszczady Mountains do not run away from the difficult history of these regions and want to pay tribute to the pioneers who were here before them. One such example is

the "Silent Memorial" project by Arkadiusz Andriejkow, an artist from Sanok, whose aim is to create "deskals" (murals on wood) - on the boards of old barns, wooden buildings, the artist "reproduces" an old photograph of the former inhabitants of the area.



Source: Zatwarnica, Końkret Cinema, July 2022 (photo: KG) / Cover of the book "Cichy Memoriał" (Libra Publishing House)

Social dimension of rural areas - definition

Before we go any further, we would like to draw attention at this point to the scope of this report. We decided to ask MAP members for a definition. They understand the "social dimension of the Bieszczady" as:

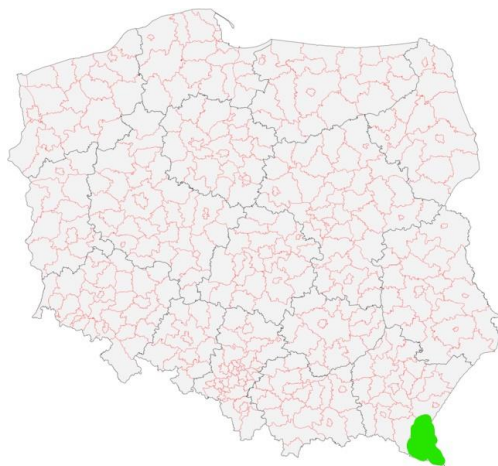
- **what one does with other people**, usually in one's free time (leisure activities) - joint activities, excursions, activities, 'shared' breathing during a class e.g. yoga, meetings, trainings, workshops, concerts, festivals, house parties, bonfires, planting trees, cooking together;
- **what you do for other people** (social activities) - projects (culture, education, nature, tourism and others), activities of NGOs, KGW ("Koło Gospodyń Wiejskich" means Rural Housewives' Circle), OSP ("Ochotnicza Straż Pożarna" means Volunteer Fire Department), creating spaces for integration, recreation, meeting; helping others;
- **local businesses**, i.e. business inspired by tradition and natural assets (e.g. crafts, regional products, tourism);
- participating in the **cyclical nature** (nature is the 'someone' we meet).

In the course of further research, the greatest emphasis in the definition was placed on social activities, child/youth-oriented activities, leisure activities and entrepreneurship/work.

3. Current situation based on research and evidence

The Bieszczady MAP area is located in the Podkarpackie Voivodship, in South-Eastern Poland and includes part of the Eastern Carpathians (The Bieszczady Mountains) and The Bieszczady National Park. It covers an area of 2 poviats (Leski, Bieszczadzki). It is a borderland of the European Union (Polish-Ukrainian border) that is why this region is ethnically diverse. The Bieszczady are the most sparsely populated area in Poland, for many years' neglected and far from large urban centres.

One of the key problems of this region is the highest unemployment rate in Poland (Leski Poviast - 16.7%, Bieszczadzki Poviast - 14.9% compared to Poland - 6.2% at the end of 2020), the quality of life, negative migration balance, isolation, poverty, low population density.



High Bieszczady / Orthodox Church ruins in Krywe

	Leski Poviast	Bieszczadzki Poviast
Population	26 375 Women - 50.7% Men - 49.3%	21 489 Women - 50.7% Men - 49.3%
Area	835 km ²	1 139 km ²
Population density	32 person/km ²	19 person/km ²
Migration balance	-21	-109
Average age of citizens	43,8	42,1
Urbanisation rate	22%	42,9%
Unemployment	16,7%	14,9%
Leading employment sector	1.Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing - 54.7% 2.Services - 10.2% 3.Industry, construction - 6.7%	1.Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing - 47.6% 2.Services - 13.4% 3.Industry, construction - 9.4%

Number of rural housewives' circles	2018 – 12, 2022 - 20 (+8)	2018 – 9, 2022 – 21 (+12)
Social economy enterprises	1	6

Source: GUS (2020), ARiMR (2022)

It should be noted that the MAP area is recognised as an area at risk of permanent marginalisation, as noted by the authors of the "Podkarpackie Voivodeship Development Strategy 2030". Therefore, measures aimed at reducing marginalisation are very important.

One such measure is to invest in the social sector and human resources. "Human resources are a strategic but heterogeneous factor in the development of the economy in a country, region, gmina (Polish administrative unit corresponding to municipality) or company. A given area may have valuable natural assets and a company may have productive and financial assets, but it will not be able to mobilise these resources, effectively and profitably, without the involvement of human capital. This is because people, through their personal and collective efforts, contribute to the realisation of the objectives adopted by economic entities and thus strengthen the competitive advantage of the region (enterprise) [Armstrong 2002, p. 19]". [Barwińska-Malajowicz A., Żegleń P., Ślusarczyk B. (2019).].

It is worth noting that the MAP area over the last few years (2018-2022) has seen a twofold increase in the number of rural housewives' circles (21 in total in 2018, 41 in 2022), which feed together with NGOs into the third sector, i.e. contribute to the development of social, but also economic capital in their local communities. The introduction of the Act on Circles of Rural Housewives at the end of 2018 formalised the activities of these organisations, giving them the possibility of applying for grants alongside other NGOs, including municipal funds, and as providing an annual subsidy for the activities of the circles (from PLN 5,000 to PLN 7,000 in 2022) from the Agency for the Restructuring and Modernisation of Rural Areas and Agriculture. This has also contributed to the renaissance of KGWs in the MAP area. This is one of the more colourful examples of the social dimension of rural areas. KGWs integrate, strengthen social ties, animate, educate, contribute to entrepreneurship, give participants new competences, and take care of local traditions.

4. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

The following section of the report is MAP's views and thoughts in terms of opportunities, needs, challenges, policy interventions, potential knowledge gaps and recommendations in relation to the topics discussed.

4.1. Identified needs

MAP Bieszczady members identified many problems and needs that affect the social dimension of this study area. Below there is a list of the most frequently mentioned issues:

1. Stopping the flight of young people from rural areas

Young people often start to leave their family homes in their teens. This is because, in the study area, children often have to commute several to several dozen kilometres to secondary school after their primary education. From then on, some children already start a gradual 'exit' and some of them choose schools much further away, in larger cities, also outside their powiat. The next stage is second-level education or getting a job. Access to universities and vocational schools is greater in provincial cities. Therefore, young people move even further away from their family homes; they find in cities jobs more easily and have more prospects. They do not see returning home as something attractive because they perceive a lack of career prospects.

This is hardly surprising. MAP members complain that there are no prospects for young people in the countryside, but they are not at all surprised by this. However, the lack of young people means that these areas are beginning to age, to become depopulated, with no one to take over the businesses they run.

"My son will soon go to high school in Lesko. It is 50 km one way... Therefore, wouldn't it be better if he had chosen a bigger city, since he has to leave anyway and will only come back on weekends? Because after all, what's the point of commuting."

2. Work: unemployment, job instability, seasonality

The next need most frequently mentioned by MAP members is the issue of stable working conditions and the possibility to work close to where they live. They also point out the seasonality of work in the tourism industry, in which a considerable number of them work. In addition to that there is the impact of external factors: the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine.

MAP members are local small entrepreneurs, often they are sole traders, but also activists and people employed in the so-called 'budget'. They all recognise that the key issue is to improve the labour market.

3. Lack of inclusive venues

MAP members note that there are few places that are conducive for residents to meet outside the home and that were open outside the tourist season (i.e. when they finally have some free time). Many villages have village halls, but not everywhere. The further 'away from civilisation', the greater the problem. One of the main obstacles cited as a limitation is that the distance from the community centre is too far for many residents, especially non-motorised and elderly residents.

The role of agoras, meeting places and information exchange is also fulfilled by shops in small towns. However, where population density is low, there are still places where there is not a single grocery shop (or shops only operate seasonally) and there is no pub, bar or meeting place in the evening, where you can take your friends if you do not want to spend time at home.

4. Needs of children and parents: range of activities, organised childcare for younger children, play areas, recreation zones

MAP members of all ages pay attention to the needs related to children and parents. They address the following issues:

- a. There is a shortage of crèches, kindergartens and other forms of organised childcare for smaller children - an issue raised in particular by those who have children and combine raising children with working. The lack of such places and, at the same time, the lack of family support for childcare is an obstacle to women in particular entering the labour market.
- b. There is a lack of playgrounds, playing fields, recreation areas and other places for children.

"There is nowhere to go with the children here. There are no playgrounds. How there are such multi-generational families that they have a common yard, three houses, grandmother, daughter, son and their children then the children play for hours in the yard. But we don't have that. It's hard without grandma and family."

- c. There is a lack of extra-curricular activities in schools - according to MAP members, this is due, among other things, to logistical reasons, because the school bus that takes the children home after school would have to wait longer for the children who stay for extra-curricular activities. And it would be at the expense of the other children who would not participate in such activities and would be at home later. Another reason is that there is a lack of commitment from the various actors to make such activities appear on school premises. There is a lack of motivation.

- d. There is a lack of winter/summer day care centres in the immediate vicinity. In large centres there is a wider range of activities on offer, the further away from the city the children are, the fewer opportunities for organised activities during the summer or winter break. As a result, parents are more burdened and have to combine work and childcare during these periods. Moreover, these are key periods in the tourism industry, where a lot of work is done to make a living in the low season, when there are no or very few tourists.

5. Low public participation

The issue of social participation concerns **two spheres** - both the formal, official one (participation in local and parliamentary elections, participation in village hall meetings, submitting one's candidature for a councillor, mayor or village leader), but also the less formal one, which involves NGO activities and voluntary work for the local community.

The members of MAP, although they themselves are active, involved people, notice among other residents less and less interest in social issues, less involvement in working for the local community. They explain that this is caused, among other things, by a lack of belief that their voice, their action matters, but also by a lack of knowledge of how certain processes work (e.g. what is the responsibility of the mayor, the gmina, the powiat, and what the residents themselves can do).

"People don't go to village meetings because they don't have faith that things will change".

From the accounts of MAP members, very few villagers attend village meetings, few people get involved in volunteering. We are beginning to see a trend that is occurring in the towns. More and more people are shutting themselves off from other residents, closing themselves off to the community, living next door. This is often the perception of new residents who have come to the area, bought land and treat living here as a business rather than a lifestyle.

"There are fewer activists. In spite of more support, in spite of the civic budget, grants, you see less involvement, nobody wants to give anything for free" (Statement by a local government official).

6. Adapting transport services to the needs of residents - this topic comes up all the time, also in a social context, as issues of movement in less populated areas affect relationships and social life.

The topic of local transport is raised especially when discussing the needs of older, non-motorised people. MAP members note that some villages have village halls, but older people are unable to get to activities, meetings because there is no one to drive them. Therefore, because of logistics, not because of a lack of desire or time, they cannot participate in the social life of their community.

7. Customised municipal office, closer to residents

MAP members note that many people find it difficult to get things done at the office - and again this mainly concerns non-motorised and elderly people. A very interesting example was given during one of the talks, which concerned the problem of low voter turnout:

"The day before the election, my husband walked up to a shop where a large group of residents were sitting and said he was buying everyone a beer. Everyone shouted 'hurray!' To which he further added: 'but on the condition that you go to the elections tomorrow'. Well, they weren't so cheerful anymore. Do you know why? Because it turned out that most of these people still had their old identity cards, booklets, long since expired. And they didn't need for so many years to replace them. Because why should they? Here, no one needs it. Most people don't have a car, and getting to Ustrzyki to the office is a whole day out of the calendar. And they won't go there. So they didn't go to the election not because they didn't want to vote. It's just because they didn't have valid ID cards."

8. Issue of availability of grants, funding for residents of peripheral areas

This theme emerges independently of the gmina. The following issues are highlighted:

- a. Smaller gminas, with a lower population density (which is what the MAP area is) often cannot apply for grants because they lose out in the scoring at the start due to the smaller number of people the project will cover.
- b. Smaller gminas often do not have a civic budget and have very limited budgets for NGO activities.
- c. Grants at the local level are dependent, according to MAP members, on familiarity and relationships with the municipal authorities.
- d. Residents do not know how to apply for grants - there is a lack of support in this matter (e.g. writing applications, programmes they can participate in, training).

4.2. Interventions and actions to date

This chapter presents examples of good practice identified by MAP members.

Table 1 - Bottom-up creation of places for integration on the example of the activity "Switching" Bieszczady Initiatives Association ["Przełączenie" Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Bieszczadzkich] (Lutowiska gmina, Bieszczadzki powiat)

Creating a place for integration, raising funds for statutory activities, creating a play area for children

"Switching" Bieszczady Initiatives Association / "Przełączenie" Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Bieszczadzkich

<https://www.facebook.com/przelaczeniebieszczady>

One example of grassroots efforts to create places for the integration of residents is the activities of NGOs, including 'Switching' Bieszczady Initiatives Association

The members of the Association leased a site on the San River from the Lutowiska gmina. They have tidied it up themselves, in a voluntary effort, and are gradually adding new facilities. For example, they built a shelter with a bread oven and a pizza oven. The shelter is used for meetings, workshops and film screenings. A fire pit is prepared next to it. In the high season, the area becomes a campsite, which is managed by the Association and the fees for using the site are used for its statutory activities. In the off-season, the area becomes a meeting place for local residents.

Planning is currently underway to develop an area for a children's playground, as there is no such place in the immediate vicinity. By the way, it is worth noting that the Association's activities are expanding.



Photos are from FB: <https://www.facebook.com/przelaczeniebieszczady> and from own collections

Table 2 - Bieszczad.SKI Wańkowa (Olszanica gmina, Leski powiat)

Social economy enterprise - Bieszczad.Ski Wańkowa (ski resort)

Need: combat unemployment, stop young residents fleeing, activate residents, support entrepreneurship

<https://bieszczad.ski>

One of the examples of actions taken cited by MAP members is that of a social economy enterprise which was set up in the Olszanica gmina as part of a revitalisation programme entitled. "Bieszczad-ski - a

revitalisation flywheel for the development of the Olszanica gmina". The value of the project was PLN 18,751,024.46, including EU funding of PLN 9,946,447.99 from the European Regional Development Fund.

The Olszanica gmina is a gmina that was not supposed to be on the map of Poland any more, it was supposed to cease to exist, but thanks to the joint efforts of local government officials, residents and entrepreneurs, it has managed to change this state of affairs. From a gmina that offered no prospects for young people, it has become a tourist destination with potential for investment.

The opening of a social economy enterprise in the form of the Wańkowa Ski Resort has been a positive stimulus, providing dozens of jobs, but also developing the entrepreneurial spirit of local residents and giving young people a reason to stay in their hometowns.

"A young man came to me whose parents live here and he has lived in Iceland for years. And he wants to come back. He wants to invest the money he earned there here and stay with his parents. Because he sees that the gmina is developing and there is potential. And he needs our support to advise. "

"Although, from a macroeconomic perspective, social economy activity is a niche complement to traditional entrepreneurship, this does not exclude the importance of these actors in solving socio-economic problems in local systems" (Wosiek 2018).

It is worth noting that the number of social economy enterprises is increasing in the MAP area. Recently one more was established in the gmina of Lutowiska: Bieszczady Sp. Z.o.o. It runs a school canteen in Lutowiska. It provides green area maintenance, cleaning and minor maintenance services.

<http://bazaps.ekonomiaspoleczna.gov.pl/gmina-12-243-1902-lutowiska.html>



Photographs: <https://bieszczad.ski>

tytuł projektu		kategoria	
Bieszczad-ski - rewitalizacyjne koło zamachowe rozwoju Gminy Olszanica		 rewitalizacja	
 nazwa beneficjenta PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWO ROZWOJU INFRASTRUKTURY GMINY OLSZANICA PRI SP Z OO	 program Regionalny Program Operacyjny Województwa Podkarpackiego na lata 2014-2020		
 wartość projektu 18 751 024,46 zł dofinansowanie z UE 9 946 447,99 zł	 działanie 6.3. Rewitalizacja przestrzeni regionalnej		
 Województwo podkarpackie Powiat leski	 perspektywa 2014 - 2020		

Source: mapadotacje.gov.pl

Title of the project: "Bieszczad-ski - a revitalisation flywheel for the development of the Olszanica gmina",
 Category: revitalisation, Program: Regional Operational Program of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship 2014-2020,
 Action 6.3 Revitalisation of regional space, Fund: European Regional Development Fund., Perspective: 2014-2020

Table 3 - Introduction of the civic budget on the example of the gmina of Ustrzyki Dolne (Ustrzyki Dolne gmina, Bieszczadzki powiat)

Need: increasing public participation

Ustrzyki Citizens' Budget

<https://www.ustrzyki-dolne.pl/strona-5287-vi-edycja-budzetu-obywatelskiego-gminy.html>

The gmina of Ustrzyki Dolne is an urban-rural gmina and is one of the first gminas in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship to introduce this type of social activation of residents.

PLN 100 000 has been earmarked for the first edition.

In 2022, the sixth edition of the budget took place. 3080 votes were cast. As part of the 2022 budget, 2 tasks were selected by residents for implementation:

1. Alleys, fencing and lighting - cemetery in Ustjanowa Dolna" PLN 100 000
2. "Green park of Ropienka" PLN 67 000

Table 4 - Project "SZANSA" (Project "Chance"), Local Action Group "Green Bieszczady" (Zielone Bieszczady)

Need: Increase digital competence of seniors, remove barriers related to movement between villages of older people, maintain intergenerational ties, two-way knowledge transfer grandparents-grandchildren

Local Action Group "Green Bieszczady" – "CHANCE project - new opportunities for adults" of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020

<https://szansa.lgd-zielonebieszczady.pl>

Grant value: PLN 691,928.16, including EU funding of PLN 652,419.06

Duration of the support model: from 01.09.2020 to 30.09.2021

Project formula: "The formula for the educational support model was innovative and involved young people (grandchildren of Project Participants, but also other volunteers) in consolidating knowledge,

Table 5 - Activities of the KGW (rural housewives' circles)

Need: increase public participation, integration of residents, professional activation

Thriving activities of rural housewives' circles

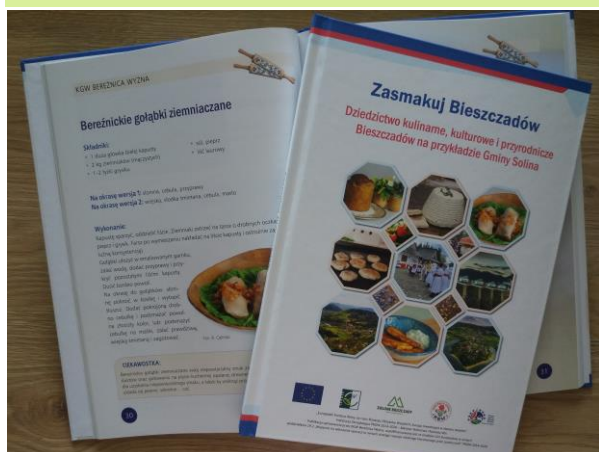
In November 2018, the Act on Rural Housewives' Circles came into force in Poland. Systemic support for the activities of KGWs from the Agency for Rural and Agricultural Restructuring emerged in the form of granting each entity registered in the KGW register an annual support, which in 2022 is between PLN 5,000 and PLN 7,000 (depending on the number of members). Read more:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/arimr/wsparcie-na-dzialalnosc-statutowa-kgw--nabor-wnioskow-na-ostatniej-prostej>

The example of the MAP area shows both in the statistics (21 in 2018, 41 in 2022), but also in conversations with MAP members that more village circles are emerging and experiencing a renaissance.

One KGW can be registered per village. It brings together mainly female residents of the village, but also other women and sometimes men. The role of KGWs cannot be overestimated. Such organisations have existed in Poland since the second half of the 19th century. They take care of the integration of local residents, create regional products (they also sell them, which becomes KGW's income), organise many activities for local residents, and pass on knowledge - e.g. the Circles from all over Poland were given the opportunity to financially support picnics promoting vaccination against Covid-19 in their community. Funding was provided by Agency for the Restructuring and Modernisation of Rural Areas and Agriculture.

In the MAP area, an example of such a Circle is, for example, the activity of KGW from Bereźnica Wyżna in the Solina gmina (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063865189806>). With the help of the LAG "Green Bieszczady" and the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, KGW members published a book with recipes entitled "Taste the Bieszczady. Culinary, cultural and natural heritage of the Bieszczady on the example of the Solina gmina". Recipes were collected from all the villages of the gmina. Such an activity had not only the role of saving old recipes and traditional dishes from oblivion, but also of integration between the inhabitants of different villages.



Photos: <https://www.facebook.com/wydawnictwo.edytorial/>
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063865189806>

4.3. Recommendations by MAP members

4.3.1. Recommendations for future rural policies

MAP Bieszczady members identified the following recommendations:

1. Retaining young people - creating the conditions for them to stay, so that they want to return after secondary school/study. Perhaps social economy enterprises, for example, could be the answer.
2. Ensuring stable jobs - not just seasonal ones.
3. Accounting and legal training for NGOs, KGWs - to improve their grant-writing skills and their ability to apply not only for municipal, but also powiat, provincial and European grants.
4. Exchange of experience, study tours - inspiration for local authorities, for NGOs, for local activists.
"You know what, it wasn't until we went on a study visit that we saw how others can do such amazing things. Before, we thought we were masters at what we do. But this visit showed us that we still have a lot to learn."
5. Openness of the local government to partnerships with local entrepreneurs and new ideas from residents.
6. Funding of grassroots initiatives e.g. in the form of small grants.
7. Giving space to grassroots, community-based activities. You do not need a lot of money here - often-even micro-grants of a few thousand zloty can do many good (organising an event for residents, creating a meeting place, buying equipment that contributes to integration). Making a meeting room available is also a good idea.
8. Taking seasonality into account - during 'tourist' periods, residents are overloaded with work and do not have much space for social activities. They think about it "out of season" and then it is easier for them to write applications. Therefore, application deadlines should address this.
9. Support for social economy enterprises should be tailored to the specifics of a given area, a given gmina. For example, social enterprises performing well on the market should be supported in terms of strengthening their participation in e.g. public procurement, management, and those with a weaker position should be strengthened internally (e.g. through training).
10. Realising the potential of older people who are nearing the end of their working lives and have a high level of social capital.
11. Transporting seniors, excluded people to community centres for activities - to remove the significant barriers of activities being too far from the participants' place of residence
12. Residents need to be made more active, to stimulate their untapped social energy.
13. Increase awareness of the need to support the building of social capital and raise awareness of social processes among residents.
14. The creation of a mobile office (driving to the residents) - so that official matters can be dealt with in one's own neighbourhood without having to spend a whole day travelling several dozen kilometres to the office one-way.
15. The issue of EU grants/grants to local authorities:
 - In order to increase public participation at local government level, there should be an additional score awarded to gmina/powiat projects involving an additional partner in a project (community partner).

- Avoid making the award of grants dependent on a conversion factor based on population density a not to leave out peripheral, sparsely populated areas.

4.3.2. Recommendations for future research programmes

MAP members identified the following knowledge gaps or research project proposals:

- Knowledge of social economy entrepreneurship in the MAP area
- It is recommended to increase the level of knowledge about the possibilities and ways of cooperation between the social economy sector and business and NGOs.
- Adaptation of support to NGOs, KGWs to the needs of these organisations

Conclusions

The main conclusion of the SHERPA research in MAP Bieszczady, which was emphasised by all participants, is: **more freedom and liberty should be given to the inhabitants to create social reality**. Change in the social zone should go from the bottom up, it should not be imposed. The inhabitants have many interesting and good ideas. The gmina, the powiat, the country and the EU should give local initiatives the opportunity to spread their wings, and not extinguish enthusiasm, scare people away with procedures, formal language understood only by a few, overly complicated applications and a set of restrictions. The key to this issue seems to be increasing the awareness of residents about the impact they can have on the local community (meetings, study trips, training sessions, including those teaching how to set up NGOs, KGWs, write applications, showing them where and how they can submit their ideas, micro-grants and other forms of financial support by gminas). This process should involve seniors, whose potential is still not used, residents who have a lot of enthusiasm (new residents) and those who have run out of enthusiasm (sedentary residents), as well as young people.

The driving force behind the social dimension of the Bieszczady MAP is the activists, largely the so-called "birds", i.e. residents who have recently settled in the area. It is they who bring new energy to action and inspire the most. As long as their wings are not clipped, they can do a lot of good for the local community, although they do not always know how to go about it. Therefore, they need to be shown the way and this is the role of the office, more experienced NGOs and LAGs.

The studied area is characterised by what other rural areas in Poland are facing: with young people fleeing to bigger centres, with unemployment, with instability of employment, with weakening social participation. It is difficult for working parents to reconcile caring for young children at home with their jobs (there are no crèches, kindergartens, extra-curricular activities or half-schools). What is typical for the area are problems with the communication of the village, with transport, with the movement of non-motorised residents. Integration sites are missing or too far away. There is also the issue of the awarding of grants - taking into account the specifics of the area, the low population density and the seasonality of work of the inhabitants (in high season hardly anyone finds time to look for grant programmes and write an application). Another aspect is that the awarding of small/micro grants for local initiatives should be easy and understandable.

Although there are many needs and problems in the area, the inhabitants often try to find solutions themselves (e.g. creation of a place for integration of inhabitants in the form of a shelter with a pizza oven and bread oven by "Switching" Bieszczady Initiatives Association, as well as the organisation of summer half-schools in the Cisna gmina; this was a bottom up initiative that stemmed from one of the inhabitants). They often seek support from the office, the LAG - and if they live in a commune where there is an open climate of cooperation, sooner or later they find more or less support. However, the key is this first step - coming up with an initiative and knowing what to do next.

It also seems that support is needed for knowledge about social economy enterprises, which can become an important factor for social change in rural areas.

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Unsigned photographs are from the author's own collection.

Annex 1 Methodology

MAP Bieszczady is composed of 20 members: local activists and members of NGOs/KGWs (10), local government officials (5), local entrepreneurs (3) and scientists (2).

The survey took place between May and September 2022. It included:

- desk research (e.g. gminas' websites, local forums, powiat status reports, local NGO needs survey).
- large MAP meeting at the Mountain of Taste in Przysłop on 10.05.2022 (focus group). The meeting lasted 2 hours and was organised in a relaxed atmosphere, with snacks and drinks. During the meeting we made a brainstorm, used coloured cards, flipchart and markers, and found together a definition of "social dimension of rural areas". We also collected numerous results, which we then verified in individual interviews.



- 5 smaller meetings (diads and triads) from May to September 2022
- 8 individual/self-interviews from May to September 2022

- Participatory observation (participation in local events during 4 visits to the Bieszczady Mountains: March, May, July and September 2022)

In the initial phase of the project we envisaged fewer meetings (2 meetings, but in a larger group) and planned to conduct a questionnaire. However, over the course of the project it became clear that MAP members preferred face-to-face meetings rather than a questionnaire to fill in. Conducting a survey would have been problematic.

"I would be happy to talk to you, but I must tell you straight away - I will not be filling in any questionnaire. I don't have time for that. But you are welcome to join me for coffee."

It also turned out that we received after the first MAP meeting valuable results of a survey from the LAG Green Bieszczady, which investigated the needs of local NGOs. The results were used in this report and coincided with the insights of MAP members.

We believe that face-to-face contact and participant observation, which we had not previously planned either, were crucial in this study. The observation allowed us to better understand the processes discussed and we believe that the results would have been incomplete without it. In addition, individual interviews and in smaller groups were very good: 2, 3 people.

Participation in the SHERPA project had an integrating value for the members of MAP Bieszczady - the inhabitants of the neighbouring communes had the opportunity to meet together and exchange good practices, get inspired. There was also an activist element: a new association and a rural housewives' circle are just being set up in one of the surveyed communes. These organisations will aim to improve the quality of life for the inhabitants of their village and the surrounding area.



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