



LOCAL ACTION GROUP AS A TOOL OF INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION: CASE STUDY OF SLOVAKIA

Radoslav KLAMÁR^{A*}, René MATLOVIČ^B, Monika IVANOVÁ^C,
Robert IŠTOK^D, Ján KOZON^E

Received: April 4, 2019 | Revised: May 12, 2019 | Accepted: May 18, 2019
Paper No. 19-61/1-529

Abstract

The main role of municipalities and their self-governments is to provide adequate public services and support for the local development. A significant limiting factor in achieving their effectiveness and quality is the insufficient size of municipalities, which makes impossible to realize economies of scale, and the absence of sufficient level of the human and social capital. A large number of small municipalities and a fragmented settlement structure are typical for the territory of Slovakia. In this respect, the support for inter-municipal cooperation as an alternative to amalgamations of the local self-governments is a possible solution. One of the platforms of this cooperation is Local Action Group (LAG), which is now receiving increased attention. Support for inter-municipal cooperation in the form of LAGs has also appeared in the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017" under the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic 2014 – 2020. The aim of the paper is to assess the spatial allocation of financial means from the above-mentioned call to individual LAGs across the self-governing regions of the Slovak Republic in relation to their socio-economic status. Financial allocations were monitored in the total volume as well as in respect to the number of inhabitants of LAGs and socio-economic status of the regions was defined by a set of 14 selected socio-economic indicators. The regression and correlation analysis was used to assess the spatial justice of the distribution of financial means to LAGs, with the Pearson correlation coefficient as a measure of the linear correlation between paired data. The obtained results show that funding volumes have developed a growing tendency towards the least developed regions in the south-east of Slovakia, however, considering the level of socio-economic status of the individual regions of the Slovak Republic, the allocation of financial means is not quite optimal.

Key words

inter-municipal cooperation, Local Action Group (LAG), regional development, socio-economic status, self-governing regions, the Slovak

A* University of Prešov, 17. novembra 1, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia
radoslav.klamar@unipo.sk (corresponding author)

B Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Štefánikova 49, 814 73 Bratislava, Slovakia
rene.matlovic@saavs.sk

C University of Prešov, 17. novembra 1, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia
monika.ivanova@unipo.sk

D University of Prešov, 17. novembra 1, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia
robert.istok@unipo.sk

E University of Prešov, 17. novembra 1, 080 01 Prešov, Slovakia
Jan.Kozon@statistics.sk



INTRODUCTION

Regional development as well as development of individual municipalities depend on their internal availability, whether of natural or socio-economic character. However, for many rural communities (especially the small ones), this development potential is insufficient as well as insufficiently utilized, mainly due to the absence of the corresponding level of human and social capital. These missing endogenous resources can be partly compensated by exogenous in the form of cooperation with other municipalities as well as local and regional entities.

The paper is precisely aimed at inter-municipal cooperation and its possibilities for regional development in the form of Local Action Group (LAG). Attention is directed to the spatial allocation of financial means to a particular LAGs within the regions of Slovakia. The socio-economic status of these regions has also been analysed, what makes it possible to define the major objective, and that is the assessment of the spatial justice of financial distributions to LAGs within individual regions of Slovakia in relation to their socio-economic status. Two partial objectives stem from the major objective in terms of the socio-economic analysis of the regions of Slovakia and the assessment of regional distribution of financial means to LAGs both, in the total volume as well as in relation to the number of inhabitants. We assume that in terms of regional policy and support for less developed regions, the largest amount of financial resources will be directed to the LAGs located in the regions with the lowest levels of socio-economic status.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main mission of the local self-governments is to provide public services. In recent years, the emphasis on efficiency as well as quality of their provision have increased. In order to achieve the above-mentioned conditions, the suboptimal size of the local self-governments becomes an important limiting factor, which makes impossible to exploit economies of scale and the synergy effect resulting from the concentration of the social and human capital (Allers, van Ommeren 2016, p. 717). Fixed costs increase the average spending of small self-governments (Drew et al. 2016). A traditional way how to solve this problem is consolidation of the local self-governments (Bell, Warner 2015), whose the most common form is amalgamation, or merging of the local self-governments into larger units.

Niaounakis, Blank (2017, pp. 533-4) have drawn attention to several empirical studies, which point out that consolidation may not always lead to expected expenditure cuts of self-governments (Dollery, Johnson 2005, Fox, Gurley-Calvez 2006, Hanes, Wikström 2010, Drew 2016, Allers, Geertsema 2016). This is related to the fact that services provided by local self-governments are differentiated in terms of the effects of economies of scale. Another disadvantage of amalgamation is the loss of jurisdictional autonomy and local identity of originally autonomous



local self-governments, which merge into a larger unit (Niaounakis, Blank 2017, p. 534). For the reasons given above, in addition to the traditional approach, alternatives to the problem of efficiency and quality of providing public services by local authorities have been suggested. One of them is inter-municipal cooperation.

Reasons for the cooperation of different entities are based on the existence of the “synergy effect”, or in other words, the fact that corporations will achieve better results than each entity individually. Cooperation can be generally considered as the interaction of a certain number of entities when achieving a particular common goal (Galvasová et al. 2007). Cooperation is an important element in the functioning of the public administration as well as in the development of municipalities and regions. According to Furmankiewicz (2002), De Jong (1986) and Hardin (1989), five different forms of interaction between two territorial self-governing entities can be defined: *conflict* (the problem lies in the fact that what is convenient for the first entity, is not convenient for the other one), *competition* (neighbouring entities can accept different solutions for unrelated problems, while the solution for the first entity reduces the chance for the success of the second entity), *control* (one entity is subordinate to the other one, whereby it manages a smaller part of the common territory), *coordination* (both entities are in the same relationship with possible solutions, and at the same time, they both prefer the same solution independently of each other) and *cooperation* (entities consciously cooperate from the aspect of common interest, along with the possible conflict in the distribution of potential benefits).

In order to develop inter-municipal cooperation, the last two forms of interaction are promising, although, in the case of mutual cooperation, it is also possible to overcome the obstacles in the form of conflict, competition and control.

Inter-municipal cooperation is, thus, a form of association of municipalities mainly based on the mutual cooperation, and it is one of the starting points for an effective solution and higher quality of performance of the transferred competences, when solving the problems of municipalities, especially the small ones. This fact is also emphasised by Hasprová et al. (2012), who state that the inter-municipal cooperation is a typical substitution for the so-called smallness of municipalities as well as their inability to provide independent public services.

An important and characteristic attribute of the inter-municipal cooperation can be seen in the fact that there is no complete transfer of the competences and responsibilities of municipalities to newly established organizations of the inter-municipal cooperation. Municipalities have at least indirect control over their decision-making (Swianiewicz 2011). A certain degree of autonomy and a possibility to cooperate with other municipalities that are interested in the cooperation, are maintained by municipalities.



Cooperation of municipalities is also considered as a politically more acceptable solution and its voluntariness is often promoted as well. Cooperation of municipalities, is not simpler in comparison to the amalgamation of municipalities (Ježek et al. 2015). According to Koprić (2012), a cooperation agreement between municipalities could be a functional substitution for the territorial consolidation.

According to Galvasová et al. (2007), Chabičovská, Binek (2007) or Teles (2016), it is possible to observe different characteristics of the inter-municipal cooperation based on its: *function* (efforts to achieve a common development of the territory), *goals* (development of the territory, creating the material and technical conditions, cooperating on projects), *instruments used* (non-financial – administrative instruments, institutional, material; financial – non-investment and investment incentives, capital shareholding, tax reductions), *stakeholders* (local government, self-government, non-profit organizations, entrepreneurs, citizens), *level of involvement of entities in the cooperation* (institutionalised cooperation, cooperation agreement, ad hoc cooperation) and *legal form* (micro-regions, common municipal offices, local action groups – in the form of interest groups, associations of legal entities and charitable organizations).

Kořut (2015) affirms that regarding inter-municipal cooperation, the most frequently assessed issues are: the level of cooperation, cooperation subjects, cooperation issues, problems of cooperation network functioning and cooperation factors.

In addition to the indisputable benefits of inter-municipal cooperation, it is also necessary to point at its limitations. Hasprová et al. (2012) point to the following: the problem with ensuring democratic control, the loss of autonomy, conflicts of interest, the growth of bureaucracy, the lack of transparency of financial operations and activities of personnel management, and the fact that newly created entities of the inter-municipal cooperation are not directly responsible to the local voters at the same level as municipal authorities. Similarly, Teles (2016) points out that some of the weaknesses of the cooperation such as tendencies for democratic deficits, when no mechanism of responsibility or instability are introduced in case cooperative measures are not smooth and change over time, provide strong arguments for those who support an amalgamation.

Szmigielska-Rawska et al. (2010, p. 89) with regard to the restrictions of the inter-municipal cooperation indicate that “the cooperation is perceived as an action requiring additional administrative effort with uncertain effects because it depends on the good will of others”.

Last but not least, according to Maes (1997), Ištók, Klamár (2005), processes of merging municipalities into the larger self-governing regions are very administratively demanding and sensitive to citizens, and therefore, they require careful preparation and a detailed research.



Inter-municipal cooperation and its development in Slovakia in the form of micro-regions became a central topic of various investigations: Buček (1997), Kukliš (2002), Tichý (2003), Ištók, Tej (2004), Žárska (2006), Klamár (2006), Slavík, Bačík (2007), Pustá, Dolná (2010), Pustá (2011), Faltán et al. (2011), Angelovič, Benč (2012), Grác (2014), Slavík et al. (2016), Faltán, Strussová (2016), in the form of local action groups: Tvrdonová (2006), Hradiská (2007), Donauer, Rajčáková (2014), Babinský (2015), Pončíková (2015), Wisterová (2016), Székely (2017), Kvasová (2018) and common municipal offices: Lovacká (2006), Slavík et al. (2010) and many others.

LOCAL ACTION GROUP (LAG) AS A TOOL OF THE INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION IN SLOVAKIA

Persistent fragmentation of the structure of local self-governments is a typical feature for Slovakia. In foreign countries as well as in Slovakia, debates on solutions of this issue (e.g. Nižňanský 2004, Galvasová et al. 2007, Klimovský 2009, Pustá, Dolná 2010, Dušek 2010, Ježek et al. 2015) focus on two basic approaches that are aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the municipal management, namely: amalgamation of municipalities or inter-municipal cooperation.

The term municipal amalgamation in the Slovak conditions means giving up or transferring the competences (autonomy) of one or more municipalities to a newly established municipality. A municipal amalgamation takes place in the form of merging at least two municipalities into one, or affiliating one municipality to another, usually the larger one (Nižňanský et al. 2014). The municipal amalgamation occurs either on a voluntary or forced basis. In many countries, volunteering plays a major role. The application of the principle of voluntarism, while merging municipalities, means considerable demands on the motivation of municipalities (Ježek et al. 2015). In case of constraint, internal resistance and disagreement might appear among the local residents as well as local stakeholders what might lead to the subsequent complications in the amalgamation process. Ali et al. (2012) have pointed to the negative consequences of the municipal amalgamation through the analysis of several works written by foreign authors. In the Slovak context, it was Klobučník et al. (2018) who have driven attention to this issue.

It has led to the preference of the second approach based on the principles of the inter-municipal cooperation. Local Action Group (LAG) is one of its platforms. They represent a partnership of the representatives of public, private and civil sectors operating on the entire and coherent territory. This concept is built upon the assumption that a determining role in the process of development of rural regions is attributed to the non-governmental organizations and communities of the local character that are able to define the values of the region. They also integrate and activate citizens, thereby complementing activities of self-governments. It is mainly cooperation among public administrations, entrepreneurs,



social organizations and representatives of local communities leading to the development of socio-economic initiatives as well as activation and integration of the local communities, and thus, their economic development (Czapiewska 2012). According to Guinjoan et al. (2016 in Székely 2017, p. 33) the shifts of concepts of rural development ("new paradigm of rural development") are going from sectorial focus to the spatial one, and/or from the top-down development strategy to the bottom-up one.

According to the Associations Act no. 83/1990 Coll. and its later amendments, LAGs represent public-private partnerships in which local communities, entrepreneurs, public administration, agricultural and forestry entities, young people, women as well as other important local stakeholders are represented. The main condition is that private sector representatives should make up at least 50% of the partnership.

Each LAG must meet certain conditions regarding partnership, territory and development strategies: population of the LAG must be between 10 and 150 thousand inhabitants; population density must not be higher than 150 inhabitants per km²; the minimum number of municipalities of the LAG is 7; each LAG has legal personality; LAG have structure of authorities that are able to manage public funds as well as activities of LAG; members must operate in the territory of LAG, they must have a permanent or temporary residence, seat or business in the territory of LAG; LAG must have a local development strategy developed and led by the community (called the CLLD strategy) with clearly defined objectives and measures fostering local development; strategy referring to the territory of LAG must cover a coherent territory bordering the land registry of all municipalities involved (www.nsrv.sk).

For each municipality, becoming a member of the LAG brings several benefits: networking that provides exchange of information and experience; ensuring reciprocal knowledge and experience among members of LAGs; promoting cooperation with other LAGs; representing and debating the legitimate interests of all stakeholders; creating cooperative environment and supporting mutual aid; promoting and disseminating experience and examples of good practice; supporting and developing cooperation and partnerships of rural residents, representatives of the municipalities and towns, representatives of the non-profit sector as well as other micro, small and medium-sized enterprises active in rural areas; cooperating with the National Rural Development Network, the Managing and Paying Authority under the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic and other components of the state government and self-governments; providing documents on the development, education and information activities for the rural development; organizing seminars, workshops, conferences and other professional meetings; the possibility of drawing subsidies from the LEADER subsidy program, which is intended exclusively for LAGs (Wisterová 2016).



LEADER as a main philosophy of the management and development of LAGs is aimed at supporting the development of rural areas through the pilot integrated strategies implemented into the specific territories on the basis of mutual cooperation between the local entities in a particular region (Slováková et al. 2015). LEADER can be characterised by seven key characteristics complementing and influencing each other: local development strategies, bottom-up approach, public-private partnerships: LAGs, facilitating innovation, integrated and multi-sectoral actions, networking and cooperation (CLLD management system, 2017).

The LEADER approach and profiling network of LAGs pointing to the viability of this inter-municipal cooperation platform are also created in the neighbouring countries. In Hungary, Katona-Kovács et al. (2011) evaluated active and passive participation of the cooperation partners within the network of LAGs. Kassai, Farkas (2013) focused on the opportunities and threats, with special regard to the institutional framework and governance of LAGs in the east of Hungary and Patkós (2018) traced the history of the LEADER programme and LAGs, the number of co-operating municipalities and dominant forms of the LAG management in Hungary. In the Czech Republic, Svobodová (2010) focused on the content analysis of the selected CLLD strategies of LAGs and identification of their problems. Varvažovská (2012) monitored the functioning of the LEADER programme and LAGs as well as benefits of the LAG membership, Pechrová, Boukalová (2015) created a LAG typology based on the organizational characteristics – ‘stabilized’, ‘experienced’, ‘absorbing’ and ‘well-informed’ LAGs. Pártlová, Hron (2016) focused on the use of LAGs’ leaders as experts for directing resources where they are most needed and Nunvářová (2016) evaluated the strategic planning of LAGs and their contribution to the rural development in the Czech Republic. Semian, Nováček (2017) approached LAGs in the Czech Republic and they used history and historical and historicizing elements to present the region’s image. Within the territory of Poland, Zajda, Krettek-Kamińska (2013) assessed the question whether the high level of professionalisation and economisation has a positive influence on the activities of its members or – the opposite – it constitutes a hindrance. Zajda (2014) addressed the analysis of the LAGs’ main problems and their social capital in the six Polish voivodeships, Sienkiewicz (2015) monitored the LAGs’ role in promoting local socio-economic development, on the example of the region of Lublin. Parlińska, Ignar (2016) assessed the financing of LAGs from sources of the LEADER programme in the Mazovia Voivodeship. Michalcewicz-Kaniowska et al. (2017) focused on the management of the LEADER programme and functioning of LAGs in terms of local and regional policy of sustainable development in Kujawsko-Pomeranian Voivodeship. In Croatia, for example, Lukić, Obad (2016) dealt with LAGs and Leader issues, in Slovenia it was Volk, Bojnec (2014) and in Romania, Mosora, Mosora (2012), Albu, Chitu (2014), Pocol, Kassai (2016) and many others.



DATA AND METHODS

When achieving the first partial goal in terms of assessing the level of development and socio-economic status of individual regions (self-governing regions were selected as the core observation units, and their selection is explained in the following text), the point-rating method was used as a basis. This method is, by its nature, one of the indirect methods, and it uses a set of predefined variables when evaluating data. The advantage of this method is above all, its ability to include the indicators presented in different units into one synthetic characteristic, which is a dimensionless quantity, and thus, to enable the comparison of the regions.

A set of 14 selected indicators was chosen while applying the method (gross birth rate, average monthly wage, monthly labour costs per employee, employment rate, unemployment rate, net monthly income per capita, net monthly expenses per capita, the number of completed dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants, regional gross domestic product per capita, gross value added per capita, labour productivity from turnover per employee in industry, labour productivity from turnover per employee in construction, the number of enterprises in total per 1,000 inhabitants, the number of tradesmen in total per 1,000 inhabitants), which characterise the level of development and socio-economic status of the assessed regions.

When assessing status of the regions, the following procedure was used: as the basis for the comparison for each selected indicator, its highest achieved level (the maximum value or the minimum according to the character of the indicator) was chosen in the region. It was used a maximum value of 100 points which was introduced as a base variable when comparing different regions. The values assigned to each indicator in different regions were compared with this value based on the relationship:

$$u_r = \frac{U_r}{U_{max}} \cdot 100, \quad (1)$$

where u_r – is a calculated point level of the indicator in the selected region, U_r – a real value of the indicator in the region, U_{max} – a maximum value of the indicator in the observed file.

Assessing the point level of the selected indicators in individual regions and adding their ratings, an overall rating of the region, with the maximum achievable value of 1,400 points, was obtained.

The socio-economic status of the regions was assessed in the following years observed: 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016, whereby the year 2001 was the first year of the assessment, 2004 represented the entry of the Slovak Republic into the EU, in 2008 the economic crisis appeared, 2012 was a comparative year and 2016 was the last assessed year with regard to the availability of statistical data.



Based on facts introduced by Korec (2005), Džupinová et al. (2008), Klamár (2011), Matlovič, Matlovičová (2011), Matlovičová et al. (2014), Matlovič et al. (2018) indicating the west-east gradient of the economic status of the Slovak regions, the hypothesis **H1** was formed: socio-economic status of the Slovak regions by means of the point-rating method in 2016, will have a declining trend in the west-east direction. In accordance with this hypothesis, the hypothesis **H2** was set up: development of the socio-economic status of the Slovak regions by means of the point-rating method in the years 2001 – 2016, will indicate weakening of the position of regions in the south-east of the Slovak Republic (the Banská Bystrica Region, the Prešov Region and the Košice Region).

Spatial distribution of the financial allocation to LAGs in the context of their socio-economic status was analysed by using the point-rating method. It was second partial aim of our study. This financial allocation consisted of two components: basic allocation and additional performance allocation. Financial allocation¹ to LAGs was consequently assessed as a whole for each region as well per person of the LAG (only the population of those LAGs for which the financial allocation was approved). It is important to explain the choice of the self-governing regions (NUTS3) as the evaluation units (and not for example the district level – LAU1) because of a large number of LAGs belonging to two or more districts (LAU1), what made their locating within this hierarchical level unambiguous. At the same time, statistical data of a larger number of assessing indicators are also available at the regional level (NUTS3).

In order to express spatial fairness of the allocated financial means to each LAG in relation to the socio-economic status of the region, a regression and correlation analysis method – Linear dependence of a pair of vectors, was used. An independent variable represented the socio-economic status of the region and the allocation of financial resources to LAGs in the region was represented by a dependent variable. The aim was to find out whether it is possible to assume certain dependence between variables and strength of this dependence. Suppose there is a relationship between the two variables, whose strength can be expressed by the shared variance, it is possible to do approximation with one variable by means of the other one and to create a regression model. The suitability of the model was

1 Basic financial allocation to LAG was established under the “Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017” according to the formula:

$$350,000 \text{ €} + (\text{number of habitants of LAG}) * X + (\text{size of the territory of LAG}) * Y + (\text{degree of unemployment of LAG minus 13.5\%}) * Z + (\text{number of municipalities}) * W,$$

while the coefficients were set in “Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017” at the level: $X = 9.66$, $Y = 1,150.61$, $Z = 110,413.2$, $W = 12,395.25$ and statistical data included in the calculation were collected as of 31 December 2014. Additional performance allocation was set in accordance with the conditions stated in the document Management System CLLD (LEADER and Community Development) for the programming period 2014 – 2020.



verified by ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) in the program STATISTICA, where the null hypothesis H_0 was tested: "The model is not appropriate for use." The F value represented test characteristics, whose significance was given by the p-value indicating the smallest possible level of significance for rejection of the null hypothesis. When the p-value was ≤ 0.05 , the null hypothesis was rejected at a given significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. The assessment of the strength of the linear relationship was indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient (R) whose absolute values approaching 1 indicated a stronger relationship between the status of the region and the amount of funds allocated to LAGs. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is expressed as a percentage of the variation of the dependent variable explained by the variation in the independent variable.

When assessing the socio-economic status of the regions and the volume of funds allocated to each LAG in the region (total as well as per inhabitant), the **H3** hypothesis was formed: the volume of funds allocated under the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017" will increase with a decline of the socio-economic status of the regions.

ACHIEVED RESULTS

The socio-economic status of the regions of the Slovak Republic was assessed on the basis of the point-rating method (Figure 1). Based on a set of 14 selected indicators (gross birth rate, average monthly wage, monthly labour costs per employee, employment rate, unemployment rate, net monthly income per capita, net monthly expenses per capita, the number of completed dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants, regional gross domestic product per capita, gross value added per capita, labour productivity from turnover per employee in industry, labour productivity from turnover per employee in construction, the number of enterprises in total per 1,000 inhabitants, the number of tradesmen in total per 1,000 inhabitants) in 2016, the Bratislava Region was the best ranked region which earned 1,397.1 points out of a total possible 1,400 points. It earned a maximum of points in 12 out of 14 indicators, excluding the unemployment rate (the Trnava Region as the highest-ranked region – 4.4%) and the number of tradesmen per 1,000 inhabitants (the Žilina Region as the highest-ranked region). The neighbouring Trnava Region earned 950.5 points as the highest number after the Bratislava Region, and it represented 68.0% of the region's value. The status of this region is also evidenced in the fact that it gained the second highest number in 8 indicators and was ranked first regarding the unemployment rate. The Žilina Region was the third economically strongest region (861.7 pts). It ranked third and fourth in most indicators, whereby the indicator related to the number of tradesmen per 1,000 inhabitants was the highest in the Slovak Republic. In 2016, the Trenčín Region obtained a total number of 834.7 points and it was ranked fourth. The Nitra Region (797.3 pts) was



economically the weakest region in the most developed north-western part of the Slovak Republic.

Because of a 60.3 points drop, the economically strongest region in the south-eastern part of Slovakia, the Košice Region, was ranked sixth (737.0 pts) followed by the penultimate Banská Bystrica Region with only a few points less (722.3 pts). Absolutely, the economically weakest region of Slovakia is the Prešov Region with only 702.8 points, what represented the value of only 50.3% of the Bratislava Region and 73.9% of the Trnava Region. The negative results of the region are based on the fact that it got the lowest value in 9 indicators, however, it ranked second for birth rate, after the Bratislava Region (Figure 1).

Based on the above results, we can state that the hypothesis H1 has been confirmed.

Even more problematic is the fact that the regions in the south-eastern part of Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov Regions) are not only economically the weakest regions in the country but their socio-economic situation has also deteriorated over the last 15 years. On the contrary, the improvement was recorded in more developed regions in the north-west of Slovakia (Figure 1). According to the Figure 1, it is clear that the Bratislava Region as well as the Trnava Region were always ranked first or second during the years considered (2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016). There was a gradual improvement in the position of three other regions in the north-western part of the Slovak Republic during the investigation period: The Trenčín Region – 5th, 5th, 4th, 4th, 4th place, the Žilina Region – 4th, 4th, 3rd, 3rd, 3rd place and the Nitra Region – 8th, 6th, 6th, 5th and 5th place. Regression and stagnation are clearly visible in all three regions in the south-east of the country: the Košice Region – 3rd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 6th place, the Banská Bystrica Region – 6th, 7th, 7th, 7th, 7th place and the Prešov Region – 7th, 8th, 8th, 8th and 8th place.

The findings of this analysis fully confirm the hypothesis H2 about the weakening of the position of the regions in the south-eastern part of the Slovak Republic (Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice) in the context of the entire Slovakia between the years 2001 and 2016.

There are also sources confirming our findings (i.e. Korec 2005, Džupinová et al. 2008, Rajčáková, Švecová 2009, 2014, Padová et al. 2012, Klamár 2011, 2016, Matlovič, Matlovičová 2011, Matlovičová et al. 2014, Madajová et al. 2014, Matlovič et al. 2018), which indicate deepening of the differences between the economically prosperous north-west and the stagnant or declining south-east.

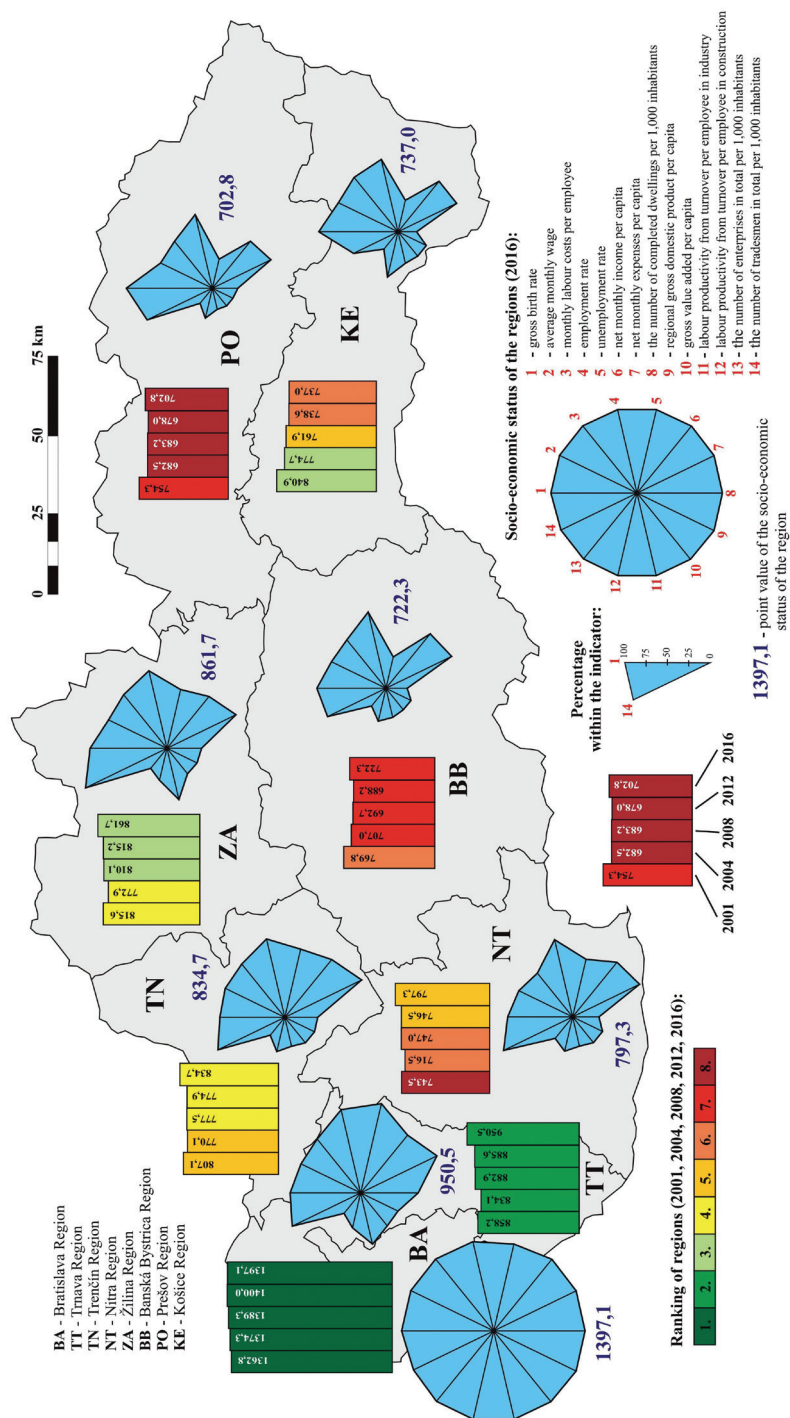


Figure 1

Socio-economic status of the regions of the Slovak Republic in the years 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016

Source: www.statistics.sk, own elaboration



The development and, in particular, the situation in 2016 referring to individual indicators, bring us closer to the socio-economic status of the regions, what is only the first step in the analysis.

The second step focuses on the spatial distribution of financial means for the support and development of LAGs for which these public-private partnerships applied in 2017.

This support was based on the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017" for approval of the proposals for the Community-led Local Development Strategy and for granting the status of LAGs for the measure 19 – Support to LEADER Local Development and a sub-measure 19.2 – Support for the implementation of operations under the community-led local development strategy.

The entire territory of Slovakia was entitled to get support under this "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", while the Managing authority for the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic 2014 – 2020 granted 87 requests out of 121 submitted by the LAGs at a total value of € 137,734,280 (Figure 2).

As mentioned in the methodology of the paper, the assessment of financial allocation had to be assessed at regional level, since the level of the districts was inadequate due to the location of several LAGs in the territory of two or more districts. Regarding regions, it was only a negligible minimum number of LAGs exceeding the regional boundaries (it was more significant only for the LAG OZ Podhoran at the borders of the Bratislava and Trnava Regions. The LAG was integrated into the Trnava Region, where it is also based according to the registration form database of the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic for the period 2014 – 2020).

The least supported LAGs (only 2) were in the most economically developed region – the Bratislava Region (Figure 3). At the same time, the total financial allocation was the lowest from all regions, only € 3.05 million (Figures 3, 5). It is important to note that even if calculated per inhabitant (107,849 inhabitants in the supported LAGs of the region) it was the lowest number within the Slovak Republic – € 28.3 per inhabitant (Figures 4, 6). In the other two economically strong regions (the Trnava Region and the Trenčín Region), the support for LAGs was comparable. It was supported by 9 or 8 LAGs with a similar amount of funding of € 9.8 million and € 10.9 million, and in terms of per inhabitant, it was almost identical at an estimated € 42 per inhabitant. It is also possible to add the Žilina Region to these three economically mature regions. There were supported 8 LAGs with a total amount of financial means of € 13.1 million. Compared to the previous two regions, however, up to 363,151 inhabitants were supported, what was later demonstrated in less amount of funding per inhabitant (only € 36). The least developed region in the north-western part of Slovakia, the Nitra Region, had the most supported LAGs (11) in comparison to the above mentioned regions. It was granted the highest amount of financial resources per inhabitant (€ 51.7).

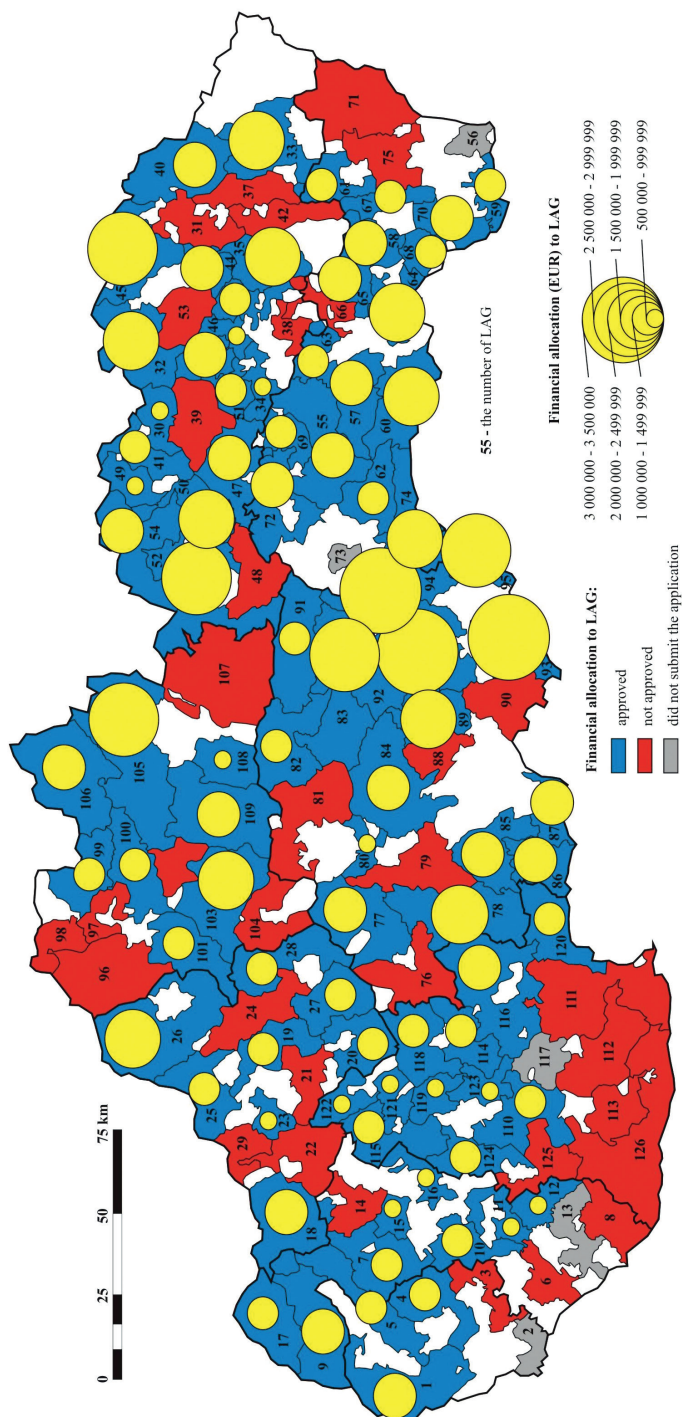


Figure 2

Financial allocation (EUR) to LAGs in 2017

Note: The list of LAGs with approved financial support introduced in the Table 2, in the Annex

Source: "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", own elaboration

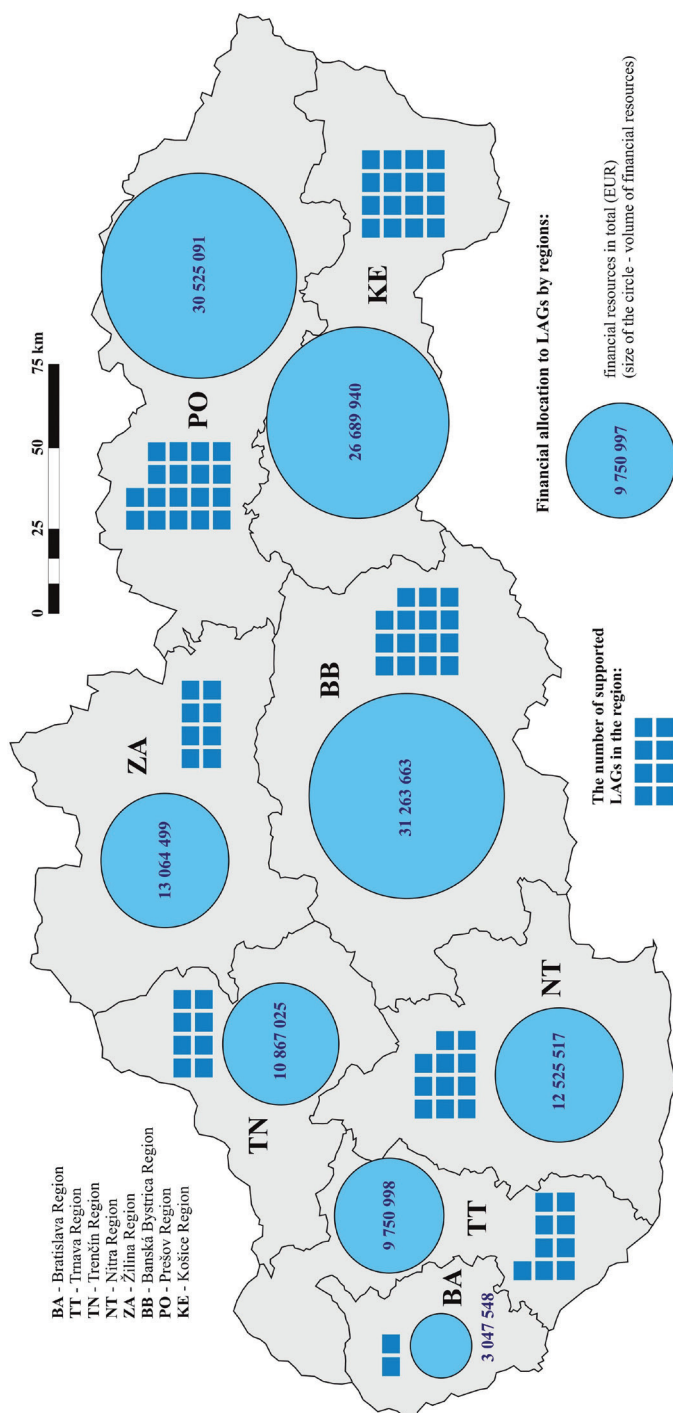


Figure 3
Financial allocation (EUR) to LAGs concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic in 2017
Source: "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017, own elaboration"

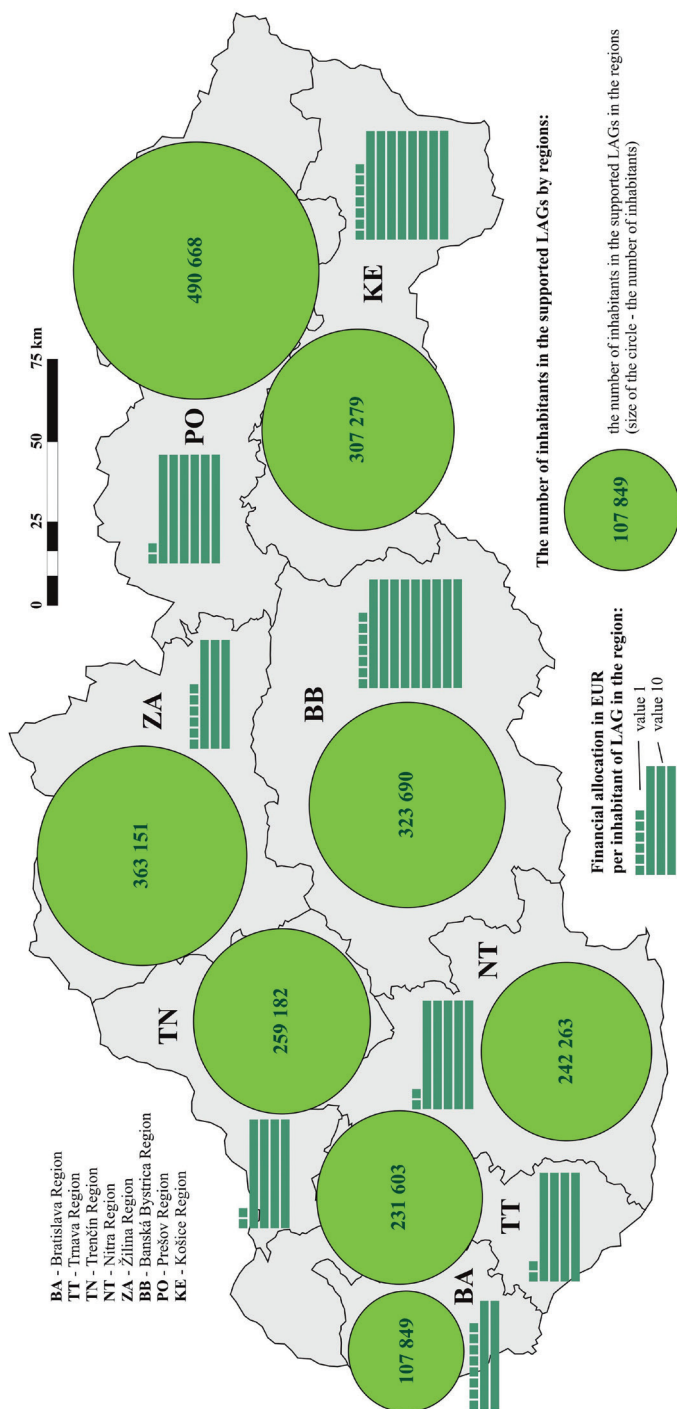


Figure 4

Financial allocation (EUR) per inhabitant of the LAG concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic in 2017

Source: "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017, own elaboration



A total value of € 88.5 million (64.2% of all finances) for 1.12 million of inhabitants (48.2% of all inhabitants of the supported LAGs in the Slovak Republic) was sent into the backward south-eastern part of the Slovak Republic (Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice Regions). In this area of Slovakia, most LAGs were supported (49 in total, the Banská Bystrica Region – 15, the Košice Region – 16, the Prešov Region – 18, Figure 3). From a more detailed perspective, the total support for individual regions varied from € 26.7 million in the Košice Region, which is one of the three economically strongest regions, to € 30.5 million in the Prešov Region and € 31.3 million in the Banská Bystrica Region (Figure 5). In the last two mentioned regions there were 8 LAGs from the top ten most supported LAGs in the Slovak Republic (the Banská Bystrica Region – LAG Malohont € 3.45 million, VSP Stredný Gemer – € 3.24 million, LAG Cerovina, o.z. – € 3.05 million, VSP Južný Gemer – € 2.54 million, Partnership Muránska Planina–Čierny Hron – € 2.54 million; the Prešov Region – Pro Tatry, o.z. – € 2.66 million, OZ Dukla – € 2.55 million, OZ pre rozvoj regiónu Spiš – € 2.47 million, Figure 2, Table 2 in the Annex).

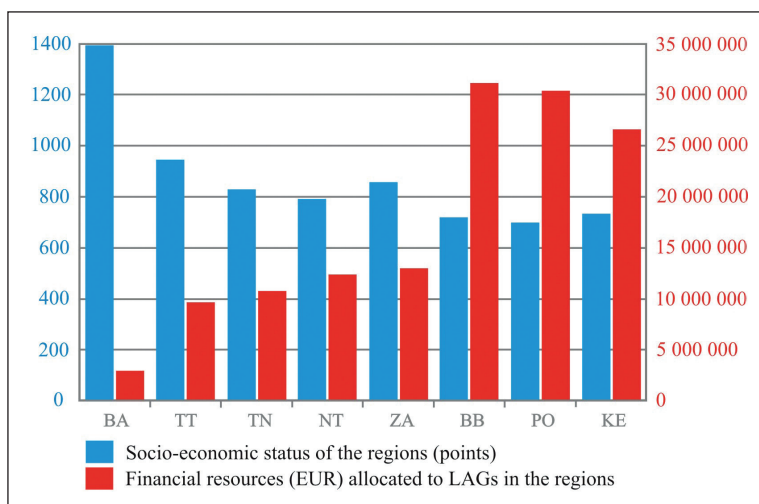


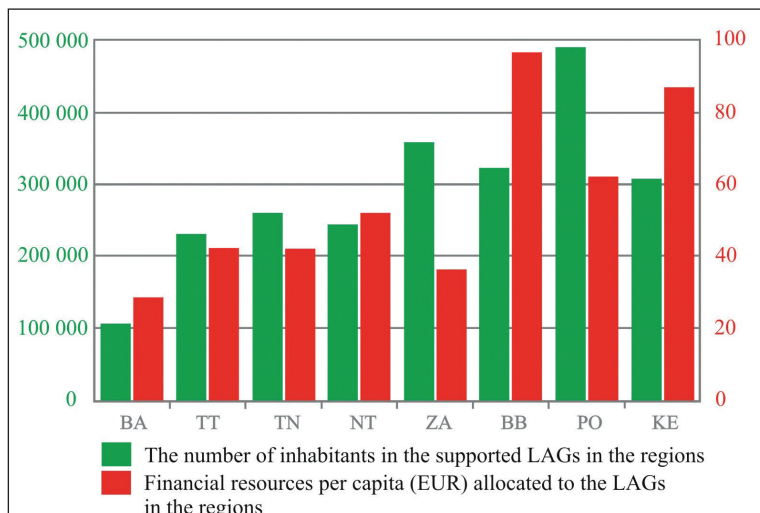
Figure 5

Socio-economic status of the regions (points) in 2016 and financial means (EUR) allocated to LAGs in the regions

Source: "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", own elaboration of the Slovak Republic

In terms of per inhabitant, the economically weakest region, the Prešov Region, was awarded only € 62.2 per inhabitant compared to € 86.9 per inhabitant in the Košice Region and € 96.6 per inhabitant in the Banská Bystrica Region (Figures 4, 6).

The final analysis of the relationship between the level of socio-economic status of all regions of the Slovak Republic and the amount of financial means allocated

**Figure 6**

The number of inhabitants in the supported LAGs in the region and financial means per inhabitant (EUR) in these LAGs in the region of the Slovak Republic

Source: "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", own elaboration

to LAGs in these regions under the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017" was the last step. In order to express this relationship, the regression and correlation analysis method was used in which socio-economic status of the region represented an independent variable and the allocated financial means to LAGs in the region was a dependent variable. The Pearson correlation coefficient was a measure of the strength of a linear relationship between paired data, while the financial allocation to LAGs was assessed globally and the financial allocation per capita of the LAGs was assessed in two combinations – for all regions of the Slovak Republic and the regions of the Slovak Republic excluding the Bratislava Region (Table 1).

Table 1 The relationship between the socio-economic status of the regions in 2016 and financial resources allocated to LAGs in these regions

	All regions of the Slovak Republic			Regions of the Slovak Republic excluding the Bratislava Region		
	R	R ²	p	R	R ²	p
Financial allocation to LAGs in total	-0.7697	0.5924	0.0255	-0.8836	0.7807	0.0083
Financial allocation to LAGs per inhabitant	-0.6658	0.4433	0.0715	-0.7577	0.5741	0.0485

Note: dark grey colour – model fits, light grey colour – model does not fit (p-value >0.05)

Source: own calculations based on STATISTICA



The calculated values of the Person Correlation Coefficient (R) point to the high level of dependence of the financial allocation to LAGs in relation to the socio-economic status of the region (Table 1). Chajdiak (2009) considers the correlation to be strong, where R values are in the range from 0.8 to 1 or from -1 to -0.8. The weak correlation is the one with an absolute value R not exceeding 0.4. If the correlation is zero, it denotes the statistical independence of the phenomena.

It is evident from the calculated data that in three out of four monitored cases, values of the Pearson correlation coefficient were at a level of the strong correlation (Table 1, dark grey colour), in one case the values were at a level of the medium-strong correlation (Table 1, light grey colour). The negative values of the mentioned coefficient generally indicate the increasing volume of financial means allocated to LAGs, or the amount of financial resources per 1 inhabitant of the LAG with decreasing socio-economic status of the regions. The absolute value of the Pearson correlation coefficient R lower than 0.7 was recorded only in the case of the calculation of financial resources allocated per inhabitant of the LAG in all regions (Table 1, light grey colour). Also in this case, the overall aspect was confirmed by the indirect dependence between the growing socio-economic status of the region and the volume of allocated financial means.

Financial means allocated under the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017" are intended to support job creation, develop local economy and improve the quality of life within a particular LAGs. It is questionable whether the financial allocation to LAGs is set optimally. Looking at the Table 1, it is clear that it can be expected more suitable setting (assessed only in relation to the above-mentioned indicators) if the economically most powerful and at the same time, significantly different region – the Bratislava Region (a capital district and metropolitan area where 2/3 of the inhabitants of the region live) would have been excluded from the analysis of the financial allocation to LAGs and its allocation would have been under a special scheme. At the same time, one can note that if financial means allocated per capita had not been calculated, the linear regression model of the allocation of financial means would have been satisfactory.

In case the Bratislava Region is excluded from the analysis, the possible changes in the socio-economic status of the region will be reflected even more significantly in the distribution of financial means to LAGs ($R^2 = 0.7807$, Figure 7). The linear regression model is selected the best of all four cases ($R = -0.8836$, $p\text{-value} = 0.0083$, what is significantly below the value of 0.05). The smallest standard deviations are typical for the Žilina Region, followed by the Košice Region. In these two regions, financial means were almost optimally allocated regarding their socio-economic status. It is encouraging that in this case, more financial resources were allocated to LAGs in most regions that were less supported (Prešov and Banská Bystrica). On the contrary, we consider inappropriate if the LAGs in the Trnava Region, which

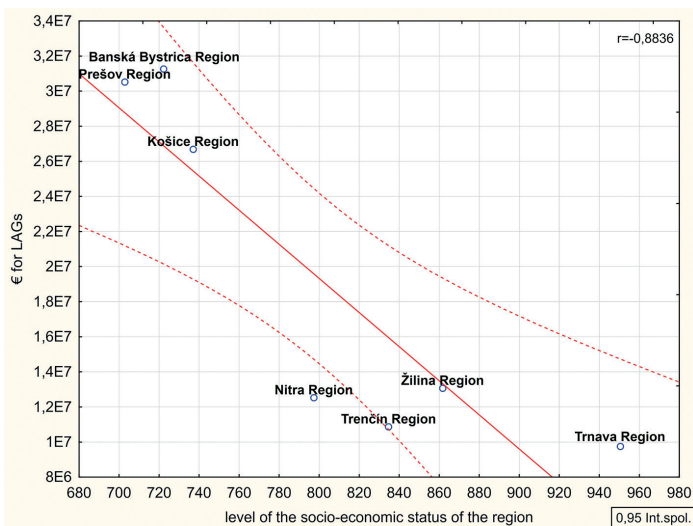


Figure 7

Relationship of the socio-economic status of the regions of the Slovak Republic (excluding the Bratislava Region) and financial allocation (EUR) to LAGs concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic (excluding the Bratislava Region)

Source: own calculations based on STATISTICA

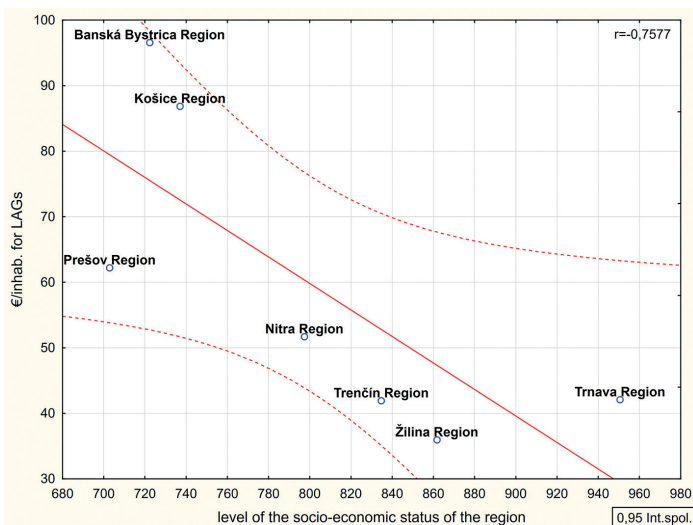


Figure 8

Relationship of the socio-economic status of the regions of the Slovak Republic (excluding the Bratislava Region) and financial allocation (EUR) per inhabitant of LAGs concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic (excluding the Bratislava Region)

Source: own calculations based on STATISTICA



took second place after the Bratislava Region in the assessment of socio-economic status in the years considered, are supported to the greatest extent. Regarding LAGs in the Nitra Region, due to its socio-economic status, the least amount of financial means was allocated and the support should have been more significant.

A more significant problem arises when assessing the financial allocation to LAG per inhabitant. If the Bratislava Region is excluded from this model, the linear regression model will be suitable for the selected data, but the correlation dependence will decrease ($R = -0.7577$, $p = 0.0485$, Figure 8). As in the preceding case, a higher amount of funding was distributed to the LAGs of the developed Trnava Region than it should have been according to the selected model. An increase of financial means to the LAGs of the Banská Bystrica Region as well as the Košice Region is perceived as positive. These regions have been long-term underfinanced and so their development can be supported at least by this form. In the sense of ensuring a more equitable distribution of financial resources, we would suggest a stronger support for the LAGs in the Prešov Region. Despite this region is, in terms of socio-economic status, the worst-rated region in the long-term perspective, it was allocated the lowest per inhabitant funding to its LAGs.

A linear regression analysis of the financial allocation assessment to LAGs could be also used in case we did not exclude the Bratislava Region from the statistical file ($R = -0.7697$, $p = 0.0255$, Figure 9). Financial resources allocated to the LAGs of the three largest underdeveloped regions (Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice Regions)

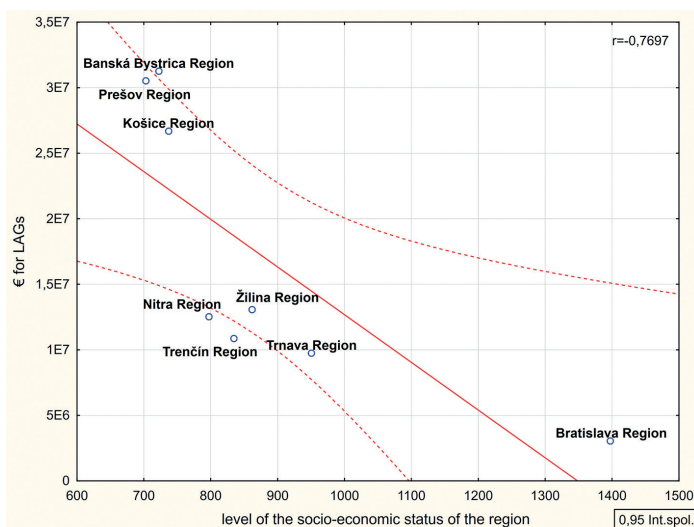


Figure 9

Relationship of socio-economic status of the Slovak regions and total financial allocation (EUR) to LAGs concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic

Source: own calculations based on STATISTICA



is satisfactory. More resources were distributed to LAGs than it is the optimum set by the regression model, what could contribute to their development. It is striking that considerable financial support provided for LAGs was reflected in the strongly developed Bratislava Region. On the contrary, in the Nitra Region, the financial means were lacking, although they would have been desirable, due to the level of socio-economic status of the region, and comparing with other regions of the developed north-western part of Slovakia.

Since the linear regression model for assessing the financial allocation to LAGs per inhabitant in all regions was not satisfactory ($p = 0.0715$, Table 1, light grey colour), its results cannot be considered as indicative. For this reason, we do not include them in the paper.

To sum up, considering the findings obtained, the hypothesis H3 has been confirmed only partially.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-15-0306, scientific projects VEGA 1/0049/18, VEGA 1/0052/17, VEGA 1/0077/17 and KEGA 011PU-4/2017.

CONCLUSION

Local action groups as one of the most perspective platforms of the inter-municipal cooperation represent, within the fragmented settlement structure of Slovakia, the possibility for the future consolidation of the local self-governments and support for the development of the regions. The success of their establishment in the Slovak conditions is also evidenced in the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", under which € 137.7 million were allocated to 87 LAGs in all regions of the Slovak Republic in the year 2017. However, when allocating financial means, it is necessary to take into account the fact that different regions have a different level of socio-economic status and, therefore, it is necessary to approach them individually. This fact, in the form of the developed north-west of the Slovak Republic and the problematic south-east, as also reported in the research findings of various pieces of works (Korec 2005, Džupinová et al. 2008, Klamár 2011, Matlovič, Matlovičová 2011, Matlovičová et al. 2014, Matlovič et al. 2018) has been confirmed by the hypothesis H1. Moreover, this unfavourable situation is not only a temporary condition, but it is a result of the gradual deepening of the south-eastern backwardness of the country (the Banská Bystrica Region, the Košice Region and the Prešov Region) during the entire monitoring period (2001 – 2016) what has been confirmed by the hypothesis H2.

A higher support for the underdeveloped south-east regions, in the form of higher financial allocation to LAGs, should be at least partial compensation of



this unfavourable situation. Based on the analysis, it is obvious that the most resources in total, as well as per inhabitant of the LAGs concerned, were directed to these backward regions – the Banská Bystrica Region (€ 31.3 million, € 96.6 per inhabitant), the Prešov Region (€ 30.5 million, € 62.2 per inhabitant) and the Košice Region (€ 26.7 million, € 86.9 per inhabitant). This fact was also declared by the Pearson's correlation coefficient R . In three cases, with the level between -0.7577 and -0.8836 , the high dependence between the level of socio-economic status and the amount of financial means allocated to LAGs were confirmed, and thus, negative R values point to the indirect correlation. It means that with the decline of socio-economic status, the amount of allocated financial means increased. At the same time, it is important to add that financial resources were not fairly allocated in either of the cases. Excluding the Bratislava Region, financial means allocated to the LAGs of the developed Trnava Region were overestimated. When calculating financial means allocated per capita, even the most underfinanced region – the Prešov Region, was the last one, whilst the LAGs in the Bratislava Region profited, considering the level of its socio-economic status. Therefore, it can be stated that the hypothesis H3 has been confirmed only partially.

The analysis and assessment have shown that the support under the "Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017", the Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic 2014 – 2020, aimed to strengthen the least developed regions (Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov) was set in general correctly, because the most financial means were directed to these problematic regions. However, in terms of the optimal calibration, it was even more necessary to take into account the level of socio-economic status of individual regions and the degree of regional inequalities (and their development) between the prosperous north-west of the country and the underdeveloped south-east.

**ANNEX****Table 2** The list of LAGs with approved subsidy from the “Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017” concerning the regions of the Slovak Republic

No.	Name of the LAG	Financial allocation to LAG (€)	No.	Name of the LAG	Financial allocation to LAG (€)
Bratislava Region		3 047 547,5	Banská Bystrica Region		31 263 663,1
1	Dolné Záhorie	1 753 117,0	92	LAG Malohont	3 450 437,6
4	OZ Malokarpatský región	1 294 430,5	94	VSP Stredný Gemer	3 238 903,2
Trnava Region		9 750 998,2	93	LAG Cerovina, o.z.	3 053 194,0
5	OZ Podhoran	1 129 531,3	95	VSP Južný Gemer	2 543 488,7
9	LAG Záhorie, o.z.	1 603 324,0	83	Partnerstvo Muránska planina – Čierny Hron	2 540 823,5
17	Partnerstvo pre Horné Záhorie, o.z.	1 485 000,0	78	OZ Zlatá cesta	2 061 637,0
7	Malokarpatské partnerstvo, o.z.	1 351 361,0	89	LAG Hornadhrad	2 116 207,1
10	LAG 11 PLUS, o.z.	1 055 000,0	86	Hontianske Poiplie	1 941 366,8
11	LAG Dubváh	864 000,0	87	Ipeľská kotlina – Novohrad	1 872 902,0
16	OZ Poniklec – Váh	810 000,0	85	LAG Hontiansko – Novohradské partnerstvo	1 822 804,0
12	LAG Stará Čierna Voda	777 782,0	77	OZ Žiarska kotlina	1 772 840,8
15	OZ Naše Jadro	67 5000,0	84	LAG Podpoľanie	1 703 555,0
Trenčín Region		10 867 024,8	82	LAG Chopok juh	1 285 027,6
26	Naše Považie	2 453 000,0	91	Verejno – súkromné partnerstvo Horehron	1 174 927,8
18	LAG Kopaničiarsky región	1 723 242,3	80	Naša Lieska, o.z.	685 548,0
28	Žiar	1 330 098,1	Prešov Region		30 525 091,2
25	LAG Vršatec	1 306 183,0	52	Pro Tatry, o.z.	2 661 124,4
27	LAG Rozvoj Hornej Nitry	1 185 060,0	45	OZ Dukla	2 549 348,0
20	LAG Stredné Ponitrie	1 165 720,8	50	OZ pre rozvoj regiónu Spiš	2 469 864,6
19	LAG Strážovské vrchy	1 002 615,5	32	LAG Horná Topľa	2 422 549,0
23	LAG Inovec	701 105,0	35	LAG Slanské vrchy – Topľa	2 136 173,0
Nitra Region		12 525 516,5	33	LAG S Pod Vihorlatom, o.z.	2 115 008,7
116	OZ Tekov – Hont	1 925 666,0	54	Tatry – Pieniny LAG	1 982 409,6
110	LAG Cedron – Nitrava	1 449 206,9	40	LAG Laborec, o.z.	1 912 360,0
115	OZ Radošinka	1 337 590,0	46	OZ LAG Sabinovsko, o.z.	1 852 691,8
118	Mikroregión Tribečsko	1 166 296,5	47	OZ LAG LEV, o.z.	1 815 693,0
120	OZ Ipeľ – Hont	1 137 849,0	44	LAG Topoľa, o.z.	1 608 200,0



No.	Name of the LAG	Financial allocation to LAG (€)	No.	Name of the LAG	Financial allocation to LAG (€)
114	OZ pre rozvoj mikroreg. Požítavie – Širočina	1 080 000,0	51	Partnerstvo Bachureň	1 402 000,0
124	LAG Vitis	1 008 298,1	36	LAG Šafrán	1 157 905,6
123	Regionálne združenie Dolná Nitra, o.z.	891 531,5	41	LAG Ľubovniansko, o.z.	1 007 999,5
119	OZ Žibrica	874 232,9	34	LAG Skala, o.z.	949 676,0
122	LAG SOTDUM	863 697,0	43	LAG Stráže	883 000,0
121	Združenie mikroregiónu SVORNOSŤ	791 148,8	30	LAG Horný Šariš – Minčol	832 088,1
Žilina region		13 064 498,9	49	OZ Partnerstvo pre región	767 000,0
105	LAG Orava, o.z.	2 613 000,0	Košice Region		26 689 940,3
103	OZ Partnerstvo pre MAS Turiec	2 108 644,0	62	LAG Gemer – Rožňava	2 313 893,3
106	LAG Biela Orava	1 945 884,2	74	OZ Kras	2 292 213,0
109	OZ Partnerstvo pre MAS Dolný Liptov	1 887 000,0	60	LAG Bodva	2 079 069,0
101	LAG Rajecká Dolina	1 360 358,5	64	LAG Hornád – Slanské vrchy, o.z.	2 030 526,4
100	OZ „Partnerstvo pre MAS Terchovská dolina“	1 255 201,0	55	LAG Hnilec, o.z.	1 990 028,5
99	LAG Bystrická dolina	1 017 227,8	57	LAG Rudohorie, o.z.	1 723 821,6
108	OZ Stredný Liptov	877 183,4	58	LAG Sečovský región, o.z.	1 700 245,1
			70	LAG Tokaj – Rovina, o.z.	1 686 500,2
			72	Miloj Spiš, o.z.	1 528 143,0
			65	LAG Olšava – Torysa, o.z.	1 517 611,2
			68	LAG Roňava, o.z.	1 487 707,1
			59	LAG Bodrog, o.z.	1 467 154,2
			61	LAG Duša, o.z.	1 307 492,8
			63	LAG Hornád – Čierna Hora, o.z.	1 224 196,4
			67	LAG Poondavie, o.z.	1 176 974,4
			69	LAG Sľubica, o.z.	1 164 364,1

Note: LAGs are marked in blue in the Figure 2 of the table; LAGs for which financial means were not approved (red colour, Figure 2) and LAGs, which did not submit the application under the “Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017” (grey colour, Figure 2) are not included in the table

Source: “Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017”, own elaboration



REFERENCES

- ALBU R.G., CHITU I.B. (2014). Local Action Groups (LAGS) – An Important Instrument in Ensuring the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in Romania. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov, Economic Sciences*, 56, 2, 97-104.
- ALI S., MACHART F., VIMMER M.K. (2012). Negativní aspekty slučování municipalit: analýza akademické diskuze. *Acta Politologica*, 4, 3, 263-283.
- ALLERS M.A., VAN OMMEREN B. (2016). Intermunicipal Cooperation, Municipal Amalgamation and the Price of Credit. *Local Government Studies*, 42, 5, 717-738. DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2016.1171754.
- ALLERS M.A., GEERTSEMA J.B. (2016). The Effects of Local Government Amalgamation on Public Spending, Taxation, and Service Levels: Evidence from 15 Years of Municipal Consolidation. *Journal of Regional Science*, 56, 4, 659-682. DOI:10.1111/jors.12268.
- ANGELOVIČ M., BENČ V. (2012). Vybrané problémy mikroregionálnych združení obcí na slovensko-ukrajinském pohraničí. *Folia Geographica*, 19, 27-36.
- BABINSKÝ P. (2015). *Medziobecná spolupráca*. Retrieved from <http://databaze.mikroinovace.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Babinsk%C3%BD.pdf>. [accessed on 16 May 2018].
- BEL G., WARNER M.E. (2015). Inter-Municipal Cooperation and Costs: Expectations and Evidence. *Public Administration*, 93, 1, 52-67. DOI:10.1111/padm.12104.
- BUČEK J. (1997). Sídelný systém a interkomunálna spolupráca. In Delmartino, F., Vermessen, E., Miháliková, S., Faltán, L., ed., *Nové podoby verejnej správy (slovenská a flámska skúsenosť)*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, pp. 162-177.
- CALL FOR PROPOSALS 21/PRV/2017 (2017). *Call for proposals 21/PRV/2017 for approval of the proposals for the Community-led Local Development Strategy and for granting the status of LAGs*. [online] [accessed on 20 July 2018]. Retrieved from: www.apa.sk/download/11565.
- CZAPIEWSKA G. (2012). Lokalne Grupy Działania a kreowanie rozwoju regionalnego w województwach pomorskim i zachodniopomorskim. *Nierówności Społeczne a Wzrost Gospodarczy*, 29, 261-272.
- DE JONG H. W. (1985). *Dynamische Markttheorie*. Leiden: Stenfert Kroese.
- DOLLERY B., JOHNSON A. (2005). Enhancing Efficiency in Australian Local Government: An Evaluation of Alternative Models of Municipal Governance. *Urban Policy and Research* 23, 1, 73-85. DOI: 10.1080/081114042000335278.
- DONAUER E., RAJČÁKOVÁ E. (2014). Endogénny a exogénny rozvoj na príklade Mikroregiónu pod Marhátom. In Lauko, V., ed., *Regionálne dimenzie Slovenska*. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského, pp. 339-362.
- DREW J., KORTT M.A., DOLLERY B. (2016). Did the Big Stick Work? An Empirical Assessment of Scale Economies and the Queensland Forced Amalgamation Program. *Local Government Studies*, 42, 1, 1-14. DOI:10.1080/03003930.2013.874341.



- DUŠEK J. (2010). *Faktory regionálního růstu a rozvoje: se zaměřením na spolupráci měst a obcí v Jihočeském kraji*. České Budějovice: Vysoká škola evropských a regionálních studií.
- DŽUPINOVÁ E., HALÁS M., HORŇÁK M., HURBÁNEK P., KÁČEROVÁ M., MICHNIAK D., ONDOŠ S., ROCHOVSKÁ A. (2008). *Periférnosť a priestorová polarizácia na území Slovenska*. Bratislava: Geografika.
- FALŤAN Ľ., STRUSSOVÁ M., KOSTLÁN D., FALŤANOVÁ Ľ., SOPIROVÁ A. (2011). *Malé vidiecke sídla na Slovensku začiatkom 21. storočia*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV.
- FALŤAN Ľ., STRUSSOVÁ M. (2016). *Mikroregionálna a euroregionálna spolupráca obcí na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV.
- FOX W.F., GURLEY-CALVEZ T. (2006). *Will Consolidation Improve Sub-National Governments? (Policy Research Working Paper No. 3913)*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- FURMANKIEWICZ M. (2002). Funkcionalno-przestrzenne sieci współpracy samorządów lokalnych. *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, 1, 8, 5-24.
- GALVASOVÁ I., BINEK J., CHABIČOVSKÁ K., HOLEČEK J., HALÁSEK D. (2007). *Spolupráce obcí jako faktor rozvoje*. Brno: Georgetown.
- GRÁC R. (2014). *Geografické aspekty komunálnej reformy*. Bratislava: 1000knih.sk.
- HANES N., WIKSTRÖM M. (2010). Amalgamation Impacts on Local Growth: Are Voluntary Municipal Amalgamation More Efficient than Compulsory Amalgamations? *Canadian Journal of regional Science*, 33, 1, 57-70.
- HARDIN R. (1989). Political Obligation. In Hamlin, A., Pettit, Ph., ed., *The Good Polity. Normative Analysis of the State*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 103-119.
- HASPROVÁ M., DRÁBIK P., ŽÁK Š. (2012). Možnosti a perspektívy medziobecnej spolupráce. In Drábik, P., Červenka, P., Hlavatý, I., Jansová, P., ed., *Vedecké state Obchodnej fakulty 2012*. Bratislava: EKONÓM, pp. 143-154.
- HRADISKÁ A. (2007). *Financing of the Rural Country through the Institute „Local Action Group“*. 2nd Central European Conference in Regional Science, October 10-13, 2007, Nový Smokovec, pp. 342-346.
- CHABIČOVSKÁ K., BINEK J. (2007). *Zdokonalování veřejné správy a samosprávy ČR*. Brno: KONVOJ.
- CHAJDIK J. (2009). *Štatistika v exceli 2007*. Bratislava: Statist.
- JEŽEK J., MALAST J., KOPECKÝ M., KAŇKA L. (2015). *Spolupráce obcí a měst – České a evropské přístupy ke slučování obcí a meziobecní spolupráci*. Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita.
- IŠTOK R., KLAMÁR R. (2005). Geografické aspekty vytvárania spoločných obecných úradov v kontexte mikroregionálnej medziobecnej spolupráce. *Acta Facultatis Rerum Naturalium Universitatis Comenianae. Geographica*. Supplementum 3, 221-228.



- IŠTOK R., TEJ J. (2004). Perspektívy reformy územnej samosprávy na miestnej úrovni v kontexte sídelnej štruktúry Slovenska. *Folia Geographica* 7, 62-74.
- KASSAI Z., FARKAS T. (2013). The Participative Characteristics of LAG-members in Hungary. *Review on Agriculture and Rural Development*, 2, 1, 98-103.
- KATONA-KOVÁCS J., HIGH CH., NEMES G. (2011). Importance of Animation Actions in the Operation of Hungarian Local Action Groups. *European Countryside*, 3, 4, 227-240.
- KLAMÁR R. (2006). Stanovenie priorít rozvoja regiónu v procese strategického plánovania na príklade vidieckeho mikroregiónu Ptava. *Folia Geographica*, 10, 224-233.
- KLAMÁR R. (2011). Vývoj regionálnych disparít na Slovensku s osobitným zreteľom na regióny východného Slovenska. *Folia Geographica*, 18, 89-170.
- KLAMÁR R. (2016). Development Tendencies of Regional Disparities in the Slovak Republic. *Geographica Pannonica* 20, 3, 136-151. DOI: 10.18421/GP20.03-02.
- KLIMOVSKÝ D. (2009). O možných riešeniach fragmentovanej lokálnej sídelnej štruktúry. *Acta Politologica*, 1, 2, 181-2013.
- KLOBUČNÍK M., BAČÍK V., MATIAŠOVÁ M., FILA R. (2018). Negatívne aspekty zlučovania obcí v rámci komunálnych reforiem – perspektíva na príklade Slovenskej republiky. *Sociológia* 50, 4, 448-481. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.31577/sociologia.2018.50.4.18>.
- KOŁSUT B. (2015). *Zinstytucjonalizowane sieci współdziałania międzygminnego w Polsce*. Dissertation work. Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.
- KOPRIĆ I. (2012). Consolidation, Fragmentation and Special Statuses of Local Authorities in Europe. *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration*, 12, 4, 1175-1196.
- KOREC P. (2005). *Regionálny rozvoj Slovenska v rokoch 1989-2004*. Bratislava: Geografika.
- KUKLIŠ P. (2002). Medziobecná spolupráca. *Právny obzor*, 85, 2, 141-145.
- KVASOVÁ D. (2018). Miestne akčné skupiny ako forma partnerstva v marketingovom manažmente cieľového miesta. In Budinská, S., Huliaková, Z., Budinský, M. eds., *Scientia luventa 2018*. Banská Bystrica: luventa, pp. 1-11.
- LOVACKÁ S. (2006). Význam a formy interkomunálnej spolupráce obcí pre regionálny rozvoj. *Folia Geographica*, 10, 335-339.
- LUKIĆ A., OBAD O. (2016). New Actors in Rural Development - The LEADER Approach and Projectification in Rural Croatia. *Sociologija i proctor*, 54, 1, 71-90. DOI: 10.5673/sip.54.1.4.
- MADAJOVÁ M., MICHÁLEK A., PODOLÁK P. (2014). Úroveň regionálnych disparít na Slovensku a jej zmena v období rokov 2001-2011. In Michálek, A., Podolák, P., eds., *Regionálne a priestorové disparity na Slovensku, ich vývoj v ostatnom desaťročí, súčasný stav a konzekvencie*. *Geographia Slovaca*, 28, 127-152.



- MAES R. (1997). Miestna samospráva a územné členenie. In Delmartino, F., Vermessen, E., Miháliková, S., Faltáň, L., eds., *Nové podoby verejnej správy (slovenská a flámska skúsenosť)*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, pp. 34-62.
- MATLOVIČ R., MATLOVIČOVÁ K. (2011). Regionálne disparity a ich riešenie na Slovensku v rozličných kontextoch. *Folia Geographica*, 18, 8-88.
- MATLOVIČ R., KLAMÁR R., KOZOŇ J., IVANOVÁ M., MICHALKO M. (2018). Spatial polarity and spatial polarization in the context of supranational and national scales: regions of Visegrad countries after their accession to the EU. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 41, 59-78. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/bog-2018-0026>.
- MATLOVIČOVÁ K., ŽIDOVÁ A., KOLESÁROVÁ J. (2014). Dynamika regionálnych disparít na Slovensku v predkrízovom a krízovom období a ich riešenie nástrojmi regionálnej politiky. In Michálek, A., Podolák, P., eds., *Regionálne a priestorové disparity na Slovensku, ich vývoj v ostatnom desaťročí, súčasný stav a konsekvencie*. *Geographia Slovaca*, 28, 63-99.
- MICHALCEWICZ-KANIOWSKA M., ZAJDEL M., TOADER C.S. (2017). Functioning of the Local Groups of Action (LAG) in the Aspects of Sustainable Rural Development Policy. *Advanced Research in Life Sciences*, 1, 1, 44-47. DOI: 10.1515/arl-2017-0007.
- MOSORA L.C., MOSORA M.H. (2012). The Importance of Local Action Groups in the Romanian European Integration Process: an Empirical Study. *Informatica Economica*, 16, 4, 44-48.
- NIAOUNAKIS T., BLANK J. (2017). Inter-municipal cooperation, economies of scale and cost efficiency: an application of stochastic frontier analysis to Dutch municipal tax departments. *Local Government Studies*, 43, 4, 533-554. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2017.1322958>
- NIŽŇANSKÝ V. (2004). *Komunálna reforma. Materiál pre verejnú diskusiu*. Retrieved from: http://komunal.eu/images/pdf/komunalna_reforma.pdf. [accessed on 25 March 2018].
- NIŽŇANSKÝ V., CIBÁKOVÁ V., HAMALOVÁ M. (2014). *Tretia etapa decentralizácie verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Wolters Kluwer.
- NUNVÁŘOVÁ S. (2016). European Integration in Rural Areas Through Local Action Groups - Complexity of the Implementation of Local Development in the Czech Republic. In Kovářová, E., Melecký, L., Staničková, M. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on European Integration*, Ostrava, pp. 679-688.
- PADOVÁ J., PIROVÁ B., POTOMOVÁ J. (2012). Analýza regionálnych disparít na príklade vybraných ukazovateľov v období rokov 2004-2010 na území Slovenskej republiky. In Klímová, Žitek, eds., *XV. medzinárodné kolokvium o regionálnych viedach*. Brno, Valtice: Masarykova univerzita, pp. 69-80.



- PARLIŇSKA A., IGNAR M. (2016). Leader Programme as the Sources of Financing Local Action Groups Activities in the Mazovian Voivodeship. *Oeconomica*, 15, 4, 137-145.
- PÁRTLOVÁ P., HRON J. (2016). Local Action Groups (LAG) as an important strategic partner for rural development in the Region of South Bohemia. *Littera Scripta*, 9, 1, 99-110.
- PATKOŠ C. (2018). Specialities in the institutionalisation of hungarian leader Local action groups. *European Countryside*, 10, 1, 89-106. DOI: 10.2478/euco-2018-0006.
- PECHROVÁ M., BOUKALOVÁ K. (2015). Differences Among Czech Local Action Groups In Using Selected Principles of Leader. *Scientia Agriculturae Bohemica*, 46, 1, 41-48. DOI: 10.1515/sab-2015-0015.
- POCOL C.B., KASSAI Z. (2016). Initiatives for Promoting Innovation Among Local Action Groups in Romania. *Bulletin UASVM Horticulture*, 73, 2, 291-298. DOI: 10.15835/buasvmcn-hort:12348.
- PONČÍKOVÁ I. (2015). *Mikroregiony x MAS: přínosy a nevýhody pro obce*. Brno, Fond mikroprojektů.
- PUSTÁ B., DOLNÁ Z. (2010). Mikroregionálne združenia ako jedna z foriem medzio-
becnej spolupráce. *Geographia Cassoviensis*, 4, 2, 168-172.
- PUSTÁ, B. (2011). Mikroregionálne združenia obcí ako jedna z možností rozvoja vid-
ieckych sídiel v kontexte ich transformácie. *Folia Geographica*, 17, 314-322.
- RAJČÁKOVÁ E., ŠVECOVÁ A. (2009). Regionálne disparity na Slovensku. *Geographia
Cassoviensis*, 3, 2, 142-149.
- RAJČÁKOVÁ E., ŠVECOVÁ A. (2014). Regionálne dispatity na Slovensku v kontex-
te kohéznej politiky EÚ 2007-2013. In Michálek, A., Podolák, P. ed., Regionálne
a priestorové disparity na Slovensku, ich vývoj v ostatnom desaťročí, súčasný
stav a konzekvencie. *Geographia Slovaca*, 28, 101-126.
- SEMIAN M., NOVÁČEK A. (2017). The reinterpretation of histories in identities of
newly established regions: The case of Local Action Groups in Czechia. *Hungari-
an Geographical Bulletin*, 66, 4, 307-319. DOI: 10.15201/hungeobull.66.4.3.
- SIENKIEWICZ W. (2015). The impact of Cross-Sectoral Partnerships on Local Devel-
opment on the Example of Activity LAGs in Lublin Province. *Zarządzanie Pub-
liczne*, 4, 32, 333-350. DOI:10.4467/20843968ZP.15.021.4767.
- SLAVÍK V., BAČÍK V. (2007). Mikroregiony ako podklad ku komunálnej reforme v SR.
Geographia Cassoviensis, 1, 1, 169-174.
- SLAVÍK V., GRÁC R., KLOBUČNÍK M. (2010). Reflexia k problematike spoločných
obecných úradov v Slovenskej republike. *Geographia Cassoviensis*, 4, 2, 193-200.
- SLAVÍK V., BAČÍK V., KLOBUČNÍK M., GRÁC R., KOŽUCH M., FALŤAN V., FILA R. (2016).
Analýza mikroregiónov Slovenskej republiky. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského.



- SLOVÁKOVÁ H., JURAJDOVÁ J., ŠULÁK T., ČEPELKA O., JÄGER S., LYSEK J., ŠARADÍN P., CHMELA T. (2015). *Metodika spolupráce obcí v místních akčních skupinách*. Zlín: Tigris.
- Systém Riadenia CLLD (2017). *Systém riadenia CLLD (LEADER a komunitný rozvoj) pre programové obdobie 2014-2020*. [online] [accessed on 20 July 2018]. Retrieved from: <http://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/system-riadenia-clld-verzia-17/>.
- SVOBODOVÁ H. (2010). Reality of local action groups' situation in rural development of the Czech Republic – aims, activities, barriers – by view of geographer in practise. In *Geography for life in the 21st century: Proceedings of XXII. the congress of the Czech Geographical Society*, Ostrava, pp. 744-747.
- SWIANIEWICZ P. (2011). Demanded but Difficult: Intermunicipal Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. In Swianiewicz, ed., *Working Together: Intermunicipal Cooperation in Five Central European Countries*. Budapest: Open Society Institute/Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, pp. 1-18.
- SZÉKELY V. (2017). Rural development and local action group in Slovakia: intranational comparisons. *Acta Geobalcanica*, 4, 1, 33-39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18509/AGB.2018.04>.
- SZMIGIEL-RAWSKA K., DZIEMIANOWICZ W., SZLACHTA J. (2010). *Samorząd lokalny w sieciach gospodarczych*. Warszawa: Wydział Geografii i Studiów Regionalnych UW.
- TELES F. (2016). *Local governance and inter-municipal cooperation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/9781137445742.
- TICHÝ D. (2003). Dobrovoľná forma spolupráce obcí. *Verejná správa*, 58, 2, 22-23.
- TVRDOŇOVÁ J. (2006). *Miestne akčné skupiny typu LEADER a tvorba stratégií sociálnoekonomického rozvoja vidieka*. Banská Bystrica: VOKA.
- VARVAŽOVSKÁ P. (2012). Local Action Groups as an Actor in the Regional Administration (Results of a Case Study in the Region of the Czech Republic). *International Journal of Economic and Finance Studies*, 4, 2, 195-204.
- VOLK A., BOJNEC Š. (2014). Local action groups and the LEADER co-financing of rural development projects in Slovenia. *Agricultural Economics*, 60, 8, 364-375. DOI: 10.17221/180/2013-AGRICECON.
- WISTEROVÁ A. (2016). *Verejno-súkromné partnerstvá: Miestne akčné skupiny (MAS)*. [online] [accessed on 16 October 2018]. Retrieved from: <http://casopisgrant.sk/verejno-sukromne-partnerstva-miestne-akcne-skupiny-mas/>.
- ZAJDA K. (2014). Problems of functioning of Polish local action groups from the perspective of the social capital concept. *Eastern European Countryside*, 20, 1, 73-97. DOI: 10.2478/eec-2014-0004
- ZAJDA K., KRETEK-KAMIŃSKA A. (2013). Professionalisation and Economisation of Rural NGOs and the Activity of Their Members. An Example of Local Action Groups from Wielkopolska. *Journal of Agribusiness and Rural Development*, 1, 27, 249-260.



ŽÁRSKA E. (2006). Bariéry a šance rozvoja malých obcí. *Acta regionalia et environmentalica*, 1, 8-12.

WWW.NSRV.SK. [online] [accessed on 11 Juny 2018]. Retrieved from: <http://www.nsrv.sk/?start>.

WWW.STATISTICS.SK. [online] [accessed on 15 February 2018]. Retrieved from: www.statistics.sk.

ZÁKON č. 83/1990 Zb. o združovaní občanov. [online] [accessed on 10 May 2018]. Retrieved from: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1990/83/20090901.html>.