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# The role of the National Support Centre for Agriculture in the process of revitalization and renewal of the rural areas

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## Abstract

Rural development policy of Agricultural Property Stock (APS) of the State Treasury in Poland is run by the National Support Centre for Agriculture (until 31.08.2017 Agricultural Property Agency). In the article, on the example of the Braniewo municipality, the size and spatial distribution of land transferred from the Agricultural Property Stock (APS) of the State Treasury to the municipality was analysed. One of the most important goals associated with this was activities related to social aspects, often part of the revitalization and renewal of the rural areas. After Poland's accession to the European Union, it was possible to obtain subsidies that allowed the rural population to apply for financing projects, such as: road construction, creating school playgrounds or socio-cultural facilities. Authors also analysed examples of good practices in this area in the municipality of Braniewo, as a recommendation for other municipalities. Attempts have also been made to indicate the role of the National Support Centre for Agriculture in the transformation of the Polish countryside, with particular emphasis on the areas of former State Agricultural Farms.

**Key words:** *National Support Centre for Agriculture, revitalization and renewal of the rural areas, rural areas, rural development policy*

## INTRODUCTION

Donation is one of the forms of allocation of real estate of agricultural land remaining in the Agricultural Property Stock (APS) of the State Treasury (Pol. Zasób Własności Rolnej Skarbu Państwa) [PESEL 2008]. National Support Centre for Agriculture (Pol. Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Rolnictwa) and earlier Agricultural Property Agency (Pol. Agencja Nieruchomości Rolnych), under the Act of 19 October 1991 on the management of the agricultural property of the State Treasury [Ustawa... 1991], as well as other provisions, has been authorized or obliged to transfer part of the APS land free of charge [PODGÓRSKI, ŚWIĘTOCHOWSKI 2014].

Free of charge transfer of lands for local self-government units is implemented in particular for purposes related to infrastructural investments carried out by these units [BARTKOWSKA, NAWROCKI 2011]. The subject of the transfer may also be property with necessary land for non-economic activities, e.g. playgrounds, kindergartens or day-care centres [SUCHOŃ 2007]. Property from the APS can also be transferred free of charge to local self-government units through a property contract:

- to perform objectives related to the implementation of investments within the meaning of the Act on Detailed Rules of Preparing for the Implementation of the Investments in Fire Protection of 8 July 2010 [Ustawa... 2010];

- in order to allow the implementation of the local plan and reconstruction plan, as referred to the Act on Special Rules of Reconstruction, Repair and Demolition of Buildings Destroyed or Damaged as a Result of Natural Disasters of 11 August 2001 [Ustawa... 2001];
- for property designated in local spatial management plan or a study of the conditions and directions of the spatial management of municipality [KUROWSKA *et al.* 2016].

Land and facilities transferred to municipalities are often used to implement a social nature tasks [NAWROCKI 2010; OGRYZEK, RZĄSA 2017; RZĄSA, OGRYZEK 2017]. These tasks, in turn, are part of the process of revitalization and renewal of the rural areas.

In accordance with the Act of revitalisation from 9 October 2015 [Ustawa... 2015], revitalization is a process of getting degraded areas out from the crisis state, conducted in a comprehensive manner, through integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, land and economy; territorially focused, carried out by stakeholders based on the municipal revitalization programme. In the process of revitalization, it is particularly important to properly determine the degraded area and the area of revitalization. The degraded area is the area of the municipality in crisis state due to the concentration of negative social phenomena, in particular unemployment, poverty, crime, low education or social capital level, as well as insufficient participation in public and cultural life. The degraded area must also be characterized by at least one of the following negative phenomena:

- economic – low level of entrepreneurship, poor condition of local enterprises, low economic activity;
- environmental – exceeding the environmental quality standards, the presence of waste posing a threat to life, human health or the environment;
- spatial and functional – insufficient equipment in technical and social infrastructure or its poor technical condition, lack of access to basic services or its poor quality, non-adaptation of urban solutions to the changing functions of the area, low level of communication service, shortage or poor quality of public areas;
- technical – in particular, degradation of the technical condition of buildings (including housing), and failure of technical solutions enabling effective use of construction facilities, in particular in the field of energy efficiency and environmental protection.

The area encompassing all or part of the degraded area, characterized by a special concentration of negative phenomena, in which the municipality intends to carry out revitalization due to significant importance for local development, is designated as an area of revitalization.

The concept of “renewal of rural areas” in Poland has been functioning since 1997, when Wilczyński, inspired by the activities for the development of rural areas in Austria and Germany, initiated the creation of the first regional programme of renewal of rural areas, in the Opole Voivodeship [WILCZYŃSKI 2003]. Renewal of rural areas is the planned and implemented by the rural community development process, based on local resources with the use of external support [WILCZYŃSKI 2008]. Taking into account

this understanding of the concept of revitalization and renewal of rural areas, the aim of research in this article was to identify elements supporting the process of revitalization and renewal of villages, with particular emphasis on the transfer of land by the National Support Centre for Agriculture to local self-government units.

## METHODOLOGY AND AREA OF RESEARCH

According to the data published by GUS Olsztyn [2019], the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship has the highest unemployment rate and it amounts to 10%. The research object is the rural municipality Braniewo, which has 6,144 inhabitants. Municipality covers approx. 25.5% of county’s area. In the Braniewo municipality, for 1000 inhabitants 110 work. Registered unemployment in the municipality of Braniewo amounted 31.5% in 2016 and is higher than the average unemployment in Poland by 26.8% and by 20.8% in comparison with the municipalities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The average monthly salaries in the Braniewo municipality amount to 3,352.72 PLN, which corresponds to 78.10% of the average monthly gross wage in Poland. 34.9% of professionally active residents of the Braniewo municipality work in the agricultural sector (agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing), 13.8% in industry and construction, and 15.0% in the service sector (trade, vehicle repair, transport, accommodation and gastronomy, information and communication) and 2.3% work in the financial sector (financial and insurance activities, real estate services).

For the purpose of the article, the monographic method was applied with reference to the literature review, legal regulations, documents regulating the principles of managing real estate remaining in the National Support Centre for Agriculture, as well as field visions and environmental interviews. As part of the research, socio-cultural and economic conditions were taken into account and the transferred property was reviewed.

Another element of the research was the analysis of the influence of the National Support Centre for Agriculture on the shaping of rural space and the indication of development directions. Land from the APS transferred to the municipality of Braniewo in the years 2000–2017 were included in the analysis. The research area was therefore the Braniewo municipality, and the research concerned real estates located in its territory and transferred from the APS to: the Braniewo rural municipality, the city of Braniewo and the Braniewo county. Cognitive concerns were the main reason for the assessment of the impact of the National Support Centre for Agriculture in the context of revitalization and renewal of the rural areas.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDIED AREA

To analyse the level of socio-economic development of municipalities, the TOPSIS method (the technique for order of preference by similarity to ideal solution) can be used [WYSOCKI 2010]. According to PAWLEWICZ [2017], the Braniewo municipality is currently in the IV TOPSIS class (the lowest) of socio-economic development level of

the municipalities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The research was carried out for 2003, 2007 and 2014, analysing the impact of European Union subsidies on the level of rural development, as one of the factors stimulating development. In most municipalities, this impact was positive, often resulting in a change to a better class or class maintenance. Unfortunately, in 2014, the Braniewo municipality dropped to the lowest class. Despite the activities of the former APA and EU subsidies, the area under study shows a low level of socio-economic development. Another indicator of the level of socio-economic development may be a synthetic indicator of the assessment of the level of sustainable development of rural municipalities. According to PAWLEWICZ *et al.* [2013], the Braniewo municipality belongs to the third class (scale from 1 meaning the highest to 4 meaning the lowest), representing the average lower level of sustainable development in the municipal classification developed using the synthetic Hellwig's measure of development [HELLWIG 1968].

By analysing data from the Local Data Bank of the Statistics Poland it can be concluded, that the population growth by municipalities in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship is negative. Low feminisation rate can be noticed in the analysed municipality, similarly the percentage of people aged 65 and more per 100 persons.

The area of the Braniewo municipality can be called a problematic area due to spatial diversity and differences in the level of socio-economic development in comparison with other municipalities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. According to BAŃSKI [2008], some regions are characterized by phenomena that hinder their proper transformation in line with social expectations, while at the same time demonstrating in some respects "impairment" in relation to other areas in the country, such areas are usually defined as problematic. Regional disparities may refer to the level of agricultural development, equipment in technical infrastructure, population situation, etc.

## THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SUPPORT CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURE FIELD BRANCH OLSZTYN AND THE MUNICIPALITY OF BRANIEWO IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RURAL AREAS OF THE BRANIEWO MUNICIPALITY

During the field visions, 90 objects transferred by the National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn to the municipality of Braniewo, the city of Braniewo and the poviats of Braniewo, were examined. They were classified into 5 types (see Tab. 1) due to the purpose of the transfer. In the municipality, examples of good practices can be found, as most of the transferred land is maintained and used for public purposes, in particular: hydrophores, wells, boiler rooms, septic tanks, fire pools, playgrounds, recreation areas, community centres, housing, roads or utility rooms.

In the years 2000–2017, for the implementation of public objectives for the rural municipality of Braniewo 52.3484 ha of land was transferred free of charge from the APA, whereas for the city of Braniewo – 20 ha, and for the

poviat of Braniewo – 6.1923 ha. On average, the National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn for each of the municipalities of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship in the analysed period, donated approx. 20 ha of land, for public purposes [Sejm RP 2015]. Poviat of Braniewo received land mainly to expand the existing poviat roads, while the purpose of the transferred land for the Braniewo municipality is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The division of land due to the type, transferred in the years 2000–2017 from the National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn

Roads	Water supply and sewage system	Sport and recreation	Residential premises and utility rooms	Others
13.8 ha	6.1 ha	6.8 ha	12.2 ha	13.1 ha

Source: own study based on data from the National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn.

Analysing the results from Table 1, it can be concluded that the largest amount of land was transferred to the Braniewo municipality for road construction or expansion. Over 12 ha were land with residential premises and utility rooms. In total, almost 13 ha of land was transferred to improve the water supply and sewage system, and for sport and recreation. The "others" type includes land designated for, among others on: fire-fighting pool, municipal investments, etc. The cooperation of the municipality authorities and National Support Centre for Agriculture has enabled the implementation of many public goals. The most important of it are:

1. In Rudłowo, the land for the playground and the boiler house was transferred, and the municipality financed the construction of the playground and modernization of the boiler room.
2. In Ułowo, a boiler house was transferred, which was modernized by the municipality, and additionally the municipality took care of the construction of the playground, modernization of the playground, renovation of housing roads, construction of a recreational shelter, construction of Braniewo–Józefowo–Ułowo–Klejnów water supply network and construction of Nowa, Stara Pasłęka–Klejnówko, Ułowo–Braniewo sewage network.
3. In Podlesne, a boiler house was transferred, which the municipality modernized; municipality also constructed the Podlesne–Gronowo sewage network and the Gronowo–Podlesne water supply network, as well as a playground and recreational shelter. An important element for the municipality was the donation of the building of the former Agricultural Property Agency headquarters for the municipal company PERIG in Młoteczno, where the municipality repaired the building, reconstructed the roads to adapt it to the safety requirements of residents; and construction of a playground and recreational shelter.

The role of National Support Centre for Agriculture was not only limited to the transfer of land, but was also related to the implementation of some or all of the investment.

Based on data obtained from National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn and the municipality

of Braniewo, field visions and environmental interviews, the most important of it are:

1. In Szyleny Osada National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn modernized the water supply (Photo 1a), where two new deep wells, two retention reservoirs, a water treatment station and a sewage network were made. The land was also donated, on which the municipality built a playground and a recreational shelter (Photo 1b) and modernized the road and football field.



Photo 1. Investments in Szyleny: a) water and sewage project, b) playground and recreational shelter (phot. *M. Ogrzyzek*)

2. In Zgoda the land was transferred and the Młoteczny–Rodowo–Zgoda water supply network was built with connections to the property in Zgoda and the Zgoda–Gronowo sewage system was built with the connections to the property in Zgoda. The municipality with its own resources completed the construction of a playground, reconstruction of the road, modernization of the pitch and built a recreational shelter.
3. In Maciejewo National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn built the Zakrzewiec–Maciejewo water supply network with connections to the property in Maciejewo and the Maciejewo–Lipowina sewage system with connections to the property in Maciejewo. The municipality, on the other hand, undertook the modernization of the road in this village.

4. In Bemowizna, a building was donated to a common room and a building intended for social housing. National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn also built a water supply and sewage network. The municipality has refurbished the common room and social building, modernized the roads, co-financed the construction of bus bays and pavements along the county road, modernized the pitch and playground.
5. In Brzeszczyny, National Support Centre for Agriculture built and delivered a water supply and sewage system, and the municipality reconstructed the road, modernized the pitch and built a recreational shelter.
6. In Gronówko, National Support Centre for Agriculture modernized the water supply, took care of the renovation of two deep water intakes, construction of two retention reservoirs, construction of a water treatment station, construction of a water supply network with connections and construction of the Gronów–Lipowina sewerage network with connections. The municipality modernized the pitch, built a recreational shelter and a playground, and co-financed the reconstruction of the county road.
7. In Lipowina, the land was transferred for the construction of a village centre, fire station and playground.

The data collected as part of the research allow to conclude that National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn transferred land to meet local social needs, which is why this institution is an important stakeholder in the process of revitalization and renewal of the rural areas. This is due to the social nature of the investments being carried out, including in particular: hydrophores, wells, boiler houses, septic tanks, fire-fighting pools, playgrounds, recreational areas, common rooms, housing, roads or utility rooms. The aforementioned investments fit well into the activities carried out as part of projects concerning revitalization and renewal of the rural areas.

Thanks to the objects transferred from Agricultural Property Stock (APS) of the State Treasury, the Braniewo municipality was able to implement investments with funds from the European Union. As part of the conducted research, the following were located:

1. Construction of a village centre in Lipowina – the area handed over by the former Agricultural Property Agency. The municipality has obtained co-financing from Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013 within the measure “Village renewal and development”: PLN 496.425,00.
2. Renovation of the factory canteen rooms for the village house in Bemowo and the renovation of the community centre in Pęciszewo – the building in Bemowo was transferred by former Agricultural Property Agency, Pęciszewo. The municipality has obtained co-financing from RDP 2007–2013 within the measure “Village renewal and development”: PLN 223,963.00.
3. Reconstruction of the central connection in the village center in Bemowo and the equipment of the recreation room in Żelazna Góra and Pęciszewo – the building in Bemowo was given by former Agricultural Property Agency. The municipality has obtained co-financing

from RDP 2007–2013 within the measure “Village renewal and development”: PLN 61,980.00.

4. Reconstruction with a change in the way of using the administration and office building in Bemowo for social premises and construction of a central heating connection. The municipality has obtained funding from Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego PLN 489,361.83.

The municipality has over 170 premises in its housing stock (as at 06.2018). The vast majority was transferred free of charge by National Support Centre for Agriculture. In some apartments before the transfer, renovations were carried out. The municipality takes over roads belonging to the State Treasury, these are internal roads that provide access to fields. The municipality’s task is to maintain these roads, which entails increased expenditure in the field of infrastructure.

A very important element of the cooperation between National Support Centre for Agriculture and the municipal company PERIG dealing with the operation of water and sewage networks in the Braniewo municipality was the initiation of monitoring of sewage pumping stations using an information system to monitor the operation of pumps (Photo 2a). Currently, there is a real-time monitoring system of 14 pumps, of which in the case of 7, National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn participated in the costs of construction and incorporation into the system. The remaining ones were financed by the municipal company PERIG. In addition, PERIG conducts analyses of the suitability of water at estuaries using the Hydro-SCADA system (Photo 2b).

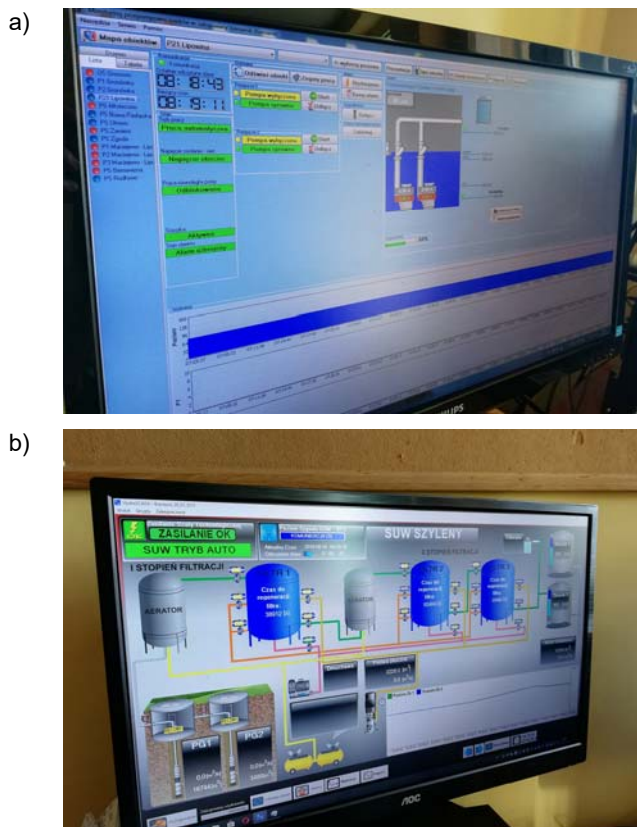


Photo 2. Monitoring system: a) pumping station, b) water quality (phot. M. Ogryzek)

The monitoring network consisted of several converter stations and hydrological stations providing real-time measurements. In these places various combinations of water flow, level and temperature are measured. The system is an industry Web GIS, used to control, visualize, monitor and control automation processes. It is based on web technology. It offers monitoring of dispersed objects of water supply and sewage infrastructure using GPRS technology, including: monitoring of sewage pumping stations, sewage treatment plants, sewage flow measurement, pumping sets, hydrophore sets, water wells, water intakes, irrigation facilities (pumping stations, weirs, dams, retention reservoirs). Analysing the records from the systems, taking into account observations during field visits and confirmed conversations with residents and service station workers, it was confirmed that there is water shortage in the municipality due to water disappearance, inefficient deep wells and therefore the lack of the ability to maintain the quality parameters of drinking water in such places as Różaniec, Cielętnik, Marcinkowo, Strubiny, Wilewo, Żelazna Góra, Podgórze, Ułowo, Klejnowko, Podleśne. These elements affect the quality of life of the population, blocking the development of rural areas.

The National Support Centre for Agriculture at the request of the Braniewo municipality also planned to transfer the land in Nowa Pasłęka, in order to create a beach (Photo 3). This investment was to support the development of tourist and agritourism activities in the Braniewo municipality over the Vistula Lagoon. These activities were closely related to the implementation of the Żuławy Loop project, that is 303 km of the waterway connecting the water routes of the Vistula, Martwa Wisła, Szkarpawa, Wisła Królewiecka, Nogat, Wisła Śmiała, Wielka Święta, Tuga, Motława, Jagielloński Channel, the Elbląg and Pasłęka Rivers, as well as the waters of the Vistula Lagoon.



Photo 3. A place for beach in Nowa Pasłęka (phot. M. Ogryzek)

As part of this program, a sailing marina was built in Nowa Pasłęka and Braniewo. There is a seaport in Nowa Pasłęka near the Ujście settlement. In addition, the tourist potential grows due to the fact that the Green Velo Cycling Trail runs through the municipality. However, due to the reported demand, the land for the beach was transferred to the customs service.

## CONCLUSIONS

Until recently, it was believed that the sale was the only proper form of disposing of the State Treasury Property as well as the only possible task to be performed by National Support Centre for Agriculture. As part of the conducted research on the activities of the former Agricultural Property Agency and the current National Support Centre for Agriculture on the example of Field Branch Olsztyn in the years 2000–2017 in the municipality of Braniewo, it can be concluded that the contribution to the development of agriculture and the Polish village was undisputed. As part of the research, it was shown that land was transferred for social purposes and a number of investments were financed. With well-functioning cooperation, construction of playgrounds, sports fields, renovation of roads, construction of recreational shelters, modernization of boiler houses, construction of water supply networks and sewage networks, and many more were carried out. These activities had a positive impact on the standard of living of the population. The problem area is a municipality in which former State Agricultural Farms were practically in every village. Tested area borders with Russia (Kaliningrad region), which on the one hand is its advantage and on the other hand a downside.

The environmental interviews conducted in the municipality allow to state that in order to use the potential of the Braniewo municipality, National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn can support, as far as organizational and financial possibilities are concerned, the following investments affecting the development of rural areas:

- 1) transfer the land in Nowa Pasłęka in order to create a beach;
- 2) transfer land for the construction of a playground and participate in construction costs in the towns of Cielętnik and Maciejewo;
- 3) participate in the construction costs of a new deep well in Nowa Pasłęka;
- 4) participate in the costs of constructing a new water supply network from Zawierz to Wielewa, from Lipowina to Strubin, from Brzeszczyn to Marcinków, from Nowa Pasłęka to Różaniec, from Podgórze to Cielętnik;
- 5) participate in the costs of constructing a sewerage network from Różańca through Klejnowo to Ułów and Marcinków to Brzeszczyna;
- 6) in Żelazna Góra, transfer land and participate in the costs of:
  - modernization of a closed sewage treatment plant in order to start it,
  - construction of a sanitary sewerage network with connections,
  - modernization of the water intake (renovation of two deep wells, modernization of the water treatment station, construction of a retention tank for drinking water).

These investments, due to their social character, could perfectly fit into the implementation of projects related to the revitalization and renewal of the rural areas.

As a result of the conducted research, it can be concluded that in the process of revitalization and renewal of the rural areas, an important element was the use of land transferred free of charge to municipalities by National Support Centre for Agriculture, especially for the implementation of social objectives.

Another important element supporting this process was the demonstration of sources of financing for social investments by the municipality of Braniewo. After the analyses, it can be concluded that support was obtained both from EU programs (RDP 2007–2013) and by National Support Centre for Agriculture Field Branch Olsztyn. The land obtained from the Agricultural Property Stock of the State Treasury gave the opportunity to apply for EU funds and allowed to obtain it.

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## **Rola Krajowego Ośrodka Wsparcia Rolnictwa w procesie rewitalizacji i odnowy wsi**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Polityka rozwoju obszarów wiejskich wchodzących w skład Zasobu Własności Rolnej Skarbu Państwa (ZWRSP) w Polsce prowadzona jest przez Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Rolnictwa (KOWR, do 31.08.2017 r. Agencja Nieruchomości Rolnych). W artykule, na przykładzie gminy Braniewo, przeanalizowano areal i przestrzenny rozkład gruntów przekazanych z ZWRSP na rzecz gminy. Jednym z ważniejszych celów z tym związanych były działania dotyczące aspektów społecznych, często wpisujące się w rewitalizację i odnowę wsi. Po przystąpieniu Polski do Unii Europejskiej stało się możliwe uzyskanie dotacji na finansowanie projektów, takich jak budowa dróg, tworzenie szkolnych placów zabaw czy obiektów społeczno-kulturowych, na terenach wiejskich. W artykule przeanalizowano również przykłady dobrych praktyk w tym zakresie w gminie Braniewo jako rekomendacji dla innych gmin. Podjęto się także próby wskazania roli KOWR w transformacji polskiej wsi, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem obszarów byłych PGR-ów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Rolnictwa, polityka rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, rewitalizacja i odnowa wsi, tereny wiejskie*