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**The state and the
development prospects
of the Lubusz cluster
initiative „The Lubusz
Wine and Honey Route”**

1. Introduction

Over the past years, we have been observing the dynamic growth of the business competitiveness in Poland. It is maintaining this trend that requires continual work for raising the quality of the offered products and continuous search for new and innovative solutions. The cooperation of the science, business and local government worlds has become an important element of the economic competitiveness of regions. The concept of the economic clusters (bunches), which are an effective way for seeking synergies arising from the cooperation among different entities being a member of the so-called triple helix, i.e. enterprises, scientific institutions and official authorities has become a synonym for success of the economy of the region built on high-quality competition.

Numerous case studies and theoretical analyses indicate that a number of phenomena, which affect positively the competitiveness of business entities forming the cluster, are associated with the existence of the cluster. The prospect of potential benefits for enterprises

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and regions, resulting from functioning of the circles, encourages their potential participants to engage in creation and development of cluster structures. The accelerated development of clusters may result from taking deliberate actions both by the very enterprises as well as other entities such as scientific institutions or regional authorities.

As it can be noticed in numerous sources, the majority of cluster initiatives operating in Poland has a character of cluster structure germs. This situation applies to many Polish regions, including also the Lubusz region.

While analysing the development of clusters in the Lubusz Voivodeship, it can be noted that the activity of entities in the creation of clusters is much lower in comparison with other voivodeships (PARP 2011, p. 6). It is in the voivodeship that the research aiming at identifying and analysing existing cluster structures has not been conducted and the knowledge on the Lubusz cluster initiatives is still limited.

The aim of this article is to analyse the state and the development prospects of the Lubusz cluster initiative „The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route”. It was meeting the purpose formulated in this way that required conducting an empirical research. As part of the research, an attempt of answering questions was made that concerned: motives of entities for accession to the cluster initiative, benefits resulting from acting within the initiative, barriers to the development of the industry in the region as well as participants’ expectations in relation to activities undertaken by local and regional governments. It is in the article that the theoretical issues associated with problems of clusters and cluster initiatives were discussed. It is later in this article that a brief characterization of the cluster potential of the Lubusz Voivodeship with particular emphasis on the wine industry was carried out. The characterization of the cluster potential of the voivodeship was begun with an analysis of the industry specialization in the region. Due to the volume limitation for describing the industry specialization in the Lubusz region in this article, only the findings of the research carried out on the area of the voivodeship in connection with examination of the economic profile of the region and with the update of the Lubusz Regional Development Strategy were presented. However, the analysis of statistical data was omitted. It is in the third part of the article that the findings of empirical research carried out were presented. It is at the end, in relation to the discussed research that the conclusions and recommendations were presented, which relate to the best ways of supporting the wine industry development and the cluster initiative described in the article. Three research methods were used: the method of examination of documents, the questionnaire survey method and the method

of the direct interview. This article uses the reports and expertises being results of research conducted in the area of the Lubusz Voivodeship, regional strategy documents as well as publications, reports, bulletins and information available on the internet.

2. Clusters and cluster initiatives: theoretical aspects

There is a significant difference between the clusters, being real economic phenomena and the cluster initiatives being aimed at creating and development of clusters.

It is in the subject literature that there is no single, widely applied and accepted definition of a cluster. The best known and most widely quoted definition is the one of M.E. Porter (2008, p. 213), according to which the bunches are „the geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, companies operating in related sectors and institutions associated with them (e.g. universities, standards bodies and trade associations) in individual fields, competing with one another but also cooperating”. The very fact of the existence of the concentration of enterprises operating in the same industry does not define the cluster. It is the existence of intensive interaction and cooperation amongst entities being its participants that is necessary.

Whereas the cluster initiative is „an organized effort aiming at intensifying growth and competitiveness of clusters in the region, which involves cluster companies, the government and/or research circles” (Sölvell, Lindqvist, Ketels 2003, p.9). These initiatives are financed by their participants as well as from public funds in frames of programs for supporting the development of clusters (Palmen, Baron 2008, p. 12). The intention of the cluster initiative is to accelerate the process of cluster formation or its strengthening. It serves communication, defining common goals and targeting specific development activities carried out later by individual entities being participants of the cluster or also its coordinator (Plawgo 2007, p. 9). It is the reason why the cluster initiative should not be identified with the objective social and economic structure, which is the cluster. The initiative is an organizational form that brings together the key players of the cluster for its development. As a rule, not all entities functioning in the cluster participate in it. Whereas the cluster is an economic phenomenon, characteristic of the economy of the given territory. The bunches may not have formalised character and their members can not be aware that they operate within the cluster. Clusters are a neutral phenomenon resulting from the natural tendency in the economy for concentrating particular types of business activity

in the given region. The cluster initiative mentioned above can be more or less formalised (in the form of a consortium, an association or other legal entity), or operate on the basis of regular official or unofficial meetings (Dzierżanowski, Fishing, Szultka 2011, pp. 15-22). The organizational form of the cluster initiative is very often dependent on the way of its creation. It is starting the cluster initiative that can be an outcome of bottom-up actions of business entities interested in cooperation (bottom-up approach) or of actions taken by official authorities (top-down approach).

The bottom-up initiatives are characterized by the fact that the very entrepreneurs aspire for establishing a cluster group. The companies interact with the local and regional self-government bodies and affect the status of the development strategy of the region. The bottom-up initiatives can also result from the impact of the so-called endogenous factors, which include: a favourable location, good transport connections, a high level of the technical infrastructure, traditions of producing defined products on the given area, the access to the determined natural resources and human resources, the presence of the refined market demand, the potential of the market, the availability and the level of the research centre, the access to the specialized knowledge and skills, the presence of FDI in the region and the like. The factors mentioned above affect the increase in the competitiveness of entities and are the base for creation of the cluster or the base for development of the cluster initiative in the given region. The top-down initiatives are the effect of actions taken by the government administration or self-government authorities. Governments or local self-governments determine themselves, which sectors are most likely to develop and therefore should be supported in the first place. The top-down initiative is implemented on the basis of the regional development strategy that gives adequate tools to self-government bodies, so that they could effectively encourage and support actions of business-related institutions and thus companies concentrated round them, for creating cluster initiatives. Actions taken by local authorities, business-related institutions and very enterprises for creating and contributing to cluster initiatives in given sectors and industries are ranked among exogenous factors determining coming into existence and development of bunches (Plawgo, Klimczuk, Citkowski 2010, p. 11; Pasieczny 2006, pp. 91-92).

The development process of any cluster initiative consists of five fundamental components: analysis, mobilization, development of a strategy as well as its implementation and evaluation of implementation of the strategy. The analysis stage includes the identification of the potential for creating the initiative, crucial actors and determinants of the development of the industry. It is at this stage

that the identification of the following factors is essential: the degree of the concentration of companies of the given industry; the distance amongst potential participants of the cluster; the confidence level amongst entities participating in the given cluster structure and the importance of the industry, in which the initiative is taken from the point of view of the development of the region. Alongside the analysis, the mobilization of participants is carried out, which is aimed at encouraging potential participants to involve with the initiative primarily by communicating potential benefits. It is during this phase that information meetings, consultations with partners from different environments, discussions and workshops are held. The next step is the development of the strategy of the initiative, which determines the direction of the development of the initiative and the industry for the coming years. The next stages of the development of the cluster initiative are the implementation of the strategy and the evaluation of the implementation of individual actions (Koszarek 2011 pp. 12-14).

Numerous case studies show that it is economically justified to create so-called bottom-up clusters. However, the involvement of local authorities is often essential, since problems with private and bottom-up financing of cluster initiatives and coordinators appear. The involvement of the public factor also helps to mitigate conflicts of interests and the distrust present amongst participants of the cluster (Hałub-Iwan, Małachowska 2008, p. 10).

It is also very important for the success of the cluster initiatives to create extended active cooperation links amongst participants of the cluster initiative. It is the coordinator of the cluster that plays an important role in this respect. This can be a non-governmental organization such as an association, a foundation or a business-related organization. The most important task of the cluster coordinator is to manage the office of the cluster. It is necessary to recruit a skilful and experienced manager, who should be independent of entities creating the cluster (Karaś 2010, pp. 27-28).

These are the positive effects associated with functioning of the cluster, perceptible both for the region, in which the cluster functions as well as for enterprises, which are its participants that are the reason for the cluster formation and setting up cluster initiatives.

The chosen benefits on the regional level include among others: development of the market of the specialized production factors, development of scientific infrastructure in the region as well as increased use of the infrastructure by business entities, creation of the innovation and entrepreneurship culture, development of large-scale production networks, creation of new business

entities, creation of new places of employment, increase in employment, reduction of social transfers, creation of the attractive labour market, increasing the attractiveness of location for FDI, increase in the confidence level, the development of the social capital, promotion of the region, increasing the local competitiveness, development of entrepreneurial behaviours, increase in investments, increase in the standard of living and development of human capital. It is amongst the benefits on the enterprise level that following effects are listed: professionalization of the business activity, more effective promotion of the business activity, easier access to European Union funds, easier reaching customers by the offer of the business, distinguishing from the competition, gaining new segments of markets, increase in the number of product and services sold, broadening and enhancing the product and service offer, improvement of the quality of offered products and services, reduction of costs of the conducted business activities, increasing profits, improvement of the company image, improvement of the market position, simpler and more favourable access to resources, increasing the innovation of enterprises, increasing the flexibility and business responsiveness, increasing confidence amongst business partners, gaining new groups of customers (Staszewska 2009, p. 46; Ministry of Economic Affairs 2009, pp. 6-7; Przygodzki 2007, pp. 267-277).

The positive effects of clustering are not limited only to commercial benefits such as reducing costs or increasing profits. An important role is played also by the benefits of the non-commercial character. These are functioning of cluster initiatives and coordinators in the given region that serve faster emergence of benefits specific to clusters. It is the role of cluster coordinators in particular to provide the cluster entities with such benefits as access to information and analyses, trainings, consulting and the like.

3. The cluster potential of the lubusz voivodeship

It is for characterization of cluster potential of the Lubusz region that it is necessary to analyse the industry specialization in the region. As it is shown by statistical analyses, it is possible to talk about deepening specialization in case of the processing industry above all.² The specialization of the region in this respect concerns raw ,materials and labour intensive sectors such as: production of wood and wooden ware, pulp and paper, leather and leather products,

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2 It was for determining the industry specialization of the region that the location factor method was applied. calculated for the sold output and average employment according to the sections of PKD.

metal products, production of other non-metallic raw materials, production of machines and electric equipment, production of furniture and the textile industry (Świeczewska 2009, pp. 48-50). It is amongst the industries standing out as well as the promising sectors of the Lubusz economy that one should point also rapidly developing sectors basing on raw materials, technological possibilities and access to distribution networks, sectors associated with the food, automotive, chemical, building materials industry as well as electronic, textile and publishing industry. Besides the sectors important for the development of the region presented above, the trade, real estate and construction sectors are also perspective and very important for the region (Zarząd Województwa Lubuskiego, 2011, pp. 39-40).

The industry specialization present in the region as well as natural advantages and production traditions offer opportunities for creation and development of cluster structures. While analysing the development of clusters in the Lubusz region, it is possible to state that the voivodeship gives a very weak performance in comparison with other parts of the country. This is mainly due to high fragmentation of the private sector, a small number of innovative solutions implemented in enterprises, a small number of R&D centres and the lack of clear relations indicating existence of clusters (PARP 2011, p. 6). Emerging clusters of companies within the given industry include: the Lubusz Paper Cluster (Kostrzyn on the Oder), the Lubusz Metal Cluster (Gorzow Wilekopolski), the cluster associated with production of glass and ceramics as well as wood-based products (Żary), the Lubusz Training and Advisory Cluster (Kostrzyn on the Oder), the Cluster of Digital Archiving (Nowa Sól), the Lubusz Wine and Honey Cluster and the Lubusz Regional Tourist Organization LOTUR (Zielona Góra) (Kudlacz 2011, p. 51; PARP 2011, p. 6; www.pi.gov.pl).

The research conducted to the order of the European Commission as part of the project the Europe Innova Mapping Cluster in 10 in Ceuntries in the years 2000-2004 confirmed the presence of 10 cluster structures on the area of the voivodeship. As part of conducted research, the evaluation of functioning of the examined clusters was carried out. On the basis of established criteria³, they were given from three stars (the highest evaluation) to one star (the lowest evaluation). The clusters present in the region were defined as underdeveloped and were characterized by a low potential for innovations and therefore they were given one star (Baranowski 2008, pp. 52-53). Also, the latest research of the European Cluster Observatory conducted by Stockholm School of Economics within the

3 The evaluation was carried out on the basis of following criteria: number of employees, innovation of clusters, export power

Innova Project confirms the small cluster potential in the Lubusz region. Two of the ten identified clusters, i.e. furniture and food clusters, received two stars; the remaining clusters were assessed as one star clusters (industries: clothing, equipment and construction services, construction, financial services, footwear industry, heavy industry and textile industry) (Stockholm School of Economics 2011, p. 4).

Due to natural attractiveness and cultural heritage as well as transport availability, an important place in the regional economy can be taken by tourism. In comparison to other parts of the country, the Lubusz Voivodeship stands out with high natural advantages. A very high afforestation rate merits attention; considerable percentage of legally protected areas, relatively low air and water pollution. Extensive forest complexes and numerous protected areas have undoubtedly very great marketing significance and are a guarantee of the good condition of the natural environment and give rise to the creation of the positive image of the region. It is in this way that they support the development of tourism, of ecological farming and promoting traditional regional and local products such as for example wine and honey (Kudłacz 2011, p. 14).

The Lubusz region is a viticultural area historically shaped and still functioning. The traditions of the wine growing in this area date back to 1150. It is at present that these centuries-old traditions are maintained by members of wine associations: the Association of the Cultural Community „Lubusz Vineyards” and the Zielona Góra Wine Association. The members of the Zielona Góra Association along with the group of Lubusz Bee-keepers marked out the „Lubusz Wine and Honey Route” in 2008. The first meeting concerning the trainings associated with the possibility of the creation of the cluster was held on the initiative of the self-government authorities of the Lubusz Voivodeship in November 2006. The training cycle ended with signing an agreement on creation of a cluster initiative in June 2007. The route was determined by the representative of the cluster coordinator as a kind of a tourist product created on the basis of the potential of the Lubusz Voivodeship and associated with regional products entered on the list of traditional products, i.e. wine, mead and bee honey. The route brings together winemakers, bee-keepers, hotels, museum institutions, agritourism farms, self-government units as well as scientific and research units. It was the aim of the creation of the cluster initiative to maintain the 800-year tradition of the region and to promote local products and ecotourism.

These are the Lubusz Agricultural Advisory Centre in Kalsk and the Institute of Management and Agricultural Engineering of the Vocational College in Sulechow that provide the participants of the cluster with professional support.

The vocational college mentioned above educate students in the winemaking specialization within the frames of the horticulture major, in which students gain the knowledge on establishment of cultivations and care of vineyards, grape processing, distribution and serving of wine products. The employees of the college conduct research on wine growing and wine production (Karwowski, Kuleba 2012, p. 64).

The cluster initiative coordinator is the Zielona Góra Wine Association being a trade and social organization bringing together entities of the wine industry. The aims of the cluster initiative are in line with the objectives of the association. The main objectives of the cluster initiative are: taking initiatives for creating favourable regulations for development of wine production, reviving the tradition of the grapevine growing in the region, promoting entities participating in the cluster as well as activities taken by them, implementing the latest advances in knowledge for cultivation and wine production, developing all forms of trainings for professionals in the wine production and bee-keeping (PARP 2011, pp.20-21). As part of the implementation of purposes mentioned above, the cluster coordinator and its members organise trainings, scientific conferences, cooperate with R&D units, represent interests of the industry before appropriate authorities in the process of creation of the provisions associated with the industry, publish folders and information sheets. The members meet systematically in the course of works associated with preparing current wine events. They communicate mostly by e-mail and by posting information on the web pages of the association.

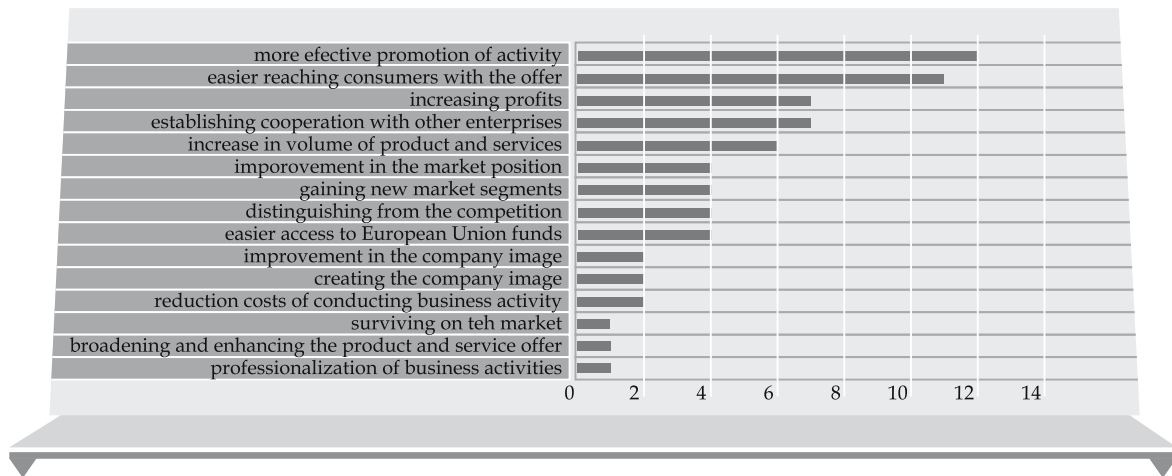
4. "The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route" in the opinion of entities operating in the cluster

It is for the characterization of the Lubusz Cluster Initiative „The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route” that the information obtained as part of own research as well as publications, documents, bulletins and accessible information on web pages were used. Three research methods were applied: the method of examination of documents, the method of the questionnaire survey and the method of the interview. Basing on the data obtained from the Marshall’s Office of the Lubusz Voivodeship, there were identified 40 entities being participants of the analysed cluster initiative. It was decided to cover the entities forming the core of the cluster, i.e. owners of vineyards, apiaries and agritourism farms, with the questionnaire survey. While determining the research sample size, it was decided to cover with the research all entities, which are active in the cluster.

This requirement was met by 28 entities. The questionnaire survey was preceded by the direct interview with the representative of the cluster coordinator. The aim of the interview was to verify the list of respondents, to identify the circumstances of the cluster formation, to diagnose the present development stage of the initiative, to identify the relations amongst participants of the cluster as well as objectives of the co-operation of the examined enterprises and the barriers to the development of the cluster. The questionnaire survey, in the form of electronic survey, was carried out in August 2012. The survey was conducted on the basis of the prepared questionnaire, which consisted of 10 questions and most of them were closed questions. For the total number of 28 questionnaire forms sent, 46% of the completed questionnaires, i.e. thirteen questionnaires, were returned. Several entities refused to participate in the research. In order to supplement the questionnaire survey also direct and telephone interviews with crucial participants of the cluster were carried out (with the coordinator of the cluster, the founders of the initiative, and the representatives of the regional self-government).

The majority of the entities, which participated in the research, are vineyards (such type of the business activity was indicated by six respondents) followed by bee apiaries (three entities, two respondents run both a vineyard and a bee apiary; other respondents are an agritourism farm and an agritourism farm and a bee apiary. The vast majority, i.e. eleven respondents, runs agricultural activity; the remaining two entities indicated self-employment as the form of the conduct of business. All the entities examined belong to the micro sector (12 respondents) and to the sector of small enterprises (1 respondent).

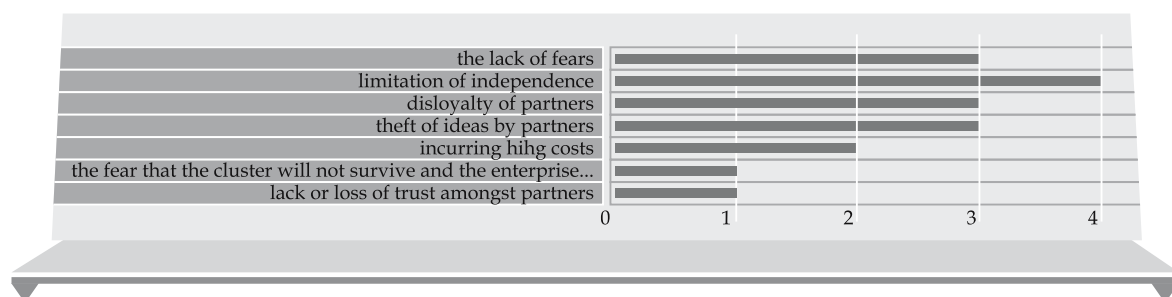
The findings of the conducted research indicate that the surveyed entities associated the accession to the cluster with the more effective promotion of their activity above all (picture 1). Such expected benefit was indicated by 12 of entities. Simultaneously, 11 of the surveyed institutions expected that the accession to the cluster would enable them easier reaching consumers with the offer. The significant benefit expected by the respondents was increase in profits and establishing cooperation with other enterprises (7 entities). It is amongst other expected benefits that the following ones were indicated: increase in volume of products and services (6 respondents), improving the market position, gaining new market segments, distinguishing from the competition and easier access to the European Union funds (4 respondents). Only two respondents indicated improving or creating the company image and reducing operating costs as expected benefits of the accession to the cluster. Only one respondent perceived the cluster as a chance of widening and enhancing the market offer, professionalization of business activity or surviving on the market.



Picture 1. Expectations of entrepreneurs at the moment of accession to the cluster

Source: own study on the base of the results of the questionnaire survey

It was during the conducted research that the concerns of the respondents at the moment of the accession to the cluster were also analysed (picture 2). Nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the examined entities had no fears while joining the cluster initiative. Four respondents were afraid of limiting their independence. Anxiety of stealing ideas away and the lack of the loyalty on the part of cooperators tormented three respondents. Only two institutions were afraid of a need for incurring higher costs. Only one respondent was afraid that the cluster would not survive and the enterprise will incur losses and lack of trust amongst partners on this account.



Picture 2. The fears of entrepreneurs at the moment of accession to the cluster

Source: own study on the base of the results of the questionnaire survey

It is very important from the point of view of competitiveness of businesses concentrated in the cluster to characterise the benefits, which resulted from

functioning within the frames of the cluster structure (table 1). Individual factors were evaluated by assigning a grade in the scale from 1 to 5, with the assumption that the 1 refers to negligible factor and 5 to the most significant benefit arising from functioning in the cluster initiative. The surveyed entities indicated that it was hard for them to assess real benefits, which they had achieved because of functioning in the cluster structure or that they had achieved no benefits.

Table 1. Benefits resulting from functioning in the cluster initiative in the opinion of respondents

N.	Benefits	Average point rating of essential benefits in the scale (1-5)
1	more effective promotion of activity	3,8
2	easier reaching consumers with the offer	3,6
3	increase in volume of products and services sold	2,8
4	improvement in the company image	2,8
5	increasing profits	2,7
6	improvement in the market position	2,6
7	establishing cooperation with other enterprises	2,5
8	distinguishing from the competition	2,4
9	professionalization of business activities	2,1
10	gaining new market segments	2,0
11	broadening and enhancing the product and service offer	2,0
12	reduction of costs of conducting business activity	2,0
13	easier access to European Union funds	1,9
14	improvement of the quality of offered products and services	1,6

Source: own study on the base of the results of the questionnaire survey

Entrepreneurs recognised as greatest benefits resulting from functioning in the cluster initiative: more effective promotion of business activity and easier reaching customers with the offer, increase in the number of products and services sold and the improvement in the company image. As negligible were recognised: easier access to the EU funds and improvement of the quality of offered products and services.

As part of the conducted research also the analysis of barriers to the development of the wine industry in the Lubusz region was carried out (table 2). The respondents were asked for the evaluation of individual barriers according to the scale 1-5, where 1: meant a minor barrier, 5: a very essential barrier. The biggest barriers to the development of the industry, referring directly to the surveyed entities, are: high costs of business activity, lack of own funds for new investments, problems with obtaining external funds and ineffective promotion. Essential barriers to the development of wine industry being on the side of regional authorities according to respondents are: poor state of the infrastructure in the region, insufficient promotion of the region and the lack of actions of self-government authorities aiming at supporting enterprises from the industry.

Table 2. The barriers to the development of the wine industry in the Lubusz region in the opinion of respondents

N.	Barriers	Average point rating of significance of barriers in the scale (1-5).
1	high operating costs	3,8
2	poor state of the infrastructure in the region	3,6
3	lack of own financial resources for new investments	3,5
4	problems with raising outside financial means	3,5
5	ineffective promotion	3,5
6	lack of actions of self-government authorities aiming at supporting enterprises from the industry	3,5
7	insufficient promotion of the region	3,5
8	unstable markets	2,9
9	unqualified staff	2,8
10	unwillingness to cooperation on the side of the business environment institutions	2,3
11	intense competition	2,2
12	unsatisfactory quality of offered products and services	1,9
13	other	1,8

Source: own study on the base of the results of the questionnaire survey

The surveyed entities indicated also other (than those listed) barriers to the development of the industry, that is: complexity of the legal issues, problems with extension of business activity, problems associated with environmental pollution.

As part of the conducted research, particular attention was paid to the scope of cooperation of surveyed entities with local and regional authorities. The respondents were asked for the evaluation of actions taken by self-government authorities aimed at development of the examined cluster initiative (table 3). The evaluation covered both the significance of the taken actions and the degree of their implementation. The surveyed entities assessed the task performed by the self-government bodies in the scale from 0 to 4, where 0: meant unnecessary actions and the complete lack of implementation of the action, whereas 4: essential action, which was conducted very well.

The most anticipated forms of supporting the examined cluster initiative in the opinion of respondents are: help by promoting the cluster, assistance in obtaining EU funds, consideration and support for the development of enterprises from the industry and representing the businesses of the affiliated entities before central and regional state government authorities. As negligible actions the respondents recognised: encouraging new entrepreneurs for participation in the cluster and help with creating business environment. The respondents assessed the degree of implementation of anticipated actions by self-government bodies as very low. The highest scoring was achieved by the actions consisting in helping by promoting the cluster. Simultaneously, the respondents indicated the greater involvement of the regional self-government than the local self-government.

Table 3. The evaluation of actions performed by self-government authorities aimed at supporting the cluster

N.	Actions of the self-government bodies	The average point evaluation of significance degree of actions in the scale (0-4).	The average point evaluation of implementation degree of actions in the scale (0-4).
1	help by promoting the cluster	3,6	2,2
2	assistance in obtaining EU funds	3,5	1,3
3	consideration and support for the development of enterprises from the industry	3,3	1,4

4	representing the businesses of affiliated companies	3,1	1,5
5	providing advisory and training services	2,8	1,4
6	supporting at job creation	2,6	0,8
7	investments in infrastructure	2,5	1,1
8	influencing the increase in trust amongst entities in the region	2,5	1,5
9	care of healthy competition and constructive cooperation	2,5	1,3
10	help in establishing cooperation amongst companies	2,5	1,5
11	involvement of authorities into activation of the labour market	2,2	0,8
12	help in creation of the business environment	2,2	1,3
13	encouraging new entrepreneurs for participation in the cluster	2,2	1,8

Source: own study on the base of the results of the questionnaire survey

It was in the opinion of surveyed entities that their decision on joining the cluster was right. Such answer was given by eight respondents. Other entities were not able to determine the correctness of their decision. The majority of the surveyed entities (8 respondents) would also recommend their contractors or partners joining the surveyed cluster structure.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the collected source materials and findings of the direct research confirmed that the analysed cluster initiative was in the embryonic stage of development. It is thanks to the support of the Self-government of the Lubusz Voivodeship that the identification of the potential for creation and development of the wine cluster in the region was carried out already in 2006. By the end of June 2007, the mobilization of participants of the cluster was conducted, which was aimed at the participants' involvement in the development of the cluster initiative and building confidence amongst them.

The described initiative has a developmental potential. Undoubtedly, the strong point of the Lubusz wine industry, which may determine the success of the cluster initiative, is the centuries-old tradition of winemaking and bee-keeping in the Lubusz region. The pillars, on which the potential of the Lubusz wine industry is supported, are favourable climatic conditions, which support

planting and cultivation of noble grapevines and the human capital, which is the group of owners of vineyards, bee apiaries, fans of grapevine cultivations as well as representatives of self-government authorities. The distance amongst crucial participants of the cluster enables frequent contacts and bidirectional exchange of information. The coordinator of the cluster also guarantees establishing direct contacts amongst participants. The findings of the conducted research indicate that the most important expectations of participants of the cluster, which were related to their accession to the initiative, were fulfilled. The majority of the respondents also think that their decision on joining the cluster was right and they would recommend the participation in the initiative to their contractors and partners. It is attracting new entities that could contribute to achieving the so-called critical mass essential for coming into existence of the synergy effect. These are also beginning educating specialists in wine professions and backing up the scientific and teaching base that are positive for the initiative from the point of view of its development.

According to the coordinator of the cluster and its key participants, the wine industry, and thus the associated cluster initiative, faces a number of barriers to development.

These include: fragmented and poorly organized wine environment, preferring own businesses to the needs of the wine community in the region, limited financial resources for undertaking shared initiatives, low interest of owners of Lubusz agritourism farms in continuing winemaking traditions, modest offer of accommodation in the vicinity of vineyards, insufficient acreage of vineyards; low annual production as for the needs of the region (resulting from legal restrictions), short list of registered, traditional regional wine products, lack of development programmes for the industry on the areas having winemaking traditions (small involvement of authorities in the development of the industry and the examined cluster initiative were also confirmed by the conducted questionnaire survey). Threats are also represented by not friendly provisions and regulations and the lack of assistance programmes for this branch of the agriculture.

An important challenge is to create the competitive edge of the Lubusz winemaking and bee-keeping. The implementation of this objective requires increasing the production potential of the Lubusz wine industry, strengthening the educational and research potential in the region, developing the tourist potential associated with winemaking, promoting and creating the brand of the Lubusz wine products and the regional winemaking. It is necessary to embrace the examined industry and the cluster initiative with a support program. Such

initiative was taken by the coordinator of the cluster by drawing up the document entitled "The Development Programme For The Lubusz Wine Industry For The Years 2012-2022", which was approved by the Board of the Lubusz Voivodeship in June of this year. The program and its crucial assumptions are consistent with the draft of the updated Development Strategy of The Lubusz Voivodeship.

The preparation and approval of the document mentioned above will allow local authorities to take precise actions being aimed at supporting the examined cluster structure by self-government authorities, such as help by promoting the cluster or financing its activity, or also representing interests of the affiliated entities towards central and regional state government authorities. The approved wine industry development program in the region may become a foundation for creation and implementation of the development strategy of „The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route”.

The development of the wine industry in the region requires involvement and cooperation of not only entities dealing with grapevines growing and wine and honey production but also of public institutions, self-government authorities, research institutions and social organizations. The joint involvement of the regional actors in the development of the industry will lead certainly to the creation of the long-lasting bonds, based on confidence that can lead to converting the examined initiative into a mature cluster structure.

Summary

The state and the development prospects of the Lubusz cluster initiative "The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route".

The concept of economic clusters, which are an effective way of seeking synergy effects resulting from cooperation of individual entities, became a synonym for the success of the economy of the region. The prospect of potential benefits for enterprises and regions, resulting from functioning of the bunches, encourages their potential participants to engage in creation and development of cluster structures. Such deliberate and organized effort of crucial players of the cluster, aimed at improvement in its competitiveness, is defined as a cluster initiative. The aim of this article is to analyse the state and the development prospects of the Lubusz cluster initiative „The Lubusz Wine and Honey Route”. It is in the article that the theoretical issues associated with problems of clusters and cluster initiatives were discussed. It is later in this article that a brief characterization of the cluster potential of the Lubusz

Voivodeship with particular emphasis on the wine industry was carried out. It is in the third part of the article that the findings of empirical research carried out were presented. Next, further to the discussed research, the conclusions and recommendations were presented for the best ways of supporting the development of the wine industry as well as the described cluster initiative.

Keywords: *clusters, cluster initiative.*

Streszczenie

Stan i perspektywy rozwoju lubuskiej inicjatywy klastrowej „Lubuski Szlak Wina i Miodu”

Synonimem sukcesu gospodarki regionu stała się koncepcja klastrów gospodarczych, które są skutecznym sposobem poszukiwania efektów synergii wynikających ze współpracy poszczególnych podmiotów wchodzących w ich skład. Perspektywa potencjalnych korzyści płynących z funkcjonowania gron dla przedsiębiorstw oraz regionów zachęca ich potencjalnych uczestników do zaangażowania się w powstawanie i rozwój struktur klastrowych. Taki świadomy, zorganizowany wysiłek kluczowych graczy klastra, skierowany na poprawę jego konkurencyjności, określany jest mianem inicjatywy klastrowej. Celem artykułu jest analiza stanu i perspektyw rozwoju lubuskiej inicjatywy klastrowej „Lubuski Szlak Wina i Miodu”. W artykule omówione zostały teoretyczne zagadnienia związane z problematyką klastrów i inicjatyw klastrowych. W dalszej części artykułu dokonano krótkiej charakterystyki potencjału klastrowego województwa lubuskiego ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem branży winiarskiej. W trzeciej części artykułu przedstawiono wyniki przeprowadzonych badań empirycznych. Następnie w nawiązaniu do omówionych badań, przedstawiono wnioski i rekomendacje w zakresie najlepszych sposobów wspierania rozwoju branży winiarskiej oraz opisywanej inicjatywy klastrowej.

Słowa

kluczowe: *klastry, inicjatywa klastrowa*

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