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Assessment of the Ability of Rural Communities to Prepare High-Quality Development Projects

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► **Abstract.** The development of communities and territories requires significant investment. At their expense, communities can restore existing or build new infrastructure, develop businesses, and launch joint development projects. All this is done to improve the living conditions and well-being of the population in communities. As a rule, there are not enough own funds to solve all tasks: community resources are limited and are largely used to meet priority needs. Rural and village communities, almost always financed on a residual basis, are practically unable to provide not only extended, but even simple reproduction of their territories. Therefore, larger projects are implemented using financial or material and technical resources provided from the state budget and/or through international technical assistance projects. This resource is mainly received on a non-refundable basis. The main requirement is for communities to get a sustainable long-term effect from investment. It is also a confirmation of the ability of territorial entities to independently maintain restored or created infrastructure or projects that have been put into operation. In order for these funds to be received by the most worthy and prepared entities, they are distributed through competitive selection mechanisms. Any communities submit project applications for the competition. The most important thing is that the applications meet the requirements of the competition and contain all the information properly submitted. The EU sectoral support competition is one of the largest, both in terms of coverage of Ukrainian communities, and in terms of development areas that can be funded. The results of the competition allow assessing which development problems seem most urgent in rural areas, and whether rural communities have an understanding of the requirements of project approaches. Conclusions and generalisations can serve as a marker for assessing the competitiveness of rural and village communities in the struggle for project resources. In addition – in terms of forming further policies for the development of rural areas and their institutional support. The purpose of the study – assess the ability of territorial communities (with an emphasis on rural and village communities) to prepare high-quality development projects in accordance with European approaches, and provide proposals for improving this ability. To assess the ability of territorial communities to prepare high-quality development projects, statistical and comparative analysis, systematisation and generalisation of information were carried out. The following methods were applied: synthesis and formalisation, graphical and tabular techniques. A study of the activity of communities (with an emphasis on rural and village ones) in terms of preparing development projects was carried out. Their readiness to participate in competitions is analysed. Based on the submitted project applications, a summary of the key priorities for the development of rural and village communities is made. A number of generalisations have been formed regarding the level of project capacity of territorial communities (primarily rural and village communities). Proposals have been developed to improve the ability of communities to attract resources through competitions of this level and their further effective use. Separately, proposals for the introduction of a "project counselling" system within agricultural advisory services and/or regional development agencies (RDA) are provided. The results of the assessment of the ability of rural and village communities to prepare high-quality development projects, the proposed recommendations for their improvement, can be used by central and local authorities, territorial communities, organisations, international technical assistance projects, whose activities are aimed at the development of communities and territories in the implementation of rural development policies both at the national and local levels

► **Keywords:** territorial community, sectoral support, development projects, project capacity, rural or village community, competition

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► Introduction

The development of territorial communities is hindered by the presence of a significant number of economic, social, and institutional problems [1]. A necessary condition for their solution is the attraction and effective use of funds from various sources (budget, credit, investment, grant) [2]. Grant funds and a significant part of budget funds are provided on an irreversible basis, usually through a competitive selection mechanism. This condition requires the preparation of a substantiation (project application, project), based on which the competition commission makes a decision on the allocation of funding. This means that applicants for such funds must have the necessary set of knowledge and practical skills to prepare a project that would meet the competitive conditions, in particular, demonstrate the ability of the community to implement it efficiently and within a certain time frame, and continue the activities reflected in the project application in the future.

An important sign of a successful application is the correct choice of project priorities: some measures solve current issues, and others – lay the foundations for future long-term success. Mistakes when choosing priorities will result in a loss of money and time. An idea of the key priorities of communities can be partially formed based on surveys conducted. According to these data, the desire to build infrastructure facilities is more than twice as high as the desire to develop the social capital of communities through the implementation of soft projects [3]. In a similar way (through surveys), it is customary to assess the quality of project management in communities. The conclusions based on the results of such a survey are quite unambiguous: “...insufficient professionalism of project management in local self-government bodies of amalgamated communities and insufficient level of its organisation” [4]. The key disadvantage of the survey is that the opinion of respondents among community managers or project managers is not always objective, which prevents the establishment of a real idea of the current state of affairs. At the same time, an idea of the quality of project management of territorial communities can be obtained by evaluating their participation in various competitions, in particular, those based on the best world practices. Such competitions in Ukraine in recent years have been: EU sectoral support competitions and Mayors for Economic Growth [5]. They covered the entire territory of Ukraine and were focused on both urban and rural and village territorial communities.

The study of the project capacity of communities in Ukraine is conventionally divided into global-theoretical and applied. The former focus on identifying systemic destructive factors that hinder effective project activity in communities and creating an optimal project model at the grassroots level. Within the framework of the study, models of the strategic planning process in Ukraine or target communities are considered and analysed, the methodology of strategic planning for the development of a territorial community is considered in detail, and the main stages

of the strategic planning process for activities and development are determined. As a result of the study, proposals and/or approaches to measure and assess the level of project competencies based on the construction of an appropriate model for local governments, materials to support project-oriented management of the strategic development of territorial communities in Ukraine, recommendations for practical application in the design of operational part and monitoring of the implementation of planning documents, etc., are prepared. In particular, this can be traced in the studies by A. Ushakova and Yu. Sharov [6], D. Bezugliy [7], O. Borodina [8].

Others base their findings on community-based field research. The purpose of such studies is to assess the implementation of project management practices in territorial communities and identify problems and obstacles that arise before local authorities. Such research is carried out mainly through surveys of local management and project managers to assess knowledge, skills, and abilities on project management issues in territorial entities, and the ability to apply the acquired skills in practice. These studies end mainly with a description of the current situation established based on a survey and the preparation of general proposals for improving project management in communities. The papers of such researchers as A. Polyanska, I. Zapukhlyak, L. Verbovska [9], V. Medvid, I. Koblyanska, O. Kovaleva [4] can be highlighted.

Unlike Ukrainian researchers, foreign researchers have been paying considerable attention to this issue for a long period of time. Long-term study of the issue allows investigating it both in the context of different regions and territories, and focusing more on the features of project management in rural areas. The purpose of these studies is to identify the reasons why many rural development projects fail, and possible ways to mitigate these negative factors. The research is based on factual information about the implementation of projects for which funds from state programmes or international donors were allocated. And, based on the results of studying the issue, they form both a list of erroneous actions and decisions, as well as suggestions for their prevention in the future. An important feature of these studies is the fact that it is not based on technical issues of projects, or methods for evaluating the effectiveness of implementation. The key aspect is to investigate the levels and competencies of local managers, organisational and structural complexity, and identify steps to improve the effectiveness of performers and structures at the grassroots level. Recent studies include M. Muronga and M. Robai [10], Ignacio de los Ríos-Carmenado [11; 12], P. Bórawski [13], E. Cejudo [14], U. Lucy [15], D. Suarez [16].

Systematic research by Ukrainian scientists on the participation of territorial communities in large-scale competitions, with an emphasis on identifying the priority areas of submitted project applications, their quality, the characteristics of applicants, the

reasons for victories and failures, was not revealed. Information about the results of contests is usually provided by the organisers themselves. It forms an idea of the number of participants and winners, and the amount of funds provided. However, this is not enough to assess the project capacity of communities, the ability of local teams to prepare projects of proper quality.

Regarding the results of the sectoral support competition for regional development projects (full name – “Sector Policy Support Program – Support for Regional Policy of Ukraine” [17]; hereinafter – EU sectoral support competition), there is also a little research here: A. Tkachuk made a general analysis of the projects submitted for the competition, highlighted a number of existing problems, and suggested possible steps to solve them [18]; M. Durman investigated the preparation and implementation of projects within the competition in Mykolaiivska oblast [19]. Studies of the results of this competition in the context of its various directions and different participants were also not revealed.

For the first time, the task is to assess the ability of territorial communities (with an emphasis on rural and village communities) to prepare high-quality development projects, in particular, the development of entrepreneurship, when the evaluation criterion is victory or loss in the EU sectoral support competition, which was held in Ukraine at the end of 2020. The fact of participation in the competition, winning the competition and their combination as research subjects for assessing the ability of communities to project activities is a new approach that provides an idea of the ability and competence of managers and specialists of territorial communities to prepare applications for participation in competitions with high requirements, win such competitions, and identify priorities that managers in rural and village communities determine for themselves. Approaches are proposed to strengthen the ability of territorial communities, especially rural and village ones, to project activities.

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the opportunities of territorial communities (with an emphasis on rural and village) to prepare development projects, in particular, entrepreneurship development for competitions, the requirements of which are formed in accordance with European standards, and, on this basis, to provide proposals for improving approaches to project activities of communities.

► Materials and Methods

Information from open sources was used when preparing this study, which is related to the organisation and holding of the second EU sectoral support competition. It was based on materials and data posted on the websites of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Ministry of Community and Territory Development.

The key sources of information in this paper were: the State Regional Development Strategy for 2021-2027, the Agreement on financing “Sectoral

Policy Support Program – Support for Regional Policy of Ukraine”, the procedure for evaluating regional development projects that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the European Union, the requirements for describing a regional development project that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the European Union, the regulations on the competition commission for the selection of regional development projects that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the European Union and the list of projects-winners of the competitive selection of regional development projects that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the EU. To assess the ability of territorial communities to prepare high-quality development projects, an analysis (statistical and comparative), systematisation and generalisation of information on the results of the second EU sectoral support competition was carried out. To this end, data was collected and analysed on the conditions and requirements of the competition specified in the financing agreement “Sectoral Policy Support Program – Support for Regional Policy of Ukraine” [17], the procedure for evaluating regional development projects that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the European Union, the requirements for describing a regional development project that can be implemented at the expense of state budget funds received from the European Union. The study confirmed that equal opportunities were created at the state level for all communities, regardless of their territorial status. And the requirements themselves correspond to the pan-European ones, which are applied when conducting similar competitions. Typical requirements of such competitions are: development of a logical and structural model; economic, social, and organisational substantiation of the project's sustainability; implementation schedule, etc.

As part of the study, the authors processed information about the participants, in particular the winners, of the second EU sectoral support competition. The information that was used was provided in the list of winning projects of the competitive selection of regional development projects that can be implemented at the expense of the state budget received from the EU [20]. The analysis determined the degree of activity of territorial entities (in particular, rural and village entities) within the competition and their main priorities. The use of the synthesis allowed forming a general idea of the ability of territorial communities to prepare development projects and identify priorities in the context of communities. The formalisation method was used at the stage of formulating proposals for improving approaches to project activities of communities. This allowed summarising the information received. It also helped identify the main steps to improve the design capacity of rural and village communities. Graphical and tabular techniques are used to visually present the results obtained.

► Results and Discussion

The EU sectoral support competition was established within the framework of the agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, which was concluded in 2014 [17]. To assess the ability of territorial communities to prepare high-quality development projects this competition is interesting for several reasons:

- firstly, the approaches used in the EU were used to organise and conduct it. In terms of requirements for the project application: the need to prepare a logical and structural matrix, determine who is affected by problems, and who will be the main beneficiary of their solution (including by groups of beneficiaries); to prepare a financial substantiation for the project's activities, coordinating it with the description and work schedule. In terms of organising the evaluation of projects and selecting the winners of the competition: forming a competition commission from among independent experts, with the appropriate set of professional competencies, making the final assessment for projects based on a comprehensive assessment of several experts, each of whom acts independently, selecting projects based on a rating approach (the higher the rating – the higher the place of the project), approving the results of the rating assessment by the relevant ministry (Minregion) without interfering with the evaluation process itself, informing the public about the entire process of collecting project applications and evaluation results through the media and profile sites. The use of such approaches significantly reduced the possibility of “manual” selection of competition winners [18];

- secondly, information about the contest was distributed in advance. Government officials and international technical assistance projects actively trained project managers in communities through various training programmes;

- thirdly, competitive requirements allow excluding a significant part of undeveloped projects at the start – projects that do not provide for socio-economic impact on the development of society in the long term.

Ultimately, only central or local executive authorities, local self-government bodies, and established RDAs were allowed to participate in the competition. Non-governmental organisations and individuals could not participate in the competition. That is why the results of the competition allow assessing the design capacity of local self-government bodies. In total, more than 700 projects from all regions of Ukraine (from cities, villages, towns, regional state administrations (RSA), RDAs, and central executive authorities (CEA) were submitted for the competition. The latter generated 51 projects (7% of the total).

In 2020, projects were submitted for 7 programmes (directions) of the EU sectoral support competition: “Innovative economy and investment”, “Rural Development”, “Tourism Development”, “Human Development”, “All-Ukrainian solidarity”, “Support for the development of depressed territories”, “Effective management of regional development”. The competitive requirements of each of the directions were formulated so that they were accessible to the majority of communities [20].

A competitive programme aimed at supporting depressed territories and improving regional development management has been launched only in 2020 as a reaction to the decree State strategy for regional development for 2021-2027 [1] and understanding the need to implement digital information technologies at the local level [21]. The contestants showed the greatest interest in the following areas: tourism (more than 200 projects were submitted), innovative economy (150 projects), and support for depressed territories (more than 100 projects). 95 projects were generated in the direction of “Rural development” – the fourth result, in which a significant emphasis was placed on supporting entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Analysis of the submitted projects showed that cities, villages, and settlements commissioned a total of 405 projects. When the competition was held, some territorial communities were not yet formed, so the study grouped the information not by territorial communities, but by localities: cities, villages, and settlements. The remaining projects were mainly ordered by the CEAs, RSAs, and RDAs (Fig. 1).

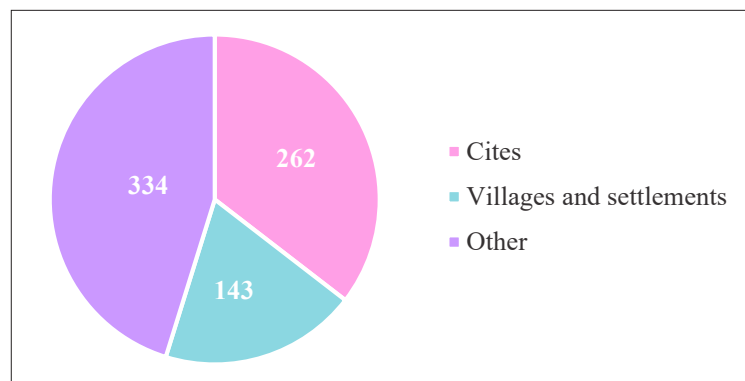


Figure 1. Distribution of projects by customers, units

Source: compiled by the authors based on [22]

Cities, villages, and settlements have prepared 55% of the projects. This is not a very high indicator,

given the focus of the competition and low entrance barriers to the participation of local authorities. The

low activity of communities in cities, villages, and settlements may be conditioned by a lower level of training of their specialists than in the central and regional authorities, RDAs, and the lack of development priorities. A certain confirmation of the latter thesis can be the fact that most localities submitted only one project. But almost all CEAs and RDAs submitted several projects.

The competitive activity of cities was almost twice as high as that of villages and settlements both in general and in the context of individual competitions. The only direction of the competition where

the number of projects submitted from villages and settlements exceeded the number of projects from cities was the direction of “Rural development”. But even here, 11 projects were submitted by cities (rather, urban communities). Villages and settlements became the authors of 40 project applications, which accounted for 43% of the total in this area. As for the remaining areas of the second EU sectoral support competition, projects from village and settlement councils usually accounted for from 10 to 20% of the total volume (Fig. 2).

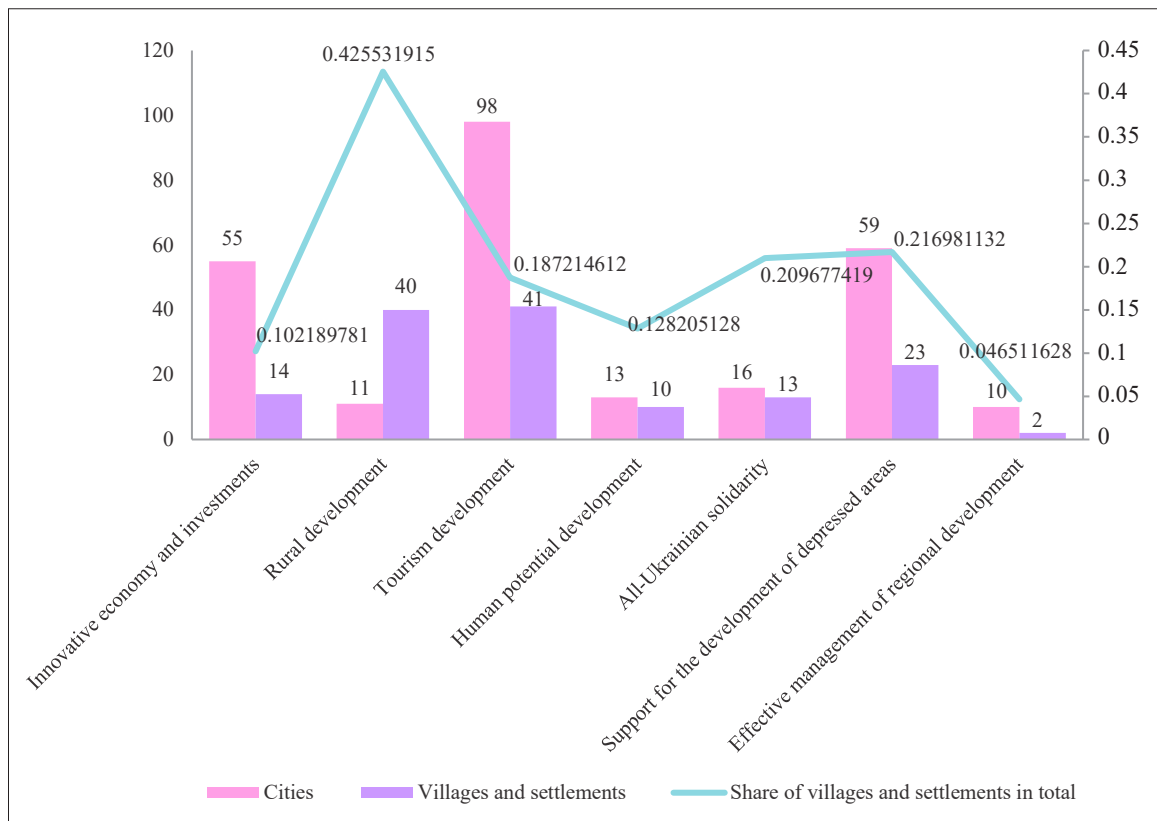


Figure 2. Distribution of projects by customers, units

Source: compiled by the authors based on [22]

The recorded gap between the number of applications from villages/towns and cities reflects the objective difference between the level of provision of local authorities with project management specialists and the level of their training. It is obvious that cities have better opportunities to attract, train, and retain such specialists. It can be assumed that for rural and village communities, maintaining a specialist, especially a project department, seems to be a financially difficult task.

The priorities of urban and rural communities differ somewhat, although they have a lot in common. Most of the proposals from villages and settlements were submitted to the competition in the following areas: “Tourism development” – 28.7%, “Rural development” – 28.0%, “Support for the development of depressed territories” – 16.1%. Urban communities sought to achieve results in the following areas: “Tourism development” – 37.4%, “Support for the

development of depressed territories” – 22.5%, “Innovative economy and investment” – 21%. There is an increased interest of applicants from all localities of interest in the positions “tourism” and “depressed territories”. It can be noted that urban communities have a slightly clearer focus of project interests: 3 key areas account for 80% of applications against 72% of rural communities, although the difference is insignificant.

There is a concentration of all localities without exception in the tourist direction of development: 63% of all projects related to “Tourism development”. There is reason to assume that the choice of “Tourism development” is not conditioned by the fact that tourism can become one of the sectors of the economy for communities, the development of which will stimulate the expansion of local trade, the hospitality industry, transport, etc. Most likely, this topic seemed to most applicants the easiest from the

standpoint of both the preparation of the project application and its implementation. This thesis is confirmed by the analysis of names and content of project applications: “Reconstruction of the building at 11 Dobrolyubova Str. in Zaporizhzhya”, “Overhaul of facades of cultural building and improvement of adjoining territory”, “Reconstruction and arrangement of improvement elements on 5 Dnistrovska Naberezhna Str., Shepetivsky district, Khmelnytska oblast, Sudilkov village. Improvement of recreation area)” [20]. The above-mentioned projects are very similar in their essence and content to the “re-faced” applications for the competition of the state fund for regional development, since it is there that it is necessary to give the project name identical to the name of the design and estimate documentation. The analysis of the goals and objectives of such project applications only gives grounds for such a conclusion:

projects are local, not regional in impact, practically do not contribute to socio-economic cohesion or strengthen the ability of communities to develop, as required by the competition conditions. In addition, the presentation of the content of applications deviates quite strongly from the requirements defined by the terms of the competition.

These facts give grounds for another assumption: the key factor of participation in the competition was not the desire to create conditions for the sustainable development of society, but the availability of previously prepared developments, and the apparent simplicity of a particular direction of the competition. The latter, as it turned out, was quite deceptive: out of 219 applications submitted for the direction of “Tourism development”, only 7 or 3.2% of the population became winners (Fig. 3).

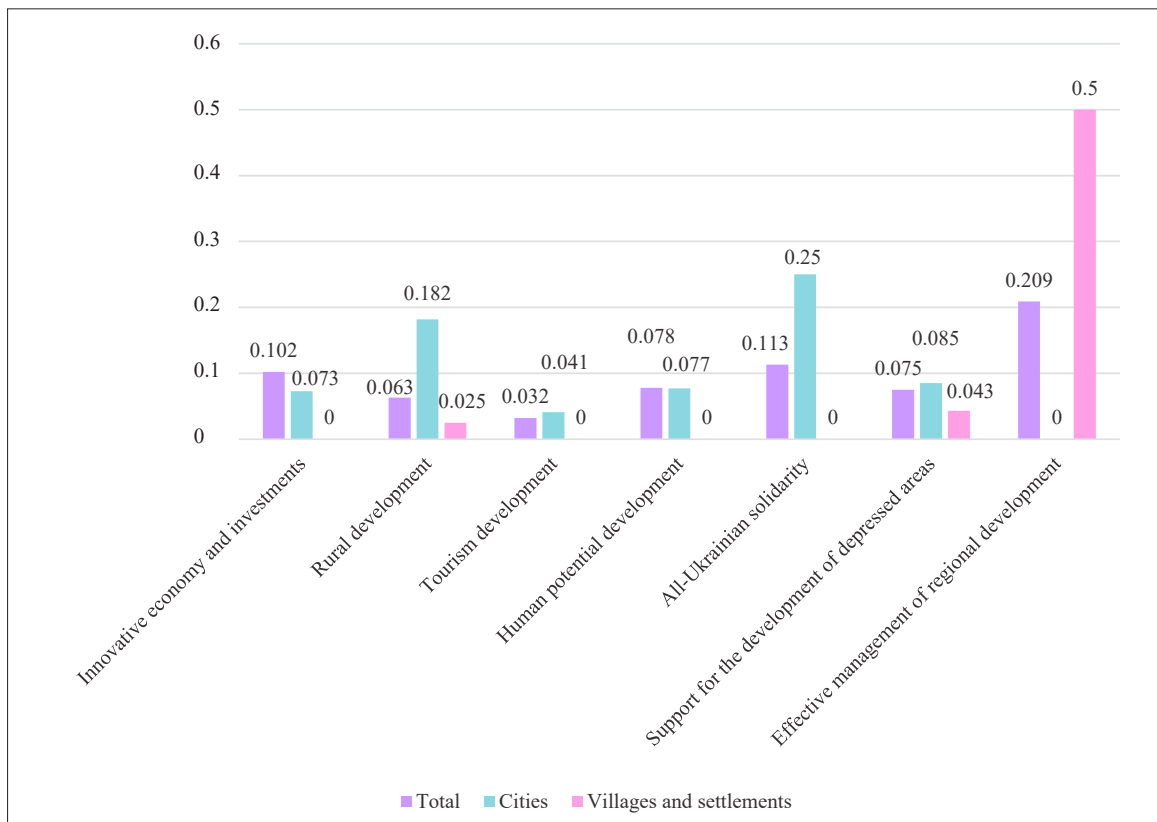


Figure 3. Winning projects by direction and submission, %

Source: compiled by the authors based on [22]

The analysis of winning projects by direction and category of applicants reinforces the conclusion that was already made earlier: there is a large gap between cities, villages, and settlements in the preparation of not only projects in general, but also high-quality projects. In general, among the 56 winning projects, only 3 (5.4% of the total number) were from villages and settlements: one each for the positions “Rural development”, “Support for the development of depressed territories” and “Effective management of regional development”. But cities submitted 20 successful applications (35.7% of the total). The winners from cities were not presented only

in the direction of “Effective management of regional development”. It is most interesting that in such an important area for rural communities as “Rural development”, almost every 5th project from cities was successful, and only 1 in 40 – from villages and settlements.

The winning projects of the competition were focused on the development of territories, starting from several communities and ending with individual regions. Not all of them were aimed at the formation of entrepreneurship: some were focused on solving environmental or social issues, developing education, developing the environment, etc. (Fig. 4).

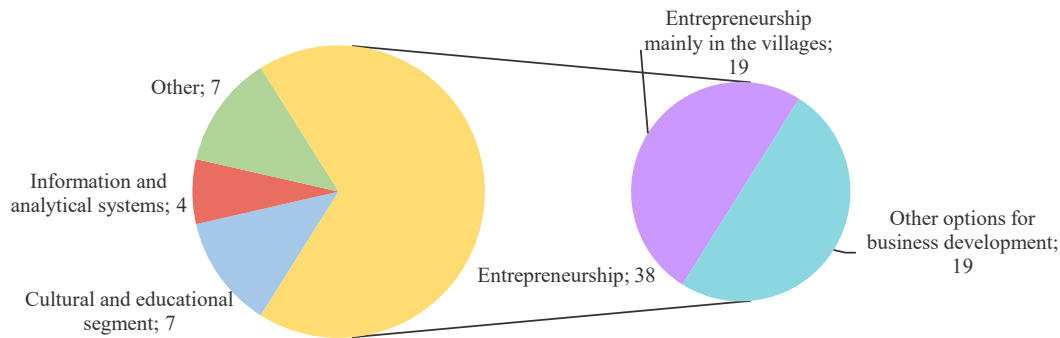


Figure 4. Distribution of winning projects by direction, units

Source: compiled by the authors based on [22]

According to the authors of this study, 38 projects, or 67.9% of the total number of winners, had a direct impact on the development of entrepreneurship. Some of them include the effect of a time-delayed impact on the development of entrepreneurship (for example, “Development of human capital in the agro-organic sector of the economy” or “Technological future of Vinnytska oblast. Teaching students of the region the basics of robotics, programming, and innovative entrepreneurship”). Others relate only to a narrow business segment (“Aquaculture Business Launch incubator (AQUABATOR)” or “EXPORT AID – support for export activities of the Chernihivska oblast”). All of them, to one degree or another, contribute to the development of entrepreneurship, and, accordingly, to improving social, economic, and territorial cohesion and improving the well-being of citizens, which corresponds to the goal of the competition.

In terms of supporting entrepreneurship in rural areas, the situation is somewhat different. The winners of a third of projects aimed, to one degree or another, at supporting entrepreneurship in rural areas. However, the vast majority of them are not submitted by rural communities. The latter have only one such project on their account: “Development of enterprises in the field of cheese making in the communities of the Rivnenska and Volynska oblasts”. The other two relate only indirectly to entrepreneurship, although they are aimed at solving equally important issues: ecology (“Measures for sorting and disposing of garbage in nature reserves of the Carpathians”) and digitalisation (“Introduction of smart city elements in rural communities of the Cherkaska oblast”). Thus, another thesis expressed by the authors earlier is confirmed: rural communities do not yet consider the development of entrepreneurship as one of the main priorities [3]. Therefore, there is a significant number of projects for the development of entrepreneurship from regional authorities, city councils, RDAs, and CEAs. At the same time, as a key player in the development of rural entrepreneurship, village and settlement councils remain extras in this process.

► Discussion

The conducted research gives grounds for the assumption that in Ukrainian practice, when analysing project activities in rural areas, the effectiveness of forces and

measures taken, and evaluating the results obtained, insufficient attention is focused on the human component and on the issues of interaction between different participants in project activities. The main emphasis, as already noted, is placed either on the general description of the situation and the construction of some mathematical models that should simplify the management system, or on the study of the problems of individual communities without its further transformation and generalisation. But foreign approaches aim to get answers to slightly different questions: how well local performers are prepared, both in terms of general project knowledge and managerial abilities to implement winning projects, especially large-scale ones. And also: evaluate the effectiveness of the project mechanism, starting from the preparation of an application for funding and ending with a report on the results achieved. This approach allows not only identifying the “bottlenecks” of the existing system of rural development, but also proposing solutions to reduce the negative impact and decrease the share of projects that were not implemented or were implemented improperly.

Within the framework of this study, the first steps were taken that would allow implementing similar approaches in Ukraine. The authors evaluated the effectiveness of the competition not because of the volume of applications submitted or the number of winning projects. The assessment was supposed to provide an understanding of whether rural communities are sufficiently ready to prepare high-quality projects, and whether they can independently identify the key problems that hinder further development. And, based on the results obtained, relevant conclusions and suggestions for improving the situation have been prepared.

► Conclusions

An analysis of project applications for the EU sectoral support competition shows that villages and settlements are less active than cities. In the project work, they submitted only 19% of all projects from villages and settlements against 35% from cities. This is despite the number of villages and settlements exceeding cities by several times. The most likely reasons are distrust of the possibility of winning the competition due to negative previous experience and difficult competitive conditions with a simultaneous

shortage of high-quality specialists. The overall level of preparation of project applications from rural localities for competitions held according to European rules is low. The total share of the winners of the EU sectoral support competition was 7.6% (of all applications submitted). For villages and settlements, this figure was 2.1% (of the number of applications from such localities). But for cities – still 7.6%. Such a gap in quality indicators also indicates problems with the staffing of rural communities with proper specialists.

Among the project applications that were selected as part of the EU sectoral support competition for further financing, 2/3 related to the development of entrepreneurship. 19 out of 56 submitted projects were aimed at developing entrepreneurship in rural areas, but only 1 out of 19 winning applications in rural areas (5.3%) was prepared directly by the rural community. Thus, in the eighth year of decentralisation, creating conditions for business development is still not a priority for the authorities in villages and settlements. While maintaining the status quo, it is difficult to hope for a resumption of business activity in rural areas and a decrease in the rate of its depopulation. It is obvious that rural communities need project management specialists who would be able

to analyse the conditions of a particular competition and prepare a high-quality application. But perhaps a more important task is to form an understanding among local authorities of the importance of the economy for the sustainable development of society.

Given the limited opportunities of rural communities to attract project managers, the way out of this situation could be state support for consulting for rural communities, including “project counseling” within the framework of agricultural advisory services, as is practised in EU countries. Community cooperation with existing RDAs should also be encouraged in various ways. There is an evident need to include at least the basics of project management and fundraising in the training programmes of specialists of the management bodies of rural and village communities. The lack of “project” knowledge and skills of specialists in rural communities determine their loss in various competitions in advance, forming the opinion of the heads of communities about the inexpediency of further participation in such competitions and/or training of specialists. It is possible to break out of this circle only by creating a unified system where successful “students” receive a monetary reward in the form of a “prize” for the implementation of the project.

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Оцінка спроможності сільських громад готувати якісні проекти розвитку

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► **Анотація.** Розвиток громад та територій потребує значних інвестицій. За їхній рахунок громади можуть відновлювати існуючу, або будувати нову інфраструктуру, розвивати бізнес, запускати спільні проекти розвитку. Все це – задля покращення умов проживання та добробуту населення в громадах. Власних коштів для вирішення всіх завдань, як правило, не вистачає: ресурси громад обмежені і значною мірою використовуються для закриття першочергових потреб. Сільські та селищні громади, котрі майже завжди фінансувалися за залишковим принципом, практично не мають змоги забезпечувати не те що розширене, але навіть просте відтворення своїх територій. Тому більш масштабні проекти впроваджуються завдяки фінансових коштів або матеріально-технічних ресурсів, котрі надаються з Державного бюджету та/або через проекти міжнародної технічної допомоги. Цей ресурс надходить, переважно, на безповоротній основі. Основна вимога полягає в отриманні громадами сталого довгострокового ефекту від здійснення інвестицій. А також – підтвердження здатності територіальних утворень самостійно утримувати відновлену або створену інфраструктуру чи запущені в дію проекти. Для того, щоб ці кошти надійшли найбільш достойним і підготовленим, їхній розподіл відбувається через механізми конкурсного відбору. На конкурс подають проектні заявки будь-які громади. Головне, щоб заявки відповідали вимогам конкурсу, та містили всю інформацію, подану належним чином. Конкурс Секторальної підтримки ЄС – один з найбільших, як за охопленням громад України, так і за напрямками розвитку, які можуть бути профінансовані. Результати конкурсу дозволяють оцінити, які саме проблеми розвитку видаються найбільш нагальними в сільській місцевості, чи є в сільських громадах розуміння вимог проектних підходів. Висновки і узагальнення можуть слугувати певним лакмусовим папірцем для оцінки конкурентоспроможності сільських і селищних територіальних громад, в боротьбі за проектні ресурси. А також – в частині формування подальших політик розвитку сільських територій і їхньої інституціональної підтримки. Мета статті – оцінити спроможність територіальних громад (з акцентом на сільські та селищні) готувати якісні проекти розвитку відповідно до європейських підходів, і, надати пропозицій щодо посилення такої спроможності. Для оцінки спроможності територіальних громад готувати якісні проекти розвитку проведено статистичний та порівняльний аналіз, систематизацію та узагальнення інформації. Застосовано методи: синтезу і формалізації, графічні та табличний прийоми. Здійснено дослідження активності громад (з акцентом на сільські та селищні) в частині підготовки розвиткових проектів. Проаналізовано їхню готовність до участі в конкурсах. На основі поданих проектних заявок зроблено узагальнення щодо ключових пріоритетів розвитку сільських та селищних громад. Сформовано низку узагальнень щодо рівня проектно-спроможності територіальних громад (насамперед – сільських та селищних). Підготовлено пропозиції щодо посилення спроможності громад залучати ресурси за допомогою конкурсів такого рівня та їхнього подальшого ефективного використання. Окремо надано пропозиції щодо впровадження системи «проектного дорадництва» в рамках діяльності сільськогосподарських дорадчих служб та/або агенцій регіонального розвитку (далі – АРР). Результати проведеної під час дослідження оцінки спроможності сільських та селищних територіальних громад готувати якісні проекти розвитку, запропоновані рекомендації з їх вдосконалення, можуть бути використані центральними та місцевими органами влади, територіальними громадами, організаціями, проектами міжнародної технічної допомоги, діяльність яких спрямована на розвиток громад та територій під час формування та реалізації політики сільського розвитку як на національному, так і місцевому рівні

► **Ключові слова:** територіальна громада, секторальна підтримка, розвиткові проекти, проектна спроможність, сільська або селищна громада, конкурс