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OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-ECONOMIC SPACE

SZANSE I ZAGROŻENIA ROZWOJU REGIONÓW WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ PRZESTRZENI SPOŁECZNO-EKONOMICZNEJ

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Abstract: The current regional development models emphasize the mobilization of internal location potential, which is to be the source of the competitive advantage of spatial systems. Commonly implemented related concepts of learning regions, innovation clusters or creative sectors illustrate the new development capabilities of regions, simplifying or hindering self-renewal in a globalized, specific civilization system. The research purpose is to identify and characterize potential opportunities and possible development problems of regions that, operating in a highly diverse and rapidly changing socio-economic space, face the resolution of numerous dilemmas. One of the important conclusions presented in the article is the statement that the early building of appropriate potential and structural, organizational, methodological, scientific facilities and an own development programme is a condition for ensuring a significant competitive position for the region.

Keywords: socio-economic space, regional policy, threats and opportunities for regions.

Streszczenie: Obecnie obowiązujące modele rozwoju regionalnego kładą nacisk na mobilizację wewnętrznego potencjału lokalizacji, który ma być źródłem przewagi konkurencyjnej układów przestrzennych. Powszechnie wdrażane pokrewne koncepcje regionów uczących się, klastrów innowacyjnych czy sektorów kreatywnych obrazują nowe zdolności rozwojowe regionów, umożliwiające lub utrudniające samoodnowę w zglobalizowanym, specyficznym układzie cywilizacyjnym. Celem badawczym jest identyfikacja i charakterystyka potencjalnych szans i możliwych problemów rozwojowych regionów, które funkcjonując w silnie zróżnicowanej i szybko zmieniającej się przestrzeni społeczno-ekonomicznej, stają w obliczu rozstrzygnięcia licznych dylematów. Jednym z istotnych wniosków zaprezentowanym w artykule jest stwierdzenie, że wczesne zbudowanie odpowiedniego potencjału i zaplecza strukturalno-organizacyjnego, metodologicznego, naukowego oraz własnego programu rozwoju jest warunkiem zapewnienia regionowi znaczącej pozycji konkurencyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzeń społeczno-gospodarcza, polityka regionalna, zagrożenia i szanse dla regionów.

1. Introduction

Achieving harmonious and comprehensive development, taking into account the principles of integrated socio-economic and spatial-ecological order, is a task whose implementation is the subject to tensions, contradictions and conflicts. The analysis of the surrounding reality reveals a whole range of differences occurring in the level of economic development, in the level of spatial development or in the state of environmental protection in individual areas (Secomski, 1987, p. 144).

The emergence of an economy based on knowledge, innovation and technological progress poses new challenges for market players. The significance of space in the socio-economic system is changing, which raises the need for the revision or modernization of many existing research approaches, concepts and models (Stryjakiewicz, 2002, pp. 9-16). Serious dilemmas concern new factors of business location and spatial diffusion of innovation. Physical distance, as a barrier to interaction in space, loses its importance (Hirst and Thompson, 1996), because the directions of development resulting from the globalization of the economy mean that the role of resources, which locally connected the fields of production and decided about economic development, begins to decrease (Dembowski, 1989). The entire resource packages determine development, both on the demand and supply sides. Under current management conditions only a highly complex configuration and the right time sequence of tangible and intangible resources involved can result in the entity gaining a permanent competitive advantage.

Contemporary regional development is characterized by the presence of both regions that compete with an offered approach consisting of a simple combination of resources, and regions that compete by synergy resulting from a complex combination of material resources closely related to high-quality intellectual resources and high-quality elements of the anthropogenic environment (Gałązka, 2017). In regions with 'simple resources' it is easier to conduct a regional policy consisting in control and

support of individual resources. In regions with ‘complex resources’, development is under the coordinated control of both regional and national authorities.

Development problems should be considered in three specific and different strategic categories in terms of form of action (Wysocka and Koziński, 2000, p. 63): restrictions and barriers, conflict situations and taking advantage of opportunities for further development. The identification of restrictions and barriers directs attention to the factors determining the durability and continuity of spatial structures. Their main goal is to maintain and stabilize the regional development policy. However, conflict situations refer to the present, deciding about the efficiency and effectiveness of proceedings, mainly in the field of systems functioning and the removal of extreme social phenomena. Openness to the future is marked by long-term actions through stimulating and harmonizing development, including leaving the field free for actions of future generations, which is why the main research problem proposed in the paper is dedicated to answering the following questions:

1. What are the specific problems in managing contemporary socio-economic space?
2. How to effectively implement regional policy taking into account potential threats?
3. What actions should be taken to optimize development opportunities for regions?

2. Problems in managing contemporary socio-economic space

It should be emphasized that as a result of globalization processes, some national resources are left outside the control of the authorities in favour of large supranational corporations, e.g. access to funds and investments. However, some resources remain under the control of the national authorities, and the most frequently indicated will be based on the level of knowledge conditioned by the functioning of the education system supervised by public authorities. Nonetheless, the scope of this control does not allow to steer or plan development step by step. The current stimulation of development in ‘complex’ regions is rather to create many opportunities for the individual decisions of producers without trying to plan the final result. At the same time, it is assumed that there is a high probability of causing growth if resources and the business environment give producers a relative competitive advantage and sufficient diversity, reducing the risk of economic activity in the regions. Innovative systems and technology transfer are also factors that give rise to building international competition. This is basically the only way to infinitely strengthen the economies of countries that have exhausted their simple reserves resulting from natural resources and labour resources. Regional innovation systems will be an important element of participation and the ability to benefit from European integration (Korenik and Rynio, 2018). In light of increasing globalization and the transition from competing with simple material resources to competing with intellectual resources, it is necessary to include in the territorial

organization of the state the possibility of forming strong regions with metropolitan cities capable of creating effective regional innovative systems.

Based on the above mentioned considerations, it can be concluded that the transformation processes of the world economy resulted in the appearance of two seemingly contradictory tendencies. It is noted that enterprises are preparing their development strategies on a global scale, which results in the creation of partnerships among global companies. On the other hand, they are strongly connected to the local environment, creating local production systems. The existing hierarchical structures are replaced by network systems with many specializations and development directions. Hence the talk of the simultaneous globalization and territorialisation of production (Jewtuchowicz, 1995, p. 83) (i.e. glocalization). The process of these changes, affecting the increase in the level of competitiveness of the individual, is determined by three basic phenomena: the decentralization of authority associated with new management logic, the strong impact of new technologies on restructuring processes and the transition to modern methods of strategic management (such as Strategic Policy Intelligence tools). It is also worth emphasizing that competitiveness as an irreplaceable value applies to both business entities and cities, regions (Pellešová, 2002, pp. 126-127), entire nation-states and their groups. In the struggle for the maximization of benefits, the spaces that have the best conditions for gaining competitiveness are winning (see: Kołodziejski, 1999, p. 70):

- favourable location in the global system (geographical and economic, institutional, etc.);
- multilaterally developed communication, IT and logistics node;
- social conditions for creating innovation – openness of authority and society to innovation, properties of human capital, concentration of institutions of science and education;
- the efficiency of functioning of the ‘place’ (infrastructure standard, efficiency of management, predictability of attitudes and decisions, trust, etc.);
- conditions to obtain a high standard of quality of life and the natural environment.

The assessment of a region’s predisposition to development is made on the basis of the evaluation of the existing state in terms of threats and opportunities. Threats in general categories include (Miszczak, 2004, pp. 70-72; Wysocka and Koziński, 2000, p. 67):

- a) limitations preventing the desired changes resulting from the poor efficiency of spatial systems or technical infrastructure and difficulties in using the possibilities inherent in material and intellectual reserves,
- b) factors inhibiting the pace of transformation, affecting the entire entity or its significant elements,
- c) arising distortions, causing disturbances in the proper functioning of territorial units and their harmonious development.

It should be emphasized that it would be pointless to try to list all the countless dilemmas of regional development policy and give directions on how they should be resolved. Thus, the main types of dilemmas encountered in space management practice will be listed and briefly characterized. The most common contradictions that cause conflicts among participants of the economic process are (Goryński, 1982, p. 134):

- a) short-term interest (ad hoc) vs. long-term interest;
- b) local interest vs. supra-local interest (regional, national);
- c) private interest vs. public (social) interest.

The combination of these concepts does not mean that they must be opposed or competitive. Often the way to meet a casual need is completely in line with the long-term interest. Equally, however, there may be cases where the effective satisfaction of the current interest makes it difficult or even impossible to meet the needs that arise in the future, and vice versa.

Contradictions of local and national interests are particularly common when compared to the location of plans of supra-local significance. Examples include industrial plants harmful to the environment or disruptive the surroundings. In the years of rapid industrialization of the country, society and local authorities were more easily reconciled with the nuisance of factories located in their area owing to the expected activation effects, in turn resulting in the accelerated development of the city, improvement of its service facilities, etc. As the standard of living and sensitivity to environmental conditions grow conflicts are increasingly common. Extreme cases are protest actions and referendums of residents in many countries against the location of nuclear power plants, erosive waste landfills, etc. (in Poland, the example of the Mielno Commune Council in West Pomeranian Voivodeship, which unanimously adopted a resolution opposing the location of the nuclear power plant in Gąski).

Problems in the management of socio-economic space (especially in countries where transformation is taking place or has taken place) can be identified in several dimensions (Rudnicki, 2000, p. 117):

- a) territorial (long-term lack of adequate territorial and administrative structure of the country);
- b) financial (no separate, concentrated financial stream in the central budget and in local government budgets earmarked for regional development);
- c) procedural (no explicit, precise principles of financial engineering in the field of financing and implementation of regional programmes);
- d) institutional (no separate structure responsible for regional development and no system of agreeing activities among individual ministries).

It is also worth noting that in a country where the polycentric structure of the settlement system is relatively balanced and no large urban or regional centre

dominates the rest of the territory, actions should not be taken to weaken the dominance of large cities. On the contrary, spatial policy should support centres of supra-regional importance as the main centres of competitiveness, economic development and technological progress (Regulski, 1998, pp. 21-22; Wysocka and Koziński, 1998). It is in urban agglomerations and metropolises that the consequences of these processes are most felt, for example, spatial concentration, associated with the benefits of large cities and their peripheral areas on the one hand, and the expansion of international exchange networks on the other. There is a 'reversal' of territorial dynamism, consisting in a crisis of industrialized areas with traditional production and taking over the role of development leaders by new areas, often not yet industrialized (Harańczyk, 1998, pp. 10-21, 47-56). In addition, globalization processes paradoxically increase the significance of the local scale and territorial factor. These two opposing tendencies are in fact closely related and mutually reinforcing. Globalization puts pressure on increasing the competitiveness of production and services, while the area may constitute a source of added value and contribute to the increase of competitive advantage of the enterprises located in it, and thus the whole region.

One of the priorities of a regional development policy should be the intensification and appropriate use of cross-border cooperation, which is an important factor in the development of various regional networks and deepening the internal integration of European Union areas. The basic objectives of contemporary regional policy should also include creating conditions (within the framework of market economy rules) for strengthening the economy of the regions. There are two reasons behind this premise – unfortunately, generally contradictory in current operations (Wojtasiewicz, 1995, pp. 48-49):

- a) striving to maximize economic efficiency, which in practice means a preference for the development of more economically efficient regions, i.e. those that are generally more developed at the start; this usually results in an increase in the disparities between more developed and less developed regions;
- b) striving to create opportunities to fully meet the needs of the inhabitants of all regions, which is tantamount to subsidizing poorer regions (directly or through specific government preferences for private investment undertaken in such regions); the effect of this is 'taking away' some of the funds from richer regions and entirely weakening the economic efficiency of resource allocation in the name of social goals.

Solving the dilemma of which premise to choose in regional practice or how to shape the right compromise is not easy. Intermediate solutions are sought, providing fairly large economic benefits and – if possible – minimizing social inconvenience (Kukliński, 1997, p. 408). It is worth emphasizing that no country has yet managed to resolve this strictly conflict situation.

Polarized or equitable development is another classic dilemma of regional development. It should be emphasized that despite a number of actions taken by decision-makers, there are still considerable differences today. One cannot fail to notice the remains of the old system still existing in various forms in post-socialist countries, where the degree of advancement of transformation processes is very differentiated. Market mechanisms are still often defective there, and the functioning of the market is far from normal (especially in some countries, mainly those formed after the collapse of the USSR on its former territory). Certain problems in dynamizing regional development are caused by the need to implement the principle of eco-development, according to which all economic and social activities must be conducted in harmony with the natural environment (Wysocka and Koziński, 1995, p. 39). One of the arguments against the full application of this principle are the high costs resulting both from the need to adapt to the stricter environmental criteria and from the introduction of quite far-reaching restrictions on economic activity. The significance of this dilemma is also strengthened by the gradual changes in the assessment of individual elements of the environment (e.g. due to the depletion of natural resources). Therefore, conducting spatial development policy in this aspect requires making a decision as to whether to respond to the challenges of the present or the future.

3. Threats to the effective realization of regional policy

As a result of observing development processes and their consequences for the economies of individual countries, it can be assumed that very different development models of territorial units will be shaped in the near future. They will be the effect of previous trends in urbanization, institutional development, intellectual potential and many other factors. Already, on the basis of observed tendencies in regional development, the following models can be distinguished which may be shaped in the future (Zembaczyński, 2001, pp. 305-306):

- 1) concentric model – with the dominant metropolitan centre and peripheral space differing in terms of living standard of inhabitants, intersected by development bands along the main communication routes; the metropolitan development needs will limit the possibilities of financing changes throughout the region;
- 2) polycentric model – based on the main regional centre and several centres of subregional significance well connected with it, adequately equipped with institutions important for development; this type of development will be closest to the idea of sustainable development;
- 3) zonal model – characteristic for regions in which highly industrialized, agricultural and tourist areas occur simultaneously; in this type of units there will be the phenomenon of specialization of dominant centres in a given zone; the interconnectedness of these centres with the administrative centre of the region will create an important infrastructure network for their development;

- 4) island model – resulting from very different, in relation to the surrounding space, development possibilities of highly competitive centres; their development will be autonomous, based on their resources and weakly associated with changes in the surrounding space.

Regions require the skills to unleash their own internal development capabilities, and after building a development program, in close consultation with the regional community, they must be supported by the government. The initiative of various environments, programme cooperation for all local government units and the stimulating effect of the government centre together should bring positive effects. The ministerial role of the government towards society – through regional policy – will be able to become more rational than before.

One of the threats that may undermine the sense of work on regional policy is the already mentioned instability (an example is the recent global financial crisis), i.e. being subject to frequent modifications that do not result from the need to adapt to new circumstances. Such instability may be the outcome of the instrumental treatment of regional policy and subordination to its short-term goals, and leads to a situation where the choice of directions for the region's development becomes the basic plane of polarization of the political scene.

Another dangerous situation depends on the interpretation of regional policy as a subject of competition of group interests. All adopted solutions are consistent with one group interest and contrary to others. That is why developing a vision of the common good cannot only be a social engineering measure in a battle of local particularisms. At the same time, regional policy may become the subject of tenders of both industry and territorial groups of interests.

The threat is not only the dominance of regional policy by external entities to those responsible for its operation. Failures may also result from the lack of proper commitment on the part of such entities. This may lead to the fragmentation of regional policy – reducing it to a public investment programme (Błaszke, Rącka, Nowak, and Buzu, 2019, pp. 47-64).

It is also impossible to ignore the fact that the fulfillment of the aspirations of the region's community may be canceled out by decisions of the central authorities that contradict its expectations and the lack of support from international institutions. The condition of dynamic development is also the inflow of external private capital. Any regional policy must be based on an estimation of the availability of this source of funding. This means that territorial authorities are passing over or are forced by economic realities to move from performing purely administrative and executive functions to the functions of development managers. Strategic planning and active territorial marketing are techniques more and more often used by competing regions, because the lack of investors' interest in the region is a failure that can severely limit its development (Miszczyk, 2004, p. 21).

All of these threats have their source in errors arising in the area of broadly understood social communication – they can be prevented by properly prepared and

disseminated public messages. Defining the roles of individual entities, influencing their opinions and decisions, and stimulating their involvement are goals far more serious than deflecting blows and building personal popularity – tasks usually set by politicians to their spokespersons. Social communication understood in this way is an integral part of policy, no less important than making decisions regarding statutory competences.

The list of threats should be supplemented by the contradiction of the assumptions and selected development directions adopted in regional policy with trends resulting from the individual decisions of citizens. The propensity to save, migrations and choice of fields of study – these are factors determined not only by decisions taken directly by the authorities, but also by the ability of regional leaders to influence the attitudes of residents by shaping public opinion. Public contacts and media coverage have an important role to play in addressing the following issues:

- a) subordinating regional policy to short-term goals (gaining popularity, intra-coalition games, rivalry between the ruling groups – the opposition);
- b) lack of consent for selected solutions and development directions;
- c) dominance of group interests over the common good;
- d) lack of involvement of external partners (commercial enterprises and NGOs, municipalities and regions authorities, central government, European Union, external investors);
- e) contradictions in the individual behaviour of the inhabitants with the assumptions and objectives of a policy.

In light of these considerations, it also seems reasonable to present threats and possible opportunities for the development of regions caused by the worst financial and economic crisis in decades that has affected the world and Europe, and caused a significant decline in economic activity. Joint actions aimed at saving the financial system, stimulating demand and increasing trust through public interventions helped to avoid economic collapse. However, the crisis significantly weakened the resilience of regions and forced more intensive cooperation to overcome it effectively and to define new public strategies adapted to quite different external conditions. The recession and financial burdens had a greater impact on those countries that were experiencing difficulties due to significant financial imbalances or weaknesses in policy before the onset of the crisis (Commission of the European Communities, 2009, pp. 2-3). Different situations in countries require different actions that involve coordination. The side effects of these activities in individual countries and policy areas need effective coordination at EU level. Equality of rules should be observed in particular in the financial and business sectors, and macroeconomic side effects should be included in the coordinated EU strategy for overcoming the crisis.

Nevertheless, apart from the above-mentioned harmful consequences of the global economic downturn, one should have faith in the power of Schumpeter's "creative destruction", the interpretation of which allows to state that "regardless of

the actual course of the crisis [...] it can have significant purifying meaning, consisting in elimination of less competitive business entities. Thus, the crisis may change the economic strength of individual territorial systems and their competitiveness” (Gorzalak, 2009, p. 41). Moreover, Florida indicates that economies and regions with a diversified socio-economic structure and high innovation capacity will emerge from the crisis relatively strengthened, even if they suffer greater losses as a result of the economic recession (Florida, 2009).

For a comprehensive analysis of the regional dimension of the global financial crisis, it seems reasonable to present the main theses of Florida on the impact of the crisis on the future shape of ‘economic geography’ (Białek and Oleksiuk, 2009, p. 350) of the USA, the country in which signs of recession first appeared. The starting point for these considerations may be the statement by Romer: “The crisis is too great a chance to lose it”. In the aspect of these words, the question arises as to what conclusions can be drawn from the crisis by those responsible for regional policy. Florida described in “The Atlantic” the economic geography of the world as “peaked”, emphasizing the important role played by place or location. As a result, the competitive advantages of the largest urban regions of the world are not weakening, but on the contrary – are increasing. Therefore, in order to understand the mechanisms translating the economic crisis into the development perspectives of individual regions of the USA, it is necessary to identify the forces shaping the panorama of the American economy in recent years. Florida emphasizes that the same trend is taking place all over the world. People are flowing into a closed number of megaregions (systems covering several cities with the surrounding suburbs) (Białek and Oleksiuk, 2009, p. 354).

The process of geographical concentration of production is becoming increasingly pronounced, and the 40 largest megaregions of the world (inhabited by 18% of the world’s population) produce two-thirds of the global production and own 90% patents. In addition, the development of megaregions means that the opportunities for attracting talented specialists to cities and regions are varied. In the opinion of researchers from the Santa Fe Institute, the advantage of large cities encouraging clever individualists is the occurrence of a higher rate of so-called urban metabolism. In the case of living organisms, the rate at which food is converted into energy – or metabolism – decreases as these organisms grow. The opposite is true for some urban areas (Cheshire, Nathan, and Overman, 2014). Studying trends in terms of innovativeness, patents, wages and local GDP, researchers noted that successful economic cities are becoming – along with the increase in their physical size (and above all human capital) – increasingly dynamic.

Proponents of this theory maintain that the larger number of inhabitants, the higher level of innovation and wealth *per capita* in a given city. Cities such as New York (with its financial and media sector), Los Angeles (film and music sector), or the Silicon Valley region (high-tech industry) are examples of “increased metabolism”. However, according to Florida, in times of crisis the issue of this metabolism is

crucial for the development of urban regions. It is not true that cities-regions with 'high metabolism' are more resistant to economic shock. The level of susceptibility to economic disturbances of these settlement units is directly proportional to the degree of ability and possibility to redirect human talents from endangered industries to new types of economic activity – arising as a result of Schumpeter's "creative destruction".

According to Florida, the causes of the crisis are essentially geographical and indicate that the modern system of organizing economic life has reached its end. Creating the basis for sustainable economic growth will require not only incentives in the field of fiscal policy or reforms in the sphere of production, but also a new type of economic geography and a new spatial fix (Białek and Oleksiuk, 2009, p. 359). The current relationship of excessive consumption and lack of savings with the post-war spatial development pattern (i.e. the popularization of home ownership and suburbanization) has led to distortions of decisions in such matters as the choice of place of residence, directions of investment flows and decisions regarding the range of production. At present the essence of economic processes is not limited to the production and transportation of things, but is based on the flow of ideas. Today, locations with the fastest circulation of ideas and the highest density of creative units, i.e. the highest rate of the aforementioned metabolism, are successful. Therefore, those regions and cities that appear to have the greatest competitive potential in the coming decades should be promoted. Examples of such settlement units are large megaregions (currently the driving force of the American economy) as well as smaller ones that attract the creative class and innovative places (Boulder or the North Carolina Research Triangle).

It is worth emphasizing that as a result of the new conditions of the global economy arising after the crisis, it becomes necessary to make smarter use of both urban spaces and suburbs (Klasik, 2018). This would amount to increasing the population density in these areas, while improving the quality of life in them. Such actions require the application of new regulations enabling the construction of residential buildings, a larger range of mixed-housing areas, density of the suburbs (especially along the railway lines) and the introduction of fees for driving into city centers.

On the other hand, one should be aware of the fact that certain places cannot be protected against the negative effects of the crisis and against falling as a result. Florida states that "we must allow fall in demand for products and lifestyles – representing the previous era – and start building a new economy based on the new geography" (Białek and Oleksiuk, 2009, p. 363). This new landscape should be more concentrated, innovative and networked, which is conducive to more effective interactions taking place in a limited number of densely populated megaregions and creative cities.

4. Actions optimizing the development opportunities for regions

Regional differences, however necessary since they condition the efficiency and development of socio-economic activities, deepen and become excessive due to the instability of regional systems and the occurring cumulation processes. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that a stable regional system is, like an unstable one, in a state of imbalance, and only after some time returns to a state of equilibrium, where the system described as unstable does not succeed. In accordance with the assumptions of Myrdal's concept, based on the idea of couplings and cumulative processes, the play of market forces usually leads to an increase, not a decrease in inequality among regions. Economic growth is a process accompanied by long periods of deepening regional contrasts, but it is also worth noting that this trend may reverse (Domański, 2000, p. 165). Therefore, the diversity in space resulting from the transition of the economy to a new phase of development, i.e. to a knowledge-based economy, is a natural phenomenon, but it cannot be unlimited. Operating conditions in this new phase impose increased competitiveness requirements on the economy. Only regions capable of introducing innovations (learning regions) can meet these requirements. Such an ability is currently created by information societies. Competing with them is becoming a more and more difficult task, which, unfortunately, causes weaker regions to stagnate and, as a consequence, deepens interregional differences. For that reason, as part of an effective and efficient regional policy, measures should be taken that prevent the continuous and uninterrupted increase of regional disparities. These actions should additionally answer the question of when growing differences still play the role of a stimulating mechanism, and when they can become a factor inhibiting progress, causing destructive effects. It should be noted that achieving sustainable development has long been one of the most important goals set for a regional development policy (Gorzelać and Jałowicki, 1995, pp. 21-34). However, the philosophy of balancing development meets with polemics in the environment of regionalists. According to some scientists, under current conditions, activities aimed at obtaining and maintaining sustainable development throughout the country – or even a larger territorial unit, which is in line with the objectives of social policy – may have an inhibitory effect on phenomena such as entrepreneurship and innovativeness, which in its shaping requires a large field of freedom and as few restrictions as possible (Nowakowska, 2016). Others see such an opportunity in reducing interregional disparities, which they believe is a priority over the insufficient level of modernity and the related competitiveness of an economy (Mync, 1997, p. 99). However, the experience of highly developed countries shows that today the economy of a region can be activated and reconstructed only through the development of modern branches (Karpiński, 1990, pp. 2-3), especially in the ICT sector. The idea of proceeding comes down to:

- creating innovative capital in the region;
- providing infrastructure conducive to the development of the high tech industry (or indicating how to create this infrastructure);

- formulating a specific programme for the reconstruction of the region's economy, included in specific government documents and containing its development strategy (against the background of a diagnosis of the region's possibilities and opportunities).

The activities require the creation of comprehensive, regional government and local government programmes, which cannot be limited to formulating a vision of the 'target' state of the region's economy. They should operate on mesospatial approaches to subregional functional areas as well as time sequences showing the path to progressive states of the economy in the future. Specific and credible programmes cannot be the only basis for governmental and local government activities in their decision-making matters, but also fulfill an inspirational and informative function towards many independent business entities, giving them knowledge of the authorities' intentions and programmed assistance and cooperation.

These programmes are not only the basis for development strategies in various territorial configurations, but they are important from the point of view of integration processes in Europe. As is known, the development processes of modern Europe are to a large extent integration processes in the regional dimension, characterized by the systematic and comprehensive cooperation of regions from various countries, especially border regions.

There are still discussions on the model of regional development policy, taking the form of publications or legal acts that contain certain assumptions forming the canon of contemporary thinking about regional development, which consists in the following beliefs (Bończak-Kucharczyk, 2001, pp. 258-259):

- a) regional development control cannot take place in a completely centralized way, and therefore the basic condition for accelerating this development is the decentralization of state management (local government reform);
- b) the development of individual regions requires the existence of an independent entity at regional level, which is capable of constructing its own development strategy and having the appropriate competences and means to effectively conduct development-oriented policy and affect economic and social phenomena occurring in area of its activity;
- c) regional boundaries can be set differently and regions may have territories of different sizes, although they should include areas forming certain economic and cultural entities, different from neighbouring areas (from other regions);
- d) the process of integration with the European Union and with other international structures will have an increasing impact on the development opportunities of individual regions, because various parts of the country (different regions) develop unevenly, special state intervention (EU) is necessary to level these differences, enabling more backward regions to catch up with development delays;

- e) the concept (strategy) of development, with the exception of some elements allowing to preserve the cohesion of the state, should not be imposed from the outside, but should be involved in local and regional possibilities and inspirations, and its implementation should be based on the acceptance and activity of local communities;
- f) the regions compete with each other, and therefore their development concepts should be different (use local differences); if this specific race for development is not to pitch one area against another, various regions should at the same time have a chance for development;
- g) the development of each territory, including the development of the region, should be sustainable and take place in accordance with environmental protection requirements.

These principles, shaping some attitudes, have an impact on specific solutions that are basic to stimulate regional development. The essential manifestations of this process, occurring on a large scale and contributing to changes in the structure, dynamics and specificity of the economy of a chosen region, and as a consequence of its position in the global market game, are (*Polska 2025*, 2000, pp. 23-24):

- increasing the importance of science and education;
- rapid development of information technologies;
- direct transformation of knowledge into the production resource;
- creation of new professions in which the skills of gathering, applying and using information are taken into account;
- a radical and complete transformation of all sectors of human life.

The results of research conducted on a global scale and the assumptions of the so-called competitive theory of endogenous growth imply that domestic capital productivity does not have to decrease at all, because there is no self-balancing mechanism for development, and regions that manage their resources better develop faster (Jaskulska, 1995, p. 222). This is due to the fact that at present the basic element of the investment process is human capital (knowledge-based economy) or its specific type – creative capital (creative economy, learning economy), which in turn increases the productivity of physical capital (Miszczak, 2012).

To sum up, it can be stated that the factors increasing the significance of regional development in the modern world, manifested in the change in the position of economic regions at the beginning of this century, are (Winiarski, 1992, p. 11):

1. Dynamic socio-economic development resulting from the scientific and technical revolution, which causes a re-evaluation of the importance of many fields in the national economy and leads to a change in the territorial division of labour, distribution of population, infrastructure, etc. As a result of these changes, regions that until recently were considered to be leaders can transform into problem areas.

2. The development of mass communication and information flow, resulting in an increase in the dissemination of knowledge about the differences in the level of wealth of individual countries or regions, causes actions aimed at reducing the differences – the distance between less and more developed areas.
3. Increased threat to the natural environment, both in the space of individual countries and in international cross-sections, resulting in the need for coordinated actions to reduce it.
4. Integration processes occurring in many places around the world, meaning that problems of regional development must be solved at international levels, which leads to the internationalization of regional policy.

It is worth mentioning that a new approach to issues related to regional development in the conditions of the global information revolution is necessary. In this regard, the following issues deserve to be highlighted (Siemiński and Starszak, 2002, pp. 5-18):

- a) the idea of common actions for more sustainable development (mainly about harmonizing economic progress with social, ecological, spatial, cultural and ethical issues);
- b) such a set of activities, referred to as the ‘network of activities’, which become possible under the conditions of the above-mentioned revolution, which, among others creates the basis for a rethinking of all existing development processes;
- c) a new approach to education, including the so-called lifelong learning;
- d) new management perspectives (on a global to regional and local scale);
- e) a new approach to governance (with public participation);
- f) rethinking the essence of a market economy;
- g) a new look at the essence of politics as a whole, including spatial policy and sustainable development policy, in a situation of constant changes; the idea of shaping this policy is eco-humanism, an essential element of survival in the conditions of the global crisis.

5. Summary and conclusions

Transforming European, also Polish, regions into structures adapted to global challenges will require not only technological innovations, but also many social innovations – changes in thinking patterns and attitudes, changes social practices and changes in institutions both in the workplace and more broadly, in a social environment. The benchmarking approach will also need to be changed. Instead of treating benchmarking as a tool mainly for comparing regions, it must be considered as a tool for acquiring knowledge and learning. Regions need to start learning lessons from monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking. Therefore benchmarking should be

transformed into “bench-learning” (Rousseau, 2008, p. 107). Facing the challenges of the global climate and migration crisis, economic actors and policy makers in European regions should take greater account of both the requirements of competitiveness and the principles of sustainable development in planned and implemented action programs. This involves preventing local collapses and uncontrolled disasters that can even cover the whole globe. The new globalised world, focused on innovation, is becoming less and less stable and is “attached to the place”.

We need to learn how to be carried away in a controlled way by a wave of continuous innovation that can have far-reaching effects in the form of ‘creative reconstruction’ which radically and rapidly changes the situation of institutions, organizations and people (Rousseau, 2008, pp. 107-108). Responsibility for creating favourable conditions of development rests mainly with the representatives of local and regional authorities. Through modern strategic instruments, they can stimulate the use of their potential, preserve regional actors and determine the desired development directions.

In light of the challenges of this century, the development of regions depends on how, and how effectively, they can identify advantages and mobilize all entities operating in public space. For this purpose, regions should invest more than hitherto in creating strategies and competences, especially those related to the diagnosis of needs and the proper selection of projects, with particular attention paid not to the aspect of speed and formal correctness of spending funds, but to the real effects that are brought by implementation of projects. Regional decision-makers should also strive to develop and build efficient endogenous mechanisms to meet not only current but also future, perhaps even more difficult, development challenges resulting from complex integration processes in Europe. The early building of the appropriate potential, structural, organizational, substantive, methodological, scientific facilities and own development program is a condition for ensuring a significant competitive position for the region.

It should also be noted that the goal that guides countries and regions today is adapting to globalization conditions and maintaining competitiveness in global markets. This goal is implemented through various strategies. From the point of view of the future of regional policy, these goals and differences in strategies for achieving them raise many questions and dilemmas. The most important of them relate to (Pezzini, 2008, p. 32):

- a) the actual stage of the development paradigm shift in EU member states and OECD countries;
- b) the level of inequalities acceptable during the transition period, when the development of growth poles is mainly supported;
- c) potential long-term benefits associated with the spreading of the effects of the development of growth poles over other regions and/or countries;

- d) methods of achieving optimal coordination and coherence of various programs of public activities (policies) having a regional dimension, implemented within the increasingly complex problem field, which has become the field of regional development.

In conclusion, the above observations do not exhaust all possible proposals for regional development activities and are not a guarantee of the proper course of socio-economic phenomena in the region. However, ignoring them will hinder the implementation of an effective regional policy and, as a consequence, lead to spontaneous, uncontrolled and dangerous shaping of spatial economic processes.

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