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RURAL AREAS IN THE POLISH REGIONAL POLICY TILL 2020

OBSZARY WIEJSKIE W POLSKIEJ POLITYCE REGIONALNEJ DO ROKU 2020

Key words: rural areas, regional policy, competitiveness, cohesion

Słowa kluczowe: obszary wiejskie, polityka regionalna, konkurencyjność, spójność

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to present current dilemmas of placing of rural areas development in regional policy. Realization of this aim was possible through a review of literature and documents connected with regional policy. There were presented two discussed models of regional policy: model of equalization vs. the polarisation and diffusion model, the new paradigm of regional policy as well as a place of rural areas development in regional policy. The place of rural areas in the Polish regional policy till 2020 was determined basing on the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: Regions, Cities, Rural Areas. It can be concluded that the Polish regional policy perceives both developed rural areas and support them within the first objective of the Strategy – competitiveness as well as rural areas lagging behind, which can get help within the second objective – cohesion.

Introduction

The European Union policies have been undergoing numerous changes recently. There are a lot of discussions on the future of regional policy. Its transformation directions have been discussed a lot recently in the group of the EU Member States as well as within other organisations and institutions, for example the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The results of these deliberations can have significant results for development opportunities of the Polish rural areas, so it is crucial to monitor them carefully and analyse their potential effects.

In Poland, these deliberations are performed both by representatives of different scientific institutions (e.g. universities, the Polish Academy of Sciences, etc.) from the theoretical point of view as well as bodies of self-governmental and governmental levels from the practical point of view. The formal discussion on the national level is moderated in this field by the Ministry of Regional Development, especially in the process of preparation of new programming documents, as the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: “Regions, Cities, Rural Areas” or the National Spatial Arrangement Concept.

Material and methods

The aim of the paper is to present changes taking place in the European and Polish regional policy, especially in the context of rural areas support. The detailed objectives can be formulated as follows:

- to collect and summarise former experiences and current discussions in the field of regional policy,
- to identify directions of changes in regional policy towards rural areas.

The following sources of information were used in the research:

- literature on rural areas development and regional policy,
- international documents and publications in the area of rural development prepared by the European Union bodies, OECD,
- information developed and published by ministries (especially the Ministry of Regional Development) and other institutions.

To attain the objectives of the paper several research methods were used:

- monographic method, analysis and synthesis methods were applied to study the theory of regional policy,
- document analysis was performed to investigate discussions and future perspectives of regional policy,
- the induction method with deduction elements was used to find out the essences of current changes in the policy towards rural areas,
- a table to present the old and new paradigms of regional policy and a figure to display relation of regional and a system of public policies towards rural areas.

Transformation of regional policy

Regional policy began in most OECD countries in the 1950's and 1960's, a period of relatively strong economic growth, fiscal expansion and low unemployment. The principal objectives of the measures introduced were greater equity and balanced growth in a period of rapid industrialisation. The main instruments used were wealth redistribution through financial transfers by the national government, accompanied by large-scale public investments. During the 1970's and early 1980's, successive economic shocks and changes in the global economy led to the emergence of geographical concentrations of unemployment in many countries and regional policy evolved rapidly to address this new challenge. The earlier focus on reducing disparities (in income, in infrastructure stock, etc.), was widened to include employment creation. The assumption was that public policy could alter supply conditions (essentially by changing production cost factors through production subsidies and incentives) and thereby could influence industrial (re)location decisions for both existing firms and new investments [Regions matter... 2009b].

Overall, the results were disappointing. Regional disparities were not significantly reduced, appearing as entrenched as ever in many countries despite significant public investment. At a regional level, the success of these policies in restructuring the economic base of the target areas was also limited [Investing for... 2009a].

This equalisation approach was the main axis of the EU former orientation of regional policy. One of the most visible examples of its failure is the case of the Triple European Mezzogiorno. The starting point for the whole case was the Italian region Mezzogiorno, which has been frequently presented in the relevant literature and the policy papers as a nexus of historically (re)produced economic, social, cultural, and political problems that require an external, large scale intervention by supra-regional authorities. Until the 1980's such an intervention was authored by the Italian state. Subsequently, following the invention of the Common Regional Policy by the European Communities, the objectives, procedures and measures of the public intervention to trigger development in Mezzogiorno have combined traditions and resources stemming from the two sources. Despite the decades' long massive intervention, accompanied by an exponentially growing body of ex-ante and ex-post policy evaluation and the related social science analyses, at the beginning of the XXI century Mezzogiorno has not managed to cease to be the emblem of regional backwardness, economic inefficiency, and political ineffectiveness [Gašior-Niemiec 2008]. The similar situation and mechanisms of lagging behind were next observed in eastern Germany and eastern Poland.

The low level of attainment of the European cohesion goal caused a necessity of revision of regional policy. In a process of territorial reviews for some European countries the OECD experts formulated the new paradigm of regional policy (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Old and new paradigms of regional policy
Tabela 1. Stary i nowy paradygmat polityki regionalnej

Specification/ <i>Wyszczególnienie</i>	Old paradigm/ <i>Stary paradygmat</i>	New paradigm/ <i>Nowy paradygmat</i>
Objectives/ <i>Cele</i>	Compensating temporarily for location disadvantages of lagging regions/ <i>Tymczasowa kompensacja niekorzystnych uwarunkowań regionów słabo rozwiniętych</i>	Tapping underutilised potential in all regions for enhancing regional competitiveness/ <i>Uruchomienie dotychczas nie w pełni wykorzystanych potencjałów dla pobudzenia regionalnej konkurencyjności</i>
Unit of intervention/ <i>Poziom interwencji</i>	Administrative units/ <i>Jednostki administracyjne</i>	Functional economic areas/ <i>Obszary funkcjonalne</i>
Strategies/ <i>Strategie</i>	Sectoral approach/ <i>Podejście sektorowe</i>	Integrated development projects/ <i>Zintegrowane projekty rozwojowe</i>
Measures/ <i>Narzędzia</i>	Subsidies and state aids/ <i>Subsydia i pomoc państwa</i>	Mix of soft and hard capital (capital stock, labour market, business environment, social capital and networks)/ <i>Połączenie inwestycji "twardych" i "miękkich" (kapitał udziałowy, kapitał społeczny i sieci współpracy)</i>
Actors/ <i>Aktorzy</i>	Central government/ <i>Centralne zarządzanie</i>	Different levels of government/ <i>Różne poziomy zarządzania</i>

Source/Źródło: Investing for... 2009

The above presented assumptions of the new paradigm of regional policy were reflected in the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: Regions, Cities, Rural Areas and as a result they strongly influence also the Polish regional policy towards rural areas till 2020.

The second model of economic policy, applied also to regional policy, widely discussed recently is the polarisation and diffusion model, proposed in the report "Poland 2030. Development Challenges" [2009] as the most appropriate for the next twenty years of development. Recognising the uneven pace of development as a natural element of economic processes, as well as threat resulting even from temporary growth in disproportion between regions, social groups, or sectors of economy, its authors decided that economic policy has to face simultaneous challenges in the field of eliminating lags, and to support the process of creating new competitive advantages. This is why apart from boosting growth polarities (i.e. polarisation processes), there should be primarily created conditions for diffusion – activities which might support the process of equalising education-related opportunities, improve transport accessibility of any place in the country, eliminate the threat of digital exclusion, improve social integration levels, structure and support a solidarity of generations. As a result the Team of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister recommends, the strategy for Poland, which should be that of a diagnosis of areas where polarisation will arise as a side effect (some rural areas can be within this scope), and of creating appropriate tools, to the purpose of minimising polarisation's social and development-related effects, with no damage to the ever-arising new opportunities for an increase in or retaining of a growth pace based on competition and market rules. This in turn means that the state's fundamental task is to support diffusion processes – the creation and constant updating of efficient and effective tools of equalising levels of development potential and living conditions.

The polarisation and diffusion model was not finally directly incorporated into the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: "Regions, Cities, Rural Areas". As a result of public consultations it was moderated, at least in its name, and included in the Strategy as the model based on competitiveness and cohesion.

Rural areas in regional policy

Regional policy, apart of course of agricultural policy, is the one which influences rural areas to the largest extent. However, it is always a dilemma where rural and regional policy should be placed within public policy and what relations should connect them. This question has been still open because of many possible solutions, which have been trying to implement in different countries. For example Fabrizio Barca [2006], the author of widely discussed report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy, entitled "An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations", analyses two approaches:

1. So called Grand Plan of the holistic approach assumes the ideal world, in which all policies are re-read through a territorial lens; they are integrated and they help to develop a Grand Plan including rural and non-rural policies, as well as regional and general policies, with perfect coordination between bottom-up and top-down approaches. In this world, agricultural policy, rural development policy, urban planning, regional policy, social policy and transportation policy work in a perfectly integrated way at the territorial level, assuring the best suited development strategy for both rural and urban areas, and achieving the utopia of the Grand Plan.
2. The minimalist approach – rural policy (the same could hold true for urban policy) is run as a niche policy, as the European Union runs LEADER – or Urban – programmes. Here the need for regional policy to be based on local information and knowledge is fully taken into account, as well as the difficulties associated with extracting and making use of that information. But in the minimalist approach this happens at the expense of forgoing the attempt of coherence with general policies as well with policies aimed at non-rural territories. Furthermore, financial resources involved are limited and it is hard to measure the impact on economic and social conditions since they are affected by the overall combination of other policies.

Taking the above mentioned approaches into account, Barca refers to the approach where coordinated and well-funded regional policies operate across the four quadrants of rural and non-rural dimensions, including both development and minimum standard objectives (Fig. 1).

According to this approach general policy is independent, but an assessment is demanded of its impact on rural and non-rural areas and on the relation between the two kinds of policies (first overlapping shaded area). This means that if one country's general social policy is having impacts on rural areas, this should at least be assessed. The same thing could be said about relationship between regional rural policies and regional urban policies (second overlapping shaded area).

Territory / <i>Obszar</i>	Policies / <i>Polityka</i>	
	Regional / <i>Regionalna</i>	General / <i>Ogólna</i>
	Minimum	Standard
Rural / <i>Wiejski</i>		
Non-rural / <i>Nie wiejski</i>		

Figure 1. The alternative approach to the place of rural areas in public policy

Rysunek 1. Alternatywne podejście do miejsca obszarów wiejskich w politykach publicznych

Source/*Zródło*: Barca 2006

Rural areas in the Polish regional policy

Two large scale processes of demographic change are taking place in Europe [Communication from... 2006]:

- a long established “urbanisation” trend drawing population and economic activity out of more remote rural areas into urban and accessible rural areas,
- a more recent “counter-urbanisation” flow out of urban areas into accessible rural areas (made possible by new transport and ICT infrastructure) increasingly under pressure from an urbanised lifestyle.

As a result, accessible parts of significantly rural areas represent a zone of growth, with an economic structure increasingly similar to that of urban areas. In contrast, predominantly rural areas, especially in the more remote parts of the EU are still being depleted of population and economic activity. It looks like the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: “Regions, Cities, Rural Areas” (NSRD) perfectly perceives these two kinds of the Polish rural areas and offers them support respectively for competitiveness and cohesion. There were formulated three aims of the Polish regional policy till 2020 [National Strategy... 2010]:

- support of growth of competitiveness in regions (“competitiveness”),
- building of territorial cohesion and preventing marginalisation of problem areas (“cohesion”),
- creation of conditions for efficient and partnership realization of development activities directed territorially (“performance”).

There were specified more detailed directions and sub-directions of operations within each objective of NSRD. The following list includes these which, according to the author, can be applied for rural areas within the first objective of NSRD:

- creation of conditions for development processes spreading and increase their absorption outside regional capitals – development of potential and absorption possibilities of rural areas; efficient use of territorial specialization potential in development processes;
- building of basics for regional competitiveness – intellectual capital development, including human and social capital; support for localization of external investments, especially foreign investments, use of advantageous of natural environment and potential of culture heritage.

Support within regional policy planned in the second objective is directed in order to overcome development difficulties strongly concentrated territorially, which are located in areas characterized by the lowest values of various indicators: economic, social, institutional or infrastructural. These areas are in danger of marginalization, so still decrease in development perspective. It causes that their endogenous potential may not be used in national development processes without additional, external support. This characteristic concerns also some rural areas so directions and sub-directions of NSRD which can concern rural area includes for example:

- support of rural areas characterised by the poorest access of inhabitants to goods and services conditioning development possibilities – educational and training services, medical services, communication services, utilities, cultural services (here is a space for innovative public service delivery playing a key role in rural areas),
- overcoming difficulties connected with location of borderlands, especially along the external EU borders,
- increase in transport accessibility to regional centres in areas of the lowest accessibility.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to clearly indicate the value of financial resources engaged into KSRR’s implementation, especially after 2013, when its realization will be connected with the new EU financial framework and of course it depends on negotiations with the European Commission. So far it can be estimated that value of resources engaged in the Strategy after 2013 will amount not less than 3% of GDP (calculated for the year 2008). The first objective concerning competitiveness will include about 63% of financial resources whereas the second one respective-

ly about 30%. The rest of the amount will be allotted to the third objective (of more technical character) – creating conditions for efficient and partnership realization of development activities territorially directed [National Strategy... 2010].

Conclusions

From the perspective of large amount of money directed for cohesion during the whole history of the EU regional policy, it is difficult to conclude that majority of them was not efficient, especially in regions most remote and lagging behind. However, taking into account efficiency of common public expenditure, it is necessary to reformulate cohesion policy to ensure its more effectiveness. On the other hand, decision on the alternative model of regional policy is a real complex issue, whereas there are not direct proofs that it will not lead to further marginalisation of regions lagging behind so far as a result of increasing polarisation processes and failure of diffusion processes.

In the context of rural areas development it is also difficult to indicate their place in a system of public policies, especially division of tasks and instruments supporting rural areas between regional policy and the Common Agricultural Policy. There exist different both theoretical as well as practical approaches to the solution of this problem.

Rural areas and support instruments for them are quite widely included in the National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020: "Regions, Cities, Rural Areas". Although it is really difficult now to examine *ex ante* its potential influence on rural areas without knowledge of financial resources allotted for particular directions and sub-directions of the Strategy but it is important to stress that these issues are present in the Polish regional policy. As an open question stays a degree of future coordination of different sectoral policies directed territorially for rural areas – it will be a basic condition of efficient allotment of public resources.

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Streszczenie

Zaprezentowano dylematy dotyczące miejsca rozwoju obszarów wiejskich w polityce regionalnej. Realizacja tego celu była możliwa poprzez studia literatury oraz dokumentów programowych polityki regionalnej. Zaprezentowano dwa rozpatrywane modele polityki regionalnej: tradycyjny oparty na podejściu wyrównawczym oraz model polaryzacyjno-dyfuzyjny, jak również nowy paradygmat polityki regionalnej oraz umiejscowienie rozwoju obszarów wiejskich w polityce regionalnej. Rola i miejsce obszarów wiejskich w polskiej polityce regionalnej do 2020 r. została określona na podstawie Krajowej Strategii Rozwoju Regionalnego 2010-2020 „Regiony, miasta, obszary wiejskie”. Na jej podstawie można stwierdzić, że zaplanowano w polityce regionalnej wsparcie zarówno dla rozwiniętych obszarów wiejskich – w ramach pierwszego celu obejmującego konkurencyjność, jak również dla słabo rozwiniętych i problemowych obszarów wiejskich, w ramach drugiego celu obejmującego działania na rzecz spójności terytorialnej.

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