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How has Poland done the EU cohesion policy lesson? The case of Polish regional development system modification

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How has Poland done the EU cohesion policy lesson? The case of Polish regional development system modification

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In the beginning of the last decade of XX century regional policy in Poland constituted a small part of all the actions under the public policy. In the second decade of XXI century, regional policy become the main policy realizing the development policy in Poland. During this twenty years the system of regional policy has changed a lot. The changes were mainly caused by transformation of polish economy from the central planning economy to market economy as well as the accession to European Union. The research concentrates on changes of the system of regional policy. The article starts with presentation of research and conceptual framework. It continues with the short description of the historical changes of regional policy in Poland. Later the evolution of the system is described. The changes are presented in three main categories: the changes in approach, strategic planning and institutional and administrative system. The author also presents the advantages and disadvantages of the changes as well as the practical problems and costs of regional policy system modification.

Przystąpienie do Unii Europejskiej jako kluczowy czynnik zmian systemu polityki rozwoju regionalnego w Polsce

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Na początku ostatniej dekady XX wieku polityka regionalna stanowiła niewielką część wszystkich rodzajów polityki w Polsce. Natomiast w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku, polityka ta pozostaje główną polityką realizującą politykę rozwoju w Polsce. Podczas tego okresu system polityki regionalnej uległ wielu modyfikacjom. Wśród najważniejszych czynników mających wpływ na zmiany należy wymienić: transformację polskiej gospodarki z gospodarki centralnie planowanej do gospodarki rynkowej, przystąpienie Polski do Unii Europejskiej oraz modyfikację podejścia do polityki rozwoju. Niniejsze badanie koncentruje się na zmianach w systemie polityki regionalnej. Po opisanu przyjętych założeń oraz metodologii badania dokonano krótkiego opisu historycznych zmian polityki regionalnej w Polsce. Główna część badania obejmuje zmiany w podejściu, planowaniu strategicznym oraz systemie instytucjonalnym i administracyjnym polityki regionalnej w Polsce. Na końcu przedstawione zostały wady i zalety tych zmian, jak również praktyczne problemy i koszty modyfikacji systemu polityki regionalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka spójności, polityka regionalna, podejście terytorialne, planowanie strategiczne, system instytucjonalny.

JEL: R10, R11

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1. Introduction

Cohesion policy is the biggest policy coordinated by the European Union, with the budget of 347 billion euros (35.7% of the EU budget in general) in 2007–2013. Under cohesion policy Poland received 67 billion euros in 2007–2013. In the programming period 2014–2020, Poland received 82.5 billion euros. These funds could be and were invested, among others, in research and science and its commercialization, entrepreneurship, key road connections and environmentally friendly transport (rail, public transport), digitization of the country as well as social inclusion and education. Thinking about cohesion policy of the European Union, most of us probably have in mind the influence of this policy on Polish socio-economic development, in particular infrastructure, additional increase in GDP, new jobs, SME support and investments in the R&D sector.

This study, however, does not concentrate on potential effects of the European cohesion policy on the national economy but on its organizational and administrative side. Allocating this amount of money requires creation of an administrative and organizational system as well as adaptation of the national legal system to new rules and regulations – those that have to be implemented after becoming a member of the European Union.

The main aim of this paper is to present the modifications of the Polish regional development policy after joining the European Union, i.e. since 2004. Poland profited a lot from the European Union's model of regional policy. Nevertheless, within the years, Poland, as every new member state, has gained its own experience in conducting regional policy and made some continuous improvement as regards adapting the system to the changing conditions.

The author tried to look at the system as a whole, analyzing the changes in the area of regional policy that were brought about as a result of joining the European Union. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. At the beginning, the author elaborates on the research questions as well as the methodology and, for clear understanding of those two concepts, presents definitions of regional and cohesion policies. Later, the article continues with a short description of historical changes of the regional policy in Poland. Subsequently, the author describes changes in approach, in the strategic planning system and in the institutional and administrative system of regional policy. This is followed by an analysis of advantages and disadvantages of those changes, main problems and costs of the regional policy system as well as benefits of institutional and organizational changes of regional policy. The article ends with conclusions.

2. Research framework and methodology

The main aim of this paper is to present modifications of the Polish regional development policy system after joining the European Union, i.e.

since 2004. As this is a complex topic, the author sets out some research questions and justifies the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework focuses, above all, on clarification of the concept of regional and cohesion policy with respect to the practical aspects of its functioning in Poland.

The first research question concerns the influence of historical changes and social readiness for changes. The main points of interest to explore in the research – the second research question – are changes within approach, strategic planning and the institutional and administrative system of the regional development policy. The third question refers to positive and negative aspects of the changes as well as benefits and main problems of those changes.

The research methods were the result of the author's assumptions as well as accepted research methodology. The main research method comprises an analysis of official national and regional documents and legal acts. The other research method was an observation. The author has been an employee of the local government administration for over 5 past years, which provides many thoughts and findings about its organization.

3. Conceptual framework, basic concepts definitions

The concepts of regional policy and cohesion policy are broadly discussed in the literature. These terms are often used interchangeably. Though they should not be understood identically, interchangeability seems to be acceptable due to a similar range of activities and mutual connections. The common word in those two concepts is policy. "Policy" is the interaction between the state and different social groups. It determines the scope of activities of the different institutions and can be seen in legislative procedures. Thereby, it affects the direction of the social and economic development of a country.

In order to understand cohesion policy and regional policy better, the definitions of the concepts of region and regional development will be given. These are terms which are often used when defining regional policy and cohesion policy. The region is a concept widely used. Basic (colloquial) understanding defines it as a piece of land, which means a unit of spatial surface characterized by specific features and elements which distinguish it from the environment. In this paper, "region" will be understood as an administrative region, that is an area enclosed according to the territorial division of a country.

The term which is often associated with the region is regional development. "Regional development" should be understood not only as a change in the gross domestic product, but also as a qualitative change, especially a change in the quality and conditions of life of the inhabitants of the region. The assumption about the diversification of regional development lies at the very foundation of regional policy. "Regional policy" means

activities in the field of a self-determined process of social and economic development of regions, which in turn contributes to the development of the whole country. Activities should be understood as activities in multiple dimensions (social, economic and space) as well as vertical and horizontal cooperation of entities at different levels of administration.

Having in mind the fact that this work relates to the regional policy in Poland, an obvious solution is to use the concepts of regional policy and cohesion policy which remain in line with the concepts adopted for implementation of those policies in Poland. Before, in Poland there was no clear distinction between regional policy and cohesion policy itself. Nowadays, according to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development “regional policy” is an integral part of development policy. It is a conscious and purposeful (intentional) action of public entities¹ that shapes social and economic development of voivodeships (regions)². Regional policy aims at using the endogenous potential of regions and concentrates on overcoming threats which slow down regional development. In addition to integration and coordination of resources, it should stimulate and strengthen growth factors in the territories. It should also eliminate spatially identified dysfunctions resulting from natural development processes in order to control the level of regional disparities³.

On the other hand, there is the cohesion policy. The cohesion policy defines actions strictly determined by the EU funding, inter alia the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

These two policies are combined, mainly by the financing system: actions taken under regional policy are mostly financed by the funds of cohesion policy. This process is reinforced by the current crisis and the bad situation of the national budget because of insufficient national funds to be allocated to regional development. As long as cohesion policy is the main source of financing regional policy, it will be impossible to clearly distinguish between those two policies.

4. A brief of historical development of Polish regional policy

The case of Polish regional development system modifications is interesting since they have traveled a long way. By the end of the 1980s, Poland had been a central planning economy. This fact determined a lot of later changes. The transformation from a central planning economy to a market economy was the best proof that Polish people could implement the reforms quickly and effectively irrespective of negative consequences which are always a part of transformation processes. Although the changes in the regional policy system were not as quick as the changes at the beginning of the 1990s, one could see the same level of determination while implementing new rules and transforming the organizational system of regional policy.

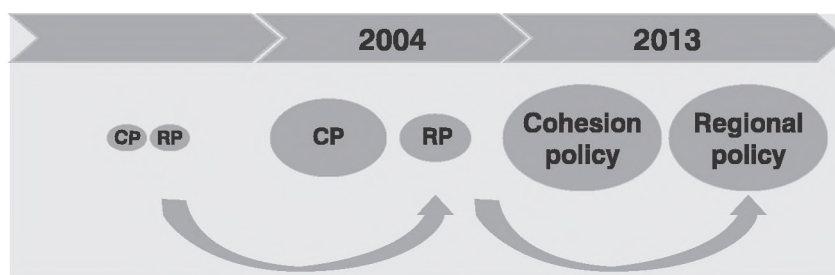
Before Poland joined the European Union, regional policy did not really exist. There were some single actions in the area of regional development policy which were mainly intended to create a market economy and eliminate after-effects of the central planning economy. Those actions were mainly addressed to the regions which were affected by negative effects of restructuring of some of the economic sectors, e.g. mining and steel industry. Except the actions mentioned above, one could distinguish operations aimed at the labor market, especially unemployment and activation of young people.

The first sign of intensive changes in regional policy could be seen in the mid-1990s, when Poland began to prepare to join the EU. Reforms included administrative and institutional changes as well as new rules and processes⁴. In the years 2000–2003, Poland benefitted from pre-accession funds: Phare, ISPA and SAPARD. In 2004–2006, Poland gained its first experience as a member of the EU. As one of less developed countries, Poland benefitted from cohesion policy the most. The strategy as well as goals and main principles were defined in the National Development Plan and the Community Support Framework. Total funds (structural funds, Cohesion Fund and national funds) engaged in the implementation of the National Development Plan (2004–2006) amounted to 14.8 billion euros, of which 11.4 billion euros were the EU funds⁵.

In the first full programming period (2007–2013), Poland allocated 85.6 billion euros to cohesion policy, with the EU funds amounting to 67.3 billion euros. The main document which defined the strategy and regulated the EU funds implementation was the National Strategic Reference Framework. The strategic goal was to create a competitive knowledge economy and entrepreneurship to ensure an increase in employment and social, economic and territorial cohesion.

During the first full programming period (2007–2013), Poland took advantage of the EU cohesion policy model. As the years went by, Poland gained experience and adapted the system to the changing conditions and its own needs.

Graph 1 illustrates the size of the regional and cohesion policies. The size of the circles reflects the size of the institutional and administrative system, not the size of funds obtained under each policy. The graph is an attempt to depict graphically the changes in the size of the regional and cohesion policy system. The author is aware that in some aspects the size of the circles is not adequate but, what is important, it presents a general tendency. In the 1990s, both policies were rather small. In 2004, the domination was on the cohesion policy side: most of the undertaken actions were connected with the EU funds. The system had to be modified so as to be able to implement the EU funds. This was a response to a big inflow of money under the EU funds. Nowadays, the sizes of those two policies are more balanced. Regional policy has grown because the governing administration noticed the importance of creating a system that could be independent from the EU funds.



CP – cohesion policy, RP – regional policy

Graph 1. Size of regional and cohesion policies in 1995–2013. Source: own study.

As mentioned before, there are three main areas that have changed the most within the regional development policy: approach, strategic planning and institutional and administrative system.

5. Changes in the approach to the regional policy

The approach to the regional policy in Poland moved from the sectoral approach through the integrated development approach to the territorial approach. In each of them, goals are directed towards competitiveness and cohesion but the way to achieve them is different. In the sectoral paradigm, there were many elements defined as potential competitiveness factors. They provoked many uncoordinated actions which did not ensure the competitiveness of regions as such. Achieving the an equal level of the various regions' development was the primary goal irrespective of their endogenous characteristics. "Awareness of the need for a new approach is driven by observation that past policies have failed to reduce regional disparities significantly and have not been able to help individual lagging regions to catch up, despite the allocation of significant public funding. The result is under-used economic potential and weakened social cohesion."⁶

In the new paradigm, the competitiveness goal is understood as the diffusion of economic growth from more developed regions (meaning mainly metropolises and cities) to less developed regions (peripheral areas). Bigger emphasis is put on the territorial dimension. The new paradigm treats regions individually, taking account of differences among them. The territorial dimension can be also seen in a more decentralized system and in the delegation of policy implementation not only to administrative units but also to functional areas, and in creation of instruments for different types of areas, e.g. urban, rural or border regions. The new paradigm of regional policy, presented in the National Strategy of Regional Development, is based on the approach that strengthens the territorial potential.

Evaluating the changes in the approach to the regional development policy is difficult because the results will be seen in a few years at the earliest. However, the changes are going in the direction emphasized in the theory of regional development. The endogenous character of a region, especially the role of knowledge and skilled labor, is stressed in the learning region theory and in the new growth theory (P. Romer and R. Lucas). Romer found that investing in skilled labor and innovation guarantees growth increase. Administration should concentrate on these two aspects and build processes that ensure appropriate diffusion of the growth generated in developed regions to peripheral areas.

Nowadays, one of the most important theories in regional development is the new economic geography (P. Krugman, 1991, pp. 483–499). Krugman found a way to combine different factors which influence regional development with the spatial aspect of regional development. He also emphasized the role of endogenous development factors and the bottom-up nature of development processes. He showed that cities have better conditions to create growth because of enterprise concentration, better information flow and a bigger market. It is also a result of the tendency to the concentration of growth factors in developed regions. Simultaneously, this causes an increase in regional disparities.

The link between the new growth theory and the new economic geography could be found in the policy of endogenous regional development. It assumes that public authorities should invest in skilled labor, innovation and technological progress. Authorities should also support informal cooperation and ensure high quality of public services. This theory has also a close connection with the European Union's cohesion policy. However, in the European Union's cohesion policy, the theoretical approach is mainly developed in OECD reports. In the last years, an important document has been the report *An agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*, written by Fabrizio Barca at the request of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in April 2009. The report showed that cohesion policy should be dedicated to all regions, irrespective of the level of development. The approaches presented in the report find the basis for regional development in endogenous potential (meaning that the potential results from natural resources of a region) of regions and their competitive advantage. This refers to the new economic geography. The main role of administration is to strengthen this potential by creating factors which stimulate diffusion processes.

The changes that have taken place in Poland are in accordance with the latest theoretical approaches. Consequently, the changes in approach have resulted in strengthening the integrated dimension, promoting the territorial dimension and emphasizing an endogenous development potential of regions.

6. Main changes in strategic planning in development policy, especially in the regional development policy

Changing the approach gave an important role to strategic planning. Graph 2 presents the relationships among current strategic documents. There are four levels of strategic planning: long-term horizontal planning (minimum 15 years' time scope), mid-term horizontal planning (between 4 and 10 years' time scope), sectoral and territorial strategies (time scope not longer than the mid-term strategy) and regional strategies. There is also an operational level (regional and national). The document which is the most important for the regional development policy is the *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010–2020. Regions, cities, rural areas*. It has to be in line with the National Development Strategy 2020 and the Long-term Development Strategy (2030). The *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010–2020. Regions, cities, rural areas* plays a specific role within the strategic planning documents system. It is a cross-sectoral document defining the objectives of development policy in the spatial arrangement. It is the main document in which the horizontal approach to the development policy was presented. It promotes multi-level governance and personalized approach to each region's needs.

Referring to the previous system, the documents were organized with a higher level of coordination, especially between the long-term planning and sectoral documents. This was intended to consolidate the actions under development policy and bring some synergy effect in regional and spatial dimensions. Strategic planning is very important for ensuring regional development. Rebuilding the whole strategic planning system was initiated by diagnosing dysfunctions of strategic planning. It resulted in systematizing valid documents by defining the ones which were not implemented and which were repeated or inconsistent with other ones.



Graph 2. Relationships among strategic planning documents in Poland's development policy in 2013. Source: own study based on: materials from the Ministry of Regional Development.

Creation of the new system of strategic planning documents is a part of systemization processes⁷. In those processes, an important role is being played by the European Union's cohesion policy which sets targets and main directions of changes. The main results of rebuilding the system can also be seen in the coordination of different policies⁸. Changes in strategic planning allow for creating a long-term planning system with a clear hierarchy and connections between documents and better horizontal and vertical coordination. Potentially, the system could become more effective. Beyond doubt, actions taken within strategic planning during last years have contributed to the creation of a framework for development of strategic management in Poland.

The growing importance of strategic planning is also visible at the regional level. Although regional governments have been obliged to prepare the regional development strategy since 1998, until recent years they did not monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of the policy conducted or implementation of the regional strategy. Strengthening the monitoring process results from the necessity to assess the effects of operational programs co-financed by the funds of the European Union's cohesion policy.

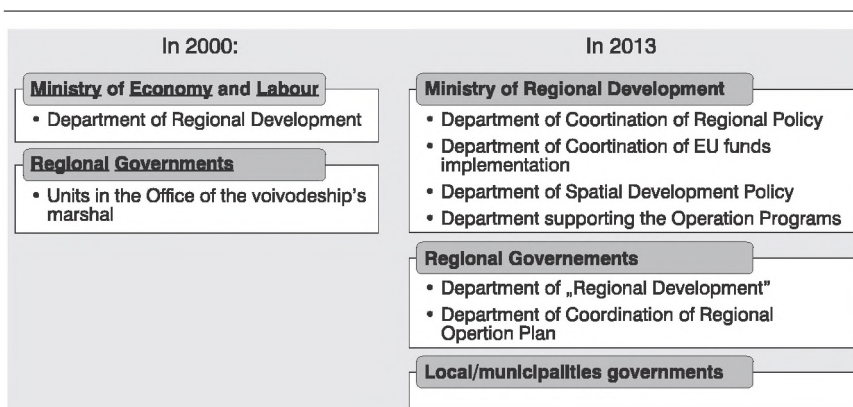
The strategic approach ensures better coordination and an opportunity to achieve synergies between properly coordinated policies as well as better functioning of the institutional and administrative system. It gives the basis for authorities to continuously improve the regional policy's model.

7. Main changes in the administrative and institutional system of regional policy

Each policy is carried out by some administrative and institutional system. Polish public administration functions in the institutional system are determined by some historical changes. The central planning economy influenced the way public administration is working –starting with the centralization of governance, and ending with supporting non-market behaviors. A legal act introducing three levels of public administration was adopted in 1998. It was the beginning of qualitative changes in the role and position of Polish voivodeships. One of the main objectives of the reform was to create larger regions (provinces) which would be able to manage programs co-financed by the European funds. New regions correspond to NUTS 2 level, which constituted the basis for the preparation of the Polish institutional system and institutional instruments of the European cohesion policy. Nowadays, a further tendency of decentralization is being observed.

The funds allocated to regional development amounted to more than 100 billion euros in 2000–2013. In the next programming period (2014–2020), they will amount to 82.5 billion euros⁹. In order to be able to transfer all the funds to final beneficiaries, the institutional system has to continually adapt to the changing conditions of socio-economic development and the

EU regulations as such. In 2000, regional policy at the central level was coordinated by one department, i.e. the Department of Regional Development in the Ministry of Economy and Labor. At the regional level, the units responsible for regional development existed only in some of the voivodeship marshal offices. In 2013, the system became much more complex. The process of reshaping the institutional system started in 2005, when the Ministry of Regional Development was established. At that moment, the Ministry was responsible for national development policy, regional policy, cohesion policy, spatial policy as well as international cooperation. In November 2013, the Ministry of Regional Development was merged with the Ministry of Infrastructure, creating the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development. For the time being, this is the biggest ministry in Poland.



* In November 2013, the Ministry of Regional Development was merged with the Ministry of Infrastructure, creating the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development.

Graph 3. Comparison of the institutional system of regional development policy in Poland in 2000 and 2013 (June). Source: own study.

According to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, one can distinguish two parallel interwoven institutional systems: one for regional development policy and another for cohesion policy. As mentioned before, cohesion policy comprises actions related with the EU funds (redistribution of funds to final beneficiaries). Regional policy is related with regional development policy as such. Most of the actions taken under the regional policy are co-financed by the EU funds. Therefore, as long as Poland obtains funds from the European Union, both systems should be seen collectively. There is also an important aspect of national law. The national law has to be adapted to the European Union regulations. It becomes the second level of the legal system after the European one.

8. Advantages and disadvantages of the Polish regional development system modification

The changes in the regional policy system brought many benefits. The administrative and institutional system is more decentralized, giving the regional level more power in the decision-making process. The experience of the western EU countries has shown that a more decentralized system works more efficiently. Decentralization makes it possible to identify local and regional needs better. Consequently, authorities can respond to local and regional problems more precisely.

The institutional system has changed in a way allowing for multi-level governance. It combines traditionally separate domains of domestic and international policies as well as national and regional ones. The theory of multi-level governance emphasized both the frequent and complex interactions between governmental actors and the dimension of non-state actors that are engaged in cohesion policy-making and in the EU policy (Wikipedia, 2014). As such, multi-level governance strengthens integration between different levels of public authorities and raises the interest in regional policy among private entities. Consequently, a higher level of partnership and cooperation between public and private entities can be observed.

Last but not least, the new structure of administrative and institutional system as well as multi-level governance have become an incentive for changes in the way public administration is working. The system has become more flexible and more effective, with clearer goals. This is also due to one of the best evaluating and monitoring systems in the European Union¹⁰.

In spite of the decentralization process being observed, none of the policy goals could be attained by the local government on its own. The policy requires good cooperation with all stakeholders at horizontal and vertical levels. The way a region's administration and institutional system is organized directly reflects the whole network capacity. The network capacity determines good processes and the achievement of development goals.

Despite the positive aspect of changes in the approach, strategic planning and the administrative and institutional system of regional policy, they also caused some problems and costs. Firstly, transformation generates higher administration costs. Since institutions have much more employees, they need more money. Secondly, the legal system does not keep up with the strategic planning system. Strategic documents are guidelines indicating the direction of changes. They do not guarantee the performance of some obligatory actions. This can be done only by means of legal acts. The problem is that preparing a new strategic planning document does not go together with preparing a legal act. Legal acts are usually prepared some time after strategic documents. It results in inconsistency since stakeholders of the strategy try to interpret documents before they become official legal acts.

Furthermore, a question arises what the situation will be like after 2020, when the European cohesion policy funds allocated to Poland are much lower. The system will either become ineffective or many employees will be dismissed, which can cause general dissatisfaction. The most important question is also about the resources allocated to the regional policy. At the moment, most of the actions are financed by the European Union funds. Will Poland find some extra money in its national budget for the regional policy after 2020?

Expansion of the institutional system as well as strengthening of multi-level approach to governance could negatively influence informal relations, especially political ones. In Poland, "politics" is still closely related with the administrative decision-making process. This may cause conflicts between the various levels of government. At the regional level, we can observe a favorable approach to supporting investments outside the central cities. Marshals prefer investments outside main cities in order to gain some extra votes. Such an action is not only a source of conflict between regional and local authorities but also runs contrary to the latest objectives of the regional development theory, e.g. supporting development of the core centers because of their key role in the development of entire regions.

9. Conclusion

The changes of the regional policy system influenced the effectiveness of its implementation. The level of effectiveness will depend on the continuity and consistency of the whole system and its role in the national development. In the national development policy, regional development policy has been recognized as one of the most important policies. On the one hand, the changes in the regional policy system such as implementation of the territorial approach, institutional development, including the implementation of multi-level governance, and a stronger role of the strategic approach provide an opportunity for better adjustment of regional policy within public policy. On the other hand, this causes problems of coordination and accountability. Greater importance should be attributed to the coordination of activities in the implementation of public policies. An important element is to adapt the hierarchical system of strategic documents, taking into account the levels of strategic management.

Public policy should be based on evidence. Evidence is a specific form of knowledge which points out to possible scenarios depending on certain actions taken, or the results arising from taken actions. Evidence covers many dimensions of the proposed action: effectiveness, proper cost-benefit relationship, adequacy of resources, expected consequences of the action taken (including the so-called unintended consequences), adequacy of resources for the purposes of political feasibility, coherence in the system of values, the context in which actions will be performed (Cartwright, Hardie,

2012, p. 12). The effectiveness of regional policy implementation as well as the effectiveness of the functioning of the whole system should be subjected to a continuous process of monitoring and evaluation.

Moving back to the title question, i.e. how has Poland done the EU cohesion policy lesson, it has to be said that joining the EU and participating in the European cohesion policy is the main factor of changing the Polish regional development system, especially in its administrative, institutional and strategic dimensions. The de-construction of the regional policy system brought about many positive changes but there is still a lot to be done in order to achieve a higher level of efficiency in regional development governance and create a strong national development policy, based on its own national strategy and budget.

Notes

- ¹ Public entities should be understood as every public entity at the central or regional level whose competences are defined in the Polish law.
- ² Voivodeship is a region that corresponds to the NUTS 2 level in the EU classification.
- ³ See more: http://www.mrr.gov.pl/rozwoj_regionalny/polityka_regionalna/strony/glowna.aspx [online], 4th September 2013.
- ⁴ National Development Plan, Ministry of Regional Development, Warsaw 2003, page 56.
- ⁵ Online: <http://www.pkpplewiatan.pl/?ID=103495>.
- ⁶ Online: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/regionaldevelopment.htm>.
- ⁷ The strategic planning systemization process is coordinated by the Ministry of Regional Development and consists of a few steps. Firstly, strategic fields were chosen. After that, the thematic dimension of each strategic field was defined and assigned the current strategy. For those which did not fit in, the procedure of recognizing them as invalid was opened.
- ⁸ See more: http://www.mrr.gov.pl/rozwoj_regionalny/polityka_rozwoju/system_zarzadzania_rozwojem/porzadkowanie_dokumentow_strategicznycy/strony/porzadkowanie_dokumentow_strategicznycy.aspx [online], 10th June 2013,
- ⁹ See more: http://www.mir.gov.pl/fundusze/fundusze_europejskie_2014_2020/strony/start.aspx [online], 20th January 2014.
- ¹⁰ Poland is given as an example of best practice for an evaluating and monitoring system in the European Union.

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