



Institute for Development

**THE CONCEPT OF TERRITORIAL
COHESION AS UNDERSTOOD AND
PRACTICED BY POLISH REGIONS**

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Pojęcie spójności terytorialnej – zrozumienie i stosowanie w Polsce na poziomie regionalnym

Styczeń 2015

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Abstrakt

Niniejsza publikacja prezentuje wyniki badań nad integrowaniem różnych wymiarów rozwoju w polskich województwach ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kapitału terytorialnego. Poszukiwana jest odpowiedź na pytanie „w jakim stopniu i w jaki sposób polskim regionom udało się wdrożyć/podjąć za paradygmatem spójności terytorialnej. W tym celu wykorzystano wyniki studium ankietowego przeprowadzonego z organami odpowiedzialnymi za szeroko rozumiany rozwój województw. Studium dowodzi, iż przedstawiciele władz regionalnych, wykazują relatywnie dobrą orientację w problematyce spójności terytorialnej, ale ich rozumienie pojęcia jest na ogół węższe niż w opracowaniach teoretycznych. Spójność terytorialna jest poprawnie łączona z prowadzeniem polityki przestrzennej, podobnie jak z wykorzystywaniem endogenicznych czynników wzrostu. Na poziomie definicji większość województw podkreśla rolę endogenicznych czynników wzrostu, lecz w odniesieniu do polityki intraregionalnej powszechnie stosuje bardziej tradycyjne podejście Regiony sprowadzają często wewnętrzną politykę przestrzenną do wyznaczenia różnego rodzaju obszarów. Co więcej wyznaczenie przeważnie odbywa się w oparciu o kryteria negatywne (nawiązujące do dawniej wydzielanych obszarów problemowych). Bardzo charakterystyczny jest również brak podejścia integracyjnego. Terytorium nie jest traktowane, jako podmiot polityki zintegrowanej, a zarazem szansa na przewyżczenie podziałów sektorowych. Jest w tym kontekście raczej narzędziem. Jednocześnie widoczna jest jednak ewolucja podejścia, która, nawet jeżeli jest do pewnego stopnia wymuszona regulacjami Unii Europejskiej, daje podstawy do bardziej terytorialnej polityki na poziomie regionalnym.

Kody JEL : R11, R12, R13

Słowa kluczowe: spójność terytorialna, rozwój regionalny

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The concept of territorial cohesion as understood and practiced by Polish regions

January 2015

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Abstract

In the paper, the results of research on integration of various aspects of development in Polish voivodships are shown with a particular reference to territorial capital. An answer is sought to the question, "to what extent and how the Polish regions managed to successfully follow/implement the paradigm of territorial cohesion. For this purpose the findings of a questionnaire survey study, conducted with the offices responsible for a broadly understood development of voivodships were made use of. The research reveals that representatives of regional authorities are relatively well acquainted with issues relating to territorial cohesion, but their understanding of this concept is generally narrower than that found in theoretical studies. Territorial cohesion is rightly associated with conducting spatial policy, as well as with utilization of endogenous development factors. At the level of definition the majority of voivodships underline the role of endogenous factors for growth, but as regards the shape of their intraregional policy more traditional approach is widely prevalent. Regions see their internal spatial policy as nothing but delimitation of areas. This takes place based on negative criteria (referring to "problem areas" that were formerly identified). A lack of integrative approach is also typical. Territory fails to be treated as a subject of integrative policy, and, as well, as an opportunity that can be used to overcome the sectoral divisions. It is rather treated as a tool for achieving other goals. Simultaneously, however, an evolution in approach (forced by the EU regulations) is clearly visible, which forms the basis for more territorial-based policy on the regional level.

JEL classification: R11, R12, R13

Keywords: territorial capital, regional development

The paper draws on the findings of the project of the Polish agency, National Science Centre, entitled "Territorial cohesion category in cohesion policy. Implications for economic growth (no. 2012/05/B/HS4/04212).

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1. Introduction

This paper presents the results of a study on integration of various aspects of development in Polish voivodships (provinces), with a particular reference to territorial capital. An answer is sought to the question: “to what extent and how the Polish regions managed to successfully follow/implement the paradigm of territorial cohesion?”. For this purpose, the findings of a questionnaire-based survey study, conducted with the offices responsible for the broadly understood development of provinces (primarily with departments of Marshall Offices), were made use of. Theoretical papers dealing with territorial cohesion (e.g. [Camagni, 2011](#), and [Medeiros, 2011](#)), as well as the theory of five territorial keys (accessibility, services of general economic interest, territorial assets, city networking, functional regions) – presented during the Polish Presidency in the EU ([Zaucha et al., 2014](#)), provide the background for this analysis.

The most important dimensions of the territorial cohesion are: management (territorial cohesion as a process of integrating the development policy with respect to a territory) and the territory as a development asset. The present paper concerns the first of these dimensions. It reports on the results from the studies on integration of various dimensions of development in Polish provinces (voivodships) with particular consideration of the spatial issues, that is – of the territorial capital. An attempt was made to find the answer to the issue of the way and the degree, to which Polish provinces succeeded in linking the spatial and the socio-economic development in the framework of the territorial cohesion paradigm. The effect of such a working connection is the territorially sensitive intra-regional policy, which is one of the main expressions of a serious treatment given the paradigm of territorial cohesion. It means, first, considering the territorial capital as an asset and the conditioning of the development, and adopting the intervention of the public authorities to this capital, that is – dis-uniformisation of this intervention over space for purposes of improvement in the attainment of the assumed public goals (e.g. GDP growth or social inclusion), and, second, analyzing the consequences of these interventions regarding the changes in the territorial capital. This is, therefore, a continuous iterative process, whose essence is the synergy of various types of public intervention with respect to a given area (territory).

Policies influence the territorial capital, which undergoes changes, and calls for modifications in the policies. In Polish conditions we are the closest to this model on the regional level and

it is at this level that broad experience has been gathered concerning the integration of the development policies. At the national level, despite the efforts, aiming at the conduct of the integrated development policy, the sectoral tendencies are still strong. That is why the present report concentrates on 16 Polish provinces.

The report is the outcome from a questionnaire-based survey study, carried out with the bureaus responsible for the broadly conceived development of the provinces. These were, as a rule, the departments of the Marshall Offices of the provinces, but, as well, the Regional Bureaus, responsible for the socio-economic or spatial development. The survey was carried out on the basis of personal meetings. Owing to this, the questions could take on an open character. There was, namely, a risk that in such a complex subject matter, the questionnaire with the closed-form responses could suggest to the interviewees definite answers, while the aim was to get acquainted with the true knowledge and opinions on the respective issues. It was only the persons conducting the interviews that disposed of the examples of the potential answers, so as to be able to avoid complete omission by the respondents of the themes, considered by the designers of the questionnaire to be of importance from the point of view of the objectives of the study.

2. Understanding of territorial cohesion by the self-governmental authorities of Polish provinces and application of the notion in the strategic documents

Understanding of the notion of territorial cohesion, and the way of referencing it in the regional documents, are not uniform. The very first differentiating element is constituted by the perception of the territorial cohesion either as a process, or even an instrument for attaining goals, or as a sort of an ideal ultimate state (a theoretical construction, which one should try to achieve, conform to the definition by [Markowski, 2009](#)). The first kind of perception dominates, however, in the Polish regions.

The second distinct dichotomy reduces to the different emphases concerning the issues of levelling out of the disparities and supporting the endogenous factors of development. Most provinces base their definitions on both of these issues. A part of them, though, treats territorial cohesion as, in a sense, identical with the socio-economic cohesion, only being attained with other means (i.e. using own potentials). In other cases the issue of the endogenous factors is treated as the most important, accompanied by the differentiation of

the spatial policy across various territories. It was most frequent in each of the voivodships that several elements were mentioned simultaneously as shaping jointly the understanding of territorial cohesion (the frequencies of their specification are provided in Table 1). Then, only joint consideration of these elements determined the perception of the problem.

The defining element	Number of voivodships referring to the element
Development based on endogenous factors	11
Levelling out of the socio-economic disproportions	8
Functional areas and territorial differentiation of policies	7
Functional cohesion, connectedness and spatial accessibility	7
Joining of potentials and building of regional identity	4
Services of general economic interests	3

Table 1. Elements referred to in the definition of territorial cohesion

Regarding the most commonly encountered ways of interpreting territorial cohesion (Szlachta and Zaucha, 2010), it should be considered that Polish regions understand it, first of all, as a method of planning and development, accounting for the territorial capital (potential), the settlement network, the regions, and their interconnections. To a certain degree the responses contain also the instrumental approach, mainly through indication of the functional regions as separate subjects of the policy, implemented in the voivodships. Consideration of the areas featuring disadvantageous geographical features appears in just one single response. Of the defining elements, given by [Medeiros \(2011\)](#), most often indicated is the evening out of the social and economic differences across space, followed – indirectly – by the improvement of the territorial management process (through the reference to the functional regions). At the same time, the interviewees rarely mentioned environmental equilibrium, polycentric urban system, or collaboration in management. A part of responses clearly refer to the definitions appearing in the Polish governmental documents (endogenous potentials), and to the interpretation path of [Gorzela \(2009\)](#), where the functional (integrative) factor is underscored, as more important than the equalizing one. It is also characteristic that regions do not perceive these approaches as alternative. Functional connections and evening out of disproportions are indicated simultaneously, as the elements jointly defining territorial cohesion. It should also be underlined that the responses do not convey the content indicating the integrative role of

the territorial cohesion (i.e. its sometimes postulated superiority with respect to the sectoral policies).

When relating the responses to the sense of the notion of territorial cohesion as provided in the ARL essay (Bohme et al., 2008), it should be stated again that the respondents noted only some of the components, listed there. These were: the endogenous potentials and the equal access to infrastructure and services. At the same time, one can hardly find in the definitions provided an unambiguous treatment of the very territorial diversity as a development asset. The responses lack also the element of the external connections of the region (influence, exerted on other territories and the impact from the sectoral policies). Likewise, the elements of governance, associated with the extraction of the so-called tacit knowledge, are also omitted.

On the other hand, special attention ought to be paid to the appearance in the definitions provided of virtually all the territorial keys, defined in the attempts of territorializing the document Europe 2020 (Zaucha et al., 2014). A part of responses mentions directly the functional regions, network connections, transport-wise accessibility, and public utility services. In almost all responses the element of territorial resources appears. It should be supposed that the reports, dealing with the territorial keys, had not been known to the province-level decision makers. Hence, the questionnaire-based study constitutes rather an evidence for the correctness of the concept then adopted, especially in its operational sense.

Summing up, it should be stated that the representatives of the regional authorities display a relatively good orientation in the problem domain of territorial cohesion, but their comprehension of the notion is usually narrower than that presented in the theoretical studies. The very ambiguity of the definitions provided is, in this context, to a certain extent a reflection of the lack of homogeneity at the theoretical level and at the European level. It can be admitted that the territorial cohesion is usually correctly associated with the conduct of an appropriately directed spatial policy and with the use of the endogenous factors. Narrow understanding of the notion is to a certain degree determined by its use in the projects and programs of the European Union. At the same time, in the background of the definitions brought in, the superior objectives appear of an egalitarian character (evening out of the differences in the development levels and in living standards). This puts, in a

sense, territorial cohesion, in an auxiliary position with respect to the social and economic cohesion.

The specific features of the understanding of the notion of territorial cohesion by the Polish provinces (with respect to the theoretical studies, as well as with respect to the European documents) are constituted by, in particular:

- Very limited references to the natural environment as a component of the territorial cohesion,
- Frequent emphases of the element of connections, though almost exclusively in the context of development of infrastructure, but not the very intensification of interactions, and even less so the cooperation between the units and the expansion of the network structures,
- Frequent, even though not always direct, reference to the evening out of the differentials between regions, as a superior value,
- Lack of references to the polycentric development.

In the last case this is certainly the consequence of the geographical level, at which the study was carried out (polycentrism being more often defined at the national level), yet, it is significant that there are no suggestions, related to the strengthening of other centers in the region (except for the provincial capital). Equilibration of development is rather supposed to be based on levelling out of the traditional dichotomy center-periphery, with the periphery being identified with rural areas and possibly also small towns. The role of functional ties and of accessibility was decidedly more often paid attention to in the voivodships surrounding the main metropolitan centers. It is, on the other hand, difficult to indicate any other regional regularities, differentiating the way of understanding of territorial cohesion.

Despite the here described differences in defining, and also comprehending, the notion of territorial cohesion, most of the voivodships declare the use of this notion in the regional strategic documents. In the case of the Development Strategy all the provinces make a reference to territorial cohesion, while in the case of the spatial development plan in only one province the respective reference is not made. For the Regional Operational Programs and Territorial Contracts, no references to the idea considered appear in 3 and 4 voivodships, respectively. In some instances, the question with respect to the Territorial Contracts was deemed to be posed prematurely.

In the development strategies, territorial cohesion appears most often in the context of determination of the Functional Areas (FuAs) and the Strategic Intervention Areas (SIAs). In a couple of cases, territorial cohesion is mentioned among the strategic objectives or development challenges. In other cases, the term is used only when referring to the national documents (the [National Spatial Development Concept 2030](#)), or to the European ones. In parallel, some respondents stated that the strategies contain the notion of the spatial cohesion, which can to a definite extent be identified with territorial cohesion. From among the territorial keys the responses mentioned most often the transport-related accessibility and the SeGi's. The respondents mentioned them as associated in the Strategies with the notion of territorial cohesion.

The formulations of the Regional Operational Programs contain more visible references to the documents and the language of the European Union. In the context of the territorial cohesion mention is being made of the document Europe 2020, of social exclusion, as well as of the Human Development Index (HDI). The expression considered is situated at the level of objectives or development axes. The respondents do usually not render precise the role of territorial cohesion in territorial contracts, judging the respective documents to be not yet ready. The existing comments, though, suggest that it is treated as a primary principle, serving to prepare the document.

Summing up, it can be concluded that the notion of territorial cohesion appears in the documents analyzed, but its role is highly differentiated (from one of the objectives of the strategy, up to just placing it in the "vocabulary"). This differentiation is certainly partly due to the timing of elaboration of the particular texts. In the older plans or strategy documents the term is only just mentioned, while in the newer ones it sometimes plays an essential role. At the same time, it is evident that the respective authors perceived territorial cohesion in different ways, and this fact exerted an influence on the place and context of application of the notion.

In comparison with the definitions of cohesion, provided in the interviews, the documents give less of exposure to the role of endogenous potentials (perhaps they are difficult to define on the operational level). Instead, territorial cohesion takes more often the role of the general objective or the developmental principle. On the other hand, it is also more

frequently identified with the delimitation of the functional areas and the strategic intervention areas (the instrumental approach).

3. The paradigm of the territorially based policy

Conform to the results of the studies, carried out at the level of the European Union (NTCCP), it was assumed that the place-based policy constitutes the key methodology for integrating the development policy with respect to a territory. This paradigm has been well described in the literature of the subject (Barca, 2009; Zaucha et al., 2014), and so we shall only refer to it here. The literature of the subject and the opinions of the practitioners distinguish the following most important universal elements of the place-based approach:

A. admission of territorial diversity in the attainment of the general development goals, that is – the need for various means of attaining the development goals and for different priorities regarding the particular parts of the territory, i.e. the “places”.

B. institutions:

- having legal competences or the capacity of coordinating, harmonious orientation of development of various “places” (supra-local institutions and other actors of the development game);
- having legal competences or the capacity of directing, influencing or controlling the development of a given “place” (local institutions and other actors of the development game);
- capable of evaluating the influence of own actions on the activity of other subjects and the influence, exerted by other subjects on the development of a given “place”.

C. knowledge:

- on the general development context, that is – the development objectives and priorities for all the “places” and the best ways of their implementation as well as monitoring of the progress in this domain;
- on the development specificity of a given “place” (territorial capital, other kinds of local / regional potential, etc.).

D. institutional frames of the dialogue of many subjects (along with respective instruments), filled with true dialogue between various persons / institutions dealing with the development, as described above.

The study of the degree of use made of the place-based policy paradigm by the Polish regions concentrated on the knowledge of the region and the ways of sharing this knowledge with the remaining stakeholders, and on the very territorial dialogue.

The territorial orientation of the policies (whether those conducted by the central authorities, or those implemented by the regional or local authorities) requires sound **knowledge** of the given territory, its problems and development opportunities, as well as mechanisms of development or stagnation. This knowledge is the first and the key condition, necessary for the implementation of territorial cohesion along all its dimensions. In order for it to become the starting point to the territorial dialogue, a definite degree of objectivization is needed (i.e., the evidence-based knowledge), along with standardization. This knowledge cannot uniquely have an intuitive character (even though tacit knowledge is its important constituent), should be gathered and verified continuously, and should allow for the formulation of the prospective judgments, and not only for the retrospective analyses.

The studies, carried out for the NTCCP countries ([Zaucha et al., 2013, 20](#)), suggest that in these countries the most often used forms of knowledge are: expert knowledge, tacit knowledge of the local or regional public administration, as well as the commonly available statistical sources and the land registers. In only six out of twenty six countries investigated there exist the systems of regional or local monitoring, that is – of on-going collection of spatial information, necessary for the decision processes, this information being shaped according to a predetermined meta-system (consistency, purposefulness, adequacy).

It is also popular among the Polish provincial bodies to collect and process statistical data. Some of the Marshall offices signed the agreements with the statistical offices and exert an influence on the studies, undertaken by the public statistical bureaus. The assessment of significance of this manner of gaining knowledge is also high. Another popular source of knowledge is constituted by the expert reports. In some provinces the departments of the Marshall offices or the regional spatial planning bureaus were also mentioned as the sources of knowledge, but quite a share of respondents indicate the importance of information obtained from other self-governmental units, from the agendas and institutions

subordinated to the Marshall office, such as, for instance, provincial labor offices or regional centers of social policy. In this context one should also mention various kinds of reports, like, e.g., report from the execution of the environmental protection program, the monitoring report from the implementation of the development strategy of the voivodship, reports on the state of spatial development, and yet other ones.

Compared to the image obtained for the NTCCP countries, Polish reality differs by a much higher significance assigned the establishment of the systems of continuous regional monitoring. An important number of provinces mention the system of information on the area as a source of knowledge and they put high hopes on the establishment of the regional territorial observatories (RTOs). These observatories are being now established, and the evaluations of the process are quite high.

Summing up, regional Poland is in the phase of a change in the ways of gaining knowledge on the regional processes. Increasing emphasis is placed on creation of consistent systems, as well as on sharing of the existing and owned knowledge. Legal regulations (like the duty of elaborating the reports on the state of spatial development of the province) take a correct direction and induce the demand for sound, although not necessarily quite current, knowledge on the region. Similarly with the requirement of elaborating the strategy of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).

A separate issue is constituted by the **manner of sharing knowledge**. The analysis of the results from the study suggests that the regional authorities have not a clear constructive idea in this respect. Most frequently mentioned are the ways resulting from the stipulations of the valid law, that is – issuing of opinions on and agreeing upon the content of strategic regional documents by the central administration, filing of applications and issuing of opinions on the governmental documents from the side of the provincial self-governmental bodies. Among the channels of routine sharing of information the respondents mentioned most often the websites, conferences, briefing the national authorities in the framework of direct meetings, discussions during the meetings of the province Marshalls, and, sporadically, publications and reports. Yet, to a large extent these are the passive methods. Situation is different with respect to sharing of knowledge with other provinces. Here, side by side with consultations and electronic information, most important are informal contacts, meetings of Marshalls and members of the provincial boards, including those during the

Marshalls Convention, as well as all kinds of projects and grass roots initiatives. The borderland provinces did mention, for instance, as an important forum for sharing knowledge the cooperation with Germany – both in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation projects and the jointly undertaken studies. Altogether, the process of sharing knowledge constitutes currently a weak side of implementation of territorial cohesion in the context of integration of the development policies in Poland.

The **territorial dialogue** consists in a kind of matching process for the opinions of various actors in the decision game, with mutual convincing concerning definite actions. It is the necessary condition for the improvement of the effectiveness of conduct of the development policy in the framework of the place-based policy paradigm. It enables a better use of the local, or regional, specificity (conditions, mechanisms, endogenous potentials, including territorial capital), and, at the same time, makes it possible to limit the negative influence of the local and regional egoisms, and perceptions from the perspective of uniquely the interest of a given “place”, without considering a broader (e.g. national) development context. Thus, for instance, the administrators of large cities bear actual responsibility with respect to their respective electorates mainly for the development of these cities, despite the enormous impact, exerted by these cities on the functioning of the entire country. The territorial dialogue may make such limitations less obstructive.

From the perspective of the regional level the initial condition for the dialogue, side by side with possessing the possibly objective knowledge, is constituted by the skill of communicating to other actors of the development game the development priorities of a given “place” (voivodship) and the conditions for their realization (expectations as to the behavior of the other actors), as well as the capacity of making evaluations of the consequences resulting from the policies of other subjects.

The regional authorities, when asked about the ways of expressing their expectations with respect to other actors of the development game, indicated the processes written down in the legal regulations, that is – issuing of opinions on and agreeing upon the content of documents between the levels of public administration. Yet, additional ways of expressing this type of expectations have appeared: writing them down in the strategic documents (option most often selected) and individual position taking by the Boards or Provincial Diets on concrete matters, as well as “soft” and “informal” ways, that is – exchange of information

and talks in the framework of cooperation with other voivodships and other decision makers. The respondents, asked whether analyses are conducted in the voivodship of the influence exerted by the supra-provincial policies (national and European ones) on the socio-economic development and spatial structures of the region, answered positively, that is – nobody chose the answer that such analyses are not conducted. Quite a share (seven out of sixteen), though, indicated the option “partly”, which may signify that these activities are in some manner limited.

At the local level, the analyses of the development policies of the region are being carried out in connection with the process of consultations / elaboration with regard to the regional or local documents. In the first case the issue is to have the regional documents (in particular – the Regional Operational Program, ROP – but also the voivodship strategy and the plan) not limit excessively the development capacities of the municipalities. In the latter case, on the other hand, the provincial priorities are treated as the conditioning for the local development, sometimes having a verbal character, but sometimes (e.g. concrete studies) taking on a formal (binding) character.

Situation in the domain of territorial dialogue is different in Poland than in the NTCCP countries in general. The nominal instruments appear, while in the NTCCP countries (Zaucha et al., 2014, 43) planning over administrative boundaries dominates, along with a hierarchy of the planning documents (which exists also in Poland, but with less of strength, see debates and consultations). In comparison with the results from the NTCCP study, though, it is interesting to note that the level of satisfaction from the territorial dialogue was higher in Polish provinces. In the NTCCP countries 48% of respondents deemed that the dialogue does not function and is not satisfactory (Zaucha et al., 2014, 37). Moderate satisfaction dominates, on the other hand, in Poland. Respondents were, namely, also asked about their general, quantified (on the scale from 0 to 6) assessment of satisfaction with the territorial dialogue, conducted in the framework of the province, with the neighboring provinces, and with other entities (including, in particular, ministries). The averages obtained were altogether high: 4.8 with respect to the “downward” dialogue, and 4.6 with respect to the “upward” dialogue. It is quite characteristic that somewhat lower scores were given in the provinces of western and northern Poland, while somewhat higher – in the southern and eastern Poland, although there was no strict rule in this matter. The sources of this

differentiation could be traced to the cultural elements (the dialogue being easier on the areas with steadier traditions and population not having been subject to large-scale changes), or to the differences in the expectations initially formulated with respect to the territorial cooperation undertaken.

In the subsequent questions, opinions were collected concerning the main **barriers, hampering the territorial dialogue**. The respondents mentioned a lot of limitations to the correct dialogue, and concentrated on problems in relations between regions and municipalities, and between regions and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development. There was just one voivodship that declared absence of barriers of this kind (inside the region), and the correct course of the dialogue. The so high number of reservations remains in a surprising opposition with the previously reported general satisfaction with the territorial dialogue. This would confirm the proposition that at least in some voivodships the expectations with regard to the quality of the dialogue are quite limited. It is generally possible to perform a simple classification of the barriers to the territorial dialogue, identified at the provincial level. This classification would be as follows:

- Barriers associated with the selfish attitude and the apprehension as to cooperation on the local level. This is connected with the perceptible opposition of interests between the levels of province and municipality, as well as between the particular units of the territorial self-government. On the top of this, municipalities often do not perceive the need for integration of actions and policies. They often undertake the dialogue only in the situations, when it is linked with the possibility of acquiring means (like, e.g., EU funds).
- Barriers associated with the legal stipulations, bureaucracy and the setting of competences at the central and regional levels. Respondents emphasized the excessive burden of formal duties, with which the provinces have to deal (at the expense of concentrating on the development policy). A separate significant problem turned out to be the insufficient coordination between the actions undertaken in the framework of the cohesion policy and those undertaken with the support from the Program of Development of Rural Areas.
- Barriers associated with the flow of information and conduct of consultations. In this field primarily the shortcomings of the functioning at the central level were pointed out (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development), mainly in terms of insufficient information policy and too fast schedules of consultations with the regions. Additionally, difficulty was emphasized

in reaching a wide spectrum of businesses (as the participants of consultations), which becomes apparent already at the regional level.

- Barriers, associated with the broadly conceived social capital, among which wrong understanding of the concept of integration, and twisting of information, were mentioned. In this context, as well, little transparent (confidential) way of proceeding was underlined, which might result from the lack of mutual trust between the actors of spatial policy. Further, demanding attitudes were noted of the representatives of the local authorities with respect to the regions (partly linked with the lack of knowledge as to the division of competences).

It is an important conclusion from this aspect of the study that the shortcomings to the territorial dialogue appear virtually in the entire country. This may mean that the foundation for these shortcomings is not of cultural character, and that they are not linked with the level of socio-economic development of the regions. These factors definitely exist, but their influence has a rather local scale (they are not visible at the level of regions). The reasons for the not always satisfactory dialogue ought, therefore, to be sought first of all in the deficiencies of the legal system at the national level. Local conditions constitute in this matter only an additional element.

4. Territory-based intra-regional policy

There are, in fact, four functioning independent documents having an essential territorial dimension, namely: a) Development Strategy; b) Spatial Development Plan; c) Regional Operational Program; d) Territorial Contract. Thus, it is necessary to appropriately coordinate the contents of these documents. The interviewees were asked about the level and the character of this coordination.

As the main way to enable the coordination of the documents in provinces the respondents mentioned, first of all, ensuring consistency in the programming process. In this context, in particular, the matrices of consistency were mentioned, along with the discipline in the sequence of elaboration of the documents. Thus, in terms of principle, the objectives of spatial policy ought to be adapted to the goals contained in the Development Strategy of the region. The responses emphasized as the most important instrument in this context the supervision over all the documents mentioned by the same team (department). There are a

couple of provinces, in which special separate teams were established in order to coordinate the strategic documents. Besides, it was deemed that an important instrument of coordination is constituted by the evaluation, both *ex post* and *ex ante*, as well as constant monitoring of implementation of the stipulations, contained in the documents, along with the internal system of cross-assessment of the documents being elaborated. In some cases the existence of such instruments as Integrated Territorial Investments and Strategic Intervention Areas was indicated as the means of coordination. There were also single regions, which indicated that a way to ensure the agreement among the strategic documents of the region consists in the lists of key projects, as well as the parallel conduct of work on the strategy and on the spatial development plan.

The representatives of the regions were asked, too, about the attention paid in the particular documents (Strategy, Regional Operational Program, Territorial Contract, other) to the internal territorial divisions within the framework of the provinces. All of the responses indicated that the divisions are accounted for in the development strategy and in the operational programs. Regarding the territorial contracts the number of positive answers was eleven, but the remaining respondents not so much negated the existence of respective references or considerations, as deemed the question to be prematurely posed. This apparent agreement with respect to the territorialization of the conducted intra-regional policy did not signify, though, the agreement as to the true scale and the ways of accounting for the territorial aspect in the respective documents.

Some responses would bring up older spatial distinctions, such as problem areas and the division into urban and rural areas. At the same time, the majority of respondents stressed that the Development Strategy contains a separate chapter, devoted to the internal diversification, and that some of the objectives of the document have a direct territorial aspect (the territorial approach is their direct consequence).

Additional information on the ways to territorialize the intra-regional policy was provided by the question concerning the use of the five territorial keys. All of the provinces confirmed the use of four keys (accessibility, public utility services, territorial resources, and functional areas). The last of the keys, dealing with the urban network, was mentioned in 13 voivodships, the other ones having noted that this key can hardly be applied at the intra-provincial level. This sort of answer corresponds, to a degree, with the lack of emphasis on

the polycentric patterns as the determinants of the territorial cohesion, already at the stage of defining it.

Some respondents remarked in their comments that the territorial keys are made use of rather in the spatial development plans. An exception is constituted by the key of the functional areas, which appears in the strategies and in the regional operational programs. Simultaneously, the very responses indicate that two out of five keys have a “hard” character, finding immediate direct reflection in the spatial policy of practically all regions. These are, exactly, the functional areas and the transport-wise accessibility. The two are closely interrelated, since accessibility may be treated as a delimitation index. At the same time, improvement in transport-wise accessibility is in several cases written down as a strategic objective, as a direction of action, etc. The keys of the public utility services and of territorial assets are also commonly applied, but their understanding is not uniform. In some regions they constitute the basis for delimitation of the functional areas, or of strategic intervention areas, while in the other ones they constitute merely a complementary differentiating element. The key of the connectedness of urban centers was usually understood by the representatives of the provinces as corresponding to internal connections. In many cases it was identified with the traditional hierarchical pattern, along with the indication of the need for improvement of accessibility from the peripheral centers to the capital of the voivodship. It was much less frequent to perceive the significance of the multi-directional interrelations between the towns inside the region (and even if so, this would most often apply to the towns located in the direct mutual neighborhood). It was not seen (or at least it was not declared) that there might be an added value resulting from the participation of the centers from the province in the network connections with other regions or on the international scale.

When summing up this part of considerations, one should point out a distinct difference between the declarative understanding of the territorial cohesion, and the practical application of the elements of territorialization (including the territorial keys). At the level of definitions, the majority of voivodships agree on the importance of the role of endogenous factors of growth, referring to the territory in positive categories. In the conduct of the intra-regional policy, the dominating approach is already – on the one hand – instrumental, and on the other – more traditional. The regions make use of the existing possibilities in the

domain here considered, such as, for instance, Integrated Territorial Investments, or Strategic Intervention Areas, while reducing frequently the internal spatial policy to determination of various kinds of areas. Moreover, the delimitation of these areas is often carried out on the basis of negative criteria (related to the formerly delimited problem areas). This occurs also when the territorial keys are being applied. Accessibility is used, but primarily as a measure of territorial handicap. A similar role is played by the public utility services. This approach is complemented by the treatment of the keys as the instruments of spatial monitoring. Founding of delimitation of the areas inside the provinces on the positive elements (the key of territorial assets) is less frequent. Lack of integrative approach is also quite characteristic. Territory is not treated as a subject of an integrated policy, and, simultaneously, as an opportunity for overcoming the sectoral divisions. In this context it is perceived more like an instrument.

Finally, a rather pessimistic statement might be forwarded, namely that in the practice of the internal policy of Polish provinces, territory is seen more in the perspective of problems, not assets. Yet, at the same time, an evolution of approach can be observed, and even if it is to some extent forced by the regulations of the European Union, it still provides the foundations for a policy that is more territorial on the regional level.

5. Summary and conclusions

The investigations performed show the image of the correct direction of changes in the intra-regional policies of the Polish provinces. This is to a large extent due to the initiation of the discourse in Poland regarding such categories as territorial contract, integrated territorial investments, territorial fora, and territorial observatories. Consequently, in the regions, quite often spontaneously, the necessary mechanisms are being developed for linking the spatial and the socio-economic development. The effects of this work are as yet not visible, nor can they be assessed. Besides, this kind of work is, as a rule, not conducted under the banner of territorial cohesion, but their motive force is pragmatism, that is – the imperative of a more effective use of the means disbursed for purposes of developing the regions. Territorial cohesion, as interpreted by the regional elite, appears to have more the character of a buzzword than of a practical (implementable) notion. The representatives of the regional authorities display a relatively good knowledge in the domain of territorial

cohesion, but their understanding of the notion is usually narrower than that from the theoretical elaborates. There is a significant differentiation and lack of uniform understanding of this category, with simultaneous acknowledgment of its importance and emphasis on the need of using it in the regional strategic documents. In many cases, though, territorial cohesion is put on the subordinate position with respect to social and economic cohesion. It is clearly evident that there has been no public debate on this subject – namely what territorial cohesion is supposed to serve, how should it be understood, how should it be used in the practice of programming, and what are the expected benefits therefrom. Some of the respondents became aware only during the interviews that the way they conduct the policy of regional development constitutes an emanation, and in definite cases even the very essence of the territorial cohesion.

In the application of territorial cohesion in the development programming process a weaker emphasis is visible on the territorial capital, while stronger – on the manner of conducting the development policy and the attempts of strengthening of its integrated character. This is evidenced, in particular, by the structure and scope of the solutions tested. Although the voivodships apply by themselves the concept of territorial keys, but this is done often in order to determine the traditional problem areas, and not in terms of an instrument for involving the territorial capital in the strengthening of the regional development. Hence, a postulate arises of a more intensive work aiming at the consideration of the systemic territorial capital in the intra-regional policy. The strategic intervention areas may make a good start. There are, however, no other instruments, concerning the assessment of the influence exerted by the policies on the territorial capital, or the influence of this capital on development.

It seems, on the other hand, that Polish regions are on the proper way toward the implementation of the place-based policy paradigm. All of the component elements of this paradigm are present in the policies of the Polish provinces. Owing to the leadership of the national level a positive turn is taking place in the methods of gathering of knowledge. The system of territorial observatories is emerging. The issue of compatibility of knowledge and information gained on various spatial scales remains, however, unresolved. The weakest link in the system is constituted by the ways of sharing the knowledge acquired. The passive methods dominate. There is no bright idea on managing development through knowledge

sharing. There are less problems concerning the interaction with other actors of the development game. Generally, the territorial dialogue was altogether assessed in a positive manner. Owing to new instruments (such as, e.g., integrated territorial investments, territorial contracts), this dialogue becomes increasingly intensive, and, in view of the improving methods of acquiring knowledge, also increasingly substantive.

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