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POLISH REGIONAL POLICY: THE PRESENT CONTEXT

Abstract. No clear and widely accepted interpretation exists for the contemporary concept of regional development. In economic sciences, some researchers believe that "regional development," as currently defined, applies to the economic, social and cultural activity which has undergone significant changes in recent years. They concern, on the one hand, the assumptions of the state's economic policy, and on the other hand, the concept of sustainable development developed. Others argue that regional development is a complex process that depends on a specific set of factors. They point out that the main driving force therefore consists of endogenous factors which determine the various aspects of the resource development capacity. However, they do not discount the importance of exogenous factors, including changes in the regional macro-environment. In the 21st century, knowledge, skills, innovation and creativity have become key individual resources (determinants) in national and regional development. These are the building blocks of the knowledge economy which develops under the influence of science, resulting in the emergence of new high-tech sectors of economy and in the adoption of innovation in traditional manufacturing industries.

Keywords: regional development determinants, regional policy, strategic management in regions, regional development measures, creative region

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, "region" and "regional policy" are not well defined. The first concept is considered at various geographical scales. It is often used to refer to areas as small as a municipality or to large geographical areas e.g. Central and Eastern Europe. To avoid these misunderstandings, delimitations such as macro-region, meso-region, micro-region, primary region, sub-region, or region I or II are sometimes used to highlight the difference in the surface area (Kosiedowski, 2005; Solarz, 2011; Dębowski, 2016).

In Poland, research on regions began late; the first complete and comprehensive study in this field was conducted by W. Nałkowski (1856–1911). The topic was further explored by a number of scientists, including J. Smoleński (1881–1940) and S. Łencewicz (1889–1944) (Berezowski, 1988). At that time, landscape type was the main suggested criterion of regional division. A little later, S. Z. Rutkowski and W. Wakar contributed to numerous academic discourses on economic regions in 1927 and 1928 (Berezowski, 1988). And thus, for some scholars the region was "(...) a delimited area of land, defined as part of the environment with the use of a specific procedure based on predefined criteria" (Kosiedowski, 2005). Others, including R. Domański, pointed out that regions may be defined in three different ways:

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"(...) according to one criterion (e.g. a region defined based on population density); according to a number of criteria (e.g. a region based on industrial production volume and urban population); and finally, by the structure of interdependent fields of human activity in the area under consideration" (Domański, 2002; Gorzelak and Tucholska, 2010). This study is supplemented by K. Dziewoński's reflections on the geographical concept of a metropolitan region (Dziewoński, 1961).

An interesting lexical reference was proposed by Potoczek (2003) who points out that the procedures and criteria used when defining a region are inevitably biased, and therefore will never be fully objective and can always give rise to a number of disputes. Regions will be perceived in different way by geographers, geologists, ethnographers, political scientists, sociologists or economists. A similar view was expressed in 1927 by A. Hettner, considered to be a classic representative of the 'natural region' concept (Hettner, 1927; Strojny, 2010). He suggested that naturally defined regions do not exist because such categorizations always result from human factors and economic activity rather than from geographical determinants.

The literature of the subject usually defines region as a "conventionally delimited, relatively homogeneous area which differs from the neighboring areas in natural or historically acquired characteristics" (Matuszczak, 2013). On the other hand, the basic characteristics of regions include: geographical location and conditions; and the linguistic, religious and ethnic identities of the local community.

According to K. Secomski (1982), the concept of a region mainly involves economic aspects, and hence a region is a part the national territory characterized by a set of common socio-economic, physical and other features that have a central influence throughout the whole region. This set of common (mainly socio-economic) features is the starting point for regional delimitation. Similarly, the economic aspect is highlighted by A. Klasik (1971) who believes that regions are complete, historically shaped units of geographical and socio-economic space, based on their own local economy.

From the point of view of economic science, regions delimited based on economic criteria are of utmost significance (Chądzyński et al., 2007). This means that "an economic region is an area of particular economic specialization resulting from the use of endo- and exogenous development factors" (Strzelecki, 2008). Note also that, for example, A. Fajferek perceives economic regions as territorial production and service units characterized by specific development patterns which make them stand apart from the surrounding areas. They are parts of a larger territory, have a specific manufacturing and service specialization within a country, have at least one urban center, and are compact areas (Fajferek, 1966).

B. Jałowiecki follows a similar line of reasoning, suggesting that in most cases, an area defined as region is an artificial construct "created by specialists to organize and classify reality." The multi-level grid of European regions used for statistical and planning purposes by the European Commission in Brussels is an example of such a construct (Jałowiecki, 1966; Wojtaszczyk et al., 2013).

Today's theoretical considerations which take the Polish and EU legislative framework into account emphasize the importance of regions in the administrative sense. Indeed, administrative authorities at regional level are the ones who manage regional policy instruments and are responsible for regional development (Act of January 24, 2014; Grzelak and Kozak, 2012). The greater the regions' autonomy in formulating their own policy, the more important their role in determining the global axes of activity (Gorzelak, 1989; Przybyszewski and Atamańczuk, 2011; Dźwigoł, 2012).

INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Based on synthetic sources, literature studies and practical activities, it can be concluded that the effects of regional development are primarily reflected in an increase in the relative importance of the region within the country. Other yardsticks are economic efficiency, an improvement in the standards of living of the inhabitants, and stronger measures taken to eliminate intra- and interregional disparities. The continued improvement of innovativeness and competitiveness at regional level is also important (Strahl, 2006; Michalewska-Pawlak, 2010; Miśkiewicz, 2016).

These general groups of regional development identifiers require a detailed approach in the context of respective voivodeships and the selection of appropriate research methods and tools. There are no widely accepted universal solutions in this respect (Obrębalski, 2002). Substantive, geographic and temporal aspects, and above all the purpose of the assessment, must be taken into account to properly select the relevant indicators. The attempts to adopt a quantitative approach to this phenomenon are particularly difficult. The literature on the subject provides several types of indicators of regional development. Different researchers propose different solutions, ranging from using a few to several dozens indicators. For example, Prandecka identifies ca. 60 basic indicators of regional development (Prandecka, 1969). Opałło (1972), on the other hand, focuses on two types of yardsticks, i.e.:

- basic indicators which represent the absolute values of various economic and social variables and processes (e.g. population, employment figures in manufacturing etc.),
- relative indicators, expressing the ratio between a specific value and other selected economic values (e.g. share of urban population in total population, number of manufacturing employees per 1,000 population etc.) (Opałło, 1972).

Defining the determinants of economic development is one of the most important challenges facing modern economics. It is reflected in the extensive ongoing discussion on methods and paths of optimum economic development. Note that this topic has for years been discussed based on solutions derived from the Harrod-Domar growth model (Harrod, 1948; Domar, 1957; Winiarski, 2000) or from the enhanced neo-classical Solow–Swan growth model (Solow, 1956; Swan, 1956). Characteristically, these solutions used a linear perspective related to the proper quantitative programming of changes in the basic instruments of economic policy. However, qualitative changes and their economic impacts (which together form a sociologically, institutionally and historically complex system) have been largely forgotten (Dziembała, 2016).

Another breakdown of economic development factors is based on their nature. This classification distinguishes between synthetic indicators (for different macroeconomic aggregates, e.g. national income, net manufacturing output in regional systems) and detailed indicators (including specific indicators for various economic and social phenomena) (Pająk, 2010).

Taking quantification as a criterion, Obrębalski proposed an interesting classification of determinants (metrics) of regional development into five basic groups:

- measurable in physical units (population, employment and unemployment figures, number of economic operators etc.),
- expressible in financial terms (remuneration, value of fixed assets, value of investments, etc.),
- measurable in technical terms but with no attributable monetary value (distance from the national border, noise intensity, water and air pollution level etc.),
- immeasurable but identifiable enough to clearly and objectively distinguish between less and more favorable conditions (e.g. from the point of view of human health);
- immeasurable and identifiable only based on subjective feelings (e.g. aesthetic and landscape values) (Obrębalski, 2002).

In order to measure the significance of individual regions in the social, economic and geographical dimension of a country, empirical research uses tools for region – regions - country comparative analysis (Michalewska-Pawlak, 2015). In this group, the most universal and widely accepted regional development indicator is per capita GDP. Gross domestic product reflects the final outcome of activities of all economic operators based in the region. Thus, it reflects both the importance of the region in the country and the quality of the region's economic environment, in broad terms. Of course, other measures can be used to capture the importance of a region in the national system, such as the region's demographic or economic potential, and the importance of the services sector. In this case, the importance of the region can be defined for a chosen field of economy, a specific industry or regional development (Strahl, 2006; Słaby, 2005). These values are complemented by some valuable suggestions from Freeman (1987), Lundvall (2010), Pike et al. (2007).

Economic development is an ambiguous term. Note that economic growth is the process of creating and expanding the actual volume of the social product. This means increasing the production volume of goods and services at national level during a given period, which is synonymous to economic growth (Nazarczuk and Marks-Bielska, 2013). In its territorial aspect, development is a broader concept than growth which is defined as a change in strictly quantitative terms. Thus, development encompasses both quantitative and qualitative changes (Ziółkowski, 2005; Nazarczuk, 2013). In addition to structural transformations, it includes the accompanying changes in institutions and economic relationships. They can be considered from either a process-based or teleological perspective (Klamut, 2006). The process-based approach involves examining development as a set of dynamic processes that determine the nature and the pace of changes (Noworól, 2007; Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2017). Conversely, a teleological approach means a sequence of changes targeted at a defined state. Usually, it is manifested in improvements to the conditions and quality of life. In this context, note however that some of these elements are immeasurable. Hull aptly summarizes this issue (Hull, 2007) as follows: "(...) what constitutes the content of development and defines its nature and forms is defined in different ways: some see it as the increase in the amount of material goods and services, increases in consumption, increased convenience of everyday life, growing freedom in the sphere of social life, while others emphasize the development of a new quality of life, the development of new forms and structures of social life, new forms of coexistence and relating in nature (...)". This is why the relevant literature often makes a distinction between 'growth' and 'development' when discussing regional policy programming, economic growth and socio-economic development. These considerations should include the development of the concept of innovation systems (Lundvall, 2010; Nelson, 1993). Complemented by local and regional growth models, they emphasize the importance of the institutional context in mainstream development economics, allowing for the analysis of development as a multidimensional phenomenon (Pike et al., 2006).

The proponents of the separation of these two concepts include Blakely and Leigh (2010) who wrote: "It is a great mistake to equate economic growth with economic development. The blind pursuit of economic growth can undermine the foundations for economic development." It can contribute to a widening of the already growing territorial inequalities, become one of the most important problems of the economy, and influence the shape of modern regional development policy (Krugman, 2010).

But there is another approach which is presented mainly by English-speaking authors. Accordingly, the concepts of *growth and development* can be used interchangeably when describing economic processes, and mean an increase in the basic macroeconomic indicators (Borys, 1999; Michalewska-Pawlak, 2015).

Various attempts are made to quantify the level of development of different regions. In such attempts, linear ordering methods are of great use. Their consist in determining the order of single objects (e.g. regions, districts, towns, municipalities) or object sets according to a certain measurement criterion. The basic tool used for linear ordering is the synthetic measure of development level: a function that aggregates micro-data included in individual attributes (measures) comprising the assessment. The combination of (domain-specific) sub-indicators of regional development allows for an overall (global) evaluation.

Such an attempt to assess the level of regional development is driven by the need for adequate statistical data. The assessment of regional development is enabled and facilitated, to varying degrees, by public statistics services (Central Statistical Office and other statistical offices) which systematically collect, process and publish statistical data (Strahl, 2006; Wojtyna, 2016).

CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL POLICY IN POLAND

In the 1990s, the Polish regional policy was defined by local government activities at voivodeship level and was interregional in nature. A centralized model predominated, and the main actor responsible for policy programming and implementation was the Minister of Infrastructure and Development. There was no partner on the other side, e.g. regional authorities with the power to make decisions at voivodeship level. There was also a great deal of aversion to running an active regional policy, which allegedly distorted competition in the market economy. Only a territorial review carried out in 1992 by the OECD documented the complexity of regional development issues in Poland and the difficulties and constraints affecting the implementation of an active policy in this domain. The establishment of self-governed voivodeships had an impact on setting regional policy goals, principles and instruments. The multi-level governance concept was supposed to determine the extent to which the regional policy model could be considered decentralized. Note that the interregional policy model took into account the self-government activity at voivodeship level in the process of developing and using the endogenous potential specific to the region (Pająk, 2011; Szlachta and Zaucha, 2014).

Economics scholars were right in that the first form of the new regional policy in Poland was state intervention in areas threatened with high structural unemployment. Other developments were related to pre-accession measures taken by Poland, geared towards supporting regional development and building capacity for cohesion policies such as STRUDER, RAPID, or CROSS-BORDER. An understanding of these processes can be clearly seen in the suggestions made by the task force for regional development in Poland concerning lines of development (Wojarska, 2013).

However, significant changes took place after the Act of July 24, 1998 entered into force. It initiated the construction of a three-tier territorial organization of the country, supplemented with decentralization measures and the establishment of districts (towns and cities) and voivodeships. In general outline, Polish regions correspond to NUTS level 2 of the European cohesion policy. Public administration of the state started its activities, where apart from representatives of the government in the area of the voivode, the governors began to operate elected representatives of self-government bodies They were responsible for the financial policy and local budgets. Also, they took over many competences from the central level. As part of the decentralization of the public finance functions of the state, a process of managing the development of regions has begun.

Further changes in regional policy were introduced by subsequent legislation. Legislative acts of significance in this field include: the Act of May 12, 2000 on the principles of supporting regional development; the Act of December 12, 2006 on development policy principles; the Act of November 8, 2008 on the amendment to certain acts in connection with the implementation of Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund; the 2010–2020 National Strategy for Regional Development of July 13, 2010; and the Act of January 24, 2014 on development policy management. This was the legislative framework which introduced the modern understanding of development policy support, symbolically underpinned by regional competitiveness, territorial cohesion and counteracting marginalization of problem areas. It created the conditions for an effective, efficient and partnership-based implementation of regionally managed development measures.

The early 2000s witnessed further investigations into many theoretical aspects of regional policy. Areas of focus included the structure of regional economies, entrepreneurship and productivity levels, the capacity to create innovative regions, modern human and social capital, accessibility of business finance (bankability), environmental quality and technical infrastructure. The evolving process of globalization was supposed to show how open the economy was and to determine its ability to cooperate in building corporate relationships by operators based in a given region. For today's regional policy makers, it seems reasonable to consider the following exogenous factors in addition to endogenous factors referred to above: capital inflow, technological progress, globalization, availability of EU funds, economic crises, increasing European integration, regulation at national and EU level (e.g. environmental protection, carbon reduction, low-carbon economy, energy and location security, etc.). The regional policy model employed at the time (designed to improve territorial cohesion) was gradually replaced with another, the polarization-diffusion model in which the stimuli are targeted at areas affected by problems or requiring strategic intervention (KSRR 2010). Regional development was found to be determined by economic (internal, external and technical/technological), socio-cultural and political, ecological, and geographical factors. To support growth processes and increase social wealth, the key elements of regional development should include: the resources (availability, allocation and productivity), and institutional factors, i.e. the categories that create developed, diverse and flexible regional economic structures. These include: human and social capital, knowledge and innovation, fixed and financial capital and material (physical) resources of the region (NSRR 2010).

The value behind these modern ways of programming the development policy is confirmed by the fact that in many developed countries (in Europe and beyond), it has been implemented through top-down hierarchical solutions developed at the national level. It was assumed that its redistributive nature would generate incentives for the relocation of lower-level businesses, and that the foundations of development would include subsidies, grants and tax reliefs. It had a clear sectoral focus. The instruments used in those policies were designed for the industries that are the most susceptible to stimuli that encourage relocation. It is therefore symptomatic that the development of regional policy in the 21st century was influenced by two groups of factors that played an important role both in practice and in theory (Michalewska-Pawlak, 2015).

From the practical perspective, regional policy was shaped by the global economic crisis which has affected Europe and the entire world since 2008. This has led to a universal search for a new paradigm in economic science and in regional development. The assumptions of the Washington Consensus, stating that the development policy required little except deregulation and well-defined property rights, declined in importance (McCann, 2013). It follows from the above that the traditional understanding of regional policy did not stand the test of time. The examples found at different levels of planning and implementation, i.e.: at community, national and sub-national (regional, metropolitan) level, suggest it might have failed (OECD Report of March 31, 2009).

From a theoretical perspective, based on many publications of renowned economists and research centers, the role of and the rationale behind regional policy has been redefined. In early 2000s, building upon the achievements of development economics, efforts were made to create universal recommendations for regional policy makers. And thus, one of the results of that broad academic discourse was the Barca's typology presented at the OECD forum.

The foundations of the new development policy included:

- an excellent institutional approach assuming that growth requires appropriate institutions of a universal nature (common good, good law, education), and that new public management should ensure these conditions are met and public goods are distributed across the country/region;
- development as a result of concentration, so that agglomeration economies become the main driving force of development; public administration removes barriers to concentration and ensures unrestricted access to these areas;
- socially sensitive development which takes social responsibility into account (e.g. based on ISO 26000);
- a local approach which means that the social and economic dimensions of growth/development must be addressed; this involves empowering local and regional government units;
- a location-oriented approach which means that both economic and social development can become true almost anywhere thanks to a skilful combination of location-aware institutions and public investments (by the EU or local, regional or national authorities) (Gorzelak, 2014).

The above is supported by Szlachta and Żuber who stated that convergence or equalization of opportunities was not paramount in the new models for regional development. Greater importance was attached to: an integrated approach to functional ties, combining hard and soft measures; combining regional potentials (financial, social, and human capital, innovation, etc.); and tapping into their endogenous value in a multi-stage development management process (Szlachta 2015; Żuber, 2008). This means that a new approach to regional development policy should result from efforts taken by all stakeholders, and should relate to: the development of the ICT infrastructure and the integration of telecommunications networks and services; the development of regional growth centers and functional connections with the largest cities in the region; stimulating urban development in remote and less developed urban areas; diversifying traditional axes of economic development; implementing innovative and novel solutions; and establishing public partnership networks (KSRR, 2010).

For the economists, the most important thing is to analyze regional development in terms of changes in the economy, as an economic process consisting in the transformation of regional and local (endo- and exogenous) inputs and resources into goods and services. The most important feature of development defined as above is the economic growth at regional level, i.e. an increase in the production volume of goods and services not only through a quantitative increase in the amount of productive inputs used but also through efficiency improvements. Quantitative changes should therefore be accompanied by qualitative and structural changes in production (Potoczek, 2003). The same factors are emphasized by Nelson who defines regional development as "changes in regional productivity measured by population size, employment, income and value added production. Regional development also includes social development in terms of healthcare, wealth, environmental quality or creativity." In the current decade, the new model of regional policy assumes that development opportunities exist in all types of regions where development determinants are located in different territorial systems. The purpose of development is to maximize growth at national level by supporting and encouraging each voivodeship to emphasize, strengthen and explore its endogenous growth potential using internal or external resources. This means that the development concept—perceived in its spatial dimension—should aim to affect the intangible environment, i.e. to stimulate relations between units and institutions operating in the region concerned, and to establish network links in voivodeships, based on the particularities of the regional government and the institutional environment.

To summarize the current considerations, it is worthwhile to formulate a few conclusions. The cohesion policy reformed by J. Delors (1988), means that sustainable development, high quality of life of regional communities, economic efficiency and territorial integrity are of key importance in the pursuit of European integration goals (Gordecki et al., 2012).

Doctrinal changes in the regional development policy lead to the implementation of a new paradigm of regional development, with the general objective being to explore the potential and enhance competitiveness. This development take place through integrated projects (strategies) in implementing the principles of new public management (Szlachta 2015).

SUMMARY

The primary target audience for regional development policies are the residents (population) of the region concerned. Their standards of living are the ultimate focus of all regional development efforts. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of regional development is social development, i.e. changes in the style, standard and quality of the population's life (Strzelecki, 2008) which are the consequence of economic growth, i.e. of quantitative increases and qualitative improvements in goods and services produced. This is complemented by the process of social change which includes the evolution of social relationships and of the region's social fabric. However, even if the scope of development was strictly limited to social and economic issues, it would still be a complex concept because the processes involved (such as those concerning public needs) are extremely sophisticated. This is because each area operates and develops as an integral part of a larger whole (national economy) and uses goods and services produced in other countries. Conversely, it provides other countries with products and services manufactured within its own territory, in what is referred to as workspaces (Bartosik, 2011).

The labor market, in terms of employment and quality of jobs offered, is one of the most important determinants of the standards of living for the local and regional communities. This is reflected in the various definitions of development. And so Blakely (Dziemianowicz, 1997) defines economic development as "a process in which local authorities or (and) neighborhood organizations engage in the stimulation or at least maintenance of economic activity or (and) employment. The main purpose of this activity is to develop local opportunities for maintaining and creating jobs in areas beneficial to the local labor market of the local community. Local economic development processes rely on local natural, human and institutional resources". This definition, on the one hand, emphasizes the role local and regional government units play in the process of regional development by stimulating changes that are beneficial for the local community; on the other hand, it demonstrates the importance of the development of today's labor market (Kwiatkowski and Suchecki, 2014). It is connected with the implementation of a new paradigm of regional development according to which the region: has an export specialization; is a source of growing revenues; and absorbs knowledge (a region based on knowledge). The region's economic fabric is affected by knowledge production, circulation and absorption; in turn, sectoral clusters (sectoral competence centers) promote innovation and enable development of scientific and research projects addressing the needs of the regional economy. The above definition also means implementing the principles of New Public Management (NPM) related to professional management in the public sector based on knowledge and skills of highly qualified managers; implementing modern standards and measures of economic activity, taking into account social responsibility for development; introducing real competition to the public finance sector; and introducing and effectively adapting management techniques and methods used in the private sector.

Today's regional policy also means implementing the low-carbon economy approach at municipality, district and voivodeship level. It is an opportunity to establish innovative enterprises in the region which subsequently will contribute to improved well-being and quality of life. Moreover, it encourages regional authorities to use new technologies in management and service development, including in the field of urban logistics, infrastructure security and organic farming. This will allow to reduce the outmigration of young educated people lured by better opportunities in the high-tech industry. In broader terms, the regional policy should provide an opportunity to implement a new market economy model expressed by the Industry 4.0 strategy, Logistics 4.0, and Elektromobilność 4.0 (Pająk, 2016, p. 7).

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POLSKA POLITYKA REGIONALNA – WSPÓŁCZESNE UWARUNKOWANIA

Abstrakt. Współczesne pojęcie rozwoju regionalnego nie ma jednoznacznie powszechnie rozumianej i akceptowanej wykładni znaczeniowej. W naukach ekonomicznych część badaczy uważa, że rozwój regionalny to obecnie obszar aktywności zarówno gospodarczej, społecznej jak i kulturowej, w którym w ciągu ostatnich lat obserwuje się istotne zmiany. Dotyczą one z jednej strony założeń polityki gospodarczej państwa, z drugiej zaś rozwijanej koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju. Inni konstatują, że rozwój regionalny to proces złożony, zależny od określonej grupy czynników, które w różnym stopniu gwarantują ten rozwój. Wskazuje się, że główną siłę sprawczą stanowią zatem czynniki endogeniczne określające zdolność rozwojową zasobów w poszczególnych jego obszarach. Nie umniejszają przy tym znaczenia czynników egzogenicznych obejmujących zmiany w makrootoczeniu regionu. W XXI wieku w rozwoju państw i regionów kluczowymi, indywidualnymi zasobami (determinantami) stają się w coraz większym stopniu wiedza, umiejętności, innowacyjność i kreatywność. Kształtują one gospodarkę opartą na wiedzy, która rozwija się pod wpływem nauki, co oznacza powstawanie nowych sektorów gospodarki nastawionych na wytwarzanie wysokich technologii, jak i funkcjonowanie tradycyjnego przemysłu, ale wprowadzającego do swojej działalności innowacje. Kluczową rolę odgrywają przedsiębiorstwa stanowiące centralną część tej koncepcji. One wykreślają nowy paradygmat rozwoju. Autorzy niniejszego artykułu uczestnicząc w dyskursie dotyczącym poszukiwania determinant rozwoju regionalnego pragną przybliżyć i upowszechnić sens takich terminów jak: rozwój regionalny i jego determinanty, kreatywny region, potencjał gospodarczy i finansowy regionu.

Słowa kluczowe: uwarunkowania rozwoju regionalnego, polityka regionalna, zarządzanie strategiczne w regionach, środki rozwoju regionalnego, region kreatywny